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California Transportation Commission c/o Doug Remedios (douglas.remedios@catc.ca.gov)
cc: CTC Staff (Naveen.Habib@catc.ca.gov; Matthew.Yosgott@catc.ca.gov;
eishara.ward@catc.ca.gov; Anja.Aulenbacher@catc.ca.gov)

re: Grant Application Santa Cruz

Dear Commissioners,

We are writing in support of a portion of the application for SB 1 grants from the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC). We are concerned that the other portion of the RTC's grant proposal does not meet the guidelines for SB 1 programs, and that would disqualify the entire application.

The projects we support are pedestrian, bicycle, and transit improvements on Soquel Drive—the original road between Santa Cruz and Watsonville and still the main transit corridor connecting residents to Cabrillo College and the hospital district. Transit signal prioritization, bus shelters, in-lane bus boarding platforms, and off-board ticketing will make the bus routes on Soquel more efficient, thereby attracting more riders. The buffered/protected bike lanes, ADA curb ramps, and complete sidewalks in the application are badly needed.

Unfortunately, the RTC is also applying for funding for a highly expensive Highway 1 auxiliary lane project in Aptos that will require the demolition and rebuilding of two railroad overcrossing bridges, and bridges over roads and Aptos Creek. The Aptos auxiliary lane portion of the grant proposal does not qualify for SB 1 funds on the bases of

- Improved safety
- Congestion relief

This is according to the only data currently available, the Tier 1 EIR for a 9-mile stretch of Highway 1 between Santa Cruz and Watsonville completed in 2019. That EIR studied a “TSM Alternative” which included auxiliary lanes and ramp metering over the 9 miles.

- The EIR concluded, “The total accident rates overall and by segment in 2035 under the Tier I Corridor TSM Alternative would be the same as the accident rates for the No Build Alternative.”
- EIR estimated that building the TSM Alternative “would result in a very slight improvement in traffic congestion when compared to the No Build Alternative... The Tier I Corridor TSM Alternative would not achieve sufficient congestion relief to attract any substantial number of vehicles that had diverted to the local street system back to the freeway.”

There will be a project EIR for the Aptos auxiliary lane project. However, RTC staff reported that the Draft EIR won't be published until spring of 2023. Hence there will be no data on this specific project on which to base claims of congestion relief or safety.

If auxiliary lanes could reduce congestion, we would already be able to see congestion relief at the completed auxiliary lane from Morrissey to Soquel. As the attached photo demonstrates, the auxiliary lane is just as congested during the evening commute as the two through lanes. What this means is that buses running in the auxiliary lanes will be stuck in traffic. Yet, that is the RTC's plan for what is misleadingly named, “bus-on-shoulder.” In the RTC plan the only places that buses will have a dedicated lane are short segments at overpasses.

Since it fails to improve safety or congestion, what is motivating the Aptos auxiliary lane project? Listening to the elected decision makers who back this project, we conclude that they want to demonstrate to the public that they are taking some action on congestion relief. A voter-approved transportation sales tax measure in 2016 promised that the auxiliary lanes would relieve traffic congestion, even when the Draft EIR (2015) said otherwise. Some politicians hold out hope for HOV lanes from Santa Cruz to Watsonville. An RTC study has found that the HOV project, which would require demolition and rebuild of interchanges, is financially infeasible until “after 2035.”

The HOV lane project faces another hurdle. In July 2022 a superior court judge invalidated the EIR. Hence there is currently no valid Tier I EIR for the series of auxiliary lanes studied in that EIR.

We request that the Commission consider favorably the portion of the RTC's grant application that includes transit, bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Soquel Drive and disapprove the part of the application related to the auxiliary lanes.

Thank you,



Michael Guth, Chair, Executive Committee
Sierra Club, Ventana Chapter, Santa Cruz Group