



Project Name: Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement
District-County-Route-Post Mile: 06-TUL-99-PM 25.2-30.6
Expenditure Authorization Number: 06-48950
EFIS ID Number: 0614000040
SCH#2021040498

California Department of Transportation Statement of Overriding Considerations

For

**PROPOSES TO WIDEN STATE ROUTE 99 FROM FOUR LANES TO SIX LANES
(BETWEEN POST MILES 25.2 AND POST MILE 30.6) AND REBUILD THE PAIGE
AVENUE INTERCHANGE IN TULARE COUNTY.**

The following information is presented to comply with State California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15093), and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Division 2, Chapter 11, Section 1501 et seq.). 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:

- Vehicle Miles Traveled
- Cumulative Air Quality Impact to Environmental Justice Populations
- Greenhouse Gas

There are impacts because of the project work which are not fully mitigable that increased passenger car and light-duty traffic on State Route 99.

Adverse impacts to environmental justice populations in the socioeconomic study area would occur from cumulative impacts to air quality described in the 2022 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainability Communities Strategy Environmental Impact Report, the proposed project's incremental increase in those emissions would be cumulatively considerable and would contribute to already identified significant cumulative effects

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

The Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement Project Alternative 1 is considered a viable alternative because it would achieve the project's purpose and need (Section 1.2 in the Final Environmental Document). The project purpose is a set of objectives the project is



intended to meet. The project need is the range of transportation deficiencies that the project is intended to address.

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to:

- Relieve traffic congestion along State Route 99 from Avenue 200 to Prosperity Avenue.
- Improve traffic operational deficiencies at the Paige Avenue Interchange.
- Improve access to local trucking-related facilities and the neighboring industrial area.

Need

- **Relieve Traffic Congestion**
- **Improve Freight Movement**
- **Improve Access to Trucking-Related Facilities and the Industrial Area**

Relieve Traffic Congestion and Improve Freight Movement

State Route 99 is designated as a Primary Highway Freight System, part of the National Highway Freight Network, from its junction with Interstate 5 in Kern County to Sacramento County.

The 2018 average daily truck traffic is about 15,410 trucks (27.6 percent of all vehicles); more than half of these trucks are large, long-haul trucks (with five or more axles).

The existing (2018) level of service for the northbound lanes between post miles 25.4 to 30.6 is Level of Service D; the level of service is C for the southbound lanes. In the year 2029, the level of service would be E for the northbound lanes and D for the southbound lanes. Twenty years later, in the year 2049, the level of service would deteriorate to a level of service F for both the northbound and southbound lanes if the freeway is still only two lanes in each direction

Improve Access to Trucking-Related Facilities and the Industrial Area

The existing Paige Avenue Interchange resembles a Type L-6 configuration. The Type L-6 Interchange configuration is no longer being considered for modern freeway design. The queue length of the eastbound approach of Paige Avenue at Laspina Street is longer than the spacing between the intersection and the northbound off-ramp intersection. The shorter spacing can lead to excessive queuing of traffic at the northbound off-ramp, which could extend to the freeway mainline.

Caltrans design guidance states that the Type L-6 configuration should be considered only when all other interchange types are not acceptable. Furthermore, the Type L-6 configuration is typically used when the parallel road system does not allow for another type of interchange and the ramps connect to the parallel roads. The distance between the parallel roads at this



location allows for a more preferred interchange configuration that would better accommodate the heavy truck volumes in the area.

Benefits of the Selected Alternative:

- The Build alternative will widen the existing four-lane freeway to a six-lane freeway by building one lane in each direction in the existing median of State Route 99. The project will relieve traffic congestion along State Route 99 from Avenue 200 to Prosperity Avenue and improve traffic operational deficiencies at the Paige Avenue Interchange by installing roundabouts. These improvements will accommodate truck freight movement in the industrial area of the City of Tulare. (Section 1.3.)
- The Build Alternative will have replacement planting at a minimum ratio of 1:1. It is anticipated that replacement planting will amount to approximately 730 to 800 new trees. The locations of the planting may occur at the proposed stormwater basin sites and the area where State Route 99 will be realigned at post mile 25.8. Most of the new planting would consist of California natives that are drought tolerant and use low to very low amounts of water. In addition, plants that attract pollinator species would be among these new plantings (Section 2.1.10 in the Final Environmental Document).

The installation of Intelligent Transportation System elements is designed to improve traffic efficiency and reduce congestion on roadways, thereby lowering vehicle emissions.

For the evaluated Build Alternative and No-Build Alternative in the FEIR, Caltrans has determined that the Build Alternative is a feasible and prudent alternative that achieves the project's purpose and need for State Route 99. Given that the Build Alternative performs better from a traffic operations standpoint than the No-Build Alternative, the Project Development Team has reached a consensus to select the Build Alternative. Among the two evaluated design options under the Build Alternative, in the Final Environmental Impact Report, Caltrans has determined that Design Option 2 is the preferred option with the better overall performance rating (Section 1.6 in the Final Environmental Document). Design Option 2 was selected for the following reasons and benefits:

- Improved Traffic Flow, Bike and Pedestrian Use and Safety
 - the proposed roundabouts would contribute to smoother, more efficient traffic circulation resulting in less stop-and-go travel and lower vehicle emissions.
 - Paige Avenue Interchange will be placed at grade and cross under State Route 99. Placing the pedestrian and bicycle facilities, crossing State Route 99, on ground level will facilitate use and benefit users.



- Vehicles travelling at lower speeds along Paige Avenue will no longer climb an overcrossing across State Route 99 therefore lower levels of emissions are expected.
- Build Alternative will include Complete Streets elements by constructing a 10-foot-wide paved path for shared pedestrian and bicycle use on both sides of Paige Avenue, between Blackstone Street and Laspina Street to promote bicycle and pedestrian use and encourage active transportation (Section 1.4 in the Final Environmental Document).
- Improvements Support and are Consistent with Local and Regional Plans
 - California Freight Mobility Plan 2014 has the following goals:
 - Goal 1: Economic Competitiveness - Invest in freight projects that enhance economic activity, freight mobility, reliability, and global competitiveness
 - Goal 2: Safety and Resiliency - Reduce rates of incidents, collisions, fatalities, and serious injuries associated with freight movements
 - Goal 3: Freight System Infrastructure Preservation – Apply sustainable preventative maintenance and rehabilitation strategies
 - Goal 4: Environmental Stewardship – Avoid and Reduce Adverse Environmental and Community Impacts of freight transportation system
 - Integrate environmental, health, and social equity considerations into all stages of freight planning and implementation, including considering impacts and mitigation relative to the context of the project location
 - Goal 5: Congestion Relief - reduce costs to users by minimizing congestion on the freight transportation system.
 - Among the goods movement projects listed for Tulare County, widening State Route 99 through Tulare is in the California 2014 Freight Mobility Plan.
- California Freight Mobility Plan 2020, trucking is the most used mode for California’s freight transportation. Trucks transport almost all freight and services during some point within the supply chain. For this reason, the trucking industry is one of California’s most valuable freight assets. California must continue to develop, maintain, and operate a safe, efficient, and reliable freight transportation network to accommodate the truck volumes necessary to move freight within the state.
- Caltrans’ Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan 2015 identified State Route 99 as a priority interregional highway. It is a critical north-south interregional freight corridor and an important highway for California’s economy. This corridor serves as a major farm-to-market route for most agricultural products from the Central Valley. Most commercial and personal travel between cities within the San Joaquin Valley



use State Route 99. This route also serves as the main access route from towns to urban services available in the larger urbanized areas.

- The San Joaquin Valley Interstate 5/State Route 99 Goods Movement Corridor Study, prepared for the San Joaquin Valley Council of Governments in 2016, identified improvements to State Route 99 and Paige Avenue Interchange to achieve strategic goals for mobility and reliability.
- In addition, improving the State Route 99/Paige Avenue Interchange is in the 2014 and 2018 Tulare County Regional Transportation Plan.

Describing regional needs for goods movement system improvements, the Tulare County Association of Governments' Regional Transportation Plan (2018) noted that agriculture accounts for a large percentage of commodity movement and truck traffic within and through Tulare County. Milk and produce are time-sensitive items that need to ship reliably to ensure profitability. Other major types of commercial truck travel in the region include retail distribution, construction, gravel mining, delivery to and from industrial facilities, household goods movement, and gasoline and fuel distribution.

The main goal of the State Route 99 Business Plan (issued in 2005 and updated in 2013) was to improve the goods movement throughout California. Other goals were to expand State Route 99 to a minimum six-lane facility to facilitate economic growth. The plan determined that correcting gaps in flow, or choke points, along this route is needed to improve safety, reduce vehicle hours traveled, increase travel-time reliability for the goods movement and general traffic on the freight mobility system, and preserve acceptable facility operation.

A goal of the Regional Transportation Plan (2018) is to protect and enhance the State Route 99 transportation corridor in Tulare County, including through the City of Tulare, to improve interregional connectivity.

The guiding principles stated in the Transportation Element of the City of Tulare General Plan 2035 (2014) include improving goods movement infrastructure and trade and linking transportation improvements to economic development.

Near the Paige Avenue Interchange are several trucking-related businesses, including truck stops and truck washing facilities. A truck stop is typically a large facility that provides fuel, food, supplies, services, and overnight parking for heavy-duty trucks.

The industrial area of the City of Tulare extends west from the freeway, south from Bardsley Avenue, and southwards along State Route 99. The City of Tulare General Plan 2035 indicates a planned shift to more heavy industry in the future.

Therefore, after comparing and weighing the benefits and impacts of the Build and No-Build Alternatives, Caltrans has identified Build Alternative as the selected alternative.

Conclusion

Pursuant to §15093 of the State CEQA *Guidelines*, decision-makers are required to balance the benefits of a project against its unavoidable environmental risks in determining whether to approve a project. In the event the benefits of a project outweigh the unavoidable adverse effects, the adverse environmental effects may be considered "acceptable". The State CEQA



Guidelines require that, when a public agency allows for the occurrence of significant effects which are identified in the FEIR but are not at least substantially mitigated, the agency shall state in writing the specific reasons the action was supported. Any statement of overriding considerations should be included in the record of project approval and should be mentioned in the Notice of Determination.

To the extent the significant effects of the project are not avoided or substantially lessened to a level of insignificance, Caltrans, having reviewed and considered the information contained in the FEIR for the Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement Project, and having reviewed and considered the information contained in the public record, and having balanced the benefits of the project against the unavoidable effects which remain, finds such unmitigated effects to be acceptable in consideration of the overriding considerations discussed herein.

Caltrans finds that all feasible mitigation measures have been imposed to lessen unavoidable project impacts to the extent possible. As such, Caltrans, as the Lead Agency for the Project, has reviewed and considered the information contained in the Draft and the Final Environmental Impact Reports prepared for the Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement Project and the public record. Accordingly, the Lead Agency makes the following finding, pursuant to §15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines, with regard to the Statement of Overriding Considerations for the Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement Project Project:

California Administrative Code, Title 14, Section 15093(a) states: "If the specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of a proposed project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, the adverse environmental effects may be considered 'acceptable'." Based on the above discussion and on the evidence presented, Caltrans therefore finds that the benefits of the proposed project outweigh the adverse impacts on Vehicle Miles Traveled, Environmental Justice Populations and Greenhouse Gas.

for Diana Gomez
District Director (or designee)


Signature

12/28/2023
Date