

Fact Sheet

Project Name

California High-Speed Rail Project, Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye

Project Description

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) proposes to construct and operate the Merced to Fresno Section project, with an approximately 51- to 55-mile portion for the Central Valley Wye, as part of the larger, 800-mile California High-Speed Rail (HSR) system planned throughout California. The HSR system will connect the major population centers of Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Central Valley, Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, Orange County, and San Diego. As part of the Merced to Fresno Section of the statewide HSR system, the Central Valley Wye would create the east-west HSR connection between the San Jose to Merced Section to the west and the north-south Merced to Fresno Section to the east. The Central Valley Wye is located in Merced and Madera counties near the city of Chowchilla with related electrical interconnections and network upgrades extending into Fresno and Stanislaus counties.

This Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (Final Supplemental EIR/EIS) is a supplement to the Merced to Fresno Section Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (Merced to Fresno Final EIR/EIS). The Merced to Fresno Final EIR/EIS identified the Hybrid Alternative as the preferred alternative for the north/south rail alignment, but deferred identification of a preferred alignment for the wye connection of the alignment.

The Authority Board of Directors certified the Merced to Fresno Final EIR/EIS under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) approved the Hybrid Alternative on May 3, 2012. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a Record of Decision (ROD) on September 18, 2012, and the Surface Transportation Board (STB) issued a ROD on June 13, 2013. Although the Authority Board of Directors and FRA approved the Hybrid Alternative outside the wye area for the north/south alignment of the high-speed rail and the Downtown Merced and Downtown Fresno Mariposa Street station locations, these approvals deferred a decision on the area known as the “wye connection”, that is, the east-west high-speed rail connection between the San Jose to Merced Section to the west and the north-south portion of the Merced to Fresno Section to the east, to allow for additional consideration of wye alternatives and environmental analysis.

This Final Supplemental EIR/EIS is the next step in the environmental review process to select a wye connection. This document evaluates the impacts and benefits of implementing a wye connection in the geographically limited area of the wye connection between the cities of Merced and Madera and is based on additional project planning and engineering that has occurred over the last several years. This Final Supplemental EIR/EIS also evaluates the No Project Alternative¹ and four Central Valley Wye alternatives: the State Route (SR) 152 (North) to Road 13 Wye Alternative, SR 152 (North) to Road 19 Wye Alternative, Avenue 21 to Road 13 Wye Alternative, and SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative.

In this Final Supplemental EIR/EIS, the Authority affirms its earlier identification of a Preferred Alternative in the Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS. The Preferred Alternative for the Central Valley Wye is the SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative. The Authority based this identification on balancing the impacts of the Central Valley Wye alternatives on community resources and the natural environment in the context of CEQA, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), stakeholder preferences, and capital construction costs. This alternative would generally have less intensive community impacts than other alternatives, although it would still result in impacts

¹ The No Project Alternative as defined in the Final Supplemental EIR/EIS serves as both the No Project Alternative under CEQA and the No Action Alternative under NEPA.

on the community of Fairmead. Relative to the other alternatives, the SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative would have the fewest residential displacements, second fewest daytime construction noise impacts, least permanent conversion of Important Farmland, and would require the relocation or reconfiguration of the fewest dairies. This alternative would also result in the fewest linear feet of disturbance to the historic Robertson Boulevard Tree Row. The SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative would expose two sensitive receptors to a permanent increase in traffic noise, and train operations would expose 35 sensitive receptors to severe noise impacts, all single-family residences. This alternative would have more of such impacts than the other alternatives because it would displace fewer homes. With regard to the natural environment, the SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative would have the least potential for direct impacts on special-status plant communities because it would have the least vegetation removal. It would have the least potential for impacts on wetlands and waters of the United States.

NEPA and CEQA Lead Agency

California High-Speed Rail Authority
770 L Street, Suite 620 MS-1
Sacramento, CA 95814

Pursuant to 23 United States Code (U.S.C.) Section 327, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the State of California executed a NEPA Assignment Memorandum of Understanding (NEPA Assignment MOU), dated July 23, 2019 (FRA and State of California 2019). Pursuant to this MOU, the State of California, acting through the California State Transportation Agency and the Authority, assumed FRA's responsibilities under NEPA and other federal environmental laws, as assigned by FRA under the NEPA Assignment MOU, for projects necessary for the design, construction, and operation of the California HSR System and for other passenger rail projects that directly connect to the HSR system, including documents that were not final for distribution as of the publication date of the memorandum.

Accordingly, the Authority is now the Lead Agency for complying with NEPA and other federal environmental laws for the HSR System and will now be identified as such in this and other environmental documents.

Responsible NEPA and CEQA Official

Brian P. Kelly, Chief Executive Officer
California High-Speed Rail Authority
770 L Street, Suite 620 MS-1
Sacramento, CA 95814

Document Availability

This Final Supplemental EIR/EIS is available online in PDF form at the Authority's website:
http://hsr.ca.gov/Programs/Environmental_Planning/supplemental_merced_fresno.html

The Authority website also contains the previously released Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS (published May 2019 under CEQA and September 2019 under NEPA), as well as the Revised Draft Supplemental EIR/Second Draft Supplemental EIS, Biological Resources Analysis (published in March 2020 pursuant to both CEQA and NEPA).

A Spanish language version of the Summary of the Final Supplemental EIR/EIS is available upon request to the Authority by calling (916) 324-1541.

Printed and/or electronic copies of the Final Supplemental EIR/EIS have been placed at the following locations and can be viewed during hours the facilities are open. Please note that open days/hours may be reduced for compliance with coronavirus public health and safety directives:

- Authority's Fresno Office: 1111 H Street, Fresno, CA 93721

- Authority’s Sacramento Office: 770 L Street, Suite 620, Sacramento, CA 95814

If library and local government facilities open and become accessible to the public, printed and/or electronic copies will be placed at the following locations:

- Chowchilla Branch Library: 300 Kings Avenue, Chowchilla, CA 93610
- Madera County Library: 121 North G Street, Madera, CA 93637
- Merced County Library: 2100 O Street, Merced, CA 95340
- Madera County Clerk: 200 W 4th Street, Madera, CA 93637
- Merced County Clerk: 2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340

To request an electronic copy of this Final Supplemental EIR/EIS, please contact the Authority by calling (800) 881-5799. In addition, the Merced to Fresno Final EIR/EIS is also available by request to the Authority at the same number. .

Permits, Approvals, and Consultations

Federal Agencies

- **Federal Railroad Administration** – General Conformity Determination under the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401-7671q) and regulatory authority over railroad safety under 49 U.S.C. 20103.
- **Surface Transportation Board** – Authority to construct and operate a railroad under Section 10901 of the ICC Termination Act of 1995.
- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers** – Section 404 Permit under the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251-1387) for Discharge of Dredge or Fill Materials into Waters of the U.S., including wetlands. Section 408 permit under the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 Section 14 (33 U.S.C. 408).
- **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** – Review of Environmental Justice conclusions pursuant to United States Executive Order 12898.
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service** – Consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, 16 U.S.C. 1531-1544.
- **U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation** – Rights of entry permits; Temporary Construction Permits; Acquisition of Land Rights.
- **Advisory Council on Historic Preservation** – Consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended, 54 U.S.C. 306101-307106 et seq.

State Agencies

- **California Office of Historic Preservation** – Consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended, 54 U.S.C. 306101-307106 et seq.
- **California Department of Fish and Wildlife** – California Endangered Species Act (CESA) permits (California Fish and Game Code, Chapter 1.5, sections 2050-2115.5). Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement pursuant to Section 1602 of the California Fish and Game Code.
- **California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)** – Encroachment permits for any construction in the Caltrans right-of-way.
- **California Public Utilities Commission** – Approval for construction and operation of railroad crossing of public roads and for construction of new transmission lines and substations.
- **California State Lands Commission** – Lease for crossing state sovereign lands.
- **State Water Resources Control Board, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board** – Permits under the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251-1387): Section 401 Water Quality Certification; Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Waste Discharge Permit. Statewide Stormwater General Permit for Construction; Statewide

Stormwater General Permit for Industrial Activities, Dewatering Permit (Order No. 98-67);
Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasures Plan (part of Section 402 process);
Stormwater Construction and Operation Plan (part of Section 402 process).

- **Central Valley Flood Protection Board** – Encroachment permit under Section 208.10 (designated streams, flood control and protection facilities).

Regional Agency

- **San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District** – Permits under Rule 201, General Permit Requirements; Rule 403, Fugitive Dust; Rule 442 Architectural Coatings; Rule 902 Asbestos.

Authors and Principal Contributors

Chapter 11, List of Preparers, contains a complete list of the persons involved in preparation of this Final Supplemental EIR/EIS.

Public Release of Final Supplemental EIR/EIS

Friday, August 7, 2020

Subsequent Steps

The Authority's Board of Directors will hold a board meeting to consider whether to certify the Final Supplemental EIR/EIS and approve the Preferred Alternative (SR 152 [North] to Road 11 Wye Alternative) pursuant to CEQA.

The Authority's Board of Directors will also consider whether to direct the Authority Chief Executive Officer to issue a Supplemental Record of Decision (ROD) for the Merced to Fresno Section selecting the Preferred Alternative in the Authority's role as NEPA lead agency.