

3/21/12

Mobility study:

The premise that a highway has to be redesigned for an accident at one location is suspect enough, but the study's conclusion seems to be wrong in many areas.

While we all support a finalized plan for a way overdue, and much needed trail system, especially in sight of the new open spaces, the rest of the highway needs a comprehensive corridor study with all the local, and regional traffic circulations included. At the minimum it should start from Pacifica to HMB, including 92, the only perpendicular main traffic connector.

The study makes no attempt to do this. Instead, it is a fragmented draft without any solid technical, or statistical data, and very likely put together to change the character of the road and the area, for more, and different type of development.

The coastal Hgwy. 1 is a driving attraction itself used by many visitors for it's scenic qualities, also the route for visitors for coastal access and more recently for the more numerous open space access on the east side.

At the same time it is the only, linear route for local, commuter, commercial traffic, and all emergency vehicles.

In the present state the main problems are:

*The lack of safe pedestrian crossings, especially in Montara and Moss beach. The main reason is the geographical location. There is no true traffic intersection for crossings, except for designated services (post office, store, the only playground etc.) on the east side, or beach access on the west. (El Granada already has traffic lights on the two main intersections, feeding into the highway with pedestrian crossing).

*Unregulated parking at surfers beach in El Granada, combined with poorly signed beach access locations, and parking availability all over the mid coast.

* Poor event planning and coordination, jamming the traffic, and underestimating the parking availability.

* Lack of public transportation for schools, slowing all traffic to halt, especially during the morning commute.

*In case of emergencies, or traffic congestion, many places have no alternate route available to divert traffic.

*The possibility for rebuilding the whole section of the highway at surfers beach, due to erosion.

*Unregulated commercial traffic on 92 a winding road with constant accident rate, and road closures. This traffic was regulated for many years in the commuter hours, yet with the increase of the population it ceased to exist.

*Neither the County, nor Caltrans enforces the regulation, that businesses have no direct access to the highway, and that the minimum landscape requirements are maintained. Especially at Moss Beach where existing landscape barriers were eliminated one by one.

*Not utilizing the existing shoulders for slowing down cars to making right turns, it is done by many residents voluntarily.

*No riding directions for bikes.

*The study further accepts the unsafe roadblocks, that will be created if the at grade crossing are build at the tunnel ends, combined with traffic lights, and multiple choices.

It is not clear, or explained, why a bus designation is needed at this location without a coastal access, and no data supports the dangerous idea of interfering with the tunnel traffic this way. Contrary there are plenty of examples of horrific accidents in tunnels. One would think that traffic entering especially exiting the tunnel, should be integrated as smoothly as possible without interference into the road traffic, to avoid abrupt backing up in the tunnel.

Previous traffic studies provided some accident data, and speed never been the cause for even the minority of the total accidents. At the Devil Slide, all the car-suicides were counted into the accident rate of the total Montara, Moss Beach numbers, which were numerous in the past. The previous traffic volume, LOS studies also been at the unacceptable F level . The study offers no solution to the problems, except “regulating the road to a lower speed and make it “friendlier’ for development while achieving the El Camino Real effect. In contrast, national statistics post the vehicle speed between 35-45 mph, in the highest accident rate category.

If the status of the Highway 1 is put in limbo, between a “village” serving county road and a main traffic route, no one wins. We need a comprehensive study to resolve the real problems. Just before the recent public presentation, the County designated the existing highway corridor for a “rural corridor ” serving to commute to “rural centers”, without further explanation. While this concept may fit the “new road designation” for the “villages” provided by the new traffic study, nothing could be further from the reality, and makes both questionable.

-The existing Community Plan describes the area with rural character. It does not make it rural by function. There are rural elements with rural zoning, but he majority of the population lives in urban-zoned areas, and commutes to work.

El Granada is one of the very few places with a historical city plan, ignored unfortunately by the study. It would have been a wonderful opportunity to enhance the city plan with a well designed park and beach rebuilding, combined with a supporting parking solution for visitors and locals alike, separating it all from the highway traffic.

The LCP’s coastal act, and coastal access, scenic views, protected habitats, and visitor serving requirements are not rural, but coastal. We are costal communities with a fragile balance between the coastal protections, and developments. The rural character requirement supports the open feel for the area. Rural centers are a different type of entities, with all together different development needs, priorities, and design guidelines.

So are the standards for the connecting rural roads.

-The services, are scattered between communities but mainly provided by Half Moon Bay, which is not accessible on many weekends due to heavy unregulated traffic. The mid coast communities are lacking community centers, or meeting a place, to give it a “village” or any other kind of identity. They also are without libraries, play/sport fields etc., and medical services.

-The lack of emergency medical care is already a problem, causing many airlifts. While the consultants were referring to Europe for traffic example, the new studies, and mandatory laws to reduce emergency respond time in many European counties was not mentioned. According those studies an average 4 minutes time saving can increase the chance for surviving 40%

-The arbitrary use of roundabouts by the consultants would just add to the traffic confusion, and create more possibilities for accidents. Roundabouts are designed for equal traffic flow from all direction, not for unregulated pedestrian crossings on the highways. By the size they are huge to accommodate all uses, expensive, and simply not right for this area. According to the design guidelines they also cause more severe accidents for pedestrians, and not recommended for children, older population, (and surfboard).

To keep the highway traffic flowing and identifying the problems, with the corresponding locations correctly, would give a better solution for all involved.

- Keep the traffic flow moving on the highway, with the least number of interference.
- Eliminate blockings at the tunnel ends.
- Regulate commercial traffic on 92.
- Eliminate all parallel parking on the highway, starting with Surfers Beach.
- Direct pedestrians to crossings, and prohibit crossings any other places.
- Establish a visitor friendly beach access signage system, directing traffic to available spaces and designations. Identify designation for family oriented “play” beaches, marine reserve, and for surfers, kayakers, fishing etc. Give priority use for parking on those locations.
- Establish an event signage system, directing traffic to available spaces and designations.
- Utilize and expand service roads for slow traffic and businesses.
- Enforce landscape requirements for all businesses.
- Provide each community with at least one pedestrian/bike over or undercrosss. They are good looking lightweight solutions out there, contrary to the heavy concrete structure the consultants used for example. Most accidents are caused by children and young adults with careless crossing. The safest solution would be to eliminate grade crossings, like many other communities do.
- Provide safe crossing islands at the main pedestrian crossing locations in Montara and Moss Beach.
- Eliminate and close some of the street/traffic crossings, redirect local traffic to fewer highway crossing.
- Close direct business accesses to the highway with the required landscape islands and/or service roads.

Elisabeth Vespremi