

## MEMORANDUM

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS  
CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CTC Meeting: June 24-25, 2020

From: STEVEN KECK, Chief Financial Officer

Reference Number: 2.2c.(14), Action Item

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Division of Environmental Analysis

Subject: **APPROVAL OF PROJECT FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF FUNDING  
RESOLUTION E-20-55**

### **ISSUE:**

Should the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a responsible agency, approve the attached Resolution E-20-55?

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

The California Department of Transportation (Department) recommends that the Commission, as a responsible agency, approve the attached Resolution E-20-55.

### **BACKGROUND:**

#### **12-Ora-74, PM 1.0/2.1 RESOLUTION E-20-55**

The attached resolution proposes to approve for future consideration of funding the following project for which a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) has been completed:

- State Route 74 (SR 74) in Orange County. Widen SR 74 from two lanes to four lanes in Orange County. (PPNO 4110)

This project is located in the City of San Juan Capistrano in Orange County and would widen SR 74 by adding one through lane in each direction, east and west bound, from Calle Entradero to the eastern City of San Juan Capistrano City limits. This project is currently programmed in the 2020 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for \$8,540,000 for Plans, Specifications & Estimate only. The total estimated project cost is \$75,713,000. Depending on the availability of funding, construction is estimated to begin Fiscal Year 2023-2024. The scope, as described for the preferred alternative, is consistent with the project scope programmed by the Commission in the 2020 STIP.

*“Provide a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system  
to enhance California’s economy and livability”*

A copy of the FEIR has been provided to Commission staff. Due to the time lapse between the original EIR and the current request for future funding, a revalidation of the EIR was also provided. Resources that may be impacted by the project include community character, and visual and aesthetics.

Potential impacts associated with the project can all be mitigated to below significance with the exception of community character and visual and aesthetics, for which a Statement of Overriding Considerations was prepared. As a result, an FEIR was prepared for the project.

Attachments

## **CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

### **Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding 12-Ora-74, PM 1.0/2.1 Resolution E-20-55**

- 1.1 WHEREAS**, the California Department of Transportation (Department) has completed a Final Environmental Impact Report and revalidation pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:

  - State Route 74 (SR 74) in Orange County. Widen SR 74 from two lanes to four lanes in Orange County. (PPNO 4110)
- 1.2 WHEREAS**, the Department has certified that a Final Environmental Impact Report and revalidation has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for its implementation; and
- 1.3 WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission, as a responsible agency, has considered the information contained in the Final Environmental Impact Report and revalidation.
- 1.4 WHEREAS**, the project will have a significant effect on the environment.
- 1.5 WHEREAS**, a Statement of Overriding Considerations was made pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines.
- 2.1 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby support approval of the above referenced project to allow for consideration of funding.

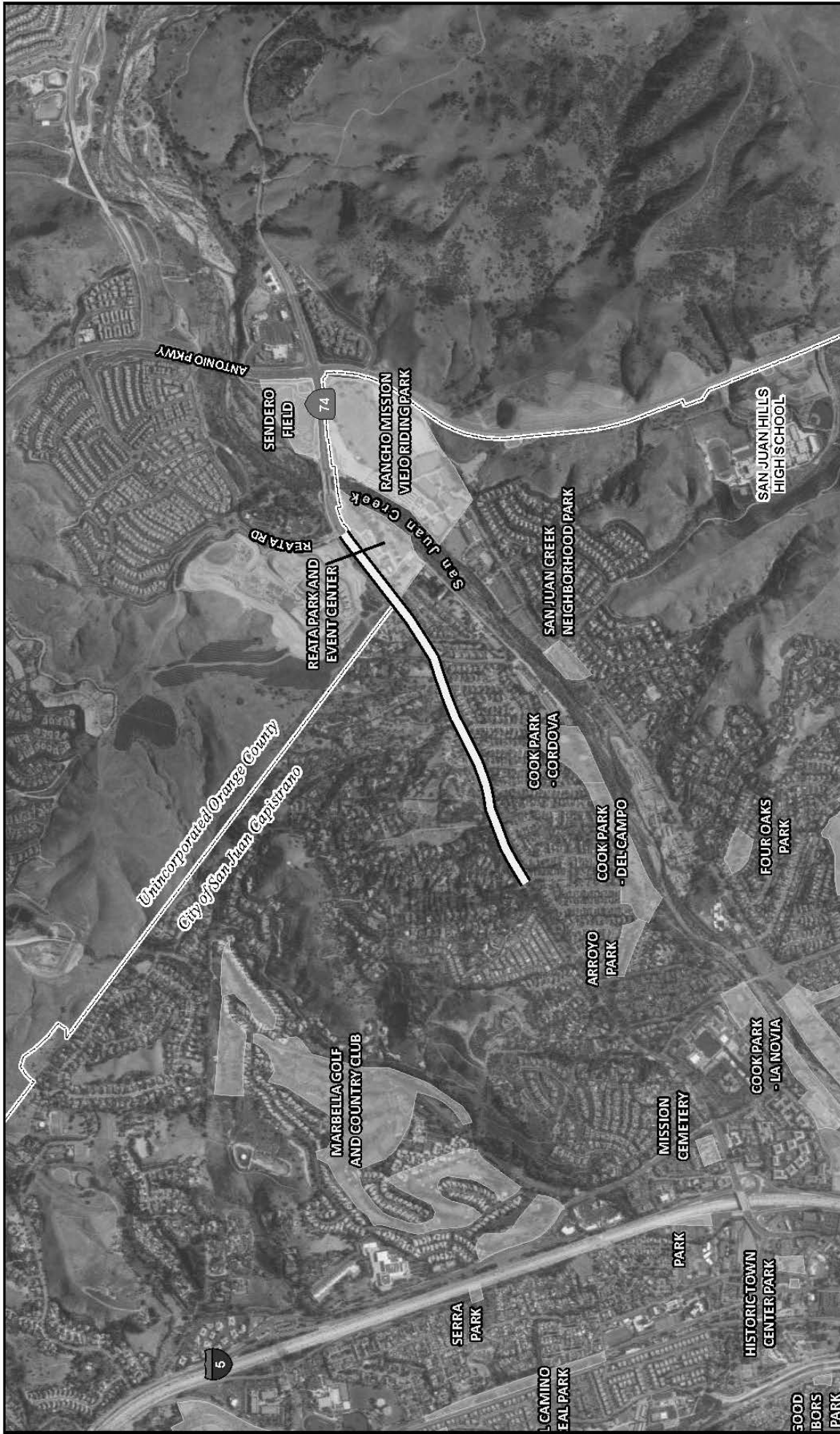


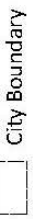


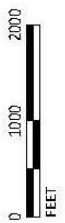
FIGURE 1-2

SR-74 Lower Ortega Highway Widening Project  
Project Vicinity Map

12-ORA-74 PM 1.0/2.1  
EA 086920

LEGEND

-  Project Location
-  Recreational Resources
-  City Boundary



SOURCE: Google Maps (2017); Caltrans (4/3/2019)

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**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR  
STATE ROUTE 74 – LOWER ORTEGA HIGHWAY WIDENING PROJECT  
CALLE ENTRADERO TO CITY/COUNTY LINE  
SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, ORANGE COUNTY**

The following information is presented to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15903), and with the California Department of Transportation (Department) and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following impacts have been identified as significant and not fully mitigable:

- 1. Community Character:** Implementation of Build Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative) includes removal of existing vegetation, including trees; constructing noise barriers; and constructing retaining walls. Based on the subjective human perception of community character, the widening of State Route 74 (SR-74) would result in a potentially significant impact on community character overall, irrespective of the differential findings for the various key views. Specifically the Visual Impact Analysis found that significant impacts to community character would remain at Key Views 1, 4, and 5, even after implementation of Mitigation Measures V-1, V-2, V-3, and V-4.
- 2. Visual and Aesthetics (Permanent):** Implementation of Build Alternative 2 (Preferred Alternative) would widen SR-74 to four lanes and would generally introduce curb and gutter, retaining wall structures, sound walls, new sidewalk (Avenida Siega to the City of San Juan Capistrano/County of Orange [City/County] line), and ornamental landscaping throughout the project limits. Construction of these project features would change the existing rural landscape to a more suburban landscape. With implementation of Mitigation Measures V-1, V-2, V-3, and V-4 visual and aesthetic impacts would be significant overall, irrespective of the differential findings for the various key views. Specifically the Visual Impact Analysis found that significant impacts would remain at

Key Views 1, 4, and 5. Therefore, the visible change in character/quality would remain significant even after implementation of Mitigation Measures V-1, V-2, V-3, and V-4.

The overriding considerations that support approval of this recommended project (Build Alternatives 1 and 2) are listed below. For the reasons set forth below the specific economic, social, technological, or other benefits of the project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects identified above.

### **SELECTION OF THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

A meeting with the Project Development Team (PDT) for the proposed project was held at the Department District 12 office on Thursday, April 30, 2009. The purpose of the PDT meeting was to select the Preferred Alternative.

Both Build Alternatives 1 and 2 were evaluated based on the following evaluation criteria:

- Meeting the purpose and need
- Significant impacts
- Public input

The purpose and need for the project are detailed below.

### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the project is to accomplish the following specific objectives:

- Relieve existing and future traffic congestion and improve the flow of traffic on SR-74
- Accommodate planned growth and development in the surrounding areas
- Provide improvements consistent with local planning documents
- Gap closure

The project is a proposed solution to the deficiency identified in the need statement below.

### **NEED**

SR-74 serves as a key connection route between Orange and Riverside Counties. The closest other roadways that provide this connection are State Route 91 (SR-91), approximately 26 miles (mi) to the north, and State Route 76 (SR-76), approximately 32 mi to the south. Both of these facilities are heavily traveled. As a result of the distance to alternative connectors, SR-74 experiences a consistent amount of regional traffic despite the rural design of much of

the roadway. In addition to serving this regional demand, the subject segment of SR-74 also serves as a primary access to the City. Because of topography, SR-74 is one of the few arterial highways within the City that extends to the east beyond Interstate 5 (I-5).

The City developed a Circulation Element as part of the General Plan for City planning policies. The plan evaluates the transportation needs of the community within the framework of the planned transportation network of the County, region, and State. The County Master Plan of Arterial Highways (MPAH) and the City designate Ortega Highway as a primary arterial highway (a four-lane divided roadway). In Table C-6 of the City's Circulation Element, the widening of Ortega Highway to four lanes, from Calle Entradero to the east City limits, is planned as a long-range roadway improvement.

The City has a 2002 Strategic Transportation Plan (STP) that includes the widening of Ortega Highway. The plan evaluated local and regional transportation issues and land development projects to assess the significant traffic impacts on the City's streets and State highways.

The need for this project is based on an assessment of the existing and future transportation demand, and current and predicted future traffic on SR-74 as measured by level of service (LOS). LOS is based on the ratio of traffic volume to the design capacity of a facility. It is expressed as a range from LOS A (free traffic flow with low volumes and high speeds, resulting in low densities) to LOS F (traffic volumes that exceed capacity and result in forced flow operations at low speeds, resulting in high densities). The existing and forecast traffic demand on SR-74 are described below.

### **MEETING THE PURPOSE AND NEED**

Build Alternatives 1 and 2 are the same with the exception of the removal of the sidewalk along the north side of SR-74 between Calle Entradero and Via Cordova and the number of retaining walls that would be constructed. Both Alternatives 1 and 2 would meet the purpose and need; the No Build Alternative would not meet the purpose and need.

### **SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS**

Both Build Alternatives would have similar significant impacts, and both would affect the same number of trees and sound walls. However, Alternative 1 would require five retaining walls, whereas Alternative 2 would require seven retaining walls due to reconstruction of the sidewalk on the north side of SR-74 between Calle Entradero and Via Cordova. Also,

Alternative 2 includes a sidewalk. Thus, Alternative 2 would introduce more urban structures into the existing viewshed than Alternative 1.

Alternative 2 would maintain pedestrian access on the north side of SR-74 from Calle Entradero to Hunt Club Drive through the replacement of the sidewalk. Although both Alternatives 1 and 2 would result in significant impacts to both visual resources (Key View 1) and to community character, Alternative 1 would have reduced impacts on the rural nature of the roadway by excluding urban features such as two retaining walls and a sidewalk within the western project limits.

### **PUBLIC INPUT**

Comments received during the public circulation period of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), indicated concern for continued access on the north side of SR-74 through the replacement of the existing meandering sidewalk with a straight sidewalk (Alternative 2). Other comments received during the public review period of the Draft EIR indicated a preference to preserve the rural nature of the roadway by removing the sidewalk entirely (Alternative 1).

During the PDT meeting to select the Preferred Alternative, the balance between maintaining public access and reducing environmental effects was discussed. Given that the proposed project is located on a State highway, maintenance of the existing public access was determined to be the governing factor.

The PDT was asked to select either Alternative 1 or 2 as the Preferred Alternative. Based on the above, and because the Build Alternatives would meet the purpose and need and the No Build Alternative would not, the PDT officially selected Alternative 2 as the Preferred Alternative.

Based on the above, the Department finds that there are specific considerations associated with the proposed project that serve to override and outweigh the project's significant environmental impacts. Therefore, the significant unavoidable environmental impacts associated with the proposed project are considered acceptable.