

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

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March 24, 2008

Mr. Ronald J. Kosinski, Deputy District Director
Division of Environmental Planning
Department of Transportation, District 7
100 South Main Street MS-16A
Los Angeles, California 90012

**Interstate 405 Sepulveda Pass Widening Project
Final Environmental Impact Report/
Environmental Impact Statement
and Section 4(f) Evaluation**

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (Conservancy) has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement and Section 4(f) Evaluation for the Interstate 405 Sepulveda Pass Widening Project (Project). The Conservancy appreciates the ongoing collaboration and cooperation with Caltrans in the design and construction of the Skirball Center Drive wildlife bridge across Interstate 405 (I-405) and the design and construction of the culvert for funneling wildlife under the northbound on-ramp at the Getty Trailhead. The Conservancy supports Alternative 2, identified by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) as the preferred alternative, with the following additional recommendations.

The Conservancy supports Caltrans' design of the southbound I-405 Skirball Center Drive interchange which moves the congestion and infrastructure south of the existing intersection. In addition to relieving traffic congestion around this interchange, the relocation of the interchange will significantly improve conditions for wildlife crossing Sepulveda Boulevard using the Skirball Center Drive wildlife bridge. More specifically, the wider gap between the Skirball Center Drive overpass and the proposed intersection relocation eliminates pavement, lighting, and noise for an animal located between Sepulveda Boulevard and I-405. The preferred alternative creates an invaluable pocket of wildlife habitat between the street and freeway. No other project alternative, including the no project alternative, can achieve this level of wildlife crossing function.

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In addition to the Conservancy's July 9, 2007 comments regarding the design of the Skirball Center Drive wildlife bridge, we request the following additional mitigation measure or conditions. Caltrans shall provide a water meter, and a 3/4-inch diameter pipe on the east side of Skirball Center Drive near the wildlife staging area at the bridge's east end terminus on Conservancy-owned land. The water source would help mitigate cumulative impacts to habitat degradation in Sepulveda Pass and will help encourage wildlife to make use of the Skirball Center Drive wildlife bridge. The Conservancy also recommends installing a similar seepage pipe for the proposed northbound on-ramp at Getty View Trailhead. The seepage pipe should be located near the eastside of the proposed culvert that will funnel wildlife under the proposed northbound on-ramp. Because the Conservancy owns the land where both artificial seeps would be, the Conservancy should control the flow and Caltrans should pay for the water. Both water sources would also create small wetlands.

Since the construction of the Getty View Trailhead and the Skirball Trailhead into Conservancy land, materials and construction costs have risen. As previously stated (October 22, 2007) the in-lieu fee agreement must reflect such increases including the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority staff time spent for arranging reimbursement of funding sources.

Please direct any questions or future correspondence to Paul Edelman of our staff at (310) 589-3200, ext. 128.

Sincerely,

RONALD P. SCHAFER
Chairperson