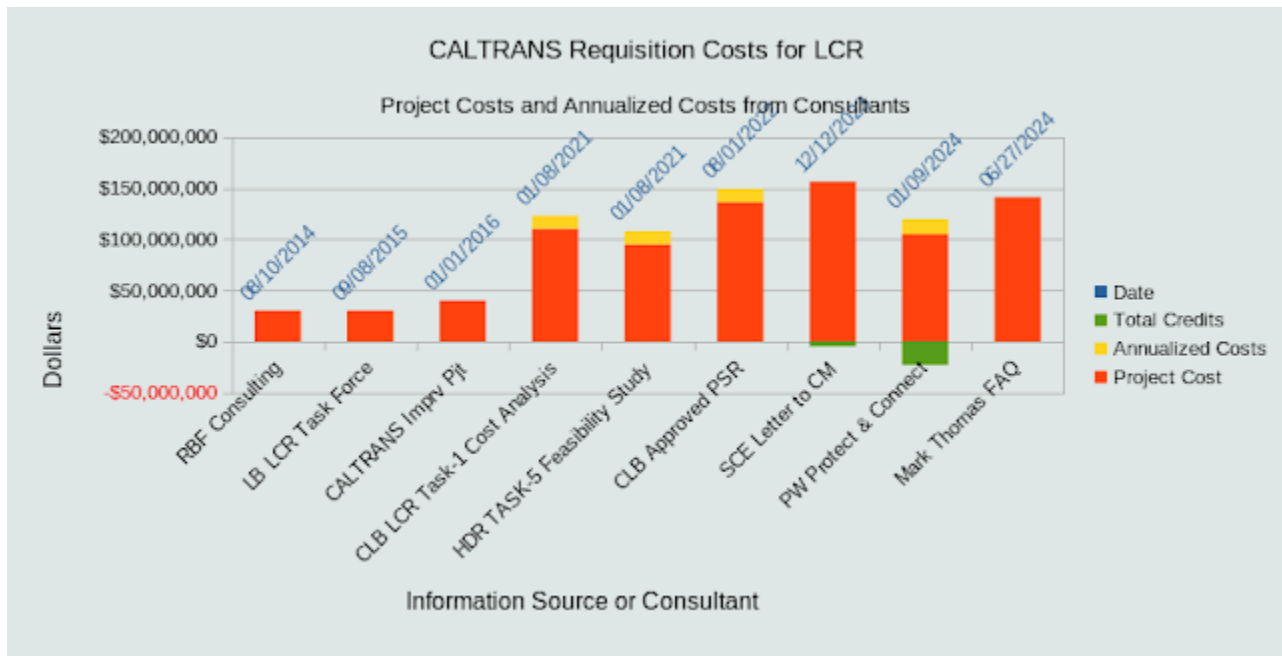


## The CALTRANS Relinquishment of Laguna Canyon Road

What you probably didn't know about the CALTRANS Relinquishment of LCR to the City of Laguna Beach. You should read this, somebody is on the hook for upwards of \$141,000,000 to pay for it.

The chart shows the anticipated cost of acquiring a 2.5-mile segment of Laguna Canyon Road from Canyon Acres to El Toro Road in order to underground overhead power utilities found there. The project costs were estimated by Laguna Beach City Public Works Department in conjunction with several consulting firms RBF, MIG, HDR, and Mark Thomas over a ten-year period 2014 to 2024. The trend of this endeavor over time is evident, increasing as the complexity of project construction is realized. Details of the project follow the chart. If the details are overwhelming, skip to Item 5) below.



The Project Cost is the present value of the project, the Annualized Costs occur annually, the Total Credits offset Project Costs.

Overall Sentiment: Hearts and minds of City Officials and Residents are in the right place but the design proposals here don't meet project goals or requirements, as the Consultants reveal, they are not yet well developed.

## 1) Project Intent/Purpose

The project intent from public outreach is markedly different than that from the LB City Subcommittee trying to sell it to the same LB public. The original reference and intent follow:

### 2024 LB LCR City Subcommittee:

1. Wildfire safety
2. Beautification
3. Develop multi-modal mobility system

### 2022 Approved Project Study Report (PSR)

1. Improve vehicle safety
2. Improve pedestrian and bicycle mobility & safety
3. Encourage active transportation on corridor

### 2015 LB LCR Task Force:

1. Beautification

2. Minimize impact to open space
3. Enhance vehicular mobility and safety
4. Add active transportation peds/bikes
5. Narrow lanes to lower speeds

*\* the words "fire" or "wildfire" or "fire safety" does not appear anywhere in the August 2022 Approved Project Study Report (654 pages) or the LCR Task Force Final Report.*

## **2) How to pay for it: Grant Funding**

There are many sources of grant funding anticipated to pay for the now \$141 Million project. Two favorites are BRICK and RAISE grants, there are seven more: LTCAP, LPP, SCCP, SS4A, PROTECT, MPDG, and CSP. Grant funding is competitive with no guarantee of funding success. California runs a \$45 Billion deficit, what are the chances grant administrators will look upon Laguna Beach charitably?

## **3) Meeting stated Purpose: Wildfire Mitigation**

What do the Consultants say? HDR says of Undergrounding "There is an **expected low likelihood** that undergrounding utility lines along Laguna Canyon Road will reduce wildfire risk, and the expected **magnitude of this benefit is low.** "

HDR Consultants say of Wildfire Mitigation: "**There is a low likelihood that the relocation of utility infrastructure in the Laguna Canyon Road right-of-way (city ownership), as opposed**

to outside of the right-of-way (Caltrans ownership), will generate wildfire prevention benefits. The magnitude of these benefits are expected to be low."

#### 4) Benefit Cost Analysis

9 January LB Agenda Report Mark Thomas Consultants say "With City ownership, the underground utilities can be located within the roadway, resulting in significant cost and right-of-way savings. Undergrounding utilities within the roadway will also minimize the environmental impacts to open space." But is that smart roadway design? So when when underground water enters an electrical power vault we close the highway for repairs? CALTRANS knows better.

HDR Consultants BCA: Approved PSR

HDR computed the attractiveness of benefit over cost in dollar amounts or in the mathematical ratio of the two (yes this topic leads most readers into the weeds). As the numbers show the BCA scores quite low.

Table 1: Benefit/Cost Analysis Ratios page 102

Benefit Cost: 1.41

Benefit/Cost 7% Discount rate : 0.63

Table 20: Wildfire Mitigation Benefit

Wildfire Damage/annual

Powerline Associated Wildfires County: \$168,000

All California County fires: \$12.18 Million/annual  
LBC 30-year benefit total \$1065.00

Table 26: Summary Emission Reduction Benefits 30-yr

Utility Undergrounding: - na

Beautification: - na

Bicycle: \$809

Roadway Widening:\$62,000

### **5) New Pending Legislation**

The Complete Streets Bill SB-960 mandates that Caltrans implement a multi-modal design for Laguna Canyon Road whether or not the city buys the road, whether or not the requisition is completed. The new legislation passed the Assembly 11:3 vote and the Governor expected to sign. The Bill is not mentioned anywhere in 654-pages of the August 2022 Approved PSR nor the City of Laguna Beach 9 January Agenda Report.

### **6) Assessment by CALTRANS**

In a letter to LB City Manager, Caltrans PR Sam Siddiqui writes "This concept primarily focuses on bike and Ped facility and has less to offer for the bigger demand of the vehicular traffic, which is the bigger objective of this study." Consistently Caltrans retains their focus on moving more cars faster and the Approved PSR plans show this.

## 6a) Assessment by LB Public Works

Assistant PW Director Tom Prez: "Thus, creating 'flexibility' in the physical character of the Canyon improvements, and thereby recognizing the significant differences in seasonal, weekly and temporal use, would likely be the most prudent, responsive, and expedient approach to making improvements in the Canyon (LCR)"

Unfortunately this emphasis does not yet appear in the design Alternatives 1-5 in the Approved PSR.

## 7) Missing from the Approved PSR

- Consultants HDR TEPA analysis (PSR) shows us Level of Service (a measure of car traffic) after improvements remains at 'F'. That means how it sounds.
- LOS is a mobility metric that does not include the benefit of moving traffic by alternatives to the automobile.
- The present measure of LOS does not include the measure of transit passengers, bikes, pedestrians or rickshaws.
- There are no speed reductions proposed in the PSR
- There is no reference to Complete Streets Policy in the PSR.
- For all five alternatives the roadway retains 12-foot freeway lanes and *maintains the posted speed limit set by Caltrans.*
- You don't see bike-lanes on freeways. The proposed design retains freeway speeds and roadway width that are not consistent with bike lanes and pedestrian pathways a true multi-modal design would demand. Stay tuned.

**-LS**

d