



Project Name: Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement
District-County-Route-Post Mile: 06-TUL-99-PM 25.2-30.6
EA: 06-48950
EFIS ID Number: 0614000040
SCH#2021040498

California Department of Transportation Findings

For

PROPOSES TO WIDEN STATE ROUTE 99 FROM FOUR LANES TO SIX LANES (BETWEEN POST MILES 25.2 AND POST MILE 30.6) AND REBUILD THE PAIGE AVENUE INTERCHANGE IN TULARE COUNTY.

The following information is presented to comply with State California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15091) and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21, California Code of Regulations, Division 2, Chapter 11, Section 1501 et seq.). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following effects have been identified in the Environmental Impact Report as resulting from the project. Effects found not to be significant have not been included.

Vehicle Miles Traveled

Adverse Environmental Effects:

Senate Bill 743 required changes to the guidelines implementing CEQA with using vehicle miles traveled as the most appropriate metric to evaluate a project's transportation impacts. The project will induce annual vehicle miles traveled by 19,759,200.

Findings

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environment effect as identified in the final environmental document.

Statement of Facts

Mitigation measures to address Vehicle Miles Traveled impacts have been incorporated into the project. The measures would be implemented to address impacts associated with increasing capacity on State Route 99 within the project limits.

Section 2.1.9 of the Final Environmental Impact Report, Vehicle Miles Traveled mitigation can be achieved through modification of the project to reduce the amount of Vehicle Miles Traveled generated or by providing transportation improvements on-system or off-system.

The following mitigation will be incorporated into the project using Cooperative Agreements with local partners and collaboration with local agencies.

Tulare County Regional Transit Agency Vanpool Program

Caltrans would provide \$432,000 in funding to subsidize the vanpool program at the Tulare County Regional Transit Agency for five years. Caltrans' funding would subsidize the addition of 30 vanpools to the existing program in the first year and 15 vanpools to the program in the second year.

Increase Frequency on Tulare County Area Transit Route 20

Caltrans would provide five years of funding in the amount of \$1,500,000 to subsidize the round-trip bus service for Route 20 on the Tulare County Area Transit.

Increase Frequency on Tulare County Area Transit Route 40

Caltrans would provide five years of funding in the amount of \$1,500,000 to subsidize the round-trip bus service for Route 40 on the Tulare County Area Transit.

Increase Frequency on Tulare County Area Transit Route 11x

Caltrans would provide five years of funding of \$1,250,000 to subsidize round-trip bus service for Route 11x on the Tulare County Area Transit.

Comprehensive Corridor Management Plan

Caltrans Districts 6, 10, and 3 will collaborate with local agencies in the San Joaquin Valley to prepare a Comprehensive Multimodal Corridor Plan for State Route 99 through the Valley. The Comprehensive Multimodal Corridor Plan will include the prioritization of identifying managed-lane and mode shift opportunities in the corridor that will lead to reduced VMT. Implementation of a VMT-reducing managed lane strategy through the corridor (or parts of the corridor that include this project) could eliminate about 80 percent of the VMT concern from the project because the only relevant capacity increase will result from the removal of trucks from the two general-purpose lanes. Since the draft environmental document, the VMT-reducing managed lane strategy has been identified as the preferred strategy to reduce significant VMT impacts. A project to establish a VMT-reducing managed lane will be programmed prior to project construction closeout in 2026.

Before the start of the State Planning and Research contract, Caltrans District 6 has done preliminary work toward the investigation and implementation of a managed lane in the project vicinity. Preliminary work includes:

- Review of the California Vehicle Code regarding converting existing general-purpose lanes to managed lanes, such as truck-only lanes.
- Coordination with district management to identify and prepare a project delivery schedule for a State Highway Operation and Protection Program project to be initiated for a VMT-reducing managed lane project.

The California Vehicle Code does not prevent the reallocation of a general-purpose lane to a managed lane using changes to signage and striping. Vehicle Code 21655 gives the Department of Transportation the authority to designate preferential highway lanes, allows the Department of Transportation to provide instructions to motorists on the use of those lanes, and states that a driver cannot drive on those lanes unless they follow the Department of Transportation's instructions. The rules allow the Department of Transportation to mark vehicle lanes as truck lanes. The California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (Section 2B.31) should be used for sign guidance, and changes in the California Vehicle Code may be needed for enforcement.

Below is a proposed schedule for a VMT-reducing managed lane project. Two assumptions have been made in the development of the proposed schedule and are listed below.

- 1) The project will mainly be signage and delineation for lane conversion.
- 2.) Approval will be granted to amend the project into the 2024 State Highway Operation and Protection Program.

The proposed schedule is as follows:

- VMT-reducing managed lane strategy will be provided to Asset Management in June 2024
- Asset Management will add the mitigation project to the Ten-Year Project Book in July 2024
- K-phase will open for a VMT-reducing managed lane project, and work will commence on the Project Initiation Document in November 2024
- Project Initiation Document will be completed in May 2025
- Project will be amended into the 2024 State Highway Operation and Protection Program in August 2025
- Project Approval and Environmental Document phase will begin in September 2025

- VMT-reducing managed lane project will be ready to list for advertisement in the fiscal year 2026/2027 or 2027/2028 and will be funded in the 2024 State Highway Operation and Protection Program.

A preliminary traffic operational analysis was performed for a segment of State Route 99 within the limits of the Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement project. The analysis showed that the facility would operate at an acceptable Level of Service with the implementation of a truck-only lane. The analysis assumed an existing condition that included the improvements from the Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement project to be completed by 2029. The project proposes to widen the existing 4-lane freeway to a 6-lane facility on State Route 99 from post mile 25.2 to post mile 30.6 in Tulare County.

The segment of the Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement project with the highest forecast volumes was selected for this preliminary analysis. Level of Service analysis was used to describe operational conditions and forecasted weekday peak hour traffic volumes for the Year 2047 conditions were used. Highway Capacity Software was used to analyze the Level of Service for freeway segments. The results indicate that before the implementation of truck-only lanes, the Level of Service with three mixed-flow lanes would be 'C.' After the implementation of a truck-only lane, the Level of Service in the two mixed-flow lanes and the single truck-only lane would be 'C' and 'D,' respectively.

The California Statewide Travel Demand Model will be used as a tool in the assessment of operations and VMT reducing strategies on an interregional and statewide basis. Preliminary work has been done to modify the transportation network used by the California Statewide Travel Demand Model. The 2050 base Travel Demand Model network was used to create a network with managed lanes on State Route 99 across District 6. This updated network includes parallel segments to all the segments across the district with coding that reflects a managed lane. The parallel segments connect to all the nodes of the existing 2050 network. This work has been done in collaboration with the California Department of Transportation Statewide Modeling Branch in the Division of Transportation Planning, Office of Data Analytics Services.

Caltrans intends to fully mitigate VMT by increasing the frequency on transit routes and vanpool program. However, there is the possibility of an unforeseen event that would prevent the mitigation from being completed because Caltrans is relying on a third party to implement the mitigation. A Statement of Overriding Considerations has been prepared to document the mitigation strategy described above.

Cumulative Air Quality Impacts to Environmental Justice:

Adverse Environmental Effects:

Adverse impacts to environmental justice populations in the socioeconomic study area would occur from cumulative impacts to air quality described in the 2022 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainability Communities Strategy Environmental Impact Report, the proposed project's incremental increase in those emissions would be cumulatively considerable and would contribute to already identified significant cumulative effects.

Findings

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environment effect as identified in the final environmental document.

Statement of Facts

Mitigation measures outlined for the Tulare Six-Lane and Paige Avenue Interchange Improvement project includes providing safer pedestrian crossings along Paige Avenue at Laspina Avenue and Blackstone Avenue by removing six ramp crossings, enhanced pedestrian pathways, and shoulders to accommodate bicycle lanes. Improve or add pedestrian facilities such as crosswalks, sidewalks, and traffic calming devices (the roundabouts will calm and slow traffic down). Improve or add bicycle lanes that were not present.

The 2022 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainability Communities Strategy Environmental Impact Report (Section 4.3 Air Quality) outlines mitigation and minimization measures that will be incorporated by Tulare County.

- Locate sensitive receptors more than 500 feet of a freeway, 500 feet of urban roads with 100,000 vehicles/day, or rural roads with 50,000 vehicles/day.
- Locate sensitive receptors more than 1,000 feet of a major diesel rail service or railyards. Where adequate buffer cannot be implemented, implement the following: ▫ Install air filtration (as part of mechanical ventilation systems or stand-alone air cleaners) to indoor reduce pollution exposure for residents and other sensitive populations in buildings that are close to transportation network improvement projects. Use air filtration devices rated MERV-13 or higher.
- Plant trees and/or vegetation suited to trapping roadway air pollution and/or sound walls between sensitive receptors and the pollution source. The vegetation buffer should be thick, with full coverage from the ground to the top of the canopy Install higher efficacy public street and exterior lighting.
- Incorporate design measures and infrastructure that promotes safe and efficient use of alternative modes of transportation (e.g., neighborhood electric vehicles, bicycles) pedestrian access, and public transportation use. Such measures may include incorporation of electric vehicle charging stations, bike lanes, bicycle-friendly intersections, and bicycle parking and storage facilities
- Incorporate design measures that promote ride sharing programs (e.g., by designating a certain percentage of parking spaces for ride sharing vehicles, designating adequate passenger loading and unloading and waiting areas for ride sharing vehicles, and providing a web site or message board for coordinating rides.

Greenhouse Gas:

Adverse Environmental Effect

The project would increase greenhouse gas emissions and, therefore, conflict with current air quality plans that require the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Without established regulatory, industry-wide methods to accurately measure whether the project features and measures would reduce emissions enough to mitigate the project impacts, Caltrans must determine that the project impacts for increased greenhouse gas emissions are significant and unavoidable.

Findings

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environment effect as identified in the final environmental document.

Statement of Facts:

The following measures would be incorporated into the project and would help to reduce construction-related emissions:

- All construction contracts include Caltrans Standard Specifications related to air quality. Sections 7-1.02A and 7-1.02C, Emissions Reduction, require contractors to comply with all laws applicable to the project and to certify they are aware of and will comply with all Air Resources Board emission reduction regulations. Section 14-9.02, Air Pollution Control, requires contractors to comply with all air pollution control rules, regulations, ordinances, and statutes. Certain common regulations, such as equipment idling restrictions, that reduce construction vehicle emissions also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Truck and equipment idling is limited to five minutes for delivery and dump trucks and other diesel-powered equipment (with some exceptions).
- Schedule truck trips outside of peak morning and evening commute hours.
- Encourage improved fuel efficiency from construction equipment by maintaining equipment in proper working condition, using the right size equipment for the job, and using equipment with new technologies.
- Use recycled water for construction.

In addition to the onsite improvements on Paige Avenue, between Blackstone Avenue and Laspina Street, Caltrans is coordinating with project stakeholders to implement additional sidewalks to reduce the gaps between existing sidewalks and connect adjacent residential developments. They are located:

- East of the Paige Avenue and Laspina St intersection, sidewalks will extend on both sides of Paige Avenue to connect to existing sidewalks on the east for approximately 900 feet.

- North of Paige Avenue and Laspina Street intersection, a sidewalk will connect to the existing sidewalk on the west side of Laspina Street. On the east side of Laspina street, an 800 feet long sidewalk will connect to the existing sidewalk. However, this will be coordinated with the City of Tulare during the Plan, Specification, and Estimate phase of the project to ensure to ensure the sidewalk is consistent with the development plan for the existing vacant lot.
- South of the Paige Avenue and Laspina Street intersection, sidewalk will be placed on both sides of Laspina Street for approximately 800 feet.
- On the north and south sides of the Blackstone Street and Paige Avenue intersection, sidewalks will connect to existing sidewalks.
- At the westside of Blackstone Street and Paige Avenue Intersection, the existing sidewalk on the southside of Paige Avenue to K Street will extend for approximately 2,500 feet. However, this will be coordinated with the City of Tulare during the Plan, Specification, and Estimate phase of the project to ensure to ensure the sidewalk is consistent with the development plan for the existing vacant lot.

for _____
Diana Gomez
District Director(or Designee)

Philip Vallejo

Signature

12/28/2023

Date