

The Start of a Community Conversation about Highway 1 Improvements

The City Council has clearly heard the community's desire to be part of any future steps related to the "Calera Parkway Project." During their annual goal setting process this past spring, the Council once again confirmed the high priority of this effort by identifying it as one of the Top 10 activities for the City in 2015-16.

I have certainly been aware of the need to launch a community engagement process but action had been delayed pending the resolution of a lawsuit filed in mid-2013 that challenged the project's environmental process. (If the plaintiffs prevailed, the result could alter the nature of the improvements so starting in this uncertainty didn't make sense.) In March 2015, the trial court indicated that it would deny all of the plaintiff's claims in the suit. With the trial court's decision and other work such as the budget complete, the staff and I are now able to begin the "Community Conversation" (a term I like to use to describe this type of process because it indicates a two-way dialogue) about Highway 1 improvements.

To paraphrase Shakespeare, "to widen or not to widen" the section of Highway 1 between Westport Drive and Fassler Avenue has been a point of discussion and disagreement in Pacifica for many years. What seems not to be in dispute is that vehicle congestion exists at peak morning and evening times along that particular stretch of the highway. I say "not disputed" in part because traffic congestion is documented in the City's 1980 General Plan and the need for improvements to address it is included in the *Measure A San Mateo County Transportation Expenditure Plan* that was passed by voters in November 1988.

Solving this particular problem (reducing congestion in this area of highway) has been made especially complex because there have been three governmental agencies involved—Highway 1 belongs to the State of California (CalTrans), the funding for improvements would come from San Mateo County Transportation Authority, and, of course, the stretch of affected highway is located within the City of Pacifica's boundaries. Even so, cooperative efforts by the three agencies have been progressing since at least the mid-1990s.

In 2013, the final environmental impact report (FEIR) was completed. In it, eleven project options were evaluated based on criteria including each one's ability to address the expected congestion levels through 2035; its impact on wetlands, safety, business and bicycle access; and total cost including whether there would be ongoing operational costs.

Out of this process, the FEIR focused on a concept that would add a traffic lane in each direction between Fassler Avenue and Reina del Mar Avenue, plus other changes that brought the roadway up to “freeway standards”. This concept represented the largest viable project footprint possible which is typical of the environmental assessment process in order to analyze the maximum potential impact. ***Doing so doesn’t necessarily mean that this version of the project would be constructed.*** However, an image of the cross section that showed the freeway-sized roadway compared to the existing roadway was printed in the *Pacifica Tribune* in late 2013 or early 2014 and has been erroneously assumed by some to be the City’s final project choice.

To be clear, the Council did not approve nor accept this concept which assumes construction to freeway standards. In fact, the Council has taken no action to move forward with any project to date.

The Council has tasked me with helping clarify where we are with these efforts and bringing the larger community into the conversation—this is where you come in. The process is fairly simple: the staff and I will provide clear information, solicit feedback and then set up community meetings to provide an opportunity to talk together about the issues and the ways to address them.

This column begins the Community Conversation; here’s how you can start to get involved:

- **Visit the new “Highway 1 Transportation Planning” webpage on the City’s website** where we will post information relevant to the conversation such as a copy of the 1988 Measure A ballot measure information that listed “Highway 1 Improvements: Fassler Avenue to Westport Drive” as a project to be funded, copies of the environmental documents that I referenced, and other materials and resources that help tell the story of where we have been and where we are now.
- **Sign up to receive further information** on the City’s activities related to planning for Highway 1 improvements via a link on the webpage.

Activities this summer will include creating a “frequently asked questions” answer sheet to share project and process information, and posting an online questionnaire to help us understand the community’s awareness and knowledge of the traffic congestion issue. All of our actions will help structure the community meetings—likely to be held in the late summer or early fall—for success.

The planning activities to improve Highway 1 and address traffic congestion have been underway for more than two decades. Over the next few months, we will be sharing information and inviting residents, businesses and other community members to connect with the City around this critical issue. Our goal is to collect community input in a variety of ways from a wide range of people that includes all sides, and provide it to the Council to inform their future decisions. I hope you will join us.