STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION STATEMENT OF OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE CENTENNIAL CORRIDOR PROJECT IN THE CITY OF BAKERSFIELD AND KERN COUNTY

DISTRICT 6-KER-58-PM T31.7 to PM R55.6

DISTRICT 6-KER-99-PM 21.2 to PM 26.2

(PROJECT ID#: 0600000484)

SCH# 2008091102

The following information is presented to comply with State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Section 15903), and the Department of Transportation and California Transportation Commission Environmental Regulations (Title 21 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 11, Section 1501). Reference is made to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the project, which is the basic source for the information.

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

- Visual/Aesthetics - Construction of the project will add a major new transportation corridor in the Westpark neighborhood. Removal of existing residential, commercial, and industrial structures and construction of elevated structures such as sound walls, retaining walls and an above-grade freeway will create a significant, permanent change to the visual character and quality of the neighborhood and its surroundings.

- Land Use and Planning - Implementation of the project will not be able to fully meet all the goals outlined in the *Metropolitan Bakersfield 2010 General Plan (2002, update 2007)*. The remaining inconsistencies pertain to minimizing impacts from truck traffic on noise-sensitive uses, retaining existing residential neighborhoods, and allowing in-fill development that is compatible with the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

- Noise - Construction of the project will introduce traffic noise impacts to 49 frequent outdoor use areas west of State Route 99 that would have more than a 12-decibel noise increase and 21 frequent outdoor use areas along State Route 58 and State Route 99 that would have more than a 5-decibel

noise increase. A total of 25 sound walls would be constructed to provide noise abatement for Alternative B. Future predicted traffic noise levels with the recommended abatement measures would range from 54 to 75 decibels. There will be 11 affected frequent outdoor use areas for which noise abatement is not recommended, and 58 frequent outdoor use areas will still be affected even with the recommended sound walls.

- Community Impacts - Construction of the project will result in land use conversions and divide the existing Westpark neighborhood. The new corridor will segment and isolate portions of the neighborhood and alter circulation patterns due to changes to the internal roadway network. In addition to the displacement of 310 residential units, construction of the proposed transportation corridor will result in disruptions in access, causing significant community cohesiveness impacts to the Westpark neighborhood.

Given the significance of impacts to visual/aesthetic resources, land use and planning, noise, and community impacts, mitigation, avoidance, and minimization measures have been incorporated to reduce significant unavoidable effects to the maximum extent practicable.

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

Alternative B is considered a viable alternative because it would achieve the project's purpose and need. The project purpose is a set of objectives the project is intended to meet. The project need is the range of transportation deficiencies that the project was initiated to address.

Purpose

The purpose of the Centennial Corridor Project is to provide route continuity and associated traffic congestion relief along State Route 58 within metropolitan Bakersfield and Kern County from State Route 58 (at Cottonwood Road) to Interstate 5.

Need

State Route 58 is a critical link in the state transportation network and is used by interstate travelers, commuters, and a large number of trucks. State Route 58 lacks continuity in central Bakersfield, resulting in severe traffic congestion and reduced levels of service on adjoining highways and local streets. These transportation deficiencies are described below.

Route Continuity

State Route 58 lacks route continuity; it lacks route continuity from the State Route 58 (East)/State Route 99 interchange west to Interstate 5. From the State Route 58 (East)/99 interchange, State Route 58 is offset by about 2 miles where State Routes 58 and 99 merge and share a common north-south alignment. Along this shared portion, State Route 58/99 is an eight-lane, access-controlled (access is limited to interchanges) freeway. This section of State Route 99 between State Route 58 (East) and Airport Drive is the third most congested segment of the highway in California. Regional and inter-regional traffic, including heavy trucks, merge with local traffic using this segment to access metropolitan Bakersfield. The lack of route continuity contributes to traffic congestion and reduced levels of service on adjoining highways and local streets.

Existing East-West Traffic Congestion and Projected Demand

Based on the traffic study prepared for this project, during the year 2008 (baseline year), 15 key intersections with signals operated at worse than level of service (LOS) D (25 to 35 seconds of delay) during one or both peak hours periods and one intersection without a signal operated at an unacceptable LOS (worse than LOS D). In 2018, the opening year, without the project, 12 intersections (11 with signals and 1 without a signal) in the project area are projected to operate at worse than LOS D during one or both peak hour periods. In 2038, the horizon year, without the project, 22 intersections (18 with signals and 4 without signals) in the project area are projected to operate at worse than LOS D during one or both peak hours.

Construction of the Centennial Corridor Project will relieve traffic congestion along State Route 99, which is the major Central Valley north-south highway in California. State Route 99 provides a connection between the two legs of State Route 58 (Rosedale Highway and State Route 58 East) for drivers traveling in the east-west direction. The merging of two major State Routes (58 and 99) into one alignment between the eastern and western legs of State Route 58 (a distance of about two miles) has made the traffic level of service deteriorate on this segment of freeway. Conditions are projected to worsen in the coming years.

Traffic Congestion on the Shared Portion of State Routes 58 and 99

State Route 99, which is the major Central Valley north-south highway in California, provides a connection between the two legs of State Route 58 (Rosedale Highway and State Route 58 East) for drivers traveling in the east-west direction. The merging of two major State Routes (58 and 99) into one alignment between the eastern and western legs of State Route 58 (a distance of about two miles) has made the traffic level of service deteriorate on this segment of freeway. Conditions are projected to worsen in the coming years.

Also, State Route 99's close spacing for its two connections with State Route 58 (East and West), as well as an interchange at California Avenue, has resulted in conflicting merging conditions (cars entering the freeway are trying to move to the left and the cars exiting the freeway are trying to move to the right to use the off-ramp) that add to traffic congestion. Caltrans' standard for spacing between freeway-to-freeway connections is 2 miles, and the standard for spacing between interchanges is 1 mile. In this location, the two connectors from State Route 58 to State Route 99 and the California Avenue interchange are located within slightly over 2 miles of each other.

Benefits of the Selected Alternative B

The Centennial Corridor Project would result in the following traffic circulation and operational benefits:

- Improvements between Cottonwood Road and State Route 99 would include auxiliary lanes and collector-distributor lanes (lanes separated from the freeway to accommodate the lane-changing associated with traffic getting on and off the freeway). These roadway improvements would enhance traffic flow by separating traffic entering and exiting the freeway from through traffic.

- State Route 58 would no longer be required to share an alignment with State Route 99. It would continue westerly and connect to the Westside Parkway. This would eliminate the 2-mile overlap where State Routes 58 and 99 merge and share a common north-south alignment, thereby removing traffic from State Route 99.

- By moving traffic onto the Westside Parkway, which is a freeway, the project would enable drivers to continue their trips without having to use a local roadway. This would also eliminate the need to stop at multiple signals and the San Joaquin Valley railroad crossing at Landco Drive. Decreased travel times in high congestion travel corridors will lead to an overall reduction in harmful emissions by reducing idling. Increased idling times on the local streets would occur under the No Build conditions. It is important to note that idling times would dramatically raise the particulate matter quantities for the No-Build with most concentrations added along Rosedale and Stockdale Highways.

- The Westside Parkway would connect to Stockdale Highway to provide a direct link to Interstate 5, eliminating the offset route that exists at State Route 43. Thus, the project will reduce out of direction travel.

- The additional capacity provided by the build alternatives compared to the No Build Alternative would also help reduce congestion on adjacent local roadways because traffic is expected to shift to the freeway.

- By 2018, the No-Build Alternative is anticipated to result in four deficient freeway segment operations compared to Alternative B, which is not anticipated to result in deficient freeway segment operations.

- By 2038, the No-Build Alternative is anticipated to result in 16 deficient freeway segment operations compared to Alternative B, which is anticipated to result in four deficient freeway segment operations.

Among the three build alternatives (A, B, and C) evaluated in the Final Environmental Impact Report prepared for this project, Caltrans has determined that Alternative B is a feasible and prudent alternative that avoids parkland and other Section 4(f) properties, such as historic properties. It would also achieve the project's purpose and need of providing route continuity and associated traffic congestion relief along State Route 58 (East) between Interstate 5 and Cottonwood Road. In addition, Alternative B has the least impact on jurisdictional waters and would not have disproportionate impacts on environmental justice communities. It is also the least expensive alternative, costing almost $100 million less than the other alternatives. Additionally, residential displacements for Alternative C are concentrated in two environmental justice communities, specifically the environmental justice community south of Saunders Park, while Alternative A would have the greatest number of overall displacements. Therefore, after comparing and weighing the benefits and impacts of Alternatives A, B, and C, Caltrans has identified Alternative B as the selected alternative.

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 which are identified in the FEIR 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 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 FEIR for the Centennial Corridor Project, and having reviewed and considered the information contained in the public record, and having balanced the benefits of the project against the unavoidable effects which remain, finds that 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 the Final Environmental Impact Reports prepared for the Centennial Corridor 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 Centennial Corridor Project:

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 therefore finds that the benefits of the proposed project outweigh the adverse impacts on aesthetic/visual resources, land use and planning, community, and noise impacts related to fair share mitigation from the Centennial Corridor Project, which cannot be eliminated or reduced to a less than significant level.