

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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TO: Commissioners and Interested Persons

FROM: Peter M. Douglas, Executive Director
Susan M. Hansch, Chief Deputy Director
Tami Grove, Statewide Development and Transportation Liaison

SUBJECT: Interagency Agreement with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to fund up to three staff positions and related expenses to provide coordinated development, review and processing of Caltrans' plans and projects

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to enter into an interagency agreement to accept up to \$1.5 million from the Department of Transportation to provide environmental guidance, coordination and review services to Caltrans-related plans and projects in Caltrans Coastal Districts 1, 4, 5, 7, 11, and 12 that are under the CCC's permit, appeal and federal consistency review jurisdiction.

Staff Analysis:

The California Department of Transportation undertakes many plans and projects in the coastal zone every year, involving construction and repair of highways, bridges, and other facilities. Transportation planning issues are interlinked with many of the land use planning issues that the Commission reviews and monitors in local coastal programs throughout the state. Further, many transportation projects are located within the Coastal Commission's original jurisdiction area for coastal permits. Other projects are located within the coastal permit jurisdiction of cities or counties with certified Local Coastal Programs (LCPs) where the local government is responsible for reviewing coastal permit applications. In most cases, however, local government actions on Caltrans projects are appealable to the Commission, and a sizeable number of these local actions are in fact appealed. Because many of these projects are significant public works, a wide array of Coastal Act issues are often implicated.

In the past, the Coastal Commission had extremely limited staff resources to devote to the timely review of Caltrans plans and projects. This was particularly a problem because of the long lead-time that is required for Caltrans project planning and design processes, where it is not uncommon for project development to take as many as ten years and early input can be critical to affecting the overall result. One of the difficulties was that staffing shortages often prevented Commission staff from participating in Project Development Team meetings as well as in the scoping of, and commenting on, critical CEQA/NEPA documents that guide Caltrans' decisions on alternatives analyses, plans and projects. As a result, Caltrans' design processes often did not adequately take into account Coastal Act and LCP policies and the environmental document record did not have sufficient information for the detailed analysis that is required of coastal permit applications and appeals. All of these factors frequently contributed to needing to redo work and redesign projects, resulting higher costs, avoidable redundancies and lengthy permit processing times. Caltrans and the Commission recognized that this situation was

generally confounding an efficient and cost-effective project design and delivery process for important public works projects and unnecessarily draining staff resources for both agencies. Accordingly, Caltrans entered into an agreement with the Coastal Commission approximately seven years ago to provide the resources necessary for a productive, coordinated, and undelayed review of Caltrans plans and projects.

This new Interagency Agreement will continue previous arrangements between Caltrans and the Commission by providing the needed resources to support the three permanent positions that were established at the Commission in FY02/03 for these purposes. The agreement provides for sufficient funding to support up to three Coastal Program Analyst III positions and additional technical services and resources needed for the Commission to effectively work with Caltrans' District staff in all 15 coastal counties, until December 31, 2009.

With these additional resources, the Commission agrees to provide such services as: participation in Caltrans' project scoping, planning, development meetings, and field reviews; identification of critical issues, key decision points and potential conflicts as early as possible; participation in Federal/State/Regional transportation planning activities and project alternative analyses and selection processes; jurisdictional determinations; early identification of coastal access and other Coastal Act and LCP coastal issues; development of context-sensitive design options that might be appropriate for consideration in coastal zone projects; review of critical environmental documents; timely analysis and processing of informationally-complete permit applications; development of programmatic approaches to achieving environmental compliance; assistance in avoiding potential violations or correcting unanticipated ones; and guidance on the development and selection of appropriate project related mitigation and monitoring activities.

The date for initiating this next phase of this continuing work is January 1, 2007. Caltrans has entered into similar agreements with other resources agencies, with the same goal of improving the design and review of transportation projects that affect a variety of resources and land uses throughout the State.