

APPENDIX E

Vehicle Miles Traveled Analysis

UC Villages Development City of Merced, CA



Vehicle Miles Travel Analysis

UC Villages Mixed-Use Development

City of Merced, California

February 20, 2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the results of a Vehicle Miles Travel analysis for the proposed UC Villages Mixed-use Development (the “Project”) in Merced County, California. The Project site is located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Bellevue Road & Lake Road, west of the University of California, Merced (“UC Merced”), campus.

This report uses methodologies that are consistent with State and City of Merced guidelines and standards. This document was prepared in accordance with best professional practices and standards that assess the impacts of a proposed development on the transportation system, and as appropriate, recommends improvements to lessen or negate those impacts. The analysis herein is intended to assist public officials and developers to plan for growth and an efficient and safe transportation network.

Project Overview

The proposed Project consists of approximately up to 15 apartment buildings with 654 four-bedroom residential units, a 200-room hotel, and 29,320 square feet (sf) of commercial retail space. The Project is intended to provide student housing for UC Merced and multi-family housing and is compatible with the Bellevue Corridor Community Plan, which was adopted in 2015 by the City of Merced.

The purpose of the report is to evaluate the impacts on the transportation infrastructure due to the addition of traffic from the proposed Project. Analyses for Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) was conducted to determine the proposed Project’s impacts on the surrounding roadway network and consistency with the City of Merced’s and Merced County’s plans and standards. The VMT analysis is based on the methodology outlined in the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research’s (OPR) *Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts* in California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), published in December 2018. The report additionally includes impacts for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit facilities.

Vehicle Miles Traveled Summary

According to the MCAG VMT Thresholds and Guidelines document, if a project is below the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) threshold, then there is no significant impact based on VMT. The threshold for Merced County is **14%** below the Regional Average for its VMT/Capita value, or 7.45 daily VMT.

The residential portion of the UC Merced Villages project has an **insignificant impact** on VMT since its VMT per capita value is lower than the MCAG threshold value.

The hotel, considered as a serviced-oriented use, has an **insignificant impact** on VMT due to being already located in a low VMT/service population area as shown in Figure 6 on page 16 of the MCAG VMT Thresholds and Guidelines document.

The retail portion of the Project is under the local-serving retail threshold of 50,000 square feet and is therefore exempt from VMT thresholds analysis. Thus, the retail portion of the Project has an **insignificant impact** on VMT.

Additional Transportation Analyses Summary

PEDESTRIAN IMPACTS

The proposed Project is **not expected to conflict** with applicable or adopted policies, plans, or programs related to pedestrian facilities or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of pedestrian facilities provided concrete sidewalks are built to the standard designs of the City of Merced along portions of Lake Road and Bellevue Road fronting the Project site.

BICYCLE IMPACTS

The proposed Project is **not expected to conflict** with applicable or adopted policies, plans, or programs related to bicycle facilities or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of bicycle facilities.

TRANSIT IMPACTS

The proposed Project could increase transit demand in its vicinity as well as within the City of Merced. This may necessitate the need to increase transit frequency beyond that currently provided.

It is suggested that the proposed Project coordinate with the City of Merced and bus service providers as each phase is constructed to adjust transit frequencies to handle changes in transit demand near the Project's vicinity. Additionally, an additional bus stop with accommodative facilities (e.g., bus shelters, bus turnouts, or center median stops) near Bellevue Road & Lake Road (Study Intersection 2) is suggested to increase transit accessibility for future residents of the Project.

These improvements would allow potential increased transit demand from the proposed Project and would help reduce overall VMT/capita within the City.

With these improvements, the proposed Project is **not expected to conflict** with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy regarding existing or planned transit facilities.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the Vehicle Miles Travel (VMT) results for the proposed UC Villages Mixed-use Development (the “Project”) in Merced County, California. The Project site is located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Bellevue Road & Lake Road, west of the campus of the University of California, Merced (“UC Merced”).

A vicinity map of the Project study area is shown in **Figure 1**.

Project entitlement and approval will be processed by the City of Merced (the “City”).

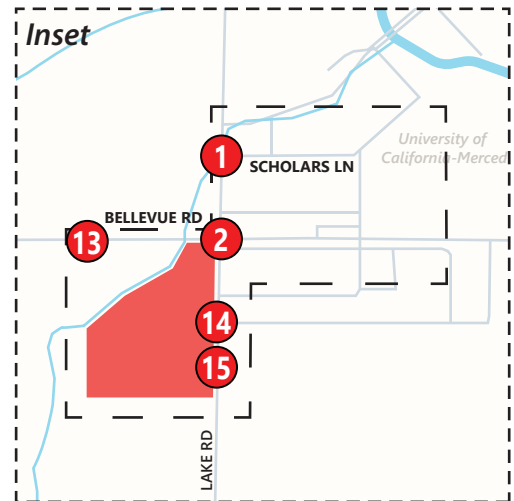
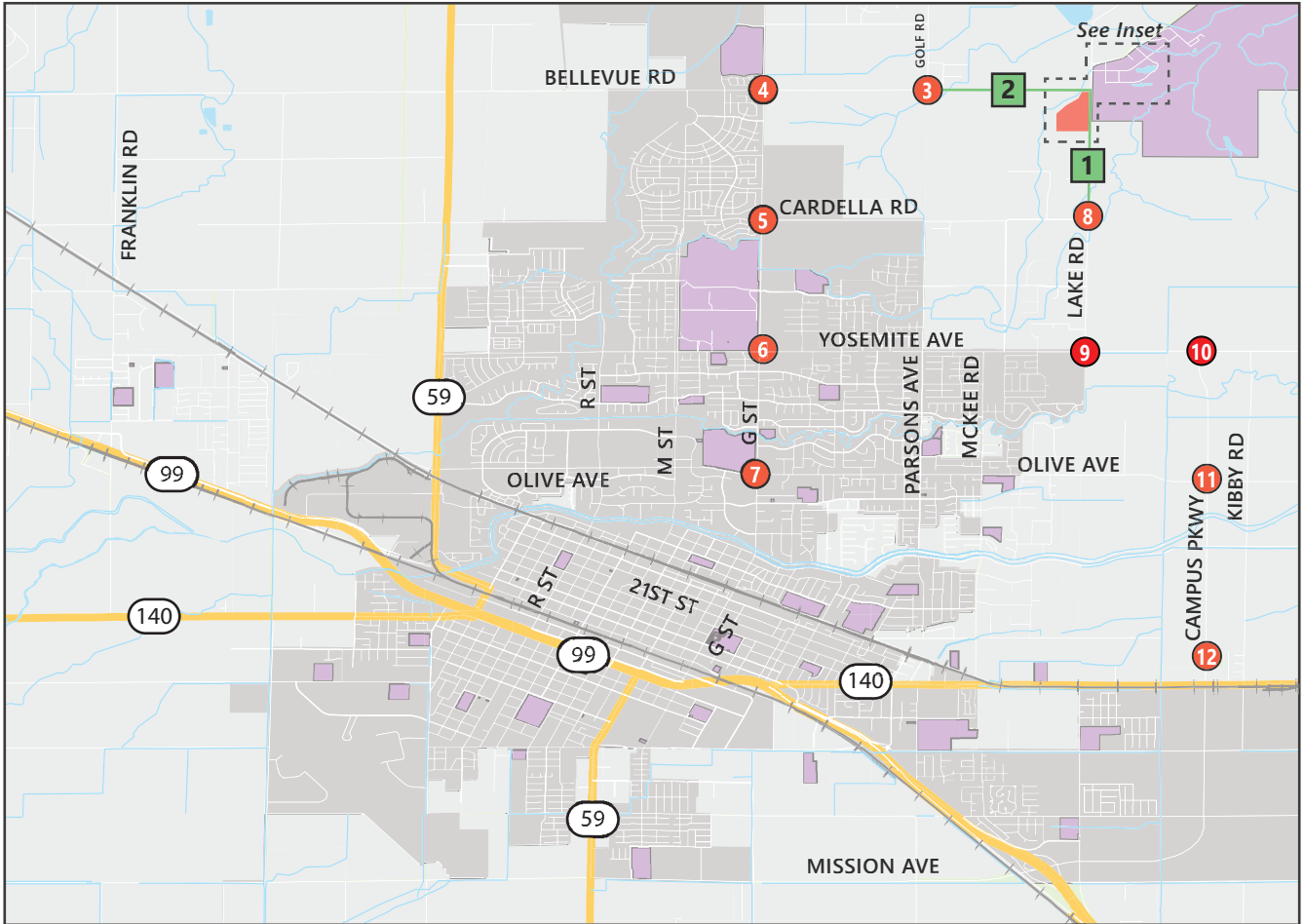
1.1 Project Description

The proposed Project consists of approximately up to 15 apartment buildings with 654 four-bedroom residential units, a 200-room hotel, and 29,320 square feet (sf) of commercial retail space. The Project is intended to provide student housing for UC Merced and multi-family housing. The Project is compatible with the Bellevue Corridor Community Plan, which was adopted in 2015 by the City of Merced.

1.2 Study Purpose

The purpose VMT analysis is to evaluate the impacts on the transportation infrastructure due to the addition of traffic from the proposed Project. A VMT analysis was conducted to determine the proposed Project’s impacts on the surrounding roadway network and consistency with the City of Merced’s and Merced County’s plans and standards. The VMT analysis is based on the methodology outlined in the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research’s (OPR) *Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts* in CEQA, published in December 2018. The report additionally includes impacts for pedestrians, bicycles, and transit facilities.

Figure 1: Vicinity Map



LEGEND

- Project Location
- Study Area
- X Study Intersection
- X Study Segment



Figure 2: Site Plan



2.0 STUDY METHODOLOGY

Traffic impacts related to the proposed Project were evaluated for both compliance with applicable regulatory documents and environmental significance as defined in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In accordance with the [Technical Advisory](#) published by OPR, a quantitative Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) assessment forms the basis of the CEQA analysis for the proposed project. Effective as of July 1, 2020, intersection Level of Service (LOS) can no longer be used to determine significant impacts for CEQA purposes. However, the CEQA guidelines do not exclude the use of LOS analyses when determining consistency with plans and standards for jurisdictions or agencies, such as with the City of Merced and with Merced County.

2.1 Vehicle Miles Traveled Methodology

Compliance with Senate Bill (SB) 743 requires the replacement of LOS with VMT for purposes of assessing traffic impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) described in Section 15064.3 of the CEQA Guidelines (effective July 1, 2020). Lead agencies have the discretion to choose the most appropriate methodology to evaluate a project's vehicles miles traveled impacts, including whether to express the change in absolute terms, per capita, per household or any other measure. VMT refers to the amount and distance of automobile travel "attributable to a project."

2.1.1 VMT SCREENING CRITERIA

The Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) has prepared [VMT Thresholds and Guidelines](#) for various jurisdictions within Merced County, published on September 2022. The [VMT Thresholds and Guidelines](#) document includes screening criteria that describe proposed project attributes that presumably would produce less-than-significant impacts. Proposed projects that include the attributes described in the screening criteria are thus exempt from VMT analyses.

The screening criteria include the following project attributes:

- Within 0.5 miles of a transit priority area or a high-quality transit area and is consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)/Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), has a floor area ratio (FAR) equal or greater than 0.75, does not provide an excessive amount of parking, or does not reduce the number of affordable residential units;
- Includes local-serving retail with a combined area of less than 50,000 square feet (sf);
- Results in an equal or net reduction in VMT may be considered to have less than significant VMT impact. A net reduction in VMT would occur if the land use proposed by the project would generate less VMT than the existing land use;
- Includes 100 percent affordable housing units;

- Generates fewer than 1,000 average daily trips (ADT) if consistent with a jurisdiction’s General Plan, or generates fewer than 500 ADT if not consistent with a jurisdiction’s General Plan;
- Is an institutional/government and public service uses that supports community health, safety and welfare (e.g., e.g., police stations, fire stations, government offices, utilities, public libraries, community centers, and refuse stations);
- Is a local park, daycare center, student housing project on or adjacent to a college campus, local-serving gas station, bank, and/or K–12 public school;
- Within areas of low VMT.

Based on the above criteria, the proposed Project is not screened out, and thus requires a full VMT analysis.

2.1.2 VMT SIGNIFICANCE STANDARDS

According to the MCAG VMT Thresholds and Guidelines document, if a project is below the VMT threshold, then there is no significant impact based on VMT. The threshold for Merced County is **14%** below the Regional Average for its VMT/Capita value.

3.0 2024 EXISTING CONDITIONS

This section describes existing conditions in the immediate project site vicinity, including roadway facilities, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and available transit service. In addition, existing traffic volumes and operations are presented for the study intersections and segments, including the results of LOS calculations.

3.1 Existing Setting and Roadway System

State Route 99 (SR 99), or “Golden State Highway,” is a four-lane freeway that runs along the Central Valley in a north-south direction. The roadway connects the City of Merced with other significant destinations in the region, including Atwater, Livingston, Modesto, Fresno, Bakersfield, Stockton, and Sacramento. UC Merced and the proposed Project would be accessible to regional traffic from SR 99 via Campus Parkway. The posted speed limit is 65 miles per hour (mph).

State Route 140 (SR 140), or “Central Yosemite Highway,” is a two-lane state highway that runs through the San Joaquin Valley between Interstate 5 (I-5) and Yosemite National Park in an east-west direction. The roadway connects UC Merced and the proposed Project with I-5, Yosemite National Park, and communities in between including Gustine, Planada, and Mariposa. The posted speed limit is 55 mph near the intersection with Campus Parkway and various from 40 mph to 45 mph within the City of Merced.

Campus Parkway is a four-lane expressway that extends from SR 99 to Yosemite Avenue east of the City of Merced in a north-south direction. Campus Parkway is planned by the Merced County Association of Governments to be part of a “Merced Loop System” of expressways (including the Atwater-Merced Expressway) that would connect to the City of Atwater, Merced-Castle Airport, UC Merced, and areas north, east, and south of the City of Merced. Campus Parkway currently provides regional traffic from SR 99 and SR 140 with quick access to UC Merced and the proposed Project via Lake Road. On-street parking is not permitted. The posted speed limit is 55 mph.

G Street is a two- to four-lane arterial that bisects the City of Merced in a north-south direction. The roadway widens to four lanes from 13th Street to approximately 500 feet north of Mercy Avenue/Community College Drive, and north of Cardella Road. G Street provides roadway users from UC Merced and the proposed Project with access to residential and commercial areas in Merced, including downtown. On-street parking is not permitted. The posted speed limit is 55 mph north of Yosemite Avenue, 45 mph from Yosemite Avenue to Olive Avenue, and 40 mph south of Olive Avenue.

Yosemite Avenue is a two- to four-lane arterial that runs in the northerly half of the City of Merced in an east-west direction. The roadway provides traffic from UC Merced and the proposed Project access to residential and commercial developments in the northern part of the City. Yosemite Avenue additional connects Lake Road with Campus Parkway. On-street parking is not permitted. The posted speed limit is 50 mph.

Olive Avenue is a two- to four-lane arterial that runs in the northern portion of the City of Merced in an east-west direction. Similarly to Yosemite Avenue, roadway provides traffic from UC Merced and the proposed Project access to residential and commercial developments in the northern part of the City. On-street parking is present on both sides on some portion of the roadway. The posted speed limit is 40 mph.

Bellevue Road is a two-lane arterial that runs in an east-west direction in the north planning area of the City of Merced. The roadway is within the City of Merced limits from G Street to approximately 2,550 feet west of M Street. Bellevue Road extends from UC Merced and the proposed Project to Fox Road near Merced-Castle Airport and connects to SR 59 in between. The roadway is planned to be the northern portion of the Merced Loop System. On-street parking is not present. The posted speed limit is 55 mph.

Lake Road is a two-lane collector that extends in a north-south direction from Yosemite Avenue to the east shore of Yosemite Lake north of UC Merced. The roadway is within the City's north planning area and provides roadway users from the City, SR 99, and SR 59 via Campus Parkway with access to UC Merced and the proposed Project. On-street parking is not permitted. The posted speed limit is 55 mph.

Cardella Road is a four-lane arterial that runs in an east-west direction from G Street to Freemark Avenue. The roadway serves residential developments in the northern portion of the City. The roadway is planned for extension from G Street east to Lake Road. On-street parking is not permitted. The posted speed limit is 40 mph.

Golf Road is a two-lane collector that runs in a north-south direction. The roadway serves rural residential neighborhoods north of Bellevue Road in the north planning area of the City. The roadway is planned to be extended south to Gardner Avenue as a minor arterial. The roadway provides travelers from UC Merced and the proposed Project access to developments north and south (in the future) of Bellevue Road. On-street parking is not present. No posted speed limit is present.

Scholars Lane is a two-lane local roadway that runs in the east-west direction through the western portion of UC Merced. The roadway provides access to the facilities at UC Merced for travelers from the proposed Project. On-street parking restrictions are present. The posted speed limit is 25 mph.

3.2 Existing Pedestrian Facilities

Walkability is defined as the ability to travel easily and safely between various origins and destinations without having to rely on automobiles or other motorized travel. The ideal “walkable” community includes wider sidewalks, a mix of land uses such as residential, employment, and shopping opportunities, a limited number of conflict points with vehicle traffic, and easy access to transit facilities and services.

Pedestrian facilities consist of marked crosswalks, concrete sidewalks, pedestrian signals, and off-street paths that provide safe and convenient routes for pedestrians to access the destinations such as institutions, businesses, public transportation, and recreational facilities.

In the Project's vicinity, pedestrian facilities are currently present only on the UC Merced campus. Concrete sidewalks or asphalt paths are present along most roadways on both sides. Concrete curb cuts with colored tactile textured surfaces, marked crosswalks, and countdown pedestrian signal heads are present at signalized intersections. Unsignalized intersections generally feature concrete curb cuts with colored tactile textured surfaces and marked crosswalks.

No pedestrian facilities currently exist west of Lake Road.

Existing pedestrian facilities are shown in **Figure 3** and **Figure 4**.

3.3 Existing Bicycle Facilities

Bicycle paths, lanes, and routes are typical examples of bicycle transportation facilities, which are defined by Caltrans as being in one of the following four classes:

- **Class I (Multiuse Trail):** A completely separated facility designed for the exclusive use of bicyclists and pedestrians with crossing points minimized.
- **Class II (Bike Lane):** A designated lane for the exclusive use or semi-exclusive use of bicycles with through travel by motor vehicles or pedestrians prohibited but with vehicle parking and cross-flows by pedestrians and motorists permitted.
- **Class III (Bike Route):** A route designated by signs or pavement markings and shared with pedestrians and motorists.
- **Class IV (Separated Bikeway):** An on-street facility reserved for use by bicyclists with physical separation between the bikeway and travel lanes. Physical separation consists of vertical elements that may include curbs, landscaping, bollards, or parking lanes.

Within the Project's vicinity, a Class I multi-use trail currently extends on the east side of Lake Road from Lake Yosemite County Park to Yosemite Avenue.

Additionally, Class II bike lanes are present along Bellevue Road from Lake Road to G Street.

Existing bicycle facilities are shown in **Figure 5** and **Figure 6**.

3.4 Existing Transit Facilities

Transit service in the vicinity of the Project is provided by Merced County Transit, which operates under the brand name "The Bus." The Bus was founded in 1996 after a consolidation of four former local transit providers and is administered and governed by the Transit Joint Powers Authority for Merced

County. The Bus provides fixed-route and demand response bus transit services throughout Merced County.

The Bus provides eight fixed-route scheduled bus routes in the City of Merced. Of the eight routes, the UC Merced Route provides direct service to UC Merced. The UC Merced Route connects UC Merced with the Merced Transportation Center in downtown Merced and serves additional points in the City in between.

Table 1 shows the operating hours and termini of the UC Merced Route. **Figure 7** shows existing transit facilities operating within the Project’s vicinity.

Table 1: Existing Bus Services

Route	From	To	Weekdays		Weekend	
			Operating Hours	Headway (minutes)	Operating Hours	Headway (minutes)
UC Merced	Merced Transportation Center	UC Merced - University Transit Center	6:10 a.m. - 8:02 p.m.	40	-	-

Source: <https://www.mercedthebus.com/220/UC---UC-Merced>

Figure 3: 2024 Existing Project Frontage Pedestrian Facilities



LEGEND

■ Project Location

⊗ Study Intersection

■ X Study Segment

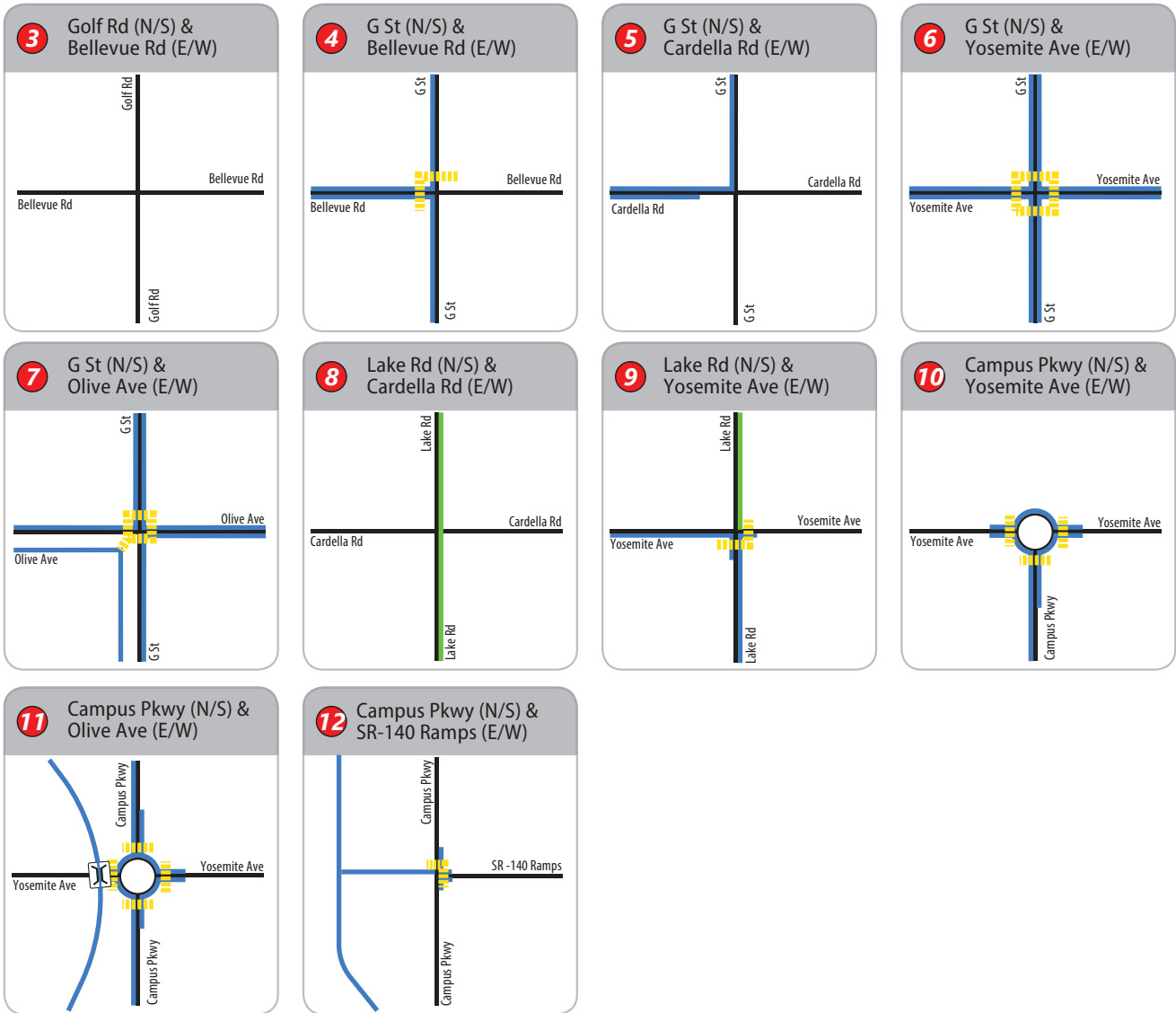
— Concrete Sidewalk

--- Marked Crosswalk

— Class I Bike-Ped Path



Figure 4: 2024 Outlying Existing Pedestrian Facilities

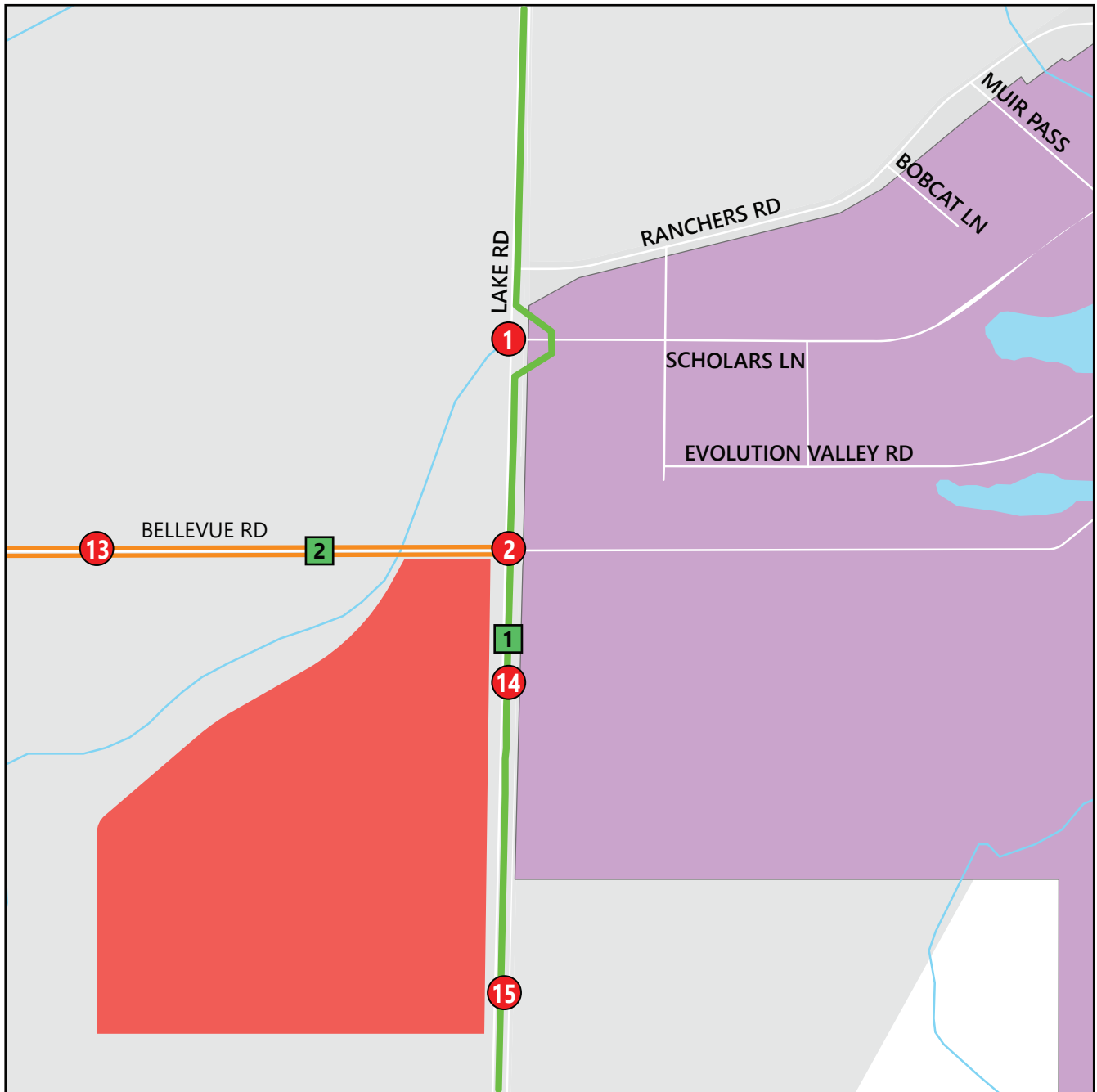


LEGEND

- Study Intersection
- Concrete Sidewalk
- Marked Crosswalk
- Class I Bike-Ped Path
- Roundabout
- Pedestrian Crossing



Figure 5: 2024 Existing Project Frontage Bicycle Facilities



LEGEND

■ Project Location

X Study Intersection

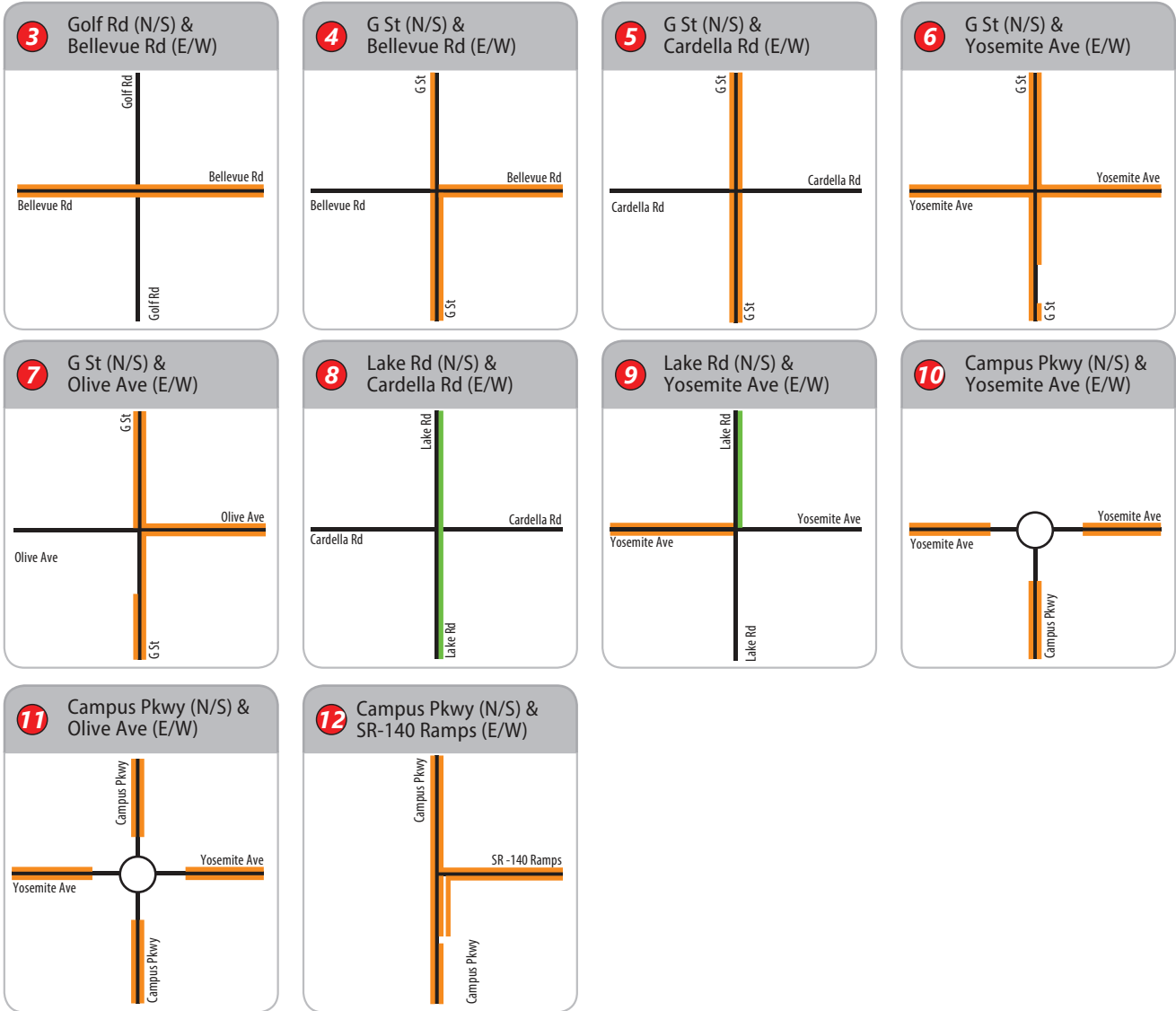
X Study Segment

— Class I Bike-Ped Path

— Class II Bike Lane



Figure 6: 2024 Outlying Existing Bicycle Facilities



LEGEND





-  Study Intersection
-  Class I Bike-Ped Path
-  Class II Bike Lane
-  Roundabout



Figure 7: 2024 Existing Transit Facilities



LEGEND

- Project Location
- Study Segment
- Study Intersection
- UC Merced Route
- Bus Stop



4.0 VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED

This section describes the impacts of the proposed Project on the surrounding roadway system.

- A vehicle mile traveled (VMT) assessment of the proposed project (Section **Error! Reference source not found.**).

For VMT forecasting, the latest version of the Merced County Council of Governments (MCAG) travel demand model (TDM) was obtained and the proposed Project was inserted into the travel analysis zone (TAZ) of the TDM where the Project is located.

The UC Merced Villages Project is located in TAZ #673 of the MCAG model. The Project is estimated to add 29,300 square feet of retail, 328 multi-family housing units, and 326 student housing units. Error! Reference source not found. shows the land use changes for the base year plus project run.

Table 2: Land Use Changes in the MCAG TDM

TAZ	Retail (ksq. ft.)	Hotel Rooms	Multi-family Housing Units	Student Housing Units	Total Housing Units
#673	+29.3	+200	+328	+326	+654

The results of the model run are shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3: MCAG TDM Run Results under 2015 Base Year Conditions

TAZ	Base Year Average Daily VMT per Resident in TAZ (per MCAG Model)	Regional Average (per MCAG Model) ¹	14% Below Regional Average (per MCAG Model)	Base Year <u>Plus</u> Project Average Daily VMT per Resident in TAZ (per Model run)
#673	7.90	8.67	7.45	7.25

Notes:

1. The regional average is the VMT/resident value of the TAZs comprising of Merced County.

Regarding the different types of housing coded in the model, a ratio of 2.73 population per multi-family housing unit and 4.00 students per student housing unit was used to calculate the final VMT/capita values extracted from the model. The Project would have a combined population of 2,200 people.

The existing base year per resident VMT for TAZ #673 is 7.90. Adding the Project into the model decreases the per-resident VMT in the TAZ from 7.90 to 7.25. The Project's VMT per-resident value is lower than the threshold value of 7.45 which means that the Project has an insignificant impact on VMT.

TJKM finds that the residential portion of the UC Merced Villages project has an **insignificant impact** on VMT since its VMT per capita value is lower than the MCAG threshold value.

A separate VMT analysis was done for the hotel portion (200 rooms) for the Project. Regarding hotels, page 23 of the MCAG VMT Thresholds and Guidelines document states, *“Hotel land uses are service oriented facilities which includes both visitors and employees. Therefore, for such projects, VMT per service population (residents plus employees) is recommended as the VMT metric”*. Since the hotel is included as a service-oriented use, it has an **insignificant impact** on VMT due to being already located in a low VMT/service population area as shown in Figure 6 on page 16 of the MCAG VMT Thresholds and Guidelines document.

The final portion of the Project, a 29,300 square-foot shopping center, is exempt from VMT analysis since the retail portion of the Project is presumed to be local serving. Page 5 of the MCAG VMT Thresholds and Guidelines document states *“One or more of the following project attributes may be presumed to produce a less than significant VMT impact; such as a local serving retail project with a combined area of less than 50,000 square feet.”* Since the retail portion of this Project is under the local-serving retail threshold of 50,000 square feet, it is exempt from VMT thresholds analysis and thus has an **insignificant impact** on VMT.

5.0 ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

The following sections provide additional analyses of other transportation issues associated with the project site, including:

- Alternative Modes of Transportation.

Unlike the VMT impact methodology, the analyses in these sections are generally based on professional judgment in accordance with the standards and methods employed by traffic engineers and planners.

5.1 Pedestrian Impacts

A significant impact occurs if a proposed project conflicts with applicable or adopted policies, plans, or programs related to pedestrian facilities or otherwise decreases the performance or safety of pedestrian facilities.

The City of Merced municipal code contains the following in Section 18.32.060 (“Sidewalks”):

Sidewalks shall be installed along all streets and may be required in other locations where sidewalks are deemed necessary by City standard.

Standard designs within the City of Merced are governed by the Standard Designs of Common Engineering Structures-2007 Edition as noted in Section 18.32.010 of the City’s municipal code.

Sheet ST-2 of the Standard Designs of Common Engineering Structures-2007 Edition delineates standards for collector streets and minor arterials, which respectively apply to the portions of Lake Road and Bellevue Road that run adjacent to the Project site.

A site plan of the Project available in **Figure 2** shows that concrete sidewalks are proposed along portions of Bellevue Road and Lake Road that run along the Project’s frontage. Provided these concrete sidewalks are built to the standard designs of the City of Merced, the Project is **not expected to conflict** with applicable or adopted policies, plans, or programs related to pedestrian facilities or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of pedestrian facilities.

5.2 Bicycle Impacts

A significant impact occurs if a proposed project conflicts with applicable or adopted policies, plans, or programs related to bicycle facilities or otherwise decreases the performance or safety of bicycle facilities.

Figure 4.9 from the Circulation Element of the City of Merced General Plan shows an existing Class 1 pedestrian-bike path along Lake Road and existing Class II bike lanes along Bellevue Road in the Project’s vicinity. No additional bicycle facilities are proposed by the City near the Project.

According to Figure 11 in the NOP of the UC Villages Environmental Impact Report, the Project proposes a relocation of the existing Class I pedestrian-bike path along Lake Road to the east to accommodate roadway widening. Additionally, a Class I pedestrian-bike path is proposed along Bellevue Road near the Project. Furthermore, Class III sharrows and bike racks are proposed on internal roadways and at locations within the Project site once constructed.

As such, the proposed Project is **not expected to conflict** with applicable or adopted policies, plans, or programs related to bicycle facilities or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of bicycle facilities.

5.3 Transit Impacts

A significant impact occurs if a proposed project conflicts with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy regarding existing or planned transit facilities.

Currently, the UC Merced bus route is the only transit service operating near the Project. The nearest bus stop to the Project site is the University Transit Center, which is approximately 950 feet to the west.

The proposed Project could increase transit demand in its vicinity as well as within the City of Merced. This may necessitate the need to increase transit frequency beyond that currently provided.

It is suggested that the proposed Project coordinate with the City of Merced and bus service providers as each phase is constructed to adjust transit frequencies to handle changes in transit demand near the Project's vicinity. Additionally, an additional bus stop with accommodative facilities (e.g., bus shelters, bus turnouts, or center median stops) near Bellevue Road & Lake Road (Study Intersection 2) is suggested to increase transit accessibility for future residents of the Project.

These improvements would allow potential increased transit demand from the proposed Project and would help reduce overall VMT/capita within the City.

With these improvements, the proposed Project is **not expected to conflict** with a program, plan, ordinance, or policy regarding existing or planned transit facilities.