

2.0 Alternatives Definition

2.1 Introduction

The WT Corridor study is being conducted as a tiered environmental study pursuant to the tiering provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1502.20) and CEQA (CEQA Guidelines Section 15152). The Tier 1 action is a route location decision to select one alternative within the WT Corridor study area. This decision will allow local governments to preserve right-of-way for a future transportation facility. A subsequent Tier 2 project development phase will define an actual project to be constructed. No construction activities will occur as a result of the Tier 1 action. The Tier 2 evaluation process will consider specific proposed projects and alternatives related to transportation issues as well as issues contained within these documents. Final decisions will be made following the Tier 2 process.

As part of this Tier 1 action, it is the intent to secure concurrence from appropriate local, regional, state, and federal agencies on the alternative most likely to yield the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA). The identification of the LEDPA will be required to obtain a Clean Water Act Section 404 permit for the construction of the future transportation facility. The selected route location alternative within the WT Corridor will then be the subject of detailed construction level engineering and environmental studies in the Tier 2 environmental analysis (project development phase).

2.2 Alternative Development Process

The CETAP alternatives were developed through extensive involvement of local, state, regional, and federal agencies, stakeholder groups, and the public. Seven alternatives have been identified for detailed analysis in the WT Corridor, in addition to the No Build alternative. The process for developing these alternatives included the following:

C Identification of Issues and Solicitation of Ideas

A series of general RCIP workshops was held in July 1999 which focused on the identification of issues to be addressed in the RCIP process, including transportation issues.

A series of eight public workshops was held as part of the outreach associated with the RCIP for both intra-county and inter-county transportation corridors. The workshops were held at various locations in western Riverside County in November and December, 1999.

The results of these two sets of workshops were summarized and distributed to committee members and interested parties participating in the RCIP process.

C Development of General CETAP Alternatives

An initial set of alternatives for potential evaluation was identified by the CETAP Advisory Committee¹ in March and April, 2000. A general evaluation of some of the potential benefits and impacts of these alternatives was conducted in April and May, 2000, and are documented in Working Paper 6 (TransCore, 2000), as part of the CETAP program. A more refined set of alternatives for screening-level evaluation was recommended by the CETAP Advisory Committee in September, 2000.

C Screening of CETAP Alternatives

A screening-level evaluation of those alternatives was conducted and documented in Working Paper 7a (TransCore, 2000), “Evaluation of Initial Alternatives in the Banning/Beaumont to Temecula Corridor.” (Note: the name of the corridor was later changed to the “Winchester to Temecula Corridor” to reflect the specific focus and study area).

The evaluation was structured around a set of evaluation criteria that had been recommended by the CETAP Advisory Committee (Working Paper 7a.) The objective of the evaluation was to determine which alternatives should be further evaluated in the Tier 1 EIS/EIR.

C Public Participation Regarding Alternatives

Three public meetings were held in western Riverside County specifically to review and obtain input on alternatives in the Winchester to Temecula Corridor and the Hemet to Corona/Lake Elsinore Corridor. The meetings were held in October and November, 2000, in Lake Elsinore, Perris, and Temecula. The public was requested to provide input on which alternatives should be carried forward, which should be eliminated from further consideration, which should be modified, and whether additional alternatives should be studied. Summaries of comments received at these three public meetings were provided to the CETAP Advisory Committee and to participating federal agencies.

Several sets of meetings were held as part of the initial community outreach for the RCIP as a whole. More focused transportation workshops were also held later in the program. In the overall RCIP workshops, transportation was discussed as an important element within the broader context of the overall RCIP. The first set of RCIP workshops (in 12 different locations throughout the County) was held in June and July of 1999. This set of workshops sought to identify overall issues within the County from a planning, environmental, and transportation perspective. These were documented and a summary distributed to the members of each of the advisory committees working on the RCIP. Copies were also provided to the Federal and state resource agencies upon initiation of the NEPA/404 process. Concerns expressed were wide-ranging, including concerns over the magnitude of future growth, the need to plan for and preserve transportation corridors, providing for adequate mobility by transit, the need to foster job growth in Riverside County, and concern over congestion on specific transportation corridors, such as SR-91 to Orange County.

¹ As part of the RCIP process, the County and RCTC established advisory committees for each RCIP component. These advisory committees included a diverse group of stakeholders including local government, building industry, and conservation groups.

The second set of workshops, held in late fall, 1999, was based on input obtained from the first set of workshops and follow-up comments by the public. The purpose of the workshops was to report back on what was heard in the first set and to move into the development of planning strategies. The transportation portion of the workshops focused on identifying the key transportation corridors for accommodating future growth and on possible transportation solution ideas. A survey of ideas from the public was conducted using a written comment form distributed at the public meetings. The CETAP advisory committee later generated a list of alternatives to evaluate in each of four CETAP priority corridors based on this public input and on engineering and environmental screening analysis. The determination was made in June, 2000, to focus initially on the two priority intracounty corridors to carry into the environmental process. Preliminary alternatives were examined for these two corridors in Working Papers 7a and 7b, prepared in September, 2000. Three workshops were then held in October and November, 2000, to solicit public input on these specific alternatives. A brochure/newsletter had been prepared prior to these workshops, describing the alternatives and summarizing the results of Working Papers 7a and 7b. In early November, 2000, the CETAP Advisory Committee identified the alternatives recommended to be carried into the EIS/EIR process, based on the technical studies and on input received from the public. The RCTC and Board of Supervisors endorsed this recommendation, with minor modifications, shortly thereafter.

C Selection of Alternatives to Be Evaluated

The CETAP Advisory Committee met on November 7, 2000, to consider alternatives to carry forward into the EIS/EIR, based on the analyses documented in Working Paper 7a and on the input received from the public. As a result of these deliberations, specific alternatives were recommended to be either carried forward or eliminated from further consideration.

The recommendations of the CETAP Advisory Committee were approved by the Riverside County Transportation Commission on November 8, 2000, and by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors in December, 2000. While these alternatives reflected local agency and stakeholder input, it was recognized that these recommendations would need to be further considered by the participating federal agencies.

The approved recommendations on alternatives to be carried forward into the EIS/EIR along with the Purpose and Need Statement and Evaluation Criteria were submitted to the agencies that were signatories to the NEPA/404 Memorandum of Understanding (adopted in 1994, signatory agencies include Caltrans, FHWA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), along with the Purpose and Need Statement, Evaluation Criteria, and other supporting documentation. The submittal package was transmitted to the federal agencies the first week of January, 2001.

A series of meetings was held with NEPA/404 agencies, resulting in revisions to the alternatives recommended to carry forward into the EIS/EIR. The revisions were primarily in response to the desire on the part of the federal agencies to consider additional options for avoiding impacts to aquatic and biological resources. The federal agencies rendered preliminary agreement on the alternatives in August, 2001. A request for final concurrence on the alternatives was submitted to the federal resource agencies by FHWA in April, 2002. Written concurrence was received from the agencies in May, 2002.