

7 OTHER CEQA/NEPA CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter describes any unavoidable adverse, potentially significant impacts resulting from implementation of the Fresno to Bakersfield Section of the California high-speed rail (HSR) project, not limited to the proposed Fresno to Bakersfield Locally Generated Alternative (F-B LGA). It also describes the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and long-term productivity. This chapter discusses significant irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources or foreclosures of future options that implementing the Fresno to Bakersfield Section HSR, not limited to the proposed F-B LGA would create. This chapter is based on the detailed analysis of environmental resources of concern presented in Chapter 3, Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Mitigation Measures.

7.1 Unavoidable Adverse Potentially Significant Impacts

Chapter 2, F-B LGA Description, explains how the agencies have used the tiered project development and environmental review process to design the HSR System, the Fresno to Bakersfield Section, and the proposed F-B LGA, in a manner that avoids and minimizes impacts. Chapter 3 describes the potential environmental consequences of developing the F-B LGA. Project design features were identified to avoid or reduce potential adverse impacts and additional mitigation measures were prescribed for significant adverse impacts as applicable specifically for the F-B LGA. In some cases, the mitigation would not reduce the impact's severity to a less-than-significant level under CEQA. The impacts that cannot be mitigated to a less-than-significant level are the following¹:

- **Noise Effects.** The Fresno to Bakersfield project section of the HSR would have significant and unavoidable noise impacts to sensitive receptors. Likewise, even after mitigation, the F-B LGA would have significant and unavoidable operations impacts on sensitive receptors such as schools, churches, and residences within 2,500 feet of the F-B LGA Alignment, particularly in the high-density urban areas of Shafter and Bakersfield. Additionally, there would be vibration impacts on 18 of the 80 receivers located within 275 feet of the alignment.
- **Socioeconomics and Communities.** The Fresno to Bakersfield project section of the HSR would have significant and unavoidable impacts to socioeconomics and communities. However, the F-B LGA impacts would be less than significant.
- **Station Area and Land Use Impacts.** The Fresno to Bakersfield project section of the HSR would have significant and unavoidable land use impacts. However, the F-B LGA impacts would be less than significant.
- **Aesthetic Impacts.** The Fresno to Bakersfield project section of the HSR, including the F-B LGA, would result in significant and unavoidable aesthetic impacts. With implementation of mitigation, adverse effects associated with construction activities and the introduction of prominent HSR structures would be mitigated to the extent feasible. These mitigation measures identify responsible parties (the project contractor and the Authority) for each project stage (pre-construction, construction, and post-construction/operation) to ensure that the requirements are appropriately implemented. The mitigation measures would minimize or avoid significant adverse aesthetic impacts to the extent feasible; however, adverse impacts to visual quality related to the introduction of permanent physical infrastructure, particularly HSR guideways with elevated structures, raised embankments, and retaining walls, and associated overpasses, would remain.
- **Environmental Justice.** The Fresno to Bakersfield project section of the HSR, including the F-B LGA, would have significant and unavoidable impacts to environmental justice populations. As many minority and low-income populations reside in the urban areas of Shafter and Bakersfield where other reasonably foreseeable construction projects will also

¹ As this chapter describes impacts of the Fresno to Bakersfield Section of the HSR project, including but not limited to the F-B LGA, potentially significant impacts from the Fresno to Bakersfield Section have been included here in addition to F-B LGA impacts.

occur, there are likely to be disproportionately high and adverse cumulative construction effects experienced by these populations. Mitigation measures that will be implemented will not completely eliminate the adverse impacts to the low-income and minority populations and when considered with other reasonably foreseeable projects in the area, these populations are likely to bear a disproportionate burden of the cumulative construction period impacts. During F-B LGA operation, despite the project benefits experienced by low-income and minority populations including the reduction in regional air pollution, a reduction in traffic congestion, and long-term regional economic benefits, minority and low-income populations concentrated in urban areas along the project area in Shafter and Bakersfield, as well as in rural areas such as Oildale, would also bear disproportionately high and adverse operational impacts. These impacts would include an increase in both ambient noise levels and vibratory impacts above standards; disruption of communities and the displacement of community facilities; changes, or loss of park resources; decreases in visual quality; and cumulative impacts for noise and vibration, communities, and aesthetics and visual resources.

- **Agricultural Lands.** Similar to the Fresno to Bakersfield Section, including the May 2014 Project, the F-B LGA would result in the permanent conversion of agricultural land to non-agricultural use, including Prime Farmland and full and partial acquisitions of parcels under Williamson Act contract. These impacts would remain significant after mitigation. The F-B LGA would convert 372 acres of Important Farmland and 18 acres of Williamson Act lands to non-agricultural use.

7.2 Relationship between Short-Term Use of the Environment and the Enhancement of Long-Term Productivity

Developing the F-B LGA would require an investment of materials to create new transportation infrastructure. This investment of materials is expected to include natural resources such as rock and aggregate (e.g., for alignment and other facility foundations), steel (e.g., for rail and catenary structures), other building materials, and the various structural components of the HSR trains. Fossil fuels would be consumed for project construction. In addition, the project would require conversion of land to accommodate the new transportation infrastructure. In many cases, the land has an economic use as productive farmland, urban and rural structures (including homes, businesses, and parks), and local roads and state highways. The consequences of these land conversions are described in Chapter 3 of this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS.

As indicated in Chapter 1, Project Purpose, Need, and Objectives of the Fresno to Bakersfield Section Final EIR/EIS, the capacity of California's intercity transportation system, including in the San Joaquin Valley, is insufficient to meet existing and future travel demand, and the current and projected future congestion of the system will continue to result in deteriorating air quality, reduced reliability, and increased travel times. The F-B LGA would provide benefits (such as increased safety, reduced pollutant emissions, and reduced greenhouse gases) and accessibility improvements (such as transit linkages from the Bakersfield area to the Bay Area, Sacramento, and Southern California). HSR service will provide linkages to a number of bus, light rail, and commuter rail services for intercity travelers to other areas. Because the HSR system would provide a new alternative to regional transportation options that consume fossil fuels (e.g., automotive trips and commercial air travel), and because the HSR system would be powered by electricity primarily generated by harnessing renewable resources (e.g., solar power, wind power), the F-B LGA would make an important contribution to greenhouse gas reduction efforts. As described in Section 3.18, Regional Growth of this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS, the proposed HSR system, not limited to the F-B LGA, would provide direct and indirect economic benefits, including short- and long-term employment benefits. The HSR system would improve accessibility to labor and customer markets and induce regional job growth by providing a more attractive market for commercial and office development in the Bakersfield station areas. Regional job growth is expected to be primarily internal to Kern County (i.e., not by population shifts from the Bay Area and Southern California). Improved accessibility would increase the competitiveness of the San Joaquin Valley, as well as the state's industries and overall economy. The benefits of the

HSR project are described in more detail in Chapter 1 of the Fresno to Bakersfield Section Final EIR/EIS.

7.3 Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes That Would Result from the F-B LGA Implementation

The F-B LGA would require the commitment of material and energy for construction and operation, and the commitment of land for HSR facilities. As previously described, the F-B LGA would require an investment of materials such as rock, aggregate, steel, and other building materials. Fossil fuels would be consumed for F-B LGA construction. In addition, the F-B LGA would require the conversion of land, including productive agricultural land, to accommodate the new transportation infrastructure (including stations and ancillary facilities). These environmental changes would be irreversible. The significance of these impacts is evaluated throughout Chapter 3 of this Draft Supplemental EIR/EIS. Overall, it is expected that residents and businesses in the region would benefit from the improved quality of the transportation system (e.g., improved accessibility, increased capacity, energy savings), which would outweigh the irreversible commitment of resources.

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