

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION  
SEATTLE REGIONAL OFFICE  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**



**DATE:** August 3, 2020

**PROJECT:** Cohasset Road Widening

**APPLICANT:** City of Chico, California

**PROJECT NUMBER:** 07-79-07584

**A. PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

**1. BENEFICIARIES**

The project beneficiaries include an existing business with potential for expansion in the manufacturing and distribution of t-shirts (Fifth Sun), as well as potential commercial development opportunity related to the technology industry (AAA Properties and M&D). AAA properties has an existing facility that once housed a satellite office for Facebook. According to the City of Chico, Facebook had approximately 300 employees until about 2017, but due to some of the physical constraints of infrastructure, left the area. With improved transportation (roadway and bikeway), this property owner expects to be able to attract a similar technology-related industry business. With the amount of vacant land, the opportunity for build-to-suit is a viable and important consideration for attracting future businesses. M&D has purchased approximately 8 acres in the airport area, looking to attract business development meeting the zoning of the parcels.

There are many businesses currently located in the commercial areas that would benefit from this project. A fixed wing aerial firefighting operating and leading supplier of specialized products to military aviation markets, a producer of sun-dried tomatoes, a roofing supply company, a dental product manufacturer, and a major graphic design and distribution company for licensed and private apparel are currently located in this area. By improving access to this area, these businesses can speed distribution of their products, improve their position in global markets, and create permanent jobs.

## **2. PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION**

The proposed Cohasset Road Widening project would complete the 2-lane to 4-lane widening of approximately 2.3 miles of Cohasset Road between the Sycamore Creek Bridge at the southern boundary and Ryan Avenue at the project's northern extent (Appendix A). The widening would result in four 12-foot lanes and 8-foot shoulders sections with limited curbs at the edge of pavement. The roadway would transition down from 4-lanes to 2-lanes between Airpark Boulevard and Ryan Avenue. Street lighting and right and left turn pockets would be installed at the intersections. Portions of an existing Class I bike trail would be relocated approximately 10 feet west of its current location on the west side of Cohasset Road to accommodate the roadway widening. The relocated bike trail would include an 8-foot paved path with a minimum of 2-foot wide shoulders. Landscaping and irrigation are proposed along the bike path and near the entry to the Chico Municipal Airport (CMA) Industrial Area.

Construction activities would include full roadway excavation and earthwork to typical depths of approximately 4 feet, and placement of aggregate base and asphalt concrete paving. Underground work would include the installation of minor sections of sewer main extensions and associated trenching depths to approximately 10 feet, with stubs to better serve and provide increased capacity to existing industrial and commercial properties along the corridor. Storm drainage improvements include a roadside bio-swale ditch on the west side of the roadway between the edge of pavement and the bike path. Additional modifications to the existing drainage system include installing longitudinal culverts along the sides of the road where the right-of-way is minimal, installing cross-culverts along some project segments to prevent soil erosion, creating small detention basins, developing bio-swale roadside ditches with gentle side slopes (a minimum of 3:1), and hydroseeding to prevent erosion from overtopping the roadway. A typical section of roadway illustrating road and bike-path widths, construction, and slopes, is provided in Appendix A.

Earlier completed phases of the project, including the widening the Sycamore Creek and Sheep Hollow Creek bridges, facilitate this third and final phase of the project to provide a continuous 4-lane roadway between Eaton Road and the CMA. These earlier phases were reviewed together with the current proposed project in 2005 and 2006 through an Environmental Assessment developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), associated Section 404 permitting through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Section 7 consultation and a Biological Opinion issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Section 106 consultation with the California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration prepared by the City of Chico pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Because the original scope of the project is unchanged, the Biological Opinion, Section 106 concurrence, and CEQA document are still in effect. This Environmental Assessment provides new or updated information on Purpose and Need, Tribal consultations, and various aspects of the affected environment.

### **3. PURPOSE AND NEED**

Cohasset Road is a major arterial connecting the CMA and three job centers in north Chico to State Route 99 (SR 99), the major state highway connecting Chico to the rest of California. Locations around the CMA also serve as a staging area during disasters in the region, housing numerous mutual aid agencies, including firefighting teams and other first responders. Traffic congestion on Cohasset Road has been increasing for years, a situation that was most recently exacerbated by the approximately 20% increase in population and commensurate increase in traffic as a result of the 2018 Camp Fire.

The project is needed to improve access to the CMA, improve roadway safety, and accommodate cumulative travel demand (anticipated travel demand for the next 20 years). Ultimately, the project would create higher paying jobs, diversify the local economy and expand the City of Chico's ability to expand into markets throughout California, nationally and internationally, by improving access to this important commercial corridor. This project has also been identified as a necessary component of the City's Capital Improvement Program to improve transportation facilities to the CMA.

The purpose of the project is to reduce existing congestion and improve north-south circulation along Cohasset Road by widening the road to four lanes to accommodate existing and future traffic conditions, resulting in the following:

- improved traffic flow and safety at the intersections along Cohasset Road in the project area by providing right- and left-turn pockets, as needed, and street lighting. Existing traffic volumes along Cohasset Road result in difficulties entering and exiting the road at several intersections. Traffic analysis indicates that cumulative traffic conditions without the project would result in substantial delays at five intersections during the p.m. peak hour. Cohasset Road has long been a dangerous and clogged thoroughfare, which has stymied business growth in the northeastern corner of Chico. Large trucks turning into and out of commercial areas from a two-lane road causes a significant safety risk;
- better access to the existing and future industrial and commercial operations at the CMA and commercial and industrial development near the airport;
- improved drainage through construction of roadside ditches and installation of longitudinal and cross culverts; and
- increased system reliability for freight movement. There has been significant underutilization of land in the airport industrial area because of freight transportation constraints.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

The range of reasonable alternatives that meet the project purpose and need is limited by the fixed location of the airport and connecting regional transportation routes. Consultation with the USFWS and SHPO has already been performed for the project as whole. Widening of the Sycamore Creek and Sheep Hollow Creek bridges has already been completed. The USFWS has issued a Biological Opinion for the project based on the proposed action and the SHPO has concurred with a determination of “no historic properties affected” during a 2009 consultation with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA). Therefore, only the proposed action (described above) and a no action alternative are considered within this Environmental Assessment.

##### **No Action Alternative**

Under the no action alternative, Cohasset Road would remain in its current 2-lane configuration between the Sycamore Creek Bridge and Ryan Avenue. Traffic congestion would persist or increase, reducing roadway safety and limiting access to the CMA and the adjacent industrial area, thereby hindering economic development. The no action alternative would not meet the project purpose and need.

##### **Summary**

Prior consultations and improvements to Cohasset Road reduce the range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed action and the no action alternative. The no action alternative would not meet the project purpose and need.

It is concluded that the proposed action does not present significantly greater environmental impacts than the no action alternative, and therefore is acceptable as the preferred alternative.

#### **B. HISTORIC/ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES**

No prehistoric sites have been recorded or otherwise identified within the area of potential effects (APE) or within a one-half mile radius of the APE on records maintained at the Northeast Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System.

Two historical sites have been recorded within the APE:

- The abandoned and cleared alignment of the Sacramento Northern Railroad Spur (site CA-BUT-2770H). This railroad was extended from the Continental Nut Company’s facility on The Esplanade northward to the CMA in 1942. This site is not eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under any of the relevant criteria.
- The Thomasson Ranch Rock Wall, recorded in December 2004 and assigned the State Trinomial CA-BUT-2665H located with the APE has been recorded, but is not eligible for inclusion on the NRHP under any of the relevant criteria.

In their consultation letter dated November 18, 2005 (Appendix B), the SHPO concurred with the California Department of Transportation, under the authority of the FHWA, that neither of the recorded sites identified within the APE were eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and that no historic properties would be affected by the project.

On October 27, 2009, the SHPO issued a letter concurring with EDA's determination that the Sacramento Northern Railroad Spur and Thomasson Ranch Rock Wall were ineligible for listing on the NRHP. The SHPO also concurred that the finding of No Historic Properties Affected is the appropriate determination for the proposed project. The SHPO also advised that under certain circumstances, such as an unanticipated discovery or a change in project description, the City may have additional future responsibilities for the undertaking under 36 CFR Part 800.

In an April 9, 2020, phone conversation between Mr. Tristan Tozer, State of California Office of Historic Preservation, and Ross Dimmick, representing EDA, Mr. Tozer stated that the SHPO can accept the concurrence from the previous consultation (October 27, 2009) but asked EDA to reconsult with tribes because of different contacts and changes to the tribal database used by the State of California Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC). By letter dated May 21, 2020, the NAHC provided contacts for four tribes: KonKow Valley Band of Maidu, Mechoopda Indian Tribe, Mooretown Rancheria of Maidu Indians, and Tsi Akim Maidu. An EDA query of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Tribal Directory Assessment Tool provided contact information for three additional tribes: Grindstone Indian Rancheria of Wintun-Wailaki Indians of California; Shoshone Tribe of the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming; and Enterprise Rancheria of Maidu Indians of California. From May 27 to May 29, 2020, EDA emailed letters requesting consultation under Section 106 of the NHPA to the seven tribes listed above. No responses were received. Follow-up phone calls to the same and alternate contacts resulted in no project comments.

The project would have no effect on historic or archaeological resources. Consultation documents can be found in Appendix B.

## **C. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **1. AFFECTED AREA**

The Cohasset Road Widening Project is located in the northeast section of Chico, California. Chico is a rural community located in the northern California region of the Sacramento Valley, approximately 90 miles north of Sacramento and four hours south of the Oregon border. Chico is located along SR 99, one of two major arteries connecting Southern California to Oregon. Some locations in the city are only 20 minutes from Interstate 5, the other main highway running the length of the state. Chico is the Butte County population hub; according to 2017 American Community Survey data, Chico's population was estimated at 94,776 and the total population of Butte County was 220,000.

In November 2018, the neighboring Town of Paradise and adjacent unincorporated areas were devastated by the Camp Fire, which burned an area of 153,336 acres and destroyed nearly 19,000 structures. During the fire, residents escaped the flames by traveling down the Skyway, the primary road in and out of the town and neighboring small communities. The Skyway connects to SR 99 in the City of Chico. Nearly 30,000 people were displaced during and after the fire, with a significant portion finding temporary and long-term residence in Chico. The California Department of Finance estimated that Chico's population spiked by over 20.7% by January of 2019, to 112,111 residents.

Chico is the main economic center of a large section of northern California located north of the Sacramento. Chico is the industrial and manufacturing hub for the region and is home to California State University, Chico. The city serves as a regional growth center for the Tri-County region of Butte, Glenn, and Tehama Counties. In addition, many residents of the region's more rural counties look to Chico for job opportunities.

The Cohasset Road Widening Project is located in the northeast corner of the city. Cohasset Road is the north/south primary arterial serving the CMA and multiple industrial complexes to the east and west. Cohasset Road connects the airport and adjacent business and industrial parks to SR 99, which is a major north/south distribution channel. Additionally, it is the principal access road to the small rural community of Cohasset.

The industrial area along Cohasset Road is often used as a first responder staging area and for other emergency personnel during disasters. For example, during the Camp Fire, the area was utilized by the California Office of Emergency Services, Federal Emergency Management Agency, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and multiple other mutual aid response organizations. Additionally, the airport serves as a regional hub for firefighting air resources for CalFire.

Land uses along the project corridor include the CMA and commercial and industrial development associated with CMA on both sides of the northern portion of Cohasset Road. Both sides of the road for one-half mile north of Sycamore Creek are in permanent open space, as well as an additional mile on the west side, associated with the airport safety zones. Approximately 754 acres on the east side of the road opposite of Ryan Avenue and the CMA was owned by the state Wildlife Conservation Board for permanent conservation. The property contains a large concentration of the endangered Butte County meadowfoam plant, rare vernal pools species, and provide prime winter range for a migrating deer herd.

The project corridor is within the overflight path of the CMA, specifically, the south end of the project corridor crosses the following airport land use compatibility zones: Runway Protection Zone, Approach and Departure Zone, Extended Approach and Departure Zone, and Traffic Pattern area.

There are no designated State or National Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, or National Game Preserves located on or in the vicinity of the proposed project activities. There are no

wild or scenic rivers as designated under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act located on or in the vicinity of the proposed project activities.

## **2. COASTAL ZONES**

The proposed project is not located within a designated coastal zone subject to the Coastal Zone Management Act. No impacts to shorelines, beaches, dunes, or estuaries would occur from implementation of this project.

## **3. WETLANDS**

The greater project area contains adjoining wetlands and other waters of the U.S. Prior to beginning two earlier phases of the Cohasset Road Widening Project, including the bridge over Sheep Hollow Creek and repaving of the 2-lane roadway between Airpark Boulevard and Ryan Avenue, the City of Chico obtained and fully mitigated all impacts to waters of the U.S., as well as associated impacts to three endangered species: Butte County meadowfoam, vernal pool fairy shrimp, and vernal pool tadpole shrimp. Specifically, in accordance with the USACE Section 404 permit and associated USFWS Biological Opinion dated August 18, 2006, a payment of \$70,050 was made to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to offset the loss of 0.467 acres of waters of the U.S., including 4,203.5 linear feet of ephemeral drainages, 546.3 linear feet of intermittent drainages, and 0.086 acres of seasonal wetlands. Additionally, the City fully addressed the project's direct and indirect biological impacts to waters of the U.S. and endangered species by purchasing all mitigation credits required by the USACE and the USFWS Biological Opinion (the Biological Opinion and wetland and biological mitigation purchase agreements and receipts are included in Appendix C). Purchase of all required mitigation fully mitigated both direct and indirect impacts to wetlands in a manner consistent with and approved by the USFWS, USACE, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB). Note that the City of Chico contacted the USFWS to inquire about the validity of the 2006 Biological Opinion for the remainder of the original project. Lily Douglas, Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist, Sacramento Valley Division of the USFWS responded by email dated May 29, 2020, that "the opinion does not have an expiration date" and that "the biological opinion is still considered to be valid" (see correspondence in Appendix C).

As identified in the adopted Cohasset Road Widening Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration prepared pursuant to CEQA (Appendix D), all impacts to jurisdictional waters have been or will be fully mitigated by obtaining and complying with the conditions of the Section 404 permit and Section 401 Water Quality Certification.

For renewal of the USACE Section 404 permit, a new wetland delineation was performed in 2020 (Appendix E). The draft report indicates no substantial change to wetlands identified in the 2006 Biological Opinion.

Wetlands mitigation measures are part of the broader category of biological resources mitigation measures listed starting on page 35 of the CEQA Cohasset Road Widening Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (Appendix D). The following measures have already been implemented for earlier phases of the Cohasset Road Widening Project:

- The City of Chico has complied with final compensation requirements and mitigation ratios for the project as determined through Section 7 consultation between the FHWA and the USFWS.
- Work covered by the City's Section 1602 Streambed Alteration Agreement (bridge widening at Sheep Hollow Creek) has already been completed as part of an earlier project phase.
- The City has compensated for direct impacts to wetlands as approved by the USACE in the Section 404 permit by purchasing wetland mitigation credits at an off-site wetland mitigation bank (Dove Ridge Conservation Bank).
- The City has compensated for indirect impacts to an estimated 1.319 acres of potential habitat for federally listed vernal pool tadpole and fairy shrimp by preserving additional habitat for these species at a ratio of 2:1 (2 acres preserved for every 1 acre of habitat affected).

Other biological resources mitigation measures listed in the CEQA document would be implemented as part of the proposed project.

With mitigation measures in effect, as specified in the CEQA Cohasset Road Widening Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration, no significant impacts to wetlands would occur.

#### **4. FLOODPLAINS**

Based on the Flood Insurance Rate Map 06007C0340E, effective January 6, 2011, a section of Cohasset Road north of Sycamore Creek is within Zone AH, an area subject to flooding from a 100-year rainfall event, with that flooding coming from a pond or lake body. Federal Emergency Management Agency maps indicate what may be a seasonal water body to the west of Cohasset Road just north of Sycamore Creek (Appendix F). The "AH" designation means that the area has been studied and a Base Flood Elevation has been determined for that area. There are levees along parts of Sycamore Creek and Sheep Hollow Creek, but the area is still zoned AH.

Activities in regulatory floodplain areas are limited in accordance with Executive Order (EO) 11988. EDA finds no practicable alternative to construction within the floodplain. The project involves the widening of an existing road and design improvements to current standards. Thus, the project may result in improved stormwater drainage, which may reduce the potential for, and impacts from, flooding. The City of Chico participates in the National Flood

Insurance Program. The project does not involve a critical action (e.g., emergency response facility, hospital, wastewater treatment plant).

All construction would be in accordance with the standards and criteria, and be consistent with the intent of those promulgated, under the National Flood Insurance Program, as applicable. There would be no significant impacts to floodplains from project implementation.

## **5. FEDERALLY LISTED SPECIES**

Surveys conducted in 2002 and 2005 for CEQA, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and permitting purposes identified presence of the Federal and State endangered Butte County meadowfoam, a special-status plant species, within the project area. The proposed project also lies within designated critical habitat for the endangered vernal pool tadpole shrimp and the threatened vernal pool fairy shrimp. The vernal pool crustaceans were assumed present at the proposed site because of suitable habitat and the known presence of these shrimp 0.9 miles from the site. As for the threatened bald eagle, there is no nesting, roosting, or foraging habitat for this species within the proposed project vicinity.

The western spadefoot toad and cliff swallows may also be present; however, no specific mitigation is required for these species under the Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act.

There may also be birds present that are afforded protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act including cliff swallows, nesting migratory birds, and raptors such as the Swainson's hawk. Mitigation measures to minimize impacts to these birds were required as part of the CEQA and original NEPA approvals.

On July 26, 2006, Caltrans, under authority from the FHWA, requested an ESA Section 7 Consultation with the USFWS. On August 18, 2006, the USFWS issued a Biological Opinion that the proposed project is likely to adversely affect the vernal pool tadpole shrimp, vernal pool fairy shrimp, Butte County meadowfoam, and the critical habitat for these species. The USFWS determined that the project was not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle. On May 29, 2020, the USFWS confirmed that the Biological Opinion is still valid (Appendix C); therefore, EDA's obligations under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act are fulfilled. The terms and conditions, which are included as special conditions in the Biological Opinion, include: purchasing preservation credits for meadowfoam habitat and vernal pools; utilizing biological monitor(s); obtaining coverage under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit; and following a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan. All mitigation purchased for the meadowfoam habitat and vernal pools has been completed (Appendix C).

The City of Chico also received a Consistency Determination from the CDFW (Appendix G) for the incidental take of the dual-listed (California Endangered Species Act and Federal Endangered Species Act) Butte County meadowfoam. Their finding was that the City of

Chico mitigation for 0.066 acres of purchasing a total of 3.185 acres of Butte County meadowfoam habitat, as required by the USFWS, met State of California requirements, as well. Furthermore, the portion of the project that impacted Butte County meadowfoam was already constructed as part of an earlier phase of the project. There would be no further impacts to Butte County meadowfoam with the current proposed project.

Biological resources mitigation measures are listed starting on page 35 of the CEQA Cohasset Road Widening Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (Appendix D), with already-completed measures noted in Section 3, Wetlands, above. As all effects to Federally listed species have been mitigated in accordance with the Biological Opinion or are less than significant, there would be “no effect” to Federally listed species (Reference: Memo to File, Appendix C).

## **6. LAND USE AND ZONING**

The proposed project is consistent with the City of Chico General Plan which identifies the project extent of Cohasset Road as a four-lane major arterial. The proposed project would also support adjacent urban growth areas and special development areas as identified in the General Plan by providing enhanced access and freight movement to these areas. Adjacent properties along the corridor are primarily zoned for industrial (light manufacturing and warehousing) and commercial office uses (Appendix H). The project maintains the Class I bicycle path as identified in the Transportation Element of the General Plan. Additionally, the project is consistent with the CMA Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan in that it provides enhanced access to this facility in support of approved airport expansion.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service, prime farmland soil types may be present in the southern portion of the project area (Appendix E); however, the area west of Cohasset Road, the direction of roadway expansion in this portion of the project area, is located in an “urbanized area,” as designated by the U.S. Census Bureau (Appendix I), and is therefore not included within the definition of farmland protected under the Farmland Protection Policy Act (7 Code of Federal Regulations § 658.2(a)).

The project would be consistent with local land use and zoning and would not affect prime or unique farmlands.

## **7. SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT**

Road construction would primarily generate asphalt and soil waste. Asphalt can be recycled and soil, provided that it is clean, suitable material, it would likely be used as fill material for other construction projects.

The business expansion and job creation resulting from the Cohasset Road Widening Project would result in an estimated increase in solid waste generation of 960 tons per year, or 7,680 cubic yards (CY) per year. The City of Chico has franchise agreement contracts with two

waste haulers, Recology and Waste Management, which are established in a manner to service growth of this kind in the Chico region. In addition, the Neal Road Landfill, managed by Butte County Public Works, has significant available capacity to handle the increase in waste generated from this potential growth. According to Butte County, the maximum capacity is 25,271,900 CY, with a remaining capacity of 20,847,970 CY (only 17.50% of existing available capacity currently utilized).

No significant impacts to solid waste management would occur from the implementation of the project.

## **8. HAZARDOUS OR TOXIC SUBSTANCES**

The proposed project does not involve the emission or generation of hazardous substances or the direct handling of acutely hazardous/toxic materials and the project area does not occur within a listed hazardous materials site, as compiled pursuant to California Government Code Section 65962.5.

Several recorded contaminated sites are identified on the CMA property and the industrial area but are situated away from the project site. Contamination concerns involved leaking underground storage tanks that either are closed cases or involved soil contamination only, rather than groundwater concerns. There is a recorded case located in the industrial area that involves past discharges of trichloroethylene (TCE) into groundwater; however, cleanup of this facility and its groundwater contamination has already been undertaken. All recorded contamination identified on the CMA property and within the industrial area are closed cases or are in the final stages of cleanup.

During construction activities, equipment would be operated and maintained in a manner protective of the environment. Best management practices (BMPs) would be employed during construction to reduce the potential for soil or water contamination when using petroleum, oil, lubricants, or hazardous materials and to address any spills.

The area served by the project is zoned for industrial use, which means future development could include businesses that may use, store, or dispose of hazardous or toxic substances. Operations involving hazardous or toxic substances would be performed in accordance with applicable Federal, State, and local requirements to avoid effects to the environment.

No significant impacts from hazardous or toxic substances would occur from implementation of the proposed project.

## **9. WATER RESOURCES**

The nearest surface water resource is Sycamore Creek which is to the south of the project. Sheep Hollow Tributary also lies between two segments of road that are being widened. Just west and adjacent to the southernmost segment of Cohasset Road that is part of this project is an area that fills with water to become a pond during the wet season. The City of Chico has

received a Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the State of California for work in the vicinity of the creeks.

Development of an erosion control plan, including incorporation of BMPs, are standard requirements for projects of this size. Additionally, the City of Chico has developed a Storm Water Management Program (SWMP) per Phase II of the NPDES Program. The project would be constructed in full compliance with applicable standards of the SWMP, which includes both construction activity and post-construction stormwater discharge BMPs. Further, all projects disturbing greater than one acre must comply with and obtain coverage under the NPDES Construction General Permit (Water Quality Order 2009-0009-DWQ) to minimize water quality impacts. The project would not violate any waste discharge requirements.

No significant impacts to water resources would occur from the proposed project.

## **10. WATER SUPPLY AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS**

The business expansion and job creation resulting from the proposed project would result in an estimated increase in usage per table of 8.33 acre-feet per year (620 new employees using an average of 12 gallons per person per day). Per the 2015 Cal-Water Master Plan, current usage is at 17,864 acre-feet per year, with a total capacity of 37,230 acre-feet per year (48% usage of existing available capacity). Water in the project area is exclusively drawn from 62 wells completed in the Lower Tuscan Aquifer, the primary groundwater-producing aquifer in Butte County. These wells average approximately 600 feet in depth and are located throughout Chico. The wells, pumps, above-ground storage structures, water, and the distribution infrastructure are operated and supplied by the California Water Service Company. According to the California Water Service's 2015 Urban Water Management Plan for the City of Chico, the district has sufficient capacity to meet annual average day and maximum day water demands for the city based on existing and future growth as identified in the City of Chico General Plan.

No significant impacts to water supply and distribution systems would occur from project implementation.

## **11. WASTEWATER COLLECTION AND TREATMENT FACILITIES**

The business expansion and job creation resulting from the Cohasset Road Widening Project would result in an estimated increase in wastewater discharge of 0.00806 million gallons per day (MGD; 620 persons utilizing 13 gallons per day at the office rate of generation). Per recent updates, the existing available capacity of the Water Pollution Control Plant is at 12 MGD, with current flows at approximately 6.5 MGD (54% usage of available capacity).

Future growth areas and specific land uses were both identified and considered in the City of Chico 2030 General Plan and impacts related to wastewater analyzed in the associated General Plan Environmental Impact Report. The City of Chico's Sanitary Sewer Master Plan

Update identifies specific wastewater improvements and expansion projects consistent with General Plan. Specifically, A future phase of the wastewater treatment plant facility expansion project will expand plant capacity to 15 MGD. Also, the Sanitary Sewer Master Plan Update identifies replacing the existing 12-inch sewer trunk line paralleling Cohasset Road with a 15-inch trunk line to serve existing and future needs. Therefore, existing capacity and future proposed expansions are sufficient to accommodate the discharge from future development at Airport Industrial Park.

The estimated wastewater volume from development associated with the project would be accommodated by the existing wastewater treatment plant. No significant impacts from the proposed project to wastewater collection and treatment facilities would occur.

## **12. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (Executive Order 12898)**

The proposed project is not expected to generate significant impacts to the health of any population segments through the development and/or increasing levels of business activity by project beneficiaries. The project is not anticipated to generate significant pollution. During construction activities, measures would be taken to mitigate the pollution of dust and noise off the construction site.

As the site is suitable for the proposed project, it would not result in disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations.

## **13. TRANSPORTATION (Streets, Parking and Traffic)**

The project consists of the completion of the final stages of widening Cohasset Road from two to four lanes to connect the employment centers within the airport region to the State highway infrastructure. No new traffic patterns would be created. There are no residential areas or hospitals, school, recreational sites that would be affected. Completion of the project would resolve the current unacceptable level of service affecting specific intersection operations during the morning and late-afternoon peak hours. Further, the proposed improvements would increase the safety of existing and future car and truck traffic.

Freight movement to and from the airport uses either the SR 99/Cohasset Road interchange or the SR 99/Eaton Road interchange, which will be upgraded with safety improvements in the spring of 2021 to access the CMA. Major businesses, manufacturers, and several industries are located near the airport and development of this industrial area is critical to the economy of Chico. Widening of Cohasset Road to accommodate travel demand is important to the economic wellbeing of the industrial area. Furthermore, the City updated the CMA Master Plan in September 2018 and the Federal Aviation Administration approved the Airport Layout and Narrative Report in January of 2020. Both documents contain policies and provisions for continued growth and development of the airport as identified and approved in the City of Chico 2030 General Plan.

A general improvement of traffic flow would be expected to result from completion of the proposed project. Traffic controls placed during construction would be coordinated with the city.

#### **14. AIR QUALITY**

Butte County air quality is heavily influenced by a “bowl” created by the Coast Ranges to the west, the Southern Cascade Mountains to the north, and the Sierra Nevada to the immediate east. This effect, coupled with the movement of weather fronts along the northwest storm tract, results in the formation of local and regional inversions during the spring, summer, and fall months. The prevailing winds in the project area, as well as in the valley region, are from the south to north and are primarily driven by marine air traveling inland from the Pacific Ocean through the Carquinez Strait, where waters from the rivers of California’s Central Valley flow into San Pablo Bay and San Francisco Bay. These winds transport pollutants from the San Francisco Bay Area and the Sacramento urban area to the northern portions of the Sacramento Valley, including the project area.

The EPA has established National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for specific pollutants determined to be of concern with respect to the health and welfare of the general public. Ambient air quality standards are classified as either “primary” (designed to protect public health with an adequate margin for safety) or “secondary” (designed to protect the public welfare from adverse effects, including those related to soils, water, crops, and vegetation). The major pollutants of concern, or criteria pollutants, are carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, particulate matter less than 10 microns (PM<sub>10</sub>), particulate matter less than 2.5 microns (PM<sub>2.5</sub>), and lead. Areas that do not meet these NAAQS standards are designated as non-attainment areas; areas that meet both primary and secondary standards are designated as attainment areas.

In addition to the ambient air quality standards for criteria pollutants, national standards exist for hazardous air pollutants (HAPs). HAPs include compounds such as benzene, which is found in gasoline. Most HAPs are volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

States must develop a State Implementation Plan (SIP) for ensuring NAAQS are achieved and maintained within a state. States may also establish their own ambient air quality standards. The California Health and Safety Code, Section 39606, authorizes the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to set ambient air pollution standards in consideration of public health, safety, and welfare. The CARB makes area designations for 10 pollutants: ozone, suspended particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>), carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, sulfates, lead, hydrogen sulfide, and visibility reducing particles. The CARB reviews the area designations each year and updates them as appropriate, based on the three most recent complete and validated calendar years of air quality data. The State of California has also established an ambient air quality standard for vinyl chloride.

California is divided into 15 air basins, or districts, based on meteorological and geographic conditions, and, where possible, jurisdictional boundaries such as county lines. The proposed

project lies entirely within the jurisdiction of the Butte County Air Quality Management District (BCAQMD). Butte County has been designated as a Federal attainment area for carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>2.5</sub>, and lead, and a non-attainment area for ozone (8 hour). It has also been designated as a state nonattainment area for ozone (1 hour and 8 hour), PM<sub>10</sub> (24 hour), and PM<sub>2.5</sub> (annual).

**Butte County—State and Federal Ambient Air Quality Attainment Status**

Pollutant	State Designation	Federal Designation
Ozone (O <sub>3</sub> ) – 1 hour	Non-Attainment	—
Ozone (O <sub>3</sub> ) – 8 hour	Non-Attainment	Non-Attainment
Carbon Monoxide (CO)	Attainment	Attainment
Nitrogen Dioxide (NO <sub>2</sub> )	Attainment	Attainment
Sulfur Dioxide (SO <sub>2</sub> )	Attainment	Attainment
Particulate Matter (PM <sub>10</sub> ) – 24 hour	Non-Attainment	Attainment
Particulate Matter (PM <sub>2.5</sub> ) – 24 hour	No Standard	Attainment
Annual PM <sub>10</sub>	Attainment	No Standard
Annual PM <sub>2.5</sub>	Non-Attainment	Attainment

Source: BCAQMD 2020

A conformity analysis is the process used to determine whether a Federal action meets the requirements of the General Conformity Rule. The General Conformity Rule prohibits any Federal action that does not conform to the applicable air quality attainment plan or SIP and applies to areas designated as nonattainment or maintenance from NAAQS. It requires the responsible Federal agency to evaluate the nature of a proposed action and associated air pollutant emissions and calculate emissions that may result from the implementation of the proposed action. If the emissions exceed established limits, known as *de minimis* thresholds, the project proponent is required to perform a conformity determination and implement appropriate mitigation measures to reduce air emissions. A project is exempt from the conformity rule if the total net project-related emissions (construction and operation) are less than *de minimis* thresholds. The project would be located in the BCAQMD and the general conformity requirements apply to the ozone precursor VOCs. The *de minimis* threshold for VOCs is 100 tons/year (40 CFR Section 93.153).

A General Conformity analysis resulted in a *de minimis* determination for the Proposed Action. Construction emissions were estimated using the Road Construction Emissions Model and project-specific data provided by the City of Chico. Both unmitigated and mitigated emission estimates were found to be substantially below *de minimis* levels for VOCs, the only applicable pollutant. The General Conformity analysis is presented in Appendix J.

BCAQMD specifies the construction-related CEQA annual threshold of significance at an average of 4.5 tons per year each for VOC and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions (BCAQMD 2014). Modeled VOC emissions with no emission controls (no mitigation) are substantially below this

threshold; NO<sub>x</sub> construction emissions were 4.83 tons per year, exceeding this threshold. To reduce NO<sub>x</sub> emissions, the following off-road equipment types or categories were modeled using Tier 4 diesel emissions standards:

- crawler tractors
- excavators
- graders
- scrapers
- tractors/loaders/backhoes

Assuming exclusive use of Tier 4-compliant equipment in these categories, modeled NO<sub>x</sub> emissions dropped to 1.67 tons per year, well below the 4.5 tons per year CEQA threshold. Modeled PM<sub>10</sub> and maximum daily emissions of VOCs and NO<sub>x</sub> are all substantially below CEQA thresholds. Emissions modeling is presented in Appendix I.

The proposed project does not include any odor-producing activities, except for temporary equipment exhaust during construction. Diesel fumes may be discernable in the immediate vicinity of construction activity, but this would be a temporary and short-term effect and there are no sensitive air quality receptors located in the project area.

Widening of Cohasset Road does not generate additional traffic along Cohasset Road or other roads within the project area; however, this action would provide enhanced access to the CMA Industrial Park and surrounding industrial areas and would spur additional development/job opportunities. Thus, the development and trip generation associated with the beneficiaries of the road widening project could result in additional air quality impacts (primarily ozone precursor emissions). However, these impacts would be mitigated through the land use entitlement processes that requires full compliance with BCAQMD rules and regulations applicable from construction through development and on-going operation of any future project. Future industrial projects would be subject to Authority to Construct Permitting requirements as administered by the BCAQMD. In addition, the Chico General Plan and associated Major Environmental Analysis/Environmental Impact Report identified, analyzed, and included mitigation measures to lessen the impacts any potential air quality impacts anticipated by the future buildout of these adjoining areas with industrial/business park uses. Finally, a bicycle path adjoins the project site to the west that would further reduce vehicle miles traveled by providing an alternative mode of transportation to employees that work in the CMA Industrial Area.

There would be no significant impacts to air quality from project implementation. The project would not result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of a criteria pollutant under applicable Federal or State and local ambient air quality standards.

## **15. NOISE POLLUTION**

The project consists of widening Cohasset Road. There are no sensitive receptors (i.e., residences, schools, hospitals) located along the project corridor. The roadway is adjacent to the CMA and primarily warehousing, industrial, grazing, and open space areas.

Construction noise would be intermittent, varying with the type, amount, and location of activities conducted. Increased noise levels during construction would be temporary. Increases in vehicles from activity of project beneficiaries could result in a slight increase of overall traffic noise along the corridor. Neither construction nor traffic noise would affect sensitive receptors.

No significant noise-related impacts would occur from construction or implementation of the project.

## **16. PERMITS**

As discussed in sections of this Environmental Assessment, above, some of the permits and authorizations from the previous application are still valid, and some are no longer necessary because of the completion of Sheep Hollow Creek bridge.

The following list outlines the permits required to construct the project and their current status:

1. USACE—The Clean Water Act Section 404 individual permit for the previous project phases has expired; however, all mitigation required by the original permits (i.e., purchase of mitigation credits and payment to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation) has been satisfied. The following steps to update the Section 404 permit are in progress:
  - a. An update to the delineation of waters of the U.S., excluding those components of the project that are already completed (Sheep Hollow Creek Bridge and road repaving between Airpark Boulevard and Ryan Avenue).
  - b. A revised Impacts Assessment for the remaining project.
  - c. A pre-construction notification, including compliance documentation of General and Regional Conditions, for submittal to USACE upon completion of updated delineation of waters of the U.S. and revised Impacts Assessment.
2. USFWS—Section 7 consultation regarding threatened and endangered species (listed vernal pool invertebrates and Butte County meadowfoam) is completed and final. USFWS has confirmed that the Biological Opinion remains valid (Appendix C) and all required mitigation has already been satisfied. Reinitiation of consultation is not required.

3. SHPO—The previous SHPO consultations, completed by FHWA in November 2005 and EDA October 2009, satisfy the USACE Section 106 (National Historic Preservation Act) and SHPO consultation requirements and would be remitted with the Pre-Construction Notification for the updated Section 404 permit (Nationwide Permit #14).
4. California RWQCB, Central Valley Region—The Section 404 permit requires a Clean Water Act Section 401 water quality certification from the California RWQCB. In addition, the project requires coverage under the NPDES General Permit for Construction. During the Section 404 permit update process, the RWQCB will reissue the Section 401 permit once the City demonstrates that the project has not expanded beyond its original footprint.
5. CDFW—The CDFW Consistency Determination (Appendix G) with the USFWS regarding the dual-listed Butte County meadowfoam has not expired and remains valid with regard to the endangered species. Since the bridge widening at Sheep Hollow Creek has been completed, the CDFW Streambed Alteration Agreement is not required for the remaining portions of the project.
6. Central Valley Flood Protection Board—An Encroachment Permit with the Central Valley Flood Protection Board was previously obtained (Appendix K). The Encroachment Permit does not expire and remains valid.

## **17. PUBLIC NOTIFICATION/CONTROVERSY**

Regulations under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality require that the public be offered an opportunity to be informed of, and involved in, Federal actions that may significantly affect the quality of their environment before decisions are made to implement actions.

Agency consultation and public participation for this project began shortly after the project was initiated in 2005 and included a variety of formal and informal methods, including a public scoping meeting, interagency coordination meetings, and an article in the local newspaper. A CEQA Initial Study was completed for the project in September 2006.

The public was again notified about the proposed project during the approval process for the city's 2020-2024 Capital Improvement Plan. Adoption of the Capital Improvement Plan included a public hearing held during a regular city council meeting. This public hearing was advertised via the public newspaper, the city's web site, and public posting. According to the City of Chico, no comments, concerns or objections to this project were received in writing or during the public hearing.

The NEPA/NHPA notice and NEPA/NHPA floodplain notice were published in the newspaper *Chico Enterprise Record* on May 27, 28, and 29, 2020 (Appendix L). The EDA Seattle Regional Office Environmental Specialist received no comments pertaining to the

proposed project during the comment period. There is no known controversy surrounding the proposed project.

## **18. DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS**

Potential direct and indirect effects of the proposed project are described for each resource area in the sections above. Cumulative effects are described below.

This infrastructure project would have a regional economic impact and benefit both Chico and the Tri-County region consisting of Butte, Tehama, and Glenn counties. The project would improve access to industrial properties and the airport; enhance goods movement; retain, expand, and diversify existing businesses; and attract new businesses, resulting in the creation of hundreds of new, permanent jobs.

Traffic analysis indicates that cumulative traffic conditions without the project would result in substantial delays at five intersections during peak hours. After the completion of the project, congestion would be significantly decreased. This project would provide for enhanced and safer response by emergency personnel in the event of subsequent disasters.

The proposed project would not result in any negative cumulative impacts that could not be mitigated. The project's incremental contribution to short-term air quality emissions during project construction would be temporary and minor and not cumulatively considerable. The project's cumulative effect on level of service at project intersections can be mitigated to less-than-significant levels with the future implementation of traffic signals or other traffic control devices.

There are no other projects in the past or the present around the project area that would result in significant cumulative effects.

## **D. MITIGATION**

Mitigation measures to be taken prior to or during construction are outlined in the Cohasset Road Widening Project Mitigation Monitoring Program, included as Appendix B to the Cohasset Road Widening Project CEQA Initial Study, included as Appendix D of this Environmental Assessment. These mitigation measures apply to air quality, biological resources (including wetlands and Federally listed species), cultural resources, geology and soils, hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, noise, and traffic and circulation. Some measures are no longer applicable because they refer only to portions of the project already constructed (e.g., Sheep Hollow Bridge). Other measures listed in the Mitigation Monitoring Program are still in effect and are incorporated into this Environmental Assessment by reference. Additionally, EDA has specified mitigation measures under Special Conditions, below.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The proposed project is not controversial or major in scope and does not appear to have the potential to create a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. An Environmental Impact Statement is not considered necessary. Review of all available data and completion of this Environmental Assessment has resulted in concluding a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on the environment. In my opinion, the approval of this project would not violate the following:

1. National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended
2. American Indian Religious Freedom Act
3. Archeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974
4. Clean Air Act, as amended
5. Clean Water Act, as amended
6. Coastal Barrier Resources Act
7. Coastal Zone Management Act, as amended
8. Community Environmental Response Facilitation Act of 1992
9. Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980, as amended
10. Endangered Species Act, as amended
11. Environmental Quality Improvement Act of 1970, as amended
12. Executive Order 11514, Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality, as amended
13. Executive Order 11593, Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment
14. Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management
15. Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, as amended
16. Executive Order 12088, Federal Compliance with Pollution Control Standards
17. Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental review of Federal Programs, as amended
18. Farmland Protection Policy Act
19. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act
20. Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act of 1972, as amended
21. Marine Sanctuaries Amendments of 1984, as amended
22. National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended
23. Noise Control Act of 1972, as amended
24. Pollution Prevention Act of 1990
25. Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, as amended
26. Safe Drinking Water Act
27. Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986
28. Toxic Substances Control Act, as amended
29. Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, as amended

**SPECIAL CONDITIONS.** To assure mitigation of potential environmental impacts, mitigation measures are used in the form of grant conditions. The following Special

Conditions are recommended for placement on the Grant Agreement as an addendum to the General Terms and Conditions:

- **ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES:** If during construction of the project, historical and archaeological resources, including burial grounds and artifacts are discovered, the Recipient shall immediately stop construction in the area, contact the applicable State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), interested Tribes, and EDA, and follow the SHPO or THPO instructions for the preservation of resources.
- **HAZARDOUS OR TOXIC SUBSTANCES:** If visual or olfactory evidence of potential soil contamination from current or historical practices is encountered during construction, work will stop immediately upon discovery and the appropriate Ecology regional office will be notified.
- **AIR QUALITY:** The following types (or equivalent) of off-road equipment used for construction must comply with Tier 4 diesel emissions standards: crawler tractors; excavators; graders; scrapers; tractors; loaders; and backhoes.
- **U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS (USACE) PERMITTING:** Prior to solicitation of bids, the Recipient shall provide evidence satisfactory to the EDA that the Recipient has received the proper permit from USACE. Recipient shall follow all requirements contained within the permit.
- **NATIONAL POLLUTANT DISCHARGE ELIMINATION SYSTEM (NPDES) PERMIT:** Prior to solicitation of bids, the Recipient shall provide documentation satisfactory to EDA that the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit is not required or has been obtained or that the bid documents include language requiring the contractor to obtain the permit prior to the start of construction. If the contractor obtains the permit, then prior to the initial disbursement of funds by EDA for construction activities, the Recipient shall provide documentation satisfactory to EDA that the permit has been obtained.
- **MITIGATION:** The Recipient shall follow all mitigation measures (excluding those no longer applicable because they apply only to already completed elements of project construction) outlined in the Mitigation Monitoring Program included as Appendix B to the Cohasset Road Widening Project CEQA Initial Study, dated September 2006.

**PREPARED BY:**

**DATE:**

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**Ross Dimmick, Environmental Specialist, Seattle Regional Office**

## REFERENCES

Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, Act 40 CFR 1500-1508, July 1, 1986.

Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration Directive 17.01, EDA Program to Reduce the Risk of Hazardous Waste Liability, March 18, 1998.

Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration Directive 17.02-2 EDA Program to Implement the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and Other Federal Environmental Mandates as Required. October 14, 1992.

Executive Order 11990 Protection of Wetlands, 42 FR 26961 May 24, 1977.

Executive Order 12898 Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, February 11, 1994.

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Butte County Air Quality Management District. 2014. CEQA Air Quality Handbook. Available at <https://bcaqmd.org/wp-content/uploads/CEQA-Handbook-Appendices-2014.pdf>. Adopted October 23.

Butte County Air Quality Management District. 2020. Air Quality Standards & Air Pollutants. Retrieved from <https://bcaqmd.org/planning/air-quality-standards-air-pollutants/>, July 6.

**EXHIBIT VI-A**

**ENVIRONMENTAL NARRATIVE, FIGURES,  
CORRESPONDENCE, AND OTHER MATERIALS  
SUBMITTED BY APPLICANT AND OTHER PARTIES  
TO SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

## **APPENDIX A**

## **APPENDIX B**

## **APPENDIX C**

## **APPENDIX D**

## **APPENDIX E**

## **APPENDIX F**

## **APPENDIX G**

## **APPENDIX H**

## **APPENDIX I**

## **APPENDIX J**

## **APPENDIX K**

## **APPENDIX L**