



Agenda Item: 16.E
Date of Meeting: May 11, 2026
Department: Administration

STAFF REPORT

To: City Council
From: Pam Foster
Subject: **Request Caltrans to initiate a Project Initiation Document on Truck Route to the east of the City of Bishop**
Prepared On: May 6, 2026
Attachments: Caltrans Truck Route Request Draft Letter
Attachment A - Annual Average Daily Truck Traffic Counts

Background/History:

The City of Bishop does not own or control its Main Street corridor, which is designated as a state highway (US 395) and operated by Caltrans. As a result, the City has limited authority over traffic composition and routing through its downtown core.

Between 2017 and 2023, the volume of heavy-duty trucks (Classes 9–13) traveling through Main Street increased by approximately 23%. Based on the most recent Caltrans data (Attachment A), a heavy truck now travels through downtown on average every 1.5 minutes throughout the day.

This increase has had measurable impacts on the downtown environment. Heavy truck traffic contributes significantly to elevated noise levels and reduced pedestrian comfort. During public outreach conducted as part of the Downtown Specific Plan, residents consistently identified truck traffic as a primary barrier to walkability and overall downtown vitality.

In addition to quality-of-life concerns, heavy truck traffic presents broader public safety considerations. Statewide data indicates that hazardous materials (hazmat) transportation incidents have increased by more than 85% since 2010. While the City of Bishop has not experienced a hazmat incident directly attributable to heavy truck traffic within the downtown corridor, incidents involving hazardous materials transport have occurred along the US 395 corridor over the past decade, including events as close as Mono County. In addition, regional freight movement includes occasional transport of sensitive or regulated materials, including munitions destined for federal facilities such as Hawthorne Army Depot. While these shipments are conducted under strict regulatory oversight, their presence further underscores the importance of carefully evaluating the routing of heavy truck traffic through population centers. Collectively, these factors highlight the potential risks associated with continued increases in heavy truck volumes and support the need to proactively evaluate alternative

routing options.

The City is also constrained in its ability to accommodate or service this level of truck traffic. Modern truck stops typically require approximately 20 acres of developable land, which is not available within City limits.

Truck traffic growth has been particularly concentrated along State Route 6. Current data indicates that approximately two-thirds of heavy trucks entering Bishop originate from SR-6, where truck volumes have increased by more than 40% over the same period (compared to approximately 13% growth along US 395).

The Caltrans project development process, as outlined in the Project Development Procedures Manual (PDPM), advances projects through four primary phases: Project Initiation Document (PID), Project Approval & Environmental Document (PA&ED), Plans, Specifications & Estimates (PS&E), Right of Way, and Construction. The PID phase establishes a project's purpose and need, scope, cost, and schedule, and determines whether it is a viable candidate for future funding. Completion of a PID typically requires two to three years and results in a Project Study Report that defines the project's core objectives and alternatives.

Analysis/Discussion:

Absent intervention, projected growth in regional freight movement is expected to materially alter the character and function of downtown Bishop over the coming decade. Caltrans forecasts indicate that regional truck traffic is expected to increase by more than 40% over the next decade, driven largely by freight movement between distribution centers in the Reno/Carson region and the San Bernardino area. If realized, this growth would result in heavy trucks passing through downtown Bishop at approximately one-minute intervals.

Historically, proposals to construct a full bypass around Bishop have been explored but have not advanced, largely due to valid concerns regarding proximity to residential areas and potential economic impacts on downtown businesses that benefit from pass-through traffic.

Given these constraints, a more targeted approach may be appropriate. One potential concept is the development of a designated truck route east of the City, generally following a realignment or extension of State Route 6 to reconnect with US 395 at a location several miles south of Bishop.

This concept may address several of the concerns raised in prior discussions:

- **Reduced proximity to residential areas:** An eastern alignment would shift heavy truck traffic further from the City's population center compared to the existing US 395 corridor.
- **Limited impact on pass-through visitation:** The proposed routing would require a detour of approximately 15 miles for non-truck traffic, making it unlikely to divert typical visitor traffic away from downtown.
- **Targeted mitigation:** By focusing specifically on heavy truck traffic rather than all vehicles, the approach may balance economic and quality-of-life considerations more effectively than a full bypass.

At this stage, these concepts are preliminary and have not been formally evaluated. Initiation of a PID would allow Caltrans to systematically analyze alternatives, assess environmental and community impacts, and determine feasibility.

Impacts to Council Goals and Strategic Planning Priorities:

The calming of traffic on Main Street would support Strategic Plan priority 1.1 Create a vibrant, authentic, and pedestrian friendly city.

Budget Impacts:

None. Given the regional significance of the state highway system and the population thresholds of the City and County, the costs associated with preparation of a Project Initiation Document would be borne by Caltrans.

Legal Review:

None.

Recommended Action:

Provide direction to staff regarding whether to formally request that Caltrans initiate a Project Initiation Document to evaluate a potential truck route east of the City of Bishop, and, if so, approve the draft letter for transmittal.

Approved By: Pam Foster 5/6/2026

Approved By:

Approved By:

Approved By: