

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

45 FREMONT, SUITE 2000
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105-2219
VOICE AND TDD (415) 904-5200
FAX (415) 904-5400

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March 26, 1999

TO: Commissioners and Interested Persons

FROM: Peter M. Douglas, Executive Director
Steve Scholl, Deputy Director *SS*

SUBJECT: Interagency Agreement with California Department of
Transportation for Coast Highway Management Plan for Highway
One on the Big Sur Coast

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to enter into an interagency agreement to accept up to \$250,000 from the Department of Transportation to prepare portions of the Coast Highway Management Plan for Highway One in the Big Sur Coast area of Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties.

Staff Analysis:

Highway One and other state highways in the coastal zone are subject to frequent failure due to weather conditions, earth movement, and the age of the facilities. Highway One in the Big Sur Coast area is particularly vulnerable to failure, but it is also a vital transportation link for coastal residents, visitors, and commerce. The highway was closed for 3-1/2 months due to damage from El Niño-related storms in 1998.

Repair activities to re-open Highway One in Big Sur or elsewhere following storm events involve the risk of adverse impacts to coastal resources. For instance, the disposal of slide material can result in siltation in coastal streams or nearshore waters, displacement of riparian habitat, spread of exotic plant species and impacts on the viewshed from the highway. In the past, the Commission has sometimes been forced to review proposals for disposal of slide material only after-the-fact, following emergency actions to re-open a portion of Highway One. At that point, options for disposal of slide material are either extremely limited or have been precluded (depending on whether the work continues in progress or has been completed). Negotiating mitigation requirements after the fact has also proven to be extremely difficult and costly, to the point where questions arise as to the state's responsibility as a steward of public funds.

The Department of Transportation has initiated a planning process for the management of Highway One on the Big Sur Coast. While a long-term management plan is envisioned, the work has been broken into phases. Phase I includes elements such as

planning for future highway damage, repair methods, and identification of potential disposal sites for landslide material. Phase II is intended to be a comprehensive planning document (referred to as a Corridor Management Plan). Phase II will be the tool for providing long-range management to preserve, protect, and enhance the unique qualities of the corridor. Specific issues may include design guidelines, opportunities for interpretive facilities, and needs for capital improvements.

In order for the Coast Highway Management Plan to be of maximum utility, it will need to fully reflect coastal zone regulatory requirements. Those requirements include coastal permit requirements under the Coastal Act and federal consistency requirements under the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. In this context, the issue of "spillover" impacts on the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary (which extends the entire approximately 100-mile length of the Big Sur Coast) will be an important focus. Another focus will be on harmonizing highway management with the applicable certified LCP policies, including Monterey County's Big Sur Coast Land Use Plan.

The purpose of this interagency agreement is to fund a planning effort that will result in preparation of a practicable plan for keeping Highway One in Big Sur open and for protecting coastal resources in the area, reflecting both the operational needs of Caltrans and the coastal zone regulatory requirements that exist. On October 16, 1998 the Commission authorized the Executive Director to commence the first phase of joint work with Caltrans on the Highway Management Plan for Big Sur. At that time, the Commission authorized an interagency agreement in the amount of \$75,000 for work anticipated to take approximately one year.

Since that time, Caltrans and Commission staff have jointly prepared a detailed scope of work for the preparation of the Highway Management Plan, in which both Caltrans and Commission staff would participate. The scope of work cannot reasonably be accomplished in the one-year period originally envisioned. Instead, approximately two years of work would be required to complete the Plan.

In order to assure staffing of the project at an appropriate level and in order to provide sufficient time for completion of all required steps in the preparation of the plan, the staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to enter into an agreement to accept up to \$250,000 from the Department of Transportation for preparation of portions of the Coast Highway Management Plan for Highway One in Big Sur. The staff person who will be supported by this interagency agreement will be based at the Coastal Commission and will be able to draw on the resources of the Commission to prepare the plan. Such resources include information about past Commission actions, regulatory requirements of the Coastal Act and the Coastal Zone Management Act, as well as the experience and expertise of other staff members of the Commission. The target date for implementing this interagency agreement is April 30, 1999 and the work is expected to take approximately two years.