

Notice of Preparation of a
Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment
and Notice of Scoping Meeting

**Highway 1 Auxiliary Lanes—
State Park Drive to Bay Avenue/Porter Street**

Santa Cruz County, CA

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in association with the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC), proposes improvements along State Route 1 (referred to as SR 1) in the City of Capitola and Santa Cruz County. Improvements under consideration include the construction of auxiliary lanes, implementation of bus-on-shoulder (known as BOS) operations, replacement of the Capitola Avenue overcrossing in the City of Capitola, and the installation of sound walls.

Caltrans plans to prepare a joint environmental document – an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (known as an EIR/EA) – pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Caltrans is the lead agency under CEQA and is assuming responsibilities of lead agency for the Federal Highway Administration under NEPA assignment.

Caltrans is distributing this Notice of Preparation to request comments from responsible and trustee agencies and interested members of the public regarding the significant environmental issues, reasonable project alternatives, and reasonable mitigation measures to be discussed in the draft EIR/EA.

Project Location

The proposed project would extend approximately 2.7 miles along SR 1 in Santa Cruz County between the State Park Drive interchange and the Bay Avenue/Porter Street interchange in the City of Capitola and unincorporated county (known as Aptos). The proposed project extends from post mile (PM) 10.34 to PM 13.43. Figure 1 shows the project location and vicinity.

Project Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to:

- Reduce congestion along SR 1 through the project limits
- Enhance bicycle and pedestrian connectivity by providing improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Promote the use of alternative transportation modes to increase transportation system capacity and reliability
- Widen the overcrossing at Capitola Avenue to current standards

This project is needed because:

- Several bottlenecks along SR 1 in the southbound and northbound directions cause congestion during peak hours, significantly delaying drivers. As a result, “cut-through” traffic—or traffic on local streets—is increasing because drivers are seeking to avoid congestion on the highway.
- There are limited opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists to safely navigate SR 1 in the project corridor, even though portions of the project area are designated as regional bicycle routes.
- There are insufficient incentives to increase transit service in the SR 1 corridor because congestion threatens reliability and cost-effective transit service delivery.
- The existing length (i.e., span) of the Capitola Avenue overcrossing cannot accommodate a wider freeway. In addition, the existing overcrossing does not meet current standards for vertical clearance over the freeway, has substandard widths, and does not have bicycle lanes across the bridge. The bridge must be reconstructed to meet current standards.

Project Background

Improvements in the project area were addressed previously in a combined Tier I/Tier II EIR with a Finding of No Significant Impact (known as a FONSI), which was adopted in December 2018. The Tier I component, referred to as the corridor improvement project, proposed approximately 8.9 miles of new high-occupancy vehicle (known as HOV) lanes, HOV on-ramp bypass lanes, auxiliary lanes, pedestrian and bicycle overcrossings, and reconstructed interchanges. It was recognized that the Tier I project would likely be implemented in phases. The Tier II component therefore analyzed the first phase of the corridor improvement project, which included auxiliary lanes between 41st Avenue and Soquel Avenue/Drive among other improvements within the Tier II project limits.

The proposed project is the second phase of the improvements described in the Tier I EIR/FONSI. The SCCRTC developed an implementation plan for building out the Tier I corridor improvement project based on traffic operation criteria to ensure that each phase identified as a future construction-level project would have independent utility because it would individually provide a benefit to traffic operations on SR 1. The proposed project has independent utility and logical termini because it would resolve a congestion problem on SR 1 between the State Park Drive interchange and the Bay Avenue/Porter Street interchange.

Project Description

Reasonable project alternatives are currently in development for the project. Proposed improvements would include the construction of auxiliary lanes on both the northbound and southbound sides of SR 1 between the State Park Drive and Bay Avenue/Porter Street interchanges. In addition, the project would include constructing retaining walls near the Bay Avenue/Porter Street interchange, replacing the Capitola Avenue overcrossing, and placing sound walls along the corridor as needed. BOS operations

would be accommodated through the interchanges by reconstructing or widening shoulders where shoulders are not currently wide enough for bus operation.

The widening would extend for approximately 2.7 miles along SR 1. The auxiliary lanes proposed are transportation system management features that would help improve operations and facilitate the BOS operations along the corridor.

Potential Environmental Effects

The project is expected to result in temporary and permanent environmental effects. The draft EIR/EA will determine what resources would be affected, the level of significance of these impacts, and feasible avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures to lessen the impacts. Based on preliminary information, potential environmental effects of the proposed project are outlined below.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

During project construction, there may be temporary increases in fugitive dust and emissions from construction equipment and vehicles. An air quality study will quantify construction emissions and assess the potential for exposure to asbestos, lead, mobile source air toxic emissions, and cumulative impacts. Project-related regional changes in long-term mobile source emissions will also be included in the study.

Biological Resources

Preliminary studies indicate that the project may result in potential impacts to federally listed animal species (tidewater goby, southern California steelhead, California red-legged frog, least Bell's vireo, and southwestern willow flycatcher), California Rare Plant Rank species, California Species of Special Concern, and nesting native birds. Impacts may also occur to waters of the United States and riparian habitats. A fish passage assessment will be completed to identify potential barriers to upstream and downstream migration of anadromous fish that may be present in the biological study area. Any project-related impacts to fish passage will be studied. A Natural Environment Study will be prepared (including a Jurisdictional Waters Assessment), and a Biological Assessment will be prepared as part of the Section 7 consultation process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. Coordination with the California Coastal Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board is also anticipated.

Coastal Zone

The project has the potential to affect resources protected by the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of 1972. A Coastal Development Permit will be required to ensure that the design criteria and use standards are consistent with the requirements of the CZMA. Avoidance and minimization measures will be identified to reduce impacts on sensitive resources in the Coastal Zone (e.g., biological resources, water quality, parks and recreational resources).

Cultural Resources

There is potential for cultural resources (archaeological and built environment) to occur within the project area. Review of prior technical studies indicated elevated sensitivity for prehistoric archaeological resources. As needed and in accordance with Caltrans guidelines and the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement, research, fieldwork, and

technical reporting will be undertaken (as necessary) to identify cultural resources in the project's Area of Potential Effects. The draft EIR/EA will provide information on the potential to affect cultural resources and identify appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

Geology and Soils

The project will be designed in accordance with the Caltrans Highway Manual. A preliminary geotechnical design report will be prepared. All of the sound walls, retaining walls, and bridges will be designed to current Caltrans Seismic Design criteria.

Hazardous Waste and Materials

A phase I Initial Site Assessment has been completed for the project. Potentially hazardous materials may exist within the project limits including aurally deposited lead, asbestos-containing materials, lead-containing paint, treated wood waste, and yellow thermoplastic traffic stripe. Surveys will be completed prior to construction to evaluate the presence of these potentially hazardous materials and develop proper protocols for their handling and reuse or disposal. Appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be identified to ensure proper handling and treatment of hazardous materials.

Noise

The proposed project has the potential to create short-term noise impacts during construction. Additionally, traffic on auxiliary lanes and BOS operations have the potential to result in long-term noise impacts. The noise study will identify measures to minimize and mitigate noise exceedances.

Paleontological Resources

Prior technical studies including a Paleontological Investigation Report and a Paleontological Evaluation Report identified the potential for paleontological resources to occur in the project area. A revised study will provide information on the potential to affect paleontological resources and will identify appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

Parks and Recreational Facilities

During construction, the proposed project has the potential to affect access to nearby public parks and recreational facilities such as the New Brighton State Beach Park and Seacliff State Beach due to lane closures along SR 1 and the Capitola Avenue overcrossing. No construction activities or staging would occur on park property.

Utilities and Emergency Services

Replacement of the overcrossing at Capitola Avenue could require temporary relocation of utilities. Additionally, any lane closures could affect emergency providers. The draft EIR/EA will identify feasible measures to avoid and minimize impacts on service providers and users.

Transportation and Traffic

The proposed project has the potential to result in temporary lane and/or partial roadway closures along SR 1 and Capitola Avenue during construction. A construction-period traffic management plan will be developed and implemented to provide information on closures and provide detours with consistent access for vehicles and

bicycles. Overall, it is anticipated that auxiliary lanes and BOS improvements would improve traffic congestion and enhance safety. Replacement of the Capitola Avenue overcrossing would provide standard shoulder widths, sidewalks, and bike paths on both sides of the road.

Visual and Aesthetic Resources

The proposed project has the potential to create short-term temporary impacts to visual and aesthetic resources during construction. The proposed project could degrade visual quality due to removal of trees. A Visual Impact Assessment will be prepared that will identify feasible measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse impacts.

Water Quality and Stormwater Runoff

Soquel and Borregas Creeks are within the project limits and could be affected by the construction and operation of the proposed project. Erosion, sedimentation, and pollution discharge resulting from rain events, material exposure, and stormwater runoff are the most common threats to water quality during construction. A stormwater pollution prevention plan will be completed for the project. The construction activities will comply with construction best management practices, and measures identified in the plan will be implemented.

Scoping Meeting

A Scoping Meeting is planned for October 23, 2019, from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm at the Community Foundation at 7807 Soquel Drive in Aptos. Caltrans is accepting comments until November 8, 2019, via mail and email at the address below.

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Figure 1
Project Limits