

Chapter 3 – COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

Notice of Preparation

The Solano Transportation Authority (STA) initiated the environmental process for the North Connector in January 2003, with the distribution of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report to the California State Clearinghouse and federal, state, and local responsible and cooperating agencies. Distribution of the NOP included a 30-day comment period. The NOP was distributed in accordance with CEQA guidelines.

Public Scoping Meeting

A public scoping meeting was held on March 6, 2003 from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM at Nelda Mundy Elementary School in the City of Fairfield. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for agencies and the public to learn more about the project and to provide input on potential environmental issues to be considered in the environmental review process. The public comment scoping comment period went for 30 days, from February 28 to April 1, 2003.

A meeting notice was mailed to more than 2,300 property owners, elected officials, city and county staff, special interest organizations and neighborhood groups in the project area. In addition, a meeting notice display ad was printed in area newspapers, meeting information was posted on the STA, City of Fairfield and Solano County Web sites and a media release and Public Service Announcement was distributed to local media outlets.

The following comments were taken from comment sheets and received verbally during the public scoping meeting. Comments are grouped into the following categories: Traffic Congestion and Cut-through Traffic, Funding, Bicycle Access, Flood Control, Regulatory Agency Comments and Other.

Traffic Congestion and Cut-through Traffic

- Several people felt that connecting the project to SR 12 West would encourage regional use (rather than just local) of the roadway.
- Constructing only the portion of the North Connector from Suisun Valley Road to Abernathy Road is a good idea.
- Many people suggested the I-80/I-680/SR 12 Interchange Project be completed prior to linking the North Connector to SR 12 West to help keep regional traffic off local roads.
- Can the study team realistically differentiate between regional and local traffic?
- Use traffic studies to determine how many regional travelers will leave the freeway system with the construction of the North Connector.
- Some felt STA is encouraging regional traffic to move on to local roads.
- The need for the North Connector Project is recognized, but regional traffic will use this roadway.
- The majority of county road traffic is cut-through.
- How many commuters are going to Napa?
- Consider improving alternate routes to Napa (i.e. SR 221).
- What is the North Connector construction schedule?
- Phasing construction of the North Connector project must happen with the interchange.
- The merging of seven lanes into four at the I-80/I-680/SR 12 Interchange is the real problem.
- Why connect the North Connector to SR 12 when you will be redesigning the Interchange. While I recognize some benefit to the local Cordelia/Green Valley

residents, the benefit is minimal when compared to the increase of regional traffic that will occur on Business Center Drive if the project is connected to SR 12 West.

- The Central Solano County Tax Payer Group supports the North Connector Project. Traffic in this area is bad.
- Encourage Caltrans to complete the I-80 Widening (Auxiliary Lane) Project earlier than 2005. Freeway users need a merging area at the truck scales to help decrease congestion.
- A connection from Gold Hill Road to Chadbourne Road is needed.
- High growth rates will impact project benefits. Will growth in the area be slowed?
- There is a petition to lock the development limits in the City of Fairfield's General Plan as it stands today. Doing so would contain growth.
- There are mandated State growth rates. This growth will create more traffic. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) has this data.
- Please consider a frontage road as an alternative when studying the North Connectors alignment.

Funding

- It is unreasonable to request the County contribute matching grant funds for transportation projects. Citizens already contribute by paying taxes.
- The State and Federal governments need to contribute more funds to these projects.

Bicycle Access

- Stripe the North Connector for Class II bicycle lanes to encourage commuting by bike.
- Add a Class I bicycle lane from the west end of Mangels Boulevard, running parallel to Business Center Drive and to Red Top Road.
- Improve the transition from the existing Class I bicycle lane, terminating at Red Top Road, to roadway and create a safe way for bicyclists to get across SR 12.

Flood Control

- Considerable flooding can occur at Suisun and Dan Wilson Creeks; consider this in your studies.
- Flood Control should start with the discharge channels in Suisun Marsh and then complete improvements upstream. Opening creek channels upstream first would place more water downstream into inadequate discharge channels.

Other

- If right-of-entry requests are denied, will there be further action to gain entry, for example legal action?
- It feels as though there is only one project alternative for consideration.
- The large orange signs near Red Top Road are redundant.
- Prefer HOV lanes not be included in freeway projects.
 - Forces the majority of traffic into remaining lanes causing congestion, adversely affecting air quality.
 - Safety hazard due to the varying speeds in different lanes.
- Current traffic conditions negatively impact emergency response.
- This project is truly needed.

The following comments were submitted by agencies in response to the NOP. A complete copy of comments is included in the Appendix.

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture forwarded the Farmland Protection Policy Act for informational purposes. The document contains criteria to use in identifying and taking into account the adverse effects of Federal programs on the protection of farmland. Also included was the Farmland Conversion Impact Rating form (AD 1066). This form is used by Federal agencies that wish to convert farmland to nonagricultural uses.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department forwarded a list of sensitive species that may be in or near the project site with an explanation of the list. A separate enclosure recommends guidelines for identifying and mitigating project impacts to fish, wildlife and their habitats.
- The California Department of Conservation, using the 2000 Solano County Important Farmland Map, the Williamson Act contract and agricultural conservation easement (Valine Ranch) analyzed the general project location. These documents indicated that the project area includes Prime Farmlands. The following items were recommended for inclusion in the Draft EIR and used when considering the alternatives.
 - Describe the actual and potential agricultural productivity of the land.
 - Type, amount and location of farmland conversion resulting directly and indirectly from the project, impacts to operations, incremental impacts that may lead to a considerable cumulative impact.
 - Locate Williamson Act acres within the project and tabulate the number properties impacted.
 - Every effort should be made to protect State investments in agricultural land conservation.
 - Recommends the purchase of agricultural conservation easements on land of at least equal quantity and size as partial compensation for direct loss of agricultural land, growth inducement and cumulative impacts to agricultural land.
- The National Marine Fisheries Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, noted that the following Federally listed threatened and candidate species and/or critical habitat might be affected by the North Connector Project and what needed to be studied in connection with:
 - Central Valley Steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)
 - Fall-run Chinook salmon
 - The Suisun Creek where the Steelhead are found has been designated critical habitat
 - An assessment of the project's effects on the listed species and their habitat, including, but not limited to, safe passage conditions, water quality and quantity, and riparian vegetation.

The comments received in response to the NOP and at the Scoping Meeting we taken into consideration in refining the proposed project design and preparing the environmental document. For example, the project has been designed to account for the periodic flooding that occurs in the area and detailed studies of potential impacts to threatened and endangered species were conducted.

Property Owner Meeting

A second meeting was held on February 5, 2004 from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM at the City of Suisun City Council Chambers. This meeting was targeted toward property owners that may be directly affected by one or more of the proposed alternatives and alignment options for the North Connector Project. The purpose of the meeting was to provide these property owners with an opportunity to review the alignment options for the North Connector and provide comments.

A meeting invitation letter was mailed to potentially impacted property owners approximately two weeks prior to the meeting. Local elected officials and key representatives from homeowner associations, business associations and special interest groups, were also invited to attend the meeting by letter.

The following comments were received during the question and answer session and the comment sheet submitted at the meeting. The responses to the comments is provided immediately after in italics. Note that comments have been organized into general categories.

Funding

- Provide the project's completion schedule, assuming there is available funding.
Depending on the availability of funding, the project could be completed as early as 2010.
- Clarify if this project has true potential of occurring due to the budget crisis.
The project has real potential of occurring, but its schedule will be largely determined by funding sources such as passing a sales tax measure and the future of the CA Traffic Congestion Relief Program funds.
- Explain the funding breakdown between federal, state, and regional sources.
The funding breakdown has not been determined. However, past experiences shows that if there is local funding, state and federal matching funds are easier to obtain.
- Will Regional Measure 2 funds be used for the North Connector?
Measure 2 funds will be used for the I-80/I-680/SR 12 Interchange Project.

Property Concerns

- Clarify when property purchases will begin and what amount of lead time will be provided.
The project's environmental document is expected to be finalized and approved in summer 2005. Afterwards, a preferred alternative will be chosen and detailed design and engineering work will take place. At that time, property impacts from the road alignment will be identified, impacted properties will be notified and negotiations will begin.
- Address instances when the North Connector divides a property. Ensure that there is access from one side of property to the other.
Access to and from each property parcel is being considered in the design of each alternative.
- Consider drainage issues when constructing the roadway.
Hydrology and floodplain studies are being conducted as part of the environmental review process.
- Property owners do not want to be assessed and obligated to beautify property adjacent to the North Connector.
There are no plans to assess local property owners for landscaping or other improvements associated with the roadway.

Other

- Explain the construction stages for the North Connector.
Construction of the North Connector may be divided into two stages – the East End could be constructed first and then be followed by the West End. Construction staging will also be coordinated with other area projects.
- Will the North Connector act as an expressway or will it have multiple traffic lights and stop signs?
The North Connector will only have a few new traffic lights and stop signs. The existing traffic lights and stop signs on Business Center Drive will remain. The posted speed limits are anticipated to be 35 mph and 45 mph.
- Address how regional traffic will be discouraged from using the North Connector once it is connected to Red Top Road.
The West End of the project will be constructed as a 2-lane roadway and most likely after some improvements have been made to the I-80/I-680/SR 12 Interchange, traveling on the North Connector will be less attractive. For example, the I-80 Widening Project is scheduled to break ground by spring 2004 and be completed prior to the North Connector Project.
- Do the traffic studies consider the worst case scenario?
The traffic studies consider peak commute hours from Tuesday to Thursday.
- Explain when the improvements to Jameson Canyon are expected to be complete and if and how they will be coordinated with the North Connector.
Caltrans is working with Napa and Solano Counties on the improvements to Jameson Canyon and the North Connector Project will be considered in the planning.
- Are there construction projects to address the congestion that may occur when motorists on the North Connector pass through Fairfield?
Projects needed in Fairfield and throughout the I-80 corridor are being evaluated as part of the I-80/I-680/I-780 Corridor Study currently underway.
- Address the problem of trash and abandoned cars located along Red Top Road between I-80 and SR 12 West.
This is an existing problem. The City of Fairfield representative at the meeting indicated that he would look into the problem.
- Consider the needs of students (high school and college) traveling in the vicinity and potential impacts to them.
The North Connector would provide an alternative route to traveling on I-80 for students traveling to Solano Community College from downtown Fairfield.
- Post North Connector alignment options on STA Web site.
The alignment options will be posted on the STA Web site, www.solanolinks.com.

Newsletter

Due to the proximity of the North Connector Project with other transportation projects being planned in Solano County, information about the North Connector project was included in the Fall 2004 issue of the *Corridor Progress*, a newsletter for the I-80/I-680/SR-12 Interchange Project which highlighted the North Connector Project and its current status. The newsletter was mailed out to approximately 2,300 contacts including property owners and residents, special interest groups, elected officials, and agency representatives.

Information on the North Connector Project was also presented at the I-80/I-680/SR-12 Interchange Project Open House and Public Scoping Meeting on May 12, 2003.

Refinement of Project Description

After initiating the environmental review in January 2003, STA, Caltrans and FHWA prepared technical environmental studies and evaluated various alignment options. Informal consultation was conducted with the USFWS, US Army Corps of Engineers, National Marine Fisheries Service and the California Department of Fish and Game, as well as with the City of Fairfield and Solano County. Based on the technical studies, public input and agency consultation, STA, Caltrans and FHWA were able to refine the preliminary design to address many of the issues raised early in the process. Based on this work, the CEQA lead agency STA, in consultation with Caltrans, decided that an Initial Study and Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration was appropriate for the project.

Future Public Hearing

A public hearing on the Draft IS/EA will be held on December 14, 2006 at the Nelda Mundy Elementary School Auditorium from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., to provide the opportunity for agencies and the public to review the environmental study results and provide comments.