

# Midcoast Community Council

*An elected Advisory Council to the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors  
representing Montara, Moss Beach, El Granada, Princeton, and Miramar*  
P.O. Box 248, Moss Beach, CA 94038-0248 - [www.MidcoastCommunityCouncil.org](http://www.MidcoastCommunityCouncil.org)

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Chair   Vice-Chair   Secretary   Treasurer

Date: April 28, 2015

To: James Hinkamp, Project Planner

CC: Supervisor Don Horsley

From: Midcoast Community Council/ Dave Olson, Chair

Subject: **Midcoast At-Grade Crossings, Raised Medians and Left Turns -  
Highway One Congestion and Safety Improvement Project**

The Midcoast Community Council (MCC) submits the following comments on the design alternatives proposed in the February 2015 Draft Preliminary Planning Study<sup>1</sup> (PPS) for the Highway 1 Congestion & Safety Improvement Project.

## **Background**

Key near-term priorities identified by the MCC in March 2012, following completion of the Midcoast Highway 1 Safety & Mobility Improvement Studies (Mobility Studies), include pedestrian crossings with refuge island, and lowered speed limit to 45 mph in Moss Beach (which will require installation of traffic-calming features such as raised medians).

Transportation Authority (TA) funding for project design and permitting was approved in October 2012 for these specific project elements:

- at-grade pedestrian crossings at 8 locations,
- raised medians in Montara and Moss Beach, and
- left-turn lanes at 8<sup>th</sup> St in Montara and Gray Whale Cove.

These improvements are based on concept plans identified as short-term in the Mobility Studies. The June 2012 TA grant application states, *“Raised medians... will provide ‘safe refuges’ for pedestrians/bicyclists when crossing the highway. All safe crossings will be connected to medians for this purpose.”*

Pedestrian refuge islands are discussed in the PPS (p.4-2): *“Providing raised medians or pedestrian refuge areas at pedestrian crossings at marked crosswalks has demonstrated a 46% reduction in pedestrian crashes. At unmarked crosswalk locations, pedestrian crashes have been reduced by 39%. Installing raised pedestrian refuge islands on the approaches to unsignalized intersections has had the most impact reducing pedestrian crashes. ... Caltrans HDM mandates that the minimum median width used for pedestrian refuges is 6 feet.”*

The Feb 2015 PPS notes, *“Most of the comments received at the two public meetings held to date fall into six main categories: medians for pedestrian refuge, acceleration lanes, lighting concerns, traffic concerns, speed issues, and schedule concerns.”*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> posted here: <http://www.midcoastcommunitycouncil.org/home/2015/4/23/mcc-special-meeting-april-28.html>

<sup>2</sup> public comments posted here: <http://www.midcoastcommunitycouncil.org/highway-1/>

## **Process**

The public process for evaluating design alternatives for this complex project would have benefited from the following:

- A project name less generic and opaque that reveals something about the project elements and that is less easily confused with other concurrent projects.
- Careful differentiation and public education about the scope of this project and similar concurrent projects. Public confusion was unnecessarily escalated by doing meeting outreach from the Connect the Coastside website and email list, and neglecting to take the time at the March 11 meeting to clearly and accurately explain the difference.
- Earlier and more frequent community input in the design process, to avoid the delay and duplication of effort to bring the designs into line with project elements originally proposed, such as pedestrian refuges instead of flashing beacons. It can be very useful, especially for outside consultants, to get early input with local knowledge such as from a steering committee.
- Clearly understandable one-page summary of each location alternative with list of distinguishing features, impacts and illustration on the same page. Definitions and features in common could be listed and illustrated separately so that important differences are not lost in extensive repetition.
- Close adherence to the concept plans of the Mobility Studies and use of Context Sensitive Solutions<sup>3</sup> if adjustments are necessary.
- More modest design proposals with reduced raised medians focused on gateway traffic calming and crossing refuges, rather than maximum cost/impact scenarios with raised medians extended beyond what was proposed in the Mobility Studies. The public expressed clear concerns at the second meeting when they learned about high cost and project delays due to raised medians.
- More robust public evaluation of the second set of alternatives. The complex set of alternatives did not lend itself to polling of either/or choice of min/max project extremes which resulted in confusion, superficial understanding, and a significant number of abstaining attendees. It does not serve the public process to have a rushed presentation and to limit group Q&A and discussion. People do better when exposed collectively to many ideas and comments. This stimulates thinking and helps in understanding other points of view. Multiple explanations of complicated or overlapping topics increases understanding. Posters and smaller groups are useful but cannot replace the group discussion.

## **Design Alternatives**

Public acceptance is highest where safe crossing opportunities do not add to traffic congestion. Raised median refuge islands, wherever they can be accommodated without extensive road widening, can provide greatly improved crossing opportunities without necessarily stopping traffic. There is concern that a proliferation of painted crosswalks and flashing beacons will add to congestion and detract from the scenic quality of our rural highway. Even narrower raised medians, though technically for traffic calming purposes, will be useful to aid highway crossing wherever they are located.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/cs\\_solutions/](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/cs_solutions/)

It is clear from the accident statistics that night lighting is necessary for high-speed highway pedestrian crossings and raised medians. Dark night skies are important to Midcoast residents -- please specify downward-directed lighting with direct rays confined to the roadway. Also consider a dimming option for low-traffic overnight times, particularly at Gray Whale Cove.

Please expedite any conversions of left-turn to acceleration lanes separately from this project. It should not be necessary to wait 3 to 5 more years to change the arrows painted on the road to help reduce intersection delays.

### **Mirada Road**

Many don't see a need for a crossing at Mirada Rd. There may be better opportunities for mid-block crossings, away from intersection turning movements, utilizing median refuge in the existing center turn lane. Alternative (Alt) 2 goes far beyond a crossing design, adding an extended raised median requiring road widening throughout Miramar, which was not proposed in the Mobility Studies or in the Project Scope of Work.

### **Moss Beach**

The need for traffic calming is greatest in Moss Beach, the one village in the Midcoast that is bisected by Highway 1, but has the highest speed limit, 50 mph. Caltrans' recent traffic survey recommends no speed limit reduction. The Mobility Studies Action Plan places a high priority on reducing the speed limit in Moss Beach and notes that raised medians and other traffic calming treatments may reduce prevailing speeds, a precondition for reducing posted speed limits. The PPS notes, "*Motorists are traveling at high speeds through the town limits because there are currently no features that define the context of the town center.*" Raised medians the length of town would provide that context as well as an extended area of improved crossing opportunities.

At a minimum, Moss Beach should have attractive gateway features including raised medians south of Marine and north of Vallemar, and one pedestrian crossing with refuge island. Alt 1 Moss Beach does not reach this minimum. It provides no traffic calming except a high-visibility painted median south of Marine, an uninspired choice for village gateway. In contrast, Alt 1 Montara proposes two sets of traffic calming raised medians bracketing 7<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> which are attractive and don't require road widening. If that is possible in Montara, why isn't it proposed in Alt 1 Moss Beach which has higher speeds and need for traffic calming?

Restricting highway access and turning movements, such as at Virginia, is proposed to improve traffic flow and safety. It might be more useful to first address the several businesses on the west side with unrestricted highway access and pedestrian no-man's-land along entire blocks. Also, consider the long delays to enter the highway from many local side streets, and that the cause of broadside accidents may be due to exasperated motorists turning onto the highway in unsafe manner. Closing some street access without nearby access improvements only shifts traffic to other intersections, worsening delays there.

Conversion of left-turn lanes to acceleration lanes to aid left turns onto the highway should be evaluated for two more locations in Moss Beach, in addition to Cypress. This could improve intersection level of service (LOS) and safety:

- North side of California: Convert left-turn lane to northbound acceleration lane.
- South side of Vermont: Convert left-turn lane to southbound acceleration lane.
- North side of Virginia: Remove left-turn lane to allow for pedestrian refuge island.
- Southbound left turns would be diverted to Etheldore and Vermont.
- Northbound left turns would be diverted to Virginia and California. Vallemar would be unaffected.

### **Lighthouse/16<sup>th</sup>**

This important highway crossing of the Coastal Trail must be considered in combination with the essential east-side trail connecting 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> across the ravine that divides Montara from Moss Beach. Without improvements from the Lighthouse to 14<sup>th</sup> St, the Coastal Trail is unconnected and so is everyone living in Montara who wishes to reach the rest of the Midcoast without their car. These issues should be noted in the PPS p.2-4. Designation of the CA Coastal Trail as a Priority Conservation Area, as currently proposed, would improve grant opportunities to construct this trail connection.

Evaluate conversion of the southbound left-turn lane at 16<sup>th</sup> to northbound acceleration lane from lighthouse/MWSD, which has significantly higher traffic volume. Since there are only a few homes on 16<sup>th</sup>, consider formalizing the connection of 16<sup>th</sup> to Carlos, which would allow closing east 16<sup>th</sup> highway access. Simplified vehicle turning movements will increase bike/pedestrian safety at this important crossing.

There is no explanation for the extensive length of proposed raised median in Alt 2 (unknown off the south end of the picture) or why the proposed widening could not include space for the essential east-side trail at the ravine.

### **Montara**

Alt 1 provides raised medians at town center entry points (*south of 9<sup>th</sup>, north of 7<sup>th</sup>, south of 2<sup>nd</sup>, and north of 1<sup>st</sup>*) as traffic-calming warning to motorists, and does not require pavement widening, retaining walls, drainage improvements, or utility relocations. These raised medians would also provide informal assistance to pedestrians crossing at 1<sup>st</sup> to the beach and at 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> to visit the coastal viewpoints there. However the official crossings in this alternative do not provide the safety of a median refuge which we would prefer.

At 7<sup>th</sup> St, the Mobility Study locates the crossing refuge on the north side where the proposed 8-ft-wide raised median is located. There is improved line of sight for westbound pedestrian crossing from the center of the road.

At 2<sup>nd</sup> St, the Mobility Study locates the crossing refuge on the south side, removing conflict between pedestrians and heavy southbound left-turn traffic onto 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Gray Whale Cove**

There is a 12-ft-wide mid-highway buffer area at the crossing location. If feasible, a raised median refuge within this area would enable safer 2-stage crossing without stopping traffic. At a minimum, please explore surface treatments to help increase safety in the buffer area, such as tactile edging, and colorized/textured paving treatments. Vegetation that contributes to the blind curve should be pruned.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.