



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

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NEIL R. CULLEN
DIRECTOR

August 15, 1996

Mr. Chris McComb
Mid Coast Community Council
P.O. Box 64
Moss Beach, CA 94038

Dear Mr. McComb:

Re: Closure of Ocean Boulevard - Moss Beach

Our Maintenance Division has reviewed the Geotechnical Report that evaluated the portion of Ocean Boulevard that has been closed, and field reviewed the roads in the area to determine what could be done to reopen the road and to address the issues raised at your Council's meeting that I attended to discuss the road closure. The following is a summary of what we have determined:

Geology

The original mapping of the area and the subsequent investigation indicates that this section of Ocean Boulevard is within a landslide that will continue to move, but that the sliding will not occur instantaneously, rather it will continue over a period of time.

Repair

We can grade, rock and oil the road to reopen it to public traffic. The consultant advises that we should limit loads on the road both during construction and after, in order to not aggravate the situation. We may also have to keep La Grande closed at its intersection with Ocean or regrade a portion of La Grande at Ocean as we anticipate lowering the grade of the road to remove some of the weight off of the slide.

The cost of this work is estimated at \$25,000. The cost of maintaining the road after this work is done will depend upon the amount of movement that continues to occur. We believe maintenance would consist of periodic patching and regrading, as needed, and can range in cost from about \$5,000 to \$15,000 per year. Both the initial cost as well as the ongoing costs will not sustain the road, as it is inevitable that the road will eventually slide onto the beach according to both the original and subsequent geotechnical reports.

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Liability

I have checked with County Counsel to determine the magnitude of liability and if there are ways for the County to limit its liability if the road is reopened, given that we do know that the area is within an active landslide. County Counsel is of the opinion that the County will have significant exposure if the road is reopened to vehicular traffic, and it would be hard to defend the allegations that an accident was caused by subsidence that we were aware of, and that we were not diligent in providing for the public safety given that there are other alternate routes that could have been used. The Board will be provided this information prior to their making a decision on either reopening the road or closing it permanently.

Other Intersections

Some of the concerns raised by residents at your Council's meeting were based on the actions of some motorists using the local streets - i.e., speeding and less than careful driving. We believe we can slow down traffic at the intersections of Park and La Grande, La Grande and San Ramon, and San Ramon and San Lucas by eliminating any "curves" and requiring more right angle turns at these intersections. This can be accomplished by placing asphalt berms to delineate the edge of the road and minor grading at the intersections to more clearly define them. This will also improve intersection sight distance. I have ordered an aerial photograph of the area and will delineate the proposed improvements on the photo and submit it to your Council as soon as it is available.

Compatibility of Area with a Coastal Trail

We can and would recommend that the area in question be graded and be left in a presentable condition that could be used by hikers and cyclists who wish to traverse this area at their own risk, and we would also re-vegetate the area where the road would be removed in order to have it blend in with the surrounding area, if the decision is to close this portion of Ocean Boulevard to vehicles. The County's liability is reduced, as compared to if we reopen the road, if we return the area back to its natural condition and sign the area, as there are provisions in the Government Code that provides immunity to the local agency when this is done. Again, that would be a consideration by the Board of Supervisors.

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Alternate Road into the Area

Another suggestion was to construct another access into the area to provide an alternative for traffic. Escalle is an unimproved street that ties into Los Banos, and Citizens Utilities has done some grading on this road to facilitate placement of some of their facilities. However, the road terminates on other unimproved roads which would also have to be improved in order to provide a complete connection. The Board of Supervisors adopted an ordinance which provides for taking a road into the maintained system once it is brought up to minimum standards. This ordinance also requires a petition signed by the adjacent property owners. I do not believe that our improving Escalle is a workable option as it is contrary to the Board's adopted ordinance, and any work would be subject to the environmental, Coastal Development permit and the public hearing process.

Other Suggestions

Traffic calming devices and "Children at Play" signs were also suggested. Traffic calming devices--traffic circles and chicanes--are controversial based on our experience with them in other areas of the County, and I believe they would be more disruptive than the problem they try to resolve. The devices require enough room to allow traffic to traverse the road which, in this case, would require widening of the road towards homes to provide the room for the device and the roadway. I believe that working on the intersections to require right angle turns will provide the results the residents are seeking without moving the roads closer to homes in the area.

We would not recommend installing signs such as "Children at Play" as they are not a standard sign, can give parents a false sense of security about the safety of their children, and provide a mixed message to the motorist.

Environmental and Coastal Permits

I have checked with Environmental Services and they believe that some type of environmental document would have to be prepared if the road is to be closed permanently. However, we have not started to prepare a document pending further discussion with your Council and the residents of the area.

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I believe we have responded to the questions asked of us at your Council's meeting and in your letter of June 27th, and I am willing to meet with your Council again to go over our responses, receive your recommendations and bring them to the Board of Supervisors when they consider the disposition of this road.

I can also send copies of this letter to the residents in the area as Mr. Ely, who spoke at your June meeting, was kind enough to provide me with mailing labels for the area. Mailing was an issue expressed at your June meeting, given the mix of P.O. Boxes and street addresses used in this area.

Please let me know how you wish to proceed with discussing this issue. I can be reached at (415) 599-1421 if you have any questions.

Very truly yours,



Neil R. Cullen
Director of Public Works

NRC:sdd
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cc: Members, Board of Supervisors
John Maltbie, County Manager
George Haines, Maintenance Division Manager