



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

DATE: 11/05/2007

AGENDA OF: 11/13/2007

DEPARTMENT: Public Works

SUBJECT: Highway 1, Soquel to Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project – Morrissey Interchange Alternatives. (PW)

RECOMMENDATION: Motion to recommend to the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) and Caltrans that the Highway 1 - Soquel to Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project include pedestrian improvements at the north side of the Morrissey Interchange, thereby reducing the pedestrian crossing lengths at the intersection, enhancing crosswalks and signage, and installing new sidewalks and access ramps on Morrissey and Rooney, between San Juan Avenue and Elk Street.

BACKGROUND: The Highway 1, Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Auxiliary Lane project description includes constructing auxiliary lanes in both directions on Highway 1, replacing the La Fonda overcrossing structure, improving the northbound ramps at Morrissey and constructing soundwalls. The La Fonda overcrossing is currently narrow and without bike lanes. The new overcrossing would address these deficiencies. This project is being funded through a combination of Federal, State Transportation Bond Funds and regional transportation funds and is on a tight timeline. The Nolte Memorandum to the SCCRTC is attached. This project is separate and on a different track than the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project.

Recently the Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) staff and Highway 1 consultant (Nolte and Associates) discussed with City staff two possible alternatives or a “no project” approach to the north side of the Morrissey interchange that could be included in the Highway 1, Soquel to Morrissey Auxiliary Lane Project. The proposals, Alternatives G and D were being considered based on public concerns that the north side of the interchange and the Morrissey/Pacheco intersection were precarious for all users. The project team consistently heard concerns from the public about this issue.

Recently the northbound off-ramp was widened as part of the Highway 1/17 Merge Lane project and a stop sign added to the off-ramp at the Morrissey/Pacheco intersection, making this a 4-way stop rather than a 3-way, with a free movement from the highway off-ramp. This has made the intersection much more manageable for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Additional changes to the intersection were being proposed for funding through the Safe Routes to School program, but increased project costs eliminated this part of the work. See attached, Preliminary Plan of Initial Safety Enhancements. The Auxiliary Lane project process may be the opportunity to improve the intersection further for pedestrians and bicyclists with the Auxiliary lane project, even if the one of the alternatives is not selected.

DISCUSSION: At the request of City staff, SCCRTC staff and the project team presented the Auxiliary Lane project and alternatives to the Santa Cruz City Transportation Commission (CTC) on October 10, 2007. The alternatives are interim improvements that could be implemented prior to the Highway 1 HOV project. The HOV project as currently envisioned would replace the Morrissey overcrossing with a new structure that would provide bike lanes, sidewalks on both sides and better connectivity to the north side of the highway. Therefore portions of both alternatives would be rebuilt as part of the Highway 1 HOV project. The primary motivation to improve the north side of the Morrissey ramps with the Auxiliary Lane projects is bike and pedestrian improvements. Staff and the CTC believe that Alternative D best reflects that intent due to the continuity of the sidewalk over the Highway. Alternative G does not address slowing offramp traffic. The CTC recommended that the City Council adopt Alternative D as the preferred alternative and the “no project” option as the second preferred alternative. The deliberation considered the project scheduling versus funding conflicts with Alternative D, subjecting Santa Cruz residents to additional construction sandwiched between the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes and the potential Highway 1 HOV Lanes projects, and the cost to the tax payer. The draft minutes of the October 10, 2007 CTC meeting are attached.

Since the CTC meeting, Caltrans has made it clear to SCCRTC and the project team that Alternative D is not implementable within the time frame required by the State Transportation Bond funds without putting the entire project at risk. Therefore “no project” is the CTC’s preferred alternative. Staff recommends that pedestrian improvements be implemented at the north side of the Morrissey Interchange as part of the Auxiliary lane project. The proposed improvements would reduce the pedestrian crossing lengths at the intersection, enhance crosswalks and signage, and install new sidewalks and access ramps on Morrissey and Rooney, between San Juan and Elk, similar to what was proposed as part of the unfunded portion of the Safe Routes to School project. These improvements would benefit bicyclists as well. Staff believes that the CTC would concur with this recommendation. This is a lower cost alternative than proposed by SCCRTC and the project team, and funds should be available within the Auxiliary Lane project.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no fiscal impact to the City with this action.

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ATTACHMENTS:
Nolte Memorandum to SCCRTC
Preliminary Plan of Initial Safety Enhancements
CTC draft minutes October 10, 2007