Notice of Preparation

Notice of Preparation

To: California State Clearinghouse
1400 Tenth St.,
Sacramento, CA 95814
(Address)

From: California Dept. of Transportation
50 Higuera St.,
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
(Address)

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report

Caltrans will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project identified below. 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 prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. A copy of the Initial Study (☐ is ☒ is not) attached.

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.

Please send your response to Claire Taggesell at the address shown above.

Project Title: Morro Bay Pavement Project

Project Applicant, if any: California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 5

Date: 8/7/2024

Signature: Dianna Beck

Title: Environmental Branch Chief

Telephone: 805-459-9406

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, and 15375.

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Caltrans Morro Bay Pavement Project in Morro Bay, California

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 5 is the lead agency for the Morro Bay Pavement Project. Caltrans is preparing an environmental document to address potential impacts associated with the proposed project. This notice of preparation is being completed pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Caltrans would prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) for the project. As required by CEQA, Caltrans is distributing this notice of preparation and requesting comments from responsible and trustee agencies and interested members of the public regarding the environmental issues, reasonable range of project alternatives, and avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures for inclusion in the environmental impact report. An Initial Study has not been prepared for this project and therefore is not attached to this notice of preparation.

Project Location

The project is in San Luis Obispo County, from just northwest of the intersection of State Route 1 and San Luisito Creek Road (post mile 25.7) to just south of the intersection of State Route 1 and Cass Avenue (post mile 34.4), on State Route 1 in and around Morro Bay and Cayucos. Refer to Figures 1 and 2 for the project vicinity and location maps, respectively.

Figure 1 Project Vicinity Map

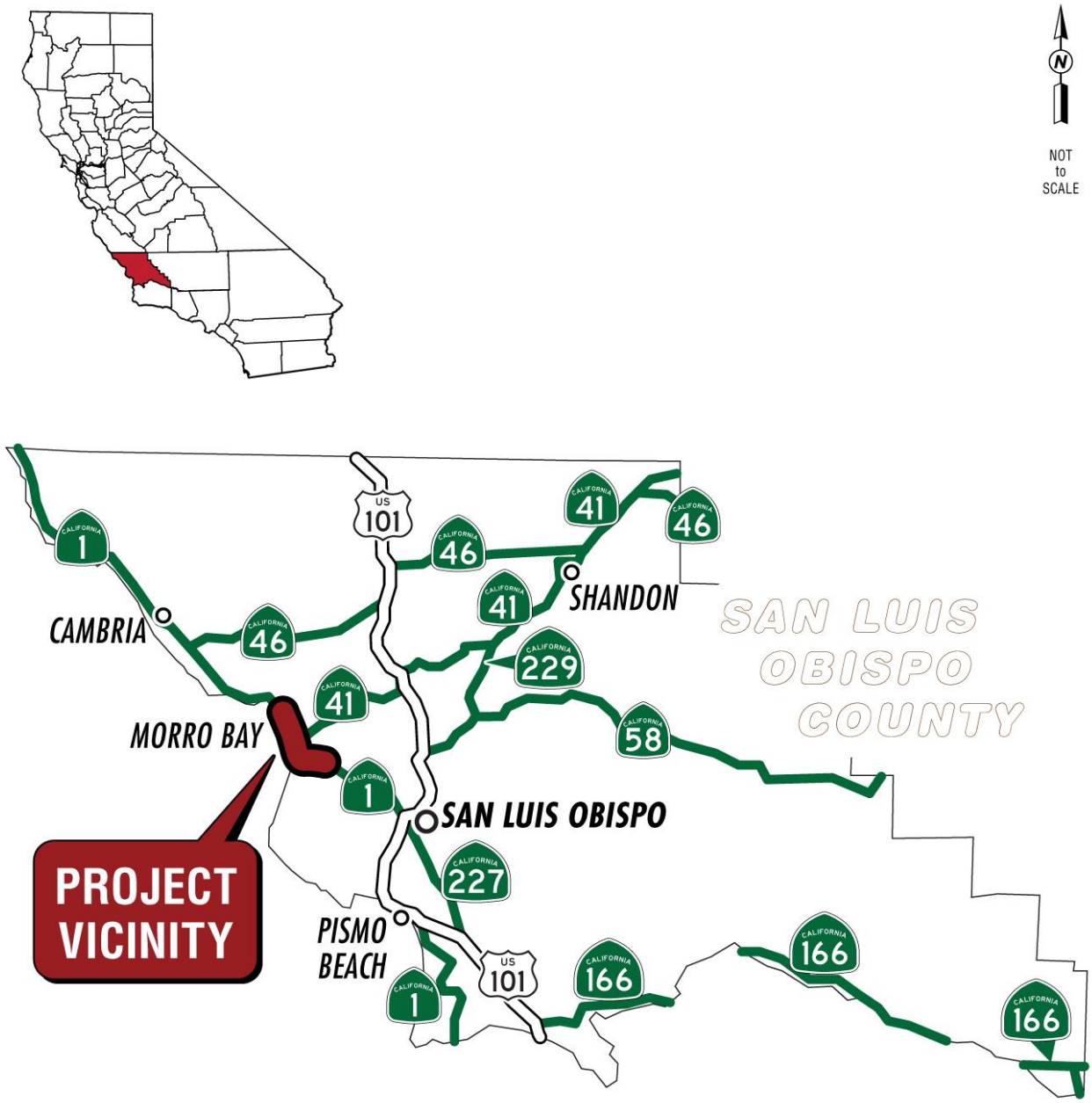
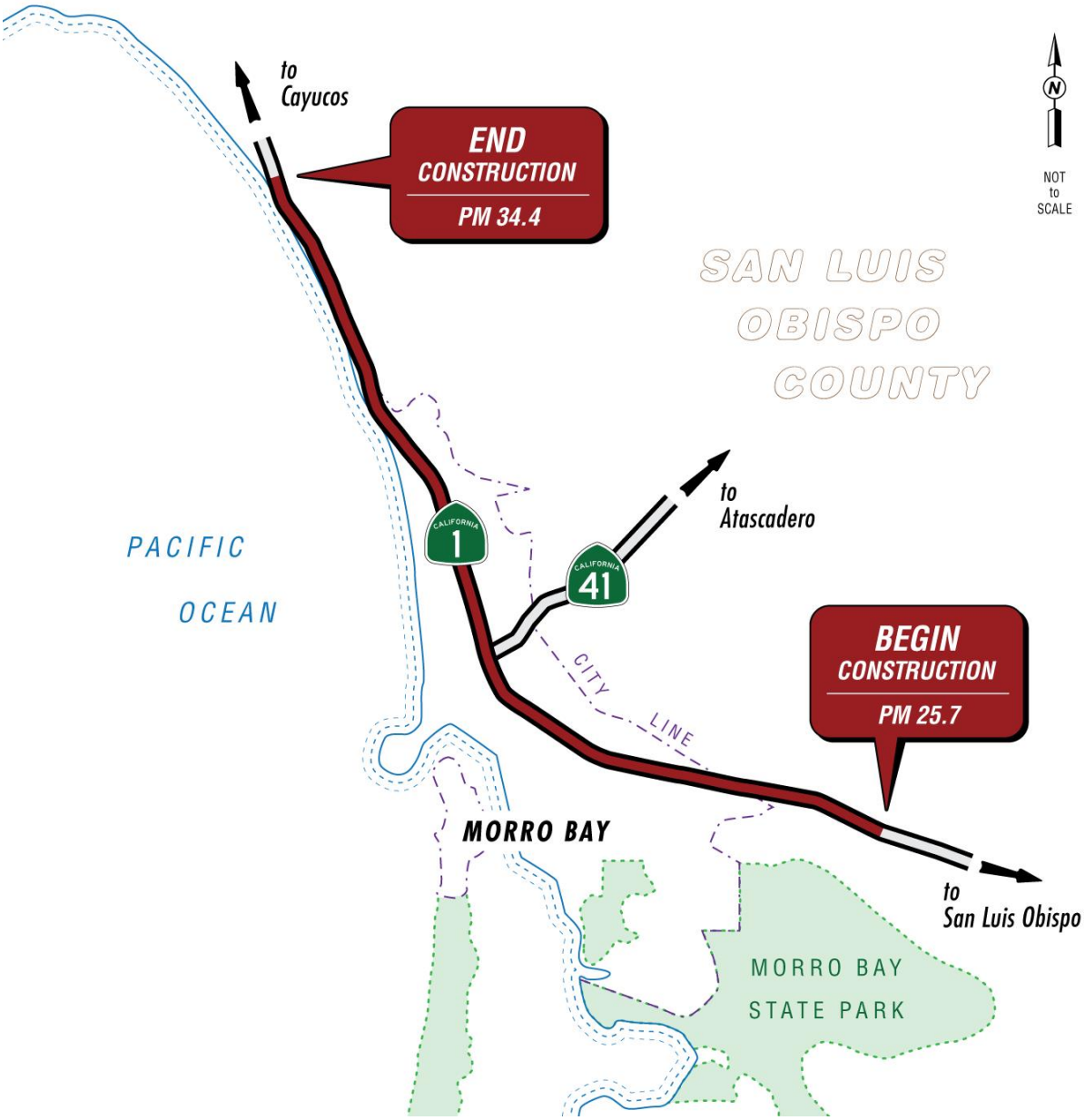


Figure 2 Project Location Map



Purpose and Need

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to preserve and extend the service life of the existing pavement. This project's purpose also includes upgrading outdated assets within the project limits as needed and improving pedestrian and bicyclist facilities to maintain an efficient transportation system.

Need: The pavement within the project limits is deteriorating, and other roadway features are in poor condition. If left untreated, deterioration would continue and result in increasingly higher maintenance costs in the future. Most of the existing pedestrian and bicyclist facilities and other assets within the project limits are also in poor condition or do not comply with current standards. Upgrading these facilities and assets would ensure a safe, accessible, and efficient transportation system.

Project Description

Project work would include the following:

Pavement and Parking Lot Improvements

The project would:

- Grind and overlay pavement on lanes and shoulders on State Route 1 within the project limits.
- Replace existing traffic stripes, pavement markings, and rumble strips in kind.
- Place shoulder backing throughout the project limits, next to the inside and outside shoulders, except where the median is paved and locations where the highway crosses through cut slopes.
- Replace any Transportation Management System loops and signal loops damaged by pavement grinding.
- Conduct light grading and place shoulder backing in the Morro Bay Dog Beach parking lot.

Pedestrian and Bicyclist Improvements

The project would:

- Replace 17 curb ramps, modify one curb ramp, and install one new curb ramp (for a total of 19 curb ramps).
- Add six additional curb ramps through a cooperative agreement with the city of Morro Bay.
- Install accessible pedestrian signals with speakers. Two would be installed at the intersection of State Route 1 and San Jacinto Street, and four would be installed at the intersection of State Route 1 and Yerba Buena Street.
- Upgrade sidewalks under the Main Street Undercrossing and the State Route 1/State Route 41 (Atascadero Road) Undercrossing from asphalt to concrete.

- Upgrade the sidewalk at the southeast corner of San Jacinto Street and State Route 1.
- Conduct minor roadway widening and relocate traffic signals at three signalized intersections to add bike lanes between through lanes and right-turn pockets.
- Install bike parking facilities at the intersections of State Route 1/Hill Plant Road and State Route 1/Toro Creek Road.

Lighting and Sign Improvements

The project would:

- Replace 12 light poles.
- Replace conduits for light poles if they are no longer usable.
- Add four new light poles, so there are two light poles per exit ramp, as is recommended per Caltrans' Roadway Lighting Manual. This is dependent on funding becoming available.
- Install lighting to illuminate undercrossings with pedestrian infrastructure.
- Replace 17 sign panels and posts.

Barrier Improvements

The project would:

- Replace about 3,900 linear feet of guardrail with the Midwest Guardrail System and install vegetation control, likely crushed shale.
- Replace about 12,000 linear feet of thrie-beam median barrier.
- Convert some of the thrie-beam median barrier to a median concrete barrier.
- Install concrete barrier transitions where guardrails end at bridge rails.

Drainage Improvements

The project would:

- Remove and replace existing dikes and overside drains.
- Extend node four of culvert system 49-001-02-03112 about 8 feet (16 linear feet due to the culvert system having two pipes) and remove and relocate the headwall to widen the roadway to place a bike lane at the signalized intersection of State Route 1 and San Jacinto Street. The slope of concrete ditches may be adjusted.

Fence Replacement

The project would:

- Replace the right-of-way fencing in kind (6-foot chain link fence). Other types of fencing may be proposed; approval would need to be obtained from maintenance. This fencing replacement is dependent on funding becoming available.

Development of a Reasonable Range of Project Alternatives

Factors determining project alternatives include considerations of project objectives, project constructability, and environmental impacts. The environmental impact report would discuss the rationale for the selection of alternatives that are feasible and therefore merit in-depth consideration. The environmental impact report would also make note of alternatives that are infeasible (e.g., failed to meet project objectives or did not avoid significant environmental effects) and therefore were rejected. The project details identified in this notice of preparation are general in nature. Further environmental resource analyses are necessary before potential alternatives can be identified. So far, a build alternative and a no-build alternative have been identified.

Potential Environmental Effects

An environmental impact report is being prepared due to the potential for the project to have significant impacts on cultural resources. No other significant impacts are expected.

Cultural Resources

This section includes an evaluation of anticipated archaeological and architectural impacts. The proposed project is in an area with high sensitivity for archaeological resources and low to moderate sensitivity for built-environment resources. Due to the potential to significantly impact cultural resources, an environmental impact report is being prepared under CEQA, and an environmental assessment is being prepared under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

There are 24 known archaeological resources located in or next to the project area. The highway passes through rural and urban sections of San Luis Obispo County, where many archaeological sites are still intact, making the area sensitive. However, portions of sites near the highway prism may have been partially impacted or destroyed. Prehistoric archaeological sites in or near the project area vary from isolated artifacts to complex shell-midden habitation sites eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Historic-period resources in the project vicinity include an adobe building associated with the original San Bernardo Rancho and old alignments of State Route 1.

Due to the nature of the work proposed, the project has low to moderate potential to affect built-environment resources. The work would occur primarily within the right-of-way, with some small temporary construction easements. A preliminary review of the curb ramp locations and temporary construction easements indicated that the work areas are next to at least five to 10 historic-period properties (constructed in 1973 or

earlier); however, the type of work proposed has a low potential to affect nearby built-environment resources. All bridges within the project area are Category 5 (not eligible). If any work is required that may cause direct or indirect effects on nearby historic-period resources, evaluations may be required.

The project has a high potential to affect cultural resources. While the project design would seek to avoid affecting cultural resources as feasible, studies are necessary to confirm site locations within and next to the right-of-way and/or to evaluate any cultural resources that may be affected by project activities.

For project completion, compliance with the following cultural resource laws is required: Section 106, Public Resources Code Section 5024, Assembly Bill 52, and Section 4(f). Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and Native American group(s) is expected. Six cultural surveys within the project site were completed between 1994 and 2014. Six sites are known to be located within the project site, and four sites may be located within the project site. Further evaluation of some or all of these sites would be required.

Since archaeological resources are located within or next to proposed work areas, an Archaeological Survey Report would need to be prepared. The Archaeological Survey Report would inventory the project area and report on record search findings and survey results.

An Extended Phase 1/ Phase 2 Excavation is expected. This is because shoulder backing is included in designs, and archaeological testing may be required to see if archaeological deposits are present in the project's Area of Potential Effects. If deposits are encountered, they must be evaluated for significance and eligibility for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

A Historic Property Survey Report would be prepared. A Historic Property Survey Report is a required cover document that summarizes the results of any technical studies, including the Historic Resources Evaluation Report, Archaeological Survey Report, and Phase 1/ Phase 2 Excavations. It is assumed that resources in the Area of Potential Effects would require evaluations for National Register of Historic Places eligibility, and a Finding of Effect would need to be prepared to assess the project’s effects on the resource(s). If any historic properties are present in the project's Area of Potential Effects that may be affected by project activities, a Finding of Effect would need to be prepared to assess the project’s effects on the resource(s). If mitigation turns out to be necessary, a Memorandum of Agreement would be completed, and a Phase 3 Excavation (mitigation) would be performed.

Biology

Numerous special-status animal species are known to occur within the project vicinity. These species are as follows: California red-legged frog, pallid bat, South-Central California Coast steelhead, tidewater goby, western pond turtle, and western snowy plover. The project is not expected to significantly impact these species, as planned work would not occur within areas likely to provide habitat. If tree trimming or removal,

work in or near jurisdictional water features, or work in or near coastal dune scrub habitat were to occur, further investigation of potential impacts to these species would be required. Jones' layia is a California Native Plant Society rank 1B.2 annual herb plant species that grows in chaparral, valley, and foothill grassland habitats. Focused surveys during the species' blooming period would be required to determine its presence within or near the project area.

No wildlife connectivity or fish passage impacts are expected. The project is located within the coastal zone and thus would be subject to compliance with applicable Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area policies. Due to the potential presence of numerous sensitive plant species and habitat, staging areas, equipment, and material storage must be located on paved or previously cleared areas, or where grading and vegetation clearing are not required. Before construction takes place, all work staging areas that are not located in existing pullouts or on previously disturbed ground surfaces must be selected and evaluated for any potential environmental impacts.

A Natural Environment Study (minimal impacts) is currently the expected biology study for this project. A Species Habitat Assessment would also be completed. As proposed, jurisdictional water features in the project area would be avoided. It is assumed no water-related permits would be necessary. However, if it is determined that the project would not be able to avoid potential jurisdictional features, the project would require 401, 404, and 1600 permit coordination with the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, respectively.

General plant and animal surveys would be required. General Plant surveys would require three visits during the blooming season (January-October). One to two initial site visits would be required to survey for animals in the spring.

Visual/Aesthetics

State Route 1 through the project limits is classified as an All-American Road in the National Scenic Byway system and is a Designated State Scenic Highway. The project is within the Coastal Zone and is considered a sensitive corridor when it comes to visual resource issues. The Pacific Ocean and Morro Rock are visible from various locations within the project limits. Visual scoping determined that there may be scenic resources affected by the project and that independent from the scenic resources, visual impacts may result. The potential visual impacts would be due to the visual effect of potential vegetation removal combined with new urbanizing elements, which would be analyzed and quantified. In addition, certain equipment staging and storage area locations under consideration may temporarily block ocean views during construction. This would be analyzed in further detail in the Visual Impact Assessment that would be prepared for the environmental impact report.

Hydrology and Floodplain

A Location Hydraulic Study would be required for the project because some floodplains are associated with the project area. The project is not expected to affect any of the floodplains.

Water Quality and Storm Water Runoff

There are four impaired water bodies (303(d) listed) within the proximity of this project: San Luisito Creek, San Bernardo Creek, Morro Creek, and Toro Creek. Considering the nature of the project, no long-term water quality impacts are currently expected. Water quality would primarily be affected by project construction. As such, further water quality analysis would be completed to address the short-term impacts and measures, including best management practices, to be implemented during the construction phase.

Geology, Soils, Seismic, and Topography

A Geologic Hazards Report would be prepared, and a District Preliminary Geotechnical Report may be prepared for the project. Due to the nature of the project, significant geologic, seismic, or soil-related concerns are not expected.

Paleontology

Earthwork for the proposed project is expected to be fairly shallow (about zero to 2 feet) and would therefore be limited to artificial fill and previously disturbed surficial sediments associated with previous construction along the highway. Because disturbed deposits have no paleontological potential, no adverse effects on paleontological resources would occur due to the project. The project is not expected to impact paleontological resources, so no avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures are expected to be required during construction.

A standard Paleontological Identification Report would be prepared to evaluate the potential paleontological impacts based on the project scope in support of the environmental impact report.

Hazardous Waste/Materials

A review of the Hazardous Waste and Substances Sites List (“Cortese List” pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5), including the State Water Resources Control Board’s GeoTracker database and the Department of Toxic Substances Control’s EnviroStor database, did not identify any known contaminant cleanup sites or land uses of concern near the project that would have the potential to affect the project.

Routine Hazardous Wastes Generated by Roadway Construction Projects

The following contaminants and waste streams common to roadway construction may be encountered or produced by the proposed project: treated wood waste, lead-containing traffic stripe and thermoplastic, and aerially deposited lead-contaminated soils from the historic use of leaded gasoline.

A Preliminary Site Investigation focusing on soil sampling for Aerially Deposited Lead would be completed to document site-specific soil lead concentrations. Caltrans has developed Standard Special Provisions for the management and disposal of Aerially Deposited Lead-contaminated soils. These Standard Special Provisions would be tailored for the project based on the results of the Aerially Deposited Lead study and implemented during project construction, along with a Lead Compliance Plan.

Routine hazardous waste issues may be encountered during construction but would be appropriately handled, treated, and disposed of (if required) by implementing Caltrans Standard Special Provisions. This project can proceed with very little risk of impacts to human and environmental health due to unanticipated hazardous waste or other contamination-related issues.

Air Quality

The proposed project is in the South-Central Coast Air Basin. The South-Central Coast Air Basin consists of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties. The San Luis Obispo Air Pollution Control District regulates air quality in the county. San Luis Obispo County is considered in attainment for all federal ambient air quality standards, except for the eastern portion of the county. It is non-attainment for federal ozone standards. The county is in non-attainment transitional for state ambient air quality standards for ozone and non-attainment for airborne particulate less than 10 microns in diameter (PM10).

Despite the county's non-attainment status for ozone (federal and state) and PM10 (state), no additional conformity requirements apply to this project. This project would not add capacity; consequently, no further emission calculations would be needed. The project would only generate air quality emissions and fugitive dust during the construction phase. As such, a detailed air quality report would not be needed, and an air quality memorandum would be prepared to support the environmental impact report.

Noise and Vibration

Noise and vibration would only be generated during project construction. Since no capacity would be added to the highway and the profile of the highway would be the same after construction, this would be considered a Type 3 project. It is assumed that local noise levels would be the same after completion of the project as they were before. Long-term noise abatement measures are not expected with this project. Construction Standard Special Provisions would be implemented to minimize disturbance due to construction noise.

Energy and Climate Change

This project would not add motor vehicle capacity and is not expected to increase operational greenhouse gas emissions. However, construction emissions are the inevitable result of construction processes such as the operation of construction equipment, worker travel, and material transport and processing. Construction emissions, including estimated greenhouse gas emissions, would be quantified in the air quality memorandum. A Climate Change Report would also be completed for the project. The Climate Change Report would analyze greenhouse gas emissions in greater detail and analyze sea level rise in the coastal zone.

The project would not increase energy use following construction. Energy use during construction would not be wasteful or inefficient.

Land Use

The project is not expected to affect land use because it would only rehabilitate the existing highway surface and highway features. Further study is not needed.

Growth

The project is not expected to induce growth because it would only rehabilitate the existing highway surface and highway features. Highway capacity would not be increased. Further study is not needed.

Farmlands/Timberlands

The project would only rehabilitate the existing highway surface and highway features and would not involve the conversion of farmland or timberland. Further study is not needed.

Community Impacts

The project is not expected to result in community impacts. The project would not increase highway capacity, reconfigure a highway, or construct a highway in a new location. No homes or people would be displaced as a result of the project. Further study is not needed.

Cumulative Impacts

A cumulative impact analysis would be required for all resources significantly impacted by the project. It is expected that a cumulative analysis may be needed for cultural resources. Cumulative studies may be determined necessary for additional resources.

Coastal Zone

This project is located in the coastal zone, under the jurisdiction of San Luis Obispo County, the city of Morro Bay, and the California Coastal Commission. Caltrans has begun and would continue coordination with all three entities throughout the project development process.

A consolidated permit may be pursued through the California Coastal Commission. The project may require a Coastal Development Permit or may be exempt. A determination on anticipated permit needs is pending decisions from San Luis Obispo County and the city of Morro Bay.

Potential Permits and Approvals

The following permit is anticipated:

- Coastal Development Permit or Exemption.

The following permits and approvals may be required if biological and cultural resources cannot be avoided:

- If it is determined that the project would not be able to avoid potential jurisdictional features, the project may require 401, 404, and/or 1600 permit coordination with the

Regional Water Quality Control Board, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and/or the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, respectively.

- If it is found that the project may affect plant or animal species protected under the California Endangered Species Act and the Federal Endangered Species Act, the project may require 2081 Incidental Take Permits, Section 7 Consultation, and/or Biological Opinions.
- If effects on cultural resources are unavoidable, further consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer and Native Americans and/or mitigation under Section 106 would be required.

Comments

Your input regarding the scope of the environmental impact report, environmental factors potentially affected, and project alternatives must be submitted to Caltrans no later than 5:00 p.m. on October 4, 2024.

Written comments can be emailed to:

morro.bay.pavement.project@dot.ca.gov

Or mailed to:
Attention: Claire Taggesell
California Department of Transportation, District 5
50 Higuera Street
San Luis Obispo, California 93401

Public Meeting

A virtual public scoping meeting is scheduled during the 30-day public scoping period, which began with the release of this notice of preparation. The virtual public scoping meeting is meant to provide an opportunity to submit comments regarding the environmental issues, a reasonable range of project alternatives, and avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures for inclusion in the environmental impact report. No final project decisions would be made during this meeting.

Meeting Details

When: Monday, September 16, 2024, starting at 5:30 p.m.

Where: Virtual Meeting

To attend the virtual meeting:

- Find the Morro Bay Pavement Project on the Caltrans District 5 Current Projects website (https://dot.ca.gov/caltrans-near-me/district-5/district-5-current-projects/05-1n880) and click on the meeting link.
- Or, enter this URL in your web browser: (https://cadot.webex.com/wbxmjs/joinservice/sites/cadot/meeting/download/e2b4cdae8b3340269c9b3c578886a287?siteurl=cadot&MTID=m55ce222278177ea029348119fc983c5e)

- Or, visit signin.webex.com and click on “Join” in the top right corner of your screen.
  - Enter meeting number: 2485 090 1907
  - Enter the meeting password: qmPQrWPw335