

Responsibly Advancing the Whittier Narrows Dam Safety Modification Project

Whittier Narrows is a 1,492-acre park located in the City of South El Monte and is one of Los Angeles County’s largest and most popular recreation areas. It includes Whittier Narrows Dam and Reservoir, which was constructed in 1957 and is owned by the federal government and operated and maintained by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Located in the natural gap between the Montebello Hills and Puente Hills that form the southern boundary of the San Gabriel Valley, the dam helps mitigate the flow of the Rio Hondo and San Gabriel Rivers, which flow through the reservoir flood control basin. It is a critical element of the Los Angeles County Drainage Area flood control system, helping manage flood risk by collecting runoff from uncontrolled drainage areas upstream and releases into the San Gabriel River. It is estimated that 1.25 million people in 25 downstream communities are safeguarded from flood risk by this dam.

Despite its importance, it has long required urgent upgrades, as well as retrofit and rehabilitation work. It was deemed by the USACE to be at a very high risk of failure, and its restoration was classified as the agency’s highest priority nationally. In 2019, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved a motion asking the USACE to

MOTION

Mitchell _____

Horvath _____

Hahn _____

Barger _____

Solis _____

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allocate the funding needed to expedite the necessary repairs and upgrades for the Whittier Narrows Dam, as well as directing the Department of Public Works, in coordination with the Office of Emergency Management, to work with USACE and downstream communities to ensure local measures are in place during emergencies.

At long last, the USACE is moving forward on the Whittier Narrows Dam Safety Modification Project. While overall repairs are much needed, the proposed project's scope of work carries significant impacts on the local communities, including both temporary and permanent changes, both during the project's estimated 5 to 7 years of construction and upon its ultimate completion. Although the project will be completed in phases, it will have significant impacts on open spaces, recreational opportunities, and transportation facilities. This includes substantial and potential permanent impacts on long-term County initiatives in the area, including the implementation of the Countywide Bicycle Master Plan for which an update is currently underway, and the San Gabriel Valley Greenway Network Plan, which ~~were~~was recently updated within the past year following robust community input. The project may hinder the implementation and expansion of the County's Class One Regional Bikeway Network as well as the San Gabriel River Bike Path from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean, which serves both as a recreational opportunity and a vital alternative transportation mode.

While recognizing that upgrading this dam is a top priority to protect millions of residents living downstream of the San Gabriel and Rio Hondo Rivers, it is imperative that any enhancements minimize detrimental impacts on the surrounding communities,

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recreational and green spaces, and transportation facilities that local residents utilize and rely on. Given the concentration of working-class and environmental justice communities surrounding Whittier Narrows, federal actions must avoid compounding historical inequities and ensure equitable access to open space and mobility throughout construction and long-term operations.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors designate the Department of Public Works to lead the County's response, in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Works to lead the County's response, in collaboration with the Department of Parks and Recreation, to:

1. Coordinate with the United States Army Corps of Engineers to identify, and avoid, and or mitigate, to the extent feasible, all temporary and/or permanent, short- to long-term impacts related to County trails, open space facilities, and roadways;
- ~~2. Establish ADA compliant and safe detours to ensure safe access to the regional system and facilities is maintained during the construction of the project;~~
- ~~3.~~2. Collaborate with United States Army Corps of Engineers on how these facilities will be fully restored and enhanced upon the project's completion;
- ~~4.~~3. Collaborate with United States Army Corps of Engineers to cConduct robust, multilingual, community outreach with local stakeholders to message project

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information including purpose and timelines, detour information, and any temporary or long-term impacts to recreational facilities ~~on associated impacts, both in conjunction with the United States Army Corps of Engineers as well as independent meetings hosted by County departments with local stakeholders; outreach shall be multilingual, accessible, and include clear timelines, detour information, and long term facility changes; and~~

5.4. Report back in writing in 60 days on the County's collaboration efforts with the United States Army Corps of Engineers pertaining to the above directives.

I, FURTHER, MOVE THAT the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Office Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations branch, in partnership with the Department of Public Works and Department of Parks and Recreation, to send a five-signature letter to the United States Army Corps of Engineers, with a copy to the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation, uplifting and formally documenting the County's concerns regarding the project's unmitigated impacts to the County's infrastructure, open space, and regional trail network, as well as local residents living near the Whittier Narrows Dam and Reservoir, and request that the USACE work with the County and conduct outreach to impacted residents to minimize any adverse outcomes.

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