



County of Monterey Planning Commission

Item No.5

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Agenda Item No. 5

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PLN220090 - CALTRANS/GARRAPATA BRIDGE RAILS

Public hearing to consider approving the replacement of bridge rails on Garrapata Bridge, Highway 1, Big Sur.

Project Location: Garrapata Creek Bridge near post mile 63.0 on HWY 1, Big Sur Land Use Plan.

Proposed CEQA action: Consider: 1) The categorical exclusion determination pursuant to the National Environmental Protection Act; and 2) The Environmental Impact Report (SCH No. 2020049027), Tier 1- Big Sur Bridge Rail Replacement Program and Tier 2 - Garrapata Creek Bridge Rail Replacement Project, with both documents being certified by the California Department of Transportation as lead agency; adopt a statement of overriding considerations; and adopt a mitigation monitoring and reporting plan.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Planning Commission adopt a resolution to:

- a. Certify the categorical exclusion determination pursuant to the National Environmental Protection Act and the Environmental Impact Report (SCH No. 2020049027), Tier 1- Big Sur Bridge Rail Replacement Program and Tier 2 - Garrapata Creek Bridge Rail Replacement Project, have been considered;
- b. Adopt a Statement of Overriding considerations (Visual Impacts);
- c. Approve a Combined Development Permit consisting of:
 1. A Coastal Development Permit and Design Approval to allow the replacement of the bridge rails on the historic Garrapata Bridge;
 2. A Coastal Development Permit to allow development within the Critical Viewshed;
 3. A Coastal Development Permit to allow development within 750 feet of known archaeological resources; and
 4. A Coastal Development Permit to allow development within 100 feet of environmentally sensitive habitat; and
- d. Adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan.

A draft resolution for approval, including findings with evidence and proposed conditions/mitigations, is attached for consideration (**Exhibit B**).

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Agent: Mitch Dallas

Project Owner: California Department of Transportation (CalTrans)

Zoning: PQP-D (CZ)

Plan Area: Big Sur Land Use Plan

Flagged and Staked: No

SUMMARY:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to remove and replace the bridge rails on the Garrapata Creek bridge. This bridge is one of seven historic bridges in Big Sur, six of which have open spandrel designs. All seven bridges are part of the Carmel San Simeon Historic District (CSSHD), a non-contiguous district named after the rural state highway constructed between 1922 and 1938, which stretches approximately 75 miles from the San Carpoforo Creek in San Luis Obispo County to the Carmel River in Monterey County. The Garrapata Creek Bridge is also individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and the California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR).

The existing bridge rails on Garrapata bridge are steel reinforced concrete rails with arched openings on both sides of the bridge that were constructed in 1931 with the original bridge construction. These bridge rails are showing signs of deterioration with areas of exposed rebar. Additionally, the bridge rails do not meet current traffic safety standards. For these reasons, CalTrans is proposing to replace the existing bridge rails with new bridge rails meeting current safety standards. New bridge rails meeting current safety standards will be bulkier than the current bridge rail impacting historic and visual qualities.

Since 6 other concrete bridges are in a similar condition (most showing less deterioration than the Garrapata bridge rails), CalTrans prepared an “Tier 1 Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR)” for the replacement of bridge rails on all of the historic concrete bridges. Only the Garrapata bridge rail replacement is moving forward at this time and CalTrans has completed a “Tier 2” environmental analysis specific to the Garrapata Bridge Rail project.

The historic concrete arched bridges are an important part of the visual fabric of the internationally renowned beauty and experience of driving Highway 1 in the Big Sur area. With the historic and visual importance of these bridges, careful attention has been paid to the need and justification for bridge rail replacement as well as alternative options and designs.

CalTrans has provided letters attempting to explain limitations on the ability to repair or replace the current bridge rails with a bridge rail that is not compliant with current traffic safety standards. Limitations on reducing speed limits in the area, which would allow for more design flexibility for the replacement rails while still meeting safety standards, appear to be well justified in a speed study conducted near the bridge and in the California Vehicle Code. The speed study conducted shows an average speed of over 55 mile per hour in the area and the Vehicle Code prohibits creating a “speed trap.” The possibility of obtaining an exception or variance to the current crash test ratings and standards is less clear. It is staff’s conclusion that CalTrans is unwilling to trade health, life, safety and liability concerns for visual and historic impact reductions. CalTrans has a responsibility to provide safe facilities for travelers and staff believes that this philosophy has some merit despite any known occurrences of accidents involving the bridge rails in the past.

To minimize impacts of the bridge rail replacement on historic and visual resource, CalTrans convened a design panel to review new bridge rail design options. The design of openings, the location of posts, the height of the rails, and other elements of the design were discussed. The

panel generally supported the new rail design provided there were no other options (speed limits, and crash test standard exceptions).

As proposed, the project will have an effect on the historic resource, but the project will not significantly impact the historic integrity of the bridge and the bridge will continue to qualify as an historic resource. Public highway safety facilities are exempted from the critical viewshed policies in the Big Sur Land Use Plan but careful siting and design is still required for such facilities. The new bridge rails will be the same height as the existing rails but the openings in the railings will be smaller affording less ability to see through the railing when traveling across the bridge.

This analysis is limited to the Garrapata Bridge rail project. In discussion between County staff and CalTrans staff, clear expectations that alternatives including reductions in speed, standard design exceptions, and other alternatives options will be explored for each individual bridge at the time of consideration.

Finally, temporary traffic control measures will be required during construction. CalTrans anticipates that the project will take about 1 year to complete during which time temporary traffic control including temporary nighttime closures of the Highway and one lane signalized traffic controls will be required. Signage will be provided at key locations north and south of the project site and information will be distributed to affected travelers in advance of any road closures.

DISCUSSION:

A detailed discussion is attached as **Exhibit A**.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

CalTrans, as the lead agency for the project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has prepared an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) consisting of a Tier 1 program level review for the Big Sur Bridge Rail Replacement Program and a Tier 2 project level review of the Garrapata Bridge Rail Replacement Project. Because the project includes federal funding, a determination is also required pursuant to the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). CalTrans found the project qualified for a Categorical Exclusion from NEPA.

As the decision-making body of a Responsible Agency, the Planning Commission must certify that it has reviewed and considered the information contained in the EIR and NEPA Categorical Exclusion. As such, the Planning Commission is asked to certify it has reviewed and considered the information contained in the Lead Agency's (Caltrans) EIR/CE and affirm the conclusions therein prior to approving the project (**Exhibit D**).

Findings in the EIR include significant and unavoidable impacts of the project due to a loss of scenic vistas, substantial reduction of visual quality and character, and loss of visual access to coastal scenic resources. When significant impacts are identified, CEQA requires the decision-making body to balance the economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the project against its unavoidable environmental risks when determining whether to approve the project. If the specific benefits outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, the adverse effects may be considered acceptable (Overriding Considerations). CalTrans has

adopted a statement of overriding considerations stating “Garrapata Creek Bridge Rail Replacement Project is needed because the existing rails do not meet current traffic safety standards...” County staff has expanded upon that within the attached resolution to relate the current traffic safety standards to protection of life and health.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

This project has been reviewed by HCD Planning, HCD-Environmental Services, and Public Works.

On November 8, 2022, the Big Sur Land Use Advisory Committee (LUAC) considered the proposed project. The LUAC recommend approval with changes by a vote of 4 ayes to 1 no (**Exhibit I**). Comments were made that the reduced opening sizes in the proposed replacement rails obscure the viewshed and the openings should be widened to their original height and width and that the historic design be maintained while attempting to meet current safety standards. Staff has considered these comments and the current safety standards mandate a maximum opening size in the railing and crash test ratings for the current speed and size of vehicles are based on State and Federal adopted standards. The new railings will meet the current safety standards without substantially adversely impacting the historic integrity of the bridge.

On January 25, 2023, the Historic Resources Review Board (HRRB) considered the proposed project. After receiving additional information on the design and justification, the HRRB 6-0 with 1 absent to recommend approval of the project with 2 conditions. The first condition is that the final color be approved by the Chief of Planning to match the existing rails as closely as possible, and the second condition was that speed studies and other alternatives be explored for each bridge.

FINANCING:

Funding for staff time associated with this project is included in the FY17-18/18-19 Adopted Budgets for HCD.

Prepared by: Craig Spencer, Chief of Planning, x 5233

Approved by: Erik Lundquist, AICP, Housing and Community Development Director

The following attachments are on file with the HCD:

Exhibit A - Detailed Discussion

Exhibit B - Resolution

- Conditions of Approval and Mitigation Measures
- Project Plans

Exhibit C - Vicinity Map

Exhibit D - Environmental Documents (Tier I & II EIR, NEPA Exclusion)

Exhibit E - Public Correspondence and Comments

Exhibit F - Caltrans Additional Information

Exhibit G - Historic Property Survey Report (LIB220303)

Exhibit H - Caltrans Supplemental Package with Attached Speed Study

Exhibit I - Big Sur LUAC Recommendation

Exhibit J - Historic Resources Review Board Recommendation

cc: Front Counter Copy; Planning Commission; Craig Spencer, Chief of Planning; Phil Angelo, Planner; Mitch Dallas, CalTrans (applicant); Keep Big Sur Wild, Christina McGinnis; Martha Diehl; The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); LandWatch (Executive Director); Project Files PLN220090.