Ridgecrest/Inyokern Pavement

Kern County, California
09-KER-178-88.6/104.6
EA: 09-38330
Project ID: 0919000069

Initial Study with Proposed Negative Declaration

Volume 1 of 2

Prepared by the
State of California Department of Transportation

March 2024

General Information About This Document

What's in this document:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has prepared this Initial Study, which examines the potential environmental impacts of alternatives being considered for the proposed project in Kern County, California. The document explains why the project is being proposed, the alternatives being considered for the project, the existing environment that could be affected by the project, potential impacts of each of the alternatives, and proposed avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures.

What you should do:

- Please read the document. Additional copies of the document and the related technical studies are available for review at the Caltrans District 9 office at 500 South Main Street, Bishop, California, open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and at the Kern County Library at 131 East Las Flores Avenue, Ridgecrest, California, open Tuesday through Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This document may be downloaded at the following website: https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-9/district-9-projects-list/09-38330

- Tell us what you think. If you have any comments regarding the proposed project, please send your written comments to Caltrans by April 26, 2024.

- Submit comments via U.S. mail to: Rebeka Riesen, District 9 Environmental Division, California Department of Transportation, 500 South Main Street, Bishop, California 93514. Or submit comments via email to: Rebeka.Riesen@dot.ca.gov.

- Submit comments by the deadline: April 26, 2024.

What happens next:

After comments are received from the public and the reviewing agencies, Caltrans may 1) give environmental approval to the proposed project, 2) do additional environmental studies, or 3) abandon the project. If the project is given environmental approval and funding is appropriated, Caltrans could design and construct all or part of the project.

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For individuals with sensory disabilities, this document can be made available in Braille, in large print, on audiocassette, or on computer disk. To obtain a copy in one of these alternate formats, please write to or call Caltrans, Attention: Rebeka Riesen, District 9 Environmental Division, 500 South Main Street, Bishop, California 93514; telephone 442-359-8454 (Voice), or use the California Relay Service 1-800-735-2929 (Teletype to Voice), 1-800-735-2922 (Voice to Teletype), 1-800-855-3000 (Spanish Teletype to Voice and Voice to Teletype), 1-800-854-7784 (Spanish and English Speech-to-Speech), or 711.

09-KERN-178-88.60/104.60
EA 09-38330/Project ID 0919000069

Rehabilitate pavement, upgrade existing pedestrian facilities,
and make other improvements on State Route 178
from post miles 88.60 to 104.60 in Kern County

INITIAL STUDY
with Proposed Negative Declaration

Submitted Pursuant to: (State) Division 13, California Public Resources Code

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Department of Transportation
and
Responsible Agencies: California Transportation Commission,
California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board

Kirsten Helton
Deputy District Director, Planning and Environmental Analysis
California Department of Transportation
CEQA Lead Agency

3/20/2024
Date

The following individual can be contacted for more information about this document:

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DRAFT
Proposed Negative Declaration

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

State Clearinghouse Number: Pending

District-County-Route-Post Mile: 09-KER-178-88.60 to 104.60

EA/Project Number: 09-38330/0919000069

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to rehabilitate pavement, upgrade existing pedestrian facilities, and make other improvements on State Route 178 from post miles 88.60 to 104.60 in the Ridgecrest/Inyokern area.

Determination

An Initial Study has been prepared by Caltrans District 9. On the basis of this study, it is determined that the proposed action with the incorporation of the identified avoidance and minimization measures will not have a significant effect on the environment for the following reasons:

- The project will have no impact to the following: visual resources, agriculture and forestry resources, cultural resources, energy, geology and soils, land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation, tribal cultural resources, utilities and service systems, and wildfire.

- The project will have less than significant impacts to biological resources, greenhouse gas emissions, hazardous waste, water quality, and noise.

_____

Kirsten Helton
Deputy District Director, Planning and Environmental Analysis
California Department of Transportation

_____

Date

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 Proposed Project

1.1 Introduction

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to rehabilitate pavement, upgrade pedestrian facilities, and repair culverts on State Route 178 from post miles 88.60 to 104.60 in Kern County.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The project “purpose” is a set of objectives the project intends to meet. The project “need” is the transportation deficiency that the project was initiated to address.

1.2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this project is to:

- Preserve, repair, and extend the service life of the existing pavement.
- Improve ride quality.
- Address culverts that are damaged and/or approaching their service life.
- Improve accessibility under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Increase and improve access and connectivity for multiple modes of transportation.
- Upgrade existing highway features to meet current standards.

1.2.2 Need

Pavement Restoration

The pavement within the project area on State Route 178 is in good to fair condition but, if left untreated, will be in fair to poor conditions in the next 20 years. Signs of major distress such as ruts and “alligator” cracks (cracks that look like the bumpy back of an alligator) occur mostly in the wheel path due to repeated heavy traffic loads along the route. The alligator cracks form over time because of the excessive wear from the heavy loads and deflections in the pavement. The project area contains two types of alligator cracks: alligator A cracks (longitudinal cracks in the wheel path) and alligator B cracks (interconnected cracks within the wheel path).

Drainage Improvements

Several culverts within the project limits are damaged or have exceeded their expected service life and are showing signs of deterioration in the form of rusting and holes. Culvert failure would put the roadway at risk due to potential flooding and erosion.

Access and Connectivity for Multiple Modes of Transportation

Per the Caltrans Complete Streets Program, a complete street is a transportation facility that is planned, designed, operated, and maintained to provide safe mobility for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit vehicles, truckers, and motorists appropriate to the function and context of the facility. The aim of the Caltrans' Complete Street policy is to create a space where people of all ages and abilities can maximize the right-of-way with a variety of mobility forms and meet the goals of safety, comfort, and connectivity.

Within the project area, pedestrian facilities such as curb ramps, sidewalks, and driveways are not in compliance with current Americans with Disabilities Act standards. The south side of the highway within the project area has gaps in the sidewalk, and these gaps do not provide for a continuous Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant pathway for multiple modes of transportation. Narrow shoulders in the project area are not suitable for bicycles and create gaps in bicycle pathways.

Roadside Safety Features

Various roadside safety features are nearing the end of their service life and/or do not meet current standards. Three sections of guardrail from post miles 93.60 to 93.61, 94.76 to 94.78, and 98.39 to 98.41 and one section of bridge rail from post miles 93.20 to 93.26 do not meet current standards in the Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware. Signs within the project limits do not meet the current Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for size, shape, color, retroflection, or other features meant to draw attention by motorists and provide optimal visibility. Signals at all signalized intersections need to be updated to current standards. Traffic striping and delineation work also need to be redone to improve their clarity and visibility.

1.3 Project Description

Caltrans proposes multiple improvements to a 16-mile stretch of State Route 178 in Kern County. The project would be constructed in two phases. The first phase would run from post miles 88.6 to 92.0 and post miles 93.4 to 99.0. The second phase would run from post miles 92.0 to 93.4 and post miles 99.0 to 104.6 in the Ridgecrest/Inyokern area. Deteriorating pavement is the main issue the project would address.

Two pavement restoration methods would be used in the project area:

- In the Partial Depth Recycling method, the existing asphalt would be milled and mixed with an emulsified recycling agent, spread, and then compacted and overlayed with a new 0.25-foot layer of hot mix asphalt.
- In the Mill and Fill method, asphalt would be removed and replaced with new asphalt.

Table 1 shows where the pavement restoration methods would be used throughout the project.

Table 1. Pavement Restoration Methods

Location (Post Miles)	Pavement Restoration Method
88.95 to 92.03	Partial Depth Recycling
92.03 to 94.84	Mill and Fill
94.84 to 99.03	Partial Depth Recycling
99.03 to 104.61	Mill and Fill

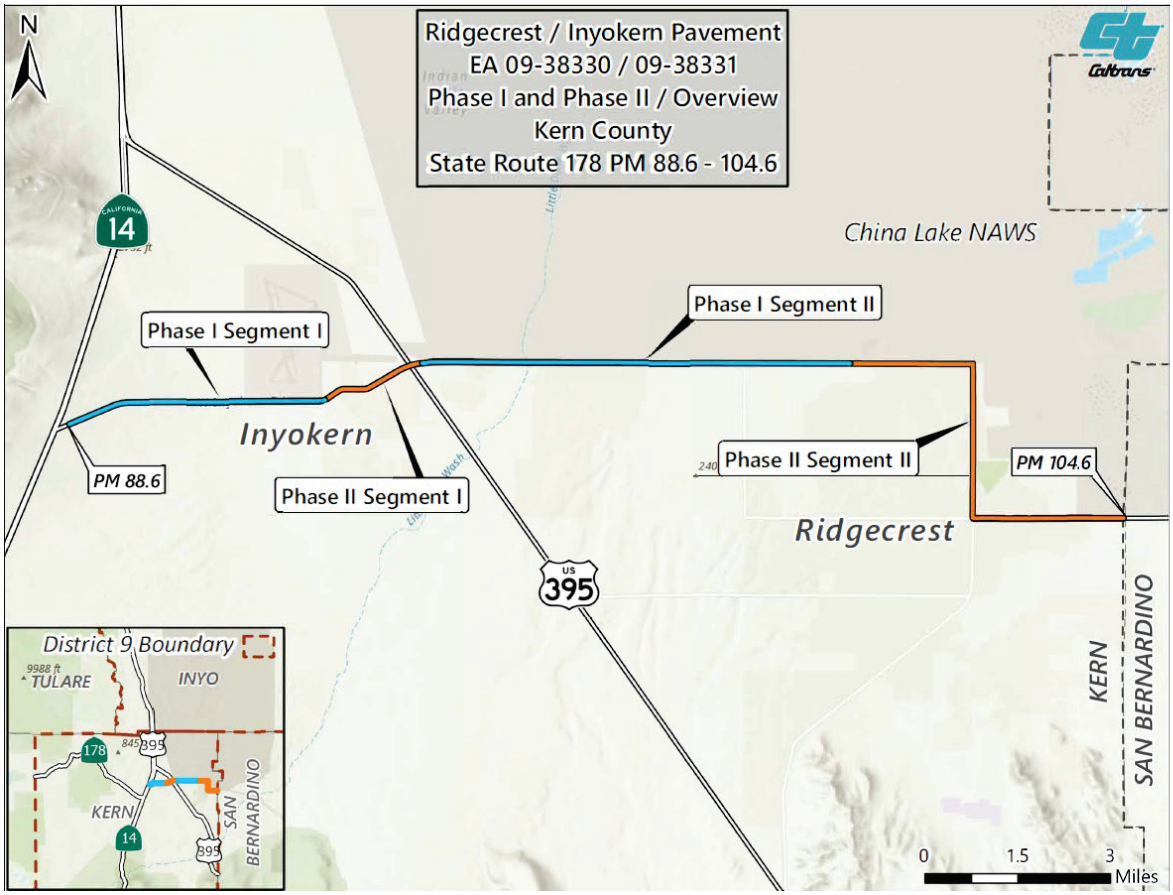
Class 2 bike lanes would be identified by incorporating enhanced pavement delineations such as pavement markings and bicycle signage throughout the project area. The bike lanes are delineated pathways on the roadway that establish where bicycles are intended to travel.

Within the project area are curb ramps that do not meet current Americans with Disabilities Act standards and need to be upgraded. There are also gaps in the sidewalk throughout the communities of Ridgecrest and Inyokern. The project would make the upgrades and fill the gaps with Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant ramps, sidewalks, curb, and gutter. In addition, several road signs within the project area have exceeded their service life and would be replaced.

The project would also remove and replace several drainage culverts and add flared end sections to culverts on State Route 178. Most culverts in the project area would be replaced in-kind, meaning there would be no alterations to the culvert length or circumference, but the need for end treatment has been identified on several culverts. These end treatments would consist of the addition of flared ends on the inlets and outlets of some culverts to limit the potential for erosion at the ends of the culverts.

The project would be split into two phases. Phase 1 would start construction in 2027. Phase 2 would start construction in 2030. See Figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1 Project Vicinity Map



Due to the length of the project area, the project location map has been split into four sections. Phase 1 Segments 1 and 2 represent the first phase of the project; Phase 2 Segments 1 and 2 represent the second phase of the project. See Figures 1-2 through 1-5.

Figure 1-2 Project Location Map (Phase 1, Segment 1)

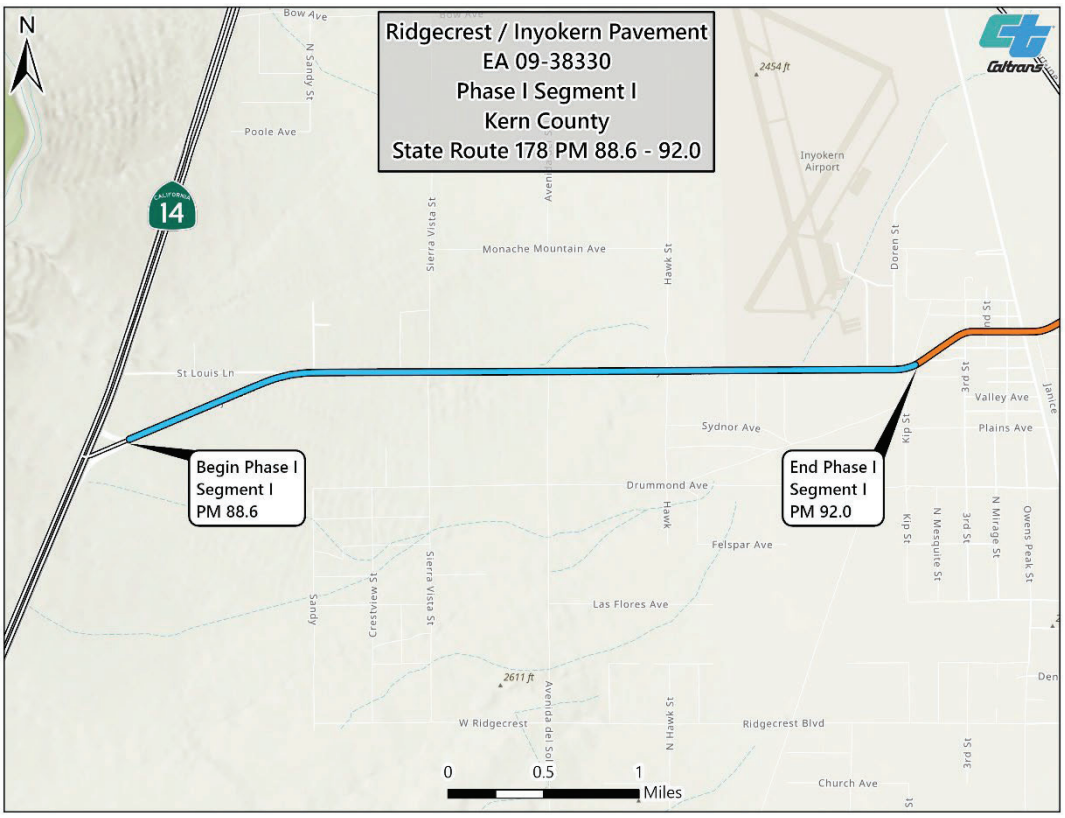


Figure 1-3 Project Location Map (Phase 2, Segment 1)

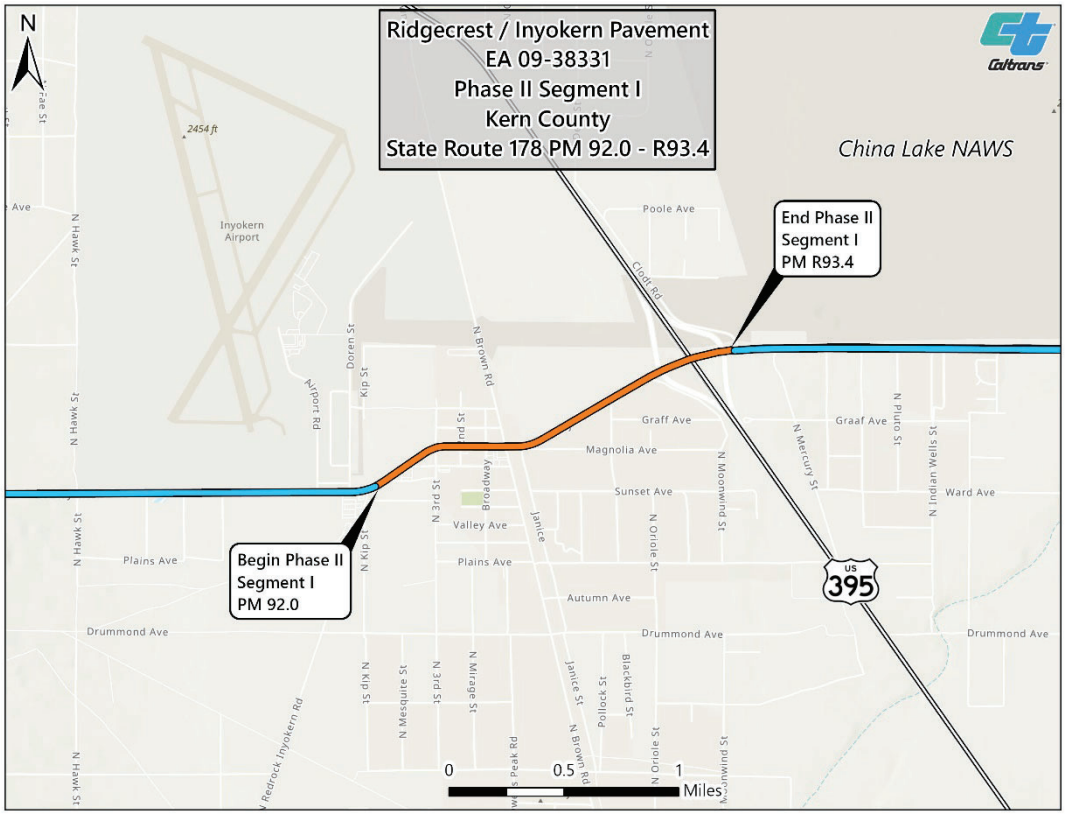


Figure 1-4 Project Location Map (Phase 1, Segment 2)

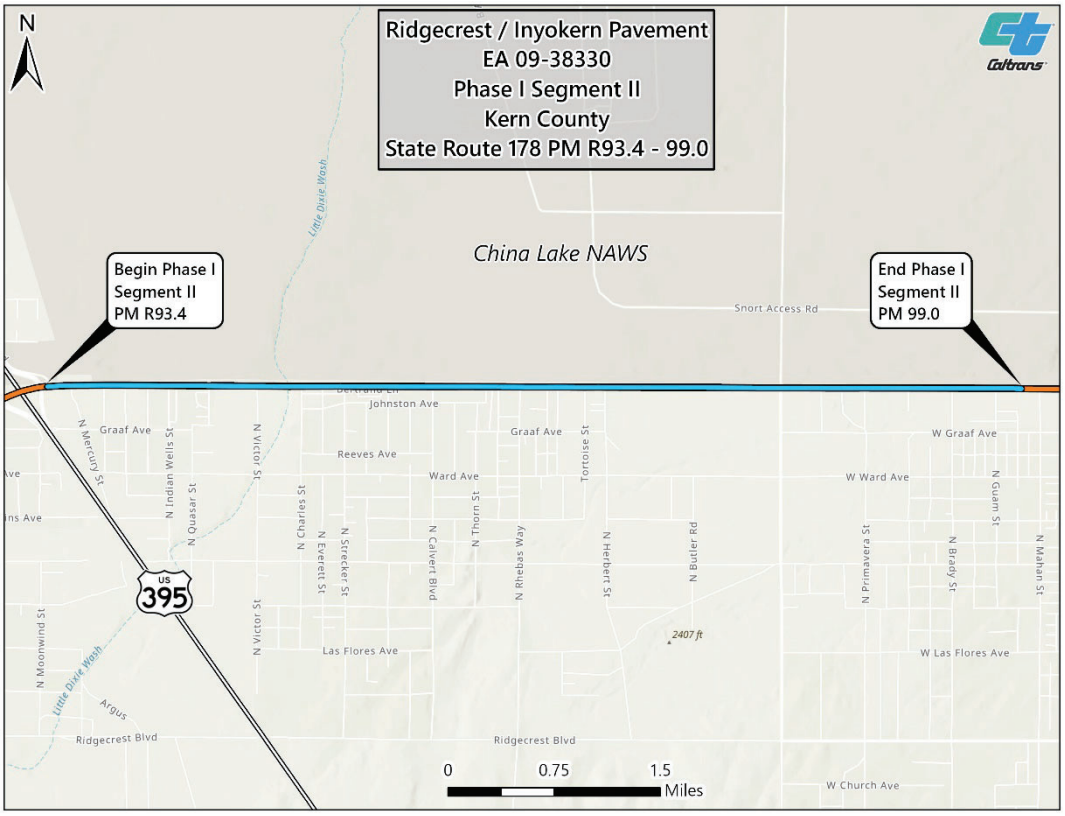
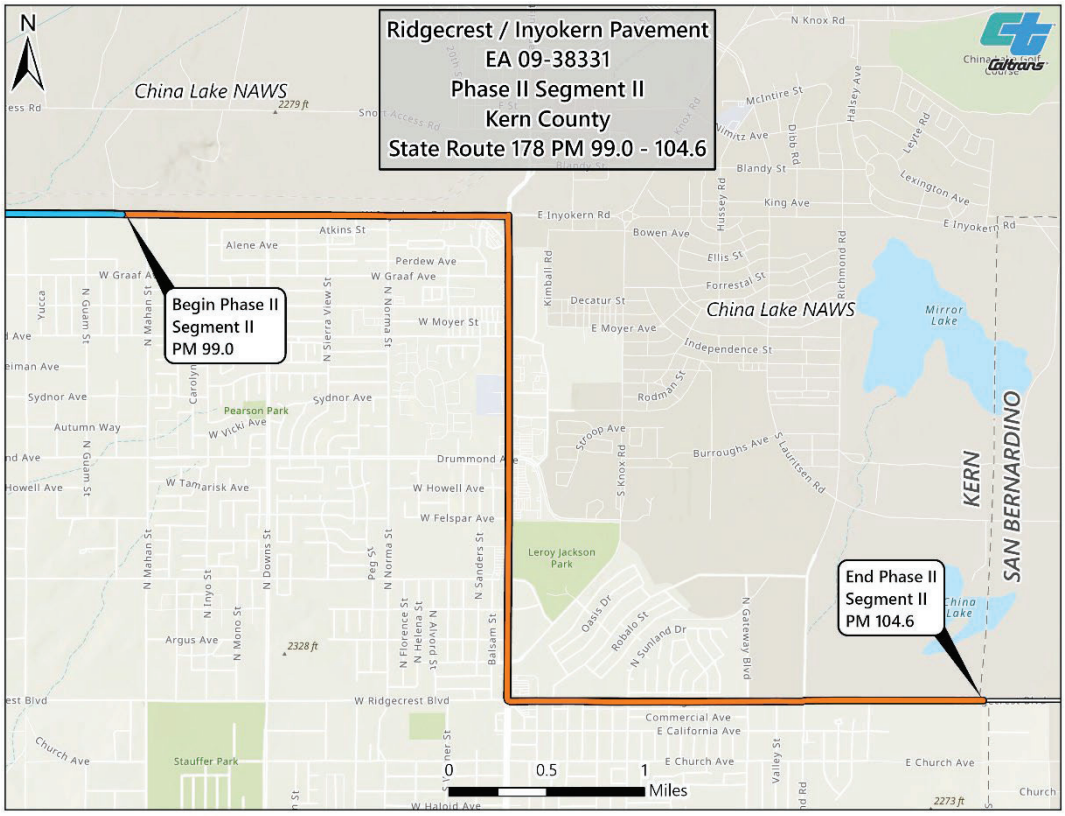


Figure 1-5 Project Location Map (Phase 2, Segment 2)



1.4 Project Alternatives

Three build alternatives and a no-build alternative are being considered for the project.

1.4.1 Build Alternatives

This project contains a number of standardized project measures that are used on most, if not all, Caltrans projects and were not developed in response to any specific environmental impact resulting from the proposed project. These measures are listed later in this chapter under “Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives.”

Common Design Features of the Build Alternatives

Pavement

All three build alternatives would rehabilitate pavement in the project area. Pavement rehabilitation would consist of either the Partial Depth Recycling or

Mill and Fill method. More information on these rehabilitation methods can be found in the Project Description section.

Drainage

All three build alternatives would include the following drainage improvements:

- Culverts would be replaced at post miles 89.03 and 101.07 in kind, including replacement of flared end sections at post mile 89.03 and replacement of curb inlets at post mile 101.07.
- Flared end sections would be added to the outlet of the culverts at post miles 99.58 and 99.6.
- A new storm drain system near the entrance to Ridgecrest Regional Hospital would be constructed to address surface runoff from the hospital parking lot and adjacent roadway. New drainage inlets would be installed on both sides of the highway at post mile 101.42 to capture and convey this surface runoff to a new infiltration gallery system on the east side of State Route 178 within the Caltrans right-of-way. Overflow from the infiltration gallery would be conveyed to the existing curb and gutter to flow east along Omega Way.
- The slotted drain system on Richmond Road at post mile 103.84 would be replaced and include a new trench drain, curb and gutter, and a series of inlets to address flooding in this area by capturing and discharging surface runoff into the existing storm drain system.

Pedestrian Facilities

All three build alternatives would improve or construct curb ramps at the locations listed in Table 2 to meet current Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

Table 2. Locations for New/Improved Curb Ramps

Location Along State Route 178 for Curb Ramp	Post Mile
Broadway Street (Inyokern)	92.43
Brown Road	92.5
Mahan Street	99.11
Inyo Street	99.37
Downs Street	99.61
Gordon Street	99.73
Sierra View Street	99.85
Griffin Street	99.96
Norma Street	100.11

Location Along State Route 178 for Curb Ramp	Post Mile
Triangle Drive (North)	100.50
Inyokern/China Lake Boulevard	100.59
Triangle Drive (South)	100.71
Graaf Avenue	100.84
Moyer Avenue	101.03
Ward Avenue	101.10
Shopping Entrance 1	101.18
Shopping Entrance 2	101.26
Sydnor Avenue	101.33
Hospital Entrance	101.38
Drummond Avenue	101.60
Howell Street	101.73
Feldspar Avenue	101.84
Home Depot Driveway 1	101.97
Home Depot Driveway 2	102.03
Las Flores Avenue	102.10
Coso Avenue	102.22
Argus Avenue	102.36
French Avenue	102.45
China Lake Boulevard/Ridgecrest Boulevard	102.60
Gemstone Street	102.74
Gold Canyon Street	102.79
Fire Opal Street	102.92
Desert Candles Drive	102.98
Holly Canyon Drive	103.04
Sunland Street	103.11
American Street	103.27
Broadway Street (Ridgecrest)	103.44
Gateway Boulevard	103.60
Richmond Street	103.83
Lumill Street	104.12

In addition, multiple driveways between Mahan Street (post mile 99.12) and Gateway Boulevard (post mile 103.70) would be upgraded to meet Americans with Disabilities Act standards.

Complete Streets Elements

All build alternatives would delineate a Class 2 bike lane from post miles 90.43 to 92.25 in both directions.

Traffic Safety Features

- All non-standard signs throughout the project limits would be replaced to meet current standards in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
- Two sections of guardrail from post miles 94.75 to 94.79 and post miles 98.39 to 98.41 would be upgraded to meet current standards in the Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware.
- One section of bridge railing on both sides of the U.S. Route 395 overcrossing, post miles 93.20 to 93.26, would be upgraded to meet standards in the Manual for Assessing Safety Hardware.
- Detector loops for the existing signals at seven intersections would be replaced in the project limits at the locations listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Locations Where Detector Loops Would Be Replaced

Cross Streets Along State Route 178 for Detector Loops	Post Mile
Inyokern and China Lake Boulevard	100.61
Ward Avenue and China Lake Boulevard	101.10
Drummond Avenue and China Lake Boulevard	101.60
Las Flores and China Lake Boulevard	102.10
French Avenue and China Lake Boulevard	102.45
Ridgecrest Boulevard and China Lake Boulevard	102.62
Ridgecrest Boulevard and Richmond Avenue	103.85

Staging Areas

Proposed staging areas would be within the Caltrans right-of-way on disturbed shoulders, disturbed dirt pullouts, and Caltrans maintenance yard and mixing table. Proposed staging areas would be located at the post miles listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Post Miles of Proposed Staging Areas

Category	Post Mile
Location for Staging Area along State Route 178	88.55, 90.42, 91.87, 93.06, 93.19, 95.62, 95.67, 95.73, 98.42, 98.48, 104.45

Unique Features of the Build Alternatives

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 would include the following features.

Pedestrian Facilities

New curb ramps would be added at the locations listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Locations Where Curb Ramps Would Be Added

Nearest Streets Along State Route 178 for Curb Ramps	Post Mile
East of Mahan Street	99.15
Between Mahan Street and Inyo Avenue	99.24, 99.26, and 99.29
West of Inyo Avenue	99.32
East of Inyo Avenue	99.38
Between Inyo Avenue and Downs Street	99.48
Between Broadway Street and South Gateway Boulevard	103.54

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 would include the following features.

Drainage

In addition to the common drainage features mentioned above, culverts at post miles 89.27, 92.43 and 100.63 would be replaced in-kind. A flared end section would be installed at the inlet and outlet of the culvert at post mile 89.27. The culverts at post miles 92.43 and 100.63 would receive a flared end section at the outlet only. The drop inlet at post mile 92.43 will be relocated and replaced. Minor grading may occur at these locations to improve flow.

Pedestrian Facilities

The addition of sidewalk, ramps, curb, and gutter would fill gaps on the southbound side of the highway from post miles 99.32 to 100.47.

New Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant ramps would be installed at the locations listed in Table 6.

Table 6. Locations Where Curb Ramps Would Be Added

Nearest Street Along State Route 178 for Curb Ramps	Post Mile
Inyo Avenue	99.34
Sierra View	99.85

A rectangular rapid flashing beacon would be added at the school crossing at 2nd Street (post mile 92.34) in Inyokern, including relocating the service drop for the existing extinguishable message sign with a service equipment enclosure into the Caltrans right-of-way.

Also, a rectangular rapid flashing beacon and cross walk would be added on Sydnor Street near the hospital entrance at post mile 101.34.

Traffic Safety Features

Intersection signals would be replaced at the locations listed in Table 7.

Table 7. Locations Where Intersection Signals Would be Replaced

Nearest Cross Streets on State Route 178 for Intersection Signals	Post Mile
Ward and China Lake Boulevard	101.1
Drummond Avenue and China Lake Boulevard	101.6
Inyokern Road and China Lake Boulevard	100.61
Las Flores and China Lake Boulevard	102.1
French Avenue and China Lake Boulevard	102.45
Ridgecrest Boulevard and China Lake Boulevard	102.62
Ridgecrest Boulevard and Richmond Drive	103.85

Lighting would be replaced at the U.S. Route 395 and State Route 178 interchange at post mile 93.24. This would include bringing six light poles, electrical pull boxes, and underground wiring up to current standard.

Also, lighting at the Park and Ride lot near the Richmond Road intersection at post mile 103.89 would be replaced. This would include bringing facilities such as nine light poles, electrical pull boxes, and underground wiring up to current standard.

Alternative 3

Improvements included in Alternative 3 are the same as those in Alternative 2, with the addition of the following features.

Shoulder Widening

Shoulder widening would occur from the southbound U.S. Route 395 intersection to the northbound U.S. Route 395 intersection (post miles 93.12 to 93.34) from the current 5-foot-wide shoulders to 8-foot wide standard shoulders. One bridge lies within these post miles; the bridge would not be widened, but the shoulders approaching the bridge would be widened. The side slopes approaching the bridge would have to be expanded as well.

Shoulder widening would occur from North Comet Avenue to west of Mahan Street (post miles 93.71 to 94.49 and 94.84 to 99.02) from the current 4-foot wide shoulders to standard to 8-foot wide shoulders.

Pedestrian Facilities

The addition of sidewalk, ramps, curb, and gutter would fill gaps on the southbound side of the highway from west of Mahan Street to Richmond Road (post miles 99.01 to 103.54).

An 8-foot multi-use path would be added from the northeast corner of 3rd Street (post mile 92.25) to the northwest corner of Brown Street (post mile 92.48). The multi-use path would address multi-modal (pedestrian and bicycle) mobility though the Inyokern corridor by providing formalized space for non-motorized travel.

New sidewalks, ramps, curb, and gutter would be added on the southbound side from 3rd Street to Broadway Street (post miles 92.25 to 92.42).

New American with Disabilities Act-compliant ramps would be installed at the locations listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Locations Where Curb Would Be Added

Nearest Streets Along State Route 178 for Curbs	Post Miles
3rd Street	92.25
2nd Street	92.34
Broadway Street	92.42
Brown Road	92.48
Mahan Street	99.03
Broadway Street	103.45
Gateway Boulevard	103.62

Complete Streets Elements

A Class 2 bike path would be added between the southbound U.S. Route 395 intersection and northbound U.S. Route 395 intersection (post miles 93.11 to 93.34) and between Frontage Road and San Bernadino Boulevard (from post miles 93.40 to 94.49 and from post miles 94.84 to 105.61). The gap between post miles 94.49 to 94.84 is a result of avoiding impacts to the floodplain through this section of the project limits.

1.4.2 No-Build (No-Action) Alternative

The no-build alternative would keep the existing facilities as they are within the project limits on State Route 178. Selection of the no-build alternative would result in no project-related construction activities taking place. The no-build alternative would not meet the project's purpose and need because it would not address pavement, drainage, or pedestrian facilities. Non-standard highway features would also not be upgraded on the segment of State Route 178 within the project limits.

1.5 Identification of a Preferred Alternative

At this time, Caltrans has not identified a preferred alternative. After the public circulation and comment period of the draft environmental document, all comments will be considered, and Caltrans will select a preferred alternative and make the final determination of the project's effects on the environment. This section will be updated in the final environmental document once a preferred alternative has been selected.

1.6 Standard Measures and Best Management Practices Included in All Build Alternatives

This project will include a list of Caltrans standard measures that are typically used on all Caltrans projects. Caltrans standard measures are considered features of the project and are evaluated as part of the project. Caltrans standard measures are not implemented to address any specific effects, impacts or circumstances associated with the project, but are instead implemented as part of the project's design to address common issues encountered on projects. The measures listed below are those related to environmental resources and are applicable to the project. These measures can be found in Caltrans' 2022 Standard Specifications.

7-1 Legal Relations and Responsibility to the Public
10-4 Water Usage
10-5 Dust Control
10-6 Watering
12-1 Temporary Traffic Control
12-3 Temporary Traffic Control Devices
12-4 Traffic Control Systems
13-1 Water Pollution Control
13-2 Water Pollution Control Program
13-4 Job Site Management
13-6 Temporary Sediment Control
13-7 Temporary Tracking Control
13-10 Temporary Linear Sediment Barriers

14-1 Environmental Stewardship
14-2 Cultural Resources
14-6 Biological Resources
14-7 Paleontological Resources
14-8 Noise and Vibration
14-9 Air Quality
14-10 Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling
14-11 Hazardous Waste and Contamination
14-12 Other Agency Regulatory Requirements
17-2 Clearing and Grubbing
18-1 Dust Palliatives
20-1 Landscape
20-3 Planting
20-4 Plant Establishment Work
21-2 Erosion Control Work

More standard measures will be added to the project as necessary or appropriate.

1.7 Discussion of the NEPA Categorical Exclusion

This document contains information regarding compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other state laws and regulations. Separate environmental documentation, supporting a Categorical Exclusion determination, has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. When needed for clarity, or as required by CEQA, this document may contain references to federal laws and/or regulations (CEQA, for example, requires consideration of adverse effects on species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species by the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)—that is, species protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA)).

1.8 Permits and Approvals Needed

The following permits, licenses, agreements, and certifications are required for project construction:

Agency	Permit/Approval	Status
California Department of Fish and Wildlife	1600 Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement	To be obtained before construction
Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board	Section 401 Water Quality Certification	To be obtained before construction

Chapter 2 CEQA Evaluation

2.1 CEQA Environmental Checklist

This checklist identifies physical, biological, social, and economic factors that might be affected by the proposed project. Potential impact determinations include Significant and Unavoidable Impact, Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated, Less Than Significant Impact, and No Impact. In many cases, background studies performed in connection with a project will indicate that there are no impacts to a particular resource. A "No Impact" answer reflects this determination. The questions in this checklist are intended to encourage the thoughtful assessment of impacts and do not represent thresholds of significance.

Project features, which can include both design elements of the project and standardized measures that are applied to all or most Caltrans projects such as Best Management Practices and measures included in the Standard Plans and Specifications or as Standard Special Provisions, are considered to be an integral part of the project and have been considered prior to any significance determinations documented below.

"No Impact" determinations in each section are based on the scope, description, and location of the proposed project as well as the appropriate technical report (bound separately in Volume 2), and no further discussion is included in this document.

2.1.1 Aesthetics

Considering the information in the Draft Visual Impact Analysis dated February 9, 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	**No Impact**
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?	**No Impact**

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Aesthetics
c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from a publicly accessible vantage point.) If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	**No Impact**
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	**No Impact**

2.1.2 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment Project; and the forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Based on a search of the California Department of Conservation's Important Farmland Mapping Tool, there are no designated Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of State Importance in or near the proposed project limits. The project will not have any effect on protected farmland, including those under the Williamson Act, or convert any farmland to non-agricultural use (source: https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/CIFF).

Impacts to timberland are analyzed as required by the California Timberland Productivity Act of 1982 (California Government Code Sections 51100 et seq.), Which was enacted to preserve forest resources. Similar to the Williamson Act with farmland, this program gives owners tax incentives to keep their land in timber production. Contracts involving timber production zones are on 10-year cycles. Searches of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection website and the California Department of Conservation website showed no designated timberlands or timber protection

zones in or near the project vicinity. The project will have no effect on protected timberlands since none exist in the project area.

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Agriculture and Forest Resources
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	**No Impact**
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	**No Impact**
c) Conflict with existing zoning, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))?	**No Impact**
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	**No Impact**
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	**No Impact**

2.1.3 Air Quality

Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations.

Considering the information in the Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, Paleontology Memo dated February 12, 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Air Quality
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	**No Impact**
b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?	**No Impact**
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	**No Impact**
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors) adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	**No Impact**

2.1.4 Biological Resources

Considering the information in the Natural Environment Study (Minimal Impacts) dated February 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, or National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries?	**Less Than Significant Impact**
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	**Less Than Significant Impact**

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Biological Resources
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	**No Impact**
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	**No Impact**
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	**No Impact**
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	**No Impact**

Affected Environment

The Natural Environment Study established a 126-acre Biological Study Area for the project, defined as the area that may be directly, indirectly, temporarily, or permanently impacted by construction and construction-related activities. The project's Biological Study Area extends 500 feet from the proposed off-pavement construction areas. The Biological Study Area was delineated to ensure all species and habitats with the potential to occur within the Project Impact Area, including potential access routes and staging areas, were properly surveyed to assess potential impacts of proposed project activities.

The project lies east of the Scodie Mountains, north of the Black Hills and Spangler Hills, and southwest of the Argus Mountains in the Indian Wells Valley. An active military base, the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station, borders the northeast edge of the project. The project location can be described as a locally urban setting in a largely rural valley, with the town of Inyokern and City of Ridgecrest both residing in the project area. The elevation within the project limits ranges from approximately 2,250 feet to 2,990 feet, and the climate is characterized by warm dry summers and cold winters.

The biological community and habitat types within the project area include denuded areas, desert scrub communities and ephemeral stream channels. Denuded areas consist of disturbed dirt shoulders and unpaved lots and roads. The desert scrub community is characterized by sandy well-drained

soils dominated by creosote brush and saltbush. The ephemeral stream channel included only sparse vegetation.

Special-Status Animal and Plant Species

Mojave Desert Tortoise

The Mojave desert tortoise is a candidate for endangered species under the California Endangered Species Act and listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act. This species occurs mostly in the Mojave Desert, and west and north of the Colorado River. The project corridor does not include designated critical habitat for the desert tortoise.

Potentially suitable habitat consisting of the creosote bush scrub plant community occurs with the Biological Study Area, but the habitat is marginal and subject to high levels of human disturbance. Surveys of the study area were conducted using the methodology described in the Pre-project Field Survey Protocol for Potential Desert Tortoise Habitats (USFWS 2010). Surveys were conducted from May 22 to May 26, 2023, and June 1 and 2, 2023. No desert tortoise or its sign was found during surveys.

American Badger

The American badger is a California Department of Fish and Wildlife species of concern. Potentially suitable habitat consisting of dry, open shrub and friable soils occurs within the project limits along with an abundant rodent population, the badger's primary food source. However, the habitat is marginal and subject to high levels of human disturbance.

Habitat requirements for the American badger, desert kit fox, and Mohave ground squirrel are very similar, so the surveys for these species were conducted simultaneously from May 22 to May 26, 2023, and from June 1 to June 3, 2023. Surveys consisted of searching for individual species, burrows, and burrow complexes. All potentially suitable burrows were mapped using a Geographic Information System, then photographed, and classified as inactive/unoccupied, potentially active/occupied, or active/occupied. Specific protocols for burrow monitoring for the Mohave ground squirrel and desert kit fox are described under the respective species sections below.

Five suitable badger burrows were found and monitored for three consecutive nights through use of infrared cameras and checking for tracks in loose dirt at the burrow entrance. No badger or badger sign was found during the surveys.

Desert Kit Fox

The desert kit fox is generally protected as a fur-bearing mammal by the California Fish and Game Code Section 4000 et. Seq. The fox is widespread throughout the North American southwest and is found in arid climates from southern Oregon and Idaho to Baja California and central Mexico. Habitat for this species is similar to that of the American badger and has potential to be

present within the Biological Study Area. However, the habitat is marginal and subject to high levels of human disturbance. Habitat requirements for the American badger, desert kit fox, and Mohave ground squirrel are very similar, so the surveys for these species were conducted simultaneously from May 22 to May 26, 2023, and from June 1 to June 3, 2023.

The same five suitable badger burrows noted above were also considered suitable for kit foxes and were monitored using infrared cameras and checked for tracks (in the loose dirt at the burrow entrance). No kit fox or kit fox sign was found during the surveys.

Mohave Ground Squirrel

The Mohave ground squirrel is listed as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act. This species has been found in all major desert scrub habitats within the western Mojave Desert in California. Suitable habitat for the Mohave ground squirrel consisting of open desert scrub and sandy soil may be present within the Biological Study Area. However, the habitat is marginal and subject to high levels of human disturbance.

Habitat requirements for the American badger, desert kit fox, and Mohave ground squirrel are very similar, so surveys for these species were conducted simultaneously from May 22 to May 26, 2023, and from June 1 to June 3, 2023. All suspected Mohave ground squirrel burrows within the project footprint were surveyed using wireless borescope to evaluate presence. Surveys were negative for the presence of the Mohave ground squirrel.

Burrowing Owl

The burrowing owl is considered a Species of Special Concern by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Potentially suitable habitat consisting of open, dry annual or perennial grassland, desert, and scrubland characterized by low-growing vegetation is present within the Biological Study Area. However, the habitat is marginal and subject to high levels of human disturbance. Burrowing owls live in colonies in burrow complexes. The owl preys on burrowing mammals, most notably the California ground squirrel.

Four burrowing owl surveys were conducted in accordance with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines. The surveys involved walking through suitable habitat within the Biological Study Area. Parcels of land to which Caltrans was not granted access were viewed using binoculars from suitable vantage points to survey for burrowing owl activity or sign. During the first set of surveys, it was determined that a large portion of the project site did not contain suitable habitat, so the subsequent surveys conducted in May and July 2023 focused on the areas that were determined to have potential suitable burrowing owl habitat. Methods used to survey for burrowing owls included visual reconnaissance and observation of key signs such as scat, tracks, burrows, nests, and calls. Onsite topography, vegetative communities, and habitat quality were

documented during field surveys. All wildlife species encountered visually or audibly during field surveys were identified and recorded in field notes. All surveys were negative for the presence of the burrowing owl.

Le Conte's Thrasher

The Le Conte's thrasher is considered a California species of concern. For this bird, potentially suitable habitat consisting of open desert wash, desert scrub, and dense spiny shrub and cactus occurs within the Biological Study Area. However, the habitat is marginal and subject to high levels of human disturbance. No Le Conte's thrasher was found during the field surveys.

Charlotte's Phacelia

Charlotte's phacelia is considered sensitive by the Bureau of Land Management and is considered rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere by the California Native Plant Society. This plant grows in Joshua tree woodland, Mojave desert scrub, and pinyon and juniper woodland and is found in granitic, sandy habitats at elevations of from 1,968 to 7,217 feet. The Biological Study Area may contain suitable, yet marginal habitat for this plant species. This species was not found during general flora and fauna surveys, but several observations have occurred within 5 miles of the Biological Study Area.

Natural Communities of Special Concern

Aquatic Resources

Waters, wetlands, and riparian habitats have various protections and permit requirements under state and federal agencies, including the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

All aquatic resources within the Biological Study Area were mapped between April and July 2023. Prior to field delineations, current and historic aerial imagery was reviewed to assess potential aquatic features that could be under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Regional Water Quality Control Board and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Riverine features within the Biological Study Area occur at all ephemeral stream channels; these drainages are dry most of the year and are only active during spring runoff and in response to large storms. The riverine features within the Biological Study Area are characterized by sparse vegetation. No riparian vegetation exists within the Biological Study Area.

Environmental Consequences

The following section analyzes environmental consequences as they pertain to each California Environmental Quality Act significance determination.

Response to *a) Less Than Significant Impact*

Special-Status Animal and Plant Species

Mojave Desert Tortoise

Temporary or permanent impacts to this species are not anticipated as a result of project activities associated with any of the three proposed build alternatives. However, incidental observations of this species during construction could occur. Therefore, standard avoidance and minimization measures are being proposed to ensure impacts to this species will not occur as a result of the project.

American Badger

Temporary or permanent impacts to this species are not anticipated as a result of project activities associated with any of the three proposed build alternatives. However, incidental observations of this species during construction could occur. Therefore, standard avoidance and minimization measures are being proposed to ensure impacts to this species will not occur as a result of the project.

Desert Kit Fox

Temporary or permanent impacts to this species are not anticipated as a result of project activities associated with any of the three proposed build alternatives. However, incidental observations of this species during construction could occur. Therefore, standard avoidance and minimization measures are being proposed to ensure impacts to this species will not occur as a result of the project.

Mohave Ground Squirrel

Temporary or permanent impacts to this species are not anticipated as a result of project activities associated with any of the three proposed build alternatives. However, incidental observations of this species during construction could occur. Therefore, standard avoidance and minimization measures are being proposed to ensure impacts to this species will not occur as a result of the project.

Burrowing Owl

Temporary or permanent impacts to this species are not anticipated as a result of project activities associated with any of the three proposed build alternatives. However, incidental observations of this species during construction could occur. Therefore, standard avoidance and minimization measures are being proposed to ensure impacts to this species will not occur as a result of the project.

Le Conte's Thrasher

The project is not anticipated to result in temporary or permanent impacts to the Le Conte's thrasher. However, incidental observations and nesting may occur within the Biological Study Area prior to or during construction. With the

implementation of the avoidance and minimization measures discussed below, there will be a less than significant effect to Le Conte's thrasher resulting from this project.

Charlotte's Phacelia

The project is not anticipated to result in temporary or permanent impacts to Charlotte's phacelia. However, rare plants may be found within the Biological Study Area prior to construction. With the implementation of the avoidance and minimization measures discussed below, there will be a less than significant effect to Charlotte's phacelia from this project.

Response to *b) Less Than Significant Impact*

Natural Communities of Special Concern

All three project build alternatives will result in both permanent and temporary impacts to Waters of the State.

Aquatic Resources—Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is anticipated to result in approximately 0.01 acre of permanent impacts to Waters of the State under the jurisdiction of both the California Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Permanent impacts would result from adding flared end sections at three culvert locations: post miles 89.03, 99.58, and 99.6.

Temporary impacts resulting from Alternative 1 are anticipated to be approximately 0.10 acre and would result from ground disturbance, trenching, minor channel grading, and potential vegetation removal needed to install the flared end sections.

Aquatic Resources—Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is anticipated to result in approximately 0.02 acre of permanent impacts to Waters of the State under the jurisdiction of both the California Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Permanent impacts would be a result of adding flared end sections at five culvert locations: post miles 89.03, 89.27, 99.58, 99.6, and 100.63.

Temporary impacts as a result of Alternative 2 are anticipated to be approximately 0.13 acre and would result from ground disturbance, trenching, minor channel grading, and potential vegetation removal to install the flared end sections.

Aquatic Resources—Alternative 3

Alternative 3 is anticipated to result in approximately 0.02 acre of permanent impacts to Waters of the State under the jurisdiction of both the California Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Permanent impacts would be a result of adding flared end sections at five culvert locations: post miles 89.03, 89.27, 99.58, 99.6, and 100.63.

Temporary impacts as a result of Alternative 3 are anticipated to be approximately 0.13 acre and would result from ground disturbance, trenching, minor channel grading, and potential vegetation removal to install the flared end sections.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

While the project does not have the potential to result in significant impacts requiring implementation of avoidance, minimization and/or mitigation measures, the following avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented to reduce impacts that have been determined to be less than significant:

Question (a):

BIO-1: To avoid impacts to Charlotte's phacelia, any individuals or populations found within the Biological Study Area during rare plant surveys or pre-construction surveys will be flagged for avoidance, given a 10-foot buffer, and designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Area. All Environmentally Sensitive Areas will be shared with the Resident Engineer and Contractor.

BIO-2: If Charlotte's phacelia is present within the Project Impact Area and cannot be avoided, the Caltrans Biologist will initiate consultation with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to determine the best course of action for impact minimization; while consultation is in progress, a no-work buffer of 10 feet will be implemented to avoid impacts.

BIO-3: Desert tortoise pre-construction surveys for any sign of individuals and/or active burrows will be conducted within the Biological Study Area. If any individuals or active burrows are found, a no-work buffer of 500 feet will be implemented and full-time biological monitoring will be implemented while desert tortoise activity exists within the Biological Study Area. Further coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be initiated to ensure all impacts to individuals are avoided.

BIO-4: American badger and desert kit fox pre-construction surveys for any sign of individuals and/or active burrows will be conducted within the Biological Study Area. If any individuals or active burrows are found, a no-work buffer of 500 feet will be implemented and full-time biological monitoring will be implemented during construction, and camera monitoring will be implemented during nighttime hours, while American badger activity exists within the Biological Study Area.

BIO-5: Mohave ground squirrel pre-construction surveys for any sign of individuals and/or active burrows will be conducted within the Biological Study Area. If any individuals or active burrows are found, a no-work buffer of 500 feet will be implemented and full-time biological monitoring will be implemented during construction, and camera monitoring will be implemented during nighttime hours, while Mohave ground squirrel activity exists within the Biological Study Area. Further coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife will be initiated to ensure all impacts to individuals are avoided.

BIO-6: Burrowing owl pre-construction surveys for any sign of individuals and/or active burrows will be conducted within the Biological Study Area. If any individuals or active burrows are found, a no-work buffer of 500 feet will be implemented and full-time biological monitoring will be implemented during construction, and camera monitoring will be implemented during nighttime hours, while burrowing owl activity exists within the Biological Study Area.

BIO-7: To avoid impacts to the Le Conte's thrasher, pre-construction surveys for active nests will be conducted within 500 feet of the Project Impact Area and any confirmed active nest locations will be shared with the Resident Engineer and Contractor; a no-work buffer of up to 500 feet from active nests may be implemented as needed as determined by the Caltrans Biologist.

BIO-8: General pre-construction nesting bird surveys will be conducted within the 72 hours prior to any work being done regardless of time of year as species nesting times vary within and outside of the normal nesting period.

BIO-9: If a nest is found within the Biological Study Area, an appropriately sized no-work buffer will be implemented as determined by the Caltrans Biologist to reduce impacts caused by construction until nesting season has finished, or nesting activities have completed, and the bird nestling has fledged and left the area.

BIO-10: Any active nests found within the Biological Study Area will be monitored by a California Department of Fish and Wildlife-approved Biologist; a no-work buffer may be implemented if the construction activities appear to be disrupting nesting activities (parent birds not exhibiting stressed behavior, territorial behavior, or abandoning nest, etc.).

Question (b):

BIO-11: Prior to the start of work, workers will receive a Biological Resource Information Program training on all project-related regulated species and environmental resource protection areas before performing onsite work.

BIO-12: A qualified Biological Monitor will be present onsite during all initial ground-clearing activities taking place within jurisdictional areas.

BIO-13: A water diversion plan will be implemented, as needed, to ensure all work within the channel is occurring under dry conditions.

HYD-1: Temporary Soil Stabilization, Sediment Control, Tracking Control, Wind Erosion Control, Non-Stormwater Management, and Waste Management and Materials Pollution Control Best Management Practices will be implemented.

2.1.5 Cultural Resources

Cultural resource studies completed for this project consist of the Archaeological Survey Report (completed September 2023), the Historic Property Survey Report (completed January 2024), and the Historical Resources Evaluation Report (completed November 2023). Support studies and survey methods conducted for this project include record searches and field surveys. The following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Cultural Resources
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	**No Impact**
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to Section 15064.5?	**No Impact**
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	**No Impact**

2.1.6 Energy

Considering the information in the Climate Change Analysis dated December 14, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Energy
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during project construction or operation?	**No Impact**
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	**No Impact**

2.1.7 Geology and Soils

Considering the information in the paleontological assessment in the Air/Noise/Hazardous Waste/Water/Paleontology memo dated February 12, 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Geology and Soils
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.	**No Impact**
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?	**No Impact**
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	**No Impact**
iv) Landslides?	**No Impact**
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	**No Impact**
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in onsite or offsite landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?	**No Impact**
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property?	**No Impact**
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?	**No Impact**
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?	**No Impact**

2.1.8 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Considering the information in the Climate Change Analysis dated December 14, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Greenhouse Gas Emissions
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	**Less Than Significant Impact**
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	**No Impact**

Affected Environment

The project location contains an urban setting consisting of the town of Inyokern and City of Ridgecrest surrounded by a mostly rural valley. The local economy is largely supported by the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station. State Route 178 is the main transportation route to and through the area for both passenger and commercial vehicles.

Environmental Consequences

Response to (a) Less Than Significant Impact

This project offers three build alternatives, each with slightly different proposed working days, but all have a potential start date in 2027. Construction greenhouse gas emissions were estimated using the Caltrans Construction Emissions Tool (referred to as CAL-CET). The tool was developed to use Caltrans-specific equipment activity data and the best available equipment emissions information to improve estimates of transportation-related construction emissions, fuel consumptions, and electricity consumption, and to support transportation and air quality planning.

Alternative 1 is estimated to take 300 working days to complete. Construction of Alternative 1 is estimated to generate approximately 414 tons of carbon dioxide, with a daily average of approximately 8,007 pounds of carbon dioxide per day.

Alternative 2 is estimated to take 360 working days to complete. Construction of Alternative 2 is estimated to generate approximately 409 tons of carbon dioxide, with a daily average of 7,888 pounds of carbon dioxide per day.

Alternative 3 is estimated to take 420 working days to complete. Construction of Alternative 3 is estimated to generate approximately 383 tons of carbon dioxide, with a daily average of 7,409 pounds of carbon dioxide per day.

While some greenhouse gas emissions during the construction period would be unavoidable, no increase in operational greenhouse gas emissions is expected once construction is complete. The project proposes to rehabilitate pavement, upgrade existing pedestrian facilities, and make other improvements on State Route 178. The project will not increase the vehicle capacity of the roadway. This type of project generally causes minimal or no increase to operational greenhouse gas emissions. The project would not increase the number of travel lanes on State Route 178, so no increase in vehicle miles traveled would occur.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

While the project does not have the potential to result in significant impacts requiring implementation of avoidance, minimization and/or mitigation measures, the following avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented to reduce impacts that have been determined to be less than significant:

All construction contracts include Caltrans Standards Specifications Section 7-1.02A and 7-1.02C, Emissions Reduction, which 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 emissions reduction regulations; and Section 14-9.02, Air Pollution Control, which requires contractors to comply with all air pollution control rules, regulations, ordinances, and statues. Certain common regulations, such as equipment idling restrictions, which reduce construction vehicle emissions, also help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. An additional Standard Specification that will be complied with during construction of the project and will reduce greenhouse gas emissions during construction is Section14-10, Solid Waste Disposal and Recycling. Recycling greater quantities of construction waste will help offset greenhouse gas emissions. Also, Standard Specifications Section 12, Temporary Traffic Control, outlines the standards for properly implementing traffic controls during construction.

In addition, the following avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented for the project:

GHG-1: When feasible, limit idling to 5 minutes for delivery and dump trucks and other diesel-powered equipment.

GHG-2: For improved fuel efficiency from construction equipment, the contractor shall maintain equipment in proper tune and working condition, use right-sized equipment for the job, and use equipment with new technologies.

GHG-3: Use alternative fuels such as renewable diesel for construction equipment.

GHG-4: Reduce construction waste. For example, reuse or recycle construction and demolition waste (reduces consumption of raw materials, reducing waste and transportation to landfill; saves costs).

GHG-5: When feasible, use recycled water or reduce consumption of potable water for construction.

GHG-6: Where feasible, use material sources and borrow sites as close to the project location as possible, reducing the number of haul trips and distance traveled per trip.

2.1.9 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Considering the information in the Revised Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, and Paleontology Memo dated February 12, 2024, the Initial Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, and Paleontology Memo dated September 20, 2023, and the Initial Site Assessment Report from August 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	**No Impact**
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?	**No Impact**
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	**Less Than Significant Impact**
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	**No Impact**

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hazards and Hazardous Materials
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?	**No Impact**
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	**No Impact**
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires?	**No Impact**

Affected Environment

The Initial Site Assessment Report identified 36 facilities or properties within or adjacent to the Caltrans right-of-way that have the potential to cause soil contamination. Most of these likely do not have contamination present or contamination would not be encountered during construction of this project because most project work would occur at or near the surface. Certain construction activities may pose a greater risk of encountering contaminated soils than others due to specific locations and depths or extent of excavation at each location.

Aerially deposited lead may be present in soils adjacent to the existing highway due to the historic use of leaded gasoline. If present, aerially deposited lead-impacted soils will be handled and disposed of in accordance with the existing aerially deposited lead agreement between Caltrans and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

After a preferred alternative is selected, the locations and depths of excavation needed to construct all project features will be evaluated for their potential to encounter contamination at any of the potential facilities/properties identified in the initial site assessment. If the project features pose a reasonable risk of encountering potential underground contamination, a Preliminary Site Investigation Report with soil and groundwater sampling may be performed to identify the depth and concentration of contaminants. If contaminants are identified in the Preliminary Site Investigation, and cannot be avoided by altering the project design, standard special provisions will be included in the contract to require the contractor to follow all applicable regulations for handling, transportation, and disposal of contaminated materials. Depending on the chosen alternative, the Preliminary Site Investigation may also include surface

soil sampling for aerially deposited lead characterization and an asbestos survey of bridge rail materials.

Although the project is not anticipated to generate or transport significant amounts of hazardous materials, the potential hazardous waste transportation routes would be adjacent to school zones, given the proximity of the project to several schools. The project encompasses the rural communities of Ridgecrest and Inyokern. Within both communities are schools and childcare facilities that lie within 0.25 mile of the project area. Inyokern Elementary, Mesquite High School, Immanuel Christian, and Western Kern Community College are several of the larger schools that are adjacent to the project limits.

Environmental Consequences

Response to (c) Less Than Significant Impact

No acutely hazardous material is expected to be handled within the project area. Although school zones are adjacent to the project area, the risk for public hazard due to proposed work in the area is low.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

HW-1: Preliminary Site Investigation may be performed after an alternative is chosen to determine the depth and extent of potential sources of historic contamination, asbestos-containing materials, and aerially deposited lead.

HW-2: Aerially deposited lead testing will occur on the highway shoulders throughout the project limits to characterize the lead concentrations in the soils.

2.1.10 Hydrology and Water Quality

Considering the information in the Revised Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, and Paleontology Memo dated February 12, 2024, the Initial Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, and Paleontology Memo dated September 20, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface water or groundwater quality?	**Less Than Significant**
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	**No Impact**

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Hydrology and Water Quality
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would: (i) result in substantial erosion or siltation onsite or offsite;	**No Impact**
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding onsite or offsite;	**No Impact**
(iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	**No Impact**
(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?	**No Impact**
d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	**No Impact**
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	**No Impact**

Affected Environment

The project scope includes three culvert replacements for Alternative 1 or five culvert replacements for Alternatives 2 and 3, the addition of flared end sections, and minor channel grading. The jurisdictional waters within the project area are identified as ephemeral desert channels, which do not have a continuous surface connection to a traditional navigable water. Because of this, all channel work proposed in the project is considered Waters of the State under the jurisdiction of the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The ephemeral stream channels within the project area include only sparse vegetation.

Environmental Consequences

The project will have both permanent and temporary impacts to Waters of the State.

Alternative 1

Alternative 1 is anticipated to result in approximately 0.01 acre of permanent impacts to Waters of the State under the jurisdiction of both the California Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Permanent impacts would result from adding flared end sections at two culvert locations: post miles 99.58 and 99.6.

Temporary impacts resulting from Alternative 1 are anticipated to be approximately 0.10 acre, which would result from ground disturbance, trenching, minor channel grading, and potential vegetation removal needed to install the flared end sections.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is anticipated to result in approximately 0.02 acre of permanent impacts to Waters of the State under the jurisdiction of both the California Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Permanent impacts would be a result of adding flared end sections at five culvert locations: post miles 89.03, 89.27, 99.58, 99.6, and 100.63.

Temporary impacts as a result of Alternative 2 are anticipated to be approximately 0.13 acre, which would result from ground disturbance, trenching, minor channel grading, and potential vegetation removal to install the flared end sections.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 is anticipated to result in approximately 0.02 acre of permanent impacts to Waters of the State under the jurisdiction of both the California Department of Fish and Game and the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Permanent impacts would be a result of adding flared end sections at five culvert locations: post miles 89.03, 89.27, 99.58, 99.6, and 100.63.

Temporary impacts as a result of Alternative 3 are anticipated to be approximately 0.13 acre, which would result from ground disturbance, trenching, minor channel grading, and potential vegetation removal to install the flared end sections.

These acreages represent a calculated estimation of the jurisdictional area within the Project Impact Area and are subject to change following modification during design. Temporary impacts are expected to result from ground disturbance, trenching, and potential vegetation removal. Project activities and features subject to California Department of Fish and Wildlife and Reginal Water Quality Control Board jurisdiction are likely to require permits and/or authorization from both agencies. Based on proposed work and resource type, the project will require a Streambed Alteration Agreement

from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and a Water Discharge Requirement permit from the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

While the project does not have the potential to result in significant impacts requiring implementation of avoidance, minimization and/or mitigation measures, the following avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented to further reduce impacts that have been determined to be less than significant:

HYD-1: Temporary Soil Stabilization, Sediment Control, Tracking Control, Wind Erosion Control, Non-Stormwater Management, and Waste Management and Materials Pollution Control Best Management Practices will be implemented.

2.1.11 Land Use and Planning

Considering the information in the Community Impacts: Memo to File dated December 20, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Land Use and Planning
a) Physically divide an established community?	**No Impact**
b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	**No Impact**

2.1.12 Mineral Resources

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mineral Resources
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?	**No Impact**
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?	**No Impact**

2.1.13 Noise

Considering the information in the Revised Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, and Paleontology Memo dated February 12, 2024, the Initial Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, and Paleontology Memo dated September 20, 2023, and the Initial Site Assessment Report from August 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project result in:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Noise
a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	**Less Than Significant Impact**
b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	**No Impact**
c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	**No Impact**

Affected Environment

The project area encompasses rural and agricultural areas as well as segments through the communities of Inyokern, China Lake Acres, and Ridgecrest. Potential sensitive receptors (hotels/motels and churches) have been identified within 1 block of the highway. No schools were directly identified adjacent to the proposed work area.

Residences and businesses adjacent to State Route 178 in China Lake Acres are accessed via a frontage road that runs parallel to State Route 178 and are within 50 feet of the proposed work at this location. Ridgecrest Regional Hospital sits along State Route 178, but the building is set back about 200 feet from the roadway and construction noise is not anticipated to cause substantial noise increases within the hospital building. In addition to this, several churches and hotels/motels were identified within 1 block offset from the highway.

Environmental Consequences

Response to (a) Less Than Significant Impact

Work will occur within the highway pavement and adjacent sidewalk footprints, which will result in temporarily elevated noise levels generated from construction activities. The generation of noise cannot be completely avoided during work; the highest anticipated noise levels will occur during demolition of existing concrete sidewalks and pulverization of existing asphalt, activities that are expected to be of short duration at any one location as construction continues through the project limits. Temporarily elevated noise levels from demolition activities are anticipated to impact only residents and businesses that are directly adjacent to where the demolition work is occurring. Construction activities will be constrained to daytime weekday working hours whenever possible. The post-construction noise environment will not change the existing baseline because the project will not increase vehicular capacity of the highway and is not anticipated to induce additional travel to the area. The project is classified as a Class III Project under 23 Code of Federal Regulations 772 and is exempt from federal noise abatement requirements.

Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Noise Abatement Measures

While the project does not have the potential to result in significant impacts requiring implementation of avoidance, minimization and/or mitigation measures, the following avoidance and minimization measures will be implemented to further reduce impacts that have been determined to be less than significant:

NOI-1: Short-term elevation in noise levels from construction equipment is unavoidable; however, the Caltrans Public Information Office will perform outreach to notify residents and businesses of upcoming work.

2.1.14 Population and Housing

Considering the information in the Community Impacts: Memo to File dated December 20, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing
a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	**No Impact**

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Population and Housing
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	**No Impact**

2.1.15 Public Services

Considering the information in the Community Impacts: Memo to File dated December 20, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Public Services
a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services: Fire protection?	**No Impact**
Police protection?	**No Impact**
Schools?	**No Impact**
Parks?	**No Impact**
Other public facilities?	**No Impact**

2.1.16 Recreation

Considering the information in the Community Impacts: Memo to File dated December 20, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Recreation
a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?	**No Impact**
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	**No Impact**

2.1.17 Transportation

Considering the information in the Community Impacts: Memo to File dated December 20, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Transportation
a) Conflict with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	**No Impact**
b) Conflict or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?	**No Impact**
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	**No Impact**
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?	**No Impact**

2.1.18 Tribal Cultural Resources

Considering the information in the Historic Property Survey Report dated January 2024, the following significance determinations have been made:

Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in Public Resources Code Section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Tribal Cultural Resources
a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code Section 5020.1(k), or	**No Impact**
b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe.	**No Impact**

Native American Consultation

Caltrans contacted the Native American Heritage Commission on November 3, 2022, requesting a review of the commission's sacred lands file for any historically significant resources within or near the project area. A positive result was received on December 7, 2022, indicating that Native American sacred sites were identified through this search. The Native American Heritage Commission provided a list of interested Native American individuals and organizations for further consultation.

On April 20, 2023, Caltrans District 9 staff sent consultation initiation letters via certified mail with return receipt, including project area maps and a list of tribal consulting parties for the project. Digital (PDF) files of the letter packets were also sent via email on April 20, 2023, to those tribal contacts who had requested both certified mail and email receipt of consultation letters. Due to changes in tribal leadership since the initial consultation mailing and email correspondence, additional letters were sent via certified mail with return receipt and/or email as appropriate on November 9, 2023; follow-up emails to the initial consultation correspondence were also sent at this time. Follow-up emails were sent to the remaining tribal consulting parties on December 13 and 14 of 2023.

On December 14, 2023, Ms. Tawny Williams, Tribal Council Member at Large for the Big Pine Paiute-Shoshone Tribe of the Owens Valley, responded via email. She inquired as to why the Lone Pine Paiute Tribe was not included in consultation efforts. Jennifer Blake, Caltrans archaeologist, responded the same day via email stating that the Lone Pine Paiute Tribe was not included in the Native American Heritage Commission list of interested parties. Ms. Williams responded the same day via email acknowledging Caltrans' response and had no further comments.

Also on December 14, 2023, Ms. Danelle Gutierrez, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Big Pine Paiute Tribe, responded via email to inquire as to whether Caltrans contacted Mr. Robert Robinson, Chairperson of the Kern Valley Indian Community, and Mr. Robert Gomez, Chairperson of the Tubatulabals of Kern Valley. Ms. Blake responded the same day via email confirming that Caltrans had contacted Mr. Robinson and Mr. Gomez.

2.1.19 Utilities and Service Systems

Considering the project's scope, in conjunction with adjacent utilities and service systems, the following significance determinations have been made:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Utilities and Service Systems
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	**No Impact**
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	**No Impact**
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?	**No Impact**
d) Generate solid waste in excess of state or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?	**No Impact**
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	**No Impact**

2.1.20 Wildfire

Considering the information in the Climate Change Analysis dated December 14, 2023, the following significance determinations have been made.

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones:

Question—Would the project:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Wildfire
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	**No Impact**
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?	**No Impact**
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	**No Impact**
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	**No Impact**

2.1.21 Mandatory Findings of Significance

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance
a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	**No Impact**

Question:	CEQA Significance Determinations for Mandatory Findings of Significance
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.)	**No Impact**
c) Does the project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	**No Impact**

Appendix A Title VI Policy Statement

CALIFORNIA STATE TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

GAVIN NEWSOM, GOVERNOR

California Department of Transportation

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
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September 2022

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY STATEMENT

The California Department of Transportation, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ensures *"No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."*

Caltrans will make every effort to ensure nondiscrimination in all of its services, programs and activities, whether they are federally funded or not, and that services and benefits are fairly distributed to all people, regardless of race, color, or national origin. In addition, Caltrans will facilitate meaningful participation in the transportation planning process in a non-discriminatory manner.

Related federal statutes, remedies, and state law further those protections to include sex, disability, religion, sexual orientation, and age.

For information or guidance on how to file a complaint, or obtain more information regarding Title VI, please contact the Title VI Branch Manager at (916) 639-6392 or visit the following web page: https://dot.ca.gov/programs/civil-rights/title-vi.

To obtain this information in an alternate format such as Braille or in a language other than English, please contact the California Department of Transportation, Office of Civil Rights, at PO Box 942874, MS-79, Sacramento, CA 94274-0001; (916) 879-6768 (TTY 711); or at Title.VI@dot.ca.gov.

TONY TAVARES
Director

"Provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment"

List of Technical Studies Bound Separately (Volume 2)

Air, Noise, Hazardous Waste, Water Quality, and Paleontology Memorandum. Caltrans, February 12, 2024

Natural Environment Study (Minimal Impacts). Caltrans, February 2024

Community Impacts Memorandum. Caltrans, December 20, 2023

Climate Change Analysis. Caltrans, December 7, 2023

Historical Property Survey Report

- Historic Resource Evaluation Report, November 2023
- Historic Property Survey Report, January 2024
- Archaeological Survey Report, September 2023

Visual Impact Analysis. Caltrans, February 09, 2024

To obtain a copy of one or more of these technical studies/reports or the Initial Study, please send your request to:

Rebeka Riesen
District 9 Environmental Division
California Department of Transportation
500 South Main Street, Bishop, California 93514

Or send your request via email to: Rebeka.Riesen@dot.ca.gov
Or call: (442)3593-8454

Please provide the following information in your request:

Project title: Ridgecrest/Inyokern Pavement

General location information: On State Route 178 from post mile 88.60 to 104.60 in the Kern County.

District number-county code-route-post mile: 09-KER-178-88.60/104.6

Project EA: 09-38330

Project ID number: 0919000069