

1.1 Overview

The Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (District), in coordination with the City of San Rafael (City), Marin County Transit District (Marin Transit), Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), and Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART), plans to replace the transit center in Downtown San Rafael (known as the San Rafael Transit Center or the C. Paul Bettini Transit Center). The proposed San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project (proposed project) is needed primarily to replace the existing transit center following the loss of some of the transit center facilities that resulted from the implementation of the SMART Phase 2 line to Larkspur. A new transit center solution in Downtown San Rafael would address near-term and long-term transit needs while improving the desirability and usability of transit for both local residents and regional commuters. A detailed description of the proposed project is provided in Chapter 2, Project Description.

This ~~Draft~~Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The District, as the owner of the transit center, is the CEQA Lead Agency for the proposed project and has prepared this ~~Draft~~Final EIR to evaluate potential impacts and identify required mitigation to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts.

Corrections and revisions to the Draft EIR in response to public comments are shown in underline and ~~strikeout~~ throughout the Final EIR.

1.2 Project History

Development of the proposed project began with the *San Rafael Downtown Station Area Plan* (Downtown SAP) in 2012. The proposed project has involved a multi-year process to identify a new transit center site and configuration that will provide for the current and future mobility needs of San Rafael and Marin County. The extension of the SMART line south to Larkspur affected the existing transit center's functionality by installing train tracks that bisect the existing transit center. The proposed project is an opportunity to create a more accessible transit facility for all users and improve both connectivity and safety.

Providing improved access to transit in Marin County and the North Bay Area is consistent with the transportation goals established in prior studies and plans including the *San Rafael Transit Center Relocation Study* (City of San Rafael et al. 2017) and the Downtown SAP (City of San Rafael 2012) and supports the long-range *Marin Strategic Vision Plan* (TAM 2017). Two of the key tenets of the vision developed through the Downtown SAP process is to provide a safe and comfortable environment for transit users and a clear, safe, and pleasant connection between the transit center and surrounding neighborhoods. The primary goal of the *Strategic Vision Plan* is to provide transportation facilities and services that support and enhance Marin County's high quality of life and vibrant economy. Other goals are to support a healthy and safe environment and maximize mobility for all residents. The proposed project is an essential tool to achieve regional auto trip reduction goals by enhancing the desirability and functionality of non-auto-dependent modes. An

improved transit center could help generate increased ridership for SMART rail service, increasing the success of the new line. The proposed project provides an improved customer service facility, improvements to safety and security, and modernized amenities. For the residents, students, and employees of San Rafael, including disadvantaged communities, a new transit center will be safer to access, more inviting, and easier to use, improving quality of life.

Improvements to the transit center also would support goals identified in the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's *Plan Bay Area* (2013), which include increasing non-auto mode share and preserving economic vitality by concentrating future development around transit nodes and along transit corridors. The transit center is within a designated priority development area in *Plan Bay Area*, which is defined as a locally designated area within existing communities that provides infill development opportunities and is easily accessible to transit, jobs, shopping, and services. A new transit center also brings the opportunity to not only improve mobility for residents but also enhance the vibrancy of Downtown San Rafael with a new public space that is aesthetically pleasing and improves circulation. Similarly, the Downtown SAP sets the stage to create a mixed-use, livable area around the future Downtown transit center and calls for a Downtown station that efficiently brings together several modes of transportation.

1.3 Project Objectives

The objectives of the proposed project are to:

- Provide improved transit connectivity and ease of use in and around Downtown San Rafael.
- Enhance local and regional transit use by bringing together multiple modes of the transportation network—including the SMART-bus connection—into a hub that affords transit users the safest, most efficient means of using bus and rail services.
- Efficiently accommodate transit users and services, optimize operating costs, and improve transit desirability.
- Design a functional, attractive, and cost-effective facility that can meet long-term projected service levels and be implemented in an expeditious manner, so as to minimize the period of use of the interim facility.
- Provide a transit facility that is readily accessible to individuals with disabilities, transit users, and transit-dependent populations, including those with low incomes.
- Provide a secure, safe, and inviting space for transit patrons.
- Create a more accessible transit facility for all users by reducing vehicular, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian conflicts and improving safety.
- Provide convenient, pedestrian connections to surrounding land uses.

The proposed project is needed primarily to replace the existing transit center following impacts on the functionality of some of the transit center facilities resulting from the implementation of the SMART Phase 2 line to Larkspur. With the extension of SMART through the existing transit center south of 3rd Street, Platform C was reconfigured, negatively affecting bus circulation and bus bay flexibility within and around the transit center and disrupting pedestrian access and transfer activity among the remaining platforms at the site. SMART riders transferring from the Downtown

San Rafael SMART station to access the current transit center south of 3rd Street, as well as riders originating from Downtown San Rafael, must navigate heavy traffic crossing through local intersections and accessing the U.S. Highway 101 on-ramps adjacent to the transit center. The configuration of the SMART rail tracks directly through the transit center is detrimental to bus, vehicle, and pedestrian access and safety. A new transit center solution in Downtown San Rafael would address near-term and long-term transit needs while improving the desirability and usability of transit for both residents and regional commuters. It would also reduce traffic congestion, facilitate more efficient transit operations, and promote pedestrian safety.

1.3.1 Agency and Public Outreach

In early 2018, the District convened a Joint Project Team composed of staff from the partnering agencies including the City, Marin Transit, TAM, SMART, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission as part of the alternatives development and screening process. The Joint Project Team identified potential site locations, reviewed proposed project facilities and amenities, screened locations, and provided input on options to continue to advance. The project team conducted presentations to executive leadership representing the partner agencies and to various elected boards, including the District Board of Directors Transportation Committee and San Rafael City Council.

The District has held various workshops on concept development and meetings since 2017, with community representatives including the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Neighborhoods, League of Women Voters, San Rafael Heritage, and Canal Alliance.

~~The~~ Prior to publication of the Draft EIR, the District has held five public meetings during the project development process, including a public scoping meeting for this Draft EIR as outlined below:

- Public Meeting #1: March 20, 2018 (Open House & Survey)
- Public Meeting #2: June 12, 2018 (Input on Specific Concepts)
- Public Meeting #3: Notice of Preparation of Draft EIR and Scoping Meeting—October 30, 2018 (Scoping for Environmental Analysis)
- Public Meeting #4: Facebook Live Event with Omar Carrera, Executive Director of the Canal Alliance—November 9, 2020
- Public Meeting #5: Community Meeting on Zoom—November 19, 2020 (Project Update/Review of Alternatives)

In addition to the meetings outlined above, public outreach has included bilingual outreach activities at the existing transit center and Food Pantry. Additional outreach to businesses through the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce and San Rafael Business Improvements District has been done and over 100 email notifications were sent out to the community, neighborhood, and business organizations. Community members have completed over 1,000 online surveys in both English and Spanish. The project team has presented on the proposed project to the following organizations: San Rafael High School English Learner Advisory Committee, San Rafael Heritage, San Rafael Chamber of Commerce, League of Women Voters, and District Bus Passengers Advisory Committee.

1.4 Environmental Review Process

1.4.1 California Environmental Quality Act

CEQA applies to all discretionary activities proposed to be implemented by California public agencies, including state, regional, county, and local agencies (California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.). CEQA requires agencies to estimate and evaluate the environmental impacts of their actions, avoid or reduce significant environmental impacts when feasible, and consider the environmental implications of their actions prior to making a decision. CEQA also requires agencies to inform the public and other relevant agencies and consider their comments in the evaluation and decision-making process. The State CEQA Guidelines are the primary source of rules and interpretation of CEQA (California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.; 14 California Code of Regulations 15000 et seq.).

1.4.2 Purpose of this EIR

The purpose of the EIR is to provide the information necessary for the District to make an informed decision about the proposed project and to supply the information necessary to support related permit applications and review processes.

This ~~Draft~~Final EIR has been prepared in compliance with CEQA to achieve the following goals.

- Identify potential direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts associated with the proposed project.
- Describe feasible mitigation measures intended to avoid or reduce potentially significant impacts to a less-than-significant level.
- Disclose the environmental analysis, including the potential project impacts and proposed mitigation measures, for public and agency review and comment.
- Discuss potential alternatives to the proposed project that can meet the basic project objectives, are feasible, and would avoid or reduce identified significant project impacts.

One of the purposes of CEQA is to establish opportunities for the public and relevant agencies to review and comment on projects that might affect the environment. ~~Scoping activities are discussed below. The District will provide a public review period for this Draft EIR of 60 days from release of the Draft EIR for comment. The District will also conduct a public meeting to receive comments during the comment period. Once the public review period is complete, the District will prepare a Final EIR that includes all the comments received on the Draft EIR, responses to all comments, and any necessary revisions to the Draft EIR. CEQA requires the District to review and consider the information in the EIR before making a decision on the proposed project.~~Scoping activities and public review of the Draft EIR are discussed below.

1.4.3 Scope and Content of EIR

Scoping refers to the process used to assist the lead agency (the District) in determining the focus and content of an EIR. Scoping solicits input on the potential topics to be addressed in an EIR, the range of project alternatives, and possible mitigation measures. Scoping is also helpful in

establishing methods of assessment and in selecting the environmental effects to be considered in detail.

1.4.3.1 Notice of Preparation and Scoping

The scoping process for this EIR formally began on October 16, 2018, when the Notice of Preparation was submitted to the State Clearinghouse for distribution to federal, state, and local agencies. The purpose of the Notice of Preparation is to solicit participation from relevant agencies and from the public in determining the scope of an EIR. The scoping period ended on November 19, 2018.

The District distributed the Notice of Preparation to approximately 36 federal, state, regional, and local agencies. The District also notified potentially interested individuals and organizations regarding the scoping process and public scoping meeting for the proposed project. The District used multiple methods to announce the scoping process and public meetings, including display advertisements in local newspapers, postcard mailing to addresses within a half-mile radius of the existing transit center, poster displays attached to sandwich boards at the transit center and in nearby windows, project website updates, information posted on the City of San Rafael's Nextdoor account, emails sent to the District's email database, a press release circulated to media outlets, social media postings, and phone and email outreach to leaders of the Canal Alliance, Canal Multicultural Center, and Ad Hoc Committee. Further information regarding the Notice of Preparation process is discussed in Section 1.4.3.1 below.

The project team held a public scoping meeting on October 30, 2018, at the Whistlestop building at 930 Tamalpais Avenue in San Rafael to provide an opportunity for attendees to comment on environmental issues of concern.

Written and oral comments received during the scoping process are on file with the District and can be accessed online at <https://www.goldengate.org/district/district-projects/san-rafael-transit-center/project-documents-materials/>. Public comments are also included in the scoping summary report in Appendix A. This ~~draft~~ EIR considers the comments received during the scoping period.

1.4.3.2 Resource Topics Analyzed in the EIR

Consistent with Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, ~~this Draft~~ the EIR evaluates the potential impacts of the proposed project for the following resource areas.

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality

- Land Use and Planning
- Noise and Vibration
- Population and Housing
- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire

The following topics are also analyzed in ~~this Draft~~ the EIR.

- Cumulative impacts
- Alternatives to the proposed project
- Significant and unavoidable impacts
- Significant irreversible changes in the environment
- Growth inducement

Although agricultural and mineral resources are identified in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines, this EIR analysis does not include these topics because there would be no impact, as described below.

- **Agricultural Resources.** Changes in the status of agricultural lands may constitute significant impacts under CEQA; examples include direct conversion of state-designated Important Farmlands to nonagricultural use, conflict with Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act) contracts, and various other types of environmental changes that have the potential to result indirectly in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use. No agricultural land exists in the project area. No impacts on agricultural resources would result from project implementation or operation. Consequently, the proposed project would not have the potential to contribute directly or indirectly to conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use, and agricultural resources are not discussed further.
- **Mineral Resources.** A project typically would cause a significant impact on mineral resources when it results in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource important to the region and state or a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan. *The City-San Rafael General Plan 20240* does not include policies relating to mineral resources because the City does not contain any mineral deposits of regional significance. There are no mineral extraction uses in the project area. There would be no impact during project construction or operation and mineral resources are not discussed further.

1.4.4 Public Review of Draft EIR and Public Meetings

The Draft EIR was released for public review and comment on August 11, 2021. The comment period was initially scheduled to conclude on October 12, 2021, but was extended to November 2,

2021. The District undertook the following actions to inform the public of the availability of the Draft EIR:

- The Notice of Availability and Draft EIR were published on the District website, posted at the existing transit center, and submitted to the Marin County Clerk for public posting.
- Notification of the availability of the Draft EIR was mailed to members of the public who had indicated interest in the proposed project.
- The Draft EIR was submitted to the State Clearinghouse and to various governmental agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals (see Chapter 3 of this Final EIR for a list of agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals that received the Draft EIR).
- Copies of the Draft EIR were made available at the Main Branch and Pickleweed Branch of the City of San Rafael Public Library.

All written comments received during this period were compiled and responses provided in Chapter 9, Responses to Comments, of this Final EIR. Additionally, the District held two public meetings on the Draft EIR, one in English and one in Spanish, on September 14 and 15, 2021. These meetings included a presentation on the proposed project and the contents of the Draft EIR. Comments were recorded at these meetings and responses to these comments are provided in Chapter 9, Responses to Comments, of this Final EIR.

1.4.5 Final EIR

In accordance with CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, the District must provide written responses to comments made by a public agency at least 10 days prior to certifying the EIR. This Final EIR and all documents referenced herein will be available for public review at the District's website and at the San Rafael Public Library's Main Branch and Pickleweed Branch during normal business hours.

The State CEQA Guidelines Section 15132 specifies that the Final EIR consist of:

- The Draft EIR or a revision to the Draft EIR;
- Comments and recommendations received on the Draft EIR, either verbatim or in summary;
- A list of persons, organizations, and public agencies commenting on the Draft EIR;
- The lead agency's responses to significant environmental points raised in the review and consultation process; and
- Any other information added by the lead agency.

This Final EIR includes all of the above information.

1.4.6 Overview of Revisions to the Draft EIR Reflected in the Final EIR

The District has made changes to the Draft EIR in response to the comments received during the public review period and due to minor clarifications made by the District, which are shown in ~~strikeout~~ and underlined text throughout the Final EIR. This section provides an overview of the main changes to the Draft EIR. These changes to the Draft EIR have not resulted in new significant

impacts or mitigation measures or caused a substantial increase in the severity of an impact described in the Draft EIR; therefore, recirculation of the Draft EIR is not required (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15088.5(a)).

1.4.6.1 San Rafael General Plan 2040

At the time of release of the Notice of Preparation and the while the District conducted the impact analysis of the proposed project, the adopted general plan in the City of San Rafael was *The City of San Rafael General Plan 2020*. Therefore, the analysis in the Draft EIR relied on applicable policies from *The City of San Rafael General Plan 2020*. A draft version of *San Rafael General Plan 2040* was available for public review but was not yet adopted. For this reason, the District also included *San Rafael General Plan 2040* policies in the Draft EIR for informational purposes, in anticipation of the adoption of the City's updated general plan. The City of San Rafael adopted *San Rafael General Plan 2040* in August 2021, while the Draft EIR was in print and shortly before the start of the public review and comment period. The City prepared a summary document that lists the changes between the City's former general plan and *San Rafael General Plan 2040* (Appendix B).

The text of the Draft EIR has been revised in this Final EIR to remove references to *The City of San Rafael General Plan 2020* and incorporate any additional *San Rafael General Plan 2040* policies, as adopted, into the analysis where applicable.

1.4.6.2 Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan

The City's *Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan* was adopted at the same time as *San Rafael General Plan 2040*. This plan serves as a policy and regulatory document for development of the Downtown San Rafael neighborhood. As described for *San Rafael General Plan 2040* above, the Draft EIR included policies from the *Downtown San Rafael Precise Plan* for informational purposes, in anticipation of the adoption of the City's updated general plan. The text of the Draft EIR has been revised in the Final EIR to indicate that this plan has been adopted since the publication of the Draft EIR.

1.4.6.3 Minor Design Modifications

Additionally, minor design modifications to the layouts of the Move Whistlestop Alternative (the preferred project) and Adapt Whistlestop Alternative were made between the publication of the Draft EIR and preparation of this Final EIR. Subsequent chapters and sections of this Final EIR have been updated in ~~strikeout~~ and underline to reflect these design modifications.

The layouts of the Move Whistlestop Alternative and Adapt Whistlestop Alternative have been revised to relocate the pick-up and drop-off area and maintenance parking. Since the publication of the Draft EIR, the pick-up/drop-off location for the Move Whistlestop Alternative and Adapt Whistlestop Alternative has been relocated from West Tamalpais Avenue between 4th Street and 5th Avenue to the eastern side of the new access alley to the west of West Tamalpais Avenue between 3rd Street and 4th Street. The maintenance parking area, described in the Draft EIR as being on the eastern side of the access alley, has been shifted to the western side of the access alley. Additionally, commuter parking spaces have been added along West Tamalpais Avenue between 2nd Street and 3rd Street.

The changes to the pick-up and drop-off and maintenance parking areas resulted in a small shift in the layout of the Move Whistlestop Alternative and Adapt Whistlestop Alternative; the access alley

would extend approximately 12 feet farther to the west than presented in the Draft EIR. No additional buildings would require removal or modification and no additional property acquisition would be required. Because of this modification, there would no longer be any construction required to the north of 4th Street for these alternatives. The updated Move Whistlestop Alternative and Adapt Whistlestop Alternative layouts are shown on Figures 2-4 and 2-5.

1.4.6.4 Right-Turn Lane onto 3rd Street from Hetherton Street

The proposed right turn onto 3rd Street from Hetherton Street has been changed from a shared right-turn/through lane and a right-turn only lane to include two right-turn only lanes with signal phasing modifications. Traffic analysis was performed on the revised geometry and phasing and an updated Transportation Summary Report is included as Appendix E to the Final EIR.

1.4.6.5 Figures and Tables

Figures and tables have been updated as necessary throughout the Final EIR to reflect design updates or clarifications. Updated or new figures and tables are noted as such in their titles.

1.5 EIR Organization

This ~~Draft~~Final EIR is organized in the chapters and appendices listed below:

- Chapter 1, Introduction, includes a brief overview of the proposed project; an overview of the environmental review process; and the scope, content, and organization of the ~~Draft~~Final EIR.
- Chapter 2, Project Description, includes a comprehensive description of the proposed project.
- Chapter 3, Environmental Analysis, includes an evaluation of the resource topics outlined above. Each resource-specific section discusses the environmental setting, impacts, and mitigation measures.
- Chapter 4, Cumulative Impacts, includes a discussion of the proposed project's potential impacts related to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable development in the project area.
- Chapter 5, Alternatives, includes a description of the project alternatives considered and evaluation of several alternatives to the proposed project, including those removed from further consideration.
- Chapter 6, Other CEQA-Required Analysis, includes a discussion of significant environmental impacts that cannot be avoided, significant irreversible changes in the environment, and growth-inducing impacts.
- Chapter 7, List of Preparers, includes a list of staff who contributed to preparation of the ~~Draft~~Final EIR.
- Chapter 8, References, includes a list of the printed references and personal communications cited in the ~~Draft~~Final EIR.
- Chapter 9, Responses to Comments, includes public comments received on the Draft EIR and responses.
- Appendices
 - A. Scoping Summary Report

- BB. Summary of Changes between *The City of San Rafael General Plan 2020 and San Rafael General Plan 2040*
- C. City of San Rafael, San Rafael Transit Center Guidance Report
- D. Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Modeling Files
- EE. Transportation Summary Report
- DF. Biological Resources: Plants and Animal Species Observed
- EG. Biological Resources: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Natural Diversity Database, and California Native Plant Society Lists
- FH. Cultural Resources: Department of Parks and Recreation Forms
- GI. Cultural Resources: Northwest Information Center Records Search Results
- HJ. Preliminary Geotechnical Design Recommendations
- IK. Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
- JL. Noise Field Data