



**Marin-Sonoma Narrows Policy Advisory Group
Meeting Notes and Summary**

March 21, 2007

3:30 p.m.

San Rafael City Council Chambers

City Hall, 1400 Fifth St.

San Rafael, CA

Attendees:

PAG Members

Supervisor Steve Kinsey, Marin Board of Supervisors (Chair)
Supervisor Mike Kerns, Sonoma Board of Supervisors (Vice Chair)
Supervisor Judy Arnold, Marin County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor Paul Kelley, Sonoma County Board of Supervisors
Mayor Jeanne MacLeamy, City of Novato
Mayor Bob Blanchard, City of Santa Rosa
Mayor Peter Breen, Town of San Anselmo
Mayor Pamela Torliatt, City of Petaluma
Councilmember Carole Dillon-Knutson, City of Novato

Caltrans

Doanh Nguyen
Melanie Brent
John Martin
Robert Nixon

SCTA

Suzanne Smith
Guy Preston

TAM

Dianne Steinhauser
Bill Gamlen

URS

Sean Charles

Vali Cooper & Associates

Connie Preston

CirclePoint

Jennifer Allen
Andrea Nocito

Public

John Anastasio, Bicycle Coalition of Marin

Suzanne Dunwell, Office of Senator Migden
Anita Franzi, Office of Congresswomen Lynn Woolsey
Tanya Maxwell, Aide to Supervisor Judy Arnold
Cynthia Murray, North Bay Leadership Council
Karen Nygren, Sierra Club of Marin
Michael Strider, SMART
Don Wilhelm, Marin Conservation League
Rick Fraites

1. Introductions

Introductions of new PAG members, and representatives from TAM, SCTA and Caltrans were made.

2. Elect New PAG Chair

Mike Kerns nominated Steve Kinsey for PAG chair. The nomination was seconded and unanimously passed.

Steve Kinsey nominated Mike Kerns for Vice PAG chair. The nomination was seconded and unanimously passed.

3. Project Update

Kinsey opened the meeting by thanking the staff of TAM, SCTA and Cynthia Murray for their work and success in securing the bond measure funding for this project.

Kinsey then opened the floor for a presentation and update of the project from Caltrans.

Nguyen announced Jit Pandher as the new Caltrans Project Manager. He noted that Pandher is also working in the area on the Marin Gap Closure project.

Draft EIR/S Schedule, Comment Period and Public Meetings:

Nguyen began the project update by explaining that goals of the MSN project are to relieve congestion by adding HOV lanes and improve safety throughout the corridor. The project consists of approximately 16 miles divided into three segments; A, B and C. Segment A is approximately the first four miles through Marin County; B is eight miles through both counties; and C is the remaining four miles through Sonoma County. Segments A and C consist of widening in the median to create extra lanes of traffic. Segment B requires alignment changes and is more costly because it requires the most construction work.

Caltrans anticipates releasing the draft environmental document in June followed by the public hearings in July. Caltrans hopes to have project clearance by summer 2008.

Brent presented an update on the environmental phase noting that the environmental office at Caltrans has completed the draft environmental document. Caltrans' legal department, editors and technical specialists reviewed the document internally. Caltrans is presently responding to comments from that review process. Certain sections of the document are being enhanced; particular attention is being paid to energy sections.

The document should be available to the public in June. There will be a minimum 45-day comment period. After that, Caltrans will respond to public comments. Caltrans will select a preferred alternative for the project with input from the local partners. The document should be finalized before the end of 2008.

Kinsey asked if the environmental document will be both a NEPA and CEQA document. Brent replied noting that the document is an Environmental Impact Report and an Environmental Impact Statement that will be circulated by FHWA.

Arnold asked for an update as to what happens between this summer [the release of the draft document] and next summer [the release of the final document]. Brent answered by stating that in addition to responding to comments, the biological studies will be continue to study red legged frogs. Mitigation requirements/commitments will be outlined for the final document by EPA, Fish & Wildlife, Fish & Game and Caltrans.

Kinsey asked for confirmation that the environmental document defines the entire project at its ultimate build out anticipating the final configuration. Once the document is certified, will certain segments be selected and implemented independently? Brent affirmed that question and added that Caltrans is studying an ultimate footprint as a result of the project and selecting any number of construction phases to proceed on as funding becomes available.

Kinsey asked if PAG suggests design changes to the project for cost or phasing reasons, is there room in the environmental process to make changes to the environmental document? Brent replied by stating that both NEPA and CEQA have a process that allows for design based changes to be amended, as long as they do not change the level of impacts to the environment. More extensive changes can be documented in a re-evaluation process which is an internal document that does not go out to the public.

Kinsey asked for Caltrans to provide parameters to the PAG for choosing a preferred alternative so as not to push beyond the boundaries of the project for environmental reasons.

Arnold asked if there was funding for segment B. Brent replied that funding for Segment B does not affect the completion of the environmental document.

Nguyen mentioned that John Martin from Caltrans will present the four alternatives within segment B as well as the two alternatives of the entire project presented in the draft EIR/S.

Martin presented the three segments and alternatives of the project identifying limits, proposed interchanges, widening of lanes, and access points via the map displays provided by Caltrans for PAG review. A brief description of Martin's presentation follows.

There are three segments of the project, A, B, and C. The southern segment, A, of the project will increase from six lanes to eight lanes by widening the median area into a HOV lane. Construction includes the widening of on-ramps, installation of ramp metering facilities and sound walls. Segment C also includes some widening with ramp improvements as well as sound walls. Segment B will be converted into an expressway by grade improvements and safety measures at intersections. Segment B improvements will also address the prevalent flooding. The project engineers were careful not to create a network of frontage roads which could lead to increased traffic congestion on the frontage roads as a means to avoiding congestion on Hwy 101. Approximately 15 alternatives have been explored for access ways which differ in the location of interchanges and frontage road options. Engineers want to provide bike and pedestrian paths using the current frontage roads.

MacLeamy asked where grade improvements would be and who would be impacted. Martin stated that these improvements will be at the approach to the Petaluma Bridge, the landfill, and San Antonio Creek.

Kinsey asked for clarity on the relationship between the bike and pedestrians paths of the MSN project to those of the SMART project. Martin noted that these paths have been coordinated between agencies and they do not conflict with one another or overlap. Kerns added that the paths connect at parts but do not duplicate.

Value Analysis:

Martin described the value analysis as an evaluation of the project's intended work and impacts. The analysis helped to validate the project. Participants included SCTA, TAM, Caltrans, counties, cities, and several consultants. The analysis identified the main purposes of the project as reducing congestion, improving safety, and attention to the public perception of how fast projects are completed. 50 alternatives were studied and presented as a result of these efforts. Caltrans narrowed those down to 10-15 to be used as part of the design planning procedures.

Kinsey asked if the value analysis worked within the current design standards. Martin replied that Caltrans examined any alternatives/exceptions that the value analysis study presented.

Kinsey noted that the PAG would like to see a copy of the value analysis report. Martin noted that a report has been circulated and will be made available.

MacLeamy asked if Caltrans is looking at the adverse impacts of development and the designated zoning adjacent to the frontage roads. Martin replied by stating that the engineers considered future development and held growth at these locations. Brent added by stating that the potential for future growth was studied and concluded that this would not be growth inducing. Smith added that Sonoma County there is a voter approved ordinance that locks future land use except for agriculture use.

Dillon-Knutson asked for discussion on the plans for frontage roads on both sides of the highway. Martin stated that current plans do not include continuous frontage roads on both sides of the highway. Access points vary depending on the alternative selected. Martin suggested a continued discussion of this topic after the meeting.

Funding (CMIA approval):

Nguyen reiterated that Caltrans is in the environmental phase of the project with the expected release of the draft document in June with a 45-day review period. The project contains two project alternatives and four segment B alternatives. After the comment period, the project development team and the local partners team will select a preferred alternative and present that alternative to PAG.

The total project cost is \$700 million. Sixty percent of the costs are within segment B. CMIA funding has brought in \$82 million. In the last few weeks, Caltrans and some of the local partners have been working on a funding plan to program funds for the project.

Torliatt asked for clarification on how many, and where the public hearings will take place. Brent answered that two meetings are planned, one in Novato and one in Petaluma.

Smith and Steinhauser presented the present funding package to PAG. A brief description of their presentation follows.

CTC approved funding for segment A which includes widening in Marin from three to four lanes to relieve congestion. CTC did provide some flexibility to determine the most efficient way to spend these funds in the corridor. The two agencies and Caltrans began planning by establishing the common goals of the project which include congestion relief and safety improvements. Steinhauser noted that TAM and SCTA working to select permanent projects making the best use of every project dollar. TAM and SCTA are planning to make use of STIP funds and future interregional funds as part of the 101 corridor improvements. TAM and SCTA are working with MTC and CTC to use CMIA funding and additional resources. Smith noted that they hope to proceed with design and right-of-way purchasing because these are important activities for CMIA funding.

CTC asked for funding plans for CMIA projects by April 1, 2007. TAM and SCTA have asked for a time extension to finalize plans for the first phase of construction.

Torliatt asked how funding for segment B could be found. Smith noted that earmarked funds could help fund key phases of the project. SCTA heard from lobbyist staff that federal earmarks will help fund the Narrows. Torliatt followed that remark asking for the total amount of funds asked for by SCTA. Smith answered around \$2 million in federal funds. Steinhauser noted that Marin also has lobbyists in Washington D.C. to seek funding for the project. Steinhauser noted that the project is currently funded through 2008, through the environmental phase. The earliest construction can start is in 2010-2011. Property/right-of-way will be purchased before much of the construction is started.

Kelley asked if any segment allowed for more funding specifically if segment A would negate access to regional funding since it is entirely in one county? Steinhauser responded by stating that TAM and SCTA believe that the CMIA funds can be applied within the corridor. TAM and SCTA want to spend their funding dollars on a regional basis because that is the best use of funds. The team will not lose track of the fact that all segments need to be funded and are looking at how to best use of the funds. MTC has expressed that they are most supportive of having funds be spent in converting expressways to freeways for congestion relief.

Kelley asked which segments give the best safety benefit and the most congestion relief. Steinhauser noted that the access points in segment B are the areas most in need of safety improvements. Getting bike riders off the shoulders would provide great safety improvements. Phasing congestion relief needs to address where current congestion is and where in these segments congestion is likely to be in the future.

Kelley stated the need to recognize this is a pressing need and to get those plans for funding in as soon as possible. If the goals are congestion relief and safety, consider segment B as the critical area for accomplishing safety and congestion in order to address public concerns.

Kerns asked for confirmation on the findings of the value analysis which indicated phase B as the preferred segment to start construction if the funding is there. Steinhauser noted that we are in a complex situation. MTC strongly recommends we have HOV connectivity in the entire 101 system, and CTC took hundreds of millions of dollars that took money away from projects that did not address congestion. TAM, SCTA, and several representatives and congresspersons were fighting "tooth and nail" to get funding for all of segment B. Funding did come off of rural projects to the Bay area and the team will keep the public needs in mind.

Arnold asked if PAG can see a copy of the recommendation TAM and SCTA are submitting as part of that April 1 deadline. Smith noted that getting a copy of these recommendations is part of a timing issue, depending on the times of PAG meetings. TAM and SCTA are requesting an additional two-three weeks beyond the deadline from

CTC to complete this package. Sacramento said yes unofficially to the extension. Steinhauser noted that PAG can reconvene in May to present a funding update.

Kinsey stated he wants PAG members to express their thoughts today. He feels the strongest goal from the PAG's perspective is congestion relief.

Arnold asked if she was correct in understanding that most of the congestion relief is in segment A, not B. Blanchard noted that segment B is a high priority for safety improvements and that congestion relief will happen by providing a continuous freeway throughout the project area. Torliatt asked when construction could begin for segment A. Steinhauser noted that the earliest any construction on the project would happen 2010-2011. Smith noted that the schedule is driven by when the environmental document is final as well as when the group is able to buy up right-of-way. Design could start on some segments while the environmental document is being finalized. Torliatt asked when the project could be expected to be completed, such as 2015 or later. Steinhauser noted that construction could be finished sooner.

Torliatt motioned to send a letter to CTC from PAG supporting a request for an extension of the April 1 deadline. The motion was seconded. No opposition to the motion was had. Motion passed.

Kinsey asked if both TAM and SCTA were satisfied with the value analysis. Steinhauser and Smith agreed that both were satisfied with the results of the value analysis. Smith asked that as Caltrans designs the project, that they look to the value analysis. Steinhauser noted that more can be done and that creative design can stretch funds to make corridor improvements.

Kinsey asked TAM and SCTA to identify areas in design during the document review phase for opportunities that could bring savings to the project.

4. Local Agency Update

Addressed in the funding discussion.

5. PAG 2007 meeting dates

Kinsey began discussion of possible future meeting dates for the PAG. Kinsey asked whether PAG wants to have the next meeting in June or July, based on the release of the environmental document. If release is in June, there would be almost no public comment on the document. If the meeting is held in July, public comments would be in and TAM and SCTA can review the response from CMIA. Steinhauser suggest the next PAG meeting could be held in May. It was decided that TAM, SCTA, and Caltrans will discuss a meeting in May to update the PAG on the document and other project activity. Steinhauser noted PAG should not meet during the environmental review process in order to hold the "sacredness" of the process.

6. Public Comment

Kinsey opened the floor to public comment.

Don Wilhelm, Marin Conservation League:

The Marin Conservation League asked in a letter for consideration of a simplified design utilizing the median strip. Doing this could possibly reduce the cost of construction and acquisition of right-of-way while protecting the beautiful vistas in the area. To date, the group has never received a response to their letter.

From today's meeting, he feels the primary safety considerations should address the left turn lanes in segment B to eliminate entrances and exits from the roadway.

Rick Fraitcs, commuter:

Fraitcs not concerns about the discussion of funding in segment B where there are interchanges that no one will use. Novato commuters need congestion relief in this segment. Maybe funding could be put to constructing segment A first, and then, any left over money could be used in segment B in order to help hundreds of commuters and their commute time.

Karen Nygren:

Nygren requested a 60 day review as opposed to a 45 day review since the document will be released during the summer time.

At one time, discussion was had to make segment B a scenic highway to maintain the beauty. Has Caltrans taken hold of this idea?

While the April 1 deadline is short, how can planners be expected to decide which package to fund without using the draft EIR/S as a resource? There are several interchange options as well as grade and fill.

Kinsey clarified this question by stating that the funding package is a focused approach on where to spend money for the project and does not have anything to do with the design of the project.

7. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at approximately 5:00 p.m. PAG will reconvene in May, 2007.