



CITY OF CORONADO

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

February 15, 2022

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SAN DIEGO - CORONADO BAY BRIDGE SUICIDE DETERRENT PROJECT MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION REVIEW

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept report and provide direction.

BACKGROUND:

Caltrans has released a draft Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the San Diego – Coronado Bay Bridge Suicide Deterrent Project for public review and comment. The public review and comment period began on January 31, 2022 and ends on March 1, 2022. The purpose of the project is to install a suicide deterrence system in the most timely manner to reduce suicides and suicide attempts while also reducing closures of the bridge due to those events. The draft MND can be reviewed at the Coronado Public Library or on the Caltrans website at [here](#).

The proposed project would install an approximately 8-10-foot tall stainless steel vertical net along both sides of the entire bridge. The vertical nets would be affixed to top and bottom perimeter tension cables. Tension cables would be strung through and attached to fixed vertical posts located approximately 20 or more feet apart. According to the project description in the MND, the proposed project would also include the following features and parameters:

- A metal continuous top plate would be installed on top of the existing railing to provide connection brackets for posts and anchorage for maintenance needs (base plates may be discontinuous at light pole locations);
- Vertical posts would measure no more than 4- by 6-inches in diameter;
- Posts would be similar in visual quality to brushed stainless steel or brushed aluminum, with ground smooth welds the same color and reflective quality of adjacent material;
- The vertical net would be composed of an unpainted stainless steel netting, with a maximum 2-millimeter wire size;
- The net may have a slight angle up to 15 degrees to follow the splay of the existing concrete rail;
- The design would use top tension cables no larger than 19 millimeters that would hold the woven mesh netting between posts;
- A minimum transparency of 85 percent would be achieved

The project would include minor improvements to the Transportation Management System (TMS) elements at the Glorietta Toll Plaza, the bridge, and the I-5/SR-75 interchange. These improvements would allow upgrades to the CCTV system using the existing conduit system, along with new CCTV cameras at five locations along the bridge spans and one on the eastern end of the Glorietta Toll Plaza. New vehicle detection systems would be installed at the I-5/SR-75 interchange and the Glorietta Toll Plaza. A changeable message sign would also be replaced at the Toll Plaza. No other work is anticipated at the Toll Plaza except the possibility of staging materials. Signage may be replaced or new signs installed as needed.

The proposed project would also enclose the substructure bays beneath the bridge to allow for maintenance activities, because the vertical nets would prevent future access from the bridge deck.

ANALYSIS:

Staff did not identify any notable deficiencies with the draft MND, and accordingly, has not drafted a comment letter for the Council's consideration. However, the timing of the MND release and the City Council calendar necessitated a truncated review period to ensure the item could be considered by the Council prior to the March 1, 2022 public comment deadline. Due to the abbreviated review period, staff has not had the benefit of hearing from community members who may have concerns with the proposal or its potential environmental impacts. Staff is therefore seeking direction from the Council on whether a comment letter should be prepared, and if so, which issues should be identified.

The environmental analysis presented in the draft MND does not identify any significant, unmitigated environmental impacts resulting from the project. The MND includes one mitigation measure to avoid construction activities under the bridge deck between February 1 – August 30 to minimize potential adverse impacts to peregrine falcons during their nesting season. All other potential environmental impacts evaluated in the MND were found to have no impact or a less than significant impact.

The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the most notable issues areas evaluated in the MND:

Aesthetics/Visual Resources

Potential impacts to aesthetics and visual resources may be the most contestable environmental issue concerning the project. The San Diego – Coronado Bay Bridge is an iconic structure that is a signature element of the San Diego Bay viewshed. The bridge is designated as a State Scenic Highway, is recognized as a Scenic Highway in the Scenic Highway Element of the City's General Plan, and is a cherished visual landmark from designated scenic vistas, including segments of the Bayshore Bikeway and the bridge located within the City's jurisdiction.

The proposed 8-10-foot tall stainless steel net would be highly visible and would represent a visual change from the bridge's present and historic appearance. A substantial change to the bridge's existing appearance, however, does not necessarily constitute a significant adverse visual impact as defined by CEQA, which focuses on whether a project would negatively effect a scenic vista, substantially damage scenic resources, or substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views in non-motorized areas.

The draft MND acknowledges that the project would result in a substantial visual alteration from existing conditions; however, the analysis concludes that impacts would be less than significant because the proposed vertical net would achieve a minimum 85% transparency, views of the bay would be largely maintained for motorists traveling across the bridge, and proposed structural improvements would not appear out of context or highly dominant in relation to existing bridge components such as the concrete bridge rail and paved roadway.

Aesthetic and visual impact analyses is probably the most subjective and commonly debated issue area evaluated through the CEQA process. While the less than significant conclusion in the MND does not seem unreasonable to staff, it is expected that some residents will object to the proposed visual alterations and may have disagreements with Caltrans' findings.

Transportation/Traffic

The analysis conducted for the draft MND found that the project would not result in a significant increase in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) or a degradation to existing levels of service (LOS). The project would, however, result in temporary ramp and lane closures during construction, which Caltrans estimates will take 550 working days to complete. To minimize traffic impacts during construction, Caltrans proposes to prepare and implement a Traffic Management Plan (TMP) to provide congestion relief, identify detour routes, and schedule construction activities during off-peak hours to the extent possible. Although anticipated construction-related traffic impacts will certainly be disruptive and inconvenient to thousands of motorists who cross the bridge daily, temporary traffic impacts resulting from construction activities are generally not considered to be a significant environmental effect as defined by CEQA.

Public Safety/Emergency Response

Although public safety and emergency response considerations are not an environmental issue area evaluated through the CEQA process, they are important considerations for the proposed project. The purpose of the project is to reduce suicides and suicide attempts while also minimizing bridge closures due to those events. If successful, the project would provide a significant public benefit by not only reducing the number of persons who commit or attempt suicide from the bridge, but also by decreasing the number of emergency response calls and potentially dangerous interventions carried out by police, fire, and other first responders. The proposed project has been reviewed by the Coronado Police and Fire Chiefs and both support the proposed design over other design alternatives previously considered by Caltrans.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None.

ALTERNATIVE:

The City Council may direct staff to prepare a comment letter to express any issues with the project and/or potential environmental impacts.

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT:

A Mitigated Negative Declaration has been prepared for the project. The Council's decision whether or not to submit a comment letter is not considered a project under CEQA and is therefore exempt from environmental review.

PUBLIC NOTICE:

No notice required.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Location Map and Visual Simulations

Submitted By: Community Development Department / Richard Grunow