

Michael Ferry
Department of Planning and Community Development
809 Center St, Room 206
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

February 19, 2008

RE: Notice of Intent to Issue a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center

Dear Mr. Ferry:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Intent to Issue a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) serves as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Santa Cruz County. Staff would like to offer the following comments for your consideration:

1. The City of Santa Cruz has previously shown a commitment to providing a Beach Shuttle Service. In addition, the Beach Shuttle is identified in the Beach/South of Laurel Plan as mitigation for congestion and parking. Staff recommends that the Beach Shuttle be funded as part of the proposed project plan. (2005 RTP goals and policies 2.5.1.)
2. Staff recommends that the City of Santa Cruz work with the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District to provide transit options from the San Jose area to the Beach Area during peak travel periods. Providing a transit alternative for interregional travelers may be one mitigation measure utilized to reduce impacts of visitors to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center, the Beach Boardwalk and the surrounding areas on the highway system and adjacent roadways and intersections (2005 RTP goals and policies 2.5.1 and 3.3.)
3. The parking demands of the project may be improved using technology which disseminates information to drivers about parking availability within the proposed project area and surrounding parking areas. Providing drivers with information about the availability of parking can reduce traveler frustration and congestion associated with searching for parking. (2005 RTP goals and policies 1.7.)
4. The RTC staff recommends that the proposed project include sufficient lighting to increase visibility on the pedestrian path during non-daylight hours and that the City ensures that the new facilities are accessible to all potential users. (2005 RTP policies 2.6.1, and 3.3.1)

5. One side of the proposed project is adjacent to the Santa Cruz Branch Line. The rail line forms a continuous thirty-two mile corridor from Davenport to the City of Watsonville. As you may be aware, the RTC is working to purchase the rail line right-of-way for future transportation purposes including a potential bicycle and pedestrian path along the right-of-way. The RTC also intends to maintain the existing freight service on the rail line.
 - Staff supports the pedestrian walkway proposed to be located adjacent to the railroad right-of-way as a way of maintaining public access between a commercial area and transportation facilities, including potential future facilities.
 - RTC staff recommends providing a set-back from the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line property line to the proposed parking spaces and sidewalk to help accommodate potential future uses of the rail line right-of-way. According to maps produced by the Santa Cruz County Geographic Information Services Department, the rail line right-of-way is approximately 36 feet wide adjacent to the proposed project.
6. Staff supports reducing the number of single-occupant vehicle (SOV) trips made by employees to the proposed project site by replacing SOV trips with transportation alternatives including, but not limited to, carpooling, transit, bicycling, walking and telecommuting. High parking demands during peak days is another reason that transportation alternatives should be encouraged as part of the project. Please work with the Commute Solutions Program to implement transportation demand management strategies that work towards this goal through implementing solutions such as; carpool ridematching, employee vanpools and preferential parking for carpools and vanpools. Staff also encourages the occupants to join the Santa Cruz Area Transportation Management Association which provides additional transportation demand management strategies to employers for employees. (2005 RTP goals and policies 1.3.1 and 1.3.2)
7. Staff recommends provisions for secure bicycle parking at the proposed project site, including bicycle lockers and bicycle racks for use by employees and visitors. (200 RTP goals and policies 2.1.1)

Thank you for the opportunity to review this project. If you have any questions about the above comments, please contact Grace Blakeslee of my staff at (831) 460-3219.

Sincerely,

George Dondero
Executive Director

Cc: Commissioner Reilly
Supervisor Coonerty