



Monday, December 5, 2011
 9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon
Sonoma Community Center
 276 East Napa Street
 Sonoma, California 95476

Highway 37 Stewardship Study MEETING #5 DRAFT AGENDA

<i>Meeting # 5 will focus on updates and focal points for the next few years (short/medium term)</i>		
Time	Topic	Presented By
9:00	Welcome and Introductions	Mary Campbell UC Davis
9:15	Overview and Update of Activities to Date	Fraser Shilling, UC Davis Road Ecology Center
9:50	Overview of Caltrans' Planning Schedule and Emergency Response Process	Erik Alm and Chuck Morton California Department of Transportation, District 4
10:15	Small groups: What do you think needs to be addressed in the short (1-5 years) and medium term (5+ years)?	All
10:45	Break	
11:00	Plenary Discussion of Group Findings	All
11:45	Next Steps (Next Meeting, Stakeholder Survey)	Fraser Shilling
12 noon	Adjourn	
Study Partners:		Study Contacts:
Sonoma Land Trust Wendy Eliot		UC Davis Road Ecology Center Fraser Shilling (530) 752-7859 fmshilling@ucdavis.edu
Sonoma Ecology Center Caitlin Cornwall		Caltrans District 4 Erik Alm Acting Office Chief, Office of System Planning (510) 286-6053 erik_alm@dot.ca.gov
Napa County Resource Conservation District Leigh Sharp		Rob Bregoff Associate Transportation Planner (510) 286-5503 Robert_bregoff@dot.ca.gov
Southern Sonoma County Resource Conservation District Susan Haydon		



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Welcome and Introductions

The group introduced themselves and which organization, if any, they represented. All PowerPoint presentations referenced in these minutes are available on the website <http://hwy37.ucdavis.edu/> under the “meetings” tab.

Update on Ecological and Transportation Framework

Fraser provided an update on the current study. The PowerPoint presentation is available at <http://hwy37.ucdavis.edu/>

- This is a Transportation Research Board (TRB) study working with Caltrans’ Corridor Management Planning Process to test recently developed tools to include environmental, community, and economic information sooner in decision-making. The data describes how the highway fits into the natural, community and economic systems.
- Study is collecting core data set that will be available to stakeholders.
- Study is developing basis for regulatory agreements by identifying key issues and potential areas for discussions around future agreements.
 - In conversations with agencies, it is clear that most scenarios would require one or more permits.
 - Expanding on fill bed in place not seen as realistic for permitting.
 - Causeway, co-aligning or passing through a tunnel were seen as realistic for mitigation. Benefits for environment would be considered and weighed against construction impacts (self-mitigation).
- Sea level rise is big issue because threatens highway because portions are at or below sea level. Some areas are protected by privately managed levees.
- Doing geographic modeling on corridor, mainly on noise. Will also be doing modeling on how highway affects human and natural systems.
- Did World Café process in October with 62 participants and asked about values and how they interact with five potential scenarios for the highway.
- Will be looking at benefits and disbenefits based on values along the highway.
- Increased transit (movement other than vehicles) is part of all scenario discussions.
- More information on the TRB and planning process tools are available at www.transformationforcommunities.com.
 - Over next 2-3 years final corridor plan will include information from this process. Draft corridor plan will be on the website.
- Emergency response: Caltrans is willing to discuss short-term response in light of longer-term vision.

Questions:

- Has the highway been evaluated for seismic vulnerability?

The Sonoma Creek, Napa River, Petaluma River, and Novato Creek bridges have been seismically retrofitted. The Tolay Creek bridge is too small to retrofit. Roadways, in general, are not seismically retrofitted in that they can be quickly repaired if damaged. When the road was widened to accommodate the concrete median barrier, lightweight fill was used in the widening. This lightweight fill has some properties that allow it to react to seismic events with less damage to the roadway surface.

- What does co-alignment mean?



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- Existing footprint would be removed and traffic would be connected to other existing roadways. Traffic would be redirected to other roadways. If take out Highway 37, the current models show most traffic will go to the south (80, 580) and some would go north (12).
- Comment: could make the roadway “less inviting” to guide redirection.
- Need to consider different terminology rather than catastrophic failure due to sea level rise, since most closures due to tidal flooding in short term.
 - Closures could also be due to levee failures.
 - In 20+ years we will be more used to road closures due to flooding.
 - Want to consider emergency response as a way to handle something that is just happening and is not part of the long-term conventional planning process.
- How long with the study continue?
 - Study is until April 2012. Corridor planning will continue for 1-2 years until there is a draft corridor plan/transportation concept report.
- Is the potential for rail transportation included?
 - All scenarios would be inclusive of transit/rail options, but there are no details yet.

Caltrans Planning Process and Emergency Response Process (Erik Alm and Chuck Morton)

Erik discussed the Caltrans long-term transportation system planning process and how it is documented (see PPT on project website). Chuck Morton discussed the shorter-term emergency repair/response issues.

- Long-Term Planning:
 - System Planning Office does long-range planning and uses corridor plan to document Caltrans long-range planning vision and evaluate current and future conditions (context of the corridor).
 - Route is key regional highway and in some cases, protects land. It is extremely environmentally sensitive and vulnerable to rising tides, so doing nothing is not an option.
 - This process is an opportunity to plan for strategies including sea level rise and more.
 - Timeline for improvements: any scenario would need political support to move forward.
 - Studies such as this one will inform the planners and decision makers.
 - Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is plan for entire region. Metropolitan Transportation Commission updates every 4 years and would include projects that would be developed in this process. Being listed in the RTP does not guarantee funding, but needs to be in it to be eligible for future funding. In most recent review of projects from RTP, there we no major Highway 37 projects, but that is fine because waiting for this process to identify best options.
- Short-term / Emergency Response:
 - Short-term projects come from different funding source, State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP). This is all state dollars, no federal funding. SHOPP Plan has a 10-year outlook, and this is updated every 2 years by Caltrans.
 - These types of projects include safety and maintenance (such as pavement, guardrails, barriers).
 - Do not increase capacity, but will improve mobility and safety by improving shoulders, etc.



- If have an emergency project, can ask for federal funding (up to 88%). Storm damage projects are an example of this.

Questions:

- If projects are not in the RTP, are they ineligible? Can an RTP be amended to add a project?
 - It must be in the RTP to be funded as a major capitol project. An RTP can be amended but don't know of this happening in the last 20 years.
- In the last 15 years, have you had any major levee failures or other dramatic short-term problems?
 - When Tolay Creek was restored by DFG and USFWS. Due to engineering issues, designed lower than expected, and was flooded. Response was to add rock to the levee. The road was not closed.
 - Prior to that was a safety project to add a barrier to 2-lane area on Highway 37 due to public pressure after several head-on collisions. Added scuppers in barriers to allow wildlife passage to mitigate for putting in the barriers.
 - The holes are not big enough to allow other creatures to pass through.
 - The barriers at Sonoma Creek were spaced to allow for more passage.
- Do you have to go through CEQA review?
 - Yes, we do CEQA and if there are federal dollars, will also do NEPA.
- What is the funding source for your funding and is it secure?
 - State Highway Fund – tax dollars on gas.
 - Maintenance dollars are more secure than capital outlay dollars.
- How many days/hours is some part of the highway closed?
 - Probably less than 20 hours / year currently, but expect more in future.
- If the highway had a serious flooding event in the future and needed to rebuild, is that now a capital outlay project? When does it switch over?
 - When we have storm events, we will repair through maintenance. If need to do something bigger, would do an emergency project with federal dollars and could probably do all the environmental mitigation through maintenance as we do construction or afterwards.
 - In other states, were stuck after Hurricane Eileen because could not use federal dollars to respond to work needed beyond exact replacement.
 - In a storm damage, first could put it back the way it was, but if we have to bring up to standard shoulders, other current standards, it would take longer and be more complicated. For example, after the Loma Prieta earthquake, used federal emergency dollars to put the road back even though it was not the exact same alignment. But it took 10 years.
 - One issue is that it takes much longer if the road remains open. If the road can be closed, can build much faster.
 - When replacing the Geyserville Bridge, realized it needed to be extended 500 feet for longer term planning, but could not do it because was using federal emergency dollars. Currently still trying to fix this issue.
- What does Caltrans need to better link the short-term and long-term visions?
 - It comes down to politics, money and the ability to work well with the regulatory agencies.



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- This issue is visible in the responses in New England when had to quickly replace hundreds of sections and did not have a longer-term vision in mind.
- Is the issue appropriate standards in CA as well as issues in DC?
 - Yes, it is both.
- If all the future scenarios mean new building or alignment, what does that mean?
 - Could put a causeway on the same alignment, but would be difficult to phase construction into small segments. The main issue is staging traffic, which costs millions to allow the road to be used while construction occurs.
- One way to accelerate the timeline is to consider public-private partnerships – allowing private funding to build. There may be companies willing to do this as a toll road.. Otherwise it will take decades to complete.
 - A firm interested could own the road outright, so it could be a public-private partnership built with private funds.

Plenary Discussion after Small Groups met to consider short- and medium-term focal points:

- Consider grant opportunities to study mitigation opportunities along the corridor (include study of animal crossings, alternative median barrier design).
- Public notification system:
 - Consider methods to help public understand issues and engage along the corridor
 - Build urgency with the public to help create support, understanding and political will.
 - Wetland Joint Venture did series of podcasts about area. Could do short podcasts about the hydrology/biology of the roadway. Have a captive audience once you are on the roadway.
- Ongoing maintenance:
 - Continue regular maintenance along the corridor.
 - Rumble strips are highly effective, recommend leaving these in place.
 - Barrier in the middle looks clean, may mean drivers are not hitting it.
- Investigate potential use of a toll-road.
 - Private entity would assume liability instead of Caltrans.
- Larger context: avoid being considered arbitrary / capricious by doing homework on existing plans and ideas throughout state so no reinventing wheel. (Such as looking at Delta Plan, and make sure consistent across broader jurisdictions).
- Develop a conceptual plan:
 - Develop implementation strategy that includes not only mitigation, but also provide context of the levee system, how would transit be integrated, could construction be phased, understand repercussions of construction decisions (ex: will there be fill that needs to be removed? Will hydrology be dramatically changed)
 - Evaluate true transit options. Need to consider getting to transit locations, etc.
 - Will help support the long-term goal while guiding shorter-term repairs.
- Link local transportation agencies:
 - Idea to get together and form Joint Powers Authority (JPA) for this alignment
 - This JPA could get project concept into next RTP, which would lead to project study report and environmental documentation of preferred alternatives and potential mitigation.
 - Within 5 years, would have a fundable plan with identified alternatives.



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- Then short-term actions could be consistent with this project concept.
- Would have corridor-specific context, while keeping in mind statewide goals.
- Keeps the individual transportation plans aligned so working toward common cause.
- JPA would not be owner operator; Caltrans would still have the liability.
- Only local transportation agencies can increase capacity.
- Immediate catastrophic plans:
 - Identify Caltrans' current emergency response plan if the highway needs to be closed.
 - What are the identified northern and southern alternatives? Are there any short-term plans to enhance these alternatives in case there is a catastrophic event? What might be necessary? We could improve those areas in the meantime.
 - Vulnerability analysis:
 - Identify properties and parcels subject to flooding / loss so communities are more aware of risks.
 - Identify vulnerable levees and have plan to maintain/improve.
 - Only levee Caltrans owns is road alignment. All others are private so cannot repair. Was a project to review all levees, but only discussed, not actually completed.
 - Army Corps doing a south bay shore review of levees.
 - Possible partnerships with landowners? They are provided a service by maintaining their private levees.
 - This would not be a SHOPP funding issue, but more of a interagency coordination issue. Would fit more under a cooperative agreement between local transportation agencies.
 - Would need to consider proportionally area of landowner versus roadway, and could assist in paying though would be small.
 - If consider costs of closure, could be small amount to maintain levee versus huge costs for closure.
 - Under draft Delta Management Plan, there is plan to have state agencies share levee maintenance costs.
- 121 Junction is problematic and is a public safety issue.
 - By-pass/offramp is an operational strategy for Caltrans to consider.
- Do not seem to be many opportunities to link short-term with long-term until we know more about which scenario is most viable and what long-term solution is the goal.
 - If do have long-term vision, could Caltrans do maintenance that is consistent with the long-term vision?
 - In VT, NY, MA responses, can see how emergency funding led to hundreds of repairs without consideration of long-term consequences, so want to learn from this and not repeat this error.
- Timeline for the Caltrans corridor plan and finalizing bigger vision is within next calendar year.

Next Steps:

- At next meeting, potentially discuss:
 - More information about the scenarios, related construction activities, etc.
 - Steps needed to make this operational, such as a partnership between transportation agencies.



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- Survey:
 - 2000 surveys going out to random resident list along corridor.
 - Will send paper mailing requesting folks to go online and take survey.
 - Cannot collect personal information, but can let them know where to go for more information.
 - Will also send out same survey for stakeholders.
 - Same survey will be used by other projects in US.
 - Survey going out in January.
- Next meeting will be in Novato in early/mid February.
- Technical memos for this project will also be available on the project website.
 - Send comments regarding any information on the project website.

Meeting Attendees		
Abdullah	Arakozie	Caltrans
Erik	Alm	Caltrans
Gary	Arnold	Caltrans District 4
Hank	Barner	Black Point Improvement Club
Rob	Bregoff	Caltrans
Mary	Campbell	UC Davis
Joel	Casagrande	NOAA
Ron	Chastain	CHP
Dan	Cherrier	TAM (Transportation Authority of Marin)
Caitlin	Cornwall	SEC
Max	Delaney	BCDC
Leah	Dreger	Weston Solutions
Tom	Gandesbery	Coastal Conservancy
Ina	Gerhard	Caltrans
Gary	Giacomini	Hanson Bridgett LLP
Jeanne	Gorham	Caltrans
Susan	Haydon	Southern Sonoma County RCD
Joe	Heublein	NOAA
Steve	Kinoshita	CHP
Linda	Meckel	Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit District
Abby	Monroe	UC Davis
Chuck	Morton	Caltrans District 4
Rolf	Ohlemutz	City of Vallejo Sanitation District
Ryan	Olah	USFWS
Barbara	Salzman	Marin Audubon
Melissa	Scianni	USEPA
Fraser	Shilling	UC Davis
Brendan	Thompson	San Francisco Estuary Project/Water Board
Dave	Vautin	MTC
Philip	Vermeulen	Governmental Relations
Tom	Yarish	Friends of the Esteros



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