

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**DISTRICT 7**

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June 11, 2015

Victoria Rutson, Director Office of Environmental Analysis
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street SW
Washington, DC 20423

Re: Invitation to Become a Participating Agency and Cooperating Agency on the High Desert Corridor Project

Effective October 1, 2012, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) assigned, and Caltrans assumed, all the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Secretary's responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) pursuant to 23 USC 327(a)(2)(A). Caltrans assumed all of FHWA's responsibilities under NEPA for projects on California's State Highway System (SHS) and for federal-aid local streets and roads projects under FHWA's Surface Transportation Project Delivery Program. Caltrans also assumed all of FHWA's responsibilities for environmental coordination and consultation under other federal environmental laws pertaining to the review or approval of projects under NEPA Assignment. For the purposes of carrying out the responsibilities assumed under NEPA Assignment, Caltrans is deemed to be acting as FHWA with respect to the environmental review, consultation, and other actions required under those responsibilities.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in coordination with the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), has prepared a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed High Desert Corridor Project. The project is proposed as a Strategic Multipurpose corridor extending approximately 63 miles between State Route 14 in Los Angeles County and State Route 18 in San Bernardino County, California. The five alternatives include:

- No Build
- Freeway/Expressway Alternative (Avenue P-8, I-15, and SR-18)
- Freeway/Tollway Alternative (Avenue P-8, I-15, and SR-18)
- Freeway Expressway Alternative with High Speed Rail Feeder/Connector Service
- Freeway/Tollway Alternative with High Speed Rail Feeder/Connector Service

Potential impacts associated with the four build alternatives include the following:

Property acquisition, displacements, and relocations; farmland; Section 4(f) resources; visual resources; hydrology and floodplains; short-term/long-term water quality; short-term/long-term noise; short-term/long-term air quality; cultural resources; paleontological resources; hazardous materials; biological resources; and wetlands.

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In accordance with 40 CFR 1501.6 of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provision of the National Environmental Policy Act, we are requesting your agency to be a cooperating agency because your agency has jurisdiction by law or special expertise.

You have the right to expect that the EIS will enable you to discharge your jurisdictional responsibilities. Likewise, you have the obligation to tell us if, at any point in the process, your needs are not being met. We expect that at the end of the process the EIS will satisfy your NEPA requirements including those related to project alternatives, environmental consequences, and mitigation. Further we intend to utilize the EIS and our subsequent record of decision as our decision-making documents and as the basis for the permit application. Further we intend to utilize the EIS and our subsequent record of decision as our decision-making documents and as the basis for any permit application.

In accordance with the Efficient Environmental Review Process codified at 23 USC 139, we are requesting your agency to be a participating agency because we believe that your agency will have an interest in this transportation project. Participating agencies are responsible for identifying, as early as practicable, any issues of concern regarding the project's potential environmental or socioeconomic impacts that could substantially delay or prevent an agency from granting a permit or other approval that is needed for the project.

Under the Efficient Environmental Review Process, if your agency is a federal agency and declines to be a participating agency, your agency must do so in writing by stating:

1. Your agency has no jurisdiction or authority;
2. Your agency has no expertise or information relevant to the project; and
3. Your agency does not intend to comment on the project.

We look forward to your response to our request for your agency to be a cooperating agency and a participating agency and to working with you on this transportation project. Neither of these designations implies that your agency supports the proposed project. The favor of a reply is requested by July 9, 2015. If you have any questions or would like to discuss in more detail the project or our agencies' respective roles and responsibilities during the preparation of this EIS, please contact Karl Price at 213-897-1839 or by e-mail at Karl.Price@dot.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ronald Kosinski", with a stylized flourish at the end.

RONALD KOSINSKI, Deputy District Director
Division of Environmental Planning
Caltrans, District

Enclosures: 1) Executive Summary