



**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
Road Division**

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**NOTICE OF INTENT TO ADOPT A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION
FOR MERCED AVENUE AT LATERAL #6 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 Merced Avenue at Lateral #6 Canal Bridge Replacement Project (project).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Project Purpose

The purpose of the project is to improve public safety by providing a safe, permanent crossing over the Lateral #6 Canal (canal) on Merced Avenue.

The existing bridge was built in 1948 and is too narrow for the current ADT. The existing bridge has wooden railings that do not meet current standards, and the bridge does not provide guardrail transition, approaches, or ends resulting in unsafe driving conditions. The County has also identified this roadway as a Class II Bikeway, and a Class I Bikeway is planned along the canal, which will terminate at the east side of the bridge.

The purpose of the project is to:

- Remove the existing structure and reconstruct a bridge that will provide adequate and safe vehicle access; and
- Provide a new structure that will be wider and meet current design standards for the multimodal transport traffic utilizing this roadway.

Project Need

The existing bridge has reached the end of its lifespan, a repair/rehabilitation would represent a questionable investment of limited long-term value to the County. The Caltrans Office of Structures Local Assistance has already concurred with the recommended replacement of this structure.

Existing Bridge and Setting

The existing bridge was built in 1948 and is too narrow for the current average daily traffic (ADT) of 2,249 vehicles per day and projected ADT of 3,218 vehicles per day by the year 2036. According to a Caltrans Bridge Inspection Report prepared on March 04, 2016, the existing reinforced concrete slab bridge was rated as Functionally Obsolete with an overall Sufficiency Rating of 54.2.

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The existing bridge has wooden railings that do not meet current standards, and the bridge does not provide guardrail transition, approaches, or ends. The County has also identified this roadway as a Class II Bikeway, and a Class I Bikeway is planned along the canal, which will terminate at the east side of the bridge.

The project is listed in the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) 2017 Federal Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (FSTIP), Administrative Modification No. 3, as Project ID 4127 on the 2014/15 – 2019/20 HBP project listing (MCAG, 2017). The project would utilize federal Highway Bridge Program (HBP) funding and a toll credit match. The County is the Lead Agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), under authority delegated by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), is the Lead Agency pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Proposed Replacement

The County proposes to replace and widen the existing bridge by approximately 27 feet along the existing horizontal and vertical alignment to provide two 12-foot lanes, an 8-foot shoulder on the east side and a 12-foot shoulder on the west side of the roadway, a 5-foot sidewalk on the eastern side of the roadway, and new concrete barrier bridge rails with a bicycle railing. Possible improvements to the canal access roads may be needed to accommodate the widened bridge. The preferred design is a single span precast/prestressed concrete slab bridge.

The bridge would be supported by reinforced concrete abutments placed on spread footings. In order to construct the new abutments, a temporary canal diversion system may need to be installed.

The bridge approaches would be raised approximately six inches to meet the hydraulic requirements of the Turlock Irrigation District (TID). The TID requires that the new bridge soffit elevation matches the existing soffit elevation. The roadway approaches would be widened to match the new bridge width. Access to the levee roads must be preserved for maintenance of the canal and access for the TID.

Utilities

There are overhead utilities within the project site that potentially require pole relocation. It appears no underground utilities are within the project site. The project would require the relocation of an existing outlet pipe, which currently is within the anticipated bridge and approach alignment.

Right-of-Way

The existing roadway and bridge are within existing County right of way (ROW) or easements; however, additional ROW and temporary construction easements (TCE) from surrounding properties will be required to complete the project. Any ROW acquisition and/or TCE's will be included in the project impact analysis.

Demolition, Construction and Staging

The existing bridge would be demolished as the first item of work, including the partial removal of the existing abutments at each side of the canal.

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The new bridge is anticipated to be a single span and would not restrict the ordinary flow of the canal.

Construction of the project is anticipated to take approximately six months, and would be completed in the following order and durations. All days are in work days with an assumed 20 work days per month:

- Mobilization (5 days);
- Bridge removal (10 days);
- Abutment construction (15 to 20 days);
- Superstructure construction (30 to 40 days); and
- Roadway approaches construction (10 days).

Construction staging would occur within the existing and proposed right-of-way. Temporary construction easements would not be required.

Detour Route

The County has indicated that Merced Avenue can be closed during all construction activities, and a temporary crossing would not be required. The detour routes around the project would be a maximum of one mile long, and include Schendel Avenue, Shanks Road, and Letteau Avenue.

PUBLIC REVIEW:

The Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) is available for a 30-day public review period beginning January 16, 2026, and ending February 16, 2026. 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 February 16, 2026. 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. If you require additional information, please contact Alvaro Buenrostro at (209) 385-7601 ext. 4632.