



**Program Environmental Document
and Service Development Plan**

Combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and Record of Decision

**Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail
Corridor Service Program**

June 2022



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Abbreviations/Acronyms

BMP	best management practice
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CEQA	California Environmental Quality Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CV	Coachella Valley
EIR	environmental impact report
EIS	environmental impact statement
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
GHG	greenhouse gas
LAUS	Los Angeles Union Station
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NOI	Notice of Intent
NOP	Notice of Preparation
Program	Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Corridor Service Program

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**Program Environmental Document
and Service Development Plan**

Part 1: Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR

**Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail
Corridor Service Program**

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**COACHELLA VALLEY-SAN GORGONIO PASS RAIL CORRIDOR SERVICE PROGRAM
Combined Final Tier 1/Program Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact
Report and Record of Decision**

Prepared by:

U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Railroad Administration

California Department of Transportation Division of Rail and Mass Transportation

and the

Riverside County Transportation Commission

Pursuant to
National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. §4321 et seq.), and implementing regulations (40 CFR
Parts 1500-1508), 64 FR 28545, 49 U.S.C. §303 (Section 4(f), formerly Department of
Transportation Act of 1966, Section 4(f)); National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. §300101 et
seq.); Clean Air Act as amended (42 U.S.C. §7401 et seq. and 40 CFR Parts 51 and 93);
Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. §§1531-1544); Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. §§1251-
1387); California Environmental Quality Act (PRC 21000 et seq); and State of California CEQA
Guidelines

June 2, 2022



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Abstract

This combined Tier 1/Program Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Tier 1/Program FEIS/EIR) and Record of Decision (ROD) evaluates the Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service Program. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), California Department of Transportation Division of Rail and Mass Transportation (Caltrans), and Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) considered comments received on the Tier 1/Program Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Tier 1/Program DEIS/EIR) and is providing responses to comments in Appendix D of the FEIS/EIR. FRA's use of the combined Tier 1/Program FEIS/ROD is consistent with 49 United States Code (U.S.C.) 304a.¹ The primary purpose of the Tier 1/Program FEIS/EIR is to present responses from FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC to public and agency comments received on the Tier 1/Program DEIS/EIR for the Program, which was published in May 2021. This Tier 1/Program FEIS/EIR and ROD evaluates alternatives for improved passenger rail service between Los Angeles Union Station and the Coachella Valley. A No Build Alternative and three potential Build Alternative Options were evaluated. The Build Alternative Options would provide improved passenger rail service to meet future intercity travel demand, improve rail facilities, and reduce journey times. FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC identified Build Alternative Option 1 as the Preferred Alternative in the DEIS/EIR. FRA identified Build Alternative Option 1 as Preferred Alternative in this FEIS/EIR and the Selected Alternative in the ROD.

¹ For FRA, the statutory authority for a combined FEIS/ROD originates with Section 1319 of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) (Public Law 112-141). On December 4, 2015, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) (Public Law 114-94) was signed into law. Its provisions became effective on October 1, 2015, after the DEIS for this Project was initiated. Section 1304(j) repealed Section 1319 of MAP-21 but included a new provision providing FRA with similar authority. This authority was codified in 49 U.S.C. 304a.

Part 1: Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report

1.1 Introduction

This combined Final Tier 1/Program Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report and Record of Decision (ROD)² (Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD) evaluates alternatives for improved passenger rail service within the 144-mile-long Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor (Program Corridor) between Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) in Los Angeles County, California and the City of Coachella in Riverside County, California. The Program is considered the “proposed action” for purposes of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the “proposed project” for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

A No Build Alternative and three potential Build Alternative Options were evaluated in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. The Build Alternative Options would provide improved passenger rail service to meet future intercity travel demand, improve rail facilities, reduce journey times, and improve connections with regional public transit services. As part of corridor planning, the first phase of the process is the development of a Corridor Investment Plan (CIP). The process of completing a CIP consists of conducting an environmental review in accordance with NEPA and CEQA, as documented in the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and developing a Service Development Plan (SDP). The SDP is a detailed definition of the service improvements and transportation network, and the operational and financial aspects for the alternative for passenger rail service that is selected through the NEPA and CEQA processes.

The intent of the CIP is to provide sufficient information to support future decision-making at the Federal, State and/or local level regarding investments within the Program Corridor. FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC utilized a tiered environmental process for the Program, which is a phased approach to environmental review used in the development of complex projects (as provided in 40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1508.28 and 14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] 15152). The tiered NEPA/CEQA review and decision-making process allows for a broad-level programmatic decision

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with a first-tier EIS and a programmatic EIR, followed by more specific analyses and decisions through one or more second-tier NEPA/CEQA evaluations, as applicable. The Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and the SDP address improvements to passenger rail service within the Program Corridor, including the following:

- **Rail corridor** – Reasonable and feasible rail alignment improvement alternatives from Los Angeles to Coachella
- **Service characteristics** – Passenger rail operational elements, train speeds, travel time, train frequency and train technology
- **Potential station catchment areas** – The general study areas where potential passenger rail stations could be located

Selection and advancement of components within the Preferred Alternative as described in this Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD would require additional planning and design. The Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD includes specific responses to comments received during the public and agency review and comment period (May 21, 2021, to July 6, 2021) related to information provided in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. The entire Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, including appendices, is attached as Appendix A.

The Tier 1 ROD identifies FRA's Selected Alternative for the Program, which may be carried forward for further planning, design, and construction subject to future available funding. Subsequent Tier 2/Project-level environmental reviews would evaluate more detailed, site-specific proposals implementing the Selected Alternative. The Tier 2/Project-level NEPA/CEQA studies may also evaluate stand-alone projects with logical termini and independent utility. In other words, one or more corridor sections that together make up the complete passenger rail system could be developed as individual projects.

The specific class of NEPA/CEQA documents for more detailed analysis of any Tier 2/Project-level improvements has not yet been defined. Preliminary design and environmental studies would be conducted in support of a Tier 2/Project-level analysis. Finally, coordination and outreach would occur as appropriate during any Tier 2/Project-level analysis to engage the public and other stakeholders. Input from the outreach effort would be incorporated into the NEPA/CEQA analysis and into the project design if warranted. The remainder of this section defines key concepts and terminology used in the environmental analysis and presents the overall organization of this combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD.

1.2 Tiered NEPA/CEQA Process

Consistent with CEQ's regulations and CEQA Guideline Sections 15168 and 15170, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC are using a tiered NEPA/CEQA process.

Tiering is a staged environmental review process, which involves the evaluation of broad-level programs and issues in a programmatic corridor-level analysis generally followed by more detailed evaluation of specific improvements.

Selection and advancement of Program components within the Selected Alternative would require additional planning and design. Subsequent Tier 2/Project-level environmental reviews would evaluate more detailed, site-specific proposals to implement the selected alternative. In addition, the Tier 2/Project-level documents would address stand-alone projects with logical termini and independent utility. In other words, one or more corridor sections that together make up the complete passenger rail system could be developed as individual projects.

Because the Preferred Alternative follows the existing UPRR rail line within the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor, infrastructure investments could be separated into relatively small, lower-cost elements, so that Caltrans or potentially another division of the State responsible for implementing the Program Corridor could implement the Preferred Alternative incrementally as funding becomes available. Caltrans or a future State/regional entity could also implement the elements deemed most valuable to support expanded passenger rail service. To plan and implement phased investments, Caltrans or a future State/regional entity would coordinate with the host railroad and passenger rail service operator.

While the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR assessed potential impacts based on previously identified resources, a Tier 2/Project-level analysis would include site-specific field investigations to identify additional resources and impacts that are outside the scope of the Tier 1/Program-level analysis. Detailed design developed for Tier 2/Project-level analysis would identify site-specific potential impacts from construction and/or operation of passenger rail improvements and the development of site-specific mitigation measures to avoid or minimize effects and impacts on sensitive environmental resources. The following representative list presents the Tier 2/Project-level analyses that may be required for subsequent Tier 2/Project-level NEPA/CEQA analysis:

- Special status species surveys and wildlife movement studies;
- Wetland delineations and identification of Section 401, Section 404, Section 1600 permitting requirements;
- Cultural resource surveys and Section 106 consultation;
- Paleontological resource surveys;

- Threatened and endangered species surveys and Section 7 consultation;
- Noise and vibration analysis;
- Section 4(f) evaluation;
- Section 6(f) analysis;
- Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments;
- Air emissions analysis in nonattainment areas;
- Station-area traffic studies;
- Land use consistency analysis;
- Community impact and relocation analyses;
- Visual impact analysis;
- Hydrologic modeling analysis, floodplain analysis and water quality assessments;
- Grade crossing and safety analysis; and
- Surveys, infrastructure inspections and engineering design.

Federal and State funding would likely be required to advance the Program into Tier 2/Project-level design and analysis. However, funding to advance the Tier 2/Project-level review has not been determined at this time. If final design and construction require Federal funding, Federal permits, and/or other Federal approval(s), a Tier 2/Project-level NEPA analysis, led by the appropriate Federal agency would be required. The scope of such analysis would be based on the nature of the proposed Federal action. In addition, Tier 2/Project-level improvements would be subject to State requirements, permits, and approvals, including CEQA.

Depending on the scope and potential environmental impacts of Tier 2/Project-level improvements, the appropriate class of Tier 2/Project-level analyses may be a NEPA EIS, Environmental Assessment, or Categorical Exclusion and/or a CEQA EIR, Negative Declaration, Mitigated Negative Declaration, Statutory Exemption, or Categorical Exemption. The specific class of NEPA and/or CEQA documentation for more detailed analysis of any Tier 2/Project-level improvement has not yet been defined. Preliminary design and environmental studies would be conducted in support of any Tier 2/Project-level analysis. Finally, coordination and outreach would occur as appropriate during any Tier 2/Project-level analysis to engage the public and other stakeholders. Input from the outreach effort would be incorporated into the environmental analysis and into the project design if warranted.

1.3 Key Concepts and Terminology

To maintain consistency between the evaluation of the No Build Alternative and the three Build Alternative Options, and the identification of the Preferred Alternative, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC used the same key concepts presented in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR for the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD. These key concepts are defined below.

1.3.1 Program Corridor

The Program Corridor runs west-to-east, extending from a western terminus at LAUS to an eastern terminus in either the City of Indio or City of Coachella and consists of two sections: the Western Section and the Eastern Section. The boundary between the Western and Eastern Sections is in the City of Colton, at the intersection of existing railroad lines owned by Union Pacific Railroad (UP) and BNSF. The Program Corridor provides a flexible regional context for the best location of an enhanced passenger rail system while providing opportunities for the Build Alternative Options within the Program Corridor to account for engineering and environmental constraints, as well as public input. Under Build Alternative Option 1, the Program Corridor includes a total Program Corridor distance of 144 miles with the Western Section terminating at LAUS and the Eastern Section terminating in the City of Coachella. Under Build Alternative Options 2 and 3, the Program Corridor includes a total Program Corridor distance of 140.25 miles with the Western Section terminating at LAUS and the Eastern Section terminating at the City of Indio. Figure 1-1 through Figure 1-3 provide an illustrative overview of the Program Corridor under all Build Alternative Options.

1.3.2 Preferred Alternative

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC used the evaluation criteria previously developed and based on the Program Purpose and Need goals and objectives to compare the No Build Alternative and the three Build Alternative Options. During scoping, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC conducted an open, interactive process to develop the Program Purpose and Need Statement and high-level goals and objectives. Those Program goals and objectives were then used to develop an evaluation framework, which served as the basis for the analysis and screening of corridor concepts and preliminary alternatives.

In association with the technical analyses conducted for the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC used the evaluation framework to compare the Build Alternative Options. Based on the comparison of performance attributes, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC proposed that Build Alternative Option 1 be identified in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR as the recommended Preferred Alternative for both NEPA and CEQA.

1.3.3 Environmentally Preferable/Superior Alternative

Both NEPA and CEQA require the lead agency to identify the alternative that would cause the least harm to the biological and physical environment. Under NEPA, a Preferred Alternative must be identified in the FEIS. However, CEQ regulations require the Federal lead agency, FRA, to identify the Environmentally Preferable Alternative as “the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA Section 101” (40 CFR 1505.2). Under CEQA, the Environmentally Superior Alternative is typically the No Build Alternative; however, the final environmental document must an Environmentally Superior Alternative among the other build alternatives (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6).

For the purposes of this joint Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, the Environmentally Superior Alternative and the Preferred Alternative is the alternative identified as meeting most of the basic project objectives, similar to satisfying the primary purpose and need, and resulting in the fewest or least severe combination of significant environmental impacts. Table 2-1 provides a summary of the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Alternatives Evaluation Findings.

1.3.4 Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative is the alternative selected by FRA in the ROD that would be carried forward for future Tier 2/Project-level analysis, as required by NEPA. Based on the analysis contained in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, FRA selected Build Alternative Option 1.

1.3.5 Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC established a Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. This Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area was broad enough to encompass a variety of potential rail alignments and potential station locations suggested from the Alternatives Analysis Report. The Program Corridor was divided into two sections: the Western Section (LAUS to Colton) and Eastern Section (Colton to Indio/Coachella). As shown on Figure 1-1 through Figure 1-3, the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area for the Western Section of the Program Corridor encompasses a 600-foot buffer from either side of the existing BNSF railroad centerline. The 600-foot buffer is used for the Western Section to take into account any on-going maintenance activities that may occur during Program implementation. The Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area for the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor encompasses an 800-foot buffer from either side of the existing Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) railroad centerline in non-station areas and a 1,500-foot buffer from either side of the UPRR railroad centerline in station areas. The buffers identified for the Easter Section of the Program are used to take into account for any rail infrastructure improvements that may be needed. FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC also developed discipline- and resource-specific

study areas for each environmental impact analysis topic studied in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.

1.3.6 Level of Detail

The level of detail presented in the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD is consistent with FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC's tiered environmental review processes. A tiered NEPA process may be appropriate where broad program decisions for large expansive corridor programs: (1) are too complex to be addressed in one document; (2) are phased over time; (3) do not have fully defined future phases; or (4) have major routing or service alternatives that need to be evaluated. Similarly, the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15168(b)) state the advantages of a tiered CEQA process as: (1) more exhaustive consideration of alternatives; (2) consideration of cumulative impacts; (3) avoidance of duplicative reconsideration of basic policy; (4) consideration of broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures; and (5) allow for a reduction in paperwork.

1.3.7 No Build Alternative

The definition of the No Build Alternative remained the same from the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR to the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. The No Build Alternative consists of the continuation of the existing Amtrak passenger train route, freight rail operations, stations, and service within the Program Corridor. The No Build Alternative also includes all committed improvements (i.e., projects with dedicated or obligated funding) to the existing intercity passenger rail system, the highway/freeway system, and other modes of transportation available to the public (e.g. intercity bus services and aviation services) within the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area.

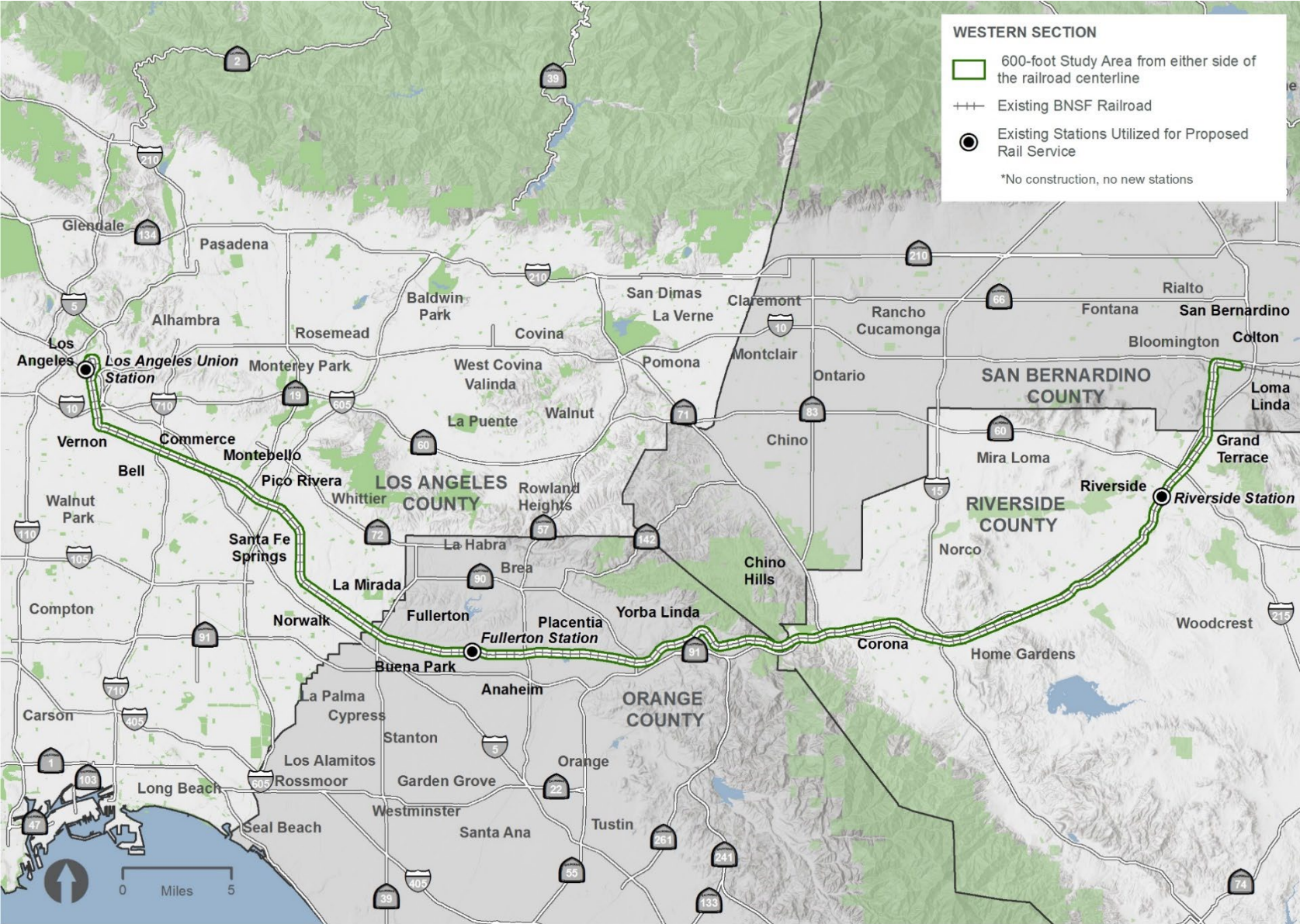
1.3.8 Section 4(f) Evaluation

The Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR identified potential properties within the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Study Area that are protected by Section 4(f) of the United States Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (Section 4(f)) and Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (Section 6(f)), and discussed legal requirements, methods of analysis, study area, affected environment, potential environmental impacts and potential mitigation strategies. This Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR does not provide detailed information FRA needs to make final determinations regarding potential uses of Section 4(f)-protected or Section 6(f)-protected resources within the Program Corridor. Final decisions on specific location and design will be made at the Tier 2/Project-level, when more detailed information is available for resource-specific analysis, and consideration of applicable avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures.

1.3.9 Mitigation Strategies

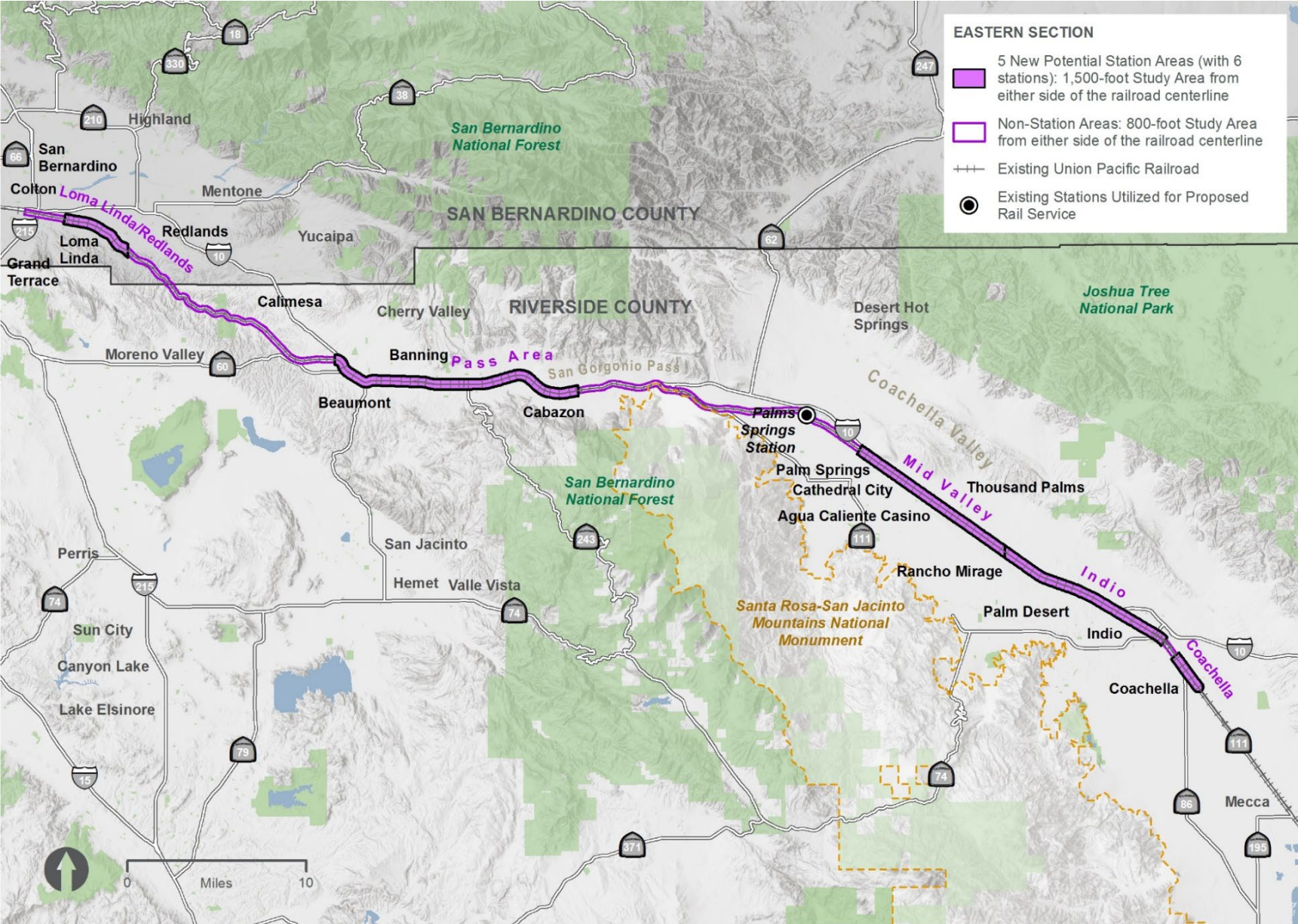
In a Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, potential effects and impacts are identified using high-level data and analysis. For the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC utilized existing information on known resources and estimated effects and impacts based on a lesser level of engineering than would be used at a Tier 2/Project-level analysis. Because of this, the available information was not detailed enough to formulate site-specific mitigation measures at the Tier 1/Program-level of analysis. Therefore, each resource evaluation in Chapter 3 of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR included a list of potential or representative mitigation strategies that would be considered and further developed in the future as part of the Tier 2/Project-level environmental analysis.

Figure 1-1. Western Section of the Program Corridor (Build Alternative Options 1, 2, and 3)



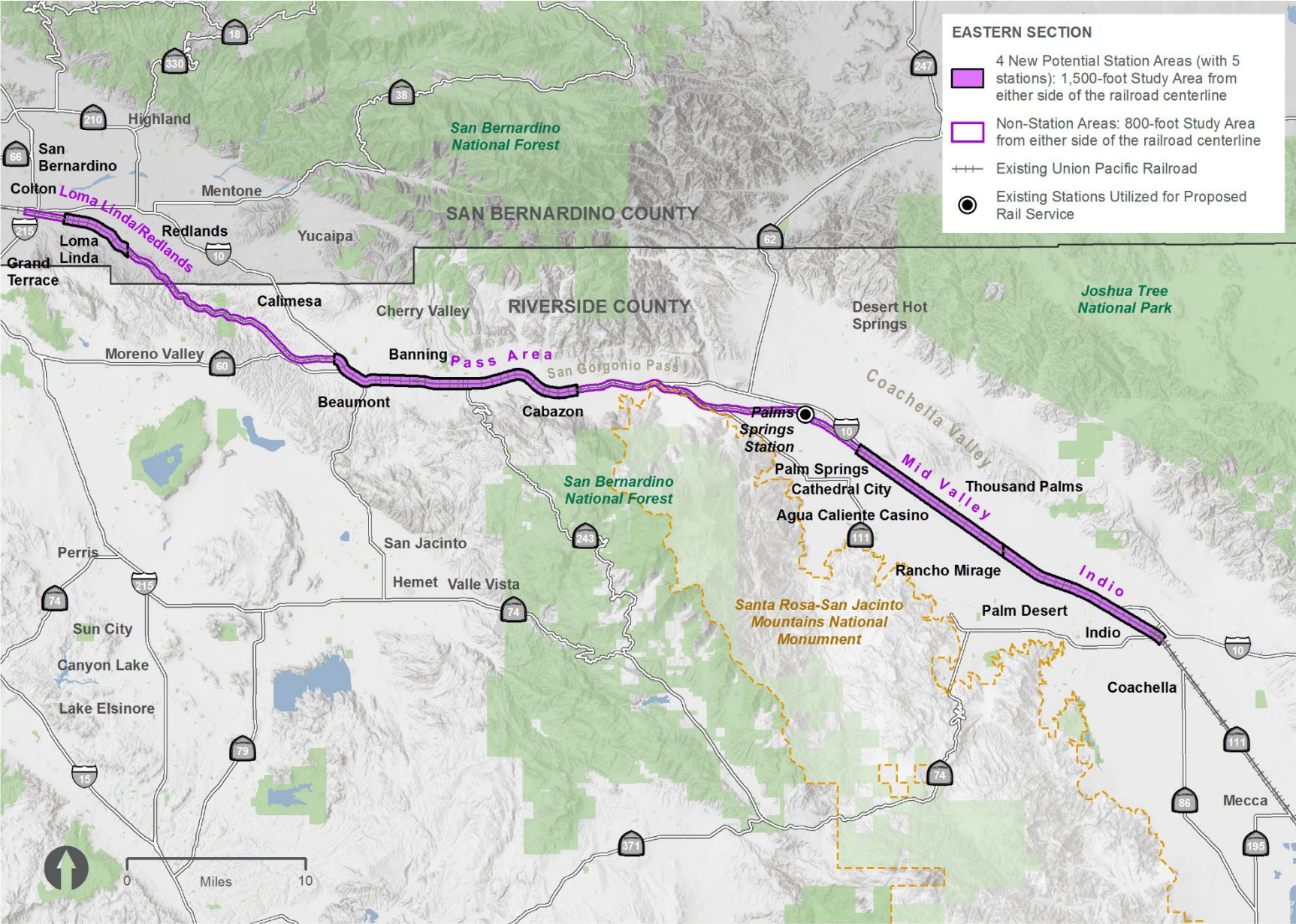
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Figure 1-2. Eastern Section of the Program Corridor (Build Alternative Option 1)



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Figure 1-3. Eastern Section of the Program Corridor (Build Alternative Options 2 and 3)



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1.4 Combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD

Under CEQ's Regulations, Final EIS and ROD documents are typically issued separately with a minimum 30-day period between issuance of the Final EIS and issuance of the ROD. However, to the maximum extent practicable, FRA must issue a combined Final EIS and ROD, unless:

- The Final EIS makes substantial changes to the proposed action that are relevant to environmental or safety concerns, or
- There are significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and that bears on the proposed action or the impacts of the proposed action.

This combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD does not include substantial changes to the proposed action in terms of environmental or safety concerns, nor are there significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns of the Program or its impacts.

As such, this combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD documents the lead agencies' decision on the Program, discusses the preferred and other alternatives, and explains potential mitigation strategies, if required, for future Tier 2/Project-level actions. Because this is a Tier 1/Program NEPA/CEQA document, the mitigation strategies generally represent commitments to further assess and refine mitigation requirements and coordinate with the public, resource and regulatory agencies, stakeholders, and Native American Tribes during future Tier 2/Project-level analysis.

1.5 Contents of Combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD

The primary purpose of this combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD is to provide an overview of the Tier 1/Program process, identify the alternatives considered by the lead agencies prior to coming to a decision and state the lead agencies' decision in regard to the proposed Program, and provide responses to those comments received during the public comment period (May 21, 2021 to July 6, 2021). This combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD contains the Tier 1/Program FEIS/EIR (Part 1), the Tier 1 ROD (Part 2), and the following Tier 1/Program FEIS/EIR appendices:

- **Appendix A:** Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR
- **Appendix B:** Public Hearing Documentation, including materials presented to the public during the Tier 1/Program DEIS/EIR public and agency comment period.

- **Appendix C:** Copies of all correspondence (including letters and emails) received from Federal, State, and local agencies, Native American Tribes, and the public during the Tier 1/Program DEIS/EIR public and agency comment period.
- **Appendix D:** Response to Comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR provided in a comments and responses matrix.
- **Appendix E:** CEQA Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.

1.6 Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative is Build Alternative Option 1 and consists of the existing route traveled by Amtrak Sunset Limited trains between Los Angeles and the Coachella Valley. As identified in the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, LAUS would serve as the western terminus while existing stations in the Cities of Fullerton and Riverside between LAUS and Colton would be utilized to support the proposed passenger rail service. No new stations or improvements to existing stations would be required to accommodate the proposed service within the Western Section of the Program Corridor. In addition, existing rail infrastructure would be used in the Western Section of the Program Corridor and no additional railroad infrastructure would be required in the Western Section.

Under the Preferred Alternative, potential new infrastructure improvements within the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor between Colton and Coachella would include sidings, additional main line track, wayside signals, drainage, grade-separation structures, and station facilities to accommodate the proposed passenger rail service. In addition, the proposed passenger rail services within the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor would use the existing station in the City of Palm Springs and up to five new potential stations could be constructed in the following areas: 1) Loma Linda/Redlands Area (serving the Cities of Loma Linda and Redlands), 2) the Pass Area (serving the communities of Beaumont, Banning, and Cabazon), 3) the Mid-Valley Area (serving the communities of Cathedral City, Thousand Palms, the Agua Caliente Casino area, Rancho Mirage, and Palm Desert), 4) the City of Indio, and 5) the City of Coachella as the eastern terminus of the Program Corridor.

Passenger train frequencies under the Preferred Alternative would consist of two daily round-trip intercity passenger trains operating the entire length of the Program Corridor between Los Angeles and the City of Coachella, with one morning departure and one afternoon departure from each end of the Program Corridor.

1.7 Overview of Public and Agency Outreach and Coordination Since Release of Draft EIS/EIR

This section provides an overview of the public and agency outreach and coordination that has occurred since the release of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR on May 21, 2021. Appendix B contains materials presented to the public during the Tier 1/Program DEIS/EIR public and agency comment period.

1.7.1 Distribution of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC released the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR for the Program in May 2021 for public review and comment. For purposes of NEPA, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register on May 21, 2021 (86 FR 27593). For purposes of CEQA, the State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research published a Notice of Completion on CEQAnet on May 21, 2021. The public was invited to provide comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR through various opportunities and communication methods from May 21 through July 6, 2021. The distribution of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR emphasized the use of electronic media to provide cost-effective access to the public. A summary of public outreach activities is provided in Appendix B.

The complete Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR with technical appendices was made available for review online on the FRA (<https://railroads.dot.gov/environment/environmental-reviews/coachella-valley-san-gorgonio-pass-corridor-investment-plan>) and RCTC's (<https://www.rctc.org/projects/coachella-valley-san-gorgonio-pass-corridor-rail-corridor-service-project/>) websites. Federal agencies, Native American Tribes, State agencies, regional and local agencies, other selected interested parties and organizations, along with others on the mailing list were emailed a notification that included information about how to access the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR; timing for the formal comment period; and public hearing dates, times and locations.

Additionally, as summarized in Table 1-1, hard copies of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Executive Summary and CD copies of the entire Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR with accompanying technical appendices were also made available for public view at various locations during the public review period (May 21, 2021 through July 6, 2021) (subject to library location hours and COVID-19 procedures).

Table 1-1. Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Locations

Location	Location	Location
Los Angeles Union Station/Metro Library and Archive One Gateway Plaza 15th Floor Los Angeles, California 90012	Fullerton Public Library 353 W Commonwealth Avenue Fullerton, California 92832	Arlington Library 9556 Magnolia Avenue Riverside, California 92503
Riverside County Transportation Commission 4080 Lemon Street Riverside, California 92501	Colton Public Library 656 N 9th Street Colton, California 92324	Loma Linda Branch Library 25581 Barton Road Loma Linda, California 92354
A.K. Smiley Public Library 125 W. Vine Street Redlands, California 92373	Beaumont Library 125 E. Eighth Street Beaumont, California 92223	Banning Public Library 21 W. Nicolet Street Banning, California 92220
Palm Springs Public Library 300 S. Sunrise Way Palm Springs, California 92262	Riverside County Indio Branch Library 200 Civic Center Mall Indio, California 92201	Riverside County Coachella Branch Library 1500 6th Street Coachella, California 92236

1.7.2 Public Hearings

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC hosted two virtual public hearings to explain the Program and the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR evaluation. The virtual public hearings for the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR occurred on June 22, 2021, and June 26, 2021 at 06:00 p.m. PST and 09:00 a.m. PST, respectively.

Public hearing materials and information were made available prior to the public hearings on the RCTC website (<http://www.rctc.org/projects/coachella-valley-san-gorgonio-pass-corridor-rail-corridor-service-project/>). The format of both public hearings consisted of a Program overview and informational video, a question and answer session, and a public comment period in which attendees could submit verbal comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. Comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR submitted verbally during the public hearing were recorded by a court reporter (see Appendix B). Spanish language translators were also present during the public hearings. People requesting Americans with Disabilities Act accommodations or additional translator services were able to notify RCTC at least 72 hours in advance of the meetings.

1.7.3 Additional Public Outreach Activities

Following the June 22, 2021 and June 26, 2021 public hearings for the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, three E-notifications were mailed to the Program's mailing list recipients, as follows:

- June 29, 2021 – A thank you for attending the public hearings was sent, alongside a reminder to submit comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.
- July 1, 2021 – A reminder of the public comment period dates was sent, alongside a reminder to submit comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.
- July 6, 2021 – A notification marking the close of the public comment period was sent, alongside a reminder to submit last comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.

In addition, as part of the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR public outreach efforts, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC will send email notifications to the individuals and groups on the Program's email list and post the combined ROD and Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR on the Program websites.

1.7.4 Comments and Responses on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR

Comments that were received on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR during the 45-day public review comment period included comments from public agencies, organizations, and individuals. Of the 279 total comment submissions received during the 45-day public comment period, 9 comment submissions were received from agencies, 15 comment submissions were received from organizations, and 255 comment submissions were received from individuals. An additional 18 verbal comment submissions were received during public hearings on June 22 and June 26, 2021. Ten comment submissions were received after the close of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR public comment period (i.e., after July 6, 2021); of which all 10 comment submissions were from individuals. The comment submissions are presented in their entirety in Appendix C. Of the comment submissions submitted, approximately 82% of commenters were generally in support of the Program.

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC prepared responses to all comments submitted on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR (Appendix D). The comments received do not provide new information that warrants recirculation of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR under CEQA nor preparation of a supplemental analysis under NEPA. In the context of the CEQA analysis, the comments do not identify new impacts that would result in a substantial increase in the severity of impacts and do not include feasible Program alternatives or mitigation strategies that are considerably different from those provided in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR that are appropriate for a Tier 1/Program-level document.

Generally, the comments sought clarification of the information presented in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR or were beyond the scope of this programmatic corridor-level analysis. Many of the comments received on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR identified the same topics and themes that could be considered in a subsequent Tier 2/Project-Level analysis. These general topics and themes included:

- Proposed Station Locations
- Conceptual Nature of Build Alternative Option Components
- Freight Train Volume Assumptions
- Noise Quiet Zones
- Train Trip Frequency and Duration
- Program Implementation, Funding and Timing
- Transportation Connections
- Locomotive Technology
- Environmental Justice

Consistent with FRA's Environmental Procedures, and CEQ's implementing regulations, an agency may respond to comments by one or more of the following means:

- Modify alternatives including the proposed action;
- Develop and evaluate alternatives not previously given serious consideration;
- Supplement, improve, or modify the analysis;
- Make factual corrections; or
- Explain why comments do not warrant further response.

The comments and responses to comments are included in Appendix D, including 12 Master Responses that are generally applicable to multiple comments. The comments did not identify new significant impacts or information that warrant changes to the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.



**Program Environmental Document
and Service Development Plan**

Part 2: Record of Decision

**Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail
Corridor Service Program**

June 2022



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**COACHELLA VALLEY-SAN GORGONIO PASS RAIL CORRIDOR SERVICE PROGRAM
Combined Final Tier 1/Program Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact
Report and Record of Decision**

Prepared by:

U.S. Department of Transportation - Federal Railroad Administration

California Department of Transportation Division of Rail and Mass Transportation

and the

Riverside County Transportation Commission

Pursuant to

National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. §4321 et seq.), and implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), 64 FR 28545, 49 U.S.C. §303 (Section 4(f), formerly Department of Transportation Act of 1966, Section 4(f)); National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. §300101 et seq.); Clean Air Act as amended (42 U.S.C. §7401 et seq. and 40 CFR Parts 51 and 93); Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. §§1531-1544); Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. §§1251-1387); California Environmental Quality Act (PRC 21000 et seq); and State of California CEQA Guidelines

June 2, 2022

Date of Approval



Paul Nissenbaum

Associate Administrator, Office of Railroad Policy and Development
Federal Railroad Administration

The following person may be contacted for additional information concerning this document:

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ABSTRACT

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is issuing this Record of Decision (ROD) concurrently with the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) pursuant to Section 1311 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (Pub. L. 114-94). Through this ROD, FRA selects Build Alternative Option 1, which would improve passenger rail service on an existing rail alignment between the Coachella Valley and Los Angeles, California. The ROD states FRA's decision; identifies the alternatives considered in reaching the decision; summarizes avoidance, minimization, and mitigation strategies and future design practices appropriate for a Tier 1 FEIS; and states the next steps in the environmental review process that may occur with subsequent phases of the Program as it moves through further planning, design, and construction subject to available future funding. Members of the public; stakeholders; local governments; elected officials, non-governmental organizations; Native American Tribes; and Federal, State and local agencies have been and will continue to be involved throughout subsequent phases of the Program, as appropriate.

Part 2: Record of Decision

In this Record of Decision (ROD), the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) selects Build Alternative Option 1 (referred to in this ROD as the “Selected Alternative”), which was described and evaluated as the Preferred Alternative in the Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service Program Tier 1/Program Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) and supporting documentation.

The Coachella Valley-San Gorgonio Pass Rail Corridor Service Program (Program) is a planning effort developed under a cooperative agreement between the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and FRA. The first phase of the process is the development of a Corridor Investment Plan (CIP). The process of completing a CIP consists of conducting an environmental review in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as documented in this Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and developing a Service Development Plan (SDP). The SDP is a detailed definition of the service improvements, transportation network, and the operational and financial aspects for the alternative for passenger rail service that is selected through the NEPA and CEQA process. The intent of the CIP is to provide sufficient information to support future decision-making at the Federal, State, and/or local levels regarding investments within the Program Corridor.

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC used a tiered environmental process for the Program, which is a phased environmental review used in the development of complex projects (as provided in (40 CFR Parts 1500–1508), FRA’s Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 FR 28545, May 26, 1999), and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15168 and 15170). The tiered NEPA and CEQA review and decision-making process allows for a broad-level programmatic decision with a Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, followed by more specific analyses and decisions through one or more Tier 2/Project NEPA/CEQA evaluations.

If a Federal, State, or local agency, including FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC provides grant funding, a permit, or other approval to advance the Program, it may use this Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD as the basis to undertake a Tier 2/Project-level NEPA/CEQA environmental review process, or processes, and subsequently make and document future NEPA/CEQA decisions. Tier 2/Project-level NEPA/CEQA studies may, for example, further define capital improvements to meet future travel demand and the proposed passenger rail service along the Program Corridor. During a Tier 2/Project-level NEPA process, FRA (or another Federal agency), Caltrans, and RCTC (or another State/local agency) will conduct more detailed environmental analyses, refine components of the

Program within the Selected Alternative, identify all applicable permits, and define location-specific avoidance and mitigation measures.

FRA is issuing this ROD based on the analysis in the Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, technical reports, supporting documentation, and after consideration of public comments. The Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR was prepared as a joint document for compliance with both NEPA and CEQA; however, this ROD is specific to FRA's action and issued pursuant to NEPA.

2.1 Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Process for the Program

FRA is the lead Federal agency responsible for conducting the Tier 1 NEPA environmental review for the Program and issuing this combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD. FRA, in coordination with Caltrans and RCTC, prepared a Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR to evaluate a broad-level programmatic decision regarding the rail corridor, service characteristics and potential station locations. For FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC, this tiered NEPA/CEQA approach allows for incremental decision-making for large corridor projects.

The Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR is the first programmatic phase of a tiered environmental review process. In making this decision on the proposed Program. The Tier 1/Program NEPA/CEQA process began with FRA's publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a Tier 1 EIS in the Federal Register and with RCTC's publication of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) to prepare a Program EIR on the State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research's CEQAnet on October 11, 2016. Following publication of the NOI/NOP, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC initiated a scoping process to inform the public and interest groups, and actively solicit feedback from agencies about the proposed Program and issues for public and agency review and input.

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC considered comments and recommendations received during the scoping process from the public, stakeholders and agencies to refine the Program's Purpose and Need Statement, corridor alternatives, and the scope of the environmental analysis. FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC released the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR for the Program in May 2021 for public review and comment.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) published a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register on May 21, 2021 (86 FR 27593). The public was invited to provide comments on the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR through various opportunities and communication methods from May 21 through July 6, 2021, including two public hearing meetings held during the comment review period. FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC reviewed the public and agency comments and have taken the comments into consideration in the decision-making process for the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. Comments and responses are included in Appendix C and Appendix D of the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.

2.2 Purpose and Need for the Program

FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC developed the Purpose and Need for the Program, informed by public input, and used it to identify the reasonable range of alternatives for the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. The Purpose and Need Statement remained consistent between the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR (see Section 1.2 of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR in Appendix A).

The Program's Purpose is to implement a safe, reliable, and convenient intercity passenger rail service within the 144-mile Program Corridor, between LAUS and Coachella, with the capability to meet the future mobility needs of residents, businesses, and visitors and meet the following objectives:

- Provides travelers between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley with a public transportation service that offers more convenient, reliable, and competitive trip times, better station access, and more frequency than currently available public transportation services
- Provides travelers between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley with an alternative to driving that offers reliable travel schedules
- Provides travelers between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley with an affordable transportation service
- Serves a range of trip purposes traveling between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley, particularly including business and personal trips
- Improves regional travel opportunities between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley for individuals without private vehicles
- Serves the expected population growth in the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley
- Assists regional agencies in meeting air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets as mandated in State and Federal regulations

The Program's need is to address the absence of effective transportation alternatives to personal automobile travel between coastal regions of Southern California (e.g., Los Angeles and Orange Counties) and cities in the Inland Empire (e.g., City of Riverside) and the Coachella Valley (e.g., Cities of Coachella, Indio, Palm Springs), the projected increase in travel demand in the Program Corridor resulting from population and employment growth, and the increasing unreliability of existing transportation systems within the Program Corridor. The Program addresses the following needs in the region including:

- The Program Corridor is served by a transportation system that includes air, highway, transit, and rail modes, few of these alternatives provide regular intercity transportation within the Program Corridor between the Coachella Valley, Inland Empire, and coastal regions of Southern California.
- The Coachella Valley is projected to be one of the fastest-growing areas in the State by 2040, with the permanent population projected to exceed 595,100 and employment growing by 94 percent to more than 253,700. The San Gorgonio Pass area population is projected to almost double to 143,000, with employment more than doubling to 38,100.
- Five of the nine incorporated cities in the Coachella Valley, containing over 40 percent of the valley's population, have poverty rates exceeding 15 percent, which is the Federal average poverty rate. Two of the nine incorporated cities have poverty rates that exceed 25 percent. In addition, a substantial portion within these disadvantaged communities does not own personal vehicles and rely on alternative transportation services. East of Colton, the lack of available alternative transportation options leaves the I-10 corridor underserved for these populations.

2.3 Alternatives Considered in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR

The alternatives considered in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR did not change in the Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. Chapter 3 of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR (Appendix A) describes the Program alternatives, which include a No Build Alternative and three Build Alternative Options (Build Alternative Option 1, Build Alternative Option 2, and Build Alternative Option 3).

The No Build Alternative consists of the continuation of the existing Amtrak passenger train route, stations, and service within the Program Corridor. The No Build Alternative also includes all committed improvements (i.e., projects with dedicated or obligated funding) to the existing intercity passenger rail system, the highway/freeway system, and other modes of transportation available to the public (e.g. intercity bus services and aviation services) within the Program Corridor.

The three Build Alternative Options are:

- **Build Alternative Option 1** –Build Alternative Option 1 assumes up to two daily round passenger rail trips between LAUS and the City of Coachella. No additional railroad infrastructure improvements would be required within the Western Section of the Program Corridor and existing stations in Fullerton and Riverside would be utilized. Within the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor, the existing station in Palm Springs would be improved and utilized, and up to five new potential stations could be constructed in the Loma Linda/Redlands Area, the Pass Area, the Mid-Valley Area, the City of Indio, and the City of Coachella. A third main line track and associated infrastructure would augment the existing two main tracks along the entire Eastern Section of the Program Corridor from Colton to Coachella.
- **Build Alternative Option 2** –Build Alternative Option 2 assumes up to two daily round passenger rail trips between LAUS and the City of Indio. No additional railroad infrastructure improvements would be required within the Western Section of the Program Corridor and existing stations in Fullerton and Riverside would be utilized. Within the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor, the existing station in Palm Springs would be improved and utilized, and up to up to four new potential stations could be constructed in the Loma Linda/Redlands Area, the Pass Area, the Mid-Valley Area, and the City of Indio. A third main line track and associated infrastructure would augment the existing two main tracks along the entire Eastern Section of the Program Corridor from Colton to Indio.
- **Build Alternative Option 3** –Build Alternative Option 3 assumes up to two daily round passenger rail trips between LAUS and the City of Indio. No additional railroad infrastructure improvements would be required within the Western Section of the Program Corridor and existing stations in Fullerton and Riverside would be utilized. Within the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor, the existing station in Palm Springs would be improved and utilized, and up to up to four new potential stations could be constructed in the Loma Linda/Redlands Area, the Pass Area, the Mid-Valley Area, and the City of Indio. A third main line track and associated infrastructure would augment the existing two main tracks along the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor from Colton to the proposed Mid-Valley Station Area.

2.4 Identification of the Selected Alternative

In association with the technical analyses conducted for the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, FRA, Caltrans and RCTC compared the Build Alternative Options against the No Build Alternative and subsequently identified Build Alternative Option 1 as the Preferred Alternative in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR. Table 2-1 below shows the Program goals and summarizes the objectives-based performance attributes that differentiate one or more of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Build Alternative Options. A high-level summary of impacts of the Build Alternative Options considered can be found in Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Table ES-1. More information on the Preferred Alternative can be found in Chapter 3 of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR.

Table 2-1. Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR Alternatives Evaluation Findings

Performance Attribute	No Build Alternative	Build Alternative Option 1	Build Alternative Option 2	Build Alternative Option 3
Program Objective: Provide travelers between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley with a public transportation service that offers more convenient, reliable, and competitive trip times, better station access, and more frequency than currently available public transportation services.				
Station Access	<p>Western Section: Limited access to existing LAUS 3 days per week via existing Amtrak Sunset Limited service.</p> <p>Eastern Section: Limited access to existing Palm Springs Station 3 days per week in the middle of the night via existing Amtrak Sunset Limited service.</p>	<p>Western Section: Daily access to existing LAUS, Fullerton, and Riverside stations.</p> <p>Eastern Section: Daily access to existing Palm Springs station and five new stations in Loma Linda/Redlands Area, Pass Area, Mid-Valley Area, Indio, and Coachella.</p>	<p>Western Section: Daily access to existing LAUS, Fullerton, and Riverside stations.</p> <p>Eastern Section: Daily access to existing Palm Springs station and four new stations in Loma Linda/Redlands Area, Pass Area, Mid-Valley Area, and Indio.</p>	Same as Build Alternative Option 2.
Passenger Rail Service Frequency	No daily passenger rail service that services the Coachella Valley.	Two daily round-trip intercity passenger trains operating the entire length of the Program Corridor between Los Angeles and the Coachella Valley, with one morning departure and one afternoon departure from each end of the Program Corridor.	Same as Build Alternative Option 1.	Same as Build Alternative Option 1.

Performance Attribute	No Build Alternative	Build Alternative Option 1	Build Alternative Option 2	Build Alternative Option 3
Program Objective: Provide travelers between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley with an alternative to driving that offers reliable travel schedules.				
Average Trip Times and connections required	4 hours and 41 minutes, 2 or more transfer connections via bus needed.	3 hours and 16 minutes, direct connection from Coachella to LAUS (no bus transfer needed)	3 hours and 9 minutes, direct connection from Indio to LAUS (no bus transfer needed)	Same as Build Alternative Option 2.
Program Objective: Improve regional travel opportunities between the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley for individuals without private vehicles.				
Transportation Connections	Limited bus services connecting to transportation hubs including Amtrak Thruway, SunLine Commuter Link 220, Beaumont Commuter Link 120, Greyhound	Passenger rail service to existing LAUS, Fullerton, and Riverside stations that connect to other transportation services. Passenger rail service from Coachella to LAUS	Passenger rail service to existing LAUS, Fullerton, and Riverside stations that connect to other transportation services. Passenger rail service from Indio to LAUS	Same as Build Alternative Option 2.
Program Objective: Serve the expected population growth in the Los Angeles Basin and the Coachella Valley.				
Boardings/Alightings	Under the No Build Alternative, no daily passenger rail service would be implemented within the Program Corridor.	Opening Year: A total of 408,214 train boardings/alightings within the Program Corridor are projected. Future Year: A total of 677,080 train boardings/alightings within the Program Corridor are projected.	Opening Year: A total of 376,580 train boardings/alightings within the Program Corridor are projected. Future Year: A total of 624,580 train boardings/alightings within the Program Corridor are projected.	Same as Build Alternative Option 2.

Performance Attribute	No Build Alternative	Build Alternative Option 1	Build Alternative Option 2	Build Alternative Option 3
Program Objective: Assist regional agencies in meeting air pollution and GHG emission reduction targets as mandated in state and federal regulations.				
Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT)	Opening Year: 3,500 billion VMT Future Year: 4,300 billion VMT	Opening Year: 3,489 billion VMT (reduction from No Build) Future Year: 4,282 billion VMT (reduction from No Build)	Opening Year: 3,490 billion VMT (reduction from No Build) Future Year: 4,284 billion VMT (reduction from No Build)	Same as Build Alternative Option 2.
Automobile Trip Redistributions	Under the No Build Alternative, the Program would not be implemented, and automobile trips would not be redistributed to rail.	Opening Year: Reduction of 107,344 automobile trips/year when compared to No Build Future Year: Reduction of 178,045 automobile trips/year when compared to No Build	Opening Year: Reduction of 99,026 automobile trips/year when compared to No Build Future Year: Reduction of 164,248 automobile trips/year when compared to No Build	Same as Build Alternative Option 2.
Total Estimated GHG Emissions	Opening Year: 934,560 metric tons/year Future Year: 862,289 metric tons/year	Opening Year: 931,930 metric tons/year (Reduction when compared to No Build) Future Year: 858,380 metric tons/year (Reduction when compared to No Build)	Opening Year: 932,369 metric tons/year (Reduction when compared to No Build) Future Year: 858,918 metric tons/year (Reduction when compared to No Build)	Same as Build Alternative Option 2.

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As summarized in Table 2-1, the key differentiating factors between the Build Alternative Options are related to a decrease in regional VMT, resulting in an associated decrease in the emissions of air pollutants and reduced regional transportation energy consumption.

- **Air quality/GHG:** The Selected Alternative would result in regional reductions of air quality and greenhouse gases emissions. These reductions would be achieved through implementation of passenger rail service and its related potential to attract passengers from other travel modes such as personal automobile and buses. It is anticipated that the passenger rail service under the Selected Alternative would result in a reduction of approximately 10.5 million VMT per year during opening year and 17.4 million VMT per year during future year scenarios. Build Alternative Options 2 and 3 are anticipated to have a smaller reduction in regional VMTs with a reduction of approximately 9.6 million VMT per year during opening year and 16 million VMT per year during future year scenarios.
- **Energy:** The proposed passenger rail service has potential to attract passengers from other travel modes. Accordingly, it is expected that a portion of these passengers would be using the rail service in place of vehicle, bus, or air travel, thus reducing transportation-related energy consumption. Additionally, travel by rail is the most energy efficient mode of long-distance, intercity transportation. However, an empty train would not reduce energy consumption. Overall, the displacement of automobile VMT to increased ridership on the railway would result in reduced transportation-related energy consumption.

The Selected Alternative would also result in similar environmental effects identified in the Tier 1/Program Draft EIS/EIR for all Build Alternative Options. Similar to what was identified for the other Build Alternative Options, installation of the components comprising of the Selected Alternative would result in construction-related effects, such as noise, vibration, the localized emission of air pollutants, one-time energy consumption effects, and potential temporary disruptions to both rail and automobile traffic. Certain components requiring the acquisition of land outside the railroad right of way would, if constructed, result in the conversion of agricultural lands as well as other lands known to include sensitive biological habitats. Construction activities could also expose soils and/or groundwater that are contaminated with hazardous materials. Construction could also potentially affect the eligibility of known and unknown archaeological sites and other cultural resources. Operational effects would include increased localized noise and vibration from additional daily trains, as well as increased levels of roadway traffic in the vicinity of existing and proposed station areas.

- **Daily Passenger Rail Service:** The Selected Alternative would provide allow for daily passenger rail service within the Program Corridor. This service would help to create an interconnected, multimodal solution allowing for better mobility throughout the Southern California region, providing additional passenger rail opportunities between Los Angeles and

the Coachella Valley. With the implementation of the passenger rail service, rail ridership would be anticipated to increase, and would also allow flexibility for people who may prefer or require alternatives to automobile transportation. This increase in service would provide additional transportation system capacity that could relieve some of the projected near- and long-term demand on the highway system, potentially slowing the need to further expand highways and roadways within the Program Corridor, or reduce the scale of those expansions, including their associated cost and impacts on communities and the environment. Rail improvements would complement the highway and local transit systems, creating an interconnected, multimodal solution, allowing for better mobility throughout the Program Corridor.

- **Economic Development:** The Selected Alternative would allow for the development of additional passenger stations within the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor. The development of additional passenger stations would complement and support local planning and revitalization plans as well as introduce new employments and growth opportunities through the provision of passenger rail service and complementary station area development.
- **Traffic and Travel:** The Selected Alternative contemplates up to five new passenger stations in the Eastern Section of the Program Corridor. Buildout of the station areas (which includes the opening of the stations themselves, increased passenger rail activity, and buildout of surrounding planned land uses) would result in increased traffic on local streets. These potential impacts would also occur under the other two Build Alternative Options.
- **Land Use and Planning, Communities and Neighborhoods, Property and Environmental Justice:** Rail infrastructure improvements (e.g. siding extensions, bridge structures) and station facilities associated with the Selected Alternative that require land conversion/acquisition outside of the railroad ROW have the potential to commit the land uses and natural resources for an expanded and realigned railway in some areas. Future implementation of components outside the existing ROW and in populated areas would have the largest impact on existing land uses and communities. The components associated with the Selected Alternative are conceptual at this time and if carried forward in the future, could be refined to avoid some or all potential impacts on existing land uses and communities. These potential impacts would also occur under the other two Build Alternative Options.
- **Agricultural Resources:** Rail infrastructure improvements (e.g., siding extensions, bridge structures, third mainline) and station facilities associated with the Selected Alternative that require land conversion/acquisition outside of the railroad ROW have the potential to convert Prime Farmland and other protected types of farmland to nonagricultural uses. The

evaluation in this document is based on a review of study areas in which the proposed components could be located in. Design refinements may result in reduced potential impacts to agricultural resources. These potential impacts would also occur under the other two Build Alternative Options.

- **Biological and Wetland Resources:** Rail infrastructure improvements (e.g., siding extensions, bridge structures, third mainline) and station facilities associated with the Selected Alternative that require land conversion/acquisition outside of the railroad ROW have the potential to be located in critical habitat areas for several protected species, habitat of special-status species, sensitive vegetation communities, and wetlands. The evaluation in this document is based on a review of study areas in which the proposed components could be located in. Design refinements may be able to avoid some or all of the aforementioned potential effects. These potential impacts would also occur under the other two Build Alternative Options.
- **Hydrology and Water Quality:** Rail infrastructure improvements (e.g., siding extensions, bridge structures, third mainline) and station facilities associated with the Selected Alternative have the potential to intersect surface waters, potentially resulting in hydrological and/or water quality effects. Design refinements of the conceptual plans components used in this evaluation could potentially avoid some of all of these hydrology and/or water quality impacts. These potential impacts would also occur under the other two Build Alternative Options.

Based on comparison of the Build Alternative Options and the No Build Alternative in achieving the Purpose and Need while identifying potential environmental consequences, as described in Chapter 3 of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, and consideration of public comments, FRA selects Build Alternative Option 1 in this ROD. Build Alternative Option 1 would include the following infrastructure features:

- A third main line track of 76 miles to augment the existing two-track main line along the Eastern Section of the Corridor from Colton to Coachella.
- Various crossovers connecting the existing main line tracks to the new third main line track.
- A new second Mt. Vernon connector track in Colton.
- A new siding at Loma Linda to allow passenger trains to meet, reducing delay.
- A new railroad bridge across the Santa Ana River.
- Additional infrastructure components throughout the Program Corridor including, but not limited to, wayside signals, drainage structures, and grade-separation structures.

- Improvements to the existing Palm Springs Station.
- Up to five new potential stations in the Loma Linda/Redlands Area, the Pass Area, the Mid-Valley Area, the City of Indio, and the City of Coachella.

This selection is made with the consideration of economic and technical factors, consistent with FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts, and CEQ's implementing regulations.

FRA's selection of Build Alternative Option 1 is made with consideration that after the approval of Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and prior to the initiation of Tier 2/Project-Level analysis, the State and/or local agency seeking to advance the Selected Alternative will:

- Conduct additional operations simulation analysis on the Selected Alternative to assess whether different infrastructure or operating plans would further improve the estimated performance of freight and passenger trains.
- Determine the initial operating plan for service and infrastructure improvements for the Selected Alternative based on good faith negotiations with the host railroads and the passenger rail service operator prior to the implementation of service.³
- Identify the entity responsible for the management and delivery of the Selected Alternative.

2.5 Environmentally Preferable Alternative

CEQ's implementing regulations require that a ROD specify the alternative or alternatives considered to be environmentally preferable. "Environmentally preferable" is defined as "the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the NEPA, Section 101." In most cases this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment, but it can also mean the alternative that best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.

FRA considered the Build Alternative Options, as well as the No Build Alternative, and weighed and balanced the environmental effects of each alternative. Based on the analyses documented in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, FRA determined that the adverse environmental impacts associated with the Selected Alternative would be similar to those associated with Build Alternative Option 2 and 3, and benefits to ridership and communities would be higher. The Selected Alternative would rely on existing railroad right of way between Los Angeles and Colton and focused rail infrastructure improvements in expanded right of way where needed

³ The operations modeling work prepared for the Program's Service Development Plan and which were used in this Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR should inform these discussions.

between Colton and Coachella. The No Build Alternative would not meet the Program's Purpose and Need, nor would it result in the benefits associated with the Selected Alternative, such as reduced air quality emissions, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and improved travel options and reliability.

FRA has determined that the Selected Alternative would result in the least overall impacts to the human and natural environment, while meeting the Purpose and Need of the Program, and is therefore environmentally preferable.

2.6 Preliminary Mitigation Assessment and Strategies

In a Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, potential impacts are identified using high-level data and analysis. For the Program, FRA, Caltrans, and RCTC used existing information on known resources and estimated impacts with a lesser level of engineering than is used for a project-level analysis. As a result, the available information is not detailed enough to formulate specific mitigation measures. Therefore, each resource evaluation in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR includes a list of mitigation strategies that would be considered and further developed in the future as part of the Tier 2/Project-level environmental analysis (see Chapter 3 of the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR in Appendix A). Project-specific mitigation strategies for Tier 2/Project-related impacts would be considered and implemented as necessary during subsequent Tier 2/Project-level environmental studies.

Representative mitigation strategies include conceptual avoidance and minimization measures for the next phase of design, suggestions for interagency agreement documents, best management practices (BMPs), regulatory agency and tribal coordination, and further technical study requirements. These mitigation strategies are summarized in Table 2-2.

Table 2-2. Summary of Potential Interagency Agreement Documents, Best Management Practices, Regulatory Coordination and Further Study Requirements and Strategies

Resource Area	Mitigation Strategies
Land Use and Planning	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of construction best management practices including development of construction management and traffic management plans, limiting noise generation construction activities in coordination with local jurisdiction noise ordinances and hours, specifications for construction equipment and staging areas. • Development of a land use consistency analysis with applicable local jurisdiction plans and programs and the avoidance or minimization of conflicts with sensitive land uses or environmental resources.

Resource Area	Mitigation Strategies
Transportation	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a project specific traffic impact analysis including construction and operational impacts, routes, and traffic management strategies.
Visual and Aesthetic Resources	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of visual or aesthetic resources at the location of specific rail infrastructure or station facilities proposed and analysis on the avoidance or minimization of impacts to identified visual resources and changes in visual character. • Preparation of construction and operational lighting plan for station facilities.
Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a project specific air quality and greenhouse gas emissions impact analysis including construction and operational impacts and management strategies.
Noise and Vibration	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a project specific noise impact analysis including construction and operational impacts and management strategies. • Identification of construction noise reduction methods such as shutting off idling equipment, construction of a temporary noise barrier, maximizing the distance between construction equipment staging areas and adjacent sensitive land use receptors. • Recommended noise reduction mitigation to be implemented (e.g., enclosures, barriers, site orientation), to ensure compliance with the local jurisdiction's noise regulations or ordinances.
Jurisdictional Waters and Wetland Resources / Biological Resources	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a preliminary biological resources screening, a biological resources assessment report, and focused surveys for biological resources that may be impacted during construction and operational activities. • Identification of avoidance and/or minimization measures (e.g. compensatory mitigation, habitat restoration, construction BMPs, worker educational program) to be applied during construction and operational activities in coordination with regulatory agencies.

Resource Area	Mitigation Strategies
Floodplains, Hydrology, and Water Quality	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of additional floodplain hydrology documentation, floodplain assessment, water quality management plan, and coordination with governing agency or local jurisdiction for floodplain or water quality resources that may be impacted during construction and operational activities. • Identification of low impact, site design, and source control best management practices shall be identified to be utilized during construction and operational activities.
Geology, Soils, Seismicity, and Paleontological Resources	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of preliminary geotechnical reports that provide analysis and recommendations on site preparation, soil characteristics, structural foundations and grading practices during construction and operational activities. • Preparation of a paleontological resources assessment report and identification of avoidance and/or minimization measures (e.g. paleontological resources impact mitigation program, worker educational program) to be applied during construction and operational activities in coordination with regulatory agencies.
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment that provide analysis and recommendations on potentially hazardous waste or site preparation, soil characteristics, observed and/or suspected asbestos containing materials, potential lead-based paint, and other materials falling under the Universal Waste requirements within the selected site during construction and operational activities. • Development of a site-specific hazardous materials management program during construction and operational activities. • Development of a site-specific fire control and emergency response plan in coordination with local fire department.
Public Utilities and Energy	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of additional water supply documentation and a site-specific utilities report including wastewater/sewer infrastructure, electrical infrastructure, and natural gas infrastructure.

Resource Area	Mitigation Strategies
Cultural Resources	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a preliminary cultural resources screening, a cultural resources assessment report, and focused surveys for archaeological, historical, and tribal cultural resources that may be impacted during construction and operational activities. • Identification of avoidance and/or minimization measures (e.g., monitoring, restoration, construction BMPs, worker educational program) to be applied during construction and operational activities in coordination with regulatory agencies and tribal governments.
Parklands and Community Services	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of recreational and community resources and facilities at the location of specific rail infrastructure or station facilities proposed and analysis on the avoidance or minimization of impacts to identified recreational and community resources during construction and operational activities.
Safety and Security	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of project specific collision hazard analysis and safety and security certification plans that provide analysis and recommendations on passenger rail safety practices during construction and operational activities in coordination with regulatory agencies and local jurisdictions.
Socioeconomics and Communities Affected	<p>Future project-level mitigation measures could include, but would not be limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of project specific acquisitions, preparation of a relocation mitigation plans that provide analysis and recommendations on property acquisitions needed during construction and operational activities in coordination with regulatory agencies, local jurisdictions, and affected property owners and tenants.

2.7 FRA Decision

Based on the consideration of the information presented in the Draft Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and this combined Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR and ROD, FRA selects Build Alternative Option 1 (the Preferred Alternative as presented in the Draft and Final Tier 1/Program EIS/EIR, and as described in the above sections of this ROD). Currently, there is no FRA funding or approval associated with advancing the Program to final design or construction.

Having carefully considered the environmental record noted above, the mitigation strategies described herein, the written and oral comments offered by agencies and the public on this record, and the written responses to the comments, FRA has determined that the Selected Alternative represents the best option for the Project and includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to the environment. With this Record of Decision, FRA selects Build Alternative Option 1.

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