

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) presents comments on the Draft EIS/EIR for the proposed Geary Corridor Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project (Project), responds in writing to comments on environmental issues, and revises the Draft EIS/EIR as necessary to provide additional clarity, address minor project modifications in response to comments, and address changes in the project since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR.

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements included in California Public Resources Code Sections 21091(d)(2)(A) and 21091(d)(2)(B), the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) and San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) have considered the comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR and evaluated the issues raised. SFCTA is providing in this document written responses to the issues raised by commenters.

The Draft EIS/EIR was prepared as a joint document to meet all pertinent requirements of both the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

However, following publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, the federal and local agencies have agreed to prepare this Final EIR separate from a Final EIS.

SFCTA is the lead agency under CEQA, and prepared this Final EIR in cooperation with SFMTA. SFCTA and SFMTA will in turn collaborate with FTA in the subsequent preparation of a Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) for the Project in compliance with NEPA. The Final EIS and Record of Decision are expected to be published in early 2017.

### 1.1 Organization of the Final EIR

This Final EIR provides a streamlined and summarized approach to identifying changes to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA identified after public circulation of the Draft EIS/EIR, summarizing environmental effects of these changes, documenting public outreach efforts since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, and updating financial analysis for the Project.

To meet the requirements of CEQA and relevant implementing regulations, subsequent chapters of this Final EIS/EIR are structured as detailed below.

**Chapter 2: Alternatives** discusses the history of Geary BRT planning efforts, identifies and summarizes all alternatives considered in the Draft EIS/EIR, and describes the minor changes proposed to one of these alternatives (the Hybrid Alternative/SRA) made in response to public comments on the Draft EIS/EIR.

**Chapter 3: Transportation** summarizes the potential transportation-related consequences of the alternatives as set forth more fully in the Draft EIS/EIR. Chapter 3 also presents updated/changed text (deletions are shown in ~~strikethrough~~ and additions in underline) associated with modifications to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA following publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, as

well as other text changes made in response to changes in regulations, or to correct typographical errors.

**Chapter 4: Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures** summarizes potential consequences of the alternatives as set forth more fully in the Draft EIS/EIR in all other environmental topic areas required by NEPA and CEQA except for transportation (which is found in Chapter 3). Chapter 4 also presents updated/changed text (deletions are shown in ~~striketrough~~ and additions in underline) associated with modifications to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA following publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, as well as other text changes made in response to changes in regulations, or to correct typographical errors.

**Chapter 5: Public Participation** describes communications and outreach efforts prior to publication of the Draft EIS/EIR, during the subsequent circulation and public comment period, and after the close of the comment period. Chapter 5 also provides updates to the Draft EIS/EIR's extensive summary of public outreach efforts (Draft EIS/EIR Chapter 8) since Project inception.

**Chapter 6: Financial Analysis** provides updated and refined financial information to supplement Chapter 9 of the Draft EIS/EIR. This chapter is included in this Final EIR for informational purposes.

This Final EIR also includes the following appendices:

**Appendix A, Errata Summary**, includes other minor text changes to chapters 5, 6, 7, and 10 of the Draft EIS/EIR.

**Appendix B, Comments and Responses**, includes all written and oral comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR during the 59-day public comment period (October 2, 2015 through November 30, 2015), plus SFCTA/SFMTA's collective responses to these comments.

**Appendix C, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program**, summarizes all avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures from the Draft EIS/EIR and identifies parties responsible to carry out and oversee all such measures.

**Appendix D, Revised Project Plans**, includes detailed drawings of the Hybrid Alternative/SRA to update similar drawings provided in Appendix A of the Draft EIS/EIR.

Together with the Draft EIS/EIR, including its appendices and supporting technical reports, this document constitutes the Final EIR on the Project.

## 1.2 Project Background

Section 2.2 of this Final EIR provides a detailed history of planning efforts leading to the Geary BRT Project.

As established in Section 7.2 of the Draft EIS/EIR, SFCTA's objectives for the Project were to:

- Improve transit performance on the corridor as a key link in the City's rapid transit network to improve the passenger experience and promote high transit use.

- Improve pedestrian conditions and pedestrian access to transit.
- Enhance transit access and the overall passenger experience, while maintaining general vehicular access circulation.

The Draft EIS/EIR evaluated four build alternatives to implement BRT service along the Geary corridor, consistent with the established NEPA need and purpose and CEQA objectives for the Project. The Draft EIS/EIR also evaluated a no-build alternative, assuming no implementation of BRT service but eventual implementation of several previously and separately planned and approved roadway enhancements. **Chapter 2** of this Final EIR provides further detail on the alternatives evaluated.

The Draft EIS/EIR identified one of these alternatives (the Hybrid Alternative) as the Staff-Recommended Alternative (SRA). The Hybrid Alternative/SRA is the alternative that SFCTA and SFMTA staffs propose their governing boards select as the federally required “Locally Preferred Alternative” (LPA) and duly carry forward for design, construction, and operation.

## 1.3 Publication of Draft EIS/EIR and Public Comments

SFCTA distributed the Draft EIS/EIR on October 2, 2015, in accordance with both CEQA and NEPA, to applicable federal, state, and local agencies, elected officials, neighborhood groups, and other interested parties who had expressed interest in the proposed project and those who requested a copy of the Draft EIS/EIR. The public comment period for the Draft EIS/EIR was originally scheduled to terminate on November 16, 2015. However, in response to several comments from the public, SFCTA extended the comment period for two weeks, ending on November 30, 2015. **Chapter 5** of this Final EIR includes further details on how SFCTA and SFMTA publicized the release of the Draft EIS/EIR.

SFCTA received nearly 300 separate communications containing a total of several hundred comments. All of these comments and SFCTA’s responses to comments are contained in **Appendix B** of this Final EIR.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15204(a) states that the focus of public review should be “on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing the possible impacts on the environment and ways in which the significant effects of the project might be avoided or mitigated.” In addition, “when responding to comments, lead agencies need only respond to significant environmental issues and do not need to provide all information requested by reviewers, as long as a good faith effort at full disclosure is made in the EIR.” CEQA Guidelines Section 15088 specifies that the lead agency is required to respond to the comments on the major environmental issues raised in the comments received during the public review period. Therefore, this document, in particular **Appendix B**, focuses on the sufficiency of the Draft EIS/EIR regarding the significance of the environmental impacts of the proposed project. However, many commenters raised issues unrelated to the adequacy of the analysis in the Draft EIS/EIR (e.g., the merits of the project itself); although not required by CEQA, **Appendix B** provides responses on many of these other topics as well.

## 1.4 Changes to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA in Response to Public Comments on the Draft EIS/EIR

Since publication of the Draft EIS/EIR on October 2, 2015, SFCTA, and SFMTA have proposed three modifications to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA, each in response to public comments on the Draft EIS/EIR. **Chapter 2** of this Final EIR describes each of these modifications in greater detail.

### 1.4.1 Retention of Webster Street Pedestrian Bridge

Throughout the extensive outreach process the agencies undertook, local stakeholder groups have voiced concern over the proposed removal of the Webster Street pedestrian bridge, an element of the build alternatives. Many comments received during the public comment period called for the retention of the Webster Street pedestrian bridge; one of which included a petition signed by over 700 people (Comment O-6.3). After careful consideration and evaluation, SFCTA is proposing to modify the Hybrid Alternative/SRA so as to keep the Webster Street pedestrian bridge in place and open for use. New street-level crosswalks would also be implemented on both the east and west sides of the Webster/Geary intersection (described in more detail in **Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2** of this Final EIR).

### 1.4.2 Retention of Spruce-Cook Local/Express Bus Stops (No Rapid Stops)

The second proposed design change to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA is also largely a result of outreach efforts with local business stakeholder groups and comments received during the public comment period expressing concern over the proposed BRT stop and associated parking space loss on the Spruce-Cook block of Geary Boulevard. On this block, the proposed design modification is to no longer add a BRT stop; the eastbound and westbound bus stops at the Spruce-Cook segment of the Geary corridor would remain in their existing locations and continue to serve Local and Express buses (rather than create a larger BRT and Local station with new bus bulbs and shelters).

### 1.4.3 Additional Pedestrian Improvements

Several comment letters received during the public comment period expressed concern over pedestrian safety along the Geary corridor. Accordingly, the third proposed design change includes incorporating additional pedestrian crossing improvements to further enhance pedestrian safety at high priority locations along the Geary corridor. The proposed modifications would include pedestrian bulbouts, painted safety zones, and daylighting<sup>1</sup> at various intersections. These

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<sup>1</sup> “Daylighting” involves increasing the visibility of pedestrians crossing the street by removing or limiting on-street parking spaces immediately adjacent to crosswalks.

improvements would reduce pedestrian crossing distances and improve pedestrian visibility to drivers, which would help to increase the overall safety of pedestrians in the corridor.

Each of these changes is discussed in greater detail in **Chapter 2** of this Final EIR. **Chapters 3 and 4**, along with **Appendix A** (Errata Summary) identify the minor text changes resulting from these minor modifications to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA. **Chapters 3 and 4** also provide information to substantiate that these changes do not introduce any new or worsened environmental effects nor do they trigger any need for new mitigation measures not included in the Draft EIS/EIR.

## 1.5 CEQA Requirements for a Final EIR

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15132, a Final EIR must consist of several elements. Table 1-1 below lists these requirements as well as where these requirements are satisfied.

**Table 1-1 Disposition of CEQA Final EIR Requirements**

REQUIRED CONTENTS OF FINAL EIR	WHERE THESE REQUIRED CONTENTS APPEAR
The draft EIR or a revision of the draft	The Draft EIS/EIR plus revisions to the Draft included in this document (Chapters 2-6, Appendices A and D)
Comments and recommendations received on the draft EIR either verbatim or in summary	Appendix B - Comments and Responses
A list of persons, organizations, and public agencies commenting on the draft EIR	Appendix B - Comments and Responses
The responses of the Lead Agency to significant environmental points raised in the review and consultation process	Appendix B - Comments and Responses
Any other information added by the Lead Agency	Chapters 2, 5, and 6 and Appendix A (Errata Summary)

## 1.6 Requirements for and Consideration of Recirculation

If significant new information is added to an EIR after the public review, the lead agency is required to recirculate the EIR or a portion of it for additional public review and comments. (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088.5.) “[N]ew information to an EIR is not significant unless the EIR is changed in a way that deprives the public of a meaningful opportunity to comment on a substantial adverse environmental effect of the project or a feasible way to mitigate or avoid such an effect (including a feasible project alternative) that the project’s proponents have declined to implement...[R]ecirculation is not required where the new information added to the EIR merely clarifies or amplifies...or makes insignificant modification in...an adequate EIR” (*Laurel Heights Improvement Association of San Francisco, Inc. v. Regents of the University of California* (1993) 6 Cal. 4th 1112,1129–1130).

Examples of significant new information requiring recirculation include information showing that:

- (1) A new significant environmental impact would result from the Project or from a new mitigation measure proposed to be implemented.
- (2) A substantial increase in the severity of an environmental impact would result unless mitigation measures are adopted that reduce the impact to a level of insignificance.
- (3) A feasible project alternative or mitigation measure considerably different from others previously analyzed would clearly lessen the significant impacts of the Project, but the Project's proponents decline to adopt it.
- (4) The Draft EIR was so fundamentally and basically inadequate and conclusory in nature that meaningful public review and comment were precluded. (See CEQA Guidelines, Section 15088.5, subd. [a]).

An EIR is adequate as long as it addresses all questions about significant environmental issues, and as long as the EIR, as a whole, reflects a good faith effort at full disclosure. "Recirculation is not required where the new information added to an EIR merely clarifies or amplifies or makes insignificant modification in an adequate EIR." (CEQA Guidelines Section 15088.5(a).)

SFCTA has reviewed the comments received on the Draft EIS/EIR and determined that recirculation of the Draft EIS/EIR is not necessary.

No new significant or substantially more severe environmental impacts have been identified that would result from the project or from an alternative or a new mitigation measure proposed as part of the project. Moreover, no new feasible mitigation measures or alternatives have been identified that are considerably different from others previously analyzed and would clearly lessen the significant environmental impacts of the project that the City and the applicant have declined to implement. All of the responses to comments contained in **Appendix B** provide information that clarifies and amplifies the evaluation of impacts contained in the Draft EIS/EIR, but does not change impact conclusions.

In addition, the minor changes to the Hybrid Alternative/SRA introduced to respond to public comments on the Draft EIS/EIR do not introduce any new or worsened impacts or require any additional mitigation measures. Further documentation of these changes and SFCTA's screening for potential environmental impacts is contained in **Chapters 2, 3, and 4** of this Final EIR. Also please refer to **Appendix A**, Errata Summary, which captures other minor text changes to the Draft EIS/EIR.

## 1.7 Agency Approvals

This document has been distributed to the State Clearinghouse, as well as to the agencies, organizations, and individuals who commented on the Draft EIS/EIR.

The SFCTA Board of Directors will consider this document, together with the Draft EIS/EIR, at a noticed public hearing scheduled for December 13, 2016, and, if deemed adequate with respect to accuracy, objectiveness, and completeness, will decide whether to certify that the Final EIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA.

Subsequently, SFCTA and SFMTA are jointly responsible for approving and carrying out any project. SFMTA would be the recipient of any grant funds and would be the operator of the Project. If SFCTA certifies the EIR and approves one of the alternatives as the Project, it will adopt environmental findings and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) at the project decision hearing (see **Appendix C** of this Final EIR).

CEQA also requires the adoption of findings prior to approval of a project for which a certified EIR identifies significant environmental effects (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15091 and 15092). Because the Draft EIS/EIR identified significant impacts that cannot be mitigated to less-than-significant levels for the Hybrid Alternative/SRA (as well as other alternatives), the findings include a Statement of Overriding Considerations for each significant unavoidable impact. (CEQA Guidelines Section 15093[b]). The SFCTA Board must, as part of making findings on the Project, adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations to state what factors have impelled the lead agency to approve the Project notwithstanding the significant and unavoidable environmental impacts.