DRAFT
APRIL 26 & 29, 2004 OPEN HOUSE/PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared for:
SCCRTC
Santa Cruz County
Regional Transportation Commission

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I. INTRODUCTION

In April 2004, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission conducted an extensive public outreach effort to solicit input on the proposed Highway 1 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane Widening Project. Two open house/public information meetings were held and many written comments were recorded.

Numerous stakeholders, interest groups and the public provided input on the proposed project. This report is intended to summarize this outreach effort and the input received.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Highway 1 freeway between Santa Cruz and Aptos currently experiences heavy congestion during various commute hours. To address this problem, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC), in partnership with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), analyzed options to increase highway capacity without encouraging more traffic. It was determined that constructing (HOV) lanes between Santa Cruz and Aptos is the most feasible and desirable option. The project involves adding a HOV lane in each direction. The purpose of the project is to reduce congestion, encourage carpooling and use of alternative transportation modes as a means to increase transportation system capacity, and improve safety. The addition of three new bicycle/pedestrian overcrossings is also being considered. Preliminary engineering and environmental studies for the project were recently initiated. This project will be coordinated with the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project.

III. PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETINGS AND PUBLIC OUTREACH

SCCRTC hosted two public information meetings to provide the Santa Cruz County community with a description of the proposed project, the preliminary issues and alternatives to be addressed in the environmental studies and to accept public input. Meetings were held on the south and north ends of the Highway 1 corridor for convenience to the public and to encourage participation. A specific opportunity for agency input was also provided on the afternoon of April 26, 2004 prior to the first public meeting.

Noticing and Publicity

The public information meetings were noticed through an informational flyer (see Appendix A) that was mailed to over 10,700 property owners, residents and businesses within 500 feet of the project area and to nearly 1,000 special interest groups, agencies and elected officials. A display advertisement (see Appendix B) was also used to invite participation and was placed in: *Santa Cruz Sentinel, Register Pajaronian, Good Times, Metro Santa Cruz, Aptos Times, Mid-County Post, Scotts Valley Banner/Valley Post.* In most cases the advertisement ran twice in each newspaper. SCCRTC also translated the advertisement into Spanish for placement in *La Ganga.* In addition to the direct mailer and display advertisement, sandwich board displays promoting the two meetings were strategically placed along the corridor, often near on ramps to Highway 1. People on SCCRTC's e-mail distribution list received notification electronically. Personalized invitations were also mailed to elected officials, including County of Santa Cruz, Cities of Capitola, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley and Watsonville, and the Board of Directors of the Santa Cruz County Metropolitan Transit District.

Report on Open House/Public Information Meetings

The open house/public information meetings were held on April 26, 2004 and April 29, 2004. Approximately 156 people attended the meetings, over 50 comment cards were received at and immediately following the meeting. Approximately 225 verbal comments were recorded.

The public information meetings were held in the following locations:

Aptos Public Information Meeting
Monday, April 26, 2004
Best Western Seacliff Inn
7500 Old Dominion Court
Aptos, CA 95003

Santa Cruz Public Information Meeting
Thursday, April 29, 2004
Simpkins Family Swim Center
979 17th Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

Both meetings were 2 ½ hours long. Participants were invited to drop by at any time between 6 PM and 7 PM to view exhibits with project information, maps, schedules, costs, etc. Staff was on hand to discuss issues and answer questions. A brief PowerPoint presentation followed summarizing the project and current activities. The presentation was taped and aired on Community Television of Santa Cruz County on July 22, 25 and 29, 2004 and August 2, 2004.

After the presentation, attendees were asked to divide into groups based on a color badge they had received as they entered the meeting. Each group was asked to consider and respond to two questions.

- Question One: What issues should be addressed in the environmental evaluations?

- Question Two: What evaluation criteria are important in assessing the alternatives (i.e. will it improve mobility, improve air quality, reduce travel times, etc.)

Breaking out into smaller groups ensured each person had a chance to make comments if desired. Once all of the comments were collected. Next, the meeting reconvened and a representative from each group presented the highlights of their discussion. Comment sheets were also distributed. Attendees were encouraged to mail additional comments that might come to mind or to pass comment sheets out to their neighbors who might have issues they would like addressed in the environmental studies. It was requested, that all comments be forwarded to SCCRTC by May 14, 2004.

VI. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES RAISED

The following summarizes by category the key issues raised verbally and in writing at the public information meetings, as well as comments received by mail, email and fax during the comment period.

Traffic/Transportation

- Evaluate the project impact to local/arterial traffic patterns.
- Consider that the project may move the bottleneck to another portion of Highway 1.
- Provide information on the effectiveness of HOV lanes to reduce overall traffic on Highway 1.
- Consider improving interchanges and metering lights to resolve the traffic problem without widening Highway 1.
- Evaluate and mitigate traffic during construction.
- Consider building the infrastructure, specifically interchanges and bridges, to accommodate eight lanes in the future.
- Widening Highway 1 will not reduce traffic and should not be associated with the Rail Trail project on the ballot.
- Bicycle and Pedestrian facilities should be included in the project.

Noise

- Noise is currently a problem for many residents in the project area and acoustical studies are important.
- Many community members support sound walls as a necessary mitigation measure. Other community members questioned the use of sound walls due to the visual impact and deflected sound.
- Community input is important for the location and design of future sound walls.
- Consider using noise reducing asphalt for the roadway material.
- Natural landscaping can be effective to reduce noise and dust.
- Evaluate the impact of deflected sound from sound walls.
- Increased noise may reduce property values.
- Topography of the project area increases noise. (Gross Road, Rodeo Gulch)

Visual Quality and Aesthetics

- Evaluate the visual impact from sound walls.
- Protect the surrounding environment and large trees.
- Landscaping should be included as part of the project.

Air Quality

- Consider that the project may not improve air quality and could cause more pollution.
- Evaluate the impact to air quality from all of the alternatives.

Land Use/Property Values

- Evaluate the impact on future land use.
- The Highway 1 HOV widening project may encourage automobile use and increase sprawl without reducing traffic.
- Evaluate projected growth in housing and jobs in the area.

- Evaluate the impact on property values.

Funding

- More state money should fund the project.
- Clarify what will occur if the tax measure on the ballot does not pass.
- Provide information on the potential impact to the funding of other transit projects.

Biological Resource/Water Resources Quality

- Protection of environmental resources is important to the community.
- Evaluate the impact to the natural environment, specifically endangered species, native plants, trees, and waterways.
- Ensure the design does not increase storm run-off and erosion.

HOV Lanes and Transportation Demand Management

- Many comments supported HOV lanes as a method to encourage alternatives to driving alone.
- Support safeguards to ensure that the HOV is not converted to a multi-use lane.
- Support additional incentives to encourage alternatives to driving alone such as employer subsidies, bus discounts, and free shuttles.
- Some comments support a toll road to reduce traffic.
- Evaluate whether HOV lanes are effective and safe for the project section of Highway 1.
- Provide quantification that HOV lanes reduce overall traffic.
- Several comments support shared-use lanes for the widening project instead of HOV lanes.
- Evaluate the safety of HOV lanes. They require difficult traffic merging patterns and may cause traffic in other lanes.

Goals

- Some community members asked whether the project will provide a long-term solution to the problem and supported a larger project that included with Monterey County.
- Evaluate if other alternatives would meeting the stated goals.

Process

- Provide information about the overall decision making process and how the project was defined.

V. Listing of Written and Verbal Comments

The following is a list of the majority of comments and inquiries received from meeting attendees, and by mail, email and fax. Some comments represent initial preferences about project elements. Other comments identify items to be addressed in the environmental document and issues needing further clarification in future studies and public outreach efforts.

General Comments

Project Goals and Scope

- Identify the ultimate long-term solution while pursuing this project.
- The project purpose of reducing congestion needs to be clarified and addressed. By the time construction is finished the lane will be filled up and congestion will not be addressed.
- Is the project sufficient to reach the stated goals?
- Does widening meet project purpose?
- Define the success criteria.
- Identify project goals and consider other alternatives that can reach them.
- Do not look at alternatives that do not meet criteria.
- Criteria should emphasize aesthetics.
- Recreational rail is not an alternative that meets this project's goal of increasing the highway's capacity.
- Growth will outpace the project.
- Need to dream of a bigger solution.
- Should Monterey County have a concurrent project?
- The project too shortsighted. It should be more lanes and go further.
- The project is too small to begin with.
- Is this the best long-term solution?
- Recognize that widening a short stretch of highway is not a permanent solution.
- Coordinate project work with Monterey County.
- The project should take a critical look at assumptions.

General

- Address all issues equally and fully.
- Quality of life should be reflected in the studies.
- There needs to be a balance between people's needs and environmental needs.
- Do not purchase more right-of-way unless absolutely necessary.

Project Alternatives and Transportation Issues

High Occupancy Vehicle Lane Considerations

- HOV lanes are important to encourage more environmentally friendly transportation.
- Demonstrate how HOV lanes reduce congestion.
- Provide evidence that use of alternative transportation will increase due to HOV lanes.
- Study how carpool lanes truly address congestion and if so, during what part of the day?
- Explain whether the HOV lanes will operate during specific hours.

High Occupancy Vehicle Lane Considerations (continued)

- Who benefits from HOV lanes?
- Guarantee that the HOV lane will be maintained.
- Note that HOV lanes can improve travel times for disabled people.
- Clearly define the benefits of HOV lanes and provide evidence that people will use the HOV lanes.
- Provide information on the hours of HOV operation.
- Will carpool lanes be available to hybrid automobiles?
- Increase carpooling through education and awareness.
- Carpool lanes are dangerous because of the speed differential between lanes.
- Carpool lanes are a better fit for long stretches of highway with few exits, which does not apply to the portion of Highway 1 in Santa Cruz County.
- If HOV lanes are constructed, provide secure parking areas for carpoolers to use.
- Evaluate HOV lanes and the relationship to freeway exits
- Evaluate HOV lane usage specifically for this area
- Ensure HOV lanes do not introduce conflicts.
- Evaluate HOV lane south of Larkin.
- Will HOV be maintained as an HOV lane or will it be converted?
- Will carpool lanes be converted to mixed flow lanes if it is underutilized?
- Consider whether the HOV lanes be gridlocked as well.
- Favor the third alternative as an HOV lane because it makes it more appealing to carpool.
- Prefer more single occupancy lanes be added to the highway instead of HOV lanes.
- HOV lanes are politically correct but do not work. Few motorists actually use them.
- Add more mixed-use lanes, not HOV.
- Auxiliary lanes would help congestion points without the years of disruption of a major freeway widening/HOV project.

Alternatives and Design Considerations

- Recommend the alternative with 12 foot lanes, with 8 foot shoulders and vegetative barrier between each direction.
- Prefer six lanes with reduced widths as an alternative.
- Study merge lane improvements versus through lane additions.
- Support no-build alternative.
- Recommend alternative of no-build plus the three bicycle/pedestrian overcrossings.
- Consider what happens with no-build. Will there be continued deterioration of system? What will it look like in 30 years?
- The no-build alternative is unacceptable.
- A plan is needed to eliminate the bottleneck at 41st Avenue and Gross Road, such as eliminate the west side of intersection and opening 40th Avenue to Clares Street.
- Overpasses and other new structures should be built to accommodate future widening to 8 lanes.
- Build overpasses for future 8 lane widening.
- The 41st Avenue overpass should be widened to six lanes.
- The traffic flow issues will only be addressed once the interchanges are fixed. Consider cloverleaves and traffic signals at freeway exits.

Alternatives and Design Considerations (continued)

- Consider improving the freeway entrance and exit ramps by implementing metering lights at Morrissey, Soquel, and 41st Avenue.
- Look at grade modification south of 41st Avenue.
- A fourth lane from Fishhook to 41st Avenue is necessary.
- Re-evaluate the Soquel Avenue/Frontage Road exit as this is a dangerous area for cars merging from the freeway exit onto Soquel Avenue.
- Remove the first merge at Morrissey exit ramp on Highway 1 South.
- The Morrissey Boulevard southbound exit and entry ramps need improvement.
- Reconfigure the Morrissey Avenue exit.
- Improve the Soquel Avenue northbound ramp to prevent back-ups.
- Modify existing on and off ramps to improve operations.
- Will on-ramps be brought to Caltrans standards?
- Include ramp metering in the project design.
- Study the alternatives with ramp metering.
- The short merging lanes create bottlenecks.
- Need longer merge lanes; short lanes add to backup.
- Pedestrian crossings are needed.
- Pedestrian bridges are a good idea as long as they are wheelchair and bicycle-friendly.
- Provide information on the overall design and whether there will be a median.
- A design-build project would speed up the process.
- Is design-build a good method for implementation? What are other approaches?
- Study interchange improvements versus mainline improvements.

Other Project Alternatives

- What about a rail alternative?
- Recommend alternative of railway and highway.
- Should HOV lanes be converted to railway transportation?
- The ultimate solution should be more lanes with rail and transit and inter-county transportation with Monterey.
- Make highway improvements further South on Highway 1.
- Evaluate other congestion reducing solutions.
- Consider a double deck or more than one new lane in each direction.
- Create a two-way tunnel under the Pagonip as a second access from University of California at Santa Cruz.
- Construct a new freeway parallel to Highway 1, 3-5 miles further inland, for regional traffic.
- Construct new freeway south of Aptos and head over Santa Cruz Mountains to tunnel into Route 85 and Route 101.
- Recommend alternative that better addressed mobility needs such as, a parallel route 4 to 5 miles inland from Highway 1.
- What about a new bypass route in Scotts Valley?
- Consider hot lanes during peak times.
- Consider charging tolls on Highway 17 and Highway 1.
- Study who uses Highway 1 and if rail would serve these trips.
- Move the highway closer to Cabrillo for less impacts.

Transportation

- How will reduced congestion be determined and ensured?
- Study why particular bottlenecks occur.
- Does the project just move the congestion to the future?
- Study where traffic jams begin.
- Will congestion be solved through this project?
- If lanes are added, wouldn't they be filled up with local drivers?
- New capacity allows for greater volume and greater congestion.
- Evaluate induced traffic.
- Study the induced demand created by additional lanes.
- Widening the highway will encourage more people to drive.
- Weekend traffic should be studied and addressed.
- Study how development caused by the widening will induce traffic.
- Will congestion be reduced?
- Study existing congestion versus congestion under proposed project.
- Consider credible peer review of traffic studies.
- Peer review of traffic studies could potentially include a Sierra Club representative.
- Compare project with other similar systems of traffic patterns.
- Evaluate the traffic and circulation impacts and benefits on neighboring streets.
- Include reducing arterial street traffic in project.
- Study how the widening will impact city streets with more traffic.
- Analyze how the project will impact arterials and streets in city and county.
- Survey who travels Highway 1 and why.
- What are the major origins and destinations?
- Evaluate alternative impacts on cyclists and pedestrians.
- Pedestrian access is critical in tying communities together.
- Measure benefits such as commute time reduction.
- Perception of reduced congestion reduces incentive for alternative transportation.
- Remember lesson of "fishhook" – turning two lanes increased traffic with serious bottleneck back-ups and increased rear-end collisions.
- Carefully study capacity for exiting freeway.
- Will this just move bottleneck? Are we moving bottleneck from one end of the county to another?
- There are approximately 100,000 Average Daily Trips and 25% commuters.
- Study safety for pre and post project collisions.
- Define and clarify traffic safety.
- Consider the importance of transport for emergency vehicles.

Alternative Transportation and Transportation Demand Management

- Study where people travel to and from to know how to best provide incentives and alternatives.
- Combine express bus with rail service by fitting buses with train wheels. The route could start at the Dominican Hospital park and ride lot and continue to Highway 17 and to San Jose.
- Consider providing a bicycle/pedestrian overcrossing or improvements at Morrissey Boulevard.
- Include transit in alternatives.

Alternative Transportation and Transportation Demand Management (continued)

- Focus on efforts to reduce the number of cars.
- Recommend providing incentives for using alternative fuels.
- Education about transit alternatives is needed to get people out of cars. Recommend free bus service, mass transit on both sides of hill, internet use to help reduce commute times, taxi routes, health aspect of walking, toll roads.
- Concentrate on alternative solutions including light rail.
- Consider providing "routed" taxis.
- Alternative transportation has limited potential.
- Recommend alternative of rail trail and bikes instead of widening.
- Public buses to San Jose should be supported.
- Money and time is being wasted on studies and discussions about alternative transportation options instead of constructing the extra lanes.
- Consider toll road that is free for buses and public transit.
- Project to address drivers' origins and destinations. If buses are implemented, will they be used?
- Consider business vanpools incentives.
- Include employer involvement in traffic solutions.

Environmental Studies

Aesthetics and Landscaping

- Provide landscaping to make the highway and surrounding areas aesthetically pleasing.
- Include a sufficient budget for landscaping.
- Explain how landscaping will be maintained, and how the districts will work together to provide maintenance.
- Incorporate public art in the project.
- Construct infrastructure underground to address aesthetic issues.
- Maximize vegetation.
- Recommend designing the project to reflect the community character, including enhanced landscaping, stonework and sculptures.
- Plant landscape that is pleasant when sitting in traffic.
- Utilize landscaping and tree preservation as an alternative to sound walls.
- Landscaping and beautifying the area is important especially by 41st Avenue.
- Prefer vegetation over concrete sound walls.

Noise Impacts and Soundwalls

- Noise impacts are a great concern to the community.
- What designs are available for sound walls?
- The design of sound walls is important.
- Sound wall should be designed with aesthetics and safety in mind.
- Sound walls in the area are long overdue and will improve quality of life.
- Provide a sound wall between the highway and Soquel Drive.
- Recommend placing sound walls along Morrissey Boulevard to help maintain livability of community.
- Consider building sound walls and using pavement materials that reduce noise

Noise Impacts and Soundwalls (continued)

- Do sound walls differ for developed and undeveloped land?
- Higher noise levels will lower property value. Will there be any financial compensation for this loss?
- Enforcement of muffler laws, especially for motorcycles needs to be increased.
- Widening will remove landscaping which will create more noise, dust and flooding issues.
- Noise studies are important.
- What determines where sound monitors are placed?
- Are sound walls placed prior to construction?
- Landscaping minimizes noise and dust impacts.
- Consider sound reflecting off sound walls.
- How will sound wall deflect sound into larger community?
- Noise models should consider sound impacts on residents within a few miles off Highway 1 and in diverse weather conditions.
- Consider alternatives to sound walls.
- Consider innovative sound solutions.
- Use trees and landscaping as a sound buffer.
- Utilize an alternative pavement to reduce noise.
- Recognize that sound barriers do not alleviate asbestos particles (from brakes), exhaust fumes, vehicle pollution. Trees and shrubs are a better alternative.
- Sound walls are aesthetically unappealing.

Construction

- Evaluate increased congestion on side streets during construction.
- Carefully evaluate construction impacts.
- Will closures during construction force traffic onto neighborhood streets?
- Analyze the construction impacts on the local area.
- Consider construction phasing impacts including, noise, delays, aesthetics, traffic, and air quality.
- Carefully evaluate construction related impacts.
- Provide information on construction times and limits.
- How many lanes will remain open during construction?
- Why are large trucks allowed in downtown area?
- Use local people for work and the project will cost less.
- Involve unions and local labor in design-build contracts.

Land Use and Socioeconomics

- Will the environmental studies consider future residential growth and University growth that may impact the Santa Cruz transportation system?
- Criteria should be county specific with assumptions on continued growth.
- Look at the big picture of how the widened freeway will impact the community including development, business and housing.
- Study projected growth and highway use.
- Analyze whether growth with be caused by the widening.
- The population is projected to double by 2040.
- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of the population.

Land Use and Socioeconomics (continued)

- Will added lanes cause excessive growth and sprawl?
- Clarify zoning restrictions in the area.
- Include two growth models, one for the no build and the other for the build alternative.
- Housing projections from the Association of Bay Area Governments should be revised to discontinue the growth assigned to Santa Cruz County.
- Land use planning should provide for work/live/shop/study within community to reduce commuting.
- If impacts are unable to be mitigated, is there compensation for properties?
- Consider impact on existing development.
- Analyze the impact to local property values and zoning.
- Evaluate the social impacts from the project.
- Identify economic hot spots.
- Consider the impacts to property values with and without the project.

Community Impacts (see also transportation section)

- Evaluate the impact on local communities.
- Study overall community access issues.
- Reduce cut-through traffic in neighborhoods.
- Signage should be representative of Santa Cruz character.
- How will the project affect community character?
- Consider the surrounding community living by a six lane highway with sound walls.

Air Quality Impacts

- Consider increased pollution from traffic.
- How are air quality studies done?
- Compare current air quality and noise impacts to impacts under the proposed conditions.
- Compare air quality impacts in alternatives.
- Analyze whether the project will improve air quality.
- Consider air pollution and noise from increased traffic.

Biological Resources

- Consider impacts to wildlife caused by the project.
- Existing trees and vegetation took years to grow and should not be destroyed.
- Study impact on environmentally sensitive areas.
- Endangered species considerations and impact studies need to be accelerated.
- Consider salamanders and endangered species.
- Study the impact from zoning changes to environmentally sensitive areas and private property areas.
- Evaluate impacts to trees (Aptos Oaks and Eucalyptus in Santa Cruz).
- The removal of trees is a concern.
- Protect the oak trees and cypress trees on New Brighton Road.
- Study impact to native plants (east live oaks, Monterey Cypress) and consider transplanting impacted plants and trees.
- Consider the impact to endangered species.

Water Resources

- Consider drainage, sewage and polluted run-off and the impact to Aptos Creek and Boregas Creek.
- Analyze the impact to water quality and the potential increase for surface run-off and drainage.
- Ensure that water run-off from the Highway goes into the sewer lines and not Aptos Creek.
- Study drainage and water quality.
- Treatment of increased water run-off should meet new EPA water quality requirements.
- Consider increase in polluted water run-off due to greater surface area.
- Study the impact on drainages, gulches and creeks.
- Consider flooding impacts to the highway.

Other Environmental Issues

- Energy is wasted in congestion.
- Will project increase fuel consumption?
- Study potential impacts from asbestos.

Public Outreach and Other Comments

Public Outreach and Process

- Provide the history of decision making regarding this project.
- Explain how the recommendation to add HOV lanes came about?
- Provide more information on the project prior to the November elections.
- Consider arranging two more public meetings with question and answer sessions.
- Interested in additional project public meetings.
- Send written updates to the 12,000 people who were on the original mailing list.
- Provide answers to community questions in writing.
- Information at meetings was presented well.
- Need to better use microphone at the meeting, it was difficult to hear.
- Better coffee next time.

Financial Issues

Funding and Costs

- Include the cost for speed bumps on neighborhood streets.
- Why should Santa Cruz pay for the benefit of employers in San Jose? Employers should pay for the project.
- If the EIR isn't approved, but the ½ cent sales tax passes in November, where will that money go?
- Will the project be able to accommodate the transportation needs of the county for the life of the sales tax measure?
- Review the Highway 1 project actual costs and schedule.
- Is passage of the sales tax required for funding?
- Provide information on the fiscal impact of past and future studies.
- Clarify whether this will be a single item sales tax measure.
- Consider cost of enforcement of HOV lanes.

Funding and Costs (continued)

- The benefits of the Highway 1 Widening Project are not worth the monetary costs.
- What if tax measure does not pass?
- Analyze whether project is the best value for the dollars.
- The environmental document should be fiscally responsible.
- Consider funding the project through toll lanes.
- Don't allow lack of funding to dictate aesthetics and Right-of-Way acquisitions.