



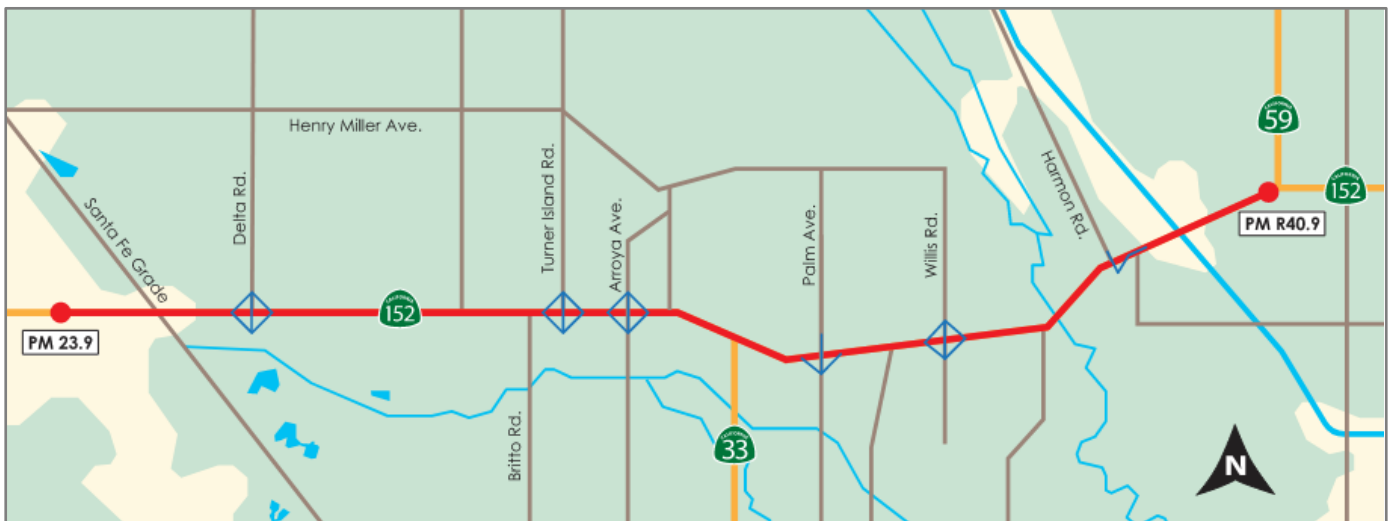
# SR 152 Rescission Evaluation Report

## Los Banos Area

District 10

August 2023

**For the Rescission of the Freeway Declaration for the  
Unconstructed Portions Between Santa Fe Grade and State Route 59**



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## **1.0 ROUTE DESCRIPTION**

The State Route (SR) 152 corridor provides three important transportation services in the State of California; (1) it serves as a goods movement route connecting the San Joaquin Valley to the Salinas Valley (Central Coast) and the Southern San Francisco Bay (South Bay); (2) it provides a commuter route from affordable housing locations in Merced County to employment locations in Santa Clara and Monterey Counties; and (3) it provides recreation and tourist access between the South Bay, Monterey, San Joaquin Valley, and the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

SR 152 connects the major north to south corridors of United States Highway (US) 101 to Interstate 5 (I-5) and SR 99 together. West to east, the route originates at SR 1 in Watsonville and ends at SR 99 in Madera County, south of Chowchilla. Within District 10, SR 152 runs through Merced County between Santa Clara and Madera Counties. SR 152 is part of the National Highway System (NHS). As a truck freight route, SR 152 connects three National Truck Network (NTN) routes (US 101, I-5, and SR 99). Within District 10, it is designed to meet the requirements of the Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) and is designated a Terminal Access (TA) route. Shown below in Table 1 is a list of the route segments along SR 152 in District 10, as identified in the Transportation Concept Report (TCR).

Efforts in District 4 to upgrade the route throughout Santa Clara County may provide impetus to increase the capacity of SR 152 in Merced County. Current efforts propose to provide a four lane freeway bypass of the existing route in Gilroy, and to provide a truck climbing lane over Pacheco Pass. These two efforts, once completed, will enhance SR 152's role as a goods movement route serving the South Bay via US 101.

SR 152 is part of the Interregional Road System (IRRS), and is built to expressway standards, except for conventional highway configuration within the City of Los Banos. Highways on the IRRS have a concept Level of Service (LOS) of D in the urban areas along the route, and of C in rural areas.

**Table 1: Route Segmentation**

<b>Segment</b>	<b>Location Description</b>	<b>County-Route-Beg. PM</b>	<b>County-Route-End PM</b>
1	Santa Clara County Line to JCT SR 33 North (N.)	MER-152-R0.000	MER-152-R13.237 Equates to 11.270E
2	JCT SR 33 N. to I-5	MER-152-R13.237 Equates to 11.270E	MER-152-13.848
3	I-5 to Merced Community College (MCC) Entrance	MER-152-13.848	MER-152-17.79
4	MCC Entrance to SR 165	MER-152-17.79	MER-152-21.272
5	SR 165 to Wards Ferry Road	MER-152-21.272	MER-152-22.252
6	Wards Ferry Road to Santa Fe Grade	MER-152-22.252	MER-152-23.915
7	Santa Fe Grade to JCT SR 33 South (S.)	MER-152-23.915	MER-152-R32.351
8	JCT SR 33 S. Eastbound (EB) Off-ramp to Northbound (NB) SR 59	MER-152-R32.351	MER-152-R40.672
9	EB Off-ramp to NB SR 59 to Madera County Line	MER-152-R40.672	MER-152-R40.949

## **2.0 ROUTE ADOPTION**

### **2.1 Historical Context**

SR 152, formerly Legislative Route 32, was added to the California Freeway and Expressway System in 1959.

On April 28, 1965, the California Highway Commission (CHC), the precursor to the current California Transportation Commission (CTC), passed a resolution to adopt SR 152 as a freeway route (Appendix 1).

On January 11, 1966, the County of Merced executed a Freeway Agreement with the State to change the location of a section of SR 152 in Merced County, between the Delta-Mendota Canal and 1.1 miles west of the Madera County Line identifying it as a freeway (Appendix 2).

## 2.2 Planned Projects in the Corridor

Shown below in Table 2 is a list of the planned projects in the Corridor, as identified in the Project Reporting System (PRS).

**Table 2: Planned Projects in the Corridor**

County	Beg. PM	End PM	Project Name	Project Description	Estimated Cost (\$1000)
MER	0	0	Merced Seismic Restoration	Seismic restoration	\$13,661
MER	0	40.8	High speed rail Merced to San Jose	High speed train system	\$250,000
MER	0.52	13.87	SR 152 Guardrail Upgrade	Collision reduction	\$3,375
MER	0.88	4.80	Midwest Guardrail System Installation	Install Midwest Guardrail System at various locations	TBD
MER	5	6.3	SR 152 BF SISK Dam	Roadway profile reconstruction	TBD
MER	10.100	13.848	SR 152 Median Barrier	Install median barrier	\$4,888
MER	11.3	11.3	STAA Truck Turning Radius Improvement	Improve turning radii	\$2,579
MER	13.835	32.353	MER MMBN	Install Middle-Mile Broadband Infrastructure	\$9,478
MER	16.235	16.235	SR 152 Intersection Control Improvement	Intersection Control Improvement	\$25,917
MER	18.4	18.4	SR Pioneer Rd Corridor	Road widening and intersection improvements	\$39,039
MER	18.5	23.0	Los Banos SR 152 Pavement Anchor	CAPM, replace culverts, texture & slope paving, upgrade bridge railings, upgrade ADA features	\$18,497

## 2.3 Bypass Project Discontinued

A bypass project, called the Los Banos Bypass (LBB), began the Project Approval & Environmental Document (PA & ED) phase in November 1998 after the Merced

County Association of Governments (MCAG) completed a Major Investment Study. Under the Federal and State environment laws at the time, alternatives, including the adopted route, were developed, and evaluated. An environmental document, Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement, was approved by the CTC for future consideration of funding (CTC Resolution E-07-21). Highway Route Adoption for the north alignment was approved through CTC Resolution HRA 07-03.

However, during the Design and Right of Way phases in 2013, MCAG applied for a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) Discretionary Grant but was unsuccessful in obtaining additional funds. MCAG subsequently passed a resolution in April 2014 to dissolve a previous 2011 resolution for priority funding. Reduced funding in the 2016 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) took \$3M from project support, and project work was stopped due to the lack of funding. Unspent funds were returned to MCAG to allow the agency to address other priorities for the region.

Due to the reduced STIP funds and the lack of support, the bypass project is inactive. There is also now a shift in priorities from capacity increasing projects to multimodal transportation systems. As a result, it is very unlikely the bypass project will receive funding and support in the future.

## **3.0 SYSTEM PLANNING**

### **3.1 Concept Rationale**

SR 152 is on the IRRS. Concept LOS for routes on the IRRS is D for segments in urban areas, and C for segments in rural areas. The post 20 year concept facility for SR 152 is expressway. All segments, except for Segments 4 through 6 (from the MCC entrance to Santa Fe Grade), are currently expressway, and all segments on SR 152 are four lanes.

### **3.2 Route Location**

SR 152 provides connectivity between the agricultural regions of the Central Coast and the San Joaquin Valley with three communities interspersed along its route. Specifically, SR 152 originates at SR 1 near Watsonville in Santa Cruz County, and travels east to US 101 through the City of Gilroy in Santa Clara County, over Pacheco Pass into Merced County to connect to I-5 and continues eastward into Madera County to terminate at SR 99. Within District 10, SR 152 is a west to east highway in Merced County that runs from Pacheco Pass to the Madera County Line. SR 152 intersects SR 33, I-5, SR 165, and SR 59. Only one community is served by SR 152: the City of Los Banos. In its entirety, SR 152 was originally designated as Legislative Route 32.



### **3.3 Route Purpose**

SR 152 supports goods movement within the NTN by providing an east to west connection between US 101, I-5 and SR 99, that serves the South Bay, as well as the agricultural regions of the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys. Between the Merced County Line and I-5, there is a significant amount of truck traffic. According to the Draft Route 152 Trade Corridor Project Study Report-Project Development Support (PSR-PDS), trucks represent 17 percent of total traffic. As a trade corridor it is critical to the region's agribusiness. In the two segments (Segments 1 and 2) between I-5 and the Santa Clara County Line, over 17.4 percent of the total traffic volume is trucks, with 11 percent of those being five axle trucks.

A large proportion of workers in Los Banos work outside of the city. Of the 10,638 work commute trips originating from the City of Los Banos; 46 percent (4,820) were to jobs located in Los Banos; 40 percent (4,253) commuted to the west on SR 152; 8 percent (855) traveled east on SR 152; and the remaining 6 percent (710) commuted on SR 165.

Furthermore, the SR 152 corridor has an important role in diverting recreation and tourist traffic away from the congested freeway corridors in the Bay Area by providing access to the South Bay from the south, or the Monterey Peninsula from the east, as well as providing a reverse commute from those destinations to the San Luis Reservoir, local wildlife refuges, or the Sierra Nevada mountains. Annual records of daily peak hour traffic data for SR 152 have reported weekly peak hours on weekends that do coincide with the work commute. Occasionally a peak hour recorded on a weekend will be the highest peak hour volume reported for a year.

### **3.4 Major Route Features**

With SR 152 crossing the Coast Range at Pacheco Pass (1,368 foot elevation), there is a need to segregate slower trucks from the rest of the traffic. Currently, there is a westbound uphill truck climbing lane, but there is no auxiliary lane present on the downhill side.

As a four lane expressway, the SR 152 corridor in Merced is uniform except for the four lane conventional highway segment in Los Banos. The conventional highway facility produces a bottleneck reducing trip reliability and extending travel time. With thirteen signalized intersections, traffic movement is further impaired by slow truck acceleration.

### **3.5 Community Characteristics**

The City of Los Banos and its immediate surroundings are considered an urban area designated by the Federal Highways Administration. Los Banos is a city of 45,532 people in Merced County, which has a population of 281,202. The current racial profile of Los Banos is 84.1 percent white, 3.8 percent African American, 3.2 percent Asian American, 1.4 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.4 percent Native Hawaiian; with the current ethnic profile of 64.9 percent Hispanic or Latino. The demographic profile of Los Banos nearly reflects the racial and ethnic profile of Merced County, with the exception that the percentage of Hispanics or Latinos is almost 10 percent higher in the city. Although both Los Banos and Merced County have some of the highest percentages of total population below the federal poverty line in the State, the median household income in Los Banos (\$49,131) is almost \$6,000 greater than Merced's (\$43,314), although both are below the median household income for California (\$58,328). This divergence in median household income between the city and the county likely reflects a larger percentage of residents in Los Banos that work in the Central Coast or the Bay Area.

Although there is a clear connection between population growth in Los Banos and increases in the interregional commute over Pacheco Pass, the contribution the San Joaquin Valley region makes to recreational traffic is more difficult to assess. With the elevated poverty found in the San Joaquin Valley, and particularly in Merced County, the contribution to recreational travel on SR 152 would be expected to be slight in comparison to the flow originating from the Bay Area.

### **3.6 Land Use**

SR 152 is subject to two General Plans (GP), the Merced County GP and the City of Los Banos GP, as well as two specialized GPs for the San Luis Reservoir State Recreation Area and the California State Water Project. The Merced County GP applies to all rural segments of SR 152, with land uses consistent with rural low-density housing, agriculture, and open lands.

## **4.0 DESIGN**

Design activities were not completed. The original plan was for six interchanges to be constructed; however, an environmental document was never completed due to the procedures at the time not including requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the California Environmental Quality Act, or other environmental laws that are now in effect.

## **5.0 EXISTING HIGHWAY**

Shown below in Table 3 is the existing highway route designations and characteristics.

**Table 3: Route Designations and Characteristics**

<b>Route Designation and Characteristics</b>	<b>MER-152-23.9/R40.9</b>
Freeway & Expressway	Yes
National Highway System	Yes
Strategic Highway Network	No
Scenic Highway	No
Interregional Road System	Yes
Focus Route	Yes
High Emphasis Route	Yes
Federal Functional Classification	Other Principal Arterial
Goods Movement Route	Yes
Truck Designation	Terminal Access
Rural/Urban/Urbanized	Rural
Metropolitan Planning Organization	MCAG
Regional Transportation Planning Agency	MCAG
Local Agency	County of Merced
Tribes	None
Air District	San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District
Terrain	Flat

## **6.0 EXISTING AND FORECASTED TRAFFIC**

The Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) and Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) information for base year (2023) and horizon year (2035) are divided into three segments due to variations in traffic volumes, and the presence of the SR 33 junction and the SR 59 junction within the study limits. As expected, Segment A, from Santa Fe Grade located near the City of Los Banos limits, to the SR 33 junction, has the highest AADT and VMT of the three segments. It is also projected to have the most growth in AADT and VMT for the horizon year 2035. Even with this projected growth, the existing facility can still handle the projected traffic. Segment B is from the SR 33 junction to the SR 59 junction. The existing AADT and VMT for Segment B drops slightly from Segment A, and it is anticipated to have a slightly lower annual growth rate in comparison to Segment A as well. Segment C is from the SR 59 junction to the Madera County Line, and it has the lowest existing

and forecasted future AADT and VMT numbers of the three segments, as a portion of the traffic is routed toward the City of Merced at the SR 59 junction.

**Table 4:** Segment A – Santa Fe Grade to SR 33 Junction  
(PM 23.923 to PM R32.370) – 8.4 miles

<b>Year</b>	<b>Annual Average Daily Traffic Count</b>
AADT Base Year 2023	22,000 – 22,200
AADT Horizon Year 2035	25,450 – 25,700
AADT: Growth Rate/Year	288 – 292
VMT Base Year 2023	186,000
VMT Horizon Year 2035	214,000

*\*2023 base year is established by Caltrans historic data and 2035 horizon year projections are based on the Tri-County travel traffic model.*

**Table 5:** Segment B – SR 33 Junction to SR 59 Junction  
(PM R32.370 to PM R40.770) – 8.4 miles

<b>Year</b>	<b>Annual Average Daily Traffic Count</b>
AADT Base Year 2023	18,900 – 19,100
AADT Horizon Year 2035	21,400 – 22,200
AADT: Growth Rate/Year	208 – 258
VMT Base Year 2023	160,000
VMT Horizon Year 2035	183,000

*\*2023 base year is established by Caltrans historic data and 2035 horizon year projections are based on the Tri-County travel traffic model.*

**Table 6:** Segment C – SR 59 Junction to Madera County Line (PM R40.770 to PM R40.949) – 0.18 mile

Year	Annual Average Daily Traffic Count
AADT Base Year 2023	16,200 – 18,000
AADT Horizon Year 2035	18,100 – 20,100
AADT: Growth Rate/Year	158 – 175
VMT Base Year 2023	3,100
VMT Horizon Year 2035	3,400

*\*2023 base year is established by Caltrans historic data and 2035 horizon year projections are based on the Tri-County travel traffic model.*

## 7.0 ALTERNATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

A review of the District Status of Projects indicates there are no alternatives for future projects along the adopted route location. In addition, there are no planned projects in the next 15 to 20 years.

## 8.0 LOCAL AND REGIONAL PLANS

The RTP for Merced County does not include any constrained or unconstrained list of projects for the unconstructed portion of SR 152 within the study limits; Santa Fe Grade (PM 23.9) to SR 59 (PM R40.9). The Merced County General Plan also does not mention any projects for the unconstructed portion of this route. The existing property surrounding SR 152 within the study limits is predominately agricultural.

## 9.0 RIGHT OF WAY

As of 2023, the State owns and manages 71 parcels, or approximately 230 acres along the Adopted Route in Merced County. The estimated annual cost to maintain these properties is \$16,000. The market value based on anticipated highest and best use assumptions is estimated to be approximately \$1,840,000 (230 acres at \$8,000 per acre).

## 10.0 LOCAL AGENCY COORDINATION

Caltrans has coordinated with MCAG, the County of Merced, UC Merced, the City of Merced, and the City of Los Banos on the proposed route rescission. Meetings were held with each of the listed agencies and additional coordination was conducted through both emails and phone calls. All local agencies have confirmed the adopted route is no longer part of any local or regional plans and it is appropriate to rescind.

On August 1, 2023, informational letters were sent to the Merced County Board of Supervisors and MCAG to brief them on District 10's proposal to rescind the freeway agreement for portions of SR 152.

## **11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It has been confirmed that the proposed route rescission conforms with criteria in Chapter 23, Article 9, as well as the G-15 options. There are no issues or concerns with moving forward with the rescission of the adopted route.

Caltrans recommends the CTC approve the rescission of the 1965 Freeway Declaration from a freeway to an expressway, for the unconstructed portions along SR 152 between Santa Fe Grade and SR 59.