



## TOPANGA TOWN COUNCIL

CARRIE CARRIER  
PRESIDENT

April 12, 2024

ALISA LAND  
VICE PRESIDENT

**MEMO:** more substantial information needed from Caltrans by 4/17/24 to mitigate complete erosion of community trust in the Topanga Cyn Blvd road mitigation process

STACY SLEDGE  
SECRETARY  
TREASURER

**SUMMARY: Current Community Challenges, Perceptions and Questions**

ROGER PUGLIESE  
MEMBER

**Four Main Issues:**

JASPREET KATRIB  
MEMBER

- 1. FIRE EVACUATION ROUTE RISKS ARE ENORMOUS**
- 2. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES ARE NOT BEING SUFFICIENTLY QUANTIFIED or ADDRESSED**
- 3. IMPACTS ON STUDENTS, PARENTS AND SCHOOLS ARE SIGNIFICANT and DIFFICULT to MITIGATE**
- 4. OPTICS ARE NOT GOOD**

TAM TAYLOR  
ADVISOR

JOHN WALLER  
ADVISOR

**Outstanding Information Requested by 4/17/24:**

- Why this Landslide is different enough to justify such a prolonged closure;
- How Caltrans might go about separating and protecting the roadway from the landslide (e.g. temporary retaining wall) prior to initiating the repair; and
- Ways in which they might ultimately stabilize and repair the hillside.

\* \* \*

I have been on the Town Council since 2016. The current Topanga Canyon Boulevard (TCB) road closure is one of the single biggest controversies that we have ever had to manage. This a road that over 30,000 vehicles traverse daily.<sup>1</sup> We are appealing to you for help in managing this crisis. For our part, we have been working with the County to try to help small businesses and parents/students affected by the road closure. But know that even additional supports will not go a long way to addressing the underlying problem: the total familial and economic disruption felt by a large swath of our community as a direct result of the TCB closure.

I have been trying to respectfully but persistently nudge Caltrans to provide more information so that residents can understand, accept and plan around the major disruption to their lives that they are currently experiencing. We do not ask for perfect information, but we do need a rough outline of what preliminary investigations show are likely to be the recommended course of action and what that means for the potential duration of the TCB closure.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Caltrans Traffic Study Data from 2008. The number is surely even larger today. (Studies available via PRA and on OneTopanga.com).

Caltrans has a 20-page Geotechnical Manual for Landslides (2020) that they rely upon for this type of mitigation work. There is a finite array of options available to them. Any Geotechnical Engineer should be able to discuss and describe some of the most likely mitigations needed at this point given the slope contours and prevailing soil type in this area (even if Caltrans has to heavily qualify anything they say). We have had thousands of landslides in the State over the past two years-some massive and some small. Many have been dealt with immediately and with almost no information. We need Caltrans to act with something approaching that level of urgency now. Based on visual inspection, extensive drone footage and mapping, and comparative analyses with other slides in Southern California, Caltrans should have enough information at this point to provide broad outlines of what will likely be needed to: (1) provide bulwarks/barriers between the slide area and the roadway so that at least 1 lane may be re-opened; and (2) an idea of what is being considered for the actual, longer term repair.

People can deal with brief periods of disruption, but they will not tolerate extended periods of limbo IF they feel that more could and should be done (and has been done in other areas far more quickly). Many residents in the community are now at a breaking point. The thin dam of patience that we have tried to reinforce is about to break.

To mitigate further adverse political consequences for all concerned, and to manage public expectations, we need more substantial information from CT by the time of the next Town Council meeting on Wednesday, April 17th. Please help to convey that urgency to them in whichever ways you can.

**Summary of some of the most pressing practical and political considerations:**

1. **FIRE EVACUATION ROUTE RISKS ARE ENORMOUS:** As TCEP will attest, Topanga Canyon is considered one of the most difficult areas in the State to protect from wildfire because of its WUI characteristics AND its extremely limited ingress and egress options. With the closure of TCB at the Southern end, we have literally closed off one of our main evacuation routes. Even with all roads operational, we have far more people living here than we can safely evacuate. With one of our two major routes off-limits, we have now halved the number of people who may be able to escape if a fire erupts unexpectedly. Note that we had a significant arson-related wildfire in May 2021. What do we do if this happens again and the road is still closed? We need at least one lane open as soon as humanly possible.
2. **ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES ARE NOT BEING SUFFICIENTLY ADDRESSED:** We have at least 200 known businesses in the Canyon (many of them home-based). Has anyone done an economic impact assessment? What are the costs to them of an extended closure? I know that many have gone out of business due to the Covid closures, reduced traffic from all the rainstorms over the past two years, and rising rents. At the same time, most of our local businesses have thus far been unable to obtain any financial support from entities like FEMA. FEMA declared our small business community ineligible for grants or loans last year in spite of the federal disaster that was declared in our County (while State and County agencies did get FEMA funding). To her immense credit, Supervisor Horvath has asked her Economic Development team if our beleaguered small businesses might qualify for some of Metro Business Disruption funding. We are currently waiting to see if any do. In addition to the small businesses themselves, what about the disruption to all the parents and commuters who are losing critical productivity hours due to their significantly increased commuting time? Average commute times seem to have doubled or tripled from 1 hour to 2 hours (or 30 minutes to 1.5 hours) for a large number of folks on a regular basis. Many of these people do not have the option to work from home.

3. **IMPACTS ON STUDENTS, PARENTS AND SCHOOLS ARE SIGNIFICANT and DIFFICULT to MITIGATE:** The Town Council has hosted multiple meetings with the two schools most directly impacted by this road closure: Paul Revere Charter Middle School (PRMS) and Palisades High Charter School (Pail High). The Principals and Head Administrators of both schools have been tremendously gracious and innovative in trying to work with the community to improve conditions for students. For instance, both Schools are adopting a policy of formally excusing tardiness or absences for students impacted by the road closure. A simple process has been put in place by the schools to implement that policy that should be very easy for parents to follow. However, transportation is another matter entirely, as our options are severely limited by funding constraints for additional bus routes and the fact that Tuna Canyon (our main alternate route) is a one-way road for the stretch that leads onto the PCH. (it is a very narrow and winding road, and it is not considered safe or feasible to make it into a two-lane road at this point). Hybrid learning may be an option for Palisades (they are looking into it), but Paul Revere does not see any way to implement it without violating their agreement with the Teachers Union or in-person instructional compliance requirements. Some spots may be available to PRMS students to enroll in LAUSD's Virtual Academy but anyone enrolled in that program is required to forgo all in-person learning. Given that extreme social isolation experienced by many students during Covid, that seems like too extreme of an option to many parents.
  
4. **OPTICS ARE NOT GOOD:** Many residents, including myself, have walked down to the Slide site itself to see the damage. While it is a big slide, it doesn't appear large enough to most of us to justify the closure. It looks like it could be handled in much the same way that other mudslides and landslides have been handled across LA County. Caltrans needs to do a better job of explaining to Topangans why this slide is so different. People are not content to simply take their word for it anymore. This Friday will equal five weeks of road closure with almost no information. People need and deserve more at this point.

#### **THE ASK: MORE INFORMATION**

We ask that you use the influence that you or your Office has to provide the community with the critical information that they seek from Caltrans about the following issues by this Wednesday, April 17th at the Topanga Town Council meeting:

- (1) Why this landslide appears different enough to justify such a prolonged closure;
- (2) How Caltrans might go about separating and protecting the roadway from the landslide (e.g. temporary retaining wall) prior to initiating the repair; and
- (3) Ways in which they might ultimately stabilize and repair the hillside.

Kind regards,  
Carrie L. Carrier  
Topanga Town Council