

Preface

What Is This Document?

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) proposes to construct, operate, and maintain an electric-powered high-speed rail (HSR) system in California. When completed, the 800-mile HSR system will provide new passenger rail service to California’s major metropolitan areas and through the counties that are home to more than 90 percent of the state’s population. The Merced to Fresno Section of the California HSR system is a critical link connecting the Bay Area HSR sections north and south to the rest of the system.

In keeping with the Safe, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act for the 21st Century (California Streets & Highways Code § 2704 et seq.), the Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye (Central Valley Wye) would create the east-west HSR 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. The term *wye* refers to the Y-like formation that is created at the point where train tracks branch off the mainline to continue in different directions. Four Central Valley Wye alternatives and the No Project Alternative are analyzed in this joint California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)/National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document.

The Council on Environmental Quality provides for NEPA decisionmaking through a phased process (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] § 4321 et seq.). This process is referred to as *tiered decisionmaking*. This phased process supports a broad-level programmatic decision using a first-tier environmental impact statement (EIS); this first-tier process is followed by more specific decisions at the second tier, with one or more second-tier EISs. CEQA (Public Resources Code 21000 et seq.) also encourages tiering and provides for a first-tier and second-tier environmental impact report (EIR).

Sequence of California HSR Tiered Environmental Documents

1st Tier/Program Documents

- Final Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System (2005)
- San Francisco Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Final Program EIR/EIS (2008)
- Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Revised Final Program EIR (2010)
- Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Partially Revised Final Program EIR (2012)

2nd Tier/Project Documents

- Merced to Fresno Section Final EIR/EIS (2012)
- Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS (this document)

The Authority and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) prepared the 2005 *Final Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System* (Statewide Program EIR/EIS) (Authority and FRA 2005), which was a first-tier analysis of the general effects of implementing the HSR system across two-thirds of the state. The 2008 *San Francisco Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train (HST) Final Program EIR/EIS* (Bay Area to Central Valley Program EIR/EIS) (Authority and FRA 2008) and the Authority’s 2012 *Bay Area to Central Valley HST Partially Revised Final Program EIR* (Authority 2012) were also first-tier, programmatic documents, focusing on the Bay Area to Central Valley region. These first-tier EIR/EIS documents provided FRA and the Authority with the environmental analysis necessary to evaluate the overall HSR system and make broad decisions about general HSR alignments and station locations for further study in the second-tier EIR/EISs.

The Merced to Fresno Section EIR/EIS, approved in 2012, is a second-tier EIR/EIS that tiers off of the program EIR/EIS documents; it provides project-level information for decisionmaking on the Merced to Fresno Section of the HSR system. The Authority’s Board of Directors certified the Merced to Fresno Section Final EIR/EIS under CEQA on May 3, 2012, and filed a Notice of Determination on May 4, 2012, and approved the Hybrid Alternative. Although the Authority approved the Hybrid Alternative 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 Merced to Fresno Section to the east, for additional environmental analysis. FRA issued a Record of Decision (ROD) under NEPA on September 18, 2012, and the Surface Transportation Board issued a ROD on June 13, 2013. Through the ROD, FRA approved the Hybrid Alternative and Downtown Merced and Downtown Fresno Mariposa Street station locations, consistent with the Authority's decision in May.

This document, the *Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS* (Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS), is the next step in the environmental review process to select a wye connection. The Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS evaluates the impacts and benefits of implementing the wye connection alternatives, including the No Project Alternative, in the more geographically limited area of the wye connection between Merced and Madera and is based on more detailed project planning and engineering. The analysis therefore builds on the earlier decisions and program EIR/EISs, while providing more site-specific and detailed analysis.

This Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS does the following:

- Describes the four Central Valley Wye alternatives and their potential impacts.
- Provides environmental information to assist decision-makers in selecting the project to be built.
- Identifies measures to avoid and minimize impacts, and, when necessary, compensate for adverse impacts.
- Considers cumulative impacts as part of the environmental review process.

The Authority and FRA widely circulated the Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS to affected local jurisdictions, state and federal agencies, tribes, community organizations, other interest groups, and interested individuals. The document is also available at Authority offices, public libraries, and county clerk offices. The public comment period closes 45 days after this draft document is circulated for public review. During this period, public hearings will be held to receive verbal testimony on the Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS.

How Do I Use This Document?

The purpose of environmental documents prepared under NEPA and CEQA is to disclose information about a proposed project to decision makers and the public. While the science and analysis that supports this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS is complex, this document is intended for the general public. Every attempt has been made to limit the use of technical terms and acronyms. Where this cannot be avoided, the terms and acronyms are defined the first time they are used in each chapter.

Volume I of this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS is organized into 15 chapters and a Summary. Volume II contains technical appendices, and Volume III provides plans and other relevant engineering drawings. For a reader with limited time to devote to this document, the Summary is the place to start. It provides an overview of all of the substantive chapters in this document and includes a table listing the potential environmental impacts for each environmental resource topic. If the reader begins here, but wants more information, the Summary directs the reader where to get details elsewhere in the document. Below is a list of the chapters and a short summary of each.

Chapter 1.0, Introduction and Purpose, Need, and Objectives, explains the Authority's purpose and need for the Merced to Fresno Section, including the Central Valley Wye and provides a history of the planning process.

Chapter 2.0, Alternatives, describes the proposed Central Valley Wye alternatives, as well as the No Project Alternative used for purposes of comparison. It contains illustrations and maps and provides a review of construction activities. These first two chapters help the reader understand what is being analyzed in the remainder of the document.

Chapter 3.0, Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Mitigation Measures, is where the reader can find information about the existing transportation, environmental, and social conditions in the area of the Central Valley Wye. This chapter provides the findings of the analysis of potential environmental impacts, along with methods to reduce these impacts (called mitigation measures). Chapter 3 is divided into subsections discussing the following environmental resource topics:

- Transportation*
- Air Quality and Global Climate Change*
- Noise and Vibration*
- Electromagnetic Fields and Electromagnetic Interference
- Public Utilities and Energy
- Biological Resources and Wetlands*
- Hydrology and Water Resources*
- Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontological Resources*
- Hazardous Materials and Waste*
- Safety and Security
- Socioeconomics and Communities*
- Land Use and Development
- Agricultural Farmland
- Parks, Recreation, and Open Space
- Aesthetics and Visual Resources*
- Cultural Resources*
- Regional Growth
- Cumulative Impacts

*separate technical report available

Chapter 4.0, Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) Evaluations, provides the analysis to support FRA's determinations under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Funds Act.

Chapter 5.0, Environmental Justice, discusses whether the Central Valley Wye alternatives may cause disproportionate impacts on low-income and minority communities. It also identifies mitigation to reduce those impacts where appropriate.

Chapter 6.0, Project Costs and Operations, summarizes the estimated capital and operations and maintenance costs for each Central Valley Wye alternative evaluated in this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS, including funding and financial risk.

Chapter 7.0, Other NEPA/CEQA Considerations, summarizes the Central Valley Wye alternatives' environmental effects under NEPA, the significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided under CEQA, and the significant irreversible environmental changes that would occur as a result of the Central Valley Wye alternatives or irretrievable commitments of resources or foreclosure of future options.

Chapter 8.0, Preferred Alternative, describes the Preferred Alternative and the basis for identifying the Preferred Alternative.

Chapter 9.0, Public and Agency Involvement, contains summaries of coordination and outreach activities with agencies and the general public during preparation of this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS. In addition, this chapter contains a list of common comments and the responses to this subset of comments.

Chapter 10.0, Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS Distribution, identifies the public agencies, tribes, and organizations that were informed of the availability of, and locations to obtain, this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS, as well as the timing of the 45-day formal comment period.

Chapter 11.0, List of Preparers, provides the names and responsibilities of the authors of this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS.

Chapter 12.0, References/Sources Used in Document Preparation, lists the references and contacts used in writing this document.

Chapter 13.0, Glossary of Terms, provides a definition of certain terms used in this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS.

Chapter 14.0, Index, provides a tool to cross-reference major topics used in this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS.

Chapter 15.0, Acronyms and Abbreviations, defines the acronyms and abbreviations used in this document.

Technical Appendices provide additional details on the Central Valley Wye alternatives and the Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS process. Technical appendices, included in Volume II, are primarily related to the affected environment and environmental consequences analyses. These appendices are numbered to match their corresponding section in Chapter 3, as well as Chapter 2, of this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS (e.g., 3.7-A is the first appendix for Section 3.7, Biological Resources and Wetlands).

Volume III, Alignments and Other Plans, also available on compact disc (CD), presents the design drawings, including trackway and roadway crossing design. These documents are also available at:

http://hsr.ca.gov/Programs/Environmental_Planning/supplemental_merced_fresno.html and at locations identified in Chapter 10, Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS Distribution.

Technical Reports provide more detailed technical analyses and data than that included in Chapter 3 of the Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS. The asterisks (*) in the list of Chapter 3 sections indicate topics that have a separate technical report. Technical reports are not included in the Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS. They are available on CD and at:

http://hsr.ca.gov/Programs/Environmental_Planning/supplemental_merced_fresno.html.

What Happens Next?

Comments received during the 45-day public comment period on this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS will be used to develop a Final Supplemental EIR/EIS. Following completion of a Final Supplemental EIR/EIS, the Authority will consider certifying the Final Supplemental EIR/EIS for compliance with CEQA, making a final decision on the Central Valley Wye, and whether to approve the Preferred Alternative. If the Authority certifies the Final Supplemental EIR/EIS and makes a decision on the Central Valley Wye, it will file a Notice of Determination with the State Clearinghouse.

The SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative is called a “preferred alternative” by FRA to make clear that the federal government has not made a decision until it issues a ROD. FRA will issue the ROD as part of a Final Supplemental EIR/EIS. The ROD will state FRA’s decision on the Central Valley Wye, identify the alternatives considered by FRA in reaching its decision, and itemize the Authority’s commitments to mitigate for impacts. Issuance of the ROD is a prerequisite for any federal funding. The schedule for final design, construction, and operation will be refined as the project moves closer to the end of the environmental review and preliminary design phase. The Authority envisions that revenue service would be provided between Silicon Valley and the Central Valley (Valley to Valley) by 2025. The Central Valley Wye is a critical component of the Valley to Valley service.

As permitted under the Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program, the State of California has requested that the FRA assign its responsibilities under NEPA and related federal environmental laws to the Authority. The program is authorized by 23 U.S.C. section 327 and has been implemented by the Federal Highway Administration, FRA, and the Federal Transit Administration through joint regulations defining project and applicant eligibility, the application

requirements, and the requirements for a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) approving the assignment.

The Authority, in partnership with the California State Transportation Agency, made available for public review and comment a draft application to FRA to assume the federal environmental responsibilities under the NEPA. The official comment period on the draft application began Thursday, November 9, 2017, and ended Monday, December 11, 2017. Public comments received during this period were reviewed and considered prior to submitting the final application to the FRA in February 2018. The FRA published the final application and draft MOU in the Federal Register on Wednesday, May 2, 2018, and solicited public comment for 30 days, which ended June 1, 2018. The final application and MOU can be viewed on the California High-Speed Rail Authority website at:

http://www.hsr.ca.gov/Programs/Environmental_Planning/nepa_assignment.html. These comment periods do not substitute for, or duplicate, the comment period for this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS.

The FRA remains the lead agency under NEPA for this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS until the application process is complete and FRA has signed the MOU. If FRA signs the MOU and does so prior to the ROD for this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS, the Authority would issue the ROD and finalize any related environmental reviews in lieu of FRA.