



CITY OF MORGAN HILL

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: June 3, 2020

PREPARED BY: Adam Paszkowski, Principal Planner
APPROVED BY: City Manager

PROVIDE DIRECTION REGARDING REVIEW OF HIGH SPEED RAIL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT/STUDY

RECOMMENDATION(S)

Receive an update and provide input on the High Speed Rail Environmental Impact Report/Study (EIR/EIS) Analysis.

COUNCIL PRIORITIES, GOALS & STRATEGIES

Ongoing Priorities

Enhancing Public Safety
Protecting the Environment and Preserving
Open Space and Agricultural Land
Maintaining Infrastructure

2020-2021 Strategic Priorities

Economic Development
Transportation

GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Bikeways
Trails
Parks and Recreation Masterplan
Downtown Specific Plan
Economic Blueprint
General Plan/Housing Element
Public Safety Master Plan

REPORT NARRATIVE:

On April 15, 2020, the City Council approved a contract with David J Powers & Associates (DJP&A) to review the High-Speed Rail project Draft Environmental Impact Report/Study (EIR/EIS) released on April 24, 2020.

DJP&A assembled a team of sub consultants to assist with technical analysis in the areas of Noise and Vibration (Illingworth & Rodkin, Inc.), traffic and circulation/emergency response impacts (Hexagon), Civil Engineering (BFK) and Urban Design (Perkins & Will). The team has been reviewing the technical reports and are preparing a draft response for the City's review and consideration. The comment period deadline to submit a response to for the EIR/EIS has been extended from the original 45-days period to 60-days, with a submittal deadline date of June 23, 2020.

The purpose of this report is to provide the City Council with an update on the status of the review and assessment to date, highlight key issues that have been identified, and provide the opportunity for City Council and community to provide feedback on the

current analysis. The team will also share the review with the community at the next community town-hall meeting on June 4, and will finalize a response for Council's review and approval for the June 17 meeting.

Background

CHSRA is the State Agency responsible for planning, designing, and constructing the California High Speed Rail system that will connect the San Francisco Bay Area to Los Angeles (eventually from Sacramento to San Diego) with a train system. The approximately 90-mile segment that contains Morgan Hill is the San Jose to Merced portion of the overall project.

Over the past few years, the CHSRA has been preparing the environmental review for the San Jose to Merced segment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) policies and procedures. The Authority has identified three possible alignments through Morgan Hill.

1. Viaduct West of Highway 101 - Elevated
2. Embankment Adjacent to UPRR Tracks - on a berm with grade separations
2. Viaduct West of Highway 101 - Elevated
3. Blended, At-grade within UPRR Right-of-Way - No Grade Separations

CHSRA has identified the blended, at-grade within UPRR right-of-way as the preferred alignment. However, the Draft EIR/EIS analysis will review all alternatives.

The City issued a request for proposal (RFP) on March 10, 2020 to solicit technical support and assistance with the review of the Draft EIR/EIS. The City only received one response to the RFP, from DJP&A.

On April 15, 2020, the City Council approved a contract with DJP&A to assist the City in reviewing the Draft EIR/EIS and prepare a response that identifies appropriate, feasible, effective and enforceable mitigation measures with a special focus on:

- o Noise and Vibration
- o Traffic and Circulation
- o Emergency Response Impacts
- o Urban Design and Planning
- o Pedestrian Access and Connectivity
- o Aesthetics
- o Land Use and Economic Development Impacts

DJP&A is in an ideal position to assist the City with this task as this firm had previous experience working with the City of Morgan Hill on various projects and specifically on High Speed Rail (HSR) preliminary technical documents and analysis of the alignments.

Analysis

DJP&A, in collaboration with a consultant team and City staff, is reviewing the four HSR

alignments proposed within the San Jose to Merced Draft EIR/EIS identified above. While DJP&A is reviewing the entire document, the focus of the analysis is on High Speed Rail's Preferred Alternative- known as "Alternative 4, the at-grade blended alignment." The review is focused on traffic operations, safety, noise, vibration, aesthetics, cultural and historic resources, and City facilities.

Attachment 1 provides DJP&A's initial analysis of the HSR EIR/EIS.

Below is a high-level summary of the key issues that have been identified as part of the review:

Visual

Alternatives 1 and 3 are identical through Morgan Hill and propose an aerial structure adjacent to 101 that would traverse a residential neighborhood west of US 101 between the East Main Street overcrossing and East Dunne Avenue interchange, passing immediately adjacent to homes for about 0.5 mile. The height, length, and concrete construction of the aerial structure would contrast with the scale and materials of the existing residential structures. Additionally, the project would remove (or impact) half a block of homes and landscaping from the streetscape, and impacting the visual characteristic of the residential neighborhood. This alternative also will limit the visibility of the Honda Car Dealership from US 101.

Alternative 2 envisions the HSR tracks on an embankment along the east side of the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) tracks. Monterey Road would need to be shifted to the east to make room for the HSR tracks north of Cochrane Road. Railroad Avenue would need to be shifted to the east to make room for the HSR tracks south of Barrett Avenue. The bridge at Butterfield Boulevard would be extended to cross an at-grade portion of HSR and the realigned Railroad Avenue. All streets that currently cross the Caltrain/UPRR tracks at-grade would be rebuilt as underpasses (grade separated). The embankment for Alternative 2 creates a tall wall that runs the length of the City and blocks views to the west, including views towards El Toro Peak. The EIR suggests that the removal of buildings and trees, and the introduction of the embankment for HSR under Alternative 2 would somehow *improve* the visual character of this area. However, the embankment creates a visual barrier visible from Downtown streets, running through the City for several miles.

Alternative 4 (CHSRA's preferred alternative) would place the high-speed rail tracks within the existing UPRR right-of-way, in an at-grade, on a blended service system with Caltrain. This alternative maintains all current at-grade crossings but with four-quadrant barrier gates for added safety. The Morgan Hill Caltrain Station would be redesigned to accommodate new design standards and replace the at-grade crossing with a new pedestrian/bicycle underpass. The design of the Station, especially the design of the underpass, would have to be well thought out to ensure safety and comfort.

Traffic & Circulation:

The project will have an adverse impact on numerous intersections (see table below) with no concrete mitigation across any of the alternatives. The "gate down" time is

anticipated to be approximately up to 28 minutes of the hour during peak time, but it is not clear if it is inclusive of all future rail traffic, including freight and Amtrak, anticipated by 2040. The reports state significant impact to emergency response time with no clear mitigations.

Number of Intersections Affected by Each Alternative								
	2029				2040			
	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4
Diridon	14	14	14	9	26	26	26	11
Monterey	23	23	23	5	25	26	25	5
Morgan Hill-Gilroy	9	12	4	13	8	13	2	15

Under Alternative 4, grade separating Dunne, Tennant and Tilton Avenues would alleviate traffic and circulation impacts. These intersections would be grade separated under Alternative 2.

Noise & Vibration

The greatest amount of noise and vibration impacts occur in the UPRR/Downtown HSR options (Alternatives 2 & 4), with the highest impacts being for Alternative 2 due to the elevated railway on the embankment, followed by the at-grade Alternative 4. Alternative 2 would impact roughly 1,000 properties and Alternative 4 about 800 properties. Alternatives 1 and 3 (identical through Morgan Hill) would impact roughly 100 properties primarily along US101.

Number of Properties impacted by noise in Morgan Hill	
Alternatives 1 & 3	100
Alternative 2	1,000
Alternative 4	800

Alternative 4 has noise issues associated with train horn blasts sounding as each of the 176 trains per day pass through at-grade intersections. The horns will be sounding continuously given the speed and frequency of trains moving through the intersections. The amount of grade crossings in a densely populated, compacted Downtown area without grade separations would be unprecedented for any segment of the HSR. For operational noise, the primary mitigation strategy is the use of sound walls at various locations in Alternative 2 and 4. For mitigation, the EIR/EIS identifies the use of (10-foot high) noise barriers and Quiet Zones. High Speed Rail does not have jurisdiction to apply for quiet zones; this would be the City's responsibility.

The vibration impacts of Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 would be minimal, while Alternative 4, the at-grade blended option, would impact over 100 properties, mostly south of Tennant to the City's southern boundary. Grade separations would improve noise impact from horn blasts because there is no need to sound a horn at grade-separated crossings.

Cultural Resources:

There are four historic resources identified in Morgan Hill area that could potentially be affected by the construction and/or operation of the HSR alignments. Those four resources are as follows:

1. Madrone Underpass, UPRR underpass structure for Monterey Road crossing
2. Villa Mira Monte, 17860 Monterey Rd, Victorian Stick-style residence.
3. Church of Christ, 17098 Monterey Rd, Arts and Crafts-style church.
4. Cribari Winery, 18980 Monterey Rd, L-plan Craftsman-style building.

The impact to these cultural resources ranges from noise and vibration impacts and varies depending on the alternative.

Property	Impact	Alternative
Madrone Underpass	The Madrone underpass would be demolished and replaced by a new box girder overpass structure	4
Villa Mira Monte	No increased vibration that could cause adverse change. Construction noise.	2, 4
Church of Christ	None or less than significant impact.	-
Cribari Winery	The Cribari Winery would have to be demolished to accommodate the new Monterey Road	2

The Morgan Hill Historical Society (MHHS) has provided direct input to the CHSRA for the impacts to the Villa Mira Monte property (Attachment 2).

4(f) City Facilities

There are six properties identified as '4(f)' facilities in Morgan Hill potentially affected by the HSR alignments. Section 4(f) properties are publicly owned lands of a park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge; or a historical site, publicly or privately owned, that is listed or determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). These 4(f) facilities in Morgan Hill potentially affected by HSR are:

1. Morgan Hill Community and Cultural Center (CCC)
2. Morgan Hill Outdoor Sports Center (OSC)
3. Morgan Hill Aquatics Center (MHAC)
4. Villa Mira Monte
5. Madrone Underpass
6. Sanchez Park

Property	Impact	Alternative
CCC	Construction and operational noise impacts. Additionally, property right-of-way impacts from grade separation under Alternative 2.	2 & 4
OSC	No significant noise or vibration impacts.	-
MHAC	No significant noise or vibration impacts.	-
Villa Mira Monte	No increased vibration that could cause adverse	2,4

	change. Construction noise.	
Madrone Underpass	The Madrone underpass would be demolished and replaced by a new box girder overpass structure	4
Sanchez Park	Some visual and noise impacts, but not significant.	4

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Inform

The Draft EIR/EIS and many of the associated documents were made available to the public on April 24, 2020. The public can visit [High Speed Rail Authority Website](#) for more information.

The CHSRA will receive public comment on the EIR from April 24th through June 23rd.

The City of Morgan Hill will host a virtual community townhall meeting on June 4, 2020 and will present draft comment letter to City Council on June 17, 2020.

CHSRA has been holding community open houses (virtual meetings) in San Jose, Morgan Hill, and Gilroy to present updates on the project and get input on the San Jose to Merced Project Segment. The City of Morgan Hill has a [project web page](#) that provides basic information on the project and links to the HSR website for additional information.

Comments can be submitted at the open houses or

Email: mailto:san.jose_merced@hsr.ca.gov or

Mail: Northern California Regional Office California High-Speed Rail Authority

100 Paseo De San Antonio, Suite 300

San Jose, CA 95113

[HSR EIR/EIS factsheet.](#)

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS:

The Council may choose to provide different direction to staff on the preliminary assessment of the HSR EIR/EIS review.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL AND COMMISSION ACTIONS:

On April 15, 2020, the City Council authorized the City Manager to execute and administer a consulting agreement with DJP&A to respond to CHSRA’s EIR/EIS associated with the San Jose to Merced Project segment for an amount not to exceed \$104,772.

FISCAL AND RESOURCE IMPACT:

There is no direct fiscal impact to receiving this update report. HSR EIR/EIS review and comment is an activity included in the City staff’s workplan.

CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act):

Not a Project.

By the definition provided in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15378, this item does not qualify as a “project” and is therefore exempt. This report is providing a high-level summary of the review of an environmental impact report.

LINKS/ATTACHMENTS:

1. HSR Draft Comments and Layouts
2. Letter from Morgan Hill Historical Society
3. 16 Supplement 1
4. 16 Supplement 2
5. 16 Supplement 3
6. 16 Consultant Presentation