

ITEM 9b

**Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Executive Committee
June 27, 2022**



STAFF REPORT

Subject: Update on Western Coachella Valley Flooding and Blowsand Projects

Contact: Jonathan Hoy, Director of Transportation (jhoy@cvag.org)

Recommendation: Information

Background: At the April 2022 meeting of the Transportation Committee, staff was asked to return with an update on the follow up steps being taken for projects in the “Flood and Blowsand Risk Assessment and Improvement Plan for the Western Coachella Valley.” This staff report provides a recap of the study and outlines the next steps of the project, including plans to solicit bids this summer from planning and engineering consultants.

CVAG’s Executive Committee, at the recommendation of the Transportation Committee, identified the need for the flooding and blowsand study in spring 2019. That February, the Coachella Valley experienced record-setting rainfall that prompted widespread flooding and blowsand issues on regional roadways. Indian Canyon, Gene Autry Trail, and Ramon Road were flooded at crossings of the Whitewater River stormwater channel. Emergency services personnel along with people travelling to work, school, doctor’s appointments, and other locations were stuck at a standstill for hours. The traffic woes were particularly problematic to and from Palm Springs and Desert Hot Springs, although it impacted drivers across the entire Coachella Valley.

It was not an isolated event. Far too often, storms and major wind events force the closures of regional roadways, sometimes for extended periods of time. For decades, there have been plans to provide all-weather bridges at the low-water crossings on Ramon Road, Vista Chino Drive, Indian Canyon, and Gene Autry Trail. All of them are expensive projects that require years to design and hundreds of millions of dollars of state/federal funds to build.

After a competitive process was initiated to hire a consultant, CVAG hired Michael Baker International (MBI) to complete a study that identified options that will reduce risks to travelers while protecting critical plant and animal species at the specific locations. The goal was to identify, develop, and evaluate alternative concepts that provide a level of flood protection appropriate for the specific location. Where locations are heavily travelled, a 100-year storm frequency design was considered and a 10-year storm frequency designs was considered for less travelled roadways. The solutions also needed to be compatible with the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conversation Plan (CVMSHCP), as well as comply with local, county, and state design guidelines and follow good sound engineering practices.

In addition to structural solutions, MBI was encouraged to develop non-capital, non-structural solutions that could address public safety and immediate concerns accessing local and regional medical centers and provide continuous and uninterrupted services by first responders and emergency personal, such as vehicles that can move emergency personnel and patients

through or over flood and dust zones. The study also identified short-term solutions to address flooding and blowsand events, most notably the installation of changeable message signs that alert travelers in advance of roadway closures.

At the December 7, 2020, meeting, the CVAG Executive Committee considered the findings from the “Flood and Blowsand Risk Assessment and Improvement Plan for the Western Coachella Valley.” The Flood and Blowsand assessment prioritized projects that would best fit the needs of the Western Coachella Valley during a flooding or emergency event. High, medium, and low priority rankings were assigned to projects based on emergency and evacuation access, traffic volumes and stormwater flows. After coordinating with the Cities of Desert Hot Springs, Cathedral City and Palm Springs, CVAG Transportation and Executive Committees in April 2021 prioritized improvements on North Indian Canyon Road (from Sunrise Parkway to Palm Station Road), Varner Road (from Mountain View Road to Date Palm Drive) and Date Palm Drive (from I-10 to Varner Road), which were identified in the study as project numbers INCN7, VRNR2, and DPLM5.

CVAG staff has been focused on finalizing a scope of work for the engineering and design stages of these projects. On May 10, 2022, CVAG staff met with Cities of Desert Hot Springs, Cathedral City and Palm Springs on the three projects to obtain input on the approach. Based on the feedback, CVAG plans to release a Request For Proposals (RFP) this June for professional engineering services. The scope of work will include environmental studies and permits, design and engineering of bridge and/or culvert structures, geotechnical studies, right of way engineering, support in preparing the construction bid documents and support during construction. Bridge and culvert structures shall be designed to convey 100-year flood events at Whitewater River, Chino Canyon Creek, Willow Wash, and Long Canyon Wash crossings. The roadways will incorporate bike lanes and mitigation measures for blowsand.

Staff anticipates recommending an engineering services contract when CVAG’s committees resume their meetings in the fall. If approved, the design work shall start early October 2022. Staff will be recommending a fast-track project management method, including having the three projects progressing concurrently.

Fiscal Analysis: There is no cost to this update.

The 2017 estimate of cost for projects INCN7, VRNR2 and DPLM5, as identified in the RACE was \$266 million. The new estimate of cost based on MBI’s alternative concept design is \$39 million, an estimated \$227 million savings. The design and engineering phase of work required to advance these projects is estimated to be \$4-5 million, but the exact cost will be determined through the RFP process.

Attachment: Project location map as identified in the Flooding and Blowsand Study

