

3.21 Relationship between Local Short-term Uses of the Human Environment and the Maintenance of Long-Term Productivity

According to the original Eastern Transportation Corridor (ETC) EIR/EIS, project implementation with the west leg of the corridor would result in attainment of long-term transportation objectives at the expense of commitment of substantial financial and material resources and the adverse impacts of construction including dust from earth movement, noise associated with heavy equipment, scarring of the natural landscape, the potential for increased downstream sedimentation, removal of native vegetation, and additional traffic congestion and rerouting of traffic. Long-term effects of the ETC include major changes in landforms, visual quality, localized changes in hydrology, localized increases in ambient noise levels, reduced open space, loss of substantial plant and animal communities, and growth-inducing effects.

The majority of those impacts were realized during the construction of the ETC, an approximately 23-mile corridor through the Santa Ana foothill area. Now that the Proposed Project is limited to a much smaller project site (which is developed), the balance of short-term versus long-term goals weighs much heavier with the accomplishment of long-term goals. A median connector between the ETC to SR-91 was always contemplated as part of ETC. Today, with this proposed construction, the short-term impacts that will be tolerated to accomplish the ETC build out are nominal by comparison. As stated in the original ETC Final EIR and Final EIS, the Proposed Project's transportation improvements are based on comprehensive State and local planning efforts that consider the need for present and future traffic requirements within the context of present and future land use development. The need for these long-term transportation improvements is based on the lack of connectivity between the SR-241 and the SR-91 Express Lanes, and it is necessary to ensure safe and efficient local and regional movement of people and goods. Indeed, the short-term consequences to achieve the long-term transportation goals have already been accounted for.

3.21.1 Build Alternative (Two-Lane Express Lanes Connector) (Preferred Alternative)

Short-term losses and impacts would include:

- Traffic delays and detours; construction impacts related to visual quality, water quality, biology, and increased noise levels; and general access and travel inconveniences
- Temporary construction impacts, such as increased noise, impaired air quality from dust and debris, increased nighttime light, blocked viewsheds, and construction in recreation areas
- Temporary construction impacts, such as disruption of local traffic patterns and access to residences, businesses, and community facilities
- Temporary construction impacts to utility services, such as service interruptions or damage to facilities
- Temporary construction impacts to sensitive viewers, including viewers along the segment of SR-91 designated as a scenic highway, clearing of existing vegetation, grading, construction of road improvements and structures, construction vehicles, and construction staging areas
- Temporary impacts to natural communities and habitats, wetlands and other waters of the United States, bird and bat species, and threatened and endangered species

Short-term benefits would include:

- Job creation and a secondary increase in local revenue generated during construction activities

Long-term losses and impacts would include:

- Permanent loss of plant and wildlife resources
- Permanent consumption of energy and construction materials, including concrete, steel, and asphalt, during construction
- Permanent loss of approximately 5 acres of a County of Orange-owned parcel with a conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy.
- Permanent impacts on wetlands and other waters of the United States, on coast live oaks, southern California black walnut, and Coulter's matilija poppy habitats for threatened and endangered species, and biological resource habitat areas

Long-term gains and benefits would include:

- Improvement to the throughput traffic in the area
- Increased access to the project vicinity and region

- Reduction of congestion and improvement of the regional transportation network between the counties of Riverside and Orange
- Improvement of vehicle, person, and goods movement travel times on SR-241 and SR-91 to more effectively serve existing and future travel demand between and within the Counties of Riverside and Orange
- Improvements to storm water management facilities along SR-241 and SR-91
- Improvements to utility facilities crossings or within the right-of-way for SR-241 and SR-91

3.21.2 No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not change the existing conditions on SR-241 and SR-91. The No Build Alternative would offer none of the benefits nor have any of the impacts listed above; however, it would not resolve worsening congestion on local streets and highways or fix the lack of connectivity of the two facilities described in the Purpose and Need. Additionally, the No Build Alternative would not result in the generation of short-term jobs and revenues during construction, and is not expected to result in the potential environmental effects of the Build Alternative.

3.21.3 Comparative Analysis

In summary, implementation of the Build Alternative would result in trade-offs between addressing short- and long-term transportation needs and goals and adverse short- and long-term environmental impacts. The Build Alternative would provide increased capacity and improved regional transportation connecting major population and employment centers between the Counties of Riverside and Orange. The long-term benefits to the community of those transportation improvements would be weighed against the short- and long-term adverse environmental impacts of the Build Alternative and the No Build Alternative.

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