



**Project Name:**I-15 Express Lanes Project Southern Extension (ELPSE)  
**DIST-CO-RTE-PM:** 8-RIV-15-PM 20.3/40.1  
**EA:** 08-0J0820  
**EFIS ID:** 08-18000063

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS**

FOR

**CONSTRUCT TWO NEW EXPRESS LANES IN BOTH THE NORTHBOUND (NB) AND SOUTHBOUND (SB) DIRECTIONS FOR A TOTAL OF FOUR LANES WITHIN THE MEDIAN OF I-15 FROM STATE ROUTE (SR) 74 (CENTRAL AVENUE) (POST MILE [PM] 22.3) IN THE CITY OF LAKE ELSINORE, THROUGH THE UNINCORPORATED RIVERSIDE COUNTY COMMUNITY OF TEMESCAL VALLEY TO EL CERRITO ROAD (PM 38.1) IN THE CITY OF CORONA, FOR A DISTANCE OF APPROXIMATELY 15.8 MILES. THE PROJECT WOULD ALSO ADD A SB AUXILIARY LANE BETWEEN BOTH THE MAIN STREET (PM 21.2) OFF-RAMP AND SR-74 (CENTRAL AVENUE) ON-RAMP (APPROXIMATELY 0.75 MILE), AND THE SR-74 (CENTRAL AVENUE) OFF-RAMP AND NICHOLS ROAD ON-RAMP (PM 23.9) (APPROXIMATELY 1 MILE). IN ADDITION, DUE TO THE SB EXPRESS LANE ACCESS BETWEEN CAJALCO ROAD INTERCHANGE AND WEIRICK ROAD INTERCHANGE, THE SB I-15 WEIRICK ROAD OFF-RAMP WOULD BE RECONFIGURED AS A DUAL LANE EXIT.**

The following information is presented to comply with State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Division 6, Chapter 3, Section 15093), and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Division 2, Chapter 11, Section 1501 et seq.). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (Final EIR/EA) for the I-15 Express Lanes Project Southern Extension (ELPSE) Project (Project), which is the basic source for the information.



The following impacts have been identified as significant and not fully mitigable:

- Air Quality cumulatively significant and a significant and unavoidable impact related to PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>.
- Cumulatively significant and a significant and unavoidable impact related to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- Conflict with the California Assembly Bill (AB) 32 Climate Change Scoping Plan.

The regional emissions analysis prepared for the Project indicates that particulate emissions (particles of 10 and 2.5 micrometers or smaller [PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>, respectively]) are expected to increase during operation of the Build Alternative under Opening Year (2030) and Design Year (2050) when compared to both the Existing (2019) and No-Build conditions. As the Project is located within a nonattainment area for the state PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> ambient air quality standards, the Project-related increase would be cumulatively significant and significant and unavoidable under CEQA even after the implementation of mitigation.

The Project is projected to increase travel speeds and reduce travel times, but operational GHG emissions are still expected to increase over time compared to existing conditions and in the Opening Year (2030) and Future Year (2050) when comparing the Build Alternative (Preferred Alternative) to the No-Build Alternative. Because operational GHG emissions would increase over time compared to existing conditions, the impact is considered to be significant and unavoidable under CEQA.

Due to the projected increase in operational emissions under the Build Alternative in the Opening Year (2030) and Design Year (2050) when compared to the Existing (2019) condition and No-Build condition in the Opening and Design years, the Project would conflict with the goals included in the California AB 32 Climate Change Scoping Plan and other regulations adopted for the purpose of reducing GHG emissions. Even with the implementation of mitigation measures to reduce GHG emissions, the impacts would remain significant and unavoidable, as the Project is still inconsistent with the California AB 32 Climate Change Scoping Plan.

**Overriding considerations that support approval of this recommended project are as follows:**

The I-15 ELPSE Build Alternative is considered a viable alternative because it would achieve the Project's purpose and need (Section 1.2 of the EIR/EA). The Project's purpose is a set of objectives the Project is intended to meet, and the Project's need is to address the transportation deficiencies described below.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the Project is to:

- Improve and manage traffic operations, throughput (traffic flow), and travel times along the corridor.



- Expand travel mode choice along the corridor.
- Provide an option for travel time reliability.
- Provide a cost-effective mobility solution.
- Expand and maintain compatibility with the express lane network in the region.

## **Need**

Existing traffic volumes often exceed current highway capacity along several segments of I-15 between SR-74 (Central Avenue) and El Cerrito Road. Due to forecasted population growth and the continued development to support the projected growth in the region, the I-15 corridor is expected to continue to experience increased congestion and longer commute times that are projected to negatively affect traffic operations along the freeway mainline.

The recently adopted Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Connect SoCal (2024–2050 Regional Transportation Plan [RTP]/Sustainable Communities Strategy [SCS]) Growth Forecast estimates a 25.4-percent increase in population in Riverside County between 2019 and 2050, with the number of households and employment increasing by approximately 42.7 percent and 39.9 percent, respectively. In the City of Corona, the 2020–2045 RTP/SCS Growth Forecast estimates an 11.6-percent increase in population from 2016 to 2045 and an 11.7-percent increase in households.<sup>1</sup> According to the same source, the City of Lake Elsinore is projected to see a 76.8-percent increase in population. This projected growth is expected to place a high demand on existing transportation facilities and services.

### *Improve Operational Deficiencies*

The inadequate number of lanes along I-15 in the project corridor, coupled with the expected increase in congestion during peak periods and worsening traffic conditions, will restrict traffic flow causing bottlenecks along the mainline. This will create operational deficiencies on critical segments of I-15 and result in additional local and regional traffic congestion in Western Riverside County.

### *Expand Travel Mode Choice, Provide Options for Travel Time Reliability and a Cost-Effective Mobility Solution*

Currently, north-south mobility options for motorists are limited through this portion of Riverside County. Besides local streets, the only parallel route for motorists is I-215, which is over 10 miles east of I-15 and generally serves a different region within Riverside County.

### *Compatibility with the Express Lane Network in the Region*

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<sup>1</sup> Local growth projections for the City of Corona and the City of Lake Elsinore are not available in the recently adopted SCAG 2024–2050 RTP/SCS; however, the difference in rates when compared with 2050 is not anticipated to be substantial.



The express lanes network in both Riverside and San Bernardino Counties has been growing rapidly in response to the increased inter-county travel demand. Development of an extensive regional express lanes network is a key strategy in the 2024–2050 RTP/SCS that aims to improve travel time reliability, provide travel choices, and optimize existing freeway capacity within the SCAG region. In 2017, RCTC completed construction of the SR-91 Express Lanes in the City of Corona—the first express lanes constructed in Riverside County. RCTC's I-15 Express Lanes Project—which extends the SR-91 express lanes network north and south of SR-91 along I-15 through the Cities of Jurupa Valley, Eastvale, Norco, and Corona—opened to traffic in 2021. North of the I-15 Express Lanes Project, in 2024 the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority broke ground on the I-15 Corridor Project, which will construct express lanes in both directions along I-15 between Cantu-Galleano Ranch Road in the City of Jurupa Valley and Foothill Boulevard Road in the City of Rancho Cucamonga. In addition to providing continuity of express lanes north of the I-15 Express Lanes Project, the I-15 Corridor Project will connect to the I-10 Corridor Project (Phase 1), which is now fully operational, adding express lanes in each direction on I-10 from the western terminus at the Los Angeles/San Bernardino county line to just east of the I-15/I-10 interchange. Once these projects are completed, the southern terminus of the express lanes network in the Inland Empire will be at Cajalco Road on I-15.

### **Benefits of the Selected Alternative**

- The construction of express lanes in both the NB and SB directions of I-15 would alleviate restricted traffic flows that cause peak hour bottlenecks.
- The express lanes option would provide choices for drivers that are currently unavailable, such as congestion-free travel for a fee, free use for three or more persons carpooling in a vehicle with a transponder, and expanded opportunities for existing and future regional express bus operations.
- The Build Alternative would be compatible with the existing toll lane system by extending the southern terminus of the express lane network in the Inland Empire to SR-74 on I-15, and using the same pricing and technologies as existing toll facilities in Orange and San Diego counties, “presenting the opportunity to create a regionally integrated and connected toll system (FHWA, Caltrans, and RCTC 2009).

For the evaluated Build Alternative and No-Build Alternative in the Final EIR/EA, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has determined that the Build Alternative is a feasible and prudent alternative that achieves the Project's purpose and need. Given that the Build Alternative has public and agency support, does not require any permanent right of way acquisition, and performs better from a traffic operations standpoint than the No-Build Alternative, the Project Development Team identified the Build Alternative as the Preferred Alternative during a meeting held on January 9, 2025.

Standard Project Measure **EN-1** and Standard Project Measure **AQ-4** would be implemented during construction activities to reduce impacts related to GHG emissions. Additionally, Mitigation Measures **GHG-1** through **GHG-4** and **AQ-5** are expected to reduce the Project's construction GHG emissions. Mitigation Measures **GHG-5** through **GHG-11** and **AQ-6** through **AQ-8** would reduce the GHG emissions and potential



climate change impacts from operation and maintenance of the Project. These measures include complying with SCAQMD's rules and ordinances regarding air quality restrictions, incorporating energy-efficient lighting, using water-efficient technologies for landscaping, installing urban planting/vegetation, especially canopy trees, to reduce "heat island" effects, incorporating native plants and vegetation to the Project design, avoiding loss of tree canopies, and completing a Life Cycle Cost Analysis (LCCA), which will ensure long-life pavement structures will be designed to withstand the projected increase in ambient temperatures and changes in precipitation in the Project area as much as feasible.

Additionally, as the Project Sponsor, Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) will mitigate air quality impacts resulting from vehicle travel by providing increased transit benefits, both regionally and along the I-15 corridor. As part of Mitigation Measure **AQ-5**, RCTC launched the Riverside County Free Rail Pass Program<sup>2</sup> in March of 2025. The 2-year program offers temporary free Metrolink passes to Riverside County residents to increase the number of passenger rail riders within Riverside County. Eligible participants can ride free on any and all Metrolink lines serving Riverside County for a period of 3 months from the date they receive their first pass. During this 3-month window, they may receive and use as many non-overlapping passes as needed. This program helps expand access to public transportation for disadvantaged and low-income populations and encourages a mode shift for travelers on the most congested corridors, such as SR-91, SR-74, I-15, and I-215. These temporary free Metrolink passes reduce the cost of using public transportation in order to attract new riders and encourage existing riders to take more trips. The program allows riders to be issued free passes through Metrolink's Mobile Ticketing Application and reduces the financial barriers of trying public transportation. For riders without access to mobile devices, physical fare cards are mailed and can be reloaded as needed. If additional future funding becomes available, then RCTC will extend this program beyond the initial 2-year period.

As part of Mitigation Measure **AQ-5**, RCTC will also work with RTA to improve and potentially expand RTA's existing CommuterLink bus service,<sup>3</sup> which currently operates along I-15 between Temecula and Corona. At a minimum, RTA buses would be permitted to use the express lanes at no cost within the Project limits upon the opening of the Project.

Vanpools provide a high-capacity transportation option for individuals whose travel needs are not met by traditional bus or rail transit, reducing vehicle travel and improving air quality. This reduction in vehicle use directly contributes to improved air quality by decreasing the number of individual vehicles on the road, thereby lowering emissions. As part of Mitigation Measure **AQ-6**, RCTC will continue supporting vanpooling in Riverside County by committing \$15 million to fund vanpool subsidies through a component of the VanClub program (vanclub.net) over a 5-year period beginning in 2030. This includes the launch of an Incremental Vanpool Subsidy Program<sup>4</sup> to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rctc.org/ride-train-free-experience-metrolink-program/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.riversidetransit.com/index.php/riding-the-bus/commuterlink-express>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.vanclub.net/rp2/home/faq>



supplement existing subsidies from regional agencies such as the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Orange County Transit Authority, San Diego Association of Governments, and San Bernardino County Transportation Authority. By enhancing vanpool affordability, the program aims to increase vanpool participation, support long-distance commuters, and promote sustainable commuting options. This increased participation will lead to a reduction in congestion and vehicle travel, resulting in fewer emissions and improved air quality across the region.

IE Commuter ([iecommuter.org](http://iecommuter.org)) serves as RCTC's flagship Commuter Assistance (rideshare/TDM) program, administered jointly with SBCTA, and supports commuters and employers across Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Within this framework, VanClub ([vanclub.net](http://vanclub.net)) is a separate vanpool subsidy program managed solely by RCTC, offering subsidies to eligible vanpools commuting to worksites in Riverside County, regardless of their origin.

The proposed Incremental Vanpool Subsidy Program would introduce a new origin-based subsidy exclusively for Riverside County residents, regardless of their destination county. Although distinct from the existing VanClub program, it would be marketed under the VanClub brand as a special bonus incentive for Riverside County residents.

RCTC has developed and is currently administering the IE Commuter rideshare program, which is a component of RCTC's premier Commuter Assistance program, designed to shift commuter behavior toward sustainable transportation options to worksites, thereby improving air quality. The program provides services, including ride matching assistance, marketing materials, and promotional incentives. Employees benefit from personalized commuting solutions such as carpool and vanpool matching, customized transit itineraries, and incentives like the \$5/Day Rideshare Incentive.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, participants have access to the Guaranteed Ride Home program,<sup>6</sup> offering emergency ride options to ensure flexibility and reliability for those using alternative commute modes. These programs collectively contribute to reduced vehicle travel and translate to lower emissions. Under Mitigation Measure **AQ-7**, RCTC will provide \$12 million dollars to administer the IE Commuter program over a 5-year period starting in 2030 (the Project's Opening Year), which will be available to Riverside County residents.

Additionally, as part of Mitigation Measure **AQ-8**, RCTC will extend park and ride leases beyond their current expiration in 2029 and expand the network to secure an estimated 300 leased spaces along the I-15 corridor through Temescal Valley to support growing commuter demand and promote multimodal transportation options. Currently, there are 206 leased spaces in the area, including:

- 75 spaces at I-15/Ontario Avenue (Canyon Community Church, Corona).
- 91 spaces at I-15/Nichols Road (Lake Elsinore Outlets).
- 40 spaces at I-15/Dexter Avenue (Caltrans Park & Ride).

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rctc.org/5day-incentive/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.iecommuter.org/rp2/home/CommuterIncentives?page=grh>





This Project would secure an approximate 94 additional leased spaces<sup>7</sup> within the I-15/Temescal Valley area to meet future demand. The agency is committed to maintaining and expanding this vital infrastructure through 2035, with a total investment of \$300,000. This initiative will reduce vehicle emissions by encouraging carpooling and public transit use, thereby improving regional air quality. The program is designed to be equitable, ensuring access to all community members, and will be implemented through a multi-phase approach involving site identification, stakeholder coordination, compliance, and ongoing operations. The leasing agreements, structured as three-party contracts between the property owner, Caltrans, and RCTC, are designed to enhance air quality by reducing vehicle emissions through increased carpooling and public transit use. This program prioritizes equitable access for all community members, ensuring that everyone can benefit from improved air quality and sustainable transportation options. It also accommodates growing commuter demand and acknowledges the public's desire for multiple choices of transportation opportunities in the Inland Empire.

Ultimately, the Project will benefit all users of the corridor.

## **Conclusion**

Pursuant to §15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines, decision-makers are required to balance the benefits of a project against its unavoidable environmental risks in determining whether to approve a project. In the event the benefits of a project outweigh the unavoidable adverse effects, the adverse environmental effects may be considered "acceptable." The State CEQA Guidelines require that, when a public agency allows for the occurrence of significant effects that are identified in the Final EIR/EA but are not at least substantially mitigated, the agency shall state in writing the specific reasons the action was supported. Any statement of overriding considerations should be included in the record of the project approval and should be mentioned in the Notice of Determination.

To the extent the significant effects of the Project are not avoided or substantially lessened to a level of insignificance, Caltrans, having reviewed and considered the information contained in the Final EIR/EA, having reviewed and considered the information contained in the public record, and having balanced the benefits of the Project against the unavoidable effects that remain, finds such unmitigated effects to be acceptable in consideration of the overriding considerations discussed herein.

Caltrans finds that all feasible mitigation measures have been imposed to lessen unavoidable Project impacts to the extent possible. As such, Caltrans, as the lead agency for the Project, has reviewed and considered the information contained in the Draft and Final EIR/EAs prepared for the Project and the public record. Accordingly, the lead agency makes the following finding, pursuant to §15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines, with regard to the Statement of Overriding Considerations for the Project:

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<sup>7</sup> The number of additional leased spaces is subject to ongoing lease negotiations and property availability. RCTC is committing \$300,000 to secure 94 additional spaces based on 2025 property valuations. The actual number of spaces secured by 2029 may vary depending on lease terms, site conditions, and market rates at the time of implementation.



*California Administrative Code, Title 14, Section 15093(a) states: “If the specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of a proposed project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, the adverse environmental effects may be considered ‘acceptable’.”* Based on the above discussion and on the evidence presented, Caltrans finds that the benefits of the Project outweigh the adverse impacts on cumulative air quality impacts, GHGs, and conflict with the California AB 32 Climate Change Scoping Plan. Based on the above discussion, pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21081, subdivision (b), Caltrans finds that specific overriding economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the Project outweigh the significant effects on the environment.

Catalino A. Pining III  
District 8 Director  
California Department of  
Transportation

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Pining III', written over a horizontal line.

Signature

12/03/2025  
Date