



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
Transportation & Circulation Committee
and
Planning Commission
Staff Report

DATE: October 16, 2008

TO: Transportation & Circulation Committee
Planning Commission

FROM: Browning Allen, Transportation Manager

SUBJECT: **INTRODUCTION OF THE LAS POSITAS/MISSION
CIRCULATION OPTIONS REPORT PROCESS**

RECOMMENDATION:

The Transportation and Circulation Committee (TCC) and Planning Commission (PC) to hold a work session to discuss the process and development of the Las Positas/Mission Circulation Options Report.

PURPOSE AND NEED:

The Las Positas and Mission Interchanges are currently operating at or near capacity. The stretch of Highway 101 between the interchanges is the most congested section of the freeway in Santa Barbara County. The Mission Southbound off-ramp occasionally experiences ramp back ups onto the mainline freeway. Distances between ramps are short and add to the congestion friction. Additionally, Cottage Hospital, the major trauma center for the County, is accessed from these interchanges.

A Caltrans project in the 1980s created a one-way section of Calle Real which prevents access to Cottage Hospital from the Las Positas Interchange, compounding the many challenges to accessing the Hospital. Pedestrian and bicycle access in the area is also challenging. Because the interchanges are congested, local vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian traffic is heavily impacted for short distance trips to the hospital or between neighborhoods. A circulation options report is needed to develop improvements to hospital access; and eventually, a Project Study Report in order to pursue project funding opportunities.

BACKGROUND:

In 2005, Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital's Seismic Compliance and Modernization Project identified in the Environmental Impact Report that the project would contribute additional traffic to the Las Positas/Mission interchanges as well as to some surrounding intersections. One of the project's Conditions of Approval (specifically Condition 10 of Resolution 020-05), required Cottage Hospital to provide \$250,000 towards the funding of a Project Study Report (PSR) that would explore transportation improvements to the Las Positas and Mission Interchanges. The PSR is the initial step to planning, funding, and constructing needed improvements.

Staff is proposing a two-part process to fulfill this requirement. Phase I will be the development of a circulation options report. This step will include a public input process to narrow the project down to the most cost effective improvements and to make sure that Caltrans does not see any fatal flaws with the proposed improvements. Phase II will be the drafting of the PSR for Caltrans' approval and will only include the option that is developed through the public input process.

PHASE 1 - DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIRCULATION OPTIONS REPORT:

The City began Phase 1 in August 2008. IBI Group was retained by the City for the development of the circulation options report through the City's Request for Proposal process. IBI hired Penfield & Smith as their sub-consultant. Cottage Hospital will reimburse the City for the full cost of this contract.

Project Study Area and Objectives

The study area is bounded by Micheltorena Street to the East, Las Positas to the West, Modoc to the South and State and De la Vina Streets to the North (Attachment 1). The objectives of the study are:

- To understand the causes of traffic congestion in the area and the circulation inadequacies that limit access to Cottage Hospital;
- To develop various circulation options that improve freeway access and crossing within the study area; and
- To present circulation improvement options that service all modes of travel.

Existing Conditions Analysis

Over the past couple months, IBI Group has analyzed existing traffic conditions, transit service and ridership, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the designated project study area. The existing conditions analysis has also included a data collection process to obtain information regarding the generation and distribution of vehicle trips to and from Santa Barbara Cottage Hospital and surrounding land uses to better understand the need for traffic access improvements to the hospital and its general vicinity.

IBI's primary findings of the existing conditions analysis are as follows:

- High levels of traffic congestion are observed at and near the Las Positas Road and Mission Street interchanges with US-101. Several intersections near these

two interchanges are operating at unacceptable levels of service in the existing condition during one or both of the weekday peak hours.

- The existing traffic congestion at the Las Positas Road and Mission Street interchanges with US-101 impacts the ability of local residents and commuters to cross US-101 on local streets. This condition could result in the redistribution of traffic to other freeway crossing locations such as Micheltorena Street and La Cumbre Road, potentially increasing traffic congestion in other parts of the city. An alternative freeway crossing or improvements to these interchanges should be explored to address the existing traffic congestion.
- The queuing analysis of the freeway off-ramps in the study area did not identify any issues related to vehicles queuing back onto US-101 in the existing condition. However, the closely spaced on and off-ramps in the study area, particularly on the northbound side of US-101 do create weaving sections that can contribute to traffic congestion on the freeway.
- The study area is generally well-served by existing transit services, particularly for connections to Downtown Santa Barbara and the La Cumbre Plaza. However, the existing transit services provide limited connections across US-101 in the study area and between Cottage Hospital and the Goleta area.
- While there are extensive existing pedestrian facilities in the study area, there are two important missing links in pedestrian connectivity in the form of missing sidewalks along segments of Las Positas Road and Calle Real.
- Based on a review of Cottage Hospital employee residence distribution data, it is estimated that a majority of hospital employees use the freeway to access the hospital. The majority of the commuters using the freeway travel from north and west of the study area, using the southbound US-101 to access the study area. This condition reinforces the need for better connections to the hospital from the southbound US-101 off-ramps at Las Positas Road and Mission Street.

Next Steps: Preliminary Improvement Options; Stakeholder, City Boards and Public Involvement and Report Timeline

Given the results of the existing conditions analysis, the next steps in the study effort include the evaluation of circulation improvement alternatives, which will be documented in a Preliminary Improvement Options Report. Some improvement possibilities will be discussed at the PC/TCC work session on October 16th. Two public workshops will be held to discuss the development of the circulation options report and to brainstorm circulation improvement alternatives. Dates of the public workshops have not been finalized yet; although one of the workshops is anticipated to occur in November 2008. A follow up PC/TCC work session will also be planned to narrow down improvement alternatives. Continued stakeholder meetings with Cottage Hospital, Caltrans, Santa Barbara Association of Governments and Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTD) will also occur during the development of this report. Stakeholder meetings will also include discussion of potential State and Federal Grant funding opportunities for these potential improvements.

With the existing conditions analysis and Stakeholder, City Board and Public feedback on the various improvement alternatives, IBI will incorporate findings and recommendations of this study into a Final Circulations Options Report. This report will be presented to the TCC and PC prior to presenting it to the Council. It is anticipated that these reports will be presented to TCC and PC in February 2009 and to the Council in March 2009. The report will serve as the basis for the development of a Project Study Report (PSR) for the preferred improvements consistent with Caltrans guidelines

PROJECT FUNDING

At this point, there is no funding for the hospital access improvements that would be developed in the options report. The main funding source envisioned for such a project would be State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) monies. A Project Study Report (PSR) would be required in order to submit any project for STIP funding. Additionally, it would be premature to propose any improvement projects for grant funding without first knowing the costs of such a project. The options report and following PSR will provide the information needed for the funding stage of the project.

The projects that will be investigated as a part of this study are expected to be in the tens of millions of dollars. As such, funding and constructing the improvements will likely take the better part of a decade, if not longer.