

**CITY OF CARPINTERIA  
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD  
Meeting of NOVEMBER 12, 2009**

*Agenda Item #1*

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**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
PROJECT REVIEW**

**Project:** 09-1500-CUP / CDP **Contract Planner:** Jonathan Leech  
**Address:** US Highway 101 from Mobil Pier Undercrossing (Ventura County) to  
Vicinity of Casitas Pass Road (Carpinteria)  
**APN:** Multiple Parcels  
**Zoning:** General Plan Land Use Designation is Transportation Corridor (TC); US  
Highway 101 is not designated under Carpinteria Zoning; the project  
corridor is adjacent to multiple zone districts including M-RP, CPD, PRD,  
REC, CF, MHP, etc.  
**Applicant:** **GPA Environmental (Agent)**  
Erinn Peterson  
1611 S. Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 104  
Redondo Beach, CA 90277

**Project Review:**     Conceptual  
                               Preliminary  
                               Final

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

This is a request for preliminary review of a proposal by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to construct High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes within the existing median along a six-mile segment of US 101 between the Mobil Pier Undercrossing (PM 39.8) in Ventura County and the vicinity of Casitas Pass Road (PM 2.2) in Santa Barbara County. The proposed project will provide six total travel lanes (three northbound and three southbound) as well as 10-foot medians and shoulders through the communities of Mussel Shoals, La Conchita, Rincon, and the City of Carpinteria. The project length exclusively within the City of Carpinteria involves 2.2 miles, and this component of the project will require a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and Coastal Development Permit (CDP) from the City of Carpinteria. All highway improvements will be constructed within the existing limits of US 101 and within State right-of-way (ROW).

Landscaping/Median Barriers: Widening along the inland portion of the highway will require the removal of vegetation along some portions of US 101. Similarly, the addition of HOV lanes and median barriers will require increased paving in the center divide areas. Removal of all landscaping in these locations is required, and replacement plantings are provided where feasible. Caltrans has provided updated/revised landscape planting plans in response to input received from your board at the conceptual review hearing (August 13, 2009) and joint meeting of regional design boards (September 10, 2009). The revised plant palette and preliminary

planting plans are attached as exhibits to this staff report. In general, low-profile median landscaping will be provided where it does not conflict with line-of-sight requirements and taller landscaping elements would be provided to assist in the screening of retaining wall elements (see attached preliminary planting plan). The existing median metal beam guard rails will be removed and replaced with concrete barriers. The replacement of existing barriers will improve safety, but should not impact driver views, as the proposed concrete barriers are approximately two inches higher than the existing metal guard rails. Based upon input from your board at conceptual review, Caltrans is proposing to employ a sandstone coloring for the concrete median barrier.

Grading/Retaining Walls: Earthwork quantities within Carpinteria are anticipated to be approximately 48,900 cubic yards. In order to accommodate the elevation difference between the southbound and northbound travel lane groups, one median retaining wall has been incorporated in the proposed design, extending a total of 1,875 feet south of Bailard Avenue and 1,300 feet northward. Caltrans considered comments from your board with regard to breaking up the massing of the proposed retaining wall; the attached retaining wall design minimizes the varying height of the wall and incorporates a gently sloping adjacent ground surface (where possible) to maximize landscape planting area. Retaining wall heights have now been called out on a new more detailed exhibit (see the attached retaining wall location / height map for the proposed extent of the retaining wall). The northbound traveler would see only the height of the standard median barrier when looking toward the ocean, while the southbound traveler would experience the retaining wall only looking away from the ocean. Landscaping is proposed at the base of the retaining wall to soften the appearance, with a creeping vine proposed in the taller retaining wall sections. Caltrans is proposing a *split-face* texture for the retaining wall, in response to input from your board. There are no soundwalls proposed within the City limits.

Caltrans Response to Conceptual Review Comments, Landscape Plant List & Specifications, Preliminary Planting Plan, Barrier & Retaining Wall Color/Texture Specification, and the Retaining Wall Location Map are attached as Exhibit A.

## **PROJECT SETTING**

The portion of the project within Carpinteria begins at the eastern City Limit (near Bates Road) and extends westward to the vicinity of Casitas Pass Road. The proposed improvements, including HOV lane, shoulder and median paving, landscaping, manufactured slopes and retaining walls, would be achieved within the Caltrans right-of-way. The highway corridor can be characterized as a largely urban setting, dominated by the existing highway facility.

The project corridor passes through approximately the eastern half of the City, including neighborhoods or districts ranging from industrial research park, to retail commercial, to single family residential, to open space and recreational lands.

The US Highway 101 right-of-way carries a Land Use Designation of TC (Transportation Corridor) under the General Plan. The right-of-way is not designated with a zone district under the City of Carpinteria Zoning Code. The project corridor is adjacent to multiple zone districts

including industrial research park, retail commercial, planned residential, mobile home park single family residential, open space and recreation.

## **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

### **Carpinteria Municipal Code**

The Carpinteria Municipal Code (Section 14.62.030, Conditional Uses) requires that public improvement proposals such as the US Highway 101 HOV lanes project obtain a Conditional Use Permit. Because the project is located within the Coastal Zone, a Coastal Development Permit is also required. Both of these permits are discretionary in nature, with the Planning Commission having decision-making authority.

### **Design Review**

The proposed project principally involves the development of an additional travel lane in both travel directions, resulting in three travel lanes and a varying width median and shoulders for each the northbound and southbound directions. Existing mature landscaping would be preserved where possible, but some vegetation would need to be removed to accommodate the additional lanes. Replacement landscaping consisting of perennial herbs and shrubs native to southern California (primarily Coastal Sage Scrub) will be provided within the right-of-way to balance that removed, and to achieve the most appealing visual qualities possible within the corridor, considering highway safety design restrictions. Please refer to the attached Plant List and Planting Plan for updated details regarding the proposed landscaping. Retaining walls heights would vary from 2 feet to 8 feet (the portion visible to the highway traveler), as illustrated on the attached exhibit. A solid concrete median barrier would be provided, and it is proposed to be composed of a sandstone colored concrete, matching the materials already used in the median for the Cabrillo Boulevard to Hot Springs segment of the neighboring HOV project. Retaining walls are proposed to incorporate a split-face texture, in response to comments from your board at conceptual review. **The Board is requested to confirm the updated preliminary plant list and planting plan, median barrier coloring, and retaining wall texture and structural design comply with the direction provided during concept review. More detailed comments are also solicited.**

### **General Plan/Coastal Plan Design Policies**

The project corridor has a General Plan/Coastal Plan designation of TC (Transportation Corridor). According to the General Plan:

The TC land use category is intended to identify limited access State Highways. The character of the highway will include landscaping and overpass design that reflects positively on the character of the community.

The proposal does not include modification to any existing overpass structures. However, there are proposed structural elements including a concrete median divider and a retaining wall. In

accordance with direction given by your board and other design boards in the region, Caltrans is proposing a sandstone coloring for the median to help it blend with natural materials in the corridor. In addition, a split-face texture is proposed to be incorporated into the retaining wall to mimic construction with native stone materials. These proposed treatments for structural elements should, to the extent feasible, ensure they are in keeping with Carpinteria's beach town character.

The project does include proposed landscaping. In some instances existing landscaping would need to be removed to accommodate the lane, shoulder, and median construction. The attached Preliminary Plant List & Planting Plan provides the proposed approach to landscape treatment within the project corridor. The use of California natives and the placement of landscaping wherever feasible, within the technical constraints of the project, would ensure an attractive overall appearance to the proposed highway improvements.

### **CITYWIDE COMMUNITY DESIGN OBJECTIVES**

**Objective CD-3:** *The design of the community should be consistent with the desire to protect views of the mountains and the sea.*

Within the City of Carpinteria, the project would not have the potential to affect mountain and sea views. Existing grades along the edge of the right-of-way would be preserved, there are no substantial elevation changes proposed for travel lanes themselves, and the solid median barrier would be only two inches (2") taller than the existing metal rail barrier. The proposed retaining wall is necessary because the placement of opposing travel lanes closer together would create too steep a slope face; the retaining wall therefore replaces an existing slope of the same height which separates the travel lanes in the Bailard Avenue area. Please see the attached exhibit for the location and varying height of the proposed retaining wall element.

**Policy CD-9e.** *Major streets should be designed and planted to preserve views of the ocean to the south and hills to the north.*

Although US Highway 101 is not a "major street" per se, the policy is intended to preserve existing views along roadways with substantial numbers of travelers. In this regard, the policy is deemed applicable to US Highway 101.

Within the City of Carpinteria, existing grades along the edge of the US 101 right-of-way would be preserved, and there are no substantial elevation changes proposed for travel lanes. The solid median barrier would be only two inches (2") taller than the existing metal rail barrier, and median landscape is planned generally not to exceed the height of the barrier. Thus existing views from the travel lanes to the sea and mountains would be preserved. Landscaping along the outside edge of the right-of-way should be selected with care to avoid new view blockage. The proposed Plant List and Planting Plan indicates that landscaping would consist of low-growing ground-cover and shrubs that would not have the potential to create view blockage; the exception would be taller shrubs in the vicinity of Bailard Avenue, and these are designed to provide screening of the taller retaining wall sections.

## **DOWNTOWN SUB-AREA OBJECTIVES & POLICIES**

The downtown sub-area is bordered on the north by US Highway 101; the project corridor does not extend to the vicinity of the heart of the downtown at Linden / Carpinteria Avenue, but it is immediately adjacent to the eastern extreme of the downtown commercial core neighborhoods.

**Objective CDS2A-1:** *Preserve and strengthen the visual and physical connections between the downtown and the beach, mountains, and other neighborhoods.*

The project corridor is situated between the downtown/beach areas and the mountains. View blockage by project elements is not anticipated (discussed above) and therefore travelers would still be afforded opportunities to experience both ocean and mountain views. The sandstone coloring of the proposed median and split-face texture of the retaining wall elements would enhance the visual relationship of the project to locally occurring earth materials such as sandstone and granitic rocks.

**Policy CDS2A-c.** *Encourage the gradual but systematic transformation of Carpinteria Avenue from a highway commercial strip to an integrated downtown street similar in character to Linden Avenue.*

A primary objective of the proposed HOV lane addition is to increase the capacity of US Highway 101 during commuter peak hour periods, in order to reduce the volume of traffic utilizing parallel routes such as Carpinteria Avenue. The increased peak hour capacity of the US Highway 101 facility supports the above policy to reduce the width and number of travel lanes along Carpinteria Avenue.

## **NORTHEAST SUB-AREA OBJECTIVES & POLICIES**

The northeast sub-area is bordered on the south by US Highway 101.

**Objective CDS4-1:** *Strengthen the visual and physical connections between the subarea, the downtown and other neighborhoods and districts in the city.*

**Policy CDS4-a.** *Ensure that new development is sensitive to the scale and character of the existing neighborhoods, and consistent with the city's "small beach town" image.*

The citywide and downtown sub-area objectives and policies already discussed are echoed in the northeast sub-area, as listed immediately above. View blockage by project elements is not anticipated (discussed above); the color and texture of the median and retaining walls (structural engineering design components) have been selected to blend them into the natural environment as much as possible. Retaining walls would also be softened with adjacent landscaping, and with creeping vines.

**Implementing Strategy 49.** *The frontage street along the north side of the freeway should be improved with a wall and rows of trees on both sides. This will help to buffer the neighborhood from freeway noise and visual impacts.*

Caltrans surveyed the existing residents along US Highway 101 in areas where noise studies indicated that soundwall installation would be appropriate for noise control. Caltrans guidelines only permit soundwall installation where the majority of the residents vote to accept this measure. The neighborhoods along the project corridor within Carpinteria voted *not* to have soundwalls, in order to preserve their views to the ocean. Given the vote was motivated by a desire to preserve views to the ocean (which also preserves views to the mountains from the highway corridor), the decision not to install soundwalls would be consistent with the overarching theme to minimize the scale of project improvements and preserve the visual connection between sub-areas of the community.

## **THE BLUFFS SUB-AREA OBJECTIVES & POLICIES**

The Bluffs sub-area is bordered on the north by US Highway 101.

**Policy CDS6-a.** *Provide a clear direction for the future development of the Carpinteria Bluffs that:*

- 1. Protects unique and sensitive environmental resources within the Bluffs.*
- 2. Is compatible with the small town character of Carpinteria, enhances the community's image, and contributes to a pleasant visual experience for travelers entering Carpinteria on U.S. 101 from the south.*

The above policy is meant to govern any future development of the Bluffs, recognizing this is an important visual resource for travelers along US Highway 101. The HOV lane proposal would preserve view opportunities toward the Bluffs and ocean beyond. The structural elements of the project (discussed above), incorporate coloring or surface texturing designed to mimic native materials occurring within the corridor, serving to minimize the obviousness of these elements. Proposed landscaping would consist of perennial herbs and shrubs native to southern California (primarily Coastal Sage Scrub), which would be biologically appropriate as well as visually compatible with the Carpinteria Bluffs.

**Implementing Strategy 58.** *All structures, including ancillary structures, shall be appropriately placed so as to minimize their obtrusiveness, and to maintain existing view corridors. Existing views from Bailard Avenue, Carpinteria Avenue, and U.S. 101 to the ocean shall be preserved.*

**Implementing Strategy 59.** *Development that is located on or adjacent to bluffs, beaches, or streams shall be designed and sited to prevent adverse impacts on the visual quality of these resources.*