Notice of Preparation

of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

April 21, 2021

Subject

Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Central Mobility Hub (CMH) project in the Midway Community of the City of San Diego, California.

Introduction

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), as the Lead Agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process, is initiating the preparation of a Draft EIR for the CMH project. SANDAG, as the Lead Agency for the CMH Project, is issuing this NOP to initiate scoping to solicit input on the project, including alternatives under consideration and environmental effects. SANDAG has decided to forego preparing an Initial Study (*CEQA Guidelines* 15063(a)), so none is attached. In addition to soliciting input from the public, SANDAG is requesting feedback from agencies as to the Proposed Project scope and content of environmental information that is relevant to an agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the Proposed Project (for example, this Draft EIR will be used by an agency to issue a permit or other approval for the Proposed Project).

The CMH project may require federal approvals or permits from the Federal Highway Administration/California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Federal Railroad Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, and/or the Federal Aviation Administration, and thus will require review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Once the federal lead agency is established, that lead agency will formally initiate the NEPA process.

Background

On **December 7, 2018**, the SANDAG Board of Directors established the Airport Connectivity Subcommittee to explore transportation solutions for improved connectivity to San Diego International Airport (SDIA). On **December 21, 2018**, the Board of Directors allocated funds to develop and analyze conceptual transportation solutions, including a potential Central Mobility Hub where multiple modes of transportation (e.g., walking, biking, transit, and shared mobility) converge and provide convenient connections for people to access SDIA and other regional destinations. Mobility hubs provide an integrated network of mobility services, amenities, and supporting technologies to better connect high-frequency transit to an individual's origin and destination.

On **September 19, 2019**, SANDAG released its *Airport Connectivity Analysis* (ACA) (SANDAG, 2019). The ACA includes a detailed description of four conceptual transportation solutions.

> **Concept 1** proposed the creation of a Central Mobility Hub at the Naval Base Point Loma Old Town Campus (OTC) site, which is the location of existing Naval Information Warfare Systems Command (NAVWAR) and Naval Information Warfare Center Pacific (NIWC PAC) facilities. The

Central Mobility Hub was envisioned as a multimodal transportation center with numerous connections to regional transit lines, a high-frequency transit connection service to SDIA, and a curb drop-off for auto-based travelers. In the ACA, the transit connection service was via an automated people mover (APM) system. APMs are small-scale guideway systems that serve to transport people within relatively small areas such as airports and theme parks. Examples include the monorail system at Disneyland in California and PHX Sky Train at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport in Arizona.

The APM envisioned in Concept 1 was intended to provide service to a transit-ready area located between SDIA Terminals One and Two via a tunnel configuration. Concept 1 was also envisioned to include freeway modifications to provide access to the Central Mobility Hub, roadway modifications, and other supporting infrastructure, such as traction power substations (TPSSs) to provide power to the APM and a maintenance and storage facility (MSF).

Concept 2 proposed the creation of a Central Mobility Hub at the same location as Concept 1. Concept 2 included a surface/elevated high-frequency connection (also assumed to be an APM) route along Pacific Highway, Laurel Street, and Harbor Drive, with intermediate stops at the Airport Rental Car Center and at Harbor Island East Basin. At SDIA, the APM was envisioned to provide service to a transit-ready area located between SDIA Terminals One and Two. Similar to Concept 1, Concept 2 included freeway modifications to provide access to the Central Mobility Hub, roadway modifications, and other supporting infrastructure, such as TPSSs to provide power to the APM and a MSF.

Concept 3 proposed a Central Mobility Hub at the planned Intermodal Transit Center (ITC) site rather than the OTC site. Similar to Concepts 1 and 2, Concept 3 included a multimodal transportation center with numerous connections to regional transit lines, a high-frequency transit connection, such as APM, with service to SDIA, and a curb drop-off for auto-based travelers. Under Concept 3, the APM was envisioned to be in a surface/elevated route along Pacific Highway, Laurel Street, and Harbor Drive, with intermediate stops at the Airport Rental Car Center and at Harbor Island East Basin, serving the same location at SDIA as Concept 2. Concept 3 also included freeway modifications to provide access to the Central Mobility Hub, roadway modifications similar to those under Concepts 1 and 2, and other supporting infrastructure, including a MSF.

Concept 4 proposed an extension of the Trolley light rail transit system to a station at SDIA, with an intermediate stop at Harbor Island East Basin. The new extension was envisioned to branch from the existing Trolley corridor either via aerial structure near Laurel Street (Concept 4A) or via underground trench/tunnel below Grape and Hawthorn Streets (Concept 4B).

On **September 25, 2019**, the Airport Connectivity Subcommittee discussed the conclusions of the ACA. On **September 27, 2019**, the SANDAG Board of Directors approved the recommendation of the Airport Connectivity Subcommittee to advance the four conceptual transportation solutions included in the ACA for further planning, preliminary engineering, and environmental analysis.

SANDAG is currently preparing *San Diego Forward: The 2021 Regional Plan* (2021 Regional Plan), which will provide a bold new vision for the San Diego region through 2050. Mobility hubs are one of SANDAG's Five Big Moves that will transform the way people and goods move around the region. The

proposed CMH is intended to be the centerpiece of SANDAG's mobility hub network and will provide the much-needed direct connection from regional transit to SDIA.

In addition to the planning efforts reflected in the 2021 Regional Plan, SANDAG has initiated development of 12 Comprehensive Multimodal Corridor Plans (CMCP) to be completed over the next five years. CMCPs are recommended by the California Transportation Commission to be competitive for federal and state funding. CMCPs are data-driven plans intended to reduce congestion and generate transportation choices while preserving community character and creating opportunities for enhancement projects. CMCPs include all travel modes in a defined corridor—roadways, public transit, bikeways, and more. One of these CMCPs, the CMH and Connections CMCP, focuses on the CMH Project area and the surrounding communities. The CMH and Connections CMCP informs the CMH design and surrounding roadway, active transportation, transit, and freeway connections that will be evaluated in the Draft EIR.

On **July 2, 2019**, the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (SDCRAA) announced a new 10-year airline operating and lease agreement with its airlines that financially supports the redevelopment of Terminal 1, with the possibility of preapproved funding for eligible airport-related transportation projects, provided that other regional funding could be secured. In January 2020, SDCRAA adopted a Final EIR and approved Alternative 4 for implementation for the redevelopment of Terminal 1 (T1). This alternative included preservation of a portion of SDIA as a "transit-ready" area to accommodate future regional transit improvements that would link to SDIA. Additionally, in February and March 2020, SANDAG, the City of San Diego, the SDCRAA, and San Diego Unified Port District unanimously approved moving forward with a memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding transportation projects at and near SDIA. The MOU outlines how these agencies will work together to create a regional transportation plan that advances a transit connection to SDIA while also addressing agency goals and objectives for improving roadway access, multimodal circulation, and reducing congestion around SDIA and the port area.

On **January 24, 2020**, the U.S. Navy published a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to analyze the potential environmental effects associated with revitalization of the OTC site. The Navy's objective is to receive new mission-capable, modern NAVWAR and NIWC PAC facilities to support the Navy's cyber security mission, and the revitalization may also include mixed-use commercial development and a transit center. SANDAG is exploring with the Navy the possibility of locating the CMH at the OTC site, given the OTC site's proximity to SDIA.

Project Objectives

SDIA is the busiest single-runway airport in the nation and has established itself as a major economic engine for the region. According to the SDCRRA's Final EIR, SDIA is preparing for an anticipated increase of 16 million annual passengers by 2050, bringing the total to an estimated 40 million passengers annually. Improving connectivity to the airport has been one of the region's biggest challenges throughout the past several decades. There is a need to offer passengers and visitors cleaner, environmentally friendly ways to access SDIA that avoids traffic and connects to the regional transit system. Based on forecasted regional growth and anticipated increases in activity at SDIA, implementation of improved transit connectivity to the airport is needed. Freeway and roadway modifications alone are unlikely to reduce severe congestion on key airport access roadways. SANDAG, in its role as the regional planning agency, is looking for an opportunity to modernize the transportation

system with a direct transit connection to SDIA that will accommodate the anticipated increase in passengers.

The purpose of the CMH Project is to provide better regional connectivity, including to SDIA, through efficient, regional, high-quality multimodal transportation travel options. A Central Mobility Hub offers the potential to provide improved transit connectivity, efficient freeway access, convenient pick-up/drop-off facilities, a quick and comfortable ride directly to the airport terminals, and a way to divert or remove traffic from key airport access roadways. Proposed street modifications would enhance circulation and promote the safety of existing and proposed active transportation elements.

Based on these factors, the project's CEQA objectives include the following:

- Increase regional transit ridership through the provision of convenient transit service that provides mode choices for riders and improves regional transit intermodal connectivity and accessibility
- Provide direct, convenient, and quality transit options to and from SDIA and Port of San Diego tidelands that minimize travel times, increase ease of travel, and enhance the travel experience
- Minimize environmental impacts, including through reductions in regional vehicle miles traveled and associated vehicular greenhouse gas emissions
- Improve roadways to accommodate access to transportation facilities, enhance overall mobility and circulation, improve safety, and accommodate multiple alternative transportation modes, including active transportation
- Minimize impacts to surrounding communities while maximizing integration into such communities
- Provide multimodal transit facilities that enhance transit-oriented development and economic growth opportunities while promoting social equity

Project Description

SANDAG has identified potential locations for a CMH and developed airport connectivity concepts that reflect feedback from the SDCRAA, the Port, the City of San Diego, Caltrans, the North County Transit District, the Metropolitan Transit System, and other key community and agency partners. SANDAG proposes to advance a Proposed Project and two alternatives for consideration as part of CEQA Scoping, referred to as the Proposed Project and Alternatives 1 and 2, as described below. Exhibits for each alternative are provided at the end of this document. A transit connection via a tunnel under the airport runway between the CMH at the OTC site and SDIA is no longer being advanced as a result of further coordination with stakeholders, including the Federal Aviation Administration.

Proposed Project: CMH at OTC with Direct Transit Connection to SDIA

In summary, the Proposed Project would consist of the following primary components:

- Multimodal CMH at the OTC site, located between Pacific Highway and Interstate 5 (I-5)
- Relocation of transit services from the Old Town Transit Center (OTTC) to the CMH on the OTC site
- A high-frequency transit connection via dedicated right-of-way between the CMH and SDIA within or adjacent to Pacific Highway, Laurel Street, and Harbor Drive

- Up to four high-frequency transit stations, with locations likely provided at CMH, Airport Rental Car Center, Harbor Island East Basin, and SDIA
- Modifications to I-5 to enhance access to the CMH
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and other active transportation improvements promoting safety and connectivity in accordance with the *Midway–Pacific Highway Community Plan* and *Regional Bike Plan*, including new connection(s) across I-5 between the CMH and the Old Town community and the Coastal Rail Trail along Pacific Highway
- Roadway modifications to improve airport access and/or accommodate the transit connection
- Ability to accommodate future transit services at the CMH as described in the pending *San Diego Forward: The 2021 Regional Plan* (2021 Regional Plan)
- Supporting infrastructure, including TPSSs and a MSF

The CMH would be served by the San Diego Trolley light rail, Amtrak intercity rail, COASTER commuter rail, and buses. Taxis and other mobility services would also use the CMH. Currently, these other transit services utilize the OTTC, which is approximately 1,000 feet northwest of a potential location of the CMH within the OTC site. To provide high-capacity, multimodal transportation options in a centralized location, the Proposed Project would relocate OTTC transit services southeast to the CMH. Because of the size of the OTC site, it is envisioned that a CMH at this location would also accommodate the future transit service envisioned in the 2021 Regional Plan, including a potential connection to California High-Speed Rail.

The Proposed Project would also include a high-speed, fixed-guideway transit connection between the CMH to the SDIA. It is anticipated that the fixed-guideway connection would be located within or adjacent to Pacific Highway, Laurel Street, and Harbor Drive, and may be at-grade, above grade, and/or below grade, depending on constraints, such as right-of-way, utilities, and airspace. Stations are under consideration at the CMH, the Airport Rental Car Center, at Harbor Island East Basin, and SDIA. The transit system would include supporting infrastructure, such as TPSSs. A MSF of approximately 75,000 square feet would also be required.

Potential Environmental Effects

SANDAG as the lead CEQA agency will describe and analyze the impacts of the Proposed Project on the physical environment. The EIR will address the resource categories contained in Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines* and identify potential impacts to the following environmental resources:

1. Aesthetics
2. Air Quality
3. Biological Resources
4. Cultural Resources
5. Energy
6. Geology and Soils
7. Greenhouse Gas Emissions/Global Climate Change
8. Hazards and Hazardous Materials
9. Hydrology and Water Quality
10. Land Use and Planning
11. Population and Housing
12. Noise

13. Public Services
14. Transportation
15. Tribal Cultural Resources
16. Utilities and Service Systems
17. Mandatory Findings of Significance

In addition, the EIR will address cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and other issues required by CEQA.

Alternatives to be Analyzed in the EIR

SANDAG will evaluate two alternatives to the Proposed Project in the EIR. Under CEQA and the *CEQA Guidelines*, an EIR must describe a reasonable range of alternatives to the Proposed Project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives (*CEQA Guidelines* 15126.6(a)). The CMH Project Draft EIR will include a comparison of each alternative to the Proposed Project for its potential to achieve the goals of the Proposed Project while reducing the Proposed Project's potentially significant environmental impacts. In addition to the Proposed Project, the EIR will include an evaluation of the two alternatives described below.

Alternative 1: CMH at ITC Site with Direct Transit Connection to SDIA

Alternative 1 would consist of the following primary components:

- A multimodal CMH at the ITC site
- Potential modifications to the Washington Street and Middletown Trolley stations
- A high-frequency transit connection in dedicated right-of-way between the CMH and SDIA within or adjacent to Pacific Highway, Laurel Street, and Harbor Drive
- Up to four stations at CMH, Airport Rental Car Center, Harbor Island East Basin, and SDIA
- Modifications to I-5 to enhance access to the CMH
- Roadway modifications to improve airport access and/or accommodate the transit connection
- Supporting infrastructure, including an MSF
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and other active transportation improvements promoting safety and connectivity in accordance with the *Midway–Pacific Highway Community Plan* and *Regional Bike Plan*, including new connections between the CMH and the Uptown community and the Coastal Rail Trail along Pacific Highway
- Roadway modifications to improve airport access and/or accommodate the transit connection
- Ability to accommodate future transit services at the CMH as described in the pending 2021 Regional Plan

Under Alternative 1, a CMH would be developed at the ITC site, which is located east of the Airport Rental Car Center on Pacific Highway, west of I-5, roughly between Washington and Vine Streets. The CMH would be served by the San Diego Trolley light rail, Amtrak intercity rail, COASTER commuter rail, and buses. Taxis and other mobility services would also use the CMH. The CMH at this location would also be able to accommodate the future transit service envisioned in the 2021 Regional Plan and California High-Speed Rail. In order for the CMH to be served by the Trolley, the existing Washington

Street would be relocated. Under this alternative, the OTTC would remain operational in its existing location.

Similar to the Proposed Project, Alternative 1 would also include a high-speed, fixed-guideway transit connection between the CMH and SDIA. It is anticipated that the fixed-guideway connection would be located within or adjacent to Pacific Highway, Laurel Street, and Harbor Drive, and may be at-grade, above grade, and/or below grade, depending on constraints. Stations are under consideration at the CMH, the Airport Rental Car Center, at Harbor Island East Basin, and at SDIA. The transit system would include supporting infrastructure, such as TPSSs. An MSF of approximately 75,000 square feet would also be required

Alternative 2: Extension of Trolley to SDIA

Alternative 2 would consist of the following primary components:

- San Diego Trolley light rail extension to SDIA
- Station at Harbor Island
- Station at SDIA

Under this alternative, light rail transit spur tracks would extend west from the existing Trolley alignment toward SDIA. It is anticipated that the alignment would extend west from the existing Trolley tracks via an underground trench/tunnel below Grape and Hawthorn Streets. The alignment could consist of underground, at-grade, and above-grade configurations. Additional Trolley stops along the alignment could be considered. It is anticipated that the Trolley service operated along this new alignment would connect the OTTC, SDIA, Santa Fe Depot, and the 12th & Imperial Transit Center, including all existing intermediate stops.

Under this alternative, a CMH would not be constructed. Additionally, due to right-of way and other constraints, the existing transit hubs at OTTC and Santa Fe Depot could not be expanded; both existing stations would remain operational and in their existing locations and configurations. No freeway modifications are proposed as part of this alternative.

Comments Requested

Comments on the scope of the CMH Project Draft EIR in response to this NOP should be provided to SANDAG at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. Due to the time limits mandated by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after the date of publication of this notice. Your comments may be submitted in writing to SANDAG no later than **May 28, 2021**, in excess of 30 days from the publish date (April 21, 2021).

SANDAG is seeking input on the alternatives under consideration and potential environmental effects. A public scoping meeting is scheduled on May 11, 2021, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. as noted below. Written comments should be sent to SANDAG, 401 B Street, Suite 800, San Diego, CA 92101, ATTN: Kirsten Uchitel, or via email with subject line “CMH Project” to: CentralMobilityHub@SANDAG.org. Comments may also be provided orally or in writing via the public scoping meeting.

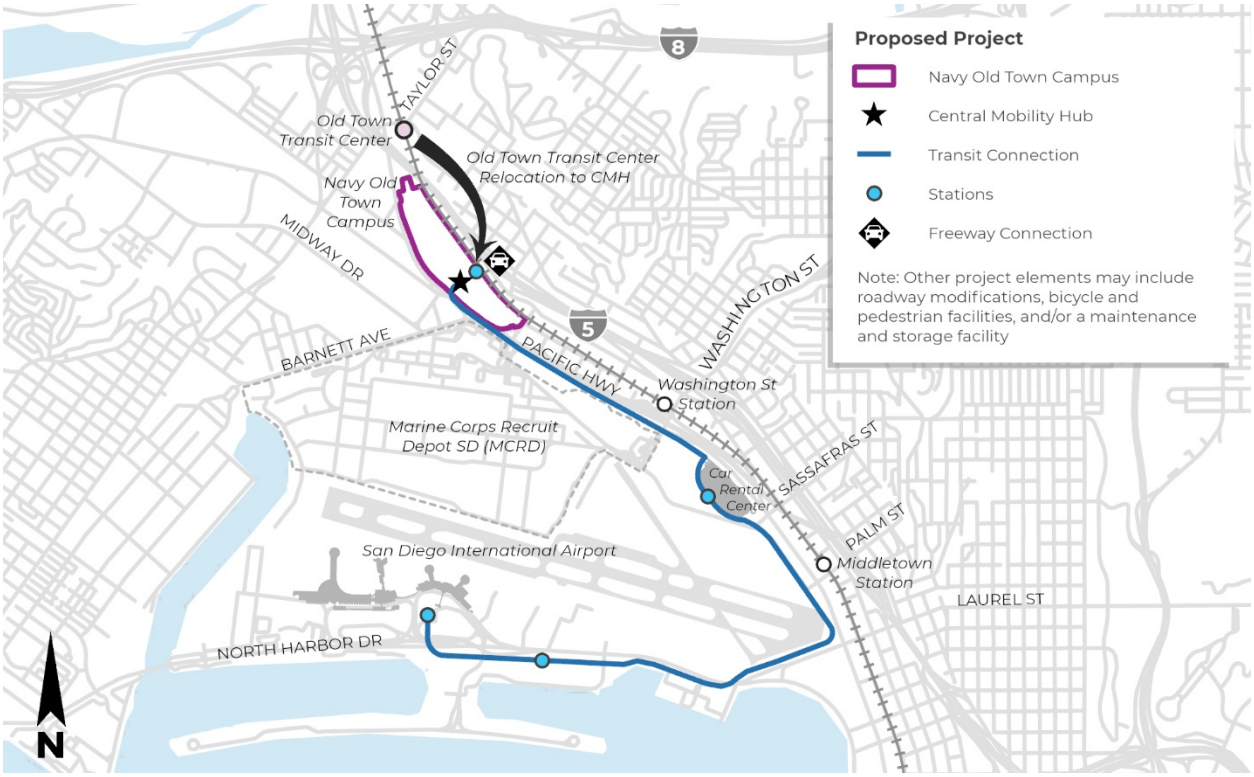
Public Scoping Meetings

A public scoping meeting is scheduled for May 11, 2021, from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. To attend the scoping meeting, visit our Virtual Engagement Hub at: sandag.mysocialpinpoint.com/CentralMobilityHub.

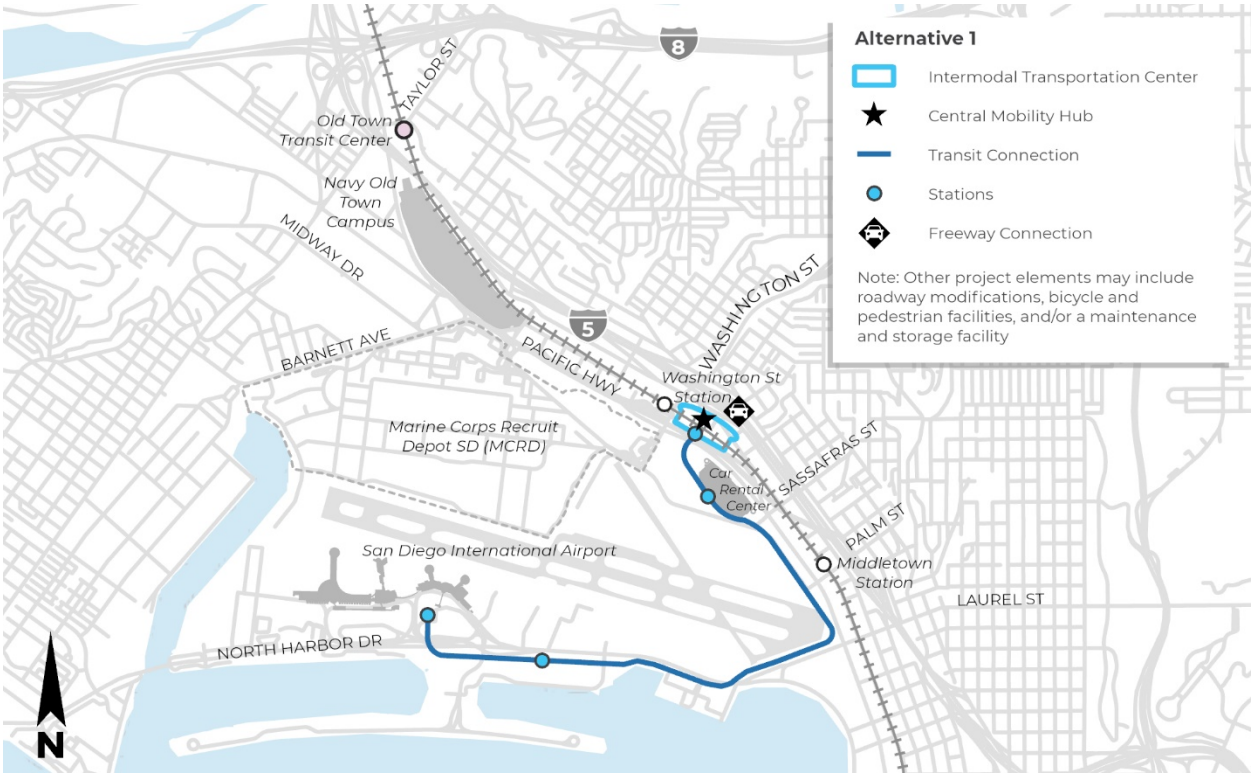
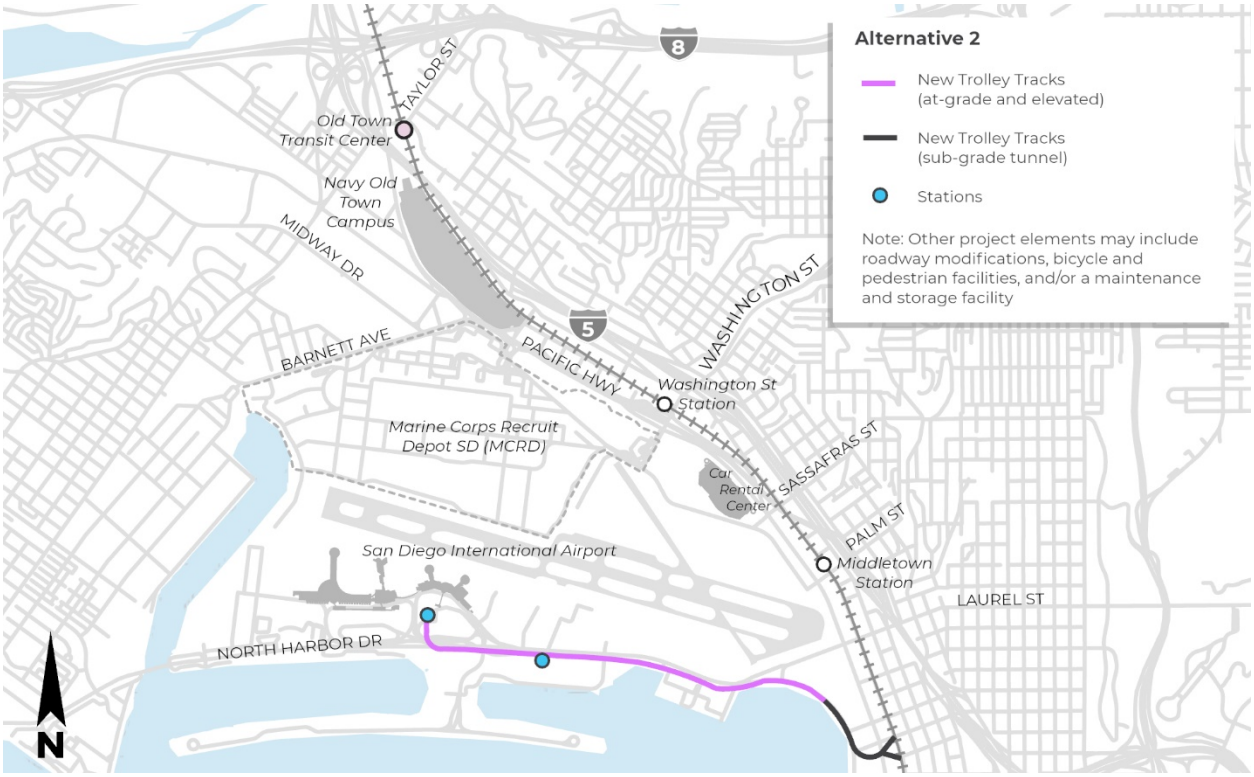
Additional Information

For additional information regarding this project, the scoping period, or the environmental process, please contact CentralMobilityHub@SANDAG.org or visit sandag.mysocialpinpoint.com/CentralMobilityHub.

Proposed Project



Alternative 1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