

REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

DATE: JANUARY 27, 2016
TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
FROM: GREG RAMIREZ, CITY MANAGER *hrt For G.R.*
BY: RAMIRO ADEVA, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS/CITY ENGINEER *RA*
SUBJECT: APPROVE COMMENTS LETTER TO CALTRANS REGARDING
LIBERTY CANYON WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

On January 13, 2016, the Caltrans project team presented an update to the City Council regarding the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Corridor project. During the presentation, the Caltrans environmental lead, Barbara Marquez, clarified that Friday, January 29, 2016, would mark the conclusion of the comment period for the project scoping portion of the Project Approval/Environmental Document (PAED) phase.

This news afforded the City Council additional time to consider the information provided by the Caltrans project team during the meeting, as well as information provided at the official Public Scoping Meeting held the following day, on January 14, 2016, wherein four of the five Councilmembers attended (Mayor Pro Tem, Denis Weber, did not attend).

Attached is a letter for the City Council's consideration, outlining the comments the City would like to submit for the official record before the public scoping period ends on January 29, 2016.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff respectfully recommends the City Council:

1. Approve the content of the comments letter.
2. Authorize the Mayor to sign the comments letter on behalf of the City Council.

Attachment: Draft Comments Letter



DRAFT

January 28, 2016

"Gateway to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area"

Barbara Marquez
Senior Environmental Planner
Stewardship Unit
Caltrans District 7 – Division of Environmental Planning
100 S. Main Street, MS-16A
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Liberty Canyon Wildlife Corridor Scoping comments

Dear Ms. Marquez:

Thank you for your presentation to the City Council at our January 13, 2016 regular meeting. The following day, January 14, 2016, I was able to attend the Public Scoping meeting for the project at King Gillette Ranch, and I found both presentations to be informative.

Since that time, the City Council considered and approved the following list at our regularly scheduled meeting on January 27, 2016, to be added to the official scoping record. It outlines the City Council's comments, questions, and/or concerns on the project. It is our hopes that these issues will be incorporated into the scope of work for this next phase of the design.

The City of Agoura Hills would appreciate response/attention to the following matters:

- (1) How can the proposed/anticipated environmental determination for this project be a Negative Declaration (ND)/ Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)? In previous discussions with the city, it was noted that the total width and length of the structure would be 165-feet wide by approximately 600-feet long (this accounts for the 200-feet to cross the 101-freeway added to the estimated 400 feet needed to traverse over a tunnel on Agoura Road to meet the grade of the existing MRCA-owned land south of Agoura Road). Intuitively, one would assume massive grading in the form of import and dirt moving, disturbance to existing habitat, oak tree mitigation, noise and traffic impacts, etc. It would seem that a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) would be more appropriate at the very least to address significant impacts such as these.
- (2) Both the PSR and presentation to the City Council made note of two undercrossing alternatives (one 13'x13' undercrossing and one 15' x 32' undercrossing) that were being proposed for elimination. However, there was a

previous meeting on this project months ago wherein a statement was made by a biologist that under-crossings do indeed work, and can be used as a viable option when faced with similar obstacles to wildlife movement. In light of this, we feel at least one, if not both, of these two alternatives should undergo a detailed analysis in this next phase, alongside the other three alternatives, instead of being eliminated at this point.

- (3) With respect to the proposed tunnel in Alternative #3, it would be the expectation of the City to maintain a roadway width that provides the same flexibilities for building future road improvements to comply with "Complete Streets" law, which preserves adequate space for all modes of transport (ie: motorist, bicyclist, pedestrian). As noted in the comments submitted by the City during the PSR phase (and reiterated here), the expected tunnel cross section should accommodate 4 lanes of travel, bike lanes on both sides, and pedestrian facilities on both sides. It was noted by the project team during internal discussions that the existing public right-of-way on Agoura Road at the proposed crossing location is approximately 60-feet. This next phase should establish a cross section that meets the aforementioned multi-modal needs of the city. If it's determined that the cross section needed is greater than the available right-of-way on Agoura Road, what would be the plan to acquire the additional space needed? This issue should also be included in the scope of this next phase.
- (4) If a tunnel is built over Agoura Road, who maintains it since the city has no interest or intentions of inheriting the maintenance of the tunnel? What are the details of the maintenance? Is Caltrans, or another entity, going to accept full maintenance responsibility of the facility, both inside (ie: structural damage, graffiti, etc) and on top of (ie: landscaping, etc)?
- (5) What is the approximate amount of earthwork/grading quantities being expected with this project (import, export, any dirt moving)? How many oak trees (scrub oak included) will be impacted, and what would be the anticipated mitigation for these impacts?
- (6) It seems like the bridge and tunnel structures over the freeway and Agoura Road will be carrying significant weight (ie: soil, landscaping, trees, etc). What sort of safety factor is being used in the design to ensure these structures can withstand a major earthquake?

If the proposed tunnel over Agoura Road structurally fails in an earthquake, who is responsible for repairs and/or re-construction of the tunnel?

- (7) Agoura Road has historically been used as an emergency by-pass route when the 101-freeway shuts down. If a tunnel is built over Agoura Road for over 200-feet as outlined in the PSR, what assurance does the City have that Agoura Road can still be used as a by-pass route in the event a major earthquake causes the interchanges on the freeway and the tunnel structure over Agoura

Road to fail? The study should discuss the plans to address this major safety concern, and outline a way for vehicles to get around the proposed tunnel, so the City can be sure the capability to by-pass Agoura Road in an emergency remains in-tact regardless of which alternative is built.

- (8) It is important that we keep the Agoura Hills community informed on the progress of this project. What is the anticipated timeline to build this project?
- (9) There was much discussion at the Public Scoping meeting about a hiking trail component to this project. Are recreational uses (ie: formal hiking trail) being included as part of the current studies and analyses? Is that being considered within the \$55 million dollar estimate? If so, there should be analysis on the additional facilities that may be needed to support formal hiking trail uses (ie: parking lot, special signage, low lighting, etc?).
- (10) Further analyses should be conducted on the impact and safety concerns this project will have on the nearby residential areas on the south side of Agoura Road. Does this project encourage closer contact than normally would exist with wildlife such as mountain lions? If so, is this a safety concern that is being addressed and how?
- (11) What is the basis of the 165-foot width of the wildlife crossing? There have been statements made in the past that this width is actually on the smaller size of what's desired. However, it was noted at the City Council meeting and the Public Scoping meeting that this crossing could potentially be the biggest in the world, implying there have been other successful crossings built that have been smaller. Although the concept of a crossing is appealing, we need to balance the size of it with the reality it is being proposed in a suburban area. Additionally, the undercrossing options proposed for elimination specify widths of 13-feet and 32-feet. How can those widths be considered viable for undercrossings, while 165-feet be considered a minimum requirement for the overcrossing?

The width of the crossing over the 101-freeway has direct impact on the grading component south of the freeway in Agoura Hills, which affects the length of any proposed tunnel within the City limits as well. The study should clarify the data supporting a 165-foot structure, and why something less wide is not a viable option worth considering in further detail during this next phase.

On behalf of the City Council, I want to thank you for your serious consideration to these important items. Although this project affects multiple entities and groups of people, it is undeniable that the City of Agoura Hills is a unique stakeholder in this process given the proximity and encroachment of the proposed crossing within the city's limits.

If you should have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the City's Public Works Director/City Engineer, Ramiro Adeva, directly at 818-597-7353, or email at radeva@ci.agoura-hills.ca.us.

Sincerely,

Harry Schwarz
Mayor

Cc:

City Council members
Greg Ramirez, City Manager
Ramiro Adeva, Director of Public Works/City Engineer
Erika Reppun, Caltrans