



**CEQA EXEMPTION / NEPA CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION
DETERMINATION FORM (rev. 06/2022)**

Project Information

Project Name: Ridgewood Grade Safety Geotechnical Drilling

DIST-CO-RTE: 01-MEN-101

PM/PM: 39.8/40.4

EA: 01-0L380

Federal-Aid Project Number: N/A

Project Description

Caltrans proposes a Geotechnical drilling project in support of the Ridgewood Grade Safety Project, located between PM 39.8 and PM 40.4 on US Highway 101 in Mendocino County, approximately 6 miles south of the City of Willits. The Ridgewood Grade Safety project would increase inside and outside shoulder widths on both sides of US 101, and require roadway excavation, construction of a Mechanically Stabilized Embankment Wall (MSEW), and construction of new roadway structural section. This MSEW requires collection of subsurface data that is necessary in the preparation of geotechnical recommendations and construction procedures.

Caltrans CEQA Determination (Check one)

- Not Applicable** – Caltrans is not the CEQA Lead Agency
- Not Applicable** – Caltrans has prepared an IS or EIR under CEQA

Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, the project is:

- Exempt by Statute.** (PRC 21080[b]; 14 CCR 15260 et seq.)
- Categorically Exempt. Class 6.** (PRC 21084; 14 CCR 15300 et seq.)
 - No exceptions apply that would bar the use of a categorical exemption (PRC 21084 and 14 CCR 15300.2). See the [SER Chapter 34](#) for exceptions.
- Covered by the Common Sense Exemption.** This project does not fall within an exempt class, but it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant effect on the environment (14 CCR 15061[b][3].)

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Julie McFall		5/16/23
Print Name	Signature	Date

Project Manager

Katie Everett		5/16/2023
Print Name	Signature	Date



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Caltrans NEPA Determination (Check one)

Not Applicable

Caltrans has determined that this project has no significant impacts on the environment as defined by NEPA, and that there are no unusual circumstances as described in 23 CFR 771.117(b). See SER Chapter 30 for unusual circumstances. As such, the project is categorically excluded from the requirements to prepare an EA or EIS under NEPA and is included under the following:

23 USC 326: Caltrans has been assigned, and hereby certifies that it has carried out the responsibility to make this determination pursuant to 23 USC 326 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated April 18, 2022, executed between FHWA and Caltrans. Caltrans has determined that the project is a Categorical Exclusion under:

23 CFR 771.117(c): activity (c)(24)

23 CFR 771.117(d): activity (d)()

Activity listed in Appendix A of the MOU between FHWA and Caltrans

23 USC 327: Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, Caltrans has determined that the project is a Categorical Exclusion under 23 USC 327. The environmental review, consultation, and any other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by Caltrans pursuant to 23 USC 327 and the Memorandum of Understanding dated May 27, 2022, and executed by FHWA and Caltrans.

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Julie McFall
Print Name
Signature
Date 5/16/23

Project Manager/ DLA Engineer

Katie Everett
Print Name
Signature
Date 5/16/2023

Date of Categorical Exclusion Checklist completion (if applicable): 05/15/2023
Date of Environmental Commitment Record or equivalent: 05/15/2023

Briefly list environmental commitments on continuation sheet if needed (i.e., not necessary if included on an attached ECR). Reference additional information, as appropriate (e.g., additional studies and design conditions).



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Continuation sheet:

Caltrans Geophysical Branch, or an appropriate consultant, will perform seismic refraction surveys at the proposed line locations. These surveys will take approximately two weeks to complete (one day for mobilization, one day for brush clearing, four days for data collection, and one day for demobilization). It is anticipated that minor brushing may be required to provide unobstructed access to the ground to lay out the probe cables, and that traffic control will not be required to conduct geophysical surveys. Seismic refraction survey equipment will consist of an array of 24 geophones (seismic sensors) connected by a specialized cable to a battery powered seismograph unit, and a seismic source. Seismic sources typically consist of either a hammer and striker plate, a down-hole shotgun, or explosives. Detonation of the shells occurs below ground and usually does not pose a fire hazard, but fire suppression equipment is kept on hand when working during wildfire season. With well-prepared shot holes, the highest anticipated noise generated consists of a muffled "thump" of approximately 80 dB.

Caltrans Drilling Services, or an approved drilling subcontractor, will also perform drilling operations at all geotechnical boring locations to characterize the geotechnical subsurface conditions in the vicinity of project structures, cuts, and potential fills. Approximately four (4) vertical borings are proposed, with mud-rotary drilling methods being utilized at an estimated maximum depth of 60 feet. The total time frame will take approximately three (3) weeks. The following equipment will be required to support the geotechnical drilling operations: a track or truck-mounted drill rig, a water truck, crew cab, and a geologist/engineer's vehicle.

Drilling fluid is made up of water alone, or water mixed with a thickening agent such as bentonite clay and/or a liquid polymer. The drilling fluid is fully contained and recirculated through a closed system using an 8-inch outer steel casing, 94- mm drill rod, and mud tank. The mud tank will be positioned on the ground surface adjacent to the drill rig and will serve as a settlement tank for soil cuttings. The cuttings are periodically removed and placed in 55-gallon steel drums, and the drums removed from the job site and transferred to an appropriate fenced staging area. From the staging area, the drums will be tested and taken to an appropriate landfill site as specified through the Mud Disposal Contract managed by the Office of Drilling Services.

STAGING

All the equipment will be removed from the road at the end of each shift and stored at the local Caltrans Maintenance yard or another appropriate location. Drill rigs and certain support vehicles will stay on site throughout the duration of drilling for the borings atop the cut slope, which is located above the highway grade.

DISPOSAL/BORROW

Precautions during drilling will be employed using Best Management Practices (BMP) to mitigate excessive noise, possible equipment leaks, or drilling fluid spillage. These may include plastic tarps, absorption mats, and jute waddles, on an as-needed basis to contain any drilling fluid or impacted water for clean-up.



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After the completion of each geotechnical boring, soil cuttings and drilling fluid generated by the operation will be pumped and/or shoveled into 55-gallon drums for Haz waste characterization and disposal. Any cuttings and/or drilling fluid inadvertently spilled onto the ground during drilling operations will similarly be shoveled or sponged up and disposed of in 55-gallon drums. If additional water is needed to clean pavement surfaces to prevent contamination of future stormwater or impacts to public safety, a minimal amount will be used and as much of the impacted water captured as practical. Any areas of ground disturbance created during off-road drilling activities will be mitigated with appropriate BMPs to prevent erosion and storm-water pollution. Borings will be backfilled following the requirements of the Mendocino County Health Department.

RIGHT-OF-WAY

One (1) PTE was requested and has been obtained.

CONSULTATION/COORDINATION

No consultation/coordination with other agencies is required for Geotech Studies.

PERMITS

No permits are required for Geotech Studies.