



TRANSPORTATION AGENCY FOR MONTEREY COUNTY

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## **HIGHLIGHTS**

**August 28, 2024**

### **TAMC Board Approves Alternative Alignment of the SURF! Busway and Bus Rapid Transit Project**

The Transportation Agency for Monterey County's Board of Directors provided direction and feedback allowing the alignment of the SURF! Busway and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project to be moved onto the alignment of the existing rail tracks within the Monterey Branch Line corridor.

California Coastal Commission staff requested the SURF! busway project be realigned onto the existing Monterey Branch Line rail tracks to minimize impacts on Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Areas (ESHA). If this request is not met, the Coastal Commission staff would likely recommend denying the Coastal Development Permit; this would result in the cessation of the SURF! project, undermining years of planning and investments made toward improving regional transit.

The Monterey Branch Line corridor, acquired by TAMC in 2003 with Proposition 116 funds, has been envisioned as a key transportation asset that can support both near-term bus rapid transit and long-term rail service. The corridor has been integral to several planning documents, including the Monterey Bay Area Rail Network Integration Study and the California State Rail Plan, both of which propose a phased approach starting with bus service and transitioning to rail.

The TAMC Board voted to approve the alternative on-tracks alignment, on the condition the California Coastal Commission acknowledge the Monterey Branch Line, including portions owned by Monterey and Seaside, is a historic and future transportation corridor; and that the California Coastal Commission agree to not require putting a conservation easement on the Monterey Branch Line right-of-way, which would limit the potential for future rail service.

These conditions underscoring the Transportation Agency for Monterey County Board's support for the immediate benefits for the traveling public anticipated from the SURF Busway project while preserving the Monterey Brach Line corridor for future of rail service.

## **TAMC Board Receives Update on US 101 South of Salinas Project**

The US 101 South of Salinas project is in the planning stage that includes extensive community engagement. At their meeting, TAMC 's Board of Directors received an update on the project and feedback received through the project's public outreach efforts.

The intention of the US 101 South of Salinas project is to address safety issues along the corridor between the southern Salinas city limits and Chualar. This corridor experiences collision rates above the state average with concentrations at uncontrolled intersections. One fatality occurs annually, and one severe collision occurs monthly. Another safety concern is the number of uncontrolled railroad crossings along the corridor, which are often the only access to adjacent properties that include some of the world's premier agricultural land.

The two existing US 101 interchanges at Abbot Street and Main Street need significant upgrades to address antiquated features. The project's environmental process is expected to include alternatives to reconstruct both interchanges along with some combination of frontage roads that may maintain access from US 101 to existing properties.

Information collected from the following community stakeholders has guided the project team's approach to developing preliminary alternatives for the environmental process:

- Traffic Safety Alliance
- The Monterey County Farm Bureau
- Chualar community
- East Salinas community
- Property owners
- Business owners
- City of Salinas
- County of Monterey
- Various stakeholders, including the Ag Land Trust

The information provided by the stakeholders are generalized in the following comments:

- Proactively preparing a long-term plan avoids being forced to react to a major incident in the future.
- Minimize the takings of prime agricultural land.

- Adequate access to individual property owners can be obtained through public roads and/or agreements with property owners.
- Current interchanges cannot be closed for extended timelines during construction without alternative access to US 101 being provided.
- The truck traffic in Chualar negatively impacts the community's quality of life and needs to be reduced.
- Traffic congestion at the Airport Blvd interchange is a problem that needs to be addressed. Stakeholders are interested in how this project could improve conditions at the Airport Blvd interchange.

The project team is scheduled to conduct the next series of community engagement activities this fall, while working towards identifying the project alternatives. Identifying feasible alternatives that meet the project purpose and need are an important part of the environmental evaluation that is scheduled to start early next year. The timing for this is to:

- Identify feasible options by end of the year;
- Start environmental work early next year;
- Finish environmental work by end of 2026; and
- Finish final design by end of 2027.