



ECOS
ENVIRONMENTAL
♦ COUNCIL ♦
OF SACRAMENTO

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ECOS SUES CALTRANS ON CAPITAL CITY FREEWAY BRIDGE WIDENING PROJECT

On March 29, 2021, the Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS) filed a Petition for Writ of Mandate with the Sacramento County Superior Court challenging Caltrans' approval of the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment with a Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for a project to widen the Capital City Freeway (SR 51) bridge over the American River.

The IS/MND does not provide adequate environmental review under CEQA, in that it fails to provide an adequate project description and piecemeals environmental review of further planned widening of SR 51. Furthermore, this project may have significant impacts to greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and climate change. ECOS seeks a determination from the Superior Court that Caltrans' approval of the project is invalid and void and that the Mitigated Negative Declaration fails to satisfy the requirements of CEQA Guidelines (Title 14, California Code of Regulations, section 15000 et seq.).

Since 1966, the bridge has had three lanes in each direction. Caltrans' Bridge Needs Report states that major deck rehabilitation is necessary to preserve the deck and provide a better wearing surface, because an overlay has worn off and cracks have appeared due to spalling and corrosive chloride content. According to Caltrans, deck rehabilitation requires bridge widening by over 50%. Bridge widening, however, is logically the first stage of a larger project to widen SR 51 to five lanes in each direction for 3.4 miles from E Street in Midtown Sacramento to El Camino Avenue. The larger project is not yet fully funded, but its scope was established in a Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report that Caltrans released in 2017.

Caltrans is abusing CEQA by issuing a MND for the bridge widening project -- passed off as merely "deck replacement" -- rather than undertaking an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for that larger project. CEQA specifically prohibits this "piecemealing" of environmental review. An issue that can only be addressed in an EIR is the traffic induced by widening of SR 51, resulting in increased vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and associated increased GHG emissions and air pollution. Pursuant to SB 743, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) requires that the impacts of increased VMT and emissions be considered in the environmental review of projects of this nature.

ECOS is asking the Court to require Caltrans to live up to California legislation and policies.

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