City Council Meeting
07-13-26
Item
1.B.6.

Council Agenda Report

To: Mayor Silverstein and the Honorable Members of the City Council

Prepared by: Gregory Kajszo, Assistant to the City Manager

Approved by: Joseph D. Irvin, City Manager

Date prepared: June 30, 2026 Meeting date: July 13, 2026

Subject: Letter to Governor Newsom – Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) and Telecoms Safety in Malibu

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RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize the Mayor to sign a letter to Governor Newsom regarding PCH and Telecoms Safety in Malibu and authorize staff to proceed with its formal submission.

FISCAL IMPACT: There is no fiscal impact associated with the recommended action.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION:
Goal 3*:* Advance Infrastructure Resilience
Objective 3.1*:* Develop and fund a comprehensive Infrastructure Resilience Plan

Goal 4: Improve Public Safety
Objective 4.1: Reduce injury and fatal collisions on Pacific Coast Highway

DISCUSSION: In May of 2026, Malibu's Rebuild Task Force received a formal advocacy letter addressed to Governor Newsom. The letter requests immediate State intervention to address two critical post-wildfire infrastructure vulnerabilities in Malibu: the structural stabilization of PCH and the undergrounding of overhead telecommunications lines along key evacuation routes. Staff have completed a thorough review, incorporating minor clarifying edits, and are now presenting the final draft for City Council consideration and approval.

ATTACHMENTS: Letter to Governor Newsom - PCH and Telecoms Safety in Malibu.

City of Malibu

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Dear Governor Newsom,

We are writing to respectfully request the State's leadership in addressing two critical infrastructure issues impacting public safety and recovery following the January 7, 2025 wildfires:

- The structural stability and resilience of Pacific Coast Highway / State Route 1; and
- The undergrounding of overhead telecommunications infrastructure in fire-impacted areas.

Pacific Coast Highway is a critical transportation corridor and the primary arterial route serving the Malibu community. It provides essential access for emergency response, evacuation, utilities, commerce, and daily mobility. The safety and reliability of this roadway are fundamental to the protection of life and the long-term recovery of the region.

Historically, portions of Pacific Coast Highway along Malibu's coastline have functioned within a complex and interdependent physical environment, where public infrastructure has existed alongside private development, including retaining walls, foundations, seawalls, and shoreline protection devices associated with beachfront properties. While these improvements were privately owned, they have, in certain locations, contributed to the effective stabilization of the coastal edge adjacent to the highway.

The recent wildfires have significantly altered these conditions. The loss of numerous beachfront structures has created uncertainty regarding whether segments of Pacific Coast Highway are now more vulnerable to coastal erosion, slope instability, drainage impacts, and long-term structural degradation. Importantly, these risks exist independent of whether, when, or how private property owners rebuild.

It is also important to note that the urgency of addressing these conditions is heightened by near-term environmental and regional factors. Weather forecasters have indicated that current ocean temperature patterns are consistent with the development of an El Niño event, which may increase the likelihood of coastal erosion, storm surge, and additional stress on already compromised shoreline conditions. In addition, the Los Angeles region will be hosting high-profile global events in the near term, including the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games. Ensuring the reliability and resilience of critical infrastructure such as Pacific Coast Highway is essential not only for local recovery, but also for regional mobility, emergency preparedness, and the State's broader readiness for these events.

Recent site observations, including photographs taken during the last week of April 2026 (attached), indicate that several locations along Pacific Coast Highway between Las Flores Drive and Big Rock Drive are approaching conditions that may become problematic if not addressed promptly. The longer these areas remain without corrective measures, the higher the probability of a significant

disruption to traffic flow on this critical corridor, as well as substantially increased costs associated with future emergency repairs. The absence of visible repair or stabilization measures to date is therefore a matter of concern.

In some locations, the toe of existing slope movement appears to extend toward or into the highway corridor. With retaining walls, seawalls, and other lateral support systems potentially compromised following the fire, there may be a reduced factor of safety for both the roadway and adjacent bluff conditions.

Under current circumstances, including the potential for increased rainfall associated with El Niño patterns, post-fire drainage impacts, erosion, debris flow risk, and the region's exposure to seismic activity, the probability of localized slope instability, settlement, roadway undermining, or partial roadway failure may be materially higher absent timely corrective measures.

We respectfully submit that private property owners should not be expected to assume responsibility, directly or indirectly, for stabilizing or protecting a state highway. The structural integrity and long-term resilience of Pacific Coast Highway is a matter of statewide public infrastructure and must be addressed as such, irrespective of private rebuilding decisions or timelines. Moreover, given applicable permitting timelines and the inherent complexities of beachfront construction, it would be prudent to assume that it may be multiple years before the majority of adjacent homes are rebuilt and able to provide any meaningful protection against erosive forces, including wind, tides, wave action, and storm surge. The State's assessment and stabilization efforts should therefore proceed on the assumption that these private improvements will not be restored in the near term.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that the State of California, through Caltrans, take the following actions:

- Conduct a comprehensive and transparent assessment of Pacific Coast Highway in Malibu to identify segments where the loss of adjacent structures, fire-damaged retaining walls, compromised shoreline protection systems, or slope movement may have reduced coastal, lateral, or geotechnical support for the roadway.

- Implement, on an expedited basis, any necessary emergency and permanent stabilization measures, including shoreline protection, slope stabilization, drainage improvements, retaining wall repair or replacement, and structural reinforcement.

- Clearly define the State's role in maintaining and protecting Pacific Coast Highway as a critical transportation asset, independent of private property conditions.

In addition, we respectfully request that the State take action to address the continued risk posed by overhead telecommunications infrastructure in fire-prone and recently impacted areas.

The issue is not limited to whether telecommunications lines ignite fires. In Malibu's fire-prone hillside communities, overhead telecommunications facilities are often carried on wooden poles. When those poles or lines fail, they can create debris, ember production, and physical obstructions that prevent emergency vehicles from accessing burning neighborhoods. During the Palisades Fire, fire apparatus were unable to drive up to Big Rock community because fallen telecommunications

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wires were blocking the roadway. Similarly, in Las Flores Mesa, a fallen pole blocked access to the upper Mesa, and two homes burned the following day because emergency access had been compromised.

We therefore respectfully request that the State:

- Direct relevant state agencies and work with telecommunications providers to develop and implement a program to underground overhead communications infrastructure in high-risk and fire-impacted areas, including Malibu.
- Prioritize undergrounding in locations where emergency access routes may be compromised by downed lines.
- Explore the use of emergency authorities, funding mechanisms, or public-private partnerships to expedite implementation.

We note that Executive Order N-24-25 provides the State with broad authority to expedite recovery efforts, coordinate across agencies, and take necessary actions to protect critical infrastructure and public safety following the wildfires. We respectfully request that these authorities be utilized to advance the undergrounding of overhead telecommunications infrastructure in Malibu and similarly impacted communities where emergency access and public safety are at risk.

These actions are necessary to ensure that critical infrastructure does not hinder emergency response during future disasters.

We recognize that Malibu's recovery will take time and will require coordination across multiple levels of government. However, addressing these infrastructure vulnerabilities proactively is essential to protecting public safety and enabling long-term recovery.

Pacific Coast Highway is the lifeline of Malibu. Its continued safety, stability, and reliability are essential to emergency response, evacuation, regional mobility, and the restoration of our community. The State's leadership and immediate engagement are essential.

Thank you for your leadership and attention to these urgent matters.

Respectfully,

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