

Ashlan to Shaw Auxiliary Lane Project

State Route 41
Fresno, California
06-FRE-41-27.6/28.3
ID: 0617000103

Initial Study with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration



Prepared by the
State of California Department of Transportation

August 2019



General Information About This Document

Please read this Initial Study. Additional copies of this document are available for review at the Caltrans district office at 1352 West Olive Avenue, Fresno, California 93728, Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and at the Fresno Public Library at 2420 Mariposa Street, Fresno, California 93721, Monday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

If you have any concerns about the project, please send your written comments to Caltrans by the deadline. Submit comments via U.S. mail to Caltrans at the following address:

Jeff Sorensen
Senior Environmental Planner
California Department of Transportation
855 M Street, Suite 200
Fresno, CA 93710

Submit comments via email to: jeff.sorensen@dot.ca.gov.

Submit comments by the deadline: September 19, 2019.

After comments are received from the public and reviewing agencies, Caltrans may 1) give environmental approval to the proposed project, 2) do additional environmental studies, or 3) abandon the project. If the project is given environmental approval and funding is appropriated, Caltrans could design and build all or part of the project.

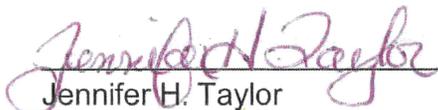
For individuals with sensory disabilities, this document is available in Braille, in large print, on audiocassette, or on computer disk. To obtain a copy in one of these alternate formats, please write to or call Caltrans, Attention: Jeff Sorensen, Senior Environmental Planner, 855 M Street, Suite 200, Fresno, CA 93710; (559) 445-6447, Caltrans California Relay Service 1 (559) 559-488-4066, or use California Relay Service 1 (800) 735-2929 (TTY), 1 (800) 735-2929 (Voice), or 711.

Construct a northbound auxiliary lane on State Route 41 from post mile 27.6 (Ashlan Avenue) to post mile 28.3 (Shaw Avenue) in the City of Fresno, Fresno County.

**INITIAL STUDY
with Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration**

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Department of Transportation



Jennifer H. Taylor
Office Chief, Southern San Joaquin Valley
Central Region
California Department of Transportation

7/17/19

Date

DRAFT

Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to construct a northbound auxiliary lane on State Route 41 from the northbound Ashlan Avenue on-ramp (post mile 27.6) to the northbound Shaw Avenue off-ramp (post mile 28.3). The project will also widen the Shaw Avenue northbound off-ramp to two lanes to accommodate the addition of the new auxiliary lane.

Determination

This proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration is included to give notice to interested agencies and the public that it is Caltrans' intent to adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration for this project. This does not mean that Caltrans' decision on the project is final. This Mitigated Negative Declaration is subject to change based on comments received by interested agencies and the public.

Caltrans has prepared an Initial Study for this project and, pending public review, expects to determine from this study that the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons.

The project would have no effect on: existing or future land use, wild and scenic rivers, parks and recreational facilities, farmlands/timberlands, growth, utilities, emergency services, transportation, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, visual characteristics/aesthetics, historic resources, archaeological resources, a floodplain, geology, soils, seismic activity, topography, natural communities, wetlands and other waters, plant species or invasive species, hydrology, hazardous waste/materials, threatened/endangered species, animal species or air quality.

The project would have no significant effect on: noise.

The project would have no significantly adverse effect on paleontological resources because the following mitigation measures would reduce potential effects to insignificance:

Paleontological construction monitoring, fossil salvage and preservation.

Jennifer H. Taylor
Office Chief, Southern San Joaquin Valley
Central Region
California Department of Transportation

Date

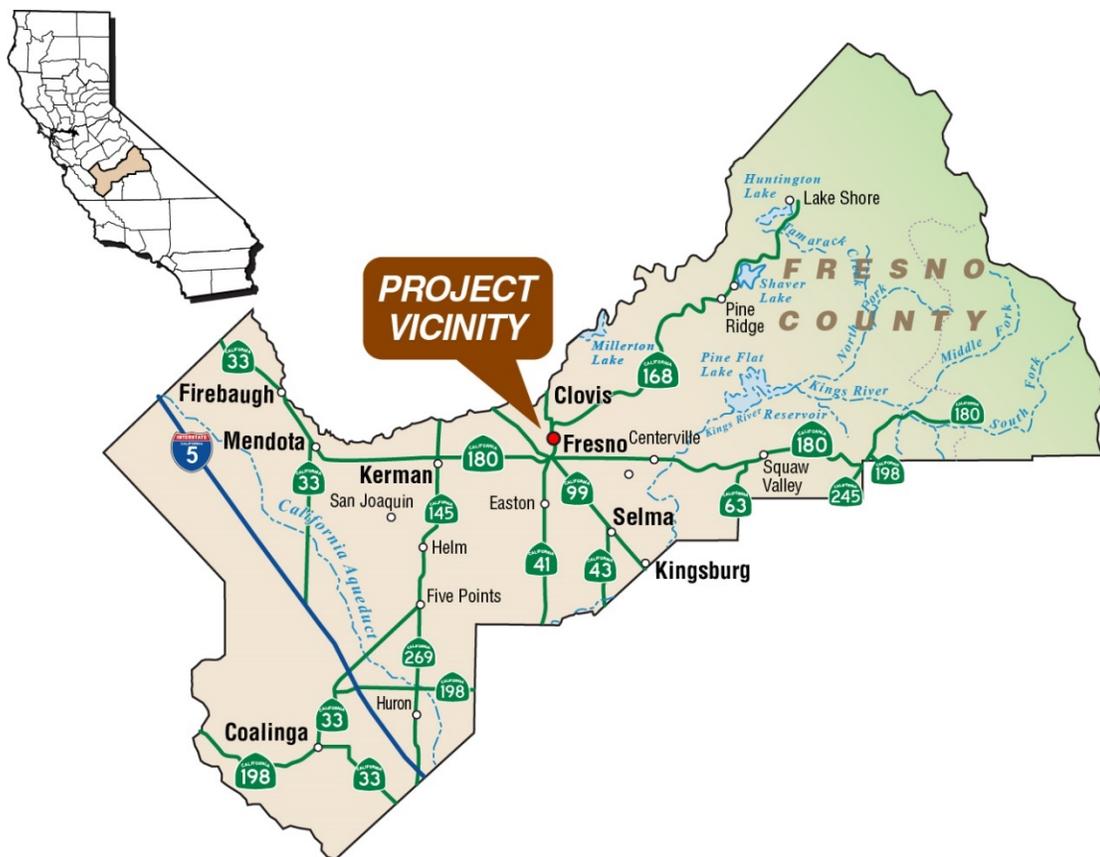
Section 1 Project Description and Background

1.1 Project Title

Ashlan to Shaw Auxiliary Lane

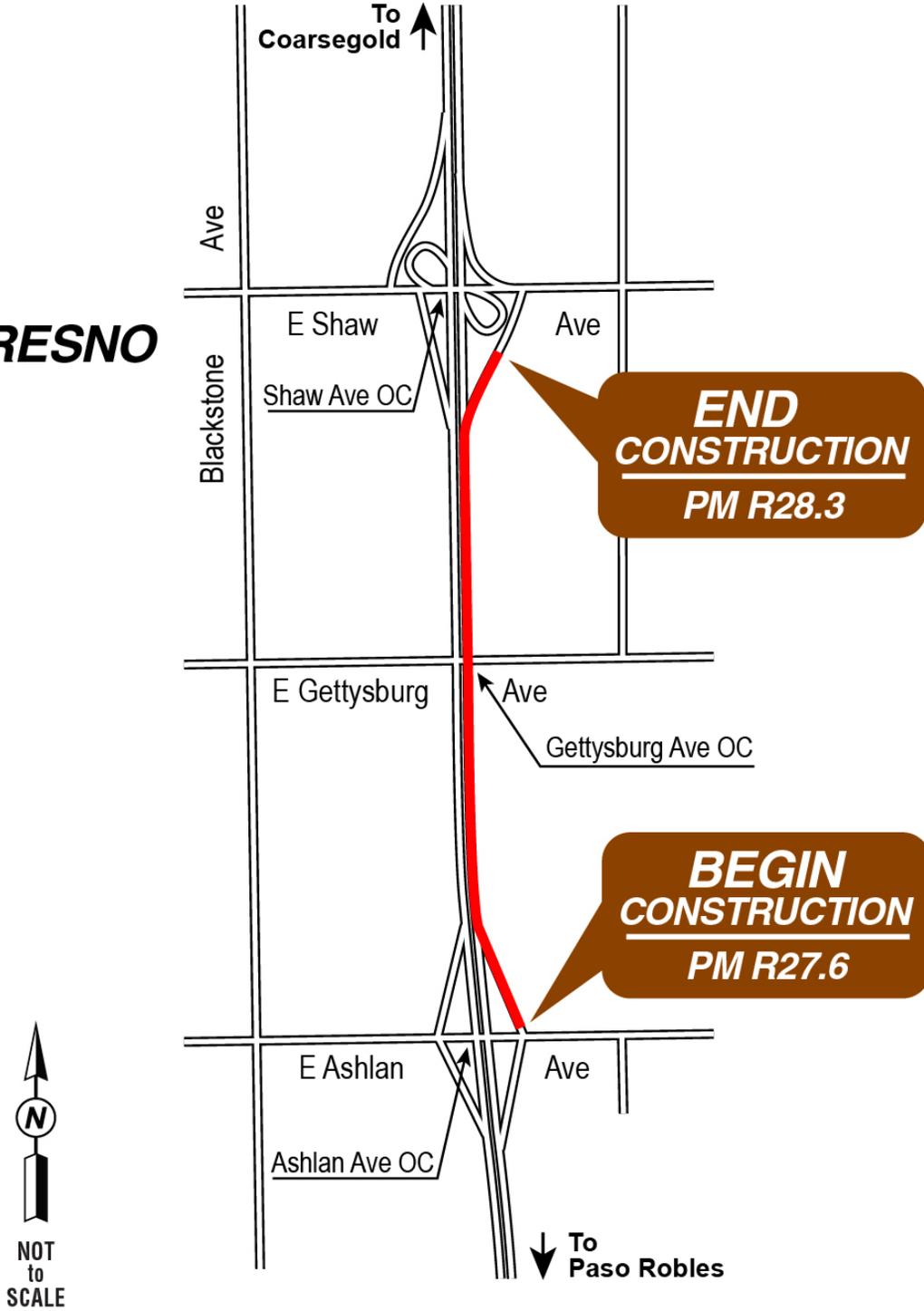
1.2 Project Location

The project lies on State Route 41 in the city of Fresno from post mile 27.6 (Ashlan Avenue) to post mile 28.3 (Shaw Avenue).



Project Vicinity Map

FRESNO



Project Location Map

1.3 Description of Project

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to construct a northbound auxiliary lane on State Route 41 from the northbound Ashlan Avenue on-ramp at post mile 27.6 to the northbound Shaw Avenue off-ramp at post mile 28.3. The project would also widen the Shaw Avenue northbound off-ramp to two lanes to accommodate the addition of the new auxiliary lane.

The project would relieve congestion and improve safety for this segment of northbound State Route 41. The addition of the auxiliary lane within the project limits would improve traffic operations on mainline State Route 41 and the northbound State Route 41 off-ramp to Shaw Avenue.

The project is needed due to increasing congestion and rear-end collisions that occur on this segment of the roadway. Accident data from 2013 to 2015 revealed that fatal-plus-injury and total accident rates were higher than the statewide average for similar roadways with comparable traffic volumes. There were 91 accidents within this period. The total fatal-plus-injury accident rate per million vehicle miles traveled for the project area was 0.84, while the statewide average was 0.30.

1.4 Surrounding Land Uses and Setting

The project area is developed with a mix of land uses consisting mostly of residential and commercial development.

1.5 Other Public Agencies Whose Approval is Required

No approvals from other public agencies are required.

Section 2 CEQA Environmental Checklist

2.1 CEQA Checklist

This checklist identifies physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. Potential impact determinations include Significant and Unavoidable Impact, Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated, Less Than Significant Impact, and No Impact. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with a project will indicate that there are no impacts to a particular resource. A No Impact answer reflects this determination. The words “significant” and “significance” used throughout the following checklist are related to California Environmental Quality Act (known as CEQA) impacts, not National Environmental Policy Act (known as NEPA) impacts. The questions in this checklist are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

Project features, which can include both design elements of the project and standardized measures that are applied to all or most Caltrans projects such as Best Management Practices and measures included in the Standard Plans and Specifications or as Standard Special Provisions, are considered to be an integral part of the project and have been considered prior to any significance determinations documented below.

2.1.1 Aesthetics

CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

No Impact

b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

No Impact

c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

No Impact

d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

No Impact

2.1.2 Agriculture and Forest Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forest Resources

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Would the project:

a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?

No Impact

b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?

No Impact

c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?

No Impact

d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

No Impact

e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

No Impact

2.1.3 Air Quality

CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Would the project:

a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?

No Impact

b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?

No Impact

c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?

No Impact

d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?

No Impact

2.1.4 Biological Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources

Would the project:

a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

No Impact

b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or

by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

No Impact

c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?

No Impact

d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?

No Impact

e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?

No Impact

f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?

No Impact

2.1.5 Cultural Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources

Would the project:

a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to §15064.5?

No Impact

b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to §15064.5?

No Impact

c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?

No Impact

2.1.6 Energy

CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy

Would the project:

a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?

No Impact

b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?

No Impact

2.1.7 Geology and Soils

CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils

Would the project:

a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:

No Impact

i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42?

No Impact

ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?

No Impact

iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?

No Impact

iv) Landslides?

No Impact

b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?

No Impact

c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?

No Impact

d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risks to life or property?

No Impact

e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?

No Impact

f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?

Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated—Paleontological resources of historical significance may be present within the project limits. Impacts to these resources, if such resources are found in the area, will be mitigated to a less than significant level through construction monitoring, salvage and preservation. The sediment underlying the project area is from the Quaternary Pleistocene Epoch (2.88 million years ago to 11 thousand years ago). It is comprised of non-marine alluvium, meaning it did not form in the ocean and it settled in the area after being transported by water. A section of this province is called the Riverbank Formation and underlies the project area. The Riverbank Formation is classified by Caltrans as high sensitivity for paleontological resources. The cost of paleontological monitoring is estimated to be approximately \$10,000. This monitoring would occur during construction and would involve searching the sediment and salvaging any fossils found for preservation, as appropriate, in a permanent paleontological collection.

2.1.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Would the project:

a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?

Less Than Significant Impact— There would be no increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions. Construction greenhouse gas emissions would be avoided or minimized to a less-than-significant level by implementing

standard air pollution control measures and construction Best Management Practices (BMPs).

b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?

No Impact

2.1.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Would the project:

a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?

No Impact

b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?

No Impact

c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?

No Impact

d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?

No Impact

e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?

No Impact

f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?

No Impact

g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?

No Impact

2.1.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality

Would the project:

a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?

No Impact

b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?

No Impact

c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:

i) Result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;

No Impact

ii) Substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or off-site;

No Impact

iii) Create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or

No Impact

iv) Impede or redirect flood flows?

No Impact

d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?

No Impact

e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?

No Impact

2.1.11 Land Use and Planning

CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning

Would the project:

a) Physically divide an established community?

No Impact

b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?

No Impact

2.1.12 Mineral Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources

Would the project:

a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?

No Impact

b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?

No Impact

2.1.13 Noise

CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise

Would the project result in:

a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?

Less Than Significant Impact— There would be a temporary increase in noise during the 13-month construction period. The auxiliary lane would result

in a projected increase in noise of approximately 1 decibel at the properties right next to the east side of the project. This increase would not be detectable to the human ear.

b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?

No Impact

c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?

No Impact

2.1.14 Population and Housing

CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing

Would the project:

a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?

No Impact

b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?

No Impact

2.1.15 Public Services

CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services

a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:

Fire protection?

No Impact

Police protection?

No Impact

Schools?

No Impact

Parks?

No Impact

Other public facilities?

No Impact

2.1.16 Recreation

CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation

a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?

No Impact

b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?

No Impact

2.1.17 Transportation

CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation

Would the project:

a) Conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?

No Impact

b) Conflict with or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?

No Impact

c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?

No Impact

d) Result in inadequate emergency access?

No Impact

2.1.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources

Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or

No Impact

b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resource Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.

No Impact

2.1.19 Utilities and Service Systems

CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems

Would the project:

a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?

No Impact

b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?

No Impact

c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the

project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?

No Impact

d) Generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?

No Impact

e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?

No Impact

2.1.20 Wildfire

CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:

a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?

No Impact

b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?

No Impact

c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?

No Impact

d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?

No Impact

2.1.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance

CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance

a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?

Less Than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated—Paleontological resources of historical significance may be present within the project limits. Impacts to these resources, if such resources are found in the area, will be mitigated to a less than significant level through construction monitoring, salvage and preservation.

b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)

No Impact

c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?

Less Than Significant— There would be a temporary increase in noise during the 13-month construction period. The auxiliary lane would result in a projected increase in noise of only approximately 1 decibel at the properties right next to the east side of the project. This increase would not be detectable to the human ear.

Appendix A Title VI Policy Statement

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

EDMUND G. BROWN Jr., Governor

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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*Making Conservation
a California Way of Life.*

April 2018

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT

The California Department of Transportation, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ensures *"No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."*

Related federal statutes and state law further those protections to include sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and age.

For information or guidance on how to file a complaint, please visit the following web page:
http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/bep/title_vi/t6_violated.htm.

To obtain this information in an alternate format such as Braille or in a language other than English, please contact the California Department of Transportation, Office of Business and Economic Opportunity, 1823 14th Street, MS-79, Sacramento, CA 95811. Telephone (916) 324-8379, TTY 711, email Title.VI@dot.ca.gov, or visit the website www.dot.ca.gov.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laurie Berman".

LAURIE BERMAN
Director

*"Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system
to enhance California's economy and livability"*

List of Technical Studies

Air Quality Study

Noise Study

Water Quality Study

Biological Compliance Memo

Section 106 Cultural Resources Screening Memo

Climate Change Review

Hazardous Waste Compliance Memo

Paleontological Resources Reports

 Paleontological Identification Report

 Paleontological Evaluation Report

 Preliminary Paleontological Mitigation Plan

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports or the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment, please send your request to the following email address: d6.public.info@dot.ca.gov.

Please indicate the project name and project identifying code (under the project name on the cover of this document) and specify the technical report or document you would like a copy of. Provide your name and email address or U.S. postal service mailing address (street address, city, state and zip code).