

Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

CTC Meeting: December 10-11, 2008

Reference No.: 2.2c.(5)
Action Item

From: CINDY McKIM
Chief Financial Officer

Prepared by: Jay Norvell
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Environmental
Analysis

Subject: **APPROVAL OF PROJECT FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF FUNDING**
05-SBt-156, PM 3.0/R8.2
RESOLUTION E-08-25

RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Transportation (Department) recommends that the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a responsible agency, approve the attached Resolution E-08-25.

ISSUE:

The attached resolution proposes to approve for future consideration of funding the following project for which a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) has been completed:

- Route 156 in San Benito County – Widen Route 156 from two-lane conventional highway to four-lane expressway from The Alameda (PM 3.0) in San Juan Bautista to 0.2 mile east of Fourth Street/Business Route 156 (PM R8.2). (PPNO 4060)

This project in San Benito County would widen the existing two-lane conventional highway to a four-lane expressway from The Alameda (PM 3.0) in San Juan Bautista to 0.2 mile east of Fourth Street/Business Route 156 (PM R8.2). The project is fully funded in the 2008 State Transportation Improvement Program with Regional Improvement Program, Interregional Improvement Program, local, and federal funds. The estimated cost of the project is \$69,611,000, capital and support, and is estimated to begin construction in Fiscal Year 2012-13.

A copy of the FEIR has been provided to Commission staff. Issues with the construction, permanently removing farmlands and the public controversy associated with the project resulted in an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) being completed for this project. Upon completion of the EIR, impacts related to farmlands are anticipated to be significant and unmitigable. As a result, a Statement of Overriding Consideration was adopted.

The Department has approved this project for construction. This approval and the filing of the Notice of Determination with the Office of Planning and Research will satisfy the environmental requirements for this stage of the project planning process.

Attachments

CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

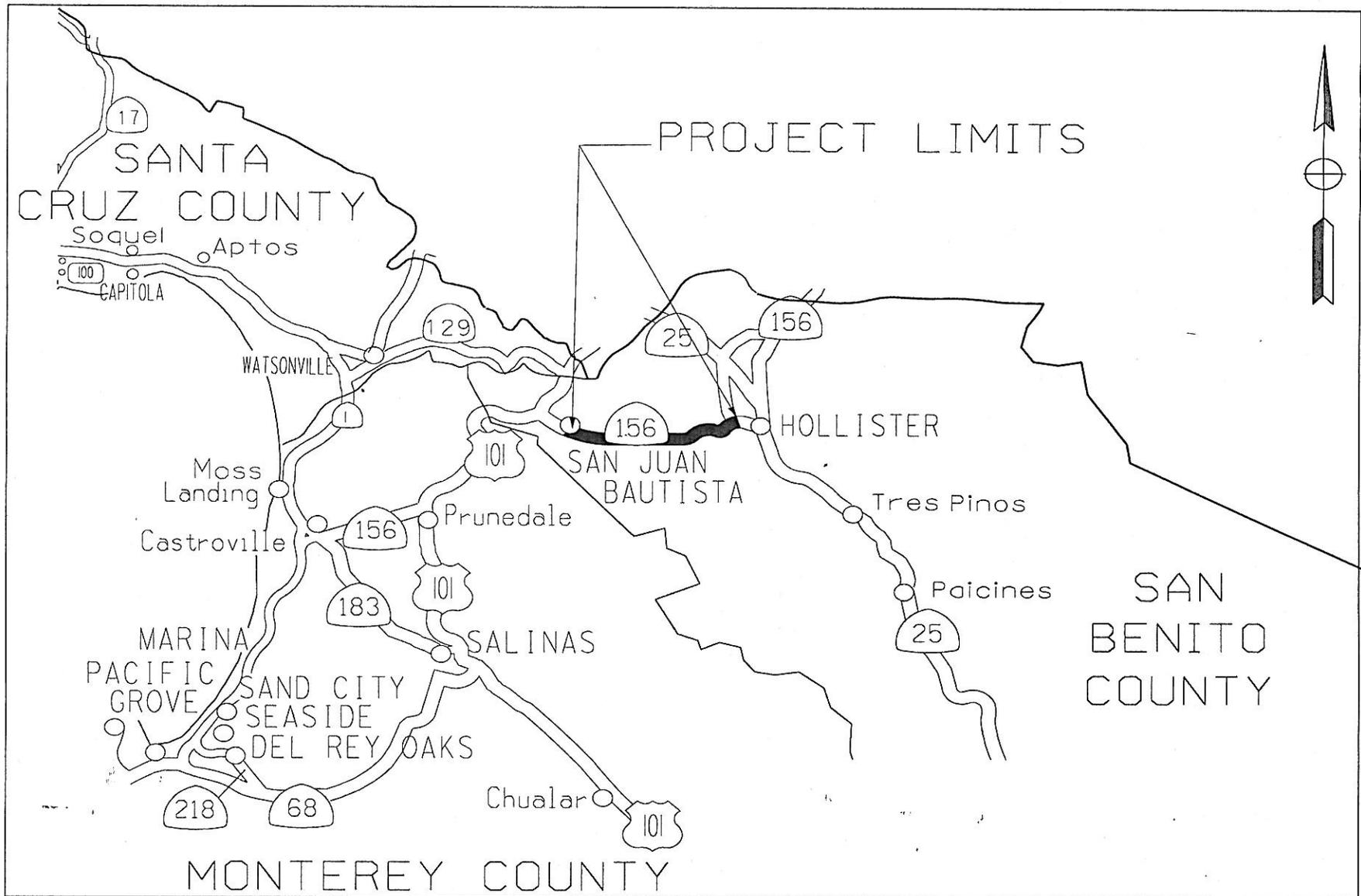
Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding

05-SBt-156, PM 3.0/R8.2

Resolution E-08-25

- 1.1** **WHEREAS**, the California Department of Transportation (Department) has completed a Final Environmental Impact Report pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:
- Route 156 in San Benito County – Widen Route 156 from two-lane conventional highway to four-lane expressway from The Alameda (PM 3.0) in San Juan Bautista to 0.2 mile east of Fourth Street/Business Route 156 (PM R8.2). (PPNO 4060)
- 1.2** **WHEREAS**, the Department has certified that the Final Environmental Impact Report has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for its implementation; and
- 1.3** **WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission, as a responsible agency, has considered the information contained in the Final Environmental Impact Report; and
- 1.4** **WHEREAS**, the Final Environmental Impact Report did identify significant effects after mitigation; and
- 1.5** **WHEREAS**, a Statement of Overriding Considerations was adopted and Findings were made pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines.
- 2.1** **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby adopt the Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations that support approval of the above referenced project to allow for future consideration of funding.

Attachments



FINDINGS

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FINDINGS FOR THE SAN BENITO ROUTE 156 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, WHICH PROPOSES TO WIDEN STATE ROUTE 156 FROM THE ALAMEDA IN SAN JUAN BAUTISTA TO 0.2 MILE EAST OF FOURTH STREET (BUSINESS ROUTE 156) IN SAN BENITO COUNTY

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15901) and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21, California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following effects have been identified in the EIR as resulting from the project. Effects found not to be significant have not been included.

Significant Impact to Farmland

Impact to farmland cannot be avoided because farmland surrounds the proposed project area. The preferred alternative requires 145 acres of farmland. Caltrans considered measures to convert fewer acres of farmland during the design of the intersections and frontage roads at Union Road by keeping the alignment as close to the new highway as permitted and by reducing the median width throughout the project. Remnant parcels were avoided as much as possible by acquiring right-of-way in "slivers or linear strips of property adjacent to the existing parcels. Any northern alignment resulted in numerous residential displacements and utility relocations, and in order to avoid a 4(f) property, the alignment had to convert farmland to the south.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

The preferred alternative was modified to help minimize farmland conversion but has the potential to result in approximately 27 acres of excess land. As part of the right-of-way process for purchasing land, Caltrans tries to negotiate parcel exchanges with neighboring farmers to reconfigure split farmland parcels for resale so that the parcels would continue to be farmed and not contribute further to the segmentation and conversion of farmland. Generally, when Caltrans resells or reconfigures land in an area zoned for agriculture as buffers or conservation easements, deed restrictions limiting future use to agriculture would be included to keep land in agricultural use in perpetuity.

STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE SAN BENITO ROUTE 156 IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, WHICH PROPOSES TO WIDEN STATE ROUTE 156 FROM THE ALAMEDA IN SAN JUAN BAUTISTA TO 0.2 MILE EAST OF FOURTH STREET (BUSINESS ROUTE 156) IN SAN BENITO COUNTY

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15903), and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following impacts have been identified as significant and not fully mitigable:

- farmland impacts

Overriding considerations that support approval of this recommended project are as follows: The purpose of the proposed project is to reduce existing congestion and provide for future traffic needs, improve safety, and improve route continuity. The need for the project is based on increasing congestion, lack of passing opportunities when slower trucks and agricultural vehicles conflict with passenger vehicles, the existing non-standard compound curve, lack of continuous expressway on the route, and a history of flooding along the route.

The project is surrounded by farmland and farmland conversion was a consideration in determining which alternatives would warrant further consideration and which alternatives would be withdrawn. However, significant environmental effects to farmland are unavoidable because the existing State Route 156 is surrounded by farmland and any modification of new alignment of the route inevitably affects farmland. Alternatives to the north would lessen the farmland conversion but would result in numerous residential and utility relocations. The Preferred Alternative meets the purpose and need and requires minimal relocation of utilities, reduces the amount of farmland converted, and minimizes the disruption of traffic during construction. It also provides a safer route for pedestrians, bicyclists, and school transportation by removing this type of traffic from the expressway while maintaining the existing northern residential access (driveways) for property owners.