

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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April 24, 2020

TO: Commissioners and Interested Persons

FROM: John Ainsworth, Executive Director
Susan M. Hansch, Chief Deputy Director
Tami Grove, Statewide Development and Transportation Manager

SUBJECT: Interagency Agreement with California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for 2020-2025 to fund the equivalent of 10 staff positions and operating expenses to provide coordinated review and processing of Caltrans' plans and projects for public hearing and Commission action at the Coastal Commission Meeting of May 13-14, 2020

Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to enter into a five-year Interagency Agreement for 2020-2025 to accept funds up to \$12 million to cover approximately 10 staff positions and operating expenses from the Department of Transportation, subject to annual installments of fund transfers, to provide environmental assistance, coordination and review services to Caltrans-related plans and projects that are under the Commission's permit, appeal and federal consistency review jurisdiction. The contract includes staff time, travel and operating expenses.

Motion:

“I move that the Commission authorize the Executive Director or his designee to enter into a five-year Interagency Agreement with the Department of Transportation (CALTRANS) and accept up to approximately \$12 million from 2020-2025 to cover approximately 10 staff positions and operating expenses to provide coordinated review and processing of CALTRANS plans and projects. This authorization also allows the Executive Director or his designee to make routine adjustments to the Interagency Agreement as needed during the term of the Agreement.”

Staff recommends a **YES** vote.

Staff Analysis:

Caltrans undertakes many plans and projects in California's coastal zone every year, involving construction, maintenance 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. Also, many transportation projects are located within the Coastal Commission's original jurisdiction area for coastal permits. While many other projects are located within the coastal permit jurisdiction of cities or counties with certified Local Coastal Programs (LCPs), these projects are appealable to the Commission in most cases. Because a large number of these projects are significant public works, a wide array of Coastal Act issues are often involved.

Without this Interagency Agreement, the Coastal Commission would have extremely limited staff resources to devote to the review of Caltrans plans, particularly for the necessary detailed analysis of coastal permit applications and appeals. In the past, due to staffing limitations, the Commission was not always able to promptly act on Caltrans' submittals. Caltrans recognized that this situation was frequently preventing the participation of Commission staff in the early stages of alternatives analysis and environmental review of their projects, resulting in the advancement of final plans and project blueprints that did not always comport with Coastal Act and LCP policies. Too often, this situation resulted in costly re-designs and delays or permit denials of projects that represented significant investments.

Starting in March 2000, Caltrans entered into a series of Interagency Agreements with the Coastal Commission to provide additional resources needed for a timely, coordinated, and meaningful review of Caltrans plans and projects. For the past 20 years, this arrangement has generally fostered a better exchange of information between the two agencies and improved the overall design of projects in the coastal zone to be consistent with the Coastal Act. One particularly noticeable measure of success from this effort is that a number of significant public works projects approved at the local level are not now appealed to the Coastal Commission, resulting in sizeable time and cost savings to all parties involved. This additional funding has enabled the Commission to be in the position to agree to consolidating the permit review of several projects that fall within both the Commission's original and local government jurisdictions; representing considerable time savings to Caltrans.

There have been five Interagency Agreements and the current agreement which funds approximately six positions ends in November, 2020. This new proposed Interagency Agreement is the sixth agreement between CALTRANS and the Coastal Commission and this agreement will run from 2020 to 2025. Funds will be in the Commission's yearly budget as a part of the reimbursement component of the budget. The Commission staff has been co-ordinating with the Department of Finance on this Interagency Agreement. The ten positions funded through this Interagency Agreement will provide staff services

for all CALTRANS districts in the coastal zone and for collaboration with CALTRANS on statewide coastal transportation issues.

To the extent possible with the level of funding under this Interagency Agreement, the Commission agrees to provide such services as: participation in Caltrans' project scoping, development meetings, and field reviews; identification of critical issues, key decision points and potential conflicts as early as possible; input on alternative analyses and selection processes; jurisdictional determinations; early identification of applicable coastal access and other coastal policy issues; prompt reviews of environmental documents; guidance on the preparation of informationally-complete permit applications; timely review, analysis and processing of those applications; evaluation and guidance in the development and selection of appropriate mitigation and monitoring activities; involvement in State/Regional transportation planning activities, especially Regional Transportation Plans and providing for the California Coastal Trail; and, participation in transportation-related planning efforts on a local, regional or statewide basis relating to climate change, including efforts to anticipate the impacts of sea level rise on transportation infrastructure, evaluate adaptive responses, and consider related land use issues.

This Interagency Agreement will begin as soon as possible after approval by CALTRANS and the Commission and preferably no later than May or June 2020. Because there was no April 2020 Coastal Commission meeting due to Covid-19 "Stay at Home" orders, Commission authorization for this Interagency Agreement had to be postponed till May. Caltrans has entered into similar agreements with other resource agencies, with the same goal of improving the design and review of transportation plans and projects that affect a variety of resources throughout the State.