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COUNTY OF SAN MATEO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
Interdepartmental Correspondence

Date: September 19, 1995

**TO:** Honorable Members of the Board

**FROM:** Ted Lempert and Ruben Barrales

**SUBJECT:** Request CalTrans to examine and investigate thoroughly the tunnel option for Devil's Slide

RECOMMENDATION: Authorize Board of Supervisor to ask CalTrans to further examine and investigate the geological, design and construction, and financial viability of a tunnel for Devil's Slide.

BACKGROUND:

There has been confusion, misstatements and misinterpretations of the origin of the current discussion on a tunnel as a possible solution for the Devil's Slide problem. The tunnel option was first mentioned in 1973 and was briefly (in one paragraph) discussed and rejected by CalTrans in 1986. Many people are saying environmental groups re-introduced the tunnel alternative as another attempt to delay the bypass. That's not the case. Here's the facts:

In late January, 1995, shortly after Highway 1 was closed down, Supervisors Lempert and Barrales organized a panel of geologists, geotechnical engineers and engineering geologists (many of whom were new to the Devil's Slide issue) who volunteered their time and expertise to evaluate the geological condition of Devil's Slide and suggest short-term and long-term solutions. The members of the panel average over 20 years of geological experience. In February, this independent panel of experts spent an afternoon examining the current damage and rock structure and meeting with CalTrans technical personnel. They rejected the modified MDA alternative as an immediate, permanent solution and suggested a tunnel as the safest (both from drainage and seismic perspectives) and most reliable permanent solution (see attached "Summary Opinions of the Assembled Panel of Geologists and Engineers").

On March 7th, Supervisors Lempert and Barrales wrote to Caltrans to examine the tunnel alternative and to meet with the panel of experts in a private meeting without prejudice to the litigation. On March 23rd, CalTrans responded: "I must respectfully decline your request to engage in a new dialogue in the tunnel alternative unless requested to do so by an official action of the full Board of Supervisors." On April 4th, the Board, in a 3-2 decision, voted not to ask CalTrans to provide data, information and studies discussing the viability of a tunnel for

## Devil's Slide.

On August 10th, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), after reviewing numerous comments on the tunnel, committed itself to "address the issue of a tunnel alternative in the reevaluation of the 1986 final EIS."

On September 8th, John Shultz, District Chief for FHWA, in a telephone conference with Supervisor Lempert's legislative aide, stated that "federal funds are available for a limited study of the tunnel alternative for Devil's Slide." He explained: "I can not see us rejecting a study that Caltrans proposes that was requested by the Board of Supervisors. I do not think the availability of funds will be an issue." Mr. Shultz further commented that the FHWA would be glad to attend any meeting to discuss funding that CalTrans also attends. He acknowledged that a meeting to discuss federal funding for the Devil's Slide problem with local, state and federal elected officials, CalTrans officials and FHWA personnel in attendance might be helpful.

We ask the Board to request CalTrans to examine and investigate thoroughly the tunnel option for Devil's Slide by performing the following:

(1) Request CalTrans geologists, geotechnical experts and engineers involved in the Devil's Slide project meet with the panel of independent geologists, geotechnical engineers and engineering geologists ("independent experts") who visited the Slide in February, reviewed all the data available on the Slide and recommended a tunnel as the safest and best permanent solution;

(2) Request CalTrans geo-technical experts, Division Maintenance Manager and Regional Director along with the independent experts meet and consult with reputable tunnel design and construction firms, including, but not not limited to M. L. Shank at Shank/Balfour Beatty, a world-renown tunnel builder who already has reviewed the Devil's Slide situation and submitted a bid to build a tunnel at the site;

(3) Request CalTrans officials (including the Regional Director) meet with local, county, state and federal elected officials and FHWA personnel to examine the permitting and funding process if the tunnel were the preferred, chosen alternative (e.g., what are the alternatives for acquiring federal funding to design and construct a tunnel?);

(4) Request CalTrans to follow the FWHA request to prepare a tunnel study by hiring a reputable engineering firm with recent experience in the design and construction of tunnels through a Request for Proposal (RFP) public bidding process to address the viability of a tunnel at Devil's Slide. The tunnel contractor will report findings throughout the study to the independent experts and consider at least the following concerns/issues:

(a) the geological and engineering viability of a tunnel for the site;

(b) the design, size and specifications for the type of tunnel required to satisfy FWHA safety standards including a detailed discussion of what factors are considered in determining the appropriate tunnel for the site (e.g., would a single-bore, 46 feet wide tunnel as suggested by Shank/Balfour Beatty and James Roberts, CalTrans Chief of the Division of Structures, meet those requirements?);

(c) the time required to design and construct the appropriate tunnel for the site;

(d) the required permitting process for approving a tunnel option and the time to complete that process;

(e) the cost of designing and building the different tunnel options that would satisfy FWHA safety standards (including the cost based upon a design-build contract);

(f) the annual cost to maintain the tunnel option(s) suggested (both short-term and long-term); and

(g) the benefits and disadvantages of a tunnel at Devil's Slide considering at least safety, cost, speed of design/construction/ permitting and environmental effects.

There is currently an injunction in place which prevents the Board from taking any action to approve the permits for the bypass option. This injunction is controlled by the federal courts and could be lifted for many more months.

In the meantime, it would be useful to explore thoroughly the tunnel alternative now so that time will not be wasted when the Board does have the power to act. Approving this resolution, will not do anything to delay a decision on a permanent solution to this frustrating problem. All the information and meetings requested can be completed within a few months (even quicker if expedited by CalTrans). In addition, the four items requested would not cost the County or State any out-of-pocket expenditures.