APPENDIX A

State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Vision, Goals, and Purpose and Need Memorandum

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State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Vision, Goals, and Purpose and Need Memorandum

This memorandum summarizes the planning and outreach process led by California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 4 to develop and refine the *State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study* (SR 37 PEL Study) vision, goals, and purpose and need. This memorandum is intended to document why the SR 37 PEL Study is needed and to support concurrence between Caltrans District 4 and Caltrans Headquarters regarding the SR 37 PEL Study purpose and need.

1. State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Process

The SR 37 PEL Study process is a collaborative and integrated approach to transportation decisionmaking that uses the information developed during transportation planning, including stakeholder and regulatory agency engagement, to inform a subsequent environmental review process. Integrating project planning activities with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process can have great benefits: a more seamless decision-making process that minimizes duplication of effort, promotes environmental stewardship, and reduces costs and time delays in project implementation (FHWA 2014). 23 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Part 450 (*Linking the Transportation Planning and NEPA Processes*), Appendix A provides further guidance on the key role that the SR 37 PEL Study process can play in supporting subsequent NEPA analysis:

Past successful examples of using transportation planning products in NEPA analysis are based on early and continuous involvement of environmental, regulatory, and resource agencies. Without this early coordination, environmental, regulatory, and resource agencies are more likely to expect decisions made or analyses conducted in the transportation planning process to be revisited during the NEPA process. Early participation in transportation planning provides environmental, regulatory, and resource agencies better insight into the needs and objectives of the locality. Additionally, early participation provides an important opportunity for environmental, regulatory, and resource agency concerns to be identified and addressed early in the process, such as those related to permit applications. State Route (SR) 37 is a heavily traveled 21-mile corridor linking the east and west portions of the North San Francisco Bay. The corridor traverses through Solano, Napa, Sonoma, and Marin Counties in highly sensitive marshland. Given its location, SR 37 is extremely vulnerable to flood-related closures, sea-level rise, and congestion. Nearly the entire length between the cities of Novato and Vallejo is predicted to become permanently submerged as sea levels rise. The result would be additional traffic on distant roadways that are not equipped to handle it and economic loss and reduced opportunity for disadvantaged Solano community residents who commute to Marin and Sonoma Counties (Caltrans 2021).

Caltrans District 4 is undertaking this SR 37 PEL Study for SR 37 between U.S. Highway (US) 101 and Interstate (I-) 80 to identify a transportation vision, determine needs, and consider alternatives within this critical corridor. The SR 37 PEL Study process will bridge the gap between project planning and environmental phases of the corridor, streamline environmental and permitting phases, and reduce long-term project costs, time, and risk to the public by:

- Compiling and integrating previous work, including several past studies
- Identifying and supplementing data needs
- Engaging partners and agencies in a facilitated forum to evaluate alternatives
- Developing a cohesive implementation plan integrating prioritized transportation projects and restoration/mitigation considerations

2. Public and Agency Outreach

Building new or upgrading existing infrastructure to be resilient to the numerous threats posed by climate change and sea-level rise is enormously complex. This complexity underpins the need for the SR 37 PEL Study process because it facilitates early and consistent engagement with a broad range of stakeholders. Stakeholders engaged through this process include local, state, and federal agencies; Native American Tribes; nonprofit organizations; and members of the general public. The outreach process has been designed to elicit input at each critical phase of the SR 37 PEL Study (e.g., vision, goals, purpose and need, alternatives). Through this collaborative process, the expertise and experience from these diverse stakeholders will shape considerations in the search for a range of potentially feasible alternatives for SR 37.

Feedback received to date has been essential in framing the vision, goals, and purpose and need for the SR 37 PEL Study. In support of this effort, Caltrans conducted stakeholder interviews and convened focus groups of individuals from diverse interests, sectors, agencies, and geographies. The focus groups supporting the SR 37 PEL Study include:

- Stakeholder working group (SWG)
- Resource agency partners (RAP)
- Three technical working groups (TWGs)
 - o Design
 - o Environmental
 - \circ Traffic

Each of the focus groups play an integral role in identifying constraints and opportunities relevant to the SR 37 PEL Study.

- The SWG includes bicycle and pedestrian users, businesses, cultural and historic preservation interests, community and neighborhood associations, environmental and recreation advocates, landowners, transportation representatives, and various agency representatives.
- The RAP includes representatives from local, state, and federal agencies, such as the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), Sonoma County Transportation Authority, Napa Valley Transportation Authority, Solano Transportation, San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Regional Water Quality Control Board, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Caltrans.
- Three TWGs were identified to provide forums for deep feedback focused on pertinent corridor-critical issues:
 - Design TWG is focused on identifying feasible alignments, potential design concepts (e.g., embankment, causeway, existing routes, ferries, floating bridge, tunnel), and mechanisms to accommodate multimodal transportation options.
 - Environmental TWG is focused on addressing environmental and ecological concerns including, but not limited to, sea-level rise projections, risk factors, ecological connectivity and function, inundation assumptions, and carbon neutrality.
 - Traffic TWG is focused on establishing appropriate metrics/assumptions to evaluate corridor capacity, quantify existing and future vehicle miles traveled, and meet greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals.

Initial training sessions for both the SWG and RAP were hosted in October and November 2020 to provide information on the overall SR 37 PEL Study process, baseline information (e.g., analysis of existing data and previous studies), and planned projects along the SR 37 corridor. Key discussion topics during the initial training sessions included sea-level rise adaptation, traffic and congestion, multimodal transportation, restoration and ecology, equity, access, land use, recreation, and utilities. An online survey and interactive map were also made available on the study website to gather input. Following the initial training sessions, Caltrans hosted a series of SWG and RAP meetings to formulate goals, objectives, and the project need and purpose statement. In total, Caltrans hosted five training sessions and five working group meetings (2 SWG and 3 RAP meetings) and one public meeting between October 2020 and August 2021.

In an earlier separate but related effort, the MTC initiated a **Design Alternatives Assessment (DAA)** for two reaches of the SR 37 corridor: the Central Reach (SR 121 to Mare Island) and the West Reach (US 101 to SR 121).

Outreach efforts for the DAA were similar to those for the SR 37 PEL Study: the DAA coordinated with and solicited input from a DAA Environmental Technical Working Group (DAA ETWG), a DAA Stakeholders Working Group (DAA SWG), and a RAP, with many focus group members overlapping between the DAA and SR 37 PEL Study efforts.

As the DAA effort comes to a close in late 2021 or early 2022, the SR 37 PEL Study will incorporate and synthesize DAA conclusions on potential alignment alternatives. To this end, the SR 37 PEL Study and DAA aligned on a purpose and need in fall 2021.

3. Key Themes Emerging from Outreach Process

To date, Caltrans has identified the following key themes from public and agency outreach and corridor analysis.

- Resiliency, climate change, and sea-level rise
- Habitat restoration and environmental protection
- (Lack of) Multimodal Options
- Traffic and congestion
- Equity
- Access
- Education
- Safety
- Funding availability
- Collaboration with regional partners

There was broad alignment in values, principles, and desired outcomes among stakeholders. These key themes were in turn integral to the SR 37 PEL Study's vision, goals, and purpose and need.

Several iterations of each component were drafted and revised based on input received and presented back to the focus groups for further input and refinement. The outreach process included a concerted effort to incorporate and address all feedback provided.

4. State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Vision

In collaboration with focus groups, Caltrans developed a comprehensive vision for the SR 37 PEL Study that incorporates long-range goals and forecasts future needs for the corridor.

To create a vision for the SR 37 corridor that addresses existing and future transportation needs by planning for infrastructure resilience against climate change and sea-level rise while improving route movement, reliability, adaptability, and functionality for corridor commuters, residents, and essential service industries in the area.

5. State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Goals

A key element of the SR 37 PEL Study is to assess the ability of alternatives to meet overarching goals for the corridor and region. Feedback received from stakeholders was integral in the goal development process.

SR 37 PEL Study goals afford Caltrans as the SR 37 PEL Study lead greater flexibility to consider and ultimately recommend incorporation of concepts that might be distinct from the project purpose. As viable alternatives that all meet the project purpose and need are developed, goals can play an important role in differentiating among alternatives.

Based on focus group feedback to date, Caltrans has developed the following SR 37 PEL Study goals:

1. Evaluate long-term integrated solutions that address the SR 37 corridor's vulnerabilities and facilitate the restoration of the surrounding baylands.

- 2. Improve route reliability, mobility, and connectivity across all modes and maintain public access.
- 3. Implement nature-based solutions to enhance resilience while simultaneously facilitating natural ecosystem function where practicable.
- 4. Achieve ancillary ecosystem benefits with the northern baylands through partnerships and collaborative planning for future conditions.
- 6. State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Purpose and Need

6.1 Federal Highway Administration and California Department of Transportation Requirements for Project Purpose and Need

A project's purpose and need statement is intended to set the stage for the identification and evaluation of reasonable project alternatives and ultimately the identification of a recommended alternative or small suite of alternatives at the conclusion of the SR 37 PEL Study process. The requirements for contents of a purpose statement are provided at 40 C.F.R. Part 1502:

The statement shall briefly specify the underlying purpose and need for the proposed action. When an agency's statutory duty is to review an application for authorization, the agency shall base the purpose and need on the goals of the applicant and the agency's authority. Additional guidance is provided in the United States Code (USC) 23 for highways and the Department of Transportation (DOT) implementing regulations.23 USC 139 and 23 CFR 450 clarify the requirements for the development of the purpose and need statement in planning studies. 23 USC 139(f)(3) states:

The statement of purpose and need shall include a clear statement of the objectives that the proposed action is intended to achieve, which may include —

- A. achieving a transportation objective identified in an applicable statewide or metropolitan transportation plan;
- B. supporting land use, economic development, or growth objectives established in applicable Federal, State, local, or tribal plans; and
- C. serving national defense, national security, or other national objectives, as established in Federal laws, plans, or policies.

23 C.F.R. Part 450 (*Linking the Transportation Planning and NEPA Processes*), Appendix A provides guidance on how the planning process is used to develop the transportation purpose and need statement:

A sound transportation planning process is the primary source of the project purpose and need. Through transportation planning, state and local governments, with involvement of stakeholders and the public, establish a vision for the region's future transportation system, define transportation goals and objectives for realizing that vision, decide which needs to address, and determine the timeframe for addressing these issues. The transportation planning process also provides a potential forum to define a project's purpose and need by framing the scope of the problem to be addressed by a proposed project. This scope may be further refined during the transportation planning process as more information about the transportation need is collected and consultation with the public and other stakeholders clarifies other issues and goals for the region.

23 C.F.R. Part 450, Appendix A also emphasizes that the purpose and need statement "should be a statement of the transportation problem (not a statement of a solution)."

For the SR 37 PEL Study, the purpose and need statement must align with Caltrans' mission to provide a safe and reliable transportation network that serves all people and respects the environment while considering and complementing other key goals and objectives for the region. It also must be consistent with the directive to "identify and describe the proposed action and the transportation problem(s) or other needs which it is intended to address." Accordingly, Caltrans collaborated with outreach focus groups to develop the SR 37 PEL Study purpose statement. The development and evolution of this purpose statement is detailed below.

Finally, FHWA 2014 Technical Advisory (TA) T 6640.8A directs State DOTs to "identify and describe the proposed action and the transportation problem(s) or other needs which it is intended to address." The FHWA TA goes on to highlight nine examples that may be helpful in explaining the established need for a proposed action/project. These nine examples are intended as a guide and are not considered all-inclusive.

- 1. **Project Status**—Briefly describe the project history including actions taken to date, other agencies and governmental units involved, actions pending, schedules, etc.
- 2. **System Linkage**—Is the proposed project a "connecting link"? How does it fit in the transportation system?
- 3. **Capacity**—Is the capacity of the present facility inadequate for the present traffic? Projected traffic? What capacity is needed? What is the level(s) of service for existing and proposed facilities?
- 4. **Transportation Demand**—Including relationship to any statewide plan or adopted transportation plan together with an explanation of the project's traffic forecasts that are substantially different from those estimates from the planning process required by 23 U.S.C. Part 134.
- 5. Legislation—Is there a Federal, State, or local governmental mandate for action?
- 6. **Social Demands or Economic Development**—New employment, schools, land use plans, recreation, etc. What project economic development/land use changes indicate the need to improve or add to the highway capacity?
- 7. **Modal Interrelationships**—How will the proposed facility interface with and serve to complement airports, rail and port facilities, mass transit services, etc.?
- 8. **Safety**—Is the proposed project necessary to correct an existing or potential safety hazard? Is the existing crash rate excessively high? Why? How will the proposed project improve it?
- 9. **Roadway Deficiencies**—Is the proposed project necessary to correct existing roadway deficiencies (e.g., substandard geometrics, load limits on structures, inadequate cross-section, or high maintenance costs)? How will the proposed project improve it?

6.2 State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Project Need

Caltrans collaborated with focus groups to develop the SR 37 PEL Study need to clearly demonstrate the issues requiring action and to be sure the need is defined in terms that are

understandable to the general public. As detailed further below, the need for the project is grounded in the following issues:

- Resiliency and extreme events
- Route movement and functionality
- Travel time reliability
- Lack of multimodal options
- Maintaining access to properties
- Need to address existing inequities in the transportation network

Input received through the focus groups was organized into themes as presented in the following sections.

6.2.1 Resiliency and Extreme Events

The SR 37 corridor currently experiences flooding during winter rain and high -tide events, with closures happening with increasing frequency (e.g., a 100-yearflood event is happening every 10 years) (UC Davis and AECOM 2016). With the roadway's low-lying elevation, proximity to San Pablo Bay and the associated bayland marshes, and the ever-increasing threat of sea-level rise, the SR 37 corridor is expected to experience increasing direct impacts from flooding and storm surge. Portions of SR 37 are only a few feet above the surrounding San Pablo Bay. The western portion of SR 37, from Novato Creek to Sonoma Creek, is particularly vulnerable to sea -level rise and flooding, due to its relatively low elevation compared to the middle and eastern portions of the road, exposure to present-day flooding, and reliance on flood protection features maintained by other landowners. The middle and eastern portions of SR 37 are flooding, and reliance on flood protection features maintained by other landowners. The middle and eastern portions of SR 37 are moderately vulnerable because of their relatively higher elevation.

Rising sea levels due to climate change will critically impact both the study corridor and surrounding sensitive ecosystems. The most immediate impact of sea-level rise will be flooding of lands that did not previously experience tidal or storm-based inundation. Changes in wave height and run-up, as well as wave action on newly eroded lands, will impact shoreline areas as sea levels rise. Sea-level rise will also increase salinity and erosive pressure on tidal, brackish, and freshwater marshes that border SR 37 and surrounding lands.

The State Route 37 Integrated Traffic, Infrastructure and Sea Level Rise Analysis study (UC Davis and AECOM 2016) found that, in general, all segments of the highway could be exposed to storm surge flooding by a 25-year coastal storm event today. The roadway would be permanently inundated with 36 inches of sea-level rise and by a 5- to 10-year coastal storm event with 6 to 12 inches of sea-level rise. As sea level rises more than 12 inches above 2016 levels, several points along SR 37 face increasing temporary flooding from wave action and storms (e.g., at Novato Creek), while the stretch of SR 37 between the Petaluma River and Lakeville Highway faces permanent inundation if the levees near the eastern end of the Petaluma Bridge are overtopped.

Existing levees protect the low-lying western portion of SR 37 from daily tidal inundation and storm surge flooding. In the middle portion of the corridor, SR 37 functions as a levee and will increasingly face threats from scour, saturation, erosion, inundation, or failure as sea level rises and flood frequency increases. As of 2021, flood protection along SR 37 is provided by a complex interconnected system of largely privately-owned levees along Novato Creek, the Petaluma River, Tolay Creek, Sonoma Creek, the Napa River, and the San Francisco Bay. Many of these privately-owned levees were not constructed specifically to protect SR 37 from flooding. Instead, protection of SR 37 is an ancillary benefit of the levees (UC Davis and AECOM 2016), although flooding occurs along some portions of SR 37, such as Novato Creek, Tolay Lagoon, and Mare Island. Such flooding

is expected to worsen with rising sea levels, imperiling the future viability of the existing SR 37 roadway.

6.2.2 Route Movement and Functionality

SR 37 is a critical route within the San Francisco Bay Area's regional transportation network important to the movement of both people and goods. SR 37 provides the most direct east and west connections within the region, providing the shortest land route between Novato and Vallejo. SR 37 roughly parallels the route of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge (on I-580) and thus functions as a recovery route in case of an emergency or closure of the bridge. SR 37 is also part of the Interregional Roads System between US 101 and I-80 and serves as a wildfire evacuation route for northern Marin, Sonoma, and Napa Counties. Loss of SR 37 functionality and periodic closures results in network fragmentation and adversely affects the more than 30,000 daily users that rely on this route.

6.2.3 Travel Time Reliability

SR 37 currently serves large numbers of single occupancy vehicles and does not have viable transit alternatives. Portions of SR 37 are highly congested during weekday commute periods but also on the weekends, when recreational travelers visit the wine country in both the Napa and Sonoma Valleys (Caltrans 2021). The corridor experiences congestion for roughly 13 hours a day and currently has no transit options (see Section 6.2.4, *Lack of Multimodal Options*).¹

The primary cause of corridor congestion is vehicular demand exceeding the capacity of the SR 37 corridor, specifically between SR 121 and Mare Island (Kimley-Horn and AECOM 2018).

Caltrans evaluates travel time reliability in the corridor to understand the level of congestion, changing traffic conditions, and factors contributing to travel delay. For the purposes of evaluating travel time, the corridor has been evaluated based on key intersections and bottlenecks occurring from changes to the roadway's typical sections (a change in the number of lanes within the section) and to the facility's designation (conventional highway, freeway, expressway). In its current configuration, travel through the corridor takes approximately 20 minutes under free -flow conditions, while travel times of 120 minutes or more are periodically recorded during congested conditions. Roadway crashes and similar incidents, weather, and special events were factors in approximately half of the instances where travelers experienced these delays. Near -, mid-, and long-term interim measures have been proposed along the corridor to improve this condition, several of which are assumed in the baseline conditions of this SR 37 PEL Study.

However, numerous mobility issues affecting highway capacity, roadway design standards, and structural conditions along the route will remain, including various lane configurations within the study area, bottlenecks, short merge distances, high frequency of intersections, and settlement of this coastal roadway.

¹ In 2019, a *Travel Behavior and Transit Feasibility Study* (Fehr & Peers 2019) was completed for SR 37. The traffic count data collected during this study indicates that the SR 37 corridor has a relatively low v olume of vehicles in both directions in the AM and PM peak periods (roughly 16,000 from SR 121 to Mare Island) when compared to nearby transit corridors such as US 101 (roughly 85,000 just north of San Rafael) and SR 29 (roughly 25,000 north of American Canyon Road), necessitating a high market capture rate to make fixed-route transit feasible.

6.2.4 Lack of Multimodal Options

The lack of multimodal options contributes to and perpetuates traffic congestion. No existing transit or rail services exist in the corridor. The failure to accommodate users' needs, highway design, and unreliable travel times substantially impact the ability of people to move across and along the corridor.

Many areas along the SR 37 corridor have insufficient shoulders to accommodate bicycles. Coupled with high vehicle speeds, SR 37 is not conducive to bicycle usage. Pedestrian facilities are minimal.

6.2.5 Maintaining Access to Properties

Numerous public lands, individual private driveways, and business properties have access points along the SR 37 corridor that must be considered and evaluated during this PEL process. The current number, locations, and design of these public access points have contributed to traffic operational deficiencies along the corridor. Inconsistent access spacing negatively affects reliable and efficient mobility along the corridor. In addition, there is strong desire for improved public access to the recreational opportunities in and around San Pablo Bay.

Additionally, climate change and sea-level rise pose significant threats to many low-lying properties adjacent to the existing SR 37.

6.2.6 Need to Address Existing Inequities in the Regional Transportation Network

The SR 37 corridor primarily serves lower density, dispersed development patterns. The corridor connects job markets and housing within Marin, Sonoma, Napa, and Solano Counties (Kimley-Horn and AECOM 2018). The corridor mostly serves users traveling long-distance work-related trips (approximately 44 percent of users). Additionally, a high percentage of corridor trips are made by those earning at or below the median San Francisco Bay Area income of \$100,000 per year. This income group is typically shown to have a higher transit usage rate than those earning above the median income. Unfortunately, this 21-mile corridor currently has no transit options and experiences congestion for roughly 13 hours a day. Accordingly, congestion issues along SR 37 disproportionately burden lower-income people.

6.3 State Route 37 Corridor Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Purpose

The purpose statement has evolved throughout the SR 37 PEL Study process. On February 26, 2021, and March 26, 2021, Caltrans presented an initial draft purpose statement for the SR 37 PEL Study to the RAP and SWG focus groups as follows:

- Enhancing resilience against extreme events (earthquakes, fire, flooding) through year 2100
- Improving travel time reliability
- Preserving SR 37 as a critical route
- Accommodating multimodal uses
- Maintaining and improving access

Since the initial draft purpose statement was presented to RAP and SWG members, Caltrans hosted its first public meeting in May 2021, where the purpose statement was presented. In addition, follow-up discussions were held with the SWG on July 30, 2021, and with RAP members on August

27, 2021. During these engagements, RAP members, SWG members, and the public provided hundreds of comments on the SR 37 PEL Study's draft purpose statement. Comments also covered many key themes for Caltrans to consider in the SR 37 PEL Study, as noted above.

Commenters stressed the need for the purpose statement to not be limited to interests of the lead agency only but to also articulate all areas of concern clearly from stakeholders. Stakeholders identified a range of items they believe should be incorporated into the purpose statement, from specific terminology to transportation solutions for the corridor, such as rail and bus. Caltrans made a good-faith effort to incorporate stakeholder input in the development of the project purpose for the SR 37 PEL Study. With careful consideration of the feedback received, the proposed purpose statement for the SR 37 PEL Study was updated five times and reflects the current focus for the SR 37 PEL Study. The final purpose statement developed for the SR 37 PEL Study is as follows:

- Preserving a critical regional transportation corridor that is resilient to extreme events, while integrating ecological resiliency, which facilitates adaptation to sea-level rise.
- Providing reliable travel time and increasing average vehicle occupancy.
- Providing safe mobility for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Maintaining and enhancing public access, including to recreational areas.
- Providing equitable transit and multimodal transportation solutions that improve access for, and provides meaningful benefits to, all users of SR 37, with special consideration of underserved communities.

7. Conclusion

Caltrans has engaged a variety of stakeholders to seek input and build consensus on the SR 37 PEL Study vision, goals, and purpose and need, and the feedback received thus far has been integral to the development of these foundational pillars of the SR 37 PEL Study process. Caltrans has carefully evaluated all the feedback received to date, incorporated information into the process where appropriate, and provided responses to stakeholders regarding feedback that has not been incorporated to describe why such actions have been taken. Caltrans appreciates the engagement of our transportation partner agencies, regulatory agencies, and stakeholders through the SR 37 PEL Study process and looks forward to continued collaboration to advance the SR 37 PEL study.

8. References

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