

SANTA MONICA MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY

RAMIREZ CANYON PARK
5750 RAMIREZ CANYON ROAD
MALIBU, CALIFORNIA 90265
PHONE (310) 589-3200
FAX (310) 589-3207



May 3, 2006

Mr. Ron Kosinski
Deputy District Director
Department of Transportation, District 7
100 South Main Street
Los Angeles, California 90012-3712

**Interstate 405 HOV Lane Over the Sepulveda Pass (I-10 to US-101)
Wildlife Crossings**

Dear Mr. Kosinski:

The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is the principal State planning agency for the Santa Monica Mountains zone. Both preserving and enhancing the capability of wildlife to cross the 405 Freeway in the Sepulveda Pass is major objective of this agency. Such movement capability is fundamental to protect the public's approximately \$100 million investment in open space located east of the 405 Freeway and within 5,000-acre, Los Angeles City-owned Griffith Park.

The Conservancy currently owns 272 acres that abut the subject Caltrans rights-of-ways on the east side of the 405 Freeway. Both the proposed new Getty Center Drive northbound on-ramp and the Skirball Center Drive bridge reconstruction require extensive grading and facilities on Conservancy-owned parkland.

The purpose of this letter is to insert the recommendations and concerns of our Natural Resources and Planning staff on wildlife movement into the planning and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) preparation process without delay. Airing of the complex issues regarding the sacrifice of State parkland for transportation infrastructure we shall leave to another venue but in no way diminishes this agency's concerns. Onsite meetings with your staff in December 2005 and last week are much appreciated. However, the late stage of the environmental review process took us by surprise last week, and we have no knowledge or record of receiving any written notice of, or the Notice of Preparation for, the subject project. We respectfully request that all such future documentation be sent to the attention of Paul Edelman, Deputy Director of Natural Resources and Planning, at the above address. We also request that this letter be included in the DEIR.

SMMC
Attachment
May 22, 2006
Item 9 (b)

Mr. Ron Kosinski
Interstate 405 HOV Lane Over the Sepulveda Pass Wildlife Crossings
May 3, 2006
Page 2

The main focus of this letter is facilitate the incorporation of critical specific design components to accommodate wildlife movement on the proposed Skirball Center Drive bridge. A subsequent letter will address the proposed Getty Center Drive on-ramp and the loss of the Getty View Trailhead parking lot.

The complete reconstruction of a freeway bridge with documented large mammal crossings provides a once in a century opportunity to incorporate elements that permanently facilitate successful wildlife crossings. The Skirball Center Drive bridge plans presented by your staff last week showed just the standard required five-foot-wide sidewalk with no walls to buffer either street or freeway traffic noise. The bridge reconstruction proposal calls both for widening the bridge and extending its length by approximately twenty feet into Conservancy parkland. The manufactured fill slopes would extend even further into parkland and a riparian area. A longer wider bridge carrying more traffic would have a negative impact on wildlife movement capability.

This combination of adverse impacts and the opportunity of a complete fresh start designing a new bridge warrants a better design for wildlife movement at a key regional habitat choke point. We acknowledge that cost factors are an issue. However, both the CEQA process and good planning militate that decision makers be presented with the appropriate range of project alternatives. We request that the project and its DEIR alternatives be modified to include the following components and details.

Modifications between Freeway and Sepulveda Boulevard

The removal (relocation) of the southbound on-ramp provides excellent opportunities to improve the wildlife approach to the bridge area. Along this section of the immediate Sepulveda Boulevard interface, right-of-way fencing should be permanently omitted for approximately 70-feet south of the intersection of Sepulveda Boulevard and Skirball Center Drive. The entire island area located south of Skirball Center Drive, east of Sepulveda Boulevard, and west of the Freeway should have an eight-foot-high perimeter fence to allow the area to provide a temporary refuge for wildlife staging. Such fencing with wooden posts and large-sized rectangular mesh is now commonly used all over the world to funnel wildlife movement near highways. The large mesh minimizes its visibility.

Wildlife use of the bridge will increase if the interface between the above described island area, and a travel path on the south side of the bridge, is broadened to the greatest extent possible. To partially accomplish widening, or funnel design, the immediate transition point between the bridge structure and the island area should be flared. That flared area

Mr. Ron Kosinski
Interstate 405 HOV Lane Over the Sepulveda Pass Wildlife Crossings
May 3, 2006
Page 3

must be located in the apex formed by the existing bridge and existing southbound on-ramp. It will require a special retaining wall on the west side of the proposed southbound on-ramp. Under separate cover, we will send a color annotated diagram based on the plans provided to our staff that depicts the suggested extent of this fencing and entry area widening.

Minimum Ten-Foot-Wide Bridge Pedestrian/Wildlife Travel Path with Walls

The above described fencing system should funnel animals to a minimum ten-foot-wide travel path on the south side of the bridge. The travel path would function both as a sidewalk and animal movement area(in the night hours). The south, or freeway side, of the travel path should have a minimum five-foot-high, continuous, solid masonry wall. That masonry wall must extend ten feet beyond any travel lanes (including ramps) below. The inside, or north, side of the travel path must have a continuous three-foot-high concrete wall extending from a point 20 feet east of the Sepulveda Boulevard northbound street lane to the eastern terminus of the bridge structure. A metal guard rail, as currently exists on top of the existing wall, is compatible with this design. Under separate cover we will send a color annotated diagram based on the plans provided to our staff that depicts the suggested extent of the separate masonry block and concrete walls.

Ideally portions of the ten-foot-wide travel path would have a maximum amount of surface area composed of resin-bound decomposed granite. For example five feet of concrete sidewalk would be located side-by-side with a five-foot-wide band of this more natural-like surface. The surface would not have to be permeable. Lighting should be carefully designed on the bridge and path to create the darkest conditions permissible on the southern side of the travel path.

If any portion of this proposed travel lane can be constructed to be less load bearing than a typical sidewalk-street combination, we urge the exploration of this idea to reduced costs. The DEIR analyses should address this option thoroughly. Because the freeway slopes considerably down (away) from this Conservancy-proposed five foot bridge widening, we do not believe height clearance limitations are a constraint. If the proposed travel path had less weight bearing restrictions it possibly could have a thinner profile.

Fencing and Eastern Transition into Conservancy Parkland

The above described wall should seamlessly connect to the above described type of wire mesh fencing along Skirball Center Drive. The fence should follow Skirball Center Drive

Mr. Ron Kosinski
Interstate 405 HOV Lane Over the Sepulveda Pass Wildlife Crossings
May 3, 2006
Page 4

for the length of the proposed new right-of-way shown on Conservancy land and potentially continue another 100 feet northward on Conservancy property (beyond proposed Caltrans right-of-way). A well marked gap in this mesh fence is necessary to maintain the existing pedestrian movement capability between the bridge, the park and ride lot and the Conservancy Skirball Center Drive Trailhead. Under separate cover we will send a color annotated diagram based on the plans provided to our staff that depicts the suggested extent of this fencing.

Wildlife use of the bridge will increase if the interface between the above described pedestrian and wildlife travel path and vegetated fill slopes to the east is broadened to the greatest extent possible. To partially accomplish widening, or funnel design, the immediate transition point between the bridge structure and the fill slope surface should be flared. That flared area must be located in the plan view apex formed by the outer edge (shown proposed retaining wall) of the proposed northbound off-ramp and Skirball Center Drive. The actual southeast corner of the bridge structure must flared southward to accomplish this important improvement.

These types of wildlife crossing are constructed all over the world and in at least five countries in Europe. The maintenance of unique wildlife populations in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the largest City-owned park is a major public benefit.

In our last site visit, the Caltrans engineers repeatedly stated design limitations based on existing standard regulations. We urge Caltrans to be creative and produce a cost effective design that enhances wildlife movement and meets all necessary safety requirements. Standard codes should not thwart the implementation of a regionally significant mitigation component to this large transportation project.

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

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RORIE SKEI". The signature is stylized and includes a large, circular flourish on the left side.

RORIE SKEI
Chief Deputy Director