

## **Coastal Commission Debates CalTrans' \$30 million Project**

by Susan Aksu

CalTrans' request for financial support from the Humboldt County Association of Governments for a \$30 million road improvement project was approved on Thursday with an 8-2 vote during the association's meeting.

Humboldt County agreed to pay for \$16 million of the project CalTrans proposed in 2007 to widen the shoulder, add an interchange and half signal to Airport Road and Indianola Road off of the highway 101 safety corridor.

If given the green light by the Coastal Commission, CalTrans will be making changes to Airport Road and Indianola Road off of the U.S. Highway 101 safety corridor between Eureka and Arcata.

The association of governments was given three options to review and accept from: to install a half signal at Airport Road with a full interchange on Indianola, to install a half signal at Airport Road with a half interchange on Indianola, or the last option to leave the 101 as is.

When CalTrans first proposed the new options they expected to use funding from the State Highway Operation and Protection Plan, but were not able to use the funds for the safety corridor. Doby Class, the City of Arcata Public Works director, said that every two years the State Transportation Improvement Fund allots a certain amount of money for new construction projects – funds which city officials from Humboldt County had proposed for citywide repairs.

John Schafer, a resident of Arcata, said there are other road repair priorities throughout Humboldt County that need attention.

“We’re spending too much money on things we don’t want,” Schafer said.

Schafer, was among others, who spoke against the motion and expressed concerns about the impact the two proposed options will have on the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists traveling on the 101. The plan had originally proposed to widen the shoulder of the safety corridor to 8 feet, but now the plan proposes to widen the shoulder to 10 feet. Those concerned with widening the shoulder an additional 2 feet feel that this step will take away from the multipurpose use of the current trail. Widening the road also raised the concern of increasing the speed of the safety corridor from 50 to 65 mph. This could endanger bicyclists and pedestrians Schafer said.

Emily Sinkhorn, a member of the advisory board for Green Wheels, a local non-profit which works to improve sustainable transportation, said the two options improve the road for only one mode of transportation. “This doesn’t improve safety. People who don’t drive need safe access as well,” Sinkhorn said.

Charles Fielder, District 1 CalTrans director, said the widening of the lanes on the safety corridor will not affect the safety of those on the Humboldt Bay Trail because of speed. “We will maintain a 50 mph speed limit and maintain it as an expressway,” Fielder said.

Ralph Martinelli, CalTrans' Chief of Traffic Safety said, “the speed will be determined based on what would be safe. There is discretion in changing the speed. By law, highways need to be surveyed every 10 years to determine the safety of the speed level.”

Environmental concerns were also addressed. CalTrans is required to provide an Environmental Impact Report that complies with Coastal Commission standards, however a finalized report has not been submitted since their original proposal in 2007.

“I have been requesting to see an EIR since the project was first brought up and no one has seen a finalized EIR,” Class said. “CalTrans won’t allow us to see the EIR until they are permitted by the Coastal Commission to go forward with the project.”