Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS **CTC Meeting**: October 16-17, 2025

From: TANISHA TAYLOR, Executive Director

Reference Number: 2.2c.(5), Action

Prepared By: Cherry Zamora
Associate Deputy Director

Published Date: October 3, 2025

Subject: Approval of Project for Future Consideration of Funding – Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project, Resolution E-25-61

Recommendation:

Staff recommends the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a Responsible Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), approve Resolution E-25-61 (Attachment A), which accepts the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project (Project) in Monterey County; approves the Project for future consideration of funding; makes CEQA Findings (Attachment C); and adopts a Statement of Overriding Considerations (Attachment D).

Issue:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is the CEQA Lead Agency for the Project. The Project is located on State Route 68 from post mile 4.8 to 13.7 in Monterey County. The Project would improve operations at nine intersections by constructing roundabouts or upgrading signalized intersections with enhanced lane configurations. The project would also construct wildlife crossing improvements through replacement of existing underground culverts at five locations and installation of directional fencing.

For all projects that are seeking funding through a program under the purview of the Commission, full compliance with CEQA is required. The Commission will not allocate funds to projects for design, right-of-way, or construction until the environmental document is complete, and the Commission has approved the environmentally cleared project for future consideration of funding.

Background:

On June 20, 2025, Caltrans certified the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Project. Caltrans found that the Project would have significant and unavoidable impacts on aesthetics/visual resources. These impacts would remain significant and unavoidable even

with implementation of mitigation, including replacement landscape planting, landform grading, and inclusion of design and aesthetic treatments on retaining walls.

Resources that require mitigation to reduce impacts to less than significant levels include cultural resources (archaeological), paleontological resources, natural communities, special status plant species, special status animal species, and threatened and endangered species. Mitigation measures include implementation of visual design treatments, establishment of Environmentally Sensitive Areas, cultural resource monitoring and implementation of a Cultural Resource Management Plan, preparation of a Paleontological Mitigation Plan, restoration and compensatory mitigation, implementation of pre-construction surveys, exclusion zones, and seasonal restrictions for nesting birds, roosting bats, and other wildlife, and off-site habitat preservation or purchasing of conservation bank credits.

The Commission, in its independent judgment as a CEQA responsible agency, has reviewed and considered the Final Environmental Impact Report prepared by Caltrans. The Commission's Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations, included in Attachment C and Attachment D respectively, have been prepared pursuant to CEQA.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Resolution
- Attachment B: Notice of Determination
- Attachment C: California Transportation Commission - Findings
- Attachment D: California Transportation Commission - Statement of Overriding Considerations
- Attachment E: Lead Agency Request for Approval of Project for Future Consideration of Funding Resolution E-25-61
    - Attachment 1: Map
    - Attachment 2: California Department of Transportation -- Findings
    - Attachment 3: California Department of Transportation -- Statement of Overriding Considerations

CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding
05-MON-68, PM 4.8/13.7
Resolution E-25-61

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

- Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project: SR 68 in Monterey County. Improve operations at nine intersections along SR 68 from post miles (PM) 4.8 to 13.7 in Monterey County. Specifically, construct roundabouts or upgrade signalized intersections with enhanced lane configurations and wildlife crossing improvements including replacing existing underground culverts at five locations and providing fencing along the highway at culvert entrances. (PPNO 1790)

1.2 **WHEREAS**, Caltrans has certified that a Final Environmental Impact Report has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for its implementation; and

1.3 **WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a responsible agency, has considered the information contained in the Final Environmental Impact Report; and

1.4 **WHEREAS,** the project will have a significant effect on the environment; and

1.5 **WHEREAS,** the Commission has made findings as required by California Code of Regulations, section 15096, subdivision (h); and

1.6 **WHEREAS,** the Commission has adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations pursuant to California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15093.

2.1 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Commission does hereby approve the above referenced project to allow for future consideration of funding.

Reference No.: 2.2c.(5)
October 16-17, 2025
Attachment B

NOTICE OF DETERMINATION

To: Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: California Transportation Commission
Attn: Cherry Zamora
1120 N Street, MS 52
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 654-4245

Subject: Filing of Notice of Determination in compliance with Section 21108 of the Public Resources Code.

Project Title: Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project

2019090448	Jill O'Connor	(805) 459-8688
State Clearinghouse Number	**Lead Agency Contact Person**	**Area Code/Telephone**

Project Location (include county): The project is located on State Route (SR) 68 from post mile (PM) 4.8 to 13.7 in Monterey County.

Project Description: Improve operations at nine intersections along SR 68 from PM 4.8 to 13.7 in Monterey County. Specifically, construct roundabouts or upgrade signalized intersections with enhanced lane configurations and wildlife crossing improvements including replacing existing underground culverts at five locations and providing fencing along the highway at culvert entrances.

This is to advise that the California Transportation Commission has approved the above
(_ Lead Agency/ **X** Responsible Agency)
described project on October 16-17, 2025, and has made the following determinations regarding the above-described project:

1. The project (_X_will/ _ will not) have a significant effect on the environment.
2. _X_An Environmental Impact Report was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.
   __A Negative Declaration was prepared for this project pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.
3. Mitigation measures (_X were/ _ were not) made a condition of the approval of the project.
4. Mitigation reporting or monitoring plan (_X was / _ was not) adopted for this project.
5. A Statement of Overriding Considerations (X_ was / _ was not) adopted for this project.
6. Findings (_X were/ _ were not) made pursuant to the provisions of CEQA.

The above identified document with comments and responses and record of project approval is available to the General Public at: Caltrans District 5, 50 Higuera Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-5415.

TANISHA TAYLOR		Executive Director California Transportation Commission
Signature (Public Agency)	*Date*	*Title*

Date received for filing at LCI:

Project Name: Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project
DIST-CO-RTE-PM: 05-MON-68-4.8-13.7
EA: 05-1J790
EFIS ID: 0518000061
SCH#: 2019090448

CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
FINDINGS OF FACT

FOR

IMPROVEMENTS TO NINE INTERSECTIONS ALONG STATE ROUTE 68 IN MONTEREY COUNTY BETWEEN JOSSELYN CANYON ROAD AND SAN BENANCIO ROAD TO IMPROVE INTERSECTION OPERATIONS AND REDUCE COLLISIONS

The following information is presented to comply with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, title 14, sections 15091 and 15096, and also title 21, section 1501 et seq. Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The following effects have been identified in the Final EIR as resulting from the project. Effects found not to be significant have not been included.

Aesthetics

Adverse Environmental Effects:

State Route 68 in the project limits is an Officially Designated State Scenic Highway. The project area has a visual quality that is moderately high, mainly due to the rural character, rolling landform with diverse vegetation types, and lack of urbanization visible along the highway corridor. Viewer sensitivities are generally expected to have high expectations of scenic quality for the State Route 68 corridor.

Both build alternatives would alter the visual character of the project corridor, however, the selected Alternative 1 will have less visual change compared to the larger footprint, higher vegetation and tree impacts, and the larger number and sizes of structural features associated with Alternative 2. The project will have significant and unavoidable adverse impacts on a scenic vista and scenic resources within a state scenic highway corridor.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

The build alternatives would increase the urban character of the state scenic highway from widening of the highway prism (either through changing the existing signalized intersections to roundabout configurations with Alternative 1 or expanding the signalized intersections with additional auxiliary through lanes and turn lanes with Alternative 2). The build alternatives would disturb existing landforms with cut slopes and altered profiles, construction of additional retaining walls and barriers, increased traffic signage. Both build alternatives would require removal of existing vegetation; most noticeable would be the removal of up to 4,000 trees of varying sizes with Alternative 1, or up to about 5,500 trees with Alternative 2. Vegetation removal in combination with landform modifications and added structural elements would cause varying degrees of visual change in the project corridor. Landscaping and aesthetic treatments to walls and other built elements would somewhat reduce the urbanizing effect of the project elements, and the preferred alternative, Alternative 1, presents more opportunities for landscaped areas. However, the long-term permanent visual changes from increased visual scale and hardscape features would be unavoidable and noticeable.

In addition, the project would contribute to a cumulative increase in the urban character and reduction of visual quality along the State Route 68 corridor. The visual change would be considerably more noticeable due to the scale of the project, the addition of retaining walls, the addition of highway signage, removal of trees and vegetation, and the implementation of other road elements. The project would contribute to the alteration of the rural character of the area, which would be potentially adverse when combined with the sensitivity of viewers.

Alternative 2 would have also caused substantial alteration of the visual environment by increasing the urban character of the project corridor overall, but to a larger degree than the selected Alternative 1 roundabouts. Alternative 2 would have had additional hardscape and retaining wall features, auxiliary lanes and turn lanes at the intersections, and a generally larger amount of urban structural elements. The No-Build Alternative would avoid aesthetic impacts but would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures VIS-1 through VIS-14 will be implemented and include aesthetic treatments to concrete and metal structural elements, stormwater

elements, rock slope protection material, roadway signage, revegetation, and lighting elements. Measures VIS-15 through VIS-17 are compensatory mitigation measures under CEQA and include replacement landscape planting, rounded slope and other landform grading design refinements where appropriate, and design and aesthetic treatments on retaining walls. Although these avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be implemented to reduce project impacts to the existing visual character and quality of the State Route 68 project corridor, they would not collectively reduce the project's impacts to below significance.

The project would add new landscaping after construction along with aesthetic treatments on some of the hardscape features, such as retaining walls, concrete barriers, staining or darkening of metallic elements, and other aesthetic applications to be determined in the final design phase, which would reduce the level of adverse impacts to visual character to some extent. However, given the high viewer sensitivity, the inherent visual change associated with an increase in visual scale and additional hardscape elements in the project corridor at multiple intersections would result in a noticeable and substantial degradation of visual character along the State Route 68 corridor.

Cultural Resources (Archaeological)

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The State Route 68 highway corridor is sensitive overall for cultural resources, with the eastern portion of the project area having Moderate to Highest potential for buried archaeological sites. The project will potentially generate deep ground disturbance (over three feet in depth) from excavation activities during construction and buried archaeological remains could be encountered. Archaeological sites CA-MNT-3 and CA-MNT-4 were previously determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as part of studies for other projects in the area. In addition, another area considered to have elevated buried site sensitivity could not be completely sampled due to concerns of impacting sensitive biological resources. As a result, the decision was made to conduct further testing as part of a minor phased program approach. Therefore, the finding of effect for Alternative 1 (or Alternative 2, should that alternative have been selected) on this additional area is undetermined until testing is completed as part of the Findings of Effect and Cultural Resources Management Plan.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the Final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Within the project Area of Potential Effect for historic resources, there are three cultural sites that have been determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Two of the historic properties are archaeological sites CA-MNT-3 and CA-MNT-4, and one is an historic-era resource CA-MNT-1438/H. The historic-era resource would be avoided with no direct effects by both project Build Alternatives 1 and 2.

Archaeological sites CA-MNT-3 and CA-MNT-4 are within the project Area of Potential Effect. Alternative 1 would likely affect a small portion of CA-MNT-4, and Alternative 2 may have affected portions of CA-MNT-3. Both sites will be protected from project impacts with establishment of an Environmentally Sensitive Area. The project will likely not have an adverse effect on the two known pre-historic sites and potential buried resources within the restricted areas to be tested. The procedures for completion of testing are in the Finding of Effect document that Caltrans prepared for the project. Completion of subsurface testing within restricted areas of the project will determine the project's effects on potential buried archaeological resources and their potential for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. Any adverse effects would be addressed by implementing procedures in the Cultural Resources Management Plan, including preconstruction, construction, and post-construction procedures. The post-construction procedures include the final Finding of Effect analysis process. Mitigation Measure CR-1 prescribes the implementation of procedures included in the Finding of Effect document and the Cultural Resources Management Plan. Mitigation Measure CR-2 will be implemented if remains and/or related items of Native American origin are discovered during implementation of the terms of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement.

The project has the potential for deep ground disturbance (over 3 feet of depth) during construction, and therefore, buried archaeological remains could be encountered by earth disturbance activities. If unexpected cultural materials are discovered during project construction, all earth-moving activity within and around the immediate discovery area will be diverted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the nature and significance of the find, as prescribed in Mitigation Measure CR-3. If human remains are discovered, California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 states that further disturbances and activities shall stop in any area or nearby area suspected to overlie remains and the County Coroner contacted, as prescribed in Mitigation Measure CR-4.

A Native American monitor will be present during data recovery. As a precautionary measure, monitoring by an archaeologist during construction will also be implemented, so that if anything is uncovered, construction can be diverted from the finds and there is sufficient time to assess the nature and significance of the remains.

Overall, the project as a whole would likely not have an adverse effect on historic properties with implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 through CR-4.

Paleontological Resources

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The project (both build alternatives) has the potential to result in direct impacts to scientifically significant paleontological resources, mostly due to construction of retaining walls, landform grading, and wildlife crossings. Impacts from wildlife crossings, drainage swales, and utility undergrounding would be about the same for each alternative.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Both build alternatives have the potential to disturb high value paleontological deposits, particularly the Monterey Formation, however, Alternative 2 would have required more extensive earthwork than the selected Alternative 1. Potential impacts to paleontological resources would be mitigated with preparation and implementation of a Paleontological Mitigation Plan as prescribed in Mitigation Measures PALEO-1 and PALEO-2.

Natural Communities

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The project would result in both temporary and permanent, and direct and indirect, impacts to natural communities and habitats within the project limits, including ponds, wetlands and streams and other jurisdictional waters, coast live oak woodland, Monterey pine forest, white-root beds, red willow riparian forest and purple needlegrass grassland.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Up to 4,000 trees of varying sizes may be impacted under Alternative 1, and up to 5,500 trees may be impacted under Alternative 2. Up to approximately 3,600 of these would be coast live oaks and Monterey pines. The selected Alternative 1 would result in direct impacts to approximately 1,100 to 1,200 coast live oak trees (up to 900 temporary and 300 permanent impacts), while Alternative 2 would result in impacts to approximately 2,600 to 2,700 coast live oaks (up to 2,200 temporary and 500 permanent impacts).

Temporary and permanent project-related impacts to other special-status natural communities (purple needlegrass, white-root beds, and red willow riparian) are expected to be associated with construction activities such as grading, access, and road widening.

Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be implemented to reduce long-term impacts to natural communities including design elements to minimize the removal of native trees and other vegetation and restoration of Coast live oak and Monterey pine forest, purple needlegrass and white-root beds habitats (Measures BIO-1 through BIO-7).

The project will potentially adversely affect jurisdictional features in the watersheds of Del Monte Lake, Canyon Del Rey Creek, and El Toro Creek, including in-stream and adjacent wetlands, some three-parameter wetlands that are not immediately adjacent to streams or other waterways, multiple ephemeral and intermittent streams (including named streams such as Canyon Del Rey Creek and El Toro Creek), streambanks and riparian zones, stormwater ditches and artificial ponds.

Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures BIO-8 through BIO-14 will be implemented to reduce impacts to jurisdictional wetland and other waters (of the United States and of the State). Mitigation Measure BIO-14 requires the preparation of a Mitigation and Monitoring Plan to offset permanent and temporary impacts of the project to wetlands, other waters, and riparian habitat to prevent a net loss of wetlands or other aquatic resource acreage, functions, and values.

Special Status Plant Species

Adverse Environmental Effects:

Manzanita species: Both build alternatives have the potential to cause temporary impacts to Toro, Pajaro, and Sandmat Manzanitas, and permanent impacts to Sandmat Manzanita; impacts from the project may include removal of vegetation, soil compaction, erosion, and pathogen and introduction of invasive species. Alternative 2

would have had substantially larger permanent and temporary footprints than Alternative 1 and would have the potential for a larger impact.

Congdon's Tarplant: Both build alternatives have the potential to directly impact Congdon's Tarplant near the Laureles Grade and Corral de Tierra Road intersections with State Route 68 through vegetation removal and grading activities, and indirectly impact this plant through spread of invasive species and road maintenance activities.

Lewis' Clarkia: Both build alternatives could result in temporary impacts to the populations of Lewis' clarkia at the State Route 68/State Route 218 and State Route 68/Ragsdale Drive intersections. The project has the potential to directly impact Lewis' clarkia through vegetation removal and grading activities, and indirectly impact this species through spread of invasive species and road maintenance activities. Avoidance and minimization measures to be implemented for Lewis' clarkia include soil and duff salvage and seed collection (Measures BIO-22 and BIO-23).

Monterey Pine: Both build alternatives would potentially remove large numbers of Monterey Pine trees of varying sizes; up to about 400 pines with Alternative 1, and up to 900 pine trees under Alternative 2.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Measures for design, alternatives to removal, and pre-construction surveys will be implemented to avoid and minimize impacts to special status manzanita species (Measures BIO-15 through BIO-17). Compensatory mitigation measures for special-status manzanitas (BIO-18) and Congdon's Tarplant (Measures BIO-19 through BIO-21) will include replanting and restoration of habitat, preconstruction surveys, seed collection, soil and duff salvage.

Special Status Animal Species

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The project may result in temporary, direct, and/or indirect impacts to nesting birds, Dusky-Footed Woodrat, and American Badger.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Permanent impacts to nesting birds from the project are not expected. Construction activities have the potential to create temporary, direct and indirect impact to nesting birds, eggs, and young birds. Direct impacts may include vegetation removal and site grading. Temporary loss of vegetation supporting potential nesting habitat would be offset by revegetation efforts for the project. Implementation of the avoidance and minimization measures BIO-24 through BIO-26 would further reduce the potential for adverse project-related impacts to nesting bird species. These measures include scheduling vegetation removal outside the typical nesting season, using exclusionary methods to prevent birds from occupying nests in the construction zone, and conducting nesting bird surveys and establishing buffer areas around any active nests, as needed.

Dusky-Footed Woodrat middens are present within the project's Biological Study Area. The presence of the American Badger is considered unlikely given the poor habitat conditions within the project limits and availability of higher quality habitat nearby. The risk of injury or mortality to either species is considered low with the implementation of the measures proposed to protect jurisdictional areas (wetlands and other waters), oak woodlands, the California Red-Legged frog, and the California Tiger Salamander. Impacts to potential habitat for Monterey Dusky-Footed Woodrat and American Badger would be offset by site restoration within the project limits using native plant species or at offsite mitigation areas associated with compensatory mitigation for jurisdictional areas, oak woodlands, and Monterey Pine forest.

The project could result in temporary impacts to roosting bats as a result of clearing vegetation and grading for cut or fill slopes and temporary construction access. Injury or mortality could occur if bats are roosting when trees are removed. Bats may also be temporarily displaced, if present, during construction activities to repair culverts (Alternatives 1 and 2). Because suitable snag and tree roosting habitat are present within the Biological Study Area and tree removal is anticipated for this project, measures to protect roosting bats are required. Avoidance and minimization measures BIO-27 through BIO-31 include pre-construction surveys, avoidance of maternity roosts, buffer areas, bat exclusion zones for construction, and habitat incorporation into the project wildlife crossings.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The updated Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 Effects determinations for the preferred alternative, Alternative 1, Roundabouts, include the following:

- California Tiger Salamander – may affect, likely to adversely affect
- California Red-Legged Frog – may affect, likely to adversely affect
- Southwestern Pond Turtle – may affect, likely to adversely affect
- Yadon's Piperia – may affect, not likely to adversely affect
- South-Central California Coast Steelhead – no effect

The Biological Study Area of the project is not within any designated critical habitat.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts

California Tiger Salamander. The Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 preliminary effects determination is that the project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the California Tiger Salamander. The basis for the effects determination is that the presence of this species has been inferred and there is a potential for adverse effects, including temporary and permanent, direct and indirect impacts to upland habitat and individual salamanders, if the species is present. Alternative 1 may have temporary impacts to salamander breeding (aquatic) habitat, and both temporary and permanent impacts to upland habitat, however, Alternative 2 would have greater impacts to jurisdictional features and suitable habitat.

Mitigation for impacts to California Tiger Salamander (BIO-59) includes permanent preservation of suitable off-site upland habitat, anticipated to be in the form of off-site mitigation credits to be purchased from the Sparling Ranch Conservation Bank. Some of the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for California Red-Legged Frog would also help protect California Tiger Salamander from potential project-related impacts.

California Red-Legged frog. Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 would both have temporary and permanent impacts to Red-Legged frog potential breeding (aquatic) habitat as well

as upland habitat, however, Alternative 2 would impact more jurisdictional features (wetlands and other waters) and more suitable habitat for the species than Alternative 1. The Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 preliminary effects determination is that the project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the California Red-Legged Frog. The basis for the determination is that the presence of this species is inferred, and there is a potential for adverse effects, temporary and permanent, from impacts to potential aquatic breeding habitat, adjacent upland riparian habitat, and to individual frogs.

Potential impacts to California red-legged frog will be reduced with implementation of avoidance and minimization measures BIO-39 through BIO-55, as well as compensatory Mitigation Measures BIO-56 through BIO-58, in addition to measures for jurisdictional wetlands and other waters. The mitigation measures include preparation and implementation of a habitat restoration plan, a protection and relocation plan, and frog handling procedures.

Southwestern Pond Turtle. The project may affect and will likely adversely affect Southwestern Pond Turtle because the species shares similar jurisdictional aquatic and upland habitat as the seasonal behaviors of species such as California Red-Legged Frog for which avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures are included in the project. Those measures will also provide protection for the southwestern pond turtle (see measures BIO-39 through BIO-58). Because this species shares the same types of aquatic and upland habitats as the California red-legged frog, Alternative 2 would have had greater impacts to those habitats than Alternative 1.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently drafted additional avoidance and minimization measures for southwestern pond turtle that are included in Measures BIO-69 through BIO-77. These measures include specifications for conducting preconstruction surveys, and measures pertaining to construction activities to avoid harm to southwestern pond turtles. Mitigation Measure BIO-78 prescribes implementation of a habitat mitigation plan or purchase of credits in an approved conservation bank that will fully offset the project's adverse effects to Southwestern Pond Turtle if the species receives federal listing under the federal Endangered Species Act, and if the project causes permanent impacts to suitable aquatic or upland habitat.

Yadon's Piperia. Alternative 1 may result in temporary impacts to 0.136 acre of potentially suitable Yadon's Piperia habitat, but no permanent impacts would occur. Alternative 2 would have resulted in 1.987 acres of temporary impacts and 0.247 acre of permanent impacts to potentially suitable habitat. However, the habitat loss would not occur within designated critical habitat and would be in an area that is already highly fragmented by roads and development. Neither Build Alternative would result in permanent impacts to any Yadon's Piperia plants observed in the Biological Study Area. Avoidance, minimization measures will be implemented for this species (Measures BIO-

32 through BIO-38), compensatory Mitigation Measures BIO-34 through BIO-38, and measures for Monterey Pine Forest and Woodland would also help reduce potential impacts to Yadon's Piperia. The Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 preliminary effects determination is that the project may affect, not likely to adversely affect, Yadon's Piperia.

South-Central California Coast Steelhead. The selected Alternative 1 would not impact steelhead habitat and no mitigation is required. Alternative 2 would have potentially impacted steelhead habitat for construction of additional bridge piers in Toro Creek. If Alternative 2 had been selected it would have needed to implement mitigation measures BIO-62 through BIO-67 which include dewatering methods, capture, handling and relocation procedures for steelhead, exclusion of fill from waterways, creek restoration after construction, and administrative procedures with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Crotch Bumble Bee (California Endangered Species Act). Crotch Bumble Bee is a candidate for listing as Endangered under the California Endangered Species Act. Crotch Bumble Bees were not observed during Caltrans surveys of the Biological Study Area, but suitable foraging habitat for this species is present throughout the Biological Study Area and they are known from the region. Suitable nesting/overwintering habitat may also be present in less disturbed parts of the Biological Study Area, however use of the area for nesting is considered unlikely given high levels of ambient disturbance, proximity to the existing highway, and the overall low quality of the habitat present when higher quality habitat is available outside the Biological Study Area.

It is expected that the project would not result in state take (construction-related mortality) of Crotch Bumble Bee, and therefore, the updated determination under the California Endangered Species Act for this state-listed species is that the project is not anticipated to have any impacts. However, additional Crotch Bumble Bee surveys will be conducted during the project design phase, per California Department of Fish and Wildlife guidance. If Crotch or other special-status bumble bees are observed using the project area, Caltrans would apply to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for an Incidental Take Permit (2081 permit). Mitigation Measure BIO-84 would be implemented which prescribes replacement on-site of temporarily impacted habitat during construction at a minimum ratio of 1-to-1 replacement. In addition, avoidance and minimization measures BIO-79 through BIO-83 include focused surveys for the bee during the project final design phase, coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, flowering plant inspections, and fencing of environmentally sensitive areas prior to construction.

DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY

Documents or other material which constitute the record of the proceedings upon which the California Transportation Commission's decision is based are available at: Caltrans District 5, 50 Higuera Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401-5415.

Tanisha Taylor		
Executive Director	Signature	Date

Project Name: Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project
DIST-CO-RTE-PM: 05-MON-68-4.8-13.7
EA: 05-1J790
EFIS ID: 0518000061
SCH #: 2019090448

CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS
FOR
IMPROVEMENTS TO NINE INTERSECTIONS ALONG STATE ROUTE 68 IN MONTEREY COUNTY BETWEEN JOSSELYN CANYON ROAD AND SAN BENANCIO ROAD TO IMPROVE INTERSECTION OPERATIONS AND REDUCE COLLISIONS

The following information is presented to comply with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, California Code of Regulations, title 14, sections 15091 and 15096, and also title 21, section 1501 et seq. Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

The California Transportation Commission (Commission), in its independent judgment as a CEQA responsible agency, reviewed and considered the Final EIR prepared by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and finds that the Final EIR contains a complete, objective, and substantiated reporting of the project's potential impacts.

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

Aesthetics/Visual:

State Route 68 in the project limits is an Officially Designated State Scenic Highway. The project will result in substantial alteration of the existing visual environment by increasing the urban character from widening of the highway prism by converting the project intersections to roundabouts, and from disturbance of landforms with cut slopes and altered profiles, construction of additional retaining walls and barriers, increased traffic signage, removal of existing vegetation including up to 4,000 trees of varying sizes, and conversion of intersection cross-street design to roundabout configurations. Project landscaping and aesthetic treatments to walls and other built elements and other minimization measures for aesthetics would somewhat reduce the urbanizing effect of the project elements, but the long-term permanent visual changes from increased visual scale and hardscape features would be unavoidable and noticeable. The project would also

contribute to a cumulative increase in the urban character and reduction of visual quality along the State Route 68 corridor.

Overriding considerations that support approval of this recommended project are as follows:

- The purpose of this project is to improve intersection operations by reducing travel delay throughout the project corridor and to reduce the rate and severity of collisions, enhance wildlife connectivity across the highway and to improve bicycle and pedestrian access within the project corridor. The project is needed because the State Route 68 in the project limits experiences heavy congestion during peak traffic periods leading to travel delays, primarily at the existing signalized intersections. Travel delay is forecast to rise to 18,457 Daily Vehicle Hours of Delay by the year 2045 with no changes to the existing traffic intersection controls and lane configurations compared to the current 6,609 Daily Vehicle Hours of Delay. Traffic delay resulting from queuing of vehicles at the intersections is caused, in part, by inefficiency of the existing signal controls with limited green time for the directions of travels and lack of coordinated signal timing between the intersections.

- The project corridor also has several segments of the highway with collision rates above the statewide average for similar highways, with rear-end collisions comprising the majority of the collision types associated with traffic congestion. In addition, State Route 68 intersects a critical wildlife habitat area connecting the coast to the Sierra Azul mountain range. Collisions between vehicles and larger mammals trying to cross the highway routinely occur resulting in roadkill and vehicle property damage.

- Further, the lack of bike and pedestrian refuge areas, sidewalks, and marked bike lanes at the intersections at State Route 68, along with the high number of conflict points at signalized intersections, has led to increased delay for both motorists and non-motorists at the intersections.

Two build alternatives that meet the majority of the project purpose and need were analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Report. Alternative 1, Roundabouts, was selected as the preferred alternative since it best achieves the overall project purpose and need and has less overall environmental impacts compared to Alternative 2.
Both build alternatives would alter the visual character of the project corridor, however, Alternative 1 will have less visual change compared to the larger footprint and the number

and size of structural features with Alternative 2. These impacts would remain significant and unavoidable but necessary to meet the project purpose and need.

For the reasons listed above, and the substantial evidence included in the administrative record as a whole, the Commission finds that the benefits of the proposed project outweigh the project's adverse, significant impacts on aesthetics/visual resources.

Tanisha Taylor		
Executive Director	Signature	Date

State of California
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

California State Transportation Agency

MEMORANDUM

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS
CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CTC Meeting: October 16-17, 2025

From: STEVEN KECK, Chief Financial Officer

Reference Number: 2.2c.(5), Action Item

Prepared By: Jeremy Ketchum, Chief
Division of Environmental Analysis

Subject: **APPROVAL OF PROJECT FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF FUNDING RESOLUTION E-25-61**

ISSUE:

Should the California Transportation Commission (Commission), as a responsible agency, approve the attached Resolution E-25-61?

RECOMMENDATION:

The California Department of Transportation (Department) recommends that the Commission, as a responsible agency, approve the attached Resolution E-25-61.

BACKGROUND:

05-Mon-68, PM 4.8/13.7
Resolution E-25-61

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:

- Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project: State Route (SR) 68 in Monterey County. Improve operations at nine intersections along SR 68 from post miles (PM) 4.8 to 13.7 in Monterey County. Specifically, construct roundabouts or upgrade signalized intersections with enhanced lane configurations and wildlife crossing improvements including replacing existing underground culverts at five locations and providing fencing along the highway at culvert entrances. (PPNO 1790)

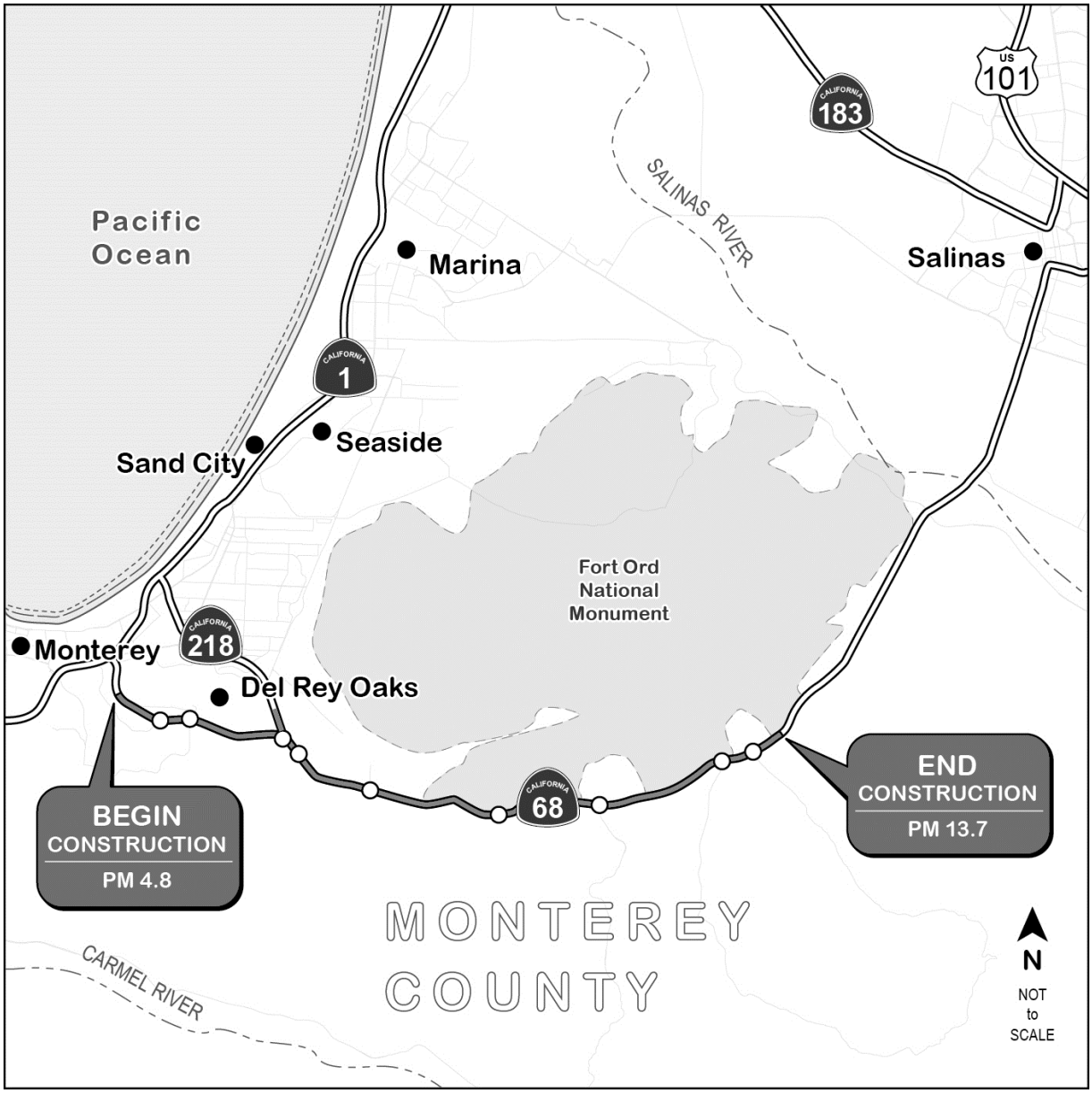
The project is located on SR 68 from PM 4.8 to 13.7, in Monterey County. The Department proposes to perform operational improvements at nine intersections and wildlife connectivity improvements at five locations along SR 68. The project is currently programmed in the 2024 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The total programmed amount which

includes Right of Way (Capital and Support), and Construction (Capital and Support) is $226,985,000 from STIP (Regional Improvement Program), and Senate Bill 1 Local Partnership Program (Formulaic). Construction is estimated to begin in Fiscal Year 2027-28. The scope, as described for the preferred alternative, is consistent with the project scope as programmed by the Commission in the 2024 STIP.

A copy of the FEIR has been provided to Commission staff. Resources in the project area that may be significantly impacted by the project, but would have mitigation measures implemented to reduce impacts to less-than-significant, include cultural (specifically, archaeological), paleontological, and biological (specifically, natural communities, special status plant species, special status animal species, and threatened and endangered species). Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will reduce potential effects on the cultural, paleontological, and biological resources. These measures include, but are not limited to, implementation of visual design treatments, establishment of Environmentally Sensitive Areas, cultural resource monitoring and implementation of a Cultural Resource Management Plan, preparation of a Paleontological Mitigation Plan, restoration and compensatory mitigation, implementation of pre-construction surveys, exclusion zones, and seasonal restrictions for nesting birds, roosting bats, and other wildlife, and off-site habitat preservation or purchasing of conservation bank credits. Potential impacts associated with the project can all be mitigated to below significant except for aesthetic/visual impacts, for which a Statement of Overriding Considerations pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act was prepared. As a result, an FEIR was prepared for the project.

Attachments

Attachment 1



Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project

Project Name: Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project
DIST-CO-RTE-PM: 05-MON-68-4.8-13.7
EA: 05-1J790
EFIS ID: 0518000061

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FINDINGS

FOR

IMPROVEMENTS TO NINE INTERSECTIONS ALONG STATE ROUTE 68 IN MONTEREY COUNTY BETWEEN JOSSELYN CANYON ROAD AND SAN BENANCIO ROAD TO IMPROVE INTERSECTION OPERATIONS AND REDUCE COLLISIONS

The project will make operational improvements to nine intersections within an 8.9-mile section of State Route 68 in Monterey County between Post Miles 4.8 and 13.7 to reduce travel delays, vehicle collisions, and collisions between wildlife and vehicles, as well as improve access through the project corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Two build alternatives were evaluated in the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment: Alternative 1, construction of roundabouts in place of the existing signalized intersections, and Alternative 2, signalized intersections with enhanced lane configurations and adaptive signal control system improvements. The Project Development Team selected Alternative 1, Roundabouts at all nine intersections as the preferred alternative to proceed with into the Plans, Specifications, and Estimates phase of the project. The nine project intersections with State Route 68 include Josselyn Canyon Road, Olmsted Road, State Route 218 (Canyon del Rey Boulevard), Ragsdale Drive, York Road, Pasadera Drive-Boots Road, Laureles Grade, Corral de Tierra Road, and San Benancio Road.

With the selection of Alternative 1 as the Preferred Alternative, the existing nine signalized intersections will be converted to roundabouts, including five single-lane, one multi-lane and three hybrid designs. Hybrid roundabouts have two travel lanes on the state highway and one travel lane on the cross-street sides of the roundabout. The typical roadway section at each roundabout will consist of a central island with apron, two to four travel lanes (1 or 2 travel lanes in each direction), a landscaped buffer, a splitter island with landscaping, and a shared path for bicyclists and pedestrians constructed to the north and south of the vehicle travel lanes. Accessible shared-use crosswalks will be painted across each leg of the roundabout. Additional safety features of the roundabouts will include island refuge areas to allow staged pedestrian and bicyclist crossings, signage and illumination.

Construction of retaining walls and/or landform grading will be required adjacent to some of the roundabout locations. The roundabout center islands will be hardscaped to minimize maintenance and associated temporary travel lane closures, and to facilitate

worker safety. Landscaping the center islands may be considered during the final design phase.

Wildlife connectivity improvements will also be included with the project, including new replacement culverts at five locations to facilitate large mammal crossings under the state highway. Directional fencing will be added along the highway leading to the culverts to deter wildlife from entering onto the highway.

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15091) and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21, California Code of Regulations, Division 2, Chapter 11, Section 1501 et seq.). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment with Finding of No Significant Impact (FEIR/EA-FONSI) for the project, which is the source of the information.

The following significant effects have been identified in the FEIR/EA-FONSI as resulting from the project. Effects found not to be significant have not been included.

Aesthetics

Adverse Environmental Effects:
State Route 68 in the project limits is an Officially Designated State Scenic Highway. The project area has a visual quality that is moderately high, mainly due to the rural character, rolling landform with diverse vegetation types, and lack of urbanization visible along the highway corridor. Viewer sensitivities are generally expected to have high expectations of scenic quality for the State Route 68 corridor.

Both build alternatives would alter the visual character of the project corridor, however, the selected Alternative 1 will have less visual change compared to the larger footprint, higher vegetation and tree impacts, and the larger number and sizes of structural features associated with Alternative 2. The project will have significant and unavoidable adverse impacts on a scenic vista and scenic resources within a state scenic highway corridor.

Findings:
Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:
The Build Alternatives would increase the urban character of the state scenic highway from widening of the highway prism (either through changing the existing signalized intersections to roundabout configurations with Alternative 1, or expanding the signalized intersections with additional auxiliary through lanes and turn lanes with Alternative 2. The build alternatives would disturb existing landforms with cut slopes and

altered profiles, construction of additional retaining walls and barriers, increased traffic signage. Both build alternatives would require removal of existing vegetation; most noticeable would be the removal of up to 4,000 trees of varying sizes with Alternative 1, or up to about 5,500 trees with Alternative 2. Vegetation removal in combination with landform modifications and added structural elements would cause varying degrees of visual change in the project corridor. Landscaping and aesthetic treatments to walls and other built elements would somewhat reduce the urbanizing effect of the project elements, and the preferred alternative, Alternative 1, presents more opportunities for landscaped areas. However, the long-term permanent visual changes from increased visual scale and hardscape features would be unavoidable and noticeable.

In addition, the project would contribute to a cumulative increase in the urban character and reduction of visual quality along the State Route 68 corridor. The visual change would be considerably more noticeable due to the scale of the project, with the addition of retaining walls, additional highway signage, tree and vegetation removals, and other road elements. The project would contribute to the alteration of the rural character of the area, which would be potentially adverse when combined with the sensitivity of viewers.

Alternative 2 would have also caused substantial alteration of the visual environment by increasing the urban character of the project corridor overall, but to a larger degree than the selected Alternative 1 roundabouts. Alternative 2 would have had additional hardscape and retaining wall features, auxiliary lanes and turn lanes at the intersections, and a generally larger amount of urban structural elements. The No-Build Alternative would avoid aesthetic impacts but would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

Avoidance and Minimization Measures VIS-1 through VIS-14 will be implemented and include aesthetic treatments to concrete and metal structural elements, stormwater elements, rock slope protection material, roadway signage, revegetation, and lighting elements. Measures VIS-15 through VIS-17 are compensatory mitigation measures under CEQA and include replacement landscape planting, rounded slope and other landform grading design refinements where appropriate, and design and aesthetic treatments on retaining walls. Although these avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be implemented to reduce project impacts to the existing visual character and quality of the State Route 68 project corridor, they would not collectively reduce the project’s impacts to below significance.

The project would add new landscaping after construction along with aesthetic treatments on some of the hardscape features, such as retaining walls, concrete barriers, staining or darkening of metallic elements, and other aesthetic applications to be determined in the final design phase, which would reduce the level of adverse impacts to visual character to some extent. However, given the high viewer sensitivity, the inherent visual change associated with an increase in visual scale and additional hardscape elements in the project corridor at multiple intersections would result in a noticeable and substantial degradation of visual character along the State Route 68 corridor.

Cultural Resources (Archaeological)

Adverse Environmental Effects:
The State Route 68 highway corridor is sensitive overall for cultural resources, with the eastern portion of the project area having Moderate to Highest potential for buried archaeological sites. The project will potentially generate deep ground disturbance (over three feet in depth) from excavation activities during construction and buried archaeological remains could be encountered. Archaeological sites CA-MNT-3 and CA-MNT-4 were previously determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as part of studies for other projects in the area. In addition, another area considered to have elevated buried site sensitivity could not be completely sampled due to concerns of impacting sensitive biological resources. As a result, the decision was made to conduct further testing as part of a minor phased program approach. Therefore, the finding of effect for Alternative 1 (or Alternative 2, should that alternative have been selected) on this additional area is undetermined until testing is completed as part of the Findings of Effect and Cultural Resources Management Plan.

Findings:
Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:
Within the project Area of Potential Effect for historic resources, there are three cultural sites that have been determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Two of the historic properties are archaeological sites CA-MNT-3 and CA-MNT-4, and one is an historic-era resource CA-MNT-1438/H. The historic-era resource would be avoided with no direct effects by both project Build Alternatives 1 and 2.

Archaeological sites CA-MNT-3 and CA-MNT-4 are within the project Area of Potential Effect. Alternative 1 would likely affect a small portion of CA-MNT-4, and Alternative 2 may have affected portions of CA-MNT-3. Both sites will be protected from project impacts with establishment of an Environmentally Sensitive Area. The project will likely not have an adverse effect on the two known pre-historic sites and potential buried resources within the restricted areas to be tested. The procedures for completion of testing are in the Finding of Effect document that Caltrans prepared for the project. Completion of subsurface testing within restricted areas of the project will determine the project's effects on potential buried archaeological resources and their potential for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. Any adverse effects would be addressed by implementing procedures in the Cultural Resources Management Plan, including preconstruction, construction, and post-construction procedures. The post-construction procedures include the final Finding of Effect analysis process. Mitigation Measure CR-1 prescribes the implementation of procedures included in the Finding of Effect document and the Cultural Resources Management Plan. Mitigation Measure CR-2 will be implemented if remains and/or related items of Native American origin are discovered during implementation of the terms of the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement.

The project has the potential for deep ground disturbance (over 3 feet of depth) during construction, and therefore, buried archaeological remains could be encountered by earth disturbance activities. If unexpected cultural materials are discovered during project construction, all earth-moving activity within and around the immediate discovery area will be diverted until a qualified archaeologist can assess the nature and significance of the find, as prescribed in Mitigation Measure CR-3. If human remains are discovered, California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 states that further disturbances and activities shall stop in any area or nearby area suspected to overlie remains and the County Coroner contacted, as prescribed in Mitigation Measure CR-4.

A Native American monitor will be present during data recovery. As a precautionary measure, monitoring by an archaeologist during construction will also be implemented, so that if anything is uncovered, construction can be diverted from the finds and sufficient time allowed to assess the nature and significance of the remains.

Overall, the project as a whole would likely not have an adverse effect on historic properties with implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 through CR-4.

Paleontological Resources

Adverse Environmental Effects:
The project (both build Alternatives) has the potential to result in direct impacts to scientifically significant paleontological resources, mostly due to construction of retaining walls, landform grading, and wildlife crossings. Impacts from wildlife crossings, drainage swales, and utility undergrounding would be about the same for each alternative.

Findings:
Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:
Both build alternatives have the potential to disturb high value paleontological deposits, particularly the Monterey Formation, however, Alternative 2 would have required more extensive earthwork than the selected Alternative 1. Potential impacts to paleontological resources would be mitigated with preparation and implementation of a Paleontological Mitigation Plan as prescribed in Mitigation Measures PALEO-1 and PALEO-2.

Natural Communities

Adverse Environmental Effects:
The project would result in both temporary and permanent, and direct and indirect, impacts to natural communities and habitats within the project limits, including ponds, wetlands and streams and other jurisdictional waters, coast live oak woodland,

Monterey pine forest, white-root beds, red willow riparian forest and purple needlegrass grassland.

Findings:
Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:
Up to 4,000 trees of varying sizes may be impacted under Alternative 1, and up to 5,500 trees may be impacted under Alternative 2. Up to approximately 3,600 of these would be coast live oaks and Monterey pines. The selected Alternative 1 would result in direct impacts to approximately 1,100 to 1,200 coast live oak trees (up to 900 temporary and 300 permanent impacts), while Alternative 2 would result in impacts to approximately 2,600 to 2,700 coast live oaks (up to 2,200 temporary and 500 permanent impacts).

Temporary and permanent project-related impacts to other special-status natural communities (purple needlegrass, white-root beds, and red willow riparian) are expected to be associated with construction activities such as grading, access, and road widening.

Avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures will be implemented to reduce long-term impacts to natural communities including design elements to minimize the removal of native trees and other vegetation and restoration of Coast live oak and Monterey pine forest, purple needlegrass and white-root beds habitats (Measures BIO-1 through BIO-7.

The project will potentially adversely affect jurisdictional features in the watersheds of Del Monte Lake, Canyon Del Rey Creek, and El Toro Creek, including in-stream and adjacent wetlands, some three-parameter wetlands that are not immediately adjacent to streams or other waterways, multiple ephemeral and intermittent streams (including named streams such as Canyon del Rey Creek and El Toro Creek), streambanks and riparian zones, stormwater ditches and artificial ponds.

Avoidance, Minimization, and Mitigation Measures BIO-8 through BIO-14 will be implemented to reduce impacts to jurisdictional wetland and other waters (of the United States and of the State). Mitigation Measure BIO-14 requires the preparation of a Mitigation and Monitoring Plan to offset permanent and temporary impacts of the project to wetlands, other waters, and riparian habitat to prevent a net loss of wetlands or other aquatic resource acreage, functions, and values.

Special Status Plant Species

Manzanita species: Both build alternatives have the potential to cause temporary impacts to toro, Pajaro, and sandmat manzanitas, and permanent impacts to sandmat manzanita; impacts from the project may include removal of vegetation, soil compaction, erosion, erosion, and pathogen and introduction of invasive species.

Alternative 2 would have had substantially larger permanent and temporary footprints than Alternative 1 and would have the potential for a larger impact.

Congdon's Tarplant: Both build alternatives have the potential to directly impact Congdon's tarplant near the Laureles Grade and Corral de Tierra Road intersections with State Route 68 through vegetation removal and grading activities, and indirectly impact this plant through spread of invasive species and road maintenance activities.

Lewis' Clarkia: Both build alternatives could result in temporary impacts to the populations of Lewis' clarkia at the State Route 68/State Route 218 and State Route 68/Ragsdale Drive intersections. The project has the potential to directly impact Lewis' clarkia through vegetation removal and grading activities, and indirectly impact this species through spread of invasive species and road maintenance activities. Avoidance and minimization measures to be implemented for Lewis' clarkia include soil and duff salvage and seed collection (Measures BIO-22 and BIO-23).

Monterey Pine: Both build alternatives would potentially remove large numbers of Monterey pine trees of varying sizes; up to about 400 pines with Alternative 1, and up to 900 pine trees under Alternative 2.

Measures for design, alternatives to removal, and pre-construction surveys will be implemented to avoid and minimize impacts to special status manzanita species (Measures BIO-15 through BIO-17). Compensatory mitigation measures for special-status manzanitas (BIO-18) and Congdon's tarplant (Measures BIO-19 through BIO-21) will include replanting and restoration of habitat, preconstruction surveys, seed collection, soil and duff salvage.

Special Status Animal Species

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The project may result in temporary, direct, and/or indirect impacts to nesting birds, dusky-footed woodrat, and American badger.

Findings:

Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts:

Permanent impacts to nesting birds from the project are not expected. Construction activities have the potential to create temporary, direct and indirect impact to nesting birds, eggs, and young birds. Direct impacts may include vegetation removal and site grading. Temporary loss of vegetation supporting potential nesting habitat would be offset by revegetation efforts for the project. Implementation of the avoidance and

minimization measures BIO-24 though BIO-26 would further reduce the potential for adverse project-related impacts to nesting bird species. These measures include scheduling vegetation removal outside the typical nesting season, using exclusionary methods to prevent birds from occupying nests in the construction zone, and conducting nesting bird surveys and establishing buffer areas around any active nests, as needed.

Dusky-footed woodrat middens are present within the project's Biological Study Area. The presence of the American badger is considered unlikely given the poor habitat conditions within the project limits and availability of higher quality habitat nearby. The risk of injury or mortality to either species is considered low with the implementation of the measures proposed to protect jurisdictional areas (wetlands and other waters), oak woodlands, the California red-legged frog, and the California tiger salamander. Impacts to potential habitat for Monterey dusky-footed woodrat and American badger would be offset by site restoration within the project limits using native plant species or at offsite mitigation areas associated with compensatory mitigation for jurisdictional areas, oak woodlands, and Monterey pine forest.

The project could result in temporary impacts to roosting bats as a result of clearing vegetation and grading for cut or fill slopes and temporary construction access. Injury or mortality could occur if bats are roosting when trees are removed. Bats may also be temporarily displaced, if present, during construction activities to repair culverts (Alternatives 1 and 2). Because suitable snag and tree roosting habitat are present within the Biological Study Area and tree removal is anticipated for this project, measures to protect roosting bats are required. Avoidance and minimization measures BIO-27 though BIO-31 include pre-construction surveys, avoidance of maternity roosts, buffer areas, bat exclusion zones for construction, and habitat incorporation into the project wildlife crossings.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Adverse Environmental Effects:

The updated Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 Effects determinations for the preferred alternative, Alternative 1, Roundabouts, include the following:

- California tiger salamander – may affect, likely to adversely affect
- California red-legged frog – may affect, likely to adversely affect
- Southwestern pond turtle – may affect, likely to adversely affect
- Yadon's piperia – may affect, not likely to adversely affect
- South-Central California coast steelhead – no effect

The Biological Study Area of the project is not within any designated critical habitat.

Findings:
Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project, which avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the final EIR.

Statement of Facts

California tiger salamander. The Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 preliminary effects determination is that the project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the California tiger salamander. The basis for the effects determination is that the presence of this species has been inferred and there is a potential for adverse effects, including temporary and permanent, direct and indirect impacts to upland habitat and individual salamanders, if the species is present. Alternative 1 may have temporary impacts to salamander breeding (aquatic) habitat, and both temporary and permanent impacts to upland habitat, however, Alternative 2 would have greater impacts to jurisdictional features and suitable habitat.

Mitigation for impacts to California tiger salamander (BIO-59) includes permanent preservation of suitable off-site upland habitat, anticipated to be in the form of off-site mitigation credits to be purchased from the Sparling Ranch Conservation Bank. Some of the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for California red-legged frog would also help protect California tiger salamander from potential project-related impacts.

California red-legged frog. Alternative 1 and Alternative 2 would both have temporary and permanent impacts to red-legged frog potential breeding (aquatic) habitat as well as upland habitat, however, Alternative 2 would impact more jurisdictional features (wetlands and other waters) and more suitable habitat for the species than Alternative 1. The Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 preliminary effects determination is that the project may affect, and is likely to adversely affect, the California red-legged frog. The basis for the determination is that the presence of this species is inferred, and there is a potential for adverse effects, temporary and permanent, from impacts to potential aquatic breeding habitat, adjacent upland riparian habitat, and to individual frogs.

Potential impacts to California red-legged frog will be reduced with implementation of avoidance and minimization measures BIO-39 through BIO-55, as well as compensatory Mitigation Measures BIO-56 through BIO-58, in addition to measures for jurisdictional wetlands and other waters. The mitigation measures include preparation and implementation of a habitat restoration plan, a protection and relocation plan, and frog handling procedures.

Southwestern pond turtle. The project may affect and will likely adversely affect southwestern pond turtle because the species shares similar jurisdictional aquatic and upland habitat as the seasonal behaviors of species such as California red-legged frog for which avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures are included in the project. Those measures will also provide protection for the southwestern pond turtle (see measures BIO-39 through BIO-58). Because this species shares the same types of

aquatic and upland habitats as the California red-legged frog, Alternative 2 would have had greater impacts to those habitats than Alternative 1.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently drafted additional avoidance and minimization measures for southwestern pond turtle that are included in Measures BIO-69 through BIO-77. These measures include specifications for conducting preconstruction surveys, and measures pertaining to construction activities to avoid harm to southwestern pond turtles. Mitigation Measure BIO-78 prescribes implementation of a habitat mitigation plan or purchase of credits in an approved conservation bank that will fully offset the project's adverse effects to Southwestern pond turtle if the species receives federal listing under the federal Endangered Species Act, and if the project causes permanent impacts to suitable aquatic or upland habitat.

Yadon's piperia. Alternative 1 may result in temporary impacts to 0.136 acre of potentially suitable Yadon's piperia habitat, but no permanent impacts would occur. Alternative 2 would have resulted in 1.987 acres of temporary impacts and 0.247 acre of permanent impacts to potentially suitable habitat. However, the habitat loss would not occur within designated critical habitat and would be in an area that is already highly fragmented by roads and development. Neither Build Alternative would result in permanent impacts to any Yadon's piperia plants observed in the Biological Study Area. Avoidance, minimization measures will be implemented for this species (Measures BIO-32 through BIO-38), compensatory Mitigation Measures BIO-34 through BIO-38, and measures for Monterey Pine Forest and Woodland would also help reduce potential impacts to Yadon's piperia. The Federal Endangered Species Act Section 7 preliminary effects determination is that the project may affect, not likely to adversely affect, Yadon's piperia.

South-Central California Coast Steelhead. The selected Alternative 1 would not impact steelhead habitat and no mitigation is required. Alternative 2 would have potentially impacted steelhead habitat for construction of additional bridge piers in Toro Creek. If Alternative 2 had been selected it would have needed to implement mitigation measures BIO-62 through BIO-67 which include dewatering methods, capture, handling and relocation procedures for steelhead, exclusion of fill from waterways, creek restoration after construction, and administrative procedures with the National Marine Fisheries Service.

Crotch Bumblebee (California Endangered Species Act). Crotch bumble bee is a candidate for listing as Endangered under the California Endangered Species Act. Crotch bumble bees were not observed during Caltrans surveys of the Biological Study Area, but suitable foraging habitat for this species is present throughout the Biological Study Area and they are known from the region. Suitable nesting/overwintering habitat may also be present in less disturbed parts of the Biological Study Area, however use of the area for nesting is considered unlikely given high levels of ambient disturbance, proximity to the existing highway, and the overall low quality of the habitat present when higher quality habitat is available outside the Biological Study Area.

It is expected that the project would not result in state take (construction-related mortality) of Crotch bumble bee, and therefore, the updated determination under the California Endangered Species Act for this state-listed species is that the project is not anticipated to have any impacts. However, additional Crotch bumble bee surveys will be conducted during the project design phase, per California Department of Fish and Wildlife guidance. If Crotch or other special-status bumble bees are observed using the project area, Caltrans would apply to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for an Incidental Take Permit (2081 permit). Mitigation Measure BIO-84 would be implemented which prescribes replacement on-site of temporarily impacted habitat during construction at a minimum ratio of 1-to-1 replacement. In addition, avoidance and minimization measures BIO-79 through BIO-83 include focused surveys for the bee during the project final design phase, coordination with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, flowering plant inspections, and fencing of environmentally sensitive areas prior to construction.

Tim Campbell		06/18/2025
for Scott Eades, District 5 Director	Signature	Date

Project Name: Scenic Route 68 Corridor Improvements Project
DIST-CO-RTE-PM: 05-MON-68-4.8-13.7
EA: 05-1J790
EFIS ID: 0518000061

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS

FOR

IMPROVEMENTS TO NINE INTERSECTIONS ALONG STATE ROUTE 68 IN MONTEREY COUNTY BETWEEN JOSSELYN CANYON ROAD AND SAN BENANCIO ROAD TO IMPROVE INTERSECTION OPERATIONS AND REDUCE COLLISIONS

The following information is presented to comply with State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15093), and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Division 2, Chapter 11, Section 1501 et seq.). 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:

Aesthetics/Visual:
State Route 68 in the project limits is an Officially Designated State Scenic Highway. The project will result in substantial alteration of the existing visual environment by increasing the urban character from widening of the highway prism by converting the project intersections to roundabouts, and from disturbance of landforms with cut slopes and altered profiles, construction of additional retaining walls and barriers, increased traffic signage, removal of existing vegetation including up to 4,000 trees of varying sizes, and conversion of intersection cross-street design to roundabout configurations. Project landscaping and aesthetic treatments to walls and other built elements and other minimization measures for aesthetics would somewhat reduce the urbanizing effect of the project elements, but the long-term permanent visual changes from increased visual scale and hardscape features would be unavoidable and noticeable. The project would also contribute to a cumulative increase in the urban character and reduction of visual quality along the State Route 68 corridor.

Overriding considerations that support approval of this recommended project are as follows:

The purpose of this project is to improve intersection operations by reducing travel delay throughout the project corridor and to reduce the rate and severity of collisions, enhance wildlife connectivity across the highway and to improve bicycle and pedestrian access within the project corridor. The project is needed because the State Route 68 in the

project limits experiences heavy congestion during peak traffic periods leading to travel delays, primarily at the existing signalized intersections. Travel delay is forecast to rise to 18,457 Daily Vehicle Hours of Delay by the year 2045 with no changes to the existing traffic intersection controls and lane configurations compared to the current 6,609 Daily Vehicle Hours of Delay. Traffic delay resulting from queuing of vehicles at the intersections is caused, in part, by inefficiency of the existing signal controls with limited green time for the directions of travels and lack of coordinated signal timing between the intersections.

The project corridor also has several segments of the highway with collision rates above the statewide average for similar highways, with rear-end collisions comprising the majority of the collision types associated with traffic congestion. In addition, State Route 68 intersects a critical wildlife habitat area connecting the coast to the Sierra Azul mountain range. Collisions between vehicles and larger mammals trying to cross the highway routinely occur resulting in roadkill and vehicle property damage.

Further, the lack of bike and pedestrian refuge areas, sidewalks, and marked bike lanes at the intersections at State Route 68, along with the high number of conflict points at signalized intersections, has led to increased delay for both motorists and non-motorists at the intersections.

Two build alternatives that meet the majority of the project purpose and need were analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Report. Alternative 1, Roundabouts, was selected as the preferred alternative since it best achieves the overall project purpose and need and has less overall environmental impacts compared to Alternative 2.

Both build alternatives would alter the visual character of the project corridor, however, Alternative 1 will have less visual change compared to the larger footprint and the number and size of structural features with Alternative 2. These impacts would remain significant and unavoidable but necessary to meet the project purpose and need.

Tim Campbell		06/18/2025
for Scott Eades, District 5 Director	Signature	Date