

Ernest Klock, Principal Civil Engineer
Marin County Dept. of Public Works
3501 Civic Center Drive, Rm. 404
San Rafael, CA 94903



June 25, 2010

Re: Sir Francis Drake Boulevard (SFDB) Rehabilitation Project Draft
Environmental Impact Report

Dear Mr. Klock:

Marin Conservation League has reviewed the subject DEIR and wishes to submit the following comments on its adequacy. In general respects, the DEIR provides sufficient information to enable the County to make an informed decision in selecting the least environmentally damaging alternative ("Environmentally Superior Alternative"). We differ with the DEIR's conclusion, however, that all significant impacts have been mitigated to a less-than-significant level. Given the unique sensitivity of the project's environment, effective mitigation will play a critical role in reducing impacts and placing conditions on the project's implementation. The FEIR must provide the necessary supporting information and be honest in its conclusions, even if significant unavoidable adverse impacts require a finding of overriding considerations.

General Comment: All references in the DEIR to the use of rubberized asphalt concrete (RAC) should be replaced with the appropriate material (permeable asphalt?), as discussed in the presentation of the project before the Board of Supervisors, July 15, 2010.

Our comments on the DEIR focus on Biological Resources, Hydrology and Water Quality, certain aspects of Traffic and Circulation, and Alternatives.

Biological Resources

Impact BIO-5 and associated Mitigation Measures: Maintaining the long-term health of the Lagunitas Creek habitat for federal and state listed salmonid species is of paramount importance in this project. As discussed below, under Impact HYD-1, the DEIR devotes most of its analysis to construction-related impacts. Certainly these will be the most obviously disruptive to the environment. The discussion of post-construction (ongoing operation) of the rehabilitated roadway warrants more detailed mitigation. The discussion points out that design elements should contribute to a general improvement in the quality of stormwater discharged from SFBD. It also states that "In the absence of a proper long-term maintenance program . . . the proposed project could cause a significant adverse impact to salmonids in Lagunitas Creek due to a gradual decline in runoff water quality under post project conditions" (Page 197). Measure BIO-5b is the only mitigation specific to post-construction operation that addresses this concern.

Comment: See comment below under Impact HYD-1, and our request for more detailed discussion of measures to protect against long-term water quality degradation to salmonid habitat.

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Impact BIO-9 and 10 : These impact discussions concern the direct removal of “protected” trees (under County Tree Preservation Ordinance) and root damage to redwood and native trees. Impact BIO-9 is explicit in documenting the trees and species that would be removed. Impact BIO-10 is thorough in documenting the nature of root damage that can occur under various disturbance regimes. In both instances, the alternative that results in the least possible impact to trees, consistent with meeting the objectives of the project, should be selected.

Comment: We do not agree that the potential loss of eight trees at Station 270-25 (for installation of a retaining wall), plus nine trees under Option A, is biologically insignificant, even on a watershed basis (Page 206). Each individual contributes to a large, mature canopy that is rich in wildlife and helps to sustain the Lagunitas Creek riparian corridor. Mitigation Measures BIO-9a and 9b call for replanting trees of the same species at a 3:1 replacement ratio. As with similar, widely employed mitigation measures, these new specimen plantings will take many decades to reach the maturity of the specimens they replace and therefore will not mitigate the loss to a level of insignificance. The mitigation measures detailed in BIO-10a to i, designed to limit damage to redwood roots, are very detailed. Our concern, however, is with the potential long-term impacts from compaction of soil, root pruning and smothering, alteration of drainage patterns, and other damage to root zones that may not show the evidence of weakened or diseased trees for many years. Due to this uncertainty, we do not accept that the mitigation measures will reduce the level of impact on redwood trees to less than significant.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Impact HYD-1: This impact considers the possible contribution of stormwater runoff that could contribute to violation of water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, or substantially degrade the water quality of Lagunitas Creek and/or Tomales Bay. The mitigation measure HYD-1a provides a series of BMPs to mitigate construction-related impacts. When coupled with the discussion under Impact BIO-5 and associated mitigation measures (impacts on federal and/or state listed salmonid species) a fairly comprehensive program emerges for protecting the water quality of Lagunitas Creek habitat during construction. Mitigation Measure (MM) BIO-5b and HYD-1b, which deal with post-construction (ongoing) operation and maintenance, are less satisfactory. MM BIO-5b consists of brief reference to the long-term Storm Water Management Plan (SWMP) that will be prepared prior to start of construction. MM HYD-1b lists four water quality improvement measures, such as establishing a vegetative buffer and installing vegetated swales with permeable backfill.

Comment: Since it is the operation of the road over time that will have long-term impacts on the Lagunitas Creek water quality and hydrology, the FEIR should provide more specific information to support these generic measures, in particular concerning the effectiveness of the proposed plantings and swales: (1) specifications for permeable soil type and treatment to assure maximum absorption of pollutant runoff; (2) the amount of soil filtration needed (volume per square yard/mile of roadway) to ensure pollutant runoff is mitigated to accept-

able standards; (3) what plantings are best to absorb the pollutants in the soil (“indigenous” species covers a wide variety of possibilities)? (4) What monitoring and/or long-term maintenance plan will be required to ensure continued absorption of roadway runoff pollutants? (5) If roadway swales are not normal bio-swales, and actually serve as a drainage conduit, should there be sumps where pollutants can be accumulated and removed with periodic maintenance?

Traffic and Circulation

Comment: The Traffic and Circulation impact analysis is based on the single premise that because the project will not increase the capacity on SFDB, the project will not result in permanent increased traffic. Therefore, only increases in traffic volume of construction-related traffic are analyzed (Page 283). This premise does not seem reasonable, in that we can expect increased use of SFDB from Butterfield Rd. to State Rte. #1 due to: 1) projected population growth in Marin, and 2) increased tourism travel to and from West Marin on this route. By what factor might traffic increase due to these conditions, and in what periods of time? Further, it seems reasonable to expect that the improvement to SFDB may in itself attract users, most likely at higher speeds. Can we use an increase in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) of 25-26 per cent for the County as a whole as a proxy for increased traffic on this roadway segment? Additional traffic impact analysis in this regard would be useful.

Alternatives

Comment: The “Resurface Alternative” is presented with minimal other improvements, such as culvert replacement and other repairs that are environmentally beneficial and are included only in the “environmentally superior alternative.” Given the extent of the work needed for just resurfacing, it appears counterintuitive that defective culverts would not be replaced. In addition, bank repair and other slides could be included in this alternative as reasonable although minimal improvements. There appears to be a deliberate attempt in the DEIR to reduce the environmental benefits of this alternative in comparison to the Mitigated Alternative.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.



Nona Dennis
President