

Notice of Preparation

Notice of Preparation

To: Responsible and Trustee Agencies

From: Tanvi Gupta

Environmental Scientist

(Address)

(Address)

Caltrans District 4 Environmental P.O. Box 23660, MS: 8B Oakland, CA 94623-0660

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

Caltrans District 4 will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project identified below. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the Initial Study (is is not) attached.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Please send your response to Tanvi Gupta at the address shown above. We will need the name for a contact person in your agency.

Project Title: US Route 101 (US 101)/ Interstate 580 (I-580) Multi-Modal and Local Access Improvement Project

Project Applicant, if any: Caltrans

Date 10/02/2024

Signature Tanvi Gupta

Title Environmental Scientist

Telephone (510) 421-8378

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Assessment
US 101/I-580 Multi-Modal and Local Access Improvement Project
Marin County, California

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 4 in cooperation with Transportation Authority of Marin County (TAM) 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 <http://marin101-580.com>.

Scoping Period for Receipt of Comments

Comments must be sent by November 15, 2024. Submit written comments one of three ways: at the public meeting, described below, mail, email, or project website.

- 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: info@Marin101-580.com and Tanvi.Gupta@dot.ca.gov
- If sending via the project website by the comment form: <http://marin101-580.com>

In-Person Environmental Scoping Meetings

An in-person environmental scoping meeting will be held on October 1, 2024, from 5:30 to 7:30pm at the following location:

- Marin Health & Wellness Campus
3240 Kerner Boulevard
San Rafael, CA 94901

At the in-person meeting, attendees can ask questions about the project. However, questions and discussion at the meeting are not considered official scoping comments and all scoping comments must be written and submitted at the meeting, or sent by mail or by email. Attendance at the in-person scoping meeting is not required to submit comments.

Spanish interpretation will be available at the in-person meeting.

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

Purpose and Need

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to do the following:

- Improve regional connectivity between northbound US Route 101 (US 101) and eastbound Interstate 580 (I-580).
- Improve traffic operations on local streets and freeway segments.
- Enhance the active transportation (bicycle and pedestrian) network and improve bicycle and pedestrian safety within the community.
- Improve transit access and travel times.
- Support economic prosperity by providing better and more reliable access to local businesses.
- Improve community cohesion by enhancing local connectivity to work, school and businesses for disadvantaged communities near the project area

Need for the Project

The following describes the existing and future deficiencies that establish the need for the improvements contemplated under the proposed Project:

Lack of Connectivity

The existing I-580/US 101 interchange has no direct connection between northbound (NB) US 101 and eastbound (EB) I-580. Instead, regional and pass-through traffic must use East Sir Francis Drake Boulevard or Bellam Boulevard to travel between NB US 101 and EB I-580. Travel degrades operations on northbound US 101 and eastbound I-580 during weekday peak periods. Similarly, west and southbound trips on weekends causes congestion during weekend peak periods during the afternoon and evening hours.

Deficient Traffic Operations

Because a freeway-to-freeway direct connection doesn't exist within the project area, freeway traffic must continue onto surface streets, thus mixing regional pass-through traffic with local traffic. The current congestion backs up through San Rafael, blocking access to businesses, neighborhoods, and contributing to NB US 101 back up.

Limited Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Bicycles and pedestrians traveling to and from the Canal and East San Rafael neighborhoods must navigate through busy stretches of Bellam Boulevard, Francisco Boulevard East and Andersen Drive (north of Bellam Boulevard) which lack protected bicycle lanes and have narrow sidewalks in some locations. Although, popular bicycle and pedestrian pathways exist on the fringes of the Canal neighborhood, such as the Bay Trail and Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) trail that utilizes Cal Park Hill tunnel, these pathways lack connections to the local area to build a robust bicycle and pedestrian network. The lack of active transportation accommodations and connections to existing facilities discourages the use of the transit network and trail systems that are nearby.

Absent Transit Links

Multi-modal connections in the project area have been improved over the years but the area is still lacking a fully integrated system. The closest transit connections are local and regional bus routes that serve San Rafael and reach as far as downtown San Francisco through Marin Transit and Golden Gate Transit.

Project Description

Project Title: US 101/I-580 Multi-Modal and Local Access Improvement Project

Project Location: The project is located in the City of San Rafael in Marin County at the US 101 and I-580 interchange

TAM and Caltrans propose three Build Alternatives in addition to the No Build:

- Build Alternative 1 Local Improvements would construct a series of local street improvements on Bellam Boulevard (Figure 1),
- Build Alternative 2 would build a connector between US 101 and I-580 along Simms Street (Figure 2), and
- Build Alternative 3 would construct a connector approximately at the location of Bellam Boulevard off-ramp (Figure 3).

All build alternatives would include these common elements of Alternative 1:

- Replacement of the EB I-580 bridge over Bellam Boulevard;
- Bicycle and pedestrian improvements which may include bicycle lanes and/or sidewalks along Bellam Boulevard from Kerner Boulevard to Anderson Drive;
- Bellam Boulevard intersection improvements to enhance bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and reliable transit service; and
- Assumed completion of the separate Ramp Project being administered by TAM.

Each of the Build Alternatives are discussed in greater detail below.

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would consist of the area continuing with the existing connections, the missing connection of US 101 NB to I-580-EB and would not involve any local street improvements on Bellam Boulevard.

Build Alternatives Under Consideration

Build Alternative 1

Alternative 1, would include Bellam Corridor improvements for vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians to address congestion and safety and would span less than half a mile. The safety enhancements would consist of new or improved sidewalks and bicycle lanes between the east and west sides of I-580 along Bellam Boulevard from Andersen Drive to Kerner Boulevard. An enhanced bicycle and pedestrian facility would provide access to Cal Park Hill path via Jacoby Street and direct connections to SMART Larkspur train station and Larkspur ferry terminal. Although, the proposed bicycle and pedestrian improvements

would not reach Davidson Middle School, the enhanced bicycle and pedestrian facilities would help close the gap for students and provide a safer route to school.

This alternative will evaluate design options of signalized intersection modifications and/or roundabouts at the Bellam Boulevard intersections with Andersen Drive, NB US 101 Off-ramp, WB I-580 Off-ramp, Francisco Boulevard, Castro Avenue and Kerner Boulevard. Signalized intersection modifications may involve restricting vehicular movements at different intersections along Bellam Boulevard. The Andersen Drive and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard intersection is currently an unsignalized intersection that would be included for improvements for bicycle movements and traffic operations.

In addition, this alternative is anticipated to enhance economic prosperity by reducing congestion in the area and providing more reliable access to local businesses.

Build Alternative 2

Alternative 2 connector exits NB US 101 (at PM 9.26) at approximately 3,000 feet north of the Sir Francis Drake Boulevard on-ramp gore point beyond the crest of the vertical curve. The connector has two lanes along a single curve to connect the two freeways and traverses a commercial district in San Rafael. This alternative requires a structure spanning over the SMART tracks. The entire route is over half mile in length and the assumed design speed for this alternative is 45 mph. This alternative would add an auxiliary lane on EB I-580 to the new connector entrance to the existing auxiliary land that continues onto the Richmond-San Rafael bridge. Ramp metering is not part of this Alternative.

Alternative 2 would include all the improvements described in Alternative 1, Local Improvements.

Build Alternative 3

Alternative 3, connector exits NB US 101 approximately 600 feet south of the current Bellam Boulevard exit point. The connector has two lanes along a single horizontal curve to connect the two freeways. It provides an optional left side exit, 500 feet downstream of the freeway-to-freeway connection departure, that connects to the existing Bellam Boulevard off-ramp. Overhead advanced signage will be installed to inform drivers' lane choice for exiting to Bellam Blvd or continuing to EB I-580. A new Bellam Undercrossing will be required for the new ramp. With this alternative, the existing connections to Bellam Blvd from SB US 101/EB I-580 and NB US 101 are preserved. The existing EB I-580 on-ramp at Bellam Boulevard will be realigned slightly to merge with the NB US 101/EB I-580 connector and the additional auxiliary lane along EB I-580.

In addition, this alternative requires the approval of a left side exit. The Bellam Blvd exit from the freeway-to-freeway connection is an optional exit from the left lane. As mitigation, advanced signage ahead of the exit will notify drivers to keep left if they want to exit at Bellam Blvd instead of continuing on the freeway-to-freeway connector to EB I-580. The proposed design will operate similar to a collector distributor, which pulls drivers off of the mainline and then gives them a choice of directions. Ramp metering is not part of this alternative.

Alternative 3 would include all the improvements described in Alternative 1, Local Improvements.

Potential Environmental Effects

Based on the preliminary surveys and information, TAM 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
- Noise and Vibration
- Air Quality
- Transportation
- Biological Resources
- Greenhouse Gases/Energy/Climate Change
- Wetlands/Jurisdictional Waters
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Community Impacts/Land Use/Growth
- Geologic/Seismic/ Paleontology
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Mandatory Findings of Significance
- Environmental Justice
- Cumulative Impacts
- 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.

Aesthetics and Visual Impacts

The project could construct new ramps that would install a new visual feature between US 101 and I-580. A visual and aesthetic assessment will be completed for the Project. The assessment will address proposed structures, lighting, and tree and vegetation removal. The environmental document will summarize the results of the visual and aesthetic assessment, identify avoidance and minimization measures, and if necessary, identify mitigation measures to reduce or avoid visual and aesthetic impacts.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

An air quality report will be completed to quantify the effects of the Project on the ambient air quality of the Project study area and the region. This report will be completed to document if the Project will expose residences or other sensitive receptors to substantial air quality pollutants. In addition, a study evaluating potential increases in greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions generated from the construction and operation of the Project will be completed. The environmental document will summarize the air quality and GHG emissions analysis and identify best management practices (BMPs), avoidance and minimization measures, and if necessary, mitigation measures to reduce impacts to air quality.

Biological Resources

A biological resources study will be completed, and a Biological Study Area defined to determine if there is sensitive wildlife, plants, or habitats present within the study area. In addition, a tree survey will be conducted to identify the trees that will potentially be impacted by the Project. The environmental document will summarize the biological resources study and tree survey, identify avoidance and minimization measures, and if necessary, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid impacts to biological resources.

Community Impacts

A community impact assessment will be completed to identify potential impacts to social, economic, public services, land use, growth impacts, and potential community concerns during construction of the Project. The assessment will incorporate analysis from air quality, noise, traffic and transportation, and aesthetics and visual studies to evaluate how impacts on these resources would affect community character and cohesion. The environmental document will summarize the community impact assessment, identify avoidance and minimization measures, and if necessary, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid community impacts.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resources reports, including Native American consultation, will be completed to determine if cultural resources would be impacted by the Project. The environmental document will summarize the reports and the consultation process, identify avoidance and minimization measures, and if necessary, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid impacts to cultural resources.

Noise and Vibration

Potential noise and vibration impacts generated from the construction and operation of the proposed Project will be evaluated in a noise study report. Current noise levels will be measured and future noise levels will be based on Project traffic operations. The environmental document will summarize the results of the noise study report, identify avoidance and minimization measures, and if necessary, mitigation measures to reduce or avoid noise impacts.

Traffic and Transportation

A traffic analysis will be completed for the Project. The traffic analysis will evaluate the improvements to the US 101 and I-580 interchange, Bellam Boulevard, and nearby roadway operations. The traffic analysis will estimate traffic volumes for existing conditions, future opening year with and without the Project, and future design year with and without the Project. The study would include an analysis of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) to assess impact in accordance with CEQA's VMT requirements. The environmental document will summarize the results of the traffic analysis (including impacts to bicycle and pedestrian circulation), identify avoidance and minimization measures, and if necessary, mitigation measures will be identified to reduce or avoid traffic impacts.

Figure 1: Alternative 1



Figure 2: Alternative 2 \



Figure 3: Alternative 3

