Marin-Sonoma Narrows Policy Advisory Group
Meeting Notes and Summary

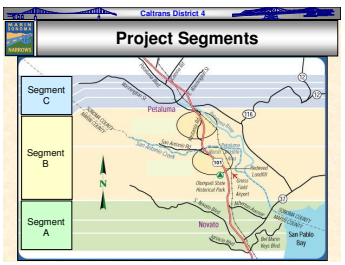
Dec. 21, 2005, 3:30 p.m.,
Supervisor's Chambers, Sonoma County Administration Building, 575 Administration Drive, Room 100A,
Santa Rosa, California

Attendees:
PAG members
Supervisor Cynthia Murray, Marin Board of Supervisors, Chair
Councilmember Pat Eklund, City of Novato
Council Member Michael Healy, Petaluma City Council
Supervisor Mike Kerns, Sonoma Board of Supervisors
Supervisor Tim Smith, Sonoma Board of Supervisors
Caltrans
Ray Akkawi
Sean Charles
SCTA
Suzanne Wilford
Guy Preston
TAM
Craig Tackabery
CirclePoint
Elizabeth Emmett

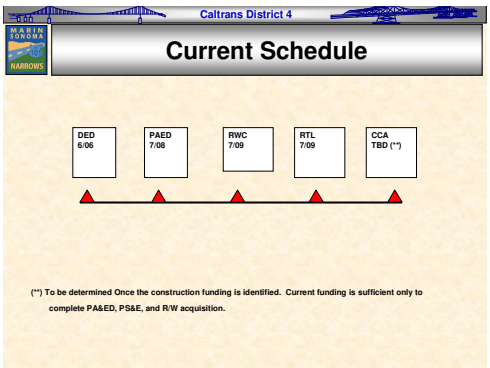
Two members of the public were present.

1. Project Update

Ray Akkawi of Caltrans presented a PowerPoint project update.



No change to the project segments since last meeting.



Akkawi reported a change in the Project Approval/Environmental Document date, from July 07 to July 08, because of the new red-legged frog (RLF) protocols issued by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Under the new protocols, the project's RLF surveys are expired (they will now expire every two years). Caltrans will have to submit a complete site assessment and have it approved by USFW before conducting the new surveys. Since the protocols call for surveys to be conducted from January to September, the team is too late to start surveying in January 2006.

Healy asked if RLF is present in the entire project corridor. Charles replied that it is hit and miss throughout the project corridor. When asked, Wilford said that this new protocol shouldn't affect other non-MSN projects in county because the problem is that these particular surveys expired, although Charles explained that under the new protocol, all surveys will expire in two years. Murray noted that this will add millions to the project cost, because of the delay in going to construction. Healy asked when the USFW protocol changed. Akkawi replied that it changed in Sept 05, too late to submit a site assessment for 2006 monitoring.

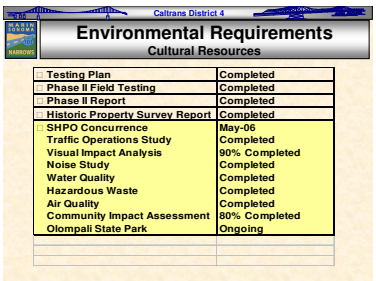
Akkawi continued that Caltrans hopes to get the site assessment approved in spring, and added that Caltrans will ask USFW if they can do the fall survey first, followed by the spring survey. Staff is not optimistic. Murray asked why the team can't go ahead and hire a firm to do the survey, based on what we know the site will be. Akkawi said that USFW requires the approved site assessment first. Murray asked if the team is in danger of having the rest of the environmental assessments expire while re-doing the RLF survey. Charles replied that it is possible that some studies may need to be updated as the project progresses.

Eklund asked several questions regarding the timeline and various agency reviews and mentioned that the PAG members can put some political pressure on USFW to act on the Draft Environmental document in an expeditious manner and use fewer than the 135 days they are allowed for review and comment.

Akkawi further noted that current funding is sufficient only to complete PA/ED, PS&E (Plans and Specifications) and right-of-way acquisition.

Eklund suggested that schedule remain at 7/07 for PA/ED with an asterisk that says "This schedule can be met if USFW adheres to a previously agreed upon regulatory review schedule"

Eklund asked if Caltrans provides funding for USFW staffing. Akkawi said yes, Caltrans pays for one person year each fiscal year.



The slide above showed the status of the various Cultural Resource assessments. Akkawi noted that the Olompali State Park item was on this slide for a different presentation and didn't belong in the presentation for the PAG group.

Caltrans District 4

Environmental Requirements

Biology

Biology	Status
Wetland Delineation	Completed
Biological Surveys:	
Red-Legged Frog Survey	Completed
Fish Surveys	Completed
Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse	Assume presence/avoid
Biological Assessments:	
Red-Legged Frog	Est. December 2007
Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse	Completed
Natural Environment Study:	
Tree Survey	Completed
Rare Plant Survey	Completed
Biological Opinions (USFWS)	Est. June 2008
Conceptual Mitigation Plan	Identify sites for early acquisition

Healy asked about the change in frog protocol and Charles offered some additional information: The Site Assessment requirement is new, any survey more than 2 years old must be redone, and that the new rules actually made it easier to look for frogs and standardized the testing, Sean mentioned that a lot of technical data is now required before staff even goes out in the field. The site assessment includes water depth, types of soils, etc.

Kerns asked if there was anything the members can do on RLF. Murray asked if USWF would waive the new protocol. Akkawi said there is a chance. Eklund asked if a waiver exists; Charles replied that a waiver does not yet exist, and that he is not optimistic the project can get one, since it is one of the first projects to fall subject to the new protocol and USFW likely would not want to set a precedent.

Caltrans District 4

Project Report Status

- Geotech Studies - Completed
- Hydraulics Studies - Completed
- Environmental Impact Review - Completed
- Administrative Circulation of the Draft Project Report due in February, 2006

No comments or questions regarding this slide.

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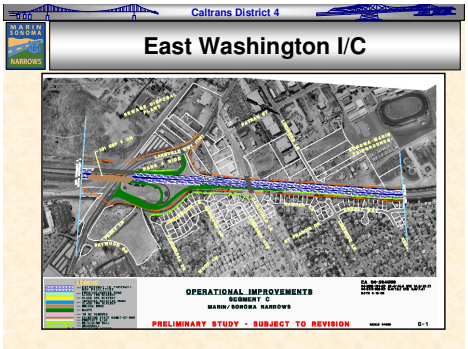
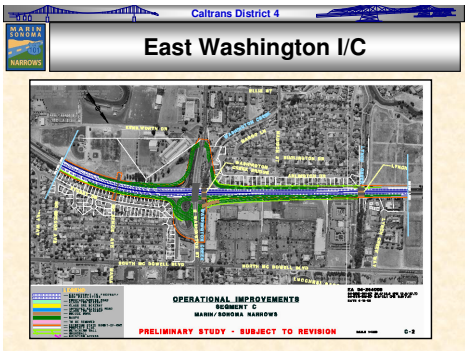
3. E. Washington Project Report

With no objections from Board members or staff, Akkawi moved to item 3 on the agenda, an update on the E. Washington Project.

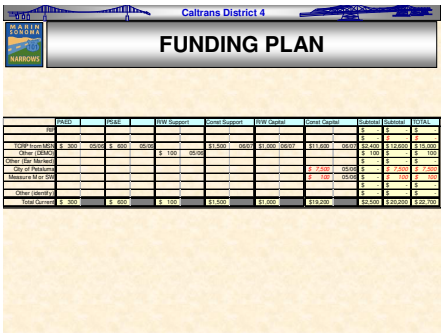




Akkawi reported that the E. Washington project in Petaluma is the first phase of MSN, and Caltrans is trying to deliver it as soon as possible. It has its own funding source and building it would provide an immediate benefit to the community while preserving the logical phasing of the entire MSN Project.

Akkawi gave a short project description, including new (and in some cases longer) on- and off-ramps to Highway 101 from E. Washington, and sound walls at the northwest corner and southeast corner. The project is not yet programmed, and Caltrans is working on the environmental document. The Project Report was approved in Sept. 2005 and Caltrans is waiting for funding to be approved. Design is at 35% and Caltrans hopes to have the complete package by April.

Kerns asked how eastbound traffic on E. Washington will access Highway 101. Akkawi used a visual aid to describe a loop on-ramp. Freeway widening will come later, in a different phase of the MSN Project.



	PA&ED		PS&E		R/W Support		Const Support		R/W Capital		Const Capital		Subtotal	Subtotal	TOTAL
RM													$ -	$ -	$ -
													$ -	$ -	$ -
TCRP from MSN	$ 300	05/06	$ 600	06/07			$1,500	06/07	$1,000	06/07	$11,600	06/07	$ 14,000	$ 12,600	$ 15,000
Other (DEMO)					$ 100	05/06							$ 100	$ -	$ 100
Other (Bar Market)													$ -	$ -	$ -
City of Petaluma											$ 7,500	05/06	$ -	$ 7,500	$ 7,500
Measure M or SN											$ 100	05/06	$ -	$ 100	$ 100
													$ -	$ -	$ -
Other (identify)													$ -	$ -	$ -
Total Current	$ 300		$ 600		$ 100		$1,500		$1,000		$19,200		$ 22,500	$ 20,200	$ 22,700

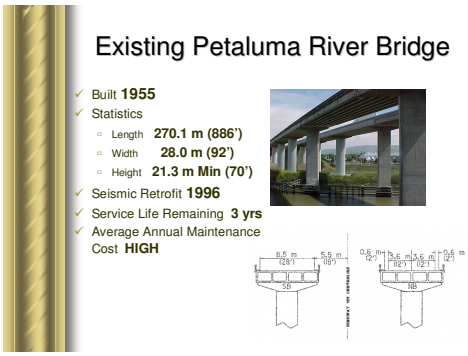
Akkawi reported that Petaluma approved $4 million at a Council meeting earlier in the week, the project will get $4 million from Measure M and an additional $15.4 million will come from MSN and will be repaid later.

The team hopes to put the construction project out to bid by April 2006. There also are issues with ROW. More than 100 homeowner easements are required for the sound walls. There also are easement issues to be resolved with the city and those are critical path items. Charles estimated that it would take twelve months to build and feasibly construction could begin in January 2007. Murray noted that it will show good progress to get these improvements done.

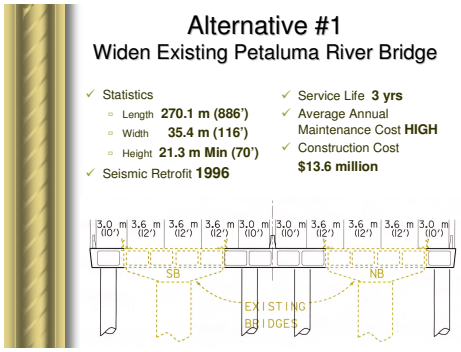
2. MOU update

Tackabery and Wilford gave a short report on the intent and progress of the MOU among Caltrans, SCTA and TAM. The intent is to define how the entities work together, outlining roles, responsibilities and funding strategy. Wilford has been reviewing the drafts from the implementation perspective, Tackabery from the funding perspective. Both SCTA and TAM were under the impression they needed to have the agreement done for the 2006 STIP cycle, but because there is no funding in STIP, it isn't so critical. However, Wilford and Tackabery want to have the MOU complete well before the June 2006 release of the environmental document. The MOU will be brought to both the SCTA and TAM boards in February or March.

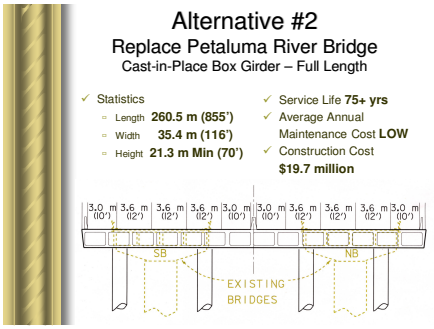
4. Petaluma River Bridge



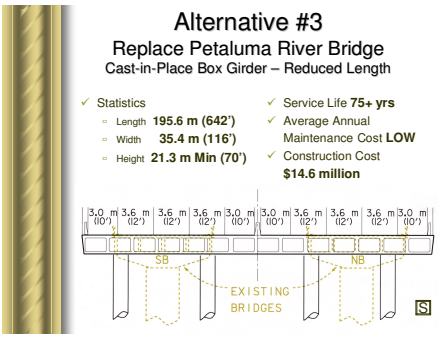
Sean Charles presented a PowerPoint report of the alternatives that Caltrans has considered for repairing or replacing the Petaluma River Bridge, which is nearing the end of its useful life and is not wide enough to accommodate the HOV lanes associated with the MSN project.



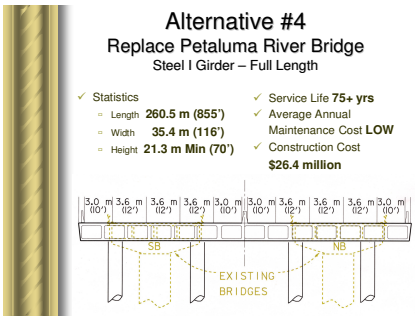
Alternative 1 is to widen the existing structure to accommodate HOV lanes. Charles noted that this is not a very desirable alternative because it does not address the service life issues and the maintenance costs remain "high" and would, in fact, jump up to "very high" in a short time.



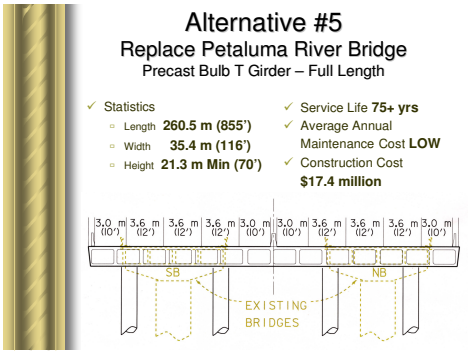
Alternative 2 entails replacing the bridge by essentially building a new structure on top of the current one. In response to questions, Charles noted that there is no bike access or pedestrian access in these alternatives, since this is freeway and 70 feet above the surface of the river. The MSN project plans to include Class 1 and Class 2 bike paths to ensure continuous bike passage through the Highway 101 corridor.
Kerns asked for clarification on the Petaluma River Bridge versus the 116/Lakeville Bridge. Charles noted that there really are four bridges in close proximity: Two (northbound and southbound) over the river and two (northbound and southbound) over Highway 116. These alternatives being discussed apply only to the two bridges over the river.



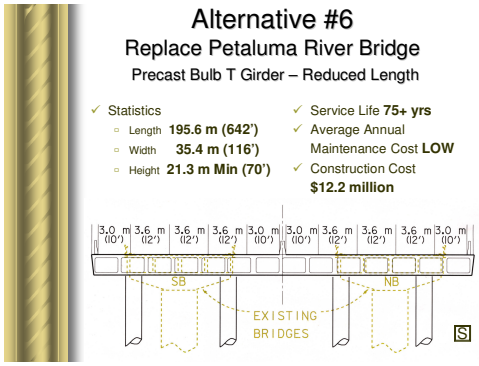
Alternative 3 is essentially the same as Alternative 2, but is a reduced length. In surveying the area, Caltrans found that the existing bridge was built to accommodate a railroad that is no longer in place, so Caltrans can save money by using dirt to fill the northern end of the bridge, allowing Caltrans to build a shorter bridge.



Alternative 4 is a full-length (same as existing bridge), built of steel girders. Caltrans believes this alternative is not the most cost-effective, due to the cost of materials.



Alternative 5 is similar to Alternative 2, the difference being where the concrete is cast. In Alternative 2, the concrete is cast in place. In Alternative 5, the concrete is precast elsewhere and assembled in place.

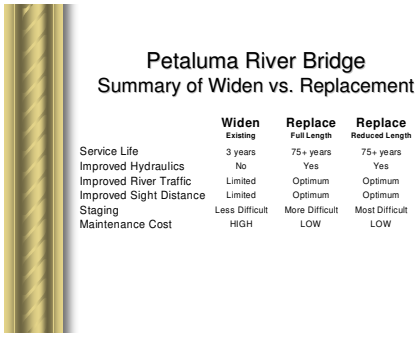


Alternative 6 is the shorter version of Alternative 5.

Murray asked if there were any seismic considerations among the alternatives. Charles noted there were no appreciable differences.

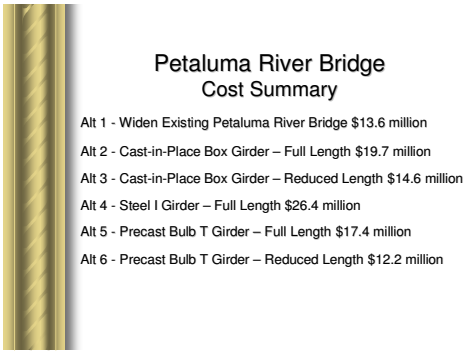
Charles noted there may be some aesthetic issues with the pre-cast concrete alternatives, but Caltrans is working to address those. Eklund asked if the City will have input into the resolution of the aesthetics issues and was satisfied that City staff takes part on the Project's Aesthetics Committee.

Charles noted that both swallows and bats live in the existing bridge and will be handled during construction.



Petaluma River Bridge
Summary of Widen vs. Replacement

	Widen Existing	Replace Full Length	Replace Reduced Length
Service Life	3 years	75+ years	75+ years
Improved Hydraulics	No	Yes	Yes
Improved River Traffic	Limited	Optimum	Optimum
Improved Sight Distance	Limited	Optimum	Optimum
Staging	Less Difficult	More Difficult	Most Difficult
Maintenance Cost	HIGH	LOW	LOW



After reviewing the two summary slides, the Board informally agreed that Alternative 6 should be pursued. No vote was requested or required.

Charles noted that the next steps are to start discussing phasable pieces of the project and the costs of those pieces. Murray reiterated the value of focusing on safety improvements as a way to shake some funding loose. Healy suggested that project- wide, the team should be able to identify what pieces are not affected by RLF and try to move ahead with those. Charles pointed out that wouldn't save time if they had to prepare a separate environmental document for each piece.

In parting, Akkawi also noted the need for a mitigation funding plan for the environmental document and noted that it is being included in the draft funding plans.

5. Public Comment

There were no comments from the public. During the Public Comment period, Akkawi asked for consideration of a meeting schedule for 2006. The members agreed to meet quarterly, immediately following the SMART meetings scheduled for March 15, June 21, Sept. 20 and Dec. 20.

6. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:45 p.m.