

## PREFACE

### What is this Document?

The Authority proposes to construct, operate, and maintain an electric-powered High-Speed Rail (HSR) system in California. When completed, the nearly 800-mile California HSR System would provide a 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. In keeping with the Safe, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act for the 21st Century (California Streets and Highways Code Section 2704 et seq.), the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section would serve to connect the Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section to the north, and the Burbank to Los Angeles Project Section to the south.

Six Build Alternatives and a No Project Alternative are analyzed in this joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS), which was developed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Pursuant to 23 U.S. Code (U.S.C.) Section 327, under the NEPA Assignment MOU between the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the State of California, effective July 23, 2019, the Authority is the project sponsor and the lead federal agency for compliance with NEPA and other federal laws for the California HSR System, including the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section. The Authority is also the state lead agency under CEQA.

The Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) provides for NEPA decision making through a phased process (42 U.S.C. 4321).<sup>1</sup> This process is referred to as tiered decision making. This phased process supports a broad-level programmatic decision using a first-tier process followed by more specific decisions at the second tier, with one or more second-tier EISs. The NEPA tiering process allows incremental decision making for large projects that would be too extensive and cumbersome to analyze in one traditional project EIS. CEQA (Cal. Public Res. Code Section 21000 et seq.) also encourages tiering, and provides for a first-tier and second-tier EIR.

The Palmdale to Burbank Project Section EIR/EIS is a second-tier EIR/EIS that follows first-tier EIR/EIS documents and provides project-level information for decision making on this portion of the HSR system. The Authority and the FRA prepared the 2005 Final Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System (Authority and FRA 2005), which provided a first-tier analysis of the general effects of implementing the HSR system across two-thirds of the state. The 2008 Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Final Program EIR/EIS (Authority and FRA 2008) and the Authority's 2012 Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Partially Revised Final Program EIR (Authority 2012) were also first-tier programmatic documents, but they focused on the Bay Area to Central Valley region. These first-tier EIR/EIS documents provided the Authority and the FRA with the environmental analyses 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 Authority has prepared this Final EIR/EIS for the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section of the California HSR System as the next step in the environmental review process. The Final EIR/EIS includes:

- A detailed description of the project alternatives and their potential benefits and impacts
- Environmental analysis to assist decision makers in selecting the project to be built
- Feasible avoidance and minimization measures and mitigation for potential adverse impacts
- Discussion of potential cumulative impacts as part of the environmental review process

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<sup>1</sup> The CEQ issued new regulations, effective September 14, 2020, updating the NEPA implementing procedures at 40 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) 1500-1508. However, because this project initiated the NEPA process before September 14, 2020, it is not subject to the new regulations. The Authority is relying on the regulations as they existed prior to September 14, 2020. Therefore, all citations to CEQ regulations in this environmental document refer to the 1978 regulations, pursuant to 40 C.F.R. 1506.13 (2020) and the preamble at 85 Fed. Reg. 43340.

## How Do I Use this Document?

The purpose of environmental documents prepared under CEQA and NEPA is to disclose information to decision makers and the public. Although the science and analysis that support the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section Final EIR/EIS are complex, the 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, and a list of acronyms and abbreviations is provided in Chapter 15 of the Final EIR/EIS. This Palmdale to Burbank Project Section Final EIR/EIS has been prepared in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, as required under Section 11546.7 of the California Government Code, and can be found on the Authority's website ([www.hsr.ca.gov](http://www.hsr.ca.gov)).

Volume 1 of this Final EIR/EIS has 15 chapters and a Summary, which is available in English. The Summary will be provided in three languages: Spanish, Armenian, and Arabic. For a reader with limited time to review this document, the **Summary** is the best 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 on where to get details elsewhere in the document.

Below is a list and short summary of the chapters of **Volume 1**, Report, of the Final EIR/EIS.

- **Chapter 1, Project Purpose, Need, and Objectives**, explains why the project is proposed and provides a history of the planning process.
- **Chapter 2, Alternatives**, describes the proposed alternatives and station location as well as the No Project Alternative used for purposes of comparison. It contains illustrations and maps and provides a review of construction activities. Chapter 2 also identifies the Authority's Preferred Alternative, which also serves as the proposed project for CEQA.

The first two chapters help the reader understand what is being analyzed in the remainder of the document.

- **Chapter 3, Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Mitigation Measures**, is where the reader can find information about the existing transportation, environmental, and social conditions in the Palmdale to Burbank region. 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 Interference and Electromagnetic Fields
  - Public Utilities and Energy
  - Biological and Aquatic Resources
  - Hydrology and Water Resources
  - Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontological Resources
  - Hazardous Materials and Wastes
  - Safety and Security
  - Socioeconomics and Communities
  - Station Planning, Land Use, and Development

- Agricultural Farmland and Forest Land
  - Parks, Recreation, and Open Space
  - Aesthetics and Visual Quality
  - Cultural Resources
  - Regional Growth
  - Cumulative Impacts
- **Chapter 4, Section 4(f)/6(f) Evaluations**, summarizes impacts to parks, wildlife refuges, and historic properties in accordance with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.
  - **Chapter 5, Environmental Justice**, discusses whether the proposed alternatives would cause disproportionate impacts on low-income and minority communities. It also identifies mitigation to reduce those impacts, where appropriate.
  - **Chapter 6, Project Costs and Operations**, summarizes the estimated capital, operations, and maintenance costs for each alternative and design option, including funding and financial risk.
  - **Chapter 7, Other CEQA/NEPA Considerations**, summarizes the project's significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the project is implemented, the project's benefits, and the significant irreversible environmental changes that would occur as a result of project implementation.
  - **Chapter 8, Preferred Alternative and Station Sites**, identifies the Preferred Alternative for the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section and the basis for its identification.
  - **Chapter 9, Public and Agency Involvement**, contains summaries of coordination and outreach activities with agencies and the general public.
  - **Chapter 10, EIR/EIS Distribution**, identifies the public agencies, tribes, and organizations that were informed of this Final EIR/EIS, and locations where it can be reviewed.
  - **Chapter 11, List of Preparers**, provides the names and roles of the authors of this Final EIR/EIS.
  - **Chapter 12, References**, lists the references and contacts used in writing this Final EIR/EIS.
  - **Chapter 13, Glossary of Terms**, provides a definition of certain terms used in this Final EIR/EIS.
  - **Chapter 14, Index**, provides a tool to cross-reference major topics addressed in this Final EIR/EIS.
  - **Chapter 15, Acronyms and Abbreviations**, defines the acronyms and abbreviations used in this Final EIR/EIS.

**Volume 2, Technical Appendices**, provides additional details on the project alternatives; the Final EIR/EIS, and provides-specific background information, data, and other evidence supporting the analyses. Technical appendices 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 Final EIR/EIS (e.g., Appendix 3.2-A is the first appendix for Section 3.2, Transportation).

**Volume 3, Preliminary Engineering Plans**, presents the design drawings, including trackway and roadway crossing designs.

**Volume 4, Responses to Comments**, provides a list of all commenters on the Draft EIR/EIS, reproductions of the original written comments, transcriptions of oral comments at public meetings, and responses to the comments. In addition, this volume provides the Authority's Standard Responses that address the most frequently raised issues. Standard Responses are provided in Chapter 17.

The Technical Reports provide more detailed technical analyses and data on some of the environmental resources evaluated in Chapter 3 of the Final EIR/EIS. Technical reports are not part of the Final EIR/EIS,

but are available upon request. For information on how to access and review technical reports, please refer to the Authority's website ([www.hsr.ca.gov](http://www.hsr.ca.gov)) or call (866) 300-3044. Please see the Notice of Availability for more information about the availability of the Final EIR/EIS and associated technical reports.

## What Has Changed?

Since the close of the public comment period on the Draft EIR/EIS on December 1, 2022, the Authority has reviewed the public comments received. The Authority has continued to consult with local jurisdictions and property owners about the HSR Build Alternatives, and continues to work closely with regulatory agencies with jurisdiction over some components of the project. These consultations have resulted in additional and revised Impact Avoidance and Minimization Features, additional and revised mitigation measures, and minor revisions to the Preliminary Engineering for Project Description.

The Authority has revised the Final EIR/EIS in response to public comments and Authority review of the Draft EIR/EIS. Key substantive changes to the Final EIR/EIS include, but are not limited to:

- **Design Refinement (Bee Canyon and Pacoima Wash).** A design refinement was identified in coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to minimize the footprint of the SR14A Build Alternative in the vicinity of Bee Canyon and Pacoima Wash, which would reduce impacts to waters of the U.S. and special-status species habitat. The Authority reduced the temporary and permanent footprint associated with an access road in Bee Canyon. In Pacoima Wash, the Authority reduced the temporary footprint associated with adit SR14-A3. The Final EIR/EIS has been revised to include this design refinement, including engineering changes in the Track Alignment Plans, Roadway and Grade Separation Plans, Grading and Drainage Plans, Utility Relocation Plans, Construction Stating Plans and Tunnel Plans of the PEPD Record Set REV02, and PEPD Record Set Addendum SR14A/E1A/E2A. Final EIR/EIS updates in Section 3.7, Biological and Aquatic Resources, Section 3.8, Hydrology and Water Resources, Section 3.9, Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontological Resources, Section 3.10, Hazardous Materials and Wastes, Section 3.12, Socioeconomics and Communities, Section 3.13, Station Planning, Land Use, and Development, Section 3.14, Agricultural Farmland and Forest Land, and Section 3.15, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space include analysis of the footprint changes.
- **Design Refinement (Portal 9).** Related to the SR14A and Refined SR14 Build Alternatives, the Authority reduced the temporary cut width through the Lang Mine area, where the Nike Missile facility (LA-98) used to be and where contaminated materials are expected to be found. The width at the cut bottom elevation has been reduced from 455 feet to 200 feet (Authority 2024). This refinement results in an overall reduction of total spoils by 2.66 million cubic yards (both hazardous and nonhazardous).<sup>2</sup> This design refinement is reflected in the Final EIR/EIS in Section 3.10, Hazardous Materials and Wastes, and Appendix 2-I, Spoils Disposal Assumptions used for Environmental Analysis.
- **Biological and Aquatic Resources.** In responses to biological resource agency comments (e.g., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife), Section 3.7, Biological and Aquatic Resources, has been revised to provide additional clarification and explanation regarding both project impacts and mitigation requirements specific to special-status plants, animals, aquatic resources, and wildlife movement.
- **Hydrology and Water Resources.** In response to comments, Section 3.8, Hydrology and Water Resources, has been revised to clarify project effects from tunneling on hydrogeologic resources and potential effects to surface habitats.
- **Public Utilities.** In responses to comments, additional evaluation regarding the potential sources of water, particularly during dry and multi-dry years, for construction purposes has been added to Section 3.6, Public Utilities and Energy, including information regarding the availability of recycled water for construction purposes.

A more detailed list of changes is available in Summary Section S.13.

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<sup>2</sup> 2,663,243 = 10,255,651 cubic yards (assumed in the Draft EIR/EIS) – 7, 592,408 (with the refinement)

## What Happens Next?

Following issuance of this Final EIR/EIS, the Authority will consider whether to certify the Final EIR/EIS for compliance with CEQA and whether to approve the Preferred Alternative, along with CEQA findings of fact, a statement of overriding considerations, and a mitigation monitoring and reporting plan. If the Authority certifies the Final EIR/EIS and approves the Preferred Alternative, it will file a Notice of Determination with the State Clearinghouse as required under CEQA. As the federal lead agency pursuant to the NEPA Assignment Memorandum of Understanding, the Authority would also consider whether to issue a Record of Decision. The Record of Decision would describe the project and alternatives considered; describe the selected alternative; make environmental findings and determinations as may be required by the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, and environmental justice pursuant to U.S. Executive Order 12898; and describe required mitigation measures. Separately, FRA would make findings and determinations with regard to air quality conformity under the federal Clean Air Act.

The schedule for final design, construction, and operation would be refined as the project moves closer to the end of the environmental review and preliminary design phase.

### Palmdale to Burbank Milestone Schedule

- September 2022 – Public Release of Draft EIR/EIS
- May 2024 – Public Release of Final EIR/EIS
- Anticipated June 2024 – CEQA Notice of Determination and NEPA Record of Decision

The schedule for final design, construction, and operation would be refined as the project moves closer to the end of the environmental review and preliminary design phase.

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