

APPENDIX 3.14-B: RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF LAND EVALUATION AND SITE ASSESSMENT PURSUANT TO THE FARMLAND PROTECTION POLICY ACT

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This appendix summarizes the results of the farmland land evaluation and site assessment (LESA) for the Central Valley Wye alternatives, which was performed in compliance with Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) requirements. The purpose of the FPPA is to minimize the extent to which federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses (7 U.S.C. § 4201). Specifically, the FPPA requires that federal agencies:

- Use criteria (described in this appendix) to identify and take into account the adverse impacts of their programs on the preservation of farmland
- Consider alternative actions, as appropriate, that could lessen adverse impacts
- Make sure that their programs, to the extent practicable, are compatible with state and units of local government and private programs and policies to protect farmland

Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye Alternatives

The Central Valley Wye alternatives evaluated in the *Merced to Fresno Section: Central Valley Wye Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* (Final Supplemental EIR/EIS) are 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. The four alternatives pass through two counties (Merced and Madera).¹ Calculations and results from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are reported by county. Therefore, the alternative results discuss each county separately.

Land Evaluation and Site Assessment

As required by the FPPA implementing regulations (7 C.F.R. § 658), NRCS staff and high-speed rail system analysts performed LESA calculations using the CPA-106 form (for corridor-type projects) to determine an overall farmland conversion score.² Using alignment information provided by a geographic information system, the NRCS calculated the relative value of each of the alternative corridors as farmland; the NRCS land evaluation calculations and the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program site assessment criteria are presented in Attachment 1, Natural Resources Conservation Service Land Evaluation Explanations and Calculations—Merced County, and Attachment 2, Natural Resources Conservation Service Land Evaluation Explanations and Calculations—Madera County. The NRCS provided separate scores for each county within which the Central Valley Wye alternatives were located (e.g., the SR 152 [North] to Road 13 Wye Alternative was assigned separate scores for Merced County and Madera County).

When the NRCS provided land evaluation scores, analysts calculated site assessment scores for each alternative. Analysts determined the total LESA rating by adding the land evaluation score (up to 100 points) and site assessment scores (up to 160 points) for each county, and weighting scores based on the percentage of the alternative lying within each county (total possible score of 260 points). Analysts then compared the results to thresholds established in the FPPA implementing regulations. After determining total LESA scores, the analysts evaluated farmland impacts and assessed relative suitability of sites for farmland protection.

¹ Although electrical network upgrades associated with the Central Valley Wye alternatives would occur in Stanislaus and Fresno counties, there would be no permanent impacts on agricultural lands in these two counties; therefore, no further discussion is required.

² In the CPA-106 form, note that Corridor A corresponds to the SR 152 (North) to Road 13 Wye Alternative, Corridor B corresponds to the SR 152 (North) to Road 19 Wye Alternative, Corridor C corresponds to the Avenue 21 to Road 13 Wye Alternative, and Corridor D corresponds to the SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends the following:

1. Sites with the highest combined scores be regarded as most suitable for protection and the sites with the lowest scores as least suitable for protection.
2. Sites receiving a total score of less than 160 points not be given further consideration for protection and no additional sites need to be evaluated.
3. Sites receiving scores totaling 160 points or more be given increasingly higher levels of consideration for protection.
4. When making decisions on proposed actions for sites receiving scores totaling 160 or more points, the following should be considered:
 - a. Use of land that is not farmland or use of existing structures
 - b. Alternative sites, locations, and designs that would serve the proposed purpose, but would convert either fewer acres of farmland or other farmland that has a lower relative value
 - c. Special siting requirements of the proposed project and the extent to which an alternative site fails to satisfy the special siting requirements as well as the originally selected site

Farmland Conversion Impacts Results

Table 1 provides land evaluation, site assessment scores, and total LESA scores for the alternatives (analyzed according to the portions of the alternatives in each county). All four alternatives in Merced County had a total LESA score of less than 160 points, while two alternatives in Madera County had total LESA scores equal to or greater than 160 points.

Table 1 Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Table Scores for the Central Valley Wye Alternatives

Alternative	Land Evaluation Information Criterion Relative Value of Farmland to be Converted or Otherwise Affected	Total Corridor Assessment Points	Total Points
Merced County			
SR 152 (North) to Road 13 Wye	45	97	142
SR 152 (North) to Road 19 Wye	49	98	147
Avenue 21 to Road 13 Wye	43	95	138
SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye	47	99	146
Madera County			
SR 152 (North) to Road 13 Wye	65	94	159
SR 152 (North) to Road 19 Wye	67	94	161
Avenue 21 to Road 13 Wye	68	94	162
SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye	65	94	159

Source: NRCS-CPA-106 forms for Merced County (Attachment 1) and Madera County (Attachment 2) (Natural Resources Conservation Service 2016).

The SR 152 (North) to Road 13 Wye Alternative is Corridor A on the NRCS-CPA-106, the SR 152 (North) to Road 19 Wye Alternative is Corridor B on the NRCS-CPA-106, the Avenue 21 to Road 13 Wye Alternative is Corridor C on the NRCS-CPA-106 form, and the SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternative is Corridor D on the NRCS-CPA-106.

Findings

The FPPA does not mandate that a federal agency make a specific decision based on LESA ratings, but provides suitability guidance for protection of farmland from conversion to nonagricultural uses. Based on FPPA guidance, the SR 152 (North) to Road 13 Wye and SR 152 (North) to Road 11 Wye Alternatives both received scores below 160 in Merced and Madera counties and would have the lowest impacts.

1. The Central Valley is primarily devoted to agricultural land uses and is dominated by soils that are well suited for crop production. Therefore, impacts on agricultural lands from the Central Valley Wye alternatives cannot be completely avoided, although impacts have been avoided and minimized to the extent feasible. Section 3.14, Agricultural Farmland, proposes impact avoidance and minimization features to reduce potential impacts on agricultural resources, including administering a farmland consolidation program to facilitate the sale of parcels severed by construction of the Central Valley Wye alternatives to neighboring landowners to provide for continued agricultural use. In addition, the Authority has proposed a mitigation measure to fund the California Department of Conservation Farmland Conservancy Program's work to identify suitable agricultural land for mitigation of impacts and to fund the purchase of agricultural conservation easements from willing sellers.
2. The two program EIR/EISs for the high-speed rail system—the *Final Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System* (Authority and FRA 2005) and the *San Francisco Bay Area (Bay Area) to Central Valley High-Speed Train Final Program EIR/EIS* (Authority and FRA 2008)—and two partially revised and recirculated versions of the Bay Area to Central Valley Program EIR, the *2010 Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Revised Final Program EIR* (Authority and FRA 2010) and the *2012 Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Partially Revised Final Program EIR* (Bay Area to Central Valley Revised Program EIR) (Authority 2012) are collectively referred to as the Program EIR/EIS documents. The Program EIR/EIS documents recognized the potential for impacts on agricultural resources, and some possible alternatives were rejected during the programmatic review because of the extent of impacts on agriculture. Recognizing the need to protect important agricultural resources to the extent possible, the alternatives would follow existing road and railway alignments to the extent feasible.
3. Siting requirements for the high-speed rail system established in the Bay Area to Central Valley Revised Program EIR included a wye between Merced and Fresno and the San Francisco Bay Area (Authority 2012). Following the completion of the decisionmaking process, the decisionmaking agency is requested to return a copy of the farmland conversion calculations to the NRCS for recordkeeping purposes. The Federal Railroad Administration, as the federal decisionmaking agency for the alternatives, is expected to complete the FPPA reporting process, following posting of the Record of Decision.

References

Authority	California High-Speed Rail Authority
C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
U.S.C.	United States Code

- California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority). 2012. *Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train (HST) Partially Revised Final Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR)*. Sacramento, CA. April 2012.
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- California High-Speed Rail Authority and Federal Railroad Administration (Authority and FRA). 2005. *Final Program Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System*. www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/Statewide_Program_Environmental_Reports_EIR_EIS.aspx.
- . 2008. *San Francisco Bay Area (Bay Area) to Central Valley High-Speed Train Final Program EIR/EIS*.
- Natural Resources Conservation Service. 2016. Evaluation of NRCS-CPA-106 forms for Merced County and Madera County. State Office, Davis, CA.