



**CEQA EXEMPTION DETERMINATION FORM (rev. 06/2022)
NEPA CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION FOR MIDDLE-MILE BROADBAND
NETWORK PROJECTS DETERMINATION FORM (rev. 05/2023)**

Project Information

Project Name (if applicable): SR-125 Middle-Mile Broadband Network Installation

DIST-CO-RTE: 11-SD-125

PM/PM: 12.9/22.3

EA: 4B012/1122000225

Federal-Aid Project Number:

Project Description

On State Route 125, in the Cities of La Mesa and Santee, County of San Diego the proposed project would install broadband fiber optic network cable from 0.6 mile south of Spring Street undercrossing near La Mesa to Mission Gorge Road in Santee to improve affordability and accessibility to high-speed internet in San Diego County. Attached Middle-Mile Broadband Network CE Checklist.

Caltrans CEQA Determination (Check one)

- Not Applicable** – Caltrans is not the CEQA Lead Agency
- Not Applicable** – Caltrans has prepared an IS or EIR under CEQA

Based on an examination of this proposal and supporting information, the project is:

- Exempt by Statute.** (PRC 21080[b]; 14 CCR 15260 et seq.)
- Categorically Exempt. Class 1.** (PRC 21084; 14 CCR 15300 et seq.)
 - No exceptions apply that would bar the use of a categorical exemption (PRC 21084 and 14 CCR 15300.2). See the [SER Chapter 34](#) for exceptions.
- Covered by the Common Sense Exemption.** This project does not fall within an exempt class, but it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity may have a significant effect on the environment (14 CCR 15061[b][3]).

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Matthew Voss	<i>Matthew Voss</i>	4/24/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date

Project Manager

Mike Dispenzieri	<i>Mike Dispenzieri</i>	6/7/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date



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Caltrans NEPA Determination

Caltrans has determined this project meets the conditions set forth below and therefore is categorically excluded from the requirements to prepare an EA or EIS under NEPA.

The actions listed in Appendix A, Number 6 (“Actions including, but not limited to, right-of-way use agreements, encroachment permits, and consent letters that are subject to subpart D of 23 CFR 710”) of the 23 USC 326 CE Assignment MOU between FHWA, California Division and the California Department of Transportation (2022) may be classified as a categorical exclusion, provided the following conditions are met:

- The action is required in order to implement a project that is part of the California Middle-Mile Broadband Network
- The Federal Action consists of: Approval of a non-highway use of the right-of-way/grant of a right-of-way use agreement
- The action does not, either individually or cumulatively, have any significant environmental impacts as described in 23 CFR 771.117(a); and
- The action does not involve unusual circumstances as described in 23 CFR 771.117(b):
 - Significant environmental impacts;
 - Substantial controversy on environmental grounds;
 - Significant impact on properties protected by Section 4(f)¹ requirements or Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act; or
 - Inconsistencies with any Federal, State, or local law, requirement or administrative determination relating to the environmental aspects of the action.
- The action can be authorized under a Section 404 Nationwide Permit, or Regional General Permit, including one specific to Middle-Mile Broadband Network activities when issued. Sufficient information to issue a Wetlands Only Practicable Alternative Finding must be included in the CE documentation; and
- The action would not significantly encroach on the base floodplain and no impacts to the natural and beneficial floodplain values are anticipated; and
- The action would not impact the features or attributes of a designated scenic river that make it eligible for inclusion in the National System of Wild and Scenic Rivers published by the U.S. Department of Interior/U.S. Department of Agriculture; and
- The action does not require any U.S. Coast Guard construction permits;

¹ Middle-Mile Broadband Network Projects are not considered transportation projects and are therefore exempt from the requirements of 23 CFR 774.



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- The use of this CE certifies that the project has been evaluated and is designed to prevent unauthorized releases of hazardous materials. Caltrans would maintain compliance with the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Soil Management Agreement for Aerially Deposited Lead-Contaminated Soils effective July 1, 2016, and that there are no known Cortese sites within the project footprint based on a record search; and
- The action does not require formal Section 7 Consultation for effects to federally listed or proposed species or critical habitat (likely to adversely affect determination for any species or critical habitat), or can be covered under an existing Programmatic Biological Opinion or the specific Programmatic Biological Opinion for Middle-Mile Broadband Network activities when issued; and
- The action is consistent with the State's Coastal Zone Management Plan, if applicable.

The proposed project(s) are in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. It is anticipated that no impacts would occur with the construction and implementation of the Middle-Mile Broadband Network.

Categorical Exclusion (CE) issued by Caltrans approving certain actions subject to subpart D of 23 CFR 710 for projects that are a part of the California Middle-Mile Broadband Network.

Senior Environmental Planner or Environmental Branch Chief

Matthew Voss	<i>Matthew Voss</i>	4/24/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date

Project Manager/DLA Engineer

Mike Dispenzieri	<i>Mike Dispenzieri</i>	6/7/2024
Print Name	Signature	Date



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Continuation sheet:

Project Description

The project (11-4B012) is part of the Middle-Mile Broadband Network (MMBN) initiative program, which includes the installation of broadband infrastructure throughout California within the State Highway System (SHS), including Interstate routes.

Due to the varied topography and locations of the broadband infrastructure across the State of California, the design would be dependent on project site features. This project segment of the MMBN is located in San Diego County within Caltrans District 11 (District). The project would install broadband conduit and fiber on State Route 125 (SR-125) from 0.6 mile south of Spring St at Post Mile (PM) 12.9, through La Mesa to Mission Gorge Road PM 22.3 in Santee, within San Diego County. Work would take place within existing Caltrans Right-of-Way. The areas of project impact would be limited to the existing paved surfaces, disturbed shoulders, and maintained Caltrans Right-of-Way, and would primarily install subsurface fiber-optic conduit network (see *Description of Work*).

Purpose and Need

Purpose: This MMBN project will install the broadband infrastructure along the SHS necessary to connect to a third-party–operated Last Mile Broadband Network, which will bring equitable highspeed internet connectivity to homes, businesses, and community institutions.

Need: In July 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law Senate Bill 156 to create an open-access middle-mile network to bring equitable high-speed broadband service to all Californians.

Description of Work

The project proposes the installation of the MMBN along SR-125 using 70 horizontal directional drilling (HDD) pits within Caltrans right of way along the SR-125 alignment. The project proposes installation of MMBN, which includes:

- Installing new vaults to be owned by the California Department of Technology (CDT) and connect to the conduit network, to be constructed for CDT use as part of this project.



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- Vaults would be spaced approximately every 450 feet, vaults would generally measure a maximum of approximately 48 square feet and be flush with the ground surface (or 2 inches above unpaved areas).
- Linear connection of broadband conduit and fiber installation to vaults is generally anticipated to consist of one 2-inch conduit, with minimum cover of 24 to 42 inches depending on location.
 - The three methods for underground installation of fiber optic conduit proposed to connect vaults are plowing, trenching, and trenching in pavement (micro-trenching). However, the SR-125 will require horizontal directional drilling for MMBN conduit installation.
 - Micro-trenching would occur under asphalt pavement when off-pavement solutions are not feasible due to site-specific restrictions, with the depth of cover over conduit in paved areas a minimum of 24 inches.
 - For bridges or culverts, fiber optic fiber would be placed within structure cells, attached underneath the structure, hung underneath the structure, or attached to the barrier on the structure. No additional conduit or modifications to the exterior of bridges or structures are proposed.

Environmental Factors

If project scope should change, the Division of Environmental shall be notified to determine whether the current environmental documentation and technical assessments are adequate or further documentation for a reevaluation will be required.

The project would not affect agriculture and forestry, air quality, a wild or scenic river, energy, geology/soils, greenhouse gas emissions, land use/planning, mineral resources, noise, population/housing, public services, recreation, transportation, utilities/service systems, or wildfire potential.

Avoidance of Sensitive Resources

- This project has been independently evaluated for sensitive resources prior to construction. Caltrans intends to identify and avoid potential environmental impacts throughout construction.
- Sensitive locations have been noted as areas to be avoided during construction.



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- Caltrans shall use Caltrans Standard Special Provisions (SSP), Non-Standard Special Provisions (NSSP), pre-construction training, and Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) flagging to avoid potential impacts.
- Environmental reevaluation would be required if the scope of the project changes to include additional areas or activities, or if previously unknown cultural, biological, or other unidentified environmental resources were discovered.
- The contractor would not be allowed to park, stage, or store equipment or materials outside of the project impact area or on sensitive areas identified within Caltrans Right-of-Way.
- Staging areas would shift along the alignment as construction progresses and be limited to temporary equipment parking at each vault/connection location and would remain within existing Right-of-Way. All work would remain within the project footprint and within the area cleared for construction as delineated by environmental constraints mapping for biological (including jurisdictional waters) and cultural resources.

Technical Studies Prepared

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

A No Effect Memo was prepared for the project on 11/15/2022 and updated on 1/11/2024 and found that biological resource impacts would be avoided with adherence to the avoidance and minimization measures discussed below. The project limits extend through urban areas and are located within the boundaries of the roadway and shoulders.

Any tree or shrub removal or trimming should be completed between September 1 and February 14, which is outside the bird breeding season. If vegetation clearing cannot be done outside the breeding season, a biologist should survey areas to be cleared for nesting birds. If active nests are detected, work shall not occur near the active nest until the young have fledged. No work will occur in coastal sage scrub habitat.

• Staging or storage areas will occur in paved areas or level areas devoid of vegetation in Caltrans right-of-way.

• No work is authorized in any drainages near the project limits. Possible debris or runoff, generated as a result of the work, shall be restricted to Caltrans right-of-way and directed away from drainages to prevent deposition into the waterways.



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CULTURAL RESOURCES;

A Screened Undertaking Memo was prepared on 3/22/2024. The memo determined it is unlikely that the proposed undertaking has potential to affect historic properties/historical resources, and therefore the proposed undertaking is exempt from further review pursuant to the First Amended Section 106 PA, Stipulation VII and Attachment 2. The proposed undertaking conforms to the following “classes of screened undertakings” listed in the First Amended Section 106 PA, Attachment 2:

Class 6 -Minor utility installation or relocation.

As a result, this undertaking is exempt from further review.

HAZARDOUS WASTE/MATERIALS:

A Hazardous Waste Memo was prepared on 12/1/2023, and revised on 4/2/2024 which included discussions of typical waste issues that could affect the proposed project. Environmental Engineering staff reviewed the EnviroStor and GeoTracker (Cortese) databases for onsite and nearby hazardous waste/unauthorized release facilities that may have impacted the environmental condition of the project area. No facilities of concern were identified in the database review for this Project.

The following will discuss typical hazardous waste issues that could affect this project.

Aerially Deposited Lead

*Results of previous aerially deposited lead (ADL) studies indicate that soil south of Interstate 8 (I-8) along SR-125 (PMs R9.8 to 15.2) is regulated. Therefore, **SSP 14-11.09 Minimal Disturbance of Regulated Material Containing Aerially Deposited Lead** is applicable and will be provided by Environmental Engineering.*

*Additionally, results of ADL studies of soil along SR-125 from the I-8 interchange to the northern termination (PMs R15.2 to 22.3) indicate that the soil is unregulated based on screening data and build date. Therefore, **SSP 7-1.02K(6)(j)(iii) Unregulated Earth Material Containing Lead** is applicable and will be provided by Environmental Engineering.*

Both SSP's require a Lead Compliance Plan (LCP).



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Lead Compliance Plan

A Lead Compliance Plan (LCP), prepared by a certified industrial hygienist (CIH), is required and must be provided by the Contractor and implemented for all workers handling hazardous or non hazardous soil (Bid Item 070030). Regulations containing specific Cal/OSHA requirements when working with lead include 8 CA Code of Regs Section 1532.1. The plan must:

- 1. Document the compliance program to prevent or minimize worker exposure to lead.*
- 2. Include items listed in 8 CA Code of Regs Section 1532.1(e)(2)(B).*
- 3. Be sealed and signed by a CIH with knowledge of and experience complying with 8 CA Code of Regs.*

Allow 7 days for review. Obtain authorization for the plan before starting any activity that presents the potential for lead exposure.

The Contractor is responsible for identifying the appropriate permitted landfill to receive excavated material and for all associated trucking and disposal costs, including any additional sampling and analysis required by the receiving landfill.

Discovery of Unknown Contamination and/or Hazards

It is still possible to discover previously unknown contamination and hazards during construction activities. Health and Safety Code Section 25914.2 specifies that unanticipated hazardous substances encountered during construction cannot legally be tested and/or managed and removed by the prime contractor who discovered it. The District has an on call Construction Emergency Response Contract managed by the Environmental Engineering branch that can be accessed to have appropriate testing and disposal performed.

Storm Water/NPDES

A National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)/Storm Water Compliance Review Memo was prepared for this project by Caltrans in May 2023. This project would be designed in conformance with the NPDES Permit Order 2012-0011-DWQ and Appendix E of the Caltrans Project Planning and Design Guide. A Short Form Storm Water Data Report (SWDR) was prepared for the project



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Paleontology

A Paleontological Research Memo was prepared on March 18, 2024. As part of background research, geology and paleontological resource sensitivity maps of the proposed project corridor were consulted to assess sensitivity for paleontological resources. In addition, Paleontological Mitigation Monitoring Reports for the construction of SR-125 (Deméré et al. 2004a, and 2004b), as well as a Paleontological Identification Report for the State Routes 94/125 Interchange Project (Rieboldt 2014), were also consulted because a large portion of the current proposed project limits were included in these reports. The results of the research indicated that the current project limits between Interstate 8 and Mission Gorge Road have higher potential for buried paleontological resources (Friars Formation, Mission Valley Formation, and Stadium Conglomerate). The Paleontological Mitigation Monitoring Reports for the SR-125 construction indicated that many fossil samples were collected during construction. As such, the current project is considered to have higher potential to impact paleontological resources during construction. In order to mitigate the potential impacts to paleontological resources, implementation of a paleontological mitigation monitoring program will be required.

Paleontology requests that the following items be incorporated into the project's Environmental Commitments, and necessary funds to retain qualified paleontologists be secured.

- 1. A qualified paleontologist (as defined in the Caltrans' Standard Environmental Reference) must be invited to the pre-construction (or tailgate) meeting to consult with the grading and excavation contractors concerning excavation schedules, paleontological field techniques, and safety issues. A qualified paleontologist is defined as an individual with a MS or Ph.D. in paleontology or geology who is familiar with paleontological procedures and techniques, who is knowledgeable in the geology and paleontology of San Diego County, and who has worked as a paleontological mitigation project supervisor in the county for at least one year.*

- 2. A paleontological monitor must be on-site on a full-time basis during the original cutting of previously undisturbed deposits of high or moderate paleontological resource potential, and on-site on a part-time basis during the original cutting of previously undisturbed deposits of low paleontological resource potential (sedimentary deposits of younger alluvium), to inspect exposures for contained fossils. A paleontological monitor is defined as an individual who has experience in the collection and salvage of fossil materials. The paleontological monitor must work under the direction of a qualified paleontologist. As grading progresses, the qualified paleontologist and paleontological monitor will confer with the Resident Engineer regarding the level of effort needed and reduce the scope of the monitoring program to an appropriate level if it is determined that the potential for impacts to paleontological resources is lower than anticipated.*



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3. *When fossils are discovered, the paleontologist (or paleontological monitor) will recover them. In most cases this fossil salvage can be completed in a short period of time. However, some fossil specimens (such as a complete large mammal skeleton) may require an extended salvage period. In these instances, the paleontologist (or paleontological monitor) will consult with the RE to temporarily divert, or halt grading, to allow recovery of fossil remains in a timely manner.*

4. *During the monitoring and recovery phases, the qualified paleontologist and/or the paleontological monitor will also routinely collect stratigraphic data (e.g., lithology, vertical thickness, lateral extent of strata, nature of upper and lower contacts, and taphonomic character of exposed strata). Collection of such data is critical for providing a stratigraphic context for any recovered fossils.*

5. *Fossil remains collected during monitoring and salvage must be cleaned (removal of extraneous enclosing sedimentary rock material), prepared, sorted (separating fossils of the different species), cataloged (scientific identification of species, assignment of inventory tracking numbers, and recording of these numbers in a computerized collection database), and curated as part of the mitigation program.*

6. *A final summary report that outlines the results of the mitigation program must be completed. This report will include discussion of the methods used, stratigraphic section(s) exposed and documented, fossils collected, and significance of recovered fossils.*

Project will add CC44 - \$60,000 to WBS Code 3.280.50 for the Paleontological Monitor.

Aesthetics and Visual Resources

Change to visual resources would be low. Although the quantity of viewers experiencing the project is considered high; viewer sensitivity and response to the anticipated visual change caused by trenching and vaults is considered low. Collectively, the 'low' change in visual resources combined with the 'low' viewer response to changes indicates the broadband work would cause a 'low' visual impact with the inclusion of impact avoidance measures as noted below.



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There would be no substantial visual impacts to the project locations and surrounding areas with the inclusion of the following avoidance measures:

- *Protect vegetation outside of the work area by prohibiting staging areas, material storage, parking, and construction access in vegetated areas.*
- *Avoid impacts to enhanced paving at beyond gore areas. (Example: colored concrete, rock blanket).*
- *If trenching is required in landscape areas, contractor must hand trench when crossing irrigation lines. Any damage to irrigation components by construction shall be replaced in kind. Any minor grading or trenching within the critical root zone of trees must be done manually with prior approval of the District Landscape Architect or Engineer.*
- *Install fiber optic lines a minimum of 24" from edge of existing irrigation valve boxes and irrigation conduit pullboxes.*
- *Repair or replace existing irrigation equipment to an operational status where the project disturbs roadside areas.*
- *If approved, apply a tan or brown concrete stain to the exposed surface of concrete vault lids to blend lids with native soils.*
- *Disturbed soil shall be mulched, or hydroseeded with a CA native seed mix as recommended by the Caltrans Landscape Architect in Landscape Design.*

The suggested SEED MIX is:

Total= 30 pounds pure live seed (PLS)/Acre

*Acmispon glaber (deerweed) 2 LBS PLS/Acre
Artemisia californica (California sagebrush) 2 PLS/Acre
Asclepias fascicularis (narrow leaf milkweed) 2 PLS/Acre
Eschscholzia californica (California poppy) 3 PLS/Acre
Festuca microstachys (small fescue) 3 LBS PLS/Acre
Lasthenia Californica (goldfields) 4 LBS PLS/Acre
Lupinus bicolor (miniature lupine) 4 LBS PLS/Acre
Muhlenbergia microsperma (little-seed muhly) 1 LB PLS/Acre
Nasella pulchra, deawned (foothill needlegrass) 6 LBS PLS/Acre
Plantago erecta (dotseed plantain) 3 LBS PLS/Acre*