

December 2024



State Route 37 Corridor Planning
and Environmental Linkages Study
2024 Addendum



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

California State Route (SR) 37 is a heavily used corridor connecting the cities of Vallejo and Novato as well as Interstate 80 (I-80) to U.S. Highway 101 (101). Traversing San Pablo Bay at a low bayside elevation, SR 37 has long been prone to flooding, often leading to closures during high tides and storms. Now, sea level rise due to climate change is increasing the threat.

A comprehensive solution was urgently needed, yet finding one was complicated by SR 37's location through sensitive habitats, the jurisdictions of four counties and multiple transportation agencies, need for permits from state and federal resource regulators, considerations of Tribal and private property interests, and concerns for equity communities.

Caltrans brought the parties together in the **Resilient SR 37 Program** to conduct the State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study, the first PEL study conducted for the California State Highway System. The goal of the **SR 37 PEL Study** was to identify needs and a transportation vision that all stakeholders could support and to find a solution that would address the present and future threats to this critical corridor. Examination of numerous alternatives over two years of collaboration and engagement with the agencies, organizations, and citizens of the busy corridor achieved the goal. Culminating in late 2022, the SR 37 PEL Study identified a preferred alternative consisting mostly of an elevated causeway within or adjacent to the existing SR 37 right-of-way. Given the challenges of constructing 21 new miles of highway all at once, the preferred alternative was

WHAT IS PEL?

The Federal Highway Administration's **Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL)** model is an integrated, collaborative approach to transportation planning. Conducting a PEL study early in the planning process helps transportation decision makers consider environmental, community, and economic goals. Findings can then be used to inform project design and environmental analysis to accelerate project delivery.

segmented into eight smaller projects with logical termini and independent utility. **Figure 2** displays the eight sections of the preferred alternative and brief descriptions of each. Further information and a link to the State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Report can be found online at [PEL Study Information | Caltrans](#).

The SR 37 PEL Study noted that a key next step was to establish an order of priority for delivering the eight sections. This addendum to the 2022 SR 37 PEL Study describes how Caltrans and the Resilient 37 partners accomplished this objective (**Figure 1**).

Through a participatory engagement process for the addendum modeled after that of the PEL study, the partners concluded that Section 2—consisting of Phase 2 of Caltrans' in-progress SR 37 Flood Reduction Project from US 101 to Atherton Avenue in Marin County—would form the first piece of the new causeway. With the identification of the preferred alternative and an order of project delivery settled, Caltrans and all its partners in the Resilient 37 Program are a major step closer to the long-term preservation of this critical roadway.

Figure 1. Addendum Workflow

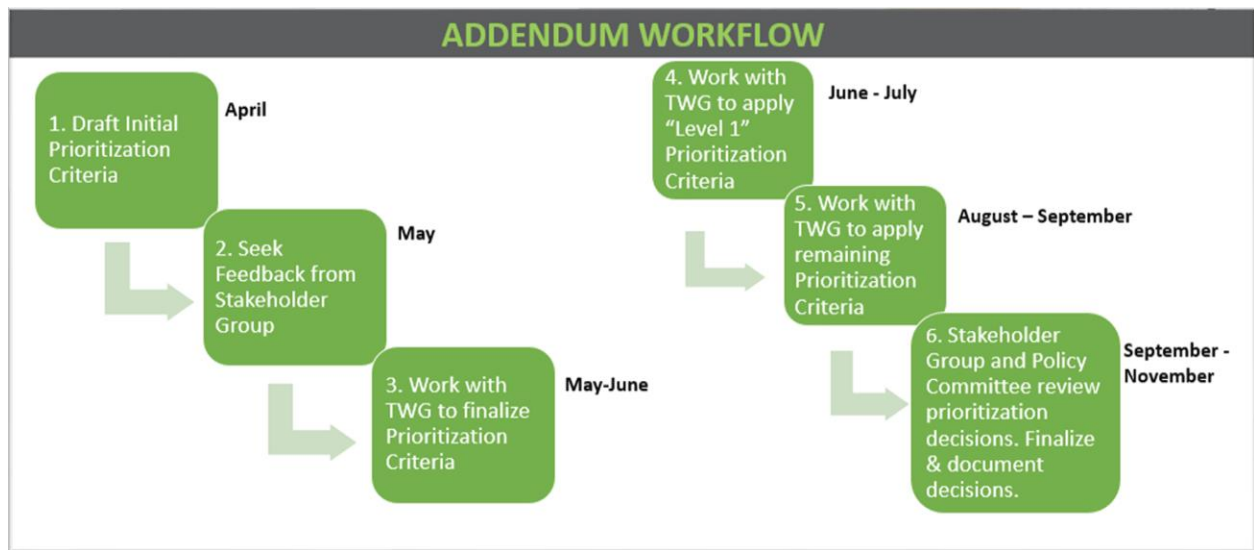


Figure 2. Eight Sections of the Preferred Alternative



Section ID	County	Proposed Phase	Description
1	Marin	US 101/SR 37 Interchange	Interchange and access road improvements
2	Marin	US 101 to Atherton Avenue (SR 37 Flood Reduction Project)	Causeway
3	Marin	Atherton Avenue to Petaluma River Bridge	Embankment/at grade, local access issues
4	Marin/Sonoma	Petaluma River Bridge to East of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters	Causeway
5	Sonoma	East of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters to SR 37/SR 121 Interchange at Sears Point	Embankment/at grade
6	Sonoma	SR 37/SR 121 Interchange at Sears Point	Interchange improvements
7	Sonoma/Solano	SR 37/SR 121 Interchange to SR 37/Walnut Avenue Interchange at Mare Island	Causeway
8	Solano	SR 37/Walnut Avenue Interchange at Mare Island to I-80	Causeway and coordination of multiple interchanges

Source: California Department of Transportation, 2022. *State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study*. December.



CHAPTER 2

The Prioritization Process

To take a deeper dive into the Prioritization effort at the heart of the Addendum, the PEL Study Project Management Team convened a **Technical Working Group** (TWG) and a **Stakeholder Group** (SG). The collective mission of these working groups was to establish screening criteria, rank their importance, and apply them to evaluate the optimum order of project implementation. These groups consisted of many of the same participants as in the 2022 SR 37 PEL study.

2.1 Review of Existing Conditions

As a preliminary step, Caltrans revisited applicable general plans and ordinances for the cities, counties, and regional jurisdictions along the SR 37 corridor to identify any substantial changes in environmental conditions of the 21 resource areas evaluated for the 2022 SR 37 PEL study. None were identified. Future environmental studies will consider any future changes in regulations, sea level rise projections, and species protection status as projects proceed.

2.2 Resilient SR 37 Program Governance and Prioritization Working Groups

Both the SR 37 PEL Study and this Addendum were developed within the governance structure of the Resilient SR 37 Program. The highly specialized, focused nature of the Addendum required a more targeted form of engagement relative to the PEL Study itself.

Resilient SR 37 includes a **Project Leadership Team (PLT)** composed of staff from key agencies involved in the corridor: Caltrans (District 4), Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA), Napa Valley Transportation Authority (NVTA), Solano Transportation Authority (STA), and Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART). Directors of the transportation agencies also serve on Resilient 37's **Executive Steering Committee**. Finally, the Resilient 37 **Policy Committee** is composed of three elected officials from each North Bay county in the SR 37 corridor, with representatives of Congressional offices, State legislative offices, and Tribal chairs as ex-officio members. These bodies provided oversight through all stages of the Addendum.

The **TWG** was tasked to establish and organize prioritization criteria and rank project sections accordingly. It consisted of Caltrans staff, the PLT, the San Francisco Estuary Institute representing Baylands Group, and the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board representing permitting agencies.

The **SG** consisted of federal, state, and local agencies; local Tribes, nongovernmental organizations, and other interest groups. They provided input to the initial prioritization criteria and process and commented on the TWG's work. Attachment 1, *Participants List*, provides the full list of participants in each group.

2.3 Establishing Prioritization Criteria

“Prioritization” in this context meant deciding the order in which the eight sections of the Preferred Alternative would be delivered. Delivering a section includes numerous steps: securing funding, advancing design plans, completing environmental review, securing federal and state permits, and moving into construction. First, however, criteria for such a ranking needed to be established.

The project management team (Caltrans District 4 leadership and consultants) first met with the PLT and ESC to introduce and discuss the proposed prioritization process and ideas for criteria. They then held separate meetings with the SG and TWG to present them with a wide range of factors that could affect project delivery. Table 1 shows the initial list of possible prioritization criteria. The groups provided feedback on this initial list, with both groups supporting sea level rise and flood vulnerability as important prioritization criteria while questioning the usefulness of some of the other criteria offered. Participants also contributed other suggestions, such as the potential to further phase or merge individual sections.

Table 1. Initial List of Prioritization Criteria

Topic	Potential Criterion
Flood vulnerability	Potential to resolve existing and expected future areas of high flood risk (gradual)
Flood risk reduction	Potential to reduce risk of corridor/connectivity due to sudden or immediate sea level rise
Construction period safety	Potential to require (or avoid needing?) non-standard geometrics or complex detours/reroutes
Constructability	Potential for construction to occur in a currently “dry” area that may be inundated by the time of construction
Safety – Construction period	Anticipated duration of construction/duration of placement of temporary features
Safety – Operational period	Potential to resolve existing points of conflict
Environmental	Anticipated duration of environmental surveys: could they take multiple years to complete?

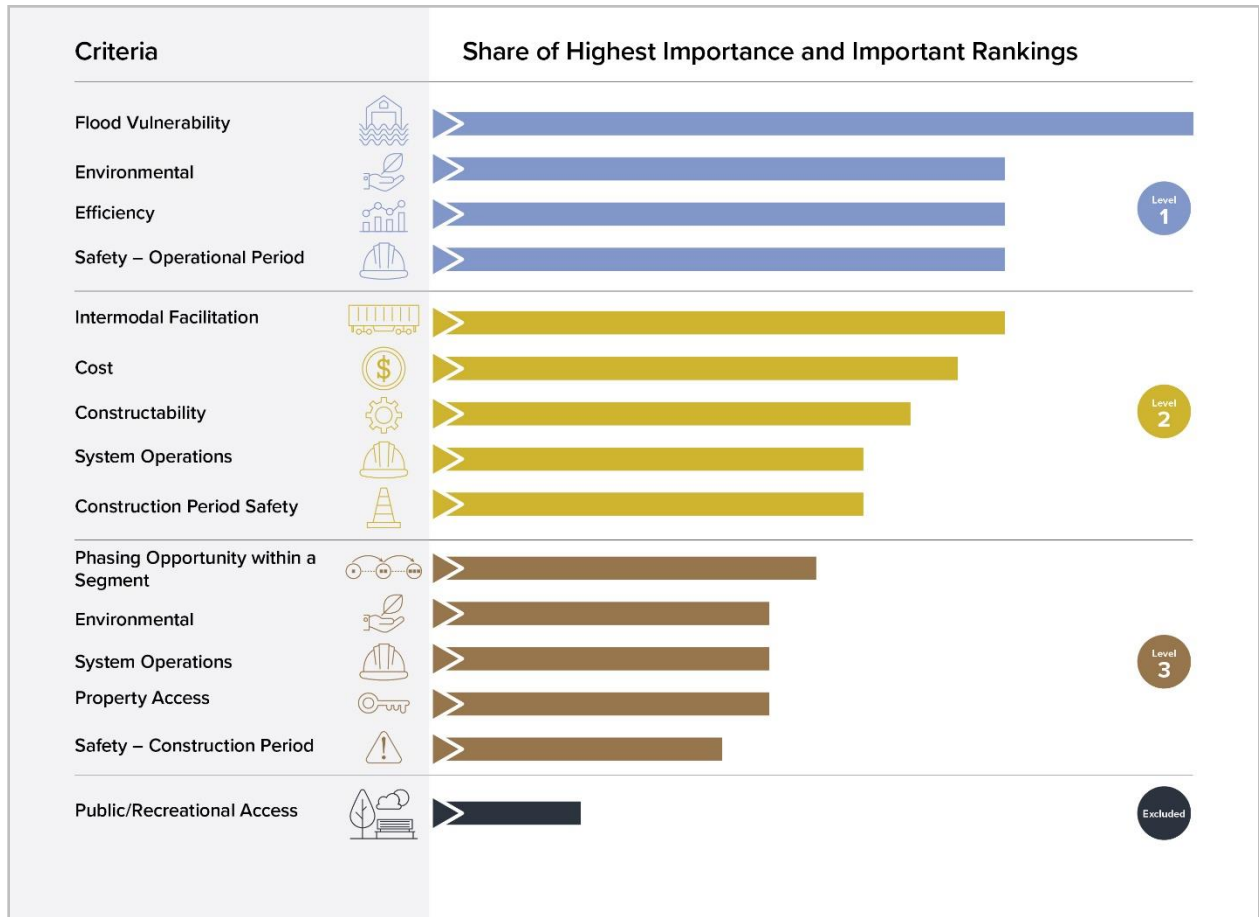
Topic	Potential Criterion
Environmental	Potential for a section to incorporate ecological enhancement/environmental benefits
Environmental	Anticipated cost of mitigation
System Operations	Construction period impact to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Movement of goods ▪ Emergency response ▪ General traffic
System Operations	Operational period impact to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Movement of goods ▪ Emergency response ▪ General traffic
Property access	Number (or cost/ complexity?) of access connections needed to connect adjacent properties
Cost	Expected cost to construct a particular section
Efficiency	Complexity of construction staging (including minimization of “throwaway” costs between sections or phases)
Public/Recreational Access	Potential for construction to reroute or eliminate access to recreational sites along corridor
Intermodal facilitation ¹	Potential to provide more connection to existing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trails and paths Transit (bus, SMART)
Phasing opportunity within a section	Potential for a particular section to be phased (similar to Flood Reduction Project)

1. Intermodal facilitation was later refined to “accommodate SMART’s ongoing and planned operations.”

The TWG was then given a first homework assignment to provide input on the relevance of each proposed criterion to the prioritization effort, its importance to project delivery, and its potential equity implications. Over the course of two SG meetings and three TWG meetings, TWG homework, and follow-up discussions, the initial list of criteria was refined to Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 criteria, shown on Figure 3.

The four criteria that rose to the top—flood vulnerability, environmental benefit opportunities, efficiency, and operational period safety—were designated as Level 1 screening criteria. Sections that met the most Level 1 criteria were ranked highest for project delivery. Section 2, SR 37 from US 101 to Atherton in Marin County (SR 37 Flood Reduction Project Phase 2), met the most Level 1 criteria and was identified as the first project to be implemented.

Figure 3. Prioritization Criteria Levels



Level 2 and 3 criteria were then applied in a single round of ranking to prioritize the remaining sections. Level 2 criteria were those that ranked relatively high behind Level 1 criteria in the initial ranking: cost, constructability, construction period safety, system operational impacts, and intermodal facilitation (clarified as accommodating SMART's ongoing and planned operations).

The remaining lower-ranking criteria were assigned to Level 3: environmental survey considerations, opportunities for project phasing, potential for complex detours or closures, potential for operational improvements, and property access. Figure 2 shows the results of the sorting process. After taking into consideration results from Levels 1, 2, and 3 criteria rankings, the TWG arrived at the final prioritization results:

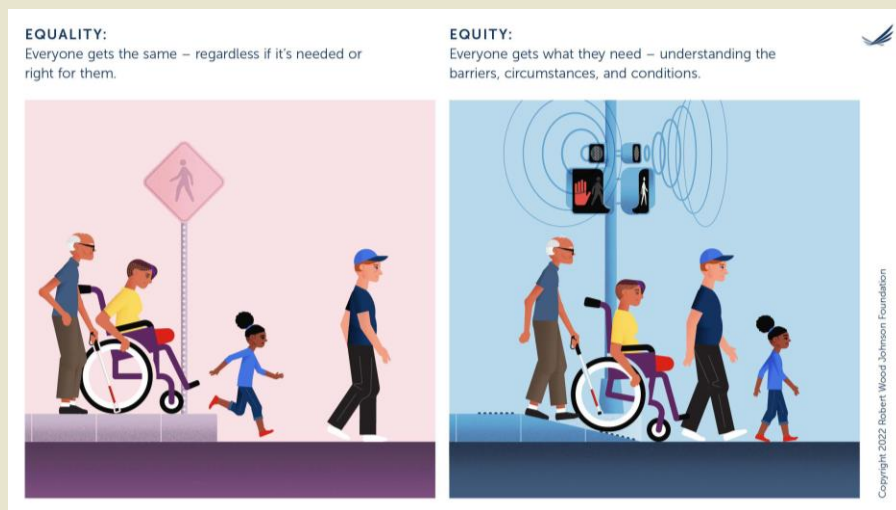
Top Priority	2nd – 4th Priority	5th – 8th Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sections 6 and 7 (tie)• Section 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Section 1• Section 8• Section 3• Section 5

The PMT presented the results of the project delivery rankings to the SG for review and comment in October 2024. It delivered its prioritization recommendations to the ESC in October 2024 and to the Policy Committee in November 2024. In November 2024, the Executive Steering Committee and the Policy Committee confirmed the proposed prioritization strategy.

COORDINATION WITH SMART

Recognizing the threat of sea level rise to its facilities, Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) is in very early stages of planning to elevate its tracks adjacent to SR 37 at Section 1. Obviously, this will require coordination with Caltrans projects. As SMART's project planning develops further in the future, Caltrans will coordinate with the agency on an appropriate path forward.

A WORD ABOUT EQUITY



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Equity in transportation planning is gaining increasing attention in federal and state policies. Equity, remember, is the allocation of benefits in proportion to need. Transportation equity therefore had a prominent role in shaping both alternatives development for the SR 37 PEL study and the project prioritization process that followed. Equity priority and disadvantaged communities are present in Vallejo, American Canyon, and Fairfield/Suisun; 85% of travelers on SR 37 have household incomes lower than the Bay Area median income. These communities use the corridor to access jobs, health care, and other resources. Congestion and roadway flooding impair everyone's mobility; but the impact is worse for lower-income people who can't work from home and may not be able to get to work or may have to take a lengthy detour, adding to commute time and expense. For example, during the original PEL study, possible alternative routes to the far north and south of the existing SR 37 corridor were dismissed in particular because they would bypass these communities. The subsequent prioritization process considered both beneficial and adverse effects that alternative screening criteria for mobility, flooding, roadway efficiency, and safety during construction and operation would have on equity communities. TWG participants identified strong equity connections across several prioritization criteria. Many such criteria revolved around the centrality/vitality of SR 37 to disadvantaged communities in Vallejo and greater Solano County. Accordingly, factors such as improved system operations, flood vulnerability, and construction period safety were cited as needing equity consideration. Short flood-related closures and any construction period issues would likely have disproportionately negative effects on equity priority communities. Additionally, MTC continues to work on tolling technical assessments and a tolling equity discount program. Furthermore, Caltrans and SR 37 partners are working collaboratively on an SR 37 corridor-wide communications plan, community and equity engagement, and developing plans to benefit equity priority communities.



CHAPTER 3

Summary and Next Steps

The solution for SR 37 had to not only address sea level rise, but also minimize adverse environmental impacts, incorporate environmental enhancements to the sensitive marsh habitat, preserve connectivity through the corridor over the long term, and avoid adverse effects on communities with equity concerns. The elevated design of the preferred alternative will accommodate sea level rise by allowing bay waters to move inland as sea level rises, restoring natural marsh functions and avoiding roadway flooding and closures. When the ultimate project is complete, the elevated causeway and other improvements will enhance both transportation safety and mobility for all and the ecological health of the surrounding environment.

Building on the success of the participatory 2022 SR 37 PEL study process in identifying a solution to the challenges facing the critical highway corridor, Caltrans extended it to prioritizing the eight project sections of the preferred alternative for project delivery. Partners from the PEL Study reconvened and applied the criteria they developed together to determine that Phase 2 of Section 2 (also known as the SR 37 Flood Reduction Project) would be prioritized for delivery first. They prioritized Sections 6 and 7, 4, 1, 8, 3, and 5 to follow in order to seek funding, begin design, conduct environmental studies, and execute other project delivery steps leading to construction of the ultimate project. One of the advantages of Section 2 is that, as an existing project, environmental review has already been completed. Accordingly, Sections 6 and 7, which tied for second priority, will be next to undergo environmental review. Recognizing the cumulative purpose and nature of the eight interrelated projects, Caltrans has committed to preparing a corridor-wide cumulative analysis to be integrated in the next project level environmental review (i.e., the environmental document for Sections 6 and 7).

Buildout of the PEL preferred alternative over the next several decades will require a long list of permits from at least six federal and state resource agencies. As a companion effort to this PEL

Addendum, Caltrans is developing a “roadmap” of permitting strategies to guide the permitting process for the ultimate project toward a more efficient and predictable outcome. Any permitting strategy requires understanding multiple factors to determine which permits are required from which agencies, which permit vehicles from those agencies are potential fits, and which permit vehicles will best serve the applicant and the project with regard to schedule, cost, labor, and complexity. The strategy will build on the past several years of federal and state resource agency involvement in both the PEL Study and this Addendum. Collectively, this involvement exemplifies efforts between Caltrans and state resource agencies to improve permitting efficiency and effectiveness through early engagement.

The roadmap will spotlight programmatic permits—permits that cover groups or categories of similar or linked projects or activities.

Developed well in advance of the actual permit process for the individual Resilient SR 37 projects, a long-term permitting approach will establish consistent agency approaches to key factors such as clear definitions of impact types; compensatory mitigation types and ratios; avoidance, minimization, and restoration of impacts; and permit compliance. For example, a programmatic permit can establish a single holistic permittee-responsible mitigation approach for all covered projects or activities, reducing the need to seek small mitigation opportunities for each individual project. Consistency across the individual projects would result in streamlined permitting processes and timelines, while agency concurrence on even a few key factors would provide efficiencies for permitting agency staff in schedule, costs, labor, and coordination. Through ongoing engagement with resource agencies through the Resilient SR 37 Program as well as through pending permit applications for the Flood Reduction project and the Sears Point to Mare Island Interim project, Caltrans anticipates continuing to hone and evolve the SR 37 permitting strategy.

Additional next steps include further agency and community engagement, communication plans, tolling technical assessments by MTC, design, developing plans, specifications, and estimates, securing funding and permits, and moving forward with construction.

The natural and human environments are not static, however. Caltrans will publish ongoing updates, addenda, and amendments to the SR 37 PEL study as changing circumstances may warrant. The 2022 SR 37 PEL study and this and future addenda will continue to guide decisions about the SR 37 corridor.

Concurrent with the 2022 SR 37 PEL Study Report, Caltrans published the [Planning & Environmental Linkages Study Guidebook](#), a compilation of best practices and recommendations to guide transportation practitioners implementing the PEL process in California. The guidebook is also being updated in 2024, and it too, will continue to be revised as we learn more from experience, project by project.

A PERMITTING ROADMAP

A “roadmap” of permitting strategies will guide the permitting process for the ultimate project toward a more efficient and predictable outcome. ... The roadmap will spotlight programmatic permits—permits that cover groups or categories of similar or linked projects or activities.

Attachment 1: Technical Working Group and Stakeholder Group Invitees

This attachment lists those invited to Technical Working Group meetings and Stakeholder Group meetings as part of the *State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Addendum (SR 37 PEL Addendum)*.

1. TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING INVITEES

Technical Working Group (TWG) invitees included representatives from the Project Leadership Team (PLT), San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) representing the Baylands Group, and the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board (SF RWQCB) representing relevant permitting agencies. The TWG also included representation from across Caltrans functional groups (e.g. Design, Planning, Safety, etc.).

Transportation Agencies

- Metropolitan Transportation Commission
 - Kevin Chen, Steve Kinsey, Jeanette Weisman
- Napa Valley Transportation Authority
 - Grant Bailey, Danielle Schmitz
- SMART
 - Emily Betts, Bill Gamlen
- Solano Transportation Authority
 - Nick Burton
- Sonoma County Transportation Authority
 - James Cameron, Guy Preston, David Ripperda
- Transportation Authority of Marin
 - Dan Cherrier

Other

- San Francisco Estuary Institute
 - Jeremy Lowe
- San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board
 - Xavier Fernandez, Christina Toms

Attachment 1

Caltrans District 4

- Naga Adibhatla
- Erik Alm
- Arick Bayford
- Larry Bonner
- Austin Bossetti
- Marissa Brown
- Joy Cheung
- Gina Choi
- Melissa Coppola
- Gregory Currey
- Caitlin De La Torre
- Josephine Hsai
- Chad Klein
- Kevin Krewson
- Lester Lee
- Khai Leong
- Amir Mahboubi
- Aung Maung
- Mark Morancy
- Bart Ney
- Chris Pincetich
- Brian Rowley
- Lilia Reyes
- Olivier Mbatchour
- Martin Mercado
- Moujan Mostaghimi
- Skylar Nguyen
- Shella Orson
- Allison Paich
- Diana Pink
- Ahmed Rahid
- Vishal Ream-Rao
- Kathleen Reilly
- Samantha Vincent
- Lindsay Vivian
- William Woolery
- Lucious Wu

2. STAKEHOLDER GROUP MEETING INVITEES

The **Stakeholder Group (SG)** included a broader range of participants than the TWG and was established to provide input on the initial prioritization process and TWG results. Participants included representatives from federal, state, and local agencies, tribes, NGOs, and special interest groups.

Federal Agencies

- Environmental Protection Agency
 - Connell Dunning, Ting-Sheng Liao, Luisa Valiela
- Federal Highway Administration
 - Patrick Pittenger
- National Marine Fisheries Service
 - Elena Meza
- San Pablo Bay NWR
 - Melisa Amato, Chris Barr

Attachment 1

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 - Jesse Anderson, Katerina Galacatos, Merry Goodenough, Michael Orellana
- U.S. Coast Guard
 - Chris Cerles, Carl Hausner, Greg Ressio, Rachel Zamora
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 - Brian Hansen, Kim Squires, Ryan Olah
- U.S. Geological Survey
 - Susan DeLaCruz, Tanya Graham, Karen Thorne

Tribes:

- Federated Indians Graton Rancheria
 - Hector Garcia, Buffy McQuillen, Kyle Rabellino, Lorelle Ross
- Mishewal-Wappo Tribe of Alexander Valley
 - Scott Gabaldon
- Yocha Dehe
 - Eric Hernandez, Socorro Tayed-Gutierrez

State Agencies:

- Bay Conservation and Development Commission
 - Andrea Gaffney, Ashley Tomerlin, Julie Garren, Jenn Hyman
- California State Lands Commission
 - Christine Day, Ninette Lee
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
 - Erin Chappell, Greg Martinelli, Karen Taylor, Craig Weightman
- Regional Water Quality Control Board
 - Rebecca Nordenholt, Christina Toms, Qi Yan
- San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve/SFSU
 - Stuart Siegel
- State Coastal Conservancy
 - Jessica Davenport, Sara Haugen

Cities/Counties:

- City of American Canyon
 - Brent Cooper
- City of Novato
 - David Dammuller, Clare Hartman, Petr Skala

Attachment 1

- City of Petaluma
 - Gina Benedetti-Petnic, Ken Eichstaedt, Heather Hines, Nicholas McGowan,
- City of Vallejo
 - Gillian Hayes, Mark Helmbrecht, Christina Ratcliffe, Karen Sims, Narcissa Wilson
- Greater Vallejo Recreation District
 - Gabe Lanusse
- Marin County
 - Chris Choo, Rosemarie Gaglione, Farid Javandel, Tom Lai, Roger Leventhal, Jack Liebster, Eric Miller
- Metropolitan Transportation Commission
 - Allison Brooks, Kevin Chen, Stefanie Hom, Lee Huo, Ky-Nam Miller, Ashley Nguyen, Marty Paschal, Toshi Shepard-Ohta, Nicola Szibbo, Jeanette Weisman
- Napa County
 - Brian Bordona, Steve Lederer, David Morrison
- Napa Valley Transportation Authority
 - Grant Bailey, Danielle Schmitz
- Novato Sanitary District
 - Erik Brown, Sandeep Karkal
- SMART
 - Emily Betts, Joanne Parker
- Solano County
 - Allan Calder, Bill Emlen, Chris Drake, Matt Tuggle
- Solano County Water Agency
 - Roland Sanford
- Solano Resource Conservation District
 - Chris Rose
- Solano Transportation Authority
 - Jasper Alve, Nick Burton
- Sonoma County
 - Nader Dahu, Sheri Emerson, Caryl Hart, Gary Helfrich, John Mack, Scott Orr, Mariah Robson, Ken Tam
- Sonoma County Transportation Authority
 - James Cameron, Guy Preston, David Ripperda
- Sonoma County Water Agency
 - Grant Davis, Jessica Martini-Lamb

Attachment 1

- Transportation Authority of Marin
 - Dan Cherrier
- U.C. Davis Road Ecology Center
 - Fraser Shilling
- Vallejo Flood and Wastewater District
 - Mark Tomko

Special Interest Groups:

- Bay Area Ridge Trail
 - Janet McBride
- Bay Keeper
 - Ben Eichenberg
- Baylands Corridor Public Access Study
 - Kathleen Beistel
- Bike Vallejo
 - Dave Belef
- Cross Point Realy
 - Carter Hemming, Kathy DeOchoa
- Ducks Unlimited
 - Steve Carroll, Renee Spent
- Friends of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge
 - Francesca Demgen
- Greenbelt Alliance
 - Amanda Brown-Stevens
- Marin Audubon Society
 - Rick Fraites, Barbara Salzman
- Marin Conservation League
 - Kate Powers, Susan Stompe
- Marin County Bicycle Coalition
 - Warren Wells
- Napa Valley Bicycle Coalition
 - Kara Vernor
- Napa Vine Trail
 - Phillip Sales
- Napa-Solano Audubon Society
 - Mark Stephenson
- Natural Heritage Institute
 - Jerry Meral

Attachment 1

- North Bay Leadership
 - Joanne Webster
- Point Blue
 - Sam Veloz
- San Francisco Estuary Institute
 - Jeremy Lowe, Ellen Plane
- Sierra Club
 - Steve Birdlebough, Arthur Feinstein, Joe Green-Heffern
- Solano Land Trust
 - Nicole Byrd-Braddock
- Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition
 - Bronn Griepenburg, Eris Weaver
- Sonoma Ecology Center
 - Caitlin Cornwall
- Sonoma Land Trust
 - Julian Meisler, Ariana Rickard, Kendall Webster
- SR 37 Baylands/Madrone Audubon Society
 - Susan Kirks
- The Nature Conservancy
 - Liz O'Donoghue
- Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund
 - David Schonbrunn

Other Interested Parties/Members of the Public:

- Ed Schulze

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