

# The Campaign for Sensible Transportation

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May 14, 2004

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
1523 Pacific Avenue  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Re: Comments on Notice of Preparation for the DEIR  
for the State Route 1 HOV Lane Widening Project

Dear Commissioners:

The following comments address in broad terms, areas involving project purposes, additional alternatives to be considered, project description and design, and project construction effects.

## Project purposes

It is stated in the Notice of Preparation (NOP) that two of the purposes of the SR 1 HOV Lane Widening Project (Project) are to “reduce congestion” and to “encourage carpooling and the use of alternative transportation modes as a means to increase transportation system capacity”. It is also asserted that the Project is expected “to reduce congestion and improve operations on local arterials that currently carry ‘cut-through’ traffic”.

A thorough analysis should be undertaken to determine if the proposed addition of lanes to SR 1 will in fact accomplish these purposes.

Many believe that the addition of lanes to an existing road does little to reduce traffic congestion, owing to the effects of induced traffic. For example, the *Master Transportation Study* recently completed for the City of Santa Cruz, states:

“When road capacity is increased, total travel time will ultimately equalize over time, until traffic moves at the previous levels of congestion. Expansion of roadway capacity cannot eliminate periods of frustrating slow speeds, due to drivers who previously:

- Used alternative routes during peak hours switch to the improved roadway (spatial convergence);
- Traveled just before or after the peak hour start to travel during those hours (time convergence); and
- Used public transportation during peak hours now switch to driving, since it has become faster (modal convergence).”

This is called the “Triple Convergence Principle”.

Therefore the effects of such induced traffic must be analyzed in the EIR. A considerable literature exists related to the topic of induced traffic; this should be researched, and an analysis of such effects applied to the current Project.

Will the added lanes actually encourage carpooling? There is literature addressing this question, which should be studied and used to analyze the effects of the Project. What fraction of current users now travel in multiple-occupant vehicles? Is this sufficient to ensure that the new HOV lanes will be used efficiently?

Will the added lanes actually encourage use of alternative transportation modes? For example, will bus ridership increase as a result of the new HOV lanes? Will the use of bicycles increase as a result of the new HOV lanes?

Some assert that an increase of road capacity will actually discourage both carpooling and the use of alternative modes such as buses, since new space on the road may encourage bus users to switch to using automobiles, as described in the “Triple Convergence Principle”. On the other hand, a newly available HOV lane allowing fast express bus traffic, may work in the other direction, at least for those who might otherwise drive an SOV in the SR 1 corridor. Which is the case? How many buses will be able to take advantage of the HOV lane?

Some believe that a widened SR 1 will actually cause more traffic on local alternate streets (for example, Soquel Drive, Freedom Boulevard) because widening the road will simply encourage the additional use of automobiles. But it is asserted in the NOP that the project is expected to reduce such congestion. Which is true, and what is the evidence to support this assertion?

Furthermore, an analysis should be made of the effect of the widened SR 1 on local streets in the urbanized areas of the county. Will a widened SR 1 encourage longer commutes? Will a widened SR 1 encourage the greater use of automobiles to commute to large employment centers such as UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College? Will a widened SR 1 encourage suburban growth in South County and beyond? Will a widened SR 1 encourage the growth of large shopping centers that are typically accessible only by automobile?

In short, a more detailed validation of the purposes and expected benefits of the Project should be undertaken.

Furthermore, there are no *goals* stated in the NOP. What are the precise goals, and how will we know if they are achieved? For example, is “reduction of congestion” thought to be the attainment of some overall Level of Service, or some Level of Service at some particular point on the road? Over what hours is it thought that the Project would reduce congestion? (It is also not clear from the NOP just which hours of the day congestion now occurs.) Are not weekends to be considered? (The NOP mentions only weekdays.) What levels of “carpooling” and “use of alternative transportation modes” are expected from the Project, and how are they to be measured?

## **More alternatives should be included in the DEIR**

### **A TDM alternative needs to be fleshed out and analyzed.**

Here is the basic question: Assuming well-defined project goals (*e.g.*, to improve LOS during commute hours at SR 1 and Morrissey by 1 or 2 degrees), how may such goals be achieved *without adding HOV lanes* to SR 1? That is, what increases in carpool, bus, rail use, bicycle use, telecommuting, flextime programs, “cash-out” programs and educational programs would be needed to achieve the Project goals?

For example, if we knew how many commuted to, say Cabrillo College, using an automobile on SR 1, a program might be put in place to lessen that number by some amount. This could be bus routes, or bicycle amenities, or a cash-out program such as in place at Stanford. Similar analyses could be made for other targeted groups of SR 1 users.

For such highly targeted demand-reduction strategies to be undertaken, it would likely be necessary to accumulate more detailed and accurate origin/destination data than currently exist.

An excellent reference is the new publication by Will Toor and Spenser Havlick entitled *Transportation & Sustainable Campus Communities—Issues, Examples, Solutions*.

Focusing on highway demand reduction could have the benefits of (i) provision of alternative modes for those who either cannot or choose not to use an automobile, (ii) reduced environmental impacts (especially noise pollution, visual pollution, air pollution), and (iii) a reduced time frame for achievement.

### **An alternative involving a combination of TDM plus a lesser degree of highway construction needs to be fleshed out and analyzed.**

One of the components of the Project Design is the inclusion of ramp metering. Another is the ability to provide access for emergency vehicles by constructing bypass lanes. Could the project goals be achieved through the use of these components plus a variety of TDM measures, without adding full lanes to SR 1?

## **Project description and design questions**

One of the components of the currently envisioned Project involves the construction of three bicycle/pedestrian overcrossings, but no description is provided as to how the locations or need of such crossings were determined. Are there other locations where such crossings could be useful? What are the goals of this component of the Project? Additional thought and community discussion needs to be addressed to this point.

It is not clear from the description of the Project exactly how the HOV lanes are to function. Usually an HOV lane is the inner lane in each direction, and functions efficiently mainly when a user finds it beneficial to use it, that is, when the mixed use lanes are clogged. In this case, how are HOVs going to enter and exit the roadway? If such drivers have to wait in line in order to exit, how will the efficiency of the HOV lane be affected?

How will the hours of operation of the HOV lanes be determined, and who would be empowered to set such hours? Who would be empowered to mandate HOV lane use, including, for example, the conversion of such a lane to mixed use?

**Project construction effects**

According to the available suggested timetable, the Project would require several years of construction to complete. What will be effect of such construction activities on (a) the use of SR 1, (b) on local street traffic, especially on routes that parallel SR 1?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter L. Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Peter Scott, for The Campaign for Sensible Transportation

cc: Congressman Sam Farr  
State Senator Bruce McPherson  
Assemblymember John Laird