

Highway 99 Auxiliary Lanes Phase II Public Meeting 8/31/11

My comments from follow-up review of documents provided to me by Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) after the meeting are in italics. Susan Mason, Friends of Bidwell Park

This project was initiated in 1999 and is managed by Caltrans. Funding source of \$23.5 million is Proposition 1B, which was approved by CA voters in 2006. Viking Construction of Rancho Cordova is the contractor, with John Quiggle (who formerly lived on Woodland Ave in Chico) as project manager. This is Phase II-III of the construction, between Hwy 32 and East 1st Ave. Phase I was the on/off ramp work at East 1st Ave. Phase II will be the additional lanes in the Bidwell Park to Palmetto overpass section. It will take 2 ½-3 years for the entire project. Work will start within 2 weeks; they'll work through the winter and hope to finish the park segment and Palmetto overpass by June.

The initial study showed that traffic volumes were almost enough for 3 lanes in each direction plus auxiliary lanes. No highway lighting is planned as part of the current project. Project plans available on Caltrans web site (*this is where the plans should be but aren't yet*): <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/projects/>).

Caltrans schedules their work 2-3 weeks in advance. To get notices about upcoming work, provide your email address or mailing address to BCAG's Andy Newsum.

Questions from the audience:

1. If project equipment damages the Woodland Ave. concrete roadbed, will it be repaired? State will rehabilitate the roadway if needed, at end of construction.
2. Will the gates into the park at the east end of Woodland Ave. be used to move construction equipment and materials into the park? They're trying to get permission to use the park exit at Woodland/7th St. instead. Movement of large equipment and materials in and out will be infrequent.
3. Where will construction equipment and materials be stored? Within the Caltrans right-of-way (150')
4. Where will construction workers park? Probably will park on north side since there's not much parking available on the south side. No specifics provided as to parking locations (*follow-up question via email to Andy didn't answer question either*).
5. Will work be done at night too? There's too much traffic on Hwy 99 to close a lane during the day so some work will be done at night. There will be bright lights & some pile driving during the night construction.
6. What about protecting bats? A pre-construction bat survey will be required; however, the mitigation was to prevent bats from nesting under the bridge and "bat excluders" were installed months ago at a cost of \$15,000.
7. What about storm water management for highway (according to Rey Way neighbor, current drainage causes localized flooding)? The entire drainage system will be replaced as part of the project.
8. Answers regarding trail/road closures inside park:

- Effect of construction noise on equestrians, who currently use the Vita Trail—may want to avoid this area during construction especially if horses are already afraid of the Hwy 99 noise.
 - Part of the Vita Trail will be closed, with a temporary trail on the west side starting at the Sherman Ave. entrance (*project plans supposedly showed this rerouting, but were inaccurate in their depiction of current trails so were useless in determining exact trail areas that will be closed.*)
 - Pedestrian bridge to west will stay.
 - South Park and Petersen Dr will need to be closed occasionally. No discussion of whether Petersen Dr. closure will be at east entrance or just area under highway.
9. Answers to specific construction questions:
- New columns will be installed for each of the 2 new lanes. They won't replace existing columns. No artwork is planned for the new columns.
 - 12 piles will be installed; legally pile-driving can take place for 14 consecutive days, then must stop for some days. Pile driving can damage nearby homes so residents should document condition of foundations, walls, and windows before construction starts (construction company will also survey before and after).
 - There will be a total of about 15 days of pile-driving in park segment—3-4 days on north side, 3-4 on south, 3-4 in center).
 - No plan to prevent vandalism to construction equipment stored within the Caltrans right-of-way (question asked because of site's proximity to major Bidwell Park homeless camping area).
10. Answers to sound wall questions:
- The sound wall will be built on top of the existing “abutment” wall constructed during Phase I.
 - Sound wall will be 14' high with its height determined by change in decibel level for various design heights. It's made of cast-in-place concrete and lower portions will be rough textured to discourage graffiti. Inside design looks like foothills and trees; outside walls have foothills design only.
 - BCAG's Andy Newsum provided the sound wall designs.
 - Don't know sound wall physics, so unable to answer question about where the noise will go.
 - Sound wall will extend into park on north side (a total of 300' from north Vallombrosa overpass abutment or about halfway between the Vita Trail and Petersen Dr.). This extension required because of 2-story houses on Rey Way near Vallombrosa Ave. Wall will not taper at south end. Not clear whether this will be only on east side or on both.
 - Sound walls not required for Federal Highway mitigation, but met local criteria for noise abatement and because of local support during CEQA/NEPA process, it was included.
 - Comments from occupants of homes that back up to the highway indicate that they are looking forward to the sound walls to protect them from trash, cigarette butt fires, vehicles crashing into their back yards, pedestrians who have abandoned their vehicles as well as the reduction in noise.

- Considered “open grade asphalt” as a sound absorber, but it doesn’t stick to concrete, which is the current surface (at least on the bridges).

11. Answers to vegetation removal questions:

- Tree branches that extend over “vegetation clearance” stakes may be cut back.
- The oleanders in the middle of the highway will be replaced by a traffic barrier.
- Very little vegetation will be removed between Vallombrosa Ave. and Palmetto for construction purposes, however, the irrigation system must be replaced along the entire project length and that may require removal of vegetation, including large trees.
- As much as possible, will leave native vegetation but may remove invasives.
- Landscape planting plan is available for public viewing, but no specifics about which trees will be removed.
- Tree removal will start the week of Sept 12th or later.
- No re-use planned for trees removed from construction zone (specifically trees in middle of Hwy 99 in Bidwell Park). Trees removed are the property of the contractor.
- While there’s a perception that noise increases with vegetation thinning, research shows that this isn’t true.