

## California Department of Transportation

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March 23, 2026

11-IMP-78,86  
VAR  
Ocotillo Wells SVRA GPU  
NOP/SCH#2026020853

Mr. Erik Taylor  
General Plan Project Manager  
California Department of Parks and Recreation  
Strategic Planning and Recreation Services Division  
P.O. Box 942896  
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

Dear Mr. Taylor:

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental review process for the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for a Draft Environmental Impact Report on the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) General Plan Update (GPU) located near State Routes 78 and 86 (SR-78, SR-86) in San Diego and Imperial Counties. The mission of Caltrans is to provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment. The Local Development Review (LDR) Program reviews land use projects and plans to ensure consistency with our mission and state planning priorities.

Safety is one of Caltrans' strategic goals. Caltrans strives to make the year 2050 the first year without a single death or serious injury on California's roads. We are striving for more equitable outcomes for the transportation network's diverse users. To achieve these ambitious goals, we will pursue meaningful collaboration with our partners. We encourage the implementation of new technologies, innovations, and best practices that will enhance the safety on the transportation network. These pursuits are both ambitious and urgent, and their accomplishment involves a focused departure from the status quo as we continue to institutionalize safety in all our work.

Caltrans is committed to prioritizing projects that are equitable and provide meaningful benefits to historically underserved communities, to ultimately improve transportation accessibility and quality of life for people in the communities we serve.

We look forward to working with the Department of Parks and Recreation in areas where the agency and Caltrans have joint jurisdiction to improve the transportation network and connections between various modes of travel, with the goal of improving the experience of those who use the transportation system.

Caltrans has the following comments:

### **Traffic Impact Study**

- A Vehicle Miles of Travel (VMT) based Traffic Impact Study (TIS) should be provided for this project. Please use the Governor's Office of Planning and Research Guidance to identify VMT related impacts.<sup>1</sup> If a Vehicle Miles of Travel (VMT) based Traffic Impact Study (TIS) and/or Local Mobility Analysis is completed, please provide a copy for this project to Caltrans for review.
- The TIS may also need to identify the proposed project's near-term and long-term safety or operational issues, on or adjacent any existing or proposed State facilities.
- For Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Ocotillo Wells SVRA GPU, please reference the Caltrans "Local Development Review (LDR) Safety Review Practitioner's Guidance" <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/safety-programs/documents/202402-ldr-safety-review-practitioners-guidance-a11y.pdf> to determine if the project meets both of the screening criteria. If both screening criteria are not met, then a safety review will be needed.
- On all plans, indicate Caltrans' Right-of-Way (R/W) lines. It's important to clearly delineate Caltrans' R/W limits by calling them out on your plans so we can identify any impacts to Caltrans' state facilities. You can access Caltrans' R/W lines/maps by following the link to the Caltrans public website below:  
  
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/04ae3745190047c5adf8f33714af9e3a>
- Please clarify and clearly identify on the Site Plan all proposed driveway access points for the proposed project.
- SR-78 and SR-86 in this area are mostly access-controlled. Proposed ingress and egress to the State Highways should be at permitted access points. Please include and clearly indicate the proposed and existing ingress and egress locations in the transportation/traffic study.
- Please explain whether the proposed project plans on using existing driveway access points off SR-78 and SR-86 or if the project is proposing to install any new access points along the State Highway System.
- The proposed project will not be allowed direct access off SR-78 or SR-86 if there is access to the project site through a County of San Diego or Imperial County owned local road. Caltrans District 11 standard practice is not to allow new access onto any state facility if there is access through a local street or road. Allowing new access creates new conflict points for motorists on SR-78 or SR-86 where there was none.

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<sup>1</sup> California Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) 2018. "Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA." [https://opr.ca.gov/docs/20190122-743\\_Technical\\_Advisory.pdf](https://opr.ca.gov/docs/20190122-743_Technical_Advisory.pdf)

- If the project proposes any new intersections or major modifications to existing intersections on the State Highway System along SR-78 (Anza-Borrego Desert State Park Road) or SR-86, the Caltrans Intersection Safety and Operational Assessment Policy (ISOAP) will be triggered. Please refer to the ISOAP policy for applicable requirements:  
<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/isoap>.
- An encroachment permit will be necessary to make any improvements within the State's R/W if allowed and approved by Caltrans.

### **Hydrology and Drainage Studies**

- Please provide hydraulics studies, drainage and grading plans to Caltrans for review.
- Provide a pre and post-development hydraulics and hydrology study. Show drainage configurations and patterns.
- Provide drainage plans and details. Include detention basin details of inlets/outlet.
- Provide a contour grading plan with legible callouts and minimal building data. Show drainage patterns.
- On all plans, show Caltrans' Right of Way (R/W).
- Early coordination with Caltrans is recommended.
- Caltrans generally does not allow development projects to impact hydraulics within the State's Right-of-Way. Any modification to the existing Caltrans drainage and/or increase in runoff to State facilities will not be allowed.

### **Design**

Caltrans State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP) Project 11-43194 proposes pavement preservation of approximately 25 miles of southbound SR-86 west of the Salton Sea and adjacent to the Ocotillo Wells SVRA project. This project and other proposed improvements are as follows:

- Pavement preservation, southbound SR-86 (PM R43.035/67.824)
- Drainage Restoration - Replace/Install Culvert – 526.8 Linear Feet - Cure-In-Place Line Culvert – 2379.8 Linear Feet
- Guardrail - 34,183 Linear Feet – Replace guardrail
- Sign Panel Replacement - 30 Each
- Electrical Elements - 12 Each – Lighting Rehabilitation - 3 Each – Census Stations (Minor Work) - 6 Each – Accessible Pedestrian Signal
- Complete Street Elements - 127,844 Linear Feet, Bikeway Class 2 Buffered –Southbound Direction - 8 Conflict Zone Green Paint - Rumble Strip with Gaps for Bicycles

Tentative timelines for this project are as follows:

- Begin Environmental: 8/21/2026
- PA&ED Phase: 3/7/2028
- Begin Design: 5/4/2028
- Ready to List: 12/21/2029
- Approve Construction Contract: 9/3/2030
- Contract Acceptance: 2/9/2033

In addition, Caltrans SHOPP Project 11-43274 proposes a roundabout on SR-86 at the intersection of Black Diamond Road (PM R62.38). This project is in the PID phase.

Another Caltrans SHOPP Project 11-43155 proposes rehabilitation of existing pavement along SR-78 (PM 34.0/41.1).

Other proposed improvements – Please be aware of these existing Caltrans projects:

- On SD-078 at postmiles 80.00/95.30 (near Ocotillo Wells from 3.2 miles east of Yaqui Pass Road to Imperial County Line), work is proposed to take place around July 2026 to provide microsurfacing.
- On IMP-078 at postmiles 0.00/13.20 (near Ocotillo Wells from San Diego County Line to North Junction Route 86), work is proposed to implement microsurfacing, rumble strips, and pavement delineation for pavement preservation.

### **System Planning**

The following documents are helpful resources to reference:

[ICTC Long Range Transportation Plan 2024](#) – The Imperial County Transportation Commission (ICTC) Long Range Transportation Plan may provide further background on regional planning efforts. We encourage further review of the Plan and the following sections that may support your project:

- [Appendices A-G](#) provide additional information regarding the region.
- Appendix E: SR-86 Border Patrol Checkpoint Expansion (SR-86 near intersection of SR-78)

[SCAG Connect SoCal 2024](#) – Connect SoCal 2024 is a plan prepared by Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) that supports the implementation of transportation projects in a coordinated manner across public agencies. It includes projects, policies, strategies, and investments that contribute towards the region's communities, mobility, environment, and economy.

[SANDAG 2025 Regional Plan](#) – Although the majority of the Ocotillo Wells SVRA is in Imperial County, the western portion of the area is in San Diego County. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) 2025 Regional Plan may provide further background on state and regional planning efforts.

- [Appendix A: Transportation Projects, Programs, Policies, and Phasing](#) includes one project that is relevant to the Ocotillo Wells SVRA:
  - CC095: SR 78 Transportation Technology

[California Transportation Plan 2050 \(CTP 2050\)](#) – The CTP 2050 provides a common framework for guiding transportation decisions and investments by all levels of government and the private sector. Statutorily mandated federal and state law requires that Caltrans facilitate, develop, and prepare the CTP.

- Please review this guidance for topics on safety and operations, GHG emissions reduction and VMT mitigation, multimodal transportation, land use and more.

[Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure \(CAPTI\)](#) – The California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) adopted the CAPTI in 2021, which details how the state recommends investing transportation dollars annually to combat and adapt to climate change while supporting public health, safety and equity. The update, [CAPTI 2.0](#) was released in February 2025.

- Please review this guidance as it relates to goals for reduction of GHG emissions, VMT mitigation, transportation and land use connections, multimodal transportation options, and zero emission vehicle infrastructure.

[Smart Mobility Framework 2010](#) – The Smart Mobility Framework (SMF) was prepared by Caltrans to address both long-range challenges and short-term programmatic actions to implement sustainable transportation strategies in California. The SMF is a planning framework that helps guide and assess how well plans, programs, and projects meet a definition of "smart mobility".

- Please review this guide for details on housing, improved accessibility, social equity, reduction of environmental impacts, and more.
- Please review this guide for information on VMT mitigation, GHG emissions reduction, and open space preservation.

## **Noise**

The applicant must be informed that in accordance with 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 772, the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is not responsible for existing or future traffic noise impacts associated with the existing configuration of SR-78 and SR-86.

## **Environmental**

Caltrans welcomes the opportunity to be a Responsible Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as we have some discretionary authority of a portion of the project that is in Caltrans' R/W through the form of an encroachment permit process. We look forward to the coordination of our efforts to ensure that Caltrans can adopt the alternative and/or mitigation measure for our R/W. We would appreciate meeting with you to discuss the elements of the Environmental Document that Caltrans will use for our subsequent environmental compliance.

An encroachment permit will be required for any work within the Caltrans' R/W prior to construction. As part of the encroachment permit process, the applicant must provide approved final environmental documents for this project, corresponding technical studies, and necessary regulatory and resource agency permits. Specifically, CEQA determination or exemption. The supporting documents must address all environmental impacts within the Caltrans' R/W and address any impacts from avoidance and/or mitigation measures.

We recommend that this project specifically identifies and assesses potential impacts caused by the project or impacts from mitigation efforts that occur within Caltrans' R/W that includes impacts to the natural environment, infrastructure including but not limited to highways, roadways, structures, intelligent transportation systems elements, on-ramps and off-ramps, and appurtenant features including but not limited to fencing, lighting, signage, drainage,

guardrail, slopes and landscaping. Caltrans is interested in any additional mitigation measures identified for the project's Draft Environmental Document.

### **Sustainability**

The Climate Action Plan (CAP) contains several actions and strategies that align with Caltrans' responsibilities and priorities. Caltrans recommends collaboration between our agency and the Department of Parks and Recreation on the proposed transportation related topics including adaptation strategies to help improve the City's resilience to potential climate change impacts and strategies to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and off-road and on-road greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Caltrans recognizes that transportation is a leading contributor to GHG emissions in the region and is dedicated to reducing and mitigating transportation related emissions. We recommend collaborating with Caltrans on the following measures such as increasing the use of zero emission vehicles, installing electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, identifying right-of-way areas to be used for carbon sequestration, and complete streets.

The existing climate hazards discussed in this document will have an impact of the transportation system. We recommend working with Caltrans on determining the preventative strategies the Caltrans can take to keep roadways operational and ensure their longevity against climate stressors such as increased temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, wildfire, and flooding. Caltrans recognizes the central role that transportation planning plays in safety and ensuring that when these natural hazards do occur, citizens have a reliable evacuation route.

### **Mitigation**

Caltrans endeavors that any direct and cumulative impacts to the State Highway network be eliminated or reduced to a level of insignificance pursuant to the CEQA and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) standards.

### **Right-of-Way**

Per Business and Profession Code 8771, perpetuation of survey monuments by a licensed land surveyor is required, if they are being destroyed by any construction.

Any work performed within Caltrans' R/W will require discretionary review and approval by Caltrans and an encroachment permit will be required for any work within the Caltrans' R/W prior to construction.

Additional information regarding encroachment permits may be obtained by visiting the website at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/ep>. Projects with the following:

- require a Caltrans Encroachment Permit
- have completed the Caltrans Local Development Review (LDR) process
- have an approved environmental document

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need to have documents submitted for Quality Management Assessment Process (QMAP) process via email to [D11.QMAP.Permits@dot.ca.gov](mailto:D11.QMAP.Permits@dot.ca.gov). Early coordination with Caltrans is strongly advised for all encroachment permits.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Mark McCumsey, LDR Coordinator, at (619) 985-4957 or by e-mail sent to [Mark.McCumsey@dot.ca.gov](mailto:Mark.McCumsey@dot.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

*Kimberly D. Dodson*

KIMBERLY D. DODSON, GISP  
Branch Chief  
Local Development Review