

Minutes: Kick-Off Meeting, September 3rd, 2014

State Route 37 Integrated Traffic, Infrastructure and Sea Level Rise Analysis

Norman C. King South Vallejo Community Center

545 Magazine Street

Vallejo, CA 94590

Purpose: This project contributes directly to highway and environmental designs and planning documents (i.e., Project Initiation Document) for state route 37 and associated lands that are highly vulnerable to sea level rise (SLR) effects. This advance can serve as a state-pilot for rapid and smart planning response to near-term risks from SLR and storminess. In doing so, the project will serve as an example for the triple crown of environmental protection, transportation system resilience, and stakeholder involvement.

Specifically, the project will provide up to date risk maps for inundation for the highway and surrounding marshes, describe the costs and benefits of different options for highway adaptation, and provide diagrams of model solutions for adaptation. These outputs and products will help Caltrans local transportation agencies and others to plan for highway and marsh adaptation in response to SLR.

Welcome and Introductions – Fraser Shilling

- Fraser Shilling welcomed everyone and then introduced UC Davis and Caltrans Staff. [All attendees](#) gave their name and affiliation.

Brief Description of Previous Study - Fraser Shilling

- [Slide Presentation](http://hwy37.ucdavis.edu/node/47) (<http://hwy37.ucdavis.edu/node/47>)

Goals and Findings from Phase I

- Corridor Planning Needed
 - Goods movement
 - Commute
 - Recreation
- Environmental Needs - most coastal highways are next to highly regulated environments
 - Marshes
 - Transportation impacts of noise pollution – effect on birds
 - Endangered species with access to highway
- TRB – Testing the Ecological Framework
 - Steps 1 – 7 Slide #6

- Did not reach project description with permits
- Corridor Options – All have very different impacts/costs
 - No expanded capacity – maintenance only
 - Increase capacity - Expanded footprint with levee with extra lane or larger shoulder
 - Increase capacity 2 or 4 lane causeway – up on legs
 - Strategic co-alignment – remove highway and keep traffic to 580 or 80
 - Build Tunnel under San Pablo Bay at narrowest point
 - The causeway and tunnel option are the most expensive
- Community Survey
 - Mailed to businesses and homeowners surrounding Hwy 37 within 1 mile
 - 525 responses received – return rate 5 to 10%
 - Not asked about health
 - Respondents were not informed of cost
 - Did not ask if they were Hwy 37 commuters
 - Most beneficial for the environment was moving the highway or the tunnel
 - Causeway most beneficial, better transportation benefits – best across options
- Stakeholder List Slide #8

Concerns, Issues, Q & A

Q: Why weren't commuters surveyed?

A: The cost of the survey was not built into the study.

Q: The Napa Study used license plate survey – can we?

A: Caltrans should be able to request it as a public agency and can petition DMV for the list without private names. We also could use GPS data and cell phone data.

Q: Why wasn't there more focus on environmental justice, economic objectives?

The economy was short-shrifted while flora and fauna remained the main focus.

A: We have had to rely on existing studies on those issues. The scope for this phase includes environmental and economic benefits and costs.

Concern: Community benefits were not even listed in the overall objectives.

Response: It should be elevated because the whole reason is to increase capacity which will result in additional community benefits.

Q: Why did the survey address the natural environment and not health or well-being?

A: It was incomplete in the sense it was not directly asked but being stuck in traffic might have a negative impact on health because of air quality, or effects on well-being from congestion.

Concern: Hope that the outcome is to collect information on population targets that are critical to this consideration. We work with two community college campuses and have strategic plans that will allow students to go between the campuses that you would be unaware of unless someone like me showed up at the meetings – I hope these sources of information are being tracked.

Response: We are tracking them in our minutes.

Concern: Did we look at other alternatives like rail and transit in the last phase.

Response: Rail and transit are still on the table. It is easier in the Bay Area - we don't know use patterns enough to replace the highway with transit and rail.

Concern: Remember that there is some right-of-way for rail out there for both passenger and freight.

Response: There will be more studies – folks should tell us what to do.

Q: Have you thought about surveying the large employers in the area?

A: I think the best way to do this would be to collect all the concerns and opinions and what would be the best way to sample the users. Who should we talk to? We have to study the HOV or transit options in the corridor to supplement this. Look at AB 32 (State law requiring to reduce green house gas emissions) for the corridor concept. Light rail or rail may not be the way to go – we need to get everyone in the room.

Concern: Want to include more data from SMART – we need to find out if there is a possible partnership between rail and Caltrans and what would be possible – we need to look at it.

Planned, Newly-Funded Study

- Goals – Slide 26
- Tasks – Slide 27
- Timeline – Slide 28
- Sea Level Rise Threat Assessment
 - Suisun Bay more affected by SLR than San Pablo Bay
 - The map in slide presentation shows areas below sea level
 - Marshes and parts of Hwy 37 threatened by sea level rise
 - Looking at the corridor context – need to look at everything together to develop a plan
- Alternative Scenarios for Highway
- Designs and Engineering
- Stakeholder Participation and Contribution

- Nov/Dec 2015 – final reporting in and next potential steps. Findings are not by agencies nor NEPA/CEQA
- Big Studies – Slide?

Concerns, Issues, Q & A

Q: Do the maps correlate with the FEMA maps? Will it affect homeowner's property insurance?

A: FEMA uses the same maps in this area, not true in all areas. It is a 10cm elevation model – much better. FEMA doesn't have as much rigor in other inland areas.

Q: What are you modelling?

A: It is not a traffic demand model. A traffic demand model helps determine where the traffic comes from and goes to, what future demand is likely to be, and if there is a need to add capacity. Caltrans will have to decide which one to go with (2 or 4 lane) – this study is about what the design of a future facility could look like.

Q: How did we get the 3 concepts decided upon? Why not something with rail?

A: The 3 were decided on based on stakeholder feedback in the first phase/study and to limit the range of built alternatives. The tunnel was considered less likely to occur. Built-up alternatives were the only ones considered because the removal or not doing anything were seen as less likely to occur. Need to know the risk of failure and what timeframe. We need more detailed information for decision makers. No one really knows the cost to maintain and improve the Hwy. The way transportation funding works, Caltrans will not pay for most of it – largely the CMAs will have to pay for it.

Q: What about a separate protected bike lane?

A: Better if we supported completion of the Bay Trail through that area that would be sea level rise resistant as well. It could also be a separate lane or an added lane closer to the ground. Caltrans will consider both.

Concern: Dump the trellis idea and look at a multi-modal facility and cost it out for bike, car, rail and bus. You don't want to get criticized for not looking at multi-modal for something that's going to cost \$1B.

Response: None of the alternatives explicitly looked at transit and rail.

Concern: Bike Trail needs to be a Class 1, not a bike lane on a shoulder.

Q: Will you look at the possibility of Park n Rides for 121/37 and 80/37?

A: We could and also there is the possibility of a private toll road – there is a consortium working on it. That means taking a public facility and taking it to private – it has to be discussed. It could be politically difficult.

Q: Where is this project taking us? We need to know how this fits into the CMA's and Caltrans' process.

A: A project has to be put into the next Regional Transportation Plan. More information will be needed. This study will get the conversation going to get us more data – to determine what data is needed.

Q: Seems there are conflicting goals. What about the mutual benefits?

A: We are looking at several options in the corridor plan.

Q: At what point are we going to approach the regulatory community? At what point do we not put any more effort into one of the alternatives?

A: The alternatives are already narrowing. The removal of the road and the tunnel are not being considered. During informal consultations we have already heard that the levee would not be difficult to get permitted and that there was a yes to the causeway.

Q: After 18 months what if we end up with something that won't work? We need criteria vetted by the State for environmental (NEPA/CEQA) process – When are we going to do that?

A: The study will inform Caltrans' Project Initiation Document and help define 2 or 3 options. It would be helpful for Caltrans to define a clear path for the group.

Concern: Tax payer money is scarce. We can't chase unreasonable alternatives. We have to determine what is doable AND affordable. We should be developing a public/private partnership now. If the highway is defined as a failure now, we can speed up this process. What about a roadway that can produce energy or add things to benefit the environment.

Q: We need criteria that include economy and environment. What will make the selection among alternatives?

A: There has to be a broad group to allow all the threads in. If we don't act we face sea-level rise and severe congestion.

Concern: Based on environment, equity and economics, we don't have statistics on how many people come to the marsh – it could provide equity benefits for Vallejo.

USFWS has done studies on the economic value of the marsh that can be made available to the group.

Concern: Need to look at everything together – The Marin side is not fixed, Novato is in the process of re-designing Novato flood control channels. All the projects should be linked to control flooding on Novato Creek.

Concern: There needs to be urgency. What is too long or too short a timeframe? Supervisor from Sonoma County District 1 wanted this built yesterday. Get the

PSR (Caltrans Project Initiation Document) going now because it is strangling the quality of life and the economy of the North Bay. This could take 20 years before something is done and that is too long to wait. No tunnel, roadway removal or levee should be discussed further – hash out the other alternatives instead of spending time on alternatives that are not viable.

Issue: To do the toll road would be 5 times faster. The road was private before – bridges charge tolls. This has been being looked at since the early 90's, it's time to fish or cut bait.

Concern: CEQA/NEPA take the most time. We should be developing what to collect for that process right now because the determination on a final design and implementation will take 20 years. We need a congressional line item to expedite this.

Question/concern/issue? Our coast our future tool? Consider green options for building, not just economic. It could be a way to manage marshes more cohesively.

Concern: The roadway is very unsafe – Caltrans should do something in the interim to ease the bottlenecks.

Practical outcomes lead to feasible projects.

Next Steps

Caltrans Action Items:

- Describe steps to be taken to get a Highway 37 underway.
- Outline rough timeline for next steps.
- Explain when CEQA process is kicking in and when formal consultation with resource agencies occurs to give thumbs up/down for alternative.
- Initiate coordination with CMAs.

UCD Action Items:

- Define the data requirements for determining travel demand and mode choice on the corridor
 - What elements would be in a Traffic Study
 - Origin and Destination study needed?
 - Largest employers in affected counties as source of commuter data?

Next Meeting – January 2015, location TBD

Suggestions for a good meeting space around the corridor for 150 people or more with ample parking can be sent to Kevin Ward at kward@ucdavis.edu