

# NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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From: California Dept. of Transportation, Dist. 8  
464 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, MS-827  
San Bernardino, CA 92401-1400

Subject: **Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**  
*Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.*

Project Title: Interstate 15 Express Lanes Project Southern Extension

Project Location: Along Interstate 15 in the County of Riverside, from State Route 74 in the City of Lake Elsinore (Post Mile [PM] 22.3) to Cajalco Road in the City of Corona (PM 36.8).

Project Description: The proposed project would extend the I-15 Express Lanes currently under construction, an additional 14.5 miles. The proposed new segment would extend from State Route 74 (Central Avenue) (post mile [PM] 22.3) in Lake Elsinore, through the unincorporated Riverside County community of Temescal Valley, to Cajalco Road (PM 36.8) in Corona. The project proposes to increase capacity by adding two tolled express lanes in both directions within the I-15 median to accommodate increasing traffic volumes in southwestern Riverside County. Associated improvements, including advance signage and transition striping, would extend two miles from each end of the project limits to PM 20.3 in the south and PM 38.8 in the north.

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation will be the lead agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible agency is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

A more detailed project description, location map, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials.

A copy of the Initial Study is not attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please direct your response to Shawn Oriaz, Senior Environmental Planner, California Department of Transportation, District 8 – Environmental Studies "C," Telephone (909) 388-7034, at the address shown above or e-mail: 15expsouth@dot.ca.gov Please supply us with the name for a contact person in your agency.

Date 10/11/2019

Signature Shawn Oriaz  
Title SENIOR ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNER

Attachment: Project Information

# Introduction

The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 8 propose to develop a tolled express lane network to meet existing and future travel demand, enhance mobility, and afford greater user flexibility on Interstate 15 (I-15) in Riverside County. The proposed project would extend the I-15 Express Lanes currently under construction, an additional 14.5 miles. The proposed new segment would extend from State Route 74 (Central Avenue) (post mile [PM] 22.3) in Lake Elsinore, through the unincorporated Riverside County community of Temescal Valley, to Cajalco Road (PM 36.8) in Corona. The project proposes to increase capacity by adding two tolled express lanes in both directions within the I-15 median to accommodate increasing traffic volumes in southwestern Riverside County. Associated improvements, including advance signage and transition striping, would extend two miles from each end of the project limits to PM 20.3 in the south and PM 38.8 in the north.

## Project Location and Description

### Local and Regional Setting

The lane improvements within Riverside County would run through the cities of Lake Elsinore and Corona, as well as the unincorporated Riverside County community of Temescal Valley (Figure 1, Project Location). All proposed improvements would be constructed within the existing Caltrans right of way, with the majority of the improvements occurring within the existing I-15 median.

The existing I-15 corridor within the project limits is a six-lane highway with three mixed flow lanes in each direction and paved shoulders. Recent improvements along State Route 91 (SR-91) constructed as part of the SR-91 Corridor Improvement Project (SR-91 CIP) within the City of Corona includes the easterly extension of the 91 Express Lanes from the Orange County Line to just east of I-15 and a direct connector between the eastbound 91 Express Lanes and southbound I-15, as well as a direct connector between northbound I-15 and the westbound 91 Express Lanes. RCTC is also currently constructing tolled express lanes along I-15 between State Route 60 (SR-60) and Cajalco Road, which will provide two tolled express lanes in each direction as part of the I-15 Express Lanes Project (I-15 ELP). Construction of that project began in 2018 and is expected to be completed in the second half of 2020. This proposed I-15 ELPSE would construct tolled express lanes from Corona to Lake Elsinore, which would extend the existing tolled express lane system from Corona south to Lake Elsinore.

The I-15 ELPSE is listed in the financially constrained Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS), which was approved by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) on April 7, 2016, under RTP ID 3160001. The project is also included in the financially constrained 2019 Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) (Project ID: RIV170901, In Western Riverside County – I-15 Express Lanes Southern Extension (generally in the median) from Cajalco Road [PM 36.8] in the City of Corona to approximately SR-74 [PM 22.3] in the City of Lake Elsinore [PPNO 3009X]).

## Physical Setting and Surrounding Land Uses

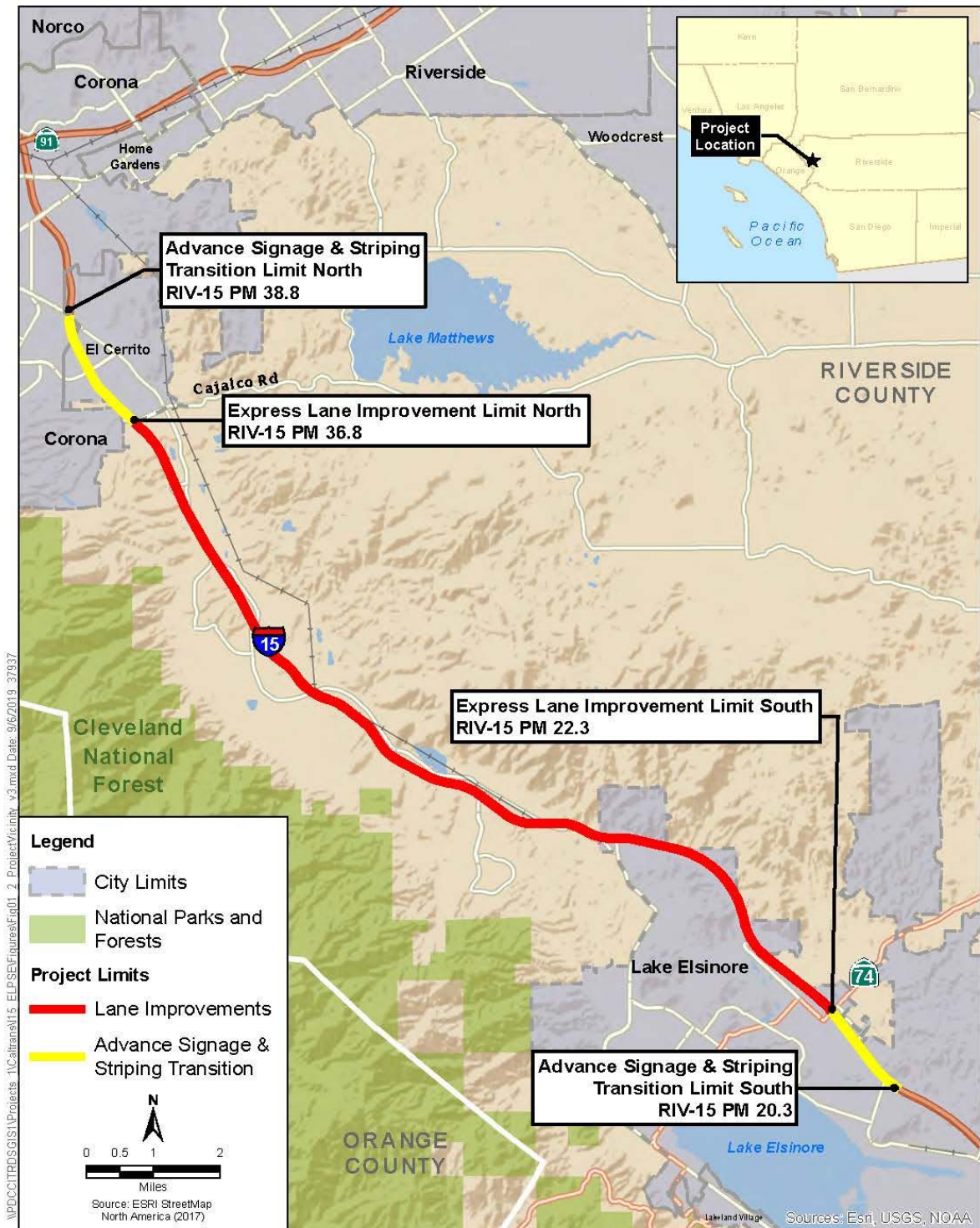
Within the project limits, from State Route 74 (SR-74) in the south to Cajalco Road in the north, the I-15 corridor traverses valleys and rolling terrain bounded by the Temescal Mountains to the east and the Santa Ana Mountains to the west. There are a number of drainages in the area, eight of which are within the proposed project limits. The elevation in the area of the project varies from approximately 1,320 feet at the southern limits of the project, near SR-74, to 900 feet at the northern limits of the project, near Cajalco Road.

Current land uses along the project limits vary greatly depending upon location along the corridor. Industrial, commercial, and residential developments abut the I-15 right of way through Lake Elsinore, the unincorporated Riverside County community of Temescal Valley, and Corona. Commercial developments tend to be concentrated along or near the on/off-ramp entrances and exits, while the residential developments tend to be located between the on/off-ramps. In addition to the developed areas, undeveloped commercial, industrial, and residential parcels, hills, and/or floodplains coexist within the developed areas. In some of the unincorporated parts of Riverside County, between the city boundaries, there are large open space areas with native habitat that exist alongside the I-15 corridor, within the project limits.

## Project Purpose

The primary purpose of the proposed project is to improve traffic operations and travel time reliability, expand the region's tolled express lanes network, and provide a new transportation option for motorists in southwestern Riverside County as summarized below:

- Improve traffic operations and travel times.
- Expand travel choice through carpooling and transit with the addition of tolled express lanes.
- Increase travel time reliability and mobility options.
- Accommodate long-term congestion management.
- Provide a cost-effective mobility solution.
- Expand the tolled express lane network in the region.



**Figure 1**  
**Project Location**  
**Interstate 15 Express Lanes Project Southern Extension**

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## Additional Project Features

In addition to the features described above, the proposed project includes additional components, such as retaining walls, noise barriers, stormwater runoff treatment devices, and bridge widening (Table 2), in order to accommodate the tolled express lanes. The proposed project is planned to be constructed within the existing Caltrans right of way.

**Table 2. Proposed Bridge Improvements**

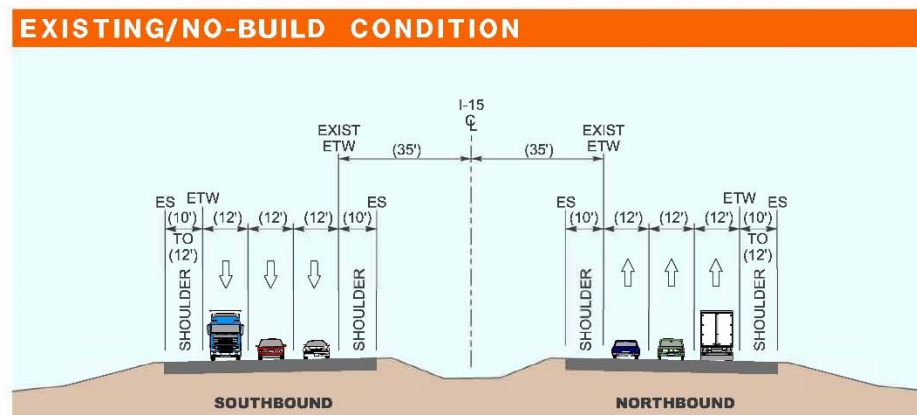
<b>Existing Bridge Name</b>	<b>Proposed Improvement</b>
Gavilan Wash	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Lake Street Undercrossing	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Temescal Canyon Road Overhead	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Temescal Wash	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Horsethief Canyon Road Undercrossing	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Horsethief Canyon Wash	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Indian Wash	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Indian Truck Trail Undercrossing	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Temescal Canyon Road Undercrossing	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Mayhew Wash	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Coldwater Wash	Inside widening
Temescal Canyon Road Undercrossing	Inside widening between existing NB & SB decks
Brown Canyon Wash	Inside widening (outside widening may be required)
Weirick Road Undercrossing	Inside widening (outside widening may be required)
Bedford Wash	Inside widening (outside widening may be required)

## Ingress and Egress Locations

The project would include multiple entrance and exit points to access the tolled express lane facility. Access into the tolled express lanes would be separated from the general purpose lanes with delineators and would be restricted for a specific length. Locations where vehicles are permitted to enter the tolled express lanes are termed “ingress” locations; locations where vehicles may leave the tolled express lanes are referred to as “egress” locations.

## No-Build Alternative

Under the No-Build Alternative, the I-15 ELPSE would not be constructed. This alternative does not meet the project purpose and need; however, it would not preclude the construction of future improvements or general maintenance activities. Even without construction of the proposed I-15 ELPSE, limited improvements on I-15 associated with the approved I-15 ELP are being constructed for opening in 2020. Describing and analyzing a No-Build Alternative helps both decision-makers and the public to compare the impacts of approving the proposed project with the consequences of not approving the proposed project.



## Scoping Process

Per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), agencies are required to analyze and document potential project impacts to environmental resources. Preparation of environmental studies and impact assessments are required. Circulation of these documents to other agencies and the public for comment is necessary before a decision is made regarding the approval and implementation of the proposed project. It has been determined that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared for the proposed project to comply with CEQA/NEPA.

## Probable Environmental Effects

The proposed project could result in environmental effects on the following resources, which will be fully evaluated in the EIR/EA:

- Aesthetics/Visual
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Community Impacts
- Cultural Resources
- Energy Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Paleontological Resources
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials



- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Traffic/Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire
- Cumulative Impacts

**Permits and Approvals:** Based on the probable effects anticipated as a result of the proposed project, the following federal and state permits and approvals could be required.

- Consistency Determination of the DBESP by USFWS and CDFW
- Section 401 Permit issued by the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Section 404 Permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement by CDFW
- Section 106 Finding of Effect by the California Office of Historic Preservation
- Section 4(f) De Minimis Finding, which is issued by the California Department of Transportation

## Public Involvement during the Environmental Process

There are several ways to get involved with the environmental process. Opportunities for public involvement include:

- Review and respond to the Notice of Preparation (NOP), which is available for review at the following public offices:
  - California Department of Transportation, District 8, 464 W, 4<sup>th</sup> Street, San Bernardino, CA 92401-1400
  - Riverside County Transportation Commission, 4080 Lemon Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Riverside, CA 92501
  - Lake Elsinore City Hall, 130 South Main Street, Lake Elsinore, CA 92530
  - Corona City Hall, 400 S. Vicentia Avenue, Corona, CA 92882
  - Lake Elsinore Library, 600 W. Graham, Lake Elsinore, California 92530
  - El Cerrito Branch Library, 7581 Rudell Road, Corona, California 92881
- Attend scoping meetings. The following provides information on the meetings:
  - Temescal Valley Scoping Meeting: Tuesday, November 12, 2019 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Temescal Valley Elementary School, 22950 Claystone Avenue, Corona, CA 92883

- Corona Scoping Meeting: Wednesday, November 13, 2019 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Eagle Glen Golf Club, 1800 Eagle Glen Pkwy, Corona, CA 92883
- Lake Elsinore Scoping Meeting: Thursday, November 14, 2019 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Ortega High School, 520 Chaney Street, Lake Elsinore, CA, 92530
- Visit [rctc.org/15expsouth](http://rctc.org/15expsouth) for a public scoping “Online Meeting.” The online meeting will feature the same exhibits as the in-person meetings and will offer an opportunity to submit comments throughout the public scoping period.
- Review and comment of the draft EIR/EA when circulated for public review.
- Attend public hearing(s)/meeting(s) regarding the draft EIR/EA
- Review responses to comments on the Final EIR/EA

Contact information about the proposed project and the EIR/EA:

Shawn Oriaz, Senior Environmental Planner  
California Department of Transportation, District 8  
Environmental Studies “C”  
464 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, MS 827  
San Bernardino, CA 92401-1400  
(909) 388-7034

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