

To: Cal-Trans, District 5
50 Higuera St.
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
% Matt C. Fowler, Environmental Branch Chief
Phone: 805-779-0793
via email: SR-68@dot.ca.gov, followed by signed hard copy, U.S.Mail
matt.c.fowler@dot.ca.gov
and Scott Eades, District Director, scott.eades@dot.ca.gov, and Carla Yu, carla.yu@dot.ca.gov

From: Mike Weaver
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Regarding; Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project
Monterey County, California 05-Mon-68-PM (4.8-13.7) EA 05-1J790 Project ID 0518000061
State Clearinghouse Number 2019090448
Draft Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Assessment and Section 4(f) Evaluation

January 8, 2024

Dear Mr. Fowler, Mr. Eades, Ms. Yu, and Cal-Trans, District 5

I have had the opportunity to read and review the subject document and have comments and questions. First some background;

1) Mike Weaver is a 72-year resident of Corral de Tierra, residing about midway in the current designated project planning area. Mike Weaver has served for over 30-years on the Monterey County Land Use Advisory Committee for the Toro Planning Area, the last several years as Chair. Mike Weaver also served for two and one-half years on the Transportation Agency for Monterey County's Citizen's Advisory Committee. This TAMC Committee was disbanded by the TAMC Board. Both are, and were, non-paying community voluntary positions.

Mike Weaver also serves with the Highway 68 Coalition, residents of the Highway 68 Corridor, with mutual concerns regarding things like safety, traffic, noise, and with upholding the scenic highway status of SR68, and County side roads.

2) A large question is what happens to our shared official Scenic Highway? Both roundabouts or enhanced intersections call for tree cutting, including cutting protected oak trees in Monterey County. Both alternatives in this DEIR also mean massive amounts of grading, straightening of curves, installation of retaining walls, lighting, signage, sidewalks.....

It is all very urban. It is counter to the Monterey County General Plan as both the Toro Area Plan and the Greater Monterey Peninsula Area Plans are part of the General Plan. Their respective adopted policies should not allow what is being proposed.

For example, The current Toro Area Master Plan, Policy T-2.3;

T-2.3 Continue to work with the state, local agencies, and citizens groups to alleviate traffic congestion while maintaining the scenic beauty of Highway 68. With the goal of eventually constructing a scenic four-lane divided highway, the County shall support the following measures:

- a. coordination with Caltrans and TAMC for the construction of a four-lane facility between the Toro interchange and State Route 218; and
- b. construction of bus stops, pull-outs, and shelters where needed.

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Also, for example, the Greater Monterey Peninsula Master Plan, GMP-1.1

GMP-1.1 The County shall overlay properties north and south of Highway 68 and west of Laureles Grade with a Visually Sensitive District ("VS") and/or other appropriate zoning designation to regulate the location, height, and design of structures within this unique scenic corridor.

3) Why has there been no staking and flagging of the subject intersections and side roads to demonstrate to the public the extent of the mass of the potential proposed changes?

4) There is the perception of a lack of "Due Process". The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) is made up of representatives from County cities as well as the five Monterey County Supervisorial Districts, and the Airport. However, the proposed CalTrans projects are in the unincorporated area of Monterey County, specifically, all in District 5. District 5 has but one seat at TAMC, however, District 5 is the one most affected.

Projects in Monterey County that are in unincorporated areas are referred to the Land Use Advisory Committees for visual/scenic/design issues. Then to the Monterey County Planning Commission for further review, finally to the Board of Supervisors.

Instead, CalTrans representatives and TAMC staff provided some walkabout meetings. The first was at a building located at the Laguna Seca Recreation Area, (at least in District 5). It was pretty well attended. However, it was a "Here ya go" type walkabout. Anyone with a question or comment would offer it to a person employed by CalTrans or TAMC standing next to a tripod easel, and would get some type of response. The rest of the attendees did not hear the question or the response. There was no multiple person learning, or ability for others to follow up on the question. I'm told the subsequent two walkabouts in other locations were poorly attended by the public. Don't you agree this was a poor roll-out for presenting such big proposed changes to Highway 68? A private citizen brought a plan for a Modified Bypass. I understand he was insulted by staff.

5) The amount of the proposed removal of Pine trees, Sycamores, and Oak Trees is significant. Past projects by CalTrans at Laureles Grade removed about 99 Oak Trees. The mitigation measure for this was to plant new small oak trees near the entrance to the Laguna Seca Recreation Area. Many of these, have died due to lack of care.

Similarly, previous work at the San Benancio intersection necessitated the removal of many oak trees. This was mitigated by a replanting of at least three to one. Sadly, many of these were planted in awkward areas, and with a lack of care, most of the replacements have also died.

This last San Benancio intersection improvement ended up with significant cost over runs.

My understanding it ended up costing about \$4 Million. Now, most all is proposed to be torn out, with more grading, and more tree cutting, virtually eliminating any previous mitigation measures. Does CalTrans re-mitigate when bulldozing out previous mitigations? How?

6) The current entrance to the Laguna Seca Recreation Area on Hwy 68 avoids a wetland area to its east, generally across from and a bit west of the Laureles Grade intersection. The County of Monterey Assessor's Map, Book 173, page 01 depicts a 20-acre Plan Line dedicated to the State of California for Future Highway. This is a bit north of the existing alignment and looks like it would avoid the wetland area. The Monterey County APN is 173-011026-000.

I did not find this information in your DEIR/EA. Did I miss it?
Why was this information not included?

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7) The Weaver's have property frontage with Corral de Tierra Road and SR68, west of the CdeT intersection. Much of this is dedicated County Scenic Easement. There is a recorded one-foot non-access strip along the frontage with SR68, this is on both sides of the one-foot strip. This information is not included in this DEIR/EA. Isn't this important?

8) North, across and below SR 68 from Weaver's is an area on former Fort Ord that has and is being used by wildlife to gather, then cross the highway 68 at night, when there is no traffic. Wildlife makes its way up and then over the open property to the Corral de Tierra side where it then crosses Corral de Tierra Road mostly at night and makes its way to the often dry Corral de Tierra Creek bed. This Creek Bed has high vegetation on both sides and becomes the wildlife "highway" to move south up the Corral de Tierra Valley. An additional draw for the wildlife is the nearby lake at the Corral de Tierra Country Club adjacent to the third fairway. The wildlife uses this for water.

The wildlife crossing the Weavers and the immediate neighbors, is 22-acres of the hill and regularly includes crossings of; deer, coyotes, bobcats, wild turkeys, and amphibians, and more. I presented this information to out-of-the-area consultants hired by CalTrans to be facilitators at a previous meeting. The consultants seemed uninterested in this. Their focus was on the culvert beneath Highway 68 at San Benancio. I provided my personal contact information. I think I even contacted them via email after the meeting. There was no follow up from them. It seems their findings were already made.

9) Weaver's have property on a hill with frontage on both Corral de Tierra Road and SR68. During rainy times Mike Weaver finds salamanders who climb up both sides to temporarily reside near my house. Many are near our residences at night. Mike Weaver has photos of some of them. There are also Pacific Chorus Frogs. I believe this information was previously supplied to CalTrans. I never heard back. CalTrans District 5 personnel has changed since. I'll email a couple photos to District 5.

10) Page 49 of the DEIR/EA states that the Official Plan Lines (OPL) for SR68 are not shown on AMBAG or TAMC documents. A big reason for this is neither AMBAG, nor TAMC are decision makers on land use in Monterey County. It was the Monterey County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors that implemented the Official Plan Lines. They were used as a mitigation for many development projects on or adjacent to SR68. Prior to TAMC dissolving the Citizen's Advisory Committee, a presentation was prepared and discussed by the Citizen's Advisory Committee on this issue and was voted to send to the TAMC Board. They must still have these records. The Plan Lines have been shown to current TAMC representatives. A recommendation that they make copies of these large maps was never followed up on. They said they had them. The Highway 68 Coalition has a complete set of the SR68 OPL. We paid \$45 for them from Bryce Hori at Monterey County Public Works

11) Further, when the Bureau of Land Management made a first ever "informational only"

presentation to the Toro Land Use Advisory Committee regarding plans for a Badger Hills Parking Area across from the Toro Cafe, the issue of the adopted Official Plan Lines for Hwy. 68 came up. Without denying the OPL existed, BLM was not that interested. The stated justification for the new BLM parking area was that the parcel of land next to it, owned by CalTrans, was being utilized for automobile parking and CalTrans was getting upset at potential safety issues. That empty dirt parcel is, and has been, the jumping off point for the Bypass. The Bypass was to leave the existing 68 road to San Benancio and Corral de Tierra as a County frontage road, eliminating two intersections (San Benancio and Corral de Tierra intersections). The new alignment was called a "Scenic Way" BLM did build a parking area across from the Toro Cafe. There was not one public hearing on
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this that I know of. The only meeting was the informational only presentation to the Toro LUAC.

In over 30 years of being on the Toro LUAC that is the only "informational presentation" the Toro LUAC ever had. Minutes of that Toro LUAC meeting are available on request.

12) The western side of the Bypass eliminating San Benancio and Corral de Tierra Intersections has an 11.716-acre parcel dedicated for that purpose to Monterey County. It was for the interchange to direct cars west to Monterey, and back. The APN for this parcel is 161-251-010-000 Why isn't this parcel mentioned in this DEIR/EA? Isn't this important? If not, why not? If CalTrans does not use it, they will lose it. CalTrans needs to check with Monterey County on the deed details. Utilize it somehow. Don't you agree?

13) Page 51 of this DEIR/EA is incorrect in that "the bypass" WAS always a part of the Official Plan Lines , it was not an alternative to the OPL. It was called a "Scenic Way". Please correct this Caltrans error and the evaluation. Does District 5 have large copies of the OPL? You may be confusing the OPL with the modified bypass concept created by Corral de Tierra resident Neal Thompson. Mr. Thompson is a registered and licensed Traffic Engineer and was the Traffic Engineer for Monterey County Public Works until he retired. This would be a solution for Highway 68. Roundabouts are not a viable solution, nor is "Alternative 2", the drag race alternative.

14) A neighbor who lives in Corral de Tierra by the name of Dwight Stump has done a considerable amount research and developed a website, analyzing this traffic situation on Highway 68 between Salinas and Monterey. The website address is;

9roundabouts.com

Mr. Stump, and others, propose that instead of 9 new roundabouts costing multi millions and millions of dollars, (and that would essentially be an experiment). Instead, Mr. Stump suggests Artificial Intelligence signal controllers to better manage the existing intersections. The cost is expected to be about \$400,000 and could improve the traffic situation without all the environmental impacts.

It is practical and affordable. It is certainly worthy of serious consideration by CalTrans. IF for some reason it does not work out, something else could be tried. The State of California budget is currently billions of dollars in debt. This might well be an affordable way to make things better on SR68.

Please add this idea to a Draft Final EIR/EA and correct the errors itemized in this letter, and do additional environmental studies. Then, recirculate the document for further review.

Thank you for your consideration. I am not blaming CalTrans, District 5, for the current Highway 68 traffic issues. It has been like a slow train wreck that I have been watching and commenting on for over 30 years. I've been to District 5 Headquarters at the end of Higuera Street several times over the years, visiting with Vaughn Newlander, Dave Murray, and other staff. I believe Monterey County Planning created a good deal of the existing traffic problem by accepting traffic studies that were biased and faulty.

One last thought. An acquaintance from England told me that when automobile round-a-bouts get too congested in England, then signal lights are installed in them, to try to help sort things out....and we're back to Square 1.

Respectfully, Mike Weaver

