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SCH NO. \_\_\_\_\_

# NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: State Clearinghouse \_\_\_\_\_ From: California Dept. of Transportation \_\_\_\_\_  
1400 10th Street \_\_\_\_\_ 855 M Street, Suite 200 \_\_\_\_\_  
Sacramento CA 95814 \_\_\_\_\_ Fresno, CA 93721 \_\_\_\_\_

Subject: **Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**  
*Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.*

Project Title: South Fresno Interchange Project – 06-0H240

Project Location: On State Route 99 in the southwest area of the City of Fresno at American Ave, Central Ave, and North Ave in Fresno County, CA.

Project Description: The reconfiguration of three existing interchanges to improve traffic flow and operations, increase the capacity of the interchanges, reduce traffic delay, enhance traffic safety and provide compatibility with local planning for the project area.

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation will be the lead agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible agency is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

Caltrans needs to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

A more detailed project description, location map, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. Also, there is a Public Information/Scoping Meeting scheduled to be held on March 20, 2019 to present preliminary options to improve the interchanges. Please see the accompanying Public Notice in this packet.

A copy of the Initial Study is not attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please direct your response to: Raychel Skeen, Associate Environmental Planner, Caltrans, Central Region Environmental Division, 855 M Street, Suite 200, Fresno CA 93721; Telephone: 559-445-6132. Please supply us with the name of a contact person in your agency and their phone number and address.

Date 3/8/2019

Signature [Handwritten Signature]  
 Title Caltrans, Senior Env. Planner



The South Fresno Interchange Project proposes to reconfigure three existing interchanges on the State Route 99 (SR 99) freeway located at American Avenue, Central Avenue, and North Avenue, in Fresno County between Post Miles 12.5 and 19.1. Currently, there are several preliminary alternatives being considered at each of the interchange locations. Generally, each alternative proposes to 1) reconstruct and widen the overcrossings, 2) construct new and/or reconstruct the on- and off-ramps, and 3) provide improvements to adjacent local roads and intersections.

SR 99 is a major north/south transportation route running through the Central Valley of California. This region is known historically as one of the largest, most productive agricultural valleys in the world. The project lies on the southern edge of the city of Fresno, where SR 99 runs north/south through the City of Fresno and Fresno County planning jurisdictions. The interchanges were originally built in the early to mid-1960s. The land use in the project footprint is predominantly industrial with some commercial. The city began implementing these uses since the early 1960s, but the surrounding area within a quarter of a mile radius varies. Roughly 100 properties are in the immediate project area, including a mobile home park. Immediately, north and east there are mostly dense industrial and commercial uses with pockets of residential. These communities have some city infrastructure such as water, sewer, sidewalks, gas stations, a few small restaurants and fast food, and a couple of elementary schools; grocery stores, hospitals, public transportation and emergency services are provided north in the city of Fresno. Some of the residents have lived in their homes for generations. South and southwest of the project area are open fields and orchards, where agriculture has been the practiced land use historically. Running alongside the freeway there are several railroad alignments, as well as sections of the newly constructed High Speed Rail, which is a large overhead structure crossing over the freeway between Central and North avenues. There are irrigation canals crossing through the area delivering irrigation water to farmland. Scattered through the industrial properties are rusted old grain silos, remnants of the area's agricultural past.

Currently, in the project area, the existing partial-interchange at American Avenue and the split-interchanges at Central/Chestnut Avenues and North/Cedar Avenues do not meet current design standards. The interchange configurations are non-standard. The pavement is old and cracked. There are only two lanes, one in each direction for traffic to cross over the freeway. Vehicles using the American Avenue interchange cannot go south or north on the freeway because there are no southbound and northbound on-ramps, so vehicles must wind their way on local streets to get onto the freeway. Vehicles using the Central/Chestnut Avenue and North/Cedar Avenue interchanges must take slow and circuitous routes, and are forced to stop at multiple intersections before arriving at their destinations located only a couple of blocks from the freeway. In addition, when the rail lines are in use, traffic is backed up on the local streets, which contributes to congestion and travel delay. Caltrans traffic studies show the interchange performance will continue to decline at the interchanges and on the intersecting local streets with continued development in and around the project area. The City of Fresno and the Fresno County general plans show continued development planned for the area, with increases in traffic, and especially large trucks. The purpose of this project is to improve the operations of the existing interchanges to accommodate the anticipated increase in traffic volume.

Caltrans is in the early "scoping" phase of the environmental process for the South Fresno Interchange Project. The environmental process for this project will include compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (CEQA and NEPA), and all substantive state and federal environmental laws, as they are relevant to the project. Caltrans has a statewide program to conduct environmental studies which includes analysis for a wide range of environmental topics, all of which will be studied for this project with the results presented in a Draft Environmental Document. In consideration of CEQA's "Fair Argument Standard" and NEPA's consideration of Public Controversy, Caltrans has determined that an Environmental Impact Report to comply with CEQA and an Environmental Assessment to comply with NEPA are the appropriate level of environmental analysis and documentation to be prepared to assess the potential impacts resulting from construction of this project.

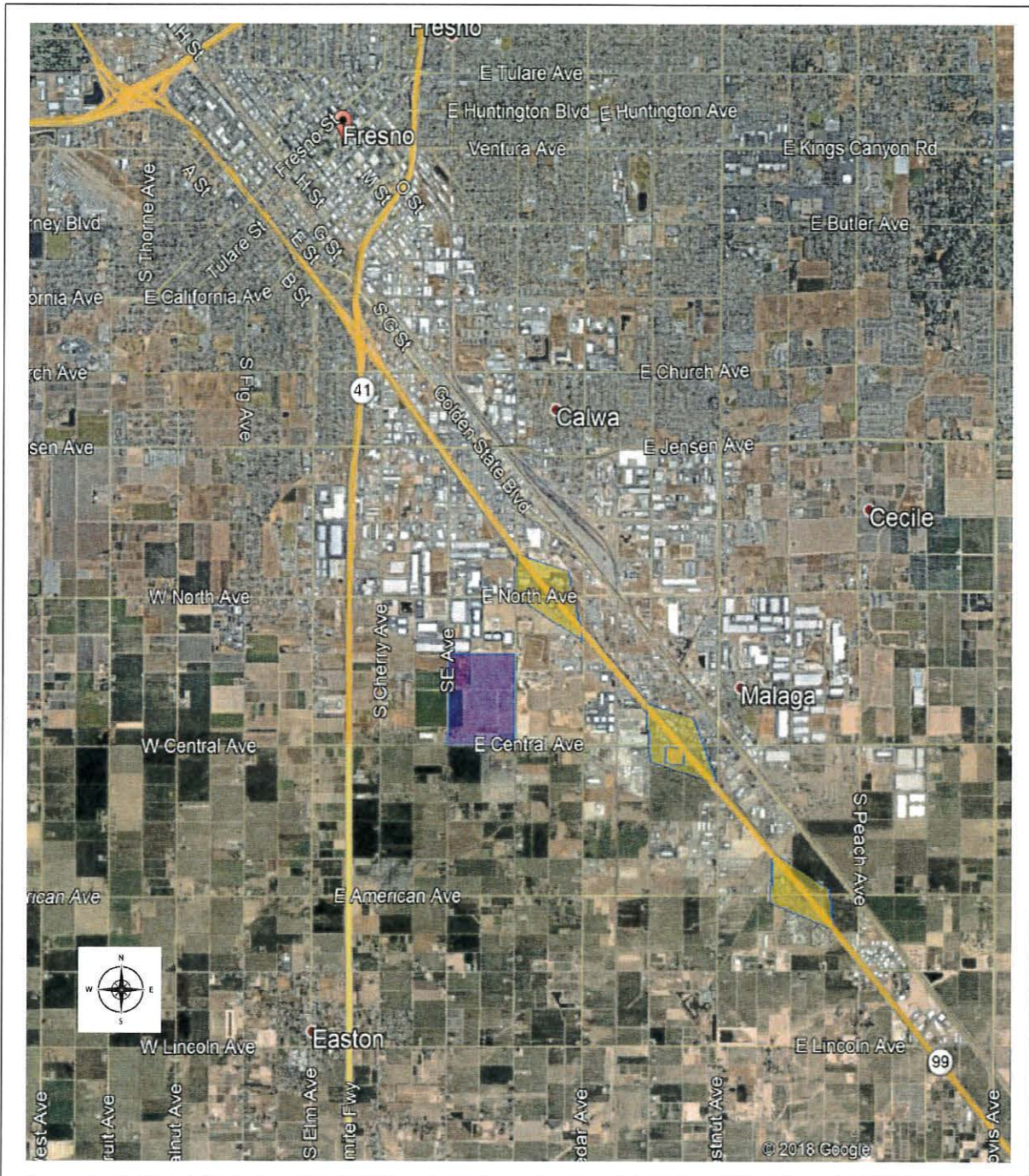


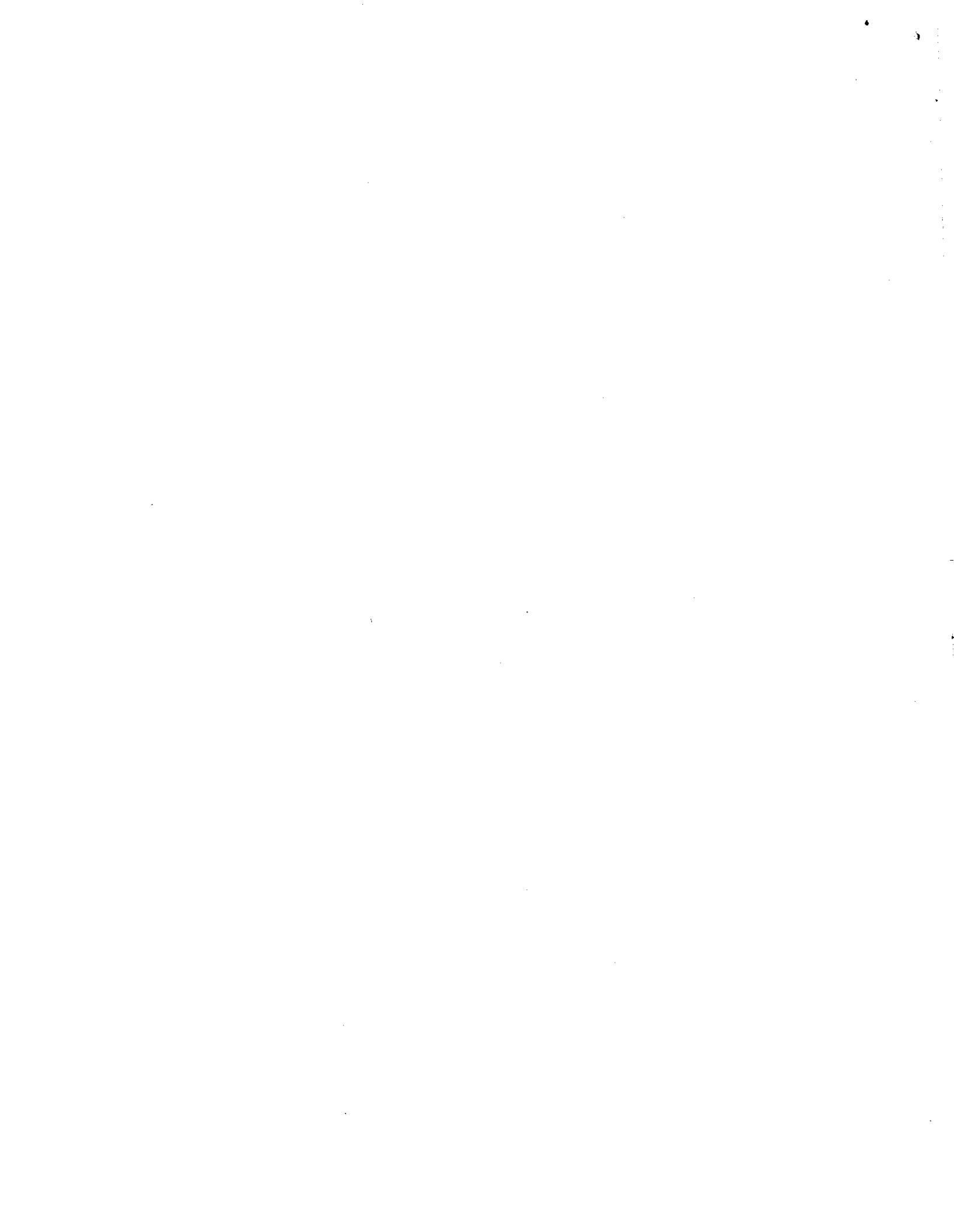


The interchange locations are shown as yellow diamonds in the view below (Google Earth, 12/2016). The diamonds indicate only a general area of the anticipated project footprint.

The purple box indicates where several businesses have recently developed in the project vicinity, such as Ultra Beauty and Amazon, which have contributed to increased vehicle traffic in the area.

Missing from view is the High Speed Rail line, which is now a dominant feature running through this area.



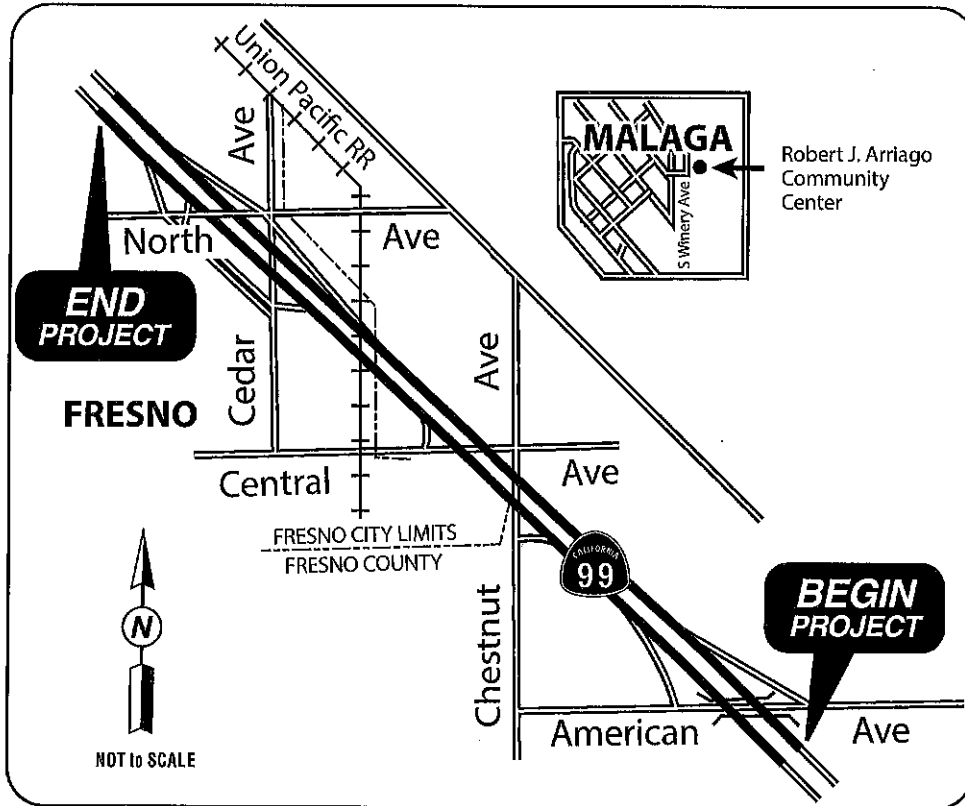




# PUBLIC NOTICE



## Announcement of Public Information/Scoping Meeting South Fresno Interchange Project on State Route 99



### WHEN AND WHERE

Date: March 20, 2019

Time: 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

Location: Robert J. Arriago Community Center  
3582 S. Winery Ave.  
Fresno, CA 93725

### WHAT IS BEING PLANNED?

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in coordination with the Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG), the Fresno County Transportation Authority (FCTA), the City of Fresno, and Fresno County, are proposing to reconfigure three interchanges on State Route 99—at American Avenue, Central Avenue, and North Avenue—in Fresno County. The project proposes to construct new overcrossing structures with additional through-lanes, construct and/or reconstruct the on- and off-ramps, add improvements to adjacent local roads and intersections, and provide for improved bicycle and pedestrian circulation and accessibility at each interchange location.

### WHY THIS PUBLIC NOTICE?

This public notice is to inform you that Caltrans will hold an open forum public information/scoping meeting to provide information on the project and gather input and feedback from the public.

### WHERE DO YOU COME IN?

Please come to the meeting, ask questions about the project, and give your comments to the project team. View the informative displays and project maps. Hmong and Spanish language interpreters will be on hand to translate, if needed. Comment cards will be available for you to submit written comments. A court reporter will also be present to take spoken comments.

### CONTACT

For information about the project, please contact the Project Manager, Neil Bretz, at (559) 243-3465 or by email at [neil.bretz@dot.ca.gov](mailto:neil.bretz@dot.ca.gov). If you are not able to attend the meeting but still want to provide written comments, you can send them by U.S. mail to Juergen Vespermann, Senior Environmental Planner, Half Dome Environmental Analysis Branch, 855 M Street, Suite 200, Fresno, CA 93721, or by email to [juergen.vespermann@dot.ca.gov](mailto:juergen.vespermann@dot.ca.gov).

### SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Individuals who require special accommodation (American Sign Language Interpreter, accessible seating, documentation in alternate formats, etc.) are requested to contact the District 6 Public Information Office at (559) 444-2518 at least 21 days prior to the scheduled scoping meeting date. TDD users may contact the California Relay Service TDD line at 1-800-735-2929 or 711. (1-800-855-3000 for Spanish version).

