

# ALEXANDER AVENUE/DANES DRIVE INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

## EA/IS Comments Received

### Responses to Written Comments Received

Agencies, organizations, and individuals that commented in writing on the Environmental Assessment/Initial Study are listed below in Table 1-1. Comment letters were solicited during the public review period, which occurred from December 23, 2011 to January 27, 2012.

**Table 1-1. Comment Letters**

<b>ID #</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Date Received</b>
<b>Public Agencies</b>		
PA1	California Highway Patrol (CHP) – Marin Area	01/11/12
PA2	California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)	01/23/12
PA3	Marin County Department of Public Works	01/26/12
PA4	Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG)	01/27/12
<b>Local Organizations</b>		
LO1	Bay Area Discovery Museum	01/11/12
LO2	Marin County Bicycle Coalition	01/27/12
LO3	Cavallo Point Lodge	01/30/12
<b>Individual Parties</b>		
IP1	Unknown Bobbitt	12/28/11
IP2	Tim Reidy	01/03/12
IP3	Sara B. Arnaud	01/03/12
IP4	Steven M. Moore	01/04/12
IP5	Verna Shaheen	12/29/11
IP6	Anthony Powers	01/05/12
IP7	David W. Schieser	01/05/12
IP8	Samuel Penrose	01/09/12
IP9	Warren Simmonds	01/18/12
IP10	Heather Page	01/09/12
IP11	Stephen Simac	01/20/12

## Response to Comments – Master Response

### Other Safety Improvements

A number of comments received during the public review period suggest that this project should also address other various safety issues that are so apparent along Alexander Avenue. The NPS realizes there are a range of other concerns along this stretch of road. However, this project has a very specific, limited scope in which it can be completed. As explained in Section 1.4, Background, of the EA/IS, the proposed project has been recommended and evaluated in three other NPS planning documents; the Fort Baker Plan EIS/ROD, the Marin Headlands and Fort Baker Transportation Infrastructure and Management Plan EIS/ROD and the Alexander Avenue Planning Study (still in draft form, not yet released to the public). Each of these documents included improvement of the Alexander Avenue/Danes Drive intersection as a transportation enhancement to improve existing conditions at the intersection. **The Alexander Avenue Planning Study is the best examination of the safety deficiencies along the Alexander Avenue corridor (from the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge to the Sausalito city limits). Issues with the corridor were identified and studied by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Central Federal Lands Highway Division (CFLHD), in cooperation with the NPS, and other key stakeholder agencies: City of Sausalito; California Department of Transportation (Caltrans); Golden Gate Bridge Highway, and Transportation District (GGBHTD); and County of Marin. In addition to identifying deficiencies the Study also developed multi-modal improvement strategies for the corridor. In summary, the study identified the following issues/concerns:**

- **Conflicts may arise among bicycle, pedestrian, transit, and vehicle access and movements**
- **Variable demands between weekday and weekend peaks for commuter, daily, and recreational users**
- **Significant grade, limited sight distances, and narrow roadways to accommodate all users**
- **Traffic volumes and patterns have changed in the corridor, possibly due to the Fort Baker redevelopment, increased park visitation, and increased bicycle use (including commuter and less experienced recreational riders)**

**Cooperating agencies will assist corridor land managers to seek funding opportunities to implement safety improvements identified in the Study, and will actively cooperate to plan and design safety improvements. When considered for implementation, these safety improvements will be publicly noticed for review and comment as part of NEPA and CEQA environmental review requirements.**

## Response to Comments – Public Agencies

### PA1 – CHP

PA1.1 Comment: The commenter notes that the proposed project would not have a significant impact on CHP operations in the Marin Area, identifies the project vicinity, and concurs with the Agency Preferred Alternative.

Response: Comment noted; no further response is required.

### PA2 – Caltrans

PA2.1 Comment: The commenter requests a copy of the Preliminary Geotechnical Investigation Report prepared for the proposed project.

Response: A copy of the Preliminary Geotechnical Investigation Report was submitted to Caltrans for review after receiving this comment.

PA2.2 Comment: The commenter states that a Transportation Management Plan or similar documentation may be required prior to project implementation.

Response: The project team will meet with Caltrans to discuss necessary information that is needed to satisfy their requirements. Upon agreement, the project team will submit all required documentation to Caltrans as appropriate.

PA2.3 Comment: The commenter states that any construction work or traffic control that encroaches on State right-of-way requires an encroachment permit.

Response: The project team will follow Caltrans encroachment permit guidance and submit necessary information to obtain an encroachment permit if necessary.

### **PA3 – Marin County Department of Public Works**

PA3.1 Comment: The County states that the visual simulations of Alternative D provided in the EA/IS show k-rail installed along the eastern side of Alexander Avenue, but the EA/IS does not make reference to this.

Response: The commenter is correct in that the visual simulation on page 3-17, Figure 3-5, East Rock Cut after Implementation of Alternative C and Alternative D, does show a temporary barrier along the eastern side of Alexander Avenue. The temporary barrier is referred to in the first paragraph, fourth sentence, on page 3-18 of the EA/IS, as follows: “Installation of the temporary barrier would introduce a new minor aesthetic element to the rock cut.” In addition, the temporary barrier is identified in Section 2.2.2.4, Alternative D: 8-Foot Rockfall Catchment Alternative, of the EA/IS.

PA3.2 Comment: The County requests the anticipated construction schedule for the proposed project and the estimated total construction time.

Response: As described in Section 2.2.2.4, Alternative D: 8-Foot Rockfall Catchment Alternative, of the EA/IS, construction activities and scheduling for Alternative D would be similar to those described for Alternative B. Section 2.2.2.2 of the EA/IS notes that construction of Alternative B would take approximately 3 to 4 months and would be completed in four separate phases. The first phase would involve the excavation of the existing rock cut along the east slope Alexander Avenue. It is anticipated that excavation of the east slope rock cut would take approximately 1 month to complete and would primarily be accomplished through the use of typical excavator equipment. Construction of the retaining wall over the East Bunker Road tunnel, reconstruction of the roadway to reduce super elevation and widen shoulders, and reconfiguration of the “Y” intersection to a “T” intersection would be completed in phases two through four. Construction during daylight hours would include the retaining wall, existing pavement removal, roadway grading, minor excavations, roadway lighting relocations, drainage, curb and gutter, guardrails, asphalt paving, and other minor miscellaneous work. If blasting is required for the excavation of the east cut slope, blasting would be conducted at night to limit traffic delays.

## PA4 – ABAG

PA4.1 Comment: The commenter notes that although Alexander Avenue is not part of the Bay Trail alignment, until the Vista Point Road Bay Trail is open to the public, the majority of cyclists and pedestrians will use Alexander Avenue between the Golden Gate Bridge and Sausalito. The commenter identifies options for improving safety for cyclists and pedestrians and notes that the safest option is the Bay Trail.

Response: Thank you for the suggestions regarding ways to further improve bicycle and pedestrian safety in this area. Unfortunately, this additional work is outside the scope of the proposed project. As identified in the Alexander Avenue Planning Study, future projects along the Alexander Avenue corridor will address additional issues related to multi-modal use and public safety as funding is available. Please see the Master Response on page 2 for more information regarding future improvements to this area.

## Responses to Comments – Local Organizations

### LO1 – Bay Area Discovery Museum

LO1.1 Comment: The commenter expresses concern regarding traffic management during construction of the proposed project.

Response: As described in Section 3.3, Transportation, of the EA/IS, traffic during daytime hours would be restricted to one lane along Alexander Avenue between the US 101 interchange and Danes Drive. Bicycles and pedestrians would be advised to use an alternative route traveling under US 101 at Vista Point and using Lower Conzelman Road. If, during final design, it is determined that enough space is available to safely allow bicycles and pedestrians to travel through the construction zone they would be allowed to do so. Otherwise, bicycles and pedestrians would be detoured during construction. The transit stop at Danes Drive would be temporarily relocated next to the existing stop while it is reconstructed.

If blasting operations are necessary, they would be performed at night to limit traffic delays. Traffic would be detoured during the blasting operations. The road closure would occur from the northbound US 101 off-ramp intersection to the Danes Drive intersection along Alexander Avenue. Potential detour routes include:

- For access to Marin Headlands from the Golden Gate Bridge, all vehicles and bicycles would be detoured southbound on Alexander Avenue, west on Conzelman Road to McCullough Road, follow McCullough Road to Bunker Road where the detour would end and traffic would use existing wayfinding signs to find their way.
- For vehicle access to Fort Baker from the Golden Gate Bridge, all vehicles would be detoured southbound on Alexander Avenue, west on Conzelman Road to McCullough Road, follow McCullough Road to Bunker Road, east on Bunker Road through the Baker-Barry tunnel and then turn left onto East Bunker Road, which accesses Fort Baker. Bicycles would be detoured down Lower Conzelman Road to access Fort Baker.
- For vehicle access to Sausalito, two vehicle options are available:

- From the Golden Gate Bridge, all vehicles would be detoured southbound on Alexander Avenue, west on Conzelman Road to McCullough Road, follow McCullough Road to Bunker Road, east on Bunker Road through the Baker-Barry Tunnel and connect back to Alexander Avenue at the Danes Drive intersection where the detour would end and traffic will turn left onto Alexander Avenue and proceed north into Sausalito.
- From the Golden Gate Bridge, vehicles would be advised to not exit at Alexander Avenue and proceed north on US 101 to either of the next two exits (Rodeo Avenue or Sausalito/Marin City) that provide access to Sausalito. The Sausalito/Marin City exit would be signed as the detour route. Local residents that know the local road network could also use the Rodeo Avenue exit.

## **LO2 – Marin County Bicycle Coalition**

LO2.1 **Comment:** The commenter expresses concern that the Agency Preferred Alternative, Alternative D, does not provide an adequate level of safety and would have a higher overall cost than Alternative B.

**Response:** The alternatives for the proposed project were developed based on guidance from the Oregon Department of Transportation’s Rockfall Containment Design Guide and computer modeling using the Colorado Rockfall Simulation Program (refer to Section 2.2.2, Alternatives, in the EA/IS). These guidelines and modeling software were used to determine the level of rockfall containment required to ensure similar standards of safety depending on the width of excavation. Through this process it was determined that a 16-foot rockfall catchment ditch as identified in Alternative B, would not require any rockfall containment (i.e., rockfall mesh or k-rail). In comparison, if a 5-foot rockfall catchment ditch (Alternative C) were to be established, in order to provide the same level of safety as Alternative B, the entire face of the cut slope would have to be covered in rockfall mesh. Similarly, it was determined using the above mentioned guidelines and modeling software that with implementation of an 8-foot rockfall catchment ditch (Alternative D) a standard height, k-rail barrier or rockfall mesh would provide the same standard of safety as the previous two alternatives. The Geotechnical Memorandum which summarizes the results of the rockfall modeling suggests that a temporary barrier be installed, so that rockfall events can be monitored. Data collected during monitoring would be used in the modeling software to better predict the safety of various containment options. From this data it may be determined that with the 8-foot rockfall catchment ditch (Alternative D), no rockfall barrier is need. Further, the commenter is incorrect in stating that Alternative B: 16-Foot Rockfall Catchment Alternative would include a permanent rockfall barrier. Contrary to the commenter’s statement, as described in Section 2.2.2.2 of the EA/IS, Alternative B would not require any type of rockfall barrier due to the width of the rockfall catchment ditch. For a visual simulation of Alternative B, please refer to Figure 3-4 on page 3-15 of the EA/IS.

LO2.2 **Comment:** This comment pertains to the need for additional bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements along Alexander Avenue.

**Response:** Please refer to the Master Response on page 2.

## **LO3 – Cavallo Point Lodge**

LO3.1 Comment: The commenter expresses concern regarding access to the Cavallo Point Lodge during construction of the proposed project.

Response: Please refer to response to comment LO1.1, above, for a description of anticipated road closures and traffic detours associated with construction of the proposed project.

LO3.2 Comment: This comment pertains to the number of guests and employees that circulate to and from the Cavallo Point Lodge on a daily basis.

Response: Comment noted; no further response is necessary.

LO3.3 Comment: This comment pertains to blasting operations and the potential for nighttime noise disturbances.

Response: Please refer to Section 3.9, Noise, of the EA/IS for a complete discussion of noise impacts associated with construction and operation of the proposed project. As described in the EA/IS, the overall noise levels associated with nighttime blasting would be below the “normally unacceptable” ranges of the California Land Use Noise Compatibility Guidelines for hotel uses. Interior noise level would also be below the established threshold, as described in Section 3.9 of the EA/IS. Further, to decrease construction-related noise to the greatest extent possible Mitigation Measures NOI-1, Noise Restrictions, and NOI-2, Noise Reducing Construction Practices, would be implemented (refer to page 3-54 of the EA/IS). Specifically, Mitigation Measure NOI-1 ensures that NPS will consult with representative from Cavallo Point Lodge in developing hourly restrictions on noise-generating construction activities.

LO3.4 Comment: The commenter requests the ability to review all potential signage associated with lane closures and detours to ensure that visibility and access to Cavallo Point Lodge be maintained.

Response: Comment noted. All plans for construction and post-construction signage will be identified in the final construction and design documents. The NPS recognizes the importance of maintaining clear and easy access to all visitor services during times of construction and will ensure the signage directing visitors to these services is clear throughout the duration of the project.

## **Response to Comments – Individual Parties**

### **IP1 – Unknown Bobbitt**

IP1.1 Comment: The commenter supports the Agency Preferred Alternative and notes the traffic congestion issues in the project vicinity.

Response: Comment noted.

### **IP2 – Tim Reidy**

IP2.1 Comment: This comment pertains to safety concerns associated with the bicycles and pedestrians crossing Alexander Avenue to access Golden Gate Bridge.

Response: Please see the Master Response on page 2 for more information regarding future improvements planned for this area.

### **IP3 – Sara B. Arnaud**

IP3.1 Comment: The commenter expresses general opposition to the proposed project.

Response: Comment noted.

### **IP4 - Steven M. Moore**

IP4.1 Comment: This comment pertains to the decision-making process associated with the selection of the Preferred Alternative and the width of Alexander Avenue through the rock cut.

Response: The environmental document prepared for the proposed project is a joint EA/IS and not a Draft EIR as stated by the commenter. As described in Section 2.2.1, Alternative Development Process, Alternative D was selected as the Preferred Alternative because it represents a compromise between Alternative B which would result in substantial loss of geologic material and Alternative C which would result in adverse aesthetic and cultural resource effects due to the installation of rockfall mesh. Although the differences are subtle, Alternative D would reduce the amount of excavated material associated with the rock cut (refer to Section 2.2 Alternatives) compared to Alternative B, while potentially eliminating the need for rockfall mesh as compared to Alternative C. Further, the proposed project would not increase the capacity of Alexander Avenue nor are there plans for future widening of Alexander Avenue beyond the proposed project.

IP4.2 Comment: The commenter suggests that the improvements associated with the proposed project be extended to the City of Sausalito in order to enhance the safety of all user groups.

Response: Extending improvements north to Sausalito is outside the scope of the proposed project. Please see the Master Response on page 2. Improvements to roads located in the City of Sausalito would be under their jurisdiction to implement.

IP4.3 Comment: This comment pertains to the addition of vehicle and bicycle restrictions along Alexander Avenue.

Response: The NPS understands the desire for additional signage to further improve safety in this area and is currently working with the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District to install additional roadway signage, an action that is separate from this project. Please refer to the Master Response on page 2 for more information regarding future improvements planned for this area.

IP4.4 Comment: The commenter expresses support for the proposed project and requests that local residents be informed of such projects.

Response: NPS conducted extensive public outreach to solicit comments on the scope of the proposed project and on the EA/IS. Refer to Section 1.8 and 4.1, Scoping and Public Involvement, for detailed information regarding the public involvement associated with the proposed project. The NPS will continue to inform the public about this project as the planning

progresses. Signage that will be located at the project site will list contact information for people to ask questions or report any concerns about the project.

#### **IP5-Verna Shaheen**

IP5.1 Comment: The commenter expresses general opposition to the proposed project.

Response: Comment noted.

#### **IP6-Anthony Powers**

IP6.1 Comment: This comment pertains to a safety issue associated with the existing Alexander Avenue/Danes Drive intersection and in particular, bicycle safety. The commenter suggests that a stop light could improve vehicle and bicycle safety.

Response: The intersection does not meet the warrants for installation of a stoplight. Further, the proposed project would reconfigure the Alexander Avenue/Danes Drive intersection from a “Y” to a “T”, thereby improving line of site for cars using this intersection. As described throughout the EA/IS, the proposed project would add roadside shoulders to both sides of Alexander Avenue within the project limits to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians outside of the travel lanes. Roadside shoulders would be 5-feet wide. Please refer to the Master Response on page 2 for more information regarding future improvements planned for this area.

#### **IP7-David W. Schieser**

IP7.1 Comment: The commenter asks if the project proponent considered reconfiguring Alexander Avenue to be a one way road, controlled by modern day signals.

Response: This design proposal is outside the scope of the proposed project. Please see the Master Response on page 2 for more information regarding future improvements to this area.

#### **IP8-Samuel Penrose**

IP8.1 Comment: The commenter expresses general support for the Preferred Alternative.

Response: Comment noted.

#### **IP9-Warren Simmonds**

IP9.1 Comment: The commenter states that Figures 2-1 through 2-3 in the EA/IS delineate the height of the east cut slope after excavation, but omit the difference between the height of the east cut slope before and after excavation.

Response: The commenter is correct. For Alternative B, approximately 10 feet would be removed from the existing top of the cut slope. For Alternative C, approximately 7 feet would be removed, and for Alternative D, approximately 8 feet would be removed.

IP9.2 Comment: This comment pertains to the visual impact of the proposed project on views of the rock cut from the east and south-east of the project site.

Response: Vantage points which provide clear and prolonged views of the project site were chosen as the basis for the visual resource analysis and visual simulations. Views from San Francisco were not considered in the analysis of visual resources because the project site cannot be clearly viewed from San Francisco. The backside of the east cut slope and the face of the west cut slope can be seen from the Golden Gate Bridge and Vista Point. However, excavation of the east slope would not significantly change the existing visual character of the project site as seen from the abovementioned locations. The commenter is correct in stating that after implementation of the proposed project more of the west cut slope will be exposed to viewers, but this change will not be significantly different from how the west cut slope appears under existing conditions. As stated in response to comment IP9.1, above, under the preferred alternative (Alternative D), approximately 8 vertical feet of material would be removed from the top of the east cut slope. The proposed project would not introduce new visual elements to the project area that would adversely affect the existing visual quality of the landscape as seen from the south and south-east of the project site. As such, the impact determinations identified in Section 3.4, Visual Resources, are accurate.

#### **IP10-Heather Page**

IP10.1 Comment: This comment pertains to the cost of the proposed project.

Response: Comment noted; no further response is required.

#### **IP11-Stephen Simac**

IP11.1 Comment: This comment pertains to bicycle safety along Alexander Avenue.

Response: The proposed project has been designed to meet current standards for bicycle lanes and road lanes in order to ensure the safety of all user groups. Road lanes were designed based on the State design criteria and the roadside shoulders which will serve as bike lanes were designed based on the Caltrans Highway Design Manual, Chapter 1000, Bike Planning and Design. Please see the Master Response on page 2 for more information regarding future safety improvements to this area.