

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION
OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
AND PUBLIC SCOPING PERIOD FOR THE
STOCKTON DIAMOND GRADE SEPARATION PROJECT**

Date: August 19, 2020

To: Governor's Office of Planning and Research/State Clearinghouse Unit,
Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, and Interested Parties

From: San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission

Lead Agency: San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission
949 East Channel Street
Stockton CA 95202

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Project Title: Stockton Diamond Grade Separation

Subject: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report in accordance with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15082(a) and Notice of Public Scoping Period

INTRODUCTION

Notice is hereby given that the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (SJRRRC), as California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency, will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Stockton Diamond Grade Separation project (Project) and will hold three virtual public scoping meetings to receive comments on the scope of the EIR, as detailed below. This Notice of Preparation (NOP)/Notice of Public Scoping Period (Notice) is also available online at StocktonDiamond.com.

SJRRRC has determined that an EIR must be prepared for the Project prior to making any final decision regarding whether to approve the Project, in accordance with CEQA. The EIR will cover environmental topics as defined in CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G. The purpose of the project-specific EIR will be to assess potential physical environmental effects of the proposed Project, to identify ways to minimize or avoid significant effects, and to describe and analyze alternatives to the proposed Project. SJRRRC has issued this Notice to Responsible Agencies, Trustee Agencies, federal agencies, transportation planning agencies, agencies with transportation facilities that may be affected, and other interested parties. Responsible Agencies are those public agencies that have a role in approving or carrying out the proposed Project.

Concurrent with the start of the CEQA process, SJRRC is coordinating with the California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) on initiating the preparation of an Environmental Assessment under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The scoping comment period described in this NOP will also serve to inform the scope of the analysis performed under NEPA. The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being or have been carried out by the State of California pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated July 23, 2019, and executed by the Federal Railroad Administration and the State of California.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND SCOPING

A 45-day public scoping comment period will **begin on August 19, 2020** and **end on October 3, 2020**. During this scoping comment period, SJRRC encourages you to learn more about the project and to provide your input into the scope of the project and environmental review under both CEQA and NEPA. Meaningful public engagement throughout the Stockton Diamond Grade Separation planning process is vital so that project solutions serve our regional needs.

Virtual Public Scoping Meetings

For your convenience, and to allow participation in a safe environment while social distancing, three virtual public meetings will be held during the project's 45-day public scoping period. Please join us at one of the following meetings to learn about the project, interact with project team members, ask questions, and submit formal comments.

For additional accessibility preferences, please call (209) 235-0133 or email info@stocktondiamond.com. For the deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired (TDD) users may contact the California Relay Service TTY and/or Voice Line at 1-800-735-2929, or 711.

| ENGLISH MEETINGS: | | SPANISH MEETING |
|---|---|---|
| Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020 6-7:30 p.m. | Wednesday, Sept. 16, 2020 2-3:30 p.m. | Thursday, Sept. 17, 2020 6-7:30 p.m. |
| WebEx: bit.ly/SD_Public_Meeting1 | WebEx: bit.ly/SD_Public_Meeting2 | WebEx: bit.ly/SD_Public_Meeting3 |
| Dial-in #: 408-418-9388 Code: 146 995 3665 | Dial-in #: 408-418-9388 Code: 146 662 8153 | Dial-in #: 408-418-9388 Code: 146 356 6775 |

Public Comment Submittal

We value your input and look forward to hearing from you. For your convenience, we have a number of ways for you to provide comments at any time during the 45-day comment period ending at 5 p.m. PDT on **October 3, 2020**. Comments can be submitted in the following ways:

- Direct Mail:
Public Outreach
2379 Gateway Oaks Drive, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95833

- Email: info@stocktondiamond.com
- Website and Online Virtual Meeting comment submittal: www.StocktonDiamond.com
- Telephone recording: 209-235-0133

If you are an authorized representative of a Responsible Agency or a Trustee Agency, the SJRRC needs to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is relevant to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed Project. Your agency will need to use the EIR when considering whether to permit or otherwise approve the Project. Comments received from State of California agencies should address: 1) whether the agency will be a Responsible Agency or a Trustee Agency for the Project; and 2) if the agency is a Responsible Agency, the significant environmental issues and reasonable alternatives and mitigation measures which the Responsible Agency will need to have explored in the analysis. We will also need the name, address, telephone number, and email address of the contact person for your agency.

PROJECT LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The Stockton Diamond Grade Separation Project is a critical element in the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (SJRRC) vision to expand intercity and commuter rail service between the San Joaquin Valley and both Sacramento and the Bay Area. SJRRC proposes to replace an at-grade crossing of the Union Pacific Railroad (UP) and Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF) rail lines with a railroad grade separation.

The proposed project is located in City of Stockton in San Joaquin County, California. **Figure 1** provides an overview of the project area. The State Route (SR) 4 Crosstown Freeway, which is grade separated from the UP tracks with an overpass, is located to the north of the Diamond. The BNSF and UP main lines and the Stockton Diamond wye connections cross several city streets at grade, creating both access and safety constraints and opportunities for the local community.

With the Project, the UP tracks would be grade-separated from the BNSF tracks. Alternative 1 which involves UP main tracks flyover of the BNSF main tracks, while maintaining BNSF tracks at grade, is the preferred Build Alternative. Alternative 2 which would elevate the BNSF tracks over the UP tracks was evaluated and eliminated from further consideration due to the potential for greater significant impacts. The UP flyover alignment is shifted east of the existing Fresno Subdivision main tracks, predominately within existing UP right-of-way. Based on coordination with UP, the flyover vertical grade has been reduced by extending the main track south of Charter Way, which encroaches on the UP Stockton yard. At the north end, the flyover alignment stays on tangent under the SR 4 Crosstown Freeway, and conforms to the existing Fresno Subdivision near Weber Avenue.

Alternative 1 includes a proposed Wye Track in the southeast quadrant of the Diamond, to provide a direct connection from the UP Stockton Yard to the BNSF Stockton Subdivision. Several design variations are under consideration for the UP Stockton yard connection to the flyover. Impacts to UP's yard vary, depending on the proposed grade of the yard track connection. Design variations are also being evaluated at the alignment's north end, which

provides connection options between the ACE, Amtrak, and UP trains as they join the main tracks or make train movements to the wye and adjacent freight rail yard(s).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Stockton Diamond Grade Separation is to:

- Provide additional capacity for passenger rail service between and among the San Joaquin Valley, Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Silicon Valley;
- Provide for an uninterrupted flow of rail through the crossing, which will improve freight movements and lead to lower costs for freight shipping, reduced delays, and a decrease in fuel consumption for idling locomotives;
- Reduce delays in freight trains serving the Port of Stockton;
- Improve air quality in the Stockton Diamond project area;
- Reduce delays for pedestrians and motorists at key local road crossings; and
- Enhance regional transportation operations and rail connectivity within the Northern California megaregion.

The Stockton Diamond Grade Separation is needed because:

- Stockton Diamond is the busiest, most congested at-grade railway junction in California;
- The current, at-grade configuration of the Stockton Diamond results in significant delays to BNSF and UPRR trains, including those serving the Port of Stockton, and also causes delays to ACE and Amtrak San Joaquins service, as a direct result of conflicts with freight trains at the Stockton Diamond;
- Delays due to the current configuration prevent the ability of ACE and Amtrak to continue to expand their respective commuter/passenger rail service;
- Train delays and congestion create delays for vehicles at multiple local road crossings; and
- Multiple at-grade crossings provide opportunity for vehicle/rail/non-motorized conflicts.

With the proposed Project, the construction of the grade separation would reduce congestion and allow for an uninterrupted flow of rail traffic through the crossing, improving freight mobility and leading to lower costs for freight shipping, reduced delays, and a decrease in fuel consumption for idling locomotives. This increase in throughput and velocity of freight trains translates to cost savings for freight movement, allowing for continued growth and improved efficiency throughout the region. Reducing the current operational challenges between BNSF and UP at the Stockton Diamond will decrease the total freight and switch train delay time by 248,818 and 8,338 hours, respectively, through the 30-year analysis period. In addition to improving freight movement, the Project will also benefit the ACE and San Joaquins passenger rail services' on-time performance. The Project will not only help reduce an estimated 4,783,804 passenger hours of delay, it will also facilitate the expansion of ACE and San Joaquins services and enable more freight and passenger trains to pass through the Diamond and allow them to travel at faster speeds.

The Project Goals and Objectives are to:

- Reduce Freight and Passenger rail delays and associated congestion;
- Accommodate planned freight and passenger rail growth, supporting ACE and San Joaquins Valley Rail;

- Maintain key community connections;
- Improve multimodal access;
- Provide local and regional environmental and economic benefits; and
- Address safety by closure and enhancements at key railroad crossings.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS AND REQUIRED APPROVALS

SJRRC recognizes that the proposed Project may have a significant effect on the environment and that an EIR is the appropriate document for compliance with CEQA. As part of the preparation of the EIR, a CEQA Initial Study will be prepared to focus the analysis and identify those resources that will require more expansive analysis; the Initial Study will include an initial assessment of all environmental topic areas as defined in CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G as shown below. The EIR will expand upon the analyses performed in the Initial Study to meet CEQA regulatory requirements and will identify practicable mitigation measures to reduce any potentially significant impacts to a less than significant level, as necessary.

Environmental Resources to be included in CEQA analysis include:

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|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Aesthetics | • Greenhouse Gas Emissions | • Public Services |
| • Agriculture and Forestry Resources | • Hazards & Hazardous Materials | • Recreation |
| • Air Quality | • Hydrology/Water Quality | • Transportation |
| • Biological Resources | • Land Use/Planning | • Tribal Cultural Resources |
| • Cultural Resources | • Mineral Resources | • Utilities/Service Systems |
| • Energy | • Noise | • Wildfire |
| • Geology/Soils | • Population/Housing | |

Field studies and/or quantitative analysis are proposed at this time for the following environmental topics, since potential significant adverse impacts or project benefits may result from implementation of the proposed Project:

- **Noise and Vibration:** The EIR will include an analysis of the noise and vibration impacts to nearby sensitive receptors that may result from implementation of the Project.
- **Emissions (Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas) Analysis:** The EIR will include an analysis of the Project construction and operational air quality and greenhouse gas emissions using the latest emissions models.
- **Transportation and Circulation:** The EIR will include a detailed analysis of the potential transportation impacts and feasible mitigations to minimize impacts to automobile, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation in the Project area.
- **Visual Quality and Aesthetics:** The EIR will include an assessment of the visual impacts of the Project on the nearby communities.
- **Community Impacts:** The EIR will include an assessment of the impacts of the Project on the residences and workers in the Project area, as well as the public facilities and services in their communities.
- **Biological Resources:** The EIR will include an analysis of the biological resources at and around the site and the potential impact of the proposed Project on these resources.
- **Cultural Resources:** The EIR will include an assessment of the cultural significance of archaeological and historic architectural resources within the Project study area, the impact of modification or removal of these resources, and measures that could reduce any impacts to less-than-significant levels.

- Geology/Soils (including Paleontological Resources) – The EIR will include an assessment of the topographical conditions of the Project site, including geology, soils, seismicity, and paleontology, as well as any potential of the Project on these resources.
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials: The EIR will include an Initial Site Assessment of the locations within which ground disturbances would occur and there would be the potential for impacts from hazardous and contaminated wastes and materials on the proposed Project.
- Hydrology/Water Quality: The EIR will include an assessment of the impacts of the Project on the hydrology and water quality of the Mormon Slough and other potential water features in the Project area.

The Project is anticipated to require the following State and local approvals:

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife – California Endangered Species Act compliance
- California State Water Resources Control Board - Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act Water Discharge Requirement (WDR) & Clean Water Act Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) - General Construction Stormwater Permit Waste Discharge Requirements
- Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board – Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification
- Central Valley Flood Protection Board Encroachment Permit
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution District– Clean Air Act compliance
- San Joaquin County local permits

As part of a concurrent NEPA process, additional approvals or permits from Federal agencies may be required, including compliance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, Section 14 of the Rivers and Harbors Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966, and Section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act.

INFORMATION

Documents relating to the Project are available for review online at www.StocktonDiamond.com.

Kevin L. Sheridan, Director, Capital Projects
San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission/San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority

Date: August 19, 2020

Attachment: Figure 1, Project Location Map