

## Notice of Preparation

### Notice of Preparation

To: Responsible and Trustee Agencies

From:

California Department of Transportation, District 12 Division of Environmental Analysis

(Address)

1750 E 4th St, Suite 100

Santa Ana, CA 92705

**Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project identified below. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which 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.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the Initial Study (☐ is ☒ 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 send your response to the attention of: Env/SCTRE Scoping at the address shown above. We will need the name for a contact person in your agency.

**Project Title:** South County Traffic Relief Effort

**Project Applicant, if any:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** November 7, 2019

**Signature**



**Title**

Senior Environmental Planner

**Telephone**

(657) 328-6000

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

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 12, in cooperation with the Foothill/Eastern Transportation Corridor Agency (F/ETCA), proposes to materially improve north-south regional mobility and accommodate regional travel demand in South Orange County.

Caltrans will be the lead agency for the Proposed Project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as delegated by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

### **LOCATION OF STUDY AREA**

The Study Area includes all or parts of the cities of Irvine, Lake Forest, Laguna Hills, Laguna Beach, Aliso Viejo, Laguna Niguel, Mission Viejo, Rancho Santa Margarita, San Juan Capistrano, Dana Point, and San Clemente, and unincorporated areas in Orange and San Diego Counties, as indicated on the following figure.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Based on conceptual analysis and preliminary engineering studies, eight build alternatives were discussed in the Project Initiation Document (PID) in addition to a “No Build” alternative. Two more alternatives (Alternative 22 and 23) were developed following the completion of the PID. The alternatives are shown on the following figure, and are described below.

#### **Alternative 1 (No Build)**

Alternative 1, the No Build Alternative, does not include improvements to the existing lane configurations and route adoptions for SR-241 and I-5. Under the No Build Alternative, no extension of the tolled SR-241 lanes to I-5, new general purpose lanes or high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes on I-5, or new connections between Ortega Highway, Antonio Parkway, Avery Parkway, and SR-73 would occur. This alternative includes other projects on the financially-constrained project list in the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) 2016 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) and the Preferred Plan in Orange County Transportation Authority’s (OCTA) 2018 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) in the Project limits on I-5. Additional land areas would not be impacted and existing and projected traffic congestion would not be alleviated beyond that associated with other projects in approved regional transportation plans. The No Build Alternative does not include any of the features considered during the conceptual analysis and preliminary engineering stage of the Project. That is, it does not address the current north-south regional traffic demand, which is projected to increase in the future. The No Build Alternative does not meet the Purpose and Need of the Project; it only provides a baseline for comparison with the Build Alternatives.

#### **Alternative 13: Connect SR-241 to I-5 via the Western Alignment (Local Connection at La Novia Avenue)**

Alternative 13 would widen Los Patrones Parkway and convert to a tolled facility from Oso Parkway to north of Cow Camp Road and extend SR-241 by adding a new four-lane tolled highway (two tolled

lanes in each direction) from north of Cow Camp Road to I-5. Alternative 13 would cross Ortega Highway and La Pata Avenue in unincorporated Orange County, and would run adjacent to the western boundary of Prima Deshecha Landfill in the City of San Juan Capistrano. Alternative 13 would connect to I-5 at La Novia Avenue in the City of San Juan Capistrano. Where Alternative 13 connects to I-5, two lanes in each direction would be provided in the median (widening I-5 to the outside) south to the County line. Alternative 13 would transition to the existing alignment of I-5 in San Diego County and would end at Basilone Road.

Alternative 13 would add HOT lanes in each direction on I-5 from La Novia Avenue to the County line. If the OCTA-planned I-5 HOV lanes south of Avenida Pico to the County line were implemented before Alternative 13, those HOV lanes would be incorporated into the Alternative 13 HOT lanes, and would allow for untolled HOV access subject to the prevailing HOV definition at the time the Project is implemented. It is noted that the existing I-5 HOV lanes north of Avenida Pico and the OCTA-planned I-5 HOV lanes south of Avenida Pico are intended to function as HOV lanes in the opening year (2025) but would be converted to HOT lanes by Caltrans as part of its regionwide regional express/HOT lane network by 2040, consistent with the financially-constrained project list in the 2016 RTP/SCS (RTP ID No. 7120013).

**Alternative 17: Connect SR-241 to I-5 via Shore Cliffs (Local Connection at Avenida Vaquero)**

Alternative 17 would widen Los Patrones Parkway and convert to a tolled facility from Oso Parkway to north of Cow Camp Road and extend SR-241 by adding a new four-lane tolled highway (two tolled lanes in each direction) from north of Cow Camp Road to I-5. Alternative 17 would cross Ortega Highway and La Pata Avenue in unincorporated Orange County, and would run adjacent to the western boundary of Prima Deshecha Landfill in the City of San Juan Capistrano. Alternative 17 would cross through Shorecliffs Golf Course and would connect to I-5 at Avenida Vaquero in the City of San Clemente. Where Alternative 17 connects to I-5, two lanes in each direction would be provided in the median (widening I-5 to the outside) to the County line. Alternative 17 would transition to the existing alignment of I-5 in San Diego County and would end at Basilone Road.

**Alternative 14: Connect SR-241 to I-5 via La Pata Avenue Crossing (Local Connection at Avenida Pico)**

Alternative 14 would widen Los Patrones Parkway and convert to a tolled facility from Oso Parkway to north of Cow Camp Road and extend SR-241 by adding a new four-lane tolled highway (two tolled lanes in each direction) from north of Cow Camp Road to I-5. Alternative 14 would cross Ortega Highway in unincorporated Orange County, and would run parallel to La Pata Avenue and cross Prima Deshecha Landfill in unincorporated Orange County and the City of San Clemente. Alternative 14 would connect to I-5 at Avenida Pico in the City of San Clemente. Where Alternative 14 connects to I-5, two lanes in each direction would be provided in the median (widening I-5 to the outside) to the County line. Alternative 14 would transition to the existing alignment of I-5 in San Diego County and would end at Basilone Road.

**Alternative 11: Add I-5 General Purpose Lanes from I-405 to San Diego County**

Alternative 11 would widen I-5 with the addition of one general purpose lane in each direction from the I-405/I-5 junction to Basilone Road, just south of the County line.

It is noted that the existing I-5 HOV lanes north of Avenida Pico and the OCTA-planned I-5 HOV lanes south of Avenida Pico are intended to function as HOV lanes in the opening year (2025) but would be converted to HOT lanes by Caltrans as part of its regionwide regional express/HOT lane network by 2040, consistent with the financially-constrained project list in the 2016 RTP/SCS (RTP ID No. 7120013).

#### **Alternative 9: Connect Ortega Highway and Antonio Parkway to Avery Parkway and SR-73**

Alternative 9 would construct four-lane (two lanes in each direction) arterial connections from SR-73 to Ortega Highway and Antonio Parkway, consistent with HDM standards for median widths for expressways under restrictive conditions. This arterial facility would include connector structures over I-5 where the arterial facility would exit SR-73 to a signalized intersection at Avery Parkway. The arterial connection would continue east from Avery Parkway and the northbound segment would terminate with a new signalized intersection at Antonio Parkway. The southbound segment would terminate with a new signalized intersection at Ortega Highway.

#### **Alternative 18: Connect SR-241 to SR-73 and Extend Crown Valley Parkway to SR-241**

Alternative 18 would construct a four-lane (two lanes in each direction) arterial connection from SR-73 to Antonio Parkway, consistent with HDM standards for median widths for expressways under restrictive conditions. This arterial facility would include connector structures over I-5 where the arterial would exit SR-73 to a signalized intersection at Avery Parkway. The arterial connection would continue northeast from Avery Parkway to a signalized intersection at Antonio Parkway and continue northeast to Los Patrones Parkway, ultimately providing access to SR-241 via Los Patrones Parkway. Crown Valley Parkway would also be extended in order to connect to Los Patrones Parkway, and ultimately providing access to SR-241 via Los Patrones Parkway.

#### **Alternative 21: Los Patrones Parkway Extension and I-5 Managed Lanes**

Alternative 21 consists of two separate roadway segments. The first segment would extend Los Patrones Parkway with two lanes in each direction from Cow Camp Road to Avenida La Pata, north of Vista Montana. The determination for Los Patrones Parkway as tolled or untolled from Oso Parkway to Vista Montana will be further evaluated during the Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PA&ED) phase. For this alternative, traffic forecasts are based upon an untolled scenario for the existing four-mile segment of Los Patrones Parkway and the extension. The second segment would provide a median-to-median HOT lane connector from SR-73 to I-5. In addition, on I-5, one existing HOV lane would be converted to a HOT lane and another HOT lane would be added in each direction from the SR-73 HOT lane connectors to Avenida Pico. Alternative 21 would provide two HOT lanes in each direction on I-5 from Avenida Pico to Basilone Road, just south of the County line.

#### **Alternative 22: Extension of Los Patrones Parkway to Avenida La Pata**

Alternative 22 proposes the extension of Los Patrones Parkway with two lanes in each direction from Cow Camp Road to Avenida La Pata. Truck climbing lanes would be included as necessary. Los Patrones Parkway is a county secondary arterial that currently extends from Oso Parkway to Chiquita Canyon Drive and provides connectivity to SR 241. The proposed alignment would measure approximately 4.1 miles and would begin north of Cow Camp Road and end at Avenida La Pata to

the south, approximately 3,700 ft north of Camino del Rio. The proposed alignment would traverse southeast across San Juan Creek into Rancho Mission Viejo's future Planning Area 5. Near the southern end of the planning area, the alignment turns west into Prima Deschecha landfill where it crosses existing open space and through an area proposed for future landfill use. The alignment ultimately intersects with Avenida La Pata at its southern terminus, north of Camino del Rio. The alignment may allow for consideration of ingress and egress at access points for future development along the conceptual alignment. The determination of Los Patrones Parkway as a managed lane facility (tolled or untolled) from Oso Parkway to Avenida La Pata will be further evaluated during the alternatives screening process following the formal scoping period.

**Alternative 23: I-5 Managed Lanes from Avenida Pico or SR 73 to Basilone Road [High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes or High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes]**

Alternative 23 proposes the extension of managed lanes on I-5 in each direction consisting of a high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) or high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, depending on the option. The HOV/HOT lanes would begin at the southern end, in the vicinity of the Basilone Road interchange near the San Diego/Orange County Line, and terminate at the northern end either near the Avenida Pico interchange or at the terminus of SR 73.

The existing mainline would be widened to the outside to accommodate the managed lanes. Bridge widening and replacement will occur at several locations, new retaining walls would be constructed, and shifting of the I-5 centerline would be implemented to minimize right-of-way impacts.

Alternative 23 would consist of four standalone options.

- Option A (also referred to as Alternative 23a) would consist of the addition of a single HOV lane in each direction from Avenida Pico to Basilone Road.
- Option B (also referred to as Alternative 23b) would consist of the addition of two HOT lanes in each direction from Avenida Pico to Basilone Road.
- Option C (also referred to as Alternative 23c) would convert one existing HOV lane to a HOT lane, and add another HOT lane in each direction from the SR 73 HOT lane connectors to Avenida Pico. This option would then add two HOT lanes in each direction on I-5 from Avenida Pico to Basilone Road.
- Option D (also referred to as Alternative 23d) would convert one existing HOV lane to a HOT lane in each direction from the SR 73 HOT lane connectors to Avenida Pico. This option would then add one HOT lane in each direction on I-5 from Avenida Pico to Basilone Road.

**POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

Various environmental and community resources are known to exist within the limits of the study area and are anticipated to be studied in the EIR. Environmental effects anticipated for study include, but are not limited to: Land Use, Farmlands/Timberlands, Growth, Community Impacts,

Utilities and Emergency Services, Traffic and Transportation/Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities, Visual/Aesthetics, Cultural Resources/Tribal Cultural Resources, Water Quality and Stormwater Runoff, Hydrology and Floodplains, Geology/Soils/Seismicity/Topography, Paleontology, Hazardous Waste/Materials, Air Quality/Greenhouse Gas Emissions/Climate Change, Noise, Mineral Resources, Wildfire, Energy, Biological Environment, Coastal Zone, and Cumulative Impacts.

## **PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS**

Caltrans will be holding public scoping meetings to provide an overview of the project, summary of the environmental process and issues addressed, and receive input regarding environmental issues and the suggested scope and content of the EIR. The scoping meetings will be held on Wednesday, November 20, 2019 from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., at Norman P. Murray Community and Senior Center, 24932 Veterans Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92692, and on Wednesday, December 4, 2019 from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., at Ocean Institute, 24200 Dana Point Harbor Drive, Dana Point, CA 92629. Further information can be found on the project website at <http://www.SCTRE.org>.



