

What is this Document?

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority) proposes to construct, operate, and maintain an electric-powered high-speed rail (HSR) system in California. When completed, the nearly 800-mile HSR system will provide 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 Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section would serve to connect the Fresno to Bakersfield Project Section to the north and the Palmdale to Burbank Project Section to the south.

Four Build Alternatives, two design options, and a No Project Alternative are analyzed in this joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (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. Code Section 327, under the NEPA Assignment Memorandum of Understanding 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 Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section. The Authority is also the state lead agency under CEQA.

The Council on Environmental Quality provides for NEPA decision making through a phased process (Code of Federal Regulations Title 40, Part 1502.20). This process is referred to as tiered decision making. This phased process supports a broad-level programmatic decision using a Tier 1 EIS; this Tier 1 process is followed by more specific decisions at Tier 2, with one or more Tier 2 EISs or project EISs. CEQA (Public Resources Code 21000 et seq.) also encourages tiering and provides for a Tier 1 and Tier 2 EIR.

The Authority and the FRA prepared the *2005 Final Program EIR/EIS for the Proposed California High-Speed Train System* (Statewide Program EIR/EIS), which was a Tier 1 analysis of the general effects of implementing the HSR system across two-thirds of the state. The *2008 San Francisco Bay Area to Central Valley High-Speed Train (HST) Final Program EIR/EIS* and the Authority's *2012 Bay Area to Central Valley HST Partially Revised Final Program EIR* were also Tier 1, programmatic documents, focusing on the Bay Area to Central Valley region. These Tier 1 EIR/EIS documents provided the Authority and the FRA with the environmental analysis necessary to evaluate the overall HSR system and make broad decisions about general HSR alignments and station locations for further study in the Tier 2 EIR/EISs.

The Authority has prepared this Draft EIR/EIS for the Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section of the California HSR System as the next step in the environmental review process. This Draft EIR/EIS is a Tier 2 environmental document that builds on the earlier program EIR/EISs and decisions while providing more site-specific and detailed analysis to support decisions for the HSR project in the geographic area from Bakersfield to Palmdale. Because of the highly technical and complex nature of the proposed Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section, this Draft EIR/EIS contains more information than is mandated by either federal or state statutory and regulatory requirements.

The Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section Draft EIR/EIS includes:

- A detailed description of the project alternatives and design options 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

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 Bakersfield to Palmdale 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 Bakersfield to Palmdale 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.

Volume 1 of this Draft EIR/EIS has 15 chapters and a Summary, which is available in English and Spanish. Volume 2 contains technical appendices. Volume 3 provides design plans and other relevant engineering drawings.

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 design options, station locations, and maintenance facilities, 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 Bakersfield to Palmdale 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, Draft Section 4(f)/6(f) Evaluations**, summarizes 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 Bakersfield to Palmdale 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 responsibilities 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 analysis to support the discussion in Volume 1. Technical appendices are primarily related to the affected environment and environmental consequences analyses. These appendices are numbered to match their corresponding chapter or section in this Project EIR/EIS (e.g., Appendix 3.7-A is the first appendix for Section 3.7, Biological and Aquatic Resources). These documents are also available on the Authority’s website and at locations identified in Chapter 10, EIR/EIS Distribution.

Volume 3, Alignments and Other Plans, presents the design drawings, including trackway and roadway crossing design. These documents are also available on the Authority’s website and at locations identified in Chapter 10, EIR/EIS Distribution.

The **Technical Reports** provide more detailed technical analyses and data on some of the environmental resources evaluated in Chapter 3. Technical reports are not part of the Draft 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.

What Happens Next?

The Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section Draft EIR/EIS will be circulated for a minimum 45-day public review period consistent with the requirements of CEQA and NEPA. The general

public and public agencies will have the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft EIR/EIS. The Authority is widely circulating this Draft EIR/EIS to affected local jurisdictions, state and federal agencies, tribes, community organizations, other interest groups, and interested individuals. The Draft EIR/EIS will be made available on the Authority's website, at the Authority's offices, and at various public libraries. For more information on accessing the Draft EIR/EIS, please visit the Authority's website (www.hsr.ca.gov) or call (866) 300-3044.

The formal public review and comment period begins on February 28, 2020, and concludes on April 13, 2020. In addition, a public hearing to receive oral testimony will be held on April 9, 2020. At the close of the public review period, the Authority will develop the Final EIR/EIS. This document will contain the information that was revised from the Draft EIR/EIS following consideration of the comments received during the public review period. The Final EIR/EIS will also contain responses to the comments received during the public review period.

Following completion of a Final EIR/EIS, the Authority will consider certifying the Bakersfield to Palmdale Project Section Final EIR/EIS for compliance with CEQA and whether to approve the Preferred Alternative. If the Authority certifies the Final EIR/EIS and makes a decision to approve the Bakersfield to Palmdale Preferred Alternative, it will file a Notice of Determination with the State Clearinghouse as required under CEQA. Pursuant to its responsibilities under NEPA as assigned by the FRA, the Authority expects to issue a Record of Decision. The Record of Decision will describe the project and alternatives considered; describe the selected alternative; make environmental findings and determinations as may be required by the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, and environmental justice; and describe required mitigation measures. Separately, the FRA will make findings and determinations with regard to air quality conformity under the federal Clean Air Act.