

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Date: February 24, 2026

To: Reviewing Agencies, Organizations, Individuals

Subject: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Ferndale Access Project (EA 01-0N330).

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 1, as Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), is issuing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Ferndale Access Project, consistent with all CEQA requirements.

This notice is to inform agencies, organizations, and individuals about the proposed project and to solicit input on the scope and content of the EIR.

Caltrans is also serving as federal lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), as assigned by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Caltrans will evaluate technical studies to determine the appropriate level of federal environmental documentation. Should a NEPA Environmental Impact Study (EIS) be required, Caltrans will announce its intention to initiate the federal environmental review process for this project by publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register, as required by NEPA.

Scoping Period for Receipt of Comments

According to State law, agencies, organizations, and individuals shall be provided, at a minimum, 30 days to respond to this NOP.

Please submit written comments by **5:00 p.m. PST on April 17, 2026**.

Please submit written comments by mail, email, or through the project website.

U.S. mail	Caltrans District 1 Environmental Attn: Breeanna Kalson 1656 Union Street Eureka, CA 95501
email	ferndalenop@publicinput.com
website	tinyurl.com/ferndalenop

Scoping Meeting

A scoping meeting will be held on **Thursday, March 26, 2026, from 5:30 to 6:30 PM** PST. At the meeting, Caltrans will provide a brief overview of the project and the environmental review process. Attendees will have an opportunity to ask questions.

All scoping comments must be submitted by mail or e-mail; questions and discussion at the meeting will not be considered scoping comments. Attendance at the scoping meeting is not necessary to submit comments.

Please visit the Caltrans website (**<https://engage.dot.ca.gov/01-0n330-paed>**) for more information about the project and the scoping meeting.

Project Title

EA 01-0N330 – Ferndale Access Project

Project Applicant

Caltrans District 1

Project Location

The Ferndale Access Project is located in unincorporated Humboldt County on State Route (SR) 211 between Post Miles R77.0 and 78.8 and encompasses Eel River Bridge No. 04 0134 (herein ‘Fernbridge’), which spans the main stem of the Eel River. See Figures 1 and 2 below.

Project Background

Fernbridge is a concrete arch bridge on SR 211 in Humboldt County, California. The bridge crosses the Eel River and is a beloved local landmark. Engineers built Fernbridge in 1911 and named it the “Queen of Bridges” due to its size. Fernbridge is the longest working poured concrete bridge in the world. It is also on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Dairy, ranching, and tourism form the basis of Ferndale’s economy. The community of Ferndale depends on Fernbridge for direct access into town. The only alternate route is a time-consuming detour along Blue Slide Road.

On December 20, 2022, there was a 6.4 magnitude earthquake 10 miles west/southwest of Ferndale. The earthquake caused widespread damage throughout Humboldt County. Fernbridge sustained major damage, which resulted in closures. A second earthquake occurred on January 1, 2023. While Caltrans completed safety repairs to allow two-way traffic by March 2023, the earthquake and damage sustained

by the bridge further highlighted the need for the Ferndale Access Project, which would provide access that meets current design standards.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to restore reliable access to and from the community of Ferndale for all roadway users, which includes providing a structurally resilient bridge that meets current bridge design standards and reduces risk of damage from future events.

Need

Fernbridge provides the most direct route to and from the community of Ferndale. On December 20, 2022, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake, with an epicenter approximately 10 miles southwest of Ferndale, damaged the road surface and bridge approaches. Monitoring sensors installed on the bridge indicated a permanent change in vertical pier alignment and increases in crack widths on multiple piers. While emergency repairs were made to stabilize the bridge, a permanent solution is needed for the bridge to be more resilient and reduce the risk of damage from future seismic events.

Project Description and Alternatives

The project proposes to address deficiencies of Fernbridge to provide permanent and reliable access to Ferndale and the surrounding area served by SR 211. The Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will analyze a 'No Build' alternative and up to seven build alternatives.

'No Build' Alternative: *No modifications to Fernbridge*

Under this alternative no work would occur. Fernbridge would not be modified from its existing condition.

Alternative 1: *Rehabilitation of Fernbridge at its existing width*

Alternative 1 would perpetuate the current appearance (superstructure and arches) of Fernbridge as much as possible (maintaining 11'4" lanes, no shoulder). New approach structures and railing may be considered. A temporary detour bridge would be constructed. This alternative would require the use of both an upstream and downstream trestle during construction. See Figure 3.

Alternative 2: *Rehabilitation and widening of existing Fernbridge*

Under Alternative 2, the bridge would be widened to accommodate two 12-foot-wide lanes and two 8-foot-wide shoulders. This option would attempt to preserve the architectural appearance and identity of the structure as much as possible. New

approach structures and railing would be required. A temporary detour bridge would be constructed. This alternative would require the use of both an upstream and downstream trestle during construction. See Figure 4.

Alternative 3: Construction of a new bridge on a new alignment and rehabilitation of Fernbridge for bicycles/pedestrians

The new bridge would be located upstream of the existing bridge. It would provide two 12-foot-wide lanes with two 8-foot-wide shoulders as well as a pedestrian and bicycle path. No detour bridge would be required for construction of this option, as the existing bridge would be open for traffic while the new bridge is being constructed. This alternative would require two temporary in-water trestles, a construction trestle for new bridge construction, and a rehabilitation trestle with 'spurs' that would allow access to the existing bridge piers. See Figure 5.

Alternative 4: Construction of a new bridge on a new alignment and rehabilitation of Fernbridge for bicycles/pedestrians with modified superstructure

The new bridge would be located upstream of the existing bridge. It would provide two 12-foot-wide lanes with two 8-foot-wide shoulders as well a bicycle and pedestrian path. Alternative 4 rehabilitation option would utilize existing piers and footings of the existing bridge to the extent possible and would replace the existing superstructure (arches and deck) with a lighter-weight steel structure or equivalent that would accommodate bicycles and pedestrians only. No detour bridge would be required for construction of this option, as the existing bridge would be open for traffic while the new bridge is being constructed. This alternative would require two temporary in-water trestles, a construction trestle for new bridge construction, and a rehabilitation trestle with 'spurs' that would allow access to the existing bridge piers. See Figure 6.

Alternative 5: Construction of a new bridge on a new alignment and demolition of Fernbridge

This new bridge would be located upstream of the existing bridge. It would provide two 12-foot-wide lanes with two 8-foot-wide shoulders as well as a pedestrian and bicycle path. Arching design elements reminiscent of Fernbridge would be incorporated as much as possible. No detour bridge would be required for construction of this option, as the existing bridge would be open while the new bridge is being constructed. This alternative would require the use of a temporary in-water trestle upstream of the existing bridge for construction and demolition. See Figure 7.

Alternative 6: Construction of a new bridge on a new alignment and Fernbridge as a monument

This new bridge would be located upstream of the existing bridge. It would provide two 12-foot-wide lanes with two 8-foot-wide shoulders as well as a pedestrian and bicycle

path. Arching design elements reminiscent of Fernbridge would be incorporated as much as possible. No detour bridge would be required for construction of this option, as the existing bridge would be open while the new bridge is being constructed. This alternative would require the use of a temporary in-water trestle upstream of the existing bridge for construction. See Figure 8.

Alternative 7: Construction of a new bridge on the existing alignment and demolition of Fernbridge

This alternative would build a new bridge on the existing bridge alignment. The new bridge would provide two 12-foot-wide lanes with two 8-foot-wide shoulders as well as a pedestrian and bicycle path. Arching design elements reminiscent of Fernbridge would be incorporated as much as possible. No elements of the existing bridge would be utilized in this alternative. A temporary detour bridge would be constructed ahead of bridge demolition. This alternative would require the use of a temporary in-water upstream trestle for demolition and construction. See Figure 9.

All Alternatives:

All alternatives, except the 'No Build' Alternative, would require intersection changes, with Alternatives 1, 2, and 7 resulting in temporary intersection changes to allow access to the detour bridge and permanent changes to accommodate widening of the existing layout (Alternatives 2 and 7). Alternatives 3 to 6 would require a new, permanent intersection to access the proposed new bridge location.

Potential Environmental Effects of the Project

The following subject areas are anticipated for study:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources (including riparian vegetation, plants, animals and wetlands/aquatic features)
- Cultural Resources (including historic resources)
- Energy
- Geology/Soils (including paleontology)
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions/Sea Level Rise/Flooding
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Land Use/Planning
- Mineral Resources

- Noise
- Population/Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities/Service Systems
- Wildlife
- Community Impacts
- Cumulative Impacts

The EIR will address NEPA-required issues such as compliance with applicable federal regulations (e.g., Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act). The EIR will consider impacts associated with construction and ongoing operation. The scope of environmental analysis may be modified based on input to this Notice of Preparation from the public or agencies, or the project development process.

Summary of Key Environmental Considerations

Preliminary review suggests that the subject areas most likely to result in potentially significant impacts are aesthetics, biological resources, and historic resources. However, further analysis and ongoing project design could reveal additional or different areas of potential impact.

Aesthetics

The project could substantially modify or remove historic Fernbridge, which has been a defining landscape feature for over 100 years. A visual and aesthetic assessment would be completed for the project. The EIR will summarize the results of the assessment, identify applicable avoidance and minimization measures, and, as applicable, identify mitigation measures that would reduce or avoid impacts.

Biological Resources

The project area would affect the Eel River, a major fish-bearing waterway, its shoreline, and banks. A Natural Environment Study (NES) would be prepared to identify the sensitive habitat areas and plant and animal special status species that may be impacted by the project. An Aquatic Resources Delineation Report would be prepared to delineate jurisdictional waters and quantify potential impacts. The EIR will summarize the results of the assessment, identify applicable avoidance and minimization measures, and, as applicable, identify mitigation measures that would reduce or avoid impacts. A Biological Assessment will be prepared as part of the Section 7 Endangered

Species Act consultation process with National Marine Fisheries Service. Coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the California Coastal Commission is also anticipated.

Historic Resources

In addition to historic Fernbridge, additional structures in and adjacent to the project area may also be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or the California Register of Historic Places (CRHP), and /or otherwise warrant special consideration under CEQA. A qualified architectural historian will evaluate the bridge and surrounding neighboring properties in a Historic Resources Evaluation Report (HRER) to identify and evaluate potentially significant properties. Then a Finding of Effect (FOE) report will assess the potential for the project to adversely affect the NRHP-listed Fernbridge and potentially any additional historic resources identified in the HRER. The EIR will summarize the results of the assessment, identify avoidance and minimization measures, and, as applicable, discuss mitigation measures.

Contact Information

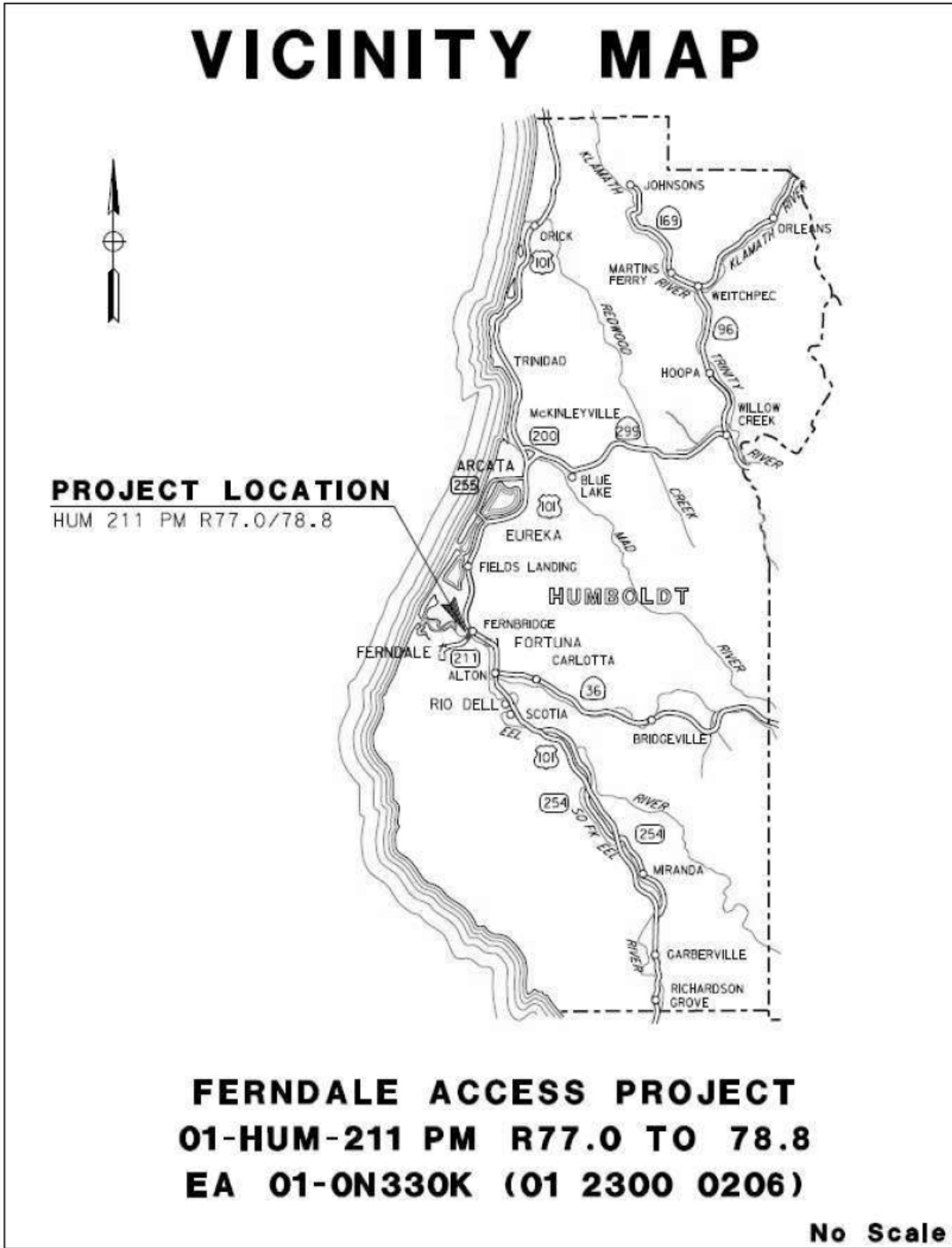
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Signature: 
Title: Environmental Coordinator

Reference:

California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

VICINITY MAP



**FERNDALE ACCESS PROJECT
01-HUM-211 PM R77.0 TO 78.8
EA 01-ON330K (01 2300 0206)**

No Scale

Figure 1. Project Vicinity Map



Figure 2. Project Vicinity Map (satellite imagery)

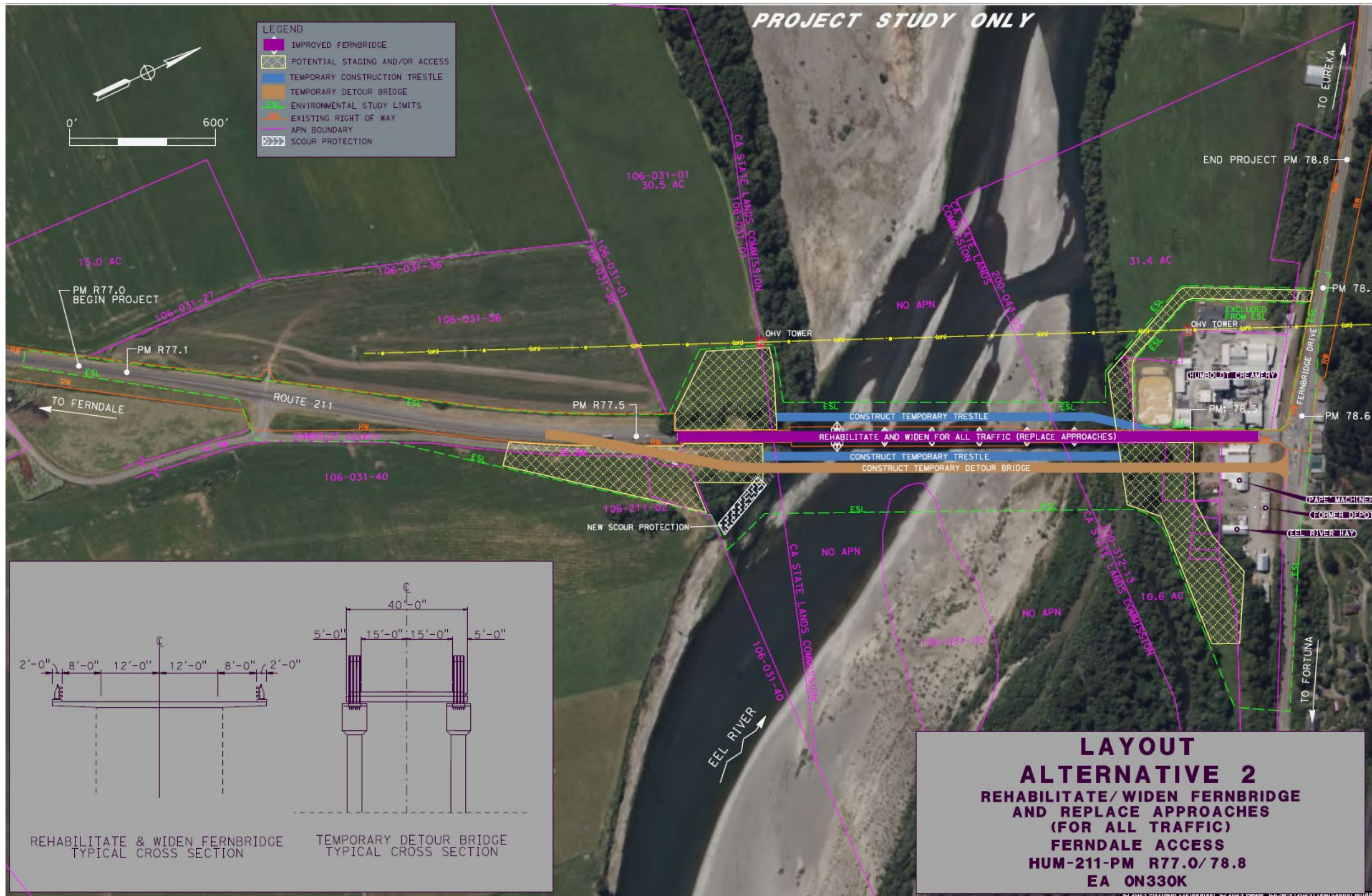


Figure 4. Alternative 2 - Preliminary Layout

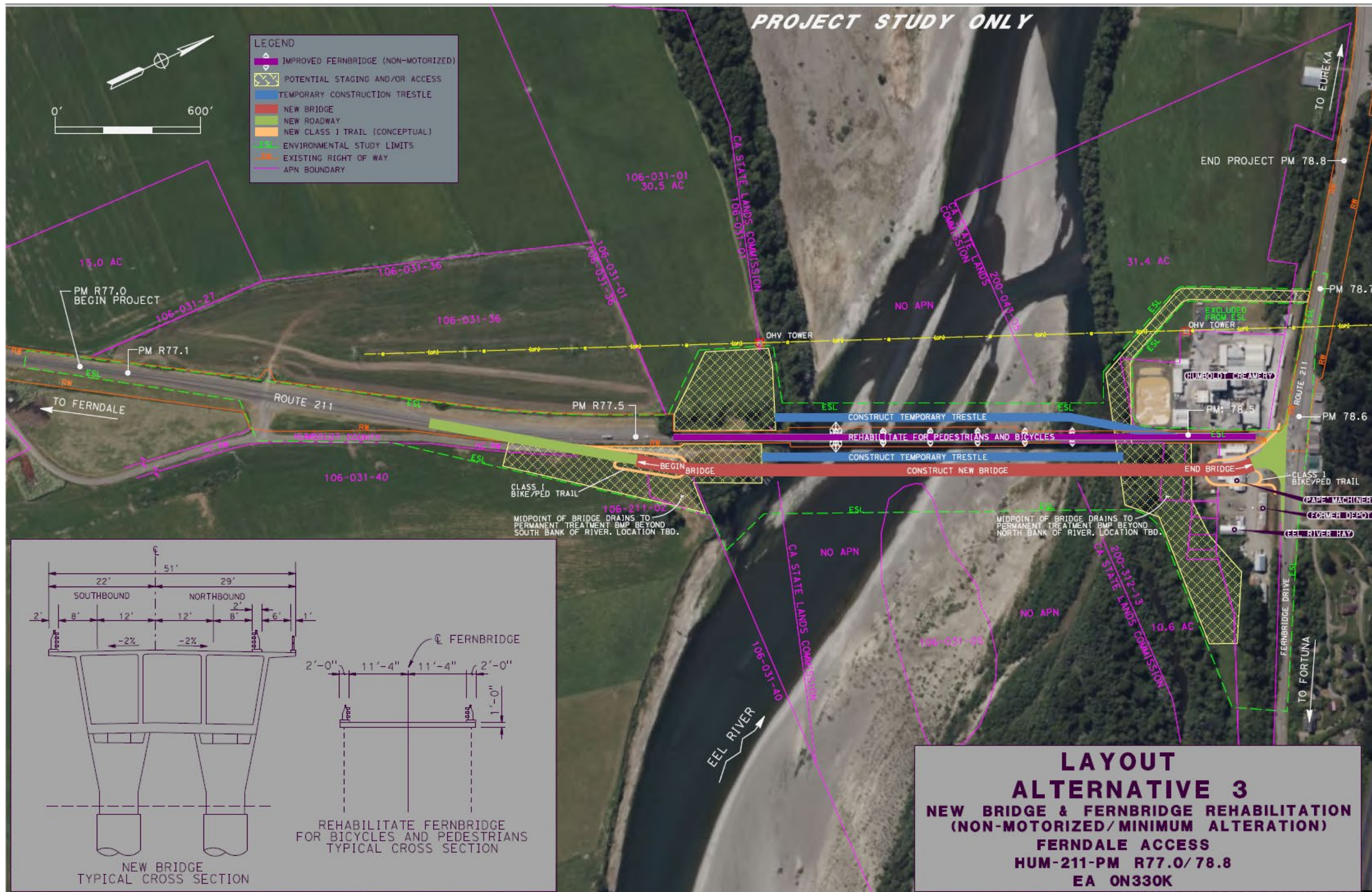


Figure 5. Alternative 3 - Preliminary Layout

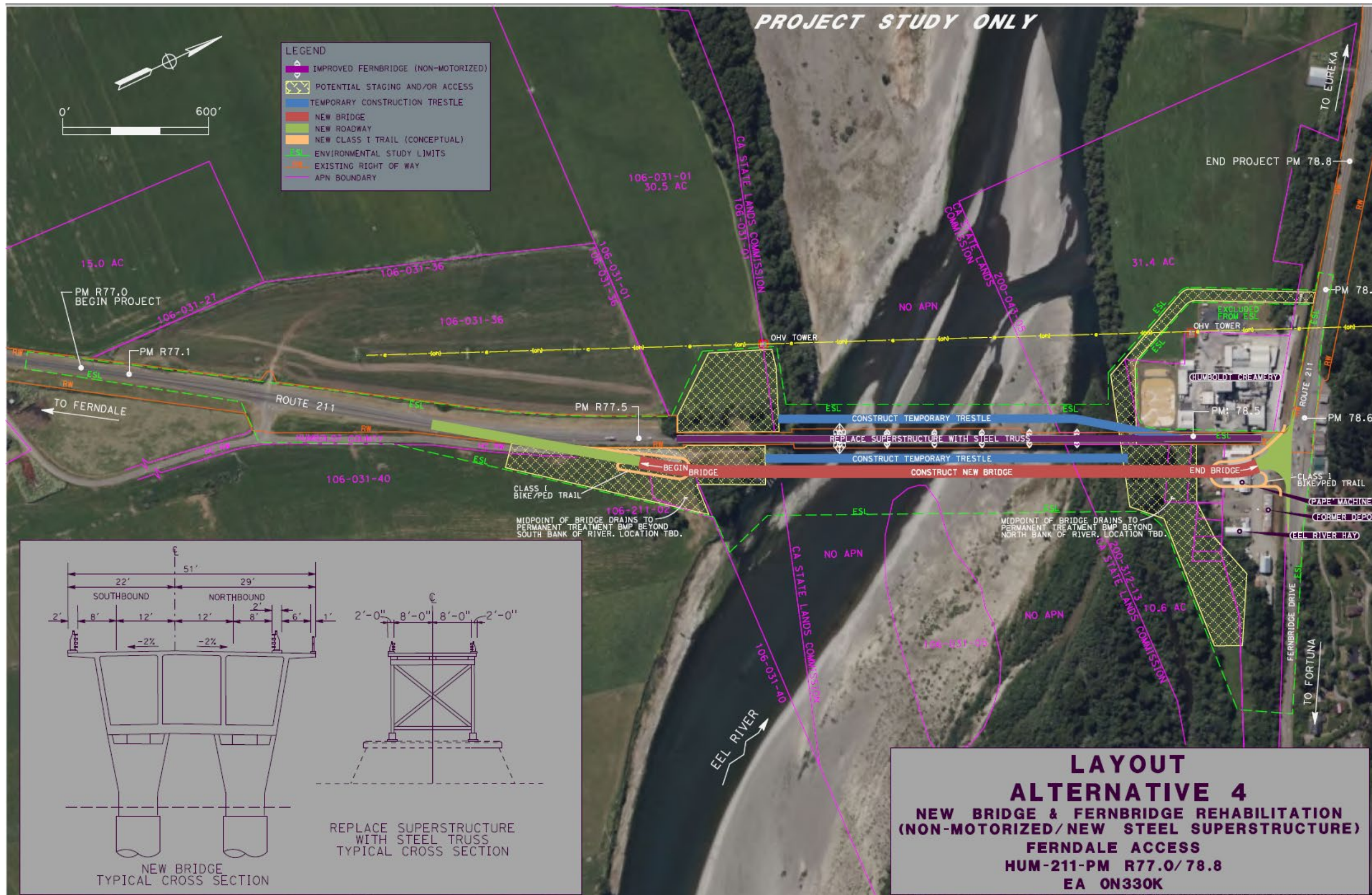


Figure 6. Alternative 4 - Preliminary Layout

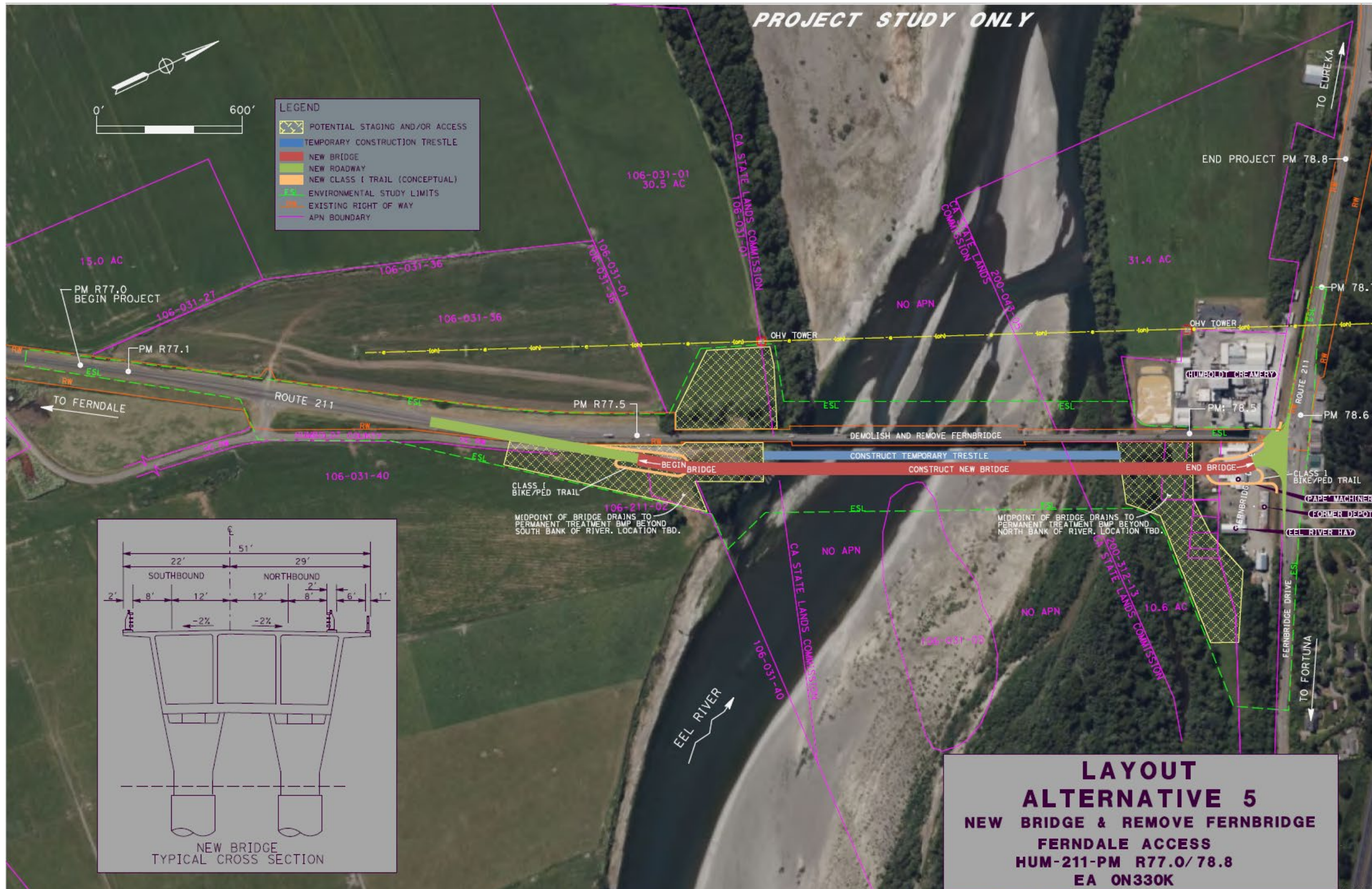


Figure 7. Alternative 5 - Preliminary Layout

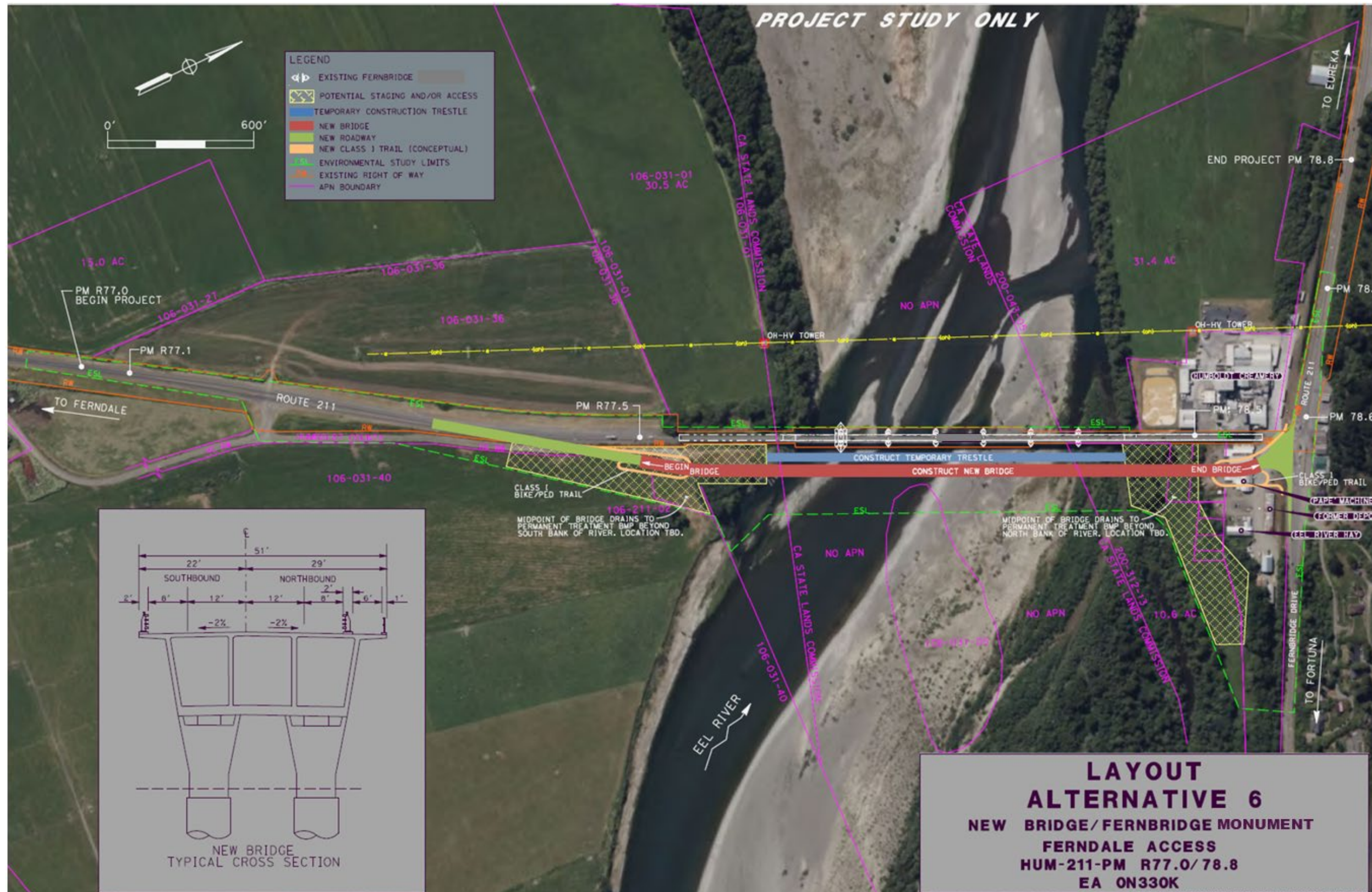


Figure 8. Alternative 6 - Preliminary Layout

