

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Highway Administration

RECORD OF DECISION

State Route 710 Freeway
Between Interstates 10 and 210
Los Angeles County, California
FHWA.CA-EIS-74-1 5-F

SUMMARY

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) decision to approve the selected alternative for the California State Route 710 Freeway. This approval constitutes FHWA's acceptance of the project location and concepts described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) dated March 2, 1992 as modified in the Environmental Reevaluation (April 1998), the Final Revised Section 4(f) Evaluation (April 1998), and this ROD.

Since the Federal-aid highway program is a Federally assisted State program, this decision must be viewed in the context of the State decision making process. As such, it is FHWA's role to ratify the State's decision once FHWA determines that the requirements of Federal law have been satisfied. This involves considerable coordination and negotiations, often resulting in changes in the proposal to ensure that both State and Federal requirements are met. The FHWA decision to approve the Route 710 project builds on the 1994 California Transportation Commission (CTC) decision to adopt the Meridian Variation alignment. While ratifying the CTC decision, FHWA has added conditions concerning both specific elements of the proposal and the process by which the project will be advanced. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has accepted these conditions.

The FHWA decision also builds on the decisions of the metropolitan transportation planning process for the Los Angeles area. Federal transportation law establishes the metropolitan transportation planning process as the forum for determining which Federally assisted highway and mass transportation improvements should be implemented. Decisions regarding transportation priorities are State and local governmental decisions, made through this cooperative process; they are not Federal decisions. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Federally recognized metropolitan planning organization for the Los Angeles area, has designated Route 710 project as a priority for implementation by including it on the long range transportation plan and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This FHWA decision focuses on approving a proposal that is consistent with these metropolitan planning decisions while also satisfying all Federal environmental and transportation mandates.

The California Route 710 Freeway project is not a typical highway project. It provides a vital link in the nation's most severely congested freeway system. It also causes impacts of a magnitude that is unusual in today's highway program. Both proponents and opponents of the project have pursued their respective interests very forcefully, with lawsuits on each side. In view of this highly contentious atmosphere, the process for selecting an alternative for implementation has not been typical. Rather than advancing immediately from an FEIS to a

ROD in a matter of weeks or months as is normal with most major highway projects, the FHWA and Caltrans have engaged in an extensive six-year effort to refine the proposal and to reduce and mitigate the associated impacts. This project development and decision making process has demanded flexibility and innovation to shape a proposal that FHWA finds acceptable. The resulting selected alternative has remarkably fewer and less severe impacts than those described in the FEIS. This reduction in impacts has come at the expense of increased costs and minor diminishment of transportation service as compared to the preferred alternative in the FEIS; however, the FHWA is convinced that on balance, the selected alternative represents a sound investment, one that gives adequate weight to both transportation needs and community and environmental quality.

This ROD is executed in conformance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations implementing NEPA and documents FHWA compliance with NEPA and all other applicable Federal statutes, regulations, and requirements. The sections that follow state the decision and provide information that has been germane in the decision making process. This information summarizes and complements information provided in numerous other documents in the project record.

DECISION

The decision is to select a modified version of the Meridian Variation Alternative as described in the FEIS. The selected alternative is named the Depressed Meridian Variation Alternative Reduced with Shift design variation. This name reflects the adoption of the general alignment of the Meridian Variation Alternative with modifications that include a reduced highway width, a shift to avoid the Short Line Villa Tract Historic District and include a commitment to further depress the highway in the El Sereno and South Pasadena area. Each modification was based on a process to reduce overall impacts of the project.

This selected alternative involves completing the State Route (SR) 710 freeway gap between Interstate 10, the San Bernardino Freeway (1-10), in the city of Alhambra and Interstate 210, the Foothill Freeway (1-210), in the city of Pasadena, a distance of 6.2 miles (4.5 miles unconstructed). The freeway will also pass through the cities of Los Angeles (El Sereno community) and South Pasadena. The freeway will have six mixed-flow lanes and two high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV) lanes. Local service interchanges will be provided at various locations (Hellman Avenue and Valley Boulevard in the city of Alhambra, Alhambra Avenue/Mission Road and Huntington Drive in the city of Los Angeles, and Del Mar Boulevard in the city of Pasadena).

The selected alternative will closely follow the alignment of the Meridian Variation Alternative identified as the preferred alternative in the FEIS. Starting on the southerly terminus at 1-10, it will follow the alignment of the existing Long Beach Freeway northerly to Valley Boulevard. From Valley Boulevard to Huntington Drive, the alignment will generally parallel and run just west of the Los Angeles city limits. North of Huntington Drive, the alignment will approximately follow Meridian Avenue to Bank Street. At this point, the alignment will shift westward and run between Orange Grove Boulevard and Prospect Street north to the Arroyo Seco Parkway. The alignment will continue to parallel the now eastward-curving alignment of Orange Grove Boulevard to the Pasadena city limits, where it will continue shifting eastward to join with Pasadena Avenue at Madeline Street. From here, the project will follow Pasadena Avenue.

north to Del Mar Boulevard, where it will connect to the existing Long Beach Freeway stub connecting to 1-21 0/SR 134.

The freeway is depressed for about 85% of the newly constructed 4.5 mile section and is fully depressed through Pasadena and South Pasadena except for the structure over State Route 110. The freeway is depressed in virtually all of the residential areas. Approximately 25% of the 4.5 mile remaining gap closure is in cut-and-cover tunnels.

This decision adopts a comprehensive set of modifications to the Meridian Variation Alternative as described in the FEIS. FHWA and Caltrans are adopting these modifications to reduce and mitigate the impacts that would otherwise occur these modifications do not offer additional transportation service and in some cases result in a minor reduction in service. The modifications include the following measures:

- Reducing the freeway footprint by approximately 20 percent from 176' to 142'.
- Eliminating the freeway to freeway interchange between Route 710 and Route 110.
- Providing a minimum of 6 cut-and-cover tunnels at locations throughout the corridor.
- Relocating National Register eligible properties in Districts to their original locations on top of or in proximity to cut-and-cover tunnels to the extent feasible, or, alternatively, relocating them in the area where possible.
- Shifting the alignment to avoid the Short Line Villa Tract Historic District.
- Depressing the freeway at additional locations in El Sereno and South Pasadena.
- Incorporating extensive urban design and landscaping measures about one block each side of the freeway.
- Allowing no truck traffic on SR 710 between 1-10 and 1-210 except for local delivery trucks.
- Providing relocation benefits to qualified renters (renters of Caltrans owned properties), who would not normally be eligible for relocation assistance.
- Providing substantive training and job opportunities to qualified residents of the affected communities during all phases of the project.
- Establishing community design advisory groups with each of the impacted communities.
- Soundproofing and integrating the air filter system of the affected school buildings, providing the funding for temporary security and part-time custodial service at each affected school, and implementing an educational safety program in each affected school.
- Ensuring SR 710 is a candidate for the latest staging, construction and contract administration techniques to minimize construction duration and reduce storage time for structures to be relocated.

The Depressed Meridian Variation Alternative Reduced with Shift design variation is estimated to cost \$823 million in 1997 dollars. Of this amount, \$143 million is attributable to the modifications as identified in this document. In addition to the freeway elements of the - selected alternative as described above, this decision includes implementing a coordinated set of interim highway improvements. These interim highway improvements are directed at providing transportation relief in the corridor during the short term, while the freeway is being designed and constructed. A proposed set of interim improvements is described in detail in the Conditions and Commitments section of this document. The selection of interim improvements is subject to refinement through discussions among FHWA, Caltrans, SCAG, and the corridor design advisory groups. The interim highway improvements are estimated to cost approximately \$8 million, depending on the final selection of improvements for implementation.

As described above, the selected alternative is environmentally enhanced from the preferred alternative (Meridian Variation Alternative) described in the FEIS. In preparing this ROD, the FHWA evaluated whether or not the selected alternative was sufficiently different from the FEIS preferred alternative to warrant the preparation of a supplemental EIS. In conducting the Reevaluation, FHWA was guided by the provision in the FHWA/Federal Transit Administration regulation on environmental impact procedures (23 CFR §771.130) which governs the preparation of supplemental EIS's. As characterized in the latest Environmental Reevaluation April 1998), virtually all of the modifications had as their purpose the lessening of adverse environmental impacts evaluated in the EIS. The Environmental Reevaluation further concludes that the modifications to the project do not result in new significant impacts that were not evaluated in the EIS. In accordance with the regulation, a supplemental EIS is not required under these conditions.

CONDITIONS AND COMMITMENTS

FHWA and Caltrans have agreed to a number of conditions and commitments associated with the development and implementation of the selected alternative. These measures were finalized only after the October 3, 1997 meeting and subsequent consultation with interested Members of Congress, SCAG, the corridor cities, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. On November 14, 1997 the Secretary of the Department of Transportation concurred with FHWA's "Proposed Decision" document which identified the selected alternative with preliminary conditions and commitments. The final conditions and commitments are as follows:

1. Caltrans will establish community design advisory groups (DAG) with each of the impacted communities, including El Sereno, to consider the specific community mitigation needs of their community. These mitigation measures will include, but are not limited to, additions and deletions to the interim improvement measures, traffic operations and pedestrian safety issues; school impact and mitigation measures; historic impact mitigation including measures to protect and secure relocated or replaced structures; neighborhood preservation; visual impact and urban landscape considerations including pocket parks and joint use; and community integrity and cohesion issues including structural considerations (such as pedestrian overpasses, underpasses, and cut-and-cover tunnels), relocation assistance and replacement housing, property management, construction impacts and community targeted job opportunities and training programs. The FHWA will be involved on the advisory groups and in the selection of members. Technical assistance, as needed, will be provided by Caltrans to the DAG's. Memberships on the DAG's will include local

officials, neighborhood representations, preservationists and other interests (eg., schools, safety advocates, environmental justice interests etc.) Furthermore, FHWA and Caltrans will work with interested groups and agencies to determine their interest in serving or being represented on the DAG's.

2. All mitigation features promised in the environmental documents and developed and agreed to since approval of the FEIS in 1992, and those developed by the design advisory groups and agreed to by FHWA and Caltrans, will be implemented. These commitments are documented in the FEIS, Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee report and Caltrans agreement, and Section 4(1) Evaluation. Additional measures may be added as a result of the design work on the project and recommendations of the DAG's. Working through the DAG's will allow the design teams to adequately address the major issues. Also, active involvement with all DAG members will make the SR 710 project an international showcase of historic preservation.

3. From a point between Alhambra Avenue and Templeton Street to the south end of the cut- and-cover tunnel under Bank Street, the mainline SR 710 will have a vertical alignment depressed below ground. The depressed alignment shall generally be within the right-of-way limits envisioned by the original vertical alignment. Should further design studies prove this modification infeasible from an engineering, cost or other perspective, this ROD will be null and void and FHWA will treat this as a new project.

4. Cut-and-cover sections or tunnels, without ventilation, will be provided through residential neighborhoods and in the area of the Sierra Vista Elementary School unless they are proven to be infeasible because of engineering impediments. Alignment impacts and cut- and-cover mitigation treatment will be coordinated with the DAG's. This provision applies to the entire newly depressed segment of the project. A minimum of 6 cut-and-cover tunnels are committed. Should they prove infeasible, this ROD will be null and void and FHWA will treat this as a new project.

5. Except for acquisition of hardship properties or protective purchases, the FHWA will not advance mainline SR 710 projects to either right-of-way acquisition or construction authorization until it concludes that

a) For the entire SR 710 project, alignment (horizontal and vertical) has been determined, mitigation measures have been defined and right-of-way limits have been set. This generally represents 75-90 per cent geometric design completion. The DAG's will be involved throughout this development and to the point of final design approvals. In making its determination that the project is sufficiently designed to be advanced, FHWA will ascertain that both horizontal and vertical alignments are set, construction limits and right-of-way limits are fixed and mitigation measures are sufficiently designed to support detailed cost estimates. The only physical efforts that can be undertaken will be minor activities such as core borings.

b) There is, given the extraordinary circumstances and cost related to this project and the passage of time expected to elapse between the signing of this ROD and the satisfaction of the other conditions enumerated herein, a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement prepared in accordance with NEPA focussing on the project which is the product of the design process established under this ROD.

and addressing any changed conditions, including changes in project purpose and need, and results of community involvement, including design activity group activities.

c) There is an acceptable **Financial Plan** to assure that the entire project will be financially supported and expeditiously completed in order to minimize construction impacts. The **Plan** will include a staging element that contains an orderly scheduling of final design, right-of-way, and construction activities with current cost estimates of each activity, and timely completion of the facility. The **Plan** will provide that promised mitigation is completed concurrently with or before other highway elements of the project.

d) The project being advanced is currently endorsed by SCAG as a part of its long-range plan and transportation improvement program, and by Caltrans as part of the State's plan and program. Endorsement of the project will also be obtained from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

e) There is an acceptable Phase 2 **Relocation Plan** addressing the number and type of project displacements, available replacement units in the immediate area, provision of special relocation assistance services, relocation sequencing and last resort housing, if needed. The **Plan** must be current for right-of-way authorization. The **Plan** will address neighborhood preservation including measures to protect and secure relocated or replaced historic structures and measures to minimize storage time of the replaced structures. Relocation assistance will be provided to dislocated owners, renters, and re-renters of State-owned property in the corridor.

6. Construction of any segment of the mainline SR 710 project will not be authorized by the FHWA until right-of-way has been cleared for that segment of the project in accordance with Federal regulations and all individuals and families have been relocated to decent, safe, and sanitary housing or adequate replacement housing has been made available to relocatees in the immediate area as required by regulation, and displaced businesses have been assisted in obtaining and becoming established in suitable replacement locations.

7. Property currently owned by Caltrans potentially needed for construction will be properly maintained until such time it is needed for construction or unless the condition of the property requires removal of the structure.

8. In order to provide immediate relief to the impacted communities, Caltrans will work with SCAG and the DAG's to establish a list of interim improvements and traffic management measures in their communities, such as those discussed below, to be advanced in parallel with the project geometric design phase. It is expected that implementation of these measures will be expedited so that they may serve current traffic needs as the project is being designed. Additional corridor improvements may be advanced by Caltrans or the local governmental agencies. The projects listed or other replacement projects are eligible for the National Highway System and Surface Transportation Program funds apportioned to California as well as any other funds for which the mainline SR 710 project is eligible. The FHWA will work with the corridor Cities, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA), SCAG, and Caltrans to facilitate the inclusion of the projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

INTERIM HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS MEASURES:

- Make traffic engineering improvements to Fair Oaks Avenue, Raymond Avenue, and Arroyo Parkway to improve traffic flow.
 - Calm residential streets where appropriate.
 - Make parking/access improvements, including rear access, vest pocket parking, directional signs, planted medians, and system management.
 - Improve Fremont Avenue south of Huntington Drive in the city of South Pasadena to match the existing street geometrics in the city of Alhambra by restriping to four lanes, providing parking management and voluntary acquisition.
 - Reconstruct intersection of Fair Oaks Avenue with Huntington Drive to provide for higher roadway capacity.
 - Construct Hellman ramps to Cal State University Los Angeles.
 - Construct new bridges at Westminster Avenue and Palm Avenue to enhance north- south traffic flow.
 - Construct major intersection improvements at Valley Boulevard with Fremont Avenue.
 - Provide additional traffic operational improvements to reduce congestion on impacted arterials in the corridor such as improved signalization, provision of turn lanes, etc.
 - Deploy motorist assistance patrols on the improved arterials during peak hours of operation.
 - Provide additional traffic mitigation measures to reduce traffic/pedestrian conflicts in school areas including such measures as upgraded signs and markings, additional transit, lighting, crossing patrols, etc.
9. All projects proposed under the provisions of item #8 will be thoroughly reviewed and discussed with the DAG's at key points of their development during design and construction. In the early design stage of each project, detailed traffic mitigation studies will be made by Caltrans and reviewed by the appropriate DAG'S.
10. All of those interim projects which are subject to a separate National Environmental Policy Act analysis, will be appropriately processed.
11. A "before and after" study on the effectiveness of the project's mitigation measures on community cohesion and historic preservation will be made in association with interested agencies.

BASIS FOR DECISION

This decision represents the collaborative effort of FHWA and Caltrans to identify and select an alternative which effectively balances the Los Angeles area's need for an effective transportation system with the corridor communities' need to minimize adverse impacts. It reflects a lengthy process to engage all affected parties and interests and a major investment in measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts. The decision is fully consistent with NEPA and all other applicable laws and requirements. In particular, this decision is made in accordance with 23 U.S.C. 109(h), which directs that final project decisions be made in the best overall public interest, taking into account: (1) the need for fast, safe, and efficient transportation, (2) public services, (3) a broad array of social, economic, and environmental effects, and (4) the costs of eliminating or minimizing adverse effects.

Achieving compliance with Federal mandates while also taking into account State and local laws, requirements, and desires has been especially challenging for this project. The following sections address specific considerations given substantial weight in this decision.

Transportation Needs

The fundamental purpose for pursuing this project has been to serve critical transportation needs in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The Congress provided the metropolitan transportation planning process (23 U.S.C. 134) as the mechanism for evaluating transportation needs and proposing transportation improvements in metropolitan areas. Consistency with this Federally required transportation planning process is a prerequisite for Federal funding of this transportation project

Completion of the Route 710 freeway has been an element of the Los Angeles transportation plan for about 30 years. SCAG demonstrated continued commitment to the completion of the freeway by including it in the Regional Mobility Element (RME) of the 1994 Regional Comprehensive Plan. The 1994 RME is the latest update of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) required by Federal and State laws. The project is presented as one component of a regional strategic plan and has been developed in coordination with the Regional Growth Management Plan and the Regional Air Quality Management Plan. The SCAG's 1996/97 to 2002/03 Federal Transportation Improvement Program included funding for right of way. These actions by SCAG reflect a current reaffirmation of the critical role of the Route 710 freeway in satisfying the future transportation needs of the Los Angeles area. Among the factors considered by SCAG in electing to support the completion of the Route 710 freeway are:

- The project is one of the last links in this regional freeway system and its location is relatively fixed, especially by the existing termini;
- The project will provide new north-south freeway service which is projected to be used by 193,000 or more vehicles daily by the year 2010. These vehicles will carry approximately 261,600 people, reduce traffic congestion on the regional freeway system, improve safety, reduce circuitous travel, and provide an important alternative travel route when major incidents close or restrict an adjacent freeway route;

- The project will remove almost 100,000 vehicles from city streets and attract an additional 100,000 or more from elsewhere in the regional highway network, (including about 50,000 vehicles a day from the Los Angeles downtown loop) and will provide substantial relief to congested city streets in the corridor. This will result in increased safety, mobility and accessibility of the area's residents to regional employment, commercial and industrial opportunities with the result of substantial user benefits;
- The project will reduce congestion on the regional freeway system by accommodating existing and projected traffic demand within the project area, and reduce out-of-direction travel. It will connect 1-10 and 1-210 with a high-capacity north-south link, establish links with Route 134, and provide a viable alternative route around and into the Los Angeles Central Business District;
- The project will complete a critical high volume HOV/busway link with the El Monte Busway on 1-10 and the HOV lanes on 1-210 and Route 134. This link will connect the corridor cities with a county wide transit and HOV network and substantially increase ridesharing in the area. Ridesharing incentives are part of the preferred strategy of SCAG;
- The project will cause the reduction of approximately 300 crashes per 100 million vehicle miles and an estimated three deaths per 100 million vehicle miles.
- The project will reduce traffic congestion, and improve traffic flow and decrease emissions of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide;
- The project will enhance the potential for urban revitalization within the project area.

In reaching its decision, FHWA placed great weight on the assessment of transportation needs by SCAG. As the metropolitan planning organization designated under Federal law, SCAG is the officially recognized forum for adopting the long range regional transportation plan and TIP, which are prerequisites for Federal transportation funding.

All three of the build alternatives considered in the FEIS were consistent with the metropolitan transportation planning process. They met the transportation needs to a comparable degree. The selected alternative also meets the transportation needs to a comparable degree; however, the elimination of the Route 710/Route 110 interchange and the truck ban do provide a more limited set of freeway mobility options. The selected alternative is consistent with the metropolitan transportation planning process.

The multi-mode low build proposal, developed and evaluated since the FEIS was issued, failed to meet a number of critical transportation needs. This evaluation is documented in the report entitled, **State Route 710: A Model Evaluation of the City of South Pasadena's Multi-Mode Low Build Proposal** (April 1996). The multi-mode low build proposal does not meet project purpose and need, is not consistent with the regional transportation planning process, and as such cannot currently receive FHWA NEPA approval.

Air Quality Impacts

The Los Angeles metropolitan area is located in one of the most severely deteriorated air quality regions in the United States. Under the provisions of the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C.

7521), Federally assisted transportation projects must conform with and support the State Implementation Plan for achieving national ambient air quality standards. The effects of alternatives with respect to air quality is therefore a critical decision and potentially disqualifying decision factor. Through its modeling process in support of the development of the 1994 RTP, SCAG has determined that the selected alternative would contribute to improvement of the region's air quality. By reducing congestion and improving traffic flow the selected alternative would decrease emissions of hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide as compared with the no build alternative. The alternatives considered in the FEIS would have provided comparable improvements in air quality as the selected alternative.

Historic Resource Impacts

The National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470) establishes a structured process for ensuring that Federal agencies give serious attention to the effects of their undertakings on historic properties. In addition, FHWA is subject to a provision, known as Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, (23 U.S.C. 138), which prohibits the use of land from historic sites unless there are no feasible and prudent alternatives and the project includes all possible planning to minimize harm. Therefore, in addition to giving substantial weight to impacts to historic resources, this decision must assure that specific conditions have been satisfied for the selected alternative.

Impacts to historic resources were a major consideration in designating the Meridian Variation Alternative as the preferred alternative in the FEIS. All three of the FEIS alternatives had substantial impacts to historic resources; however, the FEIS determined that the Meridian Variation Alternative had fewer impacts in terms of the number and overall importance of properties impacted.

The selected alternative has markedly fewer and less severe impacts on historic resources than the Meridian Variation Alternative. Direct takings of historic properties have been reduced by narrowing the width of the freeway and by the alignment shift in the vicinity of the Short Line Villa Tract Historic District. While not retaining full historic integrity, impacts to a number of historic buildings have been lessened by relocating or reestablishing them on cut-and-cover tunnel lids, rather than demolishing the buildings. Proximity impacts to historic properties have been reduced by the cut-and-cover tunnels to be implemented at the South Pasadena High School and Prospect Circle, Pasadena Avenue, and Markham Place historic districts. Additional efforts will be made to further reduce these effects during the detailed design phase including a cut-and-cover tunnel in the vicinity of the Short Line Villa Tract Historic District.

Community Impacts

Federal highway law (23 U.S.C. 109(h)) mandates guidelines for consideration of a number of effects to communities and people, such as those relating to air, noise, and water pollution, aesthetic values, community cohesion, availability of public facilities and services, adverse employment and property value effects, displacement of people and businesses, and disruption of desirable community and regional growth. Another section of highway law (23 U.S.C. 109(n)) prohibits approval of projects which sever or destroy existing major routes for non-motorized transportation unless alternative routes exist or are provided.

With a project of this magnitude, which has the potential to divide communities, affect community facilities, and relocate hundreds of households, the overall community impact of the various alternatives must receive considerable weight in the decision making process. The challenge is to evaluate many impacts of different types which are not amenable to simple quantitative comparisons.

All three of the alternatives considered in the FEIS involved major community impacts of various types. The Meridian Variation Alternative was preferred over the Westerly alignment because the Westerly alternative would relocate more households, would impact the tax base to a greater extent and would have a more pronounced barrier and community isolation effect, especially in areas with a high pedestrian orientation. The Meridian Variation Alternative had greater community impacts than the Meridian Alternative in some respects, such as number of relocations and effects on the tax base; however, the adverse impact of the Meridian Alternative on the historic districts of South of Mission, downtown South Pasadena business district, North of Mission and Buena Vista received great weight in establishing a preference for the Meridian Variation Alternative.

The selected alternative improves upon the Meridian Variation Alternative in a number of ways that relate to community impacts. The number of relocations has been reduced by almost a third. The impact on the tax base has been reduced by a comparable extent. The barrier and community isolation effect have been mitigated to a major degree by reducing the number of cross streets that will be closed and by providing cut-and-cover tunnels over the freeway for approximately 25 percent of the newly constructed sections (this includes the proposed cut- and-cover tunnel in El Sereno). Visual, aesthetic, and noise impacts will be reduced by depressing (and, as noted above, covering) additional sections of the freeway, reducing the number of trees to be removed, implementing a comprehensive set of urban design and landscaping measures, and instituting a ban on through truck traffic. Economic impacts will be mitigated through a reenter program and an apprenticeship program. Special individual needs will be addressed through an enhanced relocation counseling effort. Community involvement in detailing many of these mitigation measures will be ensured through participation in the design advisory groups.

Environmental Justice and Nondiscrimination Impacts

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. 2000d) and related laws provides that under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance, persons shall not be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, or disability. In addition, by executive order (Executive Order 12898), Federal agencies are directed to identify and address disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of their policies, programs, and activities on minority populations and low income population. Nondiscrimination and not disproportionately affecting any particular segment of the potentially affected communities have been important considerations throughout the development of this project. Environmental justice concerns were a major factor in the requirement to depress the freeway, provide cut-and-cover tunnels, and specify the kinds of interim improvements that FHWA required to minimize impacts to minority communities.

The search for the best alternative has historically taken into account such factors as the number and concentrations of members of minority and potential low income populations and

the age composition of the potentially affected communities. The background data show the following patterns: (1) the El Sereno community of Los Angeles is predominantly minority, while South Pasadena and Pasadena are predominantly white and the affected portion of Alhambra is predominantly minority, (2) income levels vary considerably in the corridor in the following ascending order El Sereno, Alhambra, South Pasadena, and Pasadena; and (3) the affected portion of Pasadena has a much higher than average share of elderly residents.

Given the demographic composition of the corridor, all of the alternatives considered would impact, through relocation or proximity impacts, a large number of minority households. Minority households affected as a percentage of total households affected would be comparable between alternatives considered in the FEIS. Nevertheless, because of its greater length and resultant number of total relocations and proximity impacts, the Westerly Alternative had the potential for impacting a higher number of minority households and total households. The Westerly Alternative also had greater barrier and community isolation effects on the El Sereno community by separating a greater number of households from the remaining community.

The selected alternative includes a number of mitigation measures intended to reduce impacts for all affected parties, regardless of demographics, as summarized above, under community impacts. Nevertheless, some of these measures should be of particular benefit to certain segments of the affected population. For example, the apprenticeship program and the renter program will be of particular assistance to low income members of the community. The enhanced relocation counseling effort will include bilingual services and will be of assistance to elderly or disabled and non-English speaking relocatees, who may have special needs.

Community Involvement

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) calls upon Federal agencies to cooperate with each other and with State and local governments and other concerned public and private organizations in working to achieve socially, environmentally, and economically desirable outcomes. The CEQ regulation on NEPA provides further direction to Federal agencies concerning interagency coordination and public involvement processes. The FHWA has explicitly incorporated interagency coordination and public involvement requirements into its NEPA process. The FHWA views the quality of a decision as being directly related to the opportunities which affected entities were afforded to participate in the decision making process.

By any measure, affected entities have had ample opportunities to participate in the Route 710 decision. As described in the Project History section, public involvement and interagency coordination have been important elements throughout the development of this project. The establishment of the SR 710 Meridian Variation Enhancement and Mitigation Advisory Committee is an especially noteworthy effort, as it drew heavily on both agency and organizational expertise and on citizen input. In addition, the October 3, 1997 meeting and subsequent comments from participants offered FHWA an opportunity to further refine the elements of the selected alternative and the commitments associated with its implementation. The Advisory Committee and the October 3 meeting were initiated by FHWA to secure additional community involvement. Many of the commitments are directed at establishing a

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