



State Route 1 (Highway 1) Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project

Caltrans Open House and SCCRTC Public Hearing Comment Summary Report

An informational open house and public hearing to discuss the State Route 1 (Highway 1) Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project took place on November 17, 2005. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) hosted the open house. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) hosted the public hearing to focus on regional transportation issues.

COMMENT SUMMARY

Participants had opportunities to provide comments and ask questions during both the Caltrans Open House and the SCCRTC Public Hearing. This document provides a summary of all verbal comments offered and questions raised at the open house and public hearing. Participants also were provided with comment sheets to submit written comments. Written comments submitted at the meetings and those submitted to SCCRTC before or after the open house and public hearing are summarized below.

Comments submitted included comments specific to the Auxiliary Lanes Project as well as the Highway 1 HOV Widening Project and overall traffic/transportation planning. Though this open house and public hearing focused on the Auxiliary Lanes Project, comments addressing other projects or planning efforts have been included within the summary to document issues and concerns raised at the open house and public hearing or in written comments. This summary captures the general comments received and is not intended to be a verbatim transcript of the comments received at the open house and public hearing or submitted in writing.

Oral Comments Received at Open House/Public Hearing

The following provides a summary of verbal comments provided by meeting participants. Project staff were debriefed to obtain the comments and questions from the open house. Project team members and SCCRTC staff documented comments and questions heard during the public hearing.

Need for Project

Many comments focused on the necessity for the project. Some participants felt that adding auxiliary lanes between Morrissey Boulevard and Soquel Avenue is a necessary operational improvement and want construction to begin as soon as possible. Other participants felt that this would not address the long-term needs of the community or those commuting along Highway 1. Some were concerned that the auxiliary lanes project would induce growth, bringing more people into the area. Others said widening of this segment of Highway 1 is long overdue because of past growth. Participants asked to see more detailed information on existing traffic conditions. Other participants wanted to start the project development process over with an approach focused on community consensus building.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- We have been supportive of past projects completed by Caltrans and are happy they are in charge of this project.
- Provide information detailing the traffic patterns of commuters using local roads to avoid congestion. Also show traffic patterns at Morrissey Boulevard exit.
- Some using the highway do not have any problems with weaving and merging on the existing road.
- Some community members support the build alternative. They feel the Auxiliary Lanes Project was well planned and should move forward.
- Need to start at the beginning to develop a project through consensus building. This would allow the community to think about what they want before proceeding with a project.
- Support the plan as the return commute from Silicon Valley takes the same amount of time as getting home from the fishhook.
- Highways and freeways are not going away and this project will help drivers even if cars are powered by a new fuel source in the future.
- This project will induce growth and bring more people to the area. With more people, there will be more traffic.
- A widening will help for only a short while as the highway will fill up in a few years.
- Highway 1 is an important access road for the community and it needs these improvements.
- There will not be enough fuel in the future to support our dependence on cars, so this project is unnecessary.

Relationship to Other Projects

Some participants wanted to know how this project is related to other projects along the corridor.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Prepare a complete transportation plan that includes all needed projects/improvements before moving forward with this or any other project.
- Any construction should be completed in coordination with other projects to minimize impacts and amount of construction in the corridor.

Aesthetics

Several participants were concerned about the number of trees that would be removed during construction. Others voiced concern about negative impacts to the surrounding community and how this project would change the neighborhood feel of the area.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- The existing highway divides the community and a wider highway will only continue to degrade the community.
- Concerned about the number of trees that will be removed as part of the construction of the project.

Air Quality

Participants voiced concern about the level of pollution coming from highway as a result of the existing high volume of cars using Highway 1. One participant noted concern about impacts of pollution on surrounding open space / park areas.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Pollution from the existing freeway blows towards the De Laveaga Park side of the highway. Impacts of pollution from the highway should have been studied before it was ever built.
- Residents near the highway are concerned about increased pollution levels with more vehicles using the highway.

Project Design

Some participants suggested changes to the project design that could address traffic flow issues. Another suggestion was to install metering lights at selected on-ramps to manage the flow of traffic onto the highway.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Use metering lights in this section of Highway 1 rather than auxiliary lanes.

- Include an alternative that lowers the speed limit to 55 miles per hour and is limited to widening the shoulders for emergency use only.
- To improve the flow of traffic in the area, close the on-ramp from Fairmont Avenue at Morrissey Boulevard southbound. Also, allow and encourage trucks to use the left lane during rush hours.
- Extend the auxiliary lanes beyond La Fonda to expand project benefits.
- Explore alternatives to widening the highway to improve flow of local traffic.

Public Transit Options

Some participants indicated their preference to spend project funds exploring and implementing public transit solutions rather than adding auxiliary lanes. Several felt that decreasing oil supplies and increasing gasoline costs will force people to use public transit in the near future. Others noted that public transportation options do not make sense for this corridor considering the location of the existing rail line in relation to primary commute origins and destinations. Another issue raised was that the buses will be stuck in the same traffic as commuters without an HOV lane.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Oil supplies are diminishing and we must plan and invest in alternative modes of transportation now.
- Vehicle use will decrease as the population's dependence on oil decreases. Transportation plans should consider that there will likely be fewer cars on the road in the future.
- When a highway expansion is constructed, the additional space quickly fills. Recommend improving public transportation instead.
- Spend project funding on developing bike lanes, trails and bus service instead of constructing the auxiliary lanes.
- People Power collected over 1300 signatures opposing widening the highway and felt that many community members support improvement of the bus system or other public transportation options.
- Use models like San Francisco and Paris that encourage public transit use.
- Encourage Silicon Valley companies to provide van pools for employees commuting from this area.

Safety

Some participants wanted the project to provide more space for emergency vehicles. Many participants felt that the project could improve safety in local neighborhoods by encouraging cars to stay on the highway. Others felt that project funds should be used for improvements to local roads and sidewalks to improve local traffic flow. Another concern was the need to separate cars from bicycles and pedestrians in the project area.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Widen the median/shoulder space to accommodate emergency vehicles.
- This project addresses safety concerns by helping to take traffic off local roads.
- Some parts of Santa Cruz are currently unsafe for bicyclists. Bicyclists need a separate path from cars to get around town safely.

Funding

Several participants wanted more information on how the studies are being funded and how project construction would be funded.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Where is the funding for environmental studies for this project coming from?
- What is the plan to fund the Auxiliary Lanes Project.

Measure J

Several participants questioned why this project and other related projects are continuing when voters had defeated Measure J in November of 2005. Measure J included a sales tax to fund the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening project and other transportation improvement projects. Other participants indicated that their no vote was not a rejection of Highway 1 improvements but a reaction to Measure J's containing too many projects.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Provide more explanation of how this project is different from Measure J.
- Many voters did not support Measure J because it included too many projects. That does not mean that they do not support this Auxiliary Lanes Project.
- Concern expressed that the Auxiliary Lanes Project is a piecemeal part of the larger Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening that voters opposed by voting no on Measure J.

- One speaker noted that Caltrans presented the idea of this auxiliary lane in 1997 and this has nothing to do with Measure J.

Task Force

A few participants noted that the recently formed Transportation Funding Task Force should be actively involved in the development of this project and their work needs to be completed before undertaking specific transportation improvement projects. Some participants felt that Task Force should meet before a proposed project is presented to the community.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- No project should move forward before the Task Force has an opportunity to meet, discuss priorities and make suggestions.

Noise

Some participants voiced concern over noise impacts from existing traffic and potentially resulting from this project.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Other projects along the highway have already been approved and their impacts to surrounding neighborhoods must be addressed. Recommend including soundwalls to mitigate noise impacts to surrounding neighborhoods.

Other Comments

Participants also requested some editorial changes to information provided on the exhibit boards. One participant also noted concern for increases in congestion due to new development in the community.

Specific comments and questions by meeting participants included the following:

- Concern about consistency of graphics on project information boards. Need to clearly indicate project features and alternatives.
- Do not refer to the “No-Build” option as “doing nothing”.
- The shopping center to be developed at 41st Street will increase congestion greatly.

Written Comments Submitted at the Meetings

Five comment cards were submitted to Caltrans at the meeting. The comments are summarized below.

Aesthetics

One commenter noted concern for the impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods and how a widening may change the nearby communities.

Specific comments and questions by commenters included the following:

- A widening project will result in an unattractive highway and less attractive community.

Project Design

One commenter suggested closing some of the existing interchanges to improve the flow of traffic. Another suggestion was to install metering lights at selected on-ramps to manage the flow of traffic on to the highway.

Specific comments and questions by commenters included the following:

- Close the on-ramp from Fairmont Avenue at Morrissey Boulevard southbound.
- Allow and encourage trucks to use the left lane during rush hours.
- Install metering lights on the Morrissey Boulevard on-ramp southbound.
- Close the Soquel Avenue on-ramp northbound or add metering lights.
- Close the interchange at Bay-Porter exit.

Measure J

One commenter questioned why this project is continuing when voters said no to Measure J in November 2004.

Specific comments and questions by commenters included the following:

- Do not close down Highway 1 for construction when 57% of voters voted not to widen the highway.

Alternative Transit

One commenter asked for consideration of alternative transportation to remove vehicles from the highway.

Specific comments and questions by commenters included the following:

- Consider alternative transportation (public transit) to remove vehicles from the highway.
- Use the Curitiba Brazil bus rapid transit system as an example (80% of community commutes to work/school by bus) of what to implement in Santa Cruz.

Other Written Comments Submitted

SSCRTC received additional comments by mail, email, or some other means outside of the open house and public hearing.

Comments Received by Mail

SSCRTC received two letters prior to the Open House / Public Hearing. One letter noted that this segment is already part of the larger Highway 1 HOV Widening Project. This letter expressed concern about the project's moving forward without clear funding sources and without considering public transit alternatives.

Another letter expressed support for the project, noting the opportunity to improve the corridor in coordination with the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project.

Comments Received by Email

SSCRTC received 29 emails prior to and one email after the Open House / Public Hearing. Generally, the emails questioned why the project is moving forward when voters did not approve Measure J. Some expressed support for the project, noting that it would improve safety and relieve congestion. One commenter emphasized the importance of this project and that the funding must be spent responsibly. Another commenter expressed the need for improvements to the Morrissey Boulevard interchange to provide a safe crossing over Highway 1 for bicycles. The commenter urged the project team to provide a safe crossing before or as part of the construction Auxiliary Lanes Project.

Other Comments Received

SSCRTC received a copy of a petition from People Power signed by over 120 people. The petition text reads:

“In November 2004, more than 57% of Santa Cruz voters voted NO against widening Highway 1. The Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project is clearly a way to widen Highway 1. I do not support this. I believe that transportation funds should be used for projects that have full public support such as building a

consolidated Metro base, filling potholes or building pedestrian bridges over Highway 1.”

SCCRTC also received one phone call prior to the Open House / Public Hearing. This commenter was concerned about this project moving forward after voters rejected Measure J in November 2004. It was suggested to use project funds to improve public transportation and maintain existing roads instead of building auxiliary lanes.

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