

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report US 101 / SR 92 Interchange Direct Connector Project

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 4 is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) consistent with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and a joint Environmental Assessment (EA) to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to notify agencies, organizations, and individuals of this intent, and request input on the scope and content of environmental information of the proposed EIR/EA. More information regarding the project can be found at smcta.com/projects/101-92DC.

Scoping Period for Receipt of Comments

Comments must be sent by **May 15, 2024**. Submit written comments one of three ways: mail, email, or online.

- If sending by mail, send to:
Caltrans District 4
Attn. Tanvi Gupta
P.O. Box 23660, MS 8B
Oakland, CA 94623-0660
- If sending by email, email to: <mailto:101-92DC@dot.ca.gov>
- If by online, use the following Microsoft Office link that will direct you to the comments page of the project website: forms.office.com/r/ma2rHtkJi.

Virtual and In-Person Environmental Scoping Meetings

Both a virtual and in-person scoping meeting will be held.

- **The virtual environmental scoping meeting** will be held on April 23, 2024, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM.
 - Link to join the Zoom meeting: us06web.zoom.us/j/87829017732
 - Dial-in information: +1 (669) 444-9171
 - Meeting ID: 87829017732
- **The in-person environmental scoping meeting** will be held on May 1, 2024, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM at the following location:
 - Foster City Community Center
1000 E Hillsdale Boulevard
Foster City, CA 94404

At both the virtual and in-person meetings, attendees can ask questions about the project. However, questions and discussion at the meetings are not considered official scoping comments, and all scoping comments must be submitted by mail, email, or online at the project website to be shared with the entire project development team. Attendance at the virtual or in-person scoping meeting is not required to submit comments.

Spanish and Mandarin interpretation will be available at both the virtual and in-person meetings.

Contáctenos a través de uno de los canales de comunicación enumerados anteriormente para obtener una copia traducida de este aviso.

通过上面列出的一种沟通渠道与我们联系，以获取本通知的翻译副本。

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to:

- Improve the travel time reliability for those traveling between US 101 and SR 92, east of US 101,
- Encourage carpooling and the use of shuttles and buses, and
- Improve the operational efficiency of the US 101 and SR 92 interchange.

Need for the Project

The overall need for the project can be summarized as follows:

- There is substantial delay and long queues within the interchange area caused by heavy traffic volumes and recurring bottlenecks during peak periods, without any options for multi-occupant vehicles and transit vehicles to bypass the existing queues.
- There is no existing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane connecting US 101 Express Lanes and SR 92 that might provide incentives for carpool or bus use.
- Inefficient weaving and merging at the SR 92/US 101 interchange ramp connections and long queues contribute to the existing delays.

Project Description

Project Title: US 101 / SR 92 Interchange Direct Connector Project

Project Location: Cities of San Mateo and Foster City in San Mateo County - US 101/SR 92 interchange (US 101 from Hillside Boulevard to Kehoe Avenue and SR 92 west of San Mateo-Hayward Bridge)

The project location is shown in Figure 1.

Caltrans, in cooperation with the San Mateo County Transportation Authority and the City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County, proposes to create a dedicated connection between SR 92 and the US 101 Express Lanes. Currently, there is no existing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) direct connector between US 101 Express Lanes and SR 92 that might provide incentives for carpool or bus use. Once completed, the project would provide better connectivity between the US 101 Express Lanes

and SR 92 to improve operational efficiency and encourage carpooling and the use of shuttles and buses.

The project includes three build alternatives in addition to the No Build:

- Build Alternative 1: Direct Connector from Westbound SR 92 to US 101 Express Lanes
- Build Alternative 2: Reversible Direct Connector Between US 101 Express Lanes and SR 92
- Build Alternative 3: Direct Connector from US 101 Express Lanes to Eastbound SR 92

Each of the build alternatives are discussed in greater detail below.

Build Alternative 1

This alternative would provide a direct connection from westbound (WB) SR 92 to the recently opened northbound (NB) and southbound (SB) US 101 Express Lanes. The direct connector would provide access to the express lanes on US 101 from WB SR 92 without requiring lane changes, thereby reducing weaving and merging of traffic on US 101 and WB SR 92. The direct connector would take the form of a new elevated structure that would start from the left side of WB SR 92, east of US 101, at grade with the existing roadway. The structure would then rise and split into two lanes, one connecting with NB US 101 and the other with SB US 101. The NB and SB connectors would align with the existing NB and SB express lanes of US 101.

To accommodate the proposed direct connector, WB SR 92 would be shifted north between the east end of the existing bridges over Seal Slough (which has the more formal name of Marina Lagoon) and the beginning of the express lane connector east of Mariners Island Boulevard overcrossing. US 101 would be shifted between the conform locations, from south of Hillsdale Boulevard interchange to north of Kehoe Avenue interchange.

The majority of the proposed improvements would be constructed within the existing Caltrans right of way. It is anticipated that private properties adjacent to the NB US 101 within the northeast quadrant of the US 101/SR 92 interchange may be impacted. The estimated right of way required from private properties would be slivers acquisitions and should not affect existing buildings or access.

Build Alternative 2

Like Alternative 1, Alternative 2 would provide a direct connection between SR 92 and US 101 Express Lanes. The main difference would be that the connector under Build Alternative 2 would be a reversible lane, meaning that it would allow access from WB SR 92 to NB and SB US 101 Express Lanes during morning commute hours, and then switch to allow access from NB and SB US 101 Express Lanes to eastbound (EB) SR 92 during evening commute hours. Access to the reversible lane direct connector would be regulated by a system to control the direction of traffic flow.

To accommodate the proposed reversible direct connector, WB SR 92 would be shifted north between the east end of the existing bridges over Seal Slough/Marina Lagoon and the beginning of the express lane connector east of Mariners Island Boulevard overcrossing. EB SR 92 would be shifted south between the east end of the existing bridges over Seal Slough/Marina Lagoon and west of the existing bridges over the Foster City Lagoon. US 101 would be shifted to accommodate the reversible direct

connector lanes from south of the Hillsdale Boulevard interchange to north of the Kehoe Avenue interchange.

Openings to the reversible express lane direct connector in all directions would be regulated by a system to control the direction of traffic flow. The express lane direct connector reversible access openings would be controlled by opening the lane in the operating direction to guide traffic and closing the lane in the non-operating direction to prevent cars from driving in the wrong direction.

The majority of the proposed improvements would be constructed within the existing Caltrans right of way. It is anticipated that private properties adjacent to NB US 101 within the northeast quadrant of the US 101 / SR 92 interchange would be impacted. The estimated right of way required from private properties would be sliver acquisitions and would not affect any existing buildings, structures, or access.

Build Alternative 3

This alternative would provide a direct connection from NB and SB US 101 Express Lanes to EB SR 92 to serve traffic heading to the San Mateo-Hayward Bridge. The direct connector would provide access from the express lanes on US 101 to EB SR 92 without requiring a lane change, thereby reducing weaving and merging of traffic on US 101 and EB SR 92.

The direct connector would take the form of a new elevated structure that would begin from the left side on NB and SB US 101 at grade with the existing roadway. The structure would then rise and merge into one lane and connect with EB SR 92, east of US 101.

To accommodate the proposed direct connector, US 101 would be shifted to accommodate the direct connector lanes from south of the Hillsdale Boulevard interchange to north of the Kehoe Avenue interchange. EB SR 92 would be shifted between the east end of the existing bridges over Seal Slough/Marina Lagoon and the end of the direct connector east of the Foster City Boulevard overcrossing.

The majority of the proposed improvements would be constructed within the existing Caltrans right of way. It is anticipated that private properties adjacent to the NB US 101 within the northeast quadrant of the US 101/SR 92 interchange may be impacted. The estimated right of way required from private properties would be sliver acquisitions and would not affect existing buildings, structures, or access.

Features Common to All Build Alternatives

For Build Alternatives 1, 2, and 3, the direct connector access would be on the left side of the travel direction, adjacent to the median of SR 92 and US 101. For all alternatives, the direct connector would include a new bridge over Seal Slough/Marina Lagoon and an elevated connector over the existing US 101/ SR 92 interchange. All alternatives are anticipated to impact private properties along NB US 101 in the northeast quadrant of the US 101 / SR 92 interchange.

No Build Alternative

Under the No Build Alternative, there would be no action and the improvements proposed under Build Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would not be constructed.

Potential Environmental Effects/Topics to be Evaluated

Based on preliminary surveys and information, Caltrans identified the following main subject areas for analysis in the EIR/EA. The scope of environmental analysis could be modified based on input from this Notice of Preparation and project scoping.

- Aesthetics and Visual Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Wetlands/Jurisdictional Waters
- Cultural Resources
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Flood Plain and Flooding
- Cumulative Impacts
- Noise and Vibration
- Transportation
- Greenhouse Gases/Energy/Climate Change
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Community Impacts/Land Use/Growth
- Geologic/Seismic/ Paleontology
- Environmental Justice
- Mandatory Findings of Significance
- Construction-Related Impacts

Summary of Key Environmental Considerations

Despite its location within a highly developed area, the proposed project has the potential to impact sensitive environmental resources as described below. A comprehensive assessment of potential impacts to resources will be conducted in the EIR/EA.

Biological Resources

Sensitive habitats are present at the project location, including saline and freshwater riparian areas. There is potential for the project area to support avian and bat species. There is potential for special-status species, including plants, terrestrial wildlife, and aquatic species. All build alternatives have the potential for new bridge piers at Seal Slough/Marina Lagoon within the water or near the shoreline. Biological surveys would be conducted to evaluate the potential for species such as Franciscan onion (*Allium peninsulare* var. *franciscanum*), longfin smelt (*Spirinchus thaleichthys*), salt marsh harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys raviventris*), California's Ridgeway's rail (*Rallus obsoletus*), San Francisco garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia*), and others. Permits and approvals from regulatory agencies would be anticipated if the project would affect jurisdictional waters of the U.S., waters of the State, and/or habitat for protected species.

Aesthetics/Visual Resources

The project would construct new ramps that would rise up from each freeway's center median to vertically clear all the existing ramps that they cross at the US 101/SR 92 interchange. The new ramps would increase the visibility of the interchange from the surrounding area and are expected to result in noticeable visual changes that may be visible from the surrounding land uses. A Visual Impact Assessment would be prepared and would include visual simulations of the proposed structures, lighting, and signage. The analysis would consider multiple viewpoints from the surrounding areas, as well as viewpoints from the driver's perspective on the highways. There is some existing landscaping between the existing ramps at this interchange. If vegetation is removed, replacement landscaping is anticipated to the extent feasible.

Transportation/Traffic/Vehicle Miles Traveled

The project is anticipated to improve travel times and reduce delays. A Transportation Operations Analysis Report would be prepared and would include an operational analysis for existing conditions and future conditions (opening and design years) for each alternative, with and without the project as well

as any proposed project construction phasing. The study would include an analysis of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) to assess impact in accordance with CEQA's VMT requirements.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

As the project would involve a new direct connector, an Air Quality Impact Report would be prepared, along with consultation with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Task Force. A quantitative analysis would be conducted using traffic data. The analysis would include evaluation of air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions against current significance criteria.

Figure 1: Project Location

