

**Mono Lake Widening 09-26990\_  
Project Development Team Meeting Minutes  
July 12, 2001**

**INTRODUCTIONS**

Self-introductions were conducted. The following individuals were present at today's meeting: Project Manager, Tim Shultz; Joann Ronci, Mono County Board of Supervisors; Douglas E. Feay, Regional Water Quality Control Board; Lisa Cutting, Mono Lake Committee; Stewart McMorrow and Brad Sturdivant California State Parks; Christiana Darlington, Mono County Counsel; Roger Porter, U.S. Forest Service; Willy Williams, Caltrans Maintenance; Bart Godett, Caltrans Design; Juan C. Torres, Caltrans Environmental; Jerry Gabriel, Caltrans Operations; R. Steve Miller, Caltrans Landscape; and Andrea Loven, Caltrans Program/Project Management.

**STATUS OF PROJECT**

Tim Shultz reviewed the status of the scope, schedule, and cost changes. Caltrans has looked at introducing the Cemetery Road/Hwy. 395 intersection into the project and stated unofficially that he thought it could be included. The scope of the project will be changed to include improvements to the intersection and vista point at this location. The draft environmental document will be out late this year. The final environmental document will be sent out in October 2002. A Project Change Request will be submitted to program the project at the highest estimate of \$13.1 million, which will include anything the group has talked about so far. However, Tim Shultz stated that Caltrans District Director Tom Hallenbeck is not comfortable asking the State Highway Commission for money for things that aren't currently approved. Once the PCR is finished, a STIPP amendment can be done to change the project. We have approximately two years prior to the design phase to decide what we want. The Mono Lake Local Transportation Commission (LTC) will fund the project, which currently is estimated between \$7 and \$13 million dollars. Joann Ronci stated that the project could possibly be designated as an MOU project, as the Mono County Board of Supervisors don't have many projects and could possibly designate it as such. Tim Shultz stated that the original \$7 million dollar estimate done by Caltrans is realistically approximately \$11 million dollars as some earthwork movement and escalation costs were not included in the original estimate.

**ISSUES FROM THE PUBLIC MEETING ON JUNE 27, 2001**

A written summary of the meeting was presented to the PDT, which covered nine comments cards received from the 30-40 individuals present at that meeting. Discussion by PDT members that attended the public meeting revealed that some of the public present felt that the project is not needed, and that the statistics on traffic and accidents do not warrant the project. The needs of the groups interested in this project were explained at the public meeting, but some individuals present still felt these needs did not warrant the project. Others present stated that they wanted the "no build alternative".

Tim Shultz reviewed the goal of the project, which is to bring the area from south of the marina entrance to Cemetery Road up to Caltrans current highway standards of:

- 12 foot lanes
- 8 foot shoulders
- Addressing rock fall issues
- Longer curve radius at some curves to improve site distances
- Improving driveway site distances

Federal Studies done throughout the United States have shown that increasing shoulders from four to eight feet decreases the accident rate 100%. Eight-foot shoulders could also accommodate bicyclists and make it safer for automobiles or trucks needing to get off the roadway. We are trying to avoid cuts on the west side as well as moving the roadway out to provide for rock fall storage/impact area.

Lisa Cutting stated that she thought that computer generated visual drawings were going to be prepared to show the types of walls and fill for the project. Once the group has an idea of what they want Environmental would be able to inform the group of impacts to certain areas dependent on what the group wants (walls, fills, etc.) which could be a starting point for the PDT. The group felt that these visual representations are needed and would assist the group in making important decisions about the design of the project.

Tim Shultz expressed concern about any visual images being interpreted as “final” design decisions, which would be incorrect at this phase of the project. These visual images would only be presented to assist the group in making determinations about what they want and don’t want in the final design. He reminded the group that as the sponsor of this project, the Mono County Local Transportation Commission could always propose or veto a change to the project with agreement by Caltrans.

One of the concerns is the use of walls on the project. Caltrans staff relayed that there are lots of options for walls, if walls have to be used on the project. If walls are a necessary part of the project, the plant material and revegetation of native materials in front of the wall hides the wall and provides the view. In addition, the walls can be colored to blend in with their environment.

The group decided that they needed a “starting point” design and asked Caltrans to design something they think might be used in the project. The group could then look at this design and make suggestions or corrections. Discussion ensued about the locations most travelers’ visit and the best place to do a visual aid design interpretation. The Cemetery Road Vista, the Visitor’s Center, and the Marina were discussed. Tim Shultz suggested preparing one visual aid at this time since the project is only in the environmental stage. The group agreed to have Caltrans photograph from the visitor’s center down towards the highway for the visual aid. A visual representation will be done by Caltrans based on the best combination (current designer’s opinion) of walls and slopes for the group to review at the next PDT meeting. A “before” photo of this area will be sent to PDT members with the minutes of this meeting. The “before” photo and the “after” photo using design overlays will be brought to the next PDT meeting for the group to digest.

Bart Godett stated that as part of the project a geotechnical engineer would have to be sent out to visit the site. The project runs along a fault line and the wall could be impacted based on its location. A geotechnical engineer won’t visit the site until we have narrowed the alternatives to be investigated, this usually occurs after the environmental document is finished.

Christiana Darlington asked about the issue of eight-foot shoulder widths and varying shoulder widths. Caltrans currently has the project scoped for eight-foot shoulders and stated that four and eight-foot shoulders will essentially have the same visual impact. Variable shoulder widths may be included in the Draft Environmental Report, but they do not meet Caltrans requirements. Lisa Cutting stated that the variable shoulder widths should be included as an alternative on the environmental report, but Tim Shultz stated they wouldn’t because they don’t meet Caltrans need and purpose. Varying shoulder widths may be considered if the project is re-scoped at some point in time. All issues will be addressed in the draft environmental document.

Christiana Darlington stated that simply stating that something doesn’t meet Caltrans need and purpose in the project analysis of the CEQA document is not enough to summarily reject an alternative. The varying shoulder widths should be included in the draft environmental document so that legally someone cannot find a reason to say that the project analysis was not complete.

Lisa Cutting would like Caltrans to weigh the costs and benefits of safety and environmental impact and use a tailored approach to designing the road.

Jerry Gabriel stated that if the run-off-the-road accidents are to be addressed rumble strips will have to be used, which require eight-foot shoulders. Wider shoulders would help alleviate run-of-the-road and deer accidents. There are reasons for standards and those should be listed in the environmental document along with the comments and objections from the committee and public.

### **FOOTPRINT OF WALLS VS. SLOPES**

The footprint of walls vs. slopes was discussed briefly. Tim Shultz reviewed the content of the RPAC letter from May 9, 2001, which asked Caltrans to look at variable shoulders and minimize walls. Douglas Feay of the Regional Water Quality Control Board stated that the water quality of the lake is a big concern. He stated that when the Mammoth/Yosemite airport is fully functioning, jet fuel would be transported by truck from Reno. He would like to see the eight-foot shoulders for the trucks that utilize the highway. Standard guardrails won't usually stop a truck from going over the side. Eight-foot shoulders would assist trucks in staying on the roadway and avoiding a "spill" of hazardous material into the lake in the event of an accident. The Caltrans standard 20-foot recovery area would be ideal for trucks. Mr. Feay stated that we should balance that with the water quality for the slopes and wetlands. If six to seven feet of additional ground disturbance were allowed, then the guardrail could be eliminated. This may be an effective tool in certain areas.

### **PDT MEMBER ISSUES**

Tim Shultz: Nothing to add.

Joann Ronci: Stated that we are headed in the right direction with the visual aid design.

Bart Godett: Stated that he met with one of the homeowners in the area – Denise McPherson. He has a lot of notes as there would be a fair amount of impact to their property, and her views were very different than those of everyone else's. He will proceed with the visual aid overlays on the photograph of the Visitor's Center down to the road, and encouraged anyone with questions or comments about wall/slope placement to call him. He will design a "best-case scenario" with "worst-case possibilities" to present at the next PDT meeting.

Willy Williams: Stated that he wants to keep his employees safe and would like to see the eight-foot shoulders.

Doug Feay: Restated his concerned about the water quality. Suggested that the Department of Fish and Game help us with environmental concerns. Tim Shultz stated that we have lists of rules and regulations from resource agencies that we have to meet, but he could foresee the Department of Fish and Game meeting with us on this project in the future. The Department of Fish and Game is already working with our environmental specialists in preparing the draft environmental document.

Lisa Cutting: Stated the Mono Lake LTC issues:

- Slopes and walls, concerned about visual impact of either one
- Shoreline of lake needs to be preserved/protected
- Environmental damage
- Promoting variable width shoulders – please include in the environmental report

- Stewart McMorrow: Stated concerns of:
- Habitat impact
  - Lakeshore impact
- Juan Torres: Stated that he feels that we need to explain the “goal of this project” at the next public meeting and that visuals will help.
- Steve Miller: Hopes that the visual can be done by the next PDT meeting. Tim Shultz stated that he would like to show the visual to the PDT prior to the public. Steve stated that we should keep future safety issues a high priority, such as the jet fuel being transported by trucks. What will the future hold for this roadway?
- Jerry Gabriel: Spoke about the possible usage by the community of split rail fencing twenty feet from the edge of the traveled way as a method of enhancing the corridor continuity for the community.
- Roger Porter: Stated that he is concerned with the following areas:
- Visual impact
  - Impact to the wetlands
  - Lack of alternatives
- He suggested that we do the area north of Tioga and leave south of Tioga alone, which isn't a current alternative and would need a scope change by the LTC. A question was asked about the timing of scope changes and Tim Shultz stated shortening a project is never a problem to the project schedule and scope changes of this kind can be done at any time, if approved by everyone.
- Christiana Darlington: Stated that varying shoulder widths, or any public comments that have been discussed, should be included in the environmental report instead of being summarily rejected, which weakens Caltrans armor in their project analysis.

### **ACTION ITEMS**

The Caltrans designer will determine a likely combination of walls and slopes to accomplish 8-foot shoulders along a critical portion of the roadway (adjacent to and north of the Marina entrance road). The landscape branch will provide some ‘before’ photos, and then create an ‘after’ representation based on the designers current guess of configurations. The project manager will send out the candidate ‘before’ photograph to the PDT prior to starting the visual representation work on that photo.

### **NEXT PDT MEETING**

The next PDT meeting was tentatively scheduled for September 26, 2001 at 9 a.m. at the Visitor’s Center Conference Room in Lee Vining. Tim Shultz stated that he would send out confirmation/invitations three to four weeks prior to the meeting.