



REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

DATE: JANUARY 13, 2016
TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
FROM: GREG RAMIREZ, CITY MANAGER 
BY: RAMIRO ADEVA, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS/CITY ENGINEER 
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON LIBERTY CANYON WILDLIFE CORRIDOR PROJECT

The Caltrans District-7 office and the National Wildlife Federation will be making a joint presentation regarding the proposed Liberty Canyon Wildlife Corridor crossing, which is currently at the early stages of the Project Approval/Environmental Document (PAED) phase.

On May 1, 2015, Caltrans completed the first phase of the design process with the approval of the Project Study Report (PSR). Since then, City staff has worked alongside the Caltrans project team with a primary focus on those areas that specifically encroach within the City's jurisdiction.

The following are the three alternatives being considered for the PAED (refer to Figures 1-7 for visuals of each alternative):

- Alternative #1: No Build
- Alternative #2: Overcrossing over 101-freeway only (no tunnel over Agoura Road)
- Alternative #3: Overcrossing over 101-freeway and Agoura Road

Among the three alternatives being considered, Alternative #3 has the most apparent encroachment and impact within the City limits. The precise magnitude of that impact still remains to be seen as the design process continues to unfold. It should also be noted the alternative of building a tunnel underneath the freeway was eliminated by the Caltrans project team from being analyzed in detail for the PAED Phase.

With the formal Public Scoping meeting for the project scheduled to take place on Thursday, January 14, 2016, City staff thought it prudent to keep the council apprised of the latest project details, and requested the Caltrans project team make this presentation and be prepared to answer questions related to size of proposed tunnel, grading and earthwork quantities, maintenance responsibilities, preservation of emergency by-pass route, timing of improvements, ability to handle multi-modal demands of vehicle, bike, and pedestrians along the Agoura Road corridor, among other things.

Because the tunnel option would be a significant encroachment involving the City's public infrastructure, it will be expected that designated milestones can be agreed upon at the staff level to revisit the updated project details with the Public Works Subcommittee and/or the City Council on multiple occasions prior to the conclusion of the PAED phase.

Following this City Council meeting, staff will summarize the City Council's comments in a formal letter to be included on the official record for the Public Scoping meeting on January 14, 2016.

Caltrans staff has included a Fact Sheet on the project, and Senator Fran Pavley sent a letter to Mayor Schwarz. Both documents are included as attachments to this staff report.

RECOMMENDATION

No formal action is required from the City Council at this time.

Attachments:

- Figure 1 - Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing Project (Aerial Vicinity Map)
- Figure 2 - Proposed Wildlife Crossing location across 101-freeway
- Figure 3 - Alternative #1 (No Build)
- Figure 4 - Alternative #2 - Overcrossing over 101-freeway only (no tunnel over Agoura Road)
- Figure 5 - Alternative #3: Overcrossing over 101-freeway and Agoura Road
- Figure 6 - Alternative #3: Overcrossing over 101-freeway and Agoura Road
- Figure 7 - Alternative #3: Overcrossing over 101-freeway and Agoura Road (cross section)
- Caltrans District 7 Fact Sheet
- Letter from Senator Fran Pavley

FIGURE 1

Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing Project

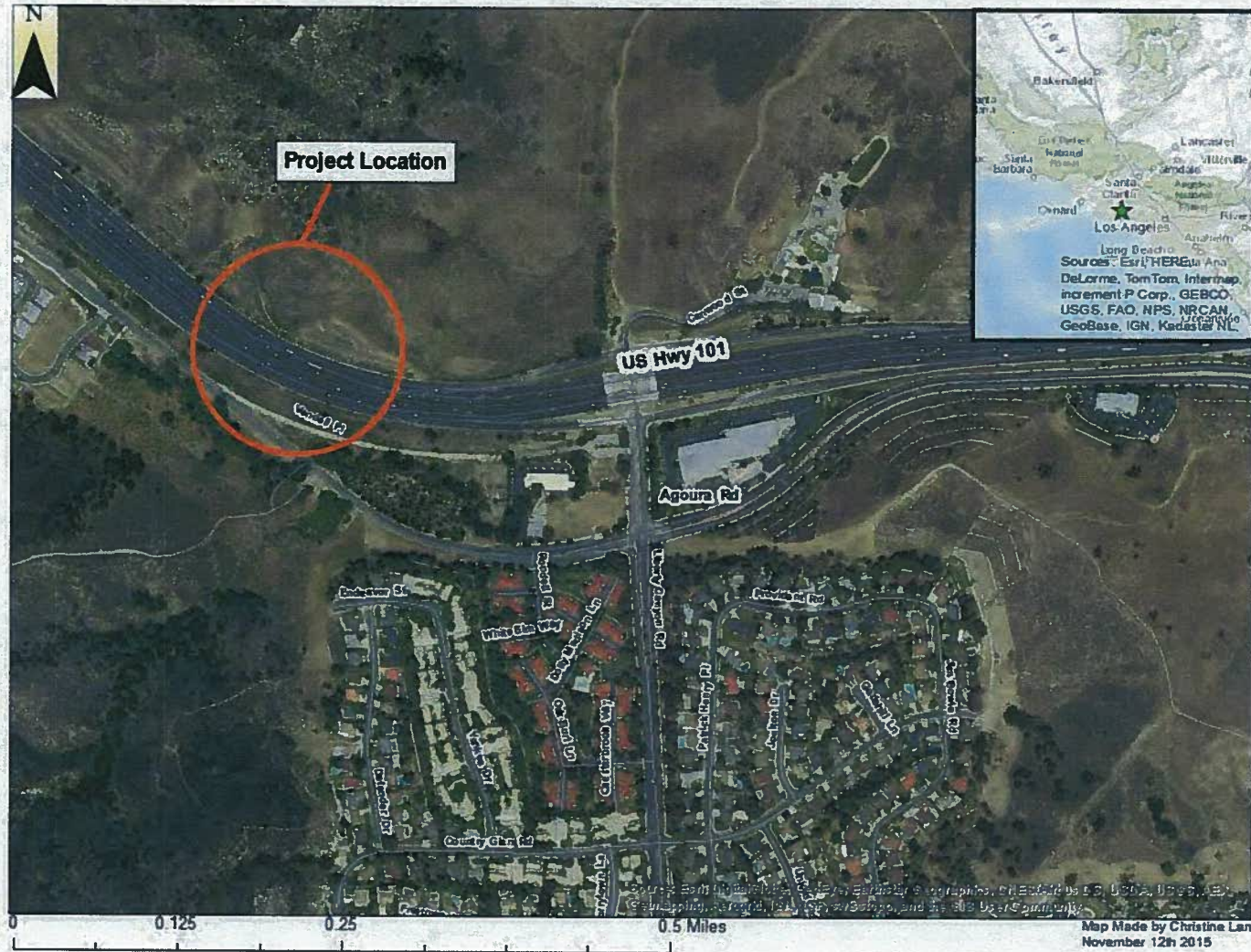


FIGURE 2
Proposed crossing location (preliminary draft)

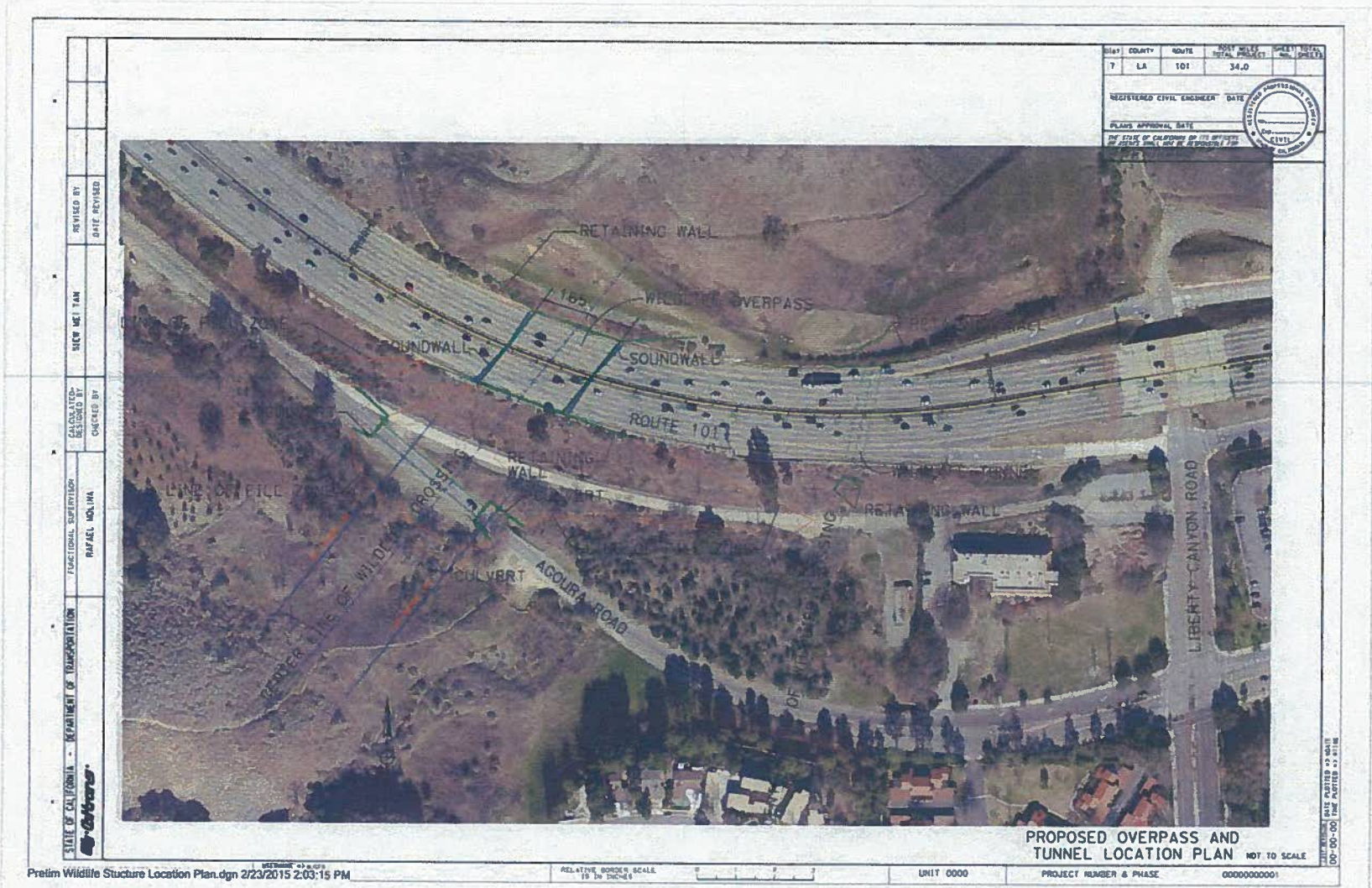


FIGURE 3

Alternative 1 (No build) - Current view looking north east



FIGURE 4

Alternative 2 – Build crossing over US-101 (for reference only, design currently under review)



FIGURE 5

Proposed view with Alternative 3 (overcrossing w/ Agoura Rd extension), looking north east



FIGURE 6

Alternative 3 – Build with extension over Agoura Road (for reference only, design currently under review)

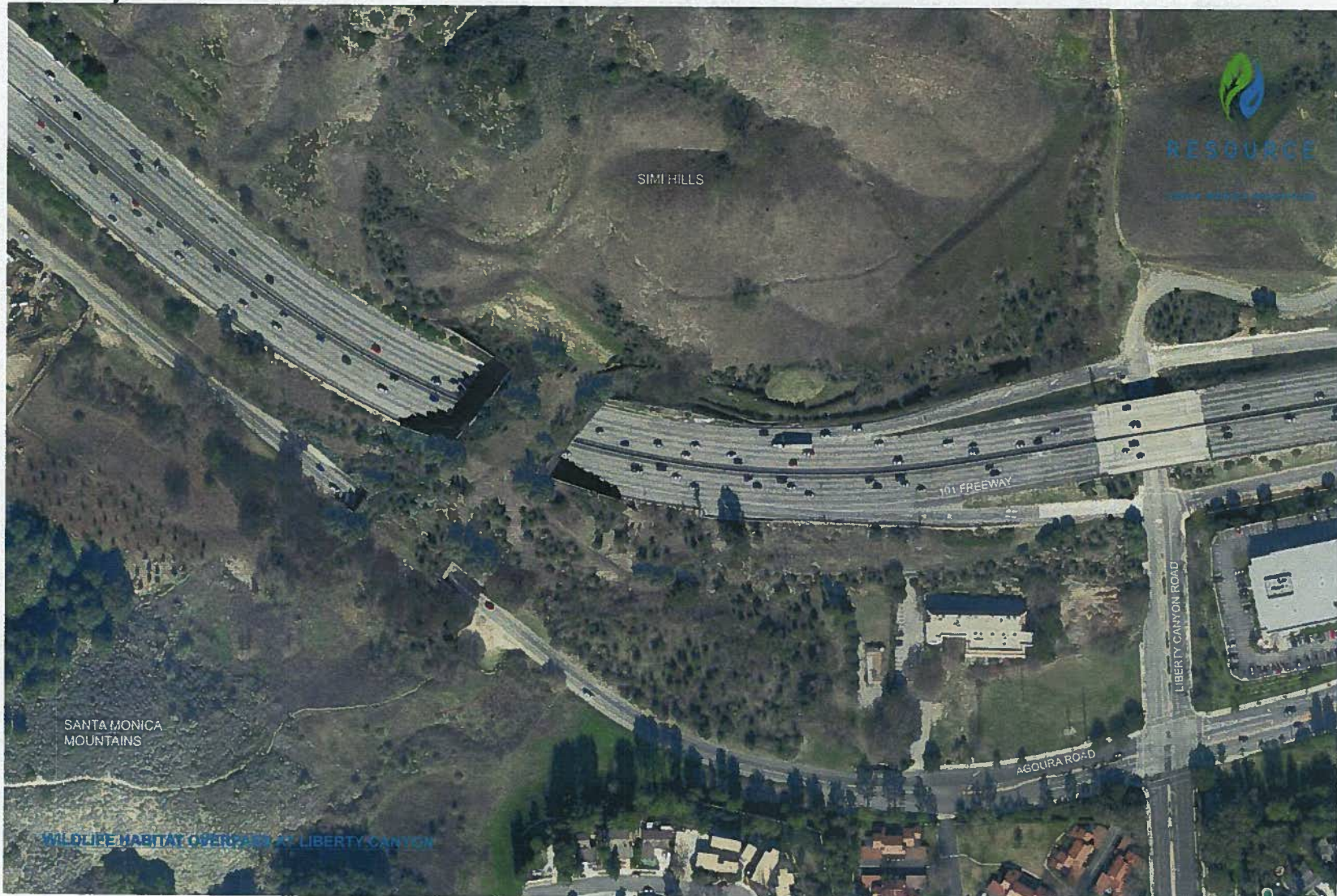
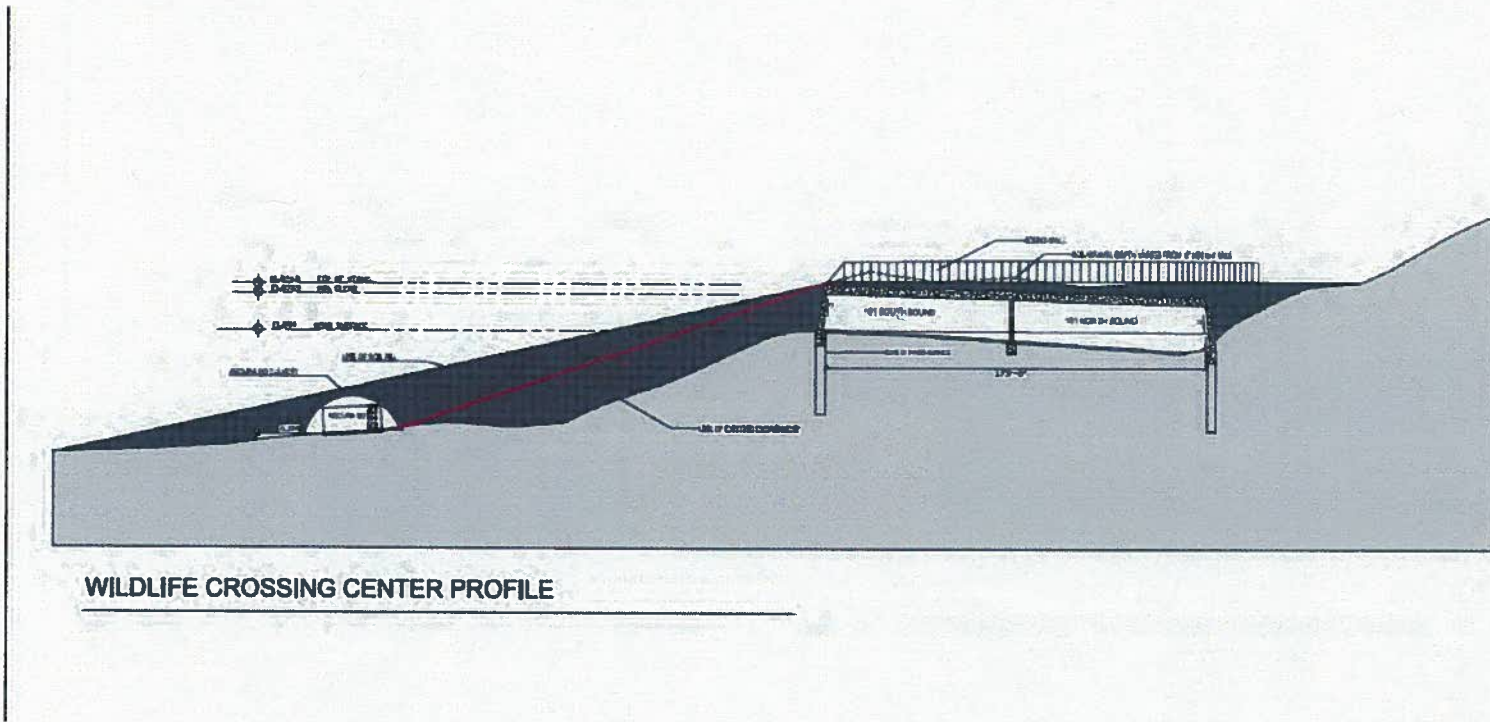


FIGURE 7

Alternative 3 -Preliminary design profile (for reference only, design currently under review)



WILDLIFE CROSSING CENTER PROFILE

CALTRANS DISTRICT 7 FACT SHEET
LIBERTY CANYON WILDLIFE CROSSING PROJECT (1/13/16)

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to build a wildlife crossing across U.S. Route 101 (US-101) just west of Liberty Canyon Road in the City of Agoura Hills in Los Angeles County (Figures 1 and 2, attached). The purpose is to maintain wildlife populations that traverse the linkage between the Santa Monica Mountains and Simi Hills, and ultimately connecting to the Sierra Madre Mountain Range. This linkage has been identified in numerous county, city and regional plans and publications as a critically important connection for wildlife. Such wildlife crossings have been built and used successfully in other states and countries. The Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing would be the first of its kind in California.

A joint Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) is being prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), respectively. Caltrans is the lead agency under CEQA and NEPA. It is anticipated the IS/EA will lead to a Negative Declaration/Finding of No Significant Impact (ND/FONSI).

The proposed project has 3 alternatives that would be fully evaluated under CEQA/NEPA:

- 1) **No Build – Alternative 1 (Figure 3)** The No Build Alternative would maintain the existing freeway configuration and would result in the continued restriction of wildlife movement into and out of the Santa Monica Mountains.
- 2) **Build – Alternative 2 (Figure 4)** A 165-foot wide x 200-foot long bridge constructed across US-101 immediately west of Liberty Canyon Road at mile marker 33.0. The bridge would be vegetated to resemble natural wildlife habitat. A hiking trail would be included on the bridge. Existing right-of-way fencing would be evaluated between Lost Hills Road (mile marker 31.9) and Palo Comado Canyon Road (Chesebro Road exit, mile marker 33.7) to determine if new wildlife fencing or revisions to existing fencing are needed. Design features such as noise barriers and vegetation on the overcrossing would mitigate traffic noise, block light, and aesthetically blend the overcrossing with the surrounding natural landscape. The estimated cost is \$30 million.
- 3) **Build – Alternative 3 (Figures 5-7)** Same as Alternative 2 with an extension of the wildlife crossing over Agoura Road south of US-101. The slope between end of the bridge and Agoura Road would be built up to grade before descending to join existing ground. Associated retaining wall systems would also be constructed. The expectation is that the crossing extension would help alleviate wildlife impacts and mortality on Agoura Road. The estimated cost is \$49.7 million.

Other Alternatives

Two other alternatives exist for this project, but were not fully developed due to recommendations from the Project Delivery Team. Both alternatives proposed to construct a tunnel under US-101 to serve as a wildlife crossing.

The first, smaller, tunnel was a 13' x 13' jacked box culvert located west of Liberty Canyon Road. This tunnel would not accommodate the same wide range of wildlife species as an overcrossing. A tunnel study, originally done by the Federal Highway Administration Central Federal Lands Highway Division (FHWA-CFLHD) in 2010 and updated in 2015, estimated the cost at approximately \$10.1 million.

The second, larger, tunnel was a 32' wide x 15' high cast-in-place rectangular culvert located west of Liberty Canyon Road. This tunnel was not considered feasible due to constructability considerations and high traffic impacts. Specifically, such a large tunnel would require using the cut-and-cover technique and the closure of US-101, one of the busiest freeways in the region. In addition, it was estimated that such a large tunnel would be more costly than an overcrossing and not accommodate as wide a range of species.

Concerned Parties

Stakeholders

This proposal presents a unique opportunity for public-private partnership. Current partners in the project include Caltrans, the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the National Park Service, the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, and the State Coastal Conservancy. Additional support and partnership is being provided by Senator Fran Pavley, Assemblymember Richard Bloom, LA County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, the National Wildlife Federation, U.S. Congressman Ted Lieu, Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, and the City of Thousand Oaks. Previous Agoura Hills Mayor Ilce Buckley Weber (2014-2015) and Agoura Hills City Engineer Ramiro Adeva have also been an integral part of the discussion and development of the project.

Project Development Team

The Project Development Team (PDT) is responsible for developing the project, carrying out the project plan, and communicating decisions and commitments throughout the life of a project.

For the Liberty Canyon project, the PDT is a collaboration among internal and external partners.

The internal Caltrans PDT members include:

- Project Manager (Sheik Moinuddin)
- Design Manager (Sujaya Kalainesan)
- Project Engineer (Kyle Kunitake)
- Senior Environmental Planner (Barbara Marquez)
- Associate Environmental Planner (Fiona Nagle)
- Various specialists

The external PDT members include:

- City of Agoura Hills (Ramiro Adeva)
- Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority/Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Paul Edelman)
- National Park Service (Seth Riley)
- Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains (Clark Stevens)
- National Wildlife Federation (Beth Pratt)
- Senator Fran Pavley (Lauren Gallant)
- Assemblymember Richard Bloom (Tim Pershing)

The Public

A Public Scoping Meeting will be held on January 14, 2016, 6:30pm-8:30pm at the King Gillette Ranch Auditorium. The goal is to present the project to the public and to gain early input from the public and interested parties. Invitees include the public (with special attention paid to residents and businesses within nearby portions of Agoura Hills and Calabasas), elected representatives, agencies (local, state, and federal), and other interested parties. The public comment period will be open from December 14, 2015, to January 29, 2016.

Project Process and Timeline

The Project Development Process is the framework by which Caltrans identifies a transportation problem and seeks to carry out specific projects to address the problems. The Project Development Process is:

- A problem-solving process to collect and verify information and to gather and analyze input
- A consensus-building process to make decisions on solutions

The Project Development Process, which begins with the identification of a project and ends when construction is complete, merges legal requirements, engineering requirements, and Caltrans management approvals. All projects, whether small or large, follow this process.

There are 4 major phases in the Project Development Process. Projected dates for the Liberty Canyon project are included below:

1) *Project Initiation Phase* (December 2014-May 2015)

This phase explores the possibilities for a Caltrans project. The final product for the Liberty Canyon project was the Project Study Report (PSR). The initiation phase included:

- Identification of the purpose and need for a project
- Identification of potential design alternatives
- Preliminary drawings and designs
- The Preliminary Environmental Analysis Report (PEAR)
- Initial budget projections
- Expected timeline
- Anticipated coordination with partners, agencies, communities, other stakeholders

2) *Project Approval & Environmental Document Phase (PA/ED)* (October 2015-June 2017)

This phase undertakes environmental studies and evaluates design issues. The final products for Liberty Canyon are expected to be the Project Report and the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment. PA/ED phase includes:

- Public input so the project can be designed to meet the community's needs
- Full environmental studies
- Design discussions
- Funding refinements

At the end of this phase, anticipated results are the selection of a Preferred Design Alternative and a Negative Declaration/Finding of No Significant Impact (ND/FONSI). A ND/FONSI precludes the need to research and draft a full Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report under CEQA/NEPA.

3) *Plans, Specifications, and Estimates Phase (PS&E)* (Approx July 2017-April 2019)

This phase, also known as the Design Phase, finalizes design details, draws up construction plans for bidding, and acquires the necessary property rights and environmental permits. If funding is available for construction, the project is bid out to contractors and awarded at the end of this phase.

4) *Construction and Closeout Phase* (Approx May 2019-November 2021)

In this phase, the selected contractor builds the project. The project reaches a complete status and closes out when project records are completed, right of way commitments are fulfilled, and any claims are resolved.

Project Funding

- A \$200,000.00 grant from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy was awarded for the Project Initiation Phase and the Project Study Report. Completed May 1, 2015.
- A \$1,000,000 grant from the State Coastal Conservancy has been awarded to conduct the PA/ED phase.
- A \$650,000.00 grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board has been awarded to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy and the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains to undertake fence removal or replacement and re-vegetation near US-101 and Liberty Canyon Road. Partners in the grant include the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Caltrans, and the County of Los Angeles.
- The National Wildlife Federation has pledged to fundraise for the PS&E and construction phases.

Project Benefits

Several benefits for wildlife and nearby communities are anticipated. These include:

- The promotion and preservation of biological diversity in the region, especially for species currently threatened by the loss of contiguous habitat (such as mountain lions).
- Habitat restoration in the open spaces along both sides of US-101, returning green space and some of the natural character, landscape, and sustainability to a region that was changed by the construction of US-101.
- Mitigation for climate change as the distributions of native species alter due to shifts in habitat, weather, and vegetation patterns.
- The improvement of recreation activities and opportunities for local hikers, bikers, and equestrians who could use the trail on the overcrossing.
- Opportunities for innovative leadership and partnerships in finding a sustainable solution to an environmental issue important to the public.

Attachments

Location maps (2 figures)

Projections of three alternatives (5 figures)

**** For questions, please contact Barbara Marquez, Caltrans Senior Environmental Planner, at 213-897-0791 or Barbara.marquez@dot.ca.gov.**

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California State Senate

SENATOR
FRAN PAVLEY

TWENTY-SEVENTH SENATE DISTRICT



COMMITTEES
NATURAL RESOURCES & WATER
CHAIR
BUDGET & FISCAL REVIEW
ENERGY, UTILITIES &
COMMUNICATIONS
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
GOVERNANCE & FINANCE

January 5, 2016

The Honorable Harry Schwarz
Mayor, City of Agoura Hills
30001 Ladyface Court
Agoura Hills, CA 91301

Dear Mayor Schwarz:

This past fall, the California Department of Transportation released a Project Study Report on a proposed dedicated wildlife passage across the US-101 near Liberty Canyon Road in the City of Agoura Hills.

As a longtime resident and the first Mayor of Agoura Hills, I am very aware of the significant wildlife population in this region. Our community proudly identifies itself as "Gateway to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area." The 27th Senate District, which I represent, includes an extensive part of the Santa Monicas south to the Pacific Ocean, and connects to vast areas of open space to the north, much of which is already in public ownership.

Bisecting this critical habitat for countless species of wildlife is the US-101. Because of urban encroachment, at no point for miles in either direction is there a viable north/south crossing point. As a result, mountain lions are trapped by this barrier in islands of habitat leading to territorial fighting and inbreeding being documented at a disturbingly high level. Over generations, inbreeding leads to a loss of genetic diversity and general weakening of the species.

Scientists, biologists and other wildlife experts have realized the critical importance of preserving this key wildlife corridor. National Park Service researchers have documented serious threats to the long-term viability of the mountain lions if a structure is not built. Twelve mountain lions have been struck and killed by vehicles in the National Park Service study area since research began in 2002, including a male mountain lion hit on US-101 near Liberty Canyon Road in 2013.

In Agoura Hills, we have the unique opportunity to facilitate the needed wildlife corridor across the US-101 to connect these parklands, promote safety for motorists, and protect our wildlife.

Further, this crossing would serve as a valuable connection for equestrians, bicyclists and hikers who enjoy the recreational opportunities in our area.

Thank you, and please contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Fran Pavley

Fran Pavley
California State Senator, District 27

cc: Mayor Pro Tem Denis Weber, City of Agoura Hills
Councilmember Illece Buckley Weber, City of Agoura Hills
Councilmember William D. Koehler, City of Agoura Hills
Councilmember Linda L. Northrup, City of Agoura Hills
City Manager Greg Ramirez, City of Agoura Hills