



Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project

Caltrans / SCCRTC Public Information Open Houses

Comment Summary Report

September 2006

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) hosted three public information open houses to present the latest information on the Highway 1 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Project. The events were held on September 20, 2006 in Aptos at the Best Western Seacliff Inn, September 26, 2006 in Watsonville at Watsonville High School, and September 27, 2006 in Santa Cruz at the Senior Citizens Opportunities, Inc.

The purpose of the open houses was to:

- Update the community about the proposed project and ongoing study effort.
- Obtain input on the proposed project, alternatives, and environmental issues.
- Clarify the relationship between the proposed Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening Project and other related projects in the vicinity, including the Highway 1/State Route 17 Merge Lanes project.

The open houses gave the public the opportunity to speak with Caltrans, SCCRTC and the project team about project issues and concerns. Participants were provided comment sheets at the event to submit written comments to Caltrans.

COMMENT SUMMARY

Open house attendees had the opportunity to make comments and ask questions of the project team during the three public information open houses. This report provides a summary of both written comments received as well as the oral comments heard by the project team throughout all three public information open house meetings (staff was debriefed after each open house). Comments received following the open house meetings are summarized as well.

Comments included those specific to the Highway 1 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane Widening Project and overall traffic/transportation planning in the project vicinity. This summary captures the general comments received by the project team and is not intended to be a

verbatim transcript of the comments received at the open house or the comments submitted in writing.

Comments Received at Open Houses

The following paragraphs summarize the comments received at the open houses by category.

Need for Project

Many participants recognized the need for Highway 1 improvements. Some participants strongly supported a widening project. There was concern from some participants that the HOV lane would not adequately relieve congestion and participants requested that the studies produce data to support the benefits of a HOV dedicated lane.

Specific comments and questions:

- Widening Highway 1 is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed in the interest of public safety.
- Prefer widening Highway 1 quickly without HOV lanes.
- Provide statistics on the number of drivers that will be able to use the HOV lanes.

Project Design and Operations

Several comments and questions were made regarding specific design and operations of the proposed project. Several participants recommended ramp metering and pedestrian overcrossings at interchanges. In addition, there was concern about traffic weaving and merging patterns as a result of people navigating in and out of the HOV lane. Participants were also concerned that restricting the new lane to HOV traffic would not adequately address the transportation needs of the area. One participant requested that no additional studies be focused on the Reduced Build Option.

Specific comments and questions:

- Prefer adding a mixed use lane for everyone to use lane instead of the HOV lane.
- Consider ramp metering at select interchanges such as at Soquel.
- Support adding auxiliary lanes as part of the project.
- Concern about pedestrian safety at some off-ramps not designed to slow or stop vehicles.
- Concern about future lane configuration for merge lanes.

- Explain how this project could accommodate UC Santa Cruz traffic south of the University.
- Confusion about operation of merge lanes / auxiliary lanes.
- Provide information on which bridges are going to be impacted by the project.
- Clarification is needed explaining the difference between full-build and reduced build options.
- Explain the difference between diamond and cloverleaf interchanges.
- A traffic control device or design change is needed at the Highway 1 South off-ramp to westbound San Andreas.
- Improve safety and special needs access for pedestrians and bicyclists at the Soquel Ave and Morrissey Ave Interchange overcrossings.
- Support for pedestrian crossings at Mar Vista.

Impacts to Properties

Some attendees were concerned about Right-of-Way (ROW) acquisition and wanted to know which properties were subject to acquisition.

Specific comments and questions:

- Concern about widening beyond existing ROW (e.g. Post Office by Kennedy Drive).
- Concern regarding ROW at the Park Ave / Kennedy Drive area.
- Provide a list of businesses and residences impacted by the project.

Noise and Soundwalls

Several participants were concerned about noise impacts and wanted to know about soundwall mitigation measures. Others were concerned soundwalls would not reduce reflective noise and would have negative visual impacts.

Specific comments and questions:

- Provide clarification about implementing soundwalls for mitigating noise impacts.
- Concern regarding noise impacts in the Park Ave / Kennedy Drive area.
- Concern regarding noise reduction and required height of potential soundwalls.
- Soundwalls do not aesthetically fit in the existing environment and should not be installed.
- Will the existing soundwalls be removed with this project?

- Will soundwalls adequately address reflective noise?

Flooding

Several participants were concerned about flooding in neighborhoods adjacent to the project corridor as a result of the widening.

Specific comments and questions:

- The widening of Router Street resulted in a large amount of flooding. Consider project impacts in relation to the Soquel Creek bridge.
- Concern that flooding would result from widening the freeway at Aptos Creek.
- Can water be siphoned away from homes to prevent flooding from the HOV bridge widening?

Environmental Impacts

Participants were concerned about a variety of environmental impacts related to the project. Specifically, participants were interested in vegetation, endangered species, archeology, and construction related impacts.

Specific comments and questions:

- Concern regarding how archeological resources can be protected during construction.
- Is testing conducted for hazardous materials along Highway 1?
- What are the mitigation measures for protecting the Red-Legged Frog?
- Coordinate mitigation opportunities with the Arana Gulch Watershed Alliance.
- Concern about the number of trees that will be removed in comparison to current construction on the Highway 1 / 17 Interchange.
- Address noise, dirt and air pollution as a result of the loss of trees from construction.
- Caltrans should provide landscaping for local neighborhood streets.
- What are the mitigation measures for addressing neighborhood graffiti?

Local Circulation Issues

Participants voiced concern about how the project would affect pedestrian, bicycle, and automobile traffic on local streets in their neighborhoods.

Specific comments and questions:

- Concern regarding street configuration and access at Morrissey and the resulting traffic volume in the neighborhood.
- Replace the Market Street Bridge and provide pedestrian and bicycle paths on both sides for surrounding neighborhoods.
- Provide more pedestrian overcrossings along the corridor.
- Please provide more information on existing bicycle and pedestrian paths.
- Will this project affect traffic at Rooney Street?

Project Schedule

Many participants asked about the project schedule and timing for construction.

Specific comments and questions:

- Provide information on the project schedule for construction.
- Explain why the project has taken so long to move forward.
- When will there be an environmental document to comment on?
- Begin working on the project soon as the project should have started long ago.
- Collapse the project schedule by working on the environmental, design and right-of-way acquisition simultaneously.

Public Involvement

Many participants expressed their appreciation for the public outreach and the information presented at the open houses. Several participants requested more detailed information for the public to review.

Specific comments and questions:

- Please provide a small schematic of the project area for participants to take home.
- Provide additional public outreach on project.
- Support for future workshops as the project progresses.
- To make an informed decision consider opposing public views and allow the public to have access to alternative information.
- No project should move forward before the Transportation Funding Task Force has an opportunity to meet, discuss priorities and make suggestions.

Funding

Several attendees questioned how this project would be funded. Some asked why this project and other related projects are continuing given the voters in November 2004 defeated Measure J, which included a sales tax to fund the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening project and other transportation improvement and transit projects. Numerous other attendees indicated that their “no” vote was not a rejection of Highway 1 improvements, but other projects included in the measure.

Specific comments and questions:

- Provide more information on the funding sources for this project.
- Measure J was defeated due to lack of support for a HOV lane in the corridor unless the design could be shown to resolve the real traffic issues.
- Support for widening, but voted against Measure J due to the rail component and HOV lane component.
- Sales tax will be difficult to pass because local residents do not use the freeway often.
- Consider the narrow shoulder alternative (“Reduced Build” Alternative) for reducing the project costs by as much as \$100 Million or 25% of the standard shoulder alternative (“Full Build” Alternative).
- Requests for state and federal money should be made quickly if the transportation bond passes in November.

Relationship to Other Projects

Participants wanted to know how this project related to other projects occurring in the area. Many participants were concerned about construction in the nearby project area and uncertain of the Highway 1 HOV Lane Widening project limits. Specifically, many participants were displeased with the impacts related to construction of the Highway 1 / 17 Interchange Project. Many participants felt the source of congestion was from the Highway 1 / 17 Interchange and reconfiguration of that interchange is needed to address traffic issues on Highway 1.

Specific comments and questions:

- Explain the relationship between the Highway 1 / 17 and HOV lanes projects.
- Consider implementing improvements to State Route 1 (Highway 1), Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard first.
- Explain how construction of the project fits in with current projects underway.

- Provide updates for the 41st Avenue Interchange and how it addresses traffic in relation to improvements in the neighborhood.
- Signs need to be posted on Highway 17 warning of road closures from San Jose to Soquel Avenue.
- Impacts from Highway 1 / 17 Interchange construction activities have caused dust, shaking, and road blockage.
- Multiple lanes for on- and off-ramps at the Highway 1 / 17 Interchange are needed to reduce congestion and improve safety.
- At least two lanes are needed at the Highway 17 merge north from Highway 1.
- Explain how diamond lane merges operate at the Highway 1 North / Highway 17 interchange where three northbound lanes and two interchange lanes merge down to one lane.
- Concerned that Highway 1 / 17 Interchange is moving the traffic congestion further south on Highway 1 by Soquel.
- Prepare a complete transportation plan that addresses 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.

Other Comments

Several participants requested further definition of project information as well as commented on the open house display boards. Another participant wanted to know how nearby commercial development would impact the project. Other participants opposed to the project supported the use of a light rail corridor rather than HOV lanes.

Specific comments and questions:

- Orientation of project maps is confusing with the North arrow pointed downward.
- Do not invest a large amount of time studying the Reduced Build Option as statistics show the option does not provide a significant benefit over the No Build alternative.
- Explain why a light rail corridor is not being considered as an alternative.
- Explain how the new Home Depot development will interface with this project.

Written Comments Submitted by Mail

Three comment cards and five emails were submitted to Caltrans after the meeting. The comments are summarized below. See Appendix D for photocopies of the actual comment cards.

Need for Project

One comment expressed concern that this project is still under evaluation even though local voters did not support Measure J which included funding for this project. The commenter also noted that highway widening projects around the Bay Area have not alleviated traffic issues.

Specific comments and questions:

- The citizens of this county, community and diverse neighborhoods do not want this project – the proposals have been voted upon and defeated.
- Building more lanes, more interchanges and overpasses are not needed in Soquel, Capitola and the surrounding community.

Public Outreach

Comments were supportive of the public information open houses.

Specific comments and questions:

- The informational sessions for the public are a good way to know there is planning occurring to improve Highway 1.
- We appreciated the displays and staff to explain the charts.

Project Design

Comments suggested the HOV lane would not relieve congestion. One comment was in favor of spending transportation funds on transit and pedestrian facilities. Another comment was also received concerning a possible pedestrian bridge being built on Trevethan Avenue. Another comment suggested adding an auxiliary lane and additional mixed use lane rather than a HOV lane to improve Highway 1. Another comment favored implementing a design with the least impact on the corridor. One comment expressed extreme concern that the reconfiguration of the 41st Avenue-Bay Avenue/Porter Street interchanges would negatively impact surrounding neighborhoods. One comment also criticized the lack of carpool and transit parking. One comment favored the use of ramp metering lights.

Specific comments and questions:

- The project lacks planned carpool parking locations at the interchanges that are necessary for individuals to take the bus or to carpool. Currently, the only official parking for carpools and vans is at the Catholic Church in Aptos; the informal parking lot at the Freedom Blvd. / Highway 1 Interchange was eliminated for a bus stop.
- The project should add another mixed use lane and not an HOV lane.
- Reconfiguration of the 41st Avenue-Bay Avenue/Porter Street interchanges would negatively impact surrounding neighborhoods.
- On and off lanes between interchanges at Freedom and Rio del Mar should be added.
- Santa Cruz County voters defeated the 2004 Measure J widening tax measure, therefore, transportation funds should be spent on buses, rail, and bikeways rather than subsidizing automobiles.
- Consider on-ramp metering lights as used in Santa Clara County.
- If the “No-Build” is not an option, then favor the “RMAX” approach to minimize impacts to the corridor and challenges with funding.
- Concern about building a pedestrian bridge and its proximity to a residence on Trevethan Avenue.

Relationship to Other Projects

Comments requested mitigation for the residents impacted by the current construction on the Highway 1 / 17 Interchange Project.

Specific comments and questions:

- Stop the “beeps” on vehicles backing up during the night. We need to be able to sleep at night.
- Sweep the street adjacent to the project and wet them down to control the dust.