

1.2 Tier 1 EIS/EIR

Multiple corridor route location alternatives are evaluated in this EIS/EIR to determine the potential environmental effects of selecting right-of-way for a future transportation corridor in these possible locations. The selection of the preferred alternative in the HCLE Corridor will be based on the application of evaluation criteria provided in Appendix D of this EIS/EIR. These criteria have been developed in cooperation between transportation and resource agencies through the National Environmental Policy Act/federal Clean Water Act Section 404 (NEPA/404) integration process.

The decision making process will take into account public comments and coordination with government agencies. This Tier 1 EIS/EIR provides environmental documentation for the selection of the route location within the HCLE Corridor. After selection of the route location, RCTC, the County, and affected cities will be able to preserve right-of-way for the future transportation corridor in the study area. The Tier 2 environmental analysis will examine the environmental impacts of a range of alignment,¹ mode, and facility type² alternatives for the selected route. The Tier 2 engineering and environmental studies will analyze these alternatives at a greater level of detail and will identify specific mitigation measures. The Tier 2 level project may be subject to multiple NEPA and CEQA documents if the selected alternative is implemented in phases.

1.3 RCIP Planning Context

In 2020, Riverside County will be home to approximately 2.8 million people, who will occupy approximately 918,000 dwelling units (Riverside County Draft General Plan). This represents a doubling of the present population and housing stock of Riverside County. Riverside County encompasses 7,295 square miles, stretching across 200 miles from the eastern portion of the Los Angeles metropolitan area to the Colorado River. Riverside County is the fourth largest county in California and is bound by Orange County on the west, San Bernardino County to the north, the State of Arizona to the east, and San Diego and Imperial Counties to the south. Riverside County is also one of the most diverse counties in the State of California, and includes well-established urban, suburban, and rural communities; an extensive array of agricultural lands, lands devoted to mineral extraction, and recreational areas; rugged mountains, flat valley areas, and open desert; and expansive natural open space areas.

The challenge of balancing the housing, transportation, and economic needs of existing and future populations with limited natural resources and the sensitivity of the natural environment required Riverside County to develop the Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP), which consists of three coordinated plans to determine future planning, transportation, and conservation needs for Riverside County. The three components of the plan include the following:

¹ “Alignment” refers to the physical line followed by an alternative. The engineering of the preferred alignment will occur in the Tier 2 level planning and environmental review, and will be used to determine the right-of-way width.

² “Facility type” refers to the definition of the future facility as a freeway, major arterial, transitway, etc.