

Eastern Sierra Corridor Enhancement Program

US 395 & SR 14 Corridors in Kern, Inyo, and Mono Counties

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Prepared For:
Kern Council of Governments
Inyo County Local Transportation Commission
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ANTELOPE VALLEY

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The area referred to as Antelope Valley includes the towns of Walker, Topaz, and Coleville. It stretches from the California-Nevada state line south to the Walker Canyon. US Highway 395 runs along the base of the Sierra Nevada range with Antelope Valley open to the east. Walker River cuts through the valley, providing water for agriculture and a prominent scenic resource through Walker Canyon.

As the two-lane highway works its way through the Valley, the small communities appear as somewhat distinct pockets of development set within a valley of agricultural lands. The towns are mainly compositions of one-story single-family homes with limited supporting commercial and/or institutional uses. Visually, the buildings' colors and materials typically blend them into the landscape.

As the northbound highway exits Walker Canyon and enters Walker from the south, a two-way left turn lane is added through the town and the speed lowers to 45 MPH. Walker is the most developed of the three communities and contains a County community center, rest area, park, regional transit stop, and other related facilities. This area is used not only by locals, but also by motorists as it provides convenient public restrooms and picnic amenities.

Traffic volumes are relatively low with an annual ADT of 3,750 vehicles per day and a peak month count of 5,400 vehicles per day. In 2005, truck traffic comprised 6% of the total. A majority are large trucks, as 84% of the truck traffic has 5 or more axles. Residents complain of motorists using the town's center lane as a passing lane.

Coleville lies about four miles north of Walker and is home to the valley's elementary and high school. The highway expands from two lanes to three at the high school as a center turn lane is incorporated into the right-of-way.

The majority of Topaz's development is located just off the corridor about three miles north of Coleville along Topaz Lane. The road's intersection with US 395 is understated with minimal signage and a small building on the southeast side.

Planning documents have noted resident concerns with three intersections along the highway – Larson Lane, Cunningham, and Topaz Lane. Turn lanes have recently been constructed at Larson Lane and at Topaz Lane.

Cell service is limited in the area, but improving. Additionally, locals have noted there is no broadband access.



Antelope Valley Gateway Sign Near Nevada Border



School Adjacent US 395 in Coleville



Commercial Use Off US 395 in Coleville



Public Restrooms at Park in Walker



US 395 with Turn-Lane in Walker



Commercial Use Off US 395 in Walker

VISION

Following is the area’s vision as developed through the Enhancement Plan’s public workshops and the study of other plans such as the Regional Transportation Plan and General Plan. Maintaining the area’s scenic, rural, and agricultural quality is of prime importance in the vision for the Valley. Highway improvements focus on safety and operational issues. Widened shoulders provide comfortable routes for bikers and pedestrians within and between the three towns. A separate path is sited outside of the right-of-way to accommodate pedestrian, bicycle, and equestrian use.

Area signage improvements allow for clear recognition of the Valley as well as its communities and traveler facilities. The Walker town park and rest area are enhanced to serve the towns and the traveling public. Clear connections are provided to local businesses from the park to facilitate their patronage.

Deer corridors are improved and options for allowing wildlife movement to cross the highway are thoughtfully planned. Depending upon land ownership opportunities, wildlife under crossings are carefully considered and sited in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and other appropriate agencies. The number of deer collision incidents is reduced.

ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Community Character and Recognition

In order to achieve the area’s vision, land use decisions should be carefully evaluated to prevent the loss of agriculture and open space to sprawling residential development. This not only helps preserve the rural lifestyle but also the scenic quality of the open landscape. Obtaining a National Scenic Byway status for the highway reinforces the importance of Valley’s natural beauty and the need for it to be maintained.

Creating a clear signage program for the Valley would be beneficial. Currently “Welcome to Antelope Valley” signs are located at the southern and northern entries. The southern sign is easy to recognize, but the northern sign gets lost amid the multiple signs located at the California/Nevada state line. At the state entry, there is a state entry sign, a Mono County entry sign, the Eastern Sierra Byway sign, and the Antelope Valley sign. Although they are not right next to each other, the quick repetition of signs one after another can cause the information to get blurred together.

The Antelope Valley sign may be more effective if it was relocated south of Topaz Lake and closer to the towns. Town gateways can also relate to the Antelope Valley signage. Smaller signs with similar graphics can introduce the communities. This would improve the visual presence of Topaz as it relates to the highway and highlight the town areas. Walker’s wayfinding signage could reference the traveler amenities provided at the town park.

Currently, residents comment that the Valley does not have a town center. This is partly a function of having three small communities that make up the area. The existing community center and town park in Walker could be enhanced to serve as the heart of the Valley. A place where locals come to gather and visitors stretch and become better connected to the towns and region. A “no passing” sign could be provided in Walker to discourage using the turn lane as a passing lane.

Improvements would include linking the facilities to the town’s commercial areas through clear signage and walkways. Parking around the park could be better organized and paving materials enhanced to visually and physically connect the park to the adjacent restrooms, which could be expanded to offer more facilities.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Preserve the area’s existing scenic quality and open views of the landscape.
- Relocate northern Antelope Valley sign away from other signs at the state gateway. Move it closer to towns. Consider creating gateway signs for Topaz, Coleville, and Walker that coordinate with the Antelope Valley sign and the Corridor as a whole.
- Improve facilities at the Walker Community Center and town park to provide a central gathering place.
- Link facilities to commercial areas with paths, walkways, and landscaping.
- Organize parking, provide seating, and provide a clearly marked transit stop at the park facilities.
- Provide a kiosk with community information at the park.
- Provide a path along Walker River from Walker to Mountain Gate for fishing access and trail use.
- Preserve existing trees where feasible.

ANTELOPE VALLEY

Benches or seating areas can be incorporated into the park or near the restrooms to provide comfortable places for people to relax as they wait for members of their traveling party. A central kiosk should give travelers information to learn about the communities, recreation opportunities, and the region.

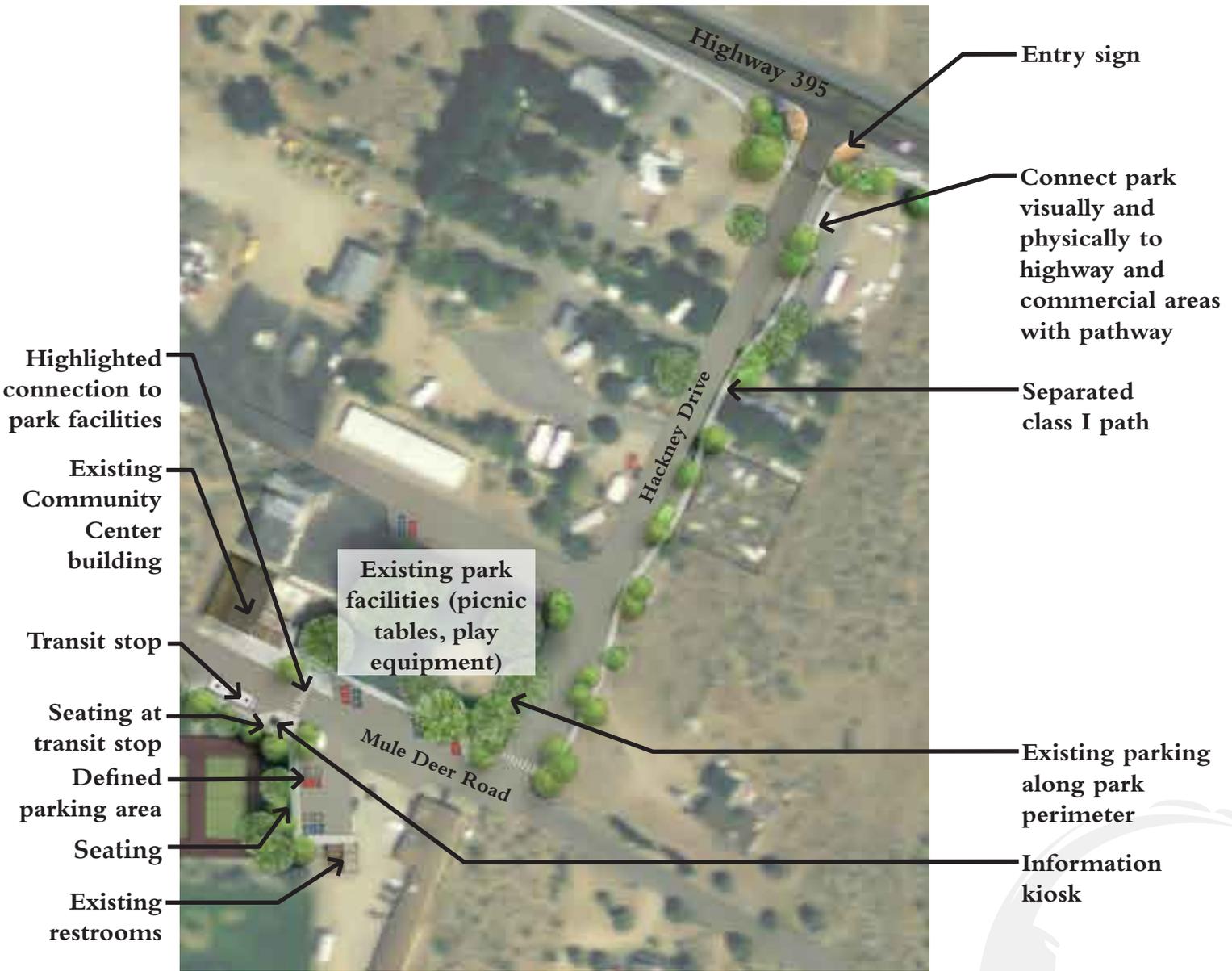
Recreation Access

A trail from Walker could follow the river south to Mountain Gate, a fishing access location, and be a great town asset. The pathway would allow for hiking, exercising, picnicking, and relaxing. Access to accessible fishing locations could be provided.

Minimal aesthetic enhancements are needed along this section of the highway. Rather, future projects should focus on not damaging the integrity of the existing landscape and viewsheds. The Corridor's existing heritage trees should be preserved, such as the cottonwoods north of Walker. Where highway widening is needed to allow for expanded shoulders for pedestrian and cyclist use, trees may need to be removed. In this situation, replacement trees should be provided.



Walker Community Center/Park Area Before Enhancements



Walker Community Center/Park Area After Enhancements

