

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR KATHRYN BARGER

DECEMBER 17, 2024

**MOUNT BALDY ROAD REHABILITATION PROJECT**

Mount Baldy Road accesses one of the most visited areas in the Angeles National Forest. It provides access to visitors and residents visiting Mount Baldy Resort, Icehouse Canyon Trailhead, the Stoddard Falls Trailhead, and Mount Baldy Village. The road has not been resurfaced in approximately 20 years and there are three collision concentration corridors identified along the roadway in the County's 2020 Vision Zero Action Plan.

In May 2021, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (DPW) submitted a project application to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) under the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) to rehabilitate 5.44 miles of Mount Baldy Road. Under FLAP, if a project is selected, FHWA and local agencies share in the costs of designing and constructing the project. In November 2021, the FHWA notified Public Works that the project application was selected. On May 16, 2023, the Board approved the County to enter into a memorandum of agreement and funds transfer agreement with FHWA not to exceed \$24,000 for project scoping.

As a result of the project scoping, the project includes 5.44 miles of resurfacing, including cold milling, asphalt-rubber hot mix overlay, dig-outs, and shoulder grading.

Safety improvements will include various treatments, such as new guardrails and signage and striping improvements. The estimated total project cost is \$17,340,000. The project will be administered by FHWA. FLAP funds will be used to finance a maximum of 73.53 percent of the total project cost or \$10,000,000, whichever is less. The remaining total project cost, estimated to be \$7,340,000, would be funded by the County. The total preliminary engineering and environmental review cost is estimated at \$1,000,000. FLAP funds will be used to finance 73.53 percent of the cost, estimated to be \$735,300. The County will fund the remaining 26.47 percent of the cost, estimated to be \$264,700.

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Public Works is required to enter into a project memorandum of agreement with FHWA and the Angeles National Forest to identify and assign responsibilities for the environmental review, design, right-of-way, utilities, acquisition, and construction for this project. This agreement does not obligate the expenditure of funds, nor does it commit the parties to complete the project. Rather, the memorandum of agreement sets forth the respective responsibilities as the project proceeds through the project development process. Preliminary engineering and environmental review for the project will take place as a result of this action.

Public Works will return to the Board to seek approval of the project and the County's funding commitment for the construction contract and construction engineering costs after preliminary engineering and the environmental review are completed.

To continue work on this important project that will increase mobility, reduce maintenance, and enhance safety for visitors and emergency response vehicles, the County must take action to enter into the necessary agreements with FHWA and the Angeles National Forest to begin work on preliminary engineering and environmental review and approve the associated costs.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Find that the proposed actions are not a project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) or, in the alternative, that the actions are exempt. The proposed actions are not subject to CEQA because they are activities excluded from the definition of a project by Section 21065 of the Public Resources Code and Section 15378(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines. The proposed actions would create a government funding mechanism that does not involve any commitment to a specific project that may result in a potentially significant physical impact on the environment. Additionally, the recommended actions are exempt pursuant to Section 15262 of the Guidelines and Section 21102 of the California Public Resources Code. They relate to planning and feasibility studies for possible future actions that the Board has not adopted, approved, or funded and, pursuant to Section 15306 of the Guidelines, relate to information gathering, including basic data collection and resource evaluation activities that do not result in a serious disturbance to an environmental resource. In addition, based on the record, they will comply with all applicable regulations, and there are no cumulative impacts, unusual circumstances, damage to scenic highways, listing on hazardous waste site lists compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5, or indications that it may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource that would make the exemption inapplicable.

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By approving the preliminary engineering and environmental review for the Mount Baldy Road Rehabilitation project, the County does not commit to or otherwise endorse, authorize, or approve any specific project. Any future recommendations on any proposed development remain subject to the Board's sole discretion to approve, deny, or modify a proposed project and to consider factors that would accompany CEQA review. Authorization of any future project activities would occur only following compliance with CEQA and the department will return to the Board for consideration of appropriate environmental documentation.

2. Approve and authorize the Director of Public Works or his designee to enter into a memorandum of agreement and a reimbursable agreement between the County of Los Angeles, FHWA, and the Angeles National Forest for the Mount Baldy Road Rehabilitation project for the purposes of identifying and assigning responsibilities for the environmental review, design, right-of-way, utilities, acquisition, and construction as appropriate for the proposed project and to ensure maintenance of the facility for public use if improvements are made.
3. Approve the County's local funding match for preliminary engineering and environmental review costs in the amount of \$264,700 from the Road Fund.

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