

Memorandum

To : The Conservancy
The Advisory Committee

Date: October 29, 2012

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Hon. ASLA, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 15: Consideration of resolution adopting findings regarding the Pacoima Wash Mountain Bikeway project.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy adopt the attached resolution recommending findings regarding the Pacoima Wash Mountain Bikeway Project.

Legislative Authority: Section 33211(c) of the Public Resources Code.

Background: In the 2005 Federal Department of Transportation/Federal Highway Administration budget, \$983,928 was earmarked to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy for planning and design of the Pacoima Wash Mountain Bikeway (FFY 2005 DOT AAA; PL 108-447; District 7, DEMO ID CA282). The funds must be obligated by November 1, 2012, through the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), or they will lapse on December 31, 2012.

The proposed 3.25 mile Pacoima Wash Mountain Bikeway will wind along the reclaimed and restored banks of Pacoima Wash as one component of a regional recreational watershed park. The Class I Bikeway and bicycle staging areas will be located within some of the most densely populated areas of the San Fernando Valley, along the eastern edge of the City of San Fernando and the Pacoima area of the City of Los Angeles. The bikeway will connect these communities to the Angeles National Forest and provide opportunities for experiencing the natural forest of the foothills, and is a recommended project of the City of Los Angeles Bicycle Master Plan.

In addition to linking to the Angeles National Forest, the bikeway route will take visitors to urban parklands including Eighth Street Park (under construction) and El Dorado Park (in planning), both of which have been funded in part by the Conservancy. Project partners for the Pacoima Wash Mountain Bikeway include the City of San Fernando, the City of Los Angeles, Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA), County of Los Angeles, and non-profits Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition and Pacoima Beautiful. Staff from all of these organizations have been collaborating for several years to plan the bikeway. Since the earmark both the City of Los Angeles (May 2011) and County of Los Angeles (March 2012) adopted their respective Bike Master Plans, and the Pacoima Wash Mountain Bikeway was included in the plans. The City of San Fernando has secured construction funds, and the City

of Los Angeles is currently identifying funding sources for construction of their portion.

All of the planning work to date has been performed by the partner organizations, and the earmarked funds were not used so that adequate funds would remain available for engineering. The key elements are now in place and the project is ready to proceed with site-specific design. In September 2012 staff were notified that the funds were in jeopardy due to an August 2012 decision by the Federal Department of Transportation to redistribute all unspent earmarked transportation funds to new projects.

Because the bikeway traverses multiple local jurisdictions, a regional agency such as the Conservancy or MRCA is best equipped to be the lead agency for design because it is not limited to only a portion of the project area. MRCA has experience with a similar role in regional planning efforts along the Arroyo Seco Parkway, which also traverses multiple local jurisdictions. Although the funds were earmarked for the Conservancy, the Conservancy does not have adequate staff to devote to the project. Even though much of the design work will be performed by engineering and planning consultants, those contracts will still require significant staff time to manage.

One mechanism the Conservancy has to spend funds such as these would be to use the Conservancy Fund to make a grant to a local agency. In this case, because the Fund requires appropriations in each budget for spending authority, use of the Conservancy Fund would delay the project. Spending authority would not be available until July 1, 2013, or later if the FY 13/14 budget is not passed on time. This would result in the loss of the funds for the project, because they must be obligated by November 1, 2012. A second drawback to using the Conservancy Fund is that these funds are only available on a reimbursable basis and may not be advanced by Caltrans. The Fund usually receives advanced funds to be used for a designated project. It simply does not have the capacity to absorb \$983,928 of costs, even if they are to be reimbursed.

For all of the reasons described, and to ensure that the funds are kept in southern California for this recreational trail, staff recommends that the Conservancy transfer the Federal Highway Administration Earmark from FFY 2005 DOT AAA (PL 108-447) from District 7, DEMO ID CA282 project 'Pacoima Wash Mountain Bikeway' project and the project funds to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority. If the proposed action is approved by the Board, MRCA would be able to work directly with Caltrans to access the funds and implement the project.