



**City of Placerville**  
**Public Works / Engineering**  
**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: November 16, 2005

TO: City Council

FROM: Rick Tippett, City Engineer

SUBJECT: **Recommendation to Certify the Western Placerville Interchanges Project Final Environmental Impact Report and Adopt Mitigation Monitoring Plan**

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**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Staff recommends that Council adopt a Resolution to:
  1. Adopt California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Findings of Fact for the Western Placerville Interchanges Project;
  2. Certify the Western Placerville Interchanges Project Final Environmental Impact Report (SCH#2003122137) dated November 2005; and,
  3. Adopt the November 2005 Western Placerville Interchanges Project Mitigation Monitoring Plan.
  4. Select Alternative D as the preferred project design and direct staff to prepare plans, specifications and estimates for this project upon approval of the Federal Highway Administration.

**BACKGROUND**

**Project and Environmental Review**

The City of Placerville, as the CEQA lead agency, has prepared an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Western Placerville Interchanges Project. The project would improve the Forni Road/Placerville Drive Interchange and upgrade the Ray Lawyer Drive Overcrossing to a full interchange by constructing highway on- and off-ramps. These improvements would occur in conjunction with modifications and improvements to eastbound and westbound Highway 50 (U.S. 50) ramps to and from Forni Road, Placerville Drive, and Ray Lawyer Drive. The project would also widen and improve segments of Forni Road, Placerville Drive, Fair Lane, and Ray Lawyer Drive.

Four alternative design configurations were considered in the Draft EIR, each of which would achieve the project objectives. Each of the alternatives would provide improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the project area and would provide opportunities for future development of park-and-ride facilities. Two alternatives (Alternatives C and D) include a roundabout at the westbound U.S. 50/Fair Lane/Placerville Drive intersection.

The Draft EIR was circulated for public and agency review between September 2, 2005 and October 21, 2005. During the Draft EIR review period a public hearing was held at the Placerville Planning Commission meeting on September 20, 2005. The project was also discussed at the October 11, 2005 City Council meeting and attendees were provided an opportunity to address the Council during that meeting. Three individuals provided oral comments at the September 20, 2005 Public Hearing and four individuals provided oral comments during the comment period at an October 11, 2005 City Council meeting. In addition, a total of 10 written comment sets were provided to the City during the public review period.

At its October 11, 2005 meeting, the City Council directed staff to prepare a Final EIR for the project which identifies Alternative D as the alternative preferred by the City. This direction was not a final alternative selection decision by the Council.

Based on Council's direction, staff and the City's consultants have prepared a Final EIR which identifies Alternative D as the City's Proposed Project. The Final EIR also includes copies of all written comments provided on the Draft EIR as well as written summaries of oral comments provided at the two meetings discussed above. The Final EIR, which incorporates the full text of the Draft EIR by reference, includes responses to each of the issues raised in these comments, and includes information necessary to clarify certain aspects of the project and environmental review.

The Final EIR identifies impacts that would be anticipated to occur as a result of project construction and operation, and identifies the significance of each individual impact. For each significant and potentially significant impact identified in the Final EIR, mitigation measures have been identified which would either avoid the impact or would reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level. Each of these mitigation measures are contained within a Mitigation Monitoring Plan, which is included as Appendix A of the Final EIR. The Final EIR, therefore, concludes that the project, with implementation of the Mitigation Monitoring Plan, would not result in significant and unavoidable impacts.

### **Federal Environmental Review**

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will administer federal funding for the project and therefore has an environmental review responsibility pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Draft EIR/EA served as a joint document to meet both the City's requirement under CEQA and the FHWA's requirement under NEPA, and both Caltrans (as a liaison to FHWA) and FHWA authorized distribution of the Draft EIR/EA. The Final EIR has been prepared as the City's CEQA document, and it is anticipated that FHWA will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact for the project.

### **Summary of Comments Received**

The Final EIR contains copies of all written comments and a summary of all oral comments provided by agencies, organizations and individuals concerning the Draft EIR. The Final EIR contains detailed responses to each issue raised. Four particular issues raised and addressed in detail within the Final EIR warrant discussion here.

1. Comments were received which expressed concern regarding increased traffic volumes and associated safety and roadway condition issues on Forni Road between Ray Lawyer Drive and Main Street. In response, the Final EIR includes summary discussion of traffic volume projections for this segment of Forni Road and that this segment of Forni Road is

anticipated to receive increased traffic volumes over time under both the No Project and the Proposed Project. The Final EIR explains that the magnitude of the differences in traffic volumes on Forni Road are minimal (a slight net decrease in the AM and PM traffic volumes with Alternative D) and do not represent a significant difference between No Project and Proposed Project traffic volumes on Forni Road. Further, the Final EIR clarifies that this segment of Forni Road is predominately outside the city limits of Placerville, and is not within the Western Placerville Interchanges Project project area. Improvements to this segment of Forni Road are not necessary to meet the objectives of the project and are not warranted as a result of changes in traffic volumes associated with the Proposed Project. It is also noted in the Final EIR that El Dorado County has included in their Interim 2004 General Plan TIM Fees Program (adopted by the County Board of Supervisors September 20, 2005) a project to perform preliminary planning, engineering and environmental investigations for future widening of Forni Road to a standard two-lane roadway.

2. Comments were received which expressed a desire for the installation of a Class I bicycle facility under-crossing beneath Forni Road at the Ray Lawyer Drive intersection to provide grade separation for the El Dorado Trail section that is located within the project limits. City staff and its project consultants have identified and presented several issues in the Final EIR which do not support the development of a grade-separated crossing at this location (including safety and personal security issues, constraints associated with interconnection with at-grade facility, and design constraints) and it is staff's position that the sidewalks, Class II bicycle lanes and at-grade surface treatments included in the Proposed Project design are sufficient to meet the anticipated pedestrian and bicycle traffic needs at this location.
3. Comments were received which expressed a desire for the project to accommodate connectivity with a potential future bicycle/pedestrian facility crossing Weber Creek parallel to U.S. 50. The trail will start in the county and cross Weber Creek Bridge. Within the project limits, the routing would require the trail to pass beneath Placerville Drive, parallel to the U.S. 50 eastbound off-ramp, and then turn southward to join with Forni Road. The County proposes to incorporate certain design modifications into the eastbound U.S. 50 Weber Creek Bridge in association with the Missouri Flat Road Interchange Project to preserve future bike trail across the bridge, but neither the County, nor the City, is proposing to design or construct this trail segment at this time. The Final EIR clarifies that the Proposed Project would preserve the alignment for a grade-separated trail to pass beneath Placerville Drive and join with either Forni Road east of Placerville Drive or connect into a park-and-ride that may be developed near this location. The proposed project does not preclude or interfere with the development of this bike trail as part of a separate project.
4. Comments were received which expressed concerns over bicycle and pedestrian movement within the project area and, specifically, in negotiating the proposed roundabout. The Final EIR discusses that City staff and the City's project consultants have determined that the roundabout possesses several operational aspects which may benefit bicycle and pedestrian movement at this location, such as reduced maximum vehicle speeds through the intersection. (The roundabout would have a 20 mph design speed, as opposed to higher speeds that would occur with traffic moving through a signalized intersection.) The proposed roundabout would include a 10-foot-wide sidewalk along the eastern side of the facility which would enable both pedestrians, as

well as cyclists choosing to negotiate the roundabout intersection as pedestrians, to have a clearly delineated route adjacent to the roundabout and incoming/outgoing lanes of traffic. Crosswalk delineation would be provided at all surface street crossings, and handicapped-accessible ramps would be installed at all curb/lane crossings along the pedestrian walkway. Signage would be placed to aid bicyclists and pedestrian movement at the roundabout, and to advise motorists of pedestrian crossing and Class II bicycle lanes at approach and exit lanes. The Final EIR also discusses that the City may implement a public outreach and educational program prior to and during the initial period of roundabout operation under the Proposed Project to advise the community with regard to safe and legal movement within the roundabout and to foster increased awareness of motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

## **DISCUSSION**

City staff and its project consultants will provide a presentation to the Council to provide an overview of the project, the environmental review and staff's recommendation to the Council. Based on the conclusions of the Final EIR and in consideration of all public and agency input received, staff recommends that the Final EIR be certified by the Council and that the Mitigation Monitoring Plan be adopted as a required element of the project. This action would be fulfilled through the Council's adoption of the attached Resolution which 1) adopt the Council's Findings of Fact related to the City's CEQA review of the project, 2) certify that the EIR is adequate, complete, and in compliance with the requirements of CEQA 3) adopt the project Mitigation Monitoring Plan and all measures contained therein as a required component of the project and 4) select Alternative D and directs staff to prepare plans specifications and estimates for the project upon approval of the Federal Highway Administration.

The City is the lead agency for the implementation of this project. As such, the City is also responsible for oversight of the Mitigation Monitoring Plan (MMP). While much of the oversight of the MMP will be outsourced, it will still require City staff commitments during project implementation. However, the staff commitment is difficult to estimate at this early stage of the project. As the project proceeds, staff will program this commitment into future budgets. It may be that other projects of lower priority may be delayed or, alternatively, additional staff will be needed. Staff will periodically update the City Council on this issue in the future.

It should be noted that FHWA approval is necessary in order to proceed with the plans, specifications and estimates phase of the project. FHWA has indicated its intent to make a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the project pursuant to NEPA. However, in connection with its review of the project FHWA must make a determination that the project is in conformity with regional transportation planning and air quality budgets contained within regional air quality plans. To be found in conformity, a project must be part of the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization's conforming Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). The WPIP is included in both the latest RTP (*Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for 2025*) and TIP (*2005/07 Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program*) for El Dorado County, and on February 6, 2003 the MTP and TIP were found to conform to the State Implementation Plan (SIP) by the U.S. Department of Transportation. However, the MTP and TIP conformity determinations were dependant upon the completion of certain projects within the planning region. As a result of delays and uncertainties with the completion of these projects, FHWA determined that the implementation of the RTP and TIP as projected in the SIP conformity determination may not occur, and the region entered what is referred to as a conformity "lapse" on October 4, 2004. As a result of the

conformity lapse, FHWA is unable to make final NEPA determinations at this time. Although the project conforms to the existing MTP and TIP, the conformity lapse must be resolved prior to obtaining FHWA's approval and proceeding with subsequent phases of project design and construction.

On September 23, 2005, a draft Environmental Impact Report for the Sacramento Regional Non-Attainment Area 8-Hour Ozone Rate-Of-Progress (ROP) Plan and Draft 8-Hour Ozone Rate-Of-Progress Plan was issued and the comment period for that document ended on November 7, 2005. Upon approval by regional agencies and in consultation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), SACOG will be able to prepare new air quality conformity determinations and end the lapse. The current schedule calls for the ROP emissions budgets that will be used in the conformity determinations to be approved by EPA as early as February 16, 2006. Once these emission budgets are available for conformity determinations, SACOG will prepare new conformity determinations on the 2006 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program for submittal to the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration for their review and approval. Upon approval by both of these agencies, which is expected as early as March 3 or as late as April 15, 2006, the conformity lapse will end. FHWA approval of the project environmental review can be anticipated shortly thereafter.

## **DOCUMENTS AND ATTACHMENTS**

- Resolutions
- CEQA Findings of Fact are included with this staff report as Exhibit A of Attachment A.
- The Final EIR and Draft EIR have been provided to the Council under separate cover.
- The Mitigation Monitoring Plan is contained within the Final EIR as Appendix A.

Prepared by:

Approved

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Richard Tippett, P.E., T.E.  
City Engineer

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Randy Pesses, P.E.  
Director of Public Works

Reviewed for Recommendation  
and Approved for Agenda

Reviewed for Financial Impact

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John Driscoll  
City Manager/City Attorney

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Dave Warren  
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