PREFACE

What is this Document?

The Authority proposes to construct, operate, and maintain an electric powered HSR system in California. When completed, the nearly 800-mile California HSR System would provide a new passenger rail service to California's major metropolitan areas and through the counties that are home to more than 90 percent of the State's population. In keeping with the Safe, Reliable High-Speed Passenger Train Bond Act for the 21st Century (California Streets and Highways Code Section 2704 et seq.), the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section would serve to connect the Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section to the north and the Burbank to Los Angeles Project Section to the south.

Six Build Alternatives and a No Project Alternative are analyzed in this joint EIR/ EIS, which was developed in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Pursuant to 23 U.S.C. Section 327, under the NEPA Assignment MOU between the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the State of California, effective July 23, 2019, the Authority is the project sponsor and the lead federal agency for compliance with NEPA and other federal laws for the California HSR System, including the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section. The Authority is also the state lead agency under CEQA.

The Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) provides for NEPA decision making through a phased process (42 U.S. Code 4321).[1] This process is referred to as tiered decision making. This phased process supports a broad-level programmatic decision using a first-tier process is followed by more specific decisions at the second tier, with one or more second-tier EISs. The NEPA tiering process allows incremental decision making for large projects that would be too extensive and cumbersome to analyze in one traditional project EIS. CEQA (Cal. Public Res. Code Section 21000 et seq.) also encourages tiering and provides for a first-tier and second-tier EIR.

The Palmdale to Burbank Project Section EIR/EIS is a second-tier EIR/EIS that tiers off first-tier EIR/EIS documents and provides project-level information for decision making on this portion of the HSR system. The Authority and the FRA prepared the 2005 Final Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System (Authority and FRA 2005), which provided a first-tier analysis of the general effects of implementing the HSR system across two-thirds of the state. The 2008 Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Final Program EIR/EIS (Authority and FRA 2008) and the Authority's 2012 Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train Partially Revised Final Program EIR (Authority 2012) were also first-tier programmatic documents, but they focused on the Bay Area to Central Valley region. These first-tier EIR/EIS documents provided the Authority and the FRA with the environmental analyses necessary to evaluate the overall HSR system and make broad decisions about general HSR alignments and station locations for further study in the second-tier EIR/EISs.

The Authority has prepared this Draft EIR/EIS for the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section of the California HSR System as the next step in the environmental review process. The Draft EIR/EIS includes:

- A detailed description of the project alternatives and their potential benefits and impacts
- Environmental analysis to assist decision makers in selecting the project to be built
- Feasible avoidance and minimization measures and mitigation for potential adverse impacts
- Discussion of potential cumulative impacts as part of the environmental review process

[1] The CEQ issued new regulations, effective September 14, 2020, updating the NEPA implementing procedures at 40 C.F.R. 1500-1508. However, because this project initiated the NEPA process before September 14, 2020, it is not subject to the new regulations. The Authority is relying on the regulations as they existed prior to September 14, 2020. Therefore, all citations to CEQ regulations in this environmental document refer to the 1978 regulations, pursuant to 40 C.F.R. 1506.13 (2020) and the preamble at 85 Fed. Reg. 43340.

How Do I Use this Document?

The purpose of environmental documents prepared under CEQA and NEPA is to disclose information to decision makers and the public. Although the science and analysis that supports the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section Draft EIR/EIS is complex, it is intended for the general public. Every attempt has been made to limit the use of technical terms and acronyms. Where this cannot be avoided, the terms and acronyms are defined the first time they are used in each chapter, and a list of acronyms and abbreviations is provided in Chapter 15 of the Draft EIR/EIS. This Palmdale to Burbank Project Section Draft EIR/EIS has been prepared in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, as required under Section 11546.7 of the California Government Code, and can be found on the Authority's website (www.hsr.ca.gov).

Volume 1 of this Draft EIR/EIS has 15 chapters and a Summary, which is available in English. The Summary will be provided in three languages: Spanish, Armenian, and Arabic. For a reader with short amount of time to review this document, the **Summary** is the best place to start. It provides an overview of all of the substantive chapters in this document and includes a table listing the potential environmental impacts for each environmental resource topic. If the reader begins here but wants more information, the Summary directs the reader where to get details elsewhere in the document.

Below is a list and short summary of the chapters of **Volume 1,** Report, of the Draft EIR/EIS.

- **Chapter 1, Project Purpose, Need, and Objectives**, explains why the project is proposed and provides a history of the planning process.
- **Chapter 2, Alternatives**, describes the proposed alternatives and station location as well as the No Project Alternative used for purposes of comparison. It contains illustrations and maps and provides a review of construction activities. Chapter 2 also identifies the Authority's Preferred Alternative, which also serves as the proposed project for CEQA.

  The first two chapters help the reader understand what is being analyzed in the remainder of the document.
- **Chapter 3, Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Mitigation Measures**, is where the reader can find information about the existing transportation, environmental, and social conditions in the Palmdale to Burbank region. This chapter provides the findings of the analysis of potential environmental impacts, along with methods to reduce these impacts (called mitigation measures). Chapter 3 is divided into subsections discussing the following environmental resource topics:
  - Transportation
  - Air Quality and Global Climate Change
  - Noise and Vibration
  - Electromagnetic Interference and Electromagnetic Fields
  - Public Utilities and Energy
  - Biological and Aquatic Resources
  - Hydrology and Water Resources
  - Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontological Resources
  - Hazardous Materials and Wastes
  - Safety and Security
  - Socioeconomics and Communities
  - Station Planning, Land Use, and Development
  - Agricultural Farmland and Forest Land
  - Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

  - Aesthetics and Visual Quality
  - Cultural Resources
  - Regional Growth
  - Cumulative Impacts

- **Chapter 4, Section 4(f)/6(f) Evaluations**, summarizes impacts to parks, wildlife refuges, and historic properties in accordance with Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.
- **Chapter 5, Environmental Justice**, discusses whether the proposed alternatives would cause disproportionate impacts on low-income and minority communities. It also identifies mitigation to reduce those impacts, where appropriate.
- **Chapter 6, Project Costs and Operations**, summarizes the estimated capital, operations, and maintenance costs for each alternative and design option, including funding and financial risk.
- **Chapter 7, Other CEQA/NEPA Considerations**, summarizes the project's significant adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the project is implemented, the project's benefits, and the significant irreversible environmental changes that would occur as a result of project implementation.
- **Chapter 8, Preferred Alternative and Station Sites**, identifies the Preferred Alternative for the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section and the basis for its identification.
- **Chapter 9, Public and Agency Involvement**, contains summaries of coordination and outreach activities with agencies and the general public.
- **Chapter 10, EIR/EIS Distribution**, identifies the public agencies, tribes, and organizations that were informed of, and locations to review, this Draft EIR/EIS.
- **Chapter 11, List of Preparers**, provides the names and roles of the authors of this Draft EIR/EIS.
- **Chapter 12, References**, lists the references and contacts used in writing this Draft EIR/EIS.
- **Chapter 13, Glossary of Terms**, provides a definition of certain terms used in this Draft EIR/EIS.
- **Chapter 14, Index**, provides a tool to cross-reference major topics addressed in this Draft EIR/EIS.
- **Chapter 15, Acronyms and Abbreviations**, defines the acronyms and abbreviations used in this Draft EIR/EIS.

Volume 2, Technical Appendices, provides additional details on the project alternatives; the Draft EIR/EIS, and provides-specific background information, data, and other evidence supporting the analyses. Technical appendices are primarily related to the affected environment and environmental consequences analyses. These appendices are numbered to match their corresponding section in Chapter 3, as well as Chapter 2 of this Draft EIR/EIS (e.g., Appendix 3.2-A is the first appendix for Section 3.2, Transportation).

Volume 3, Preliminary Engineering Plans, presents the design drawings, including trackway and roadway crossing designs.

The Technical Reports provide more detailed technical analyses and data on some of the environmental resources evaluated in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIR/EIS. Technical reports are not part of the Final EIR/EIS but are available upon request. For information on how to access and review technical reports, please refer to the Authority's website (www.hsr.ca.gov) or call (866) 300-3044. Please see the Notice of Availability for more information about the availability of the Draft EIR/EIS and associated technical reports.

What Happens Next?

The Authority welcomes comments on the content of the Draft EIR/EIS. The minimum 45-day public comment period will begin in February 2022. Please see the Notice of Availability for the Draft EIR/EIS for details on how to comment.

The Authority anticipates publishing the Final EIR/EIS in winter 2023. Subsequently, the Authority Board will consider whether to certify the Final EIR and approve the Preferred Alternative pursuant to CEQA. In addition, the Authority, as NEPA lead agency, will consider whether to issue a Record of Decision approving the Preferred Alternative, which best serves the purpose and need for the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section and minimizes economic, social, and environmental impacts.

The schedule for final design, construction, and operation would be refined as the project moves closer to the end of the environmental review and preliminary design phase.