Notice of Preparation

To: _____

From: Caltrans, District 4

P.O. Box 23660, MS-8B, Oakland, CA 94623-0660

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

Caltrans will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project identified below. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which 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.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the Initial Study (☐ is ☒ 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 send your response to **Juliane Smith, Associate Environmental Planner** at the address shown above. We will need the name for a contact person in your agency.

Project Title: SR 17 Corridor Congestion Relief

Project Applicant, if any: Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority

Date 5/5/2022 Signature Juliane Smith

Title Associate Environmental Planner

Telephone (510) 926-0426

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment

SUPPLEMENTAL PROJECT INFORMATION:

Introduction

The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), in cooperation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and Town of Los Gatos, proposes the State Route (SR) 17 Corridor Congestion Relief Project (Project) to construct improvements on SR 17 and to upgrade the SR 17/SR 9 interchange in the Town of Los Gatos. Figure 1 shows the Project location.

Purpose and Need

Purpose

The purpose of the Project is to:

- Improve mainline traffic operations and reduce congestion on SR 17;
- Reduce cut-through traffic in the Town of Los Gatos;
- Improve SR 17/SR 9 interchange operations; and
- Improve active transportation (bicycle and pedestrian) mobility and connectivity in the Town of Los Gatos across SR 17.

Need

- As the primary highway connection between western Santa Clara County and Santa Cruz County, SR 17 is highly congested during peak travel periods and this congestion is anticipated to increase with future growth in the region. Travel demand between residential land uses in Santa Cruz County and jobs in Santa Clara County results in congestion that degrades operations on SR 17.
- Congestion on SR 17 and SR 85 encourages traffic to exit the freeways, cut-through the Town of Los Gatos, and utilize local streets to bypass the routinely congested segment of SR 17. The cut-through traffic degrades operations on local streets. This problem is a recurring condition and occurs most frequently in the late spring and summer months of May to October (both weekday and weekend).
- Regional growth and subsequent travel demand have rendered the existing cloverleaf configuration at the SR 17/ SR 9 interchange obsolete. Short weaving distances between successive loop on-ramps and off-ramps in this interchange create a bottleneck effect caused by vehicles weaving to enter and exit SR 17.
- Bicycles and pedestrians traveling along SR 9 must cross high speed ramp termini at the SR 17/SR 9 interchange. These locations create conflicts between free-flowing traffic and pedestrians and bicyclists. In addition, the lack of multimodal facilities and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant sidewalks, curb ramps, and crosswalks on SR 9 discourage the use of active transportation travel modes.

Project Description

The Project would widen the existing SR 17 corridor from Lark Avenue to SR 9 and modify the existing SR 17/SR 9 interchange by widening the on-ramps and off-ramps, removing loop off-ramps (and possibly removal of the loop on-ramps), and realigning on-ramps and off-ramps. The Project ties into other local projects such as the Los Gatos Creek Trailhead Connector to SR 9 Project and the SR 17 Bicycle & Pedestrian Overcrossing Project at Blossom Hill Road. The Project features are described below.

SR 17 Widening

On SR 17, a third lane would be added in both the southbound and northbound directions between Lark Avenue and SR 9, with the widening primarily toward the existing center median. A new median barrier would be constructed in compliance with Caltrans Standards. The merging lane from Lark Avenue in the southbound direction would be extended, creating an auxiliary lane (fourth lane) for approximately 2,500 feet.

The existing 1,700-foot auxiliary off-ramp lane to Lark Avenue would be extended in the northbound direction, requiring minor widening at the right shoulder for approximately 800 feet. Roadside safety improvements at the Blossom Hill Road overcrossing would be included to protect the structure in place. Retaining walls would be constructed in select locations to minimize right of way impacts, including impacts to structures. A barrier at the right shoulder would be constructed to allow some existing trees within the clear recovery zone to remain.

SR 9 Overcrossing Structure

On SR 9, the reconstructed interchange would result in realignment and widening of freeway on-ramps and off ramps, removal of loop off-ramps (and possibly removal of the loop on-ramps), and the realignment of on-ramps and off-ramps. The existing SR 9 overcrossing structure, which includes one through lane and one merge lane in each direction, would be replaced with a new structure that includes four through lanes (two in the eastbound direction, two in the westbound direction). The new overcrossing structure is anticipated to have two-spans. Traffic signals would be added at the squared-up intersections of the freeway ramps and SR 9. The existing traffic signals at Alberto Way and University Avenue would be upgraded with signal interconnect infrastructure connecting this intersection with others along the SR 9 corridor.

The Project would improve active transportation mobility and connectivity along the SR 9 corridor by adding bicycle and pedestrian facilities for users travelling between locations on opposite sides of SR 17. The Project would also improve traffic operations and relieve congestion on SR 17 between the SR 17/Lark Avenue and SR 17/SR 9 interchanges by implementing the following project features:

- Modify on- and off-ramps at the SR 17/SR 9 interchange;
- Modify SR 17 mainline lanes and shoulder to improve lane-drop transitions and reduce bottlenecks between Lark Avenue and the SR 17/SR 9 interchange;
- Implement and/or interface with advanced transportation technology solutions such as advanced traffic signal control systems implemented by the Town of Los Gatos and adaptive ramp metering systems; and
- Implement “complete streets” features to improve bicyclist and pedestrian travel and other modes of active transportation.

Probable Environmental Effects

Based on preliminary surveys and information, Caltrans has identified the following main subject areas for analysis in the EIR/EA. The scope of environmental analysis will be modified based on input during the Project scoping period.

Air Quality

An air quality analysis will be completed to quantify the effects of the Project on the ambient air quality of the project study area and the region. An air quality study will be completed to document if the Project will expose residences or other sensitive receptors to substantial air quality pollutants. The environmental document will summarize this study and identify Best Management Practices (BMPs) and, if necessary, mitigation measures to reduce impacts to air quality.

Biological Resources

A biological study will be completed to determine if sensitive wildlife, plants, or habitat is present within the project study area. Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) will be clearly delineated to indicate areas with sensitive habitats where construction is not allowed. Bat roosting surveys will be completed to identify potential bat habitats within the Project area. Bird surveys will be completed during nesting season to identify any active nests during construction. In addition, a tree survey will be completed to identify the trees anticipated to be removed by the Project. The environmental document will summarize the biological study and surveys and, if necessary, identify mitigation measures to reduce or avoid impacts to biological resources.

Climate Change

According to mapping prepared by Caltrans and CalFire, the Project area is not within identified high hazard severity zones for either sea level rise or wildfires, though these topics will be addressed in the environmental document.

Community Impacts

Potential social, economic, public services, land use, and growth impacts will be discussed and addressed in the environmental document, including potential community concerns during construction of the Project. If necessary, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid community impacts will be identified.

Cultural Resources

Archaeological and historic architectural reports, and Native American consultation, will be completed to determine if cultural resources would be impacted by the Project. An Area of Potential Effects (APE) will be delineated to formally identify the limits for the identification and evaluation of resources. The environmental document will summarize the reports and consultation process and, if necessary, identify mitigation measures to reduce or avoid impacts to cultural resources.

Energy

Because the Project is intended to provide congestion relief, a quantitative energy analysis report will be prepared.

Geology and Soils

Geology and paleontology reports will be completed to identify geologic hazards, such as active faults, landslides, and liquefiable soils. The reports will be summarized in the environmental document. If necessary, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid geology and soils impacts will be identified.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

A greenhouse gas (GHG) study will be completed to determine if the Project would substantially increase GHG emissions. The environmental document will summarize the study and, if necessary, identify mitigation measures to reduce or avoid GHG emission impacts.

Hazardous Materials

A hazardous materials report will be completed to determine the potential for the Project to disturb contaminated soil. The report will be summarized in the environmental document. If necessary, mitigation measures will be identified to reduce or avoid hazardous materials impacts.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Hydraulic/flooding reports will be prepared to assess Project impacts on hydrologic conditions in the surrounding area. Short and long-term effects of the Project on water quality will be analyzed and summarized in the environmental document, including temporary water quality impacts resulting from construction activities. Construction BMPs and, if necessary, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid water quality impacts will be identified.

Noise and Vibration

A noise study report will be prepared to determine if construction and/or operational noise or vibration impacts would occur on nearby land uses. Current noise levels will be measured, and future noise levels will be modeled based on Project traffic operations. The environmental document will summarize the noise study and, if necessary, identify mitigation measures to reduce or avoid noise impacts.

Paleontology

As a result of the high potential to yield paleontological resources in the Project area, preparation of a Paleontological Identification Report/Paleontological Evaluation Report will be required. If the Project area is found to have paleontological resources of high sensitivity, then a Paleontological Mitigation Plan will also be required.

Traffic and Transportation

A traffic analysis will be completed for the Project. The traffic analysis will focus on improvements to freeway and roadway operations in the project area and calculate vehicle miles travelled (VMT) with and without the Project. Potential impacts to bicycle and pedestrian circulation will also be analyzed and summarized in the environmental document. If necessary, mitigation measures will be identified to reduce or avoid transportation impacts.

Visual

An assessment of visual and aesthetic effects due to the Project related to proposed structures, lighting, and tree and vegetation removal will be completed and summarized in the environmental document. If necessary, mitigation measures will be identified to reduce or avoid visual and aesthetic impacts.

Figure 1: Project Location