

Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

CTC Meeting: January 21-22, 2004

Reference No.: 2.2a.
Action Item

From: ROBERT L. GARCIA
Chief Financial Officer

Prepared by: Gary R. Winters
Division Chief
Environmental Analysis

Ref: **SUMMARY – NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT, STATE ROUTE 163 IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY – IMPLEMENT CORRIDOR MANAGEMENT PLAN IN SAN DIEGO**

ISSUE:

The California Transportation Commission (Commission) is being asked to review and comment at the January 2004 Commission meeting on the following Notice of Preparation (NOP):

- Route 163, KP 1.4/6.0 (PM 0.8/3.7). Implement the Corridor Management Plan to reduce the number and severity of median accidents on State Route 163 in San Diego.

PROGRAMMING:

This document is the first step in the environmental process to implement the Corridor Management Plan to address several issues on Route 163 through Balboa Park. The plan includes features such as guardrail, slope and gore paving, lighting, signing and maintenance pullouts. The first project covered under this environmental document will be a Fiscal Year 2003-04 median barrier project in the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP). The project will be amended into the SHOPP in January 2004. The total cost of the project is \$5,104,000.

ALTERNATIVES BEING CONSIDERED:

- No-Build
- Variations in horizontal placement of median barrier

POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

- Modifications and additions to the facility have the potential to change the character of two historic resources: 1) the Balboa Park Historic District; and 2) this portion of Route 163, which is designated an Historic Parkway and is listed on the National and California Registers of Historic Places and is an historic landmark of the City of San Diego.

PROPOSED MEASURES TO MINIMIZE HARM:

- Enhance and upgrade the irrigation system, ground cover and shrubs.
- Plant trees in the median and at two proposed adjacent locations.
- Execute a Cooperative Agreement for additional planting outside the State right of way.
- Age the replacement concrete to match the concrete from the original construction in the Historic District.
- Keep new safety signage to a minimum.
- Where possible, conceal new traffic monitoring stations behind guardrail or under bridges.
- Replace fencing with new vinyl coated fencing to assist in visual integration.
- Remove unnecessary pavement and plant trees.

Attachments

SCH NO. _____

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: _____
(leave blank—will be filled in with Responsible/Trustee Agency)

From: California Dept. of Trans. MS -46
P.O. Box 85406
San Diego, CA 92186-5406

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report
Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

Project Title: State Route 163 Corridor Management Plan

Project Location: State Route 163 in San Diego County from "A" Street through the Balboa Park historic district to the Sixth Avenue Undercrossing.

Project Description: The proposed project is aimed at minimizing the number and severity of accidents that occur in the median. Upgrading and enhancing the safety, scenic quality and historic resources on approximately three miles [PM 0.8–3.7 (KP 1.4-6.0)] of the State Route 163 corridor through Balboa Park.

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible agency is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

A more detailed project description, location map, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials.

A copy of the Initial Study (is) (is not) attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but **not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.**

Please direct your response to Jason A. Reynolds, Environmental Analysis, Branch A, Chief at the address shown above. Please supply us with the name for a contact person in your agency.

Date _____

Signature _____
Title _____
Telephone _____

SR-163 Environmental Impact Report
EA 08140K
KP: 1.4-6.0

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The primary objective of these proposed projects is to lessen the number and severity of accidents that occur in the median. These projects would implement the State Route 163 (SR-163) Corridor Management Plan (CMP) developed by the California Department of Transportation (Department) in response to continued safety concerns and the recommendations of the SR-163 Safe and Scenic Advisory Committee (SSAC) to upgrade the safety within this corridor.

The proposed project covers a variety of features aimed at upgrading the safety of the freeway, enhancing the scenic views while preserving and restoring historic elements of the facility.

The following are a list of activities and features that are proposed for implementation and would meet the purpose and need of the SR-163 Corridor Management Plan.

FEATURES

Guardrail: The main safety element is the proposed installation of dual runs of median guardrail in order to shield trees in the median from being struck by errant vehicles leaving the roadway. Of the proposed projects to be implemented along the SR-163 corridor, the installation of guardrail is the most controversial feature.

Landscape: Proposed installation of new trees that have not been replaced over approximately the past 25 years, removal of dead or dying trees and removal of non-native species within the freeway corridor. The current deteriorated condition of the landscape is causing visual impacts. Trees are dying due to the infestation of the Lerp Psyllid, a tree parasite.

Irrigation: Proposed upgrade of the irrigation system to current Department standards with Remote Irrigation Control Systems and bubbler type irrigation heads to help eliminate waste, saving water and money. The irrigation system is old and is being replaced in kind.

Walls: Evaluation and rehabilitation of crib walls and retaining walls that have been in place since the original construction of the freeway. There are two retaining type walls that are currently in a state of decline, with rebar showing through the outside of the concrete. These walls would be refurbished or replaced in kind, depending on the

evaluation by maintenance, and the new concrete would be aged to match concrete from the original wall construction within the Historic District.

Slope and Gore Paving: Evaluation and rehabilitation of gore areas and slope areas, especially slopes under bridges, where deterioration is a significant factor in the looks and condition of the existing paving. Currently, no plants or vegetation grow on slopes under the bridges. The proposed project would pave these slope areas and the concrete would be aged to match concrete from the original highway construction. This would blend with the existing surroundings after completion. The impacts on the Historic District would be significant because of the change in the character of the resource. The proposed project would remove vegetation and shorten the raised portion of the gore points and restripe the lanes after completion.

Lighting: Proposed changes to the type of illuminating bulbs contained in the lighting standards from low-pressure sodium fixtures to 310-watt high pressure sodium fixtures. This will be consistent with fixtures used by the City of San Diego south of Interstate 8.

Traffic Signing: Increase safety provided by upgrading signage to current Department standards by including reflective signs, warning signs, and adding exit numbering. Signage would be kept to a minimum within the Historic District to minimize the changes in the character of the resource.

Traffic Monitoring Stations: Proposed upgrade to the existing and installation of new Traffic Monitoring Stations in order to relay current traffic conditions to the Transportation Management Center which monitors speeds and flow of traffic. Even though they are small additions, they should be concealed behind guardrail or under bridges to minimize visual impacts.

Fencing: Replace existing fencing due to significant and severe deterioration and lack of proper placement. The fencing, in some places, is outside the Department right of way and in other locations it is inside the right of way. The fencing will be replaced in kind, and will not cause a significant change to the character of the Historic District.

Maintenance Vehicle Pullouts: Installation of safe pullout areas for personnel and vehicles while maintenance activities are being conducted. It would no longer be necessary to close lanes and cause impacts to traffic flow through the corridor. This element would be an addition to the Historic District and cause a change in the character of the resource.

Abandoned Equipment and Appurtenances: Currently, there are areas of pavement that had previously been used for on or off ramps on SR-163 or I-5. In these areas, proposed pavement removal and installation of trees is proposed.

TRAFFIC

The SR-163 corridor has experienced an increase in the volume of traffic, which has led to a high accident rate, fatal accidents in particular. The information found in the Traffic Accident Surveillance and Analysis System (TASAS) and the Median Barrier Monitoring Program (MBMP) have demonstrated that the lack of safety features and additional traffic trips have added to the increased number and severity of accidents. The lack of a median guardrail has added to the severity of these accidents since there is no shielding of median trees. Errant vehicles hit the trees in the median when they leave the roadway. The percentage of fatal accidents on SR-163 through Balboa Park is higher than the state average for similar facilities.

SD - 163 - 1.2/2.4 Accident Summary (Nov 1997 - Oct 2002)			
Accident Type	3-Year	4-Year	5-Year
Total # of Accidents	167	250	316
Fatal (# of incidents)	1	3	5
Injury	55	79	95
PDO	111	168	216
Killed (# of persons)	1	4	6
Injured	82	125	156
PDO = Property Damage Only			

A second major safety issue is that of maintenance workers who must accomplish trash removal, tree trimming and weed removal along the corridor. There is a current lack of accessibility to maintain the existing vegetation. Maintenance accomplishes these tasks by doing a complete closure of the highway. The highway closure is usually done on a Sunday morning in one direction of traffic and all of the maintenance crews tasks are completed at one time approximately once a quarter.

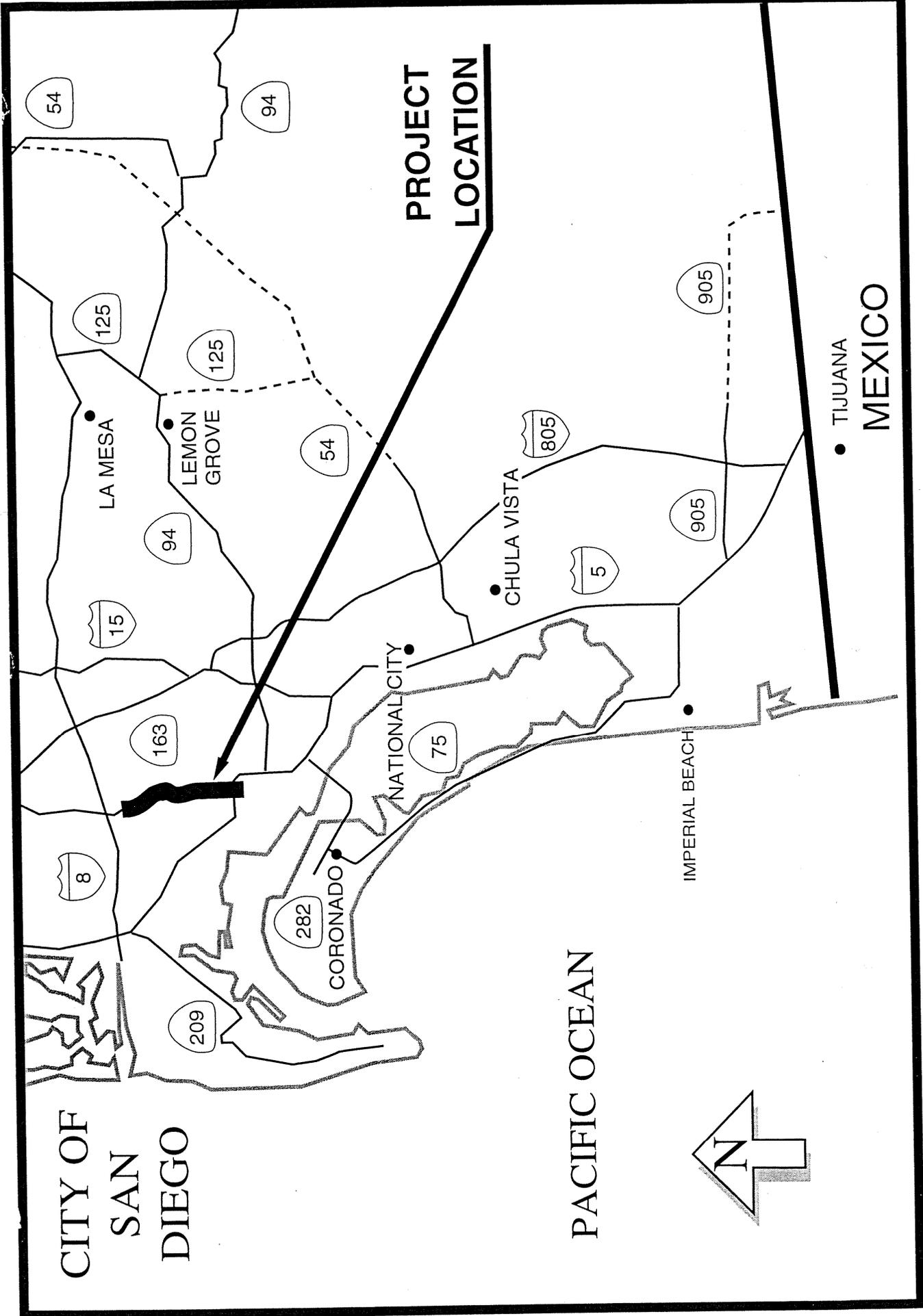
The general condition of the vegetation along the SR-163 corridor has been in a state of decline. Eucalyptus trees, planted during the early 1900's, have been attacked by Lerp Psyllid infestation and many of the original trees have died. This infestation of the Eucalyptus forest has been devastating to the viewshed. There has been a long-standing Department policy of not replacing median trees due to the safety concerns regarding lack of shielding. As one drives through the existing corridor, you are met with brown areas in the landscaping on the shoulders and outside of the State right of way. This condition is considered a high visual impact.

The steady deterioration of the vegetation over the years has prompted the need for enhancement and upgrading the irrigation system, ground cover and shrubs within the State right of way. Of the projects listed above, the installation of the guardrail would be the highest visual impact and proposed mitigation for this would be tree planting in the median. A Cooperative Agreement between the Department and the City is being proposed for additional mitigation planting out side of the State right of way.

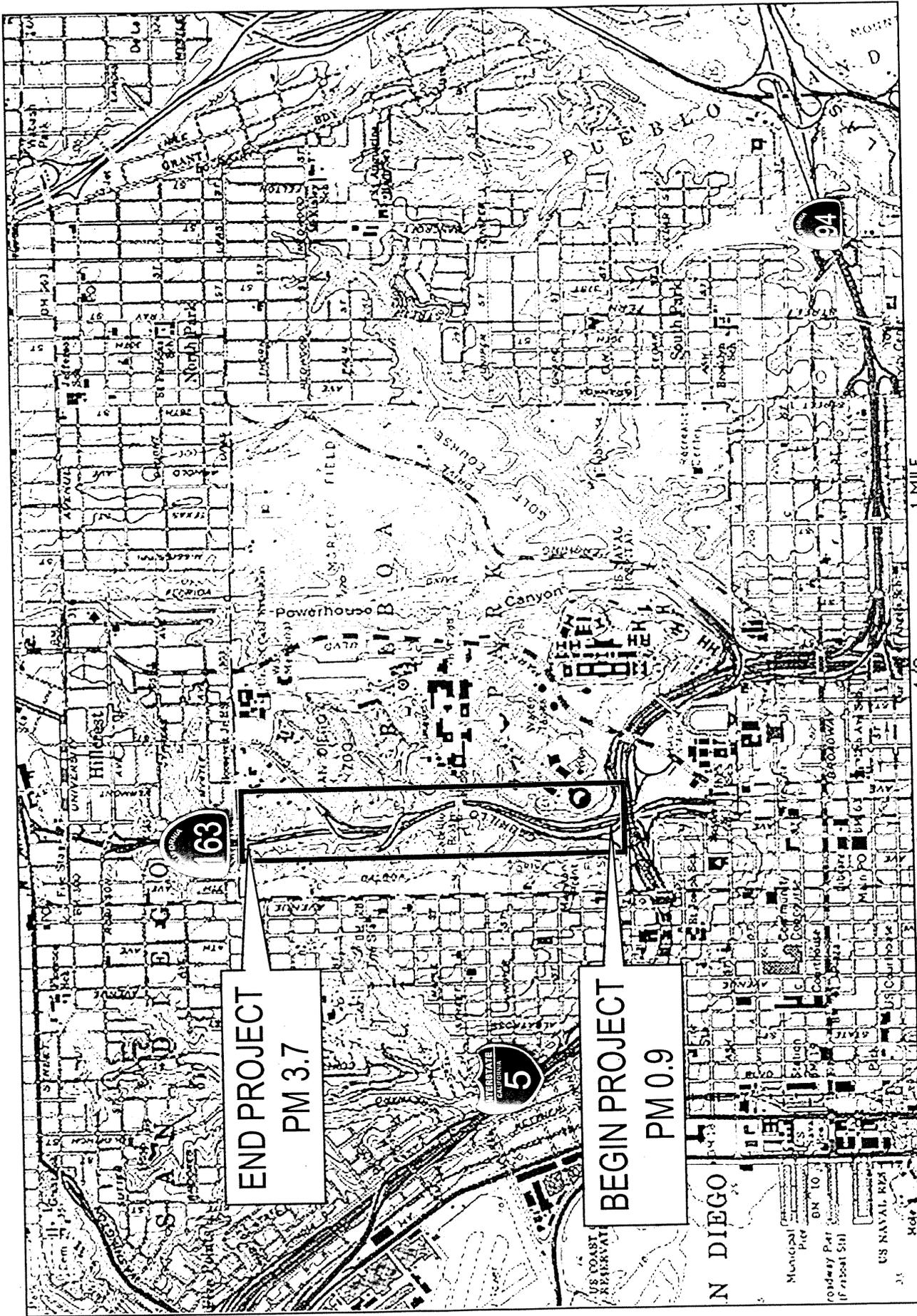
The portion of SR-163 that traverses Balboa Park has also been designated an Historic Parkway, the Cabrillo Historic Parkway (AB 3025), and is listed on the National and California Registers of Historic Places as well as an historic landmark by the City of San Diego.

FUNDING

The funding for the projects associated with the CMP would come from State only funds, specifically, the State Highway Operation and Protection Program. This program includes funds for Rehabilitation and Safety projects and non-capacity increasing construction projects. In order to accomplish the various projects, these tasks are scheduled to be completed in phases over approximately a 10-year period.



PROJECT LOCATION MAP



END PROJECT
PM 3.7

BEGIN PROJECT
PM 0.9

SR-163
E.A. 08140K

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PROJECT LOCATION MAP

TN * MN
13 1/2°