

Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements

On State Route 14 near Inyokern in Kern County, California

09-KER-14-PM 46.20-58.60

Project ID Number: 0922000005

Initial Study with Proposed Negative Declaration

Volume 1 of 2



Prepared by the
State of California Department of Transportation

July 2026



General Information About This Document

What's in this document:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has prepared this Initial Study, which examines the potential environmental impacts of alternatives being considered for the proposed project in Kern County in California. The document explains why the project is being proposed, the alternatives being considered for the project, the existing environment that could be affected by the project, potential impacts of each of the alternatives, and proposed avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures.

What you should do:

- Please read the document. Additional copies of the document and the related technical studies are available for review at the Caltrans District 9 office at 500 South Main Street, Bishop, California 93514, during business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.), and at the Ridgecrest Branch Library at 131 East Las Flores Avenue, Ridgecrest, California 93555, during business hours (Tuesday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.). This document may be downloaded at the following website: <https://engage.dot.ca.gov/09-39140>.
- Tell us what you think. If you have any comments regarding the proposed project, please send your written comments to Caltrans by the deadline. Submit comments via U.S. mail to: Amber Stoerp, District 9 Environmental Division, California Department of Transportation, 500 South Main Street, Bishop, California 93514. Submit comments via email to: amber.stoerp@dot.ca.gov.
- Submit comments by the deadline: September 8, 2026.

What happens next:

After comments are received from the public and the reviewing agencies, Caltrans may 1) give environmental approval to the proposed project, 2) do additional environmental studies, or 3) abandon the project. If the project is given environmental approval and funding is appropriated, Caltrans could design and construct all or part of the project.

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Reduce collisions, enhance safety, preserve, repair, and extend the life of the existing pavement, and improve access for multiple modes of transportation on State Route 14 from post miles 46.20 to 58.60 in Kern County, California.

**INITIAL STUDY
with Proposed Negative Declaration**

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Department of Transportation
and
Responsible Agency: California Transportation Commission

Alexeya Williams

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Deputy District Director, Planning and Environmental Analysis
California Department of Transportation
CEQA Lead Agency

7/1/2026

Date

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DRAFT
Proposed Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

State Clearinghouse Number: Pending

District-County-Route-Post Mile: 09-KER-14-PM 46.20-58.60

EA/Project Number: EA 09-39140 and Project ID Number 0922000005

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to reduce collisions, enhance safety, preserve, repair, and extend the life of the existing pavement, and improve access for multiple modes of transportation on State Route 14 from post miles 46.20 to 58.60 in Kern County, California.

Determination

An Initial Study has been prepared by Caltrans District 9. On the basis of this study, it is determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

The project would have no effect on aesthetics, agriculture and forestry resources, air quality, cultural resources, energy, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, utilities and service systems, and wildfire.

The project would have less than significant effects on biological resources, greenhouse gas emissions, and hydrology and water quality.

Alexeya Williams
Deputy District Director, Planning and Environmental
California Department of Transportation

Date

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Chapter 1 Proposed Project

1.1 Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to reduce collisions, enhance safety, preserve, repair, and extend the life of the existing pavement, and improve access for multiple modes of transportation on State Route 14 from post miles 46.20 to 58.60 in Kern County, California.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The project “purpose” is a set of objectives the project intends to meet. The project “need” is the transportation deficiency that the project was initiated to address.

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the project is to:

- Reduce collisions and enhance safety on State Route 14.
- Maintain the facility in a state of good repair.
- Preserve, repair, and extend the life of the existing pavement and improve road quality.
- Improve access for multiple modes of transportation

1.2.2 Need

Reduce Collisions and Enhance Safety

This section of State Route 14 has a fatal crash rate nearly three times the statewide average for a comparable stretch of highway, according to collision data recorded from July 2016 to June 2021. According to the same collision data, there have been fewer collisions and no fatalities in areas along the remaining two-lane sections of State Route 14 that contain passing lanes. Passing opportunities within this section of State Route 14 are limited due to the absence of passing lanes and reduced sight distance.

Maintain Facility in a State of Good Repair

Drainage systems have exceeded or are approaching their useful service and design life. Many of these culverts are over 75 years old and are showing signs of significant degradation. Scour and erosion threaten the bridge abutments at the Freeman Gulch Bridge. The bridge railings were constructed

prior to current standards. Erosion along steep highway slopes is degrading the roadway.

Address Pavement Needs

The pavement is deteriorating and is expected to become rough and cracked by 2029 without repairs.

Improve Access for Multiple Modes of Transportation

The current narrow shoulders do not provide adequate separation between traffic, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

1.3 Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to rehabilitate the pavement from post miles 52.80 to 58.60 and place a thin blanket of hot mix asphalt from post miles 46.20 to 52.80. The project also proposes to widen the roadway shoulders by 6.33 feet on each side of the highway between post miles 46.20 and 58.30 to meet current design standards, resulting in 8-foot-wide shoulders and a 4.66-foot-wide paved median. The shoulders on the Freeman Gulch Bridge would also be widened from 4 to 8 feet. Bridge rails would be upgraded to meet current design standards.

Culverts exceeding their useful service life and showing signs of wear would be replaced. Other culverts would be extended to accommodate the shoulder widening and would receive flared end sections and rock slope protection to reduce erosion. Erosion control measures, including grading, constructing drainage ditches, and native seeding, would be implemented to protect roadside slopes and support vegetation growth.

The existing passing lanes within the project limits would be lengthened from 0.63 mile to 1.0 mile (post miles 52.80 to 53.20). A paved apron would be installed at the off-highway vehicle crossing at post mile 50.34. Figure 1-1 shows the project vicinity map, and Figure 1-2 shows the project location map.

Figure 1-1 Project Vicinity Map

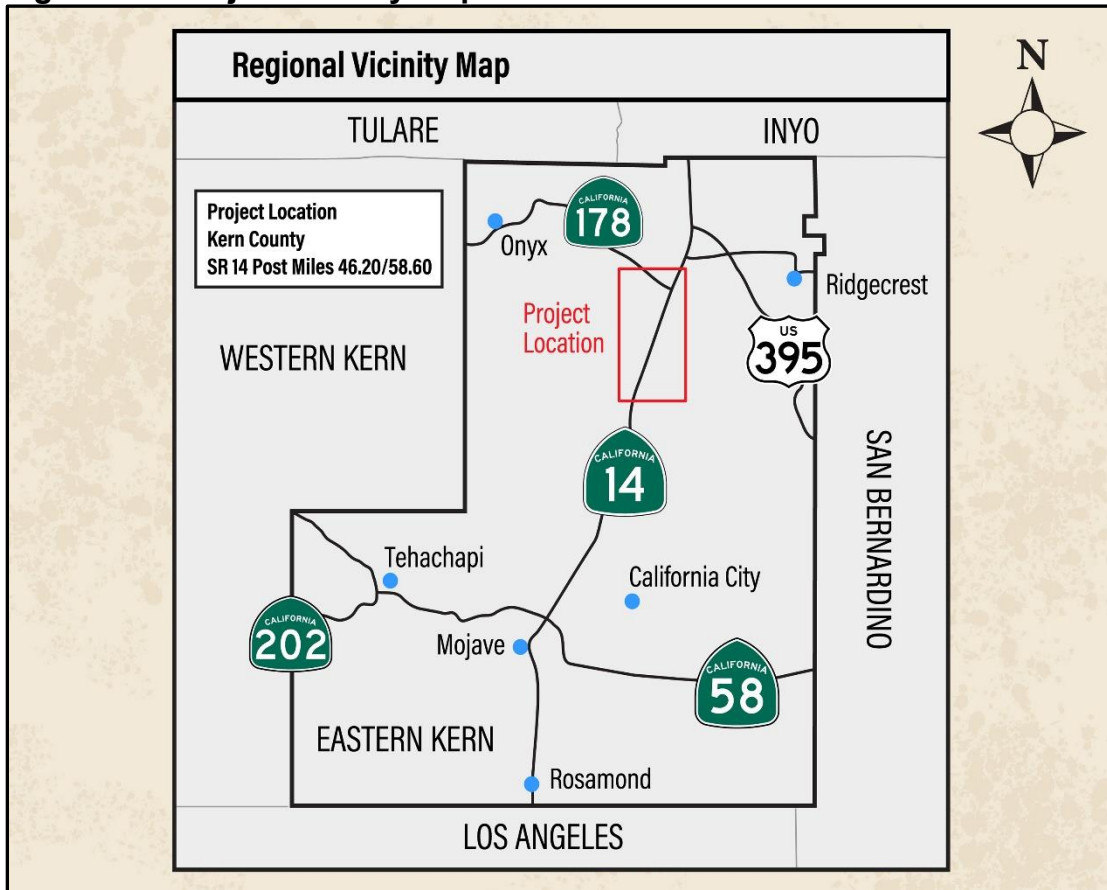
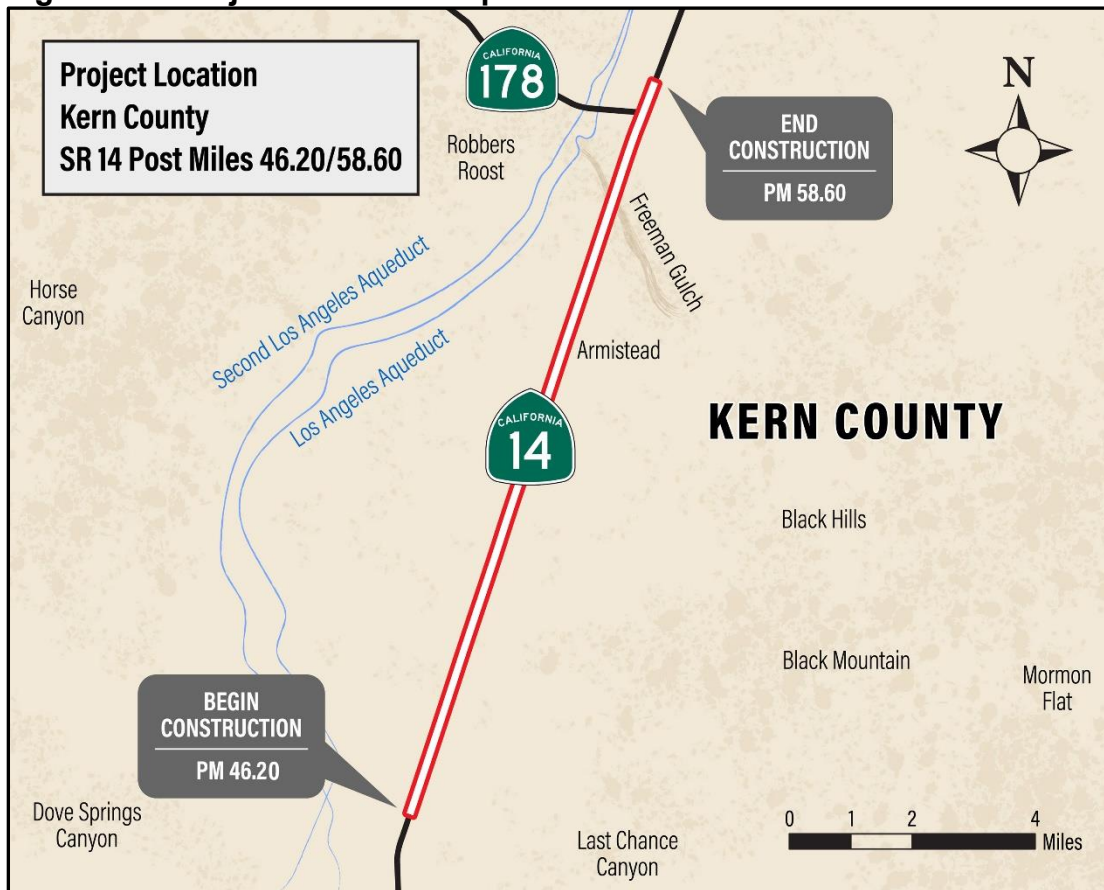


Figure 1-2 Project Location Map



1.4 Project Alternatives

Two build alternatives and one no-build alternative are under consideration for this project.

1.4.1 Build Alternatives

This project contains a number of standardized project measures that are used on most, if not all, Caltrans projects and were not developed in response to any specific environmental impact resulting from the proposed project. These measures are listed later in this chapter under “Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives.”

Common Design Features of the Build Alternatives

Shoulder Widening

The project proposes widening the existing shoulders by approximately 6.33 feet on each side of the highway to provide a total shoulder width of 4 to 8 feet and a 4.66-foot-wide median island. Shoulder widening would occur between post miles 46.20 and 58.30. The shoulders on the Freeman Gulch

Bridge would be widened to accommodate 8-foot-wide shoulders to meet current design standards.

Pavement

The project proposes to rehabilitate pavement between post miles 52.80 and 58.60, covering approximately 11.6 lane miles. The proposed project would also place a thin blanket of hot mix asphalt from post miles 46.20 to 52.80.

Drainage Work

The project would replace, extend, or upgrade over 20 culverts along the project limits to improve drainage and prevent erosion. Many of these culverts are more than 75 years old and have exceeded their expected service life, showing signs of significant wear and degradation. Culverts would be replaced where needed and extended in areas where the roadway and shoulders would be widened. Upgrades would include the installation of flared end sections and rock slope protection to reduce erosion. Additionally, shallow drainage ditches would be constructed to direct stormwater runoff from the roadway to these improved culvert systems or natural infiltration areas, helping to protect the highway from long-term stormwater damage. Table 1 below presents the proposed culvert work for the project.

Table 1 Proposed Culvert Work

Post Mile	Proposed Work
46.58	Add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
47.02	Add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
47.58	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
47.66	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
47.91	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
48.17	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
48.38	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
48.56	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
49.23	Extend the culvert by 4 to 8 feet and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
50.75	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
51.28	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
52.25	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
52.84	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.

Post Mile	Proposed Work
53.34	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
54.02	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
55.10	Extend the culvert by 4 to 8 feet and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
56.23	Extend the culvert by 4 to 8 feet and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
57.09	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
57.23	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
57.40	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
57.47	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
57.70	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.
57.87	Replace the culvert and add a flared end section and rock slope protection.

Safety Devices

The following safety devices would be addressed:

- Rumble strips would be added in the middle of the road and on the shoulders to warn drivers if they start to cross into oncoming traffic.
- Bridge railings at the Freeman Gulch Bridge would be upgraded to meet current design standards.
- Census loops would be replaced at post miles 57.43 and 58.0 on State Route 14, and at post mile 87.93 on State Route 178.
- Traffic signs north of post mile 52.79 would be upgraded to meet current design standards.

Grading

Roadside slopes would be graded at a low angle to minimize the potential for erosion and promote revegetation. The low-angled slopes would also provide better recovery efforts for vehicles that may drive off the roadway.

Passing Lanes

The existing passing lanes between post miles 52.80 and 53.20 would be lengthened from 0.63 mile to approximately 1.0 mile in northbound and southbound directions.

Utilities

Approximately 13 utility poles are proposed to be relocated due to roadway widening and grading. A 20-to-30-foot-wide maintenance road is anticipated to be needed for construction and maintenance access to the relocated poles.

Off-Highway Vehicle Access

The intersection of Last Chance Canyon Road and State Route 14 at post mile 50.34 would receive paved aprons on both sides of the highway.

Unique Features of the Build Alternatives

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would include all the elements listed above in *Common Design Features of the Build Alternatives*.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would include all the elements listed above in *Common Design Features of the Build Alternatives*. In addition, approximately 1 mile of northbound and southbound passing lanes would be added from post miles 54.60 to 55.80. Proposed work includes total pavement widening by 18.33 feet on each side to accommodate an additional 12-foot-wide passing lane, an 8-foot-wide shoulder on each side, and a 4.66-foot-wide median island.

No-Build (No-Action) Alternative

The no-build alternative would not meet the project's purpose and need of enhancing safety, maintaining the existing pavement, or improving access for multiple modes of transportation on this segment of State Route 14. Selection of the no-build alternative would result in no project-related construction activities, and the existing facilities would remain the same.

1.5 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Further Discussion

Alternative 3 would have included all elements of alternatives 1 and 2 and would have additionally realigned the intersection of State Routes 14 and 178 to meet at a 90-degree angle. Crash data did not support the need for this action. On October 3, 2024, the Project Development Team eliminated this alternative from further consideration because it did not address the project's purpose and need.

1.6 Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives

This project includes a list of Caltrans standard measures that are typically used on all Caltrans projects. Caltrans standard measures are considered

features of the project and are evaluated as part of the project. Caltrans standard measures are not implemented to address any specific effects, impacts, or circumstances associated with the project but are instead implemented as part of the project's design to address common issues encountered in resources and are applicable to the project. These measures can be found in Caltrans' 2025 Standard Specifications.

- 7-1 Legal Relations and Responsibility to the Public
- 10-4 Water Usage
- 10-5 Dust Control
- 10-6 Watering
- 12-1 Temporary Traffic Control
- 12-3 Temporary Traffic Control Devices
- 12-4 Traffic Control Systems
- 13-1 Water Pollution Control
- 13-2 Water Pollution Control Program
- 13-4 Job Site Management
- 13-6 Temporary Sediment Control
- 13-7 Temporary Tracking Control
- 13-10 Temporary Linear Sediment Barriers
- 14-1 Environmental Stewardship
- 14-2 Cultural Resources
- 14-6 Biological Resources
- 14-7 Paleontological Resources
- 14-8 Noise and Vibration
- 14-9 Air Quality
- 14-10 Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling
- 14-11 Hazardous Waste and Contamination

- 14-12 Other Agency Regulatory Requirements
- 17-2 Clearing and Grubbing
- 18-1 Dust Palliatives
- 20-1 Landscape
- 20-3 Planting
- 20-4 Plant Establishment Work
- 21-2 Erosion Control Work

Additional standard measures will be added to the project as necessary or appropriate.

1.7 Discussion of the NEPA Categorical Exclusion

This document contains information regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other state laws and regulations. Separate environmental documentation, supporting a Categorical Exclusion determination, has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. When needed for clarity, or as required by CEQA, this document may contain references to federal laws and/or regulations (CEQA, for example, requires consideration of adverse effects on species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—that is, species protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act).

1.8 Permits and Approvals Needed

The following permits, licenses, agreements, and certifications are required for project construction:

Agency	Permit/Approval	Status
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	1602 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement	Notification to be submitted before construction starts.
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act Incidental Take Permit	Application to be submitted before construction starts.
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board	General Waste Discharge Requirements Permit	Application to be submitted before construction starts.

Chapter 2 CEQA Evaluation

2.1 CEQA Environmental Checklist

This checklist identifies physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. Potential impact determinations include Significant and Unavoidable Impact, Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated, Less Than Significant Impact, and No Impact. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with a project will indicate that there are no impacts to a particular resource. A “No Impact” answer reflects this determination. The questions in this checklist are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

Project features, which can include both design elements of the project and standardized measures that are applied to all or most Caltrans projects, such as Best Management Practices and measures included in the Standard Plans and Specifications or as Standard Special Provisions, are considered to be an integral part of the project and have been considered prior to any significance determinations documented below.

“No Impact” determinations in each section are based on the scope, description, and location of the proposed project as well as the appropriate technical report (bound separately in Volume 2), and no further discussion is included in this document.

2.1.1 Aesthetics

Considering the information in the Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire dated December 26, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	No Impact
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	No Impact
c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	No Impact
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	No Impact

2.1.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Based on a search of the California Department of Conservation's Important Farmland Mapping Tool, there are no designated Prime, Unique, or Farmlands of Statewide Importance in or near the project limits. The project will not have any effect on protected farmlands, including those under the Williamson Act (<https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/ciff>).

Impacts to timberland are analyzed as required by the California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982 (California Government Code Section 51100 et seq.), which was enacted to preserve forest resources. Searches of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection website and the California Department of Conservation website show no designated timberlands or Timber Protection Zones in or near the project vicinity.

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forestry Resources
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	No Impact
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	No Impact
c) Conflict with existing zoning, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))?	No Impact
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	No Impact

2.1.3 Air Quality

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Considering the information in the Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Waters, and Paleontology – Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements – 0-Phase Technical Study dated January 16, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	No Impact
b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?	No Impact
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	No Impact
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	No Impact

2.1.4 Biological Resources

Considering the information in the Natural Environment Study dated February 26, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	Less Than Significant Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	No Impact
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	No Impact
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	No Impact
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	No Impact

Affected Environment

The Natural Environment Study established a biological study area where resources were assessed, including the area that would be directly affected by the project (project impact area). The project impact area includes all areas where permanent and temporary disturbance or human activity could occur during construction.

The project lies within the western Mojave Desert, which is predominantly flat with rolling hills. Numerous ephemeral washes are present throughout the project area. The climate is characterized by hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. It remains dry throughout the year, except during storm events, which can produce flash floods.

The project area contains sparse development, such as buildings, private residences, paved surfaces, guardrails, dirt roads, and off-highway vehicle trails.

Question a): Special-Status Animal and Plant Species

Western Joshua Tree

The Western Joshua tree is regulated by the state through the Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act, which was enacted in July 2023. The Western Joshua Tree Conservation Act prohibits the importation, exportation, take, possession, purchase, or sale of Western Joshua trees or parts or products of

the species. The Western Joshua tree is also a candidate for listing under the California Endangered Species Act. This species is native to California as well as other states located in western North America in desert environments.

A total of 148 Western Joshua trees occur within the biological study area and were mapped in April 2025 following the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Western Joshua Tree Census Protocol. Individuals ranged from 0.1 foot to approximately 20 feet in height.

Desert Tortoise

The desert tortoise is a federally threatened and state-endangered species. This species occurs throughout most of the Mojave Desert to the eastern Colorado Desert. The species' habitat consists of creosote scrub, desert washes, and Western Joshua tree woodlands with well-drained sandy loam soils.

Surveys conducted in October 2024 observed multiple inactive desert tortoise burrows; however, no individuals, active burrows, or other signs were observed. The habitat does not support native plant communities that desert tortoises use for foraging. Invasive annual grasses were found in the project area and offer poor nutritional quality and signal unsuitable habitat for desert tortoises.

Burrowing Owl

The burrowing owl is a species of special concern in California and a candidate for listing under the California Endangered Species Act. This species prefers grassland, shrub-steppe, and desert habitat where vegetation is short and sparse with well-drained soils. Burrowing owls require underground burrows for nesting, roosting, and refuge and will reuse previously successful burrows.

Burrowing owls were not observed during October 2024 and April 2025 burrowing animal and nesting bird surveys. One old burrow was observed and showed signs of white, chalky waste, but no owl pellets were present near the entrance. The burrow is located approximately 100 feet from the edge of the project impact area. No recent signs of burrowing owl activity were observed.

Desert Kit Fox

The desert kit fox is protected under California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 460. The code states that the desert kit fox, along with fisher, marten, river otter, and red fox, may not be taken at any time. This species occurs in the Mojave and Colorado Deserts in California, southern Nevada, southwestern Utah, and Arizona in vegetation communities containing creosote bush and saltbush with an abundance of small mammals.

Desert kit fox scat was observed during desert tortoise surveys in October 2024. No individuals, active dens, or other signs were observed during surveys.

Mohave Ground Squirrel

The Mohave ground squirrel is a state-threatened species. The species is restricted to the Mojave Desert in open desert scrub and Western Joshua tree woodland with sandy and gravelly soils. The Mohave ground squirrel uses burrows at the base of shrubs for cover.

Native shrub cover is sparse in the project area and close to the highway, where noise, vibration, and human activity are frequent, indicating a lack of suitable habitat for this species. No individuals or signs of Mohave ground squirrels were observed during surveys.

Migratory and Nesting Birds

The Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act makes it unlawful to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, or remove nests of migratory birds. California Fish and Game Code Sections 3503, 3503.5, and 3513 also protect migratory birds and prohibit the destruction of any bird nest, egg, or nestling.

Suitable nesting habitat in the form of creosote scrub, Western Joshua trees, and power poles was observed during nesting bird surveys conducted in April 2025. Common species of birds, such as the house finch, white-crowned sparrow, common raven, western flycatcher, and horned lark, were observed flying, foraging, or perched. No nests of any bird species were observed during surveys.

Question b): Natural Communities of Special Concern

Aquatic Resources

Water, wetlands, and riparian habitats have various protections and permit requirements under state and federal agencies, including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. An aquatic resource delineation was conducted in November 2022 and identified 63 ephemeral washes that are considered a California Department of Fish and Wildlife 1602 resource. Most of the 1602 resources are small ephemeral washes that travel short distances along the roadside shoulder before flowing through culverts across the highway. Freeman Gulch, an ephemeral wash, was the largest 1602 resource identified by the aquatic resource delineation. The Freeman Gulch Bridge crosses Freeman Gulch.

Environmental Consequences

Response to a) Less Than Significant Impact: Special-Status Animal and Plant Species

Western Joshua Tree

Impacts on Western Joshua trees would be limited to shoulder-widening activities. Based on surveys, approximately four Western Joshua trees are

anticipated to be removed and would require an incidental take permit through the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Desert Tortoise

Due to high vehicle traffic, development in the project area, and poor habitat, impacts on desert tortoises and their habitat are not anticipated.

A Caltrans biologist conducted informal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in February 2026 regarding Section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act and potential impacts on the desert tortoise and its habitat. The Caltrans biologist received no concerns from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in response to Caltrans' "No Effect" determination.

Burrowing Owl

Burrowing owls could be present during construction, but based on survey results, presence is unlikely. The one burrow observed during surveys is located approximately 100 feet from the edge of the project impact area and would not be directly impacted by shoulder-widening activities. Construction activities may generate noise and vibration and may increase human presence in the project area, which may temporarily impact burrowing owls, resulting in distressed behavior and displacement of individuals.

Desert Kit Fox

Desert kit foxes could be present during construction, but based on surveys, their presence is unlikely. Construction activities may generate noise and vibration and may increase human presence in the project area, which may temporarily impact desert kit foxes, resulting in distressed behavior and displacement of individuals.

Mohave Ground Squirrel

Impacts on Mohave ground squirrels and their habitat are not expected because habitat is absent and no individuals were observed during surveys.

Migratory and Nesting Birds

Nesting and foraging habitat for migratory and nesting birds may be impacted by the removal of four Western Joshua trees. However, no nests were observed in trees or shrubs during surveys.

Response to b): Natural Communities of Special Concern

Aquatic Resources

Grading, culvert replacements, installation of flared end sections and rock slope protection, and vegetation removal are anticipated to result in both permanent and temporary impacts to California Department of Fish and Wildlife 1602 resource areas. Impacts to Freeman Gulch are also anticipated from widening the shoulders on the Freeman Gulch Bridge. Permanent

impacts to 1602 resources are estimated to amount to 0.015 acre. Temporary impacts on 1602 resources are estimated to amount to 0.007 acre.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed for the project:

Question (a): Western Joshua Tree

BIO-1: Before construction activities begin, all construction personnel will attend a Biological Resource Information Program training course. The training course may include, but would not be limited to, descriptions and an overview of the legal protection status of the Western Joshua tree, desert tortoise, burrowing owl, Mohave ground squirrel, and desert kit fox.

Question (a): Desert Tortoise

BIO-1: Before construction activities begin, all construction personnel will attend a Biological Resource Information Program training course. The training course may include, but would not be limited to, descriptions and an overview of the legal protection status of the Western Joshua tree, desert tortoise, burrowing owl, Mohave ground squirrel, and desert kit fox.

BIO-2: A preconstruction burrow and den occupancy survey for burrowing owls, desert tortoises, and desert kit foxes will be performed within the project impact area.

BIO-3: A biological monitor shall be present during initial ground-disturbing activities, such as clearing, grubbing, and grading of native soil.

BIO-4: If desert tortoises or Mohave ground squirrels are found, a temporary construction buffer may be established until the animals move outside the buffer.

Question (a): Burrowing Owl

BIO-1: Before construction activities begin, all construction personnel will attend a Biological Resource Information Program training course. The training course may include, but would not be limited to, descriptions and an overview of the legal protection status of the Western Joshua tree, desert tortoise, burrowing owl, Mohave ground squirrel, and desert kit fox.

BIO-2: A preconstruction burrow and den occupancy survey for burrowing owls, desert tortoises, and desert kit foxes will be performed within the project impact area.

BIO-5: A preconstruction survey will be conducted at the location of a potentially active burrowing owl burrow 30 days prior to construction.

BIO-6: If work does not occur within 30 days of the initial preconstruction survey or if project activities are stopped for 30 days or more, additional preconstruction burrowing owl surveys may be required.

BIO-7: If an occupied burrow is discovered during construction, an appropriately sized construction buffer will be implemented at the discretion of a Caltrans biologist.

Question (a): Desert Kit Fox:

BIO-1: Before construction activities begin, all construction personnel will attend a Biological Resource Information Program training course. The training course may include, but would not be limited to, descriptions and an overview of the legal protection status of the Western Joshua tree, desert tortoise, burrowing owl, Mohave ground squirrel, and desert kit fox.

BIO-2: A preconstruction burrow and den occupancy survey for burrowing owls, desert tortoises, and desert kit foxes will be performed within the project impact area.

BIO-8: If active desert kit fox dens are present and cannot be avoided, coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be initiated, and passive relocation techniques may be implemented by a Caltrans biologist.

Question (a): Mohave Ground Squirrel:

BIO-1: Before construction activities begin, all construction personnel will attend a Biological Resource Information Program training course. The training course may include, but would not be limited to, descriptions and an overview of the legal protection status of the Western Joshua tree, desert tortoise, burrowing owl, Mohave ground squirrel, and desert kit fox.

BIO-3: A biological monitor shall be present during initial ground-disturbing activities, such as clearing, grubbing, and grading of native soil.

BIO-4: If desert tortoises or Mohave ground squirrels are found, a temporary construction buffer may be established until the animals move outside the buffer.

Question (a): Migratory and Nesting Birds:

BIO-9: If the project occurs between February 1 and September 30, preconstruction nesting bird surveys will be conducted.

Question (b): Aquatic Resources

BIO-10: A 1600 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement Notification will be submitted to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. All measures included in the executed 1600 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement will be implemented.

2.1.5 Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Historic Property Survey Report dated June 2026 and the Archaeological Survey and Extended Phase 1 Testing

Report dated August 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	No Impact
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	No Impact
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	No Impact

The cultural resources studies were carried out in a manner consistent with Caltrans' regulatory responsibilities under the Caltrans National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Programmatic Agreement and the Caltrans Public Resources Code Section 5024 Memorandum of Understanding. Caltrans identification and consultation efforts included a records search, tribal consultation, historical society consultation, a Phase 1 pedestrian survey, and Extended Phase 1 testing. In accordance with Stipulation 8.A of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement and the Public Resources Code Section 5024 Memorandum of Understanding, the area of potential effects of the project was established in consultation with Caltrans Professionally Qualified Staff and a Caltrans project manager on February 24, 2026.

The area of potential effects was established as all of Caltrans' right-of-way between the programmed project limits and includes subsurface areas anticipated to be disturbed during construction. Caltrans, in accordance with Stipulation 8.C.5 of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement and the Public Resources Code Section 5024 Memorandum of Understanding, determined that there are 12 cultural resources within the area of potential effects that were previously determined to be ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, with the State Historic Preservation Officer's concurrence, and that those determinations remain valid.

Caltrans, in accordance with Stipulation 8.C.3 of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement and the Public Resources Code Section 5024 Memorandum of Understanding, determined that there are five cultural resources within the area of potential effects that are considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places for the purpose of this project only because they will be protected in their entirety from any potential effects through the establishment of Environmentally Sensitive Areas. Caltrans Professionally Qualified Staff determined that the remaining cultural resources within the area of potential effects meet the criteria for Appendix 4

(Properties Exempt from Evaluation) of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement and the Public Resources Code Section 5024 Memorandum of Understanding. Caltrans, pursuant to Stipulation 9.B.1a of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement and the Public Resources Code Section 5024 Memorandum of Understanding, determined that a Finding of No Adverse Effect with Standard Conditions – Environmentally Sensitive Areas is appropriate for this project because the cultural resources identified within the area of potential effects would either be fully protected through the establishment of Environmentally Sensitive Areas, were determined exempt, or were determined ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Caltrans District 9 will consult with the Caltrans Cultural Studies Office on the Finding of No Adverse Effect with Standard Conditions – Environmentally Sensitive Areas in July 2026.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed for the project:

CUL-1: If human remains and/or related items are discovered during construction, California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 states that further disturbances and activities shall stop in any area or nearby area suspected to overlie remains and that the Kern County coroner be contacted immediately. If the remains are thought by the coroner to be Native American, the coroner will notify the California Native American Heritage Commission within 24 hours. Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 5097.98, the California Native American Heritage Commission will then notify the Most Likely Descendant. The Most Likely Descendant, upon being granted access to the site, will have the opportunity to provide recommendations for the appropriate and dignified treatment of the human remains and associated items. Further provisions of Public Resources Code Section 5097.98 are to be followed as applicable.

2.1.6 Energy

Considering the information in the Climate Change Analysis dated March 20, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during project construction or operation?	No Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	No Impact

2.1.7 Geology and Soils

Considering the information in the Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Waters, and Paleontology – Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements – 0-Phase Technical Study dated January 16, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.	No Impact
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	No Impact
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	No Impact
iv) Landslides?	No Impact
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	No Impact
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in onsite or offsite landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?	No Impact
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property?	No Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?	No Impact
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?	No Impact

2.1.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Considering the information in the Climate Change Analysis dated March 20, 2026, and the Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Waters, and Paleontology – Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements – 0-Phase Technical Study dated January 16, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	Less Than Significant Impact
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	No Impact

Affected Environment

The Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements project is in a rural area between the population centers of Ridgecrest/Inyokern and Mojave. State Route 14 is the main transportation route to and through the area for both passenger and commercial vehicles. The nearest alternate route, U.S. Route 395, is 15 miles to the east. The Kern Council of Governments guides transportation development in the project area. The Kern County General Plan Circulation, Safety, and Traffic elements address greenhouse gas emissions in the project area.

Environmental Consequences

Response to a) Less Than Significant Impact

Construction emissions cannot be avoided with any construction process, and construction activities will generate some level of emissions. The project would take an estimated 200 working days to complete, with a potential start date in the year 2029. Construction-related greenhouse gas emissions were calculated using the Caltrans Construction Emissions Tool (CAL-CET2021 v1.0.4). The tool was developed to use Caltrans-specific equipment activity

data and the best available equipment emissions information to improve estimates of transportation-related construction emissions, fuel consumption, and electricity consumption and to support transportation and air quality planning. During construction, the project is estimated to emit 6.6 tons of carbon dioxide per day and 664.2 tons of carbon dioxide in total.

While some greenhouse gas emissions during construction are unavoidable, the project would not result in any increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions after construction is complete.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed for the project:

GHG-1: When feasible, limit idling to 5 minutes for delivery and dump trucks and other diesel-powered equipment.

GHG-2: For improved fuel efficiency from construction equipment: Maintain equipment in proper tune and working condition, use right-sized equipment for the job, and use equipment with new technologies.

GHG-3: When feasible, use recycled water or reduce consumption of potable water for construction.

2.1.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Considering the information in the Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Waters, and Paleontology – Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements – 0-Phase Technical Study dated January 16, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	No Impact
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?	No Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within 0.25 mile of an existing or proposed school?	No Impact
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	No Impact
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?	No Impact
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?	No Impact

2.1.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

Considering the information in the Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Waters, and Paleontology – Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements – 0-Phase Technical Study dated January 16, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface water or groundwater quality?	Less Than Significant Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	No Impact
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would: (i) result in substantial erosion or siltation onsite or offsite;	No Impact
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding onsite or offsite;	No Impact
(iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	No Impact
(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?	No Impact
d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	No Impact
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	No Impact

Affected Environment

Numerous ephemeral channels considered Waters of the State are present at all culverts and the bridge streambed location, Freeman Gulch, within the project area. These channels are dry washes, ephemerally flowing as a result of precipitation with no long-term or seasonal continuous water flow. These channels are considered jurisdictional to the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Environmental Consequences

The project scope includes widening the Freeman Gulch Bridge, replacing culverts, and adding flared end sections and rock slope protection to culverts. These activities are anticipated to temporarily and permanently impact Waters of the State.

It has been estimated that project activities for Alternative 1 may temporarily impact 0.4892 acre and permanently impact 0.3082 acre of Waters of the State. It has been estimated that project activities for Alternative 2 may temporarily impact 0.4892 acre and permanently impact 0.3103 acre of Waters of the State. Waters of the U.S. are not present and will not be impacted.

A general Waste Discharge Requirements permit through the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board would be required for impacts to Waters of the State. No federal permits for water resources would be required.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

The following avoidance and minimization measures are proposed for this project:

HYD-1: A Waste Discharge Requirements permit from the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board would be acquired before construction, and all applicable permit-related measures would be implemented.

2.1.11 Land Use and Planning

Considering the information in the Community Impacts Memorandum dated May 27, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning
a) Physically divide an established community?	No Impact
b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	No Impact

2.1.12 Mineral Resources

Considering the project's scope, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?	No Impact
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?	No Impact

2.1.13 Noise

Considering the information in the Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Waters, and Paleontology – Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements – 0-Phase Technical Study dated January 16, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project result in:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise
a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	No Impact
b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	No Impact
c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within 2 miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	No Impact

2.1.14 Population and Housing

Considering the information in the Community Impacts Memorandum dated May 27, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing
a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	No Impact
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	No Impact

2.1.15 Public Services

Considering the information in the Community Impacts Memorandum dated May 27, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services
a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services: Fire protection?	No Impact
Police protection?	No Impact
Schools?	No Impact
Parks?	No Impact
Other public facilities?	No Impact

2.1.16 Recreation

Considering the information in the Community Impacts Memorandum dated May 27, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation
a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?	No Impact
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	No Impact

2.1.17 Transportation

Considering the information in the Community Impacts Memorandum dated May 27, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation
a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	No Impact
b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?	No Impact
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	No Impact
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?	No Impact

2.1.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Historic Property Survey Report dated June 2026 and the Archaeological Survey and Extended Phase 1 Testing Report dated August 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code Section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, or cultural landscape that is geographically

defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe and that is:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources
a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code Section 5020.1(k), or	No Impact
b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.	No Impact

2.1.19 Utilities and Service Systems

Considering the information in the Community Impacts Memorandum dated May 27, 2025, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or stormwater drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	No Impact
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	No Impact
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?	No Impact

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems
d) Generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?	No Impact
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	No Impact

2.1.20 Wildfire

Considering the information in the Climate Change Analysis dated March 20, 2026, the following significance determinations have been made:

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	No Impact
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?	No Impact
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	No Impact
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	No Impact

2.1.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance
a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	No Impact
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (“Cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)	No Impact
c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	No Impact

Chapter 3 Coordination

Caltrans has initiated coordination with Southern California Edison regarding potential utility conflicts associated with the proposed shoulder widening and grading activities. A utility search conducted within the project limits identified existing overhead electrical facilities owned by Southern California Edison and overhead communication facilities owned by Frontier Communications. The Frontier Communications lines are currently colocated on Southern California Edison's overhead utility poles.

Based on the current project design, approximately 13 Southern California Edison utility poles are anticipated to require relocation or resetting. Caltrans and Southern California Edison are coordinating to ensure that the relocated utility facilities comply with Caltrans' Clear Recovery Zone requirements. The final location of the poles and the maintenance road requirements will be determined during the project's design phase.

Appendix A Title VI Policy Statement

CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR

California Department of Transportation

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
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September 2025

TITLE VI/NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT

It is the policy of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the assurances set forth in the Caltrans' Title VI Program Plan, to ensure that no person in the United States shall on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. Related non-discrimination authorities, remedies, and state law further those protections, including sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, age, low income, and Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Caltrans is committed to complying with 23 C.F.R. Part 200, 49 C.F.R. Part 21, 49 C.F.R. Part 303, and the Federal Transit Administration Circular 4702.1B. Caltrans will make every effort to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its services, programs, and activities, whether they are federally funded or not, and that services and benefits are fairly distributed to all people, regardless of race, color, or national origin (including LEP). In addition, Caltrans will facilitate meaningful participation in the transportation planning process in a non-discriminatory manner.

The overall responsibility for this policy is assigned to the Caltrans Director. The Caltrans Title VI Coordinator is assigned to the Caltrans Office of Civil Rights Deputy Director, who then delegates sufficient responsibility and authority to the Office of Civil Rights' managers, including the Title VI Branch Manager, to effectively implement the Caltrans Title VI Program. Individuals with questions or requiring additional information relating to the policy or the implementation of the Caltrans Title VI Program should contact the Title VI Branch Manager at title.vi@dot.ca.gov or at (916) 639-6392, or visit the following web page: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/title-vi>.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dina El-Tawansy'.

Dina El-Tawansy (Sep 12, 2025 16:52:12 PDT)

DINA A. EL-TAWANSY
Director

"Improving lives and communities through transportation."

List of Technical Studies Bound Separately (Volume 2)

Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Waters, and Paleontology – Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements – 0-Phase Technical Study. Caltrans, January 16, 2026.

Climate Change Analysis. Caltrans, March 20, 2026.

Community Impacts Memorandum. Caltrans, May 27, 2025.

Natural Environment Study. Caltrans, February 26, 2026.

Historical Property Survey Report. Caltrans, June 2026.

Archaeological Survey and Extended Phase 1 Testing Report. Caltrans, August 2024.

Visual Impact Assessment Scoping Questionnaire. Caltrans, December 26, 2025

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports or the Initial Study, please send your request to:

Amber Stoerp
District 9 Environmental Division
California Department of Transportation
500 South Main Street, Bishop, California 93514

Or send your request via email to: amber.stoerp@dot.ca.gov
Or call: 760-937-4666

Please provide the following information in your request:

Project title: Freeman Gulch Safety Improvements

General location information: On State Route 14 near Inyokern in Kern County, California

District number-county code-route-post mile: 09-KER-14-PM 46.20-58.60

Project ID number: 0922000005