

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

SAN DIEGO COAST AREA
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REGULAR CALENDAR
STAFF REPORT AND PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATION

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Application No.: 6-97-167

Applicant: California Department of Transportation Agent: John Rieger

Description: Project 2 of a four-phase seismic retrofit of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge including rocker bearing replacement, addition of a catcher beam and two piles on both sides of Abutment 1; strengthening the column caps, replacing expansion hinge restrainers, installing isolation bearings, cross frames and shear keys at expansion hinges, adding reinforced concrete encasement to columns and strengthening the pier pile caps at Piers 2 through 24; and adding twelve 48-inch diameter piles at Piers 2, 3 and 4. Construction will require the placement of coffer dams around Piers 16 through 20 and the use of barges as construction platforms. The project includes a mitigation program for temporary impacts on eelgrass resources.

Site: San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge (State Route 75), San Diego and Coronado, San Diego County.

Substantive File Documents: Visual Impact Assessment, dated November 3, 1997
 Final Eelgrass Report, by Ogden Environmental
 Letter from National Marine Fisheries Service,
 dated May 7, 1997

STAFF NOTES:

Summary of Staff's Preliminary Recommendation:

This application is the second part of a four-phase seismic retrofit of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge; the Commission previously approved Project 1 and Projects 3 and 4 are not in the Commission's jurisdiction. Staff recommends approval of the proposed Project 2 with a special condition addressing the project's temporary impacts on eelgrass. Biological and visual resources and public access are the only issues raised by the proposal; these issues are resolved herein and the recommendation is acceptable to the applicant.

PRELIMINARY 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 conditions:

1. Eelgrass Mitigation Program. As proposed by the applicant and approved by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the applicant shall implement the following measures to mitigate for temporary impacts on eelgrass:

- a) the applicant shall identify the acreage to be impacted by conducting a pre-project 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 (this survey occurred prior to the start of Project 1);
- 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 and History. The California Department of Transportation is performing a four-project (phase) seismic retrofit of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge. Coastal Development Permit (CDP) #6-97-35 authorized Project 1, which involved work on the bridge superstructure only; that phase is currently under construction. Project 3 was submitted to the Commission in Coastal Development Permit Application #6-97-150. It includes work at the eastern end of the bridge, over land areas rather than water, and all occurs within either the San Diego Unified Port District's or the City of San Diego's coastal permit jurisdiction. Therefore, the Commission is not involved in the review or approval of Project 3 and that application will not be processed. The file materials are being retained so the Commission has a clear understanding of the entire seismic retrofit project for future reference. Project 4 is still in the design phase and appears to be entirely in the City of San Diego's coastal development permit jurisdiction.

The subject application is for Project 2. It includes rocker bearing replacement, the addition of a catcher beam and two piles on both sides of Abutment 1, and the strengthening of column caps, replacement of expansion hinge restrainers, installation of isolation bearings, cross frames and shear keys at expansion hinges, the addition of reinforced concrete encasement to columns and strengthening of the pier pile caps at Piers 2 through 24. Also proposed is the addition of twelve 48-inch diameter piles at Piers 2, 3 and 4. Construction will require the placement of coffer dams around Piers 16 through 20 and the use of barges as construction platforms. The project includes a mitigation program for approximately one acre of temporary impacts on eelgrass resources, due to placement of barge anchors and shading by the barges. Project 2 is scheduled to begin construction in April, 1998 and be completed by the spring of 2001.

The applicant has identified the potential for adverse environmental effects (temporary impacts on eelgrass resources) due to the placement of barges in the waters of San Diego Bay near the bridge, which is necessary in order to perform the required work on the bridge piers. Therefore, the proposal is not an exempt repair and maintenance activity covered in the Interpretive Guideline on Exclusions from Permit Requirements (and in Section 30610(d) of the Coastal Act). Thus, the entire above-described project requires a coastal development permit.

CalTrans has also proposed the expansion of traveling scaffolds at many of the existing piers to allow safer access for maintenance workers to the underside of the bridge decking and upper areas of the piers. However, this work is performed from the bridge itself and does qualify as an exempt repair and maintenance activity under Section 30610(d) of the Coastal Act. Therefore, this part of Project 2 is not addressed in the subject permit.

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. 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 few years. The placement of barges for both projects will adversely impact eelgrass by shading the resource and by the placement of barge anchors. Although the resource will be avoided to the extent possible, the applicant still estimates slightly over one acre of eelgrass impact for both projects.

As an incidental public service project, the proposed development is an allowed use in wetlands. Project 1 (CDP #6-97-35) is currently causing temporary impacts on approximately one acre 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. Proposed Project 2 occurs in the same general areas as Project 1 and will thus re-impact the same resources in the same manner, since it also requires placement of barges on the water for the entire duration of the work period, which is scheduled to begin in April, 1998 and continue until the spring of 2001. The barges, which range in size from 40'x 20' to 40'x 100,' will not remain in stationary locations for the entire time but will be needed at several different areas of the bridge to conduct the Project 2 improvements.

The applicant submitted an eelgrass mitigation program addressing the total impacts from both phases of development with Project 1. It was approved by both the Commission and National Marine Fisheries as appropriate for the type and extent of expected temporary impacts. Special Condition #1 requires the applicant to implement the program as approved. The program required a pre-construction survey, to establish a baseline, which was conducted prior to the start of Project 1. It also requires a post-construction survey 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. Visual Resources. 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. In addition to temporary visual impacts due to construction activities, Project 2 will result in insignificant permanent changes to the bridge's appearance, since it includes reinforcement (i.e., enlargement) of several piers. Since this part of the bridge is only visible from a distance from the San Diego or Coronado shorelines, or potentially by boat, the minor enlargement of individual piers is unlikely to be noticed by anyone, and the bridge overall retains its pre-project appearance. Thus, the Commission finds the proposed development consistent with Section 30251 of the Act.

4. 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. As with Project 1, 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. 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.

5. 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 2 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 2, as conditioned, will not prejudice the ability of any contiguous local jurisdiction to continue implementation of its certified program.

6. 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.

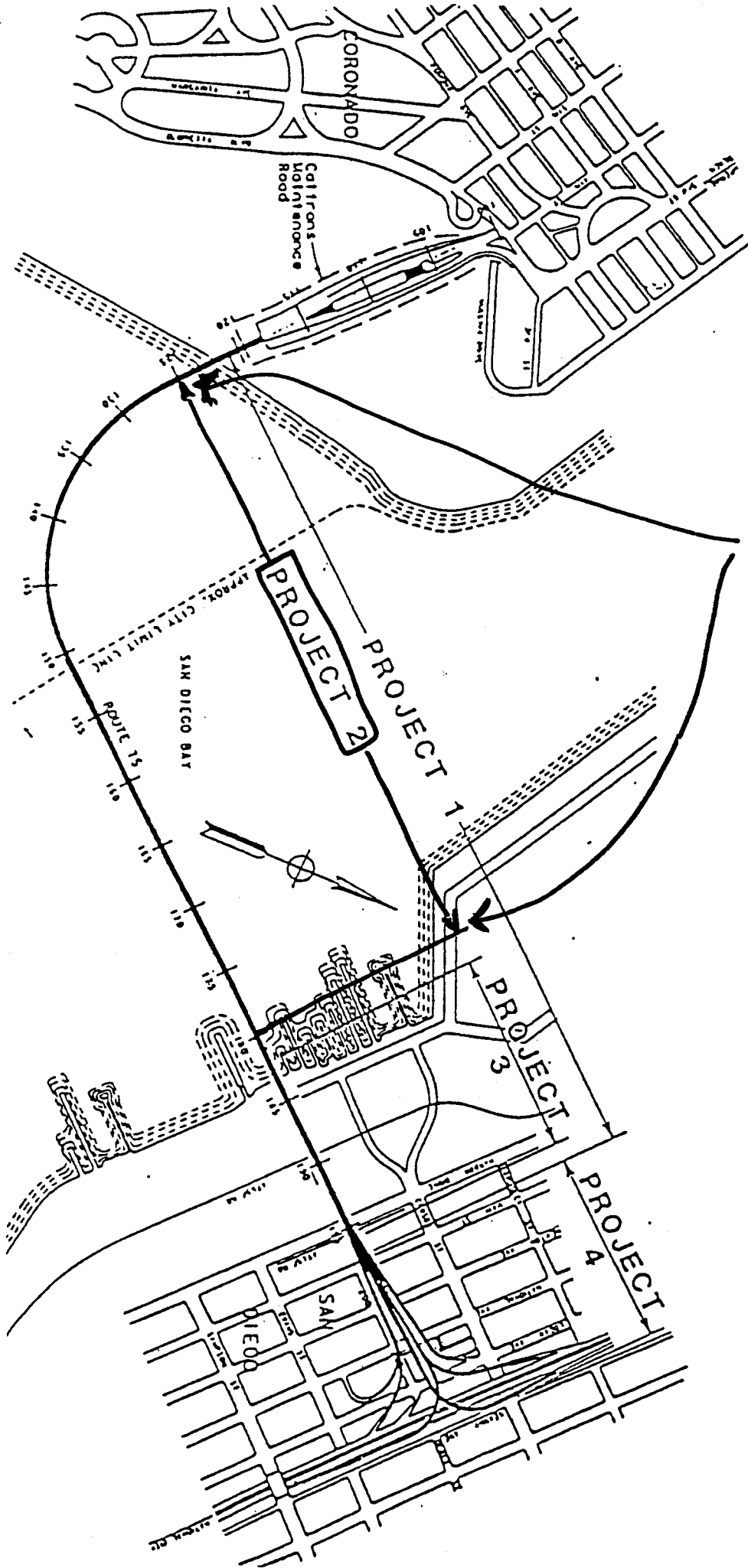
As discussed herein, the proposed project will not cause significant adverse impacts to the environment. Specifically, the project has identified potential temporary impacts on eelgrass, but includes a mitigation and monitoring program to address them. It has been found consistent with the public access 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.

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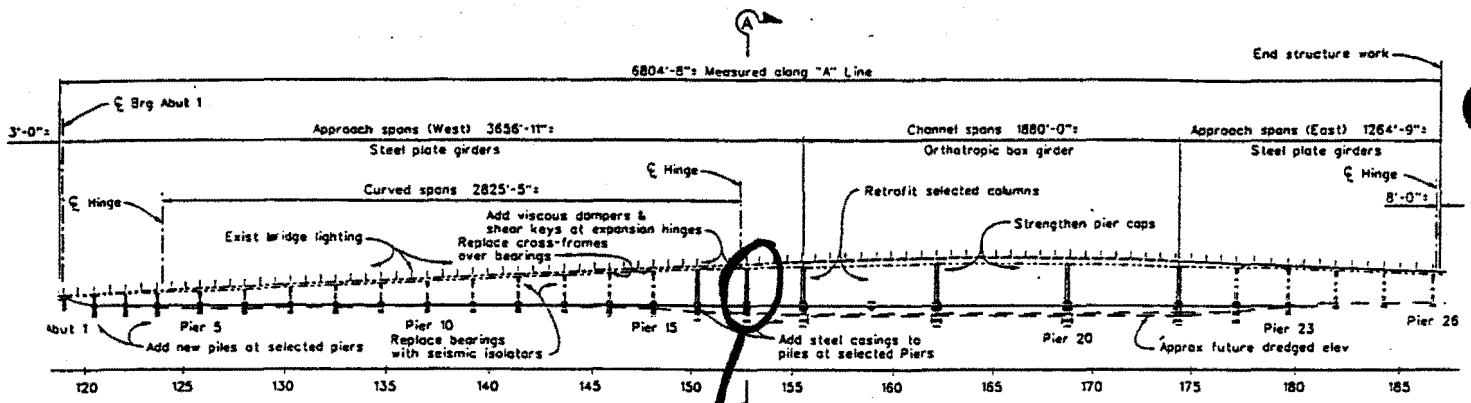
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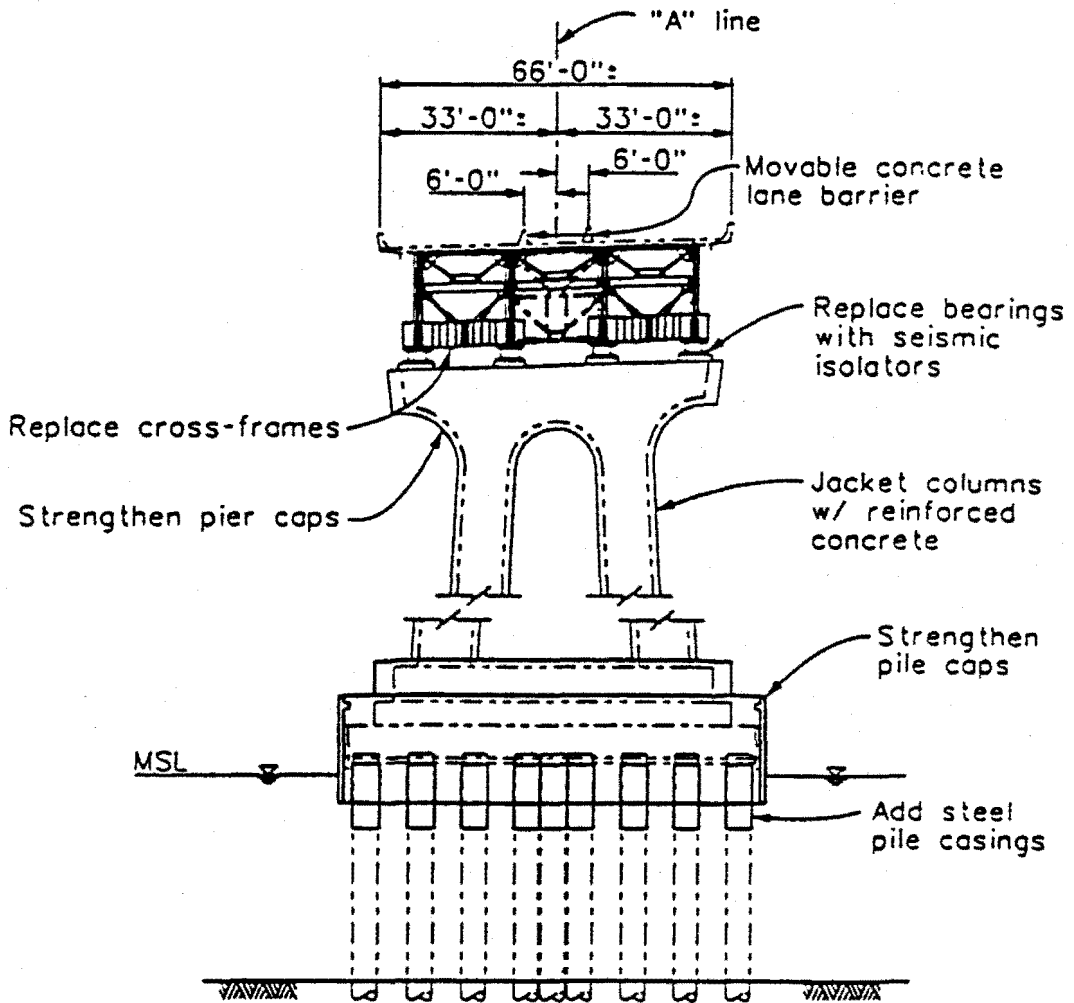
Project 2
Only

EXHIBIT NO. 1
APPLICATION NO. 6-97-167
Location Map
California Coastal Commission

6-97-167



DEVELOPED ELEVATION



SECTION A-A

1" = 30'

Pier 17 shown

EXHIBIT NO. 2
APPLICATION NO. 6-97-167
Typical Pier Work
California Coastal Commission