

Last Chance Grade fixes narrowed to 2 options

One year cut from posted timeline to fix by 2039



State officials announced Friday that there are two options remaining for addressing the constant landslides at Last Chance Grade. One option is an inland tunnel, the other is permanently shoring up the slopes and hillsides. (Caltrans — Contributed)

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There are now only two options remaining for how to move forward at Last Chance Grade, state lawmakers announced Thursday.

The two remaining options are either building an inland tunnel that avoids the landslide area or permanently shoring up slopes and hillsides along the current route.

Reducing the possibilities to two options cuts a year off of the project schedule, which according to Caltrans' lastchancegrade.com extends to 2039.

North Coast lawmakers celebrated the milestone.

“Relying on temporary fixes just isn’t acceptable,” North Coast Sen. Mike McGuire said in a prepared statement. “We all want to start moving dirt on a new route ASAP and narrowing down the alternatives is another big step in the right direction.”

“I’m encouraged to see progress, especially speeding up the project,” Assemblyman Jim Wood said in a release. “I know this has been a long process, but one that can’t be avoided because of the complexities of this huge project.”

Both Wood and McGuire have been working with Caltrans and the federal government for years to address the unstable section of U.S. Highway 101.

Over the past few years, \$50 million has been secured from the state to launch the environmental and engineering studies that helped get the project to its current position.

According to Caltrans’ posted timeline, the current phase of studies on Last Chance Grade was expected to last through 2026. According to Myles Cochrane, a spokesman for Caltrans, the Caltrans website needs to be updated to reflect cutting a year off the timeline.

“Because we narrowed the alternatives down to two, we now expect to select a preferred alternative by 2025,” Cochrane told the Times-Standard on Monday.

Caltrans has the next steps in the process outlined.

“The environmental team will continue studies this year to identify and describe the impacts of each alternative so they can begin writing the draft environmental document beginning in early 2022,” Cochrane said. “Meanwhile, the design team will be studying the geotechnical data that comes in and refining the project alternatives.”

Then, input from the public will be sought as the environmental document is shared.

“Caltrans will then coordinate with stakeholders as we decide on what alternative to select,” Cochrane said. “We will have an open and engaging process that considers how the alternatives measure up in terms of performance measures that have been selected by stakeholders. Key performance measures include safe and reliable operations of the highway, impacts to environmental resources, and costs to build, mitigate, and maintain the finalized route.”

North Coast U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman lauded the progress forward.

“The decision will allow Caltrans to concentrate its work on necessary, superior alternatives and avoid wasteful analyses on routes that studies have already shown are not viable,” Huffman said in a prepared statement. “This will save money, but more importantly will save time and get this critical infrastructure over the finish line sooner.”

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