

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: _____ From: California Dept. of Transportation

_____ 855 M Street Suite 200
_____ Fresno, CA 93721

Subject: **Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report**
Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

Project Title: Olancha-Cartago Four-Lane Project

Project Location: State Route 395 in the County of Inyo

Project Description: The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to convert approximately 12.6 miles of the existing U.S. Highway 395 from a two-lane conventional highway into a four-lane expressway near the communities of Olancha and Cartago in Inyo County. Additionally, a route adoption is proposed for U.S. Highway 395 and State Route 190.

This is to inform you that the California Department of Transportation will be the lead agency and will prepare an environmental impact report for the project described below. Your participation as a responsible agency is requested in the preparation and review of this document.

Based on the findings in the Initial Study prepared in August of 2010, Caltrans has determined that a project EIR in accordance with Section 15161 of the State CEQA guidelines will be prepared due to potentially significant unavoidable impacts associated with the project.

We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that 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.

A complete project description, location, and probable environmental effects are contained in the attached material.

A copy of the Initial Study is not attached, but is available online at:
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

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 direct your response to Kirsten Helton, Senior Environmental Planner, Central Region Environmental Division Special Projects Branch at the address shown above. Please provide us with the name of a contact person in your agency.

Date 12/5/2014

Signature _____



Christine Cox-Kovacevich
Chief, Central Region Environmental

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Olancha-Cartago Four-Lane Project

The California Department of Transportation (the Department), the Lead Agency, is preparing environmental documentation to address impacts associated with converting the existing U.S. Highway 395 segment from a two-lane conventional highway into a four-lane expressway. In addition, this Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) would provide environmental compliance documentation for construction of the project from post mile 29.2 to post mile 41.8 in Inyo County. The document will be prepared as a joint document pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. The Department will be preparing an Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) for the project, which is known as the Olancha-Cartago Four-Lane Project. As required by CEQA, the Department is distributing this Notice of Preparation requesting comments from responsible and trustee agencies regarding the significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and reasonable mitigation measures that need to be discussed in the Draft EIR/EA to address each agency's concern.

Project Location

The project is located on U.S. Highway 395 near the communities of Olancha and Cartago in Inyo County. The project extends the existing four-lane highway segment just south of the Los Angeles Aqueduct Bridge No. 48-10 at post mile 29.2 north to the four-lane segment at the Ash Creek Bridge No. 48-11, post mile 41.8. The project is approximately 12.6 miles long. Figure 1 provides a Project Vicinity Map and Figure 2 is the Project Location Map.

Project Description

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposes to convert approximately 12.6 miles of the existing U.S. Highway 395 from a two-lane conventional highway into a four-lane expressway from post mile 29.2 to post mile 41.8 in Inyo County. The new facility will have four 12-foot lanes with a variable median width. There will be paved shoulders throughout the project, 5 feet wide on the inside and 10 feet wide on the outside. The project will construct new concrete bridges to cross the Los Angeles Aqueduct and install concrete box culverts and smaller pipe culverts throughout the project limits to promote drainage. A material site at the end of Fall Road and south of Olancha Creek may be used to provide soil and road materials for the project. Additionally, a route adoption is proposed for U.S. Highway 395 and State Route 190.

Project Alternatives

The Department will continue to screen the alternatives identified through the scoping process and only carry forward those alternatives that are considered viable for evaluation in the EIR/EA. The following alternatives are currently under consideration:

Build Alternatives

- Alternative 1 proposes constructing segments of conventional all-paved, conventional divided and controlled-access four-lane divided highway along the existing U.S. Highway 395 alignment.
- Alternative 2 proposes construction of a controlled-access four-lane divided expressway with the northbound and southbound lanes separated by at least a 100-foot-wide unpaved median throughout the project along the existing U.S. Highway 395 alignment.
- Alternative 2A is a variation of Alternative 2 and proposes that the controlled-access divided four-lane expressway be constructed to the west of the community of Cartago with the northbound and southbound lanes separated by at least a 100-foot-wide unpaved median throughout.

- Alternative 3 proposes construction of a controlled-access divided four-lane expressway to the west of the community of Olancha with the northbound and southbound lanes separated by at least a 100-foot-wide unpaved median throughout the project.
- Alternative 4 proposes construction of a controlled-access divided four-lane expressway to the west of the communities of Olancha and Cartago with northbound and southbound lanes separated by a variable-width median throughout the project to avoid utilities.
- The Recommended Preferred Alternative is a combination of Alternatives 3 and 4 that was not circulated as part of the Initial Study. The combined alternative will be a controlled-access four-lane divided expressway that will pass west of Olancha and the Los Angeles Aqueduct (Alternative 4). Once the alignment crosses Olancha Creek, the preferred alternative will cross the Los Angeles Aqueduct and continue north through Cartago along the existing highway to meet up with the four-lane section of U.S. Highway 395 to the north (Alternative 3). The northbound and southbound lanes will be separated by a 100-foot wide unpaved median.

No Build Alternative

The “No-build” alternative proposes to leave the facility as it currently exists.

Environmental Effects

The project would not create a significant encroachment upon the floodplain. The proposed project would not increase seismic hazards. There would be no effects on air quality, water quality, or sensitive noise receptors. The character and composition of traffic would not be affected. The project would not affect planned land use.

Biological Resources

Impacts to threatened or endangered species would be mitigated in accordance with a Biological Opinion rendered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and with a Section 2081 Incidental Take Permit issued by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Relocations

Residents and businesses displaced by the project would receive assistance through the Relocation Assistance Program in accordance with the Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act.

Visual/Aesthetic

Impacts would be mitigated by contour grading cut and fill slopes to a non-uniform profile to blend with the adjacent slopes. The selection of materials and methods for the revegetation of the project is critical for erosion control and restoring the visual quality. To preserve the native seed stock and natural chemical compounds, it is critical to collect and store topsoil/duff for placement on disturbed areas before replanting. A plan would be instituted to minimize the removal of existing vegetation wherever feasible. Fremont Cottonwood trees would be replaced in accordance with the California Department of Fish and Game 1602 permit.

Utilities

Utilities affected by the project would be relocated in coordination with utility companies.

Cultural Resources

Impacts to cultural resources would be mitigated under the provisions of the Caltrans, Federal Highway Administration, and State Historic Preservation Officer Programmatic Agreement for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Paleontological Resources

Impacts to paleontological resources would be minimized by implementing a well-designed paleontological resource mitigation plan.

Wetlands

Wetlands would be mitigated through the in-lieu fee process or by purchasing credits from an approved bank at a ratio to be determined during the permitting process with the United States Army Corps of Engineers.

Section 4(f)

A Section 4(f) evaluation is required for this project because prehistoric and historic archaeological sites and cultural landscape/property exist within the project limits.

Figure 1

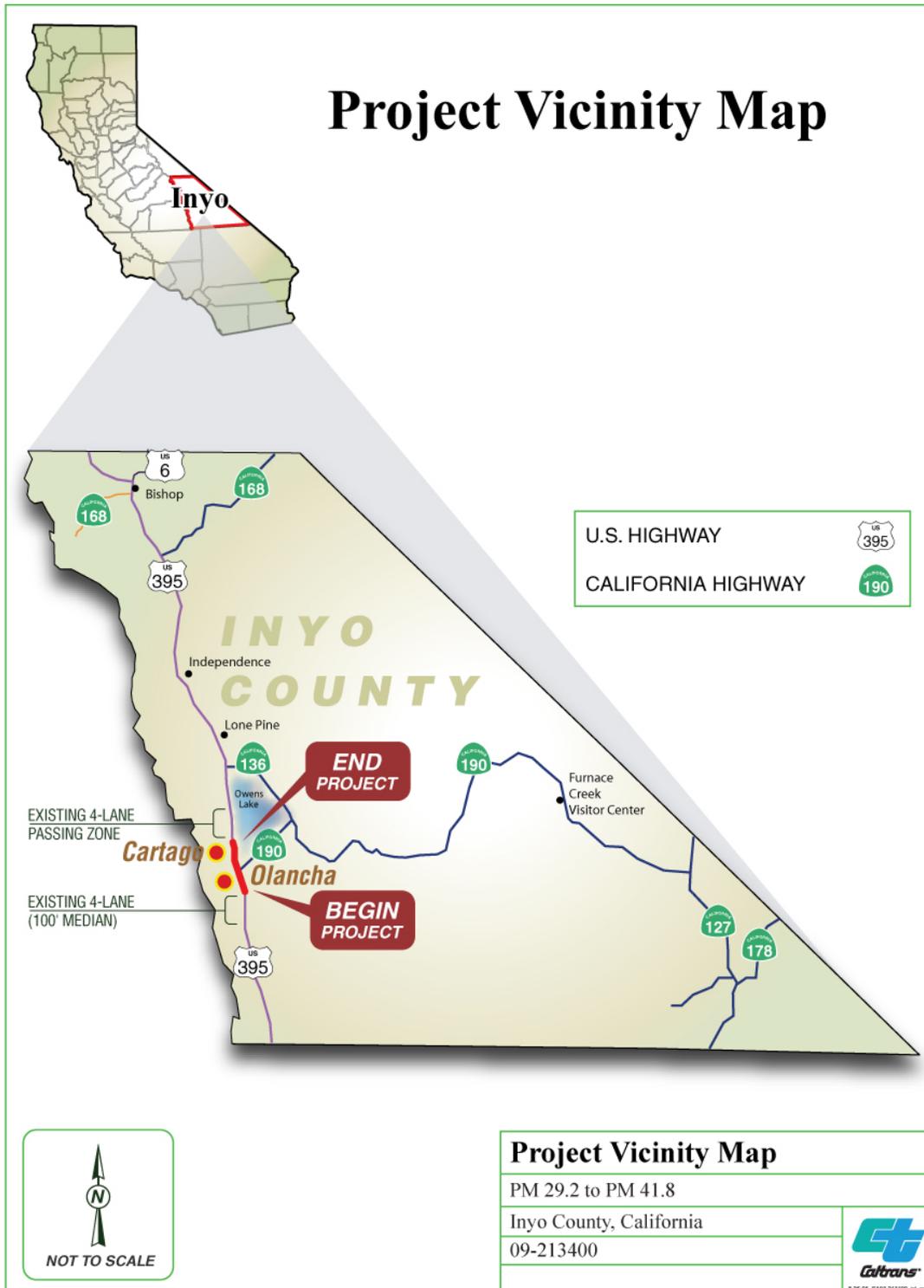


Figure 2

