

### 1.1 Overview

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

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

### 1.2 Project History

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

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

employees of San Rafael, including disadvantaged communities, a new transit center will be safer to access, more inviting, and easier to use, improving quality of life.

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

## 1.3 Project Objectives

The objectives of the proposed project are to:

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

The proposed project is needed primarily to replace the existing transit center following impacts on the functionality of some of the transit center facilities resulting from the implementation of the SMART Phase 2 line to Larkspur. With the extension of SMART through the existing transit center south of 3rd Street, Platform C was reconfigured, negatively affecting bus circulation and bus bay flexibility within and around the transit center and disrupting pedestrian access and transfer activity among the remaining platforms at the site. SMART riders transferring from the Downtown San Rafael SMART station to access the current transit center south of 3rd Street, as well as riders originating from Downtown San Rafael, must navigate heavy traffic crossing through local intersections and accessing the U.S. Highway 101 on-ramps adjacent to the transit center. The

configuration of the SMART rail tracks directly through the transit center is detrimental to bus, vehicle, and pedestrian access and safety. A new transit center solution in Downtown San Rafael would address near-term and long-term transit needs while improving the desirability and usability of transit for both residents and regional commuters. It would also reduce traffic congestion, facilitate more efficient transit operations, and promote pedestrian safety.

### 1.3.1 Agency and Public Outreach

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

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

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

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

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

## 1.4 Environmental Review Process

### 1.4.1 California Environmental Quality Act

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

### 1.4.2 Purpose of this EIR

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

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

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

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

### 1.4.3 Scope and Content of EIR

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

### 1.4.3.1 Notice of Preparation and Scoping

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

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

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

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

### 1.4.3.2 Resource Topics

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

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise and Vibration

- Population and Housing
- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire

The following topics are also analyzed in this Draft EIR.

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

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

- **Agricultural Resources.** Changes in the status of agricultural lands may constitute significant impacts under CEQA; examples include direct conversion of state-designated Important Farmlands to nonagricultural use, conflict with Williamson Act (California Land Conservation Act) contracts, and various other types of environmental changes that have the potential to result indirectly in conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use. No agricultural land exists in the project area. No impacts on agricultural resources would result from project implementation or operation. Consequently, the proposed project would not have the potential to contribute directly or indirectly to conversion of farmland to nonagricultural use, and agricultural resources are not discussed further.
- **Mineral Resources.** A project typically would cause a significant impact on mineral resources when it results in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource important to the region and state or a locally important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan. *The City San Rafael General Plan 2020* does not include policies relating to mineral resources because the City does not contain any mineral deposits of regional significance. There are no mineral extraction uses in the project area. There would be no impact during project construction or operation and mineral resources are not discussed further.

## 1.5 EIR Organization

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

- Chapter 1, Introduction, includes a brief overview of the proposed project; an overview of the environmental review process; and the scope, content, and organization of the Draft EIR.
- Chapter 2, Project Description, includes a comprehensive description of the proposed project.

- Chapter 3, Environmental Analysis, includes an evaluation of the resource topics outlined above. Each resource-specific section discusses the environmental setting, impacts, and mitigation measures.
- Chapter 4, Cumulative Impacts, includes a discussion of the proposed project's potential impacts related to past, present, and reasonably foreseeable development in the project area.
- Chapter 5, Alternatives, includes a description of the project alternatives considered and evaluation of several alternatives to the proposed project, including those removed from further consideration.
- Chapter 6, Other CEQA-Required Analysis, includes a discussion of significant environmental impacts that cannot be avoided, significant irreversible changes in the environment, and growth-inducing impacts.
- Chapter 7, List of Preparers, includes a list of staff who contributed to preparation of the Draft EIR.
- Chapter 8, References, includes a list of the printed references and personal communications cited in the Draft EIR.
- Appendices
  - A. Scoping Summary Report
  - B. Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Modeling Files
  - C. Transportation Summary Report
  - D. Biological Resources: Plants and Animal Species Observed
  - E. Biological Resources: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Natural Diversity Database, and California Native Plant Society Lists
  - F. Cultural Resources: Department of Parks and Recreation Forms
  - G. Cultural Resources: Northwest Information Center Records Search Results
  - H. Preliminary Geotechnical Design Recommendations
  - I. Phase I Environmental Site Assessment
  - J. Noise Field Data

