

participatory process for the further development of the project to ensure that needs and requirements are not misconstrued in the design and implementation phase of the project.

While Federal requirements do not require unanimous support for the selected alternative, it has been FHWA's desire to craft a proposal which would meet as many of the expressed needs of the various affected entities as possible. FHWA believes that the process and decision adopted for Route 710 reflect an extraordinarily comprehensive and equitable effort to engage and respond to as many interests as could reasonably be satisfied.

Cost

Minimization of costs is a principal consideration on any major transportation project. Nevertheless, FHWA regulations and policy recognize the legitimacy of incorporating and funding measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse impacts, provided that the associated costs represent a reasonable public expenditure.

The modifications to the Meridian Variation Alternative that were incorporated into the selected alternative have markedly increased the cost of the project. The 1997 cost estimates indicate that the selected alternative, with an estimated cost of approximately \$823 million is 40 percent more costly than the Meridian Variation Alternative. It is the FHWA's judgment that the increased costs are justified in that they result in much less severe and less extensive impacts to the established communities along the freeway route.

Summary

The above considerations were principal factors in arriving at the best overall public interest decision and the commitments adopted in this ROD. The FEIS expression of a preference for the Meridian Variation Alternative, and the subsequent refinement of that alternative to arrive at a selected alternative reflect a balancing of pertinent factors and values, in accordance with the requirements of a number of laws, regulations, and orders. Additional information on the project history, alternatives considered, environmental impacts and mitigation measures is summarized in subsequent sections of this ROD. The decision also relies on a more complete set of project documents, including the FEIS, the 1998 Environmental Reevaluation, the Final Revised Section 4(1) Evaluation, and other project reports. This ROD will permit Caltrans to proceed with the design of the project and directs the preparation of a Supplemental EIS before construction will be authorized.

PROJECT HISTORY

As a project, Route 710 has had an unusually long life-span. A project in this corridor has been part of the long range transportation plan for about 30 years, and remains as an integral feature of SCAG's current transportation plans and programs. It is important to understand that the conditions that formed the basis for this project's need nearly three decades ago have continued to exist and have actually further deteriorated. In identifying a selected alternative, FHWA and Caltrans have had extensive public and agency involvement and proposed expansive mitigation to reduce the impacts.

Almost from the very beginning this project has had a high level of controversy, beginning with a lawsuit filed against FHWA by the city of South Pasadena for failing to prepare an EIS.

Construction was enjoined in 1973. Before advancing to the next stage, right-of-way acquisition, this injunction will have to be lifted.

After the injunction was issued in 1973, FHWA and Caltrans started the EIS process. The project has been analyzed in one Draft EIS, three Supplemental Draft EIS's, one Final EIS, seven Section 4(f) Evaluations, and several Reevaluations.

- December 23, 1974, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was approved.
- July 29, 1976, the first Supplemental DEIS (SDEIS) was approved, as a response to the passage of the 1975 Arroyo Seco Park Preservation Act (AB 1716) which prevented freeway construction in the Arroyo Seco Park. This first SDEIS addressed four additional alternatives which did not pass through Arroyo Seco Park.
- June 1977, Caltrans submitted a proposed Final EIS (FEIS), which presented a partial completion alternative as the preferred alternative. The FHWA rejected the proposed FEIS due to route segmentation and lack of local agency support.
- March 22, 1983, the second SDEIS was approved. This SDEIS was mandated by Assembly Bill 1623 (enacted on March 16, 1982) that established a process leading to route selection for a freeway link.
- October 24, 1986, the third SDEIS was approved, which identified the new Meridian Variation Alternative as the locally preferred and the California Transportation Commission (CTC) adopted alternative. The Meridian Variation Alternative was developed to lessen the impacts to historic properties in the corridor.
- May 1988, a Supplemental Section 4(f) Evaluation was circulated. The document addressed the impacts on the Prospect Circle Historic District, a new site found to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.
- March 27, 1990, an Environmental Reevaluation was approved. The Reevaluation concluded that there was no significant changes or new information since the 1986 SDEIS and another supplemental EIS was not necessary.
- January 10, 1992, another Environmental Reevaluation was approved. This 1992 Reevaluation concluded there were no significant changes in the project and that a supplemental EIS was not necessary.
- March 2, 1992, FHWA approved the FEIS/Section 4(f) Evaluation for SR 710, Long Beach Freeway with certain provisions due to the controversy and concerns surrounding the project. These provisions required Caltrans to thoroughly investigate all reasonable techniques and measures to reduce the facility's "footprint" and to minimize the project's impact on the affected communities, both during construction and after completion. FHWA emphasized they will not execute the Record of Decision (ROD) until Caltrans satisfied these conditions.

Since the approval of the 1992 FEIS/Section 4(f) Evaluation, the original Meridian Variation Alternative has been further refined to minimize its impacts to the surrounding communities.

The SR 710 Meridian Variation Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) was established to recommend measures to reduce the projects "footprint" and lessen its impacts on the surrounding communities. This Advisory Committee was composed of two members each from the corridor cities of Alhambra, Los Angeles, South Pasadena, and Pasadena and one member each from SCAG, LACMTA, the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), the Los Angeles Conservancy, and the Sierra Club; and one representative each from Caltrans and the FHWA serving as ex-officio members. The membership of the Committee was intended to both capture the diversity of interest and craft an interdisciplinary set of recommendations for lessening the impacts of the Meridian Variation. There were also a number of subcommittees to tackle specific aspects of mitigation. After a series of 13 workshops, the Advisory Committee issued a final report in June 1993. Most of the mitigation and enhancement measures recommended in the Advisory Committee's final report have been incorporated into the selected alternative, as agreed to by Caltrans in

their report "Caltrans Final Mitigation Enhancement Recommendations for SR 710 Project" dated June 1993. These recommendations have dramatically reduced the impacts of the Meridian Variation Alternative.

The June 1993 Final Report from the SR 710 Meridian Variation Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee recommended several mitigation measures which were adopted by Caltrans and resulted in changes to the preferred alternative identified in the FEIS. The refined preferred alternative was then called the Meridian Variation Alternative Reduced design variation. Notification of the Meridian Variation Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee report availability was published in the Federal Register on July 9, 1993. The basic revision was the reduction of the design width of the facility's cross section from 176 feet to 142, trucks were banned from the freeway except for local deliveries and the elimination of a proposed interchange between SR 710 and SR 110. For a more detailed account of the mitigation for the Meridian Variation Alternative, see sections entitled "Additional Mitigation for the Selected Alternative".

On January 15, 1993, before the Meridian Variation Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee issued its Final Report, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) referred the SR 710 project to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) due to their concerns about the impact to historic properties and adequate evaluation of a Low-Build Alternative. The CEO did not accept the referral, but instead recommended that FHWA and ACHP work together on designing an acceptable methodology to update the historic inventory and to identify and evaluate one technically feasible Low-Build proposal. To complete the inventory of historic properties, FHWA used the Meridian Variation Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee to develop the methodology and a September 30, 1997 letter to FHWA, the ACHP stated, "...the Council is in agreement that the historic properties inventory is now complete and adequate for purposes of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act". In developing a technically feasible Low-Build, SCAG organized an October 18, 1995, meeting of government agencies and municipalities and interest groups to develop the specific parameters of the Low-Build. This group used a Low Build Plan prepared by the city of South Pasadena in a consultant prepared report dated September 17, 1993 and submitted from the ACHP on October 13, 1993 as the basis.

After the Meridian Variation Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee Final Report in June 1993, FHWA and Caltrans continued to seek ways to further reduce impacts of the project. In a letter dated November 20, 1995, the Keeper of the National Register determined

that the Short Line Villa Tract Historic District was eligible for the National Register. Various design modifications, depressed profiles and alignment shifts were considered and reviewed in attempt to avoid and minimize impacts through this District. It was found that a shift in alignment will fully avoid any taking of the District. The shift will be about 400 feet from the original alignment at the widest point of departure. The 3700 feet (0.7 miles) of shift varies from zero feet near Huntington Drive to 400 feet near the Short Line Villa Tract Historic District and back to zero feet near Summit Drive. It has been determined that 116 properties (including a 43-apartment complex) which would have been taken by the original alignment would be spared. This design change is a further modification to the Meridian Variation Alternative Reduced design variation, and is now referred to as the Meridian Variation Alternative Reduced with Shift design variation. A public outreach office was opened in El Sereno from December 27, 1995 to January 11, 1996 to provide information regarding the shift in project alignment and obtain comments from the affected communities of El Sereno and South Pasadena.

After the Meridian Variation Alternative Reduced with Shift design variation was developed, FHWA and Caltrans continued to work to reduce the project impacts by working with representatives of El Sereno to identify technically and financially feasible methods to depress more of the alignment in El Sereno. On October 3, 1997, a meeting of the impacted communities, key Federal agencies, and interested congressional representatives was held by the FHWA to discuss a potential approach for approving a ROD and advancing the project to final design. Based on comments received at that meeting and afterwards, the approach was refined and is incorporated in this ROD. In responding to the meeting, recommendations for conditional approval were submitted by Caltrans, and the cities of Alhambra, Los Angeles, Pasadena and San Gabriel. South Pasadena continued to oppose this action. Support from other individuals, agencies, and non-governmental organizations was mixed.

As a result of the October 3, 1997, meeting, FHWA staff worked to address all comments received from this meeting. This led to the development of the "Proposed Decision" paper. The "Proposed Decision" paper, in addition to other things, commits FHWA and Caltrans to further depress the alignment in El Sereno and South Pasadena, adds at least one additional cut-and-cover tunnel, implements a process for involving local communities in design and identifies other transportation changes that can improve existing traffic conditions on an interim basis until the facility can be built. Reflecting the latest change, the selected alternative is named the Depressed Meridian Variation Alternative Reduced with Shift design variation.

On November 14, 1997, Secretary Rodney E. Siser concurred with the "Proposed Decision" paper, thereby allowing FHWA to advance the Record of Decision.

In a November 19, 1997, letter to ACHP, FHWA reiterated that it was continuing work toward a ROD and FHWA also provided three enclosures that served FHWA in reaching the decision to proceed with a ROD. The three items were: 1) a proposed decision paper that included the conditions for the ROD (See Condition and Commitments of this ROD for a final version), 2) a four volume set of project related material on historic preservation, and 3) a revised summary table on the effects of the proposal to historic properties. The four volumes consisted of information which had already been provided to the ACHP through reinventory of historic properties and reassessment of project effects. This was an unprecedented effort which involved the preparation and submittal of over nine documents in response to comments by the SHPO and interested preservation groups and in response to identification of new

historic properties. Over twenty letters were sent to the SHPO and the ACHP during this process. In addition, FHWA requested that the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places make final determinations of eligibility for properties included in the six volume Third Supplemental Historic Architectural Survey Report and the Fourth Supplemental Historic Property Survey Report. A June 23, 1996 briefing of the ACHP had also preceded this letter. The revised summary table enclosure provided to the ACHP reflected FHWA deference to the ACHP for effect determinations under §106 for the properties in the proposed corridor. FHWA changed the effect determinations of 11 historic properties, under §106 in accordance with ACHP's views, and reviewed its determinations under §.4(f) in light of these changes.

On December 3, 1 997-OSTIFHWA briefed ACHP on the Secretary's decision and the draft ROD that included additional mitigation and enhancements.

On January 7, 1 998-OSTIFHWA attended the ACHP Executive Committee meeting at which an ACHP Staff Analysis of the Route 710 proposal was presented. ACHP made a decision to postpone a vote on the referral to CEO until March 12-13, 1998 meeting in Miami, Florida.

On March 3, 1998, FHWA Executive Director Tony Kane sent a letter to ACHP addressing the ACHP Staff Analysis on a point-by-point basis. This letter clarifies and strengthens previous commitments made as well as providing new measures. The main points were as follows:

1. As a part of the required Relocation Plan, a detailed preservation plan addressing project staging and historic structure relocation and replacement will be prepared with the objectives of maximum protection of these facilities and minimum storage duration.
2. In addition to Caltrans and SCAG endorsement of the Route 710 project, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority will be required to advance the project to construction.
3. FHWA and Caltrans will work with interest groups and agencies to determine their interest in serving on the DAG's.
4. If either the depressed alignment or any of the six committed cut and cover tunnels prove infeasible, the ROD will be declared null and void.
5. A "before and after" study on the effectiveness of mitigation on community cohesion and historic preservation will be made on the project.

At the March 13, 1998 meeting of the ACHP in Miami, FL, the DOT Secretary's Chief of Staff Michael Huerta addressed the Council and summarized the commitment made. In his address, Mr. Huerta stated that if the ROD were determined null and void (as provided for in item 4 above), the project would be treated as a new project.

At the March 13, 1998, ACHP meeting, the Council voted to recommend to the President that the project not be built and to address specific concerns to DOT Secretary Rodney Slater instead of referring the project to the CEQ. These letters were sent by Council Chair Cathryn Slater on March 20, 1998. In response to these letters, FHWA made the following additional commitments:

1. All practical measures for continued public information and involvement including broad representation on the DAG's, the provision of a storefront in the project area for continuing information and service, and commitment to a public hearing.
2. A commitment to design technical assistance to the DAG's and an independent consultant review of landscape plans, and structural and architectural proposals.
3. Relocation Plan to address maximum protection of stored, relocated, or replaced structures.

This project has had a long history with various supporters for the project formalizing their positions at different points in time. The affected local jurisdictions, with the exception of South Pasadena, while differing in their preferences for alternatives, have consistently agreed that completion of a freeway is what they wanted. On March 24, 1989, the SCAG East Los Angeles/West San Gabriel Valley Area Technical Study Policy Advisory Committee, (composed of local elected officials) voted overwhelmingly to move as quickly as possible to finalize all requirements and construct the selected alternative to complete the Long Beach Freeway (SR 710). The California State legislature, on two occasions, has given clear indication of its opinion that completion of the freeway is necessary; first, when it passed AB 1623 in March 1982, and again in 1994, when it passed additional legislation supporting the Meridian Variation Alternative. The CTC adopted the Meridian Variation Alternative on September 19, 1994.

A crucial element in this long project history is the sustained efforts of public involvement. Through a variety of forums during critical points in the process, FHWA and Caltrans have worked with the public to identify an alternative that satisfies the purpose and need. While achieving an alternative that meets the purpose and need, FHWA and Caltrans have painstakingly refined that proposal to minimize impacts, using the public involvement as a tool to determine levels of acceptability. FHWA and Caltrans have determined that the changes in project design discussed above since the approval of the FEIS will neither change the general project alignment nor will they compromise the project's purpose and need. In fact, the changes to the project design will result in a lessening of adverse environmental impacts which were evaluated in the FEIS.

ALTERNATIVES

More than 24 alternatives and design variations (including low build plans) were considered and discussed in past SR 710 environmental documents. Only the No-Build alternative and the three freeway alignments were carried forward and evaluated in the March 2, 1992 FEIS. The ACHP's referral to the CEQ in early 1993 required an analysis of a Multi-Mode/ Low-Build type alternative. The alternatives which were evaluated in the FEIS and discussion of the Multi-Mode/Low Build are described below

No-Build Alternative (FEIS page 1148)

The No-Build Alternative involves no improvements in the corridor where SR 710 remains unfinished and the ends of the freeway would remain at Valley Boulevard in Alhambra and Del Mar Boulevard in Pasadena. Under the No-Build Alternative, Caltrans would need to dispose of the excess land which it presently owns. There are approximately 515 dwelling units on this

