

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

SAN DIEGO COAST AREA

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 Staff: EL-SD
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 Hearing Date: May 13-16, 1997

STAFF REPORT: CONSENT CALENDAR

Application No.: 6-97-35

Applicant: California Department of Transportation Agent: John Rieger

Description: Project 1 of four-phase seismic retrofit of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge, including work on the superstructure extending above Piers 2 through 33 to install additional cross bracing and strengthen the expansion hinges, and requiring temporary lane closures on the bridge and placement of supply barges within San Diego Bay for construction access; also, implementation of an eelgrass mitigation/monitoring program to address impacts to eelgrass.

Site: San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge (State Route 75), from Post Mile 20.5 to 21.9, San Diego and Coronado, San Diego County.

Substantive File Documents: Letter to National Marine Fisheries Service, dated March 24, 1997

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

The staff recommends the Commission adopt the following resolution:

I. Approval with Conditions.

The Commission hereby grants a permit for the proposed development, subject to the conditions below, on the grounds that the development will be in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 3 of the California Coastal Act of 1976, will not prejudice the ability of the local government having jurisdiction over the area to prepare a Local Coastal Program conforming to the provisions of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act, and will not have any significant adverse impacts on the environment within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act.

II. Standard Conditions.

See attached page.

III. Special Conditions.

The permit is subject to the following special condition:

1. Eelgrass Mitigation Program. Prior to the issuance of the coastal development permit, the applicant shall submit a final mitigation program to address impacts to eelgrass which has been approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and is in substantial conformance with the preliminary mitigation program described in the attached March 24, 1997 letter to Mr. Robert Hoffman of the National Marine Fisheries Service (Exhibit #2). The final mitigation program shall include the following components:

- a) the applicant shall identify the acreage to be impacted by conducting a Spring 1997 survey of existing eelgrass beds within the proposed area of construction activity for Projects 1 and 2, and shall document the pre-project densities of the impacted area (Project 2 impacts will be addressed in a separate coastal development permit);
- b) during construction, eelgrass in an adjacent area will be monitored at least twice over two growing seasons to determine natural fluctuations in density and area;
- c) after construction, the applicant shall revegetate the access and work areas with eelgrass and monitor the replanted area for five years;
- d) mitigation success will be determined by comparing pre-construction and post-construction density and area, and remedial replanting will be required, as necessary, to assure restoration to pre-project densities and area, taking into consideration natural fluctuations.

The applicant shall undertake the mitigation in accordance with the approved eelgrass mitigation plan. Any proposed changes to the approved plan shall be reported to the Executive Director. No change to the plan shall occur without a Commission approved amendment to this permit, unless the Executive Director determines that no such amendment is required.

IV. Findings and Declarations.

The Commission finds and declares as follows:

1. Project Description/Visual Resources. The California Department of Transportation is performing a four-project (phase) seismic retrofit of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge. The subject application is for Project 1 only; future projects (phases) will be submitted under separate applications in the future as plans are developed. This first project is anticipated to begin in September, 1997 and continue to April, 1998.

Project 1 involves work on the bridge superstructure only, and includes installing additional cross bracing, strengthening the tied and expansion hinges, strengthening the box girder section for future restrainers and relocating the inspection walkway in the box girder section. To facilitate

Project 1, temporary lane closures on the bridge will occur, although the entire bridge will not require closure at any time. Construction access will be via scaffolding suspended from the bridge and from barges anchored underneath the structure. The placement of the barges is expected to result in temporary impacts to approximately 1-1/4 acres of eelgrass.

Work on the superstructure, absent the potential for adverse environmental effects, would normally be exempt from a coastal development permit as repair and maintenance activities covered in the Interpretive Guideline on Exclusions from Permit Requirements (and in Section 30610(d) of the Coastal Act). However, the applicant has indicated that the placement of barges in the waters of San Diego Bay near the bridge is necessary in order to perform the required work on the bridge. The applicant has identified a direct and indirect impact to eelgrass resources resulting from the placement of the barges. Thus, because the project involves an adverse environmental impact, it is not subject to an exemption under the above referenced guidelines; therefore, the entire project requires a coastal development permit.

Section 30251 of the Coastal Act provides for the protection of scenic coastal areas and for the compatibility of new and existing development. Route 75, which includes the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge, is a designated scenic highway. However, although there will be temporary visual impacts due to construction activities, Project 1 will not result in any permanent changes to the bridge's appearance. Thus, the Commission finds the proposed development consistent with Section 30251 of the Act.

2. Biological Resources/Eelgrass. Sections 30230 and 30231 of the Coastal Act provide for the maintenance of biological productivity of coastal waters. Section 30240 requires that development avoid significant disruption of environmentally sensitive habitats. These policies support maintenance of eelgrass beds which are an important biological component of productive coastal waters. In addition, Section 30233 prohibits fill or dredging of open coastal waters except for eight limited uses and only if any impact is minimized and mitigated.

As an incidental public service project, the proposed development is an allowed use in wetlands. Project 1 will result in impacts on approximately 1-1/4 acres of existing eelgrass beds due to the placement of supply barges. These include both direct impacts from the barge anchors and indirect impacts due to shading. The proposed development consists of seismic safety improvements to an existing bridge. The project involves placement of barges on the water for the entire duration of the work period (i.e., September 1997 through April, 1998), although they will not remain in stationary locations for the entire time. The barges may range in size from 40'x 20' to 40'x 100'. The barges will be needed at approximately twenty areas of the bridge to conduct the Project 1 improvements. Moreover, the barges will also be needed to access and facilitate Project 2, which is scheduled to begin shortly after Project 1 and continue through 1999. Direct and indirect eelgrass impacts will thus be addressed again in a future permit application for Project 2.

Eelgrass is prevalent throughout much of the shallower area of San Diego Bay, and is found around and near several of the bridge piers, according to surveys taken within the past couple years. The placement of barges for the eight-month project will adversely impact eelgrass by shading the resource and by the barge anchors. Although the resource will be avoided to the extent possible, the applicant still estimates an approximately 1-1/4 acres total eelgrass impact for Project 1. The applicant has developed an eelgrass mitigation and monitoring program, which has been preliminarily accepted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The program is described in a letter attached as Exhibit #2, and is reiterated in Special Condition #1 which requires submittal of the final mitigation program approved by NMFS. The program will require pre- and post-construction surveys to determine the extent of any project damages, revegetation of all affected areas, and monitoring for five years to determine the success of the revegetation. As conditioned, the Commission finds the proposal consistent with the cited resource provisions of the Coastal Act.

3. Public Access/Traffic Circulation. The public access and recreation policies of the Coastal Act place a high priority on the maintenance of access to the shoreline and designated recreational sites. The San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge is a primary access route for those wishing to visit Coronado's municipal beaches and the Silver Strand State Beach. The applicant has indicated that it will be necessary to temporarily close some traffic lanes on the bridge to allow the project to proceed, but it will not be necessary to close the entire bridge at any time. Moreover, two-way traffic will be maintained at all times. Finally, Project 1 is not scheduled to occur during the summer beach season, when access is of greatest concern. Therefore, the Commission finds that the proposed development, as conditioned to address biological concerns, is consistent with the public access and recreation policies of the Coastal Act.

4. Local Coastal Planning. Section 30604 (a) also requires that a coastal development permit shall be issued only if the Commission finds that the permitted development will not prejudice the ability of the local government to prepare a Local Coastal Program (LCP) in conformity with the provisions of Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act. Such a finding can be made for the proposed development, as conditioned.

The San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge connects the municipalities of San Diego and Coronado, both of which have fully-certified LCPs. The maintenance of the bridge, and its improvement for better seismic safety, is fully consistent with those certified programs. Portions of the bridge also pass through areas owned by the San Diego Unified Port District, which has a certified Port Master Plan; again, the proposed development is consistent with that plan. The particular portions of the bridge affected by Project 1 lie within the Coastal Commission's area of original permit jurisdiction, and Chapter 3 of the Coastal Act is the standard of review. The development, as conditioned, has been found consistent with all applicable Chapter 3 policies of the Coastal Act. Therefore, the Commission finds that approval of the proposed Project 1, as conditioned, will not prejudice the ability of any contiguous local jurisdiction to continue implementation of its certified program.

5. Consistency with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Section 13096 of the Commission's Code of Regulations requires Commission approval of coastal development permits to be supported by a finding showing the permit to be consistent with any applicable requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Section 21080.5(d)(2)(i) of CEQA prohibits a proposed development from being approved if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact which the activity may have on the environment.

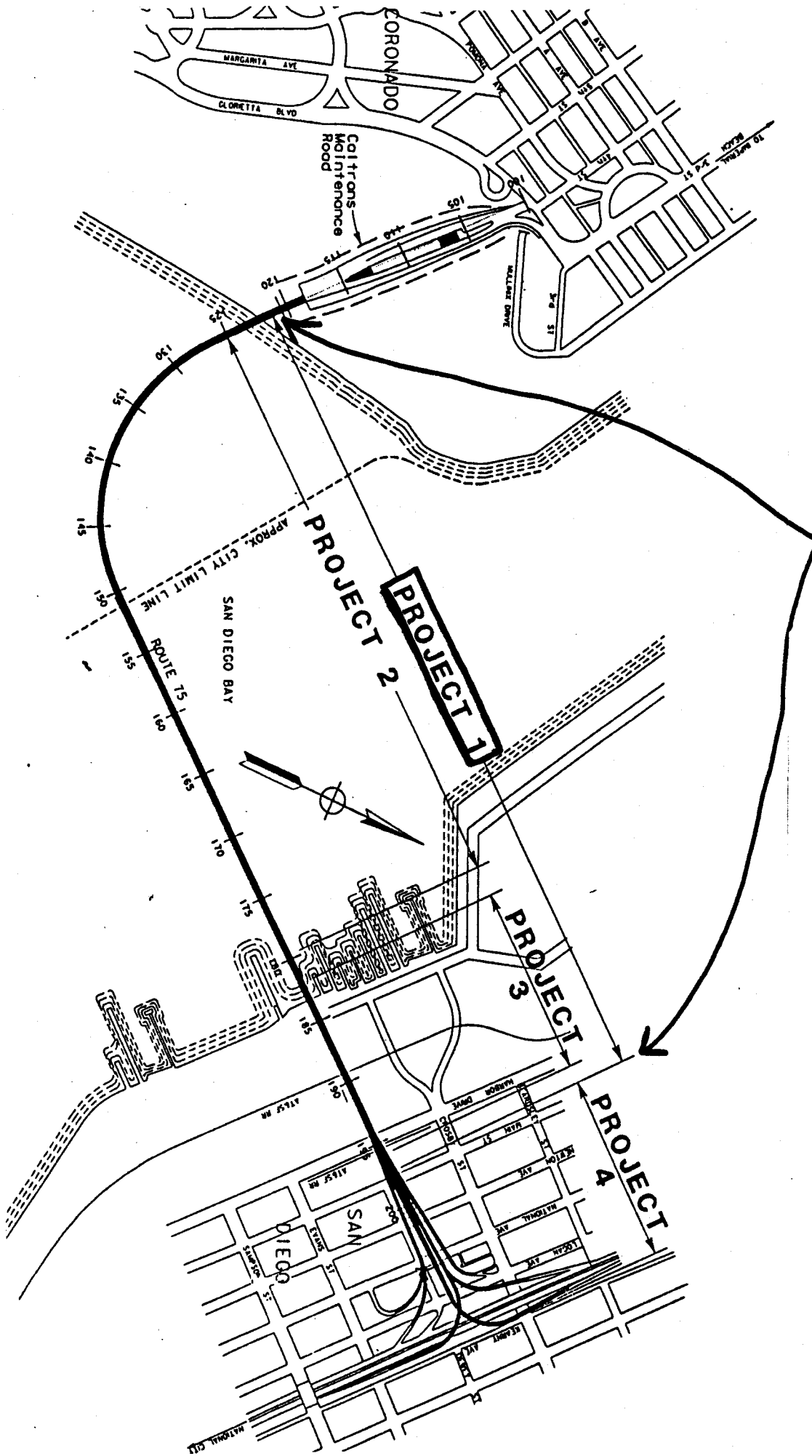
As discussed herein, the proposed project will not cause significant adverse impacts to the environment. Specifically, the project has identified potential temporary impacts on eelgrass, but includes a mitigation and monitoring program to address them. It has been found consistent with the public access and recreation policies of the Coastal Act. There are no feasible alternatives or mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen any significant adverse impact which the activity might have on the environment. Therefore, the Commission finds that the proposed project is the least environmentally damaging feasible alternative and can be found consistent with the requirements of the Coastal Act to conform to CEQA.

STANDARD CONDITIONS:

1. Notice of Receipt and Acknowledgement. The permit is not valid and development shall not commence until a copy of the permit, signed by the permittee or authorized agent, acknowledging receipt of the permit and acceptance of the terms and conditions, is returned to the Commission office.
2. Expiration. If development has not commenced, the permit will expire two years from the date on which the Commission voted on the application. Development shall be pursued in a diligent manner and completed in a reasonable period of time. Application for extension of the permit must be made prior to the expiration date.
3. Compliance. All development must occur in strict compliance with the proposal as set forth below. Any deviation from the approved plans must be reviewed and approved by the staff and may require Commission approval.
4. Interpretation. Any questions of intent or interpretation of any condition will be resolved by the Executive Director or the Commission.
5. Inspections. The Commission staff shall be allowed to inspect the site and the development during construction, subject to 24-hour advance notice.
6. Assignment. The permit may be assigned to any qualified person, provided assignee files with the Commission an affidavit accepting all terms and conditions of the permit.
7. Terms and Conditions Run with the Land. These terms and conditions shall be perpetual, and it is the intention of the Commission and the permittee to bind all future owners and possessors of the subject property to the terms and conditions.

(7035R)

6-97-35



Project 1
Only

EXHIBIT NO. 1
APPLICATION NO. 6-97-35
Location Map
California Coastal Commission

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
DISTRICT 11, P.O. BOX 85406, SAN DIEGO 92186-5406

March 24, 1997

11-SD-75
P.M. 20.5/22.5
021901

Mr. Robert Hoffman
National Marine Fisheries Service
501 W. Ocean Blvd., Suite 4200
Long Beach, CA 90802

Dear Mr. Hoffman:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Federal Highway Administration are proposing the seismic retrofit of the San Diego Coronado Bridge on Route 75 in San Diego County (Figure 1). The retrofit strategy includes work on the main span superstructure, the towers, foundation piers, and approach ramps. The retrofit will be divided into four projects which are described below and shown on Figure 2.

Project 1: The main span superstructure above the top of the pier columns will be retrofitted. Access will be from barges in the bay as well as areas adjacent to the pier columns on land. The types of work associated with this project are cutting, coring, and pouring concrete as well as sandblasting, cutting, welding, and painting metal components. The anticipated construction period will be June 1997 through March 1998.

Project 2: This is the retrofit of the Coronado abutment and the column towers and foundations of Piers 2-23 which are located in San Diego Bay. Access will be from barges in the bay and from the bridge deck. Steel shell jackets will be added at Piers 2-23; all pile and pier caps will be strengthened and enlarged. The towers at Piers 2-10 and 17-22 will also be strengthened and enlarged. This work will involve cutting, coring, and pouring concrete; sandblasting, cutting, welding, and painting metal components; placing steel reinforcement; and installing isolation bearings by hydraulic jacking. Cofferdams will be constructed around each pier to allow the steel jackets and concrete to be placed. As part of this work, gravel will be placed within each cofferdam to reduce sedimentation and other construction effects. Project construction is scheduled to begin during September 1997 and end during December 1999.

Project 3: The column towers and foundations of Piers 24-32 will be retrofitted. Access will be from local streets and the bridge deck. This project is entirely on land; there is no work in or over San Diego Bay. This work will strengthen footings, strengthen and enlarge pier caps, and install isolation bearings at Pier 24. Work associated with this project will involve excavating and backfilling soil; cutting, coring, and pouring concrete; sandblasting, cutting, welding, and painting metal components; placing steel reinforcement; and installing isolation bearings by hydraulic jacking. This project will be in construction from December 1997 until December 1999.

6-97-35
Exhibit #2

March 24, 1997

Project 4: The five structures comprising the east approach ramps to the bridge will be retrofitted. Access will be from local streets and the bridge deck. This project is entirely on land; there is no work in or over San Diego Bay. This work will strengthen footings, strengthen columns, strengthen and enlarge pile caps, replace longitudinal restrainers above all columns, and install isolation bearings. Construction work will entail excavating and backfilling soil; cutting, coring, and pouring concrete; placing steel reinforcement; and installing isolation bearings by hydraulic jacking. This project will be in construction from December 1997 until December 1999.

Eelgrass is present within work limits and the barge access areas of Projects 1 and 2. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) protocol requires surveys prior to construction as well as post-construction. Attached for your review and information is the report documenting the eelgrass within the vicinity of the bridge. Because these surveys occurred during 1996 and work will be during 1997, Caltrans will conduct a spring 1997 survey of eelgrass in areas affected by the project. Eelgrass of varying densities occurs south of the bridge at Piers 3 and 4 and surrounds Piers 10 through 14. Caltrans has minimized impacts to this resource by changing the retrofit strategy. Originally, additional piles were going to be driven; instead the existing piles will be encased in steel. Therefore, the size of the pile cap does not change, and there are no additional shading impacts. The gravel associated with the cofferdams will be removed in areas where there is eelgrass. Caltrans has also revised the barge access limits to maximize use of non-vegetated areas and minimize the area of eelgrass within project limits. Although no permanent impacts are anticipated, approximately 56,846 ft² of eelgrass will be temporarily impacted by the projects. Construction of the retrofit will extend over three years with periodic barge movement in areas of varying density of eelgrass.

During construction, eelgrass in an adjacent area will be monitored at least twice over two growing seasons to determine if natural fluctuations in density and area are occurring. To offset the temporal loss of eelgrass Caltrans proposes to revegetate the access and work areas with eelgrass and will monitor this effort for five years after construction. Mitigation success will be determined by comparing pre-construction density and area with post-planting density and area over five years. All monitoring and planting will be performed by qualified personnel.

At this time, we request your concurrence that the mitigation measures are sufficient and that Caltrans is authorized to proceed with these projects. Thank you for your time in this matter. If you have any questions, please contact Gina Moran at (619) 688-3145.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

CHRIS WHITE, Chief
Environmental Analysis Branch B

Attachments

bcc: PORso-Delgado, DEvans, TVasquez, GStyker/Env. Files, ~~JRieger/DJones~~, CWhite/GMoran