



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: County Executive Office
(Office of Emergency
Management)
Department No.: 012
For Agenda Of: January 17, 2012
Placement: Departmental
Estimated Tme: 45 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from:
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors
FROM: Department Michael D. Harris, Emergency Operations Chief
Director(s) Office of Emergency Management
Contact Info: Michael D. Harris (805) 681-5526
SUBJECT: Public Parking in High-Fire Danger Areas

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence:

California Highway Patrol
Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department
Santa Barbara County Fire Department
Santa Barbara County Public Works, Roads Division
Santa Barbara County Parks Department
Santa Barbara County Traffic Engineering Committee

Recommended Actions:

- A. Receive a staff report regarding public parking in high fire danger areas in the south coast foothills;
- B. Determine that the project is categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to exemptions found at 14 CCR 15301 and 14 CCR 15311(a), and approve the filing of a Notice of Exemption (Attachment A) on that basis;
- C. Adopt a resolution (Attachment B) that designates Tunnel Road, north from Montrose Place to its terminus, as "No Parking" and a tow away zone during National Weather Service or County Fire Chiefs declared "Red Flag Warnings" in the area;
- D. Direct staff to place permanent signage at trailheads in the unincorporated county to educate public about the risk of fire and open flame in the area;
- E. Direct staff to work with other jurisdictions and agencies along the foothill areas with authority to encourage their jurisdictions to adopt similar ordinances that restrict parking in high fire danger trail areas that have ingress/egress concerns during "Red Flag Fire Warnings"; and
- F. Direct the Roads Commissioner to provide a copy and/or other needed documents to the Traffic Courts at his/her earliest convenience to advise them of the new program.

Summary Text:

Residents living along the foothills have raised concerns regarding the large volume of parking at area trailheads during the heightened fire season. Concerns include people making fire pits (including after the Tea Fire), evidence of people smoking in high fire danger areas, large volume of parking that congests narrow roads and potentially interferes with rapid first responder access, illegal parking (including in “No Parking” areas and in the lane of traffic) and people parking facing uphill as opposed to facing downhill ready to evacuate the area should rapid evacuation become necessary.

This item is brought to the Board of Supervisors, with the support of the County’s Traffic Engineering Committee, to discuss possible education and enforcement efforts and to direct staff to work with neighboring jurisdictions on similar approaches in those high traffic/use areas in which the County shares responsibilities.

Background:

In the State of California, it is recognized that people living in high fire danger areas should now be prepared for a year-around fire season. With this now continual fire season, concerns have increased over the volume of people going into the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) for recreational activities. Due to the volume of people within the WUI and the potential carelessness regarding fire hazards, residents raise concerns around the inability to quickly evacuate the area, and allow for a rapid first responder initial fire attack.

Over the last several weeks the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has spoken with various County agencies, the California Highway Patrol and other agencies regarding this issue. Staff have spoken to residents about their perceptions of trail use, and have met with constituents who value local trail access. Through these conversations, several important issues have come forth and are brought forward to the Board of Supervisors. The recommended actions would only take place on Red Flag Warning days as declared by the National Weather Service or the County Fire Chiefs. A research into the last three years by the National Weather Service reported that there were only an average of 1.3 days per year of declared Red Flag Warning days for this area (a high of 3 Red Flag Warning Days in 2009 during the Jesusita Incident). Because of the very few days in which a Red Flag Warning is declared the impacts to the recreational public is minimal.

Jurisdiction

There are approximately a dozen major trails in the south coast area located within the WUI, and many of them cross over various jurisdictions. This “cross-over” feature means that trails may cross into federal jurisdiction, private property or even back into the City or County. Therefore, enacting policy towards trail use or parking is complicated by multi-jurisdictional and private property interests and their policy approach.

It is recommended that the Board establish policy and direction at a location in which the trailhead and roadway / parking are within the County’s jurisdiction. It is recommended that this policy approach targets an area that is of significant concern to public safety officials for emergency egress and potential impediments for emergency responders to get into the area because of traffic volumes. If directed by the Board majority, staff can engage the City of Santa Barbara, the United States Forest Service, Montecito Fire Protection District, and any other jurisdictions or agencies to determine the ability to adopt any Board policies around education, trail “closures” and parking.

Education

OEM staff would recommend signage placement where possible at trailheads controlled by the County. If directed, staff can also discuss this approach with other jurisdictions to gain their support for the same signs at their trailhead areas. Basic education signage would identify the high fire danger area hikers are entering and behaviors to avoid such as no smoking, no fires, etc.

“Closing” of Trails

Enforcement of a formal “hard” closure (where it is enforced through citations and the presence of enforcement staff) would also be impractical as people can enter the trail through a non-closed area or private property. In addition, law enforcement (including Parks and USFS) lack the staffing capacity to enforce full trail closures and therefore is not recommended by staff.

It is recommended that the public’s assistance be sought by closing the trails on Red Flag Warning days due to extreme fire conditions by simply posting a “Trail Closed Due to Extreme Weather Conditions” sign. Having a “soft” closure which seeks public assistance, combined with parking restrictions, can reduce the risk of traffic congestion that inhibits rapid first responder response and emergency evacuations. Trail closure impacts would be minimal as there are only an average 1.3 days per calendar year of Red Flag Warnings issued.

Parking

Site visits to trailheads during non-Red Flag Warning days revealed major parking and congestion issues. Numerous examples such as people parking over the white roadway line into the lane of traffic, parking within “No Parking” areas, and parking along the edge of driveways were obvious. On two separate days, between the Tunnel Trailhead and Montrose Place (a little more than ½ mile in distance), staff found 74 cars one day (a Sunday) and approximately 80 cars on another day (a Saturday). Residents report higher counts on other days.

Because of County jurisdiction and the physical restrictions of the road, staff is recommending an initial approach that only addresses the Tunnel Road area (above Montrose Place to the terminus of Tunnel Road) that serves Tunnel Trail in Mission Canyon (1st District). By establishing the initial policy and approach at a location within the County jurisdiction, the County establishes a model to determine operational and enforcement feasibility.

In addition to jurisdictional clarity, Tunnel Road is identified as a significant public safety risk because of the narrowness of the road. The width measures approximately 18 feet in several areas. Neighboring the shoulder in several places are drainage areas where cars attempting to turn around, particularly under the stress of an emergency, are at risk of becoming stuck and blocking evacuating traffic or first responders. There is an obvious inability to quickly turn-around the volume of vehicles routinely found on Tunnel Road on high-use days should an emergency occur. According to law enforcement officials, during the Jesusita Fire responding paramedics hiked on foot to a residence because the volume of traffic made responding directly to a house not possible.

Parking Facing Downhill

Some people have advocated restricting parking to the side of the roadway that forces all visitors and residents who park on the road to park facing downhill. A shift of parking to only the downhill side would have a major impact on parking capacity, perhaps by 60% to 75%. This occurs because a great deal of the downhill lane is not suitable for parking and the roadway cannot be “shifted” or re-stripped

due to unusable shoulder conditions on the uphill facing lane. At this time, staff is not recommending a “downhill only” parking requirement on Tunnel Road.

“Red Flag Warning ‘No Parking’ ”

There are models in other jurisdictions that have restricted parking on Red Flag Warning days. Staff is recommending restricting parking for Red Flag Warning days (as declared by the National Weather Service of the County Fire Chiefs) only and at this time, because of the public safety concerns discussed earlier, on Tunnel Road. The unincorporated area does not have a robust parking enforcement unit that can be easily redeployed. Instead, the unincorporated county depends on the California Highway Patrol for primary parking enforcement. The Sheriff’s Department, while not a primary enforcement agency on parking issues, can assist. Enforcement can be problematic because of staffing limitations.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

Budgeted: No

Fiscal Analysis:

<u>Funding Sources</u>	<u>Current FY Cost:</u>	<u>Annualized On-going Cost:</u>	<u>Total One-Time Project Cost</u>
General Fund	TBD	TBD	
State			
Federal			
Fees			
Other:			
Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

Narrative: As discussed, costs have yet to be determined regarding sign costs, maintenance and replacement. Additional law enforcement staffing costs are not anticipated.

Special Instructions:

None.

Attachments:

- A. Notice of Exemption
- B. Proposed Board Resolution
- C. Proposed Operational Guidelines
- D. Parking photographs and sign examples
- E. The Recommendation of the County Traffic Engineering Committee of November 14, 2011.

Authored by:

Michael D. Harris, Emergency Operations Chief

cc:

Captain Jeff Sgobba, California Highway Patrol;
 Sheriff Bill Brown (c/o Chief Deputy Geoff Banks);
 County Fire Chief Michael Dyer (c/o Deputy Chief Chris Hahn);
 Public Works Director Scott McGolpin (c/o Chris Sneddon and Gary Smart)
 Community Services Department, Parks Division Director, Brian Roney