

1.1 Overview

The purpose of this Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) is to evaluate the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed improvements related to the Madera High-Speed Rail Station Full-Build Project Phase 3 (“Project”). The San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA) will serve as the lead agency under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Project. California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) is a responsible agency under CEQA.

1.2 Background

In July 2015, SJJPA assumed the responsibility of day-to-day management, planning, funding, and support services of the existing San Joaquins Intercity Rail Service (*San Joaquins*) from the state of California. SJJPA contracts with San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (SJRRC) to provide staffing, consultants, and other services to support SJJPA. SJJPA’s governing board consists of 10 member agencies within the Central Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area.

CHSRA is developing the Merced–Bakersfield High-Speed Rail (HSR) Early Operating Segment (EOS). SJJPA is partnering with CHSRA, and California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) on network integration with the EOS, and SJJPA is expected to be the operating agency for the EOS. Once the HSR EOS begins operations between Merced and Bakersfield, the *San Joaquins* service would be truncated and would terminate at a multi-modal station in downtown Merced (R Street) where passengers would be able to transfer between *San Joaquins* and HSR trains. Future *San Joaquins* improvements would also increase service north of Merced, enhancing ongoing connections to/from Sacramento, the northern San Joaquin Valley, and the Bay Area, maximizing the ridership and benefits of the EOS.

The *San Joaquins* currently serve Madera County at a station located in Madera Acres, a census-designated place in unincorporated Madera County north of the city of Madera. As part of Phase 1 of the Project, SJJPA is currently working in coordination with CHSRA, CalSTA, Madera County, Madera County Transportation Commission, and the city of Madera to relocate the existing San Joaquins station to a new location along Avenue 12 to capture anticipated higher ridership due to better access for riders to public transportation and SR-99, existing land uses in the immediate vicinity, such as Madera Community College, existing land uses in northern Fresno County, as well as anticipated higher levels of future development in areas around the new station location and along Avenue 12 over that of the current location in Madera Acres. The relocated station would then be expanded to accommodate HSR service and would become the proposed Madera HSR Station. Once EOS service is initiated, HSR service at the proposed Madera HSR Station along Avenue 12 would become Madera County’s and portions of Fresno County’s passenger rail connection to the larger statewide passenger rail network as part of Phase 2 of the Project.

In 2012, CHSRA completed environmental clearance of the HSR EOS project section between Merced and Fresno, with stations in downtown Merced and downtown Fresno. CHSRA later identified Madera as a location for a proposed HSR station for the first time in its 2016 Business Plan (CHSRA, 2016). The environmental clearance of the HSR EOS project section between Merced and Fresno did

1 not include a HSR station in Madera; therefore, a separate environmental clearance process is
2 required for the proposed Madera HSR Station.

3 The evolution of the Madera Station is being planned in three phases of implementation as follows:

- 4 • **Phase 1: Relocated Station (for San Joaquins only).** Phase 1 would close the current
5 San Joaquins station in Madera Acres and relocate it to a site just north of Avenue 12 as shown
6 in **Figure 1.2-1**. Phase 1 was environmentally cleared through the preparation and adoption of
7 an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) (SJJPA, 2021) in 2021. Final design
8 has been completed and construction for Phase 1 will begin in Fiscal Year 2025.

9 **Phase 2: Partial Build-Out of the Proposed Madera HSR Station.** Phase 2, which is at the
10 same station site as the relocated San Joaquins station site near Avenue 12, would develop the
11 eastern half of the proposed Madera HSR Station. **Figure 1.2-1** illustrates the specific
12 components of this phase, including a station siding track, a single side-platform located
13 immediately east of the HSR mainline tracks (which are being implemented as part of California
14 HSR Project by CHSRA), a new station building, and expanded parking over the approved
15 amount of parking for Phase 1. These improvements, along with other station facilities, would
16 accommodate the anticipated service of 18 trains (round-trips) per day that are envisioned to be
17 in place when HSR service commences on the Merced–Bakersfield HSR EOS, as described in the
18 CHSRA’s 2024 Business Plan (CHSRA, 2024). Phase 2 was also environmentally cleared as part
19 of same IS/MND in 2021 that cleared Phase 1.⁽¹⁾ On March 13, 2025, the SJJPA and San Joaquin
20 Regional Rail Commission (SJRRRC) Board adopted the Madera Station Relocation IS/MND
21 Addendum, which included design refinements to the parking lot layout, bus depot, access road,
22 and bike path as part of Phase 1 and Phase 2. Phase 2 is estimated to cost approximately \$134.5
23 million. Funding sources include \$80 million from the regional 2024 Interregional
24 Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP), and \$54.5 million from the federal MEGA program
25 as part of the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG). Final design is expected to begin
26 in 2025.

27 **Phase 3: Full Build-Out of the Proposed Madera HSR Station.** Phase 3, which is the phase this
28 Draft EIR pertains to, would complete the western side of the proposed Madera HSR Station by
29 adding a second station siding track and second platform. This phase would also include a
30 pedestrian overpass, several culverts (new and extended), wildlife corridor extensions, and the
31 expansion of parking and the station building over that which was approved in Phase 2. These
32 improvements, along with other station facilities, would accommodate the “HSR Service (Bay
33 Area to the north, Southern California to the south, or both) and subsequently Phase 1 HSR
34 Service (San Francisco to Los Angeles) in the longer-term.

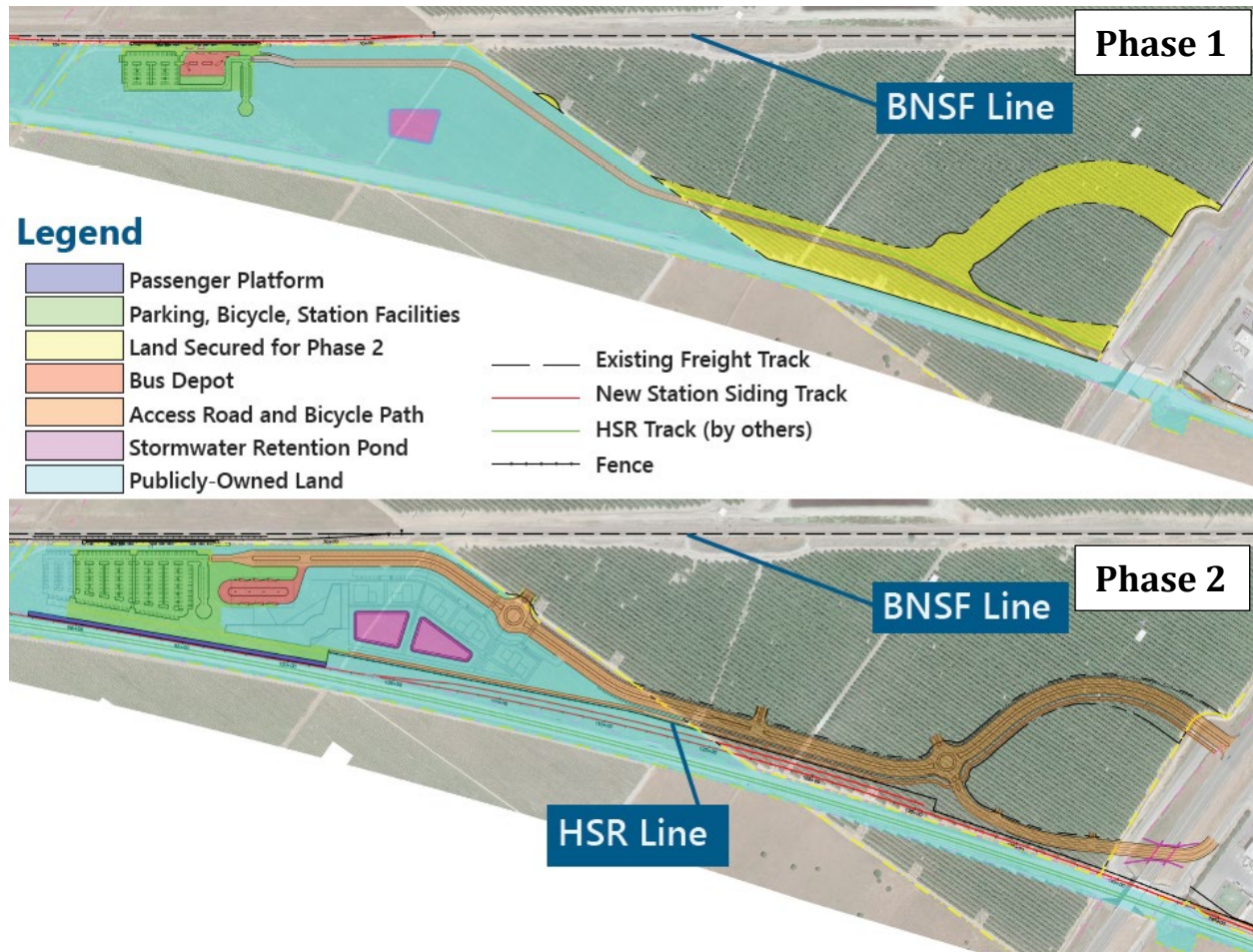
35 SJJPA and CHSRA completed a memorandum of understanding in 2020 that establishes SJJPA as the
36 expected operator of the Merced–Bakersfield HSR EOS. Based on this partnership and at the
37 direction from CHSRA and CalSTA, SJJPA was assigned responsibility for environmental clearance of
38 the three phases of the proposed Madera HSR Station.

(1) Note: The reason Phases 1 and 2 were cleared together while excluding Phase 3 is that SJJPA had not yet received direction at that time to include the proposed fully built-out Madera HSR Station in the environmental clearance. Subsequently, CHSRA saw a need to clear the full station earlier than originally anticipated; hence, CHSRA requested SJJPA to conduct a follow up to the IS/MND with a clearance for a Phase 3 expansion of the proposed Madera HSR Station.

1 SJJPA approved the Madera Station Relocation Project Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration
2 (IS/MND) for Phases 1 and 2 at the January 22, 2021, Board Meeting. SJJPA received state funding in
3 FY 2022/23 to advance the environmental work for Phase 3 and initiated the CEQA process in late
4 2023.

5 SJJPA is also responsible for securing funding for final design and construction of each phase. Phase
6 1 is nearing the completion of final design. Phase 2 has received funding for final design and
7 construction with final design work anticipated to begin in 2025. Funding for final design and
8 construction of Phase 3 has not been identified yet.

9 **Figure 1.2-1: Phase 1 and Phase 2 Components**



10
11 Source: (SJJPA, 2024)

1.3 Project Goals and Objectives

The Project includes additional improvements to the proposed Madera HSR Station that would meet all the requirements needed for expanded HSR service levels (above the EOS) associated with HSR Service (Bay Area to the north, Southern California to the south, or both) and subsequently Phase 1 HSR Service (San Francisco to Los Angeles).

The Project would provide unprecedented economic, mobility, and safety benefits for Madera County. The Project goals and objectives are to enhance the following needs:

Climate Change, Resiliency, and the Environment

- Reduce emissions by providing a cleaner mode of transportation, reduce vehicle miles travelled (VMT), and promote increased transit use and transit-oriented development.

Equity, Multimodal Options, and Quality of Life

- Improve rail and transit transportation access for Historically Disadvantaged Communities and Areas of Persistent Poverty.
- Enhance mobility and accessibility by providing an improved mode of state-wide transportation.

Economic Impacts and Job Creation

- Provide employment opportunities related to the construction, operation, and maintenance of the staffed facilities.
- Connect travelers to destinations throughout California.
- Enhance connection to educational and employment centers.

Safety

- Increase safety in the transportation system by lessening automobile travel by shifting travel to a safer mode of transport, passenger rail.

1.4 Environmental Review Process

1.4.1 California Environmental Quality Act

CEQA applies to all discretionary activities proposed to be implemented by California public agencies, including state, regional, county, and local agencies (California Public Resources Code [Public Res. Code] 21000 et seq.). CEQA requires agencies to estimate and evaluate the environmental impacts of their actions, avoid or reduce significant environmental impacts when feasible, and consider the environmental implications of their actions prior to making a decision. CEQA also requires agencies to inform the public and other relevant agencies and consider their comments in the evaluation and decision-making process. The CEQA Guidelines are the primary source of rules and interpretations of CEQA (Public Res. Code 21000 et seq.; 14 California Code of Regulations 1500 et seq.).

1.4.2 Purpose of This Draft Environmental Impact Report

The purpose of this Draft EIR is to provide the information necessary for SJJPA to make an informed decision about the Project and to supply the information necessary to support related permit applications and review processes.

This Draft EIR has been prepared in compliance with CEQA to achieve the following goals:

- Identify potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts.
- Identify potential significant and unavoidable impacts.
- Describe feasible mitigation measures intended to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts, where feasible, to a less-than-significant level.
- Disclose the environmental analyses, including potential impacts and mitigation measures, for public and agency review and comment.
- Discuss potential alternatives to the Project that meet the Project's goal and objectives, are feasible, and would avoid or reduce identified one or more of the Project's significant impacts.

One of the purposes of CEQA is to provide an opportunity for the public and relevant agencies to review and comment on projects that might affect the environment. Scoping activities previously conducted are discussed in Section 1.5. SJJPA will provide a public review period for this Draft EIR of 45 days from its release for comment. SJJPA will also conduct at least one public meeting to receive comments during the comment period. Once the public review period is complete, SJJPA will prepare a Final EIR that includes all the comments received on the Draft EIR, responses to all comments, and any necessary revisions to the Draft EIR. CEQA requires the SJJPA Board Members to review and consider the information in the EIR before making a decision on approval of the Project.

1.5 Scope and Content of this Draft Environmental Impact Report

Scoping refers to the process used to assist the lead agency in determining the focus and content of an EIR. Scoping solicits input on the potential topics to be addressed in the Draft EIR, the range of alternatives, and possible mitigation measures. Scoping is also helpful in establishing methods of assessment and in selecting the environmental effects to be considered in detail.

1.5.1 Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meetings

The scoping process for this Draft EIR was formally initiated on November 22, 2023, when SJJPA submitted a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to the California State Clearinghouse; federal, regional, and local elected officials; and federal, state, and local agencies, including the planning and community development directors in Madera County, and the cities where the Project would be located; and the interested public. The purpose of a NOP is to solicit participation from relevant agencies, organizations, stakeholders, and from members of the public in determining the scope of an EIR. Letters were sent via first-class mail to 188 responsible and trustee agencies, organizations, nearby residents and property owners, and interested parties. Email notifications were sent to the Project's email subscribers and key organizations. A dedicated Project webpage was created, hosting scoping

1 materials, the NOP, and comment submission instructions, and social media campaigns were
2 provided on Facebook and Instagram.

3 A virtual public scoping meeting was held on December 13, 2023, between 9:30 am and 11:00 am
4 via the online platform Zoom. The meeting was set up with a PowerPoint presentation led by SJJPA
5 staff. Appendix F, *Scoping Memorandum*, contains the scoping report detailing the scoping process,
6 including the notification, scoping activities undertaken, and written comments received during the
7 scoping process.

8 The scoping period ended on January 5, 2024.

9 **1.5.2 Consultation and Coordination**

10 Appendix F, *Scoping Memorandum*, provides a list of local and regional agencies, community
11 organizations, and stakeholders that SJJPA met with throughout the development of the Project, as
12 well as meetings held during the development of this Draft EIR.

13 The alternatives analysis process for this Draft EIR utilized preliminary planning and
14 environmental/engineering information to identify feasible and practicable alternatives to carry
15 forward for environmental review and preliminary engineering. Chapter 2, *Project Description*,
16 describes the Project; Chapter 5, *Alternatives*, describes the alternatives considered, the evaluation
17 criteria that were applied and used to determine which alternatives to analyze in this Draft EIR, and
18 which alternatives were considered but rejected for further analysis.

19 In addition to consultation and coordination meetings, the Project webpage
20 (<https://sjjpa.com/madera-station-relocation-project/>) was developed within the SJJPA website.
21 This webpage contained the most current announcements and informational materials.

22 **1.5.3 Resource Topics**

23 In October 2024 an Initial Study (Appendix E of this Draft EIR) was prepared by SJJPA to provide
24 initial environmental analysis. Impacts for environmental topics that were determined to be
25 potentially significant or less than significant with mitigation measures that would be analyzed in
26 full detail in the Draft EIR, and the environmental topics that would be less than significant or result
27 in no impacts would be analyzed at a lesser level of detail as part of Chapter 4, *Other CEQA-Required*
28 *Analysis*.

29 The impact discussions identify and focus on environmental topics that resulted in potentially
30 significant or less than significant impacts with mitigation measures as identified in the Initial Study
31 (Appendix E), and are described in detail in this Draft EIR. Those environmental topics include the
32 following:

- 33 • Agriculture (pertaining to agricultural land conversion and conflicting with existing agricultural
34 zoning);
- 35 • Air Quality (pertaining to conflicting with an air quality plan and result in a cumulatively
36 considerable net increase);
- 37 • Biological Resources (pertaining to all sub-topics except for conflicts with conservation plans);
- 38 • Cultural Resources (pertaining to unknown historic, archaeological resources, and human
39 remains);

- 1 • Geology, Soils, and Paleontological Resources (pertaining to unstable soil, expansive soil, and
2 unknown paleontological resources);
- 3 • Hazards and Hazardous Materials (pertaining to exposure to contaminants from accidental
4 release);
- 5 • Hydrology and Water Quality (pertaining to impervious surfaces and drainage);
- 6 • Noise (pertaining to permanent increase in ambient noise generation);
- 7 • Transportation (pertaining to circulation system for transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian
8 facilities);
- 9 • Tribal Cultural Resources (pertaining to unknown area of importance to Native American
10 Tribes); and
- 11 • Cumulative Impacts.
- 12 • Environmental topics and sub-topics that resulted in less than significant or no impacts in the
13 Initial Study (Appendix E) are analyzed in Chapter 4, Other CEQA-Required Analysis, of the Draft
14 EIR, but are also addressed in their corresponding sections. Those sub-topics include:
- 15 • Aesthetics (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 16 • Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions (pertaining to all other sub-topics);
- 17 • Biological Resources (pertaining only to conflicts with conservation plan);
- 18 • Energy (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 19 • Forestry Resources (pertaining to all other sub-topics);
- 20 • Geology and Soils (pertaining to rupture of a known earthquake fault, soil erosion, unstable
21 geologic unit or soils, and soils adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or wastewater
22 disposal systems);
- 23 • Hazards and Hazardous Materials (pertaining to all other sub-topics);
- 24 • Hydrology and Water Quality (pertaining to all other sub-topics);
- 25 • Land Use and Planning (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 26 • Mineral Resources (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 27 • Noise and Vibration (pertaining to all other sub-topics);
- 28 • Population and Housing (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 29 • Public Services (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 30 • Recreation (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 31 • Transportation (pertaining to all other sub-topics);
- 32 • Utilities and Service Systems (pertaining to all sub-topics);
- 33 • Wildfire (pertaining to all sub-topics).

1.6 Notification and Circulation of Draft EIR

CEQA requires the lead agency (SJPPA) to prepare an EIR that reflects the independent judgment of the agency regarding the impacts of a project, the level of significance of the impacts both before and after mitigation, and mitigation measures proposed to reduce the impacts. A Draft EIR is circulated to responsible agencies, trustee agencies with resources affected by the project, and interested agencies and individuals. The purposes of public and agency review of a Draft EIR include sharing expertise, disclosing agency analyses, checking accuracy, detecting omissions, discovering public concerns, and soliciting counterproposals.

This Draft EIR has been distributed to affected agencies, surrounding cities, and interested parties for a 45-day review period in accordance with Section 15087 of the CEQA Guidelines. Stakeholders and the public was advised of the availability of this Draft EIR through notices placed in local newspapers (The Madera Tribune and Madera County Farm Bureau), sent by email to individuals who requested to subscribe to the Project email list as well as organizations that were identified by SJPPA and the consulting team, and direct mailings to responsible and trustee agencies, organizations, interested parties, nearby landowners and current residents, and announced through the Project webpage (<https://sjppa.com/madera-station-relocation-project/>) and social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram).

A Notice of Availability (NOA) was posted with the California State Clearinghouse and at the county clerk/recorder's office for Madera County.

The Draft EIR and Appendices are available on the Project webpage (<https://sjppa.com/madera-station-relocation-project/>). A printed copy and electronic versions of the Draft EIR and the documents incorporated by reference are available for public viewing at the SJPPA offices at 949 East Channel Street in Stockton, California during normal office hours (Monday through Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm). In addition, printed and electronic versions of the Draft EIR is also available for public viewing at the following location:

Madera County Library

121 North G Street

Madera, California 93637

Library hours: Monday through Thursday from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, and Friday and Saturday from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

Reviewers of this Draft EIR should focus on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing the possible impacts on the environment and ways in which the significant effects of the Project might be avoided or mitigated. Comments are most helpful when they suggest additional specific alternatives or mitigation measures that would provide better ways to avoid or mitigate significant environmental effects.

SJPPA will hold one in-person open house meeting to provide information about the Draft EIR and respond to general questions about the environmental analysis. A presentation summarizing the Project and the Draft EIR will be provided, and staff will be available to answer questions of a general nature. All formal comments on the Draft EIR must be submitted in writing or verbally to a court reporter at the open house meeting or via mail or email (see below for details) for consideration. Spanish translation services will also be available

1 Comments on this Draft EIR must be received by SJJPA no later than 5:00 pm on the last day of the
2 Draft EIR public review period (May 28, 2025), and can be submitted by any of the following
3 methods:

- 4 • **Mail:** San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority
5 Attn: Madera HSR Station Phase 3 Project
6 949 East Channel Street
7 Stockton, California 95202
- 8 • **Email:** info@maderastation.com, including “Madera HSR Station Phase 3 Project” in the
9 subject line

10 **1.7 Environmental Impact Report Organization**

11 This Draft EIR is organized into the following chapters and appendices.

- 12 • *Executive Summary* provides a summary of the key information and conclusions in the Draft EIR.
- 13 • Chapter 1, *Introduction*, provides a brief overview of the Project; the Project objectives; an
14 overview of the environmental review process; and the scope, content, and organization of the
15 Draft EIR.
- 16 • Chapter 2, *Project Description*, provides a comprehensive description of the improvements
17 associated with the Project.
- 18 • Chapter 3, *Environmental Impact Analysis*, provides an evaluation of the Project impacts on the
19 environmental resource topics outlined above. Each resource-specific section discusses the
20 environmental setting, regulatory setting, and any impacts and mitigation measures.
- 21 • Chapter 4, *Other CEQA-Required Analysis*, provides a discussion of significant environmental
22 impacts that cannot be avoided, significant irreversible changes in the environment, and
23 growth-inducing impacts.
- 24 • Chapter 5, *Alternatives*, provides a comparison of environmental impacts for the No Project and
25 Project.
- 26 • Chapter 6, *Public Outreach*, provides a summary of public participation activities to receive input
27 from local communities, interested parties, and stakeholders.
- 28 • Chapter 7, *References*, provides a list of the printed references and personal communication cited
29 in this Draft EIR.
- 30 • Chapter 8, *Abbreviations and Acronyms*, presents the list of acronyms and abbreviations used in
31 this Draft EIR.
- 32 • Chapter 9, *List of Preparers*, provides a list of firms and staff who contributed to the preparation
33 of this Draft EIR.
- 34 • Appendices
 - 35 ○ Appendix A: Biological Resource and Aquatic Delineation Report
 - 36 ○ Appendix B: Cultural Resources Technical Report
 - 37 ■ Appendix B-1: Archeological Survey Report
 - 38 ■ Appendix B-2: Historic Architectural Survey Report

- 1 ○ Appendix C: Noise and Vibration Technical Report
- 2 ○ Appendix D: Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emission Calculations
- 3 ○ Appendix E: Madera HSR Station Full-Build Project Phase 3 Initial Study
- 4 ○ Appendix F: Notice of Preparation, Scoping Report, and Public Outreach
- 5 ○ Appendix G: Engineering Plans
- 6 ○ Appendix H: Ridership Memorandum