

Frequently Asked Questions for CETAP

Q. What is CETAP?

A. CETAP stands for “Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process.” It is the part of the RCIP that is looking at where to locate possible major new multimodal transportation facilities to serve the current and future transportation needs of Western Riverside County. It is recognized that these facilities should try to minimize the impacts on communities and the environment as much as possible, hence the “C” and “E” in CETAP.

Q. Where will these facilities be located?

A. The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) is conducting studies of where to locate these facilities. RCTC is responsible for much of the planning and funding of major transportation projects in the county. Four primary linkages, or “corridors” are being studied: Winchester to Temecula, Hemet to the Corona/Lake Elsinore area, Moreno Valley to San Bernardino County, and Riverside County to Orange County (a possible new facility to help relieve Route 91 traffic). The first two corridors are entirely within Riverside County and are proceeding ahead of the other two corridors, which link with adjacent counties. Each of the corridors has multiple routes or “alternatives” that are being studied. The best locations for the facilities are being determined through a decision-making process that involves RCTC, local governments, Caltrans, state environmental agencies, and Federal agencies. Public input has been sought throughout the process to help guide agency decisions.

Q. What will these facilities look like?

A. The characteristics of the facilities will likely vary depending on how much traffic they are likely to serve and where they are located. In general, they are intended to carry significant amounts of vehicle traffic, plus transit vehicles (such as express buses). Ultimately, they would become freeway-type facilities, with interchanges at major streets. They may also serve to accommodate underground utilities. They will provide for undercrossings and/or overcrossings for wildlife in key areas.

Q. When might these facilities be built?

A. No specific time has been set for the construction of these facilities. Construction will be at least five years away, and could be much more for some portions of the facilities. Right now, RCTC and their partner agencies are working to identify the best locations for the facilities so that the right-of-way can be preserved for their eventual construction. This is a critical step to make sure that a complete facility can be built and that a portion won't be blocked because of a development project or an environmental issue. Most likely, the facilities will be built in phases. The earlier phases may be more like conventional highways with occasional traffic lights. Freeway-type interchanges

could be built later, when the traffic warrants them. But each step must be planned out in advance so that each facility is well-coordinated with the types of land use around it.

Q. What will be the impact on homes and businesses near the selected facility locations?

A. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) has been prepared for each of the two corridors that are internal to Riverside County. Each EIS/EIR has analyzed several possible alternative locations for the transportation facilities. The evaluation of each alternative location is being documented as to its potential impact on homes, businesses, water quality, wildlife, public facilities, and other areas of concern. The type and magnitude of these impacts will be taken into account in determining where the facilities will be located.

Q. Who makes the decision as to where the facilities will be located?

A. The decision will be made jointly by agencies participating in the process. This will include the Riverside County Transportation Commission (which has representatives from every city in the County), Caltrans, the Federal Highway Administration, and several other Federal agencies that must issue permits for the facilities to be built. The permits are not needed until closer to construction, but we need to make sure that the agencies who issue the permits do not have major problems with where the facilities will be located.

Q. When will the decision be made?

A. The Draft EIS/EIRs, with all the information on potential impacts of each alternative location, have been prepared and circulated for a 120-day public review period. The Draft EIS/EIRs were released for public review on July 19, 2002. The comment period on the Draft EIS/EIRs ran from July 19, 2002 through November 15, 2002. Additional public hearings to receive comments on the alternatives were held in December 2002/January 2003. On February 12, 2003, RCTC took action to select the Hybrid Alternative as the Preferred Alternative for the Winchester to Temecula Corridor. This identifies preservation of right-of-way to allow widening of I-15 and I-215 in the South County as well as upgrading Date Street in Temecula to become the four-lane French Valley Parkway connecting Winchester Road and I-15. The final action, a federal Record of Decision, is expected to occur in August 2003. The decision on the preferred location of a facility for the Hemet to Corona/Lake Elsinore corridor is expected in October/November 2003.

Q. What happens if my home or business is within or near the path of the selected location?

A. First, it is important to remember that none of these facilities will be constructed immediately, as discussed earlier. You won't have to make any decisions for a number of years. There is no need for you to move or sell your property at this point in time. You can start by looking at the proposed Circulation Element of the Riverside County General Plan. The circulation maps indicate the locations that RCTC and the County believe to have higher probability of being selected. The maps show the potential width of the areas being preserved for transportation facilities. The alternative locations identified on the maps show more width than is actually necessary for construction. If you are planning on developing property within the unincorporated area that is within or near one of the areas to be preserved, you will be advised as to the affect this may have on your project by the County Transportation Department upon receipt of your application.

Q. What are the next steps in CETAP?

A. We will be finalizing the environmental document for the Winchester to Temecula Corridor over the next few months and a Record of Decision is expected from the Federal Highway Administration in August 2003. For the Hemet to Corona/Lake Elsinore Corridor, we will be completing additional analysis and evaluation and releasing a supplemental environmental document in August 2003. RCTC selection of a preferred alternative is expected in October/November 2003. More detailed design and environmental studies will need to be conducted for each corridor before the facilities can actually be built. No timeline has yet been established for design and construction.

Q. How are the CETAP corridors being considered in new funding plans for transportation?

A. The elected representatives on the Riverside County Transportation Commission are responsible for determining funding priorities for transportation. Decisions have not been made on how much funding will be devoted to the CETAP facilities. Funding will likely come in phases, along with phased development of the facilities. The reauthorization of Measure "A" dedicates \$370 million to corridor development.

Q. Why do some of the CETAP alternatives pass through or next to residential and commercial development?

A. Even though much of Western Riverside County is still rural, development is occurring rapidly. It is difficult to find locations for major transportation facilities that do not pass through or near areas that have homes or businesses. There are also other constraints, such as the terrain, park areas, etc. that must be considered. This is the very reason that the land use, transportation, and environmental decisions are being made together, so that we can choose routes that make the most sense. We are trying to minimize impacts, but it is not possible to entirely avoid them. There are no "perfect" locations for these facilities. But if we don't make these decisions now, it will be even more difficult later.

Q. What are the potential impacts of these new corridors on the environment?

A. The environmental impacts are being documented as part of the EIS/EIRs being prepared for each corridor. The decisions on the best locations of the facilities will take these impacts into account in order to avoid impacts to the greatest extent possible. In addition, where environmental impacts potentially occur, facility design features will be explored to help minimize the impacts. The exact nature of the design features will be determined when more detailed design and environmental studies are done, following the selection of the best overall locations for the facilities.

Q. How were the four priority linkages or "corridors" selected? What other options were considered?

A. The four priority corridors were selected from among 13 originally considered in Western Riverside County. An advisory committee comprised of 30 appointed members with broad representation of community, environmental, and business interests made a recommendation to RCTC, and RCTC made the decision to pursue the four. The other corridors are not being neglected whatsoever. In many cases other plans are in the works for those corridors, or they have already recently been improved. The selected corridors were identified as locations where major new or upgraded facilities need to be contemplated to support the growing economy of Riverside County.

Q. Why isn't Riverside County concentrating on transit, instead of continuing to build new freeways?

A. The RCIP includes a major transit initiative. It is not focusing only on highways. However, transit alone will not adequately address the transportation needs. A balanced approach is required that includes sufficient highway capacity to accommodate the needs of county residents and of industries and major employers, who need good access to suppliers and customers throughout Southern California. Transportation access is a significant factor in bringing jobs to Riverside County. The proposed General Plan for Riverside County is making an effort to identify areas for "transit adaptive" development and to plan for express transit services that link these areas.

Q. What input have local communities had in CETAP?

A. There have been literally hundreds of public forums regarding the CETAP corridors throughout the western part of the County over the course of the past three years, each soliciting public feedback on the process. In addition, each city in Riverside County is represented on the Riverside County Transportation Commission, the primary decision-making body for CETAP. Thus, each city has a direct input to the decisions being made. The Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG) is also a voice for the local communities, and regular briefings have been held with the WRCOG Executive Committee and staff committees. Most cities have requested additional information or presentations, and the RCIP team has made multiple presentations to each City Council on various aspects of the RCIP.

Q. How are the cities and County working to solve our traffic congestion problems?

A. Providing transportation facilities and services is recognized as an important priority by all our local governments. This involves a multi-pronged effort. Many roads are built as part of development projects. The County and cities are working together to make sure that new development pays its fair share of the added traffic. The Measure A half cent sales tax has funded improvements on numerous state highways and local roads, and an initiative is underway to extend the Measure A sales tax program. Metrolink, which is largely funded by Measure A, has been a great asset to Riverside County, and plans exist for expansion of those services in both the short term and long term. Other transit services are being provided through the transit agencies operating in the County, primarily the Riverside Transit Agency in Western County and SunLine in the Coachella Valley.

Q. How does CETAP affect the Coachella Valley?

A. The Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) has separate transportation initiatives underway in the Coachella Valley. The Circulation Element of the County's General Plan addresses transportation needs in the unincorporated area of the Coachella Valley. Even though the main focus of CETAP is in Western Riverside County, the new transportation facilities will improve access between the Coachella Valley and cities in Western County, and will also make it easier for visitors from San Diego, Orange, and Los Angeles counties to reach the many tourism and recreational opportunities of the Coachella Valley.

Q. Wouldn't it better to just stop the growth as a way to deal with the transportation problems?

A. The County's perspective is that it is neither wise nor practical to try to stop the growth. Rather, we must plan for the growth to occur in places where it makes the most sense. This was one of the reasons for initiating the RCIP in the first place, to make plans for growth to occur in an orderly, logical way. Stopping growth may sometimes sound like an attractive idea, but there are several negatives to that strategy. It will make housing less affordable, it will inhibit the economy and limit job opportunities, and it could make it more difficult to achieve some of our other objectives, such as providing public facilities and meeting some of our environmental objectives such as acquisition of high priority habitat areas. History has demonstrated that growth occurs whether sufficient transportation facilities exist or not. The County believes that planning for and accommodating the growth with a balanced transportation system is the right approach.

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