

## Funding nixed for Brooktrails second access

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The second access for Brooktrails is essentially dead for the foreseeable future after it was removed this month from the Mendocino County priority list for State Transportation Improvement Program funding. This action came after the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors withdrew support for the project in its Nov. 12 meeting.

At the Nov. 12 meeting, the supervisors learned the Mendocino County Department of Transportation had essentially made no progress in surveying and conducting an environmental review along the two potential routes for the project. The major landowner for the route paralleling Sherwood Road continues to refuse access to the contractor to research this option. The construction cost estimate for this option is between \$15.5 million to \$24.9 million. The county has also not received permission of all landowners for the second access option which exits onto Highway 20 near the KOA Campground entrance. This alternative is estimated at \$6.7 million for construction.

Of the two approved study options remaining, Third District Supervisor John Pinches has stated he prefers the cheaper one. The Brooktrails Board of Directors has endorsed the more expensive choice.

Pinches, with support of the Board of Supervisors, has consistently forced the Mendocino County Department of Transportation to keep the cheaper Highway 20 alternative in the mix of options despite objections offered by Brooktrails Director Tony Orth and other members of the Brooktrails board. Orth has stated the Highway 20 option should only be considered after a new highway connects Brooktrails directly with the Highway 101 bypass. Orth states any cost estimate for the Highway 20 option should consider the potential but unknown charges he believes CalTrans will require for Highway 20 improvements.

At the November supervisor's meeting Mendocino Transportation Department Director Howard Dashiell offered the supervisors a new third alternative, which would split off from Sherwood Road and tie directly to the Highway 101 bypass terminus. This unstudied option did not meet the study requirements but was offered up as a way to "advance the Brooktrails second access effort," according to Dashiell's letter presented to the board. Dashiell believed the contractor could access to this new route for study. John Wagenet, the administrator of the property on this new route, told the supervisors he was not inclined to allow access to this property while the property owner of the disputed alternative did not.

In July 2010, the county received a \$459,000 grant through the State Transportation Improvement Program to complete a Project Approval and Environmental Document for the Brooktrails Second Access project. The specified completion deadline was June 30, 2013. Mendocino County had also reserved \$3.467 million in the State Transportation Improvement Program in future funding years for this project. Using state funds requires all projects meet specified completion dates and targets to ensure projects across the state do not reserve funds for projects not ready to proceed.

The project ran into delays and was granted an extension in August 2013 from the California Transportation Commission. "Preliminary engineering and environmental studies have been delayed due to resistance from principal landowners to grant access to the proposed project site," according to the CTC staff report. "The County has diligently attempted to gain voluntary rights of entry and has not yet pursued legal access through the courts. The County has completed a few of the required environmental studies

and continues to seek cooperation of all the applicable property owners in conducting the remaining environmental and engineering studies. The County anticipates obtaining rights of entry and completing the Project Approval and Environmental Document phase by August 2014."

On Aug. 6, 2013, the California Transportation Commission granted the 14 month extension, ending Aug. 31, 2014.

With the continued lack of progress on the project, the county was facing the potential for going back to the California Transportation Commission and requesting another extension. The commission rarely grants more than one extension, according to Mendocino Council of Governments' Executive Director Phil Dow.

Dashiell told the Board of Supervisors on Nov. 12, 2013 that his agency still did not have permission from landowners to survey any of the options being considered for the second access. He also said only \$200,000 remained from the original funding to conduct any survey.

Pinches introduced a motion directing Dashiell to use the remaining funds to make as much progress on the Highway 20 alternative and to abandon efforts on the other alternatives. The motion carried with only First District Supervisor Carre Brown dissenting.

Pinches said there was no support on the Mendocino Council of Governments' Board to continue pursuing the Brooktrails second access. Willits Mayor Holly Madrigal and a member of the Mendocino Council of Governments, speaking during the public comment period, said she got "a similar impression from MCOG."

Dow advised the board he did not consider the Highway 20 choice to be a "transportation" alternative and that it would receive low marks as a transportation improvement project.

A 2012 trip diversion study surprised the Mendocino Department of Transportation analysts when it found about 26 percent of the drivers would use the Highway 20 alternate as their first choice. The same study found 23 percent would continue to use Sherwood Road and 39 percent would prefer the route paralleling Sherwood Road.

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