

San Joaquin Valley Project-Level Conformity Working Group

South Fresno State Route 99 Corridor Project, City of Fresno, Fresno County

Caltrans Project EA 06-0H240

March 12, 2025, 1:00 pm – 1:30 pm

The meeting was held via Zoom teleconference.

Attendees

- SJV AQ Coordinator (Trinity Consultants): Alex Marcucci, Suriya Vallamsundar
- FHWA: Antonio Johnson, Gilberto Contreras, Kemi Ademuyewo, Christopher Dresser
- Caltrans HQ: Erika Vaca, Rodney Tavitass, Nicole Lewis
- Caltrans District 6: Jennifer Lugo, Phillip Vallejo, Michael Dennison, John Thomas, David Deel
- EPA: Lindsay Wickersham, Karina O'Connor
- CARB: Kevin Olp, Brian Moore, Nesamani Kalandiyur
- SJVAPCD: Emily Kneeland, Jessica Olsen
- FCOG: Kai Han, Matthew Shimizu, Ofelia Abundez
- StanCOG: Nick St Cook
- SJCOG: Ryan Niblock
- Kern COG: Vincent Liu
- MCAG: Elizabeth Forte
- KernCOG: Vincent Liu
- KCAG: Kayley Clay

Meeting Summary

- Introductions
Commencing the meeting, SJV AQ Coordinator provided opening remarks and conducted a roll call to establish the attendance of all participants.
- Review of the South Fresno 99 project
Caltrans: Caltrans delivered a presentation providing background on the South Fresno 99 project. The South Fresno project (Caltrans EA 06-0H240) would reconstruct two existing half interchanges where SR99 intersects with American Ave and North Ave by expanding them to full interchanges and bringing them into compliance with current Caltrans design standards. The project would provide direct access to SR99 without the need to take local, non-continuous routes. Traffic modeling showed no new truck traffic as a result of the project. The new interchanges would improve traffic flow and LOS, therefore improve air quality. Any increases in traffic at the interchanges are due to redistribution of traffic, while adjacent interchanges at Central Ave and Chestnut Ave would see a decrease in traffic.

On September 2, 2022, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) submitted to FHWA a request for a project-level air quality conformity determination. FHWA issued a conformity determination on October 3, 2022. The 2022 conformity analysis submitted by Caltrans indicates that the project-level transportation conformity requirements of 40 CFR Part 93 have been met. The Project is included in the Fresno Council of Governments current Regional Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program, as amended. The Final Environmental Document was signed on January 24, 2023. Caltrans is currently in the PS&E phase of the project.

FHWA: FHWA clarified that the purpose of the meeting is not to review and discuss previous comments, but for FHWA to give a high-level update on the remand process and to obtain IAC partner comments on the conformity determination issued by FHWA on October 3, 2022 and the analysis submitted by Caltrans on September 2, 2022. FHWA then reminded the group that the project is currently undergoing litigation at the federal level and clarified that no additional details can be provided on that process or potential legal action. Therefore, FHWA's update only focused on the motion for voluntary remand issued December 4, 2023 (specifically Section 2, #7). FHWA expects the remand proceedings to be completed before October of 2025, although the exact timeline is not yet known. The remand process includes the following steps – a) FHWA, in coordination with Caltrans, to post October 2022 analysis on South Fresno Project website; b) FHWA to re-distribute August 2022 analysis for IAC partner review; and c) upon receiving IAC input and comments from the public, FHWA to reassess their conformity determination and work to develop any follow-up analyses that FHWA determines are necessary, at their discretion. Following the motion for voluntary remand, FHWA requested that Caltrans posts the 2022 conformity analysis and distributes for IAC review. To date, both requests have been completed. To address Step "c", a public notice was published in May 2024, which started a formal public comment period from May 31 to July 15, 2024. On June 20, 2024, an in-person meeting was held in Fresno. Following today's meeting, FHWA will reassess the conformity determination issued in 2022 and work to develop any follow-up analyses FHWA determines are necessary, at their discretion. FHWA closed by stating that all comments received from the public, stakeholders, and IAC partners will be seriously considered when determining if a reassess of the conformity determination is necessary.

○ IAC Comments:

- *Caltrans*: No comments or questions.
- *EPA*: EPA reminded the group about the comment letter sent to FHWA on January 17, 2025. The agency reviewed public comments and would like to see FHWA responses to those comments, particularly with respect to the project scope and traffic data before asking the agency to re-concur on the project if another opportunity is provided. One of EPA concerns included the scope of the project in the context of the industrial campus in the Fresno area. As was stated in the EPA comment letter, the agency pointed out that the detailed traffic and LOS data for North and Cedar interchanges did not appear to include all the interchange components for all the years and scenarios.
- *SJVAPCD*: No comments.
- *CARB*: CARB began their comments by noting that the South Fresno region experiences high levels of air pollution and that the proposed project could potentially lead to increases in truck traffic and worsen air quality in the region. As indicated in the EIR, the project interchanges would become central access points to the industries and businesses along SR99 and may produce additional truck traffic and dust pollution. Therefore, CARB recommended exploring additional NOx, PM and dust mitigation measures and discussing these measures with IAC partners. Further, CARB requested that Caltrans and FHWA solicit additional public comments from the surrounding communities; CARB would like to review any new public comments and see FHWA responses to those comments. CARB also noted that the State has made approximately \$100 million investments in various active transportation programs in the area and believes that if the project impacts are not mitigated, the South Fresno 99 project may undermine many of these programs funded by the State. Since the South Fresno area is an AB 617 community, CARB again requested that FHWA and Caltrans involve Fresno residents in decision-making to ensure that the project doesn't harm those communities.

- Discussion:

Caltrans reminded the group that this meeting is about conformity determination and not NEPA or the associated EIS. FHWA closed with reiterating that this meeting is part of the remand process. FHWA will seriously consider all public and IAC comments when determining if a reassess of the conformity determination is necessary for this project and provide an update by the end of summer.

- Closing Remarks and Adjournment

The SJV AQ Coordination informed the group that the meeting minutes will be posted to the FCOG website and adjourned the meeting.