Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements Project

Tulare County, California

06-TUL-65, 198, 245-PM 29.0-R30.4, R19.5-20.0, 0.0-0.2

EA 06-43080 and Project Number 0600000426

State Clearinghouse Number 2003111011

Initial Study with Negative Declaration/ Environmental Assessment with Finding of No Significant Impact

Prepared by the

State of California Department of Transportation

The environmental review, consultation, and any other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by Caltrans pursuant to 23 U.S. Code 327 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated May 27, 2022, and executed by the Federal Highway Administration and Caltrans.

December 2023

Caltrans

General Information About This Document

The following text has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated. The Initial Study/Environmental Assessment circulated to the public for 30 days between August 26, 2020, and September 24, 2020. Comments received during this period are included in Chapter 4**.** Elsewhere, language has been added throughout the document to indicate where a change has been made since the circulation of the draft environmental document. Minor editorial changes and clarifications have not been so indicated.

For individuals with sensory disabilities, this document can be made 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: Javier Almaguer, Senior Environmental Scientist, District 6 Environmental, 2015 East Shields Avenue, Suite 100, Fresno, California 93726; phone number 559-287-9320 (Voice), or use the California Relay Service 1-800-735-2929 (Teletype to Voice), 1-800-735-2922 (Voice to Teletype), 1-800-855-3000 (Spanish Teletype to Voice and Voice to Teletype), 1-800-854-7784 (Spanish and English Speech-to-Speech), or 711.

State Clearinghouse Number 2003111011
06-TUL-65, 198, 245-PM 29.0-R30.4, R19.5-20.0, 0.0-0.2
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Make operational improvements on State Route 65 from post miles 29.0 to R30.4, State Route 198 from post miles R19.5 to 20.0, and State Route 245 from post miles 0.0 to 0.2 in Tulare County

INITIAL STUDY
with Negative Declaration/ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT with Finding of No Significant Impact

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code (Federal) 42 U.S. Code 4332(2)(C)

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
and
Cooperating Agency: Tulare County Association of Governments
Responsible Agency: California Transportation Commission

Jennifer Lugo
Office Chief, District 6 Environmental
California Department of Transportation
NEPA and CEQA Lead Agency

12/07/2023
Date

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CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

FOR

Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements Project

The Finding of No Significant Impact has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has determined that Alternatives 1B, 2B, and 3B will have no significant impact on the human environment. This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the attached Environmental Assessment, which has been independently evaluated by Caltrans and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. It provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. Caltrans takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached Environmental Assessment.

The environmental review, consultation, and any other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by Caltrans pursuant to 23 U.S. Code 327 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated May 27, 2022, and executed by the Federal Highway Administration and Caltrans.

Jennifer Lugo
Office Chief, District 6 Environmental
California Department of Transportation
NEPA and CEQA Lead Agency

12/07/2023
Date

Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

State Clearinghouse Number: 2003111011

District-County-Route-Post Mile: 06-TUL-65, 198, 245-PM 29.0-R30.4, R19.5-20.0, 0.0-0.2

EA/Project Number: EA 06-43080 and Project Number 0600000426

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in cooperation with the Tulare County Association of Governments, will make operational improvements on State Route 65 from post miles 29.0 to R30.4, State Route 198 from post miles R19.5 to 20.0, and State Route 245 from post miles 0.0 to 0.2 in Tulare County.

Determination

An Initial Study has been prepared by Caltrans, District 6. On the basis of this study, it is determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

The project will have no effect on aesthetics, cultural resources, energy, geology and soils, land use and planning, mineral resources, paleontological resources, public services, recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, wetlands and other waters, and wildfire.

The project will have no significant effect on air quality, population and housing, utilities and service systems, agriculture and forest resources, greenhouse gas emissions, biological resources, hazardous waste and materials**,** hydrology and water quality, and noise.

Jennifer Lugo
Office Chief, District 6 Environmental
California Department of Transportation

12/07/2023
Date

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Chapter 1 Proposed Project

1.1 Introduction

[This section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] California participated in the "Surface Transportation Project Delivery Pilot Program" (Pilot Program) pursuant to 23 U.S. Code 327 for more than five years, beginning July 1, 2007, and ending September 30, 2012. MAP-21 (Public Law 112-141), signed by President Barack Obama on July 6, 2012, amended 23 U.S. Code 327 to establish a permanent Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program. As a result, Caltrans entered into a Memorandum of Understanding pursuant to 23 U.S. Code 327 (NEPA Assignment MOU) with the Federal Highway Administration. The NEPA Assignment MOU became effective on October 1, 2012, and was renewed on May 27, 2022, for a term of 10 years. In summary, Caltrans continues to assume Federal Highway Administration responsibilities under NEPA and other federal environmental laws in the same manner as was assigned under the Pilot Program, with minor changes. With NEPA Assignment, the Federal Highway Administration assigned, and Caltrans assumed all of the U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary's responsibilities under NEPA. This assignment includes projects on the State Highway System and Local Assistance projects off of the State Highway System within the State of California, except for certain categorical exclusions that the Federal Highway Administration assigned to Caltrans under the 23 U.S. Code 326 CE Assignment MOU, projects excluded by definition, and specific project exclusions.

Caltrans, in cooperation with the Tulare County Association of Governments, is proposing several operational improvements on State Route 65, State Route 198, and State Route 245 in Tulare County.

Caltrans, as assigned by the Federal Highway Administration, is the lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Caltrans is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

This project is included in the new Federal Transportation Improvement Program and Regional Transportation Improvement Program. If funding is limited, project-phasing opportunities are possible. The current capital construction cost phases are as follows:

Location 1 Phase 1 is on State Route 65 from post miles 29.7 to R30.3. The estimated construction cost of the project is about $17,200,000. Right of way and utilities costs are estimated at about $5,600,000. Throughout the body of this document, Location 1 Phase 1 will be referred to as "Location 1".

Location 2 Phase 2 is at the junction of State Route 198 and State Route 245 from post miles R19.5 to 20.0 and 0.0 to 0.2. The estimated construction cost of the project is about $11,900,000. Right of way and utilities costs are estimated at about $1,100,000. Throughout the body of this document, Location 2 Phase 2 will be referred to as “Location 2”.

Location 3 Phase 3 includes a realignment of State Route 65 from Avenue 224 (Lindmore Street) to just east of Cedar Avenue, which will include construction of two roundabouts (post miles 29.0 to R30.4). The estimated construction cost of the project is about $42,100,000. Right of way and utilities costs are estimated at about $3,500,000. Throughout the body of this document, Location 3 Phase 3 will be referred to as “Location 3”.

Figure 1-1 Project Vicinity Map

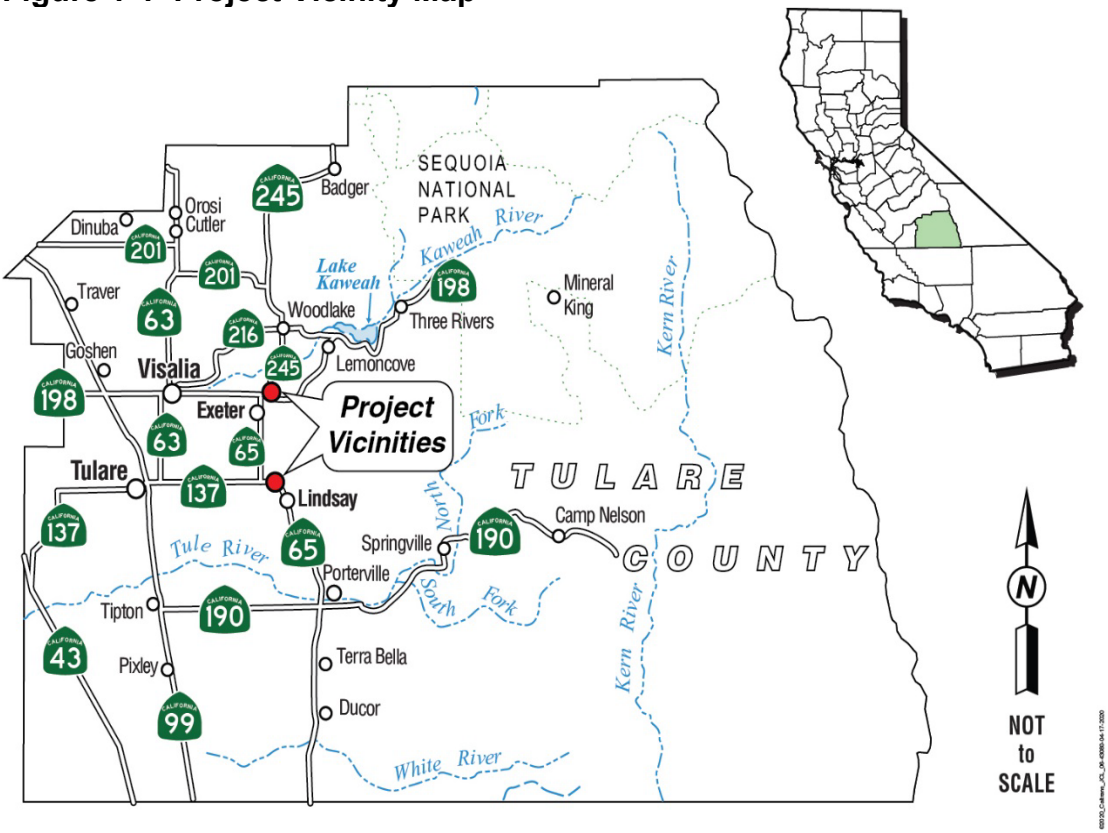
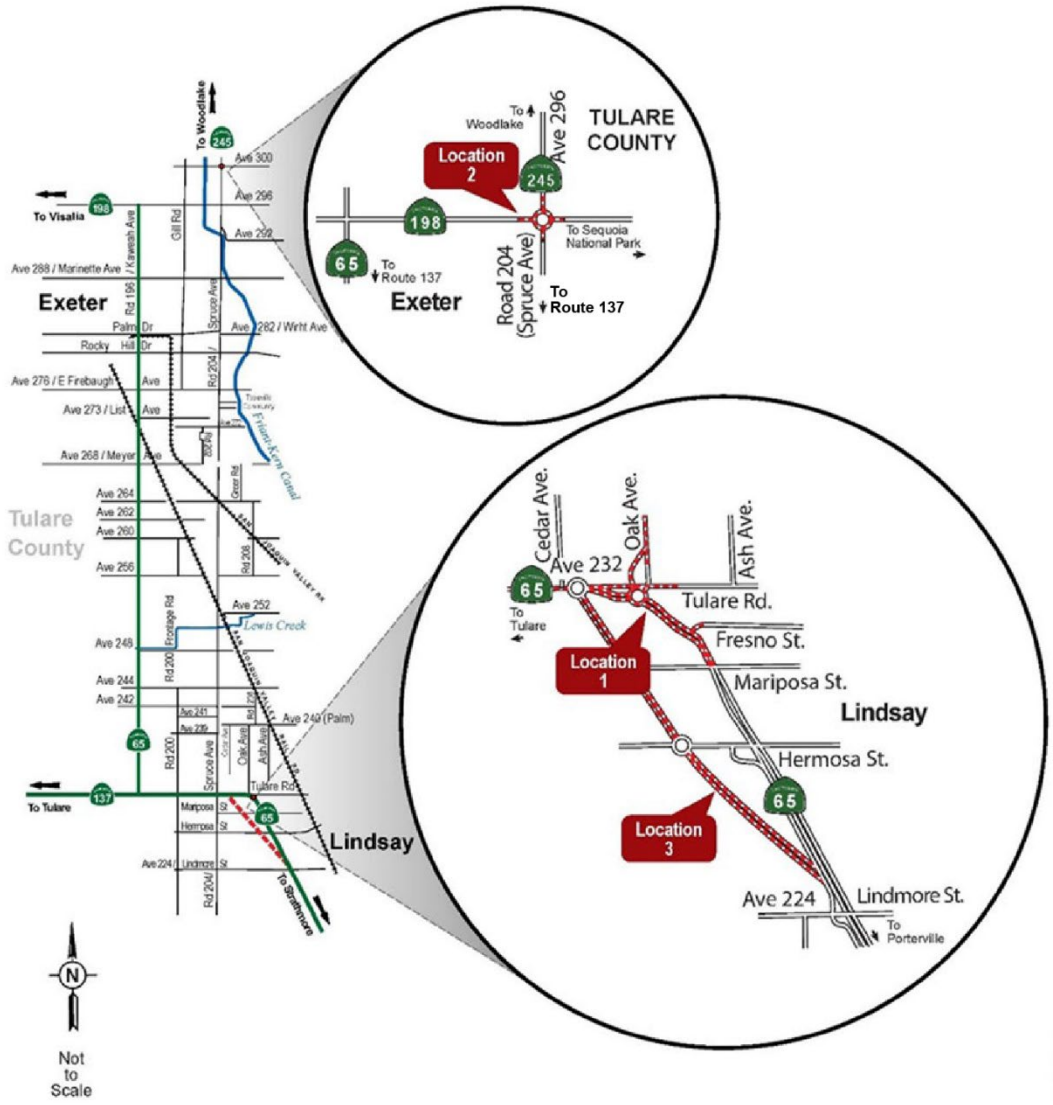


Figure 1-2 Project Location Map



1.1.1 Project History and Background

[This section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] In 2000, Caltrans approved a project study report that evaluated transportation alternatives for the State Route 65 corridor between Lindsay and Exeter. In addition, the Tulare County Association of Governments had a major investment study completed to evaluate alternative transportation options for the region. The major investment study process involved extensive public meetings to discuss and evaluate transportation alternatives, including the State Route 65 corridor between Lindsay and Exeter.

In 2009, Caltrans, in cooperation with the Tulare County Association of Governments, proposed the “Tulare 2-Lane Expressway” project. The project proposed to realign State Route 65 in Tulare County from Hermosa Street

(post mile 29.5) in the City of Lindsay to State Route 245, northeast of the City of Exeter or about 0.5 mile (post mile 0.5) north of State Route 198 (post mile R38.6). The total length of the project was 9.3 miles, and the proposed construction of a two-lane expressway (8.8 miles built on a four-lane right-of-way) would have included frontage roads, railroad overhead crossings, new bridges, controlled access, and utility relocations. The project would also have provided about 0.5 mile of transition improvements on State Route 245 starting at State Route 198.

Two Build Alternatives and a No-Build Alternative were considered in the 2012 Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment and the 2013 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment. Both Build Alternatives proposed bypassing the City of Exeter and realigning State Route 65 to the east, closer to Spruce Avenue. Both new alignments would have paralleled Spruce Avenue, and segments of Spruce Avenue would have become a frontage road.

In 2016, Caltrans, in cooperation with the Tulare County Association of Governments, withdrew from further consideration the Build Alternatives proposed in the 2012 Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment and the 2013 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment.

Caltrans and the Tulare County Association of Governments considered making several operational improvements near the same alignment as the Tulare 2-Lane Expressway project. A meeting took place on March 30, 2016, with the Tulare County Association of Governments, Tulare County, City of Lindsay, and Caltrans staff at the Tulare County Association of Governments' office in Visalia to discuss and initiate potential operational improvement projects that will replace the previous Lindsay to Exeter Expressway project.

The discussions were focused mainly on how to improve the current traffic circulation at two intersections, primarily on the State Route 65 and Tulare Road intersection in Lindsay and the State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue intersection northeast of Exeter. The City of Lindsay wanted to eliminate the current configuration at the State Route 65 and Tulare Road intersection due to the noncontinuous flow of traffic on the eastbound and westbound directions of Tulare Road. Tulare Road is a heavily traveled east-west arterial for local traffic. A roundabout-controlled intersection was proposed at this location and designated as Location 1.

The Tulare County Association of Governments reported that the intersection at State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue has an operational deficiency and experiences long wait times for motorists traveling northbound on Spruce Avenue to westbound on State Route 198. This intersection location was designated as Location 2.

During the meeting, the Tulare County Association of Governments also determined that a portion of the State Route 65 realignment, from Lindmore Street to Tulare Road covered by the original Tulare 2-Lane Expressway project, should still be actively pursued for future development in the area. This improvement was designated as Location 3.

Staff members from the Tulare County Association of Governments, Tulare County, the City of Lindsay, and Caltrans decided during this meeting that the proposed roundabout at Location 1 will be the first project to go into construction. The design and construction of Locations 2 and 3 will depend on the availability of funds.

Several meetings took place after the meeting on March 30, 2016, to allow comments on the initial design presented by Caltrans for each location. Caltrans reinitiated traffic studies and environmental studies for the project area in 2016 and 2018, respectively.

Caltrans completed the draft environmental document for this project in July 2020 and circulated the document for public review and comment from August 26, 2020, to September 24, 2020. A Virtual Public Hearing was conducted on September 9, 2020, in response to the Covid Pandemic to allow members of the public to ask questions about the project and provide comments on the draft environmental document using an online format. After circulation of the draft environmental document and receipt of public comments, the Caltrans Project Development Team initiated the final environmental document process. Additional cultural resource studies were conducted within the project area in early 2021 to address a comment received from a member of the public during the draft environmental document circulation period. See Chapter 4 of this document for further information on the public review and comment period.

As the final environmental document process continued, the Caltrans Project Development Team identified that the project would require a formal amendment into the new Federal Transportation Improvement Program and Regional Transportation Program. However, the formal amendment process was temporarily unavailable from about the Summer of 2021 to early Fall 2022. Once the formal amendment process was available, Caltrans coordinated with the Tulare County Association of Governments to formally amend the project into the new Federal Transportation Improvement Program and Regional Transportation Program.

After the formal amendment process, the Caltrans Project Development Team agreed to update the traffic Studies for the project based on the changes to the proposed Open to Traffic Years for the project. In addition to the updated traffic studies, the Caltrans Right of Way Data Sheets were updated along with the Caltrans Air Quality Report. The Caltrans Project Development Team also reinitiated coordination with the Environmental

Protection Agency and Federal Highway Administration with respect to the air quality conformity process. For more information on the findings of the updated Air Quality Report and the air quality conformity process see Section 2.2.3. The results of the updated studies and coordination efforts have been incorporated into this final environmental document.

1.1.2 Overview of State Routes 65, 198, 245, and Spruce Avenue in the Project Area

State Route 65

State Route 65 follows a general north-northeast alignment from its beginning at State Route 99 in Bakersfield until it reaches the project area. State Route 65 in Lindsay transitions from a four-lane expressway to a two-lane divided highway just south of Mariposa Avenue. State Route 65 continues to the north for about 0.25 mile before turning to the west and merging with east-west State Route 137. State Route 65 continues west for about 1 and 1.5 miles before turning north and continuing to the City of Exeter. State Route 65 passes through the eastern portion of Exeter and ends at its intersection with State Route 198, east of the City of Visalia.

State Route 198

State Route 198 follows an east-west alignment through the project area. State Route 198 intersects State Route 245 and Spruce Avenue, about 2.5 miles northeast of Exeter. State Route 198 transitions from a four-lane expressway to a two-lane divided highway just east of the intersection.

State Route 245

State Route 245 follows a north-south alignment from its beginning at State Route 198 through the City of Woodlake before meandering through the Sierra Nevada foothills. State Route 245 is a two-lane undivided highway on the north side of the intersection with State Route 198. The existing lanes are 12 feet wide with paved shoulders that range from 0 to 2 feet wide. The existing intersection with State Route 198 is signalized and operated at a push-pull phase for the northbound and southbound directions.

Spruce Avenue

Spruce Avenue follows a north-south alignment before intersecting with State Route 198 and State Route 245. Spruce Avenue is a two-lane divided road with 12-foot-wide travel lanes with paved shoulders that range from 0 to 2 feet wide. Spruce Avenue is often used as an alternative to State Route 65 to bypass traffic flow interruptions in Exeter.

1.2 Purpose and Need

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this project is to improve traffic flow, address current and future traffic operational needs, and alleviate congestion.

1.2.2 Need

Traffic projections for the project limits show an increase in traffic volume over time, which will result in longer motorist delays, excessive congestion, and queuing (long line of vehicles) at the existing intersections within the project limits, and potential traffic backups onto the State Route 65 mainline in Lindsay. All three project locations will have independent utility and logical termini.

Traffic volume and quality of traffic flow are used to analyze freeway operation and related congestion issues:

- Traffic volumes are represented as average annual daily traffic counts, which are the average number of vehicles that pass a given point within a 24-hour period.
- Quality of traffic flow is represented as Level of Service (also known as LOS). Level of Service ranges from A to F. Level of Service “A” indicates free-flowing traffic, while Level of Service “F” indicates gridlock and stop-and-go conditions.
- An updated traffic analysis was performed for existing conditions (2016), implementation years (2028-2034), and design-year conditions (2048-2054). Existing conditions (2016) traffic data for Location 3 are not available because the project will be on a new alignment; only implementation year (2034) and design-year (2054) data are available at Location 3.

Traffic Volumes

[Tables 1.1 – 1.3 have been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] The Caltrans Project Development Team updated the traffic numbers for this project after circulation of the draft environmental document because the proposed Open to Traffic years were revised in the new Federal Transportation Improvement Program and Regional Transportation Program. The updated traffic numbers showed negligible differences in traffic volumes between the Open to Traffic Years identified in the draft environmental document vs the updated Open to Traffic Years identified in this section. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show existing and future traffic volumes as average daily traffic. Table 1.3 shows future traffic volumes as average daily traffic. Increases in traffic volume at the project locations will cause longer delays

and long queues at the existing intersections and cause a potential overflow of traffic onto the highway mainline.

Table 1.1 Existing and Future Travel Volumes for Location 1

Year	Total Average Daily Traffic Counts
2016	23,330
2028	29,000
2048	41,500

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operations Analysis 2023.

Table 1.2 Existing and Future Travel Volumes for Location 2

Year	Total Average Daily Traffic Counts
2016	15,800
2031	19,000
2051	24,300

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operations Analysis 2023.

Table 1.3 Future Travel Volumes for Location 3

Year	Total Average Daily Traffic Counts
2034	32,000
2054	46,000

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis, 2023.

Level of Service

[Tables 1.4 – 1.6 have been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] Highway traffic flow is defined in terms of the Level of Service. For highways, there are six defined Levels of Service, ranging from Level of Service A to Level of Service F. Level of Service A represents free traffic flow with low traffic volumes and high speeds. Level of Service F results in forced flow operations at low speeds due to traffic volumes that exceed the capacity of the facility. As shown earlier in Tables 1.1 and 1.2, future average daily traffic will increase between the existing (2016) and future No-Build years 2048 and 2051. Table 1.3 shows the future average daily traffic increasing in the No-Build years 2034 and 2054. The Level of Service will decrease or will not improve, as shown in Tables 1.4 through 1.6 below.

Table 1.4 Future Level of Service for Location 1

Year	Level of Service Morning/Evening
2028	E/F
2048	F/F

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Table 1.5 Future Level of Service for Location 2

Year	Level of Service Morning/Evening
2031	E/F
2051	F/F

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Table 1.6 Future Level of Service for Location 3

Year	Level of Service Morning/Evening
2034	C/D
2054	D/E

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Existing Roadway

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The Tulare Road alignment that connects to State Route 65 in a curve will be eliminated, which will improve the existing east-west connection. The City of Lindsay categorizes the Tulare Road corridor in this area as a heavily traveled arterial. The current stop-and-go traffic in this area does not support the function of Tulare Road as a heavily traveled arterial. The proposed project will improve traffic circulation and access to State Route 65 from the eastern portion of the city.

Location 2—State Route 198/State Route 245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The signal timing at the intersection causes the intersection to operate less efficiently. Northbound motorists traveling on Spruce Avenue to westbound State Route 198 are experiencing a long delay due to high volumes of left-turn traffic. There is a need for capacity improvements at the intersection due to the lack of left-turn channelization for both the northbound and southbound

approaches to the intersection. The proposed project will improve intersection operations and greatly reduce the overall intersection delay.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

A growing use of the local street circulation system for regional trips has led to the congestion of many streets connected to State Route 65 and has affected intersections in the area.

The existing intersection of State Route 65 at Hermosa Street is aligned at a skewed angle, which poses challenges to drivers. The proposed improvement will eliminate some of these challenges. It is anticipated that conditions at this intersection will also deteriorate in future years due to growth in the area and an imbalance of traffic volumes at the Hermosa Street intersection.

The traffic volume at the Tulare Road intersection is greatly imbalanced, with State Route 65 having much higher demand, especially in the northbound movement. The proposed improvement will provide better traffic circulation in the area for many years in the future.

1.3 Project Description

This section describes the proposed action and the Build and No-Build Alternatives developed to meet the purpose and need of the project while avoiding/minimizing environmental impacts. Caltrans, in cooperation with the Tulare County Association of Governments, is proposing several operational improvements on State Route 65, State Route 198, and State Route 245 in Tulare County. The improvements include the construction of a roundabout at the junction of State Route 198 and State Route 245 (post miles R19.5 to 20.0, 0.0 to 0.2), construction of a roundabout on State Route 65 (post miles 29.7 to R30.3) near Tulare Road in the City of Lindsay, and a realignment of State Route 65 (post miles 29.0 to R30.4) near Lindsay from Avenue 224 (Lindmore Street) to just east of Cedar Avenue, which will include construction of two roundabouts. Figures 1-1 and 1-2 show the project vicinity and location maps, respectively.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The Build Alternative at Location 1 will construct a roundabout just south of the existing State Route 65 alignment near Lindsay. Tulare Road will be realigned and connected directly to the roundabout. Oak Avenue will also be realigned and connected directly to the roundabout. The roundabout will have a two-lane approach into the roundabout for eastbound and northbound

traffic. The westbound and the southbound traffic will have a single-lane approach into the roundabout.

Location 2—State Route 198/State Route 245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will construct a roundabout at the State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue intersection. The roundabout will have a two-lane approach into the roundabout for eastbound, westbound, and northbound traffic. Southbound traffic will have a single-lane approach to the roundabout.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

The Build Alternative at Location 3 will construct a four-lane expressway on a new alignment west of the current State Route 65 location near Lindsay. The new alignment will begin just north of the State Route 65 and Lindmore Street intersection and continue northbound until it reconnects with State Route 65, about 0.25 mile east of the State Route 65 and Spruce Avenue intersection.

Two roundabouts will be constructed on the new alignment. Roundabouts will be constructed at Hermosa Street and the north end of the new alignment, where it reconnects with State Route 65.

The existing portion of State Route 65 will be reconstructed and converted to a two-lane frontage road and will then be connected to the hybrid roundabout control at Location 1, which is assumed to be done by the time this realignment is completed. Due to the proximity of Cedar Avenue to the proposed roundabout control at Tulare Road, a new two-lane frontage road connection will be constructed to provide access to Oak Avenue. The existing signal at the State Route 65 and Hermosa Street intersection will be modified.

1.4 Project Alternatives

Considering the present and the projected future traffic conditions, safety, and other local needs and constraints, the following alternatives in terms of locations have been developed and analyzed based on both constructability and cost-effectiveness.

1.4.1 Build Alternatives

Three Build Alternatives (Alternative 1.B, Alternative 2.B, and Alternative 3.B) are being considered.

Common Design Features of the Build Alternatives

The following are common design features of the Build Alternatives (Alternative 1.B, Alternative 2.B, and Alternative 3.B):

- Construction of roundabouts at Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3 to maximize the efficiency of traffic flow in the project area.
- Pedestrian crossings and sidewalks will be provided at the Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3 roundabout.
- Lighting facilities for traffic and pedestrian safety will be provided at the Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3 roundabouts.
- The center island of the roundabouts at Locations 1 and 2 will be 180 feet in diameter and 200 feet in diameter at Location 3.
- The roundabouts at Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3 will be designed and constructed to accommodate the movement of large vehicles.
- A shared-use path facility will be provided at Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3.

This project contains a number of standardized project measures that are used on most, if not all, Caltrans projects and were not developed in response to any specific environmental impact resulting from the proposed project. These measures are addressed in more detail in the Environmental Consequences sections found in Chapter 2.

Unique Features of the Build Alternatives

Alternative 1.B

- Acquisition of new right-of-way will be required from 26 parcels.
- Five single-family residences and one business will be displaced and require assistance under the Relocation Assistance Program.
- Tulare Road and Oak Avenue will be connected directly to State Route 65.
- The roundabout will have two lanes at the eastbound and northbound approaches.
- The roundabout will have a single lane at the westbound and southbound approaches. A Class II bike-lane will be provided along Tulare Road.

Alternative 2.B

- Acquisition of new right-of-way will be required from 5 parcels.
- The roundabout will have two lanes at the eastbound, westbound, and northbound approaches.
- The roundabout will have a single lane at the southbound approach.

Alternative 3.B

- Acquisition of new right-of-way will be required from 24 parcels.
- One single-family residence will be displaced and require assistance under the Relocation Assistance Program.
- A 30-foot utility easement will be required on the east side of the proposed alignment.
- The existing portion of State Route 65 will be reconstructed and converted to a two-lane frontage road that will be connected to the roundabout control at Location 1, which is assumed to be open to traffic by the time this realignment is completed.
- Due to the proximity of Cedar Avenue to the proposed roundabout control at Tulare Road, a new, two-lane frontage road connection will be constructed to provide access to Oak Avenue.
- The existing signal at State Route 65 and Hermosa Street will be modified.

1.4.2 No-Build (No-Action) Alternative

Three No-Build (No-Action) Alternatives (Alternative 1.A, Alternative 2.A, and Alternative 3.A) were considered. The No-Build Alternatives consist of those transportation projects that are already planned for construction by or before Open to Traffic Year 2028 for Location 1, Open to Traffic Year 2031 for Location 2, and Open to Traffic Year 2034 for Location 3. Consequently, the No-Build Alternatives represent future travel conditions near the City of Lindsay and the City of Exeter area without the Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements project.

The No-Build Alternatives do not meet the purpose and need of the project. No improvements will be made to State Route 65, State Route 198, or State Route 245. No measures will be taken to improve traffic flow, address operational deficiencies, or alleviate traffic congestion.

Deterioration in the Level of Service will be reasonably expected to occur in the foreseeable future with the No-Build Alternatives. Air quality within the project area will worsen because traffic congestion will not be addressed.

1.5 Comparison of Alternatives

When alternatives are evaluated, the purpose and need of the project, as well as the locations where environmental impacts could occur, need to be considered.

The Build Alternatives will satisfy the purpose and need of the project because they will improve traffic flow, address current and future traffic operational needs, and alleviate congestion. Although the Build Alternatives

will result in changes to existing conditions, the changes will not be substantial with the incorporation of avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures. Chapter 2 of this environmental document provides information on the proposed project's potential environmental impacts.

The No-Build Alternatives will not satisfy the purpose or need of the project because they will not address the projected increases in traffic volume over time, which will result in longer motorist delays, excessive congestion, and queuing (long lines of vehicles) at the existing intersections within the project limits, and potential traffic backups onto the State Route 65 mainline in Lindsay. The No-Build Alternatives will not result in any construction or changes to existing conditions. Therefore, they will not result in any temporary, permanent, or indirect impacts to environmental resources. With the No-Build Alternatives, longer motorist delays and excessive congestion, and queuing (long lines of vehicles) at the existing intersections within the project limits will be expected.

[Section 1.6 Identification of a Preferred Alternative below has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated.]

1.6 Identification of a Preferred Alternative

Ultimately, the preferred alternative reflects the findings of the environmental analysis, public and stakeholder comments, and Caltrans policy—and a determination of how well the preferred alternative addresses the needs identified in the Purpose and Need. As discussed in Section 1.1.1 of this document, the Caltrans Project Development Team completed and circulated the draft environmental document for this project then initiated the final environmental document process. During the final environmental document process, the Caltrans Project Development Team reviewed several submissions received during the public comment period and continued with further environmental analysis for the project. Chapter 4, Comment Letters and Responses, provides additional information on the public comment period and comments received.

As discussed in Section 2.2.3 of this document, the project was resubmitted for Interagency Consultation on June 23, 2023, the Interagency Consultation process includes consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Highway Administration to ensure that Federal funding and approval goes to those transportation activities that are consistent with air quality goals within the region. During the consultation process, the Environmental Protection Agency concurred that Alternative 1.B and Alternative 2.B were not a "Project of Air Quality Concern". However, concurrence was not received regarding Alternative 3.B. and the Environmental Protection Agency determined that Alternative 3.B would be considered a "Project of Air Quality Concern". Due to the relatively large amount of diesel truck traffic on State

Route 65 within this region, Alternative 3.B could cause or contribute to new air quality violations within the project area by realigning State Route 65 into an area that currently does not have traffic. The Caltrans Project Development Team communicated these potential impacts to the Tulare County Association of Governments and proposed removing Alternative 3.B from the scope of work. the Tulare County Association of Governments agreed to remove Alternative 3.B from the scope of work for this project.

The Caltrans Project Development Team identified that Alternative 1.B and Alternative 2.B will satisfy the purpose and need of the project by improving traffic flow, addressing current and future traffic operational needs, and alleviating congestion. The Project Development Team identified Alternative 1.B and Alternative 2.B as the preferred alternative on July 13, 2023. The No-Build Alternatives (Alternative 1.A, Alternative 2.A) will not satisfy the purpose or need of the project because they will not address the projected increases in traffic volume over time, which will result in longer motorist delays, excessive congestion, long lines of vehicles at the existing intersections within the project limits, and potential traffic backups onto the State Route 65 mainline in the City of Lindsay. With the No-Build Alternatives, traffic volume will continue to increase over time, resulting in traffic delays and excessive congestion within the project limits.

1.7 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Discussion Prior to Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment

A Build Alternative was considered at Location 2 that proposed reconstructing the State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue intersection. The proposed alternative would have widened Spruce Avenue and constructed two northbound turn lanes. State Route 245 would have been widened to accommodate a southbound left-turn lane. The existing storage length on the east and west legs of State Route 198 would have been extended, along with the existing right-turn storage length on eastbound State Route 198.

In July 2019, the Caltrans Traffic Operations team completed an Intersection Control Evaluation for several intersections in the project area. The evaluation included the comparison between the widening/signal modification intersection mentioned above with the proposed roundabout-controlled intersection. The results of the comparison revealed that the roundabout-controlled intersection outperforms the No-Build Alternative and the widening/signal alternative in all performance measures, including the Level of Service, project cost, intersection delay, traffic delay cost, and projected savings in collision costs.

1.8 Permits and Approvals Needed

The following permits, licenses, agreements, and certifications are required for project construction:

Agency	Permit/Approval	Status
San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District	National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants Notification	The contractor will be required to notify the air district 10 days before the start of construction.

Chapter 2 Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

As part of the scoping and environmental analysis done for the project, the following environmental issues were considered, but no adverse impacts were identified. So, there is no further discussion of these issues in this document.

- Visual/Aesthetics—The project will not result in noticeable changes to the visual environment. (Visual Impact Assessment–Update, May 12, 2020)
- Coastal Zone—The project is not in the coastal zone (Field Visit, February 12, 2019)
- Wild and Scenic Rivers—There are no wild or scenic rivers in the project area. (National Wild and Scenic River Systems Interactive Map, March 2020)
- Timberlands—No timberlands are present within or adjacent to the proposed project area. (Field Visit, February 12, 2019)
- Community Character and Cohesion—An established community will not be affected due to the nature of the proposed project, so community character and cohesion will not be affected. (Field Visit, February 12, 2019)
- Environmental Justice—No minority or low-income populations will be adversely affected by the project. Therefore, the project is not subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12898. (2010 Census Data; Field Visit, February 12, 2019)
- Hydrology and Floodplain—This project is not in the 100-year base floodplain. (Updated Location Hydraulic Study, June 2020)
- Geology/Soils/Seismic/Topography—No project impacts related to geology, soils, seismicity, or topography are anticipated. There are no major topographic or geologic features located within the project area. (Field Visit, February 12, 2019), (Cal OES, Governor's Office of Emergency Services, MyHazards interactive map January 2020), (California Geological Survey, Seismic Hazard Zones, and Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone Interactive Map January 2020)
- Mineral Resources—The project is not in an area that is classified as a Mineral Resource Zone, according to the state geologist. (California Department of Conservation Mineral Land Classification Interactive Map, February 2020)

- Paleontological Resources—Excavation of the project will require shallow (not more than 6 feet) excavation in high and moderate sensitivity Modesto and Riverbank Formations. Significant paleontological resources are not expected to be encountered. (Updated Paleontological Evaluation Report, June 2020)
- Public Services (Parks and Schools)—There is one school near the project. Jefferson Elementary School at 333 North Westwood Avenue is at the east edge of the project. Project activities will not impact the school.

  The nearest park, Lindsay Olive Bowl Park, is about 0.5 mile east of the project area. The project will not affect access to the school or park. (Field Visit, February 12, 2019)
- Fisheries Resources—The project is outside the National Marine Fisheries Service jurisdiction; therefore, a National Marine Fisheries species list is not required, and no effect on National Marine Fisheries Service species is anticipated. (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020)
- Wetlands and Other Waters—No wetlands or other waters will be impacted by project activities. (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020)
- Wildfire—The project is not within or near a very high fire hazard severity zone. (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) online Fire Hazard Severity Zones Maps)

2.1 Human Environment

2.1.1 Existing and Future Land Use

The existing and future land use discussion was prepared using information from the Tulare County General Plan Update 2030, the City of Lindsay General Plan, field surveys, public information meeting comments, and online mapping resources.

Affected Environment

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Existing Land Use

Two commercial properties, including an automotive dealership and an automotive body shop, sit at the southeast corner of the State Route 65 and Fresno Street intersection. A self-storage facility is at the northeast corner of the State Route 65 and Fresno Street intersection. Vacant properties with billboard advertising sit on the east side of State Route 65 between Fresno Street and Tulare Road. Single-family residential properties are east of Oak Avenue and north of Tulare Road. Property on the west side of State Route 65 in the project area is entirely farmland.

Properties next to the east side of State Route 65 at Location 1 are zoned as “highway commercial;" the properties on the west side are zoned as “highway commercial reserve,” including the area where existing State Route 65 turns to the west between Oak and Cedar Avenues. The area north of Tulare Road is zoned for “low- and medium-density” residential development.

Future Land Use

Future land use in this area is anticipated to be commercial properties that will serve the traveling public along the State Route 65 corridor and residents of Lindsay and the surrounding areas. A proposed residential development of about 30 single-family homes just north of Tulare Road next to the east side of Oak Avenue is in the planning stage but has not been constructed.

Location 2—State Route 198/State Route 245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Existing Land Use

According to the Tulare County General Plan Update 2030, land use at this location is designated “valley agricultural.” The project area is about 2.5 miles northeast of the City of Exeter and was the northern end of the Tulare 2-Lane Expressway project that was previously discussed in Chapter 1. The project area is bordered on all sides by agricultural lands and is within the jurisdiction of Tulare County. The project area falls outside the City of Exeter's Sphere of Influence, Urban Area Boundary, and Urban Development Boundary.

Future Land Use

As mentioned above, lands next to the project area are within the jurisdiction of Tulare County and are designated “valley agricultural.” Land use policies in the Tulare County General Plan Update 2030 restrict activities other than intensive agriculture for lands with the “valley agricultural” designation. Land use activities near the project area are not anticipated to change in the foreseeable future.

Location 3— State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

Existing Land Use

Properties west and south of the State Route 65 and Hermosa Street intersection include a gas station, a large truck repair facility, an irrigation supply, and an automotive body shop. There are a few single-family residential properties mixed into the commercial properties next to the South Fremont Drive frontage road that serves this area. The remaining land use in this area is agricultural.

Properties northwest of the intersection are farmlands with a small number of scattered residences.

Properties northeast of the intersection include farmlands, a hotel, a restaurant, a gas station, and fast-food services.

Properties southeast of the intersection include a large commercial development with fast-food and retail outlets, two apartment complexes, a residence, and farmlands.

Properties next to the west side of State Route 65 at Location 3 are zoned as "highway commercial" and "highway commercial reserve." Properties on the east side of State Route 65 are zoned as "highway commercial" and "medium-density residential."

Future Land Use

Future land use in this area is anticipated to be commercial properties that will serve the traveling public along the State Route 65 corridor and residents of Lindsay and the surrounding areas. Two projects are in the planning stages near Location 3, including a Family Dollar Store near the intersection of State Route 65 and Mariposa Street and a sports complex at the intersection of State Route 65 and Hermosa Street. These projects are in the planning stages and have not been approved for construction.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B

The Build Alternative at Location 1 will cross the Urban Area Boundary and the Urban Development Boundary of Lindsay. The Build Alternative involves changes to an existing transportation facility but will not add new access points and will not increase capacity. The surrounding land uses will not change because of the project.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 involves changes to an existing transportation facility but will not change or add new access points and will not increase capacity. The surrounding land uses are agricultural and will not change because of the project. No changes to land use and development density are anticipated.

Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternative at Location 3 will cross the Urban Area Boundary and the Urban Development Boundary of Lindsay. The Build Alternative involves changes to an existing transportation facility but will not add new access points. Land between the proposed realignment and existing State Route 65 could provide opportunities for commercial development because of project activities. As previously mentioned, current zoning in this area is designated for "highway commercial" and "highway commercial reserve" use.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The project will not result in any changes to the land use designations. No avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are required.

2.1.2 Consistency with State, Regional, and Local Plans and Programs

Affected Environment

Land use and zoning are guided by general plans and other agency plans for the cities and the unincorporated areas of the project corridor. The following plans contain guidelines for developing the study area: Tulare County General Plan, the City of Lindsay General Plan, and the Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan.

Tulare County General Plan

The Tulare County General Plan, originally adopted in 1964, was most recently updated in August 2012. According to the general plan, the safe and efficient transport of people and goods within the county is of critical importance to the well-being of residents and the economic viability of the county; and the mobility of people and goods will continue to be one of the important issues the county has to face in the future (Transportation and Circulation Section, 2030 Update Tulare County General Plan).

City of Lindsay General Plan

The Circulation Element of the City of Lindsay General Plan describes State Route 65 as an essential link with other transportation facilities serving the region and the state.

Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan

The development of the Tulare County transportation system is guided by the Regional Transportation Plan. This plan is a 25-year planning document required by state and federal law that is comprehensively updated every four years and includes programs to better maintain, operate, and expand transportation. The plan was updated in 2018 and includes the project as a realignment and operational improvements project.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B

Tulare County General Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 1 is consistent with the Tulare County General Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for the mobility of people and goods by making operational improvements at intersections on State Route 65 near Lindsay.

City of Lindsay General Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 1 is consistent with the City of Lindsay General Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for State Route 65 to serve as an essential link with other transportation facilities serving the region and the state. Operational improvements on State Route 65 near Lindsay will improve traffic circulation and alleviate congestion for local and regional traffic.

Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 1 is consistent with the Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for operational improvements at intersections on State Route 65 in Tulare County.

Alternative 2.B

Tulare County General Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 2 is consistent with the Tulare County General Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for the mobility of people and goods by making operational improvements at the intersection of State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue in Tulare County.

Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 2 is consistent with the Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for operational improvements at the intersection of State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue in Tulare County.

Alternative 3.B

Tulare County General Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 3 is consistent with the Tulare County General Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for the mobility of people and goods by making operational improvements at intersections on State Route 65 near Lindsay.

City of Lindsay General Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 3 is consistent with the City of Lindsay General Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for State Route 65 to serve as an essential link with other transportation facilities serving the region and the state. Operational Improvements on State Route 65 near Lindsay will improve traffic circulation and alleviate congestion for local and regional traffic.

Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan

The Build Alternative at Location 3 is consistent with the Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan. The Build Alternative will address the need for

operational improvements at intersections on State Route 65 in Tulare County.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are required.

2.1.3 Farmland

Regulatory Setting

The National Environmental Policy Act and the Farmland Protection Policy Act (7 U.S. Code 4201-4209; and its regulations, 7 Code of Federal Regulations Part 658) require federal agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration, to coordinate with the Natural Resources Conservation Service if their activities may irreversibly convert farmland (directly or indirectly) to nonagricultural use. For purposes of the Farmland Protection Policy Act, farmland includes prime farmland, unique farmland, and land of statewide or local importance.

The California Environmental Quality Act requires the review of projects that will convert Williamson Act contract land to nonagricultural uses. The main purposes of the Williamson Act are to preserve agricultural land and to encourage open space preservation and efficient urban growth. The Williamson Act provides incentives to landowners through reduced property taxes to discourage the early conversion of agricultural and open space lands to other uses.

Affected Environment

Tulare County is one of California's largest agricultural counties. Important Farmland—farmland classified by the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, farmland of local importance, and unique farmland—comprises 1,250,121 acres in Tulare County (U.S. Census of Agriculture 2017). The top commodities are fruits, tree nuts, berries, and milk from cows, cattle, and calves. The county's gross value from agricultural production was $4,474,809,000 in 2017 (U.S. Census of Agriculture 2017).

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Farmlands at this location include citrus crops to the south of State Route 65 and vacant farmland just north of State Route 65 near Tulare Road.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Farmlands at this location are citrus crops on the northwest and northeast corners of the intersection, vacant farmland on the southwest corner of the intersection, and orchards on the southeast corner of the intersection.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

Farmlands at this location are mainly citrus crops.

Environmental Consequences

Research and consultation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service were conducted to evaluate the possible effects of the proposed project on local farmlands. Documents reviewed include California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program data and aerial photographs. The current Tulare County General Plans, zoning ordinances, and maps were also reviewed.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service Farmland Conversion Impact Rating (see Appendix D) was completed for all three locations in September 2019. This rating determines the relative value of farmland to be converted by using a formula that weighs farmland classification, soil characteristics, irrigation, acreage, creation of non-farmable land, availability of farm services, and other factors. If the rating is more than 160 points, Caltrans may consider measures that will minimize or mitigate farmland impacts.

The Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program designates and tracks “important farmland” in California, including four categories of agricultural land:

- Prime Farmland—Land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing agricultural crops.
- Unique Farmland—Land other than prime farmland that has lesser quality soils that are used for the production of high-value specialty crops.
- Farmland of Statewide Importance—Land that does not qualify as Prime or Unique Farmlands but is currently irrigated, is pastureland, or produces nonirrigated crops, and is important as determined by the state.
- Farmland of Local Importance—Land that does not qualify as Prime or Unique Farmlands but is currently irrigated, is pastureland, or produces nonirrigated crops, and is important as determined by the local government.

Alternative 1.B

The Build Alternative at Location 1 will convert 9 acres of Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program-designated "Farmland of Statewide Importance" to nonagricultural use in addition to 0.50 acre of Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program-designated "Prime and Unique Farmland." Also, 2.94 acres of this Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program-designated farmland will be converted indirectly to nonagricultural use. Please see Appendix F for a copy of the preliminary plan at Location 1. An indirect conversion of agricultural land can occur when agricultural parcels are bisected or isolated by project activities and are no longer considered viable for agricultural activities. The Natural Resources Conservation Service conversion impact rating for this site is 97.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will convert 1.50 acres of Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program-designated "Farmland of Statewide Importance" to nonagricultural use. No agricultural land will be converted indirectly to nonagricultural use. Please see Appendix F for a copy of the Preliminary Plan at Location 2. The Natural Resources Conservation Service conversion impact rating for this site is 103.

Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternative at Location 3 will convert 12 acres of Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program-designated "Farmland of Statewide Importance" to nonagricultural use in addition to 15 acres of Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program-designated "Prime and Unique Farmland." Also, 5.67 acres of this Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program-designated farmland will be converted indirectly to nonagricultural use. Please see Appendix F for a copy of the preliminary plan at Location 3. The Natural Resources Conservation Service conversion impact rating for this site is 146.

Williamson Act

The California Farmland Conservancy Program was formulated by the state legislature to protect the agricultural, wetland, and scenic areas of the state from unnecessary or premature conversion to urban uses. In Tulare County, the program is enforced through the provisions of the Land Conservation Act of 1965 and Sections 421 and 429 of the State Revenue and Taxation Code. Locally, the program is referred to as the Agricultural Preserve Program https://www.conservation.ca.gov/information-for/funding-grants-easements.

Properties under the Agricultural Preserve Program must be for agricultural or related use. The minimum size of a new Agricultural Preserve is 20 acres or 1/32 of a section, whichever is less.

Individual parcels of less than 20 acres must be combined to meet the minimum size requirements. If a landowner has a parcel less than the

minimum 20 acres and the land qualifies in terms of land use, the property owner may elect to annex to an already existing Agricultural Preserve if the parcel is adjacent or bordering their parcel https://www.conservation.ca.gov/information-for/funding-grants-easements.

No cancellation of Agricultural Preserve Program contracts is expected to occur because the right-of-way needed for the project from each parcel will be partial acquisitions, and the smaller parcels can be annexed into adjacent Agricultural Preserves, according to Tulare County's Agricultural Preserve Program. Annexing smaller properties into an existing Agricultural Preserve appears to be an option property owners have already used, as indicated by the number of smaller Agricultural Preserve parcels in the project area.

Alternative 1.B

The Build Alternative at Location 1 will not require the acquisition of new right-of-way from any parcels enrolled in the Agricultural Preserve Program.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will require the partial acquisition of new right-of-way from one parcel that is enrolled in the Agricultural Preserve Program. The project will require the acquisition of 0.14 acre of new right-of-way from this parcel. However, the parcel is 23.6 acres, and the amount of new right-of-way required will not cause a cancellation of the Agricultural Preserve Program.

Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternative at Location 3 will require the partial acquisition of new right-of-way from five parcels that are enrolled in the Agricultural Preserve Program. The partial acquisition of new right-of-way from these five parcels totals about 12 acres. One parcel will remain above the 20-acre minimum mentioned above after the partial acquisition of new right-of-way. The remaining four parcels, three of which are all below 10 acres in size, will not meet the 20-acre minimum requirement to remain in the Agricultural Preserve Program. However, these properties are all adjacent to Agricultural Preserve properties and could be annexed.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The impact rating for all three locations is less than 160 points; therefore, no further avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are necessary.

2.1.4 Growth

This section addresses the relationship between the proposed project and area growth patterns. Growth inducement is defined as the relationship between the proposed project and growth within the project area. Factors

affecting growth patterns depend on a range of economic forces that can be local, statewide, or even national in scope.

Regulatory Setting

The Council on Environmental Quality regulations, which established the steps necessary to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, require an evaluation of the potential environmental effects of all proposed federal activities and programs. This provision includes a requirement to examine indirect effects, which may occur in areas beyond the immediate influence of a proposed action and at some time in the future. The Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.8) refer to these consequences as indirect impacts. Indirect impacts may include changes in land use, economic vitality, and population density, which are all elements of growth.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) also requires the analysis of a project's potential to induce growth. The CEQA guidelines (Section 15126.2[d]) require that environmental documents "…discuss the ways in which the proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment…"

Affected Environment

The 2030 Tulare County General Plan Update states that Urban Area Boundaries "establish areas around incorporated cities where the county and cities may coordinate plans and policies relating to street and highway construction, public utility systems, and future right of way preservation, affecting the orderly development of urban fringe areas." The General Plan Update also states that Urban Development Boundaries establish areas "delineating the area expected for urban growth over a 20-year period."

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

This project location lies within the Urban Area Boundary and the Urban Development Boundary for the City of Lindsay.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

This project location lies outside the Urban Area Boundary and Urban Development Boundary for the City of Exeter. The project is within the jurisdiction of Tulare County.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

This project location lies within the Urban Area Boundary and the Urban Development Boundary for the City of Lindsay.

Environmental Consequences

Caltrans conducted a preliminary analysis to determine whether there will be potential for project-related growth. Caltrans considered the interrelated factors of accessibility, project type, project location, and growth pressure. The screening process also took into consideration the General Plans of Tulare County and the City of Lindsay.

For the following reasons, based on the first-cut screening, no further analysis is required:

Alternative 1.B

The Build Alternative at Location 1 will modify access to State Route 65 near Lindsay from Tulare Road. Currently, Oak Avenue intersects with Tulare Road just west of the Tulare Road intersection with State Route 65. The project will reconfigure this area, and Tulare Road and Oak Avenue will link directly into the roundabout. Access to State Route 65 will be modified for Oak Avenue and Tulare Road, but no new access points will be created. This type of project is consistent with accommodating growth and not influencing growth.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will not change access to State Route 198, State Route 245, or Spruce Avenue. The project will change the current signalized intersection into a roundabout. This type of project is consistent with accommodating growth and not influencing growth. This area is within the jurisdiction of Tulare County and is an intensive agricultural area that has strong policies that ensure planned development in these areas.

Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternative at Location 3 proposes to realign State Route 65 near Lindsay with access control. According to the Caltrans Highway Design Manual, access control is achieved by acquiring rights of access to the highway from adjoining property owners and by permitting arriving and exiting only at locations determined by the state. Currently, State Route 65 is a two-lane conventional highway with access into and out of driveways, local roads, and farm roads. This project will not create new access and will limit access to the new expressway. The project is not expected to make the areas east of the new alignment any more accessible than what currently exists. The project is not being proposed to support major new unplanned development.

Transportation improvements to the corridor have been on record since 1994 (2012 Caltrans Project Report). This type of project is consistent with accommodating growth and not influencing growth.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are required.

2.1.5 Community Character and Cohesion

Regulatory Setting

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, established that the federal government use all practicable means to ensure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings (42 U.S. Code 4331[b][2]). The Federal Highway Administration, in its implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (23 U.S. Code 109[h]), directs that final decisions on projects are to be made in the best overall public interest. This requires taking into account adverse environmental impacts, such as the destruction or disruption of human-made resources, community cohesion, and the availability of public facilities and services.

Under the California Environmental Quality Act, an economic or social change, by itself, is not to be considered a significant effect on the environment. However, if a social or economic change is related to a physical change, then social or economic change may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant. Since this project will result in a physical change to the environment, it is appropriate to consider changes to community character and cohesion in assessing the significance of the project's effects.

Affected Environment

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The project lies near the northwest corner of the City of Lindsay. A portion of the project lies within the city limits, and another portion is farmland located outside the city limits. The City of Lindsay was incorporated in 1910 and has a primary economy based on agricultural production and processing. This is a cohesive community with public facilities and services overseen by the city council and administered by various city departments, such as city services, planning and economic development, public safety, and human resources.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The project is about 2.5 miles northeast of the City of Exeter in an unincorporated area within Tulare County. The area is surrounded by farmland and retains a rural character.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

The project is just west of the City of Lindsay. A portion of the project will cross the city limits just north of Hermosa Street. The City of Lindsay was incorporated in 1910 and has a primary economy based on agricultural production and processing. This is a cohesive community with public facilities and services overseen by the city council and administered by various city departments, such as city services, planning and economic development, public safety, and human resources.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B

The Build Alternative at Location 1 will require State Route 65 to shift south into adjacent farmland to allow construction of the proposed roundabout at Location 1. This area is mainly farmland that lies outside of the city limits. The project will not disrupt or destroy human-made resources or result in substantial physical impacts on the community. The availability of public facilities and services will remain intact.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will not disrupt or destroy human-made resources or result in substantial physical impacts on the City of Exeter or other nearby communities. The rural character of the project area will remain after the construction of the roundabout at Location 2 is complete.

Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternative at Location 3 will require realigning State Route 65 to the west of its current location. Because the project will bypass the City of Lindsay, the expectation is the project will enhance community cohesion by removing interregional truck and automobile traffic, leaving the existing roadway to slower-moving local traffic. The project will not result in substantial physical impacts on the community. The project is on the city outskirts and will not destroy or disrupt human-made resources, existing community cohesion, and the availability of public facilities and services.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are required.

2.1.6 Relocations and Real Property Acquisition

Regulatory Setting

The Caltrans Relocation Assistance Program is based on the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended (Uniform Act), and Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations Part 24. The purpose of the Relocation Assistance Program is to ensure that persons displaced as a result of a transportation project are treated fairly, consistently, and equitably so that such persons will not suffer disproportionate injuries as a result of projects designed for the benefit of the public as a whole. Please see Appendix C for a summary of the Relocation Assistance Program.

All relocation services and benefits are administered without regard to race, color, national origin, persons with disabilities, religion, age, or sex. Please see Appendix B for a copy of the Caltrans Title VI Policy Statement.

Affected Environment

The information used in this discussion was gathered from the Caltrans Right-of-Way Data Sheets.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Acquisition of new right-of-way will be required along the west edge of State Route 65 in the adjacent farmland near the curve. Commercial properties along the east side of State Route 65 between Fresno Street and Tulare Road will be affected, and residential properties next to Tulare Road and Oak Avenue just north of the curve will be affected. The acquisition of new right-of-way at Location 1 is distinct from the acquisition of new right-of-way at Location 2 and Location 3.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Partial acquisition of new right-of-way will be required at the four corners of the intersection to allow for the construction of the roundabout. These properties are all agricultural properties. The acquisition of new right-of-way at Location 2 is distinct from the acquisition of new right-of-way at Location 1 and Location 3.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

Acquisition of new right-of-way will be required from farmland west of the existing State Route 65 alignment just west of Lindsay. Additional right-of-way will be required from commercial properties near the intersection of State Route 65 and Hermosa Street and residential properties near Hermosa Street

and Mariposa Street on the proposed alignment. The acquisition of new right-of-way at Location 3 is distinct from the acquisition of new right-of-way at Location 1 and Location 2.

A 30-foot utility easement will be required on the east side of the new alignment. Agricultural, commercial, and residential properties will be affected by the easement.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B

[This section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] The Build Alternative at Location 1 will require acquisition of new right-of-way from 26 parcels. The total acreage of new right-of-way that will be required is about 7.1 acres, no full acquisitions are anticipated. Two businesses will be impacted and will require assistance under the Relocation Assistance Program. The new right-of-way that will be required from the parcels at Alternative 1.B is shown below in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Alternative 1.B Right-of-Way Acquisition

Assessor's Parcel Number	Right-of-Way (Acres)
199-270-003	0.06
199-270-002	0.07
199-260-009	0.06
199-260-002	0.14
199-260-001	0.58
199-100-052	0.66
199-080-003	2.18
199-080-002	1.59
199-050-067	0.03
199-050-065	1.08
199-050-055	0.09
199-050-056	0.04
199-050-039	0.02
199-240-009	0.02

Assessor's Parcel Number	Right-of-Way (Acres)
199-240-010	0.12
199-250-041	0.001
199-250-029	0.01
199-250-028	0.01
199-250-027	0.01
199-100-020	0.08
199-100-019	0.01
199-100-016	0.03
199-260-003	0.07
199-260-004	0.02
199-260-005	0.04
199-260-006	0.12

Source: Caltrans Updated Right-of-Way Data Sheet, August 2023.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will require the partial acquisition of new right-of-way from five parcels; no full acquisitions are anticipated. The total acreage of new right-of-way that will be required is about 2.4 acres. Table 2.2 shows the new right-of-way that will be required from the parcels at Alternative 2.B.

Table 2.2 Alternative 2.B Right-of-Way Acquisition

Assessor's Parcel Number	Right-of-Way (Acres)
112-200-008	0.27
112-210-005	0.11
112-140-012	0.09
112-140-013	0.89
112-150-022	0.99

Source: Caltrans Updated Right-of-Way Data Sheet, August 2023.

Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternative at Location 3 will require the partial acquisition of new right-of-way from 24 parcels. The total acreage of new right-of-way that will be required is about 28.6 acres. One single-family home will be acquired and require assistance under the Relocation Assistance Program. Table 2.3 shows the new right-of-way that will be required from the parcels at Alternative 3.B.

Table 2.3 Alternative 3.B Right-of-Way Acquisition

Assessor's Parcel Number	Right-of-Way (Acres)
199-210-013	0.11
199-210-012	3.30
199-210-052	3.58
199-210-053	2.36
199-210-016	2.32
199-110-004	0.42
199-090-005	1.20
199-090-004	2.54
199-090-006	0.21
199-080-006	3.28
199-080-002	3.09
199-080-009	0.01
199-050-067	0.46
199-050-001	0.18
199-050-029	1.03
199-050-055	0.90
199-280-003	2.69
199-270-003	0.30
199-210-053	0.43
199-210-071	0.04
199-210-072	0.01
199-210-051	0.01
199-210-059	0.10
199-080-008	0.03

Source: Caltrans Updated Right-of-Way Data Sheet, February 2019.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

All activities will be conducted in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Act of 1970, as amended (see Appendix C).

2.1.7 Utilities and Emergency Services

Affected Environment

The information used in this discussion is gathered from the Caltrans Right-of-Way Data Sheets.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Utilities

Utilities in the project area are owned and administered by several different entities, including Southern California Edison, Southern California Gas, Spectrum Communications, Frontier Communications, Lindmore Irrigation District, and the City of Lindsay. The types of utilities in the project area include telecommunication facilities, overhead power lines, farmland irrigation facilities, and various underground utilities.

Emergency Services

The City of Lindsay Public Safety Department provides police and fire services for the City of Lindsay. American Ambulance of Visalia provides ambulance services for the City of Lindsay and the surrounding area. The Tulare County Sheriff's Office provides public protection and criminal investigations that occur within the unincorporated areas of Tulare County. The closest substations are in Visalia and Porterville. Tulare County Fire Station Number 15 serves the project area and sits about 1.2 miles west of the project site. The California Highway Patrol has specific jurisdiction over State Route 65 and all public roads in unincorporated parts of the county.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Utilities

Utilities in the project area are owned and administered by several different entities, including Southern California Edison, Southern California Gas, Spectrum Communications, Frontier Communications, and the Exeter Irrigation District. The types of utilities in the project area include telecommunication facilities, overhead power lines, farmland irrigation facilities, and various underground utilities.

Emergency Services

American Ambulance of Visalia provides ambulance services for the project area. The Tulare County Sheriff's Office provides public protection and criminal investigations that occur within the unincorporated areas of Tulare County. The closest substations are in Visalia and Porterville. Tulare County Fire Station Number 11 serves the project area and sits about 2.4 miles southwest of the project site in the City of Exeter. The California Highway Patrol has specific jurisdiction over State Route 198, State Route 245, and all public roads in unincorporated parts of the county.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

Utilities

Utilities in the project area are owned and administered by several different entities, including Southern California Edison, Lindmore Irrigation District, and the City of Lindsay. Types of utilities in the project area include overhead power lines, farmland irrigation facilities, and underground utilities.

Emergency Services

The City of Lindsay Public Safety Department provides police and fire services for the City of Lindsay. American Ambulance of Visalia provides ambulance services for the City of Lindsay and the surrounding area. The Tulare County Sheriff's Office provides public protection and criminal investigations that occur within the unincorporated areas of Tulare County. Tulare County Fire Station Number 15 serves the project area and sits about 1.2 miles west of the project site. The California Highway Patrol has specific jurisdiction over State Route 65 and all public roads in unincorporated parts of the county.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B

Utilities

Several parcels that will be acquired for project construction have aboveground and underground utilities present that will have to be moved.

Emergency Services

During construction, fire protection, law enforcement, emergency, and other public services may be detoured to local roads but will be given priority access. Upon completion of the project, emergency response times are expected to improve.

Alternative 2.B

Utilities

About 14 power poles will need to be relocated. Most of these poles are outside of the state's right-of-way. Two wells, irrigation pipes, and an American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) service pole will also be affected.

Emergency Services

During construction, fire protection, law enforcement, emergency, and other public services may be detoured to local roads but will be given priority access. Upon completion of the project, emergency response times are expected to improve.

Alternative 3.B

Utilities

About 32 power poles will need to be relocated. Most of the power poles are located outside of the state's right-of-way.

Emergency Services

During construction, fire protection, law enforcement, emergency, and other public services may be detoured to local roads but will be given priority access. Upon completion of the project, emergency response times are expected to improve.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

During the design phase of the project, a more detailed study will be conducted to determine the necessary relocation of utilities. Caltrans will meet with the affected utilities to coordinate the details for relocations and easements to avoid or minimize any interruption in service.

A detailed traffic management plan will be developed during the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates phase of the project to minimize delays and maximize safety during construction. The traffic management plan may include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Release of information through brochures and mailers, press releases and media alerts, and planned lane closure notices from the Caltrans website.
- Use of portable changeable message signs.
- Incident management through the Construction Zone Enhanced Enforcement Program (also known as COZEEP) and the transportation management plan.

The Construction Zone Enhanced Enforcement Program is a program that uses California Highway Patrol officers during construction to improve the safety of construction crews and the motoring public. The officers may be used for traffic control and provide needed emergency response support

services. Caltrans coordinates and manages road user information, such as identifying the fixed changeable message signs and highway advisory radio on the state highway system that will be used during construction.

2.1.8 Traffic and Transportation/Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Regulatory Setting

Caltrans, as assigned by the Federal Highway Administration, directs that full consideration should be given to the safe accommodation of pedestrians and bicyclists during the development of federal-aid highway projects (see 23 Code of Federal Regulations 652). It further directs that the special needs of the elderly and the disabled must be considered in all federal-aid projects that include pedestrian facilities. When current or anticipated pedestrian and/or bicycle traffic presents a potential conflict with motor vehicle traffic, every effort must be made to minimize the detrimental effects on all highway users who share the facility.

In July 1999, the U.S. Department of Transportation issued an Accessibility Policy Statement pledging a fully accessible multimodal transportation system. Accessibility in federally assisted programs is governed by the U.S. Department of Transportation regulations (49 Code of Federal Regulations 27) implementing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (29 U.S. Code 794). The Federal Highway Administration has enacted regulations for the implementation of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (also referred to as ADA), including a commitment to build transportation facilities that provide equal access for all persons. These regulations require the application of the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements to federal-aid projects, including Transportation Enhancement Activities.

Affected Environment

Traffic and Transportation

The information used in this discussion is gathered from the Caltrans Traffic Operational Analysis and Caltrans Traffic Management Plan.

In 2019, Caltrans completed a Roundabout Improvement Intersection Analysis for intersections along the two main arterial roadways in the project area, State Route 65 and State Route 198. The intersections identified in the analysis included the State Route 65 and Tulare Road Intersection (Location 1), the State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue intersection (Location 2), and the State Route 65 and Hermosa Street intersection (Location 3).

For comparison, the quality of traffic flow ranges from Level of Service A (free flowing) to Level of Service F (gridlock).

Table 2.4 summarizes the type of intersection control and the morning and afternoon Level of Service for the existing year (2016).

Table 2.4 Existing Intersection Level of Service

Location	Traffic Control Type	Morning Level of Service 2016	Afternoon Level of Service 2016
State Route 65 and Tulare Road	One-way stop control	A	A
State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue	Signal	D	D
State Route 65 and Hermosa Street	Signal	A	A

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2019.

Pedestrian Facilities

There are no pedestrian facilities on existing State Route 65 except within the city limits of Lindsay. The City of Lindsay has provided sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and curb ramps. No pedestrian facilities, such as sidewalks and pedestrian crossings, were identified during field reviews for the project at the State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue Intersection (Location 2).

Bicycle Facilities

No bicycle facilities exist on State Route 198, Spruce Avenue, or existing State Route 65, but bicyclists and pedestrians still use the roadways. Within the city limits of Lindsay, sidewalks for pedestrians and bicycle paths are provided.

Environmental Consequences

Traffic and Transportation

This section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated. Tables 2.5 through 2.10 show the traffic conditions with and without the project for the construction year and future conditions.

Table 2.5 Level of Service at the State Route 65 and Tulare Road Intersection (Alternative 1.A) No-Build Alternative

Location	Morning Level of Service 2028	Afternoon Level of Service 2028	Morning Level of Service 2048	Afternoon Level of Service 2048
1	E	F	F	F

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Table 2.6 Level of Service at the State Route 65 and Tulare Road Intersection (Alternative 1.B) Build Alternative

Location	Morning Level of Service 2028	Afternoon Level of Service 2028	Morning Level of Service 2048	Afternoon Level of Service 2048
1	B	B	D	D

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Table 2.7 Level of Service at the State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue Intersection (Alternative 2.A) No-Build Alternative

Location	Morning Level of Service 2031	Afternoon Level of Service 2031	Morning Level of Service 2051	Afternoon Level of Service 2051
2	D	D	E	E

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Table 2.8 Level of Service at the State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue Intersection (Alternative 2.B) Build Alternative

Location	Morning Level of Service 2031	Afternoon Level of Service 2031	Morning Level of Service 2051	Afternoon Level of Service 2051
2	B	B	C	C

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Table 2.9 Level of Service at the State Route 65 and Hermosa Street Intersection (Alternative 3.A) No-Build Alternative

Location	Morning Level of Service 2034	Afternoon Level of Service 2034	Morning Level of Service 2054	Afternoon Level of Service 2054
3	C	D	D	E

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Table 2.10 Level of Service at the State Route 65 and Hermosa Street Intersection (Alternative 3.B) Build Alternative

Location	Morning Level of Service 2034	Afternoon Level of Service 2034	Morning Level of Service 2054	Afternoon Level of Service 2054
3	B	B	C	D

Source: Caltrans Updated Traffic Operational Analysis 2023.

Based on the data presented, without the project, the Level of Service at Location 1 will worsen to Level of Service F by 2048 for both morning and afternoon traffic. Location 2 Level of Service will remain at E for both morning and afternoon traffic in 2051, and the Level of Service at Location 3 will deteriorate to D for morning and E for afternoon traffic by 2054. Without the proposed project, traffic is expected to be congested and operate with considerable delays.

With the project, all three project locations will see an improved Level of Service for the construction year. A decrease in the Level of Service is expected for the future conditions at each project location. However, all project locations will avoid Level of Service designations below D in future conditions.

Construction impacts on traffic and transportation will not be substantial. Access to and from State Route 65, State Route 198, and State Route 245 will be available during construction.

Pedestrian Facilities

The proposed roundabouts at Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3 will include the construction of sidewalks. Addressing the safety and mobility needs of bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users within the project limits will be part of this project and facilitated by creating Complete Streets, which will require collaboration among Caltrans' functional units and stakeholders during the design phase of the project.

Bicycle Facilities

The proposed roundabouts at Location 1, Location 2, and Location 3 will include the construction of shared-use paths and Class 2 bike at Location 1 only along Tulare Road.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Traffic and Transportation

A Traffic Management Plan will be developed during construction to handle local traffic patterns and reduce delay, congestion, and the likelihood of collisions during construction. The Traffic Management Plan includes notifying the public of construction activities via media outlets, using changeable message signs and construction strategies, and using the Central Valley Traffic Management Center, which reduces congestion by monitoring traffic and informing the public via media outlets, such as radio and television. Traffic delays are expected to be minimal because most of the Build Alternatives will be built on new alignments. By building the proposed project in the construction phases and rerouting traffic to local roads, disruption to local and regional traffic will be minimized with all the Build Alternatives.

Pedestrian Facilities

Curb ramps that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements will be provided at all improved intersections or new local road intersections.

Bicycle Facilities

Class 2 bike lanes and shared-use paths will be provided at the proposed roundabout locations.

[Section 2.1.9 Cultural Resources below has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated.]

2.1.9 Cultural Resources

Regulatory Setting

The term "cultural resources," as used in this document, refers to the "built environment" (e.g., structures, bridges, railroads, water conveyance systems, etc.), places of traditional or cultural importance, and archaeological sites (both prehistoric and historic), regardless of significance. Under federal and state laws, cultural resources that meet certain criteria of significance are referred to by various terms, including "historic properties," "historic sites," "historical resources," and "tribal cultural resources." Laws and regulations dealing with cultural resources include:

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, sets forth national policy and procedures for historic properties, defined as districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects included in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings on historic properties and to allow the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation the opportunity to comment on those undertakings, following regulations issued by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (36 Code of Federal Regulations 800). On January 1, 2014, the First Amended Section 106 Programmatic Agreement among the Federal Highway Administration, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and Caltrans went into effect for Caltrans projects, both state and local, with Federal Highway Administration involvement. The Programmatic Agreement implements the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's regulations, 36 Code of Federal Regulations 800, streamlining the Section 106 process and delegating certain responsibilities to Caltrans. The Federal Highway Administration's responsibilities under the Programmatic Agreement have been assigned to Caltrans as part of the Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program (23 U.S. Code 327).

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires the consideration of cultural resources that are historical resources and tribal cultural resources, as well as "unique" archaeological resources. California Public Resources

Code Section 5024.1 established the California Register of Historical Resources and outlined the necessary criteria for a cultural resource to be considered eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources and, therefore, a historical resource. Historical resources are defined in California Public Resources Code Section 5020.1(j). In 2014, Assembly Bill 52 added the term "tribal cultural resources" to CEQA, and Assembly Bill 52 is commonly referenced instead of CEQA when discussing the process to identify tribal cultural resources (as well as identifying measures to avoid, preserve, or mitigate effects to them). Defined in California Public Resources Code Section 21074(a), a tribal cultural resource is a California Register of Historical Resources or local register eligible site, feature, place, cultural landscape, or object which has a cultural value to a California Native American tribe. Tribal cultural resources must also meet the definition of a historical resource. Unique archaeological resources are referenced in California Public Resources Code Section 21083.2.

California Public Resources Code Section 5024 requires state agencies to identify and protect state-owned historical resources that meet the National Register of Historic Places listing criteria. It further requires Caltrans to inventory state-owned structures in its rights-of-way. Procedures for compliance with California Public Resources Code Section 5024 are outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding between Caltrans and the State Historic Preservation Officer, effective January 1, 2015. For most Federal-aid projects on the State Highway System, compliance with the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement will satisfy the requirements of California Public Resources Code Section 5024.

Affected Environment

A third Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report was prepared in October 2019, and a second Supplemental Historic Resource Evaluation Report was prepared in January 2021 for this project. Two historic-era properties were identified and formally evaluated.

Cultural resource studies for the project include fieldwork, such as an archaeological survey and visual inspection. Identification efforts include record searches of the National Register of Historic Places, California Register of Historical Resources, California Points of Historical Interest, California Historical Resources Information System, National Historic Landmark, California Historical Landmarks, Caltrans Historic Bridge Inventory, Caltrans Cultural Resources Database, and the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information Center at California State University, Bakersfield.

The Area of Potential Effects was established as the area subject to direct and indirect effects of activities during the project. The Area of Potential Effects for the Build Alternatives includes road construction, such as grading and trenching. A 130-foot horizontal Area of Potential Effects along the length

of the project and a vertical Area of Potential Effects of 3 feet for grading and trenching was established for the project.

Environmental Consequences

Archaeological Resources

No known prehistoric sites will be impacted within the Area of Potential Effects. No archaeological resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places or California Register of Historical Resources have been recorded within the Archaeological Study Area. No prehistoric or historic archaeological sites were discovered during pedestrian surveys of the Archaeological Survey Coverage Area in 2019.

Architectural Resources

Caltrans identified two potential historical properties within the Area of Potential Effects and determined the properties are not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Overall, the project will have no adverse effect on historical properties.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures will be incorporated into the project to avoid or minimize cultural impacts.

- If cultural materials are discovered during construction, all earth-moving activity within and around the immediate discovery area will be diverted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the nature and significance of the find.
- If human remains are discovered, California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 states that further disturbances and activities shall stop in any area or nearby area suspected to overlie remains, and the county coroner should be contacted. If the coroner thinks the remains to be Native American, the coroner will notify the Native American Heritage Commission, who, pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 5097.98, will then notify the Most Likely Descendant. At this time, the person who discovers the remains will contact Javier Almaguer, Senior Environmental Scientist, District 6 Environmental, so that he may work with the Most Likely Descendant on the respectful treatment and disposition of the remains. Further provisions of Public Resources Code Section 5097.98 are to be followed as applicable.

No mitigation measures will be required.

2.2 Physical Environment

2.2.1 Water Quality and Stormwater Runoff

Regulatory Setting

Federal Requirements: Clean Water Act

In 1972, Congress amended the Federal Water Pollution Control Act, making the addition of pollutants to the waters of the United States (U.S.) from any point source unlawful unless the discharge is in compliance with a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (known as NPDES) permit. This act and its amendments are known today as the Clean Water Act. Congress has amended the act several times. In the 1987 amendments, Congress directed dischargers of stormwater from municipal and industrial/construction point sources to comply with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit scheme. The following are important Clean Water Act sections:

- Sections 303 and 304 require states to issue water quality standards, criteria, and guidelines.
- Section 401 requires an applicant for a federal license or permit to conduct any activity that may result in a discharge to waters of the U.S. to obtain certification from the state that the discharge will comply with other provisions of the act. This is most frequently required in tandem with a Section 404 permit request (see below).
- Section 402 establishes the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, a permitting system for the discharges (except for dredge or fill material) of any pollutant into waters of the U.S. Regional Water Quality Control Boards administer this permitting program in California. Section 402(p) requires permits for discharges of stormwater from industrial/construction and Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (known as MS4s).
- Section 404 establishes a permit program for the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S. This permit program is administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The goal of the Clean Water Act is “to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters.”

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issues two types of 404 permits: General and Individual. There are two types of General permits: Regional and Nationwide. Regional permits are issued for a general category of activities when they are similar in nature and cause minimal environmental effects. Nationwide permits are issued to allow a variety of minor project activities with no more than minimal effects.

Ordinarily, projects that do not meet the criteria for a Regional or Nationwide Permit may be permitted under one of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Individual permits. There are two types of Individual permits: Standard permits and Letters of Permission. For Individual permits, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' decision to approve is based on compliance with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) Section 404 (b)(1) Guidelines (40 Code of Federal Regulations Part 230) and whether the permit approval is in the public interest. The Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines were developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in conjunction with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and allow the discharge of dredged or fill material into the aquatic system (waters of the U.S.) only if there is no practicable alternative which will have less adverse effects. The guidelines state that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may not issue a permit if there is a least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (also known by the acronym LEDPA) to the proposed discharge that will have lesser effects on waters of the U.S. and not have any other significant adverse environmental consequences. According to the guidelines, documentation is needed that a sequence of avoidance, minimization and compensation measures has been followed, in that order. The guidelines also restrict permitting activities that violate water quality or toxic effluent standards, jeopardize the continued existence of listed species, violate marine sanctuary protections, or cause "significant degradation" to waters of the U.S. In addition, every permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, even if not subject to the Section 404(b)(1) Guidelines, must meet general requirements. See 33 Code of Federal Regulations Section 320.4. A discussion of the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative determination, if any, for the document is included in the Wetlands and Other Waters section.

State Requirements: Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act

California's Porter-Cologne Act, enacted in 1969, provides the legal basis for water quality regulation within California. This act requires a "Report of Waste Discharge" for any discharge of waste (liquid, solid, or gaseous) to land or surface waters that may impair beneficial uses for surface and/or groundwater of the state. It predates the Clean Water Act and regulates discharges to waters of the state. Waters of the state include more than just waters of the U.S., like groundwater and surface waters are not considered waters of the U.S. Also, it prohibits discharges of "waste" as defined, and this definition is broader than the Clean Water Act definition of "pollutant." Discharges under the Porter-Cologne Act are permitted by Waste Discharge Requirements and may be required even when the discharge is already permitted or exempt under the Clean Water Act.

The State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards are responsible for establishing the water quality standards (objectives and beneficial uses) required by the Clean Water Act and

regulating discharges to ensure compliance with the water quality standards. Details about water quality standards in a project area are included in the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board Basin Plan. In California, Regional Water Quality Control Boards designate beneficial uses for all water body segments in their jurisdictions and then set criteria necessary to protect those uses. As a result, the water quality standards developed for particular water segments are based on the designated use and vary depending on that use. In addition, the State Water Resources Control Board identifies waters failing to meet standards for specific pollutants. These waters are then state-listed in accordance with Clean Water Act Section 303(d). If a state determines that waters are impaired for one or more constituents and the standards cannot be met through point source or nonpoint source controls (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits or Waste Discharge Requirements), the Clean Water Act requires the establishment of Total Maximum Daily Loads (also known as TMDLs). Total Maximum Daily Loads specify allowable pollutant loads from all sources (point, nonpoint, and natural) for a given watershed.

State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards

The State Water Resources Control Board administers water rights, sets water pollution control policy, issues water board orders on matters of statewide application, and oversees water quality functions throughout the state by approving Basin Plans, Total Maximum Daily Loads, and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits. Regional Water Quality Control Boards are responsible for protecting beneficial uses of water resources within their regional jurisdiction using planning, permitting, and enforcement authorities to meet this responsibility.

National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Program

Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4)

Section 402(p) of the Clean Water Act requires the issuance of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for five categories of stormwater discharges, including Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (known as MS4s). A Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System is defined as “any conveyance or system of conveyances (roads with drainage systems, municipal streets, catch basins, curbs, gutters, ditches, human-made channels, and storm drains) owned or operated by a state, city, town, county, or other public body having jurisdiction over stormwater, that is designed or used for collecting or conveying stormwater.” The State Water Resources Control Board has identified Caltrans as an owner/operator of a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System under federal regulations. The Caltrans Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System permit covers all of Caltrans’ rights-of-way, properties, facilities, and activities in the state. The State Water Resources Control Board or the Regional Water Quality Control Board issues

National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for five years, and permit requirements remain active until a new permit has been adopted.

The Caltrans Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System Permit, Order Number 2012-0011-DWQ (adopted on September 19, 2012, and effective on July 1, 2013), as amended by Order Number 2014-0006-EXEC (effective January 17, 2014), Order Number 2014-0077-DWQ (effective May 20, 2014), and Order Number 2015-0036-EXEC (conformed and effective April 7, 2015) has three basic requirements:

1. Caltrans must comply with the requirements of the Construction General Permit (see below);
2. Caltrans must implement a year-round program in all parts of the state to effectively control stormwater and non-stormwater discharges; and
3. Caltrans stormwater discharges must meet water quality standards through the implementation of permanent and temporary (construction) Best Management Practices, to the maximum extent practicable, and other measures as the State Water Resources Control Board determines to be necessary to meet the water quality standards.

To comply with the permit, Caltrans developed the Statewide Stormwater Management Plan to address stormwater pollution controls related to highway planning, design, construction, and maintenance activities throughout California. The Statewide Stormwater Management Plan assigns responsibilities within Caltrans for implementing stormwater management procedures and practices as well as training, public education and participation, monitoring and research, program evaluation, and reporting activities. The plan describes the minimum procedures and practices Caltrans uses to reduce pollutants in stormwater and non-stormwater discharges. It outlines procedures and responsibilities for protecting water quality, including the selection and implementation of Best Management Practices. The proposed project will be programmed to follow the guidelines and procedures outlined in the latest Statewide Stormwater Management Plan to address stormwater runoff.

Construction General Permit

Construction General Permit, Order Number 2009-0009-DWQ (adopted on September 2, 2009, and effective on July 1, 2010), as amended by Order Number 2010-0014-DWQ (effective February 14, 2011) and Order Number 2012-0006-DWQ (effective on July 17, 2012). The permit regulates stormwater discharges from construction sites that result in a Disturbed Soil Area (DSA) of 1 acre or greater, and/or are smaller sites that are part of a larger common plan of development. By law, all stormwater discharges associated with construction activity where clearing, grading, and excavation result in soil disturbance of at least 1 acre must comply with the provisions of the Construction General Permit. Construction activity that results in soil

disturbances of less than 1 acre is subject to this Construction General Permit if there is potential for significant water quality impairment resulting from the activity as determined by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Operators of regulated construction sites are required to develop Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans; implement sediment, erosion, and pollution prevention control measures; and obtain coverage under the Construction General Permit.

The Construction General Permit separates projects into Risk Levels 1, 2, and 3. Risk levels are determined during the planning and design phases and are based on potential erosion and transport to receiving waters. Requirements apply according to the Risk Level determined. For example, a Risk Level 3 (highest risk) project will require a compulsory stormwater runoff, potential hydrogen (pH) and turbidity monitoring, and before construction and after construction aquatic biological assessments during specified seasonal windows. For all projects subject to the permit, applicants are required to develop and implement an effective Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan. In accordance with the Caltrans Statewide Stormwater Management Plan and Standard Specifications, a Water Pollution Control Program is necessary for projects with a Statewide Stormwater Management Plan of less than 1 acre.

Section 401 Permitting

Under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, any project requiring a federal license or permit that may result in a discharge to a water of the U.S. must obtain a 401 Certification, which certifies that the project will comply with state water quality standards. The most common federal permits triggering 401 Certification are Clean Water Act Section 404 permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The 401 permit certifications are obtained from the appropriate Regional Water Quality Control Board, depending on the project location, and are required before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issues a 404 permit.

In some cases, the Regional Water Quality Control Board may have specific concerns with discharges associated with a project. As a result, the Regional Water Quality Control Board may issue a set of requirements known as Waste Discharge Requirements under the State Water Code (Porter-Cologne Act) that define activities, such as the inclusion of specific features, effluent limitations, monitoring, and plan submittals that are to be implemented for protecting or benefiting water quality. Waste Discharge Requirements can be issued to address both permanent and temporary discharges of a project.

Affected Environment

A Water Compliance Study was completed for the project in October 2018 to evaluate the potential effect of the project on water quality and stormwater runoff.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

This location is within a dry land area where crisscrossing rivers, creeks, and streams are absent.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The nearest major water body is the human-made Friant-Kern Canal, which is about 0.3 mile west of the project area. The canal was built in both concrete-lined and unlined earth sections. The canal is up to 128 feet wide at the top, and the channel width varies. The canal is about 24 feet wide at the bottom of the concrete-lined segments and 40 to 64 feet wide in the unlined or earth segments. Water depths in the canal range from about 11 to 20 feet.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

This location is within a dry land area where crisscrossing rivers, creeks, and streams are absent.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B

Considering the absence of nearby natural water bodies at this location, no long-term water quality impacts for surface water and groundwater are anticipated. However, short-term impacts on groundwater quality could occur due to accidental spills or poor management when handling hazardous materials, fuels, and other chemicals used during construction. These activities should be anticipated and addressed in the Design and Construction phases of the project.

Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 13.1 requires the contractor to address all potential water quality impacts that may occur during construction. Potential impacts such as erosion, accidental spills of hazardous materials, and disruption of natural drainage patterns must be eliminated or minimized to the maximum extent practicable during the design and construction phases of the project by incorporating the appropriate permanent and temporary Best Management Practices into the project.

Since the project is anticipated to disturb more than 1 acre of soil, the following is required:

- A Notification of Intent (NOI) will be submitted to the appropriate Regional Water Quality Control Board at least 30 days before the start of construction.

- A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan will be prepared and implemented during construction to the satisfaction of the resident engineer.
- A Notice of Termination (NOT) will be submitted to the Regional Board upon completion of construction and site stabilization. A project will be considered complete when the criteria for final stabilization in the Construction General Permit are met.

Alternative 2.B

Considering the absence of nearby natural water bodies at this location, no long-term water quality impacts for surface water and groundwater are anticipated. However, short-term impacts on groundwater quality could occur due to accidental spills or poor management when handling hazardous materials, fuels, and other chemicals used during construction. These activities should be anticipated and addressed in the design and construction phases of the project.

Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 13.1 requires the contractor to address all potential water quality impacts that may occur during construction. Potential impacts such as erosion, accidental spills of hazardous materials, and disruption of natural drainage patterns must be eliminated or minimized to the maximum extent practicable during the design and construction phases of the project by incorporating the appropriate permanent and temporary Best Management Practices into the project.

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Alternative 3.B

Considering the absence of nearby natural water bodies at this location, no long-term water quality impacts for surface water and groundwater are anticipated. However, short-term impacts on groundwater quality could occur due to accidental spills or poor management when handling hazardous materials, fuels, and other chemicals used during construction. These activities should be anticipated and addressed in the design and construction phases of the project.

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- A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan will be prepared and implemented during construction to the satisfaction of the resident engineer.
- A Notice of Termination (NOT) will be submitted to the Regional Board upon completion of construction and site stabilization. A project will be considered complete when the criteria for final stabilization in the Construction General Permit are met.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

By incorporating proper and accepted engineering practices and Best Management Practices, the project will not result in significant impacts on water quality during construction or its operation.

2.2.2 Hazardous Waste and Materials

Regulatory Setting

Hazardous materials, including hazardous substances and wastes, are regulated by many state and federal laws. Statutes govern the generation, treatment, storage, and disposal of hazardous materials, substances, and waste, and also the investigation and mitigation of waste releases, air and water quality, human health, and land use.

The main federal laws regulating hazardous wastes/materials are the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (known as CERCLA) and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (known as RCRA). The purpose of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, often referred to as “Superfund,” is to identify and clean up abandoned contaminated sites so that public health and welfare are not compromised. The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act provides for “cradle to grave” regulation of hazardous waste generated by operating entities. Other federal laws include:

- Community Environmental Response Facilitation Act

- Clean Water Act
- Clean Air Act
- Safe Drinking Water Act
- Occupational Safety and Health Act
- Atomic Energy Act
- Toxic Substances Control Act
- Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act

In addition to the acts listed above, Executive Order 12088, Federal Compliance with Pollution Control Standards, mandates that necessary actions be taken to prevent and control environmental pollution when federal activities or federal facilities are involved.

California regulates hazardous materials, waste, and substances under the authority of the California Health and Safety Code and is also authorized by the federal government to implement Resource Conservation and Recovery Act in the state. California law also addresses specific handling, storage, transportation, disposal, treatment, reduction, cleanup, and emergency planning of hazardous waste. The Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act also restricts the disposal of wastes and requires the cleanup of wastes that are below hazardous waste concentrations but could impact groundwater and surface water quality. California regulations that address waste management and prevention and cleanup of contamination include Title 22 Division 4.5 Environmental Health Standards for the Management of Hazardous Waste, Title 23 Waters, and Title 27 Environmental Protection.

Worker and public health and safety are key issues when addressing hazardous materials that may affect human health and the environment. Proper management and disposal of hazardous material are vital if it is found, disturbed, or generated during project construction.

Affected Environment

An Initial Site Assessment was completed for the project areas in August 2019. The Initial Site Assessment identified and evaluated possible hazardous waste sites and includes the following tasks:

- Review previous environmental reports about the project site, including the original Initial Site Assessment.
- Geologic evaluation regarding naturally occurring asbestos within the project limits.
- Review of government databases of hazardous waste sites.
- Preparation of a written report summarizing the records search results.

A Preliminary Site Investigation was completed in December 2019 to evaluate lead concentrations in surface soils next to the highways for proper handling and disposal. This study also addressed the discolored soil at the northwest corner of the State Route 198 and State Route 245 intersection (APN 112-210-005). The Preliminary Site Investigation was completed only for Location 1 and Location 2. Location 3 will need to be investigated before construction in 2034.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The Preliminary Site Investigation showed that total lead concentrations ranged from 2.7 milligrams per kilogram to 260 milligrams per kilogram, with an average total lead value of 23 milligrams per kilogram and a 95 percent Upper Confidence Limit for total lead of 31 milligrams per kilogram. Four of the samples exceeded 50 milligrams per kilogram and were further analyzed for soluble lead using a citric acid extraction method.

Soluble lead values ranged from non-detect to 19 milligrams per kilogram; the 95 percent Upper Confidence Limit for soluble lead is 2.1 milligrams per liter. One sample was above the Soluble Threshold Limit Concentration of 5 milligrams per liter and was further analyzed using deionized water as the extraction method. The deionized water extraction method and Toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure concentrations were below regulatory levels. Based on total and soluble 95 percent Upper Confidence Limit values, soil from either location from the surface to a depth of 2 feet or shallower will be considered nonregulated/nonhazardous and could be reused onsite, relinquished to the contractor, or disposed of as nonregulated soil. Total lead concentrations are also below the residential land use California Human Health Screening Level of 80 milligrams per kilogram and the Environmental Screening Level of 80 milligrams per kilogram.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Total lead concentrations ranged from 2.2 milligrams per kilogram to 120 milligrams per kilogram, with an average total lead value of 19 milligrams per kilogram and a 95 percent Upper Confidence Limit of 31 milligrams per kilogram. Three of the samples exceeded 50 milligrams per kilogram and were further analyzed for soluble lead using the citric acid extraction method. Soluble lead values ranged from non-detect to 3.9 milligrams per liter; the soluble lead 95 percent Upper Confidence Limit is 1.1 milligrams per liter. The Soluble Threshold Limit Concentration of 5 milligrams per liter was not exceeded; therefore, further analyses were not conducted. Based on total and soluble 95 percent Upper Confidence Limit values, soil from either location from the surface to a depth of 2 feet or shallower will be considered nonregulated/nonhazardous and could be reused onsite, relinquished to the contractor, or disposed of as nonregulated soil. Total lead concentrations are

also below the residential land use California Human Health Screening Level of 80 milligrams per kilogram and the Environmental Screening Level of 80 milligrams per kilogram.

Three borings were collected. Samples were taken at 0.0-0.5 foot, 1.0-1.5 feet, and 4.5-5.0 feet below the ground surface. One sample could not be obtained due to soil refusal. Soil samples were analyzed for total petroleum hydrocarbons, oil and grease, and dioxins; none were reported to exceed their hazardous waste thresholds or their human health screening levels. Samples were also analyzed for heavy metals. Except for arsenic, heavy metals were not reported above the thresholds or screening levels. Arsenic was reported to be 46 milligrams per kilogram in one sample. This is below state and federal hazardous waste criteria, but greater than the published background concentration range for arsenic in California (0.6 milligrams per kilogram to 12.0 milligrams per kilogram). If the soil from this area is excavated, surface soils to 0.5 foot should be excavated and transported to the appropriate landfill as nonhazardous waste.

Records Search

A hazardous materials site records search included information gathered from several government environmental databases compiled by federal, state, and local governmental agencies. No sites were identified within the search area that are likely to adversely impact the three project locations.

Aerially Deposited Lead

A Preliminary Site Investigation was completed in December 2019 to evaluate lead concentrations in surface soils next to the highways at Location 1 and Location 2. The evaluation was conducted to determine the proper handling and disposal of these soils if the lead concentrations are at or above harmful levels. Aerially deposited lead is attributed to the historical use of leaded gasoline. Areas of primary concern are soils along routes that have had high vehicle emissions from large traffic volumes or congestion during the time when leaded gasoline was in use (generally before 1986). Along roads where the shoulder subgrade has not been disturbed, the presence of aerially deposited lead is generally limited to the upper 24 inches. Lead concentrations typically drop rapidly with increasing depth below the ground surface.

Naturally Occurring Asbestos

A geologic evaluation for naturally occurring asbestos was conducted within the project limits. This evaluation included a review of geologic maps and reports, including data prepared by the California Geological Survey and the U.S. Geological Survey and previous studies conducted by Caltrans and their consultants. The evaluation found no presence of altered ultramafic bedrock, alluvium derived from ultramafic rock, or rock commonly associated with naturally occurring asbestos at all three project locations.

Yellow Thermoplastic Striping

State Route 65, State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue have yellow pavement striping and markings. Yellow thermoplastic striping and yellow painted markings may contain elevated concentrations of lead chromate and hexavalent chromium manufactured before 2005 and painted markings manufactured before 1997.

Agricultural Land Uses

A Preliminary Site Investigation was completed in December 2019 to evaluate the discolored surface soils at the northwest corner of the State Route 198 and State Route 245 intersection. Much of the project area consists of agricultural properties. Activities conducted on agricultural parcels involve the use of agricultural chemicals, including pesticides, insecticides, and herbicides. Arsenic may be present in surface soils because historical agricultural practices used herbicides that were organic compounds containing arsenic.

Treated Wood Waste

Treated wood is wood with preservative chemicals that protect it from insect attack and fungal decay during its use. Typical uses in the highway environment include signposts, metal beam guardrail wood posts, and lagging on retaining walls. The chemical preservatives used are hazardous and pose a risk to human health and the environment. Arsenic, chromium, copper, creosote, and pentachlorophenol are among the chemicals used. These chemicals are known to be toxic or carcinogenic. Harmful exposure to these chemicals may result from skin contact with treated wood waste or inhalation or ingestion of treated wood waste particulate (e.g., sawdust and smoke) as this material is handled.

Cortese List

The Cortese List is a compilation of contaminated and potentially contaminated sites. This list was reviewed as part of the initial screening for this project. The list, or a property's presence on the list, has bearing on the local permitting process and on compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act. There were no sites in the project area listed on the Cortese List.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B

The Build Alternative at Location 1 will require the acquisition of right-of-way from several parcels along State Route 65. The following two parcels that have the potential for hazardous waste issues were identified in the Initial Site Assessment.

- APN 199-260-003: The area to be acquired is pavement and is considered low risk for the potential of hazardous waste issues.

- APN 199-260-004: The area to be acquired is pavement and is considered low risk for the potential of hazardous waste issues.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will require the acquisition of right-of-way from parcels adjacent to the State Route 198, State Route 245, and Spruce Avenue intersection. The following two parcels that have the potential for hazardous waste issues were identified in the Initial Site Assessment.

- APN 112-200-002: The area to be acquired has little to no contamination and is considered low risk for the potential of hazardous waste issues.
- APN 112-210-005: The area to be acquired is agricultural land with discolored soil and surface staining. This area is considered a moderate risk for potential hazardous waste issues.

Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternative at Location 3 will require the acquisition of right-of-way from several parcels along the proposed realignment. The following seven parcels that have the potential for hazardous waste issues were identified in the Initial Site Assessment.

- APN 199-220-012: The area to be acquired consists of orchards and is considered low risk for the potential of hazardous waste issues.
- APNs 199-210-071, 199-210-072, 199-210-073: The area to be acquired is an existing gas station and is considered high risk for the potential of hazardous waste issues.
- APN 199-210-051: The area to be acquired is an automotive paint and body, repair, and storage facility. There is no visible evidence of a former service station, as the current land use description indicates. This facility handles and stores small quantities of hazardous materials and shows some staining of the soil surface. This area is considered low risk for potential of hazardous waste issues.
- APN 199-210-051: The area to be acquired is a former irrigation supply business. The area stores pipes and parts for business and miscellaneous personal items. There is no visible evidence of a former service station, as the land use description indicates. This area is considered low risk for potential of hazardous waste issues.
- APN 199-210-059: The area to be acquired is a residence that stores miscellaneous items, scrap wood, equipment, and parts. There is no visible evidence of a former service station, as the current land use description indicates. This area is considered low risk for potential of hazardous waste issues.
- APN 199-210-016: The area to be acquired is a residence and possible agricultural business that handles and stores small quantities of hazardous materials for automotive and equipment repair. There is visible

staining on the soil surface. This area is considered low risk for potential of hazardous waste issues.

- APN 199-090-006: The area to be acquired is a residence and possible agricultural business that handles and stores small quantities of hazardous materials for automotive and equipment repair. There is visible staining on the soil surface. This area is considered low risk for potential of hazardous waste issues.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Caltrans Standard Specifications and Non-Standard Specifications pertaining to hazardous waste will be provided during the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates phase of the project before construction.

2.2.3 Air Quality

Regulatory Setting

The Federal Clean Air Act, as amended, is the main federal law that governs air quality, while the California Clean Air Act is its companion state law. These laws, and related regulations by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) and the California Air Resources Board, set standards for the concentration of pollutants in the air. At the federal level, these standards are called National Ambient Air Quality Standards (also known as NAAQS).

National and state ambient air quality standards have been established for six criteria pollutants that have been linked to potential health concerns: carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), ozone (O3), Lead (Pb), and sulfur dioxide (SO2), and particulate matter (PM)—which is broken down for regulatory purposes into particles of 10 micrometers or smaller (PM10) and particles of 2.5 micrometers and smaller (PM2.5). In addition, state standards exist for visibility-reducing particles, sulfates, hydrogen sulfide (H2S), and vinyl chloride.

The national and state standards are set at levels that protect public health with a margin of safety and are subject to periodic review and revision. Both federal and state regulatory schemes also cover toxic air contaminants (air toxics); some criteria pollutants are also air toxics or may include certain air toxics in their general definition.

Federal air quality standards and regulations provide the basic scheme for project-level air quality analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act. In addition to this environmental analysis, a parallel “conformity” requirement under the Federal Clean Air Act also applies.

The conformity requirement is based on Federal Clean Air Act Section 176(c), which prohibits the U.S. Department of Transportation and other federal agencies from funding, authorizing, or approving plans, programs, or projects

that do not conform to the State Implementation Plan for attaining the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. “Transportation Conformity” applies to highway and transit projects and takes place on two levels: the regional (or planning and programming) level and the project level. The proposed project must conform at both levels to be approved.

Conformity requirements apply only in nonattainment and “maintenance” (former nonattainment) areas for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards and only for the specific National Ambient Air Quality Standards that are or were violated. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulations at 40 Code of Federal Regulations 93 govern the conformity process. Conformity requirements do not apply in unclassifiable/attainment areas for National Ambient Air Quality Standards and do not apply at all for state standards, regardless of the status of the area.

Regional conformity is concerned with how well the regional transportation system supports plans for attaining the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), ozone (O3), particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), and in some areas (although not in California), sulfur dioxide (SO2). California has nonattainment or maintenance areas for all of these transportation-related “criteria pollutants,” except sulfur dioxide, and also has a nonattainment area for lead; however, lead is not currently required by the Federal Clean Air Act to be covered in transportation conformity analysis.

Regional conformity is based on emission analysis of Regional Transportation Plans and Federal Transportation Improvement Programs that include all transportation projects planned for a region over a period of at least 20 years (for the Regional Transportation Plan) and four years (for the Federal Transportation Improvement Program). Regional Transportation Plan and Federal Transportation Improvement Program conformity uses travel demand and emission models to determine whether or not the implementation of those projects will conform to emission budgets or other tests at various analysis years, showing that requirements of the Federal Clean Air Act and the State Implementation Plan are met. If the conformity analysis is successful, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Transit Administration make the determinations that the Regional Transportation Plan and Federal Transportation Improvement Program conform with the State Implementation Plan for achieving the goals of the Federal Clean Air Act. Otherwise, the projects in the Regional Transportation Plan and/or Federal Transportation Improvement Program must be modified until conformity is attained. If the design concept and scope and the “open-to-traffic” schedule of a proposed transportation project are the same as described in the Regional Transportation Plan and Federal Transportation Improvement Program, then the proposed project meets regional conformity requirements for purposes of project-level analysis.

Project-level conformity is achieved by demonstrating that the project comes from a conforming Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program; the project has a design concept and scope that has not changed significantly from those in the Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program; project analyses have used the latest planning assumptions and Environmental Protection Agency-approved emissions models; and in particulate matter areas, the project complies with any control measures in the State Implementation Plan. Furthermore, additional analyses (known as hot-spot analyses) may be required for projects located in carbon monoxide and particulate matter nonattainment or maintenance areas to examine localized air quality impacts.

Affected Environment

[This section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] An Air Quality Report was completed for the project in March 2020, the Air Quality Report was updated in April 2023 and October 2023. The purpose of the report is to document the anticipated air quality effects of the proposed project and address both state and federal air quality standards with the intent to satisfy the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The project is near the cities of Lindsay and Exeter in Tulare County within the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin. The San Joaquin Valley, almost 300 miles long, stretches from the Tehachapi Mountains in the south to the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta in the north. The Sierra Nevada forms the eastern boundary, while the lower coastal ranges form the boundary on the west.

The San Joaquin Valley is characterized by hot, dry summers and cool winters. Precipitation is directly related to latitude and elevation, with the southern portion of the San Joaquin Valley accumulating an average of less than 6 inches of rain per year and the northern portion receiving about 16 inches per year. The average annual rainfall for Tulare County is about 12.7 inches per year. The rainy season is typically between November and April.

Weather and terrain influence the air quality in the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin. Seasonal differences in wind direction and temperature can provide relatively stable or stagnant weather conditions or unstable and varying weather conditions. Furthermore, the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin is surrounded by mountains to the south, east, and west, which can act to channel and restrict air movement.

The closest air monitor, the Visalia North Church Street air quality monitor at 310 North Church Street in Visalia, is about 10 miles from the project site at Location 2 and about 15 miles from Location 1 and Location 3. Tulare County is in attainment status for state and federal carbon monoxide ambient air

standards (see Table 2.8), so an analysis is not needed. Table 2.11 shows the state and federal attainment status for regulated pollutants.

Table 2.11 State and Federal Attainment Status for Regulated Pollutants

Pollutant	State Attainment Status	Federal Attainment Status
One-Hour Ozone (O_3)	Nonattainment	Nonattainment
Eight-Hour Ozone (O_3)	Nonattainment	Nonattainment/Extreme
Respirable Particulate Matter (PM_{10})	Nonattainment/Severe	Not Applicable
Fine Particulate Matter ($PM_{2.5}$)	Nonattainment	Nonattainment/Extreme
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	Nonattainment	Attainment
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2)	Nonattainment	Nonattainment
Sulfur Dioxide (SO_2)	Attainment/Unclassified	Attainment/Unclassified
Lead (Pb)	Attainment	Attainment/Unclassified
Visibility-Reducing Particles	Attainment	Nonattainment/Unclassified
Sulfates	Attainment	No Designation/Classification
Hydrogen Sulfide	Unclassified	Not Applicable
Vinyl Chloride	Attainment	Not Applicable

Source: Air Quality Report, March 2020.

The project is in an area that is in attainment-maintenance for the federal Respirable Particulate Matter standard and in nonattainment for the federal Fine Particulate Matter standard (see Table 2.11). It is nonattainment for both Respirable Particulate Matter and Fine Particulate Matter state standards. A conformity analysis for this project as “Not a Project of Air Quality Concern” was conducted and submitted to the San Joaquin Valley Council of Governments’ Directors’ Association Interagency Consultation Group. The project was submitted for Interagency Consultation on July 10, 2019, the Environmental Protection Agency concurred on September 6, 2019, and the Federal Highway Administration concurred on September 16, 2019, that the project was not a” Project of Air Quality Concern”. The project was resubmitted on June 23, 2023, and the Environmental Protection Agency concurred that Alternative 1.B and Alternative 2.B were not a “Project of Air Quality Concern”. However, concurrence was not received regarding Alternative 3.B (see Appendix H).

Figure 2-1 State and Federal Ambient Air Quality Standards

Ambient Air Quality Standards

Pollutant	Averaging Time	California Standards [1]		National Standards [2]		
		Concentration [3]	Method [4]	Primary [3,5]	Secondary [3,6]	Method [7]
Ozone (O_3)[8]	1 Hour	0.09 ppm (180 µg/m^3)	Ultraviolet Photometry	—	Same as Primary Standard	Ultraviolet Photometry
	8 Hour	0.070 ppm (137 µg/m^3)		0.070 ppm (137 µg/m^3)		
Respirable Particulate Matter (PM10)[9]	24 Hour	50 µg/m^3	Gravimetric or Beta Attenuation	150 µg/m^3	Same as Primary Standard	Inertial Separation and Gravimetric Analysis
	Annual Arithmetic Mean	20 µg/m^3		—		
Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5)[9]	24 Hour	—	—	35 µg/m^3	Same as Primary Standard	Inertial Separation and Gravimetric Analysis
	Annual Arithmetic Mean	12 µg/m^3	Gravimetric or Beta Attenuation	12.0 µg/m^3	15 µg/m^3	
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	1 Hour	20 ppm (23 mg/m^3)	Non-Dispersive Infrared Photometry (NDIR)	35 ppm (40 mg/m^3)	—	Non-Dispersive Infrared Photometry (NDIR)
	8 Hour	9.0 ppm (10 mg/m^3)		9 ppm (10 mg/m^3)	—	
	8 Hour (Lake Tahoe)	6 ppm (7 mg/m^3)		—	—	
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO_2)[10]	1 Hour	0.18 ppm (339 µg/m^3)	Gas Phase Chemiluminescence	100 ppb (188 µg/m^3)	—	Gas Phase Chemiluminescence
	Annual Arithmetic Mean	0.030 ppm (57 µg/m^3)		0.053 ppm (100 µg/m^3)	Same as Primary Standard	
Sulfur Dioxide (SO_2)[11]	1 Hour	0.25 ppm (655 µg/m^3)	Ultraviolet Fluorescence	75 ppb (196 µg/m^3)	—	Ultraviolet Flourescence; Spectrophotometry (Pararosaniline Method)
	3 Hour	—		—	0.5 ppm (1300 µg/m^3)	
	24 Hour	0.04 ppm (105 µg/m^3)		0.14 ppm (for certain areas)[11]	—	
	Annual Arithmetic Mean	—		0.030 ppm (for certain areas)[11]	—	
Lead[12,13]	30 Day Average	1.5 µg/m^3	Atomic Absorption	—	—	High Volume Sampler and Atomic Absorption
	Calendar Quarter	—		1.5 µg/m^3 (for certain areas)[12]	Same as Primary Standard	
	Rolling 3-Month Average	—		0.15 µg/m^3		
Visibility Reducing Particles[14]	8 Hour	See footnote 14	Beta Attenuation and Transmittance through Filter Tape	No National Standards		
Sulfates	24 Hour	25 µg/m^3	Ion Chromatography			
Hydrogen Sulfide	1 Hour	0.03 ppm (42 µg/m^3)	Ultraviolet Fluorescence			
Vinyl Chloride[12]	24 Hour	0.01 ppm (26 µg/m^3)	Gas Chromatography			

See footnotes on next page ...

For more information please call ARB-PIO at (916) 322-2990

California Air Resources Board (5/4/16)

1. California standards for ozone, carbon monoxide (except 8-hour Lake Tahoe), sulfur dioxide (1 and 24 hour), nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter (PM10, PM2.5, and visibility reducing particles), are values that are not to be exceeded. All others are not to be equaled or exceeded. California ambient air quality standards are listed in the Table of Standards in Section 70200 of Title 17 of the California Code of Regulations.
2. National standards (other than ozone, particulate matter, and those based on annual arithmetic mean) are not to be exceeded more than once a year. The ozone standard is attained when the fourth highest 8-hour concentration measured at each site in a year, averaged over three years, is equal to or less than the standard. For PM10, the 24 hour standard is attained when the expected number of days per calendar year with a 24-hour average concentration above 150 $\mu g/m^3$ is equal to or less than one. For PM2.5, the 24 hour standard is attained when 98 percent of the daily concentrations, averaged over three years, are equal to or less than the standard. Contact the U.S. EPA for further clarification and current national policies.
3. Concentration expressed first in units in which it was promulgated. Equivalent units given in parentheses are based upon a reference temperature of 25°C and a reference pressure of 760 torr. Most measurements of air quality are to be corrected to a reference temperature of 25°C and a reference pressure of 760 torr; ppm in this table refers to ppm by volume, or micromoles of pollutant per mole of gas.
4. Any equivalent measurement method which can be shown to the satisfaction of the ARB to give equivalent results at or near the level of the air quality standard may be used.
5. National Primary Standards: The levels of air quality necessary, with an adequate margin of safety to protect the public health.
6. National Secondary Standards: The levels of air quality necessary to protect the public welfare from any known or anticipated adverse effects of a pollutant.
7. Reference method as described by the U.S. EPA. An "equivalent method" of measurement may be used but must have a "consistent relationship to the reference method" and must be approved by the U.S. EPA.
8. On October 1, 2015, the national 8-hour ozone primary and secondary standards were lowered from 0.075 to 0.070 ppm.
9. On December 14, 2012, the national annual PM2.5 primary standard was lowered from 15 $\mu g/m^3$ to 12.0 $\mu g/m^3$. The existing national 24-hour PM2.5 standards (primary and secondary) were retained at 35 $\mu g/m^3$, as was the annual secondary standard of 15 $\mu g/m^3$. The existing 24-hour PM10 standards (primary and secondary) of 150 $\mu g/m^3$ also were retained. The form of the annual primary and secondary standards is the annual mean, averaged over 3 years.
10. To attain the 1-hour national standard, the 3-year average of the annual 98th percentile of the 1-hour daily maximum concentrations at each site must not exceed 100 ppb. Note that the national 1-hour standard is in units of parts per billion (ppb). California standards are in units of parts per million (ppm). To directly compare the national 1-hour standard to the California standards the units can be converted from ppb to ppm. In this case, the national standard of 100 ppb is identical to 0.100 ppm.
11. On June 2, 2010, a new 1-hour SO_2 standard was established and the existing 24-hour and annual primary standards were revoked. To attain the 1-hour national standard, the 3-year average of the annual 99th percentile of the 1-hour daily maximum concentrations at each site must not exceed 75 ppb. The 1971 SO_2 national standards (24-hour and annual) remain in effect until one year after an area is designated for the 2010 standard, except that in areas designated nonattainment for the 1971 standards, the 1971 standards remain in effect until implementation plans to attain or maintain the 2010 standards are approved.

    Note that the 1-hour national standard is in units of parts per billion (ppb). California standards are in units of parts per million (ppm). To directly compare the 1-hour national standard to the California standard the units can be converted to ppm. In this case, the national standard of 75 ppb is identical to 0.075 ppm.
12. The ARB has identified lead and vinyl chloride as 'toxic air contaminants' with no threshold level of exposure for adverse health effects determined. These actions allow for the implementation of control measures at levels below the ambient concentrations specified for these pollutants.
13. The national standard for lead was revised on October 15, 2008 to a rolling 3-month average. The 1978 lead standard (1.5 $\mu g/m^3$ as a quarterly average) remains in effect until one year after an area is designated for the 2008 standard, except that in areas designated nonattainment for the 1978 standard, the 1978 standard remains in effect until implementation plans to attain or maintain the 2008 standard are approved.
14. In 1989, the ARB converted both the general statewide 10-mile visibility standard and the Lake Tahoe 30-mile visibility standard to instrumental equivalents, which are "extinction of 0.23 per kilometer" and "extinction of 0.07 per kilometer" for the statewide and Lake Tahoe Air Basin standards, respectively.

For more information please call ARB-PIO at (916) 322-2990 **California Air Resources Board (5/4/16)**

Environmental Consequences

Regional Conformity

[This section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] This project is included in the new Tulare County Association of Governments' Regional Transportation Plan/Federal Transportation Improvement Program with corresponding air conformity analysis.

The final regional conformity determination includes coordination with the Federal Highway Administration to ensure any future formal amendments to the Regional Transportation Plan/Federal Transportation Improvement Program list the project correctly. The Federal Highway Administration determined that this project met the regional conformity requirements on October 13, 2023 (see Appendix I).

Project Conformity

The project is subject to conformity and is considered a regionally significant project. The project sits within the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin and is under the jurisdiction of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. Tulare County is in nonattainment for the federal 8-hour ozone and PM2.5 standards and in attainment for the federal PM10 standard.

Under 40 Code of Federal Regulations Section 93.109, a project-level hot-spot analysis for conformity is required. The project was submitted for Interagency Consultation on July 10, 2019, the Environmental Protection Agency concurred on September 6, 2019, and the Federal Highway Administration concurred on September 16, 2019, that the project was not a" Project of Air Quality Concern". The project was resubmitted on June 23, 2023, and the Environmental Protection Agency concurred that Alternative 1.B and Alternative 2.B were not a "Project of Air Quality Concern". However, concurrence was not received regarding Alternative 3.B (see Appendix H). Alternative 3.B has been eliminated from the scope of work for this project. Therefore, a project-level hot-spot analysis for conformity is not required.

For project-level conformity, a project may not contribute to any new localized Carbon Monoxide, Fine Particulate Matter, and/or Respirable Particulate Matter violations or delay the timely attainment of any National Ambient Air Quality Standards or any required interim emission reductions or other milestones during the time frame of the transportation plan (or regional emissions analysis). No project-level conformity requirements apply to Ozone since it is considered a regional pollutant. The project will not interfere with the implementation of any transportation control measures.

Particulate Matter Analysis

The project is in a federal Fine Particulate Matter nonattainment area and a federal attainment-maintenance Respirable Particulate Matter area and requires a full qualitative Fine Particulate Matter and Respirable Particulate Matter hot-spot analysis under 40 Code of Federal Regulations 93.123(b)(1)(i).

A qualitative hot-spot analysis was submitted to the Model Coordinating Committee in July 2019. Concurrence that this was "Not a Project of Air Quality Concern" was received from the Federal Highway Administration and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in September 2019. The project was resubmitted on June 23, 2023, and the Environmental Protection Agency

concurred that Alternative 1.B and Alternative 2.B were not a "Project of Air Quality Concern". However, concurrence was not received regarding Alternative 3.B (see Appendix H). Alternative 3.B has been eliminated from the scope of work for this project. As such, the project is not expected to cause an increase in particulate matter violations over the state or federal standards.

Mobile Source Air Toxics

These pollutants are a subset of the 188 air toxics defined in the Clean Air Act and are now federally regulated under 40 Code of Federal Regulations Section 1502.22 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Mobile source air toxics are 21 compounds emitted from highway vehicles and off-road equipment. The nine priority mobile source toxics are acrolein, acetaldehyde, benzene, butadiene, diesel particulate matter, ethylbenzene, formaldehyde, naphthalene, and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). The Federal Highway Administration issued interim guidance on October 18, 2016, for analysis in National Environmental Policy Act documents. There are no existing ambient air standards for the nine priority toxics. Currently, available technical tools do not enable us to predict the project-specific health impacts, so only qualitative analysis is conducted.

The Federal Highway Administration has developed a tiered approach for analyzing mobile source air toxics. Depending on the specific project circumstances, the Federal Highway Administration has identified three levels of analysis:

- No analysis for exempt projects with no potential for meaningful mobile source air toxics effects
- Qualitative analysis for projects with low potential mobile source air toxics effects
- Quantitative analysis to differentiate alternatives for projects with higher potential mobile source air toxics

The Lindsay Operational Improvements project best falls into the category of low potential mobile source air toxics effects, which requires a qualitative analysis. There are no sensitive land uses within 500 feet of the proposed project for either Build Alternative. For each alternative in this project, the amount of mobile source air toxics emitted will be proportional to the vehicle miles traveled, which equals the annual average daily traffic times miles length of the project times 365 days, if other variables, such as fleet mix, are the same for each alternative. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's MOVES2014 model and the EMFAC (Emissions FACtors) model used in California, emissions of all the priority mobile source air toxics decrease as the vehicle speed increases.

Regardless of the alternative chosen, emissions will likely be lower than present levels in the design year because of the Environmental Protection Agency's national control programs that are projected to reduce annual mobile source air toxics emissions by over 90 percent between 2010 and 2050 (Updated Interim Guidance on Mobile Source Air Toxic Analysis in NEPA Documents, Federal Highway Administration, October 12, 2016). Local conditions may differ from these national projections in terms of fleet mix and turnover, vehicle miles traveled, growth rates, and local control measures. However, the magnitude of the Environmental Protection Agency-projected reductions is so great (even after accounting for vehicle miles traveled growth) that mobile source air toxics emissions in the study area are likely to be lower in the future in nearly all cases.

Construction Conformity

Construction activities will not last for more than five years at any of the Build Alternatives, so construction-related emissions do not need to be included in regional and project-level conformity analysis (40 Code of Federal Regulations Section 93.123(c)(5)).

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

See Section 2.4.1 for avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures for construction impacts related to air quality.

2.2.4 Noise and Vibration

Regulatory Setting

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and the California Environmental Quality Act provide the broad basis for analyzing and abating highway traffic noise effects. The intent of these laws is to promote the general welfare and to foster a healthy environment. The requirements for noise analysis and consideration of noise abatement and/or mitigation, however, differ between the National Environmental Policy Act and the California Environmental Quality Act.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

CEQA requires a strictly baseline versus build analysis to assess whether a proposed project will have a noise impact. If a proposed project is determined to have a significant noise impact under CEQA, then CEQA dictates that mitigation measures must be incorporated into the project unless those measures are not feasible. The rest of this section will focus on the NEPA/Title 23 Part 772 of the Code of Federal Regulations (23 CFR 772) noise analysis; please see Chapter 3 of this document for further information on noise analysis under CEQA.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 23 Code of Federal Regulations 772

For highway transportation projects with Federal Highway Administration involvement (and Caltrans, as assigned), the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970 and its implementing regulations (23 Code of Federal Regulations 772) govern the analysis and abatement of traffic noise impacts. The regulations require that potential noise impacts in areas of frequent human use be identified during the planning and design of a highway project. The regulations include noise abatement criteria that are used to determine when a noise impact will occur.

The noise abatement criteria differ depending on the type of land use under analysis. For example, the noise abatement criteria for residences (67 decibels) is lower than the noise abatement criteria for commercial areas (72 decibels).

The following table lists the noise abatement criteria for use in the NEPA/23 Code of Federal Regulations 772 analysis.

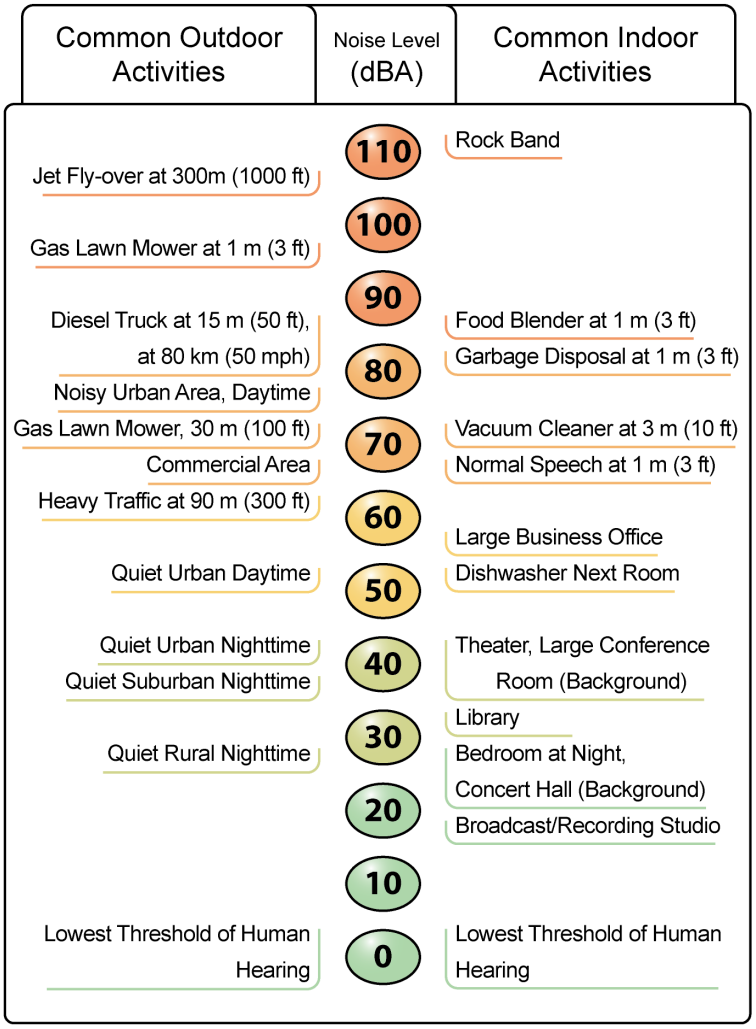
Undeveloped lands are permitted for activity categories B and C.

Table 2.12 Noise Abatement Criteria

Activity Category	Noise Abatement Criteria, Hourly A-Weighted Noise Level, Leq(h)	Description of Activity Category
A	57 (Exterior)	Lands on which serenity and quiet are of extraordinary significance and serve an important public need and where the preservation of those qualities is essential if the area is to continue to serve its intended purpose.
B	67 (Exterior)	Residential.
C	67 (Exterior)	Active sport areas, amphitheaters, auditoriums, campgrounds, cemeteries, day care centers, hospitals, libraries, medical facilities, parks, picnic areas, places of worship, playgrounds, public meeting rooms, public or nonprofit institutional structures, radio studios, recording studios, recreation areas, Section 4(f) sites, schools, television studios, trails, and trail crossings.
D	52 (Interior)	Auditoriums, day care centers, hospitals, libraries, medical facilities, places of worship, public meeting rooms, public or nonprofit institutional structures, radio studios, recording studios, schools, and television studios.
E	72 (Exterior)	Hotels, motels, offices, restaurants/bars, and other developed lands, properties, or activities not included in A–D or F.
F	No Noise Abatement Criteria—reporting only	Agriculture, airports, bus yards, emergency services, industrial, logging, maintenance facilities, manufacturing, mining, rail yards, retail facilities, shipyards, utilities (water resources, water treatment, electrical, etc.), and warehousing.
G	No Noise Abatement Criteria—reporting only	Undeveloped lands that are not permitted.

Figure 2-2 lists the noise levels of common activities to enable readers to compare the actual and predicted highway noise levels discussed in this section with common activities.

Figure 2-2 Noise Levels of Common Activities



According to the Caltrans *Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol for New Highway Construction and Reconstruction Projects, May 2011*, a noise impact occurs when the predicted future noise level with the project substantially exceeds the existing noise level (defined as 12 decibels or more) or when the future noise level with the project approaches or exceeds the noise abatement criteria. A noise level is considered to approach the noise abatement criteria if it is within 1 decibels of the noise abatement criteria.

If it is determined that the project will have noise impacts, then potential abatement measures must be considered. Noise abatement measures that are determined to be reasonable and feasible at the time of final design are incorporated into the project plans and specifications. This document discusses noise abatement measures that will likely be incorporated into the project.

The Caltrans Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol sets forth the criteria for determining when an abatement measure is reasonable and feasible. Feasibility of noise abatement is basically an engineering concern. Noise abatement must be predicted to reduce noise by at least 5 decibels at an impacted receptor to be considered feasible from an acoustical perspective. It must also be possible to design and construct the noise abatement measure for it to be considered feasible. Factors that affect the design and constructability of noise abatement include, but are not limited to, safety, barrier height, topography, drainage, access requirements for driveways, presence of local cross streets, underground utilities, other noise sources in the area, and maintenance of the abatement measure. The overall reasonableness of noise abatement is determined by the following three factors: 1) the noise reduction design goal of 7 decibels at one or more impacted receptors; 2) the cost of noise abatement; and 3) the viewpoints of benefited receptors (including property owners and residents of the benefited receptors).

Affected Environment

A Noise Study Report was completed for the project in December 2019.

The project area consists of four types of receivers, as identified in the noise abatement criteria category. The sensitive receptors associated with this project are described below.

Receiver 1 (R1)

This receiver is on the north side of State Route 65 at 1647 West Tulare Road and represents a single-family residence (Activity Category B) land use. The house is about 93 feet from the edge of the shoulder of State Route 65. The noise level measurement at this receiver will assist in determining future noise level impacts as a result of the Build Alternatives at Location 1 and Location 3.

Receiver 2 (R2)

This receiver is on the east side of State Route 65 and represents an agricultural field (Activity Category F) land use. The receiver was placed about 100 feet from the edge of State Route 65, so existing noise measurements could be defined for this land use. There are no abatement criteria for this activity category, and the noise level measurement was reported at this receiver for informational purposes only. The noise level measurement at this receiver will assist in determining future noise level impacts as a result of the Build Alternatives at Location 1 and Location 3.

Receiver 3 (R3)

This receiver is on the north side of Tulare Road and just east of Oak Street at 760 Oak Avenue and represents a single-family residence (Activity Category B) land use. The house is about 20 feet from the edge of the

shoulder of Oak Street. The noise level measurement at this receiver will assist in determining future noise level impacts as a result of the Build Alternatives at Location 1 and Location 3.

Receiver 4 (R4)

This receiver is on the north side of State Route 65 and east of Oak Street and represents a single-family residence (Activity Category B) land use. The single-family residence is about 30 feet from the edge of the shoulder of Oak Street. The noise level measurement at this receiver will assist in determining future noise level impacts as a result of the Build Alternatives at Location 1 and Location 3.

Environmental Consequences

The Build Alternatives at Location 1 and Location 3 are identified as a Type 1 project and will result in a noise impact that requires consideration of noise abatement.

The Build Alternative at Location 2 is not identified as a Type 1 project and will not result in a noise impact that requires consideration of noise abatement.

A noise study field investigation was done in May and July 2019 as close as possible to the highest traffic noise hour (10:00 a.m.). Table 2.13 shows the results of the existing noise environment measurements.

Table 2.13 Short-Term Noise Measurement Results

Receiver Number	Street Address, City	Land Use	Noise Level Meter Distance From Right-of-Way (Feet)	Measure Date	Start Time (AM)	End Time (AM)	Duration (Minutes)	Measure, Leq, dBA Equivalent Sound Level (Decibels)
R1	1647 West Tulare Road, Lindsay	Residential	93	5/30/2019	8:55	9:05	10	64
R2	Agricultural field, Lindsay	Agriculture	100	5/30/2019	9:50	10:00	10	63
R3	1260 Delta Street, Lindsay	Residential	20	7/22/2019	10:10	10:20	10	63
R4	760 Oak Avenue, Lindsay	Residential	30	7/22/2019	10:30	10:40	10	61

Source: Caltrans Noise Study Report, December 2019.

The noise study was conducted to determine the future traffic noise impacts at receptors in the vicinity of the project. Potential long-term noise impacts associated with project operations are solely from traffic noise. Traffic noise was evaluated for the worst-case traffic condition. With the use of a noise model, the four receptor locations were evaluated. The noise model was used to predict future noise levels at sensitive receptors for the design year. The future noise analysis included the design year noise levels for the No-Build Alternatives and the Build Alternatives. The design year is 20 years after the project has been opened to traffic. The future noise environment and associated impacts on sensitive receptors are detailed below.

Alternative 1.B

Modeling results indicate that predicted noise levels for the design year do not approach or exceed the noise abatement criteria for the following land uses:

- Activity Category F: There are no noise abatement criteria for land uses associated with this activity category.
- Activity Category B: The predicted noise levels in the design year under this alternative will not approach or exceed the noise abatement criteria for the designated land use. The design year noise levels will not substantially exceed the existing noise level for the designated land use.

Alternative 2.B

- Activity Category F: There are no noise abatement criteria for land uses associated with this activity category.

Alternative 3.B

- Activity Category F: There are no noise abatement criteria for land uses associated with this activity category.
- Activity Categories B and E: The predicted noise levels in the design year under this alternative will not approach or exceed the noise abatement criteria for all the receivers representing these categories except for one residence at 1524 West Mariposa Street. The design year noise level at this receiver is substantial since it will exceed the existing noise level by 15 decibels. Noise abatement must be considered for this alternative.

Measurements taken at the residence on Mariposa Street show that the existing noise level at that location is 49 decibels. The future noise level at this residence with the project is predicted to be 64 decibels. Because the predicted future noise level will exceed the existing noise level by 15 decibels, the home will be adversely affected by noise. To achieve a 7 decibels reduction, a 12-foot-high noise wall will be needed. If the total cost of the wall at this location is less than the total cost allowance, then the wall will likely be incorporated into the project. The total cost allowance, calculated as directed by the Caltrans Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol, is $107,000. The current estimated cost of the wall is $600,000. Therefore, the noise wall will not be incorporated into the project.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Noise Abatement Measures

See Section 2.4.2 for avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures for construction impacts related to noise.

2.3 Biological Environment

2.3.1 Natural Communities

Natural communities generally consist of unaltered landscapes dominated by native vegetation. These communities support a diversity of wildlife species, including special-status species.

Regulatory Setting

This section of the document discusses natural communities of concern. The focus of this section is on biological communities, not individual plant or animal species. This section also includes information on wildlife corridors and habitat fragmentation. Wildlife corridors are areas of habitat used by wildlife for seasonal or daily migration. Habitat fragmentation involves the potential for dividing sensitive habitats and thereby lessening their biological value.

Habitat areas that have been designated as critical habitats under the Federal Endangered Species Act are discussed below in the Threatened and Endangered Species Section 2.3.3.

Affected Environment

This section focuses on the issues covered in the Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts prepared for the project in June 2020.

The Biological Study Area is defined as the project impact area or the area that may be directly, indirectly, temporarily, or permanently affected by construction and construction-related activities. It includes the project footprint and a surrounding buffer.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Location 1 and Location 3 are very close geographically, and they share the same Biological Study Area, which is about 493 acres in size.

Both locations are next to the west edge of Lindsay. The topography is flat, and the main land use is agricultural. Some residential and commercial parcels, along with their landscaped areas, are present, mostly on the east side of State Route 65.

Habitat types in this area include orchards, pasture or agricultural fields, bare or ruderal ground, landscaped areas, and built-up property.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

The Biological Study Area for Location 2 is about 215 acres in size. The topography is flat, and the land use is completely agricultural.

Habitat types in this area include orchards and bare or ruderal ground.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

As mentioned above, Location 1 and Location 3 share the same Biological Study Area and habitat types.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B, Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternatives at Location 1 and Location 3 will permanently impact about 31.2 acres of orchards, 1.4 acres of pasture or agricultural field, 9.5 acres of bare/ruderal ground, 0.2 acre of landscape area, and 2.2 acres of built-up area, including portions of several residential properties. An unknown, but low, number of landscape trees (not including orchard trees) may need to be removed. Temporary impacts may occur to about 26.8 acres of orchards, 5.1 acres of pasture or agricultural field, 5.1 acres of bare or ruderal ground, 1.3 acres of landscape area, and 8.1 acres of built-up area.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will permanently impact 0.8 acre of orchards and 4.53 acres of bare or ruderal ground. There may be impacts to about 5.6 acres of orchards, 1.4 acres of agricultural fields, and 1.9 acres of bare or ruderal ground. The removal of landscape trees is not expected at this location.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

No avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures will be required for natural communities.

2.3.2 Plant Species

Regulatory Setting

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife have regulatory responsibility for the protection of special-status plant species. “Special-status” species are selected for protection because they are rare and/or subject to population and habitat declines. Special status is a

general term for species that are provided varying levels of regulatory protection. The highest level of protection is given to threatened and endangered species; these are species that are formally listed or proposed for listing as endangered or threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act and/or the California Endangered Species Act. Please see the Threatened and Endangered Species Section 2.3.3 in this document for detailed information about these species.

This section of the document discusses all other special-status plant species, including California Department of Fish and Wildlife species of special concern, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service candidate species, and California Native Plant Society rare and endangered plants.

The regulatory requirements for the Federal Endangered Species Act can be found at 16 U.S. Code Section 1531, et seq. See also 50 Code of Federal Regulations Part 402. The regulatory requirements for the California Endangered Species Act can be found in California Fish and Game Code, Section 2050, et seq. Caltrans projects are also subject to the Native Plant Protection Act, found in California Fish and Game Code, Sections 1900-1913, and the California Environmental Quality Act, found in California Public Resources Code, Sections 21000-21177.

Affected Environment

A Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts was completed for the project in June 2020. This section provides a detailed description of one special-status plant that may occur or have the potential to occur within the Biological Study Area.

Special-status plants are considered to be of “special concern” based on federal, state, or local laws regulating their development, limited distributions, and/or the presence of habitat required by the special-status plants occurring onsite.

Research conducted by the project biologist showed one record of the spiny-sepaled button-celery near the City of Exeter. However, this record dates from 1905, and it is unlikely that this population is still surviving.

A site visit was made in May 2019 to look for special-status plants, including the spiny-sepaled button-celery and habitat conditions that may support special-status plants.

Spiny-Sepaled Button-Celery (Eryngium spinosepalum)

The spiny-sepaled button-celery is an annual or perennial herb that can live in vernal pools, freshwater wetlands, and valley and foothill grassland habitats. This plant can be found in depressions and roadside ditches that retain water longer than in other areas. The plant can survive between elevations of 330 feet to 4,170 feet, and it usually blooms from April through May.

This plant can occur from San Joaquin County south to Kern County on both the east and west sides of the San Joaquin Valley. The foothills of the Sierra Nevada, Tehachapi, Transverse, and Coast mountain ranges can also provide habitat for this plant.

This plant is considered rare, threatened, or endangered throughout the areas in which it can survive. The main threats to this plant are habitat loss due to development, water diversions or shortages, agriculture, livestock grazing, and roadside maintenance practices such as mowing, disking, and herbicide applications.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

As previously discussed, habitat types in this area include orchards, pasture or agricultural fields, bare or ruderal ground, landscaped areas, and built-up property.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

As previously discussed, habitat types in this area include orchards and bare or ruderal ground.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

As previously discussed, habitat types in this area include orchards, pasture or agricultural fields, bare or ruderal ground, landscaped areas, and built-up property.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B, Alternative 3.B

The Build Alternatives at Location 1 and Location 3 will have temporary and permanent impacts on orchards, pasture or agricultural fields, bare or ruderal ground, landscaped areas, and built-up property. A site visit was made by the project biologist in May 2019; the biologist concluded that this project area does not provide habitat for the spiny-sepaled button-celery. In addition to the lack of habitat, the lack of sightings of the plant makes it highly unlikely that the plant will be present within the project area.

Alternative 2.B

The Build Alternative at Location 2 will have permanent and temporary impacts on orchards and bare or ruderal ground. A site visit was conducted by the project biologist in May 2019; the biologist concluded that this project area may provide habitat for the spiny-sepaled button-celery. The bare or ruderal areas along the road margins and median could provide the

depressions or ponding areas that the plant prefers. However, because these areas are maintained by activities, such as mowing and herbicide application, the likelihood of the plant occurring at this location is very small.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

While the likelihood that the spiny-sepaled button-celery will be found at Alternative 2.B is very small, Caltrans proposes the following avoidance and minimization measures to ensure the project will not result in measurable impacts to this species:

- A botanical survey of the project impact area at Alternative 2.B will be performed during the appropriate flowering season before the start of project activities.
- Any spiny-sepaled button-celery that is identified during the botanical survey at Alternative 2.B will be protected by an Environmentally Sensitive Area buffer. The Environmentally Sensitive Area will be marked with bright orange flagging or fencing and provide a minimum 10-foot buffer of the plant population.
- Any spiny-sepaled button-celery within the project impact area at Alternative 2.B that cannot be protected by the Environmentally Sensitive Area will be dug up so the soil around the roots remains intact, kept moist, placed in a protected area, and replanted as close to the original discovery location as possible after project construction has been completed. For plants that have already gone to seed, the topsoil layer around the plant will be removed, placed into a protective container, then spread on the ground as close to the original discovery location as possible after project construction has been completed. Replanting and soil spreading will occur only in areas that have spiny-sepaled button-celery habitat, such as depressions and ditches that can hold water longer than other areas.
- Worker Environmental Awareness Training will be performed for all project crew members that are involved in ground-disturbing activities at Alternative 2.B. The training will include information about the special-status species in question and the project-specific avoidance and minimization measures that have been implemented into project construction. The training will also provide an opportunity to explain the legal ramifications of not properly performing or of dismissing the implemented avoidance and minimization measures. Training participants will document their participation by signing an attendance sheet. Training will be required for any new crew members that are introduced to the project.
- Because of the low likelihood of occurrence and relatively small impact area, compensatory mitigation for the spiny-sepaled button-celery is not proposed.

2.3.3 Threatened and Endangered Species

Regulatory Setting

The main federal law protecting threatened and endangered species is the Federal Endangered Species Act: 16 U.S. Code Section 1531, et seq. See also 50 Code of Federal Regulations Part 402. This act and later amendments provide for the conservation of endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. Under Section 7 of this act, federal agencies, such as the Federal Highway Administration (and Caltrans, as assigned), are required to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (known as the NOAA Fisheries Service) to ensure that they are not undertaking, funding, permitting, or authorizing actions likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat. Critical habitat is defined as geographic locations critical to the existence of a threatened or endangered species. The outcome of consultation under Section 7 may include a Biological Opinion with an Incidental Take statement or a Letter of Concurrence. Section 3 of the Federal Endangered Species Act defines take as "harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture or collect or any attempt at such conduct."

California has enacted a similar law at the state level, the California Endangered Species Act, California Fish and Game Code Section 2050, et seq. The California Endangered Species Act emphasizes early consultation to avoid potential impacts on rare, endangered, and threatened species and to develop appropriate planning to offset project-caused losses of listed species populations and their essential habitats. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife is the agency responsible for implementing the California Endangered Species Act. Section 2080 of the California Fish and Game Code prohibits "take" of any species determined to be an endangered species or a threatened species. Take is defined in Section 86 of the California Fish and Game Code as "hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill, or attempt to hunt, pursue, catch, capture, or kill." The California Endangered Species Act allows for take incidental to otherwise lawful development projects; for these actions, an incidental take permit is issued by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. For species listed under both the Federal Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act requiring a Biological Opinion under Section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife may also authorize impacts to the California Endangered Species Act species by issuing a Consistency Determination under Section 2080.1 of the California Fish and Game Code.

Another federal law, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, was established to conserve and manage fishery resources found off the coast, as well as anadromous species and Continental Shelf fishery resources of the United States, by exercising (A)

sovereign rights for the purposes of exploring, exploiting, conserving, and managing all fish within the exclusive economic zone established by Presidential Proclamation 5030, dated March 10, 1983, and (B) exclusive fishery management authority beyond the exclusive economic zone over such anadromous species, Continental Shelf fishery resources, and fishery resources in special areas.

Affected Environment

This section focuses on issues covered in the Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts prepared for the project in June 2020. This section provides a detailed description of two threatened and endangered species that may occur or have the potential to occur within the Biological Study Area.

Research done by the project biologist found that the San Joaquin kit fox has a low potential to occur at Location 1 and Location 3. Although the Swainson's hawk was not included in the species query results, it has the potential to occur at all three project locations.

San Joaquin Kit Fox (Vulpes macrotis mutica)

The San Joaquin kit fox is federally listed as endangered and state listed as threatened. It is the smallest species of the dog family in North America. These foxes have small slim bodies, and their color can vary from buff or tan to grizzled or yellow-grey.

The San Joaquin kit fox is found mostly in the southern half of the state in dry annual grasslands or grassy open stages of vegetation dominated by scattered shrubs and brush. It is mostly carnivorous, but can also feed on insects and some varieties of vegetation.

San Joaquin kit foxes dig their own dens in open flat areas with loose-textured soils that support scattered, shrubby vegetation. Their litters average about four pups, born usually between February and April. San Joaquin kit foxes are active throughout the year and are mostly nocturnal, but they occasionally can be seen during the daytime during cool weather periods.

Swainson's Hawk (Buteo swainsoni)

The Swainson's hawk is state listed as threatened and is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The Swainson's hawk can be found during summer months in the Central Valley of California. During winter months, it can be found in South America.

The Swainson's hawk is a medium-sized, slim bird with long, pointed wings and dark flight feathers. It hunts for food in grasslands, grain and alfalfa fields, and livestock pastures. It eats rodents, small mammals, large insects, amphibians, reptiles, other birds, and sometimes fish.

Swainson's hawks generally rest in trees, but they rest on the ground if trees are not present. They breed in open stands of juniper-sage flats, riparian areas, and oak savannahs in the Central Valley. Breeding areas are normally close to food sources. The Swainson's hawk can also nest in landscape trees near human structures and rarely in orchards. Breeding occurs from late March to late August, with peak activity occurring in late May or July. The Swainson's hawk usually produces about two to four eggs in the nest, and the eggs take 25 to 28 days to hatch.

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

As previously discussed, habitat types in this area include orchards, pasture or agricultural fields, bare or ruderal ground, landscaped areas, and built-up property.

San Joaquin Kit Fox

The project area has two records of San Joaquin kit fox occurrence. One record shows an occurrence about 3 miles northwest of the project area in 1975. Another San Joaquin kit fox was found dead on Spruce Avenue, about 1.3 miles north of the project area, in 2001 and was presumed to have been killed by a vehicle.

The nearest location that provides large areas of potential San Joaquin kit fox habitat is in the Elephant Back Hills region, 2.8 miles east of the project area. The project area contains just under 41 acres of potential habitat in ruderal and bare areas, a good portion of which is on roadside shoulders and medians. The open parcels are mainly on the north and east sides of State Route 65 and are mixed with agricultural parcels, developed areas, and orchards. Bare or ruderal parcels may be actively maintained, which could limit their ability to provide habitat.

Swainson's Hawk

The nearest record of a Swainson's hawk occurrence (a nesting pair with young, recorded in 2017) is about 3 miles west of the project location. A site visit was made in May 2019, and no Swainson's hawks were seen. However, large landscape trees that could provide nesting and open fields that could provide a food source are present in the project area.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

As previously discussed, habitat types in this area include orchards and bare or ruderal ground.

San Joaquin Kit Fox

The San Joaquin kit fox is not anticipated to occur within or near the project area. No records of occurrence are within a 2-mile radius of the project area. The result of a site visit by the project biologist in May 2019 indicated that the presence of a San Joaquin kit fox is unlikely. The closest potential habitat is about 1.1 miles southeast of the project area in the region around Badger Hill. Although the San Joaquin kit fox could travel through orchards and agricultural fields, there is no potential habitat for producing and caring for offspring nearby. The project area lacks vacant parcels or other features that may provide food sources for the San Joaquin kit fox.

Swainson's Hawk

The nearest record of a Swainson's hawk occurrence is the same occurrence recorded at Location 1 and Location 3 (a nesting pair with young, recorded in 2017). This recorded sighting is about 9 miles south of the project location. A site visit was made in May 2019, and no Swainson's hawks were seen. However, a red-tailed hawk was seen flying near the project area. The red-tailed hawk was near some large landscape trees around a residential property on the west side of the Friant-Kern Canal. The large landscape trees could provide nesting, but the area is lacking open fields that provide a food source for the Swainson's hawk.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

As previously discussed, Location 1 and Location 3 share the same Biological Study Area. The affected environment discussion for this project area is the same as for Location 1 mentioned above.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B, Alternative 2.B, Alternative 3.B

San Joaquin Kit Fox

The project is anticipated to permanently impact about 1.4 acres of agricultural fields or pastures, 9.5 acres of bare or ruderal habitat, and 0.2 acre of landscaped areas that may provide some lower-quality habitat for the San Joaquin kit fox. Temporary impacts include about 5 acres of agricultural fields or pastures, 5 acres of bare or ruderal land, and 1.3 acres of landscaped areas. The habitat quality in all the project areas is likely very low due to ongoing management and the close proximity to heavily traveled roadways and other human activity.

Even though a subpopulation of the San Joaquin kit fox has adapted to living within an urban environment in the Bakersfield area, there is no evidence it has done so within the built-up area of Lindsay. There are no known established dens, burrows, or movement corridors for this species within or

near the project areas. Impacts on individual kit foxes or on any habitat of moderate to good quality are not anticipated.

Swainson's Hawk

The project is anticipated to permanently impact about 1.4 acres of open fields or pastures and about 14 acres of bare or ruderal habitat that may provide foraging habitat for the Swainson's hawk. Temporary impacts include about 6.5 acres of open fields or pastures and about 7 acres of bare or ruderal land. However, bare or ruderal areas next to existing highways are very low-quality foraging habitat due to the risk of vehicle collisions.

An unknown, but presumably low, number of potentially suitable nesting trees may need to be removed at these work locations. One group of trees near Location 2 was identified as a potentially suitable nesting habitat, but the trees are farther than 500 feet from the project area on the south side of State Route 198, just west of the Friant-Kern Canal.

Orchards are not typical habitat for the Swainson's hawk, but the hawks have been documented to nest in orchard trees on at least one Caltrans project (May 7, 2015, State Route 99, Project Biologist). A total of about 32 acres of orchards will be permanently impacted in the project area. These orchards will be surveyed for nesting raptors during the appropriate season before construction, and any nests observed will be avoided per the minimization efforts described below.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

San Joaquin Kit Fox

[This avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] While the likelihood that the San Joaquin kit fox will be found on the project site is very small, Caltrans proposes the following avoidance and minimization efforts to ensure the project will not result in measurable impacts on this species:

- Surveys for the San Joaquin kit fox will be conducted no less than 14 days and no more than 30 days before the beginning of ground disturbance and/or construction activities or any project activity likely to impact the San Joaquin kit fox.
- Surveys will be conducted within potential habitat areas located in the proposed project boundary in addition to a 250-foot area outside the project footprint, where permitted, to identify habitat features.
- If natal/pupping dens are discovered within the project area or within 250 feet of the project boundary, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be immediately notified.
- The configuration of exclusion zones around San Joaquin kit fox dens should have a 50-foot radius around potential dens and a 100-foot radius

around known dens measured outward from the entrance or cluster of entrances.

- Disturbance to all San Joaquin kit fox dens (if any) will be avoided to the maximum extent possible.
- If known or potential kit fox dens or burrows are located or if signs of kit fox occupancy are observed within 250 feet of the project areas, a qualified biologist will be present at the construction site during initial ground-disturbing activities.
- To the extent possible, a biologist will be available on-call throughout construction when not present onsite.
- Due to the low likelihood of occurrence and low quality of impacted habitat, compensatory mitigation for this species is not proposed.

Swainson's Hawk

While the likelihood that the Swainson's hawk will be found on the project site is low, Caltrans proposes the following avoidance and minimization efforts to ensure the project will not result in measurable impacts on this species:

- Protocol nesting surveys will be conducted during the appropriate season before the start of construction to determine if any Swainson's hawks are nesting in proximity (0.5 mile) to the project areas.
- If nesting Swainson's hawks are seen onsite, then the nest site will be designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area, with a 500-foot radius no-work buffer around the nest until a qualified biologist determines that the young have fledged.
- A qualified biologist will monitor active nests during construction activities.
- A special provision for migratory birds will be included to ensure that no potential nesting migratory birds are affected during construction.
- Removal of trees within the project impact areas will be done outside the nesting season.
- Since orchards are an artificial, managed, and atypical habitat type, impacts to orchards are not proposed to be mitigated as loss of natural nesting habitat.

2.3.4 Invasive Species

Regulatory Setting

On February 3, 1999, President William J. Clinton signed Executive Order 13112, requiring federal agencies to combat the introduction or spread of invasive species in the United States. The order defines invasive species as "any species, including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material capable of propagating that species, that is not native to that ecosystem whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm

or harm to human health." Federal Highway Administration guidance issued August 10, 1999, directs the use of the State's invasive species list, maintained by the California Invasive Species Council, to define the invasive species that must be considered as part of the National Environmental Policy Act analysis for a proposed project.

Affected Environment

This section focuses on the issues covered in the Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts prepared for the project in June 2020.

Several non-native species were identified in the Biological Study Area. Eight are listed as invasive by the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the California Invasive Plant Council. Table 2.14 lists the eight invasive species observed in the Biological Study Area along with their California Department of Food and Agriculture and California Invasive Plant Council ratings.

Table 2.14 Invasive Species in the Biological Study Area

Common Name	Scientific Name	Food and Agriculture Rating	Invasive Plant Council Rating
Wild oat	*Avena fatua*	Not applicable	Moderate
Black mustard	*Brassica nigra*	Not applicable	Moderate
Ripgut brome	*Bromus diandrus*	Not applicable	Moderate
Red brome	*Bromus madritensis ssp. rubens*	Not applicable	High
Yellow star thistle	*Centaurea solstitialis*	C	High
Russian thistle	*Salsola tragus*	C	Limited
London rocket	*Sisymbrium irio*	Not applicable	Limited
Soft brome	*Bromus hordeaceus*	Not applicable	Limited

Source: Caltrans Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, November 2019.

Of the species listed, the Russian thistle and yellow star thistle are the only species assigned with a rating of C by the California Department of Food and Agriculture. This rating designated these species as a pest of known economic or environmental detriment, and if present in California, they are usually widespread. If found in the state, they are subject to regulations designed to slow down the spread or to suppress them at the discretion of the individual county agricultural commissioner. There is no state-enforced action other than providing for pest cleanliness.

The following are invasive species ratings assigned by the California Invasive Plant Council:

- High: Species with severe ecological impacts on physical processes, plant and animal communities, and vegetation structures. They are identified as having moderate-to-high rates of dispersal and establishment, and most are widely distributed.
- Moderate: Species with substantial and apparent, but generally not severe, ecological impacts on physical processes, plant and animal communities, and vegetation structure. They are identified as having moderate-to-high rates of dispersal, though their establishment is generally dependent upon disturbance. Their size and distribution may range from limited to widespread.
- Limited: Species that are invasive, but their impacts are minor on a statewide level, or there was not enough information to justify a higher score. They are identified as having low-to-moderate rates of invasiveness. Their size and distribution are generally limited, but they may be locally persistent and problematic.

Red brome and yellow star thistle are the only invasive species in the Biological Study Area with a rating of High by the California Invasive Plant Council.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative 1.B, Alternative 2.B, Alternative 3.B

An indirect impact that could occur due to construction activities is a further reduction of available habitat due to the introduction or spread of invasive species within the project footprint.

In compliance with Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species and guidance from the Federal Highway Administration, the landscaping and erosion control included in the project will not use species listed as invasive. None of the species on the California list of invasive species is used by Caltrans for erosion control or landscaping. All equipment and materials will be inspected for the presence of invasive species and cleaned if necessary. In areas of particular sensitivity, extra precautions will be taken if invasive species are found in or next to the construction areas. These include the inspection and cleaning of construction equipment and eradication strategies to be implemented should an invasion occur.

A standard special provision will be included in the construction contract that requires construction equipment and vehicles to be cleaned before entering and exiting the project.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

To prevent the further spread of these species and the introduction of new invasive species, the following measures will be implemented for the project:

- All areas disturbed by project construction will be reseeded with duff collected from non-native grassland during clearing and grubbing activities, followed by a native mix of hydroseed and compost.
- Additional specifications to prevent the spread of, or to eradicate, invasive species may be included in the construction contract.

2.4 Construction Impacts

2.4.1 Air Quality

Environmental Consequences

During construction, the project will generate air pollutants. The exhaust from construction equipment contains hydrocarbons, oxides of nitrogen, carbon monoxide, suspended particulate matter, and odors. However, the largest percentage of pollutants will be windblown dust generated during excavation, grading, hauling, and other various activities. The impacts of these activities will vary each day as construction progresses. Dust and odors during construction could cause occasional annoyance and complaints from residences along the state right-of-way.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

Caltrans Standard Specifications pertaining to dust control and dust palliative requirements are a required part of all construction contracts and should effectively reduce and control emission impacts during construction. The provisions of Caltrans Standard Specifications, Section 14-9.02 “Air Pollution Control” and Section 10-5 “Dust Control,” require the contractor to comply with the air pollution control rules, ordinances, and regulations and statutes that apply to work performed under the contract, including those provided in Government Code Section 11017.

Some minimization measures for short-term construction-related emissions include:

- Application of the most stringent available regulations or best practices, even if not required by local/state regulations at the site.
- Possible designation of areas where construction equipment servicing and storage are not allowed (near sensitive receptors).
- Construction staging
- Temporary programs to reduce detour- and construction-related traffic congestion, such as special transit programs and subsidies.

- A construction equipment emission reduction program to encourage or require the contractor to use cleaner (newer) diesel engines or retrofit older engines.

2.4.2 Noise

Environmental Consequences

Noise from construction activities may periodically dominate the noise environment in the immediate area. However, adverse noise impacts from construction are not anticipated because construction will be done in accordance with Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 14-8.02 and applicable local noise standards. Construction noise will be short term, intermittent, and overshadowed by local traffic noise. Construction is anticipated to last about 125 working days at Location 1, 125 working days at Location 2, and 320 working days at Location 3. Nighttime work outside peak hours is anticipated for this project.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Noise Abatement Measures

The following are possible control measures that can be implemented to minimize noise disturbances in sensitive areas during construction:

- All equipment will have sound-control devices no less effective than those provided on the original equipment. Each internal combustion engine used for any purpose on the job or related to the job will be equipped with a muffler of a type recommended by the manufacturer. No internal combustion engine should be operated on the job site without an appropriate muffler.
- Construction methods or equipment that will provide the lowest level of noise impact (for example, avoid impact pile driving near residences and consider alternative methods that are also suitable for the soil condition) should be used.
- Idling equipment will be turned off.
- Truck loading, unloading, and hauling operations will be restricted so that noise and vibration are kept to a minimum through residential neighborhoods to the greatest possible extent.

The contractor will be required to adhere to the following administrative noise control measures:

- Once details of the construction activities become available, the contractor will work with local authorities to develop an acceptable approach to minimize interference with the business and residential communities, traffic disruptions, and the total duration of the construction.
- Good public relations will be maintained with the community to minimize objections to unavoidable construction impacts. Frequent activity updates of all construction activities will be provided. A construction noise

monitoring program to track sound levels and limit the impacts will be implemented.

- In case of construction noise complaints by the public, the resident engineer will coordinate with the construction manager, and the specific noise-producing activity may be changed, altered, or temporarily suspended, if necessary.

It is possible that certain construction activities, such as clearing and compacting, could cause intermittent localized concern from vibration in the project area. During certain construction phases, processes, such as earth moving with bulldozers, the use of vibratory compaction rollers, demolition activities, or pavement breaking, may cause construction-related vibration impacts such as human annoyance or, in some cases, building damages.

The following are procedures that can be used to minimize the potential impacts from construction vibration:

- Restrict the hours of vibration-intensive equipment or activities such as vibratory rollers so that impacts to residents are minimal (e.g., weekdays during daytime hours only when as many residents as possible are away from home).
- The owner of a building close enough to a construction vibration source that damage to that structure due to vibration is possible will be entitled to a preconstruction building inspection to document the preconstruction condition of that structure.
- Conduct vibration monitoring during vibration-intensive activities.

A combination of the mitigation techniques for equipment vibration control and administrative measures, when properly implemented, can be selected to provide the most effective means to minimize the effects of construction activity.

Application of the mitigation measures will reduce the construction impacts; however, temporary increases in vibration will likely occur at some locations.

Chapter 3 CEQA Evaluation

3.1 Determining Significance Under CEQA

The project is a joint project by Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration and is subject to state and federal environmental review requirements. Project documentation, therefore, has been prepared in compliance with both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Federal Highway Administration's responsibilities for environmental review, consultation, and any other actions required by applicable federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by Caltrans pursuant to 23 U.S. Code Section 327 (23 U.S. Code 327) and the Memorandum of Understanding dated May 27, 2022, and executed by the Federal Highway Administration and Caltrans. Caltrans is the lead agency under NEPA and CEQA.

One of the main differences between NEPA and CEQA is the way significance is determined. Under NEPA, significance is used to determine whether an Environmental Impact Statement, or a lower level of documentation, will be required. NEPA requires that an Environmental Impact Statement be prepared when the proposed federal action (the project) as a whole has the potential to "significantly affect the quality of the human environment." The determination of significance is based on context and intensity. Some impacts determined to be significant under CEQA may not be of sufficient magnitude to be determined significant under NEPA. Under NEPA, once a decision is made regarding the need for an Environmental Impact Statement, it is the magnitude of the impact that is evaluated, and no judgment of its individual significance is deemed important for the text. NEPA does not require that a determination of significant impacts be stated in the environmental document.

CEQA, on the other hand, does require Caltrans to identify each "significant effect on the environment" resulting from the project and ways to mitigate each significant effect. If the project may have a significant effect on any environmental resource, then an Environmental Impact Report must be prepared. Every significant effect on the environment must be disclosed in the Environmental Impact Report and mitigated if feasible. In addition, the CEQA Guidelines list a number of "mandatory findings of significance," which also require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report. There are no types of actions under NEPA that parallel the findings of mandatory significance of CEQA. This chapter discusses the effects of this project and CEQA significance.

3.2 CEQA Environmental 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 Impact 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 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.

"No Impact" determinations in each section are based on the scope, description, and location of the proposed project as well as the appropriate technical report (bound separately in Volume 2), and no further discussion is included in this document.

3.2.1 Aesthetics

CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics

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

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

No Impact—There are no scenic vistas within the project area (Visual Impact Assessment, May 2020).

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

No Impact—The project area is not within a state scenic highway designated area (Visual Impact Assessment, May 2020).

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, will the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

No Impact—The project will not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views. The project will not conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality (Visual Impact Assessment, May 2020).

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

No Impact—The project will not create a new source of substantial light or glare, which will adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area (Visual Impact Assessment, May 2020).

3.2.2 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.

Will 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 nonagricultural use?

Less Than Significant Impact—The project will convert about 15.5 acres of Prime Farmland and 22.5 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance to nonagricultural use. This is approximately 0.0013 percent of the total important farmland that is subject to the Farmland Protection Policy Act in Tulare County and is negligible when compared to the available farmland in the area.

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

Less Than Significant Impact—The project will not conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use or a Williamson Act contract. The existing zoning and Williamson Act contracts will remain in place with the project. A letter will be sent to the Department of Conservation as notification that Caltrans proposes to acquire land that is under Williamson Act contract in accordance with Government Code Section 51291(b).

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—There is no forest land or timberland in the project area.

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

No Impact—There is no forest land or timberland in the project area.

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

Less Than Significant Impact—The purpose of the project is to improve traffic circulation and relieve congestion in the project area. Though improvements will require the partial acquisition of right-of-way from adjoining parcels, the project will not increase capacity. Therefore, the project itself could not result in further conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use. There is no forest land or timberland in the project area.

3.2.3 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.

Will the project:

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

No Impact—The project will not conflict with or obstruct the implementation of an air quality plan (Updated Air Quality Report, May 2023).

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

No Impact—The project will not result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant because it is the type of project found by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to be neutral from an air quality or emissions standpoint and is exempt from conformity requirements, according to 40 Code of Federal Regulations Section 93.126 Table 2 (Updated Air Quality Report, May 2023).

c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?

No Impact—The project will not expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations (Updated Air Quality Report, May 2023).

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

No Impact—The project will not result in other emissions that will adversely affect a substantial number of people (Updated Air Quality Report, May 2023).

3.2.4 Biological Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources

Will 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 Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

Less Than Significant Impact—While the likelihood that the Swainson's hawk or San Joaquin kit fox will be found on the project site is low, Caltrans will adopt avoidance and minimization efforts to ensure the project will not result in measurable impacts to these species (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020).

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 Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

No Impact—No natural communities of concern or special-status habitats occur within or near the project areas (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020).

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—Except for the Friant-Kern Canal, which will not be impacted, wetlands and other waters do not occur within or near any of the three project locations (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020).

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—The California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project (Spencer et al. 2010) does not locate any natural habitat blocks or essential connectivity corridors within or near the project areas (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020).

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

No Impact—This project will not conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020).

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—There are no conservation plans in the project area, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Environmental Conservation Online System; therefore, the project does not conflict with any adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or regional or state habitat conservation plans (Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts, June 2020).

3.2.5 Cultural Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources

Will the project:

[Section 3.2.5 Cultural Resources has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated.]

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

No Impact—No historical resources are present in the project area (Second Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report, October 2019; Third Supplemental Historic Resource Evaluation Report, January 2021).

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

No Impact—No historical resources are present in the project area. (Second Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report, October 2019; Third Supplemental Historic Resource Evaluation Report, January 2021)

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

No Impact—The project will not disturb human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries (Second Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report, October 2019; Third Supplemental Historic Resource Evaluation Report, January 2021).

3.2.6 Energy

CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy

Will 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—The project will not result in wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during construction or operation.

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

No Impact—The project will not conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency.

3.2.7 Geology and Soils

CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils

Will the project:

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

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—The project is not in a known earthquake fault area (California Geological Survey, Seismic Hazard Zones, and Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zone Interactive Map January 2020).

ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?

No Impact—Strong seismic ground shaking is not anticipated since the project is not in a known earthquake fault area (U.S. Geological Survey U.S. Quaternary Faults interactive map, January 2020).

iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?

No Impact—The project is in an area with low potential for seismically related ground failure, including liquefaction, because the project area does not contain soil that is prone to liquefaction or seismic-related ground failure (Cal OES, Governor's Office of Emergency Services, MyHazards interactive map January 2020).

iv) Landslides?

No Impact—The project area will not be subject to landslides because of the generally flat topography and because the project will not involve large cuts and fills or steep excavation.

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

No Impact—Project construction will not result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil because the project will include appropriate Best Management Practices to prevent soil erosion or loss of topsoil.

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

No Impact—Project construction, which consists mostly of operational improvements on an existing facility, will not cause the area to become unstable or result in landslides, lateral spreading, collapse, or subsidence. The soil in the project area is not subject to liquefaction.

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—The soil in the project area is not subject to liquefaction.

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

No Impact—The project will not include septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems; therefore, there will be no impact.

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

No Impact—The project will not directly or indirectly destroy paleontological resources because none are anticipated to be found within the project limits. There are no geologic features within the project limits.

3.2.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Will the project:

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

Less Than Significant Impact—The project will not generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment. Greenhouse gas emissions impacts of operational improvements projects such as this are considered less than significant under CEQA because there will be no increase in operational emissions. While some greenhouse gas emissions during the construction period will be unavoidable, with the implementation of standard conditions or Best Management Practices designed to reduce or eliminate emissions as part of the project, the impact will be less than significant (Air Quality Report, March 2020).

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

No Impact—The project will not conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases (Air Quality Report, March 2020).

3.2.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Will the project:

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

Less Than Significant Impact—Applicable standard special provisions and/or nonstandard special provisions addressing proper handling and disposal of aerially deposited lead, asbestos-containing materials, lead-based paint, and treated wood waste will be included in the construction contract to protect construction personnel and the public (Initial Site Assessment, August 2019).

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?

Less Than Significant Impact—The implementation of applicable standard special provisions and/or nonstandard special provisions addressing proper handling and disposal of aerially deposited lead, asbestos-containing materials, lead-based paint, and treated wood waste will reduce this risk (Initial Site Assessment, August 2019).

c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within 0.25 mile of an existing or proposed school?

Less Than Significant Impact—A public school (Jefferson Elementary School) sits just east of Location 3, less than 0.25 mile from the project area. As stated in Section 2.2.3, Alternative 3.B will not involve the transport or use of hazardous materials, substances, or waste. The contractor will be required to comply with Caltrans Standard Specifications and the Regional Air Quality Control Board regulations to limit the amount of hazardous emissions emitted during construction. Alternative 3.B will also require site-specific investigations for hazardous materials and will provide recommendations for proper disposal if hazardous materials are present. Therefore, impacts related to the emission or handling of hazardous materials near a school will be less than significant (Initial Site Assessment, August 2019).

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, will it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?

No Impact—The project is not on a site that is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 (Initial Site Assessment, August 2019).

e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, will the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?

No Impact—The project will not result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area because there is no airport within 2 miles of the project.

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

No Impact—The project will not impair the implementation of, or physically interfere with, an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan.

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

No Impact—The project is not in a very high fire hazard severity zone, according to a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection online map. There is the potential that construction activities could create an unintended fire. However, the project will use adequate precautions to prevent fire incidents during construction as part of the code of safe practices.

3.2.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality

Will the project:

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

No Impact—With the implementation of Best Management Practices and Caltrans Standard Specifications, the project will not violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or degrade water quality. Adherence to construction provisions and precautions described in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit will be upheld.

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—The construction or operation of the project will not impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin since the project will not use groundwater or interfere with groundwater recharge.

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 will:

i) Result in substantial erosion or siltation onsite or offsite;

No Impact—Soils within the study area are composed of very well-drained alluvium with slow subsoil permeability and low potential for erosion. This soil tends to be evident in gently sloping environments (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service).

Project construction will not result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil because the project will include appropriate Best Management Practices to prevent soil erosion or loss of topsoil.

ii) Substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which will result in flooding onsite or offsite;

Less Than Significant Impact—This project will moderately increase the impervious surface area, causing additional volume and velocity of flow to the side of the roadway. The placement of side ditches is proposed to infiltrate the Water Quality Volume (WQV) before discharge to the existing cross culverts or any water bodies within the project limits.

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

Less Than Significant Impact—This project will require the preparation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan. The contractor will develop a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and submit it to the Caltrans resident engineer for review and acceptance before the start of construction. The Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan incorporates the applicable temporary Construction Site Best Management Practices for the project to reduce or eliminate pollutants in construction site stormwater runoff.

iv) Impede or redirect flood flows?

No Impact—The project will not alter the course of any channel or drainage patterns within the project study area.

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

No Impact—Due to the topography of the project location, it will not be possible for project construction to cause inundation of an area by seiche, tsunami, or mudflow.

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

No Impact—The project will not conflict with or obstruct the implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan. Water quality during construction will be protected by provisions as described in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit.

3.2.11 Land Use and Planning

CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning

Will the project:

a) Physically divide an established community?

No Impact—The project will not physically divide an established community.

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—The project will not 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.

3.2.12 Mineral Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources

Will the project:

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

No Impact—The project will not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that will be of value to the region and the residents of the state. The project is not on land that is classified as a Mineral Resource Zone, according to the state geologist (California Department of Conservation Mineral Land Classification Interactive Map, January 2020).

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—This project will not 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. The project is not within a locally important mineral resource recovery site (Tulare County General Plan Update 2030).

3.2.13 Noise

CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise

Will 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—The project will not generate 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 (Caltrans Noise Study Report, December 2019).

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

Less Than Significant Impact—Equipment noise control measures will be implemented to avoid or minimize potential groundborne vibration or noise levels. Any increase in vibration and noise will be temporary during construction (Caltrans Noise Study Report, December 2019).

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 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, will the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?

No Impact—The project is not located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan. The project is not located in an area where such a plan has not been adopted or within 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport.

3.2.14 Population and Housing

CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing

Will 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 the extension of roads or other infrastructure)?

No Impact—The project will not induce substantial unplanned population growth in the area, either directly or indirectly, because the project does not add capacity or extend roads or other infrastructure.

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

Less Than Significant Impact—The project will displace two single-family residences. These displacements will be conducted in accordance with the

Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (see Appendix C).

3.2.15 Public Services

CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services

a) Will 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, to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:

Fire protection? Police protection? Schools? Parks? Other public facilities?

No Impact—The project does not propose or require the provision of new governmental facilities or physical alteration of existing governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times, or other performance objectives for any public service.

Impacts on response times for emergency services will be negligible with the implementation of the Caltrans Incident Management Plan described in Section 2.1.7 Utilities and Emergency Services. Priority will be given to emergency responders to pass through to alleviate any delays.

3.2.16 Recreation

CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation

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

No Impact—The purpose of the project is to relieve congestion and improve the flow of traffic in the project area. Parks and recreational facilities near the project area are not expected to receive increased usage.

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—The project does not propose any recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities.

3.2.17 Transportation

CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation

Will the project:

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

No Impact—The project will not conflict with any applicable plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Rather, the project will ensure the safe operation of the highway system for motorists, bicyclists, and emergency responders.

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

No Impact—The project will not conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, subdivision (b) because it is an operational improvement project, so it will not impact vehicle miles traveled.

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—The project design addresses existing operational deficiencies in the project area. The existing curve on State Route 65 near Lindsay will be improved, and the proposed roundabouts will accommodate large vehicles, including farm equipment.

d) Result in inadequate emergency access?

No Impact—The project will have no long-term impacts to access. The project will be constructed in stages with traffic control, which will involve some delays for motorists. However, emergency access will always be available.

3.2.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources

Will 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—No resources in the proposed project area are 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) (Second Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report, October 2019).

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 Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.

No Impact—There are no resources in the proposed project area that are significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, significance of a resource to a California Native American tribe (Second Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report, October 2019).

3.2.19 Utilities and Service Systems

CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems

Will the project:

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

Less Than Significant Impact—The project will require the relocation of existing stormwater drainage, electrical power, and telecommunication facilities. These facilities will be relocated as needed within the project area, which will not cause significant environmental effects.

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

No Impact—The project will have sufficient water supplies for construction and will not require additional water supplies in future years.

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—The project will not generate significant amounts of wastewater or require future capacity for wastewater treatment.

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—The project will not 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.

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

No Impact—The construction contractor will be responsible for controlling/disposing of solid waste in accordance with federal, state, and local statutes and regulations.

3.2.20 Wildfire

CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire

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

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

No Impact—This project is not within a very high fire hazard severity zone (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection online Fire Hazard Severity Zones Maps).

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—This project is not within a very high fire hazard severity zone (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection online Fire Hazard Severity Zones Maps).

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—This project is not within a very high fire hazard severity zone (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection online Fire Hazard Severity Zones Maps).

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—This project is not within a very high fire hazard severity zone (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection online Fire Hazard Severity Zones Maps).

There is the potential that construction activities could create an unintended fire. However, the contractor will use adequate precautions and procedures as outlined in the contract's standard specifications to prevent and extinguish fire incidents during construction.

3.2.21 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?

No Impact—The project does not have the potential to 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 (Natural Environment Study, November 2019 and Caltrans Second Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report, October 2019).

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—The project does not have impacts that are individually limited but cumulatively considerable.

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

Less Than Significant Impact—The project will not cause substantial adverse effects on human beings directly or indirectly.

3.3 Climate Change

Climate change refers to long-term changes in temperature, precipitation, wind patterns, and other elements of the Earth's climate system. An ever-increasing body of scientific research attributes these climatological changes to greenhouse gas emissions, particularly those generated from the production and use of fossil fuels.

While climate change has been a concern for several decades, the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change by the United Nations and World Meteorological Organization in 1988 led to increased efforts devoted to greenhouse gas emissions reduction and climate change research and policy. These efforts are mainly concerned with the emissions of greenhouse gases generated by human activity, including carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), tetrafluoromethane, hexafluoroethane, sulfur hexafluoride (SF6), and various hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). Carbon dioxide is the most abundant greenhouse gas; while it is a naturally occurring component of Earth's atmosphere, fossil-fuel combustion is the main source of additional, human-generated carbon dioxide.

Two terms are typically used when discussing how we address the impacts of climate change: "greenhouse gas mitigation" and "adaptation." Greenhouse gas mitigation covers the activities and policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions to limit or "mitigate" the impacts of climate change. Adaptation, on the other hand, is concerned with planning for and responding to impacts resulting from climate change (such as adjusting transportation design standards to withstand more intense storms and higher sea levels). This analysis will include a discussion of both.

3.3.1 Regulatory Setting

This section outlines federal and state efforts to comprehensively reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation sources.

Federal

To date, no national standards have been established for nationwide mobile-source greenhouse gas reduction targets, nor have any regulations or legislation been enacted specifically to address climate change and greenhouse gas emissions reduction at the project level.

The National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S. Code Part 4332) requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions before making a decision on the action or project.

The Federal Highway Administration recognizes the threats that extreme weather, sea-level change, and other changes in environmental conditions pose to valuable transportation infrastructure and those who depend on it. The Federal Highway Administration, therefore, supports a sustainability approach that assesses vulnerability to climate risks and incorporates resilience into planning, asset management, project development and design, and operations and maintenance practices. To learn more, visit https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sustainability/resilience/. This approach encourages planning for sustainable highways by addressing climate risks while balancing environmental, economic, and social values—"the triple bottom line of sustainability." To learn more, visit https://www.sustainablehighways.dot.gov/overview.aspx. Program and project elements that foster sustainability and resilience also support economic vitality and global efficiency, increase safety and mobility, enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve the quality of life.

Various efforts have been made at the federal level to improve fuel economy and energy efficiency to address climate change and its associated effects. The most important of these was the Energy Policy and Conservation Act of 1975 (42 U.S. Code Section 6201) and Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) Standards. This act establishes fuel economy standards for on-road motor vehicles sold in the United States. Compliance with federal fuel economy standards is determined through the Corporate Average Fuel Economy program on the basis of each manufacturer's average fuel economy for the portion of its vehicles produced for sale in the United States.

Energy Policy Act of 2005, 109th Congress H.R.6 (2005-2006): This act sets forth an energy research and development program covering: (1) energy efficiency; (2) renewable energy; (3) oil and gas; (4) coal; (5) the establishment of the Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs within the Department of Energy; (6) nuclear matters and security; (7) vehicles and motor fuels, including ethanol; (8) hydrogen; (9) electricity; (10) energy tax incentives; (11) hydropower and geothermal energy; and (12) climate change technology.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in conjunction with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, is responsible for setting greenhouse gas emission standards for new cars and light-duty vehicles to significantly increase the fuel economy of all new passenger cars and light trucks sold in the United States. [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions stems from the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Massachusetts versus Environmental Protection Agency (2007). The Supreme Court ruled that greenhouse gases meet the definition of air

pollutants under the existing Clean Air Act and must be regulated if these gases could be reasonably anticipated to endanger public health or welfare. Responding to the court's ruling, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalized an endangerment finding in December 2009. Based on scientific evidence, it found that six greenhouse gases constitute a threat to public health and welfare. Thus, it is the Supreme Court's interpretation of the existing act and the Environmental Protection Agency's assessment of the scientific evidence that form the basis for the Environmental Protection Agency's regulatory actions.] The current standards require vehicles to meet an average fuel economy of 34.1 miles per gallon by 2016. The Environmental Protection Agency and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration are currently considering appropriate mileage and greenhouse gas emissions standards for 2022-2025 light-duty vehicles for future rulemaking.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency issued a Final Rule for "Phase 2" for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles to improve fuel efficiency and cut carbon pollution in October 2016. The agencies estimate that the standards will save up to 2 billion barrels of oil and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by up to 1.1 billion metric tons over the lifetimes of model year 2018-2027 vehicles.

State

California has been innovative and proactive in addressing greenhouse gas emissions and climate change by passing multiple Senate and Assembly bills and executive orders including, but not limited to, the following:

Executive Order S-3-05 (June 1, 2005): The goal of this order is to reduce California's greenhouse gas emissions to: (1) year 2000 levels by 2010, (2) year 1990 levels by 2020, and (3) 80 percent below year 1990 levels by 2050. This goal was further reinforced with the passage of Assembly Bill 32 in 2006 and Senate Bill 32 in 2016.

Assembly Bill 32, Chapter 488, 2006, Núñez and Pavley, The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006: Assembly Bill 32 codified the 2020 greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals outlined in Executive Order S-3-05, while further mandating that the California Air Resources Board create a scoping plan and implement rules to achieve "real, quantifiable, cost-effective reductions of greenhouse gases." The legislature also intended that the statewide greenhouse gas emissions limit continue in existence and be used to maintain and continue reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases beyond 2020 (Health and Safety Code Section 38551(b)). The law requires the Air Resources Board to adopt rules and regulations in an open public process to achieve the maximum technologically feasible and cost-effective greenhouse gas reductions.

Executive Order S-01-07 (January 18, 2007): This order sets forth the low carbon fuel standard (LCFS) for California. Under this order, the carbon intensity of California's transportation fuels is to be reduced by at least 10 percent by the year 2020. The Air Resources Board readopted the low carbon fuel standard regulation in September 2015, and the changes went into effect on January 1, 2016. The program establishes a strong framework to promote the low-carbon fuel adoption necessary to achieve the governor's 2030 and 2050 greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Senate Bill 375, Chapter 728, 2008, Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection: This bill requires the Air Resources Board to set regional emissions reduction targets for passenger vehicles. The Metropolitan Planning Organization for each region must then develop a "Sustainable Communities Strategy" that integrates transportation, land use, and housing policies to plan how it will achieve the emissions target for its region.

Senate Bill 391, Chapter 585, 2009, California Transportation Plan: This bill requires the state's long-range transportation plan to identify strategies to address California's climate change goals under Assembly Bill 32.

Executive Order B-16-12 (March 2012): This order directs state entities under the direction of the governor, including the Air Resources Board, the California Energy Commission, and the Public Utilities Commission, to support the rapid commercialization of zero-emission vehicles. It directs these entities to achieve various benchmarks related to zero-emission vehicles.

Executive Order B-30-15 (April 2015): This order establishes an interim statewide greenhouse gas emission reduction target of 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 to ensure California meets its target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. It further orders all state agencies with jurisdiction over sources of greenhouse gas emissions to implement measures, pursuant to statutory authority, to achieve reductions of greenhouse gas emissions to meet the 2030 and 2050 greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets. It also directs the Air Resources Board to update the Climate Change Scoping Plan to express the 2030 target in terms of million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMTCO2e). [Greenhouse gases differ in how much heat each trap in the atmosphere (global warming potential or GWP). Carbon dioxide is the most important greenhouse gas, so amounts of other gases are expressed relative to carbon dioxide, using a metric called "carbon dioxide equivalent" (CO2e). The global warming potential of carbon dioxide is assigned a value of 1, and the global warming potential of other gases is assessed as multiples of carbon dioxide.] Finally, it requires the California Natural Resources Agency to update the state's climate adaptation strategy, *Safeguarding California*, every 3 years, and to ensure that its provisions are fully implemented.

Senate Bill 32, Chapter 249, 2016: This bill codifies the greenhouse gas reduction targets established in Executive Order B-30-15 to achieve a mid-range goal of 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.

Senate Bill 1386, Chapter 545, 2016: This bill declared "it to be the policy of the state that the protection and management of natural and working lands … is an important strategy in meeting the state's greenhouse gas reduction goals, and will require all state agencies, departments, boards, and commissions to consider this policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations, expenditures, or grant criteria relating to the protection and management of natural and working lands."

Assembly Bill 134, Chapter 254, 2017: This bill allocates greenhouse gas reduction funds and other sources to various clean vehicle programs, demonstration/pilot projects, clean vehicle rebates and projects, and other emissions-reduction programs statewide.

Senate Bill 743**,** Chapter 386 (September 2013): This bill changes the metric of consideration for transportation impacts pursuant to CEQA from a focus on automobile delay to alternative methods focused on vehicle miles traveled to promote the state's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic-related air pollution and promoting multimodal transportation while balancing the needs of congestion management and safety.

Senate Bill 150, Chapter 150, 2017, Regional Transportation Plans: This bill requires the Air Resources Board to prepare a report that assesses progress made by each metropolitan planning organization in meeting its established regional greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

Executive Order B-55-18 (September 2018): This order sets a new statewide goal to achieve and maintain carbon neutrality no later than 2045. This goal is in addition to existing statewide targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

3.3.2 Environmental Setting

Location 1–State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Land use surrounding the project area is mainly agricultural, with limited commercial and residential land use. A residential development near Lindsay is in the planning stages, in addition to a retail facility and sports complex. These projects are in the early stages of development.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

Land use surrounding the project area is agricultural.

Location 3–State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

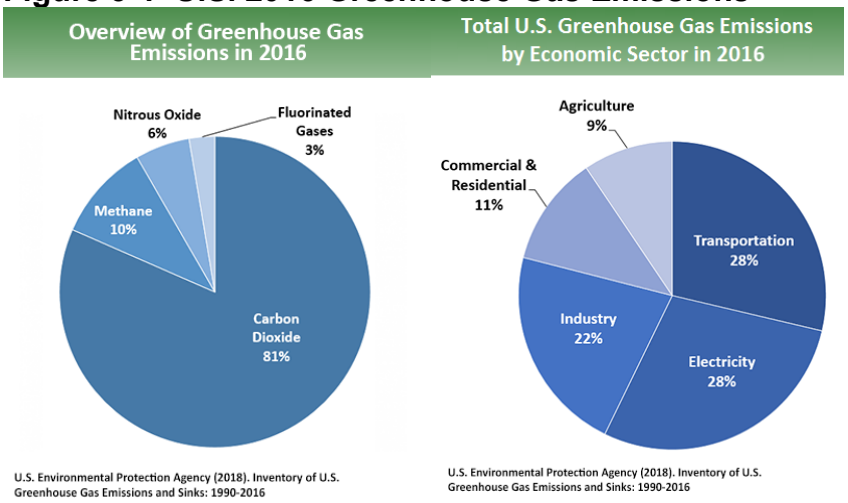
Land use surrounding the project area is mainly agricultural, with limited commercial and residential land use. A residential development near Lindsay is in the planning stages, in addition to a retail facility and sports complex. These projects are in the early stages of development.

A greenhouse gas emissions inventory estimates the amount of greenhouse gases discharged into the atmosphere by specific sources over a period of time, such as a calendar year. Tracking annual greenhouse gas emissions allows countries, states, and smaller jurisdictions to understand how emissions are changing and what actions may be needed to attain emission reduction goals. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for documenting greenhouse gas emissions nationwide, and the Air Resources Board does so for the state, as required by Health and Safety Code Section 39607.

National Greenhouse Gas Inventory

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency prepares a national greenhouse gas inventory every year and submits it to the United Nations in accordance with the Framework Convention on Climate Change. The inventory provides a comprehensive accounting of all human-produced sources of greenhouse gases in the United States, reporting emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydroflourocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexaflouride, and nitrogen trifluoride. It also accounts for emissions of carbon dioxide that are removed from the atmosphere by “sinks,” such as forests, vegetation, and soils that uptake and store carbon dioxide (carbon sequestration). The 1990-2016 inventory found that of 6,511 million metric tons of carbon dioxide greenhouse gas emissions in 2016, 81 percent consist of carbon dioxide, 10 percent are methane, and 6 percent are nitrous oxide; the balance consists of fluorinated gases (Environmental Protection Agency 2018a). [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2018. Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks. https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/inventory-us-greenhouse-gas-emissions-and-sinks]. In 2016, greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector accounted for nearly 28.5 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. See Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1 U.S. 2016 Greenhouse Gas Emissions



State Greenhouse Gas Inventory

The Air Resources Board collects greenhouse gas emissions data for transportation, electricity, commercial/residential, industrial, agricultural, and waste management sectors each year. It then summarizes and highlights major annual changes and trends to demonstrate the state's progress in meeting its greenhouse gas reduction goals. The 2018 edition of the greenhouse gas emissions inventory found total California emissions of 429 MMTCO2e for 2016, with the transportation sector responsible for 41 percent of total greenhouse gases. It also found that overall statewide greenhouse gas emissions have declined from 2000 to 2016 despite growth in population and state economic output. [2018 Edition of the Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory (July 2018). https://www.arb.ca.gov/cc/inventory/data/data.html.] See Figures 3-2 and 3-3.

Figure 3-2 California 2016 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

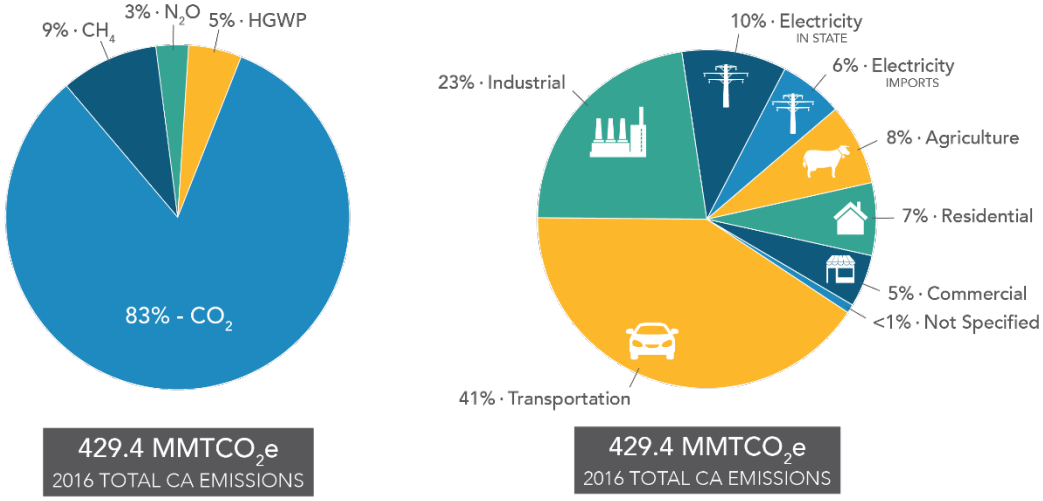
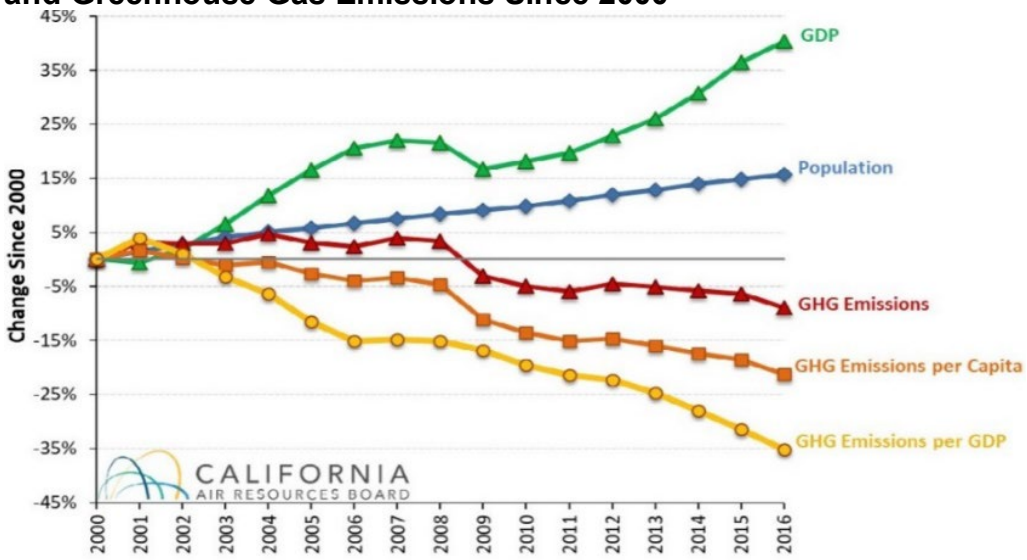


Figure 3-3 Change in California Gross Domestic Product, Population, and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Since 2000



Metric	Associated 2016 Value
GDP	2.3 trillion (2009 $)
Population	39.3 million
GHG Emissions	429.35 $MMTCO_2e$
GHG Emissions per Capita	10.8 metric tons CO_2e per person
GHG Emissions per GDP	187 metric tons CO_2e per million dollars

Assembly Bill 32 required the Air Resources Board to develop a Scoping Plan that describes the approach California will take to achieve the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020 and to update it every 5 years. The Air Resources Board adopted the first scoping plan in 2008. The second updated plan, California's 2017 Climate Change Scoping Plan, adopted on December 14, 2017, reflects the 2030 target established in Executive Order B-30-15 and SB 32. The AB 32 Scoping Plan and the subsequent updates contain the main strategies California will use to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Regional Plans

The Air Resources Board sets regional targets for California's 18 Metropolitan Planning Organizations to use in their Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategies to plan future projects that will cumulatively achieve greenhouse gas reduction goals. Targets are set at a percent reduction of passenger vehicle greenhouse gas emissions per person from 2005 levels.

The Tulare County Association of Governments is the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the project area. The regional reduction targets for Tulare County are 5 percent by 2020 and 10 percent by 2035. The Tulare County Association of Governments' 2018 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy details how the region will reduce greenhouse gas

emissions to state-mandated levels over time. The project is not required to be listed in the Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy document because it is not considered a regionally significant project. The inclusion of the Sustainable Communities Strategy is required by Senate Bill 375 and stresses the importance of meeting greenhouse gas per capita emission reduction targets set by the California Air Resources Board.

The Tulare County Association of Governments participated in the Tulare County Regional Blueprint (Blueprint), adopted in 2009, which encourages smart growth principles, improving the existing public transportation system, and investing in active transportation infrastructure such as new bicycle and pedestrian paths. These strategies, together with transportation system management and trip reduction programs, are projected to reduce per capita passenger vehicle greenhouse gas emissions in the region.

3.3.3 Project Analysis

Greenhouse gas emissions from transportation projects can be divided into those produced during the operation of the state highway system and those produced during construction. The main greenhouse gases produced by the transportation sector are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and hydrofluorocarbon's. Carbon dioxide emissions are a product of the combustion of petroleum-based products, like gasoline, in internal combustion engines. Relatively small amounts of methane and nitrous oxide are emitted during fuel combustion. In addition, a small amount of hydrofluorocarbon's emissions is included in the transportation sector.

The CEQA Guidelines generally address greenhouse gas emissions as a cumulative impact due to the global nature of climate change (Public Resources Code, Section 21083(b)(2)). As the California Supreme Court explained, "because of the global scale of climate change, any one project's contribution is unlikely to be significant by itself" (Cleveland National Forest Foundation versus San Diego Association of Governments (2017) 3 California 5th 497, 512.). In assessing cumulative impacts, it must be determined if a project's incremental effect is "cumulatively considerable" (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15064(h)(1) and 15130).

To make this determination, the incremental impacts of the project must be compared with the effects of past, current, and probable future projects. Although climate change is ultimately a cumulative impact, not every individual project that emits greenhouse gases must necessarily be found to contribute to a significant cumulative impact on the environment.

Operational Emissions

Location 1—State Route 65/Tulare Road/Oak Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

This operational improvement will allow local traffic to move through this area more efficiently. While some greenhouse gas emissions during construction will be unavoidable, the project, once completed, will not lead to an increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions.

Location 2—State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue Roundabout Operational Improvement

This operational improvement will allow local and interregional traffic to move through this intersection more efficiently. While some greenhouse gas emissions during construction will be unavoidable, the project, once completed, will not lead to an increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions.

Location 3—State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road (Avenue 232) With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road

This operational improvement will change the alignment of State Route 65 but will not add capacity. Improved interregional traffic flow will improve the operation of local intersections in Lindsay. While some greenhouse gas emissions during the construction period will be unavoidable, the project, once completed, will not lead to an increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions.

Construction Emissions

Construction greenhouse gas emissions will result from material processing, onsite construction equipment, and traffic delays due to construction. These emissions will be produced at different levels throughout the construction phase; their frequency and occurrence will, where possible, be reduced through innovations in plans and specifications and by implementing better traffic management during construction phases.

In addition, with innovations, such as longer pavement lives, improved traffic management plans, and changes in materials, the greenhouse gas emissions produced during construction will be offset to some degree by longer intervals between maintenance and rehabilitation activities.

Carbon dioxide emissions generated from construction equipment were estimated using the Caltrans Construction Emissions Tool (CAL-CET). The estimated emissions will be about 359 tons for Location 1, 212 tons for Location 2, and 918 tons for Location 3.

All construction contracts include Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 7-1.02A and 7-1.02C, Emissions Reduction, which require contractors to comply with all laws applicable to the project and to certify they are aware of and will comply with all Air Resources Board emission reduction regulations. All projects also include Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 14-9.02, Air Pollution Control, which requires contractors to comply with all air pollution control rules, regulations, ordinances, and statutes, including those of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

The project will also implement Caltrans standardized measures (such as Construction Best Management Practices) that apply to most or all Caltrans projects. Certain common regulations, such as equipment idling restrictions and the development and implementation of a traffic control plan that reduces construction vehicle emissions, also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

CEQA Conclusion

While the proposed project will result in greenhouse gas emissions during construction, it is anticipated that the project will not result in any increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions. The project does not conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases. With the implementation of construction greenhouse gas-reduction measures, the impact will be less than significant.

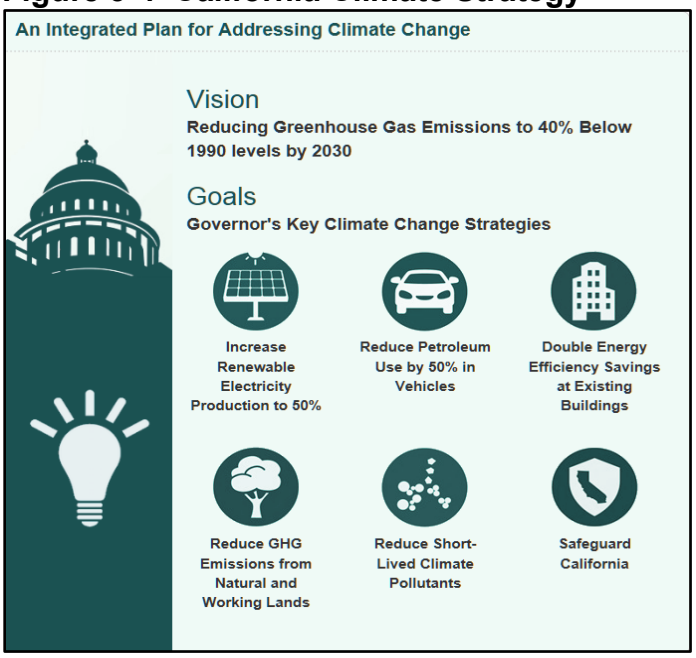
Caltrans is firmly committed to implementing measures to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These measures are outlined in the following section.

3.3.4 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategies

Statewide Efforts

Major sectors of the California economy, including transportation, will need to reduce emissions to meet the 2030 and 2050 greenhouse gas emissions targets. Former Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. promoted greenhouse gas reduction goals that involved (1) reducing today's petroleum use in cars and trucks by up to 50 percent; (2) increasing from one-third to 50 percent our electricity derived from renewable sources; (3) doubling the energy efficiency savings achieved at existing buildings and making heating fuels cleaner; (4) reducing the release of methane, black carbon, and other short-lived climate pollutants; (5) managing farms and rangelands, forests, and wetlands so they can store carbon; and (6) periodically updating the state's climate adaptation strategy, *Safeguarding California*. See Figure 3-4.

Figure 3-4 California Climate Strategy



The transportation sector is integral to the people and economy of California. To achieve greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, it is vital that the state build on past successes in reducing criteria and toxic air pollutants from transportation and goods movement. Greenhouse gas emission reductions will come from cleaner vehicle technologies, lower-carbon fuels, and a reduction of vehicle miles traveled. A key state goal for reducing greenhouse gas emissions is to reduce today's petroleum use in cars and trucks by up to 50 percent by 2030.

In addition, Senate Bill 1386 (Wolk 2016) established as state policy the protection and management of natural and working lands and requires state agencies to consider that policy in their own decision-making. Trees and vegetation on forest lands, rangelands, farms, and wetlands remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through biological processes and sequester the carbon in above- and below-ground matter.

Caltrans Activities

Caltrans continues to be involved on the governor's Climate Action Team as the Air Resources Board works to implement Executive Orders S-3-05 and S-01-07 and help achieve the targets set forth in Assembly Bill 32. Executive Order B-30-15, issued in April 2015, and Senate Bill 32 (2016), set an interim target to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. The following major initiatives are underway at Caltrans to help meet these targets.

California Transportation Plan (CTP 2040)

The California Transportation Plan (CTP) is a statewide, long-range transportation plan to meet our future mobility needs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2016, Caltrans completed the *California Transportation Plan 2040*, which establishes a new model for developing ground transportation systems consistent with carbon dioxide reduction goals. It serves as an umbrella document for all the other statewide transportation planning documents. Over the next 25 years, California will be working to improve transit and reduce long-run repair and maintenance costs of roadways and developing a comprehensive assessment of climate-related transportation demand management and new technologies rather than continuing to expand capacity on existing roadways.

Senate Bill 391 (Liu 2009) requires the California Transportation Plan to meet California's climate change goals under Assembly Bill 32. Accordingly, the California Transportation Plan 2040 identifies the statewide transportation system needed to achieve maximum feasible greenhouse gas emission reductions while meeting the state's transportation needs. While Metropolitan Planning Organizations have primary responsibility for identifying land use patterns to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the California Transportation Plan 2040 identifies additional strategies in Pricing, Transportation Alternatives, Mode Shift, and Operational Efficiency.

Caltrans Strategic Management Plan

The Strategic Management Plan, released in 2015, creates a performance-based framework to preserve the environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, among other goals. Specific performance targets in the plan that will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions include:

- Increasing percentage of non-auto mode share
- Reducing vehicle miles traveled
- Reducing Caltrans' internal operational (buildings, facilities, and fuel) greenhouse gas emissions

Funding and Technical Assistance Programs

In addition to developing plans and performance targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Caltrans also administers several sustainable transportation planning grants. These grants encourage local and regional multimodal transportation, housing, and land use planning that furthers the region's Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy; contribute to the state's greenhouse gas reduction targets and advance transportation-related greenhouse gas emission reduction project types/strategies; and support other climate adaptation goals (e.g., *Safeguarding California*).

Caltrans Policy Directives and Other Initiatives

Caltrans Director's Policy 30 (DP-30) Climate Change (June 22, 2012) is intended to establish a department policy that will ensure coordinated efforts to incorporate climate change into departmental decisions and activities. *Caltrans Activities to Address Climate Change* (April 2013) provides a comprehensive overview of Caltrans' statewide activities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions resulting from agency operations.

Project-Level Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategies

The following measures will also be implemented in the project to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and potential climate change impacts from the project. Caltrans staff will enhance the environmental training provided for contractor staff by adding a module on greenhouse gas reduction strategies, including limiting equipment idling time as much as possible.

The contractor will be required to:

- Reduce construction waste and maximize the use of recycled materials wherever possible.
- Incorporate measures to reduce the use of potable water.
- Seek to operate construction equipment with improved fuel efficiency by:
    - Properly tuning and maintaining equipment
    - Limiting equipment idling time
    - Using the right-size equipment for the job
- Caltrans Standard Specifications Section 14-9.02, Air Pollution Control, requires contractors to comply with all air pollution control rules, regulations, ordinances, and statutes. Measures that reduce construction vehicle emissions also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Adaptation

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is only one part of an approach to addressing climate change. Caltrans must plan for the effects of climate change on the state's transportation infrastructure and strengthen or protect the facilities from damage. Climate change is expected to produce increased variability in precipitation, rising temperatures, rising sea levels, variability in storm surges and their intensity, and variability in the frequency and intensity of wildfires. Flooding and erosion can damage or wash out roads; longer periods of intense heat can buckle pavement and railroad tracks; storm surges combined with a rising sea level can inundate highways. Wildfires can directly burn facilities and indirectly cause damage when rain falls on denuded slopes that landslide after a fire. Effects will vary by location and may, in the most extreme cases, require that a facility be relocated or redesigned. Accordingly, Caltrans must consider these types of climate

stressors in how highways are planned, designed, built, operated, and maintained.

Federal Efforts

Under the National Environmental Policy Act assignment, Caltrans is obligated to comply with all applicable federal environmental laws and Federal Highway Administration National Environmental Policy Act regulations, policies, and guidance.

The U.S. Global Change Research Program delivers a report to Congress and the president every 4 years, in accordance with the Global Change Research Act of 1990 (15 U.S. Code Chapter 56A Section 2921 et seq). The *Fourth National Climate Assessment*, published in 2018, presents the foundational science and the "human welfare, societal, and environmental elements of climate change and variability for 10 regions and 18 national topics, with particular attention paid to observed and projected risks, impacts, consideration of risk reduction, and implications under different mitigation pathways." Chapter 12, "Transportation," presents a key discussion of vulnerability assessments. It notes that "asset owners and operators have increasingly conducted more focused studies of particular assets that consider multiple climate hazards and scenarios in the context of asset-specific information, such as design lifetime."

The U.S. Department of Transportation Policy Statement on Climate Adaptation in June 2011 committed the federal Department of Transportation to "integrate consideration of climate change impacts and adaptation into the planning, operations, policies, and programs of Department of Transportation to ensure that taxpayer resources are invested wisely and that transportation infrastructure, services, and operations remain effective in current and future climate conditions." For more information, visit https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sustainability/resilience/policy_and_guidance/usdot.cfm.

Federal Highway Administration Order 5520 (*Transportation System Preparedness and Resilience to Climate Change and Extreme Weather Events,* December 15, 2014) established Federal Highway Administration policy to strive to identify the risks of climate change and extreme weather events to current and planned transportation systems. For more information, visit https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/legsregs/directives/orders/5520.cfm.

The Federal Highway Administration has developed guidance and tools for transportation planning that foster resilience to climate effects and sustainability at the federal, state, and local levels. For more information, visit https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sustainability/resilience/.

State Efforts

Climate change adaptation for transportation infrastructure involves long-term planning and risk management to address vulnerabilities in the transportation system. *California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment* (2018) is the state's latest effort to "translate the state of climate science into useful information for action" in a variety of sectors at both statewide and local scales. It adopts the following key terms used widely in climate change analysis and policy documents:

- *Adaptation* to climate change refers to adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities.
- *Adaptive capacity* is the "combination of the strengths, attributes, and resources available to an individual, community, society, or organization that can be used to prepare for and undertake actions to reduce adverse impacts, moderate harm, or exploit beneficial opportunities."

Exposure is the presence of people, infrastructure, natural systems, and economic, cultural, and social resources in areas that are subject to harm.

- *Resilience* is the "capacity of any entity—an individual, a community, an organization, or a natural system—to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience." Adaptation actions contribute to increasing resilience, which is a desired outcome or state of being.
- *Sensitivity* is the level to which a species, natural system, community, government, etc., will be affected by changing climate conditions.
- *Vulnerability* is the "susceptibility to harm from exposure to stresses associated with environmental and social change and from the absence of capacity to adapt." Vulnerability can increase because of physical (built and environmental), social, political, and/or economic factors. These factors include but are not limited to: ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and identification, national origin, and income inequality. Vulnerability is often defined as the combination of sensitivity and adaptive capacity, as affected by the level of exposure to changing climate.

Several key state policies have guided climate change adaptation efforts to date. Recent state publications produced in response to these policies draw on these definitions.

Executive Order S-13-08, issued by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in November 2008, focused on sea-level rise and resulted in the *California Climate Adaptation Strategy* (2009), updated in 2014 as *Safeguarding California: Reducing Climate Risk* (Safeguarding California Plan). The Safeguarding California Plan offers policy principles and recommendations

and continues to be revised and augmented with sector-specific adaptation strategies, ongoing actions, and next steps for agencies.

Executive Order S-13-08 also led to the publication of a series of sea-level rise assessment reports and associated guidance and policies. These reports formed the foundation of an interim *State of California Sea-Level Rise Interim Guidance Document* (SLR Guidance) in 2010, with instructions for how state agencies could incorporate "sea-level rise (SLR) projections into planning and decision making for projects in California" in a consistent way across agencies. The guidance was revised and augmented in 2013. *Rising Seas in California – An Update on Sea-Level Rise Science* was published in 2017, and its updated projections of sea-level rise and new understanding of processes and potential impacts in California were incorporated into the *State of California Sea-Level Rise Guidance Update* in 2018. For more information, visit http://www.opc.ca.gov/updating-californias-sea-level-rise-guidance/.

Executive Order B-30-15, signed in April 2015, requires state agencies to factor climate change into all planning and investment decisions. This order recognizes that effects of climate change other than sea-level rise also threaten California's infrastructure. At the direction of Executive Order B-30-15, the Office of Planning and Research published *Planning and Investing for a Resilient California: A Guidebook for State Agencies* in 2017 to encourage a uniform and systematic approach. Representatives of Caltrans participated in the multiagency, multidisciplinary technical advisory group that developed this guidance on how to integrate climate change into planning and investment.

AB 2800 (Quirk 2016) created the multidisciplinary Climate-Safe Infrastructure Working Group, which in 2018 released its report, *Paying it Forward: The Path Toward Climate-Safe Infrastructure in California*. The report provides guidance to agencies on how to address the challenges of assessing risk in the face of inherent uncertainties still posed by the best available science on climate change. It also examines how state agencies can use infrastructure planning, design, and implementation processes to address the observed and anticipated climate change impacts.

Caltrans Adaptation Efforts

Caltrans Vulnerability Assessments

Caltrans is conducting climate change vulnerability assessments to identify segments of the state highway system vulnerable to climate change effects, including precipitation, temperature, wildfire, storm surge, and sea-level rise. The approach to the vulnerability assessments was tailored to the practices of a transportation agency and involves the following concepts and actions:

- *Exposure*—Identify Caltrans assets exposed to damage or reduced service life from expected future conditions.

- *Consequence*—Determine what might occur to system assets in terms of loss of use or costs of repair.
- *Prioritization*—Develop a method for making capital programming decisions to address identified risks, including considerations of system use and/or timing of expected exposure.

The climate change data in the assessments were developed, in coordination with climate change scientists and experts at federal, state, and regional organizations, at the forefront of climate science. The findings of the vulnerability assessments will guide the analysis of at-risk assets and development of adaptation plans to reduce the likelihood of damage to the state highway system, allowing Caltrans to both reduce the costs of storm damage and provide and maintain transportation that meets the needs of all Californians.

Project Adaptation Analysis

Sea Level Rise

The project is outside the coastal zone and not in an area subject to sea-level rise. Accordingly, direct impacts on transportation facilities due to projected sea-level rise are not expected.

Floodplains Analysis

Most climate scientists predict increased frequency and intensity of rain events related to global climate change, although how frequent and how intense such storms are likely to be is unclear.

Wildfire

The project is not in a very high fire hazard severity zone (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, 2007). The project is about 1.5 miles west of the westernmost boundary of the nearest fire hazard severity zone. Construction activities could create an unintended fire in roadside vegetation; however, precautions and construction best practices will be implemented to prevent fire during construction.

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Chapter 4 Comments and Coordination

[Chapter 4 has been added since the draft environmental document was circulated.] Early and continuing coordination with the public and public agencies is an essential part of the environmental process. It helps planners determine the necessary scope of environmental documentation and the level of analysis required, and to identify potential impacts and avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures and related environmental requirements. Agency and tribal consultation and public participation for this project have been accomplished through a variety of formal and informal methods, including interagency coordination meetings, public meetings, public notices and Project Development Team meetings. This chapter summarizes the results of the Department's efforts to fully identify, address, and resolve project-related issues through early and continuing coordination.

4.1 Public Scoping and Participation

4.1.1 Public Information Meeting

The public information meeting was held at the Lindsay Wellness Center in the city of Lindsay on December 5, 2019. The public information meeting was conducted in an open forum format to facilitate communication between the project team and the public. When the attendees arrived, they were asked to sign in and were handed a project information sheet. Staff invited each attendee to view the displays throughout the room and ask questions. Attendees were also told they could place their written comments in the drop box at the meeting or mail/email their comments to Caltrans or give their oral comments to the court reporter onsite. A certified Spanish interpreter was provided for Spanish-speaking attendees.

The purpose of the public information meeting was to present the proposed project and its alternatives to the public and other interested parties, to answer any questions attendees may have, and to gather public feedback on the Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements project.

A total of 13 members of the public signed in at the meeting. Caltrans received four comments on the comment cards provided at the meeting and two comments through email. Comments regarding support for building roundabouts within the project area were received, in addition to comments that did not support realignment of State Route 65 through the project area.

4.1.2 Circulation of the Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment, Virtual Public Meeting

Pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act and California Environmental Quality Act requirements, the Draft Initial Study/ Environmental Assessment for the project was circulated for public review and comment. The draft environmental document was circulated for a 30-day review by agencies and members of the public from August 26, 2020, to September 24, 2020.

Notices of Availability for the draft environmental document and notice of a Virtual Public Meeting were sent to property owners, residents, public agencies, emergency responders, transit agencies, civic and community groups, chambers of commerce, school districts, environmental groups, and other interested parties likely to be interested in the corridor.

Notices of Availability for the draft environmental document and notice of Virtual Public Hearing were posted in the Visalia Times-Delta, the Porterville Recorder, and the Sun-Gazette. Notices were posted in Spanish and English in all three newspapers. All newspaper publications stated the public comment period ran from August 26, 2020, to September 24, 2020, and the virtual public hearing would be conducted on September 9, 2020, from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

The Virtual Public Hearing was held via WebEx on September 9, 2020, to present the project to the public, answer questions, and solicit comments. Property owners in the area were in attendance. During the hearing, oral and email written comments were submitted in response to the circulation of the draft environmental document.

4.2 Consultation and Coordination with Public Agencies

4.2.1 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency/Federal Highway Administration

Concurrence of air quality conformity was provided by Caltrans' interagency consultation partners, which included the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Highway Administration, on July 10, 2019.

Concurrence was provided that the project is not a "Project of Air Quality Concern" on September 6, 2019, and September 16, 2019, by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Highway Administration respectively. The project was resubmitted by Caltrans' interagency consultation partners, which included the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Federal Highway Administration, on June 23, 2023. Concurrence was provided that the project is not a "Project of Air Quality Concern" for

Location 1 and Location 2 only. Location 3 would require a Hot-Spot Analysis to determine if it was a “Project of Air Quality Concern”.

On October 10, 2023, the Air Quality Conformity Analysis was transmitted to the Federal Highway Administration for conformity concurrence. The Federal Highway Administration reviewed the Air Quality Conformity Analysis and supporting documentation and concurred on October 13, 2023 that the project conforms with the State Implementation Plan (SIP) in accordance with 40 Code of Federal Regulations Part 93. Details of the air quality conformity analysis are included in Section 2.2.3, Air Quality.

4.2.2 Native American Consultation

Native American consultation was reinitiated on December 31, 2018 as the project included additional acreage that was not surveyed during previous surveys for this project. The following Native American tribal representatives were notified about the change in the project Area of Potential Effects and provided updated mapping and new project details.

Ruben Barrios, Chairman of Santa Rosa Rancheria, Tachi Yokuts

Kerri Vera, Tule River Indian Tribe

Neil Peyron, Tule River Indian Tribe

Kenneth Woodrow, Chairman, Wuksache Indian Tribe/Eshom Valley Band

Darlene Franco, Wukchumni Tribe

No responses concerning the change in the Area of Potential Effects were received by Caltrans.

4.2.3 California State Historic Preservation Officer

The State Historic Preservation Officer coordination began on November 13, 2019 with a request by Caltrans for concurrence with the Historic Property Survey Report, which documented the findings of the Archaeological Survey Report and Historical Resource Evaluation Report.

During the public comment period for the draft environmental document, Caltrans received a comment regarding a potential historic-era resource within the project Area of Potential Effects that was not included in the Historic Resource Evaluation Report for the project. This comment necessitated a re-evaluation of the project Area of Potential Effects for potentially eligibly historical resources in a Supplemental Historic Resource Evaluation Report for the project. The Caltrans team formally evaluated this property and determined that the property was not eligible for inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places, the concurrence letter supporting this

determination from the State Historic Preservation Officer is shown in Appendix E.

4.3 Comment Letters and Responses

During the public comment period for the draft environmental document, comments were received from members of the public, the State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. A Caltrans response follows these comments.

The comment letters are stated verbatim as submitted, with acronyms, abbreviations, and any original grammatical or typographical errors included. A Caltrans response follows each comment presented. Copies of the original comment letters and documents can be found in Volume 2 of this document.

Comment Email A from State Clearinghouse and Planning Unit

The State Clearinghouse (SCH) would like to inform you that our office will transition from providing close of review period acknowledgement on your CEQA environmental document, at this time. During the phase of not receiving notice on the close of review period, comments submitted by State Agencies at the close of review period (and after) are available on CEQAnet.

Please visit: https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/search/advanced

- Filter for the SCH# of your project OR your “Lead Agency”
- If filtering by “Lead Agency”
- Select the correct project
- Only State Agency comments will be available in the “attachments” section: bold and highlighted

Thank you for using CEQA Submit.

Meng Heu

Office of Planning and Research (OPR)

State Clearing House

Caltrans Response: Thank you for circulating the Initial Study with Proposed Negative Declaration/Environmental Assessment for the Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements Project and acknowledging Caltrans’ compliance with California Environmental Quality Act requirements pursuant to State Clearinghouse guidelines. Caltrans has recorded the corresponding State Clearinghouse number for this project.

Comment Email from Charles M. Knutson:

We do not approve of this Hwy 65 Realignment because it will destroy our ranch. The ranch was planted in the 1890's and these trees are among the first planted in this area. Which makes them historic. There have been some documentaries on these trees.

Caltrans Response: As identified in Section 1.6 of this document, Build Alternative 3.B - *State Route 65 4-Lane Expressway Realignment From Lindmore Street to Tulare Road With Roundabout Intersections at Hermosa Street and Tulare Road* was not selected as one of the build alternatives for this project.

Comment Email from Jeffery Wynn:

Alternative 3B the proposed expressway between Lindmore and Cedar, in Lindsay CA which diverts traffic away from Hwy 65 as is passes through Lindsay, which from what I can tell, the main benefit from, would be cutting of the curve at Tulare Road, passes directly through my 10 acres of property and will require the destruction of both my current home, as well as the family home that I grew up in, and that my parents lived in for over 40 years, along with the 10 acres of oranges, pomegranates, and a stand of old growth olives which are very likely, a part of one of the earliest Olive groves in Lindsay, and quite probably, over 100 years old.

I can see some benefit for Alternative 1B, the Roundabout proposed for the Tulare Rd/ Hwy 65 Interchange. That is a weird intersection, and it is difficult to get onto Hwy 65 headed South from that intersection, especially with not being able to see the northbound traffic coming around the curve, as the road transitions from a north south direction, coming from Porterville and Strathmore, into an east west direction heading toward Tulare. So Alternative 1B, I would support without objections.

I can also see some benefit for Alternative 2B, the Roundabout under consideration for the intersection of Rd 204/Spruce Rd and Ave 296/ Hwy 198, although it does not seem to be as pressing an issue as Alternative 1B. There is a lot of traffic at that intersection, and sometimes a bit of a wait, to get onto 198 from Spruce. But it is no more busy than the intersection at Rd 196 and Hwy 198 as the road comes north from the City of Exeter. Both intersections currently have traffic light controlled intersections, and building a roundabout at the one, while leaving the current stoplight at the other seems sort of counter productive.

And now for some more reasons to explain why I am so vehemently opposed to Alternative 3B, which are not so selfish as the fact that is quite literally going through my bedroom. Hwy 65 which runs from just north of the interchange of Hwy 99 in Bakersfield CA, at 7th Standard/ Merle Haggard Drive, running north through the east side of the valley, east of the 99 corridor, to connect with Ducor, Terra Bella, Porterville, Strathmore, and Lindsay, is for the most part a two lane Hwy, with a posted speed limit of 55mph. At various places on this road there are stoplight controlled intersections. Ducor and Terra Bella, come to mind as well as in Porterville at Tea Pot Dome and Scranton. Only in the 10 mile stretch between Porterville and Lindsay does it become a 4 lane divided Hwy, and only a very short section in that 10 mile stretch, within the Porterville city limits, between Hwy 190 and Henderson Ave, is freeway with offramps.

Continuing north beyond Henderson there are stoplight controlled Intersections at North Grand, Ave 196 in Strathmore, and at Hermosa Street in Lindsay, Spruce Rd, and at 196 at Cairns Corner. In fact there are many

intersections within this 10 mile stretch, between Porterville and Lindsay, where the only control is a stop sign, on the crossing streets, causing crossing traffic to have to cross 4 lanes of divided highway, where the highway cross traffic is not controlled, making for some very long wait times, and dangerous crossings. Therefore it seems to me that this particular proposed section of "expressway" between Lindmore and Cedar in Lindsay, in order to bypass one intersection at Hermosa Street is superfluous and unnecessary. It seems that monies could be much more wisely spent in addressing those other "uncontrolled" crossings.

In recent years Cal Trans has spent many millions of dollars upgrading and retrofitting, the existing section of Hwy 65 between Cairns Corner and Hermosa St on the outskirts of Lindsay. Several years ago it was the renovation of the intersection at Hermosa St enlarging the intersection and placing the left turn lanes and the timed traffic lights. Most recently it was installing the traffic signals at Rd 204/ Spruce Rd. This last was within the last two years. Creating this proposed expressway will effectively bypass this entire section of Hwy and turn it over to the City of Lindsay, at the cost of many more millions of dollars, and only for the purpose of cutting off the curve.

A very good question that I would be asking, if I were an engineer/ highway planner working on this series of projects, would be, (B4) "What is the purpose of Alternative 1B, the roundabout at Tulare Rd, if the same project calls for the bypassing of that multi million dollar roundabout, with an expressway and roundabout built 300 yards to the west? The engineer that we spoke with on the video, virtual public hearing on Sept 9th, had some answer, involving creating this bypass in order to avoid having roundabouts and stop light controlled intersections too close together, which could cause confusion. And yet this proposal goes from Lindmore to Cedar, a street with virtually no traffic ever on it, which in fact does not even cross the highway, but rather tees into it from the north, and yet within 800 ft. we are still left with a stoplight at Spruce, and lo and behold another stoplight at Cairns Corner. So that in effect it only exacerbates the problem by creating another roundabout, even closer to the stoplight controlled intersection at Spruce, which I assume you will not abandon because it was just built.

Another issue which I am not sure anyone has considered, while taking into account the amount of farmland taken out of production with this project, is the disruption of the farming for the rest of the farms to the west of the proposed route. I can assure you that this will bisect the Lindmore irrigation districts main water delivery pipeline at many points along the route, also putting those farms and orchards using Lindmore water, effectively out of production for however long this project takes to complete, at the cost of many more millions of dollars to repair and renovate their water system, notwithstanding the potential crop losses.

Now I am not one to just point out problems, and make complaints, without also proposing workarounds and possible solutions which you may not have considered. The intersection at Hwy 65 and Hermosa Street in Lindsay is perhaps the largest intersection in Tulare County. So wide that when making a left turn there, the green arrow has changed before you even get 1/3 across the intersection and begin the actual left turn. If Cal Trans is so hell bent on putting roundabouts in Lindsay, then I would recommend that one could be built there. There is already plenty of room, it would tie in nicely with the businesses doing business at that corner, including the shopping center, the two gas stations and fast food places , which are currently difficult to get into and out of, as well as being able to continue to use the existing section of Hwy 65, tying into, and not bypassing the first part of this project, which is the roundabout at Tulare road. This would not require the acquisition of nearly as much productive farmland, as the right of way already exits. It would seem to preserve the millions of dollars already spent on that section of Hwy 65 in recent years, by not abandoning it. Yes the path would still take you around the curve, but that at most will add 30 seconds to the drive, and save the expense of many, many millions of dollars inquisition, and new road building costs, while at the same time, selfishly protecting my bedroom from having a highway going through it.

Caltrans Response: Thank you for your comments on the environmental document and thank you for your supporting comments of Build Alternative 1.B and your acknowledgment of the possible benefits of Build Alternative 2.B.

Caltrans acknowledges your comment regarding the concern with constructing a roundabout at State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue (Alternative 2.B) but not constructing or considering a roundabout at State Route 198 and Road 196. The State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue intersection often experiences very high demand, from a traffic-operation perspective, in the left-turn lane for westbound traffic and the roundabout alternative would handle this imbalance better than a signal alternative. Also, the proposed roundabout would provide better traffic circulation within the overall project area which can ease pressure on existing signalized intersections along State Route 198. Additionally, the installation of a roundabout at State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue does not preclude the construction of roundabouts throughout the State Route 198 corridor in the future.

Caltrans acknowledges the concern of constructing a roundabout at Tulare Rd (Alternative 1.B) then bypassing the newly constructed roundabout with an expressway and roundabout to the west (Alternative 3.B). However, the Traffic Operational Analysis completed for the project shows that multiple roundabouts along State Route 65 within the project area would not impact the existing signalized intersections at Hermosa Street or Spruce Avenue. Additionally, the operation of traffic signals along State Route 65 at Hermosa

Street, Spruce Avenue and elsewhere within the project area would take into consider the addition of roundabouts along the corridor.

Caltrans acknowledges the impacts to farmland and associated irrigation facilities, impacts to residences and other structures that would occur with the construction of Alternative 3.B. However, as identified in Section 1.6 of this document, Build Alternative 3.B was not selected as one of the build alternatives for this project.

Comment Email from Jan Harvey:

I have talked to young drivers and old drivers and all expressed their dislike to roundabouts. No one seems to know how to drive thru them. When they have the right away they stop and when they don't they blaze through. The roundabout on they way to Eagle Mountain caused confusion to a person and they were shot by another person. The one in Lindsay by the highway is a real mess. We really don't need that confusion added to all the poor drivers on the road.

It would be money better spent on fixing roads or widening roads. Only roundabout that works fairly well is the one by the Wal Mart Distribution Center in Porterville but that was only after the drivers ran over the original one and they had input in how to build it. I would like safer roads not mayhem.

Please consider another way to promote traffic safety as this is not the way.

Caltrans Response: Caltrans performs an Intersection Control Evaluation for any project that improves an intersection. The Intersection Control Evaluation makes sure that a proposed improvement alternative is the best or most effective solution for the project stakeholders, which includes safety and operational aspects. The Intersection Control Evaluation for this project includes the following:

- Traffic counts and surveillance at the subject intersection.
- Run the collision data for the intersection.
- Obtain traffic forecasting for the subject intersection (construction year and design year).
- An operational evaluation of all possible alternatives (intersection control like two-way-stop control, all-way-stop control, signal control, and roundabout control). Results are tabulated and compared in terms of intersection delay and Level of Service. This is a big step. Project development (design) would also need to provide the cost estimates for alternatives in this step (typically, cost for signal versus roundabout because “all-way-stop control” is usually dropped due to its low capacity).
- An economic analysis (benefit/cost ratios) is evaluated in this step. The benefit/cost ratios will include both “safety” (in terms of the safety index) and “operations” (delay information from step four). Note that the economic evaluation for this step is typically for the life cycle of the project (20 years). The recommended alternative will be based on the results from this step (the overall benefit/cost ratio). The higher benefit/cost value indicates the alternative yields a higher benefit.
- From a traffic operation point-of-view, roundabout control is highly preferred for skewed intersections such as the Tulare Road and State Route 65 intersection near Lindsay. Also, roundabouts can handle

imbalances in traffic at intersections better than signals. The State Route 198 and Spruce Avenue intersection often experiences very high demand in the left-turn lane for westbound traffic, the roundabout alternative would handle this imbalance better than a signal alternative. Finally, the proposed roundabouts would provide better traffic circulation within the overall project area which could ease pressure on existing signalized intersections along State Route 65, State Route 245 and State Route 198.

Comment Email E from Dan Stadtherr:

I am totally in favor of roundabouts, however I have concerns. I find that while the roundabouts now installed in the Porterville area work well, drivers do not keep their lanes reliably. With the high amounts of traffic in the project intersections, I would hope to see dedicated right turn lanes with plenty of merge lane length in each direction so only left and straight ahead vehicles need to enter the circle. At Spruce and 198 the vast majority of northbound traffic turns left and the vast majority of eastbound traffic turns right as you probably know. Dedicated right turn lanes would eliminate most or all of the lane keeping problem in the circle itself.

I would like to add a couple more concerns outside of this issue. When Highway 65 was resurfaced between Lindsay and Porterville, the North Grand intersection was not given needed improvements, was there a reason for this? Specifically, the left turn lanes on the highway are not wide enough, traffic is zooming by mere inches from you while you wait to turn, many drivers do not pay attention to this and actually straddle the lane line. I keep waiting for a wreck but so far none that I know of. Also, on Highway 190 westbound from Jaye street you have to merge to the left before exiting onto northbound 65, the merge lane needs to be shortened so people merge in the first place or lengthened so you don't have to merge at all. As it is now drivers end up using the shoulder to lengthen the merge lane into the exit lane. Always keep in mind, many drivers do not know the rules of the road, and many that do know them don't obey them.

Caltrans Response: For further information about the Caltrans Intersection Control Evaluation completed for this project, please see the prior Caltrans response above. The design detail of a proposed roundabout can be fine-tuned or adjusted during the design process. Dedicated right-turn lanes have been incorporated into the design of roundabouts within Caltrans District 6.

Caltrans acknowledges the need for congestion relief throughout the State Route 65 and State Route 190 corridor. The pavement preservation project referred to on State Route 65 between Lindsay and Porterville, which includes resurfacing, primarily consists of nonstructural preventive and corrective maintenance strategies. The goal of pavement preservation is to maintain existing pavement in generally good condition before more expensive rehabilitation is required. The scope of work for the pavement preservation project noted in the comment above did not include intersection improvements.

Comment Email from California Department of Fish and Wildlife:

September 24, 2020

Juergen Vespermann

California Department of Transportation, District 6 855 M Street, Suite 200

Fresno, California 93721

Subject: Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements (Project)

Initial Study with proposed Negative Declaration State Clearinghouse No. 2003111011

Dear Mr. Vespermann:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received a proposed Negative Declaration (ND) and its supporting Initial Study (IS) prepared by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for the above-referenced Project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.1

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife.

Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under Fish and Game Code.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statue for all the people of the State (Fish and G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Id., § 1802). Similarly, for purposes of CEQA,

1 CEQA is codified in the California Public Resources Code in section 21000 et seq. The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870

CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a Responsible Agency under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, the Project may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.). Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code will be required.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: Caltrans

Objective: Caltrans proposes several operational improvements to various state routes in Tulare County. Location 1 would include the realignment of Tulare Road and Oak Avenue and a newly constructed roundabout in northwest Lindsay. At Location 2, a new roundabout would be constructed at the State Route 198/245 and Spruce Avenue intersection. Location 3 would involve the realignment of State Route 65 to the west of its current location near Lindsay. This realignment would include the construction of a four-lane expressway beginning just north of the State Route 65/Lindmore Street intersection, continuing northbound until it reaches State Route 65 about one-quarter mile east of the SR 65/Spruce Avenue intersection, with roundabouts at Hermosa Street and where the new alignment meets with the existing SR 65 (Project). The existing, southbound SR 65 would be reconstructed and converted to a two-lane frontage road connecting to the new roundabout at Location 1. A new two-lane frontage road would be constructed, providing access to Oak Avenue. Other Project-related activities will include the construction of pedestrian crossings, sidewalks, the installation of lighting facilities, and bike lanes.

Location: The three Locations which will be realigned and/or rehabilitated exist west of the City of Lindsay along SR 65 and northeast of the City of Exeter in Tulare County.

Timeframe: Unspecified.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the following comments to assist Caltrans in adequately identifying and sufficiently reducing to less-than-significant the potentially significant, direct and indirect

Project-related impacts to fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the document.

Currently, the proposed ND indicates that the Project-related impacts to Biological Resources would be less-than-significant with implementation of specific avoidance and minimization efforts. However, as currently drafted, it is unclear: 1) whether some of the species specific measures proposed in the IS sufficiently reduce to less-than-significant the potential Project-related impacts to those species, and 2) how Caltrans came to the conclusion that there will be no impacts to State listed species CDFW considers potentially present in the vicinity of the Project.

In particular, Caltrans concludes there will be: 1) less-than-significant effects to the State threatened and federally endangered San Joaquin kit fox (Vulpes mutica macrotis) and the State threatened Swainson's hawk (Buteo swainsoni) with implementation of proposed avoidance and minimization measures. CDFW does not agree with these conclusions and herein suggests measures to survey for and avoid Project-related impacts to these species, thereby reducing to less-than-significant Project-related impacts. CDFW also recommends a path forward for Caltrans in the event avoidance of the two species is not feasible.

I. Environmental Setting and Related Impact

Would the Project 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 CDFW or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)?

COMMENT 1: San Joaquin Kit Fox (SJKF)

Issue: The Project activities will involve varying degrees of ground disturbance and the staging and laydown of equipment and materials along the three Project Locations. Some of the Project activities may constitute a novel disturbance sufficient to cause denning SJKF to abandon their dens causing increased susceptibility to predation and potentially resulting in abandoned pups during the pupping season. Caltrans proposes pre-activity clearance surveys of the Project footprint between 14 and 30 days of commencing Project activities, surveying within 200 feet of the project boundary, and exclusion radii around SJKF dens of 50 feet for potential dens and 100 feet for known dens. However, Caltrans does not propose a buffer

radius in the event that a SJKF natal den is discovered.8 Further, while Caltrans proposes consulting with USFWS in the event pupping/natal SJKF are detected during these surveys and/or inspections, Caltrans does not propose consulting with CDFW.

Specific Impacts: While CDFW agrees with Caltrans' plans to conduct pre-activity surveys and surveying outside of the project boundary, CDFW recommends a disturbance buffer around natal dens. Further, CDFW recommends Caltrans consult with CDFW in the event individual SJKF or SJKF dens are detected during the surveys and/or inspections.

Evidence impact would be significant: While habitat loss resulting from agricultural, urban, and industrial development is the primary threat to SJKF (Cypher et al., 2013), disturbance in proximity to a den can result in unsuccessful pupping and cause individuals to become more susceptible to predation. Both results of the Project-related disturbance could constitute significant impacts to the species.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Avoidance and Mitigation Measure(s) Because SJKF are known to occur in the general vicinity of the Project footprint and because dens could be present outside the Project footprint but sufficiently near the Project footprint to be affected by the Project-related activities, CDFW recommends the following edits to the SJKF avoidance and minimization measure section of the IS. Further, CDFW recommends these revised measures be made conditions of Project approval.

Recommended Edits to Avoidance and Minimization Measures No. 7 and No. 8 for SJKF on page 14 of the IS.

CDFW recommends the pre-activity clearance surveys for SJKF be conducted to identify SJKF dens at and within 250 feet of the Project footprint, and that Caltrans coordinate with USFWS and CDFW in the event that individuals and/or dens are detected during these surveys. These surveys can be limited to 100 feet beyond the Project footprint if work commences outside the pupping season. Through the aforementioned coordination, CDFW will recommend a 250-foot no disturbance buffer around natal dens, a 100-foot no disturbance buffer around known dens, and a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer around potential or atypical dens, and absolutely no disturbance to the dens within the above buffers without contacting CDFW and obtaining written authorization to do so. If the aforementioned edits to the existing avoidance and minimization measures are not made, and/or the aforementioned buffers are not feasible, CDFW recommends Caltrans obtain incidental take coverage under section 2081 subdivision (b) of Fish and Game Code and that this be specified in the revised IS, and that the revised IS support a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND). In summary, if the edited avoidance measure is not feasible, mitigation (take authorization) would be

required to reduce to less-than-significant the unavoidable Project-related impacts on SJKF.

COMMENT 2: Swainson's Hawk (SWHA)

Issue: SWHA are known to have nested in the vicinity of the Project. The Project activities will involve varying degrees of ground disturbance within the right-of-way, CDFW considers it possible that the Project-related activities would represent a novel stimulus which could result in nest abandonment if they occur within ½-mile of an active SWHA nest. This nest abandonment would represent a significant impact to SWHA as well as potentially resulting in take, as it is defined in section 86 of Fish and Game Code.

Specific Impacts: In the IS, Caltrans indicates it will maintain a 500-foot no disturbance buffer from active SWHA nests during Project implementation. However, CDFW considers this 500-foot no disturbance buffer insufficient to avoid take of SWHA. Therefore, CDFW does not agree that the proposed 500-foot no-disturbance buffer reduces to less-than-significant the potential Project-related impacts to the species.

Evidence impact would be significant: SWHA exhibit high nest-site fidelity year after year and lack of suitable nesting habitat in the San Joaquin Valley limits their local distribution and abundance (CDFW 2016). Adoption of the ND as it is written will allow activities that will involve ground disturbance, grading, and excavation employing heavy equipment and work crews within 500 feet of active SWHA nests. These activities could negatively affect these nests and have the potential to result in nest abandonment, significantly affecting nesting SWHA.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Avoidance and Mitigation Measure(s) Because the Project-related activities could threaten nest abandonment, CDFW recommends Caltrans propose a larger no-disturbance buffer in order to reduce to less-than-significant the Project-related impacts to the species. CDFW recommends the following edits to the SWHA avoidance and minimization measures section of the IS. Further, CDFW recommends these revised measures and be made conditions of Project approval.

Recommended Edits to Avoidance and Minimization Measures No. 1 for SWHA on page 15 of the IS.

Currently, under the avoidance and minimization measures section of the IS, Caltrans proposes a 500-foot no-work buffer established around active SWHA nests at and near the Project, unless a biological monitor is present. CDFW recommends Caltrans edit this measure to include protocol level surveys for nesting SWHA if Project-related activities will occur during, or extend into, the SWHA nesting season (February through August). Further, CDFW recommends Caltrans require an unqualified ½-mile no-work buffer around

active SWHA nests until the young have fledged and are no longer reliant on parental care for survival. If the aforementioned edits to the existing avoidance and minimization measures are not made, and/or the aforementioned buffers are not feasible, CDFW recommends Caltrans obtain incidental take coverage under section 2081 subdivision (b) of Fish and Game Code and that this be specified in the revised IS, and that the revised IS support an MND. In summary, if the edited avoidance measure is not feasible, mitigation (take authorization) would be required to reduce to less-than-significant the unavoidable Project-related impacts to SWHA.

II. Editorial Comments and/or Suggestions

Appropriateness of ND: In summary, the above recommended revisions to the IS pertain to avoidance of SJKF and their dens, and nesting SWHA. If surveys confirm the presence of any of the aforementioned species at or within the species specific buffers, Caltrans may not be able to avoid impacts to these species nor accomplish the Project without first obtaining incidental take authorization pursuant to section 2081 subdivision

(b) of Fish and Game Code. Incidental take authorization would require minimization of, and mitigation for, take of the permitted species. CDFW recommends Caltrans incorporate the recommended revisions to the IS and propose an MND for the Project, in lieu of the currently proposed ND.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations (Pub. Resources Code,

§ 21003, subd. (e)). Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to CNDDB. The CNDDB field survey form can be found at the following link: https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/data/cnddb/submitting-data. The completed form can be mailed electronically to CNDDB at the following email address: cnddb@wildlife.ca.gov. The types of information reported to CNDDB can be found at the following link: https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/data/cnddb/plants-and-animals.

FILING FEES

If it is determined that the Project has the potential to impact biological resources, an assessment of filing fees will be necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW. Payment of the fee is required in order for the underlying project approval to be operative, vested,

and final (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 14, § 753.5; Fish & G. Code, § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089).

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Project to assist Caltrans in identifying and avoiding the Project's impacts on biological resources.

More information on survey and monitoring protocols for sensitive species can be found at CDFW's website (https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/conservation/survey-protocols). If you have any questions, please contact Javier Mendez, Environmental Scientist, at the address provided on this letterhead, or by electronic mail at javier.mendez@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Vance Regional Manager

Attachment 1: Recommended Mitigation and Monitoring Reporting Program cc: United States Fish and Wildlife Service

2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-2605

Sacramento, California 95825

Literature Cited

CDFW. 2016. Five Year Status Review for Swainson's Hawk (Buteo swainsoni).

California Department of Fish and Wildlife. April 11, 2016.

Cypher, B. L., S. E. Phillips, and P. A. Kelly. 2013. Quantity and distribution of suitable habitat for endangered San Joaquin kit foxes: conservation implications. Canid Biology and Conservation 16(7): 25–31.

Juergen Vespermann

California Department of Transportation, District 6 September 24, 2020

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Attachment 1

Recommended Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

Attachment 1

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM

(MMRP)

PROJECT: Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements (Project)

SCH No.: 2003111011

STATUS/DATE/INITIALS

Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation

Mitigation Measure 1: SJKF Avoidance

Mitigation Measure 2: SJKF Take Authorization (if avoidance is not feasible)

Mitigation Measure 3: SWHA Avoidance

Mitigation Measure 4: SWHA Take Authorization (if avoidance is not feasible)

Responses to Comment Letter E: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Caltrans Response: Caltrans will enforce a 250-foot buffer upon the discovery of a San Joaquin kit fox natal den in addition to coordinating with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the event pupping/natal San Joaquin kit foxes are detected during pre-activity surveys.

Project analysis to date has not resulted in evidence of the current occupancy of the San Joaquin kit fox. However, Caltrans will perform pre-activity clearance surveys for the San Joaquin kit fox before construction within 250 feet of the project, where Caltrans has the legal authority to do so. Caltrans will add the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's recommended edits to the San Joaquin kit fox avoidance and minimization measures section of the Initial Study. Caltrans will enforce a 250-foot no-work buffer around natal dens, a 100-foot no-work buffer around known dens, and a 50-foot no-work buffer around potential or atypical dens. Additionally, Caltrans will not enforce work to the dens within the above buffers without contacting the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and obtaining written authorization to do so.

State Route 65, State Route 198, and State Route 245 are major arterial routes through the Lindsay and Exeter areas. Activities of all sorts are a common sight through this travel area, whether routine maintenance, project-related, or from members of the traveling public. Raptors that nest within the highway right-of-way would presumably be accustomed to a certain degree of activity. Caltrans would have a biological monitor present during any work

taking place near an active Swainson's hawk nest, who would then be able to determine if or when project activities begin to cause adverse effects to nesting Swainson's hawks and then stop construction.

Caltrans has demonstrated that a 500-foot no-work buffer with a biological monitor present to be a viable alternative to a 0.5-mile no-work buffer. If a Swainson's hawk begins nesting in the project area while construction is underway, a Caltrans biologist can begin monitoring the nest immediately to establish baseline conditions, and to enable variances from these baseline conditions to be noted, as a means of determining when project activities begin to cause adverse effects to nesting Swainson's hawks. There are currently no known nesting raptors in the project area, but if a nesting pair enters the project area, the biological monitor would watch for changes to the behavioral baseline and stop construction if adverse effects resulting from project activity are observed.

Caltrans biologists will perform focused, protocol-level surveys according to "Recommended Timing and Methodology for Swainson's Hawk Nesting Surveys in California's Central Valley" (May 31, 2001) during nesting season (February 1 to September 30) the year before groundbreaking activities to ensure no nesting Swainson's hawks will be affected if construction occurs during the nesting season. Caltrans will implement and enforce a 500-foot no-work buffer around active Swainson's hawks with a biological monitor present, in addition to migratory bird avoidance and minimization measures.

Chapter 5 List of Preparers

This document was prepared by the following Caltrans Central Region staff:

Jason Adair, Associate Environmental Planner. B.A., Geography, Humboldt State University, Arcata; 9 years of environmental analysis and engineering experience, 6 years of environmental planning experience. Contribution: Initial Study/Environmental Assessment.

Allam Alhabaly, Transportation Engineer. B.S., California State University, Fresno, School of Engineering; 18 years of experience in environmental technical studies, with emphasis on noise studies. Contribution: Noise Study Report.

Myles Barker, Editorial Specialist. B.A., Mass Communication and Journalism, California State University, Fresno; 7 years of writing and editing experience. Contribution: Technical Editor.

Jon L. Brady, Associate Environmental Planner. M.A., History, California State University, Fresno; B.A., Political Science and Anthropology; 41 years of experience in environmental planning (archaeology and architectural history). Contribution: Historic Resource Evaluation Report.

Ronald Cummings, Consultant Biologist. B.S., Biology, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon; 31 years of environmental planning and biology experience. Contribution: Natural Environment Study.

David Ewing, Staff Services Manager I. B.A., Graphic Design, Minor in Business Administration, California State University, Fresno; more than 20 years of graphic design, transportation graphics, and public participation experience. Contribution: Public Information Meeting, Environmental Document graphics, and QA/QC.

Maya Hildebrand, Associate Environmental Planner (Air Quality Coordinator). B.S., Geology, Utah State University; 6 years of air quality analysis experience and 5 years of combined geological/environmental hazards experience. Contribution: Air Quality Report.

David Lanner, Associate Environmental Planner (Archaeologist). B.F.A., Art, Utah State University; 26 years of cultural resources experience. Contribution: Historic Property Survey Report.

Rogerio Leong, Engineering Geologist. B.S., Geology, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil; 18 years of environmental site assessment and investigation experience. Authored and co-authored several Remedial

Investigation/Feasibility Study Reports for Superfund contaminated sites. Contribution: Water Quality Compliance Study.

Joseph Llanos, Graphic Designer 3. B.A., Graphic Design, California State University, Fresno; 21 years of visual design and public participation experience. Contribution: Public information meeting graphics/visuals, environmental document graphics.

Richard Putler, Senior Environmental Planner. M.A., City and Regional Planning, California State University, Fresno; B.A., Political Science, University of California, Davis; 20 years of environmental planning experience. Contribution: Supervised the preparation of the environmental document.

Lea Spann, Engineering Geologist. B.A., Environmental Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara; over 20 years of hazardous waste/materials experience and 6 years of environmental planning experience. Contribution: Hazardous Waste Investigation and Report.

Richard C. Stewart, Engineering Geologist, P.G. B.S., Geology, California State University, Fresno; more than 30 years of hazardous waste and water quality experience; 18 years of paleontology/geology experience. Contribution: Paleontological Identification Report.

Juergen Vespermann, Environmental Office Chief (Acting). Civil Engineering Degree, Fachhochschule Muenster, Germany; more than 20 years of experience in transportation planning/environmental planning. Contribution: Reviewed the draft environmental document.

Chapter 6 Distribution List

The Draft Initial Study/Environmental Assessment was distributed to the following agencies, elected officials, service providers, and utility companies.

Federal Agencies

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office, 2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605, Sacramento, CA 95825-1846

Native American Heritage Commission, 1550 Harbor Boulevard, Suite 100, West Sacramento, CA 95691

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, NRI State Resource Inventory Coordinator, 430 G Street, Davis, CA 95616

State Agencies

State Clearinghouse Office of Planning and Research, 1400 10th Street Sacramento, CA 95814-5502

State Clearinghouse Office of Planning and Research, 1400 10th Street Sacramento, CA 95814-5502

California Highway Patrol, Central Division, 4030 Kiernan Avenue, Modesto, CA 95356

California Department of Toxic Substances Control, 8800 Cal Center Drive, Sacramento, CA 95826

California Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1234 East Shaw Avenue, Suite 206, Fresno, CA 93710

California Air Resources Board, 1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

California Department of Conservation, 715 P Street, MS 1900

Sacramento, CA 95814

California Natural Resources Agency, 715 P Street, 20th Floor

Sacramento, CA 95814

California Department of Parks and Recreation, 715 P Street

Sacramento, CA 95814

California Department of Water Resources, 715 P Street

Sacramento, CA 95814

California Public Utilities Commission, 770 L Street, Suite 1050, Sacramento, CA 95814

California State Water Resources Control Board Division of Water Quality, P.O. Box 100, Sacramento, CA 95812

County/Regional Agencies

Tulare County Resource Management Agency, 5961 South Mooney Boulevard, Visalia, CA 93277

Tulare County Association of Governments, 210 N. Church Street, Visalia, CA 93291

County Administrative Officer, Tulare County, 2800 West Burrel Avenue, Visalia, CA 93291

Sheriff, Tulare County, 833 South Akers Street, Visalia, CA 93277

City Manager, City of Lindsay, Post Office Box 369, Lindsay, CA 93247

City Services Director, City of Lindsay, Post Office Box 370, Lindsay, CA 93247

Chief of Police, City of Lindsay, 185 N. Gale Hill Avenue, Lindsay, CA 93247

Public Safety Director, City of Lindsay, Post Office Box 370, Lindsay, CA 93247

Lindsay Fire Station #15, Tulare County Fire Department, 19603 Avenue 228, Lindsay, CA 93247

City Administrator, City of Exeter, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

Public Works Director, City of Exeter, 350 West Firebaugh, Exeter, CA 93221

Chief of Police, City of Exeter, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

Planning Director, City of Exeter, 1002 West Main Street, Visalia, CA 93291

Exeter Fire Station #11, Tulare County Fire Department, 137 North F Street, Exeter, CA 93221

Lindsay Unified School District, 519 East Honolulu Street, Lindsay, CA 93247

Elected Officials

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein, United States Senator, 2500 Tulare Street, Suite 4290, Fresno, CA 93721

The Honorable Kamala Harris, United States Senator, 2500 Tulare Street, Suite 5290, Fresno, CA 93721

The Honorable Devin Nunes, United States Congressman, 22nd District, 113 North Church Street, Visalia, CA 93291

The Honorable Shannon Grove, California State Senator, 16th District, 5701 Truxtun Avenue, Suite 150, Bakersfield, CA 93309

The Honorable Melissa Hurtado, California State Senator, 14th District, 1201 East California Avenue, Suite A, Bakersfield, CA 93307

The Honorable Devon Mathis, California State Assemblyman, 26th District, 100 West Willow Street, Suite 405, Visalia, CA 93291

The Honorable Kuyler Crocker, Chairman, District 1, Tulare County Board of Supervisors, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

The Honorable Mary Waterman-Philpot, Mayor, City of Exeter, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

The Honorable Barbara Sally, Mayor Pro Tem, City of Exeter, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

The Honorable Frankie Alves, Councilmember, Exeter City Council, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

The Honorable Dave Hails, Councilmember, Exeter City Council, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

The Honorable Jeremy Petty, Councilmember, Exeter City Council, 100 North C Street, Exeter, CA 93221

The Honorable Pamela Kimball, Mayor, City of Lindsay, Post Office Box 369, Lindsay, CA 93247

The Honorable Laura Cortes, Mayor Pro Tem, City of Lindsay, Post Office Box 370, Lindsay, CA 93247

The Honorable Brian Watson, Councilmember, Lindsay City Council, Post Office Box 371, Lindsay, CA 93247

The Honorable Rosaena Sanchez, Councilmember, Lindsay City Council, Post Office Box 372, Lindsay, CA 93247

The Honorable Yolanda Flores, Councilmember, Lindsay City Council, Post Office Box 373, Lindsay, CA 93247

Libraries

Tulare County Public Library, Exeter Branch Library, 230 East Chestnut Avenue, Exeter, CA 93221

Tulare County Public Library, Lindsay Branch Library, 157 North Mirage Street, Lindsay, CA 93247.

Utilities

Lindmore Irrigation District, Post Office Box 908, Lindsay, CA 93247

Exeter Irrigation District, 150 South E Street, Exeter, CA 93221

Gas and Electric

Southern California Edison, Post Office Box 800, Rosemead, CA 91770

Appendix A Resources Evaluated Relative to the Requirements of Section 4(f)

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, codified in federal law at 49 U.S. Code 303, declares that "it is the policy of the United States Government that special effort should be made to preserve the natural beauty of the countryside and public park and recreation lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites."

Section 4(f) specifies that the Secretary of Transportation may approve a transportation program or project "…requiring the use of publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, state, or local significance, or land of a historic site of national, state, or local significance (as determined by the federal, state, or local officials having jurisdiction over the park, area, refuge, or site) only if:

- There is no prudent and feasible alternative to using that land; and
- The program or project includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the park, recreation area, wildlife and waterfowl refuge, or historic site resulting from the use."

Section 4(f) further requires coordination with the Department of the Interior and, as appropriate, the involved offices of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Housing and Urban Development in developing transportation projects and programs that use lands protected by Section 4(f). If historic sites are involved, then coordination with the State Historic Preservation Officer is also needed.

Responsibility for compliance with Section 4(f) has been assigned to Caltrans pursuant to 23 U.S. Codes 326 and 327, including determinations and approval of Section 4(f) evaluations, as well as coordination with those agencies that have jurisdiction over a Section 4(f) resource that may be affected by a project action.

Resources Evaluated

This evaluation considered publicly owned recreational resources within 0.5 mile of the project site. Although no qualifying wildlife and waterfowl refuges are within 0.5 mile of the project area, one school and one public park are present that allow the public access to their recreational facilities.

School

Jefferson Elementary School at 333 North Westwood Avenue in Lindsay has playground equipment, basketball courts, and a soccer field along Hermosa Avenue east of the project area. These areas are surrounded by a fence, and

access is limited to a different area east of the facilities mentioned above. Because the project will avoid impacting these areas or access to these areas, Section 4(f) provisions are not triggered.

Park

Olive Bowl Park at 18 North Olive Avenue in Lindsay has three baseball or softball facilities along Olive Avenue, east of the project area. Because the project will avoid impacting the park or access to the park, Section 4(f) provisions are not triggered.

Appendix B Title VI Policy Statement

CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR

California Department of Transportation

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
P.O. BOX 942873, MS–49 | SACRAMENTO, CA 94273–0001
(916) 654-6130 | FAX (916) 653-5776 TTY 711
www.dot.ca.gov

September 2022

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.*"

Caltrans will make every effort to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its services, programs and activities, whether they are federally funded or not, and that services and benefits are fairly distributed to all people, regardless of race, color, or national origin. In addition, Caltrans will facilitate meaningful participation in the transportation planning process in a non-discriminatory manner.

Related federal statutes, remedies, 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, or obtain more information regarding Title VI, please contact the Title VI Branch Manager at (916) 639-6392 or visit the following web page: https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/title-vi.

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 Civil Rights, at PO Box 942874, MS-79, Sacramento, CA 94274-0001; (916) 879-6768 (TTY 711); or at Title.VI@dot.ca.gov.

TONY TAVARES
Director

"Provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment"

Appendix C Summary of Relocation Benefits

California Department of Transportation Relocation Assistance Program

DECLARATION OF POLICY

"The purpose of this title is to establish a uniform policy for fair and equitable treatment of persons displaced as a result of federal and federally assisted programs in order that such persons shall not suffer disproportionate injuries as a result of programs designed for the benefit of the public as a whole."

The Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution states, "No Person shall…be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law, nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation." The Uniform Act sets forth in statute the due process that must be followed in real property acquisitions involving federal funds. Supplementing the Uniform Act is the government-wide, single rule for all agencies to follow, set forth in 49 Code of Federal Regulations Part 24. Displaced individuals, families, businesses, farms, and nonprofit organizations may be eligible for relocation advisory services and payments, as discussed below.

FAIR HOUSING

The Fair Housing Law (Title 8 of the Civil Rights Act of 1968) sets forth the policy of the United States to provide, within constitutional limitations, for fair housing. This act, and as amended, makes discriminatory practices in the purchase and rental of most residential units illegal. Whenever possible, minority persons shall be given reasonable opportunities to relocate to any available housing regardless of neighborhood, as long as the replacement dwellings are decent, safe, and sanitary and are within their financial means. This policy, however, does not require the Department to provide a person a larger payment than is necessary to enable a person to relocate to a comparable replacement dwelling.

Any persons to be displaced will be assigned to a relocation advisor who will work closely with each displacee to see that all payments and benefits are fully utilized and that all regulations are observed, thereby avoiding the possibility of displacees jeopardizing or forfeiting any of their benefits or payments. At the time of the initiation of negotiations (usually the first written offer to purchase), owner-occupants are given a detailed explanation of the state's relocation services. Tenant occupants of properties to be acquired are contacted soon after the initiation of negotiations and also are given a detailed explanation of the Caltrans Relocation Assistance Program. To avoid loss of possible benefits, no individual, family, business, farm, or nonprofit

organization should commit to purchasing or renting a replacement property without first contacting a Department relocation advisor.

RELOCATION ASSISTANCE ADVISORY SERVICES

In accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970, as amended, the Department will provide relocation advisory assistance to any person, business, farm, or nonprofit organization displaced as a result of the acquisition of real property for public use, so long as they are legally present in the United States. The Department will assist eligible displacees in obtaining comparable replacement housing by providing current and continuing information on the availability and prices of both houses for sale and rental units that are “decent, safe, and sanitary.” Nonresidential displacees will receive information on comparable properties for lease or purchase (for business, farm, and nonprofit organization relocation services, see below).

Residential replacement dwellings will be in a location generally not less desirable than the displacement neighborhood at prices or rents within the financial ability of the individuals and families displaced and reasonably accessible to their places of employment. Before any displacement occurs, comparable replacement dwellings will be offered to displacees that are open to all persons regardless of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin and consistent with the requirements of Title 8 of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. This assistance will also include the supplying of information concerning federal and state-assisted housing programs and any other known services being offered by public and private agencies in the area.

Persons who are eligible for relocation payments and who are legally occupying the property required for the project will not be asked to move without first being given at least 90 days’ written notice. Residential occupants eligible for relocation payment(s) will not be required to move unless at least one comparable “decent, safe, and sanitary” replacement dwelling that is available on the market is offered to them by the Department.

RESIDENTIAL RELOCATION PAYMENTS

The Relocation Assistance Program will help eligible residential occupants by paying certain costs and expenses. These costs are limited to those necessary for or incidental to the purchase or rental of a replacement dwelling and actual reasonable moving expenses to a new location within 50 miles of the displacement property. Any actual moving costs in excess of the 50 miles are the responsibility of the displacee. The Residential Relocation Assistance Program can be summarized as follows:

Moving Costs

Any displaced person, who lawfully occupied the acquired property, regardless of the length of occupancy in the property acquired, will be eligible for reimbursement of moving costs. Displacees will receive either the actual reasonable costs involved in moving themselves and personal property up to a maximum of 50 miles or a fixed payment based on a fixed moving cost schedule. Lawful occupants who move into the displacement property after the initiation of negotiations must wait until the Department obtains control of the property to be eligible for relocation payments.

Purchase Differential

In addition to moving and related expense payments, fully eligible homeowners may be entitled to payments for increased costs of replacement housing.

Homeowners who have owned and occupied their property for 90 days or more before the date of the initiation of negotiations (usually the first written offer to purchase the property) may qualify to receive a price differential payment and may qualify to receive reimbursement for certain nonrecurring costs incidental to the purchase of the replacement property. An interest differential payment is also available if the interest rate for the loan on the replacement dwelling is higher than the loan rate on the displacement dwelling, subject to certain limitations on reimbursement based upon the replacement property interest rate.

Rent Differential

Tenants and certain owner-occupants (based on length of ownership) who have occupied the property to be acquired by the Department before the date of the initiation of negotiations may qualify to receive a rent differential payment. This payment is made when the Department determines that the cost to rent a comparable “decent, safe, and sanitary” replacement dwelling will be more than the present rent of the displacement dwelling. As an alternative, the tenant may qualify for a down payment benefit designed to assist in the purchase of a replacement property and the payment of certain costs incidental to the purchase, subject to certain limitations noted under the Down Payment section below. To receive any relocation benefits, the displaced person must buy or rent and occupy a “decent, safe, and sanitary” replacement dwelling within one year from the date the Department takes legal possession of the property or from the date the displacee vacates the displacement property, whichever is later.

Down Payment

The down payment option has been designed to aid owner-occupants of less than 90 days and tenants in legal occupancy before the Department’s

initiation of negotiations. The one-year eligibility period in which to purchase and occupy a “decent, safe, and sanitary” replacement dwelling will apply.

Last Resort Housing

Federal regulations (49 Code of Federal Regulations 24) contain the policy and procedure for implementing the Last Resort Housing Program on Federal-aid projects. Last Resort Housing benefits are, except for the amounts of payments and the methods in making them, the same as those benefits for standard residential relocation as explained above. Last Resort Housing has been designed primarily to cover situations where a displacee cannot be relocated because of a lack of available comparable replacement housing, or when the anticipated replacement housing payments exceed the limits of the standard relocation procedure because either the displacee lacks the financial ability or other valid circumstances.

After the initiation of negotiations, the Department will, within a reasonable length of time, personally contact the displacees to gather important information, including the following:

- Number of people to be displaced.
- Specific arrangements needed to accommodate any family member(s) with special needs.
- Financial ability to relocate into a comparable replacement dwelling that will adequately house all members of the family.
- Preferences in the area of relocation.
- Location of employment or school.

NONRESIDENTIAL RELOCATION ASSISTANCE

The Nonresidential Relocation Assistance Program provides assistance to businesses, farms, and nonprofit organizations in locating suitable replacement property and reimbursement for certain costs involved in relocation. The Relocation Advisory Assistance Program will provide current lists of properties offered for sale or rent that are suitable for a particular business’s specific relocation needs. The types of payments available to eligible businesses, farms, and nonprofit organizations are: searching and moving expenses and possibly reestablishment expenses; or a fixed, in-lieu payment instead of any moving, searching, and reestablishment expenses. The payment types can be summarized as follows:

Moving Expenses

Moving expenses may include the following actual, reasonable costs:

- The moving of inventory, machinery, equipment, and similar business-related property, including dismantling, disconnecting, crating, packing, loading, insuring, transporting, unloading, unpacking, and reconnecting personal property. Items acquired in the right-of-way contract may not be moved under the Relocation Assistance Program. If the displacee buys an Item Pertaining to the Realty back at salvage value, the cost to move that item is borne by the displace.
- Loss of tangible personal property provides payment for actual, direct loss of personal property that the owner is permitted not to move.
- Expenses related to searching for a new business site, up to $2,500, for reasonable expenses actually incurred.

Reestablishment Expenses

Reestablishment expenses related to the operation of the business at the new location, up to $25,000 for reasonable expenses actually incurred.

Fixed In-Lieu Payment

A fixed payment in lieu of moving, searching, and reestablishment payments may be available to businesses that meet certain eligibility requirements. This payment is an amount equal to half the average annual net earnings for the last two taxable years before the relocation and may not be less than $1,000 or more than $40,000.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Reimbursement for moving costs and replacement housing payments are not considered income for the purpose of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954, or for the purpose of determining the extent of eligibility of a displacee for assistance under the Social Security Act, or any other law, except for any federal law providing local “Section 8” Housing Programs.

Any person, business, farm, or nonprofit organization that has been refused a relocation payment by the Department relocation advisor or believes that the payment(s) offered by the agency are inadequate may appeal for a special hearing of the complaint. No legal assistance is required. Information about the appeal procedure is available from the relocation advisor.

California law allows for the payment for lost goodwill that arises from the displacement for a public project. A list of ineligible expenses can be obtained from the Department’s Division of Right of Way and Land Surveys. California’s law and the federal regulations covering relocation assistance provide that no payment shall be duplicated by other payments being made by the displacing agency.

For additional information, visit the Division of Right of Way's Relocation Assistance Program website at: http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/row/rap/index.htm.

Appendix D Farmland Conversion Impact Rating

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS-CPA-106
(Rev. 1-91)

FARMLAND CONVERSION IMPACT RATING FOR CORRIDOR TYPE PROJECTS

PART I *(To be completed by Federal Agency)*	3. Date of Land Evaluation Request 8/7/19	4. Sheet 1 of _____
1. Name of Project Lindsay and Route 198/245 Operational	5. Federal Agency Involved FHWA	
2. Type of Project Transportation	6. County and State Tulare County, CA	
PART II *(To be completed by NRCS)*	1. Date Request Received by NRCS 8/7/19	2. Person Completing Form Luis Alvarez
3. Does the corridor contain prime, unique statewide or local important farmland? (If no, the FPPA does not apply - Do not complete additional parts of this form). YES ☑ NO ☐		4. Acres Irrigated 557,361 | Average Farm Size 251
5. Major Crop(s) Orchards, Corn	6. Farmable Land in Government Jurisdiction Acres: 677,506 % 21.8	7. Amount of Farmland As Defined in FPPA Acres: 971,730 % 31.3
8. Name Of Land Evaluation System Used CA Revised Storie Index	9. Name of Local Site Assessment System None	10. Date Land Evaluation Returned by NRCS 9/6/19

PART III *(To be completed by Federal Agency)*	Alternative Corridor For Segment			
	Corridor A	Corridor B	Corridor C	Corridor D
A. Total Acres To Be Converted Directly	6.14	1.27	21.09	
B. Total Acres To Be Converted Indirectly, Or To Receive Services	2.94	0	5.67	
C. Total Acres In Corridor	9.08	1.27	26.76	
PART IV *(To be completed by NRCS) Land Evaluation Information*				
A. Total Acres Prime And Unique Farmland	0.5	0	15	
B. Total Acres Statewide And Local Important Farmland	9	1.5	12	
C. Percentage Of Farmland in County Or Local Govt. Unit To Be Converted	0.0010	0.0002	0.0028	
D. Percentage Of Farmland in Govt. Jurisdiction With Same Or Higher Relative Value	57.20	61.11	29.36	
PART V *(To be completed by NRCS) Land Evaluation Information Criterion Relative value of Farmland to Be Serviced or Converted (Scale of 0 - 100 Points)*	38	35	68	
PART VI *(To be completed by Federal Agency) Corridor Assessment Criteria (These criteria are explained in 7 CFR 658.5(c))*	Maximum Points			
1. Area in Nonurban Use	15	7	15	9	
2. Perimeter in Nonurban Use	10	7	10	9	
3. Percent Of Corridor Being Farmed	20	14	20	20	
4. Protection Provided By State And Local Government	20	0	0	0	
5. Size of Present Farm Unit Compared To Average	10	3	2	0	
6. Creation Of Nonfarmable Farmland	25	8	0	15	
7. Availablility Of Farm Support Services	5	5	3	5	
8. On-Farm Investments	20	15	18	20	
9. Effects Of Conversion On Farm Support Services	25	0	0	0	
10. Compatibility With Existing Agricultural Use	10	0	0	0	
TOTAL CORRIDOR ASSESSMENT POINTS	160	59	68	78	0
PART VII *(To be completed by Federal Agency)*					
Relative Value Of Farmland (From Part V)	100	38	35	68	0
Total Corridor Assessment (From Part VI above or a local site assessment)	160	59	68	78	0
TOTAL POINTS *(Total of above 2 lines)*	260	97	103	146	0

1. Corridor Selected:	2. Total Acres of Farmlands to be Converted by Project:	3. Date Of Selection:	4. Was A Local Site Assessment Used?
A, B	10.35	7/24/2023	YES ☐ NO ☒

5. Reason For Selection:

Signature of Person Completing this Part: 7/24/2023 DATE

NOTE: Complete a form for each segment with more than one Alternate Corridor

Appendix E State Historic Preservation Officer Letter

State of California • Natural Resources Agency — Gavin Newsom, *Governor*
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION — Armando Quintero, *Director*
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION
Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer
1725 23rd Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95816-7100
Telephone: (916) 445-7000 FAX: (916) 445-7053
calshpo.ohp@parks.ca.gov www.ohp.parks.ca.gov

March 9, 2021

VIA EMAIL — In reply refer to: FHWA_2019_1024_002

Ms. Aubrie Morlet
Southern San Joaquin Valley Cultural Resources Branch
Caltrans District 6
855 M Street, Suite 200
Fresno, CA 93721-2716

Subject: Determination of Eligibility for the Proposed Lindsay and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements Project, Tulare County, CA

Dear Ms. Morlet:

Caltrans is continuing consultation regarding the above project in accordance with the January 1, 2014 *First Amended Programmatic Agreement Among the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the California Department of Transportation Regarding Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as it Pertains to the Administration of the Federal-Aid Highway Program in California* (PA). As part of your documentation, Caltrans submitted a Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report (HPSR) and Supplemental Historic Resources Evaluation Report for the proposed project.

During the public comment period for the 2020 Initial Study/Environment Assessment document, Caltrans received a comment regarding a potential historic-era resource within the project APE. This comment necessitated a re-evaluation of the project APE for potentially eligibly historical resources.

Pursuant to Stipulation VIII.C.6 of the PA, Caltrans determined that 1635 W Mariposa Street in Lindsay is not eligible for the NRHP.

Based on review of the submitted documentation, I concur with the above determinations.

If you have any questions, please contact Natalie Lindquist at (916) 445-7014 with e-mail at natalie.lindquist@parks.ca.gov .

Sincerely,

Julianne Polanco
State Historic Preservation Officer

Appendix F Avoidance, Minimization and/or Mitigation Summary

To ensure that all of the environmental measures identified in this document are executed at the appropriate times, the following mitigation program (as articulated in the proposed Environmental Commitments Record that follows) will be implemented. During project design, avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures will be incorporated into the project's final plans, specifications, and cost estimates, as appropriate. All permits will be obtained before the implementation of the project. During construction, environmental and construction/engineering staff will ensure that the commitments contained in the Environmental Commitments Record are fulfilled. Following construction and appropriate phases of project delivery, long-term mitigation maintenance and monitoring will take place, as applicable. Because the following Environmental Commitments Record is a draft, some fields have not been completed; they will be filled out as each of the measures is implemented.

Note: Some measures may apply to more than one resource area. Duplicated or redundant measures have not been included in this Environmental Commitments Record.

Utilities and Emergency Services

During the design phase of the project, a more detailed study will be conducted to determine the necessary relocation of utilities. Caltrans will meet with the affected utilities to coordinate the details for relocations and easements to avoid or minimize any interruption in service.

A detailed traffic management plan will be developed during the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates phase of the project to minimize delays and maximize safety during construction. The traffic management plan may include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- Release of information through brochures and mailers, press releases and media alerts, and planned lane closure notices from the Caltrans website.
- Use of portable changeable message signs.
- Incident management through the Construction Zone Enhanced Enforcement Program (also known as COZEEP) and the transportation management plan.

The Construction Zone Enhanced Enforcement Program is a program that uses California Highway Patrol officers during construction to improve the safety of construction crews and the motoring public. The officers may be used for traffic control and provide needed emergency response support

services. Caltrans coordinates and manages road user information, such as identifying the fixed changeable message signs and highway advisory radio on the state highway system that will be used during construction.

Traffic and Transportation

A Traffic Management Plan will be developed during construction to handle local traffic patterns and reduce delay, congestion, and the likelihood of collisions during construction. The Traffic Management Plan includes notifying the public of construction activities via media outlets, using changeable message signs and construction strategies, and using the Central Valley Traffic Management Center, which reduces congestion by monitoring traffic and informing the public via media outlets, such as radio and television. Traffic delays are expected to be minimal because most of the Build Alternatives will be built on new alignments. By building the proposed project in the construction phases and rerouting traffic to local roads, disruption to local and regional traffic will be minimized with all the Build Alternatives.

Pedestrian Facilities

Curb ramps that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements will be provided at all improved intersections or new local road intersections.

Bicycle Facilities

Class 2 bike lanes and shared-use paths will be provided at the proposed roundabout locations.

Plant Species

While the likelihood that the spiny-sepaled button-celery will be found at Alternative 2.B is very small, Caltrans proposes the following avoidance and minimization measures to ensure the project will not result in measurable impacts to this species:

- A botanical survey of the project impact area at Alternative 2.B will be performed during the appropriate flowering season before the start of project activities.
- Any spiny-sepaled button-celery that is identified during the botanical survey at Alternative 2.B will be protected by an Environmentally Sensitive Area buffer. The Environmentally Sensitive Area will be marked with bright orange flagging or fencing and provide a minimum 10-foot buffer of the plant population.
- Any spiny-sepaled button-celery within the project impact area at Alternative 2.B that cannot be protected by the Environmentally Sensitive Area will be dug up so the soil around the roots remains intact, kept moist, placed in a protected area, and replanted as close to the original discovery location as possible after project construction has been completed. For

plants that have already gone to seed, the topsoil layer around the plant will be removed, placed into a protective container, then spread on the ground as close to the original discovery location as possible after project construction has been completed. Replanting and soil spreading will occur only in areas that have spiny-sepaled button-celery habitat, such as depressions and ditches that can hold water longer than other areas.

- Worker Environmental Awareness Training will be performed for all project crew members that are involved in ground-disturbing activities at Alternative 2.B. The training will include information about the special-status species in question and the project-specific avoidance and minimization measures that have been implemented into project construction. The training will also provide an opportunity to explain the legal ramifications of not properly performing or of dismissing the implemented avoidance and minimization measures. Training participants will document their participation by signing an attendance sheet. Training will be required for any new crew members that are introduced to the project.
- Because of the low likelihood of occurrence and relatively small impact area, compensatory mitigation for the spiny-sepaled button-celery is not proposed.

Threatened and Endangered Species

San Joaquin Kit Fox

[The following text for the Threatened and Endangered Species section has been updated since the draft environmental document was circulated.] While the likelihood that the San Joaquin kit fox will be found on the project site is very small, Caltrans proposes the following avoidance and minimization efforts to ensure the project will not result in measurable impacts on this species:

- Surveys for the San Joaquin kit fox will be conducted no less than 14 days and no more than 30 days before the beginning of ground disturbance and/or construction activities or any project activity likely to impact the San Joaquin kit fox.
- Surveys will be conducted within potential habitat areas located in the proposed project boundary in addition to a 250-foot area outside the project footprint, where permitted, to identify habitat features.
- If natal/pupping dens are discovered within the project area or within 250 feet of the project boundary, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be immediately notified.
- The configuration of exclusion zones around San Joaquin kit fox dens should have a 50-foot radius around potential dens and a 100-foot radius around known dens measured outward from the entrance or cluster of entrances.

- Disturbance to all San Joaquin kit fox dens (if any) will be avoided to the maximum extent possible.
- If known or potential kit fox dens or burrows are located or if signs of kit fox occupancy are observed within 250 feet of the project areas, a qualified biologist will be present at the construction site during initial ground-disturbing activities.
- To the extent possible, a biologist will be available on-call throughout construction when not present onsite.
- Due to the low likelihood of occurrence and low quality of impacted habitat, compensatory mitigation for this species is not proposed.

Swainson's Hawk

While the likelihood that the Swainson's hawk will be found on the project site is low, Caltrans proposes the following avoidance and minimization efforts to ensure the project will not result in measurable impacts on this species:

- Protocol nesting surveys will be conducted during the appropriate season before the start of construction to determine if any Swainson's hawks are nesting in proximity (0.5 mile) to the project areas.
- If nesting Swainson's hawks are seen onsite, then the nest site will be designated an Environmentally Sensitive Area, with a 500-foot radius no-work area around the nest until a qualified biologist determines that the young have fledged.
- A qualified biologist will monitor active nests during construction activities.
- A special provision for migratory birds will be included to ensure that no potential nesting migratory birds are affected during construction.
- Removal of trees within the project impact areas will be done outside the nesting season.
- Since orchards are an artificial, managed, and atypical habitat type, impacts to orchards are not proposed to be mitigated as loss of natural nesting habitat.

Air Quality

Caltrans Standard Specifications pertaining to dust control and dust palliative requirements are a required part of all construction contracts and should effectively reduce and control emission impacts during construction. The provisions of Caltrans Standard Specifications, Section 14-9.02 "Air Pollution Control" and Section 10-5 "Dust Control," require the contractor to comply with the air pollution control rules, ordinances, and regulations and statutes that apply to work performed under the contract, including those provided in Government Code Section 11017.

Some minimization measures for short-term construction-related emissions include:

- Application of the most stringent available regulations or best practices, even if not required by local/state regulations at the site.
- Possible designation of areas where construction equipment servicing, and storage are not allowed (near sensitive receptors).
- Construction staging
- Temporary programs to reduce detour- and construction-related traffic congestion, such as special transit programs and subsidies.
- A construction equipment emission reduction program to encourage or require the contractor to use cleaner (newer) diesel engines or retrofit older engines.

Noise

The following are possible control measures that can be implemented to minimize noise disturbances in sensitive areas during construction:

- All equipment will have sound-control devices no less effective than those provided on the original equipment. Each internal combustion engine used for any purpose on the job or related to the job will be equipped with a muffler of a type recommended by the manufacturer. No internal combustion engine should be operated on the job site without an appropriate muffler.
- Construction methods or equipment that will provide the lowest level of noise impact (for example, avoid impact pile driving near residences and consider alternative methods that are also suitable for the soil condition) should be used.
- Idling equipment will be turned off.
- Truck loading, unloading, and hauling operations will be restricted so that noise and vibration are kept to a minimum through residential neighborhoods to the greatest possible extent.

The contractor will be required to adhere to the following administrative noise control measures:

- Once details of the construction activities become available, the contractor will work with local authorities to develop an acceptable approach to minimize interference with the business and residential communities, traffic disruptions, and the total duration of the construction.
- Good public relations will be maintained with the community to minimize objections to unavoidable construction impacts. Frequent activity updates of all construction activities will be provided. A construction noise

monitoring program to track sound levels and limit the impacts will be implemented.

- In case of construction noise complaints by the public, the resident engineer will coordinate with the construction manager, and the specific noise-producing activity may be changed, altered, or temporarily suspended, if necessary.

It is possible that certain construction activities, such as clearing and compacting, could cause intermittent localized concern from vibration in the project area. During certain construction phases, processes, such as earth moving with bulldozers, the use of vibratory compaction rollers, demolition activities, or pavement breaking, may cause construction-related vibration impacts such as human annoyance or, in some cases, building damages.

The following are procedures that can be used to minimize the potential impacts from construction vibration:

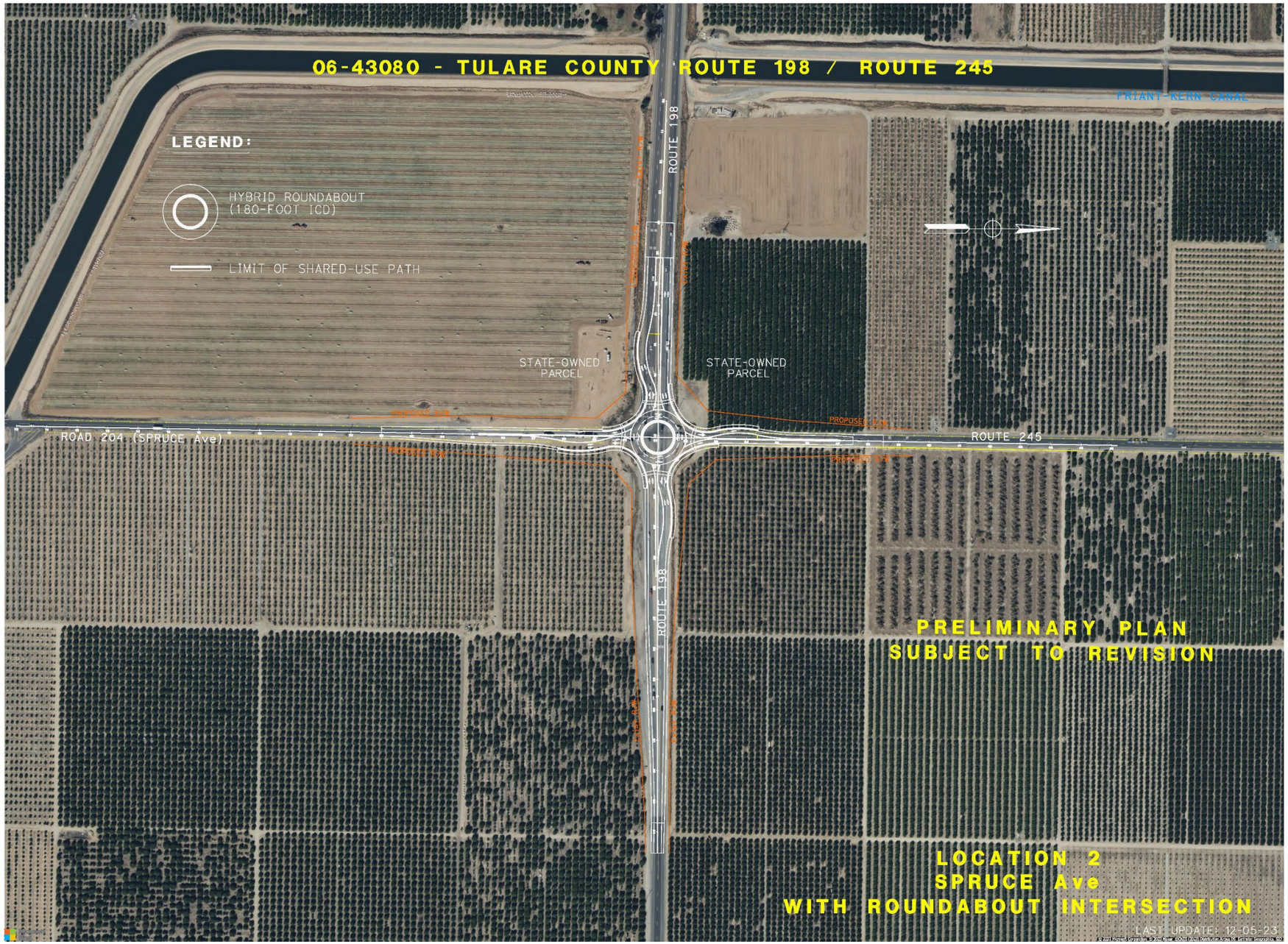
- Restrict the hours of vibration-intensive equipment or activities such as vibratory rollers so that impacts to residents are minimal (e.g., weekdays during daytime hours only when as many residents as possible are away from home).
- The owner of a building close enough to a construction vibration source that damage to that structure due to vibration is possible will be entitled to a preconstruction building inspection to document the preconstruction condition of that structure.
- Conduct vibration monitoring during vibration-intensive activities.

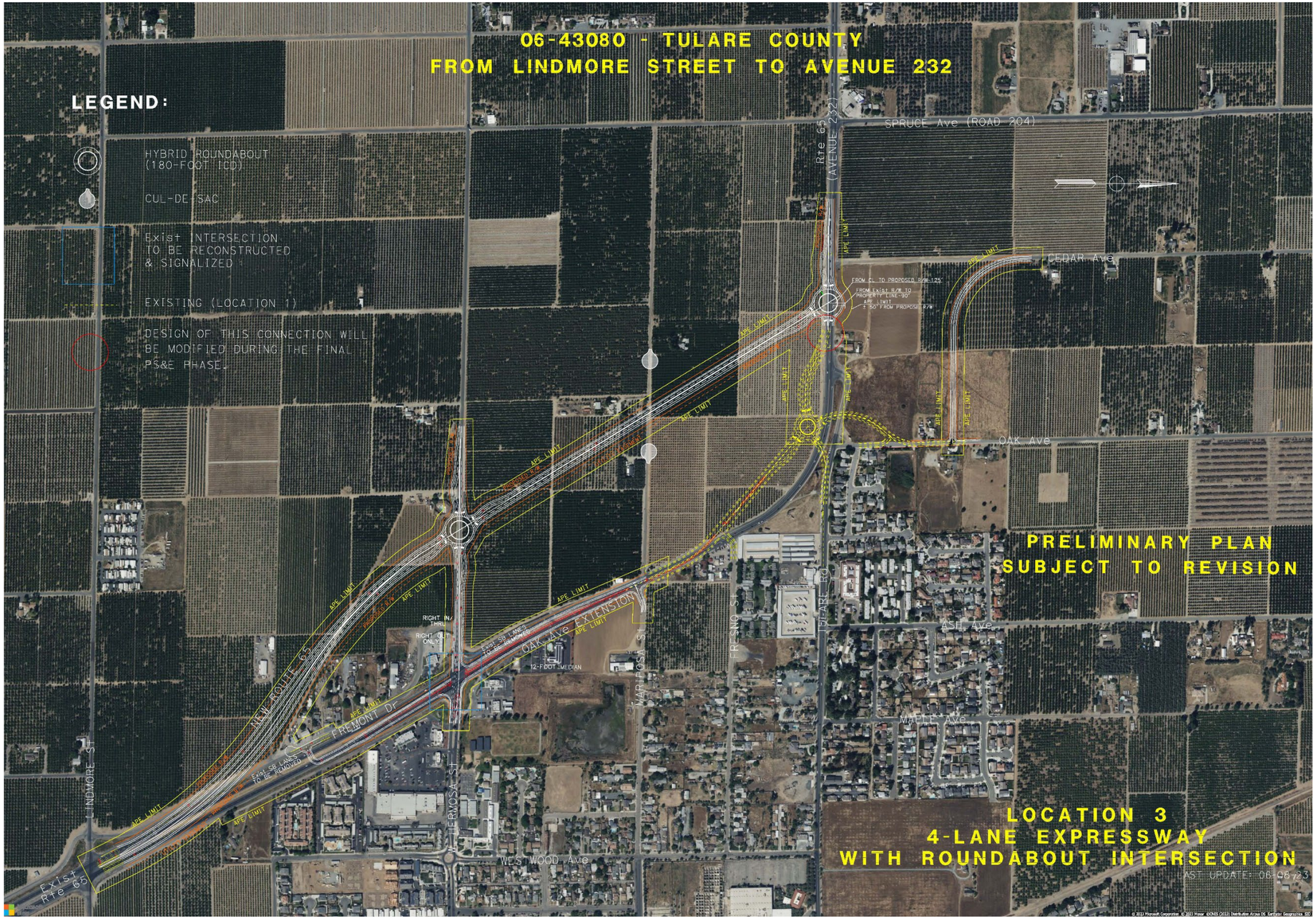
A combination of the mitigation techniques for equipment vibration control and administrative measures, when properly implemented, can be selected to provide the most effective means to minimize the effects of construction activity.

Application of the mitigation measures will reduce the construction impacts; however, temporary increases in vibration will likely occur at some locations.

Appendix G Preliminary Plans


06-43080 - TULARE COUNTY SR 65
LEGEND:
HYBRID ROUNDABOUT
CLOSE ACCESS & Exist PAVEMENT TO BE OBLITERATED
CUL-DE-SAC
COUNTY LIMIT
CITY LIMIT
CEDAR Ave
SHARED-USE PATH
400' RADIUS
180-FOOT Dia ROUNDABOUT
OAK Ave
MONTE CIRCLE
DELTA ST
CLASS 2 BIKE LANE
SHERWOOD WAY
MICHAEL LYNN PI
MARC-ANTHONY PI
ASH Ave
TULARE Rd
800' RADIUS
MARIPOSA ST
FRESNO ST
SR 65
PRELIMINARY PLAN
SUBJECT TO REVISION
LOCATION 1
OAK STREET ROUNDABOUT
LAST UPDATE: 12-05-23


06-43080 - TULARE COUNTY ROUTE 198 / ROUTE 245
FRIANT-KERN CANAL
LEGEND:
HYBRID ROUNDABOUT
(180-FOOT ICD)
LIMIT OF SHARED-USE PATH
ROUTE 198
STATE-OWNED
PARCEL
STATE-OWNED
PARCEL
ROAD 204 (SPRUCE Ave)
ROUTE 245
PROPOSED R/W
PROPOSED R/W
PROPOSED R/W
PROPOSED R/W
ROUTE 198
PRELIMINARY PLAN
SUBJECT TO REVISION
LOCATION 2
SPRUCE Ave
WITH ROUNDABOUT INTERSECTION
LAST UPDATE: 12-05-23


06-43080 - TULARE COUNTY
FROM LINDMORE STREET TO AVENUE 232
LEGEND:
HYBRID ROUNDABOUT (180-FOOT ICD)
CUL-DE-SAC
Exist INTERSECTION TO BE RECONSTRUCTED & SIGNALIZED
EXISTING (LOCATION 1)
DESIGN OF THIS CONNECTION WILL BE MODIFIED DURING THE FINAL PS&E PHASE.
SPRUCE Ave (ROAD 204)
Rte 65 (AVENUE 232)
CEDAR Ave
OAK Ave
OAK Ave EXTENSION
NEW ROUTE 65
FREMONT Dr
WESTWOOD Ave
ASH Ave
MAPLE Ave
LINDMORE ST
HERMOSA ST
MARIPOSA ST
FRESNO ST
TULARE RD
APE LIMIT
12'-F DOT MEDIAN
PRELIMINARY PLAN
SUBJECT TO REVISION
LOCATION 3
4-LANE EXPRESSWAY
WITH ROUNDABOUT INTERSECTION
LAST UPDATE: 06/06/23

Appendix H Interagency Consultation

Hildebrand, Maya@DOT

From:	Vaughn, Joseph (FHWA) <Joseph.Vaughn@dot.gov>
Sent:	Monday, October 7, 2019 11:01 AM
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Subject:	RE: a PM 2.5 and PM 10 Hot-spot Conformity Assessment TUL-65/198/245 - Lindsay and SR-198/245 Operational Improvements

FHWA concurs that these projects are not projects of air quality concern. Thanks

Joseph Vaughn
Environmental Specialist
FHWA, CA Division
(916) 498-5346

From: Hildebrand, Maya@DOT [mailto:Maya.Hildebrand@dot.ca.gov]
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Subject: a PM 2.5 and PM 10 Hot-spot Conformity Assessment TUL-65/198/245 - Lindsay and SR-198/245 Operational Improvements

Dear Interagency Consultation Partners,

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is providing a PM 2.5 and PM 10 Hot-spot Conformity Assessment memo for interagency consultation. The project is the TUL-65/198/245 - Lindsay and SR-198/245 Operational Improvements located in Tulare County. It is requested that

the Interagency Consultation Partners concur that this project is not a "Project of Air Quality Concern" (POAQC). Comments on the assessment are due on October 21, 2019. An interagency conference call will be held upon request.

An interagency conference call will be held upon request**.** The NEPA document for this project is Routine EA (23 USC 327). A Public Hearing will be held during the circulation period of the Draft Environmental Document. FHWA and EPA concurrence is requested.

Please contact me if you have questions regarding this email or the attached memo/mapping.

Maya Hildebrand
Associate Environmental Planner/Air Quality Coordinator
Environmental Engineering Branch
Caltrans Central Region
559.445.6426

Hildebrand, Maya@DOT

From: Oconnor, Karina (she/her/hers) <OConnor.Karina@epa.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, July 19, 2023 8:25 AM
To: Hildebrand, Maya@DOT; Alex Marcucci; Adekemi Ademuyewo; Ahron Hakimi (ahakimi@kerncog.org); Ryan Niblock; Adams, Alicia@ARB; amy.changchien@dot.gov; Lee, Anita (she/her/hers); Antonio Johnson; Becky Napier (bnapier@kerncog.org); Ben Raymond; Blake Dunford; Knecht, Carey@ARB; Christina White; Xiong, Christopher@DOT; Clarissa Hernlund; Padilla, Dave@DOT; Cortez, David M@DOT; Deel, David@DOT; Derek Winning; Diane Nguyen (nguyen@sjcog.org); Dylan Stone (dylan@maderactc.org); Ed Flickinger; Edith Robles; Elisabeth Hahn; Elizabeth Forte; Emma Goldsmith; Maggioncalda, Emma@DOT; Chin, Eric C@DOT; Espinosa Araiza, Erika@DOT; Vaca, Erika@DOT; Thompson, Erin M@DOT; Evelyn Espinosa; Becket, Forest P@DOT; Gabriel Gutierrez (ggutierrez@tularecog.org); Valencia, Gilbert@DOT; Sousa, Hilda@DOT; Kahrs, Jacqueline J@DOT; Anderson, James R@DOT; Perrault, James R@DOT; Jasmine Amanin; Jean Foletta; Jeff Findley (Jeff@maderactc.org); Joseph Stramaglia (jstramaglia@kerncog.org); Swearingen, Joshua B@DOT; Kai Han (khan@fresnocog.org); Becha, Karishma@DOT; Kayley Clay; Romero, Ken J@DOT; Kevin Wing; Vu, Khanh D@DOT; Le, Kien T@DOT; Kim Kloeb (kloeb@sjcog.org); Parmar, Kiranjit@DOT; Kristine Cai (kcai@fresnocog.org); Carr, Laura@ARB; Lawrence, Laura (she/her/hers); Kimura, Lezlie@ARB; Mendibles, Lorena@DOT; Sanchez, Lucas@DOT; Evans, Marcus B@DOT; Jimon, Mayra@DOT; Melany Arriola; Michael Morris; Navarro, Michael@DOT; Molly Boyett; Natalia Austin; Kalandiyur, Nesamani@ARB; Fung, Nicholas@DOT; Nicholas Hernandez; Isla, Nicholas@DOT; Singh, Parminder@DOT; Patricia Taylor (patricia@maderactc.org); Patrick Houlihan; Marquez, Paul Albert@DOT; Kang, Peter B@DOT; Martinez-Velez, Priscilla@DOT; Raquel Pacheco (rpacheco@kerncog.org); Rob Ball (rball@kerncog.org); Robert Phipps; Roberto Brady (RBrady@tularecog.org); Rochelle Invina; Tavitas, Rodney A@DOT; Mays, Rory; Rosa Park (rpark@stancog.org); Yazdi, Sadegh@DOT; Samuel Becker; Scherr, Sandra L@DOT; Santosh Bhattarai; Martinez, Steven R@DOT; Steve VanDenburgh ; Suriya Vallamsundar; Vanderspek, Sylvia@ARB; Ted Smalley (tsmalley@tularecog.org); Terri King (terri.king@co.kings.ca.us); Dumas, Thomas A@DOT; tom.jordan@valleyair.org; Tony Boren; Ty Phimmasone (ty.phimmasone@mcagov.org); Vincent Liu (vliu@kerncog.org); Choi, Yoojoong@DOT
Subject: RE: PM 2.5 and PM 10 Hot-spot Conformity Assessment - Lindsay State Route 65/198/245 Operational Improvements project in Tulare County (Location 3 dropped)

EXTERNAL EMAIL. Links/attachments may not be safe.

EPA reconfirms that the transportation roundabout operational improvement projects at locations 1 and 2 are not projects of air quality concern.

Thanks, Karina

Karina Oconnor (she/her)
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1

From: Hildebrand, Maya@DOT <Maya.Hildebrand@dot.ca.gov>
Sent: Thursday, July 13, 2023 8:38 AM
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Subject: PM 2.5 and PM 10 Hot-spot Conformity Assessment - Lindsay State Route 65/198/245 Operational Improvements project in Tulare County (Location 3 dropped)

Hello Interagency Consultation Partners,

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is providing a PM 2.5 and PM 10 Hot-spot Conformity Assessment memo for interagency consultation. The project is the Lindsay State Route 65/198/245 Operational Improvements project in Tulare County.

Locations 1 and 2 of this project received concurrence that they were not projects of air quality concern (POAQC) on June 16, 2023. Location 3, which was identified as a POAQC on that date, has been withdrawn from the project. Caltrans requests that EPA and FHWA confirm that Locations 1 and 2 are not POAQC.

Comments on the assessment are due on July 28, 2023. An interagency conference call will be held upon request.

The NEPA document for this project is Routine EA (23 USC 327). FHWA and EPA concurrence is requested.

Please contact me if you have questions regarding this email or the attached memo.

Regards,
Maya Hildebrand Garcia
Associate Environmental Planner/Air Quality Coordinator
Environmental Engineering Branch
Caltrans Central Region

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Appendix I Air Quality Conformity

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

California Division

650 Capitol Mall, Suite 4-100
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 498-5001
(916) 498-5008 (FAX)

October 13, 2023

In Reply, Refer To:
HDA-CA

ELECTRONIC CORRESPONDENCE ONLY

Maya Hildebrand, Air Quality Coordinator
California Department of Transportation,
District 6
2015 East Shields Ave, Suite A-100
Fresno, CA 93726-5428

SUBJECT: Project Level Conformity Determination for the Lindsay and State Route 198/245 Operational Improvements Project (CTIPS ID# 115-0000-0075) EA 06-43080

Dear Ms. Hildebrand:

On October 10, 2023, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) submitted to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) a complete request for a project level conformity determination for the Lindsay and State Route 198/245 Operational Improvements Project (CTIPS ID# 115-0000-0075) EA 06-43080. The project is in an area that is designated Non-Attainment or Maintenance for Ozone, and Particulate Matter (PM 2.5/PM 10).

The project level conformity analysis submitted by Caltrans indicates that the project-level transportation conformity requirements of 40 CFR Part 93 have been met. The project is included in the Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) current Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), as amended. The design concept and scope of the preferred alternative have not changed significantly from those assumed in the regional emissions analysis.

As required by 40 CFR 93.116 and 93.123, the localized $PM_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} analyses are included in the documentation. The analyses demonstrate that the project will not create any new violations of the standards or increase the severity or number of existing violations.

Based on the information provided, FHWA finds that the Lindsay and State Route 198/245 Operational Improvements Project conforms with the State Implementation Plan (SIP) in accordance with 40 CFR Part 93.

If you have any questions pertaining to this conformity finding, please contact Antonio Johnson at (916) 498-5889 or antonio.johnson@dot.gov.

Sincerely,

ANTONIO DESHAWN JOHNSON
Digitally signed by ANTONIO DESHAWN JOHNSON
Date: 2023.10.13 10:21:31 -07'00'

Antonio Johnson
Director of Planning, Environment,
& Right of Way
Federal Highway Administration

TO:

Maya Hildebrand, Caltrans
maya.hildebrand@dot.ca.gov

CC: (via email)

Rodney Tavitas, Caltrans

Rodney.Tavitas@dot.ca.gov

List of Technical Studies Bound Separately

Air Quality Report (Updated May 2023)

Air Quality Conformity Analysis (October 2023)

Noise Study Report (December 2019)

Water Quality Report (October 2018)

Natural Environment Study Minimal Impacts (June 2020)

Second Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report (October 2019)

Third Supplemental Historic Resource Evaluation Report (January 2021)

Caltrans Questionnaire to Determine Visual Impact Assessment Level (May 2020)

Caltrans Traffic Management Plan (Updated February 2023)

Caltrans Right of Way Data Sheets (Updated August 2023)

Caltrans Traffic Operational Analysis (Updated March 2023)

Hazardous Waste Reports

- Initial Site Assessment (August 2019)
- Preliminary Site Investigation (December 2019)

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports or the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment, please send your request to:

Javier Almaguer
District 6 Environmental Division
California Department of Transportation
2015 East Shields Avenue, Suite 100, Fresno, California 93726

Or send your request vias email to: javier.almaguer@dot.ca.gov
Or call: 559 287-9320

Please provide the following information in your request:
Project title: Lindsay Route 65 and Route 198/245 Operational Improvements
General location information: Tulare County
District number-county code-route-post mile: 06-TUL-65/198/245-PM 29.0-R30.4/R19.5-20.0/0.0-0.2
Project ID number: 0600000426