

The Soquel/Morrissey Lane Widening Project

We have created this new page to provide updated information regarding the **Soquel/Morrissey Lane Widening Project**, which is referred to by Caltrans as the "**Soquel to Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project**".

To access the links in this document, point your browser to <http://sensibletransportation.org/highway1/aux/>

Background information that places this project in the context of the efforts to add lanes to Highway 1 may be found on our [highway 1 issues](#) page.

With the filing of our lawsuit on October 20, 2009 challenging the legitimacy of this project, we thought it might be helpful to create this special page. **A copy of our press release, along with a copy of the Verified Petition and Complaint may be found [here \(http://sensibletransportation.org/pdf/press_release.pdf\)](http://sensibletransportation.org/pdf/press_release.pdf) .**

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Q: What is the purpose of the lawsuit**, i.e., what do you hope to achieve?

A: Our immediate purpose is to ensure that the "Auxiliary Lanes Project" is folded into the Environmental Impact Report for the entire Highway 1 Lane Widening proposal, of which the Auxiliary Lanes Project is a segment. Caltrans and the RTC are trying to widen the highway in segments, claiming that each segment has "independent utility", but their purpose is to avoid having to consider the entire impact of the widening plan. **The public needs to know how much additional traffic (and consequent additional emission of greenhouse gases) will be generated, how long any congestion relief will last, how much the entire project will cost, whether there are viable alternatives to achieve a reduction in congestion, and what the environmental impacts of the entire project will be.**

Our longer range goal is to ensure that any analysis of the entire project considers a sufficiently broad range of alternatives so as to allow an evaluation that will achieve the desired mobility for those wishing to travel from one place to another within this key transportation corridor, whether by car, by public transit (including rail) or, for the shorter trips, by bicycle or by walking.

On October 15, our Regional Transportation Commission voted unanimously to consider engaging the services of the North American Sustainable Transportation Council (NASTC) in order to apply the Sustainable Transportation Access Rating System (STARS) to the Highway 1 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes Project. (The RTC's staff report describing this approach may be found [here \(http://www.sccrtc.org/packet/2009/0910/w0910-05.pdf\)](http://www.sccrtc.org/packet/2009/0910/w0910-05.pdf) .) **We support this approach, and hope that it will be seriously pursued.**

2. **Q: It's only one mile of highway widening. What's the big deal?**

A: If only it were just a mile! In fact the so-called "Auxiliary Lanes Project" is a head start on the nearly nine-mile "Highway 1 HOV Lanes Widening Project". It is a \$22 million mile because it lengthens the La Fonda bridge overcrossing to accommodate a future eight-lane HOV Lane Project, and builds in other features of that larger project, which still does not have a completed Environmental Impact Report. If the larger project is in fact built, portions of the "Auxiliary Lanes Project" will have to be ripped out and rebuilt to the tune of nearly \$1.5 million (in current dollars). **In other words, it is a one-mile waste of public funds.**

3. **Q: I've been driving Highway 1 for years, and with its current state of congestion it clearly needs widening. Why not just get on with it?**



Looking east at the La Fonda bridge from Highway 1. All the trees and shrubs would be removed, to be replaced by walls of concrete, with the road widened and the bridge lengthened to accommodate doubling the road width to a full eight lanes.

A: First, it is generally true that traffic congestion is not reduced by highway expansion, especially for the long term. It is also generally true that highway expansion facilitates an increase in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) within the highway corridor, which therefore results in increased greenhouse gas emissions.

Second, the "Auxiliary Lanes Project", on its own, offers no congestion relief, and will simply move the current bottleneck further down the highway to somewhere near the Soquel Drive interchange, according to Caltrans engineers.

So this project on its own does very little to benefit the highway user. Whether it would be a useful segment as part of the larger HOV Lane Widening Project is not known, because an analysis of the larger project has yet to be completed and made public. The purpose of our lawsuit is to fold the "Auxiliary Lanes Project" into the larger project so that it will get properly analyzed.

4. Q: I commute from Watsonville to Santa Cruz, and that distance is too long for bicycling for me. The bus takes too long, gets stuck in traffic and does not go where I need to go. I think the only solution is to widen Highway 1. What do you say?

A: It helps to keep in mind that a **primary goal in a transportation corridor is to facilitate mobility**, and that highway expansion is frequently counterproductive toward achieving that goal.

It is likely that many trips on Highway 1 are short—five miles or less—and could be made more attractive for bicycle or public transit modes traveling on routes other than Highway 1. **When a highway is near capacity (2000 cars per hour per lane), just a small reduction in traffic will reduce congestion, so as to allow for increased mobility for long-distance users such as yourself.**

However Caltrans has stated that they do not plan to do any origin-destination studies (or surveys) to determine the fraction of Highway 1 users making such short trips. (See [the Final Environmental Document \(http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist05/projects/soquel/pdf/final_ed.pdf\)](http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist05/projects/soquel/pdf/final_ed.pdf) , page 449.) **One of our longer range goals is to ensure that such studies are undertaken and analyzed.**

5. Q: I thought that in 2004 with Measure "J" we already voted against widening the highway. What's going on?

A: That is the purpose of our lawsuit. We want to stop another piecemeal widening project and keep Caltrans honest by at least waiting until the Environmental Impact Report for the whole HOV Lanes Project (from Santa Cruz to La Selva Beach) is completed and the public has a chance to weigh in again. Without an EIR that also considers all alternatives to widening Highway 1 we may only see one piecemeal project after another in violation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

6. Q: Isn't the Regional Transportation Commission trying to make the HOV Lanes project a "green" project?

A: There is a recent effort by the RTC to consider the HOV Lanes project as a pilot project for a Portland, Oregon group (the North American Sustainable Transportation Council) that is experimenting with that idea. (See the RTC's staff report [here \(http://www.sccrtc.org/packet/2009/0910/w0910-05.pdf\)](http://www.sccrtc.org/packet/2009/0910/w0910-05.pdf) .) **We are in favor of going green. The first step that Caltrans and the RTC could take toward a greener project is to agree to stop the "Auxiliary Lanes Project" and include it in the Environmental Impact Report for the HOV Lanes project, so that a full analysis of greenhouse gas impacts and all reasonable alternatives to the eight-lane widening proposal takes place.** Right now Caltrans is refusing to do a real quantitative greenhouse gas emissions analysis on the "Auxiliary Lanes Project".

7. Q: We now have the \$22 million allocated by the state and federal governments for the Auxiliary Lanes project. Shouldn't we use the money?

A: Spending precious transportation dollars on a poorly conceived project that is incomplete and ineffective is not a good use of our tax monies. The "Auxiliary Lanes Project" does not deal with many real needs in its one mile stretch. There is only confusing, hazardous and difficult bicycle access across Highway 1 at the Morrissey interchange which is being ignored. The identified need for another pedestrian/bicycle overcrossing with a

new bridge at Trevethan is also being ignored. Pedestrian access on Soquel Drive across Highway 1 is non-existent on the south (east) side of the bridge, and although there is a sidewalk on the north (west) side of the bridge, access to it is hazardous. Instead the La Fonda overcrossing, where there is already pedestrian access on both sides across the highway, is being lengthened to the tune of \$3.2 million, in order to accommodate a future eight-lane HOV Lanes project. The "Auxiliary Lanes Project" is just a bandaid that will not solve by itself the traffic congestion on Highway 1. **We need better transportation planning, not inadequate projects that waste public funds.** The \$22 million is unlikely to vanish. Another better use for these funds can be found.

8. Q: I've heard (and seen) that when a highway is widened, cars just seem to fill up the available space. What about such "induced traffic"?

A: Induced traffic (a.k.a. "induced demand" or "induced travel") on a widened highway is defined as the increase in total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) compared with what might otherwise occur if the highway were not widened. In the finalized environmental study for the project (available [here \(http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist05/projects/soquel/pdf/final_ed.pdf\)](http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist05/projects/soquel/pdf/final_ed.pdf)) Caltrans claims (on page 94), without providing any science-based evidence, that "highway improvement projects... do not generate vehicular trips themselves". Yet, their own traffic consultants' unpublished traffic modeling report, which we obtained portions of, predicts that with just the "Auxiliary Lanes" added, Highway 1 average daily traffic would increase northbound in the auxiliary lanes area by 43% by the year 2035. The traffic increase is predicted to be yet more spectacular, if the proposed next-step HOV Lanes Project, with a total of eight lanes down Highway 1, was also to be built. Worse, that surge in traffic numbers is from a traffic model that apparently does not include a means to account for induced trips, those new vehicle trips that result from the initial attractiveness for drivers of the new highway capacity. On top of that, the consultants also forecast new downstream bottlenecks occurring on Highway 1 right from opening day of the auxiliary lanes.

9. Q: The description of the "Auxiliary Lanes Project" notes that bicycle and pedestrian improvements would be part of the project. Shouldn't we support these improvements?

A: These bicycle and pedestrian improvements are quite minor, and do not include a number of needed and contemplated improvements.

It is true that the La Fonda Bridge would, in addition to being lengthened, be widened in order to accommodate widening of the existing sidewalk and the addition of bicycle lanes. However La Fonda Avenue has only a bike lane on its east side south of Highway 1, and no bike lanes at all north of Highway 1. The City of Santa Cruz's "Bicycle Transportation Plan" does not give high priority for the construction of additional bike lanes on La Fonda. Moreover traffic on the La Fonda bridge is quite light except during the 20 minutes or so when students are arriving at or departing from Harbor High School. It is not at the moment an especially hazardous route for either pedestrians or bicyclists.

The current four-foot sidewalks on the bridge are adequate, as shown in this photo, taken at around 3 pm, just after school let out. Note that there is ample room for students to walk side-by-side.



The La Fonda bridge right after school lets out

On the other overcrossings of Highway 1 in the Soquel-Morrissey project, no improvements are scheduled for either pedestrians or bicyclists.

The Soquel Drive overcrossing currently has bike lanes on both sides, but no sidewalk on the east ("south") side. **If you're bicycling north on Morrissey, thinking about crossing Highway 1, think twice, because you'll be met with this sign, shown below.**

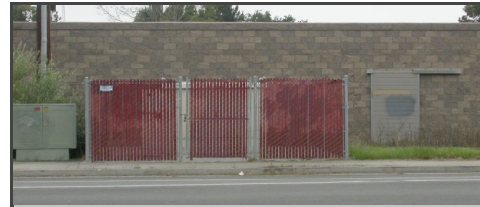


Approaching the Morrissey bridge from the South

Riding a bike northward over the bridge is illegal. What at first looks like a bike lane (next to the sign) becomes a mere gutter on the north side, and of course there's no sidewalk on the east ("south") side of the bridge. (There is a wide sidewalk on the west side.)

Most distressing is that a planned pedestrian crossing of Highway 1 at Trevethan Avenue is not included in the current project, even though it would provide an attractive route for those wishing to reach DeLaveaga Elementary School from areas south of Highway 1.

This desirable crossing is now part of the larger **HOV Lane Widening Project**. If it were constructed, would these brand new sound walls have to be reconstructed? And what about those utility boxes? Here's a



Site of the Trevethan Avenue pedestrian and bike crossing

photo, looking south at the sound wall from Trevethan Avenue.

10. Q: I appreciate your efforts. What can I do to help?

A: Lawsuits are costly, and this one is no exception. Please consider making a contribution, either through our "[support the campaign](#)" page, or by simply sending a check in any amount (put "lawsuit" on the memo line) to **The Campaign for Sensible Transportation, P.O. Box 7927, Santa Cruz, CA 95061**. If you have questions, please call Paul Elerick (our current chairperson) at (831) 688-2304. If you'd like to help in other ways, please attend our next meeting. [Contact us](#), or call Paul to find out when and where our next meeting will be.

Additional Documents

Copies of the two letters submitted by the Campaign for Sensible Transportation, containing our comments on the Draft Environmental Document (along with Caltrans responses), are reprinted in the [Final Environmental Document \(http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist05/projects/soquel/pdf/final_ed.pdf\)](#) , on pages 308 (330) through 355 (377). (The numbers in parentheses are the actual pages in the 545-page pdf document.)