

APPENDIX 3.14-B: RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF LAND EVALUATION AND SITE ASSESSMENT PURSUANT TO THE FARMLAND PROTECTION POLICY ACT

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This appendix summarizes the results of the farmland Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) for the San Jose to Central Valley Wye Project Section (Project Section), which was performed in compliance with Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) requirements. The purpose of the FPPA is to minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses (7 United States Code § 4201). Specifically, the FPPA requires that federal agencies:

- Use criteria (described in this appendix) to identify and take into account the adverse impacts of their programs on the preservation of farmland.
- Consider alternative actions, as appropriate, that could lessen adverse impacts.
- Make sure that their programs, to the extent practicable, are compatible with state and local government and private programs and policies to protect farmland.

San Jose to Central Valley Wye Project Alternatives

The four San Jose to Central Valley Wye project alternatives evaluated in the main body of this technical report (the *San Jose to Merced Project Section Agricultural Farmland Technical Report* or *Agricultural Farmland Technical Report*) would pass through five subsections (San Jose Diridon Station Approach, Monterey Corridor, Morgan Hill and Gilroy, Pacheco Pass, and San Joaquin Valley) and three counties (Santa Clara, San Benito, and Merced Counties). Calculations and results from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are reported by county. Therefore, results for each alternative discuss each county separately.

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment

As required by the FPPA implementing regulations (7 Code of Federal Regulations Part 658), NRCS staff and high-speed rail (HSR) system analysts performed LESA calculations using the CPA-106 form (for corridor-type projects) to determine an overall farmland conversion score.¹ Using alignment information provided by a geographic information system (GIS), the NRCS calculated the relative value of each of the alternative corridors as farmland; the NRCS land evaluation calculations and the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program site assessment criteria are presented in Attachment 1, *Natural Resources Conservation Service Land Evaluation Explanations and Calculations—Santa Clara County*; Attachment 2, *Natural Resources Conservation Service Land Evaluation Explanations and Calculations—San Benito County*; and Attachment 3, *Natural Resources Conservation Service Land Evaluation Explanations and Calculations—Merced County*. The NRCS provided separate scores for each county.

When the NRCS provided land evaluation scores, analysts calculated site assessment scores for each alternative. Analysts determined the total LESA rating by adding the land evaluation score (up to 100 points) and site assessment scores (up to 160 points) for each county and weighting scores based on the percentage of the alternative lying within each county (total possible score of 260 points). Analysts then compared the results to significance thresholds established in the FPPA implementing regulations. After determining total LESA scores, the analysts evaluated farmland effects and assessed relative suitability of sites for farmland protection.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that:

1. Sites² with the highest combined scores be regarded as most suitable for protection and the sites with the lowest scores as least suitable for protection.

¹ In the CPA-106 form, note that Corridor A corresponds to Alternative 1, Corridor B corresponds to Alternative 2, Corridor C corresponds to Alternative 3, and Corridor D corresponds to Alternative 4..

² Because the project is a linear project, the LESA terminology *site* refers to *corridor* or *alignment*.

2. Sites receiving a total score of less than 160 points not be given further consideration for protection and no additional sites need to be evaluated.
3. Sites receiving a total score of 160 or more points be given increasingly higher levels of consideration for protection.
4. When making decisions on proposed actions for sites receiving total scores of 160 or more points, the following should be considered:
 - a. Use of land that is not farmland or use of existing structures.
 - b. Alternative sites, locations, and designs that would serve the proposed purpose but would convert either fewer acres of farmland or other farmland that has a lower relative value.
 - c. Special siting requirements of the project and the extent to which an alternative site fails to satisfy the special siting requirements as well as the originally selected site.

Farmland Conversion Effects Results

Table 1 shows the total LESA scores for the project alternatives (analyzed according to the portions of the alternatives in each county). All four alternatives had total LESA scores of less than 160 points in Santa Clara County, San Benito County, and Merced County.

Table 1 Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Scores for the Project Alternatives

Alternative	Relative Value of Farmland Points	Total Corridor Assessment Points	Total LESA Points
Santa Clara County			
Alternative 1	59	67	126
Alternative 2	64	61	125
Alternative 3	63	67	130
Alternative 4	59	48	107
San Benito County			
Alternative 1	41	77	118
Alternative 2	41	78	119
Alternative 3	44	75	119
Alternative 4	41	77	118
Merced County			
Alternative 1	54	83	137
Alternative 2	54	83	137
Alternative 3	54	83	137
Alternative 4	54	83	137

Source: NRCS-CPA-106 forms for Santa Clara County (Attachment 1), San Benito County (Attachment 2), and Merced County (Attachment 3) (NRCS 2019)

LESA = Land Evaluation and Site Assessment

Findings

The FPPA does not mandate that a federal agency make a specific decision based on LESA ratings but provides suitability guidance for protection of farmland from conversion to nonagricultural uses. As analyzed based on FPPA guidance, all four project alternatives received scores of less than 160 in Santa Clara, San Benito, and Merced Counties. Because all alternatives received scores of less than 160, none of the alternatives needs special consideration.

The project vicinity contains urban, suburban, rural residential, and agricultural lands. Some of California's most productive agricultural lands are located in the project vicinity, in the Southern Santa Clara Valley (County of Santa Clara 2015). San Benito County's leading industry is production agriculture (County of San Benito 2016), and Merced County in the San Joaquin Valley continues to be an important agriculture center in California and the nation (American Farmland Trust 2013). Therefore, effects on agricultural lands from the project alternatives cannot be completely avoided, although effects have been avoided and minimized to the extent feasible. The Agricultural Farmland Technical Report describes impact avoidance and minimization features that are incorporated into the project design and would avoid or minimize potential effects, including administering a farmland consolidation program to sell remnant parcels to neighboring landowners for consolidation with adjacent farmland properties for the purpose of continuing agricultural use. In addition, the Authority has proposed a mitigation measure to fund the California Department of Conservation Farmland Conservancy Program's work to identify suitable agricultural land for mitigation of effects and to fund the purchase of agricultural conservation easements from willing sellers.

The two program environmental impact reports (EIR)/environmental impact statements (EIS) for the California high-speed rail system—the *Final Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System* (Authority and FRA 2005) and the *San Francisco Bay Area (Bay Area) to Central Valley High-Speed Train Final Program EIR/EIS* (Bay Area to Central Valley Program EIR) (Authority and FRA 2008)—and two partially revised and recirculated versions of the Bay Area to Central Valley Program EIR, the 2010 *Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Revised Final Program EIR* (Authority 2010) and the 2012 *Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Partially Revised Final Program EIR* (Bay Area to Central Valley Revised Program EIR) (Authority 2012) are collectively referred to as the Program EIR/EIS documents. The Program EIR/EIS documents recognized that effects on agricultural resources could be substantial, and some potential alternatives were rejected during the programmatic review because of their effects on agriculture. Recognizing the need to protect important agricultural resources as much as possible, the project alternatives would follow existing road and railway alignments to the extent feasible.

References

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