

Highways 1, 17 to get new merge lanes

By Cindy Utter,

Caltrans Transportation Planner
Special to the Aptos Times

SANTA CRUZ - Improving safety and traffic flow at the intersection of highways 1 and 17 are main goals for the three-year construction project due to start in late April, Caltrans officials said.

Major features of the estimated \$48 million project—which improves the road transitions between highways 1 and 17—include adding new merge lanes, reconstructing several bridges, and building a concrete median barrier as well as retaining and sound walls.

"The additional lanes will give motorists greater merging distance and more time to make driving decisions," said Cheryl Willis, Caltrans acting district director.

The city and Caltrans will host an open house community meeting on the project from 5 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, April 19, at the Senior Citizens' Opportunities Center, 222 Market St. The open house will feature maps, displays and exhibits of the project. Caltrans staff will be available to receive comments and answer questions from the public.

Specifically, the project will add one new merge lane on northbound Highway 1, between the Morrissey Boulevard over-crossing and Highway 17, and another southbound, between Highway 17 and La Fonda Avenue. A third new merge lane will also be constructed on northbound Highway 17, between Highway 1 and the Pasatiempo over-crossing.

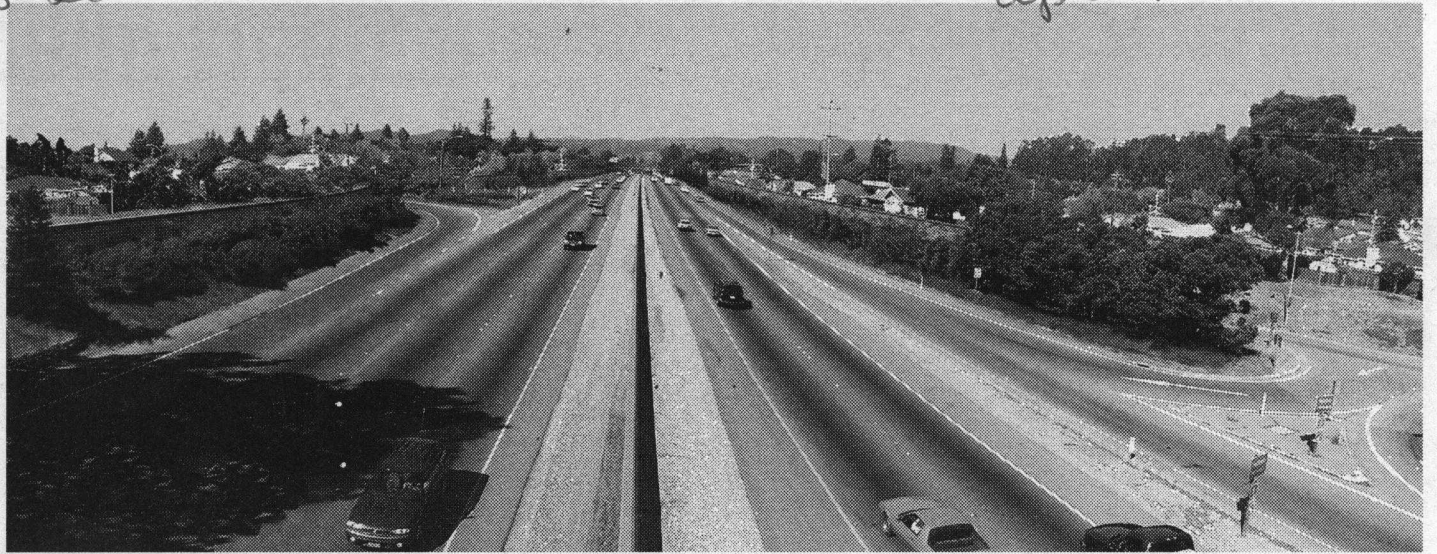
The project is located on Highway 1 from the La Fonda Avenue over-crossing to just west of the Emeline Street under-crossing, and on Highway 17 from the Highway 1/17 interchange to the Pasatiempo over-crossing. In that area of Highway 1, the current annual average daily traffic is about 107,000 in volume during peak travel times, according to the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments.

To accommodate widening for the merge lanes, the project will replace the Branciforte Avenue over-crossing and the Emeline Avenue under-crossing. It will also reconstruct the Market Street under-crossing and the Branciforte and Carbonera creek bridges.

A new, concrete median barrier on Highway 1—extending the length of the project—will improve safety by reducing maintenance in the median, resulting in fewer lane closures and less traffic congestion. It is designed to prevent head-on collisions caused by errant vehicles crossing the median.

The project will also construct nine retaining walls along northbound and southbound Highway 1, between Market Street and the Highway 1/17 interchange, and on northbound Highway 17, between the Highway 1/17 junction and the Pasatiempo off-ramp. The retaining walls allow the majority of the project to be constructed within the state property line.

In addition, the project will build 12 sound walls, ranging in height from eight to 12 feet, along north and southbound Highway 1,



and a short segment of northbound Highway 17. Sound walls reduce noise caused by traffic and transportation improvements. In the project area, the proposed barriers are expected to lessen noise levels by as much as eight decibels for the nearby residences most affected.

Where possible, the project will incorporate aesthetic treatments—such as texturing and coloring some concrete structures and walls in earth tones—to maintain the area's scenic and visual character. The proposed sound walls—comprised of rough-faced masonry blocks, colored in four shades of gray-brown—are designed to complement the new structures and median barrier.

Most of the sound and retaining walls will be covered with Ficus or "creeping fig" vines and Boston ivy, according to Bryan Parker, Caltrans landscape architect. The planting will reduce wall visibility and deter graffiti.

The new Branciforte over-crossing will feature recessed openings in the bridge rails and black, arched, decorative chain-link fencing as well as paved, colored slopes underneath the structure.

The project will require removing and

replacing numerous trees along the highway shoulders and in the creek corridors. Of those, half are acacia species and 50 percent are less than six inches in diameter. In all, Caltrans will plant more than 1,000 trees to include maple, pine and redwoods. During construction, special efforts are planned to preserve substantial existing mature trees either outstanding in size or unique in appearance, Parker said.

"In the creek areas, we'll improve the habitat for native steelhead trout, Coho salmon and other wildlife," he said. "That includes providing a natural channel bottom and native riparian plants, and stabilizing eroding creek banks."

Other major project features include the following:

- Modify the merge lane connecting southbound Highway 17 to southbound Highway 1

- Realign ramps

- Improve drainage system

- Fully landscape the project area

Earlier this month, the state awarded Pavex Construction of Santa Cruz and C.C. Myers Incorporated of Rancho Cordova, Calif., a joint venture, the construction contract for this project. Construction is scheduled for

completion in spring 2009, weather permitting. During construction, city police and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) will assist with traffic control and public information on detours.

One or more of the crossing structures on Highway 1 will be closed for extended periods with detours in effect. Every effort will be made to keep two lanes open in each direction on Highway 1 during peak travel times. Some construction work will occur at night. During construction, motorists are encouraged to consider alternatives to driving such as car or vanpooling, bicycling and riding transit. Route maps, transit schedules, rider incentives, locations for park and ride lots, and more information is available online at www.CommuteSolutions.org.

The project is funded through the State Transportation Improvement Program. It was developed in partnership between the Regional Transportation Commission, the city, Caltrans and other local, state and federal resource agencies.

For project updates, please call 888-836-0866, or visit the Caltrans web page at hwy1-17.caltrans.ca.gov. For more information, please call Susana Cruz, Caltrans public information officer, at 831-423-0396.

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