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SM Rejects Rosendahl's CA Incline Demands

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Max Taves , Staff Writer

Santa Monica will not consider local demands for around-the-clock construction when it finalizes plans for the California Incline Bridge Rehabilitation Project, Santa Monica City Manager Lamont Ewell told the Palisadian-Post last week.

Also, Ewell all but rejected Los Angeles City Councilman Bill Rosendahl's proposal for a joint Los Angeles-Santa Monica Working Group, which Rosendahl envisioned would work to mitigate the effects of yearlong construction on commuters and local residents.

'The reality is that [24/7 construction] might work for residents in the Palisades,' Ewell said. 'But imagine some of the Santa Monica residents who live on Pacific Coast Highway. It's something we believe will have a deleterious impact on our quality of life.'

He added, 'Ultimately, it's the decision of the Santa Monica City Council.'

According to preliminary plans, construction would start at 8 a.m. and end at 6 p.m. and be confined to Monday through Saturday. Santa Monica planners project that construction would last 10 months--a figure that L.A. officials consider optimistic [see LADOT story, page 6]. Palisades residents have called for 24/7 construction. Extending the construction schedule beyond current plans could reduce construction time by as much as 25 percent, according to the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

Ewell said that a formal Working Group, composed of L.A. and Santa Monica political leaders, transportation planners and citizens, could needlessly delay construction--which at its earliest would begin in spring 2009.

'There are things that we will not be able to accomplish,' Ewell said. 'Our objective is to move forward. Having these joint committees, it's inherently going to have opposing viewpoints and that's not going to help anyone.'

Rosendahl's District Director Norman Kulla, who is spearheading the councilman's talks with Santa Monica, hesitates calling Ewell's decisions a loss for the Palisades and L.A. residents.

'We're going to find some amicable solutions before we get to a more pointed debate,' Kulla said. 'At this point, until I am in a room with Lamont [Ewell] and the councilmember, I'm going to wait and see if I can work things through. There may be some room in the middle, where you don't go 24/7.'

'We don't have the right to dictate anything. But we have the right to request that [Santa Monica] reason this through in a fashion that mitigates impact,' Kulla added.

Residents of the Palisades and Santa Monica Canyon--both part of the city of Los Angeles--fear that Santa Monica will favor construction plans which might lessen the impact of construction on its residents, but leave L.A. residents and commuters suffering the consequences in the form of a 'traffic nightmare.'



Rich Schmitt / Staff Photographer

The California Incline Bridge, as seen from atop bluffs on Ocean Avenue. Reconstruction of the Incline could begin in spring 2009, blocking access between Ocean and Pacific Coast Highway.

Current plans expressed in the Draft EIR would close all three lanes of the Incline during construction, barring commuters from traversing the bluffs between PCH and Ocean Avenue.

Ewell calls these fears unjustified and vows that Santa Monica will try to accommodate both constituencies.

'Santa Monica takes every concern seriously--whether it's our residents or residents contiguous [to Santa Monica],' he said. 'We hold public meetings and we reach out to neighboring communities. We take all that into account.'

But Ewell's decision to avoid around-the-clock construction and Rosendahl's Working Group proposal has re-enlivened many of those fears.

'It doesn't sound like a very collaborative approach from the great city of Santa Monica,' said George Wolfberg, president of the Santa Monica Canyon Civic Association (SMCCA). 'This project is going to have a major impact on thousands of people.'

Many residents in the canyon worry that when the Incline is closed, commuters will choke Santa Monica Canyon with gridlock, as they travel on West Channel Road to 7th Street in Santa Monica.

'It would be unfortunate if Santa Monica weighed inconveniencing tens of thousands of commuters less than annoying dozens of Santa Monica residents,' said Richard G. Cohen, vice-chair of the Palisades Community Council. 'It seems like they are protecting their own at our expense.'

Fearing a traffic calamity, the SMCCA and the Community Council have lobbied L.A. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and State Senator Sheila Kuehl for support. But the two Westside politicians, whose constituencies include Los Angeles and Santa Monica, have offered only general support for mitigation in the Palisades and Santa Monica Canyon.

'I'm simply trying to support a collaborative process, without stepping into it,' Kuehl told the Post on Tuesday. 'But I haven't said I prefer one way of constructing over another. I don't think it's my job. I will continue to press for cooperation, but not for a specific construction plan.'

Yaroslavsky sent a letter to Santa Monica encouraging mitigation. But an advisor was cautious about stepping further into the details of the project, noting that the supervisor represented residents of both cities.

Despite numerous requests for a meeting, no one at Councilman Rosendahl's office has yet met with Santa Monica to discuss mitigation.

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[^ TOP ^](#)

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