

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

(REVISED)

for the
Campus Parkway Project
(SCH# 2000121003)

April 18, 2001

TO:

Interested Parties

FROM:

Steven E. Rough, Project Engineer
Merced County
Department of Public Works
715 Martin Luther King Jr. Way
Merced, CA 95340

SUBJECT: *Revised Notice of Preparation of a Joint Draft Environmental Impact Report-Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR-DEIS).*

The County of Merced, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), will prepare a joint EIR-EIS for the Campus Parkway project. Merced County is the CEQA Lead Agency for this project; the FHWA is the NEPA Lead Agency for this project.

We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR-EIS prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

BACKGROUND

The Campus Parkway project is sponsored by the Merced County Department of Public Works and will receive funding from Federal, State and local sources. According to the Road and Interchange Improvement Map contained in the Merced County Association of Governments Regional Transportation Plan, an expressway, referred to as the Campus Parkway Corridor, is planned on the east side of the City of Merced. The limits of the planned expressway are: the Mission Avenue Interchange with State Route 99 (to the south), and Bellevue Road (to the north). The purpose (focused end result) of the Campus Parkway project is a transportation corridor that supplies sufficient capacity and connectivity to serve the northern and eastern portions of the City of Merced through the year 2025.

In early 1999, the Merced County Public Works Department established a study area for the Campus Parkway project encompassing an area bounded roughly by Lake Road on the west, Arboleda Drive on the east, Mission Avenue on the south and Bellevue Road on the north. A range of potential north-south alignments was developed based upon a preliminary evaluation of environmental, community, and design constraints. These preliminary alternatives were presented at a public meeting in March 1999. The primary issues of concern that were identified for the alignments include: growth inducement,

impacts to farmlands, and biological resource impacts. Field surveys were subsequently conducted in order to identify wetlands as well as endangered species and their potential habitat that may exist in the study area. Refined alignments were prepared and presented at a public meeting in June 1999. As a result of the field surveys and a review of input received from the public, the Campus Parkway Project Development Team (PDT) eliminated alignments from further consideration that either did not adequately satisfy the intended purpose of the project or had significant effects on the environment. The rationale for the decision made by the PDT has been summarized in a document dated August 3, 1999, entitled, "Summary of Alternative Screening Process."

A refined traffic analysis was performed in November 2000 and is summarized in the report entitled, "Campus Parkway, Analysis of Travel Characteristics." This report reveals that the portion of the Campus Parkway corridor between Yosemite Avenue and Bellevue Road is not necessary to solve anticipated transportation deficiencies until some time well beyond the 2025 design horizon. As a result, the project description has been modified to reflect this change in the project.

The revised project, from Route 99 to Yosemite Avenue, represents the limits necessary to meet projected demand occurring within the twenty-year design horizon (year 2025). However, a future connection with Bellevue Road does represent a logical connection with the roadway network that is a reasonably foreseeable action that could occur post 2025. Therefore, in order to identify potential cumulative impacts, the EIR-EIS will also identify and analyze possible corridors for Campus Parkway between Yosemite Avenue and Bellevue Road. No construction or right-of-way acquisition north of Yosemite Avenue is proposed to be included as part of this project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The modified Campus Parkway project consists of the development of a limited access expressway on the east side of the City of Merced. The limits of the Campus Parkway project are: the Mission Avenue Interchange with State Route 99 (to the south), and Yosemite Avenue (to the north). The modified project is approximately 7.25 kilometers (4.5 miles) in length. Intersections are proposed to be located with: Mission Avenue, Gerard Avenue, Childs Avenue, Olive Avenue, and Yosemite Avenue.

An overpass will cross over the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway and the adjacent State Route 140. A connection to State Route 140 is anticipated to be included as a part of this project; the type of connection to be constructed is the subject of a Project Study Report (PSR) currently being done by Caltrans. An overpass will also cross over Bear Creek and Bear Creek Drive. No connection with Bear Creek Drive is proposed as part of this project.

An amendment to the Merced County General Plan will be included as part of this project. At a minimum, this General Plan Amendment will involve the addition of Campus Parkway to the circulation system. Additional revisions to the General Plan may be included in the amendment to respond to the potential growth inducement impacts of the Campus Parkway project.

Additional information about the Campus Parkway project can be obtained at the following website: www.campusparkway.com.

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

Between the interchange at Mission Avenue and State Route 140, all of the project alternatives share a common alignment that parallels the Doane Lateral and Hartley Lateral; north of State Route 140 the alternatives diverge along several potential alignments.

More specifically, the alternatives have been identified for evaluation in the EIR-EIS include:

1. A “no project” alternative. This alternative would not create a new roadway to accommodate expected growth.
2. Green Alignment. Beginning at the Mission Avenue Interchange, this alignment turns to the north to parallel the Doane Lateral; after crossing SR 140, this alignment veers to the west to align approximately 200 feet east of Lake Road.
3. Yellow Alignment. Beginning at the Mission Avenue Interchange, this alignment turns to the north to parallel the Doane Lateral; this alignment continues northward paralleling the Hartley and Bradley Lateral.
4. Green Alternative Alignment. This alignment follows the Yellow Alignment until crossing Olive Avenue; after this point, this alignment veers to the west paralleling a set of overhead electrical transmission lines until it merges with and follows the Green Alignment.

POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The project will require temporary and permanent right-of-way acquisition, with the potential for requiring acquisition of at least one residence. Areas of potential impact that will be addressed in the Draft EIR-EIS include the following:

- Agricultural land and Agribusiness
- Land use, General Plan consistency and growth inducement
- Socioeconomics and relocation of homes & businesses
- Utility services
- Geology
- Transportation and circulation
- Hydrology, floodplains, and water quality
- Vegetation, wildlife, wetlands and aquatic resources
- Air quality
- Noise
- Hazardous materials
- Archaeological resources
- Historic resources
- Visual resources
- Cumulative Impacts

UC MERCED AND UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

A Notice of Preparation has recently been issued for the development of UC Merced and an adjacent University Community. These projects are proposed to be located near the northern end of the Campus Parkway project. These two major projects may significantly impact the Campus Parkway project. Both of these projects will be analyzed as part of the cumulative impact analysis of the Campus Parkway EIR-EIS.

SCOPING PROCESS

The scoping process for the project includes early consultation with public agencies and the general public.

Although an official scoping meeting will not be held in response to this revised Notice of Preparation, a Public Information Meeting has been scheduled for May 10, 2001 from 4:00PM to 7:30PM at the multi-purpose room of Pioneer School, which is located at the intersection of Coffee Street and Gerard Avenue in Merced. Additional information about the Campus Parkway project will be presented and an opportunity to submit written comments in response to this Notice of Preparation will be provided at this meeting.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this project action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. If you have any information regarding historic resources, endangered species, or other sensitive issues which could be affected by this project, please notify this office.

RESPONSES

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice. Responses sent to the County as a result of the first NOP will still be addressed in the EIR-EIS, as well as any additional responses provided as a result of this notice. Please send your response and/or direct any comments or questions regarding the Campus Parkway Project to Steven E. Rough at the address shown on the first page of this NOP or e-mail at jser@co.merced.ca.us.

In your response, please provide the name and mailing address of a contact person.

Project Title: Campus Parkway

Project Applicant: Merced County Department of Public Works

Date: April 18, 2001

Signature: Original Signed by Steven E. Rough

Steven E. Rough

Project Engineer

(209) 385-7601

(209) 722-7690 (fax.)