

# Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS  
CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CTC Meeting: November 3-4, 2010

Reference No.: 2.2c.(2)  
Action Item

From: NORMA ORTEGA  
Chief Financial Officer

Prepared by: Jay Norvell  
Division Chief  
Environmental Analysis

Subject: **APPROVAL OF PROJECT FOR CONSIDERATION OF FUNDING AND ROUTE ADOPTION  
05-SLO-1, PM 64.0/R67.2  
RESOLUTION E-10-89**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The California Department of Transportation (Department) recommends that the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a responsible agency, approve the attached Resolution E-10-89.

## **ISSUE:**

The attached resolution proposes to approve for consideration of funding the following project for which a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) has been completed:

- Route 1 in San Luis Obispo County – Realignment of a portion of Route 1 near San Simeon. (PPNO 4928)

This project in San Luis Obispo County will realign Route 1 from Point Piedras Blancas to Arroyo De La Cruz Bridge near San Simeon. The project is programmed in the 2010 State Highway Operation and Protection Program. Total estimated project cost is \$71,539,000 for capital and support. The scope as described for the preferred alternative is consistent with the project scope programmed by the Commission in the 2010 State Highway Operation and Protection Program.

A copy of the FEIR has been provided to Commission staff. Resources that may be impacted by the project include; land use, biological resources, wetlands and other waters of the U.S., visual resources, and noise. Potential impacts associated with the project can all be mitigated to below significance through proposed mitigation measures with the exception of biological resources. Adverse impacts to four plant species considered rare and unique will be significant and cannot be mitigated to below significance. As a result, a Final Environmental Impact Report was prepared for the project.

Attachments

## **CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

### **Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding and Route Adoption 05-SLO-1, PM 64.0/R67.2 Resolution E-10-89**

- 1.1** **WHEREAS**, the California Department of Transportation (Department) has completed an Environmental Impact Report pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:
- Route 1 in San Luis Obispo County – Realignment of a portion of Route 1 near San Simeon. (PPNO 4928)
- 1.2** **WHEREAS**, the Department has certified that the Environmental Impact Report has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for its implementation; and
- 1.3** **WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission, as a responsible agency, has considered the information contained in the Environmental Impact Report; and
- 1.4** **WHEREAS**, the Environmental Impact Report did identify significant effects after mitigation; and
- 1.5** **WHEREAS**, a Statement of Overriding Considerations was prepared; and
- 1.6** **WHEREAS**, Findings were made pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines.
- 2.1** **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby support approval of the above referenced project to allow for consideration of funding.

## FINDINGS

### CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FINDINGS FOR REALIGNMENT OF HIGHWAY 1 NEAR PIEDRAS BLANCAS, SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15901) and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21, California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following effects have been identified in the EIR as resulting from the project. Effects found not to be significant have not been included.

#### **Coastal Prairie**

##### Adverse Environmental Effects:

There is potential for the project to permanently reduce the amount of coastal prairie in the area. Approximately 30 acres of coastal prairie would be affected by construction. Of those 30, fewer than 13 acres would be permanently lost, while about 17 acres would be temporarily impacted. There is not sufficient area within the project limits or off site to fully mitigate for the loss of coastal prairie resulting from construction. The coastal prairie affected hosts a number of sensitive plant species that would not necessarily reestablish on the off-site mitigation area at the northern end of the project. The conditions are not identical to the impact area, and there is a possibility that some relocated plant communities would not be successful. Therefore, the project could also cause a loss in numbers of these plant species.

##### Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

##### Statement of Facts:

The area of disturbance has been minimized to the extent allowable by current design standards. Replanting will be done on site wherever possible, resulting in approximately 7 acres of restored area; additional restoration and/or creation of coastal prairie will be done at the off-site mitigation area near Arroyo de la Cruz.

## **Wetlands**

### Adverse Environmental Effects:

There is a lack of sufficient land within the area of impact for re-establishment of wetlands. Measures have been incorporated into the project to maintain hydrology suitable for wetland preservation within the project limits, but there is potential for these measures to fail. Additionally, wetlands would be re-created at the northern end of the project, but the hydrology and soil types differ from the area of impact and the wetlands created might not be successful or of the same quality as those affected.

### Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

### Statement of Facts:

At the request of the Department of Parks and Recreation, and in compliance with AB 1396, portions of the abandoned roadbed base material will be left in place for potential use with the California Coastal Trail. This has reduced the on-site area available for wetland mitigation, and required the off-site development of 5 acres of wetlands in a fallow agricultural field. Restoring 2.8 acres of on-site wetlands at a 1:1 ratio (restored wetlands:permanently impacted wetlands) would not meet the state and federal "no net loss" requirement; therefore additional wetlands will be created off-site at a 3:1 ratio. If the restored and created wetlands are successful, this impact would be fully mitigated, but because of the possibility of failure, Caltrans determined that the impacts to wetlands would be unavoidable and significant.

## **California red-legged frog and its habitat**

### Adverse Environmental Effects:

Removing the existing highway would affect aquatic California red-legged frog critical habitat at Arroyo del Oso, Arroyo del Corral, and the unnamed drainage south of Arroyo del Corral. Removing the concrete pipes and box culverts would temporarily disturb small areas of aquatic habitat. Bridges proposed at both Arroyo del Oso and Arroyo del Corral would cross over critical habitat areas, including the breeding site at the Arroyo del Oso pond. The shading effect from the bridge might affect water temperatures at the breeding site. Shading would also degrade basking sites that are essential for regulating frog body temperatures. The presence of the Arroyo del Oso bridge over this highly productive breeding site and aquatic habitat is expected to degrade the critical habitat and reduce the number of California red-legged frogs that breed and reside there. In addition, the northern abutment fill slope could encroach upon the banks of the pool, displacing about 653 square feet of aquatic California red-legged frog critical habitat. Construction access at Arroyo del Oso would temporarily affect about 150 square feet of breeding critical habitat by placing a temporary culvert and fill.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

A Biological Opinion was obtained from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that includes a comprehensive list of measures to be included in the project, including creating a new frog pond in the off-site mitigation area near Arroyo de la Cruz.

**Cumulative Impacts**

Adverse Environmental Effects:

Previous residential and highway projects in the vicinity of this project have impacted coastal prairie and wetlands, resulting in an overall loss to these resources. Construction of the California Coastal Trail could also impact these resources, though these impacts are yet to be quantified. These impacts from past and anticipated future projects, combined with the proposed project, would result in potentially significant cumulative impacts on coastal prairie and wetlands.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Measures have been included in the project to mitigate impacts to wetlands and coastal prairie that result from this highway realignment, as described above.

**Visual Quality**

Adverse Environmental Effects:

Changes in visual resources would occur as a result of this project, resulting in a minor to moderate reduction in visual quality, as seen from on and off the project site. Project impacts would come from the widening of the highway, in combination with the visibility of cut and fill slopes. The three new bridges proposed by the project would add new, engineered elements into the landscape setting. If utility poles and lines were left in their current location after the project were built, they would be visible west of the highway and would detract from the ocean views. Increased visibility of the private residences would further reduce the rural character of the highway traveling experience. Viewers through this area generally have high expectations regarding scenic quality, and the state and federal scenic designations further heighten viewers' sensitivity along this route.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

The following measures have been incorporated into the project to mitigate the impacts: employ contour grading; remove landform remnants; remove or relocate overhead utilities; restore abandoned roadway and private driveways; save and re-apply topsoil; incorporate open-style bridge rail; acid-etch guardrail and end treatments; use wooden post and wire fencing; design earthen berms to appear as naturally-occurring landforms.

**Sensitive Plant and Animal Species**

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The proposed project would affect four plant species considered locally rare or unique: white brodiaea, coastal tufted hairgrass, large-flowered star tulip, and California acaena. Additionally, the proposed project has the potential to affect several plant species with special-status listing, including Nuttall's milkvetch, Cambria morning glory, compact cobwebby thistle, and Hickman's onion. These species are all found dispersed throughout the project area with the exception of compact cobwebby thistle, limited to the area around the bluffs and dunes, and Hickman's onion, found in only four patches within the study area. The project would also have potentially significant impacts on California red-legged frog, discussed above.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Measures to reduce impacts to sensitive plants are included above under discussion for Coastal Prairie. Measures to reduce impacts to California red-legged frog are included above under that heading.

## STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS

### CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE REALIGNMENT OF HIGHWAY 1 NEAR PIEDRAS BLANCAS IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15903), and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following impacts have been identified as significant and not fully mitigable:

- coastal prairie (both with this project and cumulatively with past and future projects), including individual protected plant species that comprise the coastal prairie community
- wetlands (both with this project and cumulatively with past and future projects)
- California red-legged frog and its habitat

Overriding considerations that support approval of this recommended project are as follows:

The purpose of the project is to provide a long-term solution to the adverse effects of shoreline erosion on the segment of Highway 1 from just north of the Piedras Blancas Lighthouse to the Arroyo de la Cruz Bridge. The goal is to prevent coastal bluff erosion from adversely affecting future operation of the highway for the next 100 years.

Caltrans identified this location because of the rapidly eroding bluffs that threaten highway operations. The project area is located in a rural part of northern San Luis Obispo County, where Highway 1 closely follows the shoreline. The shoreline is receding throughout the project limits an average of 20 inches per year, resulting in a loss of more than 175 feet of coast since 1957. During periods of high surf, waves frequently wash over the highway, strewing rock and debris onto the roadbed, and occasionally making the road impassible. The advancing erosion has reached the

southbound shoulder of the highway and is threatening the highway's dependability as the primary connection between Cambria and points north.

In 1996, Highway 1 south of the project location was realigned inland to address the effects of coastal erosion on the highway. Also in the mid-1990s, Caltrans initiated two emergency projects within the current project limits as part of a three-phase strategy to protect the highway from shoreline erosion. The first phase—placing rock slope protection where coastal bluff erosion was threatening highway operations—provided an immediate protective measure. The second phase in the overall strategy realigned the highway at two locations where the rock slope protection had been placed. These realignments, called Rocks I and Rocks III, were completed in 2003, and are expected to provide an operational life of at least 10 years (based on the average erosion rate.)

The protective measures taken to date provide only temporary protection for the highway. Per the permit issued by the Coastal Commission for the rock slope protection, it must be removed by October 2017. A long-term solution is necessary in order to provide continued highway operation while maintaining public access to the coastline and protecting coastal resources.

The build alternative is the only viable project alternative that meets the project purpose to address the accelerated rates of coastal erosion that threaten to undermine the highway, and prevent coastal bluff erosion from adversely affecting future operation of the highway and protect the highway from bluff retreat for the next 100 years while also meeting the need to provide a long-term solution that provides for continued highway operation, while also meeting policies for providing public coastal access and protecting coastal resources including County of San Luis Obispo Coastal Plan Policies 1 and 11:

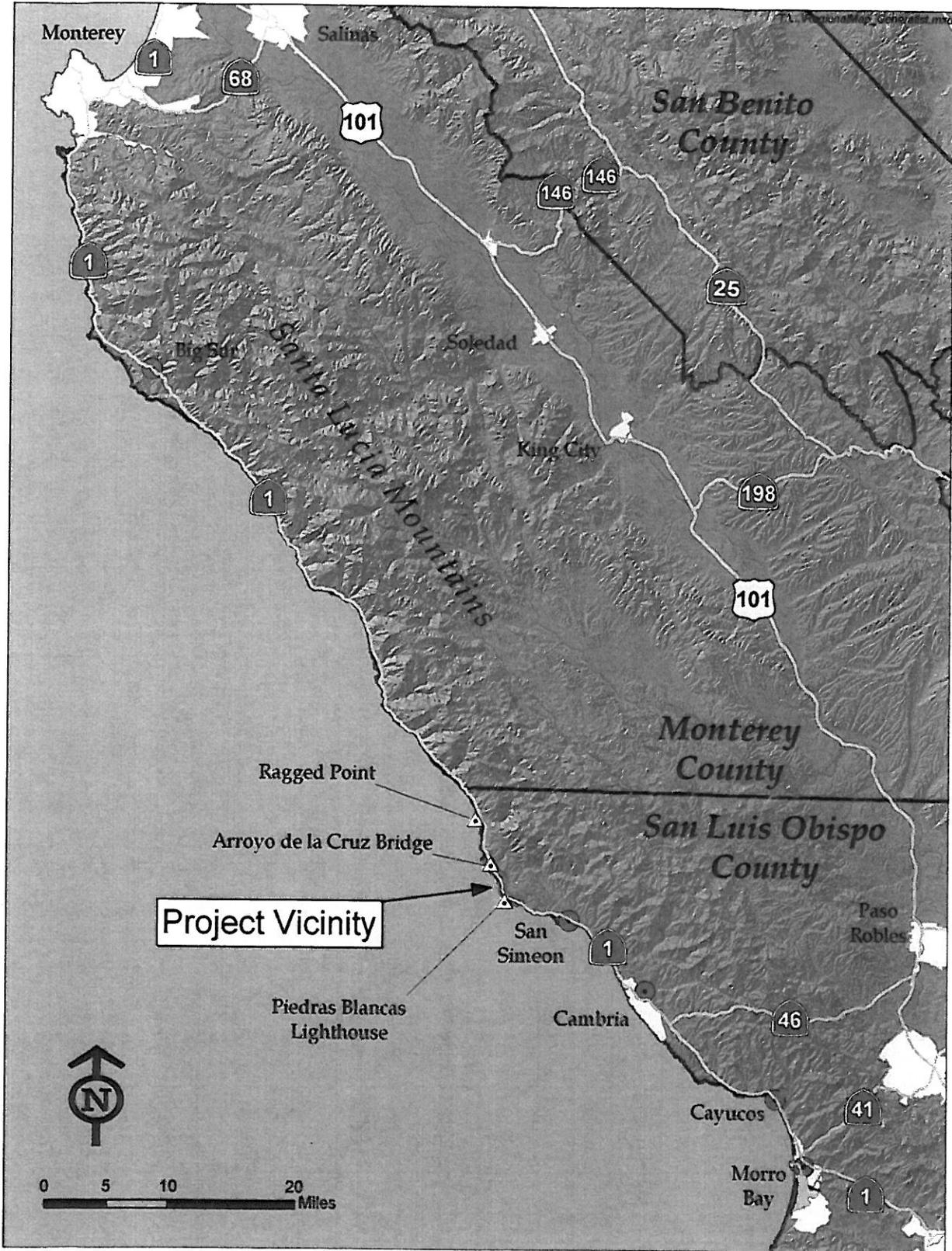
Policy 1, "...new development ... shall be designed so that shoreline protective devices ... that would substantially alter landforms or natural shoreline processes, will not be needed for the life of the structure. Construction of permanent structures on the beach shall be prohibited...."

Policy 11, "develop a program with a long-term comprehensive approach to avoid the permanent armoring of the shoreline...."

In addition the build alternative is the only viable alternative that meets the requirements of the Coastal Development Permit for the rock armoring at this location (CDP 3-07-030),

which stipulates that the rock will be removed and the site restored to its former (pre-rock placement project) condition.

The No Build Alternative would not only put the safety and dependability of the highway in jeopardy, but would require ongoing maintenance resulting in detours, road closures, and additional bluff armoring, and therefore would not be a long-term solution. Realigning the highway inland is the only long-term solution for protecting the highway from coastal erosion.



**Piedras Blancas Realignment Project Vicinity Map**