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Planning board weighs controversial freeway project

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Reporter

CARMEL VALLEY — The Carmel Valley Community Planning Board discussed the controversial Interstate 5/Highway 56 Connectors Project at its Jan. 8 meeting and listened to the frustrations of residents from the Torrey Pines area.

Allan Kosup of Caltrans and Chris Johnson of Dokken Engineering were on hand to present the latest design proposals, which haven't changed since the last public meeting was held Dec. 13 at Del Mar Hills School.

The three current alternatives are the Direct Connectors Alternative, the Local Street Alternative and the "No Build" Option.

The Direct Connectors Alternative, which would result in the demolition of approximately 30 homes on Portofino Drive just west of Interstate 5, would feature one bridge that would allow traffic to flow directly from Interstate 5 south to Highway 56 east, and one bridge from Highway 56 west to Interstate 5 north.

The Local Street Alternative would include construction of an auxiliary freeway lane from Carmel Valley Road to Del Mar Heights Road and a northbound Interstate 5 ramp at Carmel Valley Road.

The "No Build" Option would mean no changes at all.

"We are currently in the stage of identifying impacts and gathering information about them," Kosup said. "Hopefully, a draft Environmental Impact Report will be available for public review by the end of 2009."

Kosup said it's difficult to pinpoint a timeline for notifying homeowners if indeed their homes will be acquired through eminent domain. "The absolute fastest it would happen is within two years after the Environmental Impact Report is finally approved," he said.

Kosup also discussed the possibility of a "hybrid" project, which would only have one connector and utilize elements of the Local Street Alternative to lessen the impact on homes.

Another possibility is having both connectors run along the eastern side of Interstate 5, which would save homes but impact the commercial developments to the east.

"There are a lot of questions on the table and everything is very open when you work with a steering committee, which can be a challenge," Kosup said. "In the past, if we made mistakes, it would be in the privacy of our office. But when you invite everyone into the tent, now everyone gets to see whenever you make a change."

Philip Rafael, who resides on Portofino Drive, had words of caution for homeowners who currently live alongside Highway 56.

"I hope that 17 years from now, those folks won't be dealing with what I'm dealing with now," Rafael said. "When I moved to Portofino in 1991, it looked a lot like how the eastern parts of Highway 56 do now. It's something to think about."

Morton Printz, who serves as the chair of the Torrey Pines Community Planning Board, said he'd like to see more consideration given to shifting the project to the eastern side of Interstate 5.

"Yes, there are commercial developments there, but most of the effort so far has been to widen the freeway on the

west side, which is full of houses," Printz said.

The Carmel Valley Community Planning Board expressed concern over the potential traffic impacts on the community if the project does not come to fruition in one form or another.

"If you don't build connectors or some sort of reasonable way for traffic to get through, people will be cutting through Carmel Valley and impacting everyone around here for the next 50 years," said board member Ken Farinsky. "I'd prefer not to live my whole life unable to leave my house unless it's not peak hours."

The board is also concerned about the potential installation of a new on/off ramp along the south side of Highway 56 in between El Camino Real and Carmel Creek Road, and the impact that might have on the adjacent open space known as the Carmel Valley Restoration and Enhancement Project.

Printz said he understood the board's concerns about traffic and open space impacts, but he feels the potential loss of homes needs to remain at the forefront.

"We need to elevate the concern for the human being," Printz said.

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