

STAFF REPORT

City Council Business Item

DATE: April 7, 2025

TO: Honorable Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Shari Meads, Community Development Director
Brendan Byrd, Public Works Director/City Engineer

THROUGH: Amy Nilsen, City Manager

SUBJECT: **Public Hearing to Consider the Adoption of a Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, and Approval of the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project, *Resolution 2025-06***

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Title: 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project

Lead Agency: City of Fortuna

Project Location: The Project Area is located approximately 2,000 feet east of the Eel River near the center of the City of Fortuna, primarily consisting of existing Caltrans, City of Fortuna, and former Palco Mill Site rights of way.

Project Description: The purpose of the project is to improve traffic on 12th Street and Newburg Road, and at the 12th Street and U.S. 101 interchange. Improvements include a roundabout, modifications to the on- and off-ramps, a new non-motorized crossing over US 101, new bike and pedestrian facilities including a crossing improvement for the Great Redwood Trail, Pond Street access modifications, and realignment of Newburg Road.

General Plan Land Use: Commercial (COM), Mill District (MD), Agriculture (AG); Residential Low (RL); Riverwalk District (RD); Industrial (IND).

Zoning Designations: Agriculture Exclusive (A-E); Commercial Thoroughfare (C-T); Residential Single Family (R-1-6); Light Industrial (M-1); Public Facility (PF); Commercial Thoroughfare/Light Industrial (C-T/M-1)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Approve *Resolution 2025-06* adopting a Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act, and approving the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

US 101 serves as the primary regional roadway in Humboldt County and is critically important to the residents and economy of Fortuna. The existing intersection controls, roadway geometry, and the high volumes of local and regional traffic on 12th Street and Newburg Road result in poor traffic operation and safety issues at and near the interchange (Attachment 2a—Vicinity Map). Under existing conditions, the project area experiences traffic delays during peak hours and crash rates above the statewide average. Additionally, the existing facilities lack bicycle and pedestrian facilities, resulting in a barrier to bicycle and pedestrian circulation between the City's downtown and Riverwalk areas. The project need was first formally identified during the City's 2010 General Plan update, and again in the City's 2022 Local Road Safety Plan.

In 2016, the City completed the Highway 101, Fortuna Downtown and Riverwalk Area Complete Streets and Connectivity Planning Study. This study was a multi-agency effort aimed at determining the best way to modify the City's interchanges with US 101 to facilitate non-motorized connectivity. In addition to enhancing general connectivity for multi-modal transportation, another goal of the assessment was to identify projects that would improve the level of service at the US Highway 101 interchanges. The study identified several alternative concept designs for the reconfiguration of the 12th Street and US Highway 101 intersection. Ultimately, a roundabout configuration on either side of the freeway was selected as the safest and most cost-effective solution. This configuration would also provide for the best overall traffic operation over time.

With a preferred design alternative selected, the City completed a Project Study Report in 2022 to request funding from the state to complete the Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PA&ED) phase of work. The project was subsequently recommended for award in the 2022 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). In 2023, staff began the PA&ED phase of work with the City's selected engineering consultant, GHD. At the onset of the PA&ED phase of work, the City specifically identified the following goals:

- Simplify and improve navigation and traffic operations on 12th Street and Newburg Road, including the 12th Street/US 101 interchange;
- Improve traffic operations, reduce congestion, and minimize conflicts on Newburg Road and 12th Street;
- Improve safety at all locations within the project area for motorized and non-motorized users; and
- Improve the local and regional bicycle and pedestrian facilities through the 12th Street/US 101 interchange area, and provide for a non-motorized connection across US 101.

Over the past 18-months the project has advanced to the 30% design stage. As currently designed and analyzed, the proposed Project would replace the existing intersection of US 101 and 12th Street with a new roundabout on the north side of the interchange, which includes the northbound on- and off-ramps (Attachment 2b – Project Overview Map). The Project also includes modifications to the US 101 northbound on- and off-ramps, realignment of Newburg Road, three retaining walls, various lighting, signage and drainage improvements, and a new non-motorized overcrossing of US 101. In addition to

the proposed motor vehicle-related roadway safety improvements, the Project includes a segment of Class I bike path through the project area and accommodates for the future Great Redwood Trail, in addition to other at-grade pedestrian and bicycle improvements to enhance pedestrian connections and promote regional bicycle network continuity. As currently proposed, the Project would simplify and improve navigation and traffic operations on 12th Street, Newburg Road and US 101 interchange.

It should be noted that although this project is being led by the City, the majority of the facilities and rights of way involved in the project belongs to Caltrans. As such, this project is considered a Capital Oversight project with Caltrans, and they have been involved in each step of the project development and design that has taken place over the past two-plus years. All facilities included in the current project have been designed in accordance with the Caltrans *Highway Design Manual*, 7th Edition (2020) and the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP) Report 672 entitled “Roundabouts: An Information Guide, 2nd Edition”. Caltrans has provided concurrence on the current 30% design as proposed in the CEQA document.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:

Since the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project is defined as a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the potential for environmental impacts must be considered by the lead agency prior to approving the project. Staff and consultants have prepared an Initial Study (IS) and Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) (Attachment 3) and Appendices (Attachment 4) to document the environmental determination for the project, as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code, Div 13, Section 21000-21177), and the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000-15387)). The IS considers the project’s physical impacts on the environment and provides a basis for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), a Mitigated Negative Declaration, or a Negative Declaration. CEQA encourages lead agencies to modify their projects to avoid significant adverse impacts or to identify mitigation measures that can be implemented during project construction or operations to reduce impacts to less than significant levels. During preparation of the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project IS, mitigation measures were identified to reduce any potentially significant impacts to less than significant. These measures are included in a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) (Attachment 2c).

Public Review

The Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) was completed and released for public review on February 26, 2025, initiating a 30-day public review period. During the public review period, the City received two email comments, the first from the Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the second from the Great Redwood Trail Agency. Staff also received a letter from Clif Clendenen, after the commenting period. Staff will speak to the comment as part of the presentation to Council. (Attachment 2d). The comments provided by the Water Quality Control Board pertained to the active Land Use Covenant (LUC) that is part of the former Palco Mill Site, and confirming that the requirements of that LUC would be in effect for the proposed project. The comment from the GRTA was a clarification request, noting that the railroad right of way is under GRTA control, whether fee-simple or easement.

The City’s detailed response to the comments are included in the Final Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (Attachment 5), along with additional text changes to the circulated Draft ISMND. Because the letter from Mr. Clendenen was received after the commenting period, staff’s response will be given during the presentation to Council and is not included in attachment 5. The comments do not alter any conclusions reached in the Draft IS/MND or provide new information of substantial importance relative

to the draft document. Therefore the Draft IS/MND did not require recirculation pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15073.5.

Summary of Mitigation Measures

The Draft IS/MND evaluates the project for each of the environmental issues potentially affected pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act. This evaluation determines whether the project will cause potentially significant impacts and/or whether any identified potentially significant impacts can be mitigated to less-than-significant impact levels. The following environmental categories were identified as having no potential to cause significant impacts: :

- Aesthetics, Agriculture, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Land Use and Planning, Mineral Resources, Population and Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Utilities and Service Systems, and Wildfire.

Detailed discussion and analysis of each of these categories can be found in the attached IS/MND.

The IS/MND identifies environmental factors that, with project revisions and adopted mitigation measures, will be reduced to levels that are less than significant. These mitigation measures are summarized in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP), which is included as Attachment 2c. In addition, detailed analysis for each area of environmental concern listed above is provided in the “Environmental Analysis” section of the IS/MND. The MMRP also describes how the mitigation measures will be implemented during project design and/or construction, the timing of implementation, and the responsible party.

Based on the Findings of the IS/MND, staff recommends that the MND be adopted. The project design avoids impacts to the greatest extent possible, and the MND and MMRP mitigate any potentially significant impacts to less-than-significant levels.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

In 2024, the City received \$950,000 in STIP funding to cover the costs associated with the PA&ED phase of work. This includes the development of the 30% engineering design as noted above, in addition to all of the special studies and other Caltrans studies required as part of the Project Report and Initial Study. There is no additional financial impact as a result of approving the project environmental document.

Currently, the project has no funding identified for future phases of work, however, staff are continuously evaluating grant funding sources.

RECOMMENDED COUNCIL ACTION:

1. Receive staff presentation and review Council questions with staff;
2. Open Public Hearing;
3. Close Public Hearing;
4. Motion to adopt *Resolution 2025-06* and read by title only. Roll call vote.

ATTACHMENTS:

- *Resolution 2025-06, Adopting a Mitigated Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact a Mitigation, Monitoring, and Reporting Program, and Approving the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project*
- Attachment 2a. Vicinity Map;
- Attachment 2b. Project Overview Map;
- Attachment 2c. Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan;
- Attachment 2d. Great Redwood Trail and Water Board Comments (both via email)
- Attachment 3: Draft Initial Study & Mitigated Negative Declaration (ISMND) for the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project
- Attachment 4: Draft ISMND Appendices for the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project
- Attachment 5: Final ISMND for the 12th Street Interchange Modernization Project