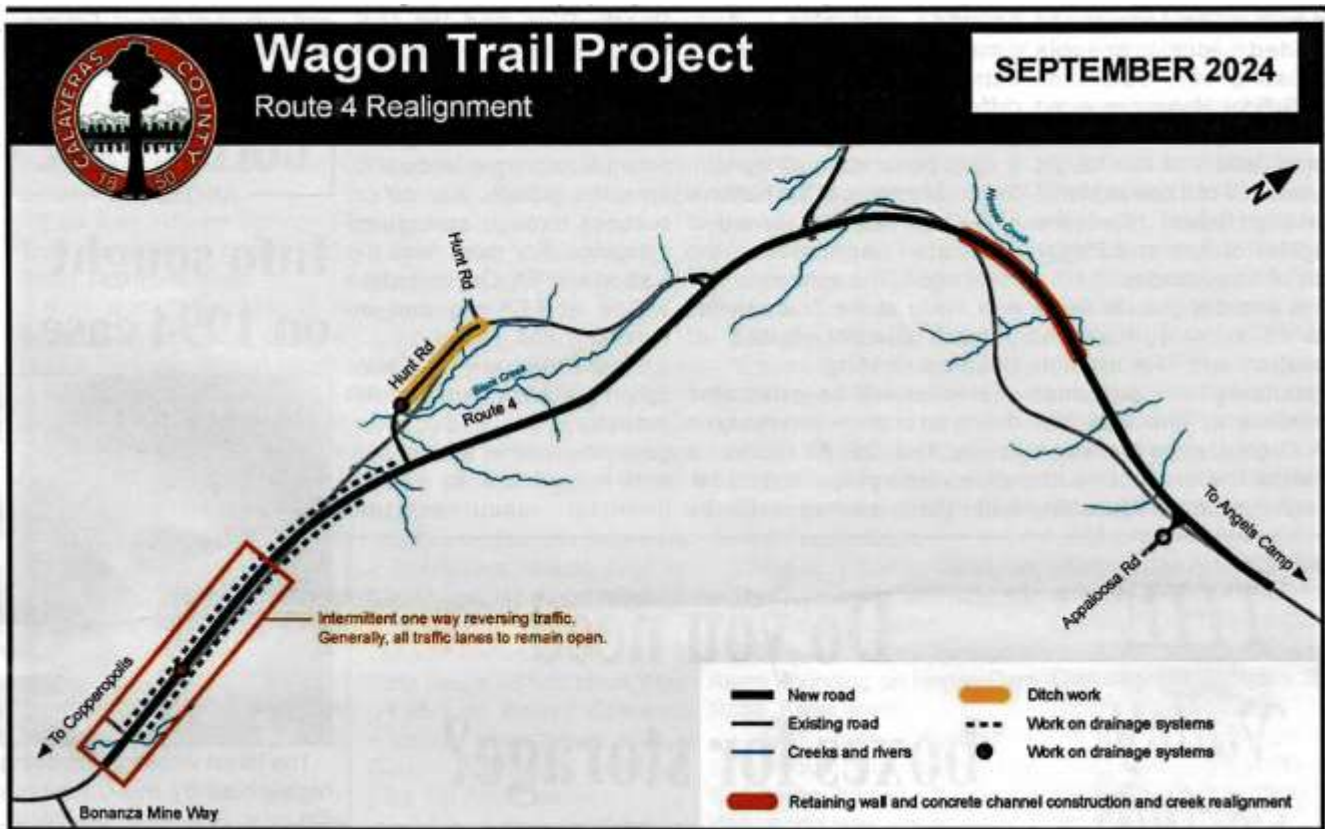


Supervisors pour millions more into Wagon Trail project

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / September 13, 2024



Calaveras County’s version of “The Money Pit,” known as the State Route 4 “Wagon Trail” Realignment Project, continues to pile up millions of dollars in cost overruns.

“The Money Pit,” a 1986 comedy movie, follows a naive couple buying a mansion and spending most of their financial resources to make the structure livable.

The Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted 3-2 on a \$2.1 million change order for Sukut Construction, the contractor on the job.

Voting in favor of the change order and additional funding to the contractor were District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli, District 3 Supervisor Martin Huberty and District 4 Supervisor Amanda Folendorf.

Phase 1 of the Wagon Trail project that goes 3.2 miles from Bonanza Mine Way to Appaloosa Road west of Angels Camp was expected to cost \$24 million. As of the end of last month, the cost was projected to be \$53 million.

The board throughout 2024 has voted on a series of change orders as the cost of the project has escalated, mainly attributed to the discovery and preservation of Native American artifacts in the construction area. To protect many of the artifacts, construction of a Mechanically Stabilized Earth retaining wall has become part of the project. It is estimated the wall added \$10 million in construction costs.

District 2 Supervisor Jack Garamendi, who has been the lone voice of dissent this year against the change orders saying the project could bankrupt the county, found an ally this week in District 5 Supervisor Benjamin Stopper as they voted against the motion.

In addition to the previous change orders, Interim Public Works Director Craig Pedro informed supervisors at Tuesday's meeting to anticipate another change order for consideration at their next meeting that would cover anticipated construction costs from the beginning of this month to the end of this construction season. That proposed change order is expected to be in the neighborhood of \$1 million.

Tofanelli asked Pedro to verify the county is not being charged for equipment that is sitting idle. The contract excludes payment for idle equipment, but it appeared there was such a charge for \$150,000.

The California Transportation Commission last fall approved \$14 million in supplemental funding from federal and state sources to cover cost overruns, but the county lately has been dipping into its own Road Impact Mitigation fees to cover the additional expenses.

At Tuesday's budget hearing that followed the change order vote, it was revealed the county plans to set aside \$10.8 million in RIM fees to cover the Wagon Trail project.

Construction of Phase 1 began in January of 2022 and was anticipated to be completed late this year. However, work is expected to continue through mid-2025.

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 some time after.