

**Unincorporated San Luis Obispo County  
Tourism Business Improvement District Advisory Board (CBID)  
Phoenix Plan - our roadmap to Recovery  
presented April 22, 2020**

**Our Process:**

**Respond** - Manage continuity.

**Recover** - Learn and emerge stronger.

**Thrive** - Prepare for the next normal.

*"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence itself, but to act with yesterday's logic."*

**Executive Summary/Background:**

In mid-March, 2020 travel to the Central Coast changed dramatically as the nation saw a halt in international flights and was asked to shelter in place as a measure to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. April, typically a busy Spring break time, was quiet as people heeded the request to stay home. Some hotels in the area closed, while others saw single digit occupancies.

During this time, the H1DR paid media and email marketing effort was paused. We focused on engaging organic traffic - stayed active on social media and focused the message on inspirational travel. We also stayed active on search engine marketing as a way to provide answers to the large contingent of people seeking online content.

Once the coast is clear, we want to be ready to start up the tourism engine and capitalize on current trends to ensure a speedy recovery. This plan utilizes the partners, budgets, and learning from our previous efforts, but pivots toward a strong retargeting effort, some new targets, and a messaging focus on our stretch of Highway 1 - chalk full of wide open spaces, no crowds, and peaceful places to come and breathe deep.

All current consumer research, as well as historical data, show a recovery in phases with domestic travel and leisure leading the way. The biggest question is when. Then we have to ask ourselves who will travel first? Which assets of our brand will be the most desirable? And what will go away?

We expect recovery to happen in phases as follows:

1.

## 2. Domestic Drive (Key California markets)

Based on historical downturns, San Luis Obispo County typically recovers faster than California or the United States as a whole because the bulk of the business is the California drive market - which will be strengthened as those CA residents planning longer-haul summer vacations will instead decide to travel closer to home.

It will be important to watch trends to see which market segments will and will not be willing to travel right away, as well as which segments could help rebuild our business. Younger travelers are expected to be the first to travel because they aren't as afraid of the virus as older travelers. And affluency is expected to be important. Only those who haven't been dramatically impacted by the economic downturn resulting from this pandemic will feel the freedom to be able to afford to travel.

As we activate on the most important opportunities, we also need to readjust our thinking and focus on the top two or three key metrics to gauge success - most prominent will be our retargeting metrics which will be compared to new target metrics as we look to reengage visitors.

## **We must move beyond 'recovering' from the crisis and toward 'thriving' in the long run.**

### **Research:**

#### Miles Media - Travel Sentiment Study

- 84% of travelers have changed their plans
  - 53% have cancelled completely
  - 43% have reduced their plans in some way
- Factors impacting plans are overwhelmingly due to the SIP recommendation:
  - 67% blamed COVID-19
  - 25% are concerned about the economy
- 65% say they plan to travel in the next six months and the majority are focused on a destination they can drive to.
- The majority of travel content being consumed was online video

#### Trip Advisor Research - Site visitors

59% say more likely to take a road trip post COVID

71% spent time IN THE LAST WEEK planning and researching potential trips

55% have spent FIVE HOURS in the last week planning their future trip

People are looking for inspirational images and content and planning for that future trip - and wanting to get back to normal.

#### Adara Data - Recent travel searches

- There is an increase in searches, especially for family travel beginning six weeks out through September 1. However, they noted that it is premature to make meaningful and specific predictions given what's happening is unprecedented and unpredictable.
- "Gating Events" must occur first which includes a reduction in rate of infection, and the removal of shelter in place orders and travel restrictions.

**Messaging:** Wide Open Spaces, uncrowded, serenity, expansive, uninterrupted trails

## Landing page:

We have created a new landing page <https://highway1discoveryroute.com/wide-open-spaces/> as the center of our “Phoenix Plan”. Not only will we have the Uncrowded Wide-Open spaces content, we will have new content focused on the Solo Traveler, a Preserves/Sanctuaries/Estuaries page, a Coastal Hikes page, a State Parks along H1 page, and Cycling content for each LFA.

## Media Recommendations:

We have reprioritized and will be activating our most important tactics. Key to our program is the utilization of retargeting to reengage those who have shown past interest in our area. Learning will help inevitably inform future efforts, creating a bridge/framework for our 2020 | 2021 plan. Reporting and metrics will be key to continuous improvement.

Note: \$140,000 in media paused in early March will help fund the recovery plan.

### LA TIMES:

- Update overall targeting to reflect audiences that may have interest in elements/events/activities most relevant to Wide Open Spaces, including people who are interested in:

Preserves/Sanctuaries/Estuaries

Coastal Hikes/hiking guide

State Parks along H1

Cycling

Overall wellness

Retargeting

Site retargeting for those who spend 1+ minutes on the H1DR website.

Dynamic Map Retargeting – video and display retargeting those that have visited specific LFAs/activities on our map.

Email retargeting – retargeting those who have opened past LA Times emails.

Search Retargeting – targets an audience based on the previous searches they conduct on other websites across the Web. Unlike site retargeting, search retargeting is designed to find new customers which have likely never been to a marketer's website before.

Emails/Newsletters

Retarget to those who have previously opened an email.

Expand new email drops to Wide Open Spaces targets.

Expand new emails to intenders showing heavy search or travel habits in the last 6 months (travel 3x in 6 months).

Facebook Ads:

New creative with updated targeting

New Testing to include Facebook Video (focused on wide open spaces), You Tube, and Pinterest

## **SFGate:**

### Email Digest

Create an email execution that includes all of the H1DR program elements to date with a focus on wide open spaces. This will include not only the stories that we have created to date, but also include links to the influencer content as well as the quiz.

### Email List Retargeting

Use the lists that we have currently reached with the new digest execution. In addition, we will add an additional 150k emails to the new target audience.

### Media Retargeting

Add a retargeting campaign reaching readers that have interacted with the site. We can also use this information to create a look-a-like audience to extend the reader pool.

### Additional Story/Listicle

### Wide Open Spaces activities

## **TripAdvisor:**

- Multi-Click and Destination Ads
- Targeting/Retargeting:

Continue to Focus on Road tripping and our GEOs

Target folks who are in the planning phase for Central Coast and/or those who are lower funnel in the shopping/booking phase.

Retarget those searching Central Coast destinations across TripAdvisor site, TripAdvisor network, and audience extension (off platform). We can leverage this also on social.

Utilize Connect (TA Facebook social).

- Consider \$25k Email Co-op

## **YOSEMITE:**

National Park newsletter feature

Facebook posts are scheduled for May, June, July and August

## **Search Engine Marketing:**

- Increased impression shares in Google Search for keywords that have a proven record of delivering engaged sessions on the website. There has been an increase in cost per click and cost per conversion

during this SIP period, but we've increased impression share by 15-25% for most of those top keywords and we've added some similar-to-high-converting keywords to help drive more qualified traffic, particularly to the LFA pages/sites.

Highest converting keywords include:

*"highway 1 trip planner," "beaches near pismo," "attractions along highway 1," "central coast ca," "things to do in cayucos," "things to do in cambria," "big sur," "big sur what to do," "weekend getaways near me," "avila beach resort" etc.*

Expanded SEM Retargeting:

Retargeting those who spent 1+ Minute on the CBID Website

Increase CPC's to capture more "in Market" users. We've been using "In-Market Audiences" who Google has identified as 'in-the-Search-market' for certain things. We've boosted bids for activities searches because they've been converting.

High Travel Intenders focused on Wide Open Spaces keywords. Google Keyword Planners shows search volume with words like "state parks," "hiking guide," and "wellness resorts."

## **Email:**

Our email program was paused in early March, and will be reinstated starting in mid-April to reach the aspirational traveler within our 80,000 person database. We will not only incorporate CrowdRiff galleries, we will also embed video to improve engagement and click-through rates. Furthermore, we will increase our send rate to every other week and the messaging will pivot to reinforce the wide open spaces creative concepts with subjects/content like:

- The Wide-Open Spaces We All Love on Highway 1
- Explore 100 Miles of Uncrowded Freedom on Highway 1 (Driving Optional)
- Find Your Distance Where Wildlife Abounds
- Tunes and Digs to Inspire Your Summer Road Trip
- Traverse Miles of Uninterrupted Trails Along Highway 1
- Your Guide to Expansive Beaches Along Highway 1

## **Social:**

Since many travelers will seek to avoid air travel in the weeks and months ahead, we will focus on road trippers and drive markets, providing travelers with the inspiration and information they need to embark on a road trip. Focusing on these audiences in drive markets, we will shift our social media messaging to focus on Road Trip verbiage and easy drive accessibility. We will continue to promote solo travel, wide open spaces, wellness activities, and preserves/sanctuaries, as visitors are initially going to want to stay away from large group gatherings and crowded attractions.

*Help travelers find calm and let them know we're thinking of them with virtual looks at beautiful scenes within the H1DR destination:*

**#Highway1Dreaming** – use this new tag to promote a social campaign around future travel – stemming

from this article: [Travelers Tell Us The First Place They Want To Go, Once Travel Is Safe Again](#). Ask all LFAs to use this hashtag to promote similar messaging about experiences along H1DR.

**Most engaged posts become ads on LAT** — As we track our most engaged posts and videos on social, we will work with LAT to quickly turn those into ads to engage our digital audiences.

**Seek out and emphasize solo travelers**—Instagrammers love to post wide shots of themselves, alone, amid a beautiful setting. Amplifying these sorts of images will help convey that H1DR features plenty of elbow room and all sorts of majestic scenery. We can use the H1DR video clips and images sourced from CrowdRiff to do so.

**Get off the grid**— Highlight remote, small towns great for avoiding crowds, recharging, and finding solitude. Additionally, focus on opportunities to eat and shop locally, supporting small businesses.

**Was your event or special occasion canceled because of coronavirus?** Visitors might have had to cancel a birthday/anniversary/honeymoon/celebration trip due to coronavirus, so, we will also message about them being able to re-book and “celebrate now.”

**Virtual Travel Guide**— Buckle up and follow this spectacular coast-hugging drive for a life-changing adventure. Design your itinerary for spontaneous pull-overs, spectacular sunsets and lots of family fun — discover why California’s Highway 1 is the ultimate road trip destination.

**Utilize Pinterest more**— Utilize this channel during the recovery period with content related to road trips, solo travel, wellness etc.

## **Video:**

We are shooting more video and photography and also editing video with existing and new footage – including the creation of a Wide Open Spaces video, Preserves/Sanctuaries, and a digital Travel Guide of each of our 10 destinations. Video will focus on experiences from a variety of perspectives, including a bi-plane, from a drone, showing people hiking from a distance, etc. We will also create more video shorts for use on social as well as curate additional video and photos for LFA usage.

## **Content/SEO:**

We will continue to develop authority pages based on SEO guidelines that will rank for top key words, including a solo travel authority page, golf, biking and more.

## **Collateral:**

Recommending we distribute the remainder of our maps through Certified Folder and then take a hiatus from printing the map so these funds can be used for additional LFA imperatives and SLO CAL co-ops.

## **Collaboration with LFAs and Visit SLO CAL**

Weekly calls and ongoing communications with our LFAs and SLO CAL is key. Taking our lead, the LFAs have re-forecasted current and new fiscal year budgets to ensure decreased revenues and expenses are in line. LFA imperatives will be an important aspect as we look to grow our SEM program, grow our photo and video assets, participate in Google 2.0 coop with SLO CAL and consider a retargeting program with LAT.

## Stewardship Travel for Good:

The Travel for Good message will be more important than ever as travelers look to make a deeper connection with themselves and their surroundings. The Coastal Discovery trail will be launched in June and many of the activities will work well with the Wide-Open Spaces concept. Here are some activities that can be done with safe social distancing practices and all have the focus of exploring the great outdoors

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- Cayucos Land Conservancy Nature Walk
- Kayak Back in Time to Port San Luis Lighthouse
- El Moro Elfin Forest Nature Walks
- Fiscalini Ranch Preserve Nature Walks
- Sea Otter Spotting
- Seaweed Foraging Tour
- Cambria Self-Guided walking tour
- Spot marine life along the Whale Trail

## Public Relations:

Pre-recovery PR efforts have focused on “Where do I want to go when it’s okay to travel again?” Here’s an example below:

### Amelia Mularz ([ameliamularz](#)) — CALIFORNIA’S HIGHWAY 1

*As much as I love the square mile of terrain, I've been covering during quarantine walks in my L.A. neighborhood (I seriously know each succulent by name now), I'm craving real nature. I'm also feeling guilty because it's only now that most hiking trails and beaches are closed in Southern California (due to coronavirus) that I realize I haven't been taking advantage of them in the first place. That's why the moment we get the green light to travel, I'm heading on a Highway 1 adventure.*

*Bidding farewell to my newfound, water-wise friends (see ya, Pablo, the Packard Street Cactus), I'm beelining straight to Nipomo to live out my lifelong dream of visiting a luffa farm. Did you know luffa sponges grow on vines? Then, I'll head to Cambria, where there's a new hotel called [Oceanpoint Ranch](#) right on Moonstone Beach. I'm embarrassed to say, I've never been to [Hearst Castle](#), so I'll swing by there, too.*

As we look to the recovery, many are now predicting that 2020 could become the year of the car. With that in mind, our stretch of Highway 1 is uniquely positioned to deliver viable offerings around experiences visitors will be craving as they gradually re-engage and travel. Initially, re-emergence public relations efforts will be focused on the Los Angeles, San Francisco/Bay Area and the Central Valley drive markets while slowly extending the perimeter as travel comfort level expands in the minds of the consumers.

Pitch themes will focus on the quintessential road trip with emphasis on wide open spaces, wellness, nature and wildlife, and outdoor activities. Key to the narrative will be positioning the unique attributes of our stretch of Highway 1 under the umbrella of mindful sanctuaries, road chill along the coast, and coastal discovery trail activities. As we look to summer/fall, we have key long-lead travel stories in the pipeline, such as Travel + Leisure, Los Angeles Times and AAA Encompass. Combined with on-going focus on short-leads to help support the recovery plan, we’re positioned to activate as soon as the timing is right.