

Interstate 10/Portola Avenue New Interchange Project

Initial Study [with Proposed Negative Declaration]/Environmental Assessment

Executive Summary

The County of Riverside (County), in cooperation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the City of Palm Desert (City), proposes to construct a new interchange on Interstate 10 (I-10) at Portola Avenue. The limits of work for this project are along I-10 from post mile (PM) 44.8 to PM 46.6 and include the construction of a new structure crossing I-10 and the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), associated on- and off-ramps, and the realignment of the adjacent frontage road, Varner Road.

I-10 is a major east-west freeway that begins at State Route 1 in Santa Monica, CA and terminates at Interstate 95 in Jacksonville, FL. The route varies from two to four lanes in each direction within Riverside County. I-10 provides interstate and interregional movement of people and goods within the Counties of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside. Travelers using the route typically consists of commuter, commercial, and recreational vehicles. Considerable development and the resulting increase in traffic in the Coachella Valley and in the City of Palm Desert led to the initiation of a new connection to I-10. Portola Avenue is classified as an arterial within the General Plan of the City of Palm Desert. The City's General plan also identifies Portola Avenue as the location for a new connection.

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to:

- Reduce existing and forecasted traffic congestion on Monterey Avenue and Cook Street intersections near I-10.
- Improve traffic operations at the I-10/Monterey Avenue Interchange and the I-10/Cook Street Interchange.
- Provide a balanced circulation system and reduce out of direction travel.
- Help achieve the goals of the SCAG RTP.
- Accommodate planned infrastructure improvements within the project vicinity and provide a facility consistent with existing and planned local development, the County of Riverside General Plan Circulation Element and the City of Palm Desert Comprehensive General Plan Circulation Element.

Need

The project is needed because the existing I-10/Monterey Avenue Interchange and I-10/Cook Street Interchange cannot accommodate forecasted travel demand without additional I-10 access. Currently, the I-10/Monterey Avenue and I-10/Cook Street Interchanges provide the primary access from I-10 to the City of Palm Desert and the unincorporated community of Thousand Palms in Riverside County, as well as portions of the cities of Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells. As traffic demands in the region increase, level of service on local roads as well as the I-10 freeway, are expected to decline to levels below acceptable according to City, County, and Caltrans standards. The interchanges at I-10/Monterey Avenue and I-10/Cook Street would be the most affected by growing congestion.

Alternatives

Three alternatives are being considered in this Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA): 1) the No-Build Alternative, 2) Modified Partial Cloverleaf Interchange, and 3) Modified Single Quadrant Cloverleaf Interchange. The No-Build Alternative is considered the base case scenario and proposes that no improvements be made to the transportation facility in the project area. Both of the two build alternatives propose fully functional interchange facilities connecting to I-10 at Portola Avenue with slightly differing on-ramp and off-ramp configurations.

Environmental Document

Caltrans, as assigned by the Federal Highway Administration, and in cooperation with the County of Riverside and the City of Palm Desert, has prepared this IS/EA, which examines the potential environmental impacts of the alternatives being considered for the proposed project located in Riverside County, California. Caltrans is the lead agency under both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The document describes why the project is being proposed, which alternatives are being considered for the project, the existing environment and how that could be affected by the project, the potential impacts of each of the alternatives, and the proposed avoidance, minimization and/or mitigation measures.

Based on the findings in the IS/EA the project is expected to have no effect on farmlands, timberlands, cultural resources, paleontological resources, or wetlands. In addition, the proposed project would not have substantial impacts to land use, recreational facilities, visual resources, floodplains, water quality, air quality, noise, and biological resources.