



MEMORANDUM

TO: CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES BERGMAN, CITY MANAGER

BY: TERESA MCCLISH, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF COMMENT LETTER TO THE SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS REGARDING THE EL CAMPO ROAD/SOUTH COUNTY HIGHWAY ACCESS MODIFICATIONS – TRAFFIC DIVERSIONS ASSESSMENT

DATE: MARCH 26, 2019

SUMMARY OF ACTION:

Authorization to submit a comment letter to the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) regarding the El Campo Road/South County Highway Access Modifications – Traffic Diversions Assessment.

IMPACT ON FINANCIAL AND PERSONNEL RESOURCES:

There is no financial impact from submitting the comment letter. There are substantial financial impacts over time associated with shared costs necessary to implement City improvements at impacted intersections associated with the project.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended the City Council review and authorize the City Manager to sign the comment letter.

BACKGROUND:

The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) Governing Board is considering a request to Caltrans to implement turn movement restrictions (right-in and right-out only access implemented via concrete median barriers along the inside shoulders of US 101) at four at-grade intersections with US 101 between the Traffic Way and Los Berros Road interchanges south of Arroyo Grande (El Campo Road, Un-named Road, Tower Grove Drive/Laetitia Winery, and Hemi Road). The [traffic diversion study](#) provides technical information pertinent to the understanding of potential detour routes, and operational and safety implications to off-system roadways that may be caused due to restrictions to US 101 access at the four at-grade intersections.

**CITY COUNCIL
CONSIDERATION OF STAFF COMMENT LETTER TO THE SAN LUIS OBISPO
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS REGARDING THE EL CAMPO ROAD/SOUTH COUNTY
HIGHWAY ACCESS MODIFICATIONS –TRAFFIC DIVERSIONS ASSESSMENT
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ANALYSIS OF ISSUES:

City staff supports the project goal of providing safer travel for South County residents and users of Highway 101. The Assessment concludes that several intersections in the City will experience delay from the project, some of the delay is at already impacted intersections. The Study also concludes that any operational degradation resulting from the closures would be more than off-set if a “new” more direct grade separated access to US 101 was implemented (long-term solution); however, as the project is outside of the City’s jurisdiction, there are significant challenges for the solution to be realized without cooperation from agency stakeholders.

The City’s comment letter identifies many of the impacts to the City, which would occur as a result of the proposed modifications, and requests that SLOCOG and the County Board of Supervisors partner with the City on interchange solutions that will complete the freeway conversion access project.

ALTERNATIVES:

The following alternatives are provided for the Council’s consideration:

1. Direct staff to submit the attached comment letter.
2. Modify and direct staff to submit the attached comment letter.
3. Provide direction to Staff.

ADVANTAGES:

Submission of the comment letter provides an opportunity for the SLOCOG Board to consider City concerns prior to their decision at its April 3, 2019 Board meeting.

DISADVANTAGES:

No disadvantages are identified by submitting the comment letter.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

No environmental review is required for this item.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND COMMENTS:

The Agenda was posted at City Hall and on the City’s website in accordance with Government Code Section 54954.2.

Attachments:

1. Comment letter from the City Manager to the SLOCOG Executive Director

DRAFT

March 27, 2019

San Luis Obispo Council of Governments
1114 Marsh Street
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Subject: El Campo/South County Freeway Conversion Traffic Displacement Assessment

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Thank you for including the City of Arroyo Grande (City) as a Stakeholder for the very important consideration of impending access modification to Highway 101 immediately south of the City. City staff has reviewed the El Campo Road/South County Freeway Conversion Traffic Displacement Assessment Report (Assessment) prepared by GHD Company for SLOCOG, March 2019, and has the following comments.

City staff supports the project goal of providing safer travel for South County residents and users of Highway 101. The SLOCOG board is requesting that Caltrans implement left turn movement restrictions (continuing to allow right-in and right-out only access) at four at-grade intersections on US 101 between Traffic Way and Los Berros Road (the "project"). The intersections include El Campo, Unnamed Road, Tower Grove Drive/Laetitia Winery, and Hemi Road, and all are located within the County of San Luis Obispo. The Assessment provides information regarding detour routes and operational and safety implications to the roadways due to the project, and provides recommendations for near-term and longer-term solutions. The conclusions clearly demonstrate that the City receives the brunt of impacts due to the proposed project in addition to already existing regional trips from growth in the County without funding corresponding regional circulation projects. This is due to South County residents utilizing local routes through the City to access the highway.

Trips from the South County have already been partially diverted from directly accessing Highway 101 at the subject four at-grade crossings over time by virtue of increased growth in the south county (estimated to continue to increase by 2.3%/year) and increased traffic volumes of Highway 101 and the resulting perceived safety concerns for travelers making left-turn movements at these crossings. These trips are referred to as latent demand in the Assessment and, as the project was not scoped to calculate delays associated with these trips, it should be acknowledged that they are not reflected in total estimated delay.

One of the short-term consequences that may result from the restricted turn modifications as identified in the assessment is the number of U-turns that may occur at Highway 101 north bound off ramp and south bound on ramp at Traffic Way. It has been shown that people will choose the shortest route to get to their desired location. The City has several projects currently under construction in this general vicinity. These on and off-ramps will need all three jurisdictions to provide a solution for this unintended consequence. The report recommends signage to detour people to the south bound on ramp at Grand, the City and its police department are not convinced that this will be sufficient to deter people from making the illegal U-turn.

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Although a location has not been identified for an at-grade crossing for emergency responders, Caltrans has indicated that an at grade crossing will be provided at a location separate from the existing at grade crossings, which are scheduled to be closed.

Regarding implications related to emergency response, impacts noted by the Arroyo Grande Police Department identify that they are requested to respond to accidents or emergencies that occur on the Highway 101. Being a city split by the 101 corridor, the police department is dispatched to calls for service on the highway because of delayed response from the responsible jurisdiction. This ranges from collisions, stalled vehicles, DUI drivers, and also serious crimes which require immediate response. Due to delays from impacts to the Traffic Way on and off-ramps due to the closure, the police department has to anticipate a potential for an increase in traffic once El Campo is closed. If there is an increase in calls for service due to the detour, police resources will be needed to respond, deter, or enforce (potentially) increasing traffic to meet community needs or complaints. The Police Department noted particular concerns about the abrupt U-turn at the northbound Traffic Way off-ramp where there is a high likelihood of rear- end collisions and that they have received complaints from the business owner at the Mobile station as their driveway would be used as a route to reenter the southbound Traffic Way on-ramp.

Five Cities Fire Authority representatives sit on the City's Staff Advisory Committee and have commented on the proposed project as responders from Arroyo Grande, Grover Beach and Oceano (please see Attachment 1).

The Assessment concludes that six intersections within the City along detour routes within the City will experience additional delay due to the project and that there are planned improvements that will make delay increases negligible. The City is building some of the planned improvements in the short term (installation of the Fair Oaks and Traffic Way signal, and minor improvements at W. Branch St. and E. Grand Ave.) but critical improvements needed at Fair Oaks and US 101 Off-ramp, and E. Grand Avenue/US 101 ramps, and Fair Oaks and No. Halcyon Road are noted as mid or long term projects and funds not programmed. As such until all of the improvements at identified intersections are constructed, and until the freeway is appropriately converted with required access, the City 1) has and will continue to experience impacts due to altered local traffic patterns; and 2) has and will continue to receive added traffic volumes to City Streets; and 3) has and will continue to experience exacerbated traffic and operations on the detour routes within the City due to the project. The City is appreciative that the Draft Regional Transportation Plan's (RTP) constrained project list includes several components of these improvements, as it is critical to tie the proposed project to these planned improvements as well as the long term solution. The City however acknowledges that the RTP is Draft at this time and action on it by the SLOCOG Board will likely take place after the project is implemented by Caltrans.

As noted in the Assessment, freeway conversion in the vicinity of El Campo Road in the County of San Luis Obispo has been contemplated through the years. Freeway conversion includes full access control with grade separations at intersections. Although the proposed project is a highway access modification, and right-turn movements will continue to be allowed at this time, it is critical to understand that it is a primary component of a freeway conversion project without access replacement. The new Interchange to replace the at-grade crossings is described in the Assessment under the long term solution, yet impacts to the City continue today and increased impacts are imminent. Therefore, as this highway modification project results in deteriorated conditions at City intersections, it should not be supported by the SLOCOG Board and the County Board of Supervisors, or approved and implemented by Caltrans, without acknowledged commitment to: 1) study, design and implement a solution for the anticipated illegal U-turns at the

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northbound Traffic Way off-ramp; and 2) to immediately programmed initiation document for the interchange solution that completes the freeway conversion.

The City alone cannot implement a freeway conversion access project outside its jurisdiction. It is therefore of utmost importance that SLOCOG, if supporting access modification at this time, will also take the initiative and continue to facilitate agency cooperation, and program for the solution through the RTP, as it unlikely due to many highway improvements identified throughout the County and limited funds that either the County of San Luis Obispo or Caltrans will be able to take the lead to implement the solution once the partial closures are in place.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this project. We appreciate your consideration of the concerns of the City and our community.

Sincerely,

James Bergman
City Manager

- c. City Council
City Attorney
SAC (Community Development Director, Public Works Director, Battalion Chief – Five Cities Fire Authority, Police Chief, City Engineer, Building Official, Planning Manager)

Attachment:

1. Five Cities Fire Authority Comment Letter



FIVE CITIES FIRE AUTHORITY

March 18, 2019

Teresa McClish
City of Arroyo Grande
Planning Department

Re: Emergency Response Comments to the El Campo Road/South County Freeway Conversion.

Although the purpose of closing the surface level exits, and on ramps, of Highway 101, along the El Campo Road, South County area is for the safety of citizens who attempt to utilize those surface ramps; although I support the closure of these ramps for the safety of citizens; by closing these ramps, a completely different safety issue is created.

The closures of these surface level ramps will increase emergency vehicle response times to the areas such as Falcon Crest, Coast View Drive, Brady Lane, El Campo Road, Los Berros Road, and the surrounding neighborhoods within the El Campo area.

Emergency vehicles responding from Arroyo Grande and north along Highway 101; such as Pismo Beach, Shell Beach, Avila Beach, San Luis City and northern San Luis Ambulance stations, will experience an increase of response times because these emergency vehicles will have to travel through the City of Arroyo Grande to reach the El Campo area. Traveling through the City of Arroyo Grande will also have an impact to the safety to citizens within the City of Arroyo Grande and increase wear of the roadways within the City.

12.2 Emergency Response Time Assessment.

The added estimated increase of response time of 9.7 minutes to a structure fire, will allow the structure fire to double in size compounding every four (4) minutes. The San Luis Obispo County fire stations only has two people on duty every day, and with the OSHA laws, if there is no known rescue, the fire crews cannot make fire attack until a second unit arrives at the scene to provide what is known as 2 in / 2 out. Meaning as two firefighters go interior to fight the fire, two firefighters shall remain outside and be ready to rescue the two that went interior. Therefore, the 9.7 minutes' increase in response time to a structure fire within El Campo area will have a significant impact to the citizens who live within those areas.

Also the report states there will be an estimated increase of response time of 9.6 minutes to medical emergencies. If an individual is having a heart attack, the process of performing proper CPR to save the individual's life requires at a minimum of an ambulance crew and an engine company. If the engine company from Nipomo is at the scene, they will need assistance either from the ambulance crew or from a second engine company, which may very well be responding from the Arroyo Grande area. The increase response time of 9.6 minutes will significantly reduce the ability of a heart attack victim survival.

My recommendation is for Cal Trans to provide a properly designed, safe use, on and off ramps, for the area of El Campo. Or at a minimum maintain and allow emergency vehicles to continue utilizing the surface exits and on ramps as they currently exist until Cal Trans is capable of providing the safe use, on and off ramps, for the area of El Campo.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Riki Heath".

Riki Heath – Battalion Chief
Five Cities Fire Authority
140 Traffic Way, Arroyo Grande, CA 93420
(805) 473-5490

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