

California Department of Transportation

DISTRICT 4
OFFICE OF TRANSIT AND COMMUNITY PLANNING
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February 15, 2022

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Co/Rt/Pm: SCL/152/30.4

Todd Sexauer, Senior Environmental Planner
Santa Clara Valley Water District
5750 Almaden Expressway
San Jose, CA 95118

Re: Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project Draft Environmental Impact Report

Dear Todd Sexauer:

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental review process for the Pacheco Reservoir Expansion Project. We are committed to ensuring that impacts to the State's multimodal transportation system and to our natural environment are identified and mitigated to support a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system. The following comments are based on our review of the November 2021 DEIR.

Project Understanding

The project proposes to construct a new dam and expanded reservoir, conveyance facilities, and related miscellaneous infrastructure (e.g., access roads and electrical transmission lines). The existing North Fork Dam would be decommissioned. The new dam and expanded reservoir would be located on North Fork Pacheco Creek, upstream from the existing North Fork Dam, and would inundate the upstream portion of the existing Pacheco Reservoir in addition to other areas.

Travel Demand Analysis

The project VMT analysis and significance determination are undertaken in a manner consistent with the Office of Planning and Research's (OPR) Technical Advisory. Per the DEIR, this project is found to have a less than significant VMT impact, therefore working towards meeting the State's VMT reduction goals.

Preferred Alternatives

Of the four strategies listed on page (ES-5), the Proposed Project/Alternative D and Alternative A are preferred over Alternative B and C. Widening SR-152 is the least

desirable strategy from Caltrans' perspective. The benefits of Alternative D and A are improved connectivity and, in the case of the temporary overcrossing, an opportunity to explore the decommissioned overpass as a wildlife crossing enhancements.

Biological Resources

Please ensure the Final EIR evaluates the project's impacts on wildlife movement and biological resources in a permanent context. The interchange at SR-152 will be in place for at least 8 years, and wildlife may permanently move away from the area due to the long-term generation of noise, light, increased traffic, and more. Additionally, the Final EIR should account for the project's contribution to cumulative impacts, including on wildlife movement and light pollution, when considering the ongoing operation of SR-152 and other planned projects in the area (e.g., High Speed Rail).

Landscape Architecture

The justification for inclusion of a permanent tight diamond interchange on SR-152 in the Proposed Project rather than a temporary access improvement is not clear. The permanent tight diamond interchange is noted to be visually prominent on SR-152, but it is stated to not substantially alter the visual character. The visual prominence is supported by the simulation; however, it is not evident that the visual character is not somewhat altered. The scale and height of the over-crossing and reconfigured interchange is notably different from the existing setting. This type of interchange is more common in urban and suburban areas than rural ones, and it looks out of place. At a minimum, the inclusion of an Aesthetic Minimization and/ or Mitigation Measure to prescribe the use of color and/or texture on new concrete surfaces could help to integrate the structure with the visual environment. While re-vegetation is included as a Biological Mitigation Measure, it is not included as one for Aesthetics. The need to restore vegetative cover is an aesthetics requirement, as well as biological, and should be addressed in a distinct measure.

Hydrology

While construction details were provided for the dam site, details on the hydrology impacts of the project on SR-152 were not provided as previously requested in the Notice of Preparation (NOP) stage. Caltrans recommends that a separate section be created to address the effects construction, diversion plans, changes in topography, and flow patterns will have on the floodplain and SR-152, as well as corresponding mitigation measures.

Construction-Related Impacts

Potential impacts to Caltrans' Right-of-Way (ROW) from project-related temporary access points should be analyzed. Mitigation for significant impacts due to construction and noise should be identified. Project work that requires movement of oversized or excessive load vehicles on State roadways requires a transportation

permit that is issued by Caltrans. To apply, visit: <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/transportation-permits>. Prior to construction, coordination may be required with Caltrans to develop a Transportation Management Plan (TMP) to reduce construction traffic impacts to the STN.

Utilities

Any utilities that are proposed, moved or modified within Caltrans' ROW shall be discussed. If utilities are impacted by the project, provide site plans that show the location of existing and/or proposed utilities. These modifications require a Caltrans-issued encroachment permit.

Lead Agency

As the Lead Agency, the Santa Clara Valley Water District is responsible for all project mitigation, including any needed improvements to the State Transportation Network (STN). The project's fair share contribution, financing, scheduling, implementation responsibilities and lead agency monitoring should be fully discussed for all proposed mitigation measures.

Equitable Access

If any Caltrans facilities are impacted by the project, those facilities must meet American Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards after project completion. As well, the project must maintain bicycle and pedestrian access during construction. These access considerations support Caltrans' equity mission to provide a safe, sustainable, and equitable transportation network for all users.

Encroachment Permit

Please be advised that any permanent work or temporary traffic control that encroaches onto Caltrans' ROW requires a Caltrans-issued encroachment permit. As part of the encroachment permit submittal process, you may be asked by the Office of Encroachment Permits to submit a completed encroachment permit application package, digital set of plans clearly delineating Caltrans' ROW, digital copy of signed, dated and stamped (include stamp expiration date) traffic control plans, this comment letter, your response to the comment letter, and where applicable, the following items: new or amended Maintenance Agreement (MA), approved Design Standard Decision Document (DSDD), approved encroachment exception request, and/or airspace lease agreement. Your application package may be emailed to D4Permits@dot.ca.gov.

Please note that Caltrans is in the process of implementing an online, automated, and milestone-based Caltrans Encroachment Permit System (CEPS) to replace the current permit application submittal process with a fully electronic system, including online payments. The new system is expected to be available during 2022. To obtain information about the most current encroachment permit process and to download

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the permit application, please visit <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/traffic-operations/ep/applications>.

Thank you again for including Caltrans in the environmental review process. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, or for future notifications and requests for review of new projects, please email LDR-D4@dot.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Leong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

MARK LEONG
District Branch Chief
Local Development Review

c: State Clearinghouse