



County of Monterey

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

Board Report

File #: 24-295, **Version:** 1

PLN220090 - CALTRANS/GARRAPATA BRIDGE RAILS

Public hearing to consider California Department of Transportation's ("Caltrans") appeal of the Garrapata Creek Bridge Rail Replacement Project on Highway 1, Big Sur.

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

Proposed California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") action: Continuing the project would be an administrative activity of government which would not be a project under CEQA.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors make a motion to continue the appeal hearing on the Garrapata Creek Bridge Rail Replacement Project to a date certain of June 25, 2024.

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Agent: Peter Hendrix

Project Applicant: California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

Zoning: WSC/40-D

Plan Area: Big Sur Land Use Plan

Flagged and Staked: No (visual simulations provided)

DISCUSSION:

The California Department of Transportation ("Caltrans") proposes to remove and replace the bridge rails on the Garrapata Creek Bridge, a historic bridge individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and California Register of Historic Resources. On December 6, 2023, the Board of Supervisors ("Board") heard an appeal of the Planning Commission denial of this combined development permit. At the hearing, the Board adopted a motion of intent to deny the project and requested that staff return with findings for denial of the permit.

Between December 2023 and January 2024, Caltrans coordinated with County staff and Coastal Commission staff on the next steps and the possibility of submitting additional details and analysis. On January 30, 2024, the Board of Supervisors continued the hearing on the item to March 26, 2024, to provide additional time for Caltrans and County staff to review new materials. Caltrans submitted supplemental packages of information on February 23, 2024, and March 6, 2024, which the Board of Supervisors considered together with the previous project materials on March 26, 2024.

Discussion at the Board of Supervisors meetings included the importance of these historic bridges, which are one of the few celebrated man-made features along Highway 1 in Big Sur Critical; and the precedent setting nature of this decision, which may impact the consideration of the other historic bridge rail replacements in the Big Sur corridor. The Board expressed a desire to work with Caltrans to come to a solution that addresses these issues, rather than punt the problem to another agency to resolve on appeal (in this case the California Coastal Commission) or deny the application without leaving some path forward for Caltrans to address safety needs along the bridge.

Therefore, with concurrence from Caltrans, the Board of Supervisors moved to continue the hearing to May 7,

2024, and assemble a working group comprised of three representatives from Caltrans, three representatives from the local community, and one representative from the County’s Housing and Community Development (“HCD”) department. The working group would be tasked with evaluating potential project alternatives that would reduce historic and visual impacts to the Garrapata Creek Bridge, considering the context of the other historic bridges along Highway 1 in Big Sur, known as the “Big Sur Arches.”

Caltrans, Supervisorial District 5 staff, and HCD staff have been coordinating to assemble the working group, and identified the following participants:

- Caltrans: Peter Hendrix, Traffic Division Chief.
- Caltrans: Kim Mori, Division of Engineering Services.
- Caltrans: Kristen Langager, Landscape Architect.
- Community: Stephen Lyon, Construction Project Manager.
- Community: Gary Knott, Structural Engineer.
- Community: Janet Hardisty, Big Sur Resident.
- HCD: Craig Spencer, Director.

A landslide over the weekend of March 24, 2024 caused a slip out of the wall and seaward portion of the travel lane just south of Rocky Creek Bridge. Highway 1 has been closed along that area, with intermittent convoys for local residents and essential workers, complicating setting up an initial working group meeting. However, the first working group meeting was conducted on April 26, 2024, at the State Parks Monterey District Office at 2211 Garden Road, Monterey, CA 93940. Due to the constraints mentioned above, the meeting only allowed in person participation. Staff received multiple public comments (**Attachment B**) expressing concern with the in-person only approach, and plan to setup hybrid zoom participation for future working group meetings. The working group set a tentative date for their next meeting of May 17, 2024.

Many of the same constraints driving the current design were discussed at the working group, including crash test requirements and AASHTO standards. However the conversation appears to be moving in a more collaborative direction. Caltrans had previously stated that all of the same analysis that went into this project would be conducted would be done on every one of these bridge rail projects, more or less. There now seems to be a shared recognition of the precedent setting nature of this decision, and that this design would likely serve as a foundation for other bridge railing replacements in Big Sur and beyond.

Given complications with coordinating the working group meeting and the complexities of this project, staff is not prepared to make a recommendation and requests that the Board of Supervisors continue the appeal hearing on the project to a date certain of June 25, 2024. Staff will continue to support the working group and report back to the Board on the working group’s progress on June 25, 2024.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:

Additional materials for the project are available on HCD’s web page for the project. The link for this website is included in **Attachment A**, and the full URL is below.

<https://www.countyofmonterey.gov/government/departments-a-h/housing-community-development/planning-services/library-current-major-projects/california-department-of-transportation-caltrans-garrapata-creek-bridge->

rail-replacement-pln220090

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. While not being federally funded, in the environmental analysis Caltrans found the project qualified for a Categorical Exclusion from the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”). As a Responsible Agency under CEQA, should the County approve the project it would need to consider the EIR prepared by the lead agency and certify that it has reviewed and considered the information contained in the EIR. Should the Board of Supervisors take action to deny the project, CEQA Guidelines section 15270 statutorily exempts projects which a public agency rejects or disapproves. The Board of Supervisors action to deny appeal and project would fit within this exemption and the County would not be required to act on the EIR at this time. The EIR certified by Caltrans is on HCDs web page for the project linked above and in **Attachment A**.

Continuance of the project is an administrative activity of the government and is therefore not a project under CEQA.

OTHER AGENCY/DEPARTMENT INVOLVEMENT:

Caltrans is the project applicant and has been involved in coordination to establish the working group. Coastal Commission staff have not directly participated but reached out to County staff requesting an update on the project.

FINANCING:

Funding for staff time associated with this project is included in the FY2023-24 Adopted Budget for HCD Appropriation Unit HCD002, Unit 8543. A fee was collected to partially recuperate the cost of staff time associated with processing the project application. No fee is collected for an appeal for projects located in the Coastal Zone.

Prepared by: Phil Angelo, Associate Planner x5731

Approved by: Craig Spencer, Acting Director of Housing & Community Development

The following attachments are on file with the Clerk of the Board:

Attachment A - Link to HCD Web Page

Attachment B - Working Group Public Comments

cc: Front Counter Copy; Planning Commission; Craig Spencer, Director; Phil Angelo, Planner; Michael Whilden; Pete Hendrix, Caltrans (applicant); Eric Stevens, California Coastal Commission staff; Keep Big Sur Wild, Christina McGinnis; Martha Diehl; The Open Monterey Project (Molly Erickson); Jim Heid, Albion Bridge Stewarts; Patricia Larson, Schute, Mihaly & Weinberger; Sara Clark, Schute, Mihaly & Weinberger; Tim Gill; Christopher Grimes; Steven Harper; John Wilson; Aengus Jeffers; Patte Kronlund, Community Association of Big Sur; Rachel Goldberger, Community Association of Big Sur; Community Association of Big Sur; Mark Lemley; Constance McCoy; Richard Mitchell; Kate Novoa; Sharon Wilson; Janet Hardisty; Gary Knott; Kristen Langager, Caltrans (applicant); Stephen Lyon; Kim Mori, Caltrans (applicant); Norbert H. Dall, Dall & Associates; David Smiley; Bruce Merchant; LandWatch (Executive Director); Project File PLN220090.