

SCH NO.

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: Office of Planning and Research
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: California Dept. of Transportation
703 B Street
Marysville, CA 95901

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

Project Title: Avenue of the Giants Four Bridges Project

Project Location: State Route 254, designated as "Avenue of the Giants", at various locations from postmile (PM) 0.88 to 43.02 in Humboldt County.

Project Description: Widen bridge decks and upgrade bridge railings at the Ohman Creek (PM 0.88), Elk Creek (PM 10.43), Bridge Creek Bridge (PM 10.80) and Bear Creek bridges (PM 43.02). A bridge replacement of the Bridge Creek Bridge is also being studied due to potential structural deficiencies that have been identified at this location.

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation will be the lead agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible agency is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

The project description, location map, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials.

A copy of the Initial Study is not attached.

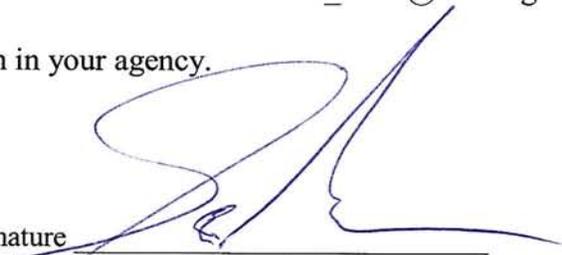
Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please direct your response via U.S. mail to Sandra E. Rosas, Environmental Branch Chief, Caltrans District 3, 703 B Street, Marysville, CA 95901 or e-mail to sandra_rosas@dot.ca.gov.

Please supply us with the name of a contact person in your agency.

Date February 14, 2011

Signature


Sandra E. Rosas, Chief
Office of Environmental Management, M-2

Project Description

Caltrans proposes to widen bridge decks and upgrade bridge railings on Route 254 in Humboldt County. The project includes the following four bridge locations:

- Ohman Creek Bridge #4-7, PM 0.88
- Elk Creek Bridge #4-8, PM 10.43
- Bridge Creek Bridge #4-9, PM 10.80
- Bear Creek Bridge #4-12, PM 43.02

The proposed project would provide a minimum shoulder width of 4 feet on each bridge and see-through railings to accommodate non-motorized traffic.

The project is located within the Humboldt Redwoods State Park, which protects the largest continuous stand of old growth coastal redwood forest in the world. A 32-mile portion of Route 254, known as the “Avenue of the Giants”, is a world-famous scenic drive and popular tourist destination along the Eel River through old growth redwoods trees and numerous dedicated redwood groves. The four bridge sites are located on the Avenue of the Giants.

Project Alternatives

The following alternatives are under consideration in this project:

Build Alternatives

- Alternative 1 – widen bridge decks and upgrade bridge railings to provide a minimum shoulder width of 4 feet on the Ohman Creek (PM 0.88), Elk Creek (PM 10.43), Bridge Creek (PM 10.80), and Bear Creek (PM 43.02) bridges. These bridges would remain open to one-way traffic during construction.
- Alternative 2 – widen bridge decks and upgrade bridge railings to provide a minimum shoulder width of 4 feet on the Ohman Creek, Elk Creek, and Bear Creek bridges and completely replace the Bridge Creek Bridge. Studies have indicated that the bridge at Bridge Creek may be structurally deficient in its current condition and widening the deck would require extensive repair of the bridge. Additionally, the locations of the existing piers at Bridge Creek are restricting natural flows on the upstream side of the bridge. The proposed replacement of the Bridge Creek Bridge includes plans for a road closure and detour during construction.

No Build Alternative

The no build alternative proposes to maintain the existing conditions without any improvements.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Discussion

Caltrans considered an alternative to upgrade the bridge railings without widening the bridge decks to avoid substructure work. This alternative does not meet project purpose and need and will be eliminated from further consideration.

Discussion of Potential Impacts

As part of the scoping and preliminary environmental analysis conducted for the project, no adverse impacts were identified for the following resources: population, housing, agriculture, forestry, cultural resources, hazard/hazardous materials, mineral resources, geology, and soils. Resources that would be potentially affected by the project include aesthetics, biological resources, land use/planning, transportation/traffic, public services, utilities/service systems, air quality, hydrology/water quality, noise, and recreation.

The following discussion addresses the potential effects of the project related those topics considered to be potentially significant:

Visual/Aesthetics

Replacement of the original bridge railings at all four locations could result in significant impacts. The current bridge railings complement the historic and scenic setting along the Avenue of the Giants. Impacts may be mitigated to less than significant levels, depending on final railing design plans and comments from the Humboldt Redwoods State Park and the public.

The entire length of Route 254 is eligible for listing as a Scenic Highway. Route 254 is also designated on the "2008 Named Freeways, Highways, Structures and Other Appurtenances" as:

- Avenue of the Giants: A portion of Route 254 in Humboldt County is named for the old U.S. Route 101, which takes a winding path through the awe-inspiring redwood groves.
- Blue Star Memorial Highway, Route 254: The designation is sponsored by the Southern Humboldt Garden Club, Inc., and the California Garden Clubs, Inc., as a tribute to the men and women of the nation's armed forces.

The project is located within the Humboldt Redwoods State Park. The park includes some of the world's most impressive old growth redwood forests and redwood groves. Old growth redwood forests are viewed as irreplaceable, as there is no evidence that they can ever be regrown once they are destroyed.

Air Quality

Construction of the project could result in temporary impacts to air quality. Avoidance and minimization measures would be implemented to minimize these impacts.

Biological Resources

Formal Section 7 consultation will be necessary, and there is a good probability of a determination of "may affect, likely to adversely affect" for more than one fully protected species.

- This project is within the habitat of at least two bird species (marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl) and three fish species (steelhead, Coho salmon and Chinook salmon), which are protected at the state and/or federal level.
- All of the bridges will involve construction activities (stream diversion, pile driving) in Essential Fish Habitat, and some are in marbled murrelet critical habitat.
- At least one species of concern, foothill yellow-legged frog, will likely be impacted by the project and there is potential for impacts to others.
- Work windows which exclude the nesting season of marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl are not feasible to complete construction in a reasonable time frame during the dry weather construction window.

The Humboldt Redwoods State Park and the Save the Redwoods League have policies regarding the protection of old growth redwoods. Work within the structural root zone is considered a significant impact if any impervious surface is placed or roots over 2 inches are disturbed. This project will result in both actions and could potentially result in significant impacts to old growth redwoods.

Construction activities including stream diversion, construction of access roads, pile driving, and other in-water work will result in impacts to jurisdictional waters.

Cultural Resources

State Route 254 (Avenue of the Giants) is a historic road alignment and is currently being evaluated to determine its eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and/or the California Register of Historical Resources. If it is determined to be eligible, the project could result in a potentially significant impact.

Hazardous Materials

The following hazardous waste issues would be minimized or with implementation of the following avoidance measures:

- Lead paint on the wooden railings of Ohman Creek Bridge
- The possibility of soil underlying the Ohman Creek Bridge being impacted with lead
- Lead paint on the wooden curb ends on the Bear Creek Bridge
- Asbestos within the Bridge Creek Bridge expansion plates.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board considers the South Fork of the Eel River to be a 303(d)-listed sediment and temperature impaired watershed. Diversion of four tributaries to the South Fork of the Eel River for at least one season, possibly two, may be a significant impact.

Wild and Scenic River

The South Fork of the Eel River parallels the project area and is designated as a both a state and federal Wild and Scenic River.

Land Use and Planning

The Humboldt County General Plan and Avenue of the Giants Community Plan will be evaluated. There are numerous policies related to the protection of biological, recreational, community and water resources within the project area. There are six communities included in the Avenue of the Giants Community Plan.

Noise

Construction of the project would temporarily increase levels in the vicinity of the work zone and may result in impacts to park users, nearby residents, and sensitive animal species (marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl). Noise generated during construction would be minimized with implementation of noise control measures.

Public Services

Emergency service providers could be affected during construction of the project. A road closure and detour will be utilized during the proposed bridge replacement at Bridge Creek. Temporary signals will be used for one-way traffic control at the other three bridge locations. Measures will be implemented to minimize impacts caused by the road closure/detour and one-way traffic control.

Recreation

Temporary construction impacts would affect visitors to the park, as well as local residents using Route 254. These impacts would be short-term and include traffic delays, a road closure and detour, increased noise levels, increased equipment emissions, and interruptions to visitors using the Humboldt Redwoods State Park facilities. Use of nearby recreational facilities could temporarily increase, if park visitors choose to leave the project area due to impacts resulting from construction activities.

Transportation/Traffic

A detour is proposed during the construction of the bridge replacement at Bridge Creek (PM 10.8). Drivers on Route 254 would be detoured onto U.S. 101 approximately 6.4 miles south of the bridge site. They would then travel 5.7 miles north on U.S. 101 where the detour would return them to Route 254 at Myers Flat. The detour affects a 7.8-mile section of Route 254, which provides access to Humboldt Redwoods State Park facilities including day use areas, a campground, trails, river access and two stops on a self-guided Avenue of the Giants Auto Tour. While the public would still have access to these facilities, the effects of the road closure and detour could result in potentially significant impacts. In addition, there are several communities in which local residents using this portion of Route 254 would be affected by the detour. It is expected that the detour would be in effect for one construction season.

Scoping Process

The scoping process for the project includes early consultation with public agencies and the general public. A public scoping meeting will be held to provide interested parties the opportunity to learn about the proposed project and to submit written comments to assist the project team in the Draft EIR development process. The details of the meeting are as follows:

Monday, February 28, 2011 – 4:30 to 6:30 PM
Humboldt Redwoods State Park Visitor Center
17119 Avenue of the Giants
Weott, CA

Written comments may also be mailed to Sandra E. Rosas, Office of Environmental Management M-2, Caltrans District 3, 703 B Street, Marysville, CA 95901. Your comments can also be emailed to sandra_rosas@dot.ca.gov. **Your response must be sent by March 21, 2011.**

Potential Responsible and Trustee Agencies

This Notice of Preparation serves as a request for comments from the responsible and trustee agencies listed in the following table regarding environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and reasonable mitigation measures that need to be discussed in the Draft EIR in order to address each agency's specific concerns in their areas of responsibility.

Potential Responsible and Trustee Agencies

Agency	Permits/Approvals
North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board	Clean Water Act Section 401 Certification
California Department of Fish and Game	Section 1602 Streambed Alteration Agreement Section 2080.1 & 2081 Consistency Determination
California Department of Parks and Recreation	Section 4(f) and 6(f) Consultation
State Office of Historic Preservation	Section 106 Consultation for Historic Resources
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Clean Water Act Section 404 Permit
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Biological Opinion
National Marine Fisheries Service	Biological Opinion
U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service	Wild and Scenic River Act Consultation

Avenue of the Giants

Four Bridges Project

