

## **“Road to Hell” receives \$6 mil**

**By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / May 24, 2024**

Another \$6 million has been approved to complete the State Route 4 “Wagon Trail” Realignment Project.

Plagued by cost overruns, the entire price tag for the project including construction, right-of-way acquisition and engineering has nearly doubled to \$49.9 million for Phase 1 that goes 3.2 miles from Bonanza Mine Way to Appaloosa Road west of Angels Camp.

The Calaveras County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 Tuesday on a change order that will be used to construct a wall off the highway to protect Native American artifacts found in the area.

Of the \$6 million, the county will use \$2.25 million from Road Impact Mitigation fees to help fund the additional work.

Board Chairman Jack Garamendi voted against the motion.

“The road to hell is paved with good intentions,” Garamendi said as he voiced his reasons for voting against the change order.

Garamendi said he didn’t have confidence the project would be completed anywhere close to the latest figures.

He said the county is mortgaging future transportation payments from the state to 2028 and using 80 percent of its RIM fees on just this one project.

The RIM fees are supposed to be used for road improvements throughout the entire county, he added.

“To just wash our hands of it and walk away from it is not a good show of faith from this board,” said District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli who made the motion to approve the change order and additional funding.

The project has been a county priority for years and the county has a contract with Caltrans to complete and deliver it, Tofanelli said.

Members of the public at the meeting voiced support to complete the project including Bret Harte High School District Superintendent Scott Nanik who said it is an issue of safety especially for school bus drivers and teen-age drivers who must navigate the route.

Former Supervisors Merita Callaway and Tom Tryon also spoke in support of spending the additional money to complete the project they were instrumental in pushing forward.

District 5 Supervisor Benjamin Stopper said the discovery of Native American artifacts has been a factor in the cost overruns and asked Public Works Director Robert Pachinger for those figures.

Pachinger said \$4.4 million has been spent so far on monitoring and recovery of the artifacts with another \$1.7 million anticipated to be needed in the future.

District 3 Supervisor Martin Huberty agreed the cost overruns will continue but felt there was no other options and the county was obligated to move forward with the project.

Construction of Phase 1 began in January of 2022 and after some delays is anticipated to be completed in late 2024.

Phase 2, which includes work from Appaloosa Road for approximately 3 miles eastward toward Angels Camp, began in 2022 with the award of a design contract. Design and right-of-way work for this phase should be completed in 2026 with construction beginning sometime after.