

The People of
Inyo County
vs.

The State of California
Department of Transportation
&
The United States
Federal Highway Administration

The essence of this dispute is the intent by Caltrans and FHWA to construct a bypass of Scenic Highway 395's existing alignment through undisturbed public and private lands circumventing the community of Olancha (the Caltrans Preferred Alternative), whereas the local citizenry and government support a straightforward widening of the existing alignment through Olancha and Cartago (Alternative 1).¹

The Inyo County General Plan specifically designates bypasses around the communities of Owens Valley as a critical issue to be avoided.² The Inyo County Board of Supervisors expressed their opposition to a bypass, with the then Olancha-Cartago District Supervisor publishing his absolute dissent.³ A survey conducted by Caltrans found a majority of Inyo County inhabitants to be in favor of Alternative 1, with the Olancha-Cartago residents most strongly supportive of it.⁴

Despite the clear directive of Inyo County, Caltrans has spent well over 5 million taxpayer dollars to generate legal documents which cast its own preferred approach in the most favorable light. The most recent Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment is presented as a formal study, yet it neither provides source references to assertions stated as facts, nor has it been certified by impartial peers.⁵ Simply stated, Caltrans and the FHWA wield the power to approve their own favored proposal, and are obligated only to go through the motions of a fair and open process in service of the public good.

Therefore the People have no choice but to reject this document and the process by which it was generated, and to demand that either the People's will be heeded or a legitimate study be created before any further action is taken.

¹ www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha | ² Inyoplanning.org/general_plan/goals/ch7.pdf [7.2.3 Roadway and Highway Issues] |
³ www.sierrawave.net/letter-to-the-editor-3/ | ⁴ www.sierraeast.org/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf [page 2] |
⁵ www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/olancha_eir_2015_7_9.pdf