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News Release

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CALTRANS OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT WILL ADDRESS CRITICAL SAFETY NEEDS ON SR94

Project Manager Sam Amen Listens to Concerns of Hwy 94 Club, Recasts Four Options into Short Term and Long Term Phases

When CalTrans' Project Manager Sam Amen came to speak to the Hiway 94 Club last September, he did more than describe the four options of the highway improvement project. He listened closely to the concerns of the members of the backcountry community planning group. Six months later, on Thursday night (Feb 15), he returned to the club's monthly meeting at Barratt Cafe with a recast plan.

What has changed? Instead of being a slow-moving project extending over as many as 20 years and facing many political and environmental hurdles, funds are available to make possible improvement to certain safety and maintenance issues now. It moves ahead on critical issues of safety, such as passing lanes and road shoulders that are in sections of the 18-mile route not impacted by known environmental protection concerns.

CalTrans Safety and Maintenance Engineer Jim Boles, who accompanied Amen in making the presentation, described the change as "a tectonic plate shift" in contrast to the pace of most highway projects in the state. He said the Highway 94 work "is one giant master project now (rather than four options). All issues are being considered at one time, and these are the early action projects."

Amen promised the list of this early action work will be completed by April and the final list approved by June of this year. The list will be posted next month on www.rural94.com.

"It's the same route as before," Amen explained. "Now we're going to fix it. That's what the change is."

In the short term, Amen said project planners will address what are called “truck-restricted curves,” curves that are too tight for large, 54- and 65-foot-long semi-trucks to safely navigate without crossing the center line. Also moved to the top of the list is construction of passing lanes on five steeply rising sections of the 18-mile, mostly two-lane roadway that links Jamul to Tecate in San Diego’s mountainous East County.

Maintenance is a separate division within CalTrans, and funds are available to draw on for these shorter term objectives. Southwest Strategic Consultants will work with CalTrans on engineering aspects of the project.

Longer term objectives will have to wait for additional funding, Amen said. He credited Congressman Bob Filner with obtaining \$2.7 million in Department of Transportation funding for CalTrans, and State Assemblywoman Denise Ducheny will lining up state highway funds.

A major factor spurring CalTrans to address the dangerous curves and lack of passing lanes in critical areas of the route is the increasing number and size of trucks using the route from the Port of Entry at Tecate into San Diego County and points beyond. Recently the California Highway Patrol has begun to enforce state laws and National Highway Safety laws regarding limits on the length of semi trailer trucks that can use the road. At the same time, international agreements under NAFTA are allowing more trucks to cross the border, but the CHP has begun to ticket trucks longer than 65 feet on Highway 94.

Related are concerns about the hours the border gates are open and staffed by US Customs agents. Currently the gates are closed from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. (?). This causes a backup at the gates on the Mexican side, and forces the trucks to mix with commuters during daylight hours.

Operating the crossing through the nighttime hours was a position advocated by Juan Rodriguez, major of Tecate, Mexico, who attended the Hwy 94 Club meeting along with a delegation of more than 30 representatives of trucking companies, maquiladores and other commercial interests. Such a move would relieve traffic during daylight hours.

Don Sauter, president of the Highway 94 club, said the club also advocates keeping the border open 24 hours a day. “We want it safe for all users,” he said.

An active community planning group, the Hwy 94 club will focus on the controversial Jamul Indian Village Casino at its March 15 meeting, followed by a presentation April 19 by the No Casino in Jamul Group. The club’s primary interest is what the tribal group is planning to do for traffic mitigation on Highway 94.

Then for May 17, the Acting Port Director at the Tecate Port of Entry, Joe Misenhelter, will report on the latest statistics on traffic coming across the border, and projected trends for growth in traffic.

Monthly meetings are held on the third Thursday of the month, except for June.

Monthly meetings are held at the Barratt Café in Barratt Junction on Highway 94 except for July and August, which are held at Camp's Grove in Dulzura in conjunction with the Kiwanis Club of Greater Jamul. Meetings begin with a social gathering at 6:30 p.m., family style dinner at 7 p.m. and the general meeting at 7:45 p.m. Cost of the dinner is \$8 per plate.

For more information, contact Gordon Hammers at 619-478-5000.

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