

Marin Sonoma Narrows Policy Advisory Group

Meeting Summary from December 15, 2004

The meeting was held at the Novato City Hall and was called to order at 3:35pm. PAG members in attendance were Chair Cynthia Murray, Tim Smith, Steve Kinsey, Pat Eklund, Mike Healy, David Glass, Mike Kerns, Bob Blanchard, Carol Dillon-Knutson, and Peter Breen.

Project update

Caltrans Project Manager Ray Akkawi provided the PAG an update on the status of the project, and indicated that all necessary technical studies are to be completed by June 2005.

- The cultural resources study is on schedule to be sent to SHPO in May 2005 with return expected in June 2005.
- Biological assessment to be submitted March 2005.
- Visual impact assessment is to be completed May-June 2005.
- The tree survey and rare plant survey is completed.
- The historical resource evaluation has been completed.
- The scheduled circulation date for the administrative draft of the environmental document is November 2005.
- The scheduled circulation date for the draft environmental document is June 2006.

Discussion of HOT lane element

The PAG inquired whether the inclusion of a HOT lane is being studied. Chair Murray stated that the original scoping for the project included a HOT lane component. In response to PAG comments, Chair Murray indicated that discussion of the HOT lane element will be on the agenda for the March 2005 PAG meeting, and the next step will be to determine whether to further pursue the HOT lane option. PAG members commented that the MTC 20-year plan should be referenced in regard to HOT lane use in the future (Kinsey); there are concerns about design impacts, enforcement, and return to source if the HOT lane is employed (Glass).

Discussion of criteria and evaluation matrix for interchange alternatives in segment B

Caltrans PM Akkawi presented the evaluation criteria for interchange alternatives in segment B, and the evaluation matrix for use of the criteria. There are four alternatives for new interchanges in segment B, from which two will be selected. PAG members asked a number of questions about how the evaluation matrix is to be used. Chair Murray stated that the matrix will “inform the process.” PAG member Eklund asked if the matrix will be used to narrow alternatives for EIS/EIR consideration, and whether all four interchange options will be shown in EIS/EIR. PM Akkawi answered ‘yes’ to both questions. Suzanne Wilford, the Executive Director of the Sonoma County Transportation Agency was asked by the Chair to voice her understanding of the use of the evaluation matrix. Wilford stated that Caltrans needs an evaluation and informational tool for the environmental process, and to inform the public and electeds. PAG member Eklund asked if the matrix will screen out alternatives, to which Wilford answered ‘no.’

PAG member Smith stated that alternatives are needed to balance the EIS/EIR and the matrix allows narrowing of options. PAG member Dillon-Knudson stated that results from use of the matrix should not be binding.

In reviewing the criteria included in the evaluation matrix, Chair Murray made three comments:

- The criteria did not include the impact of cut and fill work, extensive grading, and truck movement impacts that may be required in some interchange alternatives.
- It was suggested that visual aesthetics and biological resources should be weighted 13% each; historic architectural resources and archaeological resources should be weighted 5% each
- The loss of trees and plans for replacement of trees will make a difference in public perception of the project

Discussion of options to proceed with the project in phases

PAG member Healy stated that Measure M (Sonoma County) contains funding for fast-tracking of segment C, and that he believes the challenging issues of the EIS/EIR process will be within segment B, and asked if the environmental process can be phased?

PM Akkawi said there will be one environmental document for all three segments, and design and construction will be phases. PAG member Healy noted that there will likely be legal challenges to the EIR that will originate in segment B that could hold up work on segment C.

Next PAG meeting

Chair Murray expressed her interest in seeing some phase of the project started in a timely fashion, and asked for PM Akkawi to provide a report on project funding at the PAG meeting set for March 16, 2005, following the SMART meeting, at the Petaluma Community Center.