

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
FROM: Kim Shultz, Senior Transportation Planner
REGARDING: Highway 1 Project Status Report – Informational Item

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission accept a status report on the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project and the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project.

BACKGROUND

The 1986 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) identified the widening of Highway 1 as a high priority project to address growing congestion along the corridor. In 2003, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), in cooperation with Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), initiated preliminary design and environmental studies (referred to as the Project Approval/Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) phase) to add high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes to Highway 1 from Morrissey Boulevard in Santa Cruz to Larkin Valley Road in Aptos. For additional background and current information on the project, visit the project website at: www.sccrtc.org/hov.

In 2002, Caltrans identified auxiliary lanes between Soquel Avenue and Morrissey Boulevard as a relatively low cost operational improvement that would provide congestion relief to the busiest segment of Highway 1. In late 2005, the RTC received \$2.9 million in federal funds secured with the assistance of Congressman Sam Farr, which allowed preliminary work to begin on the project. In March 2007, the RTC was successful in securing \$16.2 million in Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) funds which provide all necessary funds to construct the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project.

DISCUSSION

Given extensive discussion on the Highway 1 projects associated with adoption of the 2008 *Regional Transportation Improvement Program* the Quarterly Progress Report provided by the consultant team has been rescheduled to June. Following is a brief status report provided by staff on the respective projects.

Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project

In late February, the consultant team submitted the Administrative Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment and Project Report together with the associated technical studies and engineering plans to Caltrans for review and comment. Comments are expected in

early April and the documents will go through another cycle of review prior to submittal the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Upon FHWA's approval, the draft environmental document and engineering plans can be released to the public. Release of the Draft Environmental Document is anticipated this summer. Staff will provide an update on the proposed schedule at the RTC meeting following a Project Development Team meeting on March 27th.

With the elimination of the Morrissey Boulevard ramp modification, the scope of this project is simpler and staff is working with the consultant team and Caltrans staff to advance the project schedule to the maximum extent possible. Potential areas where the project may be accelerated include completing the final environmental document, advancing final design engineering, and completing the right-of-way certification process.

Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project

In late January, senior staff members of Caltrans, RTC, and the consultant team toured the Highway 1 corridor to advance discussion on outstanding engineering design issues. The meeting was very productive in identifying approaches to analyze and resolve issues in areas where engineering design exceptions may be warranted to reduce impacts to the natural and built environment, and contain project costs.

Included in the field review was discussion regarding the redesign of the Soquel Avenue Interchange. A potential resolution concerning the configuration of the northbound off-ramp is currently being analyzed using a micro-traffic simulation model and applied engineering standards to ensure safe and acceptable traffic operations. Staff will provide any potential updates at the RTC meeting.

California Coastal Commission

The RTC hosted a meeting with project management staff of the California Coastal Commission (CCC) on March 19th to review progress with the design, environmental review, and operational considerations of the HOV Lanes project. Participants included the project consultants, Caltrans environmental, planning, and project management staff, and staff from the Santa Cruz County Planning Department. CCC staff were particularly interested in the role that the Highway 1 HOV Lanes project plays in promoting alternative travel modes in the corridor and meeting state mandated goals to reduce green house gases.

The group also discussed ways the CCC could participate with the RTC, local agencies, and other stakeholders in the *Corridor System Management Plan* (CSMP) currently in the early project development phase, with Caltrans serving as lead agency. For RTC, participation in the CSMP is a requirement of receiving Proposition 1B, Congestion Management Improvement Account (CMIA) funds for the Soquel/ Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project. The objective of the CSMP is to enhance and maintain optimal mobility benefits across all jurisdictions and modes, for local and interregional travel.

Speaker's Bureau

As of the April 3rd RTC meeting, staff will have made six (6) presentations as part of the Speaker's Bureau series on the Highway 1 HOV Lanes project. The presentations have been given by RTC staff so as to contain project consultant costs. In addition to discussing issues related to the Highway 1 projects, staff also provides an overview of the RTC (i.e. the RTC's role, responsibility, membership, projects and programs) and the current and future funding outlook for transportation in Santa Cruz County.

RTC Board members are encouraged to notify staff of prospective speaking opportunities or the names of groups and organizations that may be interested in having such a presentation.

SUMMARY

Staff presents a status report on the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project and the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project. The next Quarterly Progress Report will be presented by the consultant in June.

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