

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY OF A REVISED DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Merced Intermodal Track Connection Project

PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD: JULY 31, 2025 – SEPTEMBER 15, 2025

DATE: July 31, 2025
TO: Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Parties
FROM: San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority
SUBJECT: Notice of Availability of a Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report (Revised Draft EIR) for the Merced Intermodal Track Connection Project Focused on Additional Biological Resources Analysis (Crotch's bumble bee)

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA) is issuing a limited revision to its previously published Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Merced Intermodal Track Connection Project (Project), pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This document is entitled *Merced Intermodal Track Connection Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report* (Revised Draft EIR). Pursuant to Section 15088.5, subdivisions (c) and (f)(2) of the CEQA Guidelines, this document is limited to the portions of the previously published Draft EIR that require revision and recirculation.

A. Project Description

The Project would include a new track connection from the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) corridor to the proposed integrated Merced High-Speed Rail (HSR) Station in downtown Merced between R and O Streets, in addition to a new platform that would allow for a cross-platform transfer between the San Joaquins and HSR. The Project only includes the construction of the track connection; it does not include the construction of the proposed integrated station. The limits of the Project are in Merced County and almost entirely within the city limits of Merced.

As shown in Figure 1, the Project would consist of the following:

- New passenger rail connection for the San Joaquins from the BNSF north of State Route (SR) 99 to the southern terminus at the proposed integrated station
- New aerial guideway that would connect into the east side of the HSR platform (which would be shared with the San Joaquins) at the proposed integrated station, creating an elevated integrated platform with HSR
- Modification of the approved Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) Merced Layover and Maintenance Facility

Overall, eight daily roundtrips would be operated by SJJPA, including five daily roundtrips from Oakland to Merced and two daily roundtrips from Sacramento to Merced, and one between Natomas and Merced. Implementation of the Project would connect the San Joaquins intercity service with the future HSR service at the proposed integrated Merced HSR Station. Upon the opening of the Merced-Bakersfield HSR Early Operating Segment (EOS), San Joaquins intercity service from Merced to Bakersfield would be terminated.

In addition to the Project, SJJPA has identified three variants (Variant H1: On-Site Green Hydrogen Production and Green Hydrogen Transported via Rail, Variant H2: Off-Site Green or Grey Hydrogen Transported via Truck, and Variant H3: Off-site Green or Grey Hydrogen Transported via Rail) that assume

different approaches for fueling future hydrogen-powered trains in response to the state's zero emission goals. The variants would primarily occur within the same environmental footprint as the Project¹ and have the same objectives, background, and development controls, but with specific differences. The variants are a slightly different version of the Project in the event SJJPA desires to consider them for approval. The final decision as to whether to adopt the Project, a variant, and/or an alternative will be made after completion of the Final EIR for this Project.

B. Revised Draft EIR Focused on Additional Biological Resources Analysis

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife commented on the previously published Draft EIR. The commenter noted that Crotch's bumble bee was not included in the previously published Draft EIR and no measures were proposed to mitigate for potential impacts on the species. The commenter noted that habitat for Crotch's bumble bee appears to be present in the Project vicinity and the commenter recommended mitigation measures. Crotch's bumble bee is listed as a candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act, and thus meets the definition of special-status species used by SJJPA for the impact analysis. Crotch's bumble bee is assumed to be present in the study area for the Project, based on the existence of suitable habitat for the species in the study area.

Construction activities associated with the Project could affect grassland for Crotch's bumble bee, resulting in a potentially significant impact if Crotch's bumble bee are actually present at the time of disturbance. With implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-2.15: Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Crotch's Bumble Bee, the impact would be less than significant. Thus, to provide the opportunity for meaningful public review and comment regarding the additional analysis and mitigation measure associated with Crotch's bumble bee, SJJPA has decided to recirculate the relevant portions of the Draft EIR. Accordingly, Section 3.4, *Biological Resources*, of this Revised Draft EIR includes additional analysis and a new mitigation measure related to Crotch's bumble bee.

C. Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report

A new significant environmental impact could result from the Project and a substantial increase in the severity of an environmental impact could result unless mitigation measures are adopted that reduce the impact to a level of insignificance. Thus, SJJPA, as the lead agency under CEQA, is issuing the Revised Draft EIR limited to the portions of the Draft EIR that require revision based on the new information described above, consistent with the guidance provided under CEQA.² New information added to the previously published Draft EIR includes background information, impact analysis, and a mitigation measure related to Crotch's bumble bee.

New or revised text in the Revised Draft EIR compared to the previously published Draft EIR is shown with underline and red colored font for additions, and ~~strikeout~~ for deletions. The Revised Draft EIR consists of excerpted text where updates or additions related to Crotch's bumble bee have been made. Ellipses (...) are

¹ Variant H1 would have additional footprint requirements for solar panels that are beyond the environmental footprint of the Project.

² CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088.5; 40 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Section 1502.9(c)(1)(ii) (1978).

used to identify where text from the previously published Draft EIR remains unchanged and, therefore, is not included in the Revised Draft EIR.

This Revised Draft EIR includes the following:

- Executive Summary
- Section 3.4, *Biological Resources*
- Chapter 4, *Cumulative Impacts*
- Chapter 8, *References*
- Appendix 3.4-3, Special-Status Species Tables

SJPPA reviewed other sections of the previously published Draft EIR and found, based on research and a review of the evidence, that no other substantive changes would be required for this Revised Draft EIR. All other appendices to Section 3.4, as well as all technical reports supporting Section 3.4 of the Draft EIR, remain unchanged.

D. Hazardous Waste Sites

As previously noticed in the July 17, 2024, Notice of Availability for the Draft EIR for the Project, portions of the Project are located on or in close proximity to areas with hazardous materials contamination compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 (Cortese List).

E. Availability of the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report

The Revised Draft EIR is available on the Project webpage (<https://sjppa.com/mitc/>). A printed copy of the Revised Draft EIR is available for public viewing at the SJPPA offices at 949 East Channel Street in Stockton, California during normal office hours (Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). Electronic versions of the Revised Draft EIR are available upon request at the SJPPA offices as well. In addition, a printed copy of the Revised Draft EIR is also available for public viewing at the following locations:

- City of Merced, City Clerk's Office
678 West 18th Street, 1st Floor
Merced, CA 95340
Office hours: Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
(closed during the 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. lunch hour)
- Merced County Library
2100 O Street
Merced, CA 95340
Library hours: Monday and Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Tuesday and Wednesday from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and Friday and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
(electronic versions of the Draft EIR are also available upon request at this location)

F. Next Steps

The Final EIR will include SJJPA's responses to comments received on the previously published Draft EIR, in addition to responses to comments received on the content of this Revised Draft EIR. SJJPA anticipates publishing the Final EIR in late 2025. The new mitigation measure included in Section 3.4, *Biological Resources*, will be incorporated into the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program as part of the CEQA decision document. After publishing the Final EIR, the SJJPA Board of Directors will consider whether to certify the Final EIR and approve the Project pursuant to CEQA.

G. Comments on the Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report

SJJPA welcomes comments on the content of this Revised Draft EIR and requests that such comments be limited to the scope of the Revised Draft EIR. **Comments on this Revised Draft EIR must be received by SJJPA no later than 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the Revised Draft EIR public review period (September 15, 2025),** and can be submitted by any of the following methods:

- **Mail:** San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority
Attn: MITC Project
949 East Channel Street
Stockton, CA 95202
- **Email:** information@mitcproject.org; please include "MITC Project" in the subject line.

