

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

FROM: Frank Vacca
Chief Program Manager
California High-Speed Rail Authority
700 North Alameda Street, Room 3-532
Los Angeles, CA 90012

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Project Environmental Impact Report/
Environmental Impact Statement for the California High-Speed Rail System
Palmdale to Burbank Section

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (Authority), as the Lead Agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process for a proposed California High-Speed Rail (HSR) System, is **amending the existing 2007 Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Palmdale to Los Angeles section and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Palmdale to Burbank Section of the Authority's proposed HSR System (proposed project) (Refer to Exhibit 1, more details below)**. In March 2007, the Authority and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) respectively issued a NOP (SCH No. 2007031066) and a Notice of Intent (NOI) for the preparation of an EIR/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Palmdale to Los Angeles Section of the Authority's proposed California HSR System. Because the Palmdale to Los Angeles Section of the HSR System will be implemented in two parts consistent with Authority's Business Plan that prioritizes an Initial Operating Section (IOS) with a southern temporary terminus in the San Fernando Valley at Burbank Airport, the Authority and FRA have determined that there are two sections of the HSR System between Palmdale and Los Angeles and they will be better evaluated in two separate EIR/EISs: Palmdale to Burbank and Burbank to Los Angeles. Each of these sections has logical termini and independent utility, as discussed further below.

This NOP provides information regarding the Project EIR/EIS for the Palmdale to Burbank Section of the Authority's HSR System. The Burbank to Los Angeles Project EIR/EIS is the subject of a separate NOP. The Authority is issuing this NOP to solicit public and agency input into the scope of the EIR and to advise the public that outreach activities will be conducted by the Authority and its representatives in the preparation of a joint EIR/EIS.¹

¹ The Authority has prepared this Notice of Preparation voluntarily and is not waiving any rights it may have related to Surface Transportation Board jurisdiction and regulation of this proposed project under the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act of 1995, including that Act's preemptive effect on CEQA's application to this proposed project.

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FRA is the federal lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and will publish a NOI in the Federal Register, announcing the FRA's amendment of their 2007 NOI and their intention to initiate the federal environmental review process for the Palmdale to Burbank Section of the Authority's proposed HSR System.

BACKGROUND: In 2001, FRA and the Authority started a tiered environmental review process for the Statewide HSR System. In 2005, the Authority certified a Program EIR/EIS for the statewide California HSR System (Refer to Exhibit 2) (Statewide Program EIR/EIS) as the first-phase of a tiered environmental review process. The Statewide Program EIR/EIS analyzed an HSR System for intercity travel in California between the major metropolitan centers of Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area in the north, through the Central Valley, to the cities of Los Angeles and San Diego in the south.

The approved HSR System would be approximately 800-miles long, with electric propulsion and steel-wheel-on-steel-rail trains capable of operating speeds of 220 miles per hour (mph) on a dedicated system of fully grade-separated, access-controlled steel tracks with state-of-the-art safety, signaling, communication, and automated train control systems.

In approving the HSR System at the Program level, the Authority and FRA also selected corridors/general alignments and station location options throughout most of the System, including a corridor between Palmdale and Los Angeles. Based on the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, the agencies selected the Soledad Canyon Corridor and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro)/Metrolink right-of-way for the HSR routes from Palmdale to Los Angeles with station location options in the City of Palmdale, the San Fernando Valley, and the vicinity of Los Angeles Union Station.

Tiering from the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, the Authority issued an NOP for the HSR Palmdale to Los Angeles Section project-level EIR on March 12, 2007 (SCH No. 2007031066). The NOI to prepare a project-level EIS for the Palmdale to Los Angeles Section was published in the Federal Register on March 9, 2007.

Since the 2007 NOP, several alternatives analyses have been conducted to refine project-level alternatives. A Preliminary Alternatives Analysis (July 2010) addressed alignment alternatives and station options throughout the Palmdale to Los Angeles Section. Three Supplemental Alternatives Analyses ("SAA") have also been prepared. The first SAA (March 2011) addressed supplemental alignment alternatives and station options for the Los Angeles to Sylmar subsection. The second SAA (April 2012) addressed supplemental alignment alternatives for the Sylmar to Palmdale subsection and redefined the subsection into two new subsections: the Santa Clarita subsection, extending from Sylmar to two miles east of Lang Station Road, and the Palmdale subsection, extending from two miles east of Lang Station Road to Palmdale.

The third SAA (May 2014) discusses the concept of evaluating Palmdale to Burbank and Burbank to Los Angeles as two sections in light of, among other factors, the IOS concept (with its interim terminus in the San Fernando Valley/Burbank) introduced in the 2012 and 2014 Business Plans. The May 2014 SAA refined the alignment alternatives and station options, including identifying the Palmdale Transportation Center Station Option at the northern end and the Burbank Airport Station as the southern limit of this Palmdale to Burbank Section.

The Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and all SAAs included public outreach activities, including community meetings, stakeholder meetings, and public official outreach. The Preliminary Alternatives

Analysis and SAA documents include a description of public outreach activities conducted. All alternatives analyses documents have been available for public review and comment as part of the alternatives analysis process, like all alternative analyses developed in this geographic area. (See http://www.hsr.ca.gov/Programs/Statewide_Rail_Modernization/Project_Sections/palmdale_losangeles.html for copies of these AA documents). The work and information contained in the Palmdale-to-Burbank portions of those alternatives analyses documents, will inform the Authority in developing (and inform the public in commenting on) the Palmdale to Burbank EIR/EIS and its development.

As discussed further in the May 2014 SAA, it would be beneficial to address the environmental effects of the HSR System from Palmdale to Burbank in one EIR/EIS and from Burbank to Los Angeles in a separate EIR/EIS. This would provide for more effective planning and public outreach in these highly populated areas. Each of these sections has logical termini and independent utility, as discussed further below. These two sections are of sufficient length to address environmental matters on a broad scope. They have logical termini, which means that their end points are rational for transportation improvements and for the review of environmental impacts. Additionally, each section has independent utility, which means that the HSR System can function properly within each section, independent of additional improvements elsewhere. The assessment of HSR alternatives in the Palmdale to Burbank Section will assure adequate opportunity for the consideration of alternatives for this section and adjacent sections of the HSR system. The preparation of the Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will involve the development of preliminary engineering designs and the assessment of potential environmental effects associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the HSR System in this section.

DATES: Written comments on the scope of the Palmdale to Burbank HSR EIR/EIS should be provided to the Authority no later than 30 days after publication of this notice. Public scoping meetings are scheduled from August 5, 2014 to August 19, 2014 as noted below. All comments received during the scoping period will receive equal consideration as the comments received during the March to April 2007 scoping period for the Palmdale to Los Angeles Section EIR/EIS.

ADDRESSES: Written comments on the scope should be sent to Mark A. McLoughlin, Director of Environmental Services, Attention: Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS, California High-Speed Rail Authority, 700 North Alameda Street, Room 3-532, Los Angeles, CA 90012, or via email with subject line "Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS" to: palmdale_burbank@hsr.ca.gov. Comments may also be provided orally or in writing at scoping meetings scheduled at the following locations:

- **SANTA CLARITA: Tuesday, August 5**, William S. Hart Regional Park, 24151 Newhall Avenue, Newhall, CA 91321
- **BURBANK: Wednesday, August 6**, Buena Vista Branch Library, 300 N. Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91505
- **PALMDALE: Thursday, August 7**, Chimbole Cultural Center, 38350 Sierra Highway, Palmdale CA, 93550
- **ACTON/AGUA DULCE: Monday, August 11**, Acton-Agua Dulce Library, 33792 Crown Valley Road, Acton, CA 93510
- **SYLMAR: Tuesday, August 12**, Sylmar Public Library, 14561 Polk Street, Sylmar, CA 91342

- **LAKE VIEW TERRACE: Thursday, August 14**, Lake View Terrace Recreation Center, 11075 Foothill Boulevard, Lake View Terrace, CA 91342
- **DOWNTOWN LA: Tuesday, August 19**, Los Angeles Union Station Fred Harvey Room, 800 N. Alameda Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

All scoping meetings will be held from **5:30pm to 7:30pm**.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mark A. McLoughlin at the above address.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Authority was established in 1996 and is authorized and directed by statute to undertake the planning and development of a proposed statewide HSR network that is fully coordinated with other public transportation services. As required by state law, the Authority adopted a Business Plan in June 2000, which reviewed the economic feasibility of an 800-mile-long HSR System capable of speeds in excess of 200 miles per hour on a dedicated, fully grade-separated state-of-the-art track. The Authority released updated Business Plans in November 2008, December 2009 (addendum in April 2010), April 2012, and April 2014. These Business Plans, which are subject to a separate public review process, are an important part of the statewide planning process for HSR.

In 2005, the Authority and FRA completed the Statewide Program EIR/EIS as the first phase of a tiered environmental review process. The Authority certified the Statewide Program EIR under CEQA and approved the proposed HSR System, and FRA issued a Record of Decision under NEPA for the Statewide Program EIS. This Statewide Program EIR/EIS established the purpose and need for the HSR System, analyzed an HSR System, and compared it with a No Project/No Action Alternative, and with a Modal Alternative (i.e., expansion of freeways and airports). In approving the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, the Authority and FRA selected the HSR Alternative, selected general corridors/alignments and general station locations for further study, incorporated mitigation strategies and design practices, and specified further measures to guide the development of the HSR System during the site-specific project environmental review to avoid and minimize potential adverse environmental impacts.

The HSR Alternative as described in the Statewide Program EIR/EIS provides a broad planning and conceptual outline of the proposed train system. The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will allow for the consideration of alignment alternatives within this section at a greater level of detail. The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will tier from the Statewide Program EIR/EIS in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations, (40 CFR 1508.28) and the CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations §§ 15152, 15168). The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will build upon all previous work prepared for, and incorporated in, the Statewide Program EIR/EIS, including the state planning process incorporated into the Authority's Business Plans. In addition, the selection of alternatives to be included in the Palmdale to Burbank EIR/EIS will consider comments that were received from the agencies and the public during the public outreach process on the alternatives analyses conducted since the 2007 Palmdale to Los Angeles NOP.

The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will be carried out in accordance with FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 Fed. Reg. 28545 [May 26, 1999]) and will follow the Integration Process for the California High-Speed Train Program as set forth in the Memorandum of Understanding among FRA, the Authority, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will also address, as necessary, other applicable statutes, regulations, and executive orders, including (but not limited to) the Clean Water Act, Section

106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act, the Endangered Species Act, and Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice.

The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will describe site-specific environmental impacts, will identify specific mitigation measures to address those impacts, and will incorporate design features to avoid and minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. The site characteristics, size, nature, and timing of the proposed project elements will be described as a basis for determining whether the impacts are potentially significant and whether impacts can be avoided or mitigated. The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will identify and evaluate reasonable and feasible alignment alternatives along the corridor selected in the Programmatic EIR/EIS, as well as addressing alternatives that may meet project objectives while potentially reducing environmental effects as identified during the alternatives analysis process and the scoping process. The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will also identify and evaluate station options and evaluate the potential impacts of construction, operation, and maintenance of the HSR System in this section. Information and documents regarding this HSR environmental review process will be made available through the Authority's internet site: www.hsr.ca.gov.

Project Description/Alternatives

The Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will consider a No Project Alternative and HSR Alternatives for the Palmdale to Burbank Section.

No Project Alternative: The No Project Alternative (No Action or No Build) represents the conditions in the Palmdale to Burbank Section as they exist in 2014, and as they would exist based on programmed and funded improvements to the intercity transportation system and other reasonably foreseeable projects through 2040, taking into account the following sources of information: the State Transportation Improvement Program, Regional Transportation Plans for all modes of travel, airport plans, intercity passenger rail plans, and city and county plans.

HSR Alternatives: HSR Alternatives to be evaluated as part of the proposed project from Palmdale to Burbank involve various potential horizontal and vertical alignments between Palmdale and Burbank within the two horizontal corridors identified in Exhibit 1, and various potential station configurations at the Palmdale Transportation Center and the Burbank Airport section terminus points. The purpose of this NOP is to solicit input about those potential alignments and configurations and their potential impacts, so as to inform the preparation of the Palmdale to Burbank EIR/EIS.

The Authority proposes to construct, operate, and maintain an electric-powered steel-wheel-on-steel-rail HSR System, approximately 800 miles long, capable of operating speeds up to 220 mph on dedicated, fully grade-separated tracks, with state-of-the-art safety, signaling, and automated train control systems. Work on this System is underway in the Central Valley. This proposed project would continue this effort between Palmdale and Burbank.

The HSR Corridor that was selected by the Authority and FRA in the Statewide Program EIR/EIS follows Soledad Canyon from the City of Palmdale to the community of Sylmar in the City of Los Angeles and then follows the Metro/Metrolink Railroad line to Burbank Airport and Los Angeles Union Station. The corridor is relatively wide in the area that includes both the State Route 14 and Union Pacific Railroad alignments between the Antelope Valley and Santa Clarita. In addition, in response to stakeholder and public feedback, the Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS will address potential alignment alternatives that provide a more direct connection between the Palmdale station and the Burbank Airport station.

Specific station configuration options also will be evaluated in the the Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS, so as to support station area development policies to encourage transit-friendly development near and around HSR stations. The potential to promote multi-modal uses, higher density, mixed-use, and pedestrian-oriented development around the stations will guide the selection of the station alternatives. In addition, station option selection will evaluate sites with potential to function as a terminal station in the IOS. Potential sites for a terminal storage and maintenance facility will also be evaluated in the Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS.

Project Location

See attached map (Exhibit 1).

Probable Effects

The purpose of the Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS process is to explore in a public setting the effects of the proposed project on the physical, human, and natural environment. Impact areas to be addressed as potentially containing probable effects include transportation impacts; safety and security; EMI/EMF; land use and zoning; cumulative impacts; agricultural land impacts; cultural resource impacts, including impacts on historical and archaeological resources and parklands/recreation areas; neighborhood compatibility and environmental justice; natural resource impacts including air quality, biological resources and wetlands, hydrology and water resources, noise, vibration, and energy. Measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate all adverse impacts will be identified and evaluated. A copy of the Initial Study is available for review at the following link:

http://hsr.ca.gov/Programs/Statewide_Rail_Modernization/project_sections/palmdale_burbank.html.

Scoping and Comments

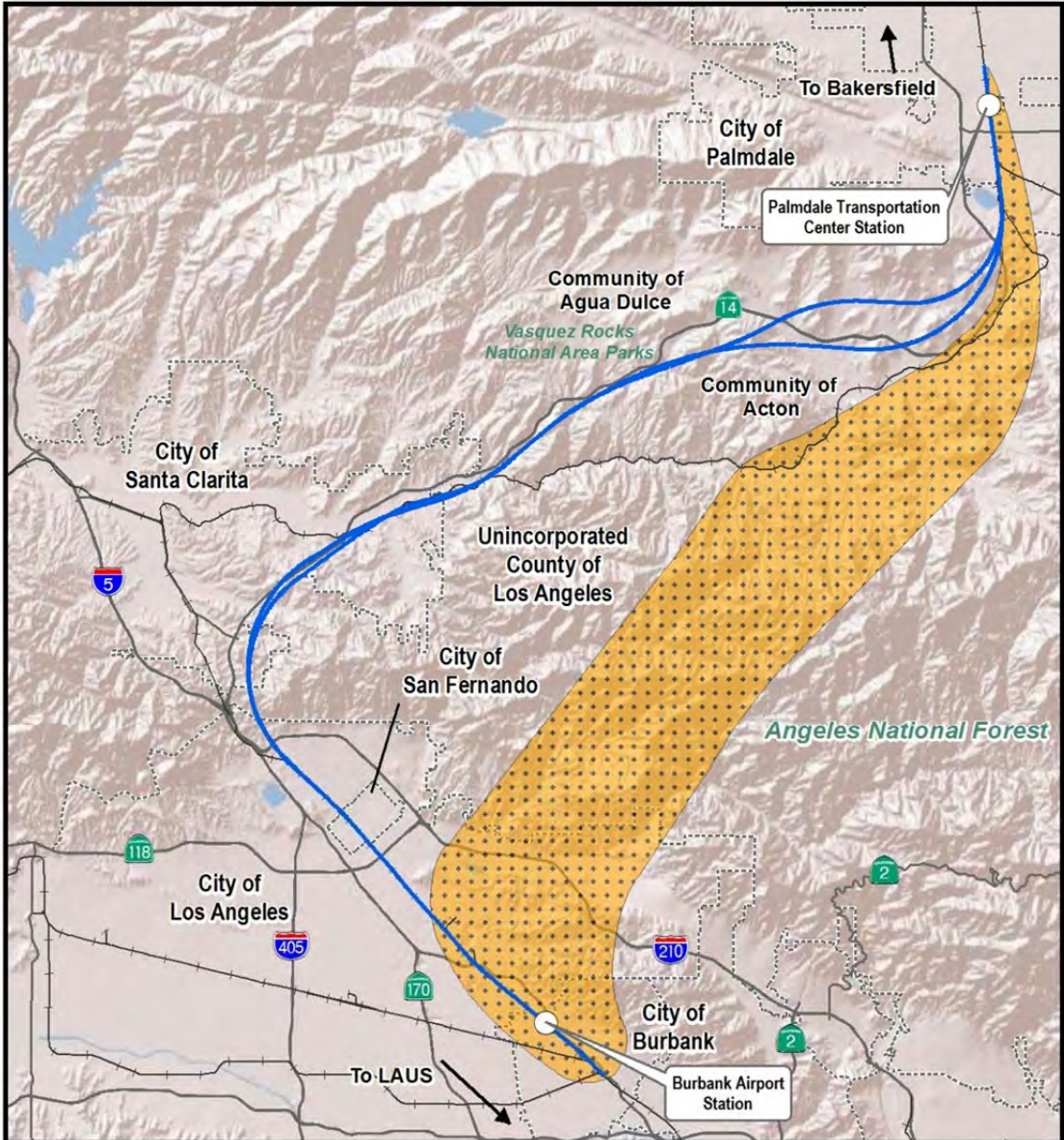
Public scoping meetings are an important component of the scoping process for the Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS. The Authority encourages broad participation in the Palmdale to Burbank Section EIR/EIS process and review of the resulting environmental documents. The Authority invites comments and suggestions from all interested agencies and the public at large to ensure that the full range of issues related to the proposed action and all reasonable alternatives are addressed and that all significant issues are identified. Comments are also sought regarding alternatives addressed in the Preliminary Alternatives Analysis and the SAAs, as noted above. Public agencies with jurisdiction are requested to advise the Authority and FRA of the applicable permit and environmental review requirements of each agency, and the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to the agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Public scoping meetings have been scheduled as an important component of the scoping process for both the State and Federal environmental review. The scoping meetings described in this Notice will be advertised locally and included in additional public notification.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, public agencies are requested to send their responses to this Notice of Preparation to the Authority no later than 30 days after publication of this notice. All comments received during this scoping period will receive equal consideration as comments received during the March to April 2007 scoping period for the former Palmdale to Los Angeles Section EIR/EIS.

Please send your response and direct any comments or questions regarding this project to Mark A. McLoughlin, Director of Environmental Services, at the address shown above.

Date: July 24, 2014

Signature: 
Frank Vacca
Chief Program Manager



Source: California High-Speed Rail Authority, 2014; ESRI Maps & Data, 2014; URS, 2014

LEGEND

- Proposed HSR Stations
- Proposed HSR Alignments
- Railroads
- - - Municipal Boundary
- Alternative Corridor - New Study Area

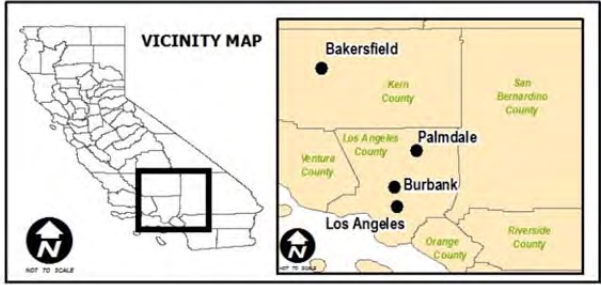


Exhibit 1
Palmdale to Burbank Section



Exhibit 2
Proposed California HSR Statewide System