



CEQA Notice of Availability/Notice of Completion

Coachella Valley – San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service

Joint Tier 1/Program Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report

Date: May 21, 2021

To: The Office of Planning and Research, Responsible and Trustee Agencies, and Other Interested Agencies, Organizations, and Individuals

Subject: Notice of Availability/Notice of Completion of Joint Tier 1/Program Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report

Project Title: Coachella Valley – San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service Program

From: Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC)
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Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15085, the purpose of this Notice of Availability/Notice of Completion (NOA/NOC) is to notify and provide information to the Office of Planning and Research, potential responsible and trustee agencies, and other interested agencies, organizations, and individuals that the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR is available for public review. This NOA/NOC provides a brief description of the Program, a description of the Program's location, goals and objectives for implementing the Program, and information on how public agencies and members of the public may comment on the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Division of Rail and Mass Transportation, and Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), have prepared a joint NEPA/CEQA Tier 1/Program Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR) to: 1) evaluate passenger rail service options between Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) in Los Angeles County, California and the City of Coachella in Riverside County, California, which are collectively known as the Coachella Valley San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service Program (Program), and 2) provide alternative travel choices to automobile ownership along the 144-mile long Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor (Program Corridor).

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC are using a tiered NEPA/CEQA process to complete the environmental review of the Program, under 40 CFR 1508.28 and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15168 and 15170.

Tiering is a staged environmental review process often applied to environmental review for complex transportation projects. In compliance with NEPA and CEQA, which require that federal and state agencies analyze a range of reasonable alternatives in an EIS (42 USC Section 4332(c)(iii)) and EIR (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(a)), this Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR evaluates a reasonable range of alternatives and will recommend a preferred alternative within the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area. This Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR evaluates a No Build Alternative and a Build Alternative with three options. The Build Alternative Options include track infrastructure improvements, new track infrastructure, and new station facility options that would be located within or adjacent to the existing rail corridor.

This Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR includes an evaluation of potential environmental impacts of the Build Alternative Options broadly within the Program Corridor. The Program Corridor provides a flexible regional context for the best location of an enhanced passenger rail system while providing opportunities for the Build Alternative Options within the Program Corridor to account for engineering and environmental constraints, as well as public input.

Based on the decisions made in this Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, subsequent Tier 2/Project-level analysis (that would be prepared at a future date for the selected Build Alternative Option) would examine the Program Corridor in greater detail. Additional public input and more refined engineering studies would be undertaken as part of NEPA/CEQA Tier 2/Project-level review.

RCTC, as CEQA lead agency, invites the public and Federal, state, and local agencies to provide input on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and will consider all information from outreach activities when preparing the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. RCTC is also requesting interested individuals' or organizations' comments on Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR that would be considered during the preparation of the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.

Program Location

As shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3, the Program Corridor runs west-to-east, extending from a western terminus at Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) to an eastern terminus in either the City of Indio or City of Coachella and consists of two sections: the Western Section and the Eastern Section. The boundary between Western and Eastern Sections is in the City of Colton, at the intersection of existing railroad lines owned by Union Pacific Railroad (UP) and BNSF. There are two proposed eastern terminus options: one in the City of Indio and one in the City of Coachella. Both proposed eastern terminus options would require construction of a new station, as neither the City of Indio nor the City of Coachella has existing stations to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service.

Program Summary

The Program's Purpose is to implement a safe, reliable, and convenient intercity passenger rail service in the Program Corridor with the capability to meet the future mobility needs of residents, businesses, and visitors. The Program is needed to address the absence of effective transportation alternatives to personal automobile travel between coastal regions of Southern California (e.g., Los Angeles and Orange Counties) and cities in the Inland Empire (e.g., City of Riverside) and the Coachella Valley (e.g., Cities of Coachella, Indio, Palm Springs), the projected increase in travel demand in the Program Corridor resulting from population and employment growth, and the increasing unreliability of existing transportation systems within the Program Corridor.

The Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR analyzes the No Build Alternative and three Build Alternative Options in the two geographic sections, as shown on Figure 1 through Figure 3 and as summarized below.

- *No Build Alternative* –The No Build Alternative provides a baseline for comparison to the Build Alternative Options. The No Build Alternative assumes no new passenger rail service is implemented in the Program Corridor except for existing and committed transportation improvements.
- *Build Alternative Option 1 (Coachella Terminus)* – Build Alternative Option 1 includes a total Program Corridor distance of 144 miles and consists of a Western Section, terminating at LAUS, and an Eastern Section, terminating in the City of Coachella. Under Build Alternative Option 1, existing rail infrastructure would be used in the Western Section of the Program Corridor, and no additional railroad infrastructure improvements or new stations would be required to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service. Potential new infrastructure improvements on the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor could include sidings, additional main line track to Coachella, wayside signals, drainage, grade-separation structures, and up to five new station facilities to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service.
- *Build Alternative Option 2 (Indio Terminus)* – Build Alternative Option 2 includes a total Program Corridor distance of 140.25 miles and consists of a Western Section, terminating at LAUS, and an Eastern Section, terminating in the City of Indio. Under Build Alternative Option 2, existing rail infrastructure would be used in the Western Section of the Program Corridor, and no additional railroad infrastructure improvements or new stations would be required to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service. Potential new infrastructure improvements on the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor could include sidings, additional main line track to Indio, wayside signals, drainage, grade-separation structures, and up to four new station facilities to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service.

- *Build Alternative Option 3 (Indio Terminus with Limited Third Track)* – Build Alternative Option 3 includes a total Program Corridor distance of 140.25 miles and consists of a Western Section, terminating at LAUS, and an Eastern Section, terminating in the City of Indio. Under Build Alternative Option 2, existing rail infrastructure would be used in the Western Section of the Program Corridor, and no additional railroad infrastructure improvements or new stations would be required to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service. Potential new infrastructure improvements on the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor could include sidings, additional main line track to the proposed Mid Valley Station Area, wayside signals, drainage, grade-separation structures, and up to four new station facilities to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service.

The Build Alternative Options have been developed to a level of detail appropriate for a Tier 1/Program service-level analysis. The Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area represents the potential area where rail infrastructure improvements and station facilities could be implemented and constructed but do not specify the precise location of the improvement or facility. The Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR service-level evaluation does not clear these potential future station facilities or rail infrastructure improvements for construction. Completion of Tier 2/Project-level environmental review would be required prior to implementation of site-specific infrastructure improvements, including station locations.

Summary of Environmental Impacts

The Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR has been prepared by FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC to analyze the potential significant environmental impacts of the to identify potential mitigation strategies that would avoid or reduce significant impacts during subsequent (future) Tier 2/Project-level analyses. The Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR analyzed the following issue areas: Land Use and Planning; Transportation; Visual and Aesthetic Resources; Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases; Noise and Vibration; Jurisdictional Waters and Wetland Resources; Biological Resources; Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Quality; Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontological Resources; Hazards and Hazardous Materials; Public Utilities and Energy; Cultural Resources; Parklands and Community Services; Safety and Security; Socioeconomics and Communities Affected; Cumulative Effects; Environmental Justice; and Section 4(f) and 6(f) Resources.

The potential for impacts and comparison of impacts among Build Alternative Options are based on the potential presence of resources within Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area for each Build Alternative Option. The identification of resources within the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area allows for a comparison of effects among Build Alternative Options and provides information about key resources that may need to be considered during Tier 2/Project-level analysis and design.



The Build Alternative Options considered could result in significant and unavoidable impacts in the following resource areas: Land Use and Planning; Transportation; Visual Quality and Aesthetics; Air Quality; Noise and Vibration; Biological Resources; Floodplains, Hydrology and Water Quality; Paleontological and Mineral Resources; Public Utilities; Parkland Resources; Cultural Resources. However, it should be noted that in this Tier 1/Program-level EIS/EIR, the description of impacts and their severity is not detailed enough to formulate specific mitigation measures. Therefore, each resource area in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR includes a list of mitigation strategies that would be considered and further developed at the Tier 2/Project-level analysis conducted in the future. Mitigation strategies include conceptual avoidance and minimization measures for the next phase of design and descriptions of options for replacing or re-establishing the affected resources.

Document Availability

In accordance with Governor Newsom's Executive Order No. N-54-20 in effect during the COVID-19 public health emergency, the requirement to provide general public access to physical copies of CEQA notices and public review documents has been suspended until further notice. Access to electronic versions of the CEQA notices and documents is required. The Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR with technical appendices is available for review online at:

- RCTC's website:
<https://www.rctc.org/projects/coachella-valley-san-gorgonio-pass-corridor-rail-corridor-service-project/>
- FRA's website:
<https://railroads.dot.gov/environment/environmental-reviews/coachella-valley-san-gorgonio-pass-corridor-investment-plan>
- Regulations.gov:
<https://www.regulations.gov/docket/FRA-2021-0048>

Requests for hard copies of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR with technical appendices may still be sent to:

Riverside County Transportation Commission

Sheldon Peterson, Rail Manager

P.O. Box 12008

Riverside, California 92502-2208

or via email to cvrail@rctc.org



Hard copies of the Executive Summary and CD copies of the entire Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR with accompanying appendices will also be available for public review at the following locations (subject to library location hours and COVID-19 procedures):

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| <p>Los Angeles Union Station/Metro Library and Archive One Gateway Plaza 15th Floor Los Angeles, California 90012</p> <p>(Hard copy of the Draft EIS/EIR and appendices available in English and hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Fullerton Public Library 353 W Commonwealth Avenue Fullerton, California 92832</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Arlington Library 9556 Magnolia Avenue Riverside, California 92503</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> |
| <p>Riverside County Transportation Commission 4080 Lemon Street Riverside, California 92501</p> <p>(Hard copy of the Draft EIS/EIR and appendices available in English and hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Colton Public Library 656 N 9th Street Colton, California 92324</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Loma Linda Branch Library 25581 Barton Road Loma Linda, California 92354</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> |
| <p>A.K. Smiley Public Library 125 W. Vine Street Redlands, California 92373</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Beaumont Library 125 E. Eighth Street Beaumont, California 92223</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Banning Public Library 21 W. Nicolet Street Banning, California 92220</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> |
| <p>Palm Springs Public Library 300 S. Sunrise Way Palm Springs, California 92262</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Riverside County Indio Branch Library 200 Civic Center Mall Indio, California 92201</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> | <p>Riverside County Coachella Branch Library 1500 6th Street Coachella, California 92236</p> <p>(Hard copy of Executive Summary available in English and Spanish)</p> |

Public Review Period

This NOA/NOC is being circulated pursuant to California Public Resource Code Sections 21083 and 21161 and the State CEQA Guidelines Section 15085. Public agencies and the public are invited to



comment on the scope and content of the environmental information included in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. RCTC will make the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR available for at least 45 days to allow for public review and comment. The comment period for the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR extends from May 21, 2021 to July 6, 2021.

Providing Comments

Please provide electronic comments, including specific statutory responsibilities of your agency, as applicable. Electronic comments on the content of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR should be submitted no later than Tuesday, July 6, 2021. The document can be viewed at the websites noted above, including <https://www.regulations.gov/docket/FRA-2021-0048>. Comments can be shared directly with FRA by visiting the regulations.gov link (above) or by searching regulations.gov for Docket Number (FRA-2021-0048). All electronic comments should be submitted via regulations.gov.

Written comments should be sent via United States (U.S.) mail to:

Federal Railroad Administration
Amanda Ciampolillo, Environmental Protection Specialist
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590

Comments should include “Coachella Valley – San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service Program – Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Comments” in the subject line and the name of a contact person in your organization, if applicable.

Public Hearings

The purpose of the public hearings is to explain the Program and the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR analysis. Comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR from the public may be submitted at the public hearing via comment card or court reporter. FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC have scheduled two virtual (2) public hearings as an important component of the CEQA and NEPA process. The virtual public hearings for the Program are scheduled as follows:

June 22, 2021, 06:00 p.m.

June 26, 2021, 09:00 a.m.

Public hearing materials and information will be available on the RCTC website:

<https://www.rctc.org/projects/coachella-valley-san-gorgonio-pass-corridor-rail-corridor-service-project/>.



The format of the public hearing will consist of a Program overview. Following presentation of the Program, meeting attendees will be able to virtually participate and are encouraged to provide questions and comments on the Program. Comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR from the public during the public hearing may be submitted virtually via court reporter. Spanish language translators will be present during the public hearings. People requesting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 accommodations or additional translator services are encouraged to contact RCTC at (909) 627 2974 at least 72 hours in advance of the meetings.

Figure 1. Western Section of the Program Corridor (Build Alternative Options 1, 2, and 3)

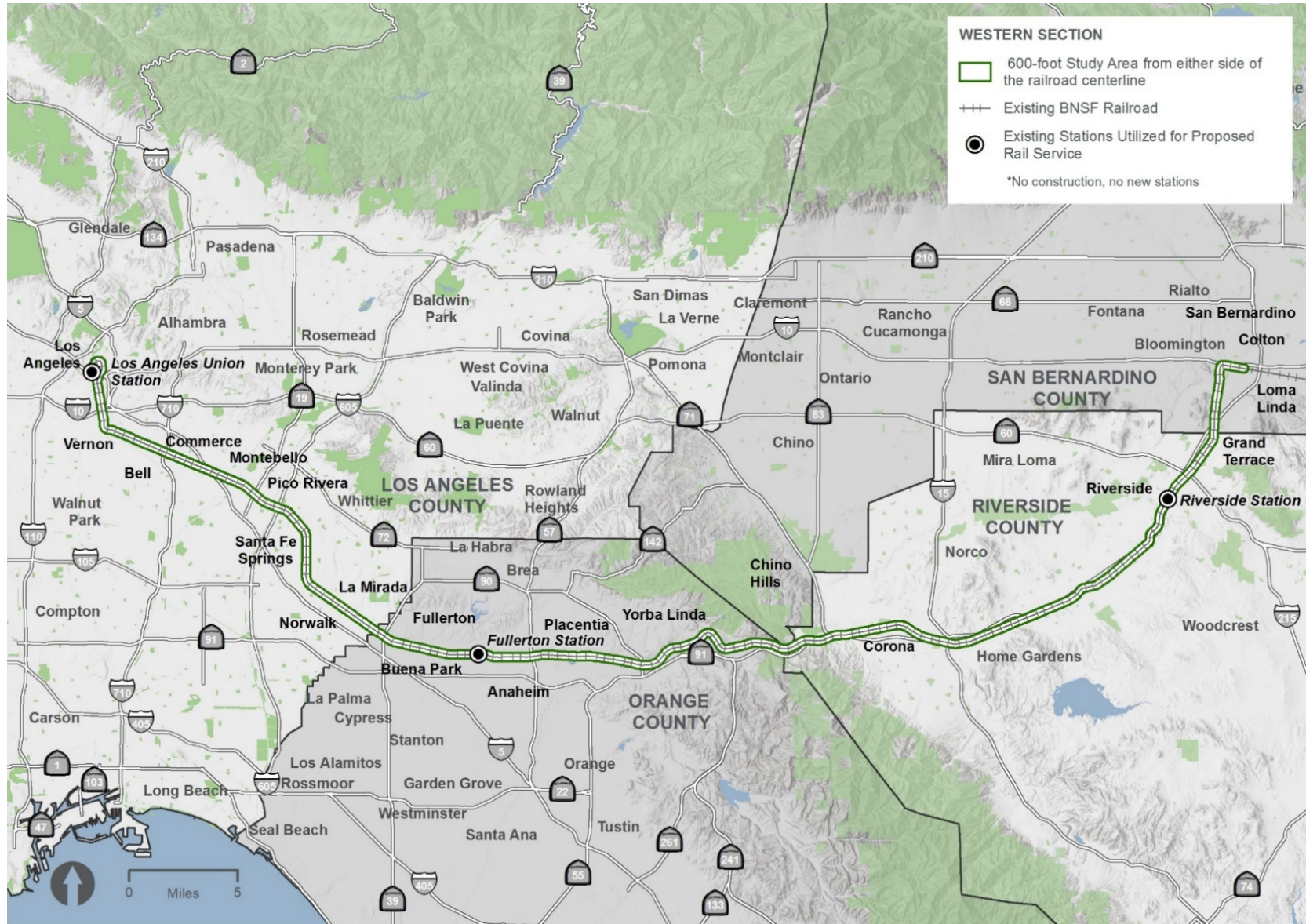


Figure 2. Eastern Section of the Program Corridor (Build Alternative Option 1)

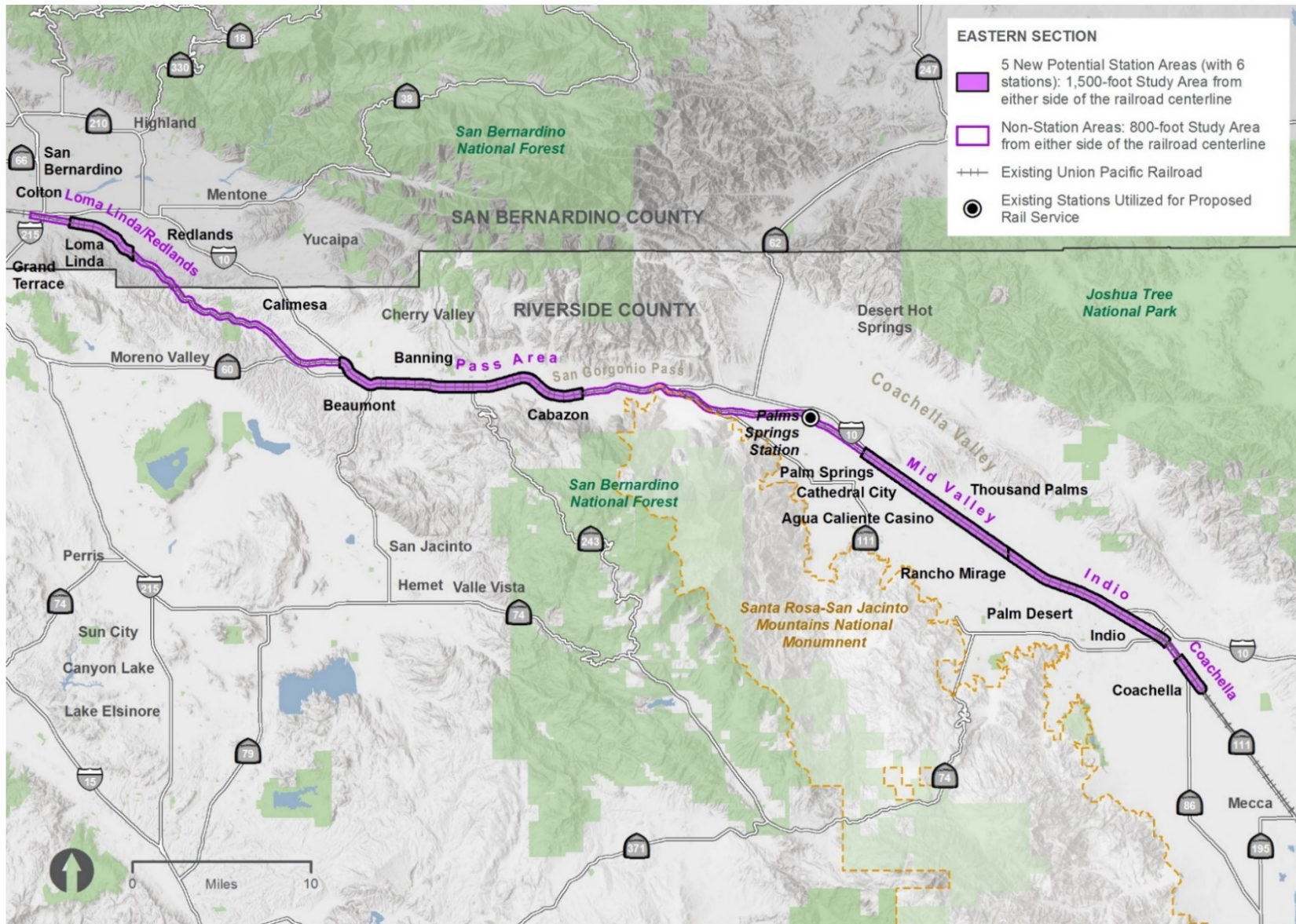


Figure 3. Eastern Section of the Program Corridor (Build Alternative Options 2 and 3)

