

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Route 154 Operational Improvements (Group II)

MEETING DATE: September 21, 2006

AGENDA ITEM: 6C

STAFF CONTACT: Fred Luna

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Route 154 Operational Improvements (Group II) project as defined in the Mitigated Negative Declaration prepared by Caltrans (acting as lead agency) and direct staff to file a Notice of Determination with the County Clerk.

SUMMARY:

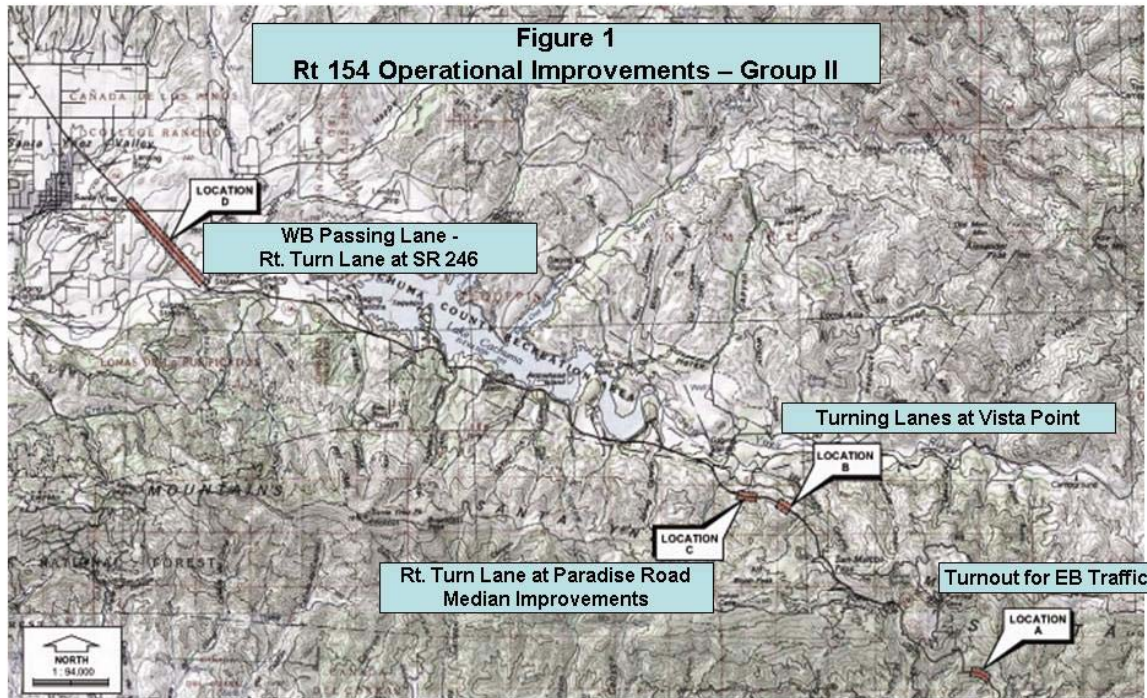
SBCAG completed an initial phase of 12 operational and safety improvements on State Route 154 in 1998 with Measure D funds. There was sufficient residual funding to undertake a second phase of operational and safety improvements funded by Measure D on Route 154. Caltrans and SBCAG entered into a cooperative agreement for "Group II" in December 2002, with Caltrans acting as lead agency for environmental and design phases and SBCAG acting as a responsible and sponsoring agency. Since that time environmental studies and preliminary engineering have been completed. A number of community meetings have been held to discuss the project and its planned improvements, including an open house in May 2006 during the public comment period on the environmental document, which is a Mitigated Negative Declaration/Initial Study. The public comment period was closed on May 26, 2006.

One comment was received from the general public and adjacent land owner (San Lucas Ranch) and two from resource agencies. Caltrans and SBCAG have evaluated the comments and have included formal responses within the final environmental document. The final mitigated negative declaration and final project report are in the process of being signed by Caltrans. With signature of the project report, Caltrans will certify the project and file a Notice of Determination with the State Office of Planning and Research pursuant to CEQA. Staff is recommending the board approve the project as defined in the Mitigated Negative Declaration (attached). Staff is also recommending that, upon certification of the project by Caltrans, that staff be directed to file a Notice of Determination allowing SBCAG to move forward with construction of the project which is currently scheduled to begin in early 2008.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The Route 154 Operational Improvements Group II project was initiated shortly after completion of the Group I improvements in 1998. A Project Study Report was prepared by Caltrans in 2000 and SBCAG retained RBF Consultants to begin preliminary engineering and environmental studies in April 2002.



Improvements

Approval by Caltrans of the Final Project Report and Mitigated Negative Declaration culminates nearly two years of analysis of several improvement locations (and alternatives at each location) for the Route 154 Group II project. In addition, the consultant team undertook several value analysis efforts to minimize construction costs of the alternatives. The Final Project Report includes four specific improvement locations which are identified as Locations A, B, C and D. The improvements include one passing lane, channelization improvements (turn lanes), and a turnout. The improvements are described in more detail below.

Location A: This improvement calls for the construction of an eastbound (toward Santa Barbara) turnout just down the grade from Painted Cave Road. The current configuration is an informal stopping point that is often used by travelers for the view it offers of the Channel Islands and South Coast. The improvement will formalize the turnout, preclude stopping and prevent access from the westbound side by removing the paved area across the highway. Drainage will be improved and safety will be improved by permitting slower traffic to pull over for faster moving downhill traffic.

Location B: This improvement is located at the Vista Point just west of the Cold Springs Arch Bridge. The improvement calls for the construction of westbound right-turn lane and an eastbound left-turn lane. These improvements will provide better and safer access to the Vista Point by separating through movements from turning movements in an area of 7% grade.

Location C: This improvement is located at the intersection of Route 154 and Paradise Road. A right turn lane will be constructed at this location to provide improved access from westbound Route 154 onto Paradise Road. Due to the 7% grade in this area and high number of recreational vehicles differential speeds between vehicles is an issue.

Location D: This location begins just west of the Santa Agueda Creek Bridge and extends up to the intersection of Route 154 and Route 246. At the east end of the improvement location, a westbound passing lane is to be constructed up a 4% grade. At the intersection, the left-turn lane from westbound Route 154 to westbound Route 246 will be lengthened to accommodate more storage due to peak hour movements. The last improvement will be the construction of a new right-turn lane from eastbound Route 154 to westbound Route 246.

Public Process

SBCAG staff, its consultants and Caltrans have met with the public on numerous occasions to discuss this project. Meetings have included formal public meetings and open houses, of which there have been three, most recently in May 2006. Staff met with local stakeholders regarding improvements at the intersection of Baseline/Edison at Route 154 and improvements adjacent to the San Lucas Ranch. Staff has also received calls and discussed the project with several local individuals who have been added to stakeholder list and informed about the project as the environmental and preliminary design process progressed. The Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration was circulated for public comment during May 2006. Each public comment received has been responded to and included in the Final Environmental Document which was approved by Caltrans.

Project Approval

As the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Caltrans is required to consider the Initial Study\Negative Declaration prior to approving the project and to adopt the Negative Declaration if it finds that the project will not have a significant effect on the environment (CEQA Section 15074). Caltrans has done so and has signed the final environmental document, Project Report, and mitigation monitoring plan. The mitigation plan was developed to address impacts that would arise as a result of the project. With mitigation implemented, it was determined that the impact would be less than significant in all cases. The mitigation monitoring plan documents the planned mitigation measures and the responsible party for implementing measures to mitigate or avoid significant environmental effects. The mitigation measures identified in the negative declaration include the following:

- ***Construction Emissions*** – Incorporation of construction emission reduction measures into the project’s construction contract documents and to monitor the measures during construction.
- ***Lead Contamination*** – Perform lead testing on the project during the design phase and incorporate remediation measures in the contract documents for construction (if necessary).

COST, FUNDING AND SCHEDULE

The total cost for the project improvements is approximately \$5.1 million. This is the cost for construction only. Design services have been retained by the SBCAG board in March 2006. Design efforts will commence in full once the project is approved. Final design is anticipated to be completed in late 2007. Prior to that, SBCAG would release a request for proposal to retain construction administration services to assist SBCAG with the process for advertising, awarding and administering a construction contract beginning in early 2008. The total cost for the final design, construction administration, and construction is being funded by Measure D.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the board approve the project as defined by Caltrans in the Mitigated Negative Declaration. Staff also recommends that the board approve the filing of a Notice of Determination pursuant to 15096 (i) of CEQA guidelines. By filing the NOD, SBCAG will move forward with completing final plans for construction and will advertise, award and administer a construction package.

COMMITTEE REVIEW: None

STOW/reports/Stow-Envir-Staff Report

MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Department), in cooperation with the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) proposes construction of additional operational improvements along the State Route 154 corridor as mandated in the Measure D Expenditure Plan. An initial phase of Measure D funded improvements, called the Group I Improvements were completed in 1997. The new set of operational improvements, called Group II Improvements, are listed below:

- Location A at KP 45.6/45.8 (PM 28.3/28.5) – Construct eastbound turnout.
- Location B at KP 35.8/36.3 (PM 22.2/22.6) – Construct eastbound left turn lane and westbound right turn lane at Vista Point, just west of Cold Springs Bridge.
- Location C at KP 34.7/35.2 (PM 21.6/21.9) – Construct westbound right turn channelization at Paradise Road.
- Location D at KP 13.1/16.1 (PM 8.1/10.2) – Construct westbound passing lane beginning just west of the Santa Agueda Creek Bridge. Extend the westbound SR 154 left turn lane at SR 246. Construct an eastbound SR 154 right turn deceleration lane at SR 246.

Determination

The Department has prepared an Initial Study for this project, and following public review, has determined from this study that the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons.

The proposed project would have no effect on land use, growth, farmlands, community, public services, utilities/service systems, traffic/transportation, cultural resources, hydrology/floodplain, geology, noise, paleontology, hazardous waste/materials, and invasive species.

The proposed project would have no significant adverse impact on visual resources, water quality, air quality, and biological resources because the following mitigation measures would reduce potential effects to insignificance:

- Slopes affected by grading would be restored and revegetated to maintain visual quality;
- A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan would be implemented using best management practices;
- Dust control measures would be fully implemented;
- Emissions from construction equipment would be reduced to the extent feasible;
- Oak trees removed would be replaced at a minimum 10:1 ratio;
- Affected streambeds would be restored to improve habitat value;

- California red-legged frog habitat would be avoided, and surveys would be conducted to ensure this species is not adversely affected.

Larry Newland, AICP
Environmental Branch Chief, Central Region
California Department of Transportation

Date