



Regional Transit

**Sacramento Regional
Transit District**
A Public Transit Agency
and Equal Opportunity Employer

Administrative Offices
1400 29th Street
Sacramento, CA 95816
916-321-2800

Mailing Address
P.O. Box 2110
Sacramento, CA 95812-2110

Human Resources
2810 O Street
Sacramento, CA 95816
916-556-0299

**Customer Service &
Sales Center**
1225 R Street
Sacramento, CA 95811

**Route, Schedule & Fare
Information**
916-321-BUSS (2877)
TDD 916-483-HEAR (4327)
sacrt.com

Public Transit Since 1973

September 14, 2020

Mr. Ray Tellis
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration Region IX
90 7th Street, Suite 15-300
San Francisco, CA 94103

Re: SacRT Folsom Light Rail Modernization Double Track Project
Concurrence with Request for a NEPA Categorical Exclusion

Dear Mr. Tellis:

The Sacramento Regional Transit District (SacRT) proposes to improve its light rail service to Folsom along its existing Gold Line. The improvements would allow light rail trains to operate every 15 minutes from the Sunrise Station to the Historic Folsom Station, rather than the current 30 minutes. The improvements are part of the "Folsom Light Rail Modernization Project" that includes new low-floor light rail vehicles, modification to station platforms to accommodate the new vehicles, and addition of new passing tracks and signalization. The proposed action specifically calls for "double tracking" (or installing a passing track) in two locations; one in the City of Folsom and the second in the City of Rancho Cordova and unincorporated Sacramento County (hereafter referred to as the "Folsom segment" and the "Rancho Cordova segment," respectively). New low-floor loading platforms would be installed at the two existing stations in these segments, and train signaling would be upgraded.

SacRT has assessed the impacts of the proposed action as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). A CEQA Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) was prepared to evaluate the impacts of the project and was adopted by the SacRT Board on January 13, 2020. The SacRT Board of Directors concluded that the proposed project would not result in significant adverse impacts with the identified mitigation measures, which were incorporated into the approved project. The IS/MND has been incorporated by reference in the FTA Categorical Exclusion worksheet (Attachment 1).

The attached Categorical Exclusion worksheet (Attachment 1) provides an overview of the proposed double track project, and supports the project's eligibility for a Categorical Exclusion pursuant to 23 CFR Section 771.118(d)(8), "Modernization or minor expansions of transit structures and facilities outside existing right-of-way, such as bridges, stations, or rail yards." SacRT requests

that FTA review the attached materials and concur that a Categorical Exclusion is appropriate environmental clearance pursuant to NEPA.

Need for the Proposed Action

SacRT currently operates light rail service on its Gold Line from downtown Sacramento in the west to the City of Folsom in the northeast. Service between downtown and the Sunrise Station is provided on 15-minute headways; however, the eastern 7.3 miles from the Sunrise Station to the terminus in historic Folsom is restricted to 30-minute headways. Service improvements are currently impeded because only a single track is available in the eastern end of the corridor. Therefore, outbound light rail trains traveling from downtown Sacramento to historic Folsom, and inbound trains traveling from historic Folsom to downtown Sacramento must use the same track, restricting service, limiting operational flexibility, and hampering service if a light rail train becomes disabled along this stretch. In addition, the train signaling system results in delays for motorists seeking to cross the light rail tracks, which could be alleviated by upgraded signaling equipment that would reduce gate downtime.

Enhanced light rail service along the Gold Line is a high priority for SacRT and is part of a long-term commitment to increase service to Folsom. The project is included in the Sacramento Area Council of Government's 2020 Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS), the area's Regional Transportation Plan and an integral component to reducing congestion along U.S. 50, which parallels the Gold Line, vehicle miles traveled, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Proposed Action

SacRT proposes the following improvements that comprise the proposed action:

- **Light Rail Trackwork** - double tracking two locations: a 0.6-mile segment in the vicinity of the Glenn/Robert G Holderness Station in the City of Folsom, and a 1.2-mile segment in the vicinity of the Hazel Station in the City of Rancho Cordova and unincorporated Sacramento County. The alignment of the new tracks relative to the existing tracks is based on available right-of-way, minimizing disruption to existing operation-related equipment, minimizing removal of mature trees, and avoiding impacts on adjacent uses. Existing overhead contact system support poles would be used as much as possible, but some would need to be relocated. The new pole locations, instrument houses, and drainage facilities all would be within the existing rail right-of-way.
- **Stations** - adding new loading platforms at the Glenn and Hazel Stations and modifying the existing platforms to accommodate new low-floor vehicles that are being acquired by SacRT. The new platforms would be 8 inches above the top of the tracks, approximately 15 feet wide and 338 feet long. They would be designed to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and include amenity and station features in accordance with SacRT's Station Design Criteria (e.g., fare vending machines, canopies, seating, light fixtures, security features, information kiosks). To accommodate existing SacRT light rail vehicles, the new loading platform would be fitted with a temporary mini-high platform. This mini-

high platform would be removed when SacRT has fully transitioned to low-floor vehicles.

- **Signaling** - updating the signal system that controls train movements so that trains would be able to operate inbound and outbound between the Sunrise and Historic Folsom Stations with little or no delay. The proposed action would include additional track circuits that would detect when the train passes through an at-grade street crossing and immediately send a signal to the control cabinet to raise the gates. In addition, at specific stations, SacRT proposes to install on-board “call” activators to lower the crossing gates only when the train is ready to leave the station.
- **Freight Line Realignment** - shifting an existing freight line and spur line serving a local business. Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) has the right to run freight trains on the line and the freight easement obligates them to maintain the tracks they use (SacRT maintains the signals), but UPRR owns neither the tracks nor the land underneath the tracks. To accommodate the double tracking in the Rancho Cordova segment, the freight tracks would be shifted. As part of this realignment, a new approximately 1,140-foot-long freight siding would be installed to the south of the freight line, to facilitate freight movements, and an existing spur line to a local business would be realigned.

Public and Agency Outreach

SacRT has created and maintained a website to keep the local communities and the general public apprised of the proposed action:

<https://www.sacrt.com/apps/modernization/>. The site contains general information about the proposed action; engineering and environmental documents, drawings prepared, and maps; and contact information for further information.

As part of the project’s CEQA environmental review process, SacRT hosted two public scoping meetings in April and June 2019 that were widely advertised. Notices with information about the meeting dates, times, and locations were sent to all property owners within 1,000 feet (on either side) of the project components, as well as to environmental advocacy groups, religious centers and cultural organizations, governmental officials and agencies, and bicycle advocacy groups. Additional public meetings were held before the SacRT Board to receive comments on the Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration in December 2019 and to adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration in January 2020.

In preparing the CEQA and NEPA documents, the following agencies/organizations have been consulted:

Local Agencies

City of Folsom

City of Rancho Cordova

Sacramento County

Native American Tribes

Native American Heritage Commission

Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians

Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe

Sacramento-Placerville
Transportation Corridor Joint
Powers Authority

Ione Band of Miwok Indians

State and Federal Agencies

Nashville Enterprise Miwok–Maidu–
Nishinam Tribe

State Office of Historic Preservation

Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Tsi Akim Maidu

United Auburn Indian Community of the
Auburn Rancheria

Wilton Rancheria

Impact Evaluation/Federal Agency Coordination and Consultation

Natural Resources. The project site is almost entirely within the existing rail right-of-way used for SacRT's Gold Line. The Rancho Cordova segment and the immediate vicinity, however, include elderberry shrubs, the host plant for the threatened Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle. As a result, SacRT and FTA initiated formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) pursuant to Section 7 of the federal Endangered Species Act on July 10, 2020, when FTA transmitted a Biological Assessment to the Service. The Service issued a Biological Opinion and Incidental Take Statement on September 14, 2020, concluding the level of anticipated take is not likely to result in jeopardy to the species, provided that terms and conditions of the incidental take statement including identified conservation, transplanting, and credit purchase measures are followed. Please refer to the Categorical Exclusion worksheet (Attachment 1), Appendix B, for details.

In addition, in recognition of potential nesting birds that could be disturbed in violation of the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, SacRT has adopted mitigation measures as part of its CEQA IS/MND that have been incorporated as part of the project. These measures regulate tree removal, require preconstruction nesting bird surveys, and creation of appropriate buffer zones if nesting birds are detected.

Because the project site would disturb more than 1 acre of ground surface, SacRT will obtain coverage under the federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for Storm Water Discharges Associated with Construction and Land Disturbance Activities (SWRCB Order No. 2009-0009-DWQ, NPDES No. CAS000002 [Construction General Permit]), as amended.

The project site does not contain waters of the U.S. or other aquatic features. As a result, consultation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or the National Marine Fisheries Service was not necessary.

Air Quality. The proposed project is included in the regional transportation plan (the 2020 MTP/SCS). The adopted MTP/SCS included an air conformity analysis that reported that the plan would not impede the ability of the region to

meet and attain air quality standards for certain criteria pollutants and associated precursors. This demonstration of the plan's conformance with the State Implementation Plan was completed pursuant to the Clean Air Act Section 176(c) (42 USC Section 7506(c) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency transportation conformity regulations (40 CFR Part 93 Subpart A).

Cultural Resources. With respect to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, there are two historic properties within the Area of Potential Effects (APE) delineated for the proposed project: the Sacramento Valley Railroad and the American River Placer Mining District. A Section 106 technical memorandum has been completed (see Appendix A to the Categorical Exclusion worksheet [Attachment 1]) that recommends a finding of "no adverse effect." SHPO in its January 23, 2020 letter to FTA concurred that the proposed action would have no adverse effects to historic properties.

Archival research conducted at the North Central Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System indicated that the project area does not contain any previously recorded Native American sites, prehistoric-period archaeological sites, historic-period cemeteries, or human skeletal remains. Based on outreach to the list of interested Native American tribes, the United Auburn Indian Community of the Auburn Rancheria has requested the environmental documents and the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians requested consultation.

The adopted CEQA document for the project includes avoidance and minimization measures for the unanticipated discovery of archeological resources, human remains, and tribal cultural properties. FTA has requested some refinements to the CEQA mitigation measures, which have been accepted by SacRT.

Section 4(f). The proposed project would not result in permanent use, temporary occupancy, or constructive use of a Section 4(f) resource. There are nearby public recreation areas and trails, but construction and operation of the proposed action would not substantially impair the activities, features, or attributes of the properties that qualify them for protection under Section 4(f). There are no wildlife or waterfowl refuges in the project area. As described above, the SHPO has concurred with FTA's conclusion that the proposed project would have a no adverse effect.

Hazards. The project site does not lie within a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) 100-year flood hazard area. However, the Rancho Cordova project segment is within a Superfund site. While there is known soil and groundwater contamination, remediation activities are in progress, and construction for Rancho Cordova project segment components (mostly for grading up to 4 feet below ground surface and in limited cases, up to 30 feet for the overhead contact system support poles) is not expected to encounter contaminated groundwater, which is approximately 50 feet below the ground surface. The CEQA document for the project includes mitigation measures to protect construction workers, the public, and the environment and to avoid remediation activities underway.

Noise. Routine daily operations of the proposed project would not alter the existing noise environment, which is primarily defined by vehicular traffic on the adjacent Folsom Boulevard and is already used by light rail trains. Based on FTA's thresholds, construction activities could affect nearby sensitive receptors.

During operation, moderate noise impacts would occur in the residential areas of the Rancho Cordova project segment, but receptors in the Folsom project segment would not experience substantial noise impacts (below the moderate threshold). The CEQA document for the project includes preparation and implementation of a construction noise control plan, employing best management practices to reduce noise levels for nearby noise-sensitive receptors.

Socioeconomic Environment. The proposed project would be consistent with the local general plans and zoning regulations, resulting in no land use compatibility effects. Construction of the proposed action would require minimal land acquisition and no displacement. In the Folsom segment, a portion of a traffic lane would be needed to accommodate the double track and additional station platform. In the Rancho Cordova segment, a narrow strip of land (approximately 3,200 square feet of a 78-acre parcel proposed for transit-supported development) would be acquired to accommodate the double tracking and the realigned freight tracks. Because the proposed action is within an existing transportation corridor, it would not physically divide an existing community or interfere with community cohesion. Rather, the increased light rail service and reliability would contribute to the complete street plans for Folsom Boulevard and enhance mobility for residents and employees along the Gold Line route.

Environmental Justice/Title VI. The proposed action would pass through several areas that house environmental justice populations: two areas in the Folsom segment have low-income populations, and one area in the Rancho Cordova segment has minority populations. The nature and severity of impacts and mitigation measures apply similarly for environmental justice populations and non-environmental justice populations in the project corridor. These environmental justice population groups would not bear disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects.

Conclusions

With implementation of the mitigation measures that SacRT adopted in its IS/MND, as amended by FTA, and the conservation and compensatory measures in the Service's Biological Opinion, there would be no adverse effects under NEPA or other related environmental regulations. The proposed action meets the requirements of 23 CFR Section 771.118(d)(8). SacRT requests that FTA review the attached Categorical Exclusion and other documentation, and that FTA concur with these conclusions.

Final project design is expected to commence as soon as possible, following completion of the NEPA review. Design would start with the Folsom segment. Construction is projected to start in the latter half of 2021.

SacRT appreciates FTA's support of this project. If you have any questions concerning this submittal or require additional information, please contact Sangita Arya at 916-557- 0998 (sarya@sacrt.com).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Abansado', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Darryl Abansado
Director, Engineering and Construction

Attachments

Attachment 1: Categorical Exclusion Worksheet (includes appendices listed below)

Appendix A: National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Compliance

Appendix B: Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation