



CITY OF LAGUNA NIGUEL CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

TO: Honorable Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Jacki Scott, Public Works Director/City Engineer

DATE: October 21, 2025

SUBJECT: Approve the Community Preferred Alternative for the La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project, Direct Staff to Proceed with Final Engineering Design, and Find the Project Categorically Exempt from CEQA

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Approve the Community Preferred Alternative for the improvements to La Paz Road from Aliso Creek Road to Crown Valley Parkway, consisting of two vehicular travel lanes, Class IV bikeways, pedestrian improvements, landscape improvements, roundabouts at the intersections of La Paz Road at Rancho Niguel Road and La Paz Road at Yosemite Road, and earth movement repair;
2. Direct staff to proceed with final engineering design of Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) for the project;
3. Find the project categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines, Section 15301, Class 1 (Existing Facilities), and Section 15304, Class 4 (Minor Alterations to Land); and,
4. Direct staff to prepare, execute, and file with the County Clerk and State Clearinghouse a Notice of Exemption documenting this categorically exempt finding within five working days of its approval.

BACKGROUND

In 2024, the City was awarded State and Federal grant funds to address infrastructure and mobility needs along La Paz Road from Aliso Creek Road to Crown Valley Parkway. The grant-funded project scope includes stabilizing the earth movement along the westerly portion of La Paz Road next to the County Regional Park, reducing the number of vehicular travel lanes from two lanes to one lane in each direction, implementing intersection improvements, enhancing mobility choices, and public outreach.

The La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project was adopted as part of the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Capital Improvement Program. The City selected Mark Thomas & Company, Inc. (Mark Thomas), a consulting civil engineering design firm, to perform the preliminary 35% design, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluation and documentation, and public outreach for this initial phase of the project, known as the Project Approval and Environmental Document (PAED) Phase. A vicinity map showing the project area is provided as Attachment "A".

ANALYSIS

A grant requirement of the PAED Phase of this project is for the City to evaluate viable alternatives for the design of La Paz Road, including lane configurations, intersection improvements, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Based upon the space available within the right-of-way along La Paz Road and various other geographic features related to La Paz Road, Mark Thomas identified two options for mobility enhancements and two options for intersection improvements.

The two mobility enhancement alternatives consist of a Class 1 Multi-Use Trail and a Class IV Bike Lane, respectively. The two options for intersection improvements include roundabouts at Yosemite Road and Rancho Niguel Road, and a traffic signal at Rancho Niguel and La Paz Road, respectively (Attachment "B"). These identified alternatives met all City standards and general engineering design criteria for roadway construction and the mitigation of the earth movement. The design alternatives were shared with the public through a robust outreach program.

Public Outreach Program

Communication and outreach to the community took place from March 2025 to September 2025, concluding with a presentation of the project to the Traffic and Transportation Commission at the September 24, 2025, meeting. The purpose of the public outreach process was to solicit feedback on the public's preference between two options for mobility enhancements and two options for intersection improvements. Specific public outreach conducted for this project included a dedicated project webpage; notifying the public about meetings through postcards, lawn signs, and emails; holding two formal Public Open House events to share the project information with the wider community; and four focused in-person meetings with nearby homeowner associations, residents, and a local church. The City also conducted an online survey to receive community input and gauge community preferences for the project. The online survey was completed by 436 community members.

Community Preferred Alternative

At the conclusion of the public outreach, 60% of the residents providing feedback on intersection improvements preferred the installation of roundabouts at the intersections of La Paz Road at Yosemite Road and at La Paz Road at Rancho Niguel Road. Roundabouts serve as an effective traffic calming measure by reducing vehicle speeds and improving overall safety at intersections. The design of roundabouts minimizes

potential conflict points, which can decrease the frequency and severity of collisions and improve traffic flow in areas of moderate traffic volumes compared to traditional intersections.

Additionally, 66% of the residents providing feedback on mobility enhancements preferred the installation of Class IV on-street separated bike lanes for northbound and southbound La Paz Road. An example of a Class IV bike lane is the existing bike lane under the Long-Term Phase II Plan. Class IV bike lanes improve cyclist safety by providing physical separations between bicycle traffic and vehicles.

Traffic and Transportation Commission Review

On September 24, 2025, the Traffic and Transportation Commission (TTC) reviewed the La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project discussion item. The full staff report from the meeting can be found in Attachment "C". Following the presentation provided by the Public Works Department during the meeting, the Commissioners inquired about roadway closures during construction and standard signage for roundabouts. Staff assured the TTC that the City will avoid or minimize any roadway closures during construction and that there will be standard signage such as yield signs at the roundabouts. The TTC affirmed their support for the project and appreciated the public outreach on the project. The TTC then approved staff's recommendation of the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road, and recommended that the City Council approve the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road. Draft meeting minutes for the TTC are provided in Attachment "D".

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The PAED Phase for this project required both a CEQA (State) and NEPA (Federal) environmental review because federal funds will be utilized for this project. Based on Mark Thomas' environmental analysis, staff recommends that the City Council find the project categorically exempt from CEQA review pursuant to Class 1 exemption for existing facilities (CEQA Guidelines, section 15301) and Class 4 exemption for minor alterations to land (CEQA Guidelines, section 15304) (Attachment "E"). Regarding NEPA, the project qualifies for a categorical exclusion per section 23 CFR 771 activity (c)(22) as all of the areas of anticipated project work are within previously disturbed areas.

Additionally, staff recommends that the City Council direct staff to prepare, execute, and file with the County Clerk and State Clearinghouse a Notice of Exemption documenting this categorically exempt finding within five working days of its approval. Caltrans will review and approve the NEPA exclusion following City Council approval of the CEQA determination.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

1. The City Council may decide not to approve the Community Preferred Alternative. This action is not recommended as the La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project would not proceed to the next phase by the grant deadline, and grant funding may be jeopardized.
2. The City Council may direct staff to reject the Community Preferred Alternative and leave La Paz Road as is, with the Long-Term Phase II configuration. As a result of this action, the roadway would remain in its current condition until the project is completed at a future date.

FISCAL REVIEW

The La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project has a total budget of \$19,429,000 for all phases of work, which includes \$15,542,000 of grant funds and \$3,887,000 of City matching funds. The City submits project costs incurred to Caltrans for reimbursement on a monthly basis.

LEGAL REVIEW

The City Attorney's Office has reviewed this report and the CEQA Categorical Exemption Memorandum and has approved both documents as to form.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends that the City Council:

1. Approve the Community Preferred Alternative for the improvements to La Paz Road from Aliso Creek Road to Crown Valley Parkway, consisting of two vehicular travel lanes, Class IV bikeways, pedestrian improvements, landscape improvements, roundabouts at the intersections of La Paz Road at Rancho Niguel Road and La Paz Road at Yosemite Road, and earth movement repair;
2. Direct staff to proceed with final engineering design of Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) for the project;
3. Find the project categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines, Section 15301, Class 1 (Existing Facilities), and Section 15304, Class 4 (Minor Alterations to Land); and,
4. Direct staff to prepare, execute, and file with the County Clerk and State Clearinghouse a Notice of Exemption documenting this categorically exempt finding within five working days of its approval.



Tamara S. Letourneau
City Manager



Jacki Scott
Public Works Director/City Engineer



Harrison Martin
Senior Civil Engineer

Attachments:

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Roadway Design Alternatives
- C. Traffic and Transportation Commission Staff Report, September 24, 2025
- D. Traffic and Transportation Commission Draft Meeting Minutes, September 24, 2025
- E. CEQA Categorical Exemption Memorandum

ATTACHMENT A

Vicinity Map



VICINITY MAP

LA PAZ ROAD Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project



ATTACHMENT B

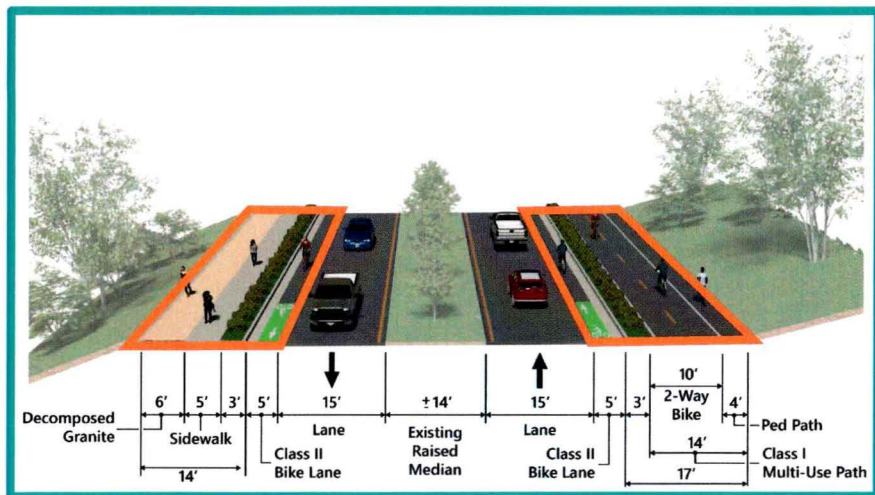
Roadway Design Alternatives



LA PAZ ROAD Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project

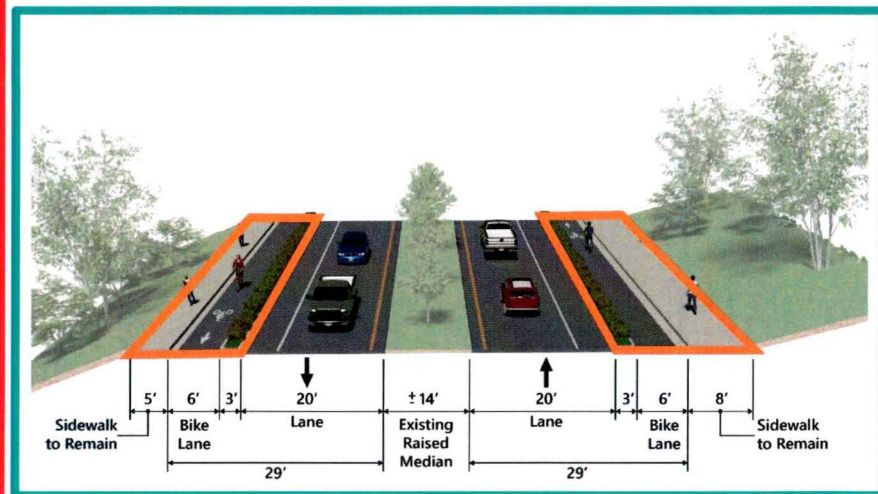
Enhanced Pedestrian and Bicyclist Mobility and Connectivity

Mobility Alternative 1: Class I Multi-Use Trail



OR

Mobility Alternative 2: Class IV Bike Lanes



Selected Mobility Option



LA PAZ ROAD Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project

Improving Vehicular Circulation and Safety

Intersection Alternative 1:

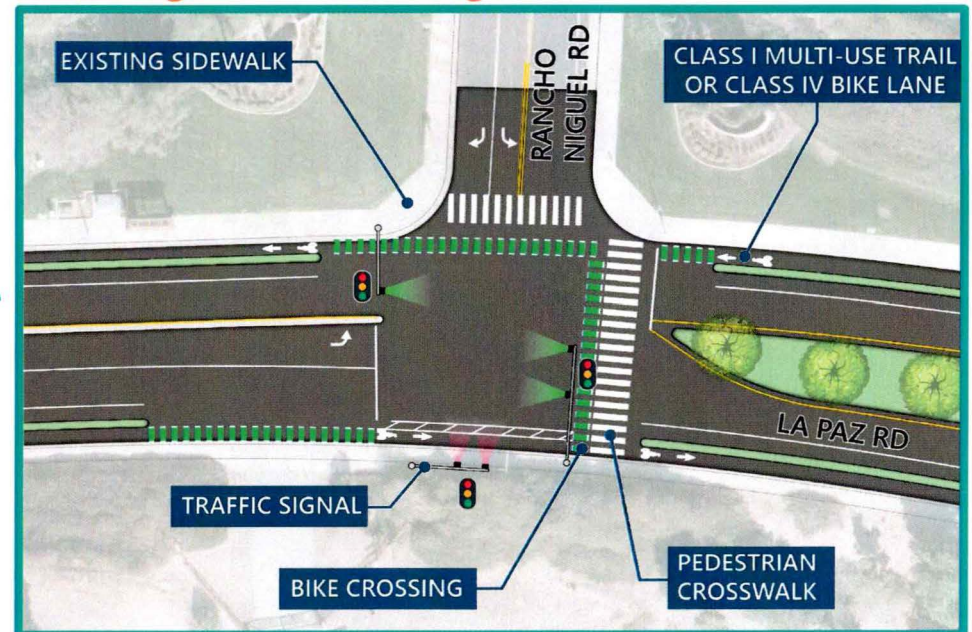
Roundabouts at Yosemite Rd & Rancho Niguel Rd



Selected Intersection Option

Intersection Alternative 2:

Traffic Signal at Rancho Niguel Rd



OR

ATTACHMENT C

**Traffic and Transportation Commission
Staff Report, September 24, 2025**



CITY OF LAGUNA NIGUEL TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM

TO: Traffic and Transportation Commission Members

FROM: Kathy Kelley, Engineering Services Manager/City Traffic Engineer

DATE: September 24, 2025

SUBJECT: La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project Update – Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PAED) Phase

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Traffic and Transportation Commission:

1. Approve staff's recommendation of the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road; and,
2. Recommend that the City Council approve the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road.

BACKGROUND

In 2024, the City was awarded Federal and State grant funds to address infrastructure and mobility needs along La Paz Road from Aliso Creek Road to Crown Valley Parkway. The grant-funded project scope includes stabilizing the ground movement along the westerly portion of La Paz Road next to the County Regional Park, reducing the number of vehicular travel lanes, implementing traffic control devices, enhancing mobility choices for users of this roadway, and public outreach.

The La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project was adopted as part of the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Capital Improvement Program. The City selected Mark Thomas & Company, Inc. (Mark Thomas), a consulting civil engineering design firm, to perform the preliminary design, environmental evaluation, and public outreach for this phase of the project, known as the Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PAED) phase. Following the successful completion of this PAED phase, the City will begin engineering design of Plans, Specifications and Estimates for the project. The design phase is scheduled to begin in Spring 2026. A vicinity map is provided as Attachment "A".

ANALYSIS

As part of the grant requirements within the PAED phase, the City must complete an environmental analysis for reconstructing La Paz Road and submit this analysis to Caltrans for approval. Mark Thomas has completed the environmental work and the report is under review by Caltrans staff.

Additionally, as part of the grant requirements within the PAED phase, the City must examine viable alternatives for how La Paz Road will be reconstructed including lane configuration, intersection traffic control, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Based upon the space available within the right-of-way along La Paz Road, and various other geographic features related to La Paz Road, Mark Thomas identified multiple roadway design alternatives. These identified alternatives meet City standards and general engineering design criteria for roadway construction and landslide mitigation. As a next step, communication to the public about these alternatives and consideration of public feedback is required prior to a final decision by the City on roadway layout and final design.

Communication and outreach to the community started in March 2025 and concludes with the September 24, 2025, Traffic and Transportation Commission meeting public comment period. The outreach performed included a dedicated project webpage; notifying the public about events through postcards, lawn signs, and emails; and holding two formal Public Open House events to share the project information with the wider community. Additionally, the City held four focused in-person meetings with nearby homeowner associations, residents, and a local church. The City also hosted an online survey portal to receive community input and gauge community preferences for the project. The survey was completed by 436 community members.

The public outreach solicited feedback on the public's preference between two options for mobility enhancements and two alternatives for intersection improvements. The public outreach has concluded and 60 percent of the residents providing feedback preferred the installation of a roundabout at Yosemite and La Paz Road, installation of a roundabout at Rancho Niguel Road and La Paz Road, and 66 percent preferred the installation of Class IV on-street separated bike lanes for the northbound and southbound directions of La Paz Road.

A presentation will be provided by Public Works at the Traffic and Transportation Commission meeting on September 24, 2025. The presentation will cover the following:

- The completed evaluation of bike lanes, traffic control, and landslide mitigation alternatives.
- A summary of the public outreach program which included approximately 8,000 mailers, community meetings, and an online survey.
- An overview of the community feedback from the in-person meetings and the online survey.

- The staff recommended Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road (shown in Attachment "B").
- A preview of the next steps for the design and construction phases.

FISCAL REVIEW

There is no fiscal impact as a result of this action.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommends that the Traffic and Transportation Commission:

1. Approve staff's recommendation of the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road; and,
2. Recommend that the City Council approve the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road.


Kathy Kelley
Engineering Services Manager/
City Traffic Engineer

Attachments:

- A. Vicinity Map
- B. Community Preferred Alternative for La Paz Road

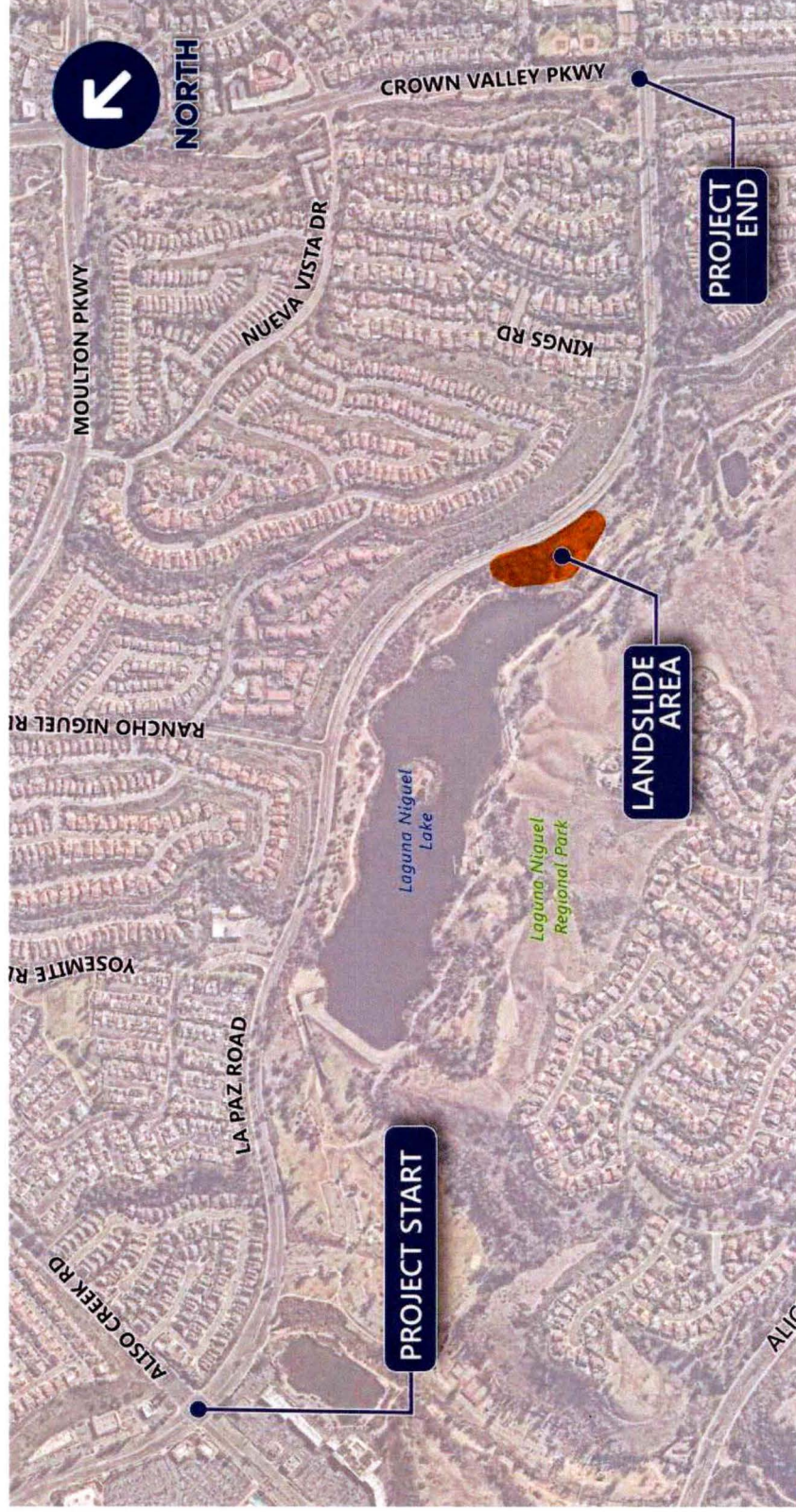
ATTACHMENT A

Traffic and Transportation Commission Agenda Item –
September 24, 2025
Vicinity Map



VICINITY MAP

LA PAZ ROAD Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project



ATTACHMENT B

Traffic and Transportation Commission Agenda Item –

September 24, 2025

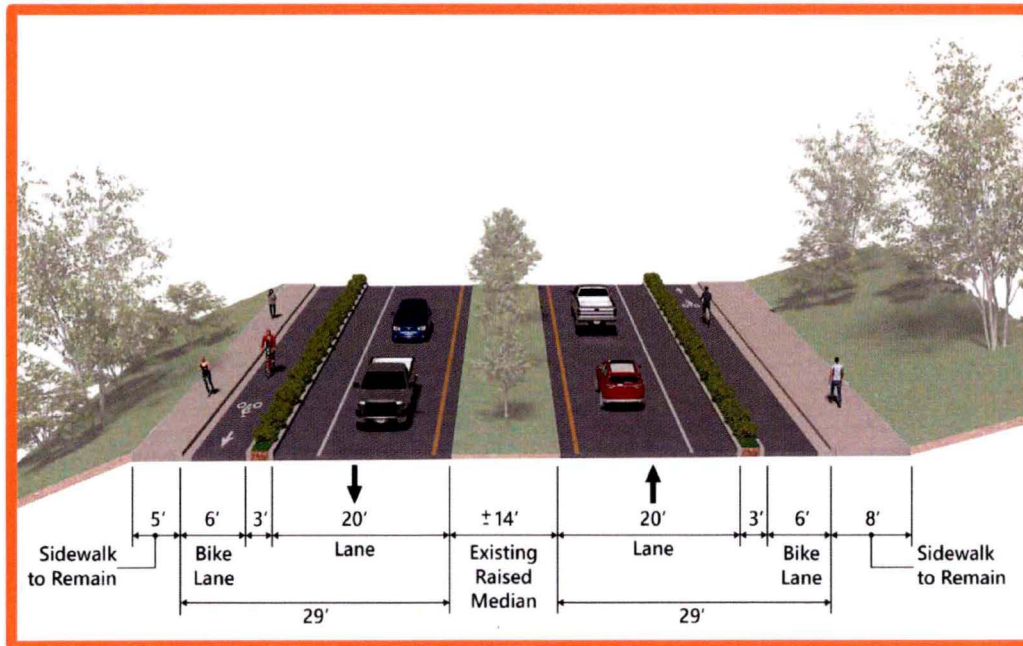
Community Preferred Alternative for La Paz Road



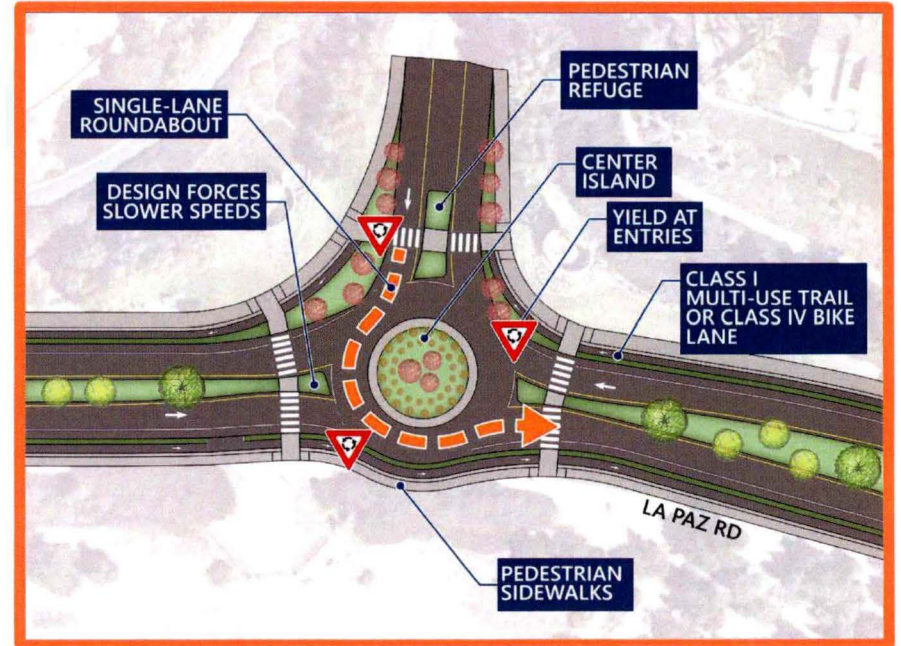
COMMUNITY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

LA PAZ ROAD Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project

Mobility Enhancement: Class IV Bike Lanes



Intersection Improvements: Roundabouts at Yosemite Rd & Rancho Niguel Rd



ATTACHMENT D

**Traffic and Transportation Commission
Draft Meeting Minutes, September 24, 2025**

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF
THE CITY OF LAGUNA NIGUEL
TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
September 24, 2025 – 7:00 p.m.**

CALL TO ORDER – Chair Cashion called the Regular Traffic and Transportation Commission Meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Commission Members:

Chair Robin Cashion – Present
Vice Chair John Kinney – Present
Commissioner Greg Emerson – Present
Commissioner Richard Riegle – Present

Council Liaisons:

Mayor Pro Tem Gene Johns – Present
Council Member Stephanie Winstead – Present

City Staff Present:

Public Works Director Jacki Scott
City Traffic Engineer Kathy Kelley
Administrative Sergeant Nicholas Spangenberg
Deputy Sheriff Shawn Murray
Commission Secretary Kaylee Ferguson

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Vice Chair Kinney

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Trevor Fitzgerald spoke on flashing yellow arrows for left turns and potential use in the city.

CONSENT CALENDAR

A **MOTION** was made by Vice Chair Kinney, seconded by Commissioner Riegle, to approve the Consent Calendar as presented.

Motion carried 4-0.

1. **Minutes of the Regular Traffic and Transportation Commission Meeting on August 27, 2025**

Approved as written.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. **La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project Update – Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PAED) Phase**

Public Works Director Scott and consultant Pat Somerville with Mark Thomas & Company, Inc. provided an update on the La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project.

COMMISSIONER QUESTIONS

Vice Chair Kinney inquired if the southbound lane in the Community Preferred Alternative will be at the same level as the northbound lane.

Consultant Pat Somerville stated that the southbound and northbound lanes would be separated in the vicinity of the landslide.

Commissioner Riegle inquired if La Paz Road will need to be closed during construction.

Public Works Director Scott stated that the City will work with the designer to avoid road closures or minimize the closure to the shortest time possible.

Chair Cashion inquired if driveway access will be impacted by the separated bike lanes at the entrance to the Laguna Niguel Regional Park and nearby shopping centers.

Public Works Director Scott stated that access will be preserved for all driveways.

Commissioner Riegle expressed concern that traffic coming from Yosemite Road will have a challenge adapting to the roundabout and suggested a yield sign instead of a roundabout sign and commented that he trusts the consultant's recommendations.

Consultant Pat Somerville stated that there are specific requirements for signage, and a yield sign would be appropriate for the roundabout.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Beryl Schlesenberg inquired about what measures are being taken to protect the Via Pasatiempo hillside adjacent to La Paz Road, the number of votes for the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts, and the timeframe for completion of the project. She also expressed concern that the roundabout would not slow down drivers on La Paz Road.

Public Works Director Scott stated that the City has installed inclinometers on the east side of La Paz Road which are monitored monthly and will continue to be monitored for the duration of the project.

Public Works Director Scott stated that there were 260 votes in favor of the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and the timeframe for completion of the project is approximately 5 years.

City Traffic Engineer Kelley stated that the roundabout design forces cars to slow down when approaching the roundabout due to the geometry of the intersection.

Irene Kennedy requested a no U-turn sign on La Paz Road at the Yosemite Road intersection.

Scott Richter spoke in favor of roundabouts and requested an active police presence on La Paz Road.

Jackie Kimbough suggested a light in the middle of the roundabout to alert drivers of the roundabout.

COMMISSION DISCUSSION

Commissioner Riegle praised Public Works Director Scott and her team for their hard work and outreach on the project.

Commissioner Emerson praised staff for securing the grant for the project and the outreach conducted for the project.

A MOTION was made by Vice Chair Kinney, seconded by Commissioner Riegle, for the Traffic and Transportation Commission to:

1. Approve staff's recommendation of the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road; and,
2. Recommend that the City Council approve the Community Preferred Alternative to install roundabouts and Class IV on-street separated bike lanes on La Paz Road.

Motion carried 4-0.

STAFF, CITY COUNCIL, AND COMMISSION COMMENTS

There were no comments from Public Works.

There were no comments from Police Services.

Council Member Winstead and Mayor Pro Tem Johns complimented staff on the La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project efforts to date.

Commissioner Riegle and Chair Cashion thanked residents for attending the meeting and sharing their feedback.

ADJOURNMENT – Chair Cashion adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kaylee Ferguson
Traffic and Transportation Commission Secretary

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ATTACHMENT E

CEQA Categorical Exemption Memorandum

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 10, 2025

To: Harrison Martin, Senior Civil Engineer, City of Laguna Niguel

FROM: Brianna Shaw, Project Manager, LSA Associates, Inc.

SUBJECT: La Paz Road Mobility Enhancement and Permanent Repair Project – Categorical Exemption Supporting Memorandum

Dear Mr. Martin,

Section 21084 of the Public Resources Code requires that California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines include a list of classes of projects which have been determined not to have a significant effect on the environment, and which shall be exempt from the provisions of CEQA and are categorically exempt from the requirement for the preparation of environmental documents. As discussed below, the proposed project is consistent with the categorical exemptions (CE) Class 1, Existing Facilities and Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land. The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide substantial evidence in support of a CE.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The La Paz Road Mobility Enhancement and Permanent Repair Project (proposed project) would reduce the number of lanes from two to one on each side of La Paz Road, along with reconfiguring the existing Class II bicycle lanes to Class IV bike path. Additionally, the proposed project incorporates two roundabouts, pedestrian facilities improvements, traffic flow improvements, geotechnical mitigation, and enhancement of lighting and landscaping.

The proposed project would impact approximately 1.6 miles along La Paz Road, between Aliso Creek Road and Crown Valley Parkway in the City of Laguna Niguel, Orange County (see **Figure 1, Project Location Map**). Regional access to the project study area is provided by State Route 73 (SR-73), located approximately 1.25 miles to the north, and Interstate 5 (I-5), located approximately 2.2 miles to the east (see **Figure 2, Regional Location Map**). Local access to the project study area is provided by Aliso Creek Road, Yosemite Road, Rancho Niguel Road, and Crown Valley Parkway.

As the proposed project would not increase the existing use of the roadway, and involves improvements within existing paved area, it is consistent with a Class 1 CE. The proposed project would require permanent partial acquisition of four parcels adjacent to the La Paz Road and Rancho Niguel Road intersection (see **Figure 3, Proposed Permanent Partial Right-of-Way Acquisition Areas**) for the proposed roundabout. The proposed project would acquire approximately less than two percent of the total parcel acreages, which is negligible and would not change the use of the

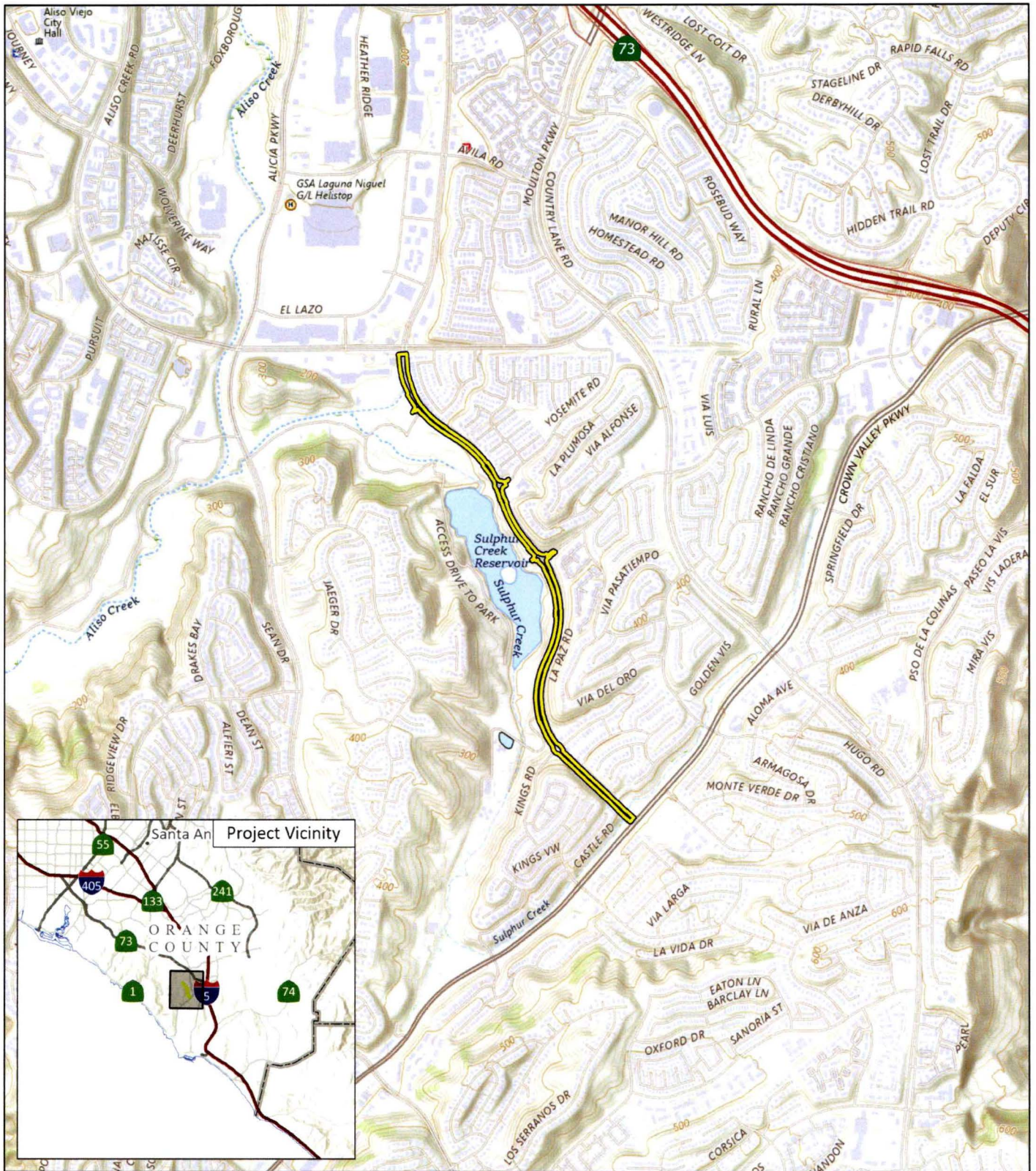


FIGURE 1

LSA

Project Location

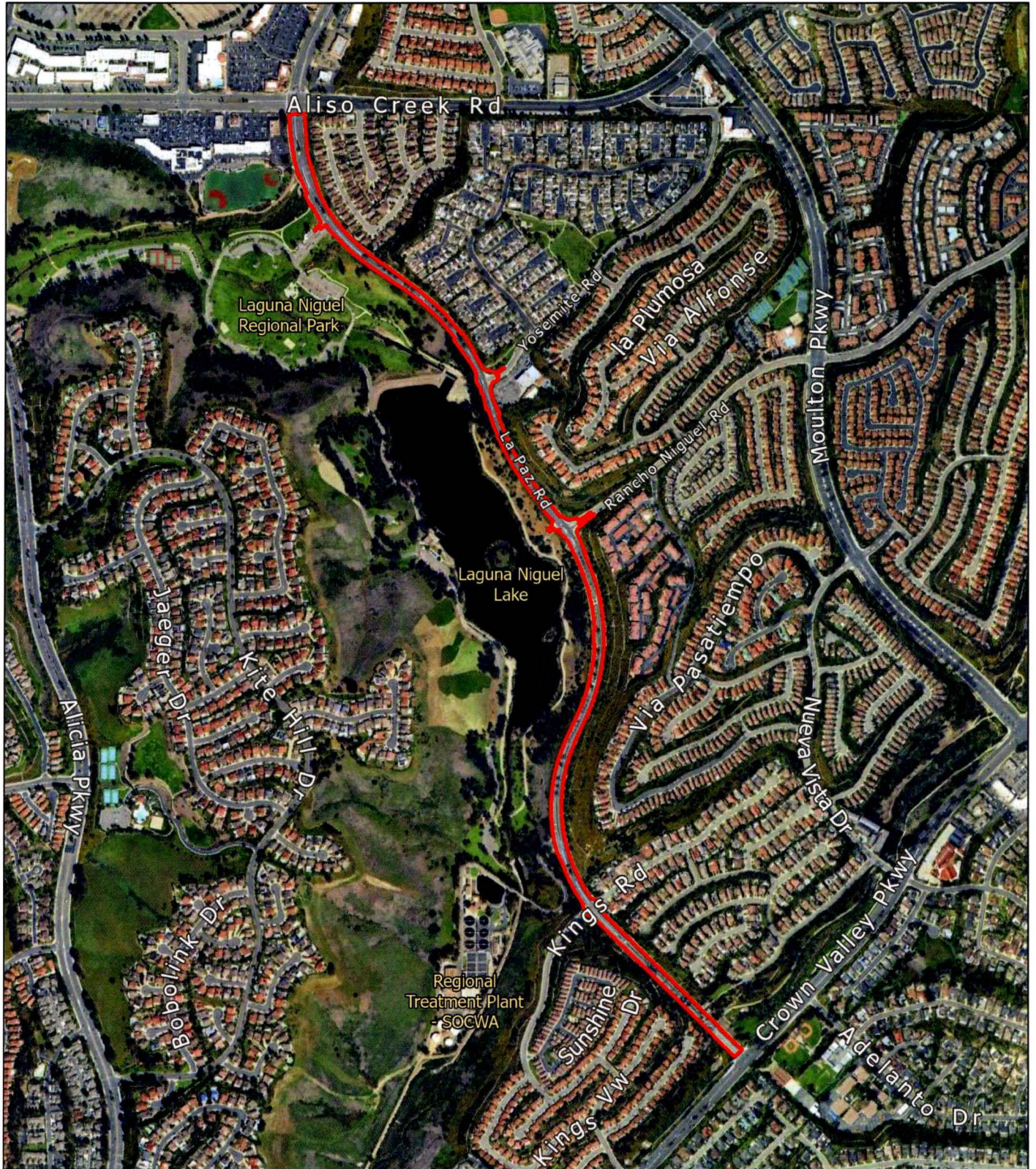


0 1000 2000
FEET

SOURCE: USGS The National Map

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La Paz Road
Project Location and Vicinity



LSA

Project Study Area

FIGURE 1



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FEET

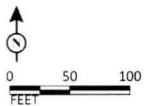
SOURCE: Google Maps (2024)

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La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project
Project Location Map



FIGURE 3



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La Paz Road Mobility Enhancements and Permanent Repair Project
Proposed Permanent Partial Right-of-Way Acquisition Areas

parcel. Additionally, the proposed facility use would remain consistent with City zoning and land use designations, as it would provide improved bikeway and pedestrian facilities, which are allowed uses under the Open Space designations. Therefore, the proposed project is consistent with a Class 4 CE. The City of Laguna Niguel is the lead agency for CEQA and Caltrans Local Assistance Program (Caltrans) is the lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The proposed project is located along La Paz Road, between Aliso Creek Road and Crown Valley Parkway in the City of Laguna Niguel, Orange County.

The proposed project is expected to improve the longevity of La Paz Road and the surrounding environment, enhance mobility, increase accessibility for bicyclists and pedestrians, mitigate impacts to the roadway from the landslide area, improve traffic flow, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Project activities would also include pavement rehabilitation using hot mix asphalt (HMA) and mitigating the existing slope failure on the west side of the road through retaining wall modifications and reducing loads with lowering a portion of the southbound lanes using lightweight fill.

Existing Facility

Generally, La Paz Road is a four-lane roadway that includes two 12-foot wide lanes, 5-foot wide Class II bicycle lanes, and 5-foot to 8-foot sidewalks on each side with a raised and landscaped median. Due to interim improvements completed on August 15, 2024, the segment of La Paz Road between Rancho Niguel Road and Kings Road is a two-lane roadway that includes 12-foot wide lanes in each direction, with a vertical separation between northbound and southbound travel lanes, 6-foot wide Class IV bike lanes and existing sidewalk on the east side (sidewalk is closed on the west side).

Surrounding Land Uses

Land uses west of the project study area are designated primarily Open Space, Parks and Recreation, and Community Commercial. Land uses east of the project site are designated as primarily Residential Detached, Open Space, and some Public/Institutional uses.

Immediate surrounding land uses include La Paz Sports Park, Aliso Village Shopping Center, and an undeveloped hillside to the north; the Laguna Niguel Regional Park, Sulphur Creek Reservoir, undeveloped hillsides, the Joint Regional Treatment Plant operated by the SOCWA, and single-family residences to the west and south; and single-family residences to the east.

The Laguna Niguel Regional Park, which is owned and operated by the Orange County Parks Department (OC Parks), is a 227-acre open space, with unpaved trails, paved access roads and parking lots, an amphitheater, maintained lawns, picnic areas, and tennis and pickleball courts, surrounding the 44-acre Laguna Niguel Lake. The lake is a human-made reservoir formed by the Sulphur Creek Dam, which impounds Sulphur Creek, a small tributary of Aliso Creek. Further north of the Laguna Niguel Regional Park is the La Paz Sports Park, commercial and mixed-use development, and the Chet Holifield U.S. Federal Building.

Project Design Considerations

Preliminary design for the proposed project would remain within the existing right-of-way, unless the evaluation of potential addition of roundabouts would require minor right-of-way easements on the east side of La Paz Road. The proposed project would not result in capacity increasing improvements. Preliminary design considerations include elements to:

- Reduce the existing two 12-foot northbound and two 12-foot southbound through lanes on La Paz Road to one 20-foot through lane including paved shoulders on each side.
- Maintain the existing median island on La Paz Road and rebuild the median between Rancho Niguel Road and Kings Road.
- Maintain a minimum 20-foot roadway width Orange County Fire Authority clearance for emergency vehicles within the project area.
- Construct a roundabout at the intersection of La Paz Road and Rancho Niguel Road.
- Construct a roundabout at the intersection of La Paz Road and Yosemite Road.
- Maintain the existing two through lanes in both directions at the La Paz Road and Aliso Creek Intersection.
- Reduce the existing two northbound lanes at the La Paz Road and Crown Valley Intersection to one through lane and maintain the existing southbound left turn lane and right turn lane.
- Retain and improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities along La Paz Road to a Class IV bike path.
- Provide slope stabilization between Rancho Niguel Road and Kings Road.
- Lower the southbound lane from Rancho Niguel to the South Orange County Wastewater Authority driveway by five feet.

The proposed project would include a roundabout at the intersection of La Paz Road and Yosemite Road and a roundabout at the intersection of La Paz Road and Rancho Niguel Road. Additionally, it would construct two raised islands to shield two new 6-foot Class IV bike paths on both the northbound and southbound sides with three-foot buffers in each direction, utilizing available space provided by the lane reductions and retaining the existing sidewalks.

Construction Details

Construction staging and grading would occur primarily within the existing right-way; however, there would be permanent partial acquisition of four parcels adjacent to the La Paz Road and Rancho Niguel Road intersection for the proposed roundabout. There is also potential for temporary construction easements to be required. Construction would require excavation to a maximum of 15

feet depth, with anticipated requirement of ten feet for the roadbed and two feet depth for the sidewalk, respectively. Additional construction activities may include pile-driving for soil stabilization measures, relocation of existing utilities, and new drainage/culverts. Existing fire hydrants located within the project area would be relocated within 10 feet of their existing location to accommodate curb modifications. Additionally, existing water and gas lines that are between Rancho Niguel and the South Coast Orange Water Authority (SOWCA) driveway within the project area would be lowered to accommodate the proposed project. Minimal vegetation removal is anticipated at the Laguna Niguel Regional Park entrance, and no tree removal is expected to be required. The overall acreage of construction is approximately 10 acres. Construction would include approximately 9,700 cubic yards of cut between Rancho Niguel Road and SOCWA driveway. Stockpiling would be minimal and would occur within the public right-of-way on La Paz Road pavement.

The proposed project is anticipated to begin final design in Spring 2026. Construction is anticipated to begin in late 2027 and be completed by 2029.

CEQA CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION CRITERIA

A CE under Section 15301 of the State CEQA Guidelines, Class 1, Existing Facilities, consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of use. This applies to existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities (this includes road grading for the purpose of public safety), and other alterations such as the addition of bicycle facilities, including but not limited to bicycle parking, bicycle-share facilities and bicycle lanes, transit improvements such as bus lanes, pedestrian crossings, street trees, and other similar alterations that do not create additional automobile lanes).

A CE under Section 15304 of the State CEQA Guidelines, Class 4, Minor Alterations to Land, consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes.

The CEQA Guidelines list the following exceptions to the Categorical Exemptions in Article 19 (see Section 15300.2). In the discussion below, each subsection (in *italics*) is followed by an explanation of why these exceptions do not apply to the proposed project.

Location

“(a) Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.”

The proposed improvements would be implemented on existing paved roadway primarily within the City right-of-way. As described in further detail below, the proposed project would not impact an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies. The project site is not listed on the Department of Toxic Substances Control Hazardous Waste and Substances Site List (Cortese List, compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code). Additionally, the habitat quality along the project area is low, the proposed project is not anticipated to require tree removal, and it would not conflict with the provisions of an adopted conservation plan, or require any special status species habitat or require substantial jurisdictional water disturbance as part of the proposed project. Therefore, the proposed project would not have an impact based on location.

Cumulative Impact

“(b) Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.”

The proposed project would be implemented primarily within existing City right-of-way. The proposed project would not result in long-term or growth inducing impacts, and temporary construction impacts would not have a significant impact with the implementation of best management practices and standard specifications. No near-term projects are expected in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project. Thus, contributions to potential cumulative impacts would not be significant.

Significant Effects (Unusual Circumstances)

“(c) Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.”

A CEQA Checklist was prepared for the proposed project, Appendix A, that evaluated the potential for significant effects on the environment, consistent with *State CEQA Guidelines* Appendix G. Technical studies for air quality and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, biological resources, cultural resources, noise, paleontological resources, and traffic were prepared for the proposed project. Based on the results of the technical analysis, the proposed project would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances and the potential for significant adverse environmental impacts as defined under CEQA is negligible. Discussion on key environmental resources is discussed below.

Aesthetics

The proposed project involves a reduction in lanes of travel, roundabouts, lighting and landscaping improvements, and reconfiguration of the existing Class II bicycle lanes. During construction activities, equipment and the construction crew would be visible; however, after construction, the visual changes associated with the project would be consistent with the roadway character and

would not result in an adverse effect on a scenic vista, would not damage scenic resources within a state scenic highway, nor would the project degrade the existing visual character. The project would introduce enhanced lighting improvements, but the lighting improvements are intended for improved safety and visibility and would be consistent with City guidelines.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

An Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Impact Analysis Memorandum (Appendix B) was prepared for the proposed project. Construction emissions associated with the proposed project would be temporary and would not exceed air quality thresholds established by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). Because the project would not increase capacity, operation of the proposed project would not increase vehicular trips; therefore, operational emissions would not exceed the SCAQMD thresholds. The proposed project would not result in generation of construction or operational air quality emissions that would conflict with an air quality plan, result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors), nor would it result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in criteria pollutants.

The operation of construction equipment has the potential to generate greenhouse gas emissions; however, the quantity and type of equipment and the duration with which the equipment would operate during the proposed project construction phase would not result in significant release of greenhouse gas emissions. The proposed project is not capacity increasing and would result in lane reduction; therefore, the project would not result in increased greenhouse gas emissions during operation. Furthermore, operation of the proposed project would not result in a significant release of greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, the project would not result in increased greenhouse gas emissions.

The construction and operational emissions associated with the proposed project would not exceed SCAQMD established significance thresholds. Compliance with SCAQMD Rule 403: Fugitive Dust would further reduce construction dust impacts. The proposed project is not expected to produce significant emissions that would affect nearby sensitive receptors, as demonstrated through the localized significance thresholds analysis. The proposed project would also not result in objectionable odors affecting a substantial number of people. Additionally, the proposed project would not produce GHG emissions that exceed the SCAQMD threshold nor conflict with the goals and objectives of State or regional plan, policy or regulation of an agency adopted for the purpose of reducing GHG emissions.

Biological Resources

A Biological Resources Assessment Technical Memorandum (Appendix C) was prepared for the proposed project, Appendix C. The proposed project is located along La Paz Road, which is adjacent to Laguna Niguel Regional Park, Narco Channel, and Sulphur Creek. The vegetation in the project area consists of coastal sage scrub, disturbed scrub, chaparral, eucalyptus woodland, ornamental trees, lawn or other nonnative grasses, and ruderal annual plants. Construction of the project would have minimal vegetation removal of ornamental landscaped areas. The habitat quality along the project area is low with nonnative species and eucalyptus woodland covering parts of the area. As there is the potential for habitat for species of special concern, focused surveys were conducted for

California Gnatcatcher (*Poliophtila californica californica*), Crotch's bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*), and a general survey for bats. A jurisdictional delineation was also conducted to delineate aquatic resources and drainage features within the project area.

During field surveys, no Crotch Bumble Bee or Coastal California Gnatcatcher were observed within the Biological Study Area (BSA). The project area has multiple locations that would be suitable roosting habitats for bats. Daytime and nighttime surveys were conducted to survey for presence of bats in July 2025. As detailed in the Bat Survey Report, two species of bats, Yuma myotis (*Myotis yumanensis*) and Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis mexicana*), were recorded at the western culvert at the Narco Channel overcrossing. Two other bat species were detected during surveys, California myotis (*Myotis californicus*) and big brown bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*). Although a number of native wildlife species were observed within the BSA, no special status species were observed during any of the focused surveys.

As a project design feature, to avoid permanent impacts to maternity colonies of bats from the installation of any new light fixtures (or upgrades to existing light fixtures), it is recommended that any lighting fixtures associated with the proposed project shall focus light on the roadway and limit backlight, uplight, and glare (sidelight) to limit light trespass into confirmed bat roosting and foraging areas per the Backlight, Uplight and Glare (BUG) classification system established by the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES). Light fixtures shall utilize luminaires with low, wildlife-friendly "BUG" ratings and may require additional measures, such as light shielding, brightness adjustment, or other methods, to direct lighting onto the roadway and avoid light overspill into roosting and foraging habitat, and to minimize potential adverse effects to bat species' movements on the landscape. Specifically, permanent lighting fixtures that are wildlife-friendly consist of a shielded light source with zero backlight and uplight falling at or below the 2500K color temperature spectrum, and limit glare (sidelight) from direct lighting to a 60-degree angle from bottom center, or less, under the BUG classification system.

The jurisdictional delineation report identified one national wetland feature within the project boundaries, Narco Channel. Six additional jurisdictional features were recorded within the jurisdictional delineation study area, as discussed in the jurisdictional delineation report. However, the proposed project is not anticipated to impact the jurisdictional features as project construction would occur within existing paved right-of-way, and any potential construction impacts would implement best management practices (BMPs) to ensure that no impacts occur.

The project site is within the coastal Orange County Natural Communities Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) area; however, the City of Laguna Niguel is not a participant in the NCCP. The plan focuses on protecting specific native habitats, including coastal sage scrub and cliff habitats, as well as associated species like the coastal California gnatcatcher and coastal cactus wren. Because the project would primarily affect ornamental/non-native habitat along an existing road right-of-way, focused surveys for species with potential to occur in the project vicinity were conducted with negative findings, and any required permits and authorizations would be acquired in accordance with the plan. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with the Orange County NCCP/HCP.

As construction would occur primarily within the existing road right-of-way, the proposed project is not anticipated to require tree removal, and would not conflict with the provisions of an adopted conservation plan, or require any special status species habitat or require substantial jurisdictional water disturbance as part of the proposed project.

Project Design Features

- The project should avoid increasing light in the vicinity of the western culvert where maternity colonies of bats were confirmed, and the following measures are recommended to reduce potential adverse effects to maternity-roosting bats from lighting generated during construction activities and from the installation of any new or upgraded light fixtures associated with the proposed project:
 - Within 100 feet of the entrance to the western culvert, any construction activities during the evening (i.e., between dusk and dawn) shall be avoided to the greatest extent feasible. If nighttime construction is necessary for project implementation, temporary impacts from nighttime lighting shall be minimized by focusing night lighting only on the direct area(s) of work and using shielding and other means to avoid light trespass into the vicinity of the culvert entrance and adjacent foraging habitat.
- If trees are planned to be removed, the removal of any mature trees and snags suitable for use by bats shall be performed outside the bat maternity season (April 1 through August 31) to avoid direct impacts to nonvolant (flightless) young. This period also coincides with the bird nesting season. If trimming or removal of trees during the bat maternity season cannot be avoided, a bat biologist will survey the trees to determine whether they serve as maternity roosts. If a maternity roost is found, a buffer will be established and the tree will not be removed until the conclusion of the maternity season. The buffer distance shall be determined by the bat biologist and shall be based upon the bat species observed because tolerance to construction activities varies based upon the species and the type of activity.

Cultural Resources

A Cultural Resources Survey Report (CRSR) was prepared for the proposed project (Appendix D) that summarizes the results of the cultural resource record search, field survey, and Native American consultation. The CRSR identified one prehistoric archaeological habitation site in the project area, identified as CA-ORA-18, which was recorded along the northernmost 1,000 feet (ft) of the project area from Aliso Creek Road south to the entrance to Laguna Niguel Regional Park. The field survey conducted for the proposed project did not find any cultural material in the previously recorded site area which is now disturbed by existing roadway, residential, and commercial buildings, and the entrance to the Laguna Niguel Regional Park, and no archaeological resources were found within the project area. For this reason, no additional archaeological work is recommended for this project, and monitoring during project construction is not recommended unless archaeological material is found during project construction. If such material is found, it is recommended that construction activities in the vicinity of the find be halted until the nature and significance of the find can be assessed by a professional qualified archaeologist.

LSA submitted a request on April 14, 2025 for a search of the Sacred Lands File (SLF) to the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC). On April 28, 2025, the NAHC responded stating that the SLF search was positive, indicating the presence of Native American cultural resources within the project. The NAHC also provided a list of 25 Native American contacts for project notification. On June 5, 2025, all designated contacts were notified of the project via certified mail. The letters requested a response within 30 days of receipt of the letter regarding their wish to consult on the project, pursuant to PRC 21080.3.1(d). One response was received from the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation – Belardes.

Because no cultural resources were found to exist within the proposed project area, along with the fact that the area is heavily disturbed by existing roadways and development, no additional cultural resource work is required, and the proposed project would not have a significant impact on cultural resources.

Project Design Features

- If archaeological resources are found during project construction, it is recommended that construction activities in the vicinity of the find be halted until the nature and significance of the find can be assessed. If the find is determined to be significant, additional archaeological work, including recording and excavation, may be necessary to record the scientifically important aspects of the resource. Once the scientifically important aspects of the resource have been recorded, construction in the vicinity of the find can resume.
- If human remains are encountered at the project areas, California Health and Safety Code Section 7050.5 and State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(e)(1) state that no further disturbance shall occur to the area of the find until the County Coroner has made a determination of origin and disposition of the human bone pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 5097.98. The County Coroner must be notified of the find immediately and shall make a determination within two working days of being notified. If the remains are determined to be Native American, the County Coroner shall notify the NAHC by phone within 24 hours, and the NAHC shall then immediately determine and notify a Most Likely Descendant (MLD). With the permission of the landowner or his/her authorized representative, the MLD may inspect the site of the discovery. The MLD shall complete the inspection and make recommendations or preferences for treatment of the remains within 48 hours of being granted access to the site. The MLD's recommendations may include scientific removal and nondestructive analysis of human remains and items associated with Native American burials, preservation of Native American human remains and associated items in place, relinquishment of Native American human remains and associated items to the descendants for treatment, or any other culturally appropriate treatment.
- To ensure no impacts to tribal cultural resources, a tribal monitor will be present during construction phases that involve ground-disturbing activities in previously undisturbed areas. In the event that tribal cultural resources are discovered, construction activities shall cease in the

immediate vicinity of the find (not less than the surrounding 50 feet) until the find can be assessed by the qualified archaeologist and/or Tribal Monitor.

Land Use and Planning

The proposed project would be located primarily in existing right-of-way and would not divide an existing community. As mentioned above, construction staging and grading would occur primarily within the existing right-of-way; however, there would be permanent partial acquisitions of four parcels adjacent to the La Paz Road/Rancho Niguel Road intersection and also the potential for other temporary construction easements to be required within the project alignment. The permanent partial acquisition would include the construction of Class IV bikeways and pedestrian facilities along the roundabout planned at the intersection. The four parcels that would have permanent partial acquisition are designated as Open Space under both Land Use and Zoning designations. The City of Laguna Niguel 1992 General Plan, Chapter 3 "Open Space/Parks/Conservation" describes what is allowed within the Open Space land use area. The "Bikeways Plan" in the General Plan encourages the development of bikeways with a goal to provide a network of both on-street and off-street bikeways. Section 9-1-52 of the City of Laguna Niguel Code of Ordinances states that bicycle trails are allowed in Open Space as a principal use within this district. Vehicular and pedestrian accessways are allowed with approval of minor use permits at the discretion of the community development director.

The proposed project would acquire minor portions of the parcel boundaries to construct the Class IV bikeways and pedestrian facilities, totaling approximately less than two percent of the total parcel acreages. As this amount is less than two percent of the total parcel, it is negligible and would not change the use of the parcel. Additionally, the proposed facility use would remain consistent with City zoning and land use designations, as it would provide improved bikeway and pedestrian facilities, which are allowed uses under the Open Space designations. Therefore, the project does not propose land use or zoning changes and is consistent with adopted land use and general plans.

Paleontological Resources

The proposed project would be primarily built on pre-disturbed soil and primarily within existing right-of-way. The proposed project would also include slope stabilization measures to address the ongoing landslide issue occurring near the proposed project. A Paleontological Identification Report and Paleontological Evaluation Report (PIR/PER) was prepared for the proposed project (Appendix F). The PIR/PER identified that the proposed project area contains geologic units that have high paleontological sensitivity (e.g. the Young Axial Channel Deposits below a depth of 10 feet and the Siltstone Facies of the Capistrano). The proposed project may result in the disturbance of the native soil and has potential to impact the geologic units that have high paleontological sensitivity during construction activities such as excavation. In the unlikely event that paleontological resources are unearthed during ground disturbance associated with the project, preparation of Paleontological Mitigation Plan (PMP) is recommended to reduce impact to paleontological resources. However, the proposed project is not anticipated to impact paleontological resources, nor would the project increase risks associated with landslides, liquefaction, or ground shaking. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant impact on paleontological resources.

Project Design Features

- If paleontological resources are encountered, all work within 50 feet of the resource must be stopped until a qualified paleontologist meeting the requirements of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP) is retained to assess the resource. If the resource is determined to be scientifically significant, the Qualified Paleontologist will develop a Paleontological Mitigation Plan (PMP) for this project. The PMP should follow the guidelines contained in the Caltrans Standard Environmental Reference, Environmental Handbook, Volume 1, Chapter 8 – Paleontology, as well as those from the SVP. Following these guidelines, the PMP shall include sections describing project activities, the geologic units within the project area and their paleontological sensitivities, the work plan for mitigating project impacts to paleontological resources, estimates of monitoring schedules and costs, decision thresholds for monitoring levels and fossil collections, a recommended repository for recovered fossils, any necessary permits, and the appropriate documentation at the end of the monitoring program.

Noise

A noise and vibration technical memorandum was prepared for the proposed project (Appendix H). The proposed project construction activities would result in temporary increases in ambient noise levels due to operation of construction equipment; however, increases in noise levels would be of short duration and would occur during normal business hours. The proposed project would be required to comply with Section 6-6-7(11) of the City's Municipal Code, which exempts construction activities between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays, and Section 14-8.02 of the Caltrans Standard Specifications to minimize construction noise impacts on sensitive land uses adjacent to the proposed project area. The proposed project is not capacity increasing nor would it introduce a new, stationary noise source; therefore, the project would not result in permanent increases in noise levels.

Vibration levels would not have the potential to result in building damage because buildings within the project area were conservatively assumed to be equivalent to older residential structures or better, and the anticipated project-related vibration levels would not exceed the FTA vibration damage threshold of 0.30 PPV (in/sec). Other existing building structures that surround the project site would experience lower vibration levels because they are farther away and are also conservatively assumed to be equivalent to older residential structures or better, and the anticipated project-related vibration levels would not exceed the FTA vibration damage threshold of 0.30 PPV (in/sec). Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant impact related to noise and vibration.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The proposed project would be constructed in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations related to water quality. Development of the project site would require grading, which would involve exposing and moving soil on-site. Since the project's overall acreage of construction is approximately 10 acres, it is subject to the requirements of the State Water Resources Control Board's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for Storm Water

Discharges Associated with Land Disturbance Activities (Construction General Permit [CGP]). The project area is within the City of Laguna Niguel which is under the jurisdiction of the San Diego Regional Water Quality Board (RWQCB) in Orange County which enforces the CGP. Compliance with the CGP requires developing and implementing a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) specifying Best Management Practices (BMPs) to be utilized during construction of the project in order to avoid or minimize the discharge of any sediments or other construction-related pollutants from the site. Prior to issuance of a grading permit, the project Applicant or designee would be required to provide a copy the Waste Discharge Identification Number (WDID) to the City to demonstrate proof of coverage under the Construction General Permit (Order WQ 2022-0057-DWQ, NPDES No. CAS000002) to avoid or minimize the discharge of any sediments or other construction-related pollutants from the site.

Under the guidance and structure of a Orange County-wide Drainage Area Management Plan (DAMP), the City has adopted a Local Implementation Plan (LIP). The City's LIP establishes requirements and guidelines for pollution prevention methods to address construction activities for all developments. The proposed project would be subject to implementation of these standard stormwater pollution prevention and erosion control measures identified in the City's LIP. The proposed project would be required to develop a Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) and Hydromodification Management Plan (HMP) in order to minimize the effects of urbanization for on-site hydrology, runoff flow rates, pollutant loads, and to address changes in magnitude and frequency of stream flows associated sediment load due to urbanization. Furthermore, the project would be subject to the San Diego Region NPDES Permit and Waste Discharge Requirement for Discharges from the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4 Permit) as the City is identified as a Co-permittee.

Prior to issuance of a grading permit, the project Applicant or designee would be responsible for submitting a Final WQMP for the project for review and approval by the City Grading Engineer and the Community Development Director that completes the following:

- a) Incorporates approved plans, conditions of approval and any applicable CEQA mitigation measures;
- b) Incorporates a runoff management plan, or equivalent, that complies with the City's runoff water quality ordinance, grading ordinance and the *San Diego Region NPDES Permit* (Order No. R9-2013-0001, as amended by Order Nos. R9-2015-0001 and R9-2015-0100, NPDES No, CAS0109266).
- c) Incorporates the applicable Source Control BMPs as defined in the City's LIP;
- d) Incorporates the applicable Treatment Control BMPs as defined in the City's LIP;
- e) Generally describes the long-term operation and maintenance requirements for the Treatment Control BMPs;
- f) Identifies the entity that will be responsible for long-term operation and maintenance of the Treatment Control BMPs; and
- g) Describes the mechanism for funding the long-term operation and maintenance of the Treatment Control BMPs.

Transportation

A Transportation Assessment Report (TAR) was prepared for the proposed project (Appendix I). The proposed project would not conflict with any existing planning documents. The TAR concluded that once operational, the proposed project would still operate at satisfactory LOS at all studied intersections. Furthermore, the project was determined under the City Transportation Assessment Guidelines to be a non-capacity increasing project, therefore resulting in the project to be screened out from a detailed VMT analysis. Although construction activities may result in temporary lane closures, the City and its contractor would coordinate with emergency service personnel in advance of construction to ensure that temporary lane closures do not affect response time. The proposed project would result in a beneficial impact to bicycle and pedestrian facilities and would not result in adverse transportation impacts. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a significant impact related to transportation.

Scenic Highways

“(d) A categorical exception shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.”

There are no scenic highways located in the project vicinity^{1, 2}, nor any resources that could be damaged as a result of the proposed project. The proposed project would reduce travel lanes along 1.6 miles of La Paz Road and would not result in damage to a scenic resource within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.

Hazardous Waste Sites

“(e) A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.”

An Initial Site Assessment (ISA) was prepared by Verdantas (Appendix G) in September 2025 for the proposed project in accordance with ASTM Standard E1527-21, and Caltrans Project Development Procedures Manual and Standard Environmental Reference. Review of historical data dating back to 1902 indicates that the proposed project property was primarily vacant land adjacent to Sulphur Creek, which was later renamed Laguna Niguel Lake. The former Sewage Disposal Site, now the Regional Treatment Plant, was constructed in 1967. No evidence of recognized environmental

¹ California Department of Transportation, State Scenic Highway Map.
<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aaca>
 (accessed August 2025).

² California Department of Transportation, List of Eligible and Officially Designated State Scenic Highways.
<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways> (accessed August 2025).

conditions (RECs), historical RECs (HRECs) or controlled RECs (CRECs) were identified in connection with the proposed project.

The project site is not listed on the Department of Toxic Substances Control Hazardous Waste and Substances Site List (Cortese List, compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code). Project plans will include emergency procedures for responding to hazardous materials releases for materials that would be brought onto the site as part of project implementation activities. The emergency procedures for hazardous materials releases will include the necessary protective equipment, spill containment procedures, and training of workers to respond to accidental spills/releases. All use, storage, transport and disposal of hazardous materials (including any hazardous wastes) during construction activities will be performed in accordance with existing local, State, and federal hazardous materials regulations.

Historical Resources

“(f) A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.”

As discussed above, a CSRS was prepared for the proposed project, and while one prehistoric archaeological habitation site was noted in the project area, identified as CA-ORA-18, the field survey conducted for the proposed project did not find any cultural material in the previously recorded site area which is now disturbed by existing roadway, residential, and commercial buildings, and the entrance to the Laguna Niguel Regional Park. In addition, no known archaeological resources were found within the project area. As the proposed project would occur on the La Paz roadway primarily within existing City right-of-way, it is not anticipated to affect any historical resources.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the proposed project would be exempt from detailed CEQA review pursuant to Section 15301 of the *CEQA Guidelines* and would not meet any of the exceptions listed in Section 15300.2 of the *CEQA Guidelines* that would make the Categorical Exemption inapplicable.

Appendices:

- A. CEQA Checklist
- B. Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Impact Analysis Memorandum
- C. Biological Resources Assessment Technical Memorandum
- D. Cultural Resources Technical Memorandum
- E. Geotechnical Evaluation
- F. Paleontological Identification Report and Paleontological Evaluation Report
- G. Initial Site Assessment Report
- H. Noise and Vibration Memorandum
- I. Transportation Assessment Report

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