

Chapter 1 General Issues Raised in Comments

INTRODUCTION

This Section addresses the general issues that were raised regarding the Jepson Parkway Project during the public comment period. Many commenters raised the same issues and/or concerns. These commenters, both proponents and opponents, submitted identical or nearly identical letters/emails or letters/emails containing many identical paragraphs and or lists of concerns. To avoid redundancy in Section 2, we have referred the reader to the general issues section in responses to specific questions and issues.

ESSAY RESPONSES

Essay Response 1: Transit Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Discussion

Some commenters asked for dedicated high occupancy vehicle lanes on the build alternatives or for re-consideration of mass transit as an alternative to roadway widening. One comment suggests that I-80 be widened and the local roadways left in their current two-lane configurations to discourage additional traffic.

Section 2.4, Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Discussion, of the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS), describes the Mass Transit Alternative, which was initially considered as a means of encouraging bus, vanpool, and carpool use during peak commute periods.

The NEPA/404 group's alternatives screening process considered a mass transit alternative. This alternative would construct an arterial roadway within the Jepson Parkway corridor. This would be accomplished by construction of new two-lane roadways, widening existing roadways to four or six lanes, or a combination of new construction and improvements to existing roadways. It would dedicate one lane in each direction to exclusive high occupancy vehicle (HOV) (bus, vanpool, and carpool) use during peak commute periods.

This alternative was eliminated because it did not meet the project purpose and need. The Mass Transit Alternative was withdrawn from further consideration in favor of the alternatives in the Jepson Parkway corridor that contain multimodal features. This alternative would meet most of the project purposes, but it would not address project needs to address existing and future traffic congestion, accommodate traffic associated with planned growth, or support future multimodal options, including pedestrian/nonmotorized transportation. The alternative was defined to include most of the features of the Jepson Parkway Concept Plan Alternative; notable differences included designation of the additional traffic lane for HOV use during morning and evening peak traffic periods and elimination of the pedestrian/bicycle path. However, comparison of the alternatives concluded that a mass transit-only alternative would provide few, if any, benefits beyond those provided by the multimodal Jepson Parkway Concept Plan Alternative, which includes features such as a continuous pedestrian/nonmotorized path and linkages to transit routes and the proposed rail transit station.

All of the alternatives initially developed for detailed consideration within the Draft EIR/EIS were screened in consultation with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries Service) and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) as part of the NEPA-404 Integration process that is being implemented for the Jepson Parkway Project. These NEPA-404 Integration parties agreed in writing with each of the alternatives either carried forward into detailed studies or withdrawn from further discussion.

Nonetheless, the Jepson Parkway Concept Plan incorporated future transit services in the corridor. Two future bus routes were contemplated, an express and a local route, between the Fairfield Transportation Center and the Downtown Vacaville Transfer Center. Implementation is contemplated after the Fairfield-Vacaville Multimodal Train Station and other future developments within the corridor are in place to generate transit ridership. Preliminary route components were identified to stimulate funding commitments from the local transit operators, but the Concept Plan recognized that actual route segments and stops would best be set once planned future developments were in place.

Widening I-80 without local roadway improvements would not have addressed the project purposes to serve local north-south trips with a safe, convenient local route that incorporated bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Essay Response 2: Identification of the Preferred Alternative

Four build alternatives were evaluated in the Draft EIR/EIS, in addition to the no-build alternative. After public circulation of the Draft EIS/EIR, all comments were considered, and the Department became aware of STA's identification of a preferred alternative on November 20, 2008. The Department, as assigned by FHWA, will document and explain its decision regarding the identified preferred alternative, project impacts, and mitigation measures in a Record of Decision in accordance with NEPA. Alternative A, the no-build alternative, was not identified as the preferred alternative because it would not address the project purpose and need. Based on studies performed for the Draft EIR/EIS and Final EIS, under no-build conditions, traffic congestion on the local roadway network and I-80 would worsen, greater numbers of local trips would need to be made on the Interstate and State highway network, unsafe conditions would be exacerbated, and multi-modal options would be lacking.

All four build alternatives were evaluated in terms of their potential impacts and benefits, as reported in the Draft EIR/EIS and Final EIS, and also in compliance with federal regulations including Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, Section 7 of the federal Endangered Species Act, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, and the NEPA-404 Integration Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

The NEPA-404 MOU establishes a process for integrating reviews and concurrence by Caltrans (as the federal lead agency for NEPA), EPA, NOAA Fisheries Service, USFWS, and the Corps, where a project requires preparation of an EIS and would also affect five acres or more of waters of the U.S., including wetlands and special aquatic sites such as vernal pools. This process requires the written concurrence of the MOU signatories at three critical checkpoints in the development of the EIS: the

project purpose and need and the alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS (prior to circulation of the Draft) and the identification of the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA)/preferred alternative (with its conceptual mitigation plan) prior to publication of the Final. The NEPA-404 MOU signatory agencies have concurred with the designation of Alternative B as the LEDPA. The signatories' concurrence are included in Appendix B of Volume I.

Consistent with the NEPA-404 process, the MOU signatories, along with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), were convened in developing the project purpose and need statement and the range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS. Please see Essay Response 1: Transit Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Discussion, for details on the preliminary consideration and withdrawal of alternatives. Copies of these agencies' concurrence letters regarding the project purpose and need statement and the range of alternatives to be evaluated in the EIS are included in Appendix B of the Final EIS.

All four of the proposed build alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIS/EIR would have the following features in common:

- All would meet the basic project purpose and need of providing a safe, local north-south roadway alternative to using I-80 for local neighborhood, work, school, and shopping trips.
- All would include multi-modal options, including a separated bicycle/pedestrian path to be constructed as part of the roadway improvements; and two new bus routes, one express and one local, to be implemented after completion of the parkway, the Fairfield multi-modal train station, and planned developments.

Only Alternative B would require portions of the parkway to be constructed on new alignment; the other three build alternatives could be provided by widening exclusively along existing roadways. Alternatives C, D, and E would include four-lane and six-lane segments of roadway in the corridor. Alternative B would include only four-lane segments of roadway in the corridor.

Alternatives B, C, and D would all widen Leisure Town Road to four lanes between Orange Drive and Vanden Road, and Vanden Road from Leisure Town Road to Peabody Road. Alternatives C and E would widen Peabody Road to six lanes from Cement Hill Road/Vanden Road and then widen Air Base Parkway to six lanes between Peabody Road and Walters Road. Alternative D would widen Peabody Road to six lanes from Cement Hill Road/Vanden Road to Huntington Drive and then follow a widened Huntington Drive to the intersection of Air Base Parkway and Walters Road. All four build alternatives would use Walters Road south of Air Base Parkway to SR 12. Walters Road is already a four-lane roadway, but some restriping and widening may be required for turn lanes at intersections. Alternative B also would require the extension of Walters Road as a four-lane roadway from its current terminus north of Huntington Drive to Cement Hill Road, and also would widen Cement Hill Road to four lanes between Peabody Road and the Walters Road extension. Alternative E would widen Peabody Road between Elmira Road and Cement Hill/Vanden Road. Peabody Road would be widened to six lanes between Elmira Road and the Vacaville City limit.

Section 2.1, Alternative Development Process, and Section 2.2, Project Alternatives, of the Draft EIR/EIS, provide details on the development of the alternatives evaluated in the Draft EIR/EIS and detailed descriptions of the four build alternatives (as well as the No Build Alternative).

The build alternatives have potential impacts in different environmental categories and different amounts of impact where they had impacts in the same environmental categories. Therefore, the identification of the preferred alternative considers each type of impact and follows a process of elimination that considered each of the related environmental laws. The following is a summary of the reasoning behind identifying Alternative B, as the Preferred Alternative:

Alternative D would displace industrial and commercial properties in the Tolenas Industrial Park along Huntington Drive in the Fairfield and would result in the loss of some 224 local jobs. The severe economic hardship to these employees and the Fairfield is not acceptable to the local community. There is no way to construct Alternative D to avoid these impacts; therefore, Alternative D was not considered practicable as the preferred alternative.

While Alternative E appears to have the least overall impacts to natural resources among the build alternatives, Alternative E would result in permanent use of 1.7 acres of land from Al Patch Park and 1.2 acres of land from Will C. Wood High School. Both of these properties are protected by Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act. Section 4(f) prohibits the Secretary of Transportation from approving a project that uses 4(f)-protected property if there is a feasible and prudent alternative to that use. Under Section 4(f) regulations, Alternative E cannot be identified as the preferred alternative unless all of the other build alternatives can be shown not to be prudent and feasible. Alternative E would also result in the acquisition of 26 single-family and 10 multi-family residential units along Peabody Road in the Vacaville.

A “flyover” ramp proposed to be constructed at the intersection of Peabody Road and Air Base Parkway with either Alternative C or Alternative E would provide high-elevation visual access to Travis Air Base facilities, including the Aero Club landing strip and the David Grant Hospital. David Grant Hospital serves sensitive Defense Department missions and is designed to provide emergency functions. This visual access—particularly on a roadway that offers quick access and retreat—poses a concern for homeland defense. Travis Air Force Base officials raised this concern in their comments on the Draft EIR/EIS; see Volume II of this Final EIS, Letter 2. Due to its potential homeland defense, residential impacts, and Section 4(f) impacts, Alternative E was not identified practicable as the preferred alternative.

Alternative C, because it would also require the flyover ramp at Peabody Road and Air Base Parkway, would have an impact on homeland defense. Also, as described in the Travis Air Force Base letter referenced above, Alternative C has the potential to affect an area of high habitat value, consisting of a combination of natural and created vernal pools and seasonal wetlands with good populations of Contra Costa goldfields, and a contiguous property that is being developed as a mitigation bank. This site includes mitigation area for vernal pools where efforts are currently underway to propagate and preserve goldfields and other listed and special status plant species. Travis officials have agreed to maintain the portion on the Air Base for preservation of vernal pools, wetlands and these plant species.

Using these lands for Alternative C would violate this agreement. Because of the homeland defense issue and the potential impacts to dedicated wetland and plant preservation areas, Alternative C was not considered practicable as the preferred alternative.

By this process of elimination, Alternative B is the only practicable alternative. Similar to other build alternatives, Alternative B would affect vernal pools and other seasonal wetlands as well as other waters of the U.S. along the proposed Walters Road extension and Cement Hill Road. These waters provide high quality habitat for wetland vegetation and wildlife. Through consultation with the USFWS and the NEPA-404 MOU signatories, avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures have been identified that would achieve the appropriate balancing of resource protection, project construction, and mitigation costs to address these impact issues (see Appendix H – Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Record).

Essay Response 3: Summary of Noise Impact Analysis and Determination of Sounds Walls

Several comment contributors indicated that traffic noise is an existing issue along Leisure Town Road and were concerned about additional noise impacts from the Jepson Parkway Project. Comments were also received concerning where and when sound barriers would be constructed. These issues are discussed below.

Abatement Considerations

NEPA guidelines require consideration of noise abatement measures when noise impacts from a project would exceed Noise Abatement Criteria. Under the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regulations (23 CFR 772), noise abatement must be considered when existing or predicted future noise levels approach or exceed Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC), which is 67 dBA for surrounding residential uses; 66 dBA is considered as approaching this criterion. Noise abatement in the form of sound walls is evaluated on the basis of feasibility and reasonableness criteria that take into account the noise reduction that would be achieved by a sound wall and the cost of the wall relative to the number of homes that would receive noise abatement. These criteria are established in the Caltrans Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol for New Highway Construction, Reconstruction, and Retrofit Barrier Projects (Protocol). Under the Protocol, noise abatement is considered to be feasible from an acoustical perspective if it would achieve 5 dB of noise reduction at receivers where noise impacts are predicted. The Protocol also defines a procedure for assessing the reasonableness of noise barriers from a cost perspective based on a cost allowance for each benefited residence multiplied by the number of benefited residences. A benefited residence is a residence that would receive a noise level reduction of 5 dB or more with the sound wall. This cost allowance estimate is compared to the engineer's cost estimate for feasible sound walls. If the total cost of the wall is less than the total cost allowance, then the wall would be considered reasonable and would likely be incorporated into the project.

Section 3.14.4, Noise – Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Abatement Measures, in Volume I, provides detailed information regarding proposed noise abatement associated with the preferred alternative. An addendum to the Noise Study Report was completed as part of the Final EIR for the Jepson Parkway

Project. A Noise Abatement Decision Report (NADR) accompanying this EIS supports the conclusion regarding abatement requirements under NEPA.

Essay Response 4: Traffic Implications of the Jepson Parkway Project

Several commenters expressed concern that the Jepson Parkway Project would increase traffic and congestion with unacceptable and unmitigated impacts on residents who live along Leisure Town Road or Peabody Road. Access to and from existing properties fronting on the widened roadway is mentioned as an issue, as is the concern that serving travel demand to Fairfield is not of benefit to residents of Vacaville. Several commenters asked for speed or vehicle type restrictions on the new parkway, or identified the need for traffic signals at specific intersections. Safety concerns for school children and bicyclists or other pedestrians traveling along a four- or six-lane highway were also mentioned.

As presented in Section 1.2, Project Purpose, of the Draft EIR/EIS, and described in Essay Response 6: Potential Growth Inducing Effects of the Jepson Parkway Project, the Jepson Parkway Project focuses on expanding local roadway facilities to serve local travel between neighborhoods, schools, and local employment. The project would also improve safety by allowing local trips to be made on local roadways, avoiding the need for local travel to use I-80 and thus somewhat reducing peak-hour congestion on I-80 between the Leisure Town Road and SR 12 interchanges. The local trip serving and safety improving purposes of the Jepson Parkway Project emphasize its benefits to residents of Vacaville, Fairfield and Suisun City, as well as unincorporated Solano County.

The potential traffic and congestion impacts of the project alternatives were studied and the results were reported in the Draft EIR/EIS. Section 3.6, Traffic and Transportation/Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities Impacts (including Permanent, Temporary, Direct, and Indirect), of the Draft EIR/EIS, presents the anticipated traffic impacts of the Jepson Parkway Project under all four build alternatives, compared to conditions over time under the no build alternative. Travel demand with and without the project was forecast for current conditions and 20 years into the future. Results from the Fairfield 2025 model were compared and updated as appropriate using the STA's 2030 model. Transportation system impact analysis that focused on intersection traffic operations as well as transit services, bicycles, and pedestrian travel was performed for future years 2010 and 2030. Local agency performance standards (level of service, or LOS criteria—see page 3.6-3 of the Draft EIR/EIS) from STA, the Cities of Suisun City, Fairfield, and Vacaville, and Solano County, were applied to the analysis results to identify those locations where delay exceeding standards would occur and additional roadway improvements would be needed to meet local performance standards. These results are shown in Section 3.6, Traffic and Transportation/Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities, and Table 3.6-1, Table 3.6-2, Table 3.6-3, Table 3.6-4, and Table 3.6-5 of the Draft EIR/EIS.

Where local level of service thresholds would be exceeded, signal timing and intersection lane configurations were adjusted or developed. Where unsignalized intersections would not meet local thresholds under any of the project build alternatives in a future analysis year, the Draft EIR/EIS recommended the addition of a traffic signal, as corroborated by full analysis of signal warrants, field-measured traffic data, and additional study of traffic conditions at that time. This is consistent with

standard traffic analysis practice for local roadway operations. Most of the unsignalized intersections would not meet the local performance standards by year 2010. All of the study intersections were assumed to be signalized by 2030.

Based on the results of these analyses and the intersection improvements and adjustments incorporated into the project, virtually any of the build alternatives would result in improved traffic operations at corridor intersections, compared with no build conditions. Improved intersection operations would facilitate transit operations; see Section 3.6, Traffic and Transportation/Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities, of the Draft EIR/EIS.

Alternative B, which has been identified as the Preferred Alternative, would not affect truck access and egress along Huntington Drive, which is the primary heavy-vehicle route for the adjacent industries in the Corridor.

Current transit routes use portions of the Jepson Corridor, serving travel primarily east-west in Vacaville generally north of Alamo Drive, and in Fairfield, along and south of Air Base Parkway. Transit serving north-south trips between Vacaville and Fairfield and into Suisun City travels primarily along I-80. The Jepson Parkway Project provides for two new north-south routes within the corridor, one local and one express, coordinated to serve the proposed Fairfield-Vacaville Multimodal Train Station. With Alternative B identified as the Preferred Alternative, these new transit services would be provided along portions of Leisure Town Road and Vanden Road. Identification of specific route segments and stops would be made following implementation of the Multimodal Train Station and other Corridor development these transit improvements are designed to serve.

Construction of any of the build alternatives would result in improved circulation and safety for non-motor traffic in the Corridor. As described in Section 2.2, Project Alternatives, of the Draft EIR/EIS, all four of the proposed build alternatives include a 10-foot-wide meandering bicycle/pedestrian path set back from the edge of the roadway at least five feet and separated by a planted strip where possible given right-of-way constraints. Alternative B, which has been identified as the Preferred Alternative, includes this bicycle/pedestrian facility with standard shoulders and sidewalks contiguous to residential developments along the opposite side of the proposed roadways. A less than five-foot-wide separation between the bicycle/pedestrian path and the roadway along the Walters Road extension to minimize right-of-way impacts would require an exception to Caltrans Design Manual criteria.

It is anticipated that the improved Jepson Parkway segment along Leisure Town Road will be designed and signed for speeds of 40-45 miles per hour. Leisure Town Road is currently restricted for heavy trucks from Orange Drive to Alamo Drive in accordance with Vacaville Ordinance 1638 (2000). This restricts truck access to local deliveries only. Continued vehicle restrictions on Leisure Town Road are up to the Vacaville.

Essay Response 5: Utility Impacts Associated with the Preferred Alternative

Several comment contributors identified utilities within the study area and provided information on these utilities and procedures to follow if a conflict is identified requiring relocation. Alternative B has been identified as the preferred alternative for the Jepson Parkway. Section 2.2, Project Alternatives, of the Draft EIR/EIS, presents a summary of utility work proposed under Alternative B. This response provides additional detail on the potential conflicts and relocations of North Bay Aqueduct, Solano Irrigation District, Kinder Morgan, and Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) facilities.

The North Bay Aqueduct runs along an old railroad right-of-way and crosses the project in and near the intersection of Cement Hill Road and the Walters Road Extension. There are two air valves in manholes in this area that will be in conflict with proposed road improvements. These air valves will be relocated along the North Bay Aqueduct away from this intersection. Close coordination with the California Water Board will take place during final design of this project to work out relocation details.

The Solano Irrigation District (SID) has numerous irrigation channels and laterals (pipes that service lines from the main irrigation line) within the project area. As described in the Community Impact Assessment completed for the Jepson Parkway Project, most of their facilities are located in Vanden Road and Leisure Town Road. In general any SID facility determined to be in conflict with the proposed roadway improvements will be relocated per SID requirements subject to approval by STA so that no interruption in service takes place. Existing SID underground facilities will be potholed to determine the exact location and depth, and potential conflicts with the proposed roadway. The Dally lateral along Vanden Road will need to be modified and slightly realigned on the northwest (upstream) end. The Byrnes Pipeline and Canal will need to be relocated to the east for the section that runs parallel to Leisure Town Road. It is likely additional facilities will need to be relocated or extended once the design progresses further.

Kinder Morgan has an active 20-inch high pressure gas pipeline that runs in an easement within the right-of-way for the majority of Vanden Road and is also underneath the existing pavement in Walters Road from Air Base Parkway to the south. In addition a dormant 14-inch high pressure gas line follows a similar alignment within railroad right of way along Vanden Road. Potholing to determine the exact location and depth of the Kinder Morgan facilities will be completed during final design. At this time it is known that a gas block valve on the north side of Vanden Road will need to be relocated outside of the proposed roadway footprint. The design of the roadway and associated drainage systems will be modified to eliminate conflicts with the gas pipelines and all crossings will follow Kinder Morgan regulations.

Existing PG&E overhead electric lines will be relocated underground when funding is available. When funding is not available to underground the overhead lines, the poles and lines will be relocated to the outside edge of the right-of-way.

Essay Response 6: Potential Growth Inducing Effects of the Jepson Parkway Project

Several comment contributors have requested additional analysis of the growth-inducing impacts of the Jepson Parkway Project or concluded without specific reference to any Draft EIR/EIS section, that the Jepson Parkway Project would be growth inducing with commensurately large cumulative impacts. Section 3.2, Growth, of the Draft EIR/EIS presents a qualitative analysis of the growth inducing effects of the Jepson Parkway Project. Based on the project's consistency with local land use plans, programs and policies, none of the project alternatives would induce unplanned growth. Local plans and policies, such as those described in Section 3.2, Growth, of the Final EIS, emphasize the need for the Jepson Parkway Project to support planned growth.

As presented in Section 1.2, Project Purpose, of the Draft EIR/EIS, the Jepson Parkway project has a three-fold purpose that focuses on expanding local roadway facilities to serve local travel between neighborhoods, schools, and local employment. The project also would improve safety by allowing local trips to be made on local roadways, avoiding the need for local travel to use I-80 and thus somewhat relieving peak-hour congestion on I-80 between the Leisure Town Road interchange and State Route (SR) 12. The local travel serving nature of the project reduces its potential to substantially reduce travel times for interregional home/work trips, which also reduces its potential to affect residential relocation decisions and induce unplanned growth.

The focus on expanding existing roadways rather than creating new roadways further limits the growth inducing potential of the Jepson Parkway Project. With the exception of the Walters Road extension, which would pass through a presently undeveloped area (that is already designated for development as office commercial, sports center, and limited industrial/service commercial and general industrial uses by the Fairfield [Peabody-Walters Master Plan, 1994]), the project would not introduce a new transportation facility nor provide new access, both of which actions would have greater potential to induce unplanned growth.

The Jepson Parkway Project includes multi-modal transportation options to maximize the carrying capacity of the expanded roadway facilities without future capacity increases. In addition to the adjacent bicycle/pedestrian facilities developed as a component of each build alternative, the Jepson Project concept plans for new transit routes to use the new facility. Both a local and an express bus route were included into the Jepson Parkway Concept Plan (STA, May 2000) to provide for higher occupancy transit use of the facility as planned developments are built and corridor travel demand increases.

Planned developments are already identified or in process for much of the developable land area along the west side of Leisure Town Road, along Vanden Road east of Peabody Road, along Peabody Road north of Cement Hill Road, and along Walters Road between East Tabor Avenue and Bella Vista Drive. Also, the Fairfield-Vacaville Multimodal Train Station and associated transit-oriented development are planned near the Peabody Road/Vanden Road intersection. These future land uses do not constitute unplanned growth induced by the Jepson Parkway Project but are included in the travel

demand models used to forecast traffic for the Jepson Parkway Project alternatives. They are the local developments the Jepson Parkway Project is designed to serve.

Because this document is based on countywide land use forecasts for 2030, and assumes transportation improvements programmed within the same time frame, effects evaluated with the project include the cumulative effects of development. Thus, additional analysis of cumulative effects related to specific development and transportation improvement projects within the county is not necessary for impacts such as land use, transportation, air quality, and noise.

As reported in Section 3.2, Growth, of the Draft EIR/EIS, local planning policies and growth mechanisms, including general plan land use designations and policies, zoning, urban limit lines, and a variety of inter-jurisdictional agreements and voter initiatives, are in place to prevent unplanned growth. These plans, policies and agreements impose specific growth limits and restrictions on major portions of the undeveloped lands within the project vicinity in Fairfield, Vacaville, Suisun City, and unincorporated Solano County.

Please also see response to comment 4-8.

