

# Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS  
CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CTC Meeting: August 6, 2013

Reference No.: 2.2c.(3)  
Action Item

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Environmental Analysis

Subject: **APPROVAL OF PROJECT FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF FUNDING  
05-Mon-156; PM R1.6/T5.2, 05-Mon-101, PM 94.6/96.8  
RESOLUTION E-13-65**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The California Department of Transportation (Department) recommends that the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a responsible agency, approve the attached Resolutions E-13-65.

## **ISSUE:**

The attached resolution proposes to approve for future consideration of funding the following project for which a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) has been completed:

- State Route 156 (SR 156) and United States Route 101 (US-101) in Monterey County. Construct roadway improvements including lane additions and interchange improvements along portions of SR 156 and US-101 near the city of Prunedale. (PPNO 0057C)

This project in Monterey County will widen a portion of State Route 156 from two lanes to four lanes and convert a portion of United States Route 101 from an expressway to a freeway near the city of Castroville. The project is not fully funded. Design and Right of Way are programmed in the 2012 State Transportation Improvement Program. The total estimated cost is \$104,194,000 for capital and support. Construction is estimated to begin in Fiscal Year 2018-19 or later. The scope, as described for the preferred alternative, is consistent with the project scope programmed by the Commission in the 2012 State Transportation Improvement Program.

A copy of the FEIR has been provided to Commission staff. Resources that may be impacted by the project include: farmland, residential and commercial displacements, aesthetics and

visual, water quality and stormwater runoff, hazardous waste, air quality noise, and biological resources. Potential impacts associated with the project can all be mitigated to below significance through proposed mitigation measures with the exception of farmlands, which has been determined to be an unavoidable significant environmental effect. As a result, a Final Environmental Impact Report was prepared for the project.

Attachments

## **CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

### **Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding 05-Mon-156, PM R1.6/T5.2, 05-Mon-101, PM 94.6/96.8 Resolution E-13-65**

- 1.1** **WHEREAS**, the California Department of Transportation (Department) has completed an Environmental Impact Report pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:
- State Route 156 (SR 156) and United States Route 101 (US-101) in Monterey County. Construct roadway improvements including lane additions and interchange improvements along portions of SR-156 and US-101 near the city of Prunedale. (PPNO 0057C)
- 1.2** **WHEREAS**, the Department has certified that the 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.
- 1.4** **WHEREAS**, the project will have a significant effect on the environment.
- 1.5** **WHEREAS**, a Statement of Overriding Considerations was prepared; and
- 1.6** **WHEREAS**, Findings were made pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines; and
- 2.1** **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby support approval of the above referenced project to allow for consideration of funding.

# Project Vicinity Map

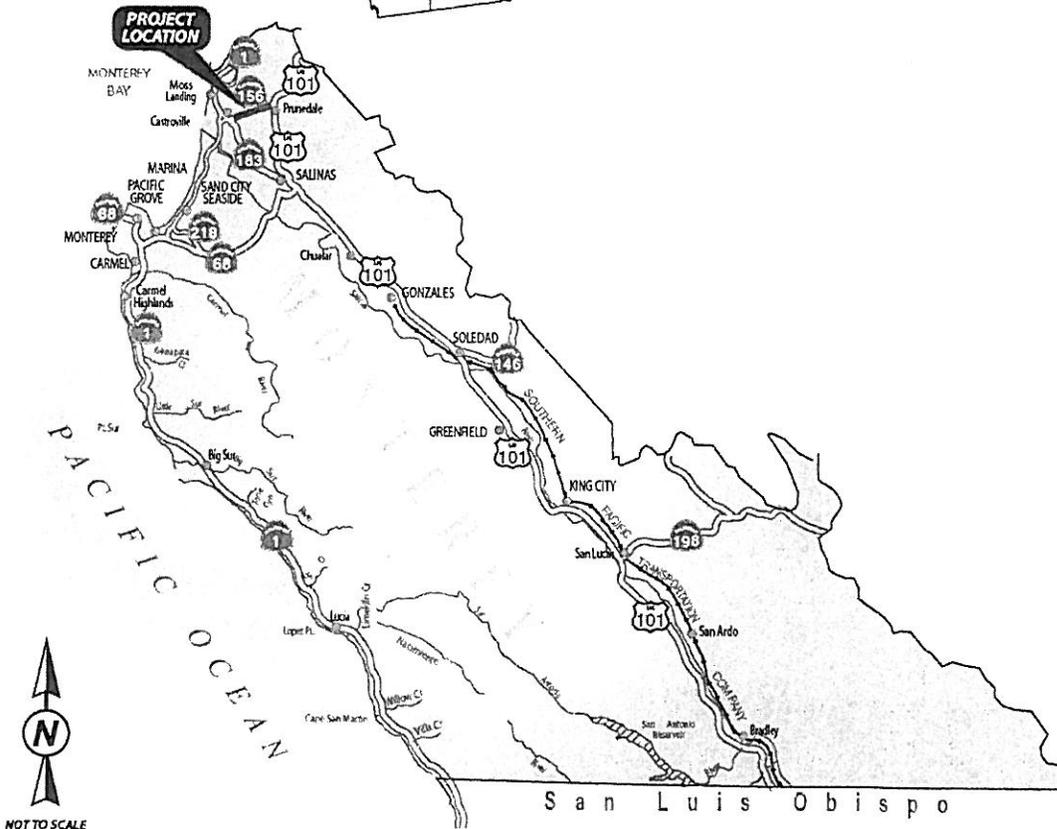
## West Corridor Project

State Route 156/US 101

05-MON-156-PM R1.6/T5.2

05-MON-101-PM 94.6/96.8

EA 05-316000



# Project Location Map

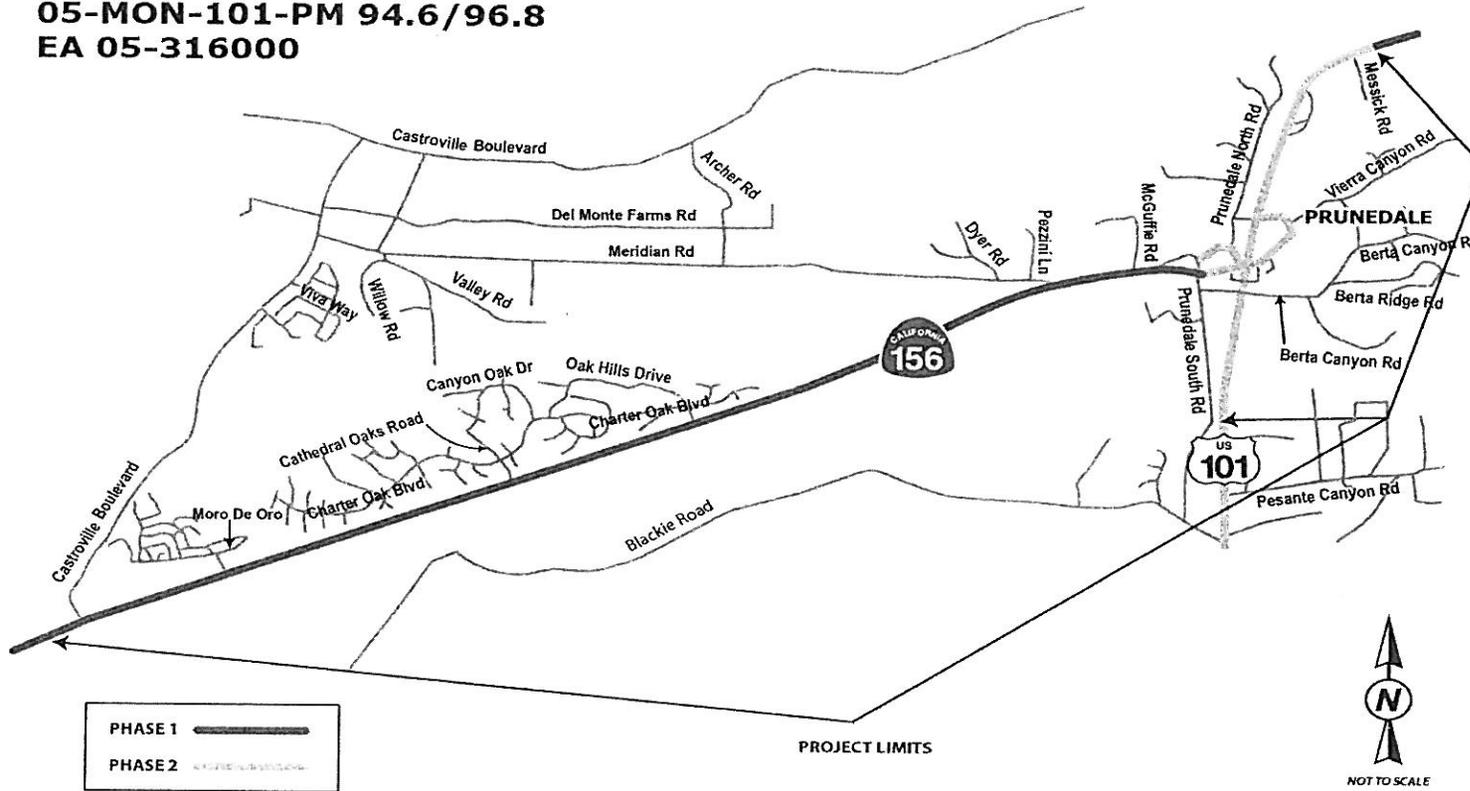
## West Corridor Project

State Route 156/US 101

05-MON-156-PM R1.6/T5.2

05-MON-101-PM 94.6/96.8

EA 05-316000



## FINDINGS

### CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION FINDINGS FOR ROUTE 156 WEST CORRIDOR

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15901) and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21, California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

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

#### Significant Impact to Farmland

The project would require conversion of 165 acres of farmland, 85.5 acres are of statewide or local importance and 147 acres of coastal agricultural preserve land. The proposed project would add two new lanes in both eastbound and westbound directions, south of the existing State Route 156. Farmland is located south of the existing State Route 156.

#### Findings

Changes or alterations have been required in or incorporated into the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

#### Statement of Facts

The proposed project would add two new lanes in both eastbound and westbound directions, south of the existing State Route 156. Farmland is located south of the existing State Route 156. The project cannot avoid farmland impacts: only the No-Build alternative would avoid farmland impacts. Farmland impacts are directly related to the amount of right of way needed for the project. Other alternatives considered to lessen farmland impacts were withdrawn because they either did not lessen environmental impacts or achieve the project's objectives.

Caltrans has reduced the project's farmland impacts from 165 acres to 118 acres and reduced impacts to coastal agricultural land to 105 acres by reducing the width of the median and by reducing the footprint of the Castroville Boulevard interchange. Caltrans' Relocation Advisory Assistance will be available for displacement of onsite investments, such as wells and irrigation systems. During construction, farmers will be provided property access easements, access to irrigation and adequate access to ensure that agricultural operations would not be impaired. This project lies within the coastal zone, and mitigation for farmland impacts would be a condition of the local coastal permit for this project.

#### Adverse Environmental Effects to Visual Resources

The entire length of State Route 156 throughout the project limits is an officially designated State Scenic Highway.

The interchanges and structures will contrast with the existing conditions. Vegetation loss and the introduction of man-made structures could result in an overall loss of rural character. The proposed Moro Cojo Slough bridge, structures and related ramps proposed at Castroville Boulevard, the State Route 156/U.S. Route 101 overcrossing at Messick Road would dramatically change the visual scale of the highway setting at those locations. The proposed State Route 156/U.S. Route 101 connector flyover would also cause an urbanizing effect.

Retaining walls along eastbound State Route 156 west of Prunedale South Road across from McGuffie Road, northbound U.S. Route 101 north of Vierra Canyon Road, and northbound San Miguel Canyon Road would have a distinctly urbanizing effect on the setting. Retaining walls proposed for southbound U.S. Route 101 would generally be below the roadway and would not be readily seen by the highway traveler. These walls would be seen, however, from local roadways such as Prunedale North Road.

Soundwalls are proposed for southbound U.S. Route 101 across from Vierra Canyon Road, along the northbound lanes of U.S. Route 101 near the proposed Messick Road overcrossing and westbound State Route 156 near McGuffie Road. These walls would contribute to a more engineered built appearance of the corridor.

The extent of visual impact caused by the project would be a factor of how these physical changes are perceived by the viewing public. Viewer sensitivity is likely to be moderately high based on the Scenic Highway designation of State Route 156, review of Monterey County planning policy, and potential viewer activity.

#### Findings

Changes or alterations have been required in or incorporated into the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

#### Statement of Facts

Measures will be taken to reduce potential impacts include: grading for a natural appearance, minimizing structure profiles, using materials and special treatments that enhance necessary additional to the built environment, and planting trees and landscaping to control erosion and improve the aesthetics of the surrounding visual resources that contribute most to the scenic quality of the corridor. New lights on structures would be shielded to keep light at downcast.

#### Adverse Environmental Effects on Biological Resources

Project activities would impact central maritime chaparral and coast live oak woodland natural communities. Central maritime chaparral and coast live oak woodland are considered habitats of special concern by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Project activities associated with construction staging and incidental runoff would result in temporary and permanent impacts to wetlands and other waters of United States requiring a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers pursuant to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

Project activities associated with temporary dewatering of aquatic habitat for culvert and bridge work and construction activities such as moving equipment, grading, clearing, removing vegetation, stockpiling, dredging, and filling would impact:

- Santa Cruz long-toed salamander (federally and state listed as endangered, fully protected species under the California Endangered Species Act)
- California tiger salamander (federally and state listed as threatened)
- California red-legged frog (federally listed as threatened and California species of special concern)

#### Findings

Changes or alterations have been required in or incorporated into the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

#### Statement of Facts

Measures to reduce impacts will be used both on and off the project site. Mitigation land will be purchased in the area that would provide the opportunity for preservation, restoration, and enhancement. The acreage required for compensating for impacts based on resource agency recommendations, as well as the function and quality of aquatic and upland habitat that needs to

be replaced. The measures to reduce impacts during construction will include where appropriate and where feasible the following: preconstruction surveys and biological monitoring; establishment of environmentally sensitive areas; revegetation inside the right-of-way; tree removal would occur outside of the nesting season.

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander is a fully protected species and "take" of any fully protected species is prohibited. Additionally, the Department of Fish and Game cannot authorize their "take" for development. Discussions with the Department of Fish and Game and the California Department of Transportation regarding the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander are ongoing.

#### Adverse Environmental Effects on Water Quality

The project would have minimal short-term impacts to surface and groundwater quality. No long-term impacts to water quality are anticipated. The project would not have substantial impacts to groundwater quality.

#### Findings

Changes or alterations have been required in or incorporated into the project which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

#### Statement of Facts

Potential temporary impacts to water quality during construction would be addressed in the project plans by including measures to ensure that there would be no detrimental discharge into any bodies of water. Basins and vegetated drainage ditches will likely be the treatments implemented. During the construction phase, Caltrans would require the contractor to prepare and implement a program to control water pollution during construction. Before the start of project construction, the contractor would be required to prepare a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan that satisfies the requirements of the Caltrans statewide National Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems Permit and the General Construction Permit. The permits require the following: A Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan is to be prepared and implemented during construction.

## STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS

### **CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATION FOR THE ROUTE 156 WEST CORRIDOR PROJECT WHICH PROPOSES TO WIDEN STATE ROUTE 156 BETWEEN U.S. ROUTE 101 AND WEST OF CASTROVILLE BOULEVARD AND REBUILD THE U.S. ROUTE 101/STATE ROUTE 156 INTERCHANGE IN MONTEREY COUNTY**

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15093, and the Department of transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report for the project, which is the basic source of information.

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

- Farmland

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

The purpose of the project is to:

- Improve safety and operations
- Improve local road access to State Route 156
- Improve interregional traffic flow along State Route 156
- Relieve existing congestion and provide capacity for future increases in traffic volume

The need for the project is based on the following:

- An increase in congestion
- Separation of interregional and local traffic
- Lack of route continuity

Monterey County's population was approximately 415,057 in 2010 and is expected to increase to 602,732 in 2030 according to the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments. The county will see the largest growth in the Fort Ord area, Marina and Salinas. Castroville and the Fort Ord area, Seaside and Marina combined will compose roughly 92 percent of the total projected population increase between the years 2005 and 2030.

In general, the employment centers closest to the project area are growing faster than those farther away in the San Francisco Bay Area. According to projections by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, between the years 2000 and 2030, 65 percent of employment growth will occur in the Silicon Valley, Coyote Valley and Gilroy. All employment centers south of San Jose except Santa Cruz are projected to grow more than or close to 50 percent by 2030 according to Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments. Relative to population or housing, jobs are also projected to grow faster in the Monterey County coastal areas.

According to the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner, agriculture contributed \$8.2 billion and more than 73,000 jobs to the County's economy in 2010. The county supplies 80 percent of the nation's lettuces and nearly the same percentage of artichokes, in addition to other vegetables. Monterey County's crop production was valued at \$3.85 billion in 2011. Agricultural land use within the project limits

is on the south side of State Route 156 between Castroville Boulevard and Meridian Road on the north side of State Route 156 next to Castroville Boulevard. Strawberries and artichokes are produced on the south side of State Route 156. Land for livestock grazing is on the north and south sides of State Route 156. Castroville, the Artichoke Capital of the World, has been producing artichokes since the early to mid-1900s. Artichokes are harvested year-round, mostly for the fresh market.

The existing State Route 156 is a two-lane conventional highway with 12-foot lanes and 6-foot to 8-foot outside shoulders. There are at-grade intersections and several private driveways along the route. Left-turn lanes at the intersections allow motorists to turn onto county roads from State Route 156. State Route 156 serves interregional and recreational traffic linking the Monterey Peninsula to the Bay Area and the Central Valley. State Route 156 goes through agricultural land for much of the route. State Route 156 within the project limits is located in the coastal zone. State Route 156 throughout the project limits is an officially designated State Scenic Highway.

The existing U.S. Route 101 within the project limits is a four-lane expressway with 12-foot-wide lanes, 4- to 8-foot-wide outside shoulders, a 16- to 22-foot-wide median and three at-grade intersections that allow right-in, right-out turns. Two interchanges—one at the State Route 156 junction and one at San Miguel Canyon Road—sit in the project limits. U.S. Route 101 is a four-lane divided expressway serving interregional traffic, much of it tourist, trucking and commuting traffic. State Route 156 and U.S. Route 101 come together and share the same roadway for 8 miles between Prunedale and San Juan Bautista.

Construction of a new alignment for State Route 156 would divert interregional traffic away from the residential communities next to State Route 156 and U.S. Route 101. This would affect the existing access provided from State Route 156 to the Oak Hills subdivision; currently Oak Hills residents or visitors must turn left, crossing in front of oncoming traffic to enter or exit the development. These turns are particularly difficult during the higher traffic volumes in summer, vacation and harvest season, and the weekday peak commuting hours.

Residents of the Monte del Lago mobile home park face a similar situation competing with recreational, truck and commuter traffic when traveling to Prunedale or Castroville for shopping, services, medical appointments and jobs.

State Route 156 within the project limits is designated as a Terminal Access Route to the National Truck Network. Commodity exports, including agricultural products and quarry materials generate significant truck traffic along State Route 156 and U.S. Route 101. Almost the entire global artichoke crop is produced in California within the Castroville area. These commodities are moved mainly by truck to the San Francisco or Los Angeles areas via U.S. Route 101 or to the interstate system. State Route 156 is a key statewide connector because, in conjunction with State Route 152, it is an important east-west corridor south of the Bay Area and north of San Luis Obispo.

Within the project limits, State Route 156 is a two-lane roadway. State Route 156 just west of Castroville Boulevard and next to the U.S. Route 101/State Route 156 interchange is a four-lane roadway. In Monterey County, the two-lane roadway of State Route 156 totals less than 4 miles. The lanes to be added under the Route 156 West Corridor project would make the roadway four lanes—for a continuous four-lane route to and from the Monterey Peninsula.

## **Project Alternatives**

Twelve build alternatives were developed and studied by the Project Development Team (comprised of Caltrans personnel from different functional branches, local and state agency representatives and other stakeholders). Ten of these alternatives were rejected because they did not reduce environmental impacts or they were not feasible to construct. Two alternatives, Alternative 11 and Alternative 12, and the No Build Alternative were considered in the environmental document. Alternative 11 would add two new lanes in both eastbound and westbound directions, while the existing highway would essentially function as a frontage road. Alternative 12 would use the existing highway for part of the alignment and would add two new lanes south of the existing highway. Both build alternatives would include improvements at the U.S. Route 101/State Route 156 and San Miguel Canyon interchanges, including new connectors to northbound and southbound U.S. Route 101.

## **Preferred Alternative**

Alternative 11 was chosen as the preferred alternative based on engineering and environmental analysis, and community and agency input. While all build alternatives would meet the purpose and need of the project, Alternative 11 was selected because:

- Fewer permanent impacts to aquatic and upland habitats of California tiger salamander, Santa Cruz long-toed salamander and California red-legged frog
- Fewer permanent impacts to Coast live oak woodland and Riparian habitat
- Fewer permanent impact to seasonal jurisdiction wetlands
- Construction can occur for the project without disrupting through traffic on the existing Route 156

Alternative 11 provides a safer route for pedestrians and bicyclists by providing a frontage road, separating interregional traffic from local traffic, while maintaining residential access for property owners.

Under the No-Build Alternative, State Route 156 and the U.S. Route 101/State Route 156 interchange would stay in their present conditions. No improvements would be made to State Route 156 or the U.S. Route 101/State Route 156 interchange. No measures would be taken to increase capacity, reduce congestion, or improve safety and operations.

## **Conclusion**

Farmland impact cannot be avoided but with mitigation measures adopted, the impact has been substantially lessened. Caltrans has reduced the project's farmland impacts from 165 acres to 118 acres, including impacts to coastal agricultural land (105 acres) by reducing the width of the median and by reducing the footprint of the Castroville Boulevard interchange. Caltrans' Relocation Advisory Assistance will be available for displacement of onsite investments, such as wells and irrigation systems. During construction, farmers will be provided property access easements, access to irrigation and adequate access to ensure that agricultural operations would not be impaired. This project lies within the coastal zone, and mitigation for farmland impacts would be a condition of the local coastal permit for this project. Caltrans would partially compensate the direct loss of agricultural land and will protect a portion of California's remaining land resources in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act Guideline 15370.