



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: July 26, 2006 REPORT NO: 06-102
ATTENTION: Council President and City Council
Docket of Aug. 1, 2006
SUBJECT: University City North/South Transportation Study

REQUESTED ACTION:

Authorize the implementation of the Regents Road Bridge Alternative; and Certifying that the information contained in Project No. 27445 has been completed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and State CEQA Guidelines, and that said Environmental Impact Report reflects the independent judgment of the City of San Diego as a Lead Agency; Stating for the record that the final EIR has been considered prior to selecting the Regents Road Bridge Alternatives; and Adopting the Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations; and Adopting the Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Regents Road Bridge Alternative; and Initiating a community plan amendment to delete Genesee Avenue Widening Alternative from the University Community Plan.

MAYOR'S RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt the Resolutions

SUMMARY:

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDING REGENTS ROAD BRIDGE

On the basis of the evaluation of the various alternatives in the EIR, and in light of social and economic considerations, the Mayor is recommending that the City Council select the Regents Road Bridge Alternative and initiate an amendment to remove the Genesee Avenue widening from the University Community Plan. The merits of removing the Genesee Avenue widening would be examined during subsequent consideration of the amendment and associated CEQA review. Thus, this discussion focuses on the effects of constructing the Regents Road Bridge.

As noted previously, the Mayor is recommending moving forward with the bridge because of a number of social and economic benefits. These are described in the Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations included as Attachments A and B to this report, and summarized below:

Improved Connectivity within University City. Connecting Regents Road would enable residents in the western portion of South University as well as the La Jolla Colony development to reach sources of everyday goods and services in the community more directly. The connection would also facilitate day-to-day automobile travel in the community, as well as

provide alternatives to the private automobile. Pedestrian and bicycle travel between South and North University would be encouraged with the bridge, which would be consistent with the Bike Master Plan. Transit vehicles could better serve the western portions of the community, by utilizing a route that currently does not exist.

Reduced Fire and Paramedic Response Time. The connection of Regents Road could reduce the emergency response time in the western portion of South University City. For example, at present, fire and paramedic vehicles from Fire Station 35, responding to an incident at Regents Road and Governor Drive covers a distance of 2.57 miles and (assuming no traffic delays) takes 4.2 minutes. With the connection of Regents Road, those emergency vehicles would have to travel only 1.5 miles and could arrive at the same location (again, assuming no traffic delays) in 2.5 minutes. Similarly, and again as an example, engines responding from Fire Station 27 in Clairemont have to cover 3.86 miles (taking 6.3 minutes) to respond to an incident at Regents Road and Arriba; with the Regents Road bridge, vehicles from Fire Station 27 travels only 2.57 miles and can arrive in 4.6 minutes. (Memorandum from Fire Chief Tracy Jarman, July 19, 2006).

Improved Emergency Access. Currently, Genesee Avenue is the only local roadway available for emergency access and/or evacuation between South and North University. Connecting Regents Road would provide an additional route for both emergency access and resident evacuation, thus reducing the congestion that would otherwise result on Genesee Avenue as the only avenue for ingress and egress in an emergency situation. Further, Regents Road would provide a critical alternative route for both emergency vehicles and residents/visitors to the community, in the event that Genesee Avenue were closed or highly congested during an emergency.

Improved Recreational Access to Rose Canyon. The Regents Road Bridge Alternative includes the construction of a paved parking lot and improved trail access for visitors to the Rose Canyon Open Space. The terminus of Regents Road on the south side of Rose Canyon has historically been used as a primary access point for the Rose Canyon open space because it avoids having to cross the railroad tracks. Currently, visitors park in the dirt at the end of the road. A 12-space parking lot including disabled-access spaces would be constructed on the west side of the roadway approaching the bridge. In addition, the upper portion of the trail would be reconstructed to better meet ADA requirements.

Construction Impacts. Construction of the Genesee Avenue Widening Alternative and the Grade Separation Alternative would be difficult and disruptive. Construction would need to be staged since traffic would have to be maintained on the facility. This constraint complicates the construction activity and worsens the length of time adjacent residents and businesses would be impacted.

Proportionate Distribution of Local Traffic. Currently, the vast majority of intra-community trips between South and North University City occur on Genesee Avenue. The connection of Regents Road would allow traffic to be distributed over two rather than one roadway.

BASIS FOR RECOMMENDING INITIATION OF AMENDMENT TO EXPLORE MERITS AND CONSEQUENCES OF REMOVING GENESEE AVENUE WIDENING FROM THE UCP

The Mayor's recommendation for initiating a community plan amendment to delete Genesee Avenue Widening Alternative from the University Community Plan, as noted above, would require subsequent consideration of the amendment and associated CEQA review. This is based on the following factors:

Neighborhood Character Impact along Genesee Avenue. As described in the EIR, widening Genesee Avenue would result in the loss of over 100 mature trees within the existing median and construction of retaining walls along much of the widened segment. This changes would have a significant impact on the character of the neighborhood along the widening. Changing the classification of Genesee Avenue from 6 to 4 lanes in the community plan would eliminate this impact.

Encroachment into Private Property along Genesee Avenue. As described in the EIR, widening Genesee Avenue would result in varying degrees of encroachment into residential as well as commercial property. This encroachment would have a financial impact on the City due to the cost of acquiring the necessary right of way. It would also have an impact on residents by diminishing their outdoor areas and bringing traffic noise closer to their homes. Businesses would be adversely affected by loss of property and the adverse affect on business during construction and modification of their existing operations to accommodate the widened roadway. Changing the classification of Genesee Avenue from 6 to 4 lanes in the community plan would eliminate this impact.

DISCUSSION

Historically, Regents Road has been planned to cross Rose Canyon to connect South and North University City. In December 1959, the City Council adopted the first Master Plan for the University Community to, "Assure that the area adjacent to the proposed site for UCSD can fully satisfy the requirements for the development of a compatible community and a local highway system for the service and convenience of a major campus." Figure 3 of this master plan showed two connections across Rose Canyon along the general alignments of Regents Road and Genesee Avenue.

In 1971, the circulation section of the UCP was updated to include the following statements: "The network of major streets proposed for the community will provide maximum auto accessibility to and from the various neighborhoods and the University. Particular attention has also been given to providing good access to the Town Center." The Circulation Figure showed the Regents Road connection over Rose Canyon. One of the proposals of this section was that, "Regents Road should be extended northerly from its present terminus at Governor Drive to Genesee Avenue as a four lane major street."

In the 1983 UCP, Regents Road was still identified as a circulation element road across Rose Canyon. This plan specifically identified development intensity based upon the anticipated circulation system which included the Regents Road bridge.

The current UC plan, adopted in 1987, continues to show Regents Road as a 4-lane facility connecting South and North University City across Rose Canyon.

In the early 1990's, the City initiated preliminary design and environmental studies for the connection of Regents Road in accordance with the Transportation Element. During this process, a number of community residents and environmental groups expressed concern over the impact of the bridge on the natural environment and recreational value of Rose Canyon. In addition, residents along the existing portions of Regents Road expressed concern over the increase in traffic volume resulting from connecting the two roadway segments. Concerns focused on safety issues related to children walking to school as well as noise impacts on nearby residents. The initial design efforts were subsequently placed on hold by the City.

In response to the concerns expressed by members of the community, the City initiated the University City North/South Transportation Corridor (UCNSTC) Study. This study included two principal elements: preliminary design and environmental review. In January 2003, the City undertook the UCNSTC Study to examine options available to improve traffic flow between the northern and southern portions of University City. This study was focused on examining a variety of potential solutions rather than concentrating solely on connecting Regents Road and widening Genesee Ave. The goal was to develop various combinations of roadway changes, referred to as "Alternatives", which could reduce traffic congestion on roadways connecting the southern and northern portions of the community.

To ensure that all potential alternatives were considered, the City hired a consultant team and selected a Public Working Committee (PWC) to advise the City on available options. The PWC had a membership of 30 people including residents, businesses and other stakeholders in the community. The PWC met regularly for six months in 2003. Initially, the PWC reviewed the nature of the traffic congestion facing the community and the reasons for the problems. Subsequently, the PWC evaluated a wide variety of transportation solutions identified by the City's consultant team and provided input regarding the desirability of the solutions.

Ultimately, the City in cooperation with the PWC identified the seven alternatives for improving traffic flow in the community. They are as follows:

Genesee Avenue Widening and Regents Road Bridge Alternative (also called the Community Plan Alternative). This alternative assumed implementation of the ultimate configuration of Genesee Avenue and Regents Road as identified in the UCP Transportation Element. This would include widening Genesee Avenue to six lanes and connection of Regents Road across Rose Canyon as a four lane roadway.

This alternative would include other modifications to the local roadways which were identified in the process of the UCNSTC study. Collectively, these modifications are referred to as "Limited Roadway Change" (LRC). Since these changes would benefit traffic flow regardless of Genesee Avenue Widening or the Regents Road Bridge, the LRC improvements were assumed to be a part of each alternative, except for the No Project Alternative. The three basic elements of the LRC are as follows:

- Adding a second left-turn lane along southbound Genesee Avenue to east bound SR-52;
- Adding a second left-turn lane from southbound Regents Road to east bound SR-52; and

- Adding a second westbound left-turn and an exclusive westbound right-turn lane at the intersection off Governor Drive and Genesee Avenue.

Genesee Avenue Widening Alternative. This alternative would involve adding a travel lane in each direction between SR-52 and Nobel Drive in an effort to increase the capacity of this roadway to carry anticipated traffic volumes. It would include all of the limited roadway changes described previously but would not include the Regents Road Bridge.

Regents Road Bridge Alternative. This alternative would involve construction of two separate, parallel, two-lane bridge structures across Rose Canyon to connect the existing ends of Regents Road. It would include all of the limited roadway changes described previously. Genesee Avenue would not be widened.

Grade Separation Alternative. This alternative would involve construction of a grade separation structure at the intersection of Genesee Avenue and Governor Drive. The two inside lanes of Genesee Avenue (one in each direction) would be lowered to pass under Governor Drive without signalization. It would include all of the limited roadway changes described earlier. This alternative would not include the Regents Road Bridge.

Grade Separation and Regents Road Bridge Alternative. This alternative would include the grade separation at the Genesee Avenue/Governor Drive and the bridge to connect Regents Road. It would include all of the limited roadway changes described below. None of the widening included in the Genesee Avenue Widening Alternative would be undertaken.

Limited Roadway Changes Alternative. This alternative would construct all of the limited roadway changes discussed earlier but would not widen Genesee Avenue, the Regents Road Bridge nor construct a grade separation at Genesee Avenue/Governor Drive.

No Project Alternative. The No Project Alternative assumes: (1) no widening would occur along Genesee Avenue, (2) no Regents Road Bridge across Rose Canyon and (3) no grade separation at the Genesee Avenue and Governor Drive intersection. In addition, none of the limited roadway changes would occur. However, the balance of the future roadway improvements included in the UCP Public Facilities Financing Plan as well as mass transit projects envisioned by the RTP prepared by SANDAG were assumed to occur.

Once these seven alternatives were identified and preliminary design completed for each, an EIR was prepared to evaluate the potential impacts of each of the alternatives. In deference to the broad range of opinions on the subject, the EIR did not identify a preferred project but evaluated each alternative equally. The primary goal of this approach was to allow the decision-makers to select an alternative based on a comparison of environmental consequences combined with social and economic factors associated with each alternative.

The EIR was circulated for public review between November 23, 2004 and April 16, 2005. During the public review period, a total of 373 comment letters, outlining over 3,000 individual comments, were received from public agencies, private organizations, and individuals. Volumes V.A and V.B of the Final EIR contain a list of those who commented and detailed responses to each of the comments.

The prospect of constructing Regents Road Bridge has deeply divided the University community for nearly two decades. Many members of the public have wanted the EIR to rank the alternatives considered in the UCNSTC Study on the basis of environmental issues. Such a ranking is problematic because different groups in the community assign different weights to different factors. Efforts to achieve compromise have been unsuccessful.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Implementation of the Regents Road Bridge Alternative would require design and refinement of the preliminary estimates. The first stage of implementation would be design and would require future council action for a consultant agreement. A Community Plan Amendment to delete the Genesee Avenue Widening Alternative would likely be a General Fund supported activity to complete land use and other community plan level studies and process necessary to support the deletion action.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL AND/OR COMMITTEE ACTION:

Consultant Agreement (R-297850) adopted April 21, 2003; First Amendment to Consultant Agreement (R-301102) adopted December 5, 2005.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS:

Over the past three and a half years, the City has focused on providing residents, businesses and other interested parties with the most current and up-to-date information about the project. In addition to the creation of a Public Working Committee (referenced earlier in this report), a Web site was established and maintained, information materials were drafted and distributed, interested parties email and mailing databases were created for project information dissemination, and a scoping meeting and two public information sessions were held.

Study Web site. At the onset of the study process, an independent web site (www.ucnorthsouth.com) was established. The web site was updated on a regular basis with information and news. During the PWC process, the meeting agendas, summaries and presentations for each of the 10 meetings, along with the committee's final report were posted for public access. From this web site, questions, comments or concerns about the project could be emailed to the City. All emails were reviewed and responded to within one business day. In addition, there was a page where interested parties could sign up to receive email or mail updates. All contact information gathered through the web site was added to the study interested parties database.

Information Materials. One fact sheet and one "frequently asked questions" document were prepared to highlight the purpose and need of the study. These materials were posted on the project web site and made available at all PWC and public information meetings. Two study articles were also drafted for publication in local news publications and organization newsletters. These articles provided milestone updates about the study's progress and next steps. Another outreach mechanism utilized was a project-specific newsletter. Three editions of the newsletter were drafted, printed and distributed to all residents and businesses on the project database. Not only did these newsletters contain information about the study, they also noticed the scoping

meeting and public information sessions. News releases were also drafted and distributed to local media outlets with project announcements and updates.

Interested Parties Database. Over the course of the outreach efforts, contact information for residents, businesses, stakeholders and interested parties was gathered and assembled into one project database. This database was used for the newsletter distributions. Email addresses were also captured in this database. Several email announcements were drafted and distributed to the email database.

Scoping Meeting. A scoping meeting was held on Oct. 23, 2003 to provide an opportunity for community and business members to provide input on what issues should be evaluated in the draft EIR. Approximately 50 speakers were given two-minute intervals in which to provide their comments for consideration in the draft EIR process. Written comments were accepted as well and carried equal weight.

Information Sessions. Two public information sessions were held in the community to provide the public with background information on the project. Display boards and project team members were available to provide answers to questions and clarify information. The first information session was held prior to the formal scoping meeting at University City High School; 119 people attended the scoping meeting and information session. The second was held on Dec. 9, 2004 at the Doyle Park Community Center; 174 people attended.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND PROJECT IMPACTS:

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

As a City-initiated project, selection of the Regents Road Bridge Alternative no property owners, developers or businesses have a direct financial interest. However, as indicated by the 373 comment letters received on the EIR and the past controversy associated with the bridge, a number of individuals, businesses and organizations within the community are interested in the outcome of the Council's decision with respect to transportation improvements within the community and Rose Canyon, in particular.

It should be noted that the procurement advertising for the EIR preparation envisioned that the selected consultant would also prepare final engineering plans if any transportation improvements were to be ultimately selected by the Council.

PROJECT IMPACTS

The Final EIR concludes that implementation of the Regents Road Bridge Alternative would result in significant impacts related to land use and planning, biology, noise, neighborhood character/aesthetics, landform alteration, geology/soils, recreation, hydrology/water quality, cultural resources, paleontological resources, and human health and public safety. Unlike projects involving development, the Regents Road Alternative would not result in significant impacts with respect to traffic due to the fact that it would not generate trips and would allow traffic between South and North University City to travel two roadways rather than one. Therefore, traffic impacts are not considered significant.

The significant environmental impacts related to the Regents Road Bridge Alternative are summarized below. The ability of the mitigation measures contained in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) to reduce these impacts is also discussed. The MMRP is included with this report as Attachment C.

To facilitate an overall comparison of the environmental consequences of the Regents Road Bridge Alternative with the other six alternatives, Table S-3 from the EIR is included with this report as Attachment D.

Neighborhood Character/Aesthetics. The Regents Road Bridge would result in the obstruction of vistas or scenic views from public viewing areas along the rim of the canyon as well as within the canyon floor along the hiking and biking trails. The introduction of a bridge spanning the canyon would significantly impact the aesthetic character of this portion of Rose Canyon by introducing a large, manmade concrete structure. The EIR concludes that no mitigation measures are available to reduce significant aesthetic impacts of the Regents Road bridge component to below a level of significance.

Landform Alteration. A ridge located in the approach to the south end of the Regents Road Bridge would be significantly altered. Cut slopes would approach 40 feet while fill slopes would reach a maximum height of 70 feet. The EIR concludes that no mitigation measures are available to reduce these significant landform alteration impacts to below a level of significance.

Recreation. The Regents Road Bridge would result in significant impacts to recreation activities within Rose Canyon. The Regents Road Bridge would permanently alter the existing noise environment and visual quality of the part of Rose Canyon crossed by the new bridge. The EIR concludes that no mitigation measures are available to reduce significant recreation impacts to below a level of significance.

Biological Impacts. While the bridge would minimize roadway impacts by spanning the canyon, construction of the bridge would impact 1.23 acres of wetlands as well as 3.93 acres of coastal sage scrub, 0.31 acres of oak woodland and 4.93 acres of non-native grasslands, each of which are considered sensitive biological resources. Construction could also impact two pairs of coastal California gnatcatchers by reducing potential habitat and/or interfering with nesting activities due to construction noise disruption.

Unlike impacts to aesthetics/neighborhood character, landform and recreation, the FEIR identifies mitigation measures which would reduce biological impacts to below a level of significance. Mitigation for wetlands would be achieved through a compensation program which would replace lost wetland at a ratio of 3:1. Upland vegetation impacts (e.g. coastal sage scrub, oak woodland and non-native grassland) would be achieved by preserving high quality biological resources within the Rose Canyon watershed.

Cultural Resources. The Regents Road Bridge could impact historic resources known to exist within the bridge alignment. However, implementation of the monitoring and data recovery measures required of the project would reduce cultural resource impacts to below a level of significance.

Paleontological Resources. The Regents Road Bridge Alternative could impact geologic formations with a moderate to high potential for significant fossils. However, implementation of the monitoring and resource recovery measures required of the project would reduce paleontological resource impacts to below a level of significance.

Noise Impacts. Connection of Regents Road between South and North University City would substantially increase traffic noise on this road between Governor Drive and Nobel Drive. The FEIR concludes that the traffic noise on this segment would increase by up to 12 decibels (dB(A)); an increase of 3 dB(A) is considered significant. The FEIR concludes that noise barriers (e.g. masonry or plexi-glass barriers) and/or architectural modifications (e.g. mechanical ventilation or dual-pane windows) would be able to reduce traffic noise impacts to below a level of significance, but only if the affected property owners permits the City to install the needed noise attenuation measures. Thus, the FEIR concludes that traffic noise impacts may not always be able to be reduced to below a level of significance.

Geology/Soils. The Regents Road Bridge Alternative would be located in areas subject to geologic hazards. As standard engineering design would assure that structural elements would be designed in accordance with seismic risks, significant geologic hazards would be avoided.

Human Health and Public Safety. Hazardous materials associated with the gas stations at the intersection of Governor Drive and Genesee Avenue could pose a public safety risk to construction workers. However, compliance with local, state and federal laws regulating hazardous waste would avoid significant impacts.

Hydrology/Water Quality. Implementation of the Regents Road Bridge Alternative is required to comply with the City of San Diego's Stormwater Regulations, as described in Chapter 4, Section 10. Compliance would avoid significant impacts to water quality.

Patti Boekamp
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R. F. Haas
Deputy Chief of Public Works

Attachments:

- [Attachment A: Candidate Findings](#)
- [Attachment B: Statement of Overriding Considerations](#)
- [Attachment C: Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan](#)
- [Attachment D: Table S-3: Comparison of Impacts of Alternatives](#)
- [Attachment E: Memorandum from Fire Department dated 7/19/06](#)

Due to the size of the attachments, they are available for viewing at the City Clerk's office located on the second floor of the City Administration Building, 202 C Street, San Diego, CA 92101.