

**CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

**Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding  
10-Mer-99, PM 0.0/10.5**

**Resolution E-07-04**

- 1.1 **WHEREAS**, the California Department of Transportation (Department) has completed a Final Environmental Impact Report pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:
- Route 99 in Merced County – Roadway improvements near Merced.
- 1.2 **WHEREAS**, the Department has certified that the Final Environmental Impact Report has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for its implementation; and
- 1.3 **WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission, as a responsible agency, has considered the information contained in the Final Environmental Impact Report; and
- 1.4 **WHEREAS**, ~~the Final Environmental Impact Report did not identify any significant effects after mitigation.~~ **Written Findings indicate that specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations make it infeasible to avoid or fully mitigate to a level less than significant the effects associated with noise and farmland impacts as a result of the project; and**
- 1.5 **WHEREAS, the above significant effects are acceptable when balanced against the facts as set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations.**
- 2.1 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby **adopt those findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations that support approval of this recommended project** ~~approve the above referenced project to allow for future consideration of funding.~~

## CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

### FINDINGS FOR STATE ROUTE 99 PLAINSBURG ARBOLEDA FREEWAY PROJECT

#### ON STATE ROUTE 99 FROM THE CHOWCHILLA RIVER TO MCHENRY ROAD (KP 0.0/16.9 [PM 0.0/10.5])

The following information is presented to comply with Section 15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines, and Section 1509.6 of the Department of Transportation and the California Transportation Commission Regulations. Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source of information.

Mitigation monitoring will be in accordance with Caltrans' standard program contained in the Environmental Handbook.

The following effects have been identified in the FEIR as resulting from the project. Effects found not to be significant have not been included in these findings.

#### **Adverse Environmental Effect: Farmland**

This project would acquire 342 hectares (835.2 acres of farmland of which 101.2 hectares (250 acres) are prime and unique.

**Findings:** Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the final EIR.

**Statement of Facts:** In accordance with the United States Department of Fish and Wildlife's Biological Opinion, Caltrans shall acquire conservation easements on 200 acres of farmland. All of these easements would be on land that is currently farmland. All build alternatives would impact prime farmland. The No Action alternative would avoid farmland acquisition, but was found to be infeasible because it did not meet the purpose and need of the project.

#### **Adverse Environmental Effect: Noise**

One property within the project area would experience a 15-decibel increase in noise between the build and the no-build alternatives.

**Findings:** Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the final EIR.

**Statement of Facts:** Noise abatement measures are not considered for this location because they do not meet Federal Highways Administration's reasonable and feasible requirements.

## **STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS**

### **CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR WIDENING STATE ROUTE 99 FROM FOUR-LANE EXPRESSWAY TO SIX-LANE FREEWAY**

The following information is presented to comply with Section 15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines, and Section 1509.6 of the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations. Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following impacts have been identified as significant and not fully mitigable:

- 342 hectares (835.2 acres of farmland of which 101.2 hectares (250 acres) would be acquired.)
- One receptor would experience a 15-decibel increase in noise.

### **Project Needs and Benefits**

Overriding considerations that support approval of this recommended project are as follows:

The proposed project would increase safety for the traveling public, correct roadway deficiencies, accommodate increased traffic demands (both present and future), and provide route continuity. By increasing State Route 99 from four lanes to six and limiting access to two new interchanges, this section of State Route 99 would see a decrease in congestion, a reduced number of accidents involving cross-median traffic and at-grade intersections, improved compatibility of truck and car traffic, and improved efficiency for emergency vehicles.

The route connects major population centers in the San Joaquin Valley to the rest of the state and is an integral part of the urban road network, carrying high volumes of regional and local traffic. Route continuity would be consistent with local, regional, and state plans, and would maintain local and regional land uses.

## **Project Alternatives**

The project is divided into two sections: the southern Plainsburg section and the northern Arboleda section. The southern Plainsburg section runs from the Chowchilla River to Buchanan Hollow Road (kilometer posts 0.0 to 7.4 [post miles 0.0 to 4.6]) and consists of four build alternatives and one no-build alternative. The northern Arboleda section runs from Buchanan Hollow Road to McHenry Road (kilometer posts 7.4 to 16.9 [post miles 4.6/10.5]) and consists of two build alternatives and a no-build alternative.

This project would select one alternative for each section. The selection of an alternative for one section does not limit which alternative can be selected for the other section. This means the construction of one alternative in the southern Plainsburg section would not affect the selection of another alternative for the northern Arboleda section, or vice versa.

All build alternatives would widen the existing four-lane highway to a six-lane freeway. This project would realign the road to the east of the current alignment, upgrade shoulders, and construct two new interchanges. Each build alternative would place the interchanges in slightly different locations along the alignment.

A no-build alternative would keep the road as it is and would not improve safety or relieve existing and future congestion in the project area. All project alternatives are explained in detail in Chapter 2.

## **Conclusions**

The project would upgrade the current expressway to freeway system, improving access from near by agricultural properties, and reduce cross median accidents.

Plainsburg Alternative 1B and Arboleda Alternative 5 have been selected together as the Recommended Alternative because these build alternatives meet the purpose and need of the project. These build alternatives also minimized farmland impacts, while avoiding a potential hazardous waste contamination site.

The no-build alternative offer no relief from congestion on State Route 99, or its intersections and is incompatible with the transportation objectives of the State of California and Merced County. All alternatives have similar noise impacts.

The reduction of traffic congestion, improved traffic flow and circulation of State Route 99, and overall improvement to traffic safety provided by the project, outweighs the unavoidable impacts identified in the findings.