



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS  
Road Division

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**NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION  
FOR COTTONWOOD ROAD AT OUTSIDE CANAL BRIDGE REPLACEMENT PROJECT**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the County of Merced, as lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), has prepared a Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) and supporting Initial Study for the Cottonwood Road at Outside Canal Bridge Replacement Project (project).

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

Project Purpose

The purpose of the project is to:

- Remove existing structure, which has been determined as Structurally Deficient, and construct a new bridge that would improve public safety.
- Construct a new structure under a road closure of Cottonwood Road with a detour of approximately six miles.
- Provide a new structure that would be wider, satisfy current design standards, and would be capable of carrying current legal and permit vehicular loads.

Project Need

The existing bridge was built in 1975 and currently carries an average daily traffic (ADT) of 280 vehicles per day with a projected ADT of 350 in 2038. The project is needed because there is substantial deterioration from corrosion and rust on the bridge's steel girders. In addition, the existing bridge railings do not meet current standards, and the bridge does not provide guardrail transition, approaches, or ends.

Existing Bridge and Setting

The project area is located in a rural area of the County where Cottonwood Road is a 2-lane roadway in the east and west direction, is functionally classified as a Minor Collector. The existing bridge over the canal was built in 1975, is a 24.6-foot wide, 43-foot long, single span on simply supported box car beams with a reinforced concrete deck, on reinforced concrete wall abutments with flared wingwalls, and on a 32-degree skew. The canal is a channelized, un-lined waterway with gravel/dirt canal access roads at the tops of the banks. Flows in the canal are controlled artificially to meet the agricultural needs of adjacent properties. The areas adjacent to the canal are disturbed and consist primarily of agricultural uses, with a rural residence located adjacent to and southwest of the project area. Vegetation in and

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around the project area is primarily limited to sparse, weedy roadside vegetation or row crops and orchards in the adjacent agricultural areas; however, there is an area in the southwest quadrant of the project area and to the west of the canal access road, which appears to be fed by irrigation water, that exhibits potential wetlands features. There is no vegetation within or along the banks of the canal.

Proposed Replacement

The County proposes to replace the bridge on the existing alignment with a 2-lane structure that is approximately four feet wider than the existing bridge to accommodate two 11-foot lanes and 3-foot shoulders on each side of the bridge. The new bridge would include approved bridge railings and guard railings with standard aesthetic treatments. The new structure would also be approximately 17 feet longer to correct some of the hydrologic restriction at the existing bridge caused by the approach fills, which restrict the width of the canal in the project area and cause a localized flow restriction. The bridge approaches and roadway profile would be raised to meet the hydraulic requirements associated with the canal. In addition, the embankment would be

covered with rock slope protection (RSP) to mitigate scour within the limits of the bridge approach fills. It is anticipated that the project would require the realignment of the canal access road approaches to the new bridge structure to accommodate the widened and lengthened bridge.

Utilities

There are overhead utilities along the north side of Cottonwood Road that carry both electrical and phone lines. There is one pole on the northwest side of the road, one pole on the northeast side of the road near the bridge and a service pole on the southwest side of the road near the bridge. There is also a water pump on the southwest side of the road that may be affected by the project. Depending on foundation type and what construction equipment is expected the overhead lines may need to be temporarily relocated or de-energized during construction activities. It is not anticipated that underground utilities are within the project limits however, further investigation would occur to confirm and avoid conflicts during construction. Additionally, there are irrigation turnouts operating through the Central California Irrigation District which would need to be modified and relocated during construction.

Right-of-Way

It is anticipated that the increased width of the new bridge and realignment of the levee access roads would require right-of-way (ROW) acquisition from adjacent properties, Assessor Parcel Numbers (APN) 069-250-003, 069-290-011, 069 290-012, 069-190-003, and 069-190-071. A Temporary Construction Easement (TCE) of approximately 0.337 acre would be required from 069-190-071 to allow the contractor access to construct a driveway conform.

Demolition, Construction and Staging

The existing bridge would be removed as the first item of work. Removal of the existing bridge would include the removal of the existing abutments at each side of the canal. The new bridge is anticipated to be a single span with no restrictions to the ordinary flow of the

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canal. A temporary channel diversion system may be required for construction activities. Typical diversion systems for this kind of facilities would consist of large pipes being placed under the construction area with temporary earth dams at each end of the pipes with water then being pumped out from the work area. Once the dewatering system is in place the contractor could remove the existing bridge and abutments and then construct the new bridge without dealing with the water of the canal. It is anticipated the contractor would have to drive the detour route to access either side of the project, no temporary crossings are anticipated. All construction staging areas would be located within the area of potential effects (APE) and County ROW. Project construction would be seasonal and take place between the months of November and March.

Detour Route

The County has indicated that it is possible to close Cottonwood Road for the duration of construction. A detour (approximately six miles in length) would be required to allow traffic access around the project site. Expected roads to be used for the detour include Whitworth Road, Snyder Road and Orchard Road.

**PUBLIC REVIEW:**

The Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) is available for a 30-day public review period beginning August 1, 2025, and ending September 2, 2025. Copies of the MND are available to review at the County's website at <https://www.countyofmerced.com/DocumentCenter/Index/1005> and at the Merced County Department of Public Works (715 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Merced, CA 95341).

**AGENCY/PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Written comments on the MND for the proposed project must be received no later than 5:00 pm on September 2, 2025. Comments may be sent by mail to Merced County Department of Public Works (715 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Merced, CA 95341) or by email to [Alvaro.Buenrostro@countyofmerced.com](mailto:Alvaro.Buenrostro@countyofmerced.com). If you require additional information, please contact Alvaro Buenrostro at (209) 385-7601 ext. 4632.