



Legislation Details (With Text)

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Title: Actions pertaining to a Route 99 Freeway Agreement (0.1 mile south of Chestnut Avenue to Church Avenue) (Council District 3):

1. RESOLUTION - Approving an addendum to EIR SCH NO. 2019039121 and adopting findings pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Sections 15091 and 15093 as required for responsible agencies by CEQA Guidelines Section 15096 for the South Fresno State Route 99 Corridor Project.
2. Approval of Route 99 Freeway Agreement with State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

Sponsors: Public Works Department

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. Resolution, 2. Draft Freeway Agreement, 3. Draft Freeway Agreement Exhibit A, 4. North Avenue Interchange Concept Plan, 5. CEQA EIR Addendum for Parkway Drive Realignment Project, 6. Current Freeway Agreement (dated March 31, 1964), 7. Previous Freeway Agreement (dated February 20, 1964), 8. Supplement Packet - 1-II ID 23-1794, 9. 1-II 23-1794 Letter of Support-Caltrans powerpoint, 10. 1-II 23-1794 Public Comment_Redacted

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
12/14/2023	1	City Council	APPROVED	Pass

REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: SCOTT L. MOZIER, PE, Director
Public Works Department

BY: ANDREW J. BENELLI, PE, Assistant Director
Public Works Department

SUBJECT

Actions pertaining to a Route 99 Freeway Agreement (0.1 mile south of Chestnut Avenue to Church Avenue) (Council District 3):

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Transportation (Caltrans)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Council approve the following actions pertaining to a Route 99 Freeway Agreement (0.1 mile south of Chestnut Avenue to Church Avenue) (Council District 3):

1. RESOLUTION - Approving an addendum to EIR SCH NO. 2019039121 and adopting findings pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Sections 15091 and 15093 as required for responsible agencies by CEQA Guidelines Section 15096 for the South Fresno State Route 99 Corridor Project.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Improvement of the freeway interchange at State Route 99 with North Avenue and Cedar Avenue was identified in the 2006 Measure “C” Expenditure Plan as a Tier 1 Regional Project for the urban area. Through previous cooperative agreements with the Fresno County Transportation Authority, Caltrans as the lead agency has utilized regional Measure “C” Tier 1 funding to advance the project through the environmental and preliminary engineering design phases of the project. The right-of-way and construction phases have no Measure “C” funds programmed, but rather are fully utilizing Regional Transportation Mitigation Fees paid by new development and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funds. The scope of the project is to replace the obsolete North Avenue Interchange with a modern interchange. The existing configuration includes a pair of half-interchanges at North and Cedar Avenues, with intersections controlled by stop signs that are essentially unchanged since the 1960’s when the area was much less populated and rural in nature. The project will close the Cedar Avenue southbound entrance ramp and northbound exit ramp, consolidating all movements into a standard, modern interchange at North Avenue with significant safety improvements. Parkway Drive will also be realigned to intersect Orange Avenue, consistent with the Circulation Element of the City of Fresno General Plan. Because the previous freeway agreement was between the State and the County of Fresno, and because the entrance and exit ramps are being reconfigured, State statutes require the execution of a revised Freeway Agreement with the City before necessary right-of-way can be acquired.

The agenda item is time-sensitive in order that right-of-way acquisition can commence, and so that the \$42.3 million in STIP funds programmed for construction in State fiscal year 2024/25 can be allocated by the California Transportation Commission within the deadlines. Development impact fees collected through the RTMF program will be utilized for the right-of-way phase along with a portion of the construction phase. Previous presentations to the Fresno Council of Governments Board by COG staff indicate that if the North Avenue/State Route 99 project cannot utilize the STIP funds, then the dollars will need to be reprogrammed on the State highway system for the American Avenue/State Route 99 interchange, in order that the STIP funds not be lost to the Fresno County region, resulting in an associated loss of funding for the Measure “C” Tier 1 Urban regional program. The issue of RTMF development impact fees having been paid to mitigate impacts to this interchange would also need to be addressed under that scenario. Should the freeway agreement not be approved, then the current situation will continue indefinitely with congestion and idling vehicles, lack of sidewalks and bicycle lanes, stopped traffic queuing back to the freeway mainline,

lack of traffic signals to control cross-traffic, and lack of street infrastructure conforming to the adopted General Plan in this area.

BACKGROUND

The South Fresno Interchange Project will replace two obsolete interchanges with two modern interchange designs to improve access, operations, and safety on the state highway, as well as the adjacent local road network. The North Avenue Interchange and the American Avenue Interchange will both be replaced. American Avenue is outside of the Fresno City limits and will not be addressed in the revised Freeway Agreement between Caltrans and the City of Fresno.

The project is intended to replace two obsolete overcrossings, realign and widen ramps, eliminate isolated ramps, install signalized intersections to replace stop signs, provide sidewalk and bicycle facilities to promote active transportation, and replace/rehabilitate existing pavement. Furthermore, the project has the potential to reduce lifecycle costs, improve safety, improve access to jobs, reduce congestion, improve goods movement and supply chains, improve pedestrian and bicycle access and safety, and facilitate California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) construction and operations.

The project will reduce driver confusion at the North Avenue interchange by reconstructing interchanges to standard design. Improvements will include installing traffic signal controls at the ramp intersections, which should reduce overall collisions as much as thirty percent, along with some reduction to collision severity. Left-turn phasing will also eliminate free movements, which reduces potential collisions with cyclists/pedestrians. The existing half-interchange ramps at Cedar Avenue will be eliminated and consolidated at North Avenue. This removes the conflict points between vehicles and cyclists/pedestrians in which free movements currently exist.

The revised agreement supersedes Freeway Agreements dated February 20, 1964, and March 31, 1964. The March 31, 1964, Freeway Agreement was executed with Fresno County because this area was outside of the Fresno City limits. However, the City annexed this area and assumed the terms of the County's Freeway Agreement. Those agreements are included as reference material. Caltrans will be acquiring additional right-of-way for the realignment of Parkway Drive, for the realignment of the southbound exit ramp, to install a southbound entrance ramp, and to install a northbound exit ramp. A plan of the proposed interchange layout is attached to this report.

Caltrans has conducted five public meetings to obtain feedback on the project.

- A Public Scoping and Information Meeting was held on March 20, 2019, to provide information about the proposed project alternatives and to gather input from the public.
- A public notice was posted in English and Spanish in local newspapers and on the Caltrans webpage. The Notice of Preparation that went to 83 parties included a copy of the public notice announcing the meeting. Prior to the meeting, Caltrans staff also hand-delivered copies to local businesses in the project area and residents of the Flamingo Mobile Home Park.
- The Project Development Team held a virtual public hearing on Thursday, November 4, 2021, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for the South Fresno State Route 99 Corridor project. The virtual public hearing was accessible through the project website.

- On December 14, 2021, Caltrans staff attended the South-Central Fresno Community Steering Committee meeting, hosted by the San Joaquin Valley Air District. Caltrans staff shared a presentation about the project and the draft environmental document and answered questions from committee members. Caltrans staff talked with the committee about potential greenhouse gas mitigation for the project and asked for feedback and recommendations.
- Friends of Calwa is a community group composed of residents from the communities of South-Central Fresno, Malaga, and Calwa. On April 26, 2022, and August 31, 2022, Caltrans staff attended a community meeting hosted by Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability and Friends of Calwa at the Friends of Calwa community center. Caltrans staff shared a presentation about the project and responded to questions and feedback from community members.

ENVIRONMENTAL FINDINGS

On January 30, 2023, the State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), as Lead Agency, certified an Environmental Impact Report for the South Fresno State Route 99 Corridor Project (Project), identified by SCH No. 2019039121 (South Fresno State Route 99 Corridor Project EIR) which included realignment of the north end of Parkway Drive to connect with Orange Avenue instead of at North Avenue as part of the overall project.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15096 allows a Responsible Agency to consider an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared by a Lead Agency for a project when the approval relates to a portion of the project assessed by the Lead Agency's EIR. In doing so, the Responsible Agency must consider the environmental effects of the project as shown in the Lead Agency's EIR and shall also complete an analysis regarding the necessity of a subsequent EIR pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15162. The City has determined that none of the conditions set forth in Section 15162 requiring a subsequent EIR have occurred and an addendum to the South Fresno State Route 99 Corridor Project EIR has been prepared pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15164.

In addition, the City has prepared the findings required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15091 and 15093 as required by Section 15096.

LOCAL PREFERENCE

Local Preference was not implemented as this item does not involve the bid or award of a construction or services contract.

FISCAL IMPACT

The City is not contributing funds to the South Fresno Interchange project. There will be no impact to the General Fund associated with the recommended action.

Attachment(s):
Resolution

Draft Freeway Agreement
Draft Freeway Agreement Exhibit A
North Avenue Interchange Concept Plan
CEQA EIR Addendum for Parkway Drive Realignment Project
Current Freeway Agreement (dated March 31, 1964)
Previous Freeway Agreement (dated February 20, 1964)