

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

June 30, 2004

**MORRO BAY TO CAYUCOS ACCESSWAY**

File No. 03-100

Project Manager: Timothy Duff

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$30,000 to the County of San Luis Obispo for planning, preliminary design and environmental review of a pedestrian and bicycle accessway between the City of Morro Bay and Cayucos.

**LOCATION:** Between the City of Morro Bay and Cayucos, San Luis Obispo County

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Public Access

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31400 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000) to the County of San Luis Obispo (County) for planning, preliminary design, and environmental review of a pedestrian and bicycle accessway between the City of Morro Bay and Cayucos subject to the condition that the County shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a final work program, budget, schedule, and names of any contractors and subcontractors to be employed for these tasks; and that the project design be consistent with the Conservancy’s Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Sections 31400 *et*

*seq.* of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding coastal access.

2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
  3. The proposed project serves greater than local needs, and is receiving federal and local matching funds.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

The County of San Luis Obispo, working in partnership with the San Luis Obispo County Council of Governments (SLOCOG), is requesting Conservancy funds to prepare preliminary designs and complete environmental review for a pedestrian and bicycle accessway between the City of Morro Bay and Cayucos. The proposal would implement a Conservancy Coastal Trail Report recommendation to integrate the Coastal Trail into State and Regional Transportation Improvement Programs, and would be constructed along the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route identified by the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for this segment of Highway One.

Proposed as a 12-foot wide multi-use facility where it parallels Highway One within the Caltrans right of way, the path would improve access for bicyclists who currently must use the shoulder of Highway One when traveling between Morro Bay and Cayucos. At its southern terminus in Morro Bay, the accessway would connect to a planned route through city streets, over a new bridge crossing Morro Creek, and then link to a planned multi-use path that will extend to the harbor and along the waterfront towards Morro Rock and the adjacent state beach. At its northern terminus in Cayucos, the facility would be routed along a city street and across a new bridge to be built over Old Creek before reconnecting to a city street leading to downtown Cayucos. The proposed trail link would offer users dramatic views of Estero Bay and provide a non-motorized connection between Morro Strand and Cayucos State Beaches.

The County of San Luis Obispo is cooperating with SLOCOG on this project. SLOCOG is the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) and Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for San Luis Obispo County, and is responsible for the planning and programming of the county’s regional transportation system with authority over a variety of state and federal transportation funding sources.

**Site Description:** The route of the proposed accessway is located west of and adjacent to Highway One between the City of Morro Bay and downtown Cayucos. At both ends the path would be routed through residential and commercial districts before reaching two popular state beaches, Morro Strand State Beach in Morro Bay and Cayucos State Beach. The ocean side of the trail corridor features panoramic vistas of Estero Bay and the open ocean, with both scenic and physical access available to the area’s broad sandy beaches. The inland side of the corridor offers a mix of residential, commercial, and limited industrial development together with large expanses of rolling hills situated above the town of Cayucos and City of Morro Bay. While much of the project site is comprised of developed or degraded land, some areas include coastal scrub and sandy coastal scrub with native and non-native vegetation. Three small, intermittent creeks (Morro, Toro, and Old Creeks) draining to the ocean provide riparian and wetland habitat, including potential habitat for sensitive species including southern steelhead and California red-

legged frog. Known habitat for the federally listed snowy plover is located along much of Morro Strand State Beach.

Highway One in the project area has been designated by the state as a State Scenic Highway Corridor, the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route, and the California Coast Millennium Trail. In 2003, the highway was formally recognized as a federal Scenic Byway/All American Road north of the City of San Luis Obispo to the San Luis Obispo/Monterey County line.

**Project History:** Beginning in 2001 with the initiation of the Proposition 12-funded Coastal Trail Program, Coastal Conservancy staff, together with staff from Caltrans, State Parks, Coastal Commission and the nonprofit Coastwalk, has been actively involved in the planning and design of public access facilities to and along the state's coastline, including bike and pedestrian projects located within the state Highway One right of way. In 2002, SLOCOG submitted a grant request to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) National Scenic Byways Program for planning, design and environmental review of the proposed accessway. At that time, SLOCOG requested and received Conservancy staff level support for providing matching funds required by the federal grant program. In April 2003, SLOCOG was awarded federal funds for this initial planning phase, and is now requesting Conservancy match funding.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$30,000
SLOCOG	20,000
County of San Luis Obispo (in-lieu staff time)	20,000
National Scenic Byways Program (FHWA)	<u>232,000</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$302,000</b>

The two expected sources of Conservancy funds for this project include the Conservancy's FY 2001 appropriation from Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 12) and the Conservancy's FY 2002 appropriation from the California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 40). Consistent with the purposes of these two funding sources, the proposed project would be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, and would serve to improve public coastal accessways to and along the coast that would serve greater than local needs and use matching funds. Consistent with Section 1, Article 7 of Proposition 12, the proposed project would provide grant funds to the County of San Luis Obispo for development of a Coastal Trail accessway.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

Public Resources Code Section 31400 directs the Conservancy to have a principal role in the implementation of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. To this end, Public Resources Code Section 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to "provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division." Funding this accessway project is consistent with these provisions as well as with Section

31400.1 which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for purposes of developing lands suitable for public accessways to and along the coast, when the subject accessways serve greater than local needs. The project would serve the recreational needs of visitors to the project area, as well as local residents.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the amount of funding provided by the Conservancy has been determined by the total amount available for coastal public accessway projects, the fiscal resources of the grantee, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible projects, and the application of factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority.

The proposed project is consistent with the Local Coastal Programs of the City of Morro Bay and County of San Luis Obispo as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

The project is consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan as follows:

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective C**, the project would entail planning and designs for the construction of approximately three miles of trail within public ownership.

Consistent with **Goal 1 Objective D**, the project would serve to bridge gaps in the Coastal Trail by establishing a new accessway between the City of Morro Bay and the town of Cayucos, and between Morro Strand and Cayucos State Beaches.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective D**, the project would serve to increase coastal recreation opportunities for residents and visitors, and correct dangerous conditions by installing signs, guardrails, and bridges.

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective E**, the project would serve to alleviate the negative impacts of traffic and congestion and minimize hazardous crossings of Highway One.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.

3. **Support of the public:** This project has widespread support, including that of Congresswoman Lois Capps, State Senator Bruce McPherson, and Assemblyman Abel Maldonado. See Exhibit 2 for letters of support. Additional letters may be delivered to the board meeting.
4. **Location:** The proposed project would be located within the coastal zone of the City of Morro Bay and the County of San Luis Obispo.
5. **Need:** Conservancy funding is needed to match federal funding awarded to complete planning, design and environmental review.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed project would serve residents from City of Morro Bay, the town of Cayucos, and throughout San Luis Obispo County, as well as bicyclists and visitors traveling along this stretch of the central coast.

**Additional Criteria**

7. **Cooperation:** The project involves the cooperation of federal, state and regional transportation and resource agencies and local governments.

**CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES:**

The project is consistent with the County of San Luis Obispo's Estero Planning Area Local Coastal Plan Land Use Element which recommends pedestrian and bicycle access improvements along the proposed accessway route, and directs the county engineering department "to install a pedestrian and bicycle path system to connect recreation areas with residential and commercial areas." The project would serve to connect Morro Strand and Cayucos State Beaches with residential and commercial areas.

The project is also consistent with the City of Morro Bay's Local Coastal Plan which calls for a bikeway system throughout the city serving the needs of bicycle commuters and shoppers, as well as recreational users. Policy C-9 states that the "City will implement the Bikeway System Plan within legal and fiscal constraints while recognizing competing needs." Policy C-9.4 states, "Portions of the Bikeway System which are within a state park and state owned properties should be encouraged to be developed by the State of California." Policy 9.7 states, "In all bikeway designs, efforts should be made to reduce conflicts between bicycles and pedestrians as well as between bicycles and vehicles." The project is consistent with and would serve to implement these policies.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed planning, design and environmental review is statutorily exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act pursuant to 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262, in that it would involve only planning studies and feasibility analysis. The project is also exempt under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Environmental factors will be considered in the studies undertaken pursuant to this authorization. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval of the project.