Revised Notice of Preparation of a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Assessment and Notice of Scoping Meetings

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in association with the Council of San Benito County Governments (SBCOG) and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), proposes improvements along State Route 25 within San Benito County and Santa Clara County, between the cities of Hollister and Gilroy. Improvements are under consideration for feasibility; a reasonable range of alternatives will be analyzed in the environmental document.

Caltrans circulated a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on November 8, 2024. Since that time, the range of alternatives has been revised to include a conventional highway alternative and an expressway alternative along the existing State Route 25 alignment for segment 1 (post miles San Benito County R52 to R55.2). Therefore, Caltrans is recirculating the NOP and will be hosting an additional scoping meeting. All comments previously submitted to Caltrans during the 2024 NOP review period (November 8, 2024 to December 31, 2024) have been retained by Caltrans. If you submitted comments previously, they have been retained and do not need to be resubmitted.

For purposes of environmental analysis, the project is divided into two components:

- Tier I – A program-level analysis for the future of the State Route 25 corridor between Hollister and Gilroy. The Tier I concept for the corridor would be built over time through multiple smaller incremental projects (referred to as Tier II projects). The environmental analysis for a Tier I project is more broadly based and assists in streamlining a future segment. (Post miles San Benito County R52.0 to San Clara County R2.1)

- Tier II – Project-level analysis of a smaller incremental project within the Tier I corridor, which would move forward based on available funding. (Post miles San Benito County R52 to R55.2)

The Tier I and the initial Tier II project will be analyzed in the environmental document as a joint environmental document—an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (known as an EIR/EA)—pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Caltrans is the lead agency under CEQA and will also serve as the lead agency for the Federal Highway Administration under Caltrans' NEPA assignment memorandum of understanding with the Federal Highway Administration.

Caltrans is distributing this Notice of Preparation to request comments from responsible and trustee agencies and interested members of the public regarding the environmental

issues, reasonable project alternatives, and feasible mitigation measures to be explored in the draft EIR/EA.

Project Location

The proposed Tier I project would extend approximately 10.2 miles along State Route 25 from San Felipe Road in Hollister to the U.S. 101/State Route 25 Interchange Improvement Project near Bloomfield Avenue in Santa Clara County.

The project post miles are as follows:

- San Benito County, State Route 25, post miles R52.0 to 60.1
- Santa Clara County, State Route 25, post miles 0.0 to 2.1 (to U.S. 101 interchange)
- San Benito County, State Route 156, post miles R10.5 to R12.2 (State Route 25/State Route 156 interchange)

The project location is shown in Figure 1.

Purpose and Need

Project Need

The project is needed for the following reasons:

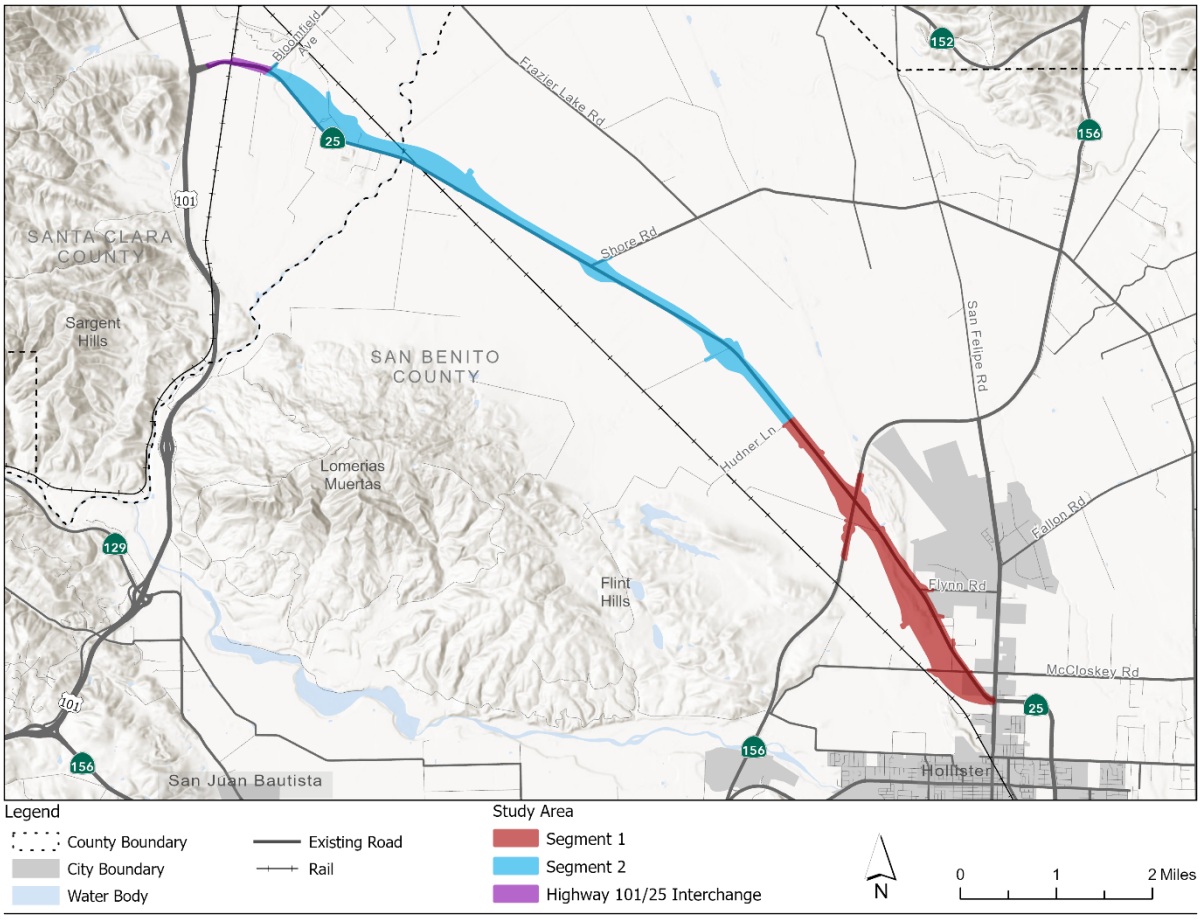
- Multiple at-grade access points and congestion lead to a high number of conflict points, creating safety issues on State Route 25.
- Due to an increase in population and an existing jobs/housing imbalance, partly driven by state-mandated affordable housing allocation (Regional Housing Needs Allocation), there is an increased demand for travel along the corridor.
- Increased demand along State Route 25, especially during morning and evening peak periods, reduces reliability for automobile travelers and transit.
- Lack of employment centers, institutions of higher education, health facilities, hospitals, and emergency care within San Benito County creates transportation demand for residents to travel to points north of the county, where jobs, educational institutions, and health facilities, hospitals, and emergency care are abundant.
- Lack of reliable multi-modal transportation options for traveling north of the county.
- Traffic diversion to surrounding rural roads due to travel delays on State Route 25 raises safety and access concerns on rural roads not designed for the increased capacity.

Project Purpose

The project's purpose is to:

- Reduce fatal and serious injury collisions on State Route 25.
- Provide sustainable multimodal mobility and travel options to improve person throughput while meeting current and future projected travel demand on the corridor to support and encourage the region's housing, economic, and job creation goals.
- Provide reliable goods movement between San Benito County and destinations on the Coast, in the Central Valley, and through the Bay Area.
- Improve travel time reliability between San Benito County and Santa Clara County.
- Equitably improve connectivity and mobility for communities in San Benito County and provide access to job centers and services in Santa Clara County.
- Alleviate regional/interregional traffic diversion onto the local roads to bypass congestion.

Figure 1: Project Location Map



Background

In 2016, the State Route 25 Route Adoption Report was prepared to identify and preserve the location of a transportation corridor on State Route 25 between Hollister and U.S. 101 with the fewest environmental effects on resources. The adopted alignment from the Route Adoption Report was previously considered as the alignment for any alternative that proposes to move State Route 25 travel lanes, but Caltrans will now evaluate two potential project alternatives on the existing alignment. Environmental impacts anticipated from build alternatives will be evaluated in the EIR/EA in accordance with CEQA and NEPA.

Project Description

The project proposes to improve State Route 25 from Hollister to Gilroy. The proposed improvements on State Route 25 will be analyzed for potential environmental effects in a combined Tier I/Tier II programmatic environmental document (EIR/EA). The programmatic environmental document will consist of two tiers: Tier 1 Program-Level Analysis and Tier 2 Project-Level Analysis. The tiered approach to the environmental analysis will allow for all components of the project to be analyzed under one document and implemented in phases as funding becomes available.

The Tier I component proposes approximately 10.2 miles of improvements from San Felipe Road in San Benito County to Bloomfield Avenue in Santa Clara County (Hollister to Gilroy). The Tier I program will be implemented in phases. The first segment of the improvements will be analyzed in the Tier II component of the Tier I/Tier II environmental document, which includes conversion from San Felipe Road to Hudner Lane.

The first segment is identified as the State Route 25 Corridor Improvement Project – San Felipe Road to Hudner Lane.

The second segment will be located along State Route 25 from Hudner Lane in San Benito County to near Bloomfield Avenue in Santa Clara County. The project would connect with the U.S. 101 Interchange Project in Santa Clara County. The second segment of the improvements will undergo a more in-depth level of environmental review in the future and is identified as State Route 25 Corridor Improvement Project – Hudner Lane to Bloomfield Avenue.

There are currently 15 potential project alternatives being reviewed for feasibility. Reasonable alternatives will be considered as project alternatives and will be evaluated in the EIR/EA. These potential alternatives consist mostly of various combinations of four primary design elements, which are: general purpose lanes, High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV), High Occupancy Toll (HOT), and transit-only options. These are summarized below:

- 4-lane expressway on the existing SR 25 alignment (on segment 1)
- 4-lane conventional highway on the existing SR 25 alignment (on segment 1)

- 4-Lane Expressway
    - 4-lane expressway on Route Adoption.
- 4-lane Expressway with High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes
    - 4 lanes with a High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane on the left and a general-purpose lane on the right for each direction.
- 4-lane Expressway with High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes
    - 4 lanes with a High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lane on the left and a general-purpose lane on the right for each direction.
- 4-lane Expressway with Bus-Only Lane
    - 4 lanes with a bus lane on the left and a general-purpose lane on the right for each direction.
- Reversible Lane
    - 3-lane expressway on Route Adoption.
    - Middle, general-purpose reversible lane.
- Reversible HOV Lane
    - 3-lane expressway on Route Adoption.
    - Middle, general-purpose HOV lane.
- Reversible HOT Lane
    - 3-lane expressway on Route Adoption.
    - Middle, HOT reversible lane.
- Reversible Transit Lane
    - 3-lane expressway on Route Adoption.
    - Middle, transit reversible lane.
- 2-Lane Expressway
    - 2-lane expressway on Route Adoption.
- 2-Lane Expressway with Bus-On-Shoulder

    - 2-lane expressway on a Route Adoption with part-time Bus-on-Shoulder operations.

- 2-Lane Busway
    - 2-lane transit-only busway on Route Adoption.
    - Existing 2-lane conventional highway continues to serve general traffic.
- 1-Lane Busway
    - 1-lane reversible transit-only busway adjacent to Hollister Branch Line.
    - Existing 2-lane conventional highway continues to serve general traffic.
    - This alternative would not have segments and would end at the county line where the railroad meets State Route 25.
- Commuter Rail Service
    - New passenger rail service on the Hollister Branch Line.
    - Existing 2-lane conventional highway continues to serve general traffic.
    - This alternative would not have segments.
    - At a conceptual level, the service would connect riders between Hollister and Gilroy.

Given the magnitude and length of the proposed project, it is anticipated that construction would be phased and individual segments would be constructed over the course of several years. The timing of the phased construction may be affected by factors such as available funding, location of other nearby highway construction projects, railroad involvement, utility relocation needs, and required permitting. Individual phases of the construction would not span the entire time but would be on a shorter timeline to minimize impacts to the adjacent communities.

Other features of the proposed project include the following: bridge replacements over Pajaro River and Carnadero Creek, an overhead crossing at the railroad near Pajaro River, frontage roads, reduction of at-grade intersections with driveways and local roads, construction of an interchange at the junction of State Route 25 and State Route 156, and drainage improvements. The project will also include maintenance or rehabilitation work along the existing State Route 25 alignment to bring the highway into a state of good repair.

The project is anticipated to require right-of-way acquisitions and utility relocations to accommodate the proposed alignment of the State Route 25 corridor. Temporary construction easements are also anticipated.

Potential Environmental Effects of the Project

The project is expected to result in temporary and permanent environmental effects. The draft EIR/EA will determine what resources would be affected, the level of significance of these impacts, and feasible avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures to lessen the impacts. Based on preliminary information, potential environmental effects of the proposed project are outlined below.

Agriculture

The project will likely result in impacts to farmland. A Community Impact Assessment will be completed to review impacts expected to farmland and identify minimization and mitigation measures.

Air Quality

Construction activities may result in temporary increases in fugitive dust and emissions from construction equipment and vehicles. An air quality study will be prepared and will quantify construction emissions and assess the potential for exposure to asbestos, lead, mobile source air toxic emissions, and cumulative impacts. The air quality study will also evaluate project-related regional changes in long-term mobile source emissions.

Biological Resources

Preliminary studies indicate that the project may result in potential impacts to federally listed animal species (California tiger salamander, which is also listed under the California Endangered Species Act and other federally and/or state listed species) or their habitat, and nesting birds. Impacts to wetlands and waters of the United States may also occur. A fish passage assessment will be completed to identify potential barriers to upstream and downstream migration of anadromous fish that may be present in the biological study area. Project-related impacts to fish passage will be studied. Potential impacts to riparian habitat and wildlife migration corridors along the Pajaro River and Carnadero Creek will be studied. A Natural Environment Study will be prepared (including an Aquatic Resources Delineation), and a Biological Assessment will be prepared as part of the Section 7 Endangered Species Act consultation process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. Coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Regional Water Quality Control Board is also anticipated.

Cultural and Historical Resources

There is potential for prehistoric archaeological resources to occur within the project area. There is also potential for historic architectural resources to occur within the project area. Research, fieldwork, and technical reporting will be undertaken to identify cultural resources in the project's Area of Potential Effects, in accordance with Caltrans guidelines and the Programmatic Agreement pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The draft EIR/EA will provide information on the potential to affect cultural resources and identify appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

Community/Relocations

Homes and businesses are expected to be impacted by the project. A Community Impact Assessment and Relocation Impact Report will be completed to review impacts expected to homes and businesses and to identify minimization and mitigation measures.

Energy

The project would use fossil fuels during construction and long-term operation. The project would follow all federal, state, and local regulations related to energy efficiency and use. While local plans, policies, and regulations do not apply to the state, assessments of the project's impact on air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and transportation will be further evaluated in the draft environmental impact report.

Geology and Soils

Bridges in the vicinity of the Calaveras Fault where it crosses the highway, in the Tier I corridor, would be sited and designed to withstand potential ground displacement caused by an earthquake.

The project may affect designated and mapped deposits of aggregate mineral resources in the SCL/Bolsa sand and gravel mine.

A preliminary geotechnical design report will be prepared and will consider potential geotechnical, geologic and seismic impacts. Appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be identified. Geotechnical investigations will be completed to gather necessary subsurface information. The project will be designed in accordance with the Caltrans Highway Manual. Retaining walls and bridges will be designed in accordance with the applicable Caltrans seismic design criteria.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

A Climate Change Report will analyze the greenhouse gas emissions impacts from short-term (construction operations) and long-term operation of the project. Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be proposed in the draft environmental document.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

An Initial Site Assessment will be prepared to evaluate whether the project may affect existing hazardous materials release sites, and whether the project may encounter or generate routine hazardous materials/wastes that are common to highway construction projects. These may include aerially deposited lead-contaminated soils, asbestos-containing materials, lead-containing paint, treated wood waste, naturally occurring asbestos, and yellow thermoplastic traffic stripe. The Initial Site Assessment will recommend additional investigations to be performed during the project design phase to identify these materials and, if present, will ensure appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to provide for proper handling, reuse, disposal, and treatment of hazardous materials.

Hydrology and Floodplain

A Location Hydraulic Study will be conducted to determine if the project would encroach upon any designated floodplains. Potential impacts to floodplains will be further evaluated in the EIR/EA.

Hydromodification, Water Quality, and Stormwater Runoff

Construction activities and operations of the project are not expected to result in short-term and long-term impacts to the Pajaro River and Carnadero Creek, portions of which are within the Tier I project limits. Impacts during construction may include erosion and sedimentation associated with the disturbance of soil, and discharge of pollutants associated with construction activities. A stormwater pollution prevention plan will be prepared and implemented to provide appropriate temporary construction site best management practices and other measures to address the potential for adverse impacts during construction. The project is anticipated to result in an increase of impervious surfaces, which has the potential for long-term water quality impacts during project operations. Permanent stormwater treatment facilities are anticipated to be included in the project in accordance with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit requirements. Permanent runoff control treatment best management practices will be incorporated to treat 100 percent of all new and replaced impervious surfaces.

Noise

Construction activities may result in short-term noise impacts during construction of the project. The project may involve new and realigned transportation infrastructure that could result in new and increased noise impacts resulting from long-term operation; therefore, the project is considered a Type 1 project. Potential noise impacts resulting from the project will be evaluated, and the effectiveness of potential noise barriers will be analyzed in the EIR/EA.

Paleontological Resources

There is potential for paleontological resources to occur within the limits of the currently proposed project. A paleontological study will be prepared for the project and will provide information on the potential to affect paleontological resources and identify appropriate avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

Transportation (Vehicle Miles Traveled)

Senate Bill 743 concurrence and analysis of this transportation project's impact under CEQA due to increases in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) attributable to capacity-increasing alternatives will be necessary. If those impacts are significant, Caltrans will need to consider mitigation or alternatives. An Induced VMT study will be prepared to evaluate impacts and identify minimization and mitigation measures.

Utilities and Service Systems

The relocation of utilities may be required during construction due to project activities such as paving and bridge placement. The Community Impact Assessment will include review of impacts expected to utility services.

Visual and Aesthetic Resources

Potential impacts to visual and aesthetic resources are anticipated due to a loss of rural agricultural character and scenic vistas. The loss of agricultural land and mature trees in combination with an increase of roadways, structures, fencing, signs, and lighting will contribute to a more urbanized character. The introduction of large structures such as interchanges and bridges will preclude scenic vistas of the distant hillsides. A Visual Impact Assessment will be prepared to identify project impacts as well as measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse impacts to visual resources.

Cumulative Impacts

The project may contribute to cumulative impacts in the area due to visual, farmland, and paleontological resource impacts. A cumulative impact report will be prepared to identify feasible measures to minimize and mitigate cumulative impacts.

Comments

Your input regarding the scope of the forthcoming draft environmental document, environmental factors potentially affected, and project alternatives must be submitted to Caltrans no later than 5:00 p.m. on December 19, 2025.

Please provide written comments to:

Dianna Beck, Senior Environmental Planner
California Department of Transportation, District 5
50 Higuera Street
San Luis Obispo, California 93401

Or emailed to:
Dianna.Beck@dot.ca.gov

Public Meeting

A supplemental scoping meeting is scheduled during the public scoping period, which will begin with the release of this Notice of Preparation (NOP). The public scoping meeting is meant to provide an additional opportunity for public comment, identify public and agency concerns, and define issues that need to be examined in the draft environmental document. No decision(s) will be made on the project itself.

Meeting Details:

Date: Wednesday, November 19, 2025

Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Where: Paine’s Restaurant; 421 East St, Hollister, CA 95023

Spanish translation will also be available during in-person meetings.

Project website: https://engage.dot.ca.gov/05-48541

Please contact any of the following with any questions regarding this notice or the scoping meeting:

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