



State of California
Business, Transportation and Housing Agency
Department of Transportation
District 7

I-5 Corridor Improvement Project (I-605 to I-710)

Los Angeles County, California
District 07 -07-LA-005
PM 6.4/14.9

Scoping Executive Summary

“Scoping is an early and open process for identifying important issues related to the proposed action” – *U.S Council on Environmental Quality*

July 2008

Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) propose to initiate studies to construct freeway improvements to Interstate 5 (I-5) from Interstate 605 (I-605) through the I-5/Interstate 710 (I-710) interchange in Los Angeles County (please see the project study area map on page 2). The proposed project consists of widening this 8 mile segment of the I-5 to accommodate additional lanes in both directions. Depending on the alternative selected, the project may also include modifications to the I-605 and I-710 interchanges. The proposed construction will improve both traffic circulation of the mainline and access to the freeway from surrounding cities.

Alternatives initially under consideration include (1) a no-build option; (2) implementing a Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management plan; (3) constructing a 10-lane facility with two HOV lanes; and (4) constructing a 12-lane facility with two or four HOV lanes.

As of July 1, 2007, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has assumed Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) authority and responsibility for the compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other environmental laws. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Federal Highway Administration and Caltrans concerning the State of California's Participation in the Surface Transportation Project Delivery Pilot Program allows Caltrans to serve as the federal lead agency on this project.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and NEPA both allow for and encourage public participation during the environmental evaluation phase of any transportation project. The initial step in this public process is called "Scoping". Scoping focuses on defining the environmental issues and alternatives that should be examined in the CEQA/NEPA process. Identification of other related projects is also important.. This report summarizes the Scoping outreach activities, distribution of notices and their responses as well as the comments received during the I-5 Corridor Improvement Project scoping period from February 6 – March 24, 2008.



Interstate 5 Study Area
 California Department of Transportation
 District 7, Los Angeles


-  Study Area
-  Highway
-  Major Road

***I-5 Corridor Improvement Project (I-605 to I-710)
 Affected Communities***

Notification

Caltrans distributed a series of letters to notify agencies and stakeholders of the initiation of project studies and offer an opportunity to become a participating agency for the project. These letters included information regarding project scoping meetings, as well as contact information for the submission of comments concerning possible alternatives or potential social, economic and environmental impacts. The letter submission/distribution was as follows:

Notice of Preparation (NOP)

Caltrans submitted a NOP to the State Clearinghouse (SCH) on February 11, 2008. During this time, the NOP was also distributed to the project master database including federal, tribal, state, regional, county, and local agencies; elected officials; special districts, and interested stakeholders and was available to the general public. The NOP notified the public of the project studies being prepared along with the scoping meeting location, date, time and where to send comments.

Notice of Intent (NOI)

FHWA arranged for the publication of the NOI for the project on February 28, 2008 in the Federal Register. The NOI included a background of the project, purpose and need, brief description of the proposed alternatives, and information regarding the scoping meeting location and where comments could be sent.

Notice of Scoping/Initiation of Studies Letters

On February 6, 2008, Caltrans distributed a Notice of Scoping/Initiation of Studies to advise recipients of the commencement of studies. The letter also stated Caltrans intention to prepare an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS). The Notice of Scoping/Initiation of Studies letter was sent to elected and city officials, all potentially affected agencies, and to the project's master database.

Cooperating and Participating Agency Letters

Caltrans submitted a letter to federal agencies which briefly defined the project goals and asked federal agencies to become a Cooperating/ Participating agency on the proposed project. In addition, Caltrans also complied with Section 6002 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). A total of 112 agencies (19 federal, 12 State and 82 regional, county and local) were asked to accept or decline Caltrans' invitation to become a Participating Agency.

Scoping Meeting Advertisements

To further expand the reach of the scoping meeting notice, an advertisement was placed in the newspapers covering the potentially affected areas. The advertisement provided a brief synopsis of the project, encouraged attendance at the meeting as well as encouraged the public to submit written comments. The advertisements ran the week of February 11, 2008 and then again on February 21, 2008 in the following newspapers: Press Telegram, San Gabriel Valley Tribune, Mundo LA, Commerce Comet.

Responses Received

Caltrans received a total of 65 responses/comments regarding the I-5 Corridor Improvement Project (I-605 – I-710). Sixteen letters were received in response to the NOP, NOI, Notice of Scoping/Initiation of Studies and Invitation to become a Cooperating and/or Participating agency. The remaining fifty-two responses were comments received as a result of the scoping meetings; comments included verbal and written statements received during the meetings, as well as comments received after the scoping meetings. The following paragraphs summarize the responses to each notification item.

Notice of Preparation

The Native American Heritage Commission and The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) responded and acknowledged the receipt of the NOI.

Notice of Scoping/Initiation of Studies Letters

Seven agency letters were received in response to the Notice of Scoping/Initiation of Studies Letters, two of which felt the proposed project had no affect or impact on their facilities and services. The other letters provided recommendations as to dealing with abandoned wells and air quality impacts and measurements. Responding agencies included:

- Unites States Environmental Protection Agency
- California Resource Agency, Department of Conservation
- South Coast Air Quality Management District
- County of Los Angeles, Public Library
- County of Los Angeles, Department of Parks and Recreation
- County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Works
- Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, Environmental Planning

Cooperating and Participating Agency Letters

Caltrans received seven letters in response to the invitation to become a Cooperating and Participating Agency; four agencies accepted the invitation and the remaining three declined the opportunity. Below is the list of the seven responding agencies:

- Unites States Environmental Protection Agency - Accepted
- United States Department of Interior – Declined
- Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance – Declined
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service – Declined
- County of Los Angeles, Community and Municipal Services – Accepted
- Union Pacific RR – Accepted
- Metropolitan Water District of Southern California – Accepted

Scoping Meetings

Caltrans received substantial comments from participants during and after the scoping meetings occurred. A total of forty-nine comments (thirty-four verbal and fifteen written) were recorded and documented during the scoping period. Comments were received from the following agency categories: Elected Officials, State, county and local agencies, Utility Company, Residents, Environmental Groups

Scoping Meetings

Caltrans hosted two scoping meetings for the proposed project at City of Commerce Council Chambers, 2535 Commerce Way, Commerce, on February 27, 2008.

- The first meeting was held for agencies and elected officials from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- A second scoping meeting was held for the general public from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

A total of 47 participants signed in for both meetings; 15 attendees at the agency meeting and 32 at the evening meeting were verified by the sign in sheets.

The open house format allowed participants to view project area maps and boundaries, as well have their questions and concerns addressed one-on-one by Caltrans staff and project consultants. The formal portion of the scoping meeting consisted of a presentation by the California Department of Transportation followed by the public comment period.

Laura Muna-Landa, Outreach Project Manager, served as the Public Meeting Officer and Ron Kosinski, Deputy District Director, Division of Environmental Planning, served as the Caltrans panel member.

Meeting Record

In an effort to capture the scoping meeting participants' comments, both meetings were digitally recorded.

Translation services

Based on the demographic composition of the community, the consultant team provided bilingual Spanish staff. A certified interpreter was also available for the duration of the public scoping meeting. Those community members requiring Spanish interpretation were provided with a headset with which to listen to the simultaneous interpretation of the scoping meeting.

Comment Summary

Comments received during the scoping period focused on three main issues: environmental impacts, alternatives and coordination with related projects.

Environmental Impacts

Air Quality Impacts - The majority of comments highlighted the concerns for health deterioration specifically at the Rosewood School in the Montebello School District, and the City of Commerce where residents live in close proximity to the I-5 and I-710 freeways and the BNSF and Union Pacific RR yards. Residents referred to California Air Resources Board's recent Health Risk Assessment of the area to support their concerns and mentioned additional pollutants such as the proposed power plant in the City of Vernon.

Property Impacts – Comments included concerns for the purchasing of property and the impacts to property value if the I-5 freeway improvements would come in close proximity to their property. Possible impacts to Bandini Park were also mentioned.

Construction Impacts – Residents and city staffs mentioned concerns regarding the traffic spillover effect during construction and the impacts caused to local and arterial streets, specifically Lakewood Avenue, Rosemead Boulevard, Washington Boulevard and Telegraph Road in the City of Commerce and bottlenecks in the City of Downey.

Potential Mitigation – Recommendations for mitigation strategies included the development of green space and an underground system for pollution run off before 2015.

Agency Comments

The Native American Heritage Commission outlined the process to adequately assess the project-related impacts and preservation of California's Native American Cultural Resources.

The EPA commented on its concerns regarding the following topics: transportation conformity, greenhouse gas emission, environmental justice, cumulative impact analysis, and water and wetlands resources.

California Resources Agency, Department of Conservation, provided recommendations to deal with abandoned wells within or in close proximity to the project area.

Southern California Edison offered to work with Caltrans to help minimize impact to five of their facilities.

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California recommended coordination to minimize impacts to three facilities in close proximity to the project: Middle Feeder, the Lower Feeder and the South Coast Feeder.

Alternatives

General Comments - Comments regarding potential alternatives varied with light consensus. One comment received supported the I-5 improvements of a 12 lane facility, while others mentioned alternatives to widening, including the construction of a public transit system.

Open Space Design Amenities – Some comments suggested Caltrans consider designing the I-5 widening with the recreational/trail connections and amenities, as well as designing an alternative that avoids Bandini Park and the adjacent residential neighborhood.

Ramp Improvements – Several comments identified the need to include improvements to all connectors and arterial interchanges as part of this project.

Telegraph Road – Scoping meeting attendees suggested annexing Telegraph Road as part of the I-5 freeway all the way to the I-710 freeway to avoid residential areas.

Other Recommendations – Included for Caltrans to incorporate recommendations presented in the Alternative Analysis for the I-5 and I-710 Interchange. Meeting participants were interested to know whether improvements to the connectors along the project area are included in the project. Participants also wanted to know Caltrans' position regarding the missing connector between the I-5 and the I-710 interchange, since previous studies deemed it unnecessary.

Related Projects

I-710 EIR/EIS Corridor Project – Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) strongly suggested the coordination of outreach and technical efforts due to the I-710 and I-5 interchange combined impacts.

Other Projects – Montebello School District is considering the rehabilitation of old school facilities and would like to coordinate to avoid interference with the I-5 Corridor Improvement Project.