

DATE ISSUED: March 21, 2001

REPORT NO. 01-038

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council
Docket of March 27, 2001

SUBJECT: Sorrento Valley Road - Industrial Court to Carmel Valley Road

REFERENCE: Manager's Report No. 99-04

SUMMARY:

Issues - Should the City Council 1) Direct the City Manager to move forward with design and permit applications for the proposed CIP project to improve existing detoured Sorrento Valley Road; 2) Amend the consultant agreement with BRW, Inc. to provide for the design and permit applications for the CIP project; and 3) Certify the Final Environmental Impact Report (LDR No. 99-0220/SCH 99071035) for Sorrento Valley Road?

Manager's Recommendations - 1) Direct the City Manager to move forward with design and permit applications for the proposed project to improve existing detoured Sorrento Valley Road; 2) Execute a third amendment to the consultant agreement with BRW for final design and acquisition of permits for the proposed project; and 3) Certify the Final Environmental Impact Report for Sorrento Valley Road.

Fiscal Impact - Funds necessary for final design and permit applications are available in the CIP budget for Sorrento Valley Road - Industrial Court to Carmel Valley Road (CIP No. 52-330.0).

Environmental Impact - The City of San Diego as Lead Agency under CEQA has prepared and completed the EIR, LDR No. 99-0220, dated November 6, 2000, and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program covering this activity.

BACKGROUND

In 1990, the City Council considered two projects that were related due to their proximity to each other, the realignment and widening of Sorrento Valley Road and the construction of Sewer Pump Station 65. On September 10, 1990, the Council, in considering an Environmental Impact Report for both projects, certified the report in respect to the Pump Station 65/Force Main project but determined that Sorrento Valley Road should not be widened from two lanes to four lanes at a design speed of 55 mph. Instead, it directed City staff to explore options relating to straightening and improving Sorrento Valley Road as a two lane collector.

In the mid-1990's Sorrento Valley Road from Carmel Valley Road to Carmel Mountain Road was temporarily closed to allow for the construction of the State Route 56/Interstate 5 ramp and the Pump Station 65/Force Main project. In 1998, the temporary road detour was no longer necessary and City staff looked at the feasibility of permanently closing the road or determining

if a roadway improvement project could be designed with minimal impact to the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon. By acknowledging that a 55 mph design speed was not achievable with the Lagoon constraints and not necessary for the functionality of the collector street, an alignment with minimal lagoon impacts was determined to be feasible. Presentations were given to the surrounding community groups and a task force of interested parties. The task force explored road opening alternatives but did not reach consensus on a preferred alternative. They did, however, provide recommendations on road improvement features which would be important to the viability of the lagoon as well as the functionality of the road.

On January 19, 1999, the City Council considered an item to modify the CIP project description to improve the road, but restrict vehicular access during night-time and weekend hours. The City Council adopted a resolution (No. R-291196) directing the City Manager to study the proposed modification to the CIP project and evaluate the Sorrento Valley Road Task Force recommendations.

In January 2000, Citizens for Improved Sorrento Access requested removal of the detour considering that nearby construction activities were complete. Staff prepared plans to remove the detour and rehabilitate the road with minor improvements. However, during the plan review process on the interim project, the California Coastal Commission determined that a coastal development permit was required. Subsequently, two counteractive lawsuits were filed by the Coastal Conservancy and Citizens for Improved Sorrento Access. As part of the Settlement Agreements to those lawsuits, it was decided and agreed upon that no action would be taken to remove the detour from Sorrento Valley Road until the Environmental Impact Report was submitted to the City Council for consideration and certification.

DISCUSSION

City staff and consultants have studied the alternatives as directed on January 19, 1999, and have prepared an environmental impact report addressing the issues associated with each alternative. The proposed project recommended by the City Manager recognizes the importance of restoring Sorrento Valley Road as a vital, century-old transportation link while respecting the environmental sensitivity of the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon. The project would end the vehicular detour on Sorrento Valley Road and includes features to improve drainage and increase the radius of curves in the road to improve road safety. The project also includes Class II bike lanes and water quality best management practices, as well as other design features to minimize environmental impacts, and allows for enhancement of the adjacent Los Peñasquitos Lagoon with habitat restoration of excess right-of-way resulting from the realignment.

The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) evaluates the following environmental issues in relation to the project: Land Use, Air Quality, Geology/Soils, Hydrology/Water Quality/Drainage, Biological Resources, Noise, Cultural Resources, Paleontological Resources, Traffic/Circulation, Visual Quality/Landform Alteration, and Recreation. It also evaluates cumulative and growth-inducing impacts, as well as alternatives to the proposed project components and the overall project.

The EIR indicates that the Sorrento Valley Road project's direct and/or cumulative impacts on

the following environmental issues can be lessened or avoided if all the proposed mitigation measures recommended in the final EIR are implemented - Hydrology/Water Quality/Drainage, Biological Resources, Paleontological Resources. The final EIR indicates that the Sorrento Valley Road project will have significant direct and/or cumulative impacts with regard to Land Use, Visual Quality/Landform Alteration, Recreation and Traffic Circulation (compared to temporary closure baseline) that would remain significant and unmitigable. Implementation of the project would not result in an increase to cumulative impacts beyond those disclosed in the EIR. Please refer to the EIR for additional and complete discussion of alternatives and impacts.

The proposed Sorrento Valley Road project makes the wildlife corridor under the proposed road as functional as pragmatically possible by: (1) maximizing the height of the Caltrans' Carmel Valley Creek bridge, (2) ensuring sediment maintenance under the bridge, (3) incorporating wing fencing to direct wildlife through the corridor, and (4) restoring and enhancing habitat within the project area as a key component. As indicated above, project impacts to wetlands are mitigable. In addition to habitat restoration, mitigation measures include exotics removal and a range of other options to enhance the overall function and viability of the Los Peñasquitos Lagoon. Upon completion of the project, it is anticipated that the City would transfer any excess property west of the Sorrento Valley Road right-of-way to the California Department of State Parks for inclusion into the State Reserve.

Project Implementation

A third amendment to the consultant agreement is proposed. This amendment will provide funding for the acquisition of environmental permits and final design including plans, specifications and estimates for construction of the improvements for CIP projects as outlined in the final EIR.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Amend the CIP project to provide for the permanent closure of Sorrento Valley Road. This alternative was analyzed in Section 9.1.2 of the EIR and was identified as an environmentally preferred alternative that does not meet all of the project objectives. The Torrey Pines Community Plan and North City Local Coastal Program Land Use Plan currently show Sorrento Valley Road as a transportation facility, and permanent closure of the road would necessitate a community plan and local coastal program amendment, as well as a possible street vacation. Additionally, the EIR would need to be revised and recirculated for public review. Closure would result in significant traffic and circulation impacts to a number of roadway segments and intersections throughout the region, when compared to the traditional open roadway baseline. The California Vehicle Code and Streets and Highway Code require that, in order to permanently close public roads, the City must hold a noticed public hearing and find that the road is no longer needed for vehicular traffic and is unnecessary for present or prospective use.
2. Amend the CIP project to provide for restriction of vehicular access during night-time and weekend hours. This alternative was analyzed in Section 9.1.1 of the final EIR. There are legal limitations imposed by the California Vehicle Code, as identified in the

draft findings for the EIR, that preclude implementation of this alternative and make the Restricted Vehicular Access alternative legally infeasible. State Legislative action would be needed to address the California Vehicle Code restrictions in order for this alternative to be considered viable. The City Council would need to seek legislative relief in order to pursue the Restricted Vehicle Access Alternative, with night time closure and day time opening via mechanized gates. The EIR would need to be revised and recirculated for public review.

Respectfully submitted,

Frank Belock
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Approved: George Loveland
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BELOCK/BOEKAMP/JM/KS