

State of California
Business, Transportation & Housing Agency
Department of Transportation

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS
Notice of Preparation
9-Mno-395 52.8/55.7
Action Item

Prepared by:
Gary Winters
Acting Program Manager,
Environmental
(916) 653-7466

CTC Meeting: January 17-18, 2001
Agenda Item: 2.2a.

Original Signed By _____
W.J. EVANS, Deputy Director
Finance
January 5, 2001

**SUMMARY- NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
ROUTE 395 IN MONO COUNTY**

9-Mno-395

On the west side of Mono Lake, from South Picnic Grounds Road to Cemetery Road near the community of Lee Vining.

Proposed Action:

Upgrade the existing two-lane roadway by modifying the existing alignment and constructing paved shoulders and scenic turnouts.

Programming:

The project is programmed in the 1998 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) in the 2003/04 fiscal year for \$10.1 million (\$7.7 million capital funds and \$2.4 million support funds). The estimated total cost of the project ranges from \$6.8 million to \$9.2 million (capital and support funds).

Alternatives Being Considered:

- Proposed centerline will vary 0-5 ft. west or east of existing centerline utilizing cut and fill slopes.
- Proposed centerline will vary 0-5 ft. west of east of existing centerline utilizing retaining walls.
- No shift in centerline. Expanded roadbed would be accommodated by cut and fill slopes.
- No shift in centerline. Expanded roadbed would be accommodated by retaining wall structures.
- Propose centerline shift to the east where necessary by design standards. No cut slopes created to the west of existing alignment. Expanded roadbed would be accommodated by retaining wall structures east of the alignment.
- No build.

Potential Significant Environmental Effects:

- Impacts to scenic resources.
- Impacts to wetlands and threatened and endangered species and habitat.

Proposed Measures to Minimize Harm:

- Coordinate with United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), and California Fish and Game (CF&G) on mitigation.
- Wetland replacement or credit against a mitigation bank.
- Minimize take.

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: The State Clearing House
1400 Tenth Street, Suite 222
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: California Dept. of Transportation - District 6
3402 N. Blackstone Ave. Ste 201
Fresno, CA 93726

Subject: **Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**

Caltrans -District 6 (Central Region) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project identified below. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the Initial Study (is is not) attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please send your response to Juan C. Torres at the address shown above. We will need the name for a contact person in your agency.

Project Title: MONO LAKE WIDENING

Project Applicant, if any: _____

Date 11-21-00

Signature Mike Donahue

Title Senior Environmental Planner

Telephone 559-243-8157

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

PROJECT LOCATION
09-MNO-395 KP 85.0/89.6
269900

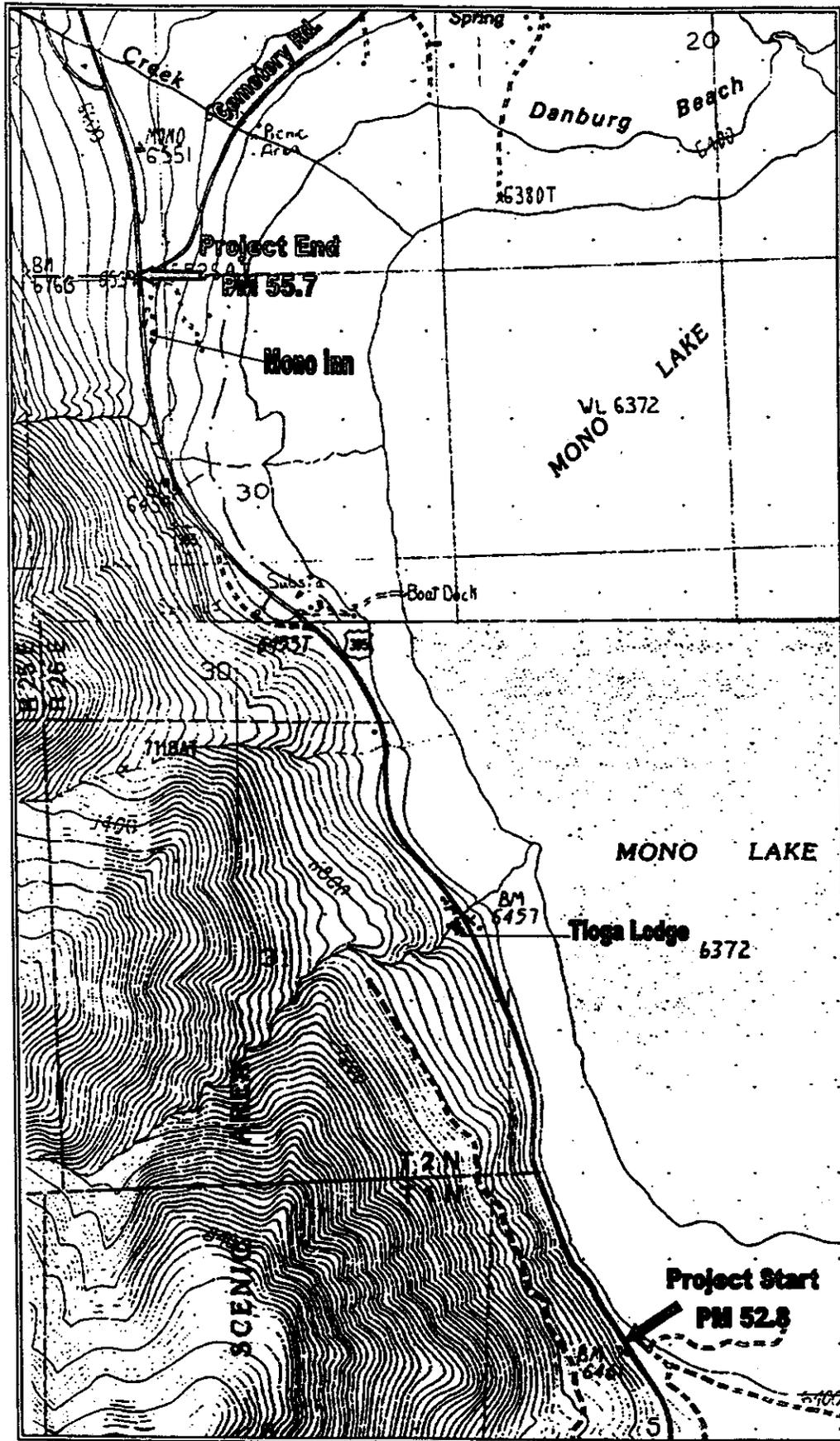


FIGURE 2

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The California Department of Transportation is proposing to improve a section of U.S. Highway 395 located just north of Lee Vining, along the west side of Mono Lake, in Mono County. The project as proposed will upgrade 4.6 km (2.9 miles) of existing two lane roadway by slightly modifying the existing alignment and constructing paved shoulders to 2.4 m (8.0 ft.). Existing drainage facilities will be upgraded as necessary. Scenic pullouts will be constructed where possible to allow the traveling public to view Mono Lake. The exact number and location of pullouts is dependent on their ability to meet public safety concerns.

There are a number of suggested alternatives on this project but they have just minor variations between them. The alternatives consist of subtle variation to the horizontal alignment; thus making minor changes to the footprint of the new construction. In addition to considering not building the project, five alternatives are being analyzed for this project. Each of these alternatives is multi-modal in nature.

The alternatives all include the following design elements:

- Construction of 8' shoulders accomplished through widening both sides of the roadway.
- Reconstruction of the existing traveled way structural section.
- Construction of right and left turn lanes where necessary or required by design standards.
- The addition of up to two pullouts.
- Correction of road access points, bringing them up to current Caltrans standards.
- Drainage improvements.

The various alternatives differ primarily in the extent of - or the method of avoiding - impacts to the environment. A general representation of the six alternatives is presented below. The following text broadly defines the design concepts:

Alternative 1: This alternative proposes to cut into the western hill slopes and add fill, additional earth, to the eastern side of the highway in order to provide a sufficient foundation to change the current highway alignment. This alternative proposes to shift the current roadway up to 5' either to the west or east depending on engineering and environmental constraints. This alternative has the greatest impact to the environment resulting from very large cut and fill slopes, the latter of which moves the toe of the new eastern slopes of the highway as much as 190' closer to Mono Lake. This alternative requires a substantial amount of new Right of Way and also the relocation of four utility poles.

Alternative 2: As with Alternative 1, this alternative proposes an improved highway alignment by occasional shifts. The occasional shifts will vary from east to west as in Alternative 1. Unlike Alternative 1, however, it includes the extensive use of earth retaining systems and, as such, reduces the

environmental impacts to the fullest extent possible. There is a reduction in the amount that needs to be cut into the western hill slopes and there is a slight encroachment upon Mono Lake's shores to the east. In addition, this alternative requires little in the way of new highway right of way and does not cause utility conflicts.

Alternative 3: This alternative is similar in concept to Alternative 1 in that it proposes to cut into the western hill slopes and extend the eastern highway slopes towards Mono Lake. It differs primarily in that it will maintain the existing highway centerline alignment. No shifts in the roadway will take place. This alternative results in significant impact to the environment due to very large cut slopes to the west and fill slopes to the east, the latter of which moves the toe of fill slope as much as 131' towards Mono Lake. This alternative requires the greatest amount of new highway right of way and also requires the relocation of four utility poles.

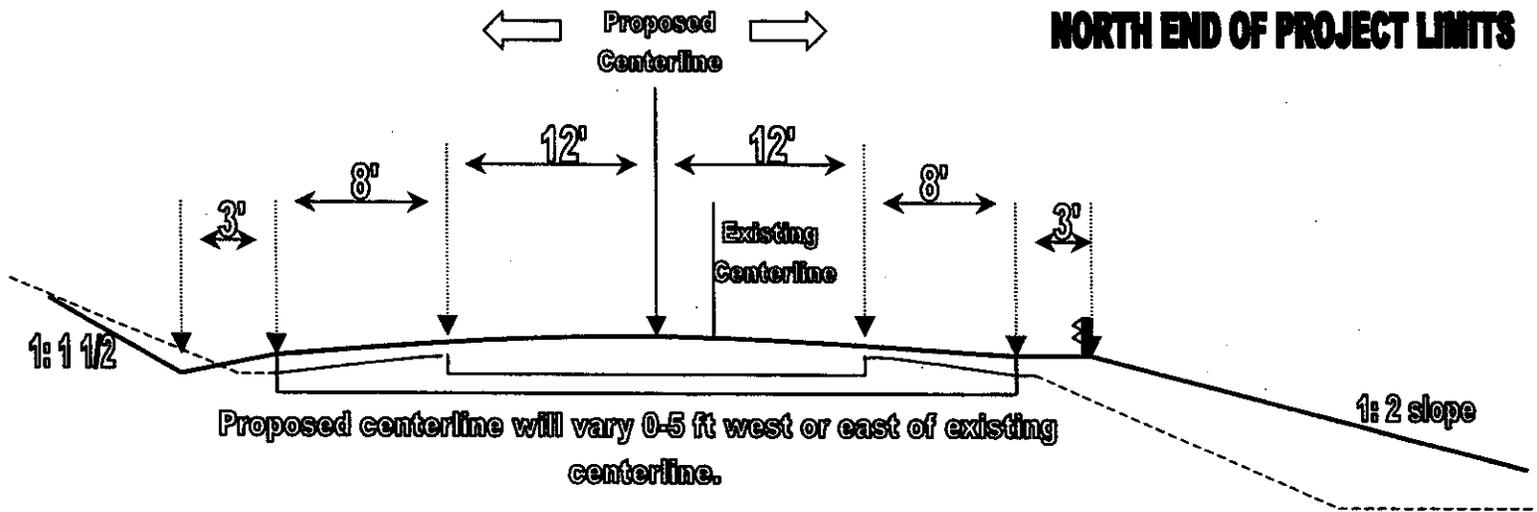
Alternative 4: This alternative is similar in concept to Alternative 2 in that it includes the extensive use of earth retaining systems to reduce the impacts to the environment. Unlike Alternative 2, however, this alternative proposes to maintain the existing highway centerline alignment. No shift in the highway alignment takes place. This alternative requires little in the way of new highway right of way and does not cause utility conflicts.

Alternative 5: This alternative is a combination of all four of the previous alternatives. Unlike the other alternatives, this alternative proposes to avoid all slope cuts to the west. The alignment will be shifted to the east in order to provide sufficient spacing for the shoulder widening and rockfall catch area. The shifted roadway will be supported by a retaining structure on the east, which reduces the amount the highway approaches Mono Lake. All of the existing turnouts will be removed, and the construction of a new turnout is proposed. This new pullout will be larger, provide parking, and provide safe access to and from Highway 395.

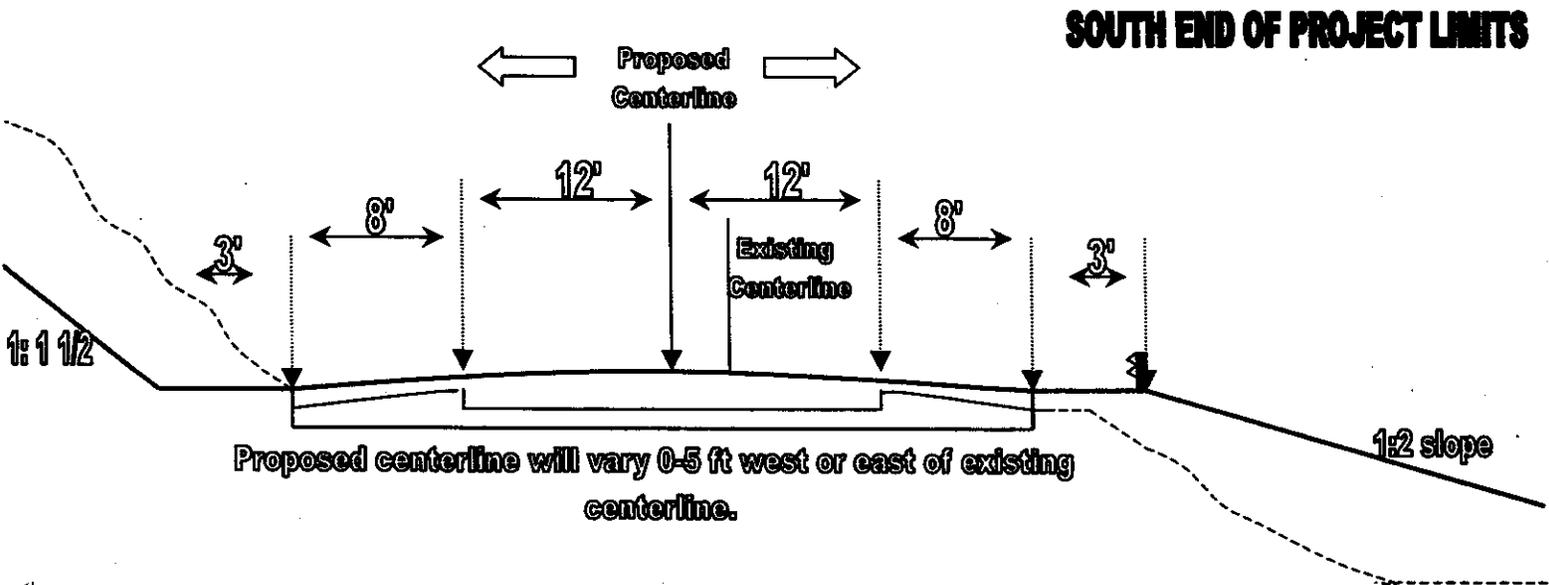
Alternative 6: The "No Build" alternative.

The following diagrams depict the alternatives mentioned above:

ALTERNATIVE #1:

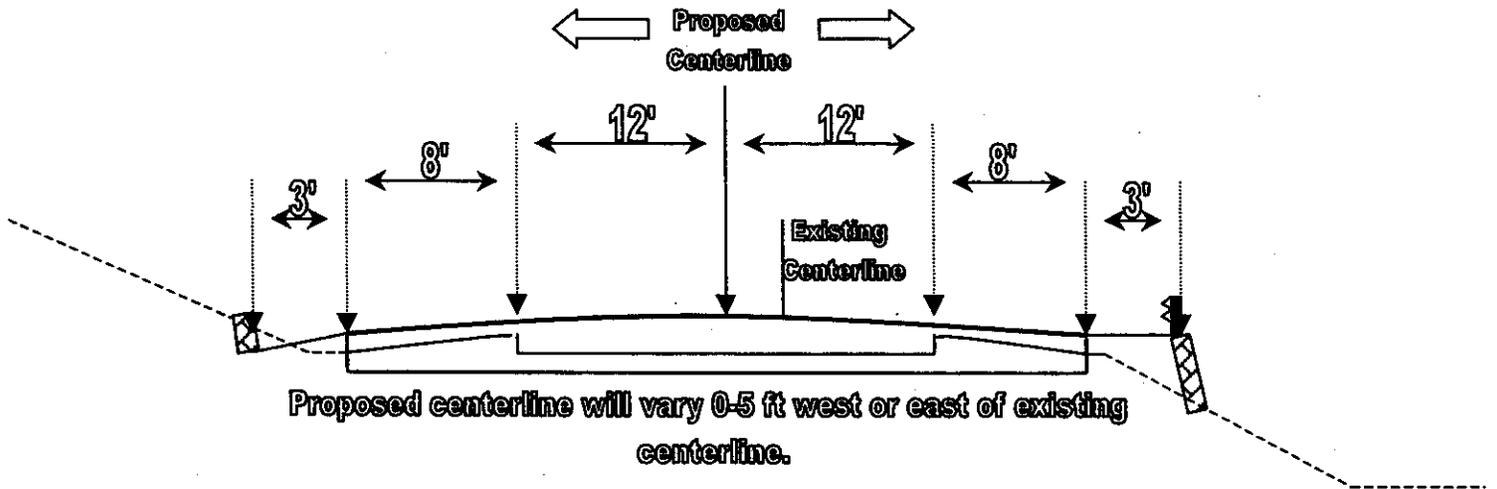


----- Existing
———— Proposed



ALTERNATIVE #2:

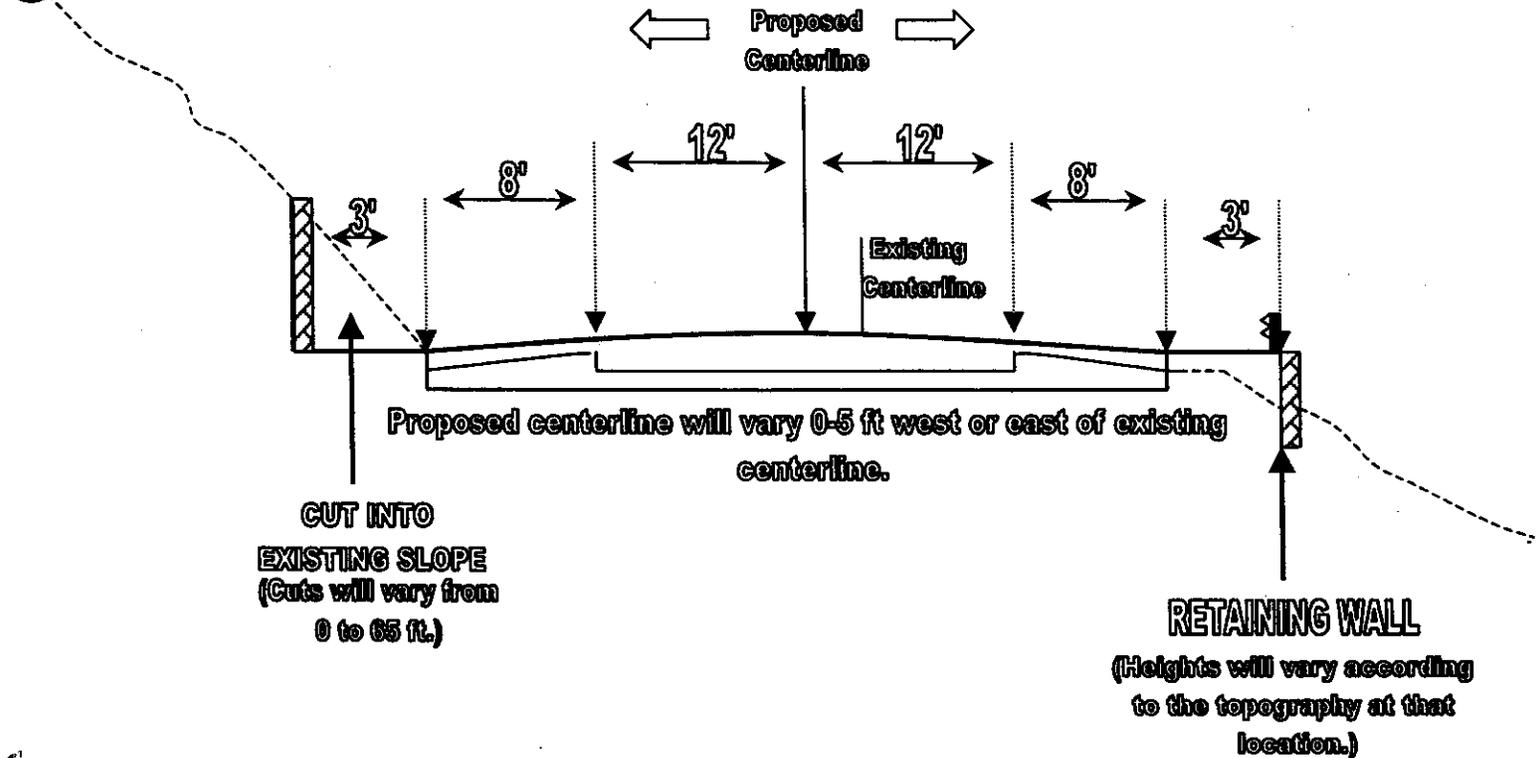
NORTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS



Proposed centerline will vary 0-5 ft west or east of existing centerline.

----- Existing
———— Proposed

SOUTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS



Proposed centerline will vary 0-5 ft west or east of existing centerline.

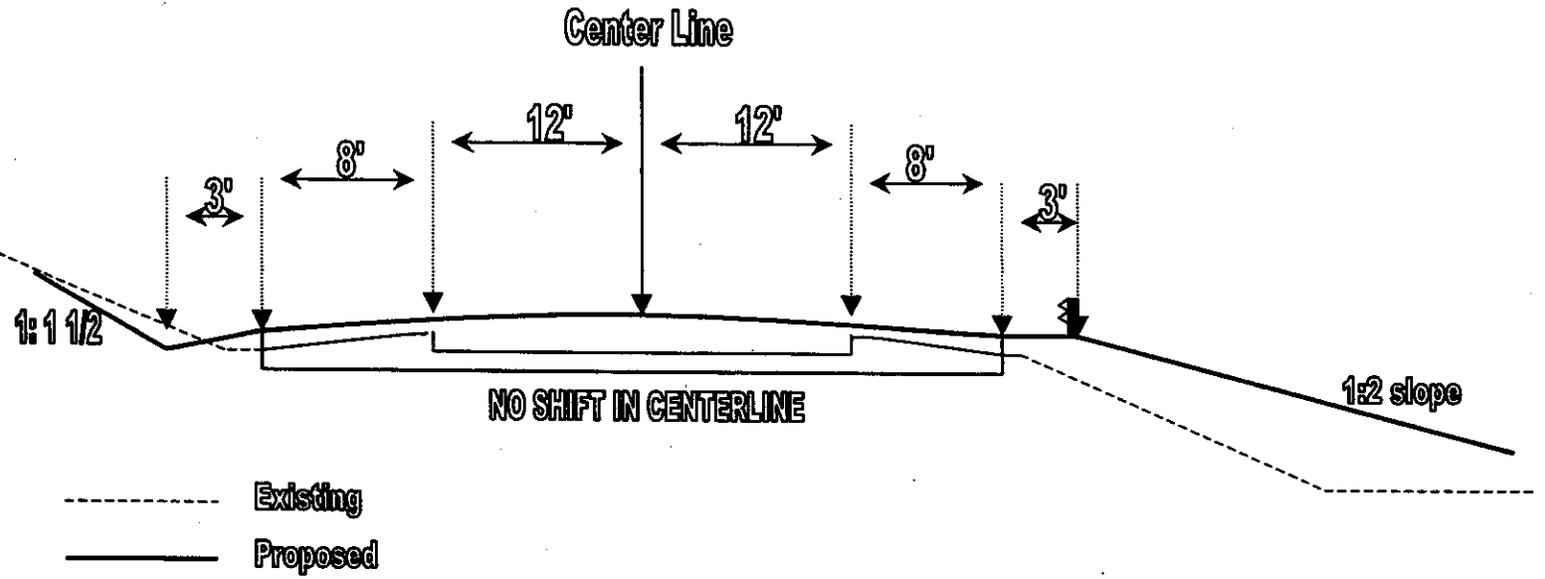
CUT INTO EXISTING SLOPE
(Cuts will vary from 0 to 65 ft.)

RETAINING WALL
(Heights will vary according to the topography at that location.)

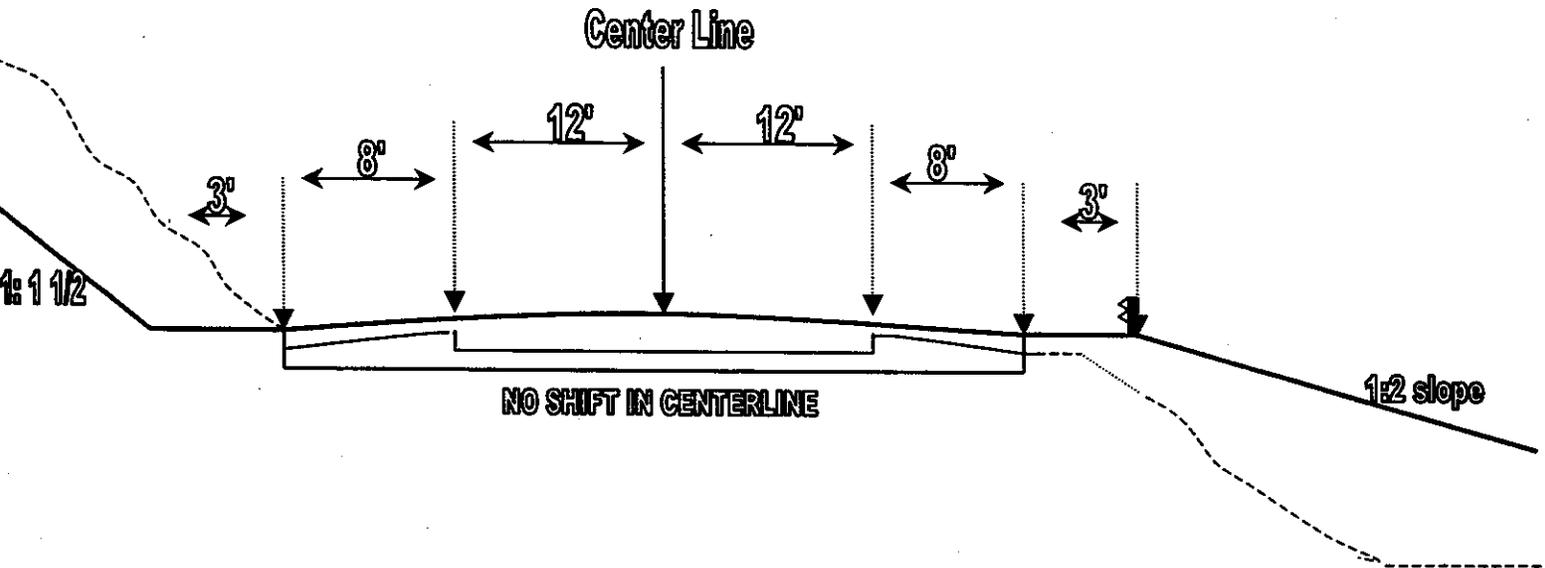
* Earth Retaining System has not been determined

ALTERNATIVE #3:

NORTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS

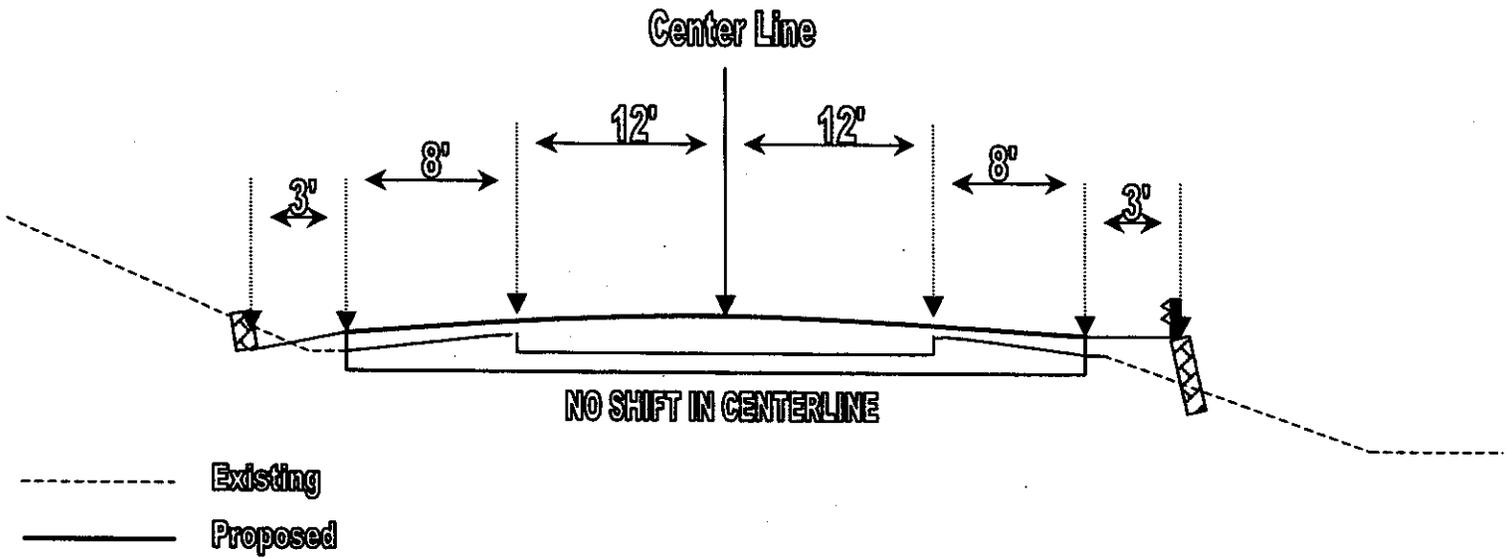


SOUTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS

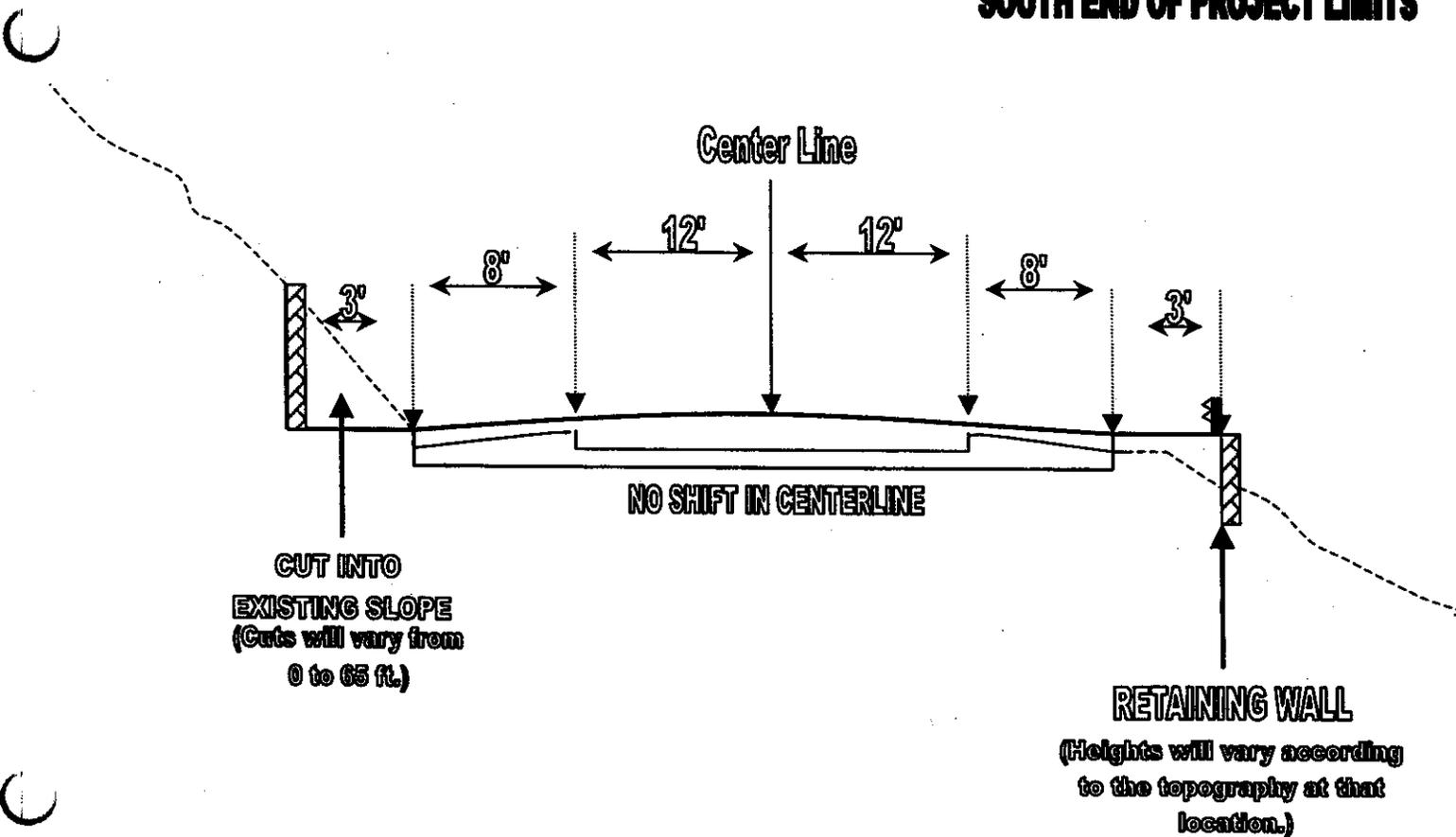


ALTERNATIVE #4:

NORTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS



SOUTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS



* Earth Retaining System has not been determined

ALTERNATIVE #5:

NORTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS

Proposed
Centerline

12' 12'

8' 8' 3' 3'

NO SHIFT IN CENTERLINE

Existing

Proposed

SOUTH END OF PROJECT LIMITS

Proposed
Centerline

12' 12'

8' 8' 3' 3'

Existing
Centerline

CENTERLINE SHIFT TOWARD THE LAKE

Additional Rockfall
Catch Zone 3-4 ft.

RETAINING WALL

(Heights will vary according
to the topography at that
location.)

* Earth Retaining System has not been determined

Probable environmental concerns include:

- Impacts to visual resource
- Construction impacts to traffic circulation patterns
- Impacts to roadside wetlands
- Impacts to natural vegetation
- Impacts to one drainage system (culvert replacement)
- Construction impacts to businesses and residents
- Slight Right of Way impact
- Proposed alternatives should not have any impacts on historic properties