

Notice of Preparation

Notice of Preparation

To: _____ From: _____

(Address)

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

_____ 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 _____ at the address shown above. We will need the name for a contact person in your agency.

Project Title: _____

Project Applicant, if any: _____

Date _____ Signature C. Scott Guidi

Title _____

Telephone _____

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

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment for the I-205 Managed Lanes Project

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Lead Agency, in cooperation with San Joaquin Council of Governments, is preparing environmental documentation to address impacts associated with the installation of managed lanes on Interstate 205 through the City of Tracy. The project limits extend from the Interstate 580 and the West Grant Line Road interchange in Alameda County to the Interstate 205 and the Interstate 5 interchange in San Joaquin County. Managed lanes are highway lanes that are actively managed to respond to an area's growth and changing needs. Examples of managed lanes being considered for the proposed project would be high occupancy-vehicle lanes, transit lanes, and express (or toll) lanes. Four build alternatives and a no-build alternative are being considered. An Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment would provide environmental compliance documentation for construction of the project. The environmental document will be prepared as a joint document pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. As required by the California Environmental Quality Act, Caltrans is distributing this Notice of Preparation requesting comments from responsible and trustee agencies regarding the significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and reasonable mitigation measures that need to be discussed in the EIR/EA to address each agency's concerns.

Project Location

The project is located along the Interstate 205 and Interstate 580 corridor, primarily through the City of Tracy, between Paradise Cut in San Joaquin County and the Interstate 580 and West Grant Line Road interchange in Alameda County. The project alignment is approximately fifteen miles long.

Purpose and Need

The proposed project has the following primary purposes:

- The proposed project would reduce traffic congestion and improve commute times on Interstate 205 resulting from Central Valley commute traffic to the Bay Area.
- The proposed project would facilitate more efficient goods movement on Interstate 205 resulting from increasing regional and interstate truck volumes and accompanying congestion.
- The proposed project would facilitate increased multi-modal transportation opportunities, including carpooling and ridesharing, while accommodating planned development of public transit in the Interstate 205 project area.

The proposed project is needed to address the following concerns:

- Traffic congestion and commute times on Interstate 205 continue to increase due to traffic from Central Valley counties to the Bay Area, as workers move to

growing Central Valley residential developments while commuting to jobs in the Bay Area.

- Traffic volumes from truck traffic continue to increase as a result of the use of Interstate 205 as a regional and interstate truck and freight route, worsening traffic congestion.
- The growth and development occurring in the Central Valley has increased the need for additional alternative modes of transportation to address planned growth and serve commuters to the Bay Area.

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the San Joaquin Council of Governments, proposes to install managed lanes on Interstate 205 through the City of Tracy, accommodate transit hubs, and improve interchanges between postmiles R1.7 on Interstate 580 and R13.5 on Interstate 5. The project limits extend from the Interstate 580 and the West Grant Line Road interchange in Alameda County to the Interstate 205 and the Interstate 5 interchange in San Joaquin County. Managed lanes are highway lanes that are actively managed to respond to an area's rapid growth. Interstate 205 in the City of Tracy has been identified as an area of heavy congestion resulting from high truck volumes and commuters that travel to and from the Bay Area. Examples of managed lanes being considered for the proposed project would be high occupancy-vehicle lanes, transit lanes, and express (or toll) lanes.

The project is proposing one no build alternative and four build alternatives. Alternative 1 would not build and the area would be left as is. Three of the four build alternatives would involve widening. Alternative 2 would involve partial widening. Alternative 3 would not involve widening but would convert an existing lane into a high-occupancy vehicle lane. Alternatives 4 and 5 would involve widening the length of the project area and would leave a 60-foot-wide median space open for future transit improvements. Local road overcrossings and undercrossings, and interchanges would be altered or reconfigured, if necessary, based on the alternative.

Each build alternative may include detention or retention basins, access roads, and up to four transit hubs. Transit hubs features may include park-and-ride lots, electric vehicle charging stations, bus stops and train stops. Locations for transit hubs would be determined in coordination with stakeholders that include but are not limited to the following: Federal Highways Administration, Caltrans, Valley Link, San Joaquin Council of Governments, City of Tracy, Community of Mountain House, Alameda County, San Joaquin County, local transit, and the interested public to improve access to the transit facility and to avoid precluding connectivity to the local communities. The proposed project could construct facilities within the right-of-way, such as rail stops, to accommodate connection to the corridor, but may or may not construct the actual transit hubs.

Alternatives

Four build alternatives and the no-build alternative (Alternative 1) will be considered.

No Build Alternative

Alternative 1. No-Build Alternative: Under the no-build alternative, no additional widening or lanes would be constructed. Other planned projects and maintenance would take place.

Build Alternatives

The four build alternatives all occur within the same corridor. The project limits extend from the Interstate 580 and the West Grant Line Road interchange in Alameda County to the Interstate 205 and the Interstate 5 interchange in San Joaquin County. The build alternatives are described briefly below.

Alternative 2. High-Occupancy Vehicle Lane Addition: This alternative would add a high-occupancy vehicle lane on Interstate 205 in each direction. High-occupancy vehicle lanes are reserved for vehicles carrying a certain number of passengers, generally 2 or 3 people. The high-occupancy vehicle lane would be added on the outside between the Interstate 580 and the West Grant Line Road interchange and the West Eleventh Street interchange. The high-occupancy vehicle lane would be added on the inside (in the median) east of the West Eleventh Street interchange. The highway would include three general purpose lanes and a high-occupancy vehicle lane in each direction.

Alternative 3. High-Occupancy Vehicle Lane Conversion: No lanes would be added, and the number one lane (or left lane) in each direction would be converted to a high-occupancy vehicle lane. The highway would include two general purpose lanes and a high-occupancy vehicle lane in each direction.

Alternative 4. Express Lanes: Interstate 205 would be widened to the outside to accommodate express lanes, leaving the median open for future planned transit improvements. Express lanes provide toll free travel lanes for high-occupancy vehicle, transit, and clean air vehicles and can be used by single-occupancy vehicles for a toll. The number one lane (or left lane) would be an express lane, providing free access to vehicles that meet a minimum occupancy or vehicle type requirement, and priced access to vehicles that do not meet those requirements. The highway would consist of three general purpose lanes, an express lane and in some auxiliary lanes in each direction. A new alignment would be constructed to cross the California Aqueduct and Delta Mendota Canal.

Alternative 5. Transit Only Lanes: This alternative would be the same as Alternative 4, but transit only lanes which would be reserved for busses would replace express lanes.

Probable Environmental Effects

Caltrans proposes to prepare an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment due to significant environmental impacts anticipated to result from the project. Probable environmental effects are described below.

Air Quality

Based on the existing average daily traffic, the project could be considered a project of air quality concern, and a quantitative hotspot analysis could be required. Interagency consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Highway Administration would be completed prior to the Draft Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Assessment. Regional and project-level conformity determinations will be documented in the Air Quality Conformity Analysis. Prior to the final environmental document and project approval, approval of Air Quality Conformity Analysis from the Federal Highway Administration will be required. An Air Quality Report will be prepared.

Biological Environment

The project may result in impacts on waters of the United States and State, Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, burrowing owl, northern harrier, tri-colored blackbird, California red-legged frog, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, riparian brush rabbit, western pond turtle, special-status fish species (in Paradise Cut), migratory birds and raptors, and potential roosting habitat for bats. Paradise Cut, a tributary of the San Joaquin River that passes under Interstate 5, is designated as critical habitat for delta smelt, steelhead, and green sturgeon and as EFH for Chinook salmon. Additionally, the I-205 corridor acts as a wildlife barrier.

Potential wetlands or waters of the state were identified in the project study area and would need to be delineated to prepare a preliminary jurisdictional determination for submittal to the US Army Corps of Engineers. The grasslands and emergent marsh in the project study area have low potential habitat for special-status plants based on the degree of past and ongoing disturbance; however, a single round of appropriately timed (i.e., April and August) floristic surveys would be required. The project study area also supports native oak trees that may be regulated under the San Joaquin County tree ordinance.

The project study area contains potential habitat for Swainson's hawk, white-tailed kite, burrowing owl, northern harrier, tri-colored blackbird, and other non-special-status migratory birds and raptors protected under the California Fish and Game Code and Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The project study area also provides potential habitat for California red-legged frog, valley elderberry longhorn beetle, riparian brush rabbit, and western pond turtle and potential roosting habitat for bats protected under the California Fish and Game Code. There is also a low potential for San Joaquin kit fox and California tiger salamander to occur in the project study area. Paradise Cut within the project study area provides suitable habitat for special-status fish species. It is designated as critical habitat for delta smelt, steelhead, and green sturgeon and as Essential Fish Habitat for Chinook salmon. Additionally, the Interstate 205 corridor acts as a wildlife barrier. Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board will be required.

Community Impacts/Farmland/Growth/Cumulative Impacts

A Community Impact Assessment would be prepared to address impacts related to acquisition of right-of-way, land use, farmland impacts, displacements, equity, and growth in the area.

Cultural Resources

Preliminary research indicates that portions of the project are sensitive for archaeological resources. Two known historic properties intersect the project study area: the California Aqueduct and the Delta-Mendota Canal. A segment of the Union Pacific Railroad, a historic-era road (the Naglee/Fremont), and three historic-era residential properties also are in or immediately adjacent to the project corridor. Archaeological and built-environment surveys will be conducted and documented, and Native American consultation under Section 106 and Assembly Bill 52 will be initiated.

Greenhouse Gas

Because some project alternatives would be capacity increasing, a quantitative analysis of greenhouse gas emissions would be required to estimate long-term climate change impacts or benefits from the project. A Greenhouse Gas memo would be prepared to support the greenhouse gas section of the Environmental Impact Report. The memo would be reviewed by Caltrans Headquarters prior to the Draft Environmental Impact Report.

Hazardous Waste/Materials

Preliminary studies indicated that there are 12 sites within a 1-mile radius that pose a high risk, as well as potential for aerially deposited lead, and lead-based paint and asbestos containing structures. An Initial Site Assessment and Preliminary Site Investigation would be conducted for the project.

Hydrology and Floodplain

The project site is in Federal Emergency Management Agency Zone X, Non-Special Flood Hazard Areas outside the 100-year floodplain in areas of minimal flood hazard. The flood zone areas adjacent to the Interstate 205 corridor are within Non-Special Flood Hazard Areas Zone AE, where the base floodplain areas are subject to flooding by the 100-year flood event. The project would result in an increase in impervious surfaces. A Location Hydraulic Study and a Floodplain Evaluation Report would be prepared to further analyze floodplain impacts.

Noise and Vibration

The project is a Type I project because it would increase the capacity of Interstate 205 between two major freeways (Interstate 580 and Interstate 5). A Noise Study Report will be prepared. Depending on the results of the Noise Study Report, abatement in the form of soundwalls may be required.

Paleontology

Surficial deposits in the project area have low sensitivity for paleontological resources, but are underlain by more sensitive formations, particularly toward the western end of the project corridor. Prior to project construction, a Paleontological Evaluation Report and Paleontological Mitigation Plan would be prepared to assess and provide mitigation for potential impacts on paleontological resources.

Traffic and Transportation

Impacts related to traffic and transportation are measured in vehicle miles travelled with the implementation of Senate Bill 743. Some project alternatives add lanes to the highways and therefore add capacity, which, by definition, results in an increase in vehicle miles travelled. Studies to quantify current vehicle miles travelled and to model projected vehicle miles travelled will be conducted to support the environmental analysis. The National Center for Sustainable Transportation Induced Travel Calculator is proposed to be used for the quantitative analysis required for this project.

Utilities

Utility relocation and construction for power sources may be required for the project.

Visual Resource/Aesthetics

A segment of landscaped freeway may be affected and there would be some noticeable visual effects though they would be consistent with the existing visual character. A Moderate Visual Impact Assessment would be prepared.

Water Quality and Storm Water Runoff

The project could have short-term effects on surface water quality associated with construction activities, grading, equipment used, temporary creek diversions, and dewatering. Long-term water quality impacts could result from added impervious areas and associated stormwater runoff and sediment transport from erosion. A Water Quality Assessment Report would be prepared for the project.

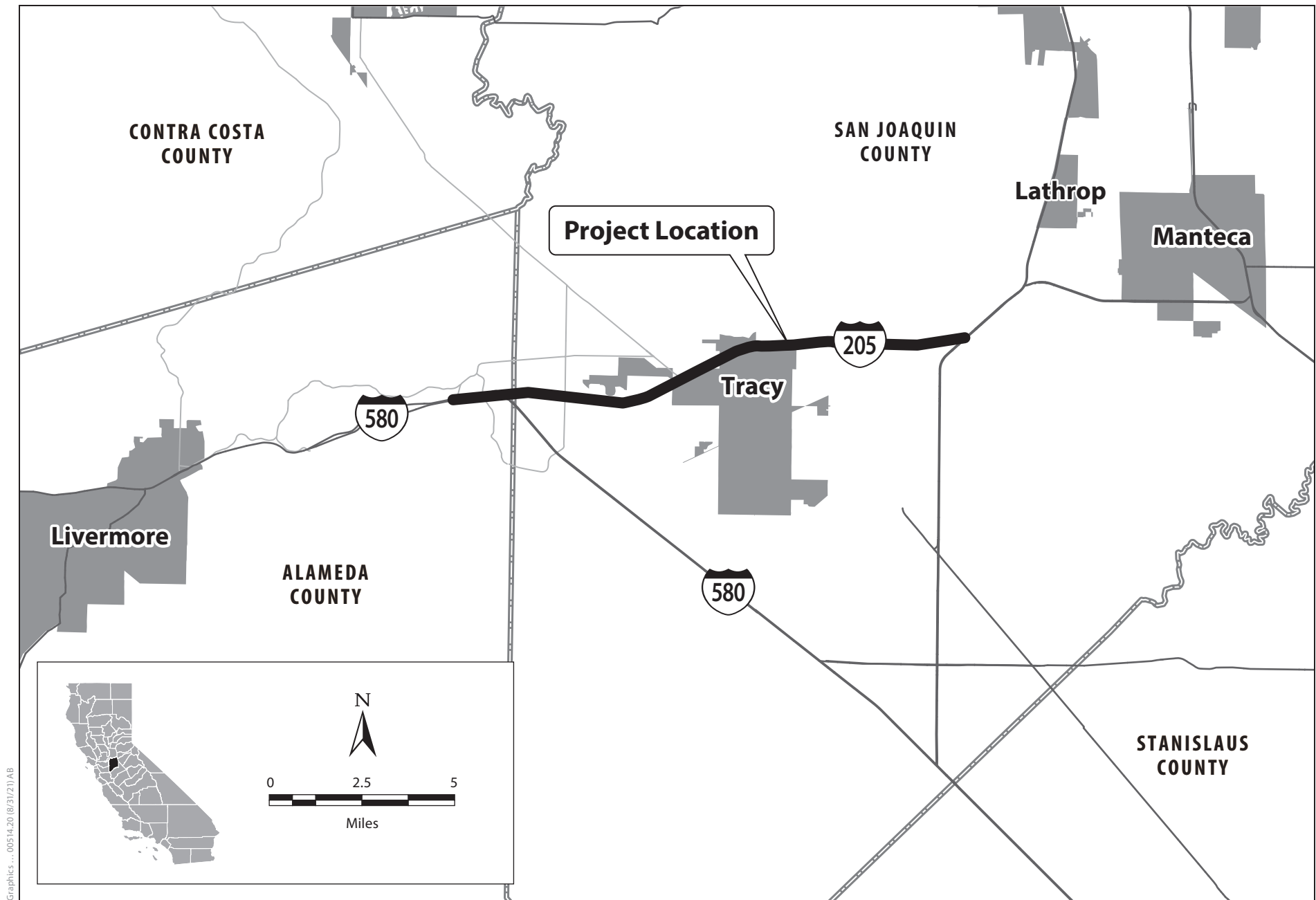


Figure 1
Project Vicinity

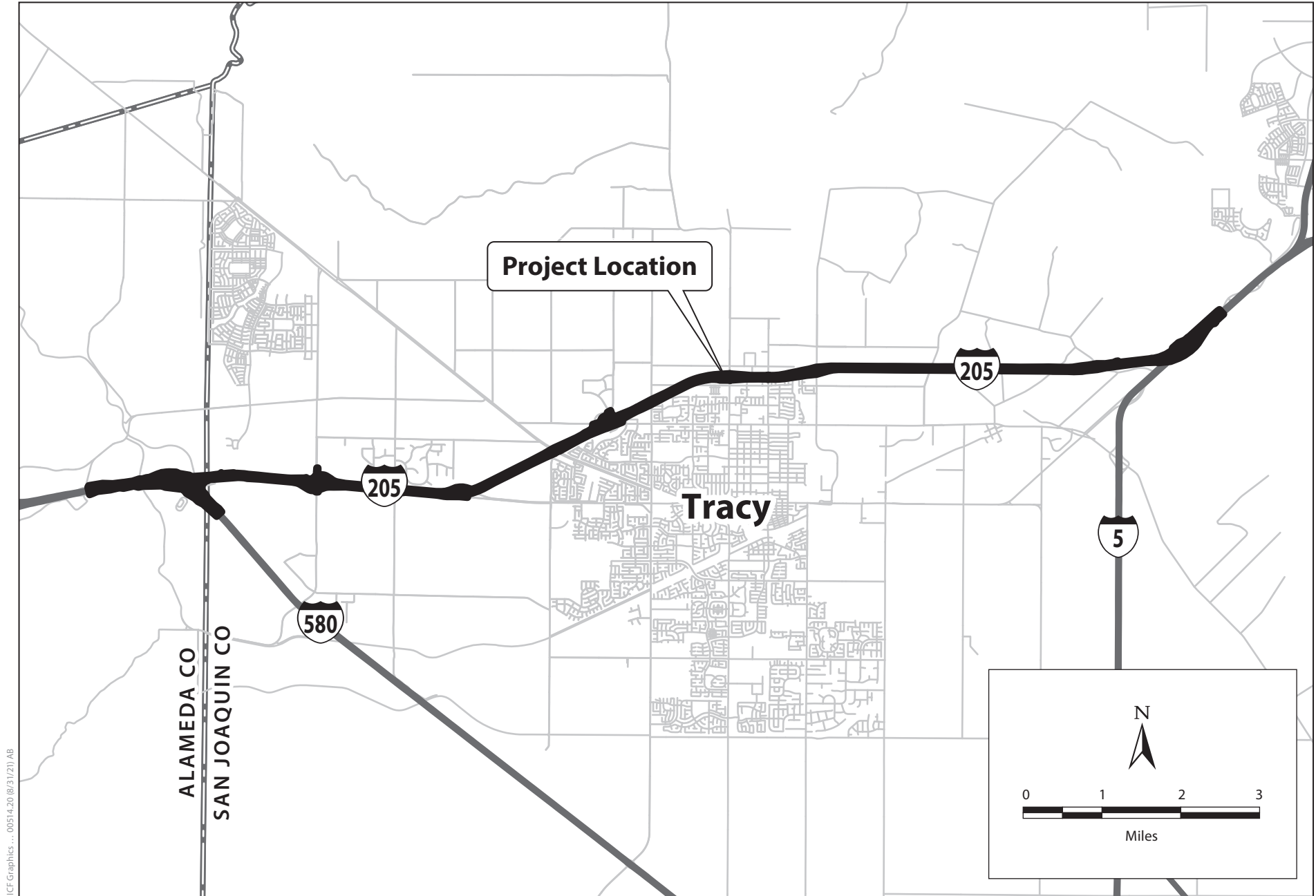


Figure 2
Project Location