



LAST CHANCE GRADE STAKEHOLDER GROUP

Lieutenant Hal Rosendahl
California Highway Patrol

Jeff Bomke
California State Parks

Talitha Hodgson
Sebastian Cohen
Caltrans

Kurt Stremberg
Community Representative

Rick Holley
Crescent City

Matt Westbrook
Crescent City-Del Norte Chamber of Commerce

David Finigan
Del Norte County Board of Supervisors

Kathryn Murray
Del Norte Local Transportation Commission

Dale Miller
Elk Valley Rancheria

Natalynne DeLapp
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)

Donna Thompson
Eileen Cooper
Friends of Del Norte

Craig Compton
Green Diamond Resource Company

Ryan Sundberg
Humboldt County

Gordon Johnson
Humboldt County Association of Governments

David Roemer
National Park Service

Chris Renner
C. Renner Petroleum

Gary Smits
Rumiano Cheese

Emily Burns
Save the Redwoods League

Suntayea Steinruck
Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation (Smith River Rancheria)

Joseph James
Yurok Tribe

Hosted by Congressman Jared Huffman

Last Chance Stakeholder Group Consensus December 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

Last Chance Grade is a segment of US 101 in southern Del Norte County between Klamath and Crescent City. Here, the highway is perched above the Pacific Ocean and winds through old-growth redwood forests. This segment of roadway has a history of geologic instability, including landslides and slip outs, which presents long-term issues with safety, roadway stability and reliability. The potential for catastrophic failure of the highway at Last Chance Grade poses a grave threat to human life and the economic viability of the region.

II. CONSENSUS REGARDING STAKEHOLDER GROUP PROCESS

The Last Chance Grade Stakeholder Group convened by Congressman Huffman, in its initial five meetings, has worked to identify areas of agreement during the pre-scoping phase so that when Caltrans begins the required regulatory processes, including environmental analyses and public involvement, they can move forward in a timely manner. As of September 2015, the group has achieved consensus on the following topics:

Process

The Stakeholder Group includes 20 members, with one representative each from a broad slate of agencies, local Native American Tribes, governmental bodies, business interests, environmental advocates, community services providers and other community groups. The Stakeholders value the process and appreciate Congressman Huffman's efforts to establish and convene the group. Members acknowledge the significant commitment made by all the participants to travel to and participate in the full-day meetings. They also appreciate the substantial preparation required by those who presented information to the group. The group honors the diverse interests and viewpoints of the members allowing for effective and productive discussion using a consensus decision-making process.

Issues are Complex

Stakeholders agree that the situation at Last Chance Grade is complex and one that takes time, more than is typically required by most processes, to understand the full range of issues and impacts that must be considered. Many of the issues are unique to a specific location or resource, requiring that each proposed alternative be evaluated separately.

Sense of Urgency

The group agrees that the need to identify a solution is urgent and the process must move forward as quickly as possible. Stakeholders agree that catastrophic failure at Last Chance Grade is not a question of “if” so much as “when” given the complex nature of slope instabilities associated with Last Chance Grade. It is vital that an optimal solution is agreed upon as early as possible to avoid having to select the solution under the pressure of an emergency or catastrophic event.

Safety

Stakeholders agree the project is needed to address the current instability of the roadway and ensure safety for users during all weather conditions.

Potential Negative Economic Impacts

Stakeholders agree that there is a strong desire to avoid the negative and devastating economic impacts the entire region would suffer in the event of catastrophic road failure.¹

III. CONSENSUS REGARDING CRITERIA FOR SELECTING A PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The purpose of the LCG Stakeholder Group is not to select a preferred alternative, as this will occur during the National Environmental Policy Act/California Environmental Quality Act (NEPA/CEQA) process. The Group carefully studied the alternatives as concrete examples and generated a consensus-based list of criteria that will help with the future comparison and evaluation of each alternative during the NEPA/CEQA process.

The “No-Build” Alternative is Not an Option

The group agrees that continued investment in road maintenance and responding to emergency repairs, as Caltrans is currently doing, is not sustainable and does not ensure that current roadway could be maintained in the event of a catastrophic failure.

¹ The *Last Chance Grade Economic Impact Study*, prepared by the Economic Analysis Branch, Office of State Planning, Division of Transportation Planning, California Department of Transportation (January 16, 2015) estimates the annual economic impact of catastrophic road failure at approximately \$1 billion.

Values and Benefits

Stakeholders agree that the community needs a reliable roadway to ensure ongoing safety of users and to secure the region's economic future.

The group places a high value and consideration on the following:

- Natural resources
- Cultural resources
- Aesthetics
- Old growth trees and habitat
- Aquatic resources
- Wildlife
- Restoration potential
- Mitigated measures
- Existing and future recreation opportunities

Stakeholders acknowledge that none of the alternatives can be carried out without the potential for impacts to natural and cultural resources. Preliminary information shows that the financial costs of minimizing and mitigating these impacts will be high. The group agrees that as project costs are considered, the higher cost alternatives are warranted given the values and benefits of the project and the complexity and range of issues that must be addressed.

Agreement Around Specific Alternatives

The group came to consensus that a number of the alternatives could not be supported. This consensus and impact helped Caltrans to eliminate eight of the fourteen alternatives from future consideration. The group agrees that there is not enough information at this time to come to consensus around alternatives. The needed information will not be available until Caltrans gets the funding to do its studies.

Funding Needed for Studies

The Stakeholders agree that securing funding for Caltrans to proceed with its studies will be essential to the analysis of the alternatives. Partner agencies with responsibilities in the project area that are impacted by the project may also need funding support to evaluate the alternatives and potential impacts.

Tunnels will be Considered as Part of All Options

The group acknowledges that tunnels, using established, proven technology, will be considered as part of all options to minimize other important impacts.

Minimize Construction Impacts

The group recommends that alternatives should be designed to minimize earthwork volume, construction impacts and area disturbance.

Impacts on Park Resources and on Old Growth Redwoods

Stakeholders agree that it is crucial to minimize impacts on park resources and on old growth redwoods, including trees located on private land, even if it adds to the cost of the project.

IV. SUMMARY

The group recognizes that all alternatives will have potential impacts. Stakeholders agree that it will take compromise to reach consensus and identify an acceptable alternative and that mitigation will be required for any alternative selected.

Stakeholders agree on the need for the process to continue so that the group can receive more information and can work toward a consensus solution and agreement on related mitigation.

The group agrees that along with continuing the process and maintaining momentum, there is a need for continued outreach and education for decision makers and the general public. The planning process will take time and it will be important to keep people engaged over the long-term and help them understand that this project is not just a Caltrans project. The entire community needs to be invested in this planning effort to ensure the long-term safety and economy of the region.