

Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project

California Environmental Quality Act Findings: Findings of Fact, Evaluation of Mitigation Measures and Alternatives

San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

In determining to approve the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project (“SSBRTE Project” or “Project”) described in Section I, Project Description, below, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (“SFPUC” or “Commission”) makes and adopts the following findings of fact and decisions regarding mitigation measures and alternatives, based on substantial evidence in the whole record of this proceeding and under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”), California Public Resources Code Sections 21000 et seq., particularly Sections 21081 and 21081.5, the Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA (“CEQA Guidelines”), 14 California Code of Regulations Sections 15000 et seq., particularly Sections 15091 through 15093, and Chapter 31 of the San Francisco Administrative Code.

This document is organized as follows:

Section I provides a description of the Project proposed for adoption, the environmental review process for the Project Environmental Impact Report (the “Final EIR” or “EIR”), Planning Department Case No. 2016-016100ENV, State Clearinghouse No. 1998082030, the approval actions to be taken and the location of records;

Section II identifies the impacts found not to be significant that do not require mitigation;

Section III identifies potentially significant impacts that can be avoided or reduced to less-than-significant levels through mitigation and describes the disposition of the mitigation measures;

Section IV identifies significant impacts that cannot be avoided or reduced to less-than-significant levels and describes any applicable mitigation measures as well as the disposition of the mitigation measures; and

Section V evaluates the different project alternatives and the economic, legal, social, technological, and other considerations that support approval of the Project and the rejection of alternatives, or elements thereof, analyzed.

Section VI presents a statement of overriding considerations setting forth specific reasons in support of this Commission’s actions and rejection of alternatives not incorporated into the Project.

The Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program ("MMRP") for the mitigation measures that have been proposed for adoption is attached with these findings as **Attachment B**. The MMRP is required by CEQA Section 21081.6 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15091. Attachment B provides a table setting forth each mitigation measure listed for the Project in the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Project ("Final EIR") that is required to reduce or avoid a significant adverse impact. Attachment B also specifies the agency responsible for implementation of each measure and establishes monitoring actions and a monitoring schedule. The full text of the mitigation measures is set forth in Attachment B. Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b has been shown in strikethrough, as the SFPUC finds that it is infeasible.

These findings are based upon substantial evidence in the entire record before this Commission. The references set forth in these findings to certain pages or sections of the Draft Environmental Impact Report ("Draft EIR" or "DEIR") or the Responses to Comments document in the Final EIR are for ease of reference and are not intended to provide an exhaustive list of the evidence relied upon for these findings.

I. Approval of the Project

The Project involves development of recreational trails and associated facilities located within the Peninsula Watershed in central San Mateo County. The Peninsula Watershed property is owned by the City and County of San Francisco and managed by the SFPUC. The Project is a component of the SFPUC's Peninsula Watershed Management Plan. The Project area includes watershed lands along the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, which is approximately 1.5 miles north of the State Route 92 (S.R. 92)/State Route 35 (S.R. 35) intersection (north of the Skylawn Memorial Park), and watershed lands extending south from S.R. 92 approximately 6 miles to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area's (GGNRA) Phleger Estate boundary and a few hundred feet east from S.R. 35.

In designing the Project, the SFPUC considered multiple public access program configurations. In response to public comments requesting the SFPUC consider multiple access options, and to allow flexibility in crafting an access program that responds to ongoing watershed management requirements as well as environmental and economic considerations, the EIR evaluates multiple access program configurations, or variants, with differing levels of restrictiveness, ranging from supervised to unsupervised. While the EIR evaluates a range of access program configurations, the proposed Project would require visitors to the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail to obtain a reservation and the supervision of a trained volunteer (similar to current access restrictions), and would require visitors to the newly constructed southern skyline ridge trail to obtain an access permit, but would not require a reservation or docent. After reviewing the EIR's conclusions, the SFPUC has determined that the access program for the proposed Project is the configuration that is most consistent with the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan goals and best meets the Project objectives. These findings address the proposed Project with the proposed access program evaluated in the EIR.

A. Project Description

By this action, the SFPUC adopts and implements the Project, as identified in the Final EIR. The Project as adopted by this Commission is described in detail in the Draft EIR in Chapter 2. Clarifications and revisions to the Project description are contained in the Responses to Comments document in Chapter 9, as well as an Errata to the Response to Comments Document dated April 19, 2021. A summary of the key components of the Project follows.

The Project would include the construction of several public access improvements and amenities in the Peninsula Watershed, both north and south of S.R. 92. Specifically, the Project adopted by the SFPUC includes installation and/or construction of the following:

South of S.R. 92:

- A new 6-foot-wide, 6-mile-long ridge trail along S.R. 35¹ (“southern skyline ridge trail”), composed of an aggregate (rock) base, some of which may be sealed with a natural resin;
- A new paved parking lot near the new trailhead, with parking for 20 cars and four horse trailers;
- Nine gated access drives (five new and four existing) between S.R. 35 and the southern skyline ridge trail, allowing for construction and operations access;
- Two new prefabricated restrooms along the new trail;
- Retaining walls at six locations to stabilize slopes and establish a terrace for building trail segments, and a 30-foot-long prefabricated bridge at one location to allow for passage over a gully; and
- Barrier rail fencing along trail segments with retaining walls (approximately 1,380 linear feet), and wildlife-friendly barbed-wire fence along approximately 5.5 miles of the trail’s eastern frontage and 3.6 miles of the trail’s western frontage.

North of S.R. 92:

- A new 0.5-mile universal access loop trail (that provides Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant access) along the existing Fifield-Cahill ridge trail,² composed of native material on compacted structural fill and sealed with a resin surface;
- Educational/interpretive signage at the universal access loop trailhead and at 13 other locations along the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail;
- A new parking area at the universal access loop trailhead, sealed with a resin surface, providing four Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant parking stalls and a school bus parking space and turnaround;
- A new paved parking lot approximately 0.5 mile south of the new trailhead, with parking for 50 cars and four horse trailers;

¹ S.R. 35 is also Skyline Boulevard in this location.

² The Fifield-Cahill ridge trail extends from Golden Gate National Recreation Area’s Sweeney Ridge Trail south through the watershed along the Fifield and Cahill service roads to S.R. 92.

- One new prefabricated restroom within the 50-car parking lot; and
- Repairs and improvements to the gates and fencing at existing Fifield-Cahill ridge trail accessways (i.e., Portola Gate in the north and Cemetery Gate in the south), new road gates and bollards on Cahill Ridge Road (a service road) south of Cemetery Gate to limit vehicles to the access road and parking area only, and split-rail fencing (approximately 560 linear feet) along the western perimeter of the 50-car parking lot.

Under the Project, visitor access would be managed differently for the Fifield-Cahill and southern skyline ridge trails. Visitors to the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail would need a reservation and the supervision of a trained volunteer (i.e., docent), similar to current access restrictions. Visitors to the southern skyline ridge trail would need to obtain an access permit, but would not require a reservation or docent. For both trails, access would be provided via designated trailheads and watershed access points. Each of these access points would have a lockable gate, which would remain locked except during the designated access hours.

For the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, the access program would allow groups of up to 20 hikers, bicyclists, or equestrians, under the supervision of an SFPUC-approved docent. A maximum of three trail event itineraries could be scheduled per day, four days per week (i.e., Fifield-Cahill ridge trail access would be limited to 60 people per day, 240 per week, 12,480 per year). The trail would be accessible during regular business hours, with seasonal adjustments based on the timing of daylight hours.

For the southern skyline ridge trail, the access program would allow unsupervised access to hikers, bicyclists, or equestrians with a permit. Permits could be obtained through the SFPUC's public website or, for those without internet access, by contacting the SFPUC's community liaison. Prior to receiving a permit, applicants would be required to complete an educational program about the watershed's purpose and function, its sensitive resources, and visitor rules and restrictions. Permits would be valid for approximately one year and would allow for up to five participants, for whom the permittee would be responsible. SFPUC staff and/or SFPUC-trained volunteers/docents would patrol the trails daily to monitor visitors' activities and check for valid permits and would enforce the permit program and watershed visitation rules. The trail would be accessible seven days per week, for approximately eight hours per day during daylight hours (depending on the season), with no restrictions on the number of trail users. With unsupervised access, up to approximately 50,020 visitors per year could visit the southern skyline ridge trail.³

The Project would include interpretive educational information for recreational users. In addition, the Project would provide for SFPUC- and volunteer-hosted school program visits to the improved trail areas. The interpretive and educational programming would be based upon recommendations contained in the Interpretive Master Plan for the Peninsula Watershed. The master plan draws upon the results of background research, site observations, visitor surveys, stakeholder interviews, and planning sessions, among other resources, to establish a vision

³ CHS Consulting Group, Memorandum from Jill Hough (CHS) to Elijah Davidian (Environmental Science Associates), re: Travel Demand and Vehicle Miles Traveled Estimates for Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension, March 22, 2018.

interpretive and educational programming in association with the proposed Fifield-Cahill ridge trail and southern skyline ridge trail improvements.⁴

SFPUC staff would maintain the Project components in a manner similar to that of other trails and trail facilities in the watershed. As with existing facilities, the SFPUC would manage and maintain the new trail segments and facilities in accordance with the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan. Typical maintenance activities would include periodic (e.g., monthly) inspection of trail infrastructure, such as the trail and parking lot surfaces, retaining walls, and drainage facilities), with more frequent inspection of restroom and security facilities (i.e., weekly). In addition, the SFPUC would continue to maintain (e.g., patch) watershed roads, including portions of the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, every two to five years.

Consistent with current vegetation management activities in the watershed, the SFPUC would implement measures to maintain access to the new Project components and reduce fire and tree-fall hazards in their vicinity. Generally, these activities would occur within a buffer area of about 5 to 10 feet on either side of Project trails and amenities. Vegetation management methods could include hand removal (e.g., pruning), mechanical removal (e.g., mowing or string-cutting), and herbicide applications. SFPUC staff would continue to annually mow the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail edges to reduce ignitable fuels, and periodically mow or masticate the vegetated fuelbreak network to reduce fuels where roadways are co-located with vegetated fuelbreaks. Vegetation management could also include hydroseeding, seeding, and/or planting propagules and new trees and shrubs in areas where habitat enhancement or erosion control are needed.

Prior to undertaking vegetation maintenance and consistent with current practice, SFPUC staff would conduct a biological survey to determine whether the area contains special-status species and habitat, as well as to identify and avoid bird nests. Surveyors would flag and map special-status plant species, including host plants for special-status butterflies, in the field for avoidance. Currently, the SFPUC uses survey markers to delineate areas of sensitive species avoidance. The SFPUC biologist would upload location information for special-status species to a database, which would be available to the maintenance operator.

The Project would also involve the transfer, from the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council to the SFPUC, of a public access easement along a 1-mile segment of paved roadway within the Skylawn Memorial Park. The easement is currently designated as Bay Area Ridge Trail. The City and County of San Francisco owns the roadways extending north and south of the easement, which are also already designated as Bay Area Ridge Trail. The SFPUC would accept and record the perpetual easement from the trail council as part of the project to facilitate consistent and efficient management of this portion of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

⁴ SFPUC, 2019, *Peninsula Watershed Trails Interpretive Master Plan*, October 2019.

B. Project Objectives

The Project is part of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan. The management plan identifies primary and secondary goals for the watershed, as follows, which form the basis for the plan's policies and actions:

- Primary goal:
 - Maintain and improve source water quality to protect public health and safety.
- Secondary goals:
 - Maximize water supply;
 - Preserve and enhance the ecological and cultural resources of the watershed;
 - Protect the watersheds, adjacent urban areas, and the public from fire and other hazards;
 - Continue existing compatible uses and provide opportunities for potential compatible uses on watershed lands, including educational, recreational, and scientific uses;
 - Provide a fiscal framework that balances financial resources, revenue-generating activities, and overall benefits, and an administrative framework that allows implementation of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan; and
 - Enhance public awareness of water quality, water supply, conservation, and watershed protection issues.

Consistent with the management plan's goals, the Project aims to expand opportunities for educational, recreational, and scientific uses on watershed lands. These expanded opportunities are intended to facilitate increased public awareness of water quality, water supply, conservation, and watershed protection issues. The Project seeks to enable such access while continuing to preserve and enhance the watershed's natural and cultural resources, and to minimize hazards and risks through specific access management and security provisions. The specific objectives of the Project are as follows:

- Enhance public awareness of water quality, water supply, ecological, and watershed protection issues by providing compatible recreational opportunities in the Peninsula Watershed;
- Provide opportunities to educate the general public about the SFPUC's responsibilities as a regional water supplier and owner of the Peninsula Watershed, including its unique and diverse habitats;
- Extend the Bay Area Ridge Trail south from S.R. 92 to the GGNRA's Phleger Estate;

- Improve the existing Fifield-Cahill ridge trail to enhance access (including access for people with disabilities), parking, and restroom facilities;
- Support the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council’s goal of creating a continuous multi-modal (pedestrian, bicycle, equestrian) trail that loops the San Francisco Bay.

C. Environmental Review

1. *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan Environmental Impact Report*

The SFPUC developed the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan in the 1990s to address the management of watershed lands in a comprehensive and integrated manner. The management plan consists of a collection of goals, policies, and management actions that address both long-term management objectives and day-to-day operations and maintenance activities. Among these management plan components are specific policies and management actions in response to the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council’s request that the Bay Area Ridge Trail be routed through a portion of the Peninsula Watershed. The San Francisco Planning Department prepared an EIR (management plan EIR) evaluating the physical effects of the management plan on the environment, including those resulting from publicly accessible recreational trails north and south of S.R. 92.⁵ The management plan EIR evaluates public access improvements north of S.R. 92 (Fifield-Cahill ridge trail) at a project level, and evaluates public access improvements south of S.R. 92 (southern skyline ridge trail) at a more conceptual program level. The San Francisco Planning Commission certified the management plan EIR in January 2001 (Motion No. 16066). The SFPUC adopted CEQA findings and the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan in June 2001 (Resolution No. 01-0140). In December 2002, the SFPUC adopted CEQA findings and a Peninsula Watershed Management Plan amendment specific to the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, and approved improvements along that trail segment (Resolution No. 02-0265).

2. *Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project Environmental Impact Report*

In the years since completion of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan and EIR, the SFPUC has identified funding opportunities that now make implementation of trail improvements south of S.R 92 more feasible. Accordingly, the southern skyline ridge trail concept has been refined, and details of location, construction, and operation are now available. In addition, the SFPUC has identified a number of additional access improvements for the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail. The potential environmental effects of these improvements are addressed in a new, project-specific Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project EIR (“EIR”).

In accordance with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines, the Planning Department, as lead agency, prepared and published a Notice of Preparation ("NOP") on December 21, 2016, and a revised NOP on March 30, 2017. Publication of the NOPs initiated two 30-day public scoping

⁵ San Francisco Planning Department, *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Report*, File No. 96.22E; State Clearinghouse No. 98082030, certified January 11, 2001, www.sfwater.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentID=4343, accessed May 18, 2018.

periods – from December 21, 2016 to February 3, 2017, and from March 30, 2017 to April 29, 2017, respectively. The Planning Department distributed copies of the NOP to the State Clearinghouse and mailed notices of the availability of the NOP to approximately 300 interested parties, including owners and occupants of properties within 300 feet of project sites. The Planning Department held a scoping meeting on January 18, 2017 at the SFPUC offices in San Francisco. The scoping meeting was noticed in local newspapers. Approximately six people attended the meeting.

The Planning Department received five oral comments at the scoping meeting and 51 written comment letters and emails during the initial scoping period, and an additional 10 comments during the extended comment period. The comments are included in the Scoping Summary Memorandum and Addendum in Appendix A of the Final EIR.

The Planning Department then prepared the Draft EIR, which describes the Project and the environmental setting, identifies potential impacts, presents mitigation measures for impacts found to be significant or potentially significant, and evaluates project alternatives. The Draft EIR analyzes the impacts associated with each of the key components of the Project, and identifies mitigation measures applicable to reduce impacts found to be significant or potentially significant for each key component. It also includes an analysis of four alternatives to the Project. In assessing construction and operational impacts of the Project, the EIR considers the impacts of the Project as well as the cumulative impacts associated with the Project in combination with other past, present, and future actions that could affect the same resources.

Each environmental issue presented in the Draft EIR was analyzed with respect to significance criteria that are based on Planning Department guidance regarding the environmental effects to be considered significant. Planning department guidance is, in turn, based on CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, with some modifications.

The Draft EIR was circulated for public comment on June 24, 2020 for a 47-day comment period, which closed at 5:00 p.m. on August 10, 2020. On July 23, 2020, the San Francisco Planning Commission (“Planning Commission”) held a public hearing on the Draft EIR to accept oral comments. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, the Planning Commission was required to conduct the meeting remotely, with public participation via internet and telephone. During the public review period, the Planning Department received approximately 418 written comments submitted through email, and oral comments from seven speakers during the public hearing. A transcript of the hearing was prepared which includes verbatim transcriptions of the oral comments.

The Planning Department then prepared the Responses to Comments, which includes copies of all of the comments received on the Draft EIR and provides written responses to each. The Responses to Comments was published on April 14, 2021, and distributed to the Planning Commission and to those persons who submitted comments on the Draft EIR, in compliance with CEQA Guidelines section 15088. The Responses to Comments provides additional, updated information and clarification on issues raised by commenters, as well as SFPUC and Planning Department staff-initiated text changes to address Project updates. Specifically, the document augments and updates information presented in the Draft EIR, on the following topics: project

description, plans and policies, transportation and circulation, noise, biological resources, hydrology and water quality, hazards, public services, and alternatives. This augmentation and update of information in the Draft EIR does not constitute new information or significance that alters any of the EIR conclusions. The Planning Commission reviewed and considered the Final EIR, which includes the Draft EIR, the Responses to Comments, and an Errata to the Responses to Comments dated April 19, 2021, and all of the supporting information.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on April 29, 2021 to consider the adequacy of the Final EIR (comprised of the Responses to Comments, Errata to the Responses to Comments, and the Draft EIR) in complying with the requirements of CEQA. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 emergency, the public hearing was held remotely. The Planning Commission found that the Final EIR complies with CEQA, the CEQA Guidelines, and Chapter 31 of the San Francisco Administrative Code, and certified the Final EIR in its Motion No. 20900

The SFPUC has reviewed and considered the Final EIR in making this decision to approve the Project. In approving the Project, the SFPUC adopts these CEQA findings, including adopting all feasible mitigation measures identified for the Project, rejecting the alternatives that avoid or reduce significant impacts, and adopting the MMRP attached as Exhibit B. Consistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15097, the MMRP is a program designed to ensure implementation of the feasible mitigation measures identified in the Final EIR to reduce or avoid the Project's significant environmental effects, and which the SFPUC has adopted as part of the conditions of project approval.

The EIR identifies significant adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated to less-than-significant levels. Therefore, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15093(b), the Project approval findings require a statement of overriding considerations. This Commission adopts a statement of overriding considerations for the Project, as set forth below in Section VI.

In certifying the Final EIR, the Planning Commission determined that none of the factors are present that would necessitate recirculation of the Final EIR under CEQA Guidelines Section 15088.5. The Final EIR contains no information revealing (1) any new significant environmental impact that would result from the Project or from a new mitigation measure proposed to be implemented, (2) any substantial increase in the severity of a previously identified environmental impact, (3) any feasible project alternative or mitigation measure considerably different from others previously analyzed that would clearly lessen the environmental impacts of the Project, but that was rejected by the Project's proponents, or (4) that the Draft EIR was so fundamentally and basically inadequate and conclusory in nature that meaningful public review and comment were precluded. This Commission concurs in that determination.

This Commission finds that the Project is within the scope of the Project analyzed in the Final EIR and the Final EIR fully analyzed the Project proposed for approval. No new impacts have been identified that were not analyzed in the Final EIR.

D. Approval Actions

Under San Francisco's Administrative Code Chapter 31 procedures, the Planning Commission certifies the Final EIR as complete and all approving bodies subject to CEQA adopt CEQA findings at the time of the approval actions. Anticipated approval actions are listed below.

1. *San Francisco Public Utilities Commission*

The SFPUC is taking the following actions and approvals to implement the Project:

- Adopts these CEQA findings and the attached Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.
- Approves the Project, as described in these findings, and authorizes the General Manager or his designee to obtain necessary permits, consents, agreements, and approvals as set forth in this Commission's Resolution approving the Project to which this Attachment A is attached, including execution of an agreement to effectuate the transfer to the SFPUC of a public access easement from the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council.
- At a future public meeting, the Commission will consider awarding a contract to construct the Project.

2. *San Francisco Board of Supervisors Actions*

- Considers any appeal of the Planning Commission's certification of the Final EIR.
- Releases appropriated funds for implementation of the Project.
- Approve SFPUC acceptance of a public access easement from the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council.

3. *Other – Federal, State, and Local Agencies*

Implementation of the Project may involve consultation with or required approvals by other local, state, and federal regulatory agencies, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Federal Highway Administration issuance of grant funding for construction of the southern skyline ridge trail after completion of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance (Caltrans acting as designated NEPA lead agency)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service consultation under section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biological opinion or habitat conservation plan, if the Project cannot avoid substantial adverse effects on federally listed species
- California State Historic Preservation Office consultation under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

- California Department of Transportation encroachment permit for construction-related activity
- California Department of Transportation transportation permit, if project work requires oversized or excessive-load vehicles on state roadways
- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection permit, or determination of exemption from permit requirements, for the removal of trees in a timberland area
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife California Endangered Species Act permit (Section 2081 incidental take permit), if the Project cannot avoid substantial adverse effects on species listed under the act

To the extent that the identified mitigation measures require consultation or approval by these other agencies, this Commission urges these agencies to assist in implementing, coordinating, or approving the mitigation measures, as appropriate to the particular measure.

E. Contents and Location of Records

The record upon which all findings and determinations related to the Project are based (“Record of Proceedings”) includes the following:

- The Draft EIR and all documents referenced in or relied upon by the EIR, including technical memoranda and reports prepared by the Planning Department, the SFPUC, and the EIR consultants and sub-consultants. (The references in these findings to the EIR or Final EIR include both the Draft EIR, the Responses to Comments, and the Errata to the Response to Comments dated April 19, 2021.)
- The Peninsula Watershed Management Plan EIR, which is incorporated by reference in the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project EIR.
- All information (including written evidence and testimony) provided by city staff to the SFPUC and Planning Commission relating to the EIR, the Project, and the alternatives set forth in the EIR.
- All information (including written evidence and testimony) presented to the SFPUC and the Planning Commission by the environmental consultant and sub-consultants who prepared the EIR or that was incorporated into reports presented to the SFPUC.
- All information presented at any public hearing related to the Project and the EIR.
- The Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.
- All other documents available to the SFPUC and the public, comprising the administrative record pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21167.6(e).

This Commission has relied on all of the information listed above in reaching its decision on the Project, even if not every document was formally presented to the SFPUC. Without exception, these documents fall into one of two categories. Many documents reflect prior planning or legislative decisions that the SFPUC was aware of in approving the Project. Other documents influenced the expert advice provided to Planning Department staff or consultants, who then provided advice to the SFPUC. For these reasons, such documents form part of the underlying factual basis for the SFPUC's decisions relating to the adoption of the Project.

The public hearing transcript, a copy of all letters regarding the Draft EIR received during the public review period, the administrative record, and background documentation for the Final EIR are available electronically and at the San Francisco Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Fourth Floor, San Francisco. **Jonas P. Ionin**, Commission Secretary, is the Custodian of Records for the Planning Department. Materials concerning approval of the Project and adoption of these findings are contained in SFPUC files, SFPUC Project No. CUW2751801, at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, 525 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, California 94102. The Custodian of Records is Donna Hood, Commission Secretary. All files have been made available to the SFPUC and the public for review in considering these findings and whether to approve the Project.

F. Findings about Significant Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The following Sections II, III, and IV set forth the SFPUC's findings about the Final EIR's determinations regarding significant environmental impacts and the mitigation measures proposed to address them. These findings provide the written analysis and conclusions of the SFPUC regarding the environmental impacts of the Project and the mitigation measures included as part of the Final EIR and adopted by the SFPUC as part of the Project. To avoid duplication and redundancy, and because the SFPUC agrees with, and hereby adopts, the conclusions in the Final EIR, these findings will not repeat the analysis and conclusions in the Final EIR but instead incorporate them by reference and rely upon them as substantial evidence supporting these findings.

In making these findings, the SFPUC has considered the opinions of SFPUC staff and experts, other agencies, and members of the public. The SFPUC finds that (i) the determination of significance thresholds is a judgment decision within the discretion of the City and County of San Francisco; (ii) the significance thresholds used in the EIR are supported by substantial evidence in the record, including the expert opinion of the EIR preparers and city staff; and (iii) the significance thresholds used in the EIR provide reasonable and appropriate means of assessing the significance of the adverse environmental effects of the Project. Thus, although, as a legal matter, the SFPUC is not bound by the significance determinations in the EIR (see Public Resources Code, Section 21082.2, subdivision (e)), the SFPUC finds them persuasive and hereby adopts them as its own.

These findings do not attempt to describe the full analysis of each environmental impact contained in the Final EIR. Instead, a full explanation of these environmental findings and

conclusions can be found in the Final EIR, and these findings hereby incorporate by reference the discussion and analysis in the Final EIR supporting the determination regarding the Project impact and mitigation measures designed to address those impacts. In making these findings, the SFPUC ratifies, adopts and incorporates in these findings the determinations and conclusions of the Final EIR relating to environmental impacts and mitigation measures, except to the extent any such determinations and conclusions are specifically and expressly modified by these findings.

As set forth below, the SFPUC adopts and incorporates all of the feasible mitigation measures set forth in the Final EIR and the attached MMRP to substantially lessen or avoid the potentially significant and significant impacts of the Project. The SFPUC intends to adopt all feasible mitigation measures identified in the Final EIR for the Project. Accordingly, in the event a feasible mitigation measure recommended in the Final EIR has inadvertently been omitted in these findings or the MMRP, such mitigation measure is hereby adopted and incorporated in the findings below by reference. In addition, in the event the language describing a mitigation measure set forth in these findings or the MMRP fails to accurately reflect the mitigation measures in the Final EIR due to a clerical error, the language of the policies and implementation measures as set forth in the Final EIR shall control. The impact numbers and mitigation measure numbers used in these findings reflect the information contained in the Final EIR.

In Sections II, III and IV below, the same findings are made for a category of environmental impacts and mitigation measures. Rather than repeat the identical finding dozens of times to address each and every significant effect and mitigation measure, the initial finding obviates the need for such repetition because, with the exception of Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b, the SFPUC adopts the conclusions of the Final EIR and the feasible mitigation measures recommended in the Final EIR for the Project. Findings regarding the feasibility of specific mitigation measures are made in Section IV.

II. Impacts Found Not To Be Significant and Thus Do Not Require Mitigation

Under CEQA, no mitigation measures are required for impacts that are less than significant (Public Resources Code, Section 21002; CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15126.4, subdivision (a)(3), 15091). In addition to topics analyzed in detail, the EIR identifies topics for which detailed environmental analysis is not required. As explained in Section 4.13, based upon the analysis presented in the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan EIR and subsequent project-level analysis, the EIR concludes the Project would have no impacts or less-than-significant impacts related to the following topics: land use, population and housing, wind and shadow, recreation, utilities and service systems, mineral and energy resources, public services, and agricultural and forestry resources. Based on the evidence in the whole record of this proceeding, the SFPUC finds that the implementation of the Project will result in no impact or less-than-significant impacts for these topics, which are not further discussed in these findings.

The SFPUC further finds that implementation of the Project would not result in any significant impacts in the following additional topics and that these impact areas therefore do not require mitigation:

Aesthetics

- **Impact AE-1:** Project construction would not result in a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas; would not substantially damage scenic resources that contribute to a scenic public setting; and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the site or its surroundings. (DEIR Section 4.2.3.4, Pages 4.2-11 to 4.2-13)
- **Impact AE-2:** Project operation would not result in a substantial adverse effect on scenic vistas; would not substantially damage scenic resources that contribute to a scenic public setting; and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character of the site or its surroundings. (DEIR Section 4.2.3.4, Pages 4.2-13 to 4.2-17)
- **Impact C-AE-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects, would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts on aesthetic resources. (DEIR Section 4.2.3.4, Pages 4.2-17 to 4.2-18)

Cultural Resources

- **Impact C-CU-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects, would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts on historical resources, archeological resources, or human remains. (DEIR Section 4.3.3.4, Pages 4.3-22 to 4.3-23)

Transportation and Circulation

- **Impact TR-1:** Construction of the project would not substantially conflict with an applicable plan, ordinance, or policy establishing measures of effectiveness for the performance of the circulation system, taking into account all modes of travel. (DEIR Section 4.4.3.4, Pages 4.4-9 to 4.4-12)
- **Impact TR-2:** Project construction activities would not result in inadequate emergency access. (DEIR Section 4.4.3.4, Page 4.4-12)
- **Impact TR-3:** Project construction activities would not result in potentially hazardous conditions for vehicles, bicyclists, and pedestrians. (DEIR Section 4.4.3.4, Pages 4.4-13 to 4.4-14)
- **Impact TR-4:** Operation of the project would not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a transportation and circulation impact. (DEIR Section 4.4.3.4, Pages 4.4-14 to 4.4-18)
- **Impact C-TR-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects, would not substantially affect transportation and circulation. (DEIR Section 4.4.3.4, Pages 4.4-25 to 4.4-25)

Noise and Vibration

- **Impact NO-2:** Construction activities would not result in excessive groundborne vibration. (DEIR Section 4.5.3.4, Pages 4.5-18 to 4.5-19)

- **Impact NO-3:** Project operations would not result in a substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels at the closest receptors or expose people to substantial noise levels in excess of standards established in the San Mateo County Noise Ordinance. (DEIR Section 4.5.3.4, Pages 4.5-19 to 4.5-21)
- **Impact C-NO-1:** Construction of the project combined with cumulative construction noise in the project area would not cause a substantial temporary or periodic increase in ambient noise levels near the Project area. (DEIR Section 4.5.3.4, Page 4.5-21)

Air Quality

- **Impact AQ-2:** Project construction activities would not create objectionable odors that affect a substantial number of people. (DEIR Section 4.6.3.4, Page 4.6-18)
- **Impact AQ-3:** Project construction activities would not expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations. (DEIR Section 4.6.3.4, Pages 4.6-18 to 4.6-19)
- **Impact AQ-4:** Emissions generated during project operation would not violate air quality standards and contribute substantially to an existing air quality violation. (DEIR Section 4.6.3.4, Pages 4.6-19 to 4.6-21)
- **Impact AQ-5:** Project operations would not create objectionable odors that affect a substantial number of people. (DEIR Section 4.6.3.4, Pages 4.6-21 to 4.6-22)

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- **Impact C-GG-1:** Project construction and operation would not generate GHG emissions that could have a significant impact on the environment, or conflict with any applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing GHG emissions. (DEIR Section 4.7.3.4, Pages 4.7-11 to 4.7-14)

Biological Resources

- **Impact BI-4:** Project operations could result in substantial adverse impacts on special-status plants. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-85 to 4.8-89)
- **Impact BI-6:** The project would not result in operational impacts on sensitive natural communities, including riparian habitat and wetlands. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-110 to 4.8-113)
- **Impact BI-8:** Construction of the project would not conflict with local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-121 to 4.8-122)
- **Impact C-BI-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects, would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts on biological resources. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-123 to 4.8-125)

Geology, Soils, and Paleontology

- **Impact GE-1:** Project construction would not result in substantial erosion or loss of topsoil during construction. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Pages 4.9-16 to 4.9-17)
- **Impact GE-2:** The project is located on a geologic unit that is potentially unstable, but would not increase the potential for landsliding, collapse, or other slope failures during construction. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Pages 4.9-18 to 4.9-19)
- **Impact GE-3:** Construction of the project would not substantially alter the topography of the proposed trail alignment. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Page 4.9-19)
- **Impact GE-4:** The project would not directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource during construction. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Pages 4.9-19 to 4.9-20)
- **Impact GE-5:** The project would not expose people or structures to the risk of loss, injury, or death involving seismic groundshaking, seismically induced landslides, or potentially unstable geologic units during operation. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Pages 4.9-20 to 4.9-22)
- **Impact GE-6:** Runoff from the permanent project components would not result in substantial erosion or loss of topsoil during operation. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Pages 4.9-23 to 4.9-24)
- **Impact GE-7:** Use of the trails under the proposed access program and variants would not result in substantial erosion or loss of topsoil during operation. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Pages 4.9-24 to 4.9-27)
- **Impact C-GE-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects, would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts on geology, soils, or paleontological resources. (DEIR Section 4.9.3.4, Page 4.9-27)

Hydrology and Water Quality

- **Impact HY-1:** Construction of the project would not violate water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, otherwise substantially degrade water quality, or alter existing drainage patterns. (DEIR Section 4.10.3.4, Pages 4.10-13 to 4.10-16)
- **Impact HY-2:** Stormwater runoff from permanent project components would not violate water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, otherwise substantially degrade water quality, exceed the capacity of an existing or planned stormwater drainage system, provide a substantial additional source of polluted runoff, or alter drainage patterns. (DEIR Section 4.10.3.4, Pages 4.10-16 to 4.10-20)
- **Impact HY-3:** Use of the trails under the proposed access program and variants would not violate water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, otherwise substantially degrade water quality, exceed the capacity of an existing or planned stormwater drainage system, provide a substantial additional source of polluted runoff, or alter drainage patterns. (DEIR Section 4.10.3.4, Pages 4.10-21 to 4.10-24)
- **Impact C-HY-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects in the site vicinity, would not result in significant adverse cumulative hydrology impacts. (DEIR Section 4.10.3.4, Page 4.10-25)

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

- **Impact HZ-1:** Project construction would not result in a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-19 to 4.11-20)
- **Impact HZ-2:** Project construction would not create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials present in the soil. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-20 to 4.11-21)
- **Impact HZ-3:** Project construction would not result in a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable conditions involving the release of naturally occurring asbestos. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-21 to 4.11-23)
- **Impact HZ-4:** Project construction would not impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-23 to 4.11-24)
- **Impact HZ-6:** The project would not create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials present in the soil during operation. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-25 to 4.11-26)
- **Impact HZ-7:** The project would not impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-26 to 4.11-27)
- **Impact C-HZ-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects, would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts related to hazards and hazardous materials. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-34 to 4.11-35)

Tribal Cultural Resources

- **Impact C-TCR-1:** The project, in combination with past, present, and probable future projects, would not substantially contribute to cumulative impacts on tribal cultural resources. (DEIR Section 4.12.3.4, Pages 4.12-10 to 4.12-11)

III. Findings of Potentially Significant or Significant Impacts That Can Be Avoided or Reduced to a Less-Than-Significant Level through Mitigation and the Disposition of the Mitigation Measures

CEQA requires agencies to adopt mitigation measures that would avoid or substantially lessen a project's identified significant impacts or potentially significant impacts if such measures are feasible (unless mitigation to such levels is achieved through adoption of a project alternative). The findings in this Section III and in Section IV concern mitigation measures set forth in the

EIR. These findings discuss mitigation measures as proposed in the EIR and recommended for adoption by the SFPUC, which can be implemented by the SFPUC. The mitigation measures proposed for adoption in this section and referenced following each Project impact discussed in this Section III, are the same as the mitigation measures identified in the Final EIR for the Project. The full text of each mitigation measure listed in this section is contained in the Final EIR and in Attachment B, the MMRP. Attachment B identifies the SFPUC as the agency responsible for the implementation of all mitigation measures and establishes monitoring actions and a monitoring schedule.

This Commission recognizes that some of the mitigation measures are partially within the jurisdiction of other agencies. The agencies and measures are:

- San Francisco Planning Department: Mitigation Measure M-CU-1: Accidental Discovery of Archeological Resources and Human Remains; Mitigation Measure M-AQ 1: Tier 4 Engines for Selected Equipment; Mitigation Measure M-TCR-1: Tribal Cultural Resources Preservation Plan and/or Interpretive Program;
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife: Mitigation Measure M-BI-1c: Revegetation Plan; Mitigation Measure M-BI-2a: Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Special-Status Reptiles and Amphibians; Mitigation Measure M-BI-2c: Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Dusky-footed Woodrat and American Badger;
- California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection: Mitigation Measure M-HZ-5: Fire Safety During Construction; M-HZ-8: Fire Management Plan;
- California Department of Transportation: Mitigation Measure M-TR-5a: Installation of Signage;
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: M-BI-2a: Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Special-Status Reptiles and Amphibians; M-BI-2d: Measures to Minimize Disturbance to Nesting Bird Species.

This Commission urges these other agencies to assist in implementing these mitigation measures and finds that these agencies can and should participate in implementing these mitigation measures, and the SFPUC will maintain primary responsibility for implementing these measures and coordinating with these other agencies.

As explained further in Section IV., at this time, this Commission declines to adopt Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b: Construction of a Pedestrian/Bicycle/Equestrian Bridge or Roundabout because that mitigation measure is infeasible. This Commission adopts all other mitigation measures proposed for the Project and listed in the MMRP. This Commission finds that all such feasible mitigation measures are appropriate, and that changes or alternations will be required in, or incorporated into, the Project that mitigate or avoid the significant environmental effects as identified in the Final EIR. This Commission finds that for the reasons set forth in the Final EIR

and elsewhere in the record, the impacts identified in this section would be reduced to a less-than-significant level through implementation of the mitigation measures identified in this section.

Cultural Resources

Impact CU-1: Project construction could cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archeological resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15064.5. (DEIR Section 4.3.3.4, Pages 4.3-15 to 4.3-18)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 would reduce impacts on previously unrecorded and buried (or otherwise obscured) archaeological deposits to less-than-significant levels by requiring the SFPUC and its contractors to adhere to the appropriate procedures and protocols to identify and appropriately treat possible archaeological resources discovered during Project construction activities.

- *Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 – Accidental Discovery of Archeological Resources and Human Remains*

Impact CU-2: Project construction could disturb human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries. (DEIR Section 4.3.3.4, Pages 4.3-18 to 4.3-19)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 would reduce impacts on buried human remains and associated or unassociated funerary objects that are accidentally discovered during Project construction activities to less-than-significant levels by requiring the SFPUC to notify the San Mateo County Coroner and, if it is determined the remains are Native American, to solicit the Most Likely Descendant's recommendations and adhere to appropriate excavation, removal, recordation, analysis, custodianship, curation, and final disposition protocols.

- *Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 – Accidental Discovery of Archeological Resources and Human Remains.*

Impact CU-3: Project operations could cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archeological resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15064.5. (DEIR Section 4.3.3.4, Pages 4.3-20 to 4.3-21)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 would reduce impacts on previously unrecorded and buried (or otherwise obscured) archaeological deposits to less-than-significant levels by requiring the SFPUC and its contractors adhere to the appropriate procedures and protocols to identify and appropriately treat possible archaeological resources discovered during Project operations, including public access and ground-disturbing maintenance activities.

- *Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 – Accidental Discovery of Archeological Resources and Human Remains.*

Impact CU-4: Project operations could disturb human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries. (DEIR Section 4.3.3.4, Pages 4.3-21 to 4.3-22)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 would reduce any impacts on buried human remains and associated or unassociated funerary objects that are accidentally discovered during project operations, including public access and ground-disturbing maintenance activities, to less-than-significant levels by requiring the SFPUC to notify the San Mateo County Coroner and, if the remains are determined to be Native American, to solicit the Most Likely Descendant's recommendations and adhere to appropriate excavation, removal, recordation, analysis, custodianship, curation, and final disposition protocols.

- *Mitigation Measure M-CU-1 – Accidental Discovery of Archeological Resources and Human Remains.*

Noise and Vibration

Impact NO-1: Construction of the Project would result in a substantial temporary increase in ambient noise levels at the closest receptors, and could expose people to substantial noise levels in excess of standards established in the San Mateo County Noise Ordinance. (DEIR Section 4.5.3.4, Pages 4.5-13 to 4.5-18)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-NO-1 would reduce impacts from Project construction noise by requiring the SFPUC and its contractors to adhere to construction noticing requirements, limitations on hours of construction, and technical and operational methods for reducing noise impacts.

- *Mitigation Measure M-NO-1 – Construction Noise Reduction.*

Air Quality

Impact AQ-1: Emissions generated during project construction activities could violate air quality standards and contribute substantially to an existing air quality violation. (DEIR Section 4.6.3.4, Pages 4.6-14 to 4.6-18)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-AQ-1a and M-AQ-1b would reduce any impacts from exhaust emissions and fugitive dust during Project construction to less-than-significant levels by requiring the use of construction equipment with engines meeting Tier 4 off-road emission standards and implementing best management practices to minimize dust emissions, criteria pollutants, and precursor emissions associated with project construction.

- *Mitigation Measure M-AQ-1a – Tier 4 Engines for Selected Equipment.*

Impact AQ-6: Implementation of the Project could conflict with or obstruct implementation of the 2017 Clean Air Plan. (DEIR Section 4.6.3.4, Pages 4.6-22 to 4.6-23)

The project would be consistent with applicable Clean Air Plan control measures and would not hinder implementation of the Clean Air Plan by implementing Mitigation Measure M-AQ-1a and M-AQ-1b. These measures would reduce construction-related pollutant emissions to a less-than-significant level by requiring the use of construction equipment with engines meeting Tier 4 off-

road emission standards and implementing best management practices to minimize criteria pollutants.

- *Mitigation Measure M-AQ-1a – Tier 4 Engines for Selected Equipment.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-AQ-1b – Bay Area Air Quality Management District Basic Construction Measures.*

Impact C-AQ-1: Construction and operation of the Project could result in cumulatively considerable increases of criteria pollutant emissions. (DEIR Section 4.6.3.4, Page 4.6-24)

See Impacts AQ-1. Implementation of the listed mitigation measures would reduce the Project's contribution to cumulative impacts to a less-than-significant level.

- *Mitigation Measure M-AQ-1a – Tier 4 Engines for Selected Equipment.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-AQ-1b – Bay Area Air Quality Management District Basic Construction Measures.*

Biological Resources

Impact BI-1: Construction of the Project could result in substantial adverse impacts on special-status plants. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-47 to 4.8-56)

Implementation of Mitigation Measures M-BI-1a through M-BI-1d would reduce potential construction-related impacts from the Project on special-status plants to less-than-significant levels by requiring general protection measures, worker training and awareness programs, preconstruction surveys, a vegetation restoration plan, and specific minimization and avoidance measures.

- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-1a – Avoidance Measures for Special-Status Plant Species.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-1b – Minimization Measures for Special-Status Plant Species and their Habitat.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-1c – Revegetation Plan.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-1d – Worker Environmental Training.*

Impact BI-2: Construction of the Project could result in substantial adverse impacts on special-status wildlife. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-56 to 4.8-79)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-BI-1c, M-BI-1d, M-BI-2a, M-BI-2b, M-BI-2c, M-BI-2d, and M-BI-2e would reduce potential construction-related impacts from the Project on special-status wildlife to less-than-significant levels by requiring general protection measures, worker training and

awareness programs, preconstruction surveys, and species-specific minimization and avoidance measures.

- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-1c – Revegetation Plan.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-1d – Worker Environmental Training.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-2a – Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Special-Status Reptiles and Amphibians.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-2b – Avoidance and Mitigation for Host Plants of Listed Butterfly Species.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-2c – Avoidance and Minimization Measures for Dusky-footed Woodrat and American Badger.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-2d – Measures to Minimize Disturbance to Nesting Bird Species.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-2e – Avoidance and Mitigation Measures for Special-Status Bats and Maternity Roosts.*

Impact BI-3: Construction of the Project could result in substantial impacts on sensitive natural communities, including riparian habitat and wetlands. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-79 to 4.8-85)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-BI-3 would reduce impacts on sensitive natural communities and riparian habitat to less-than-significant levels by requiring surveys, minimization measures, and compensatory mitigation for sensitive needlegrass grassland and serpentine bunchgrass natural communities as part of M-BI-1c.

- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-3 – Minimizing, Monitoring, and Compensatory Replacement for Impacts on Sensitive Natural Communities.*

Impact BI-5: Project operations could result in substantial adverse impacts on special-status wildlife. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, Pages 4.8-89 to 4.8-109)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-BI-2d, M-BI-2e, M-BI-5a, and M-BI-5b would reduce any potential operational impacts from the Project on special-status wildlife to less-than-significant levels by requiring general protection measures and species-specific minimization and avoidance measures.

- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-2d – Measures to Minimize Disturbance to Nesting Bird Species.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-2e – Avoidance and Mitigation Measures for Special-status Bats and Maternity Roosts.*

- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-5a – Protection of Special-Status Wildlife during Operations.*
- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-5b – Additional Biological Protections for Unsupervised Access.*

Impact BI-7: Project construction and operations would result in substantial adverse impacts related to the spread of invasive plant species and pathogens. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, pages 4.8-113 to 4.8-121)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-BI-7a would reduce impacts related to the spread of invasive plants to a less-than-significant level by requiring construction equipment to be cleaned and free of invasive weed seeds before arriving at the project site; restrictions on the types of fill and erosion control materials allowed; and development and implementation of an invasive plant management plan that includes invasive plant surveys and removal. However, as discussed in Section IV., below, Project operations would result in significant and unavoidable impacts related to the spread of plant pathogens, even with implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.

- *Mitigation Measure M-BI-7a – Measures to Reduce Spread of Invasive Plants*

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Impact HZ-5: Project construction could expose people or structures to a substantial risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-24 to 4.11-25)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M HZ-5 would reduce the Project’s potential construction-related fire risks to less-than-significant levels by requiring the SFPUC and its contractors adhere to the appropriate fire safety procedures and protocols from the Public Resources Code.

- *Mitigation Measure M-HZ-5 – Fire Safety During Construction.*

Impact HZ-8: Project operations could expose people or structures to a substantial risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires. (DEIR Section 4.11.3.4, Pages 4.11-24 to 4.11-25)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M HZ-5 would reduce the Project’s potential operational fire risks to less-than-significant levels by requiring the SFPUC prepare and implement a fire management plan in coordination with CalFire.

- *Mitigation Measure M-HZ-8: Fire Management Plan.*

Tribal Cultural Resources

Impact TCR-1: Project construction could cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource as defined in Public Resources Code section 21074. (DEIR Section 4.12.3.4, Pages 4.12-7 to 4.12-9)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M-TCR-1 would reduce the Project's potential construction-related impacts to accidentally discovered tribal cultural resources by requiring preservation in place or archaeological data recovery and interpretation.

- *Mitigation Measure M-TCR-1: Tribal Cultural Resources Preservation Plan and/or Interpretive Program.*

Impact TCR-2: Project operations could cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource as defined in Public Resources Code section 21074. (DEIR Section 4.12.3.4, Pages 4.12-9 to 4.12-10)

Implementation of Mitigation Measure M TCR-1 would reduce the Project's potential operational impacts to accidentally discovered tribal cultural resources by requiring preservation in place or archaeological data recovery and interpretation.

- *Mitigation Measure M-TCR-1: Tribal Cultural Resources Preservation Plan and/or Interpretive Program.*

IV. Significant Impacts That Cannot Be Avoided or Reduced to a Less-Than-Significant Level

Based on substantial evidence in the whole record of these proceedings, the SFPUC finds that, where feasible, changes or alterations have been required or incorporated into the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project to reduce the Project-specific significant environmental impacts as identified in the Final EIR for the Project. Most Project-specific impacts will be reduced to a **less-than-significant level** with the implementation of the mitigation measures proposed in the Final EIR and set forth in the MMRP, attached hereto as Attachment B.

The SFPUC further finds that for the reasons presented below for Impact TR-5, and pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21002.1(c) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15021(b), the SFPUC rejects Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b as legally and economically infeasible, and incapable of being accomplished within a reasonable period of time.

The SFPUC further finds, that the Project would result in or contribute to significant and unavoidable effects, even with implementation of feasible mitigation measures. Thus, for the impacts listed below, the effect remains **significant and unavoidable**.

The SFPUC, therefore, determines that the following significant impacts on the environment, as reflected in the Final EIR, are unavoidable, but under Public Resources Code Section 21081(a)(3) and (b), and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15091(a)(3), 15092(b)(2)(B), and 15093, the SFPUC determines that the impacts are acceptable due to the overriding considerations described in Section VI below. This finding is supported by substantial evidence in the record of this proceeding.

Biological Resources

Impact BI-7: Project construction and operations would result in substantial adverse impacts related to the spread of invasive plant species and pathogens. (DEIR Section 4.8.4.4, pages 4.8-113 to 4.8-121)

Project operations along the Fifield-Cahill and southern skyline ridge trails could result in significant impacts on biological resources from the accelerated spread of plant pathogens. Implementation of Mitigation Measures M-BI-7b, Measures to Limit the Spread of *Phytophthora* spp. (including Sudden Oak Death), and M-BI-7c, Measures to Monitor and Prevent Further Spread of *Phytophthora* spp. Pathogens, would reduce these impacts to a *less-than-significant* level on the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail by requiring signage and sanitation procedures for visitors, and annual monitoring and corrective action if project-related pathogen spread is detected. Under the proposed access program for the southern skyline ridge trail, with its permit and associated educational training requirements, adherence to watershed rules would likely be substantial. However, in the absence of docent supervision, it cannot be concluded with certainty that all visitors would comply with mandated pathogen control measures. As a result, the potential for visitors to spread plant pathogens more rapidly via soil contact than under baseline conditions would remain considerable. Therefore, the impact would remain significant and unavoidable with mitigation.

Transportation and Circulation

Impact TR-5: Project operations would not create potentially hazardous conditions for vehicles entering and exiting the Project area; however, project operations would increase the risk of conflicts and could create potentially hazardous conditions between vehicles and pedestrians, bicyclists, or equestrians attempting to cross State Route 92. (DEIR Section 4.4.3.4, pages 4.4-18 to 4.4-25)

Operation of the Project under the proposed access program along both the Fifield-Cahill and southern skyline ridge trails would result in significant impacts related to the increase of potential conflicts between vehicles and/or pedestrians, bicyclists, and equestrians attempting to cross S.R. 92 where no designated crossing exists. Implementation of Mitigation Measures M-TR-5a, Installation of Signage, and M-TR-5b, Construction of a Pedestrian/Bicycle/Equestrian Bridge or Roundabout would reduce the transportation hazard impacts by requiring measures to deter people from attempting to cross the highway, and through the construction of a designated crossing.

The SFPUC can implement Mitigation Measure M-TR-5a. However, this Commission rejects recommended Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b, Construction of a Pedestrian/Bicycle/Equestrian Bridge or Roundabout as infeasible within the meaning of CEQA, because it would be beyond the SFPUC's control to implement, is likely to be extremely costly, and is incapable of being implemented in a timely manner.

As discussed in the EIR, Measure M-TR-5b would require the SFPUC to secure the agreement and participation of Caltrans to plan, design, and construct a bridge or roundabout crossing of S.R. 92 prior to operating the Project. The SFPUC does not have the legal authority to direct or

otherwise compel Caltrans to enter into an agreement for or participate in the mitigation measure's implementation. In comments on the Draft EIR, Caltrans stated that a bridge or roundabout crossing could be considered as a feasible mitigation for the impacts of the Project, but only if it would not cause any other significant traffic operational concerns and would be designed in accordance with Caltrans standards. The SFPUC has considered a preliminary evaluation of S.R. 92 crossing options conducted as part of the Project by transportation engineering professionals, and the Planning Department consulted with Caltrans in the development of M-TR-5b. However, the final design and implementation of a highway crossing depend on future decisions made by Caltrans, San Mateo County, and other interested parties in developing and approving comprehensive traffic safety improvements for this area. San Mateo County and Caltrans are engaged in public planning processes to address the extensive congestion and traffic safety issues in the project area. SFPUC will continue to participate in these processes, and will work with its partner agencies, as appropriate, to design, plan, fund, and construct needed transportation improvements. But because these other agencies will develop and decide whether to implement any traffic safety improvements in this area, the construction of a grade-separated crossing or roundabout remains uncertain and outside of the SFPUC's control. The construction and operation of a grade-separated crossing or roundabout also raises unresolved environmental issues, including potential impacts to biological resources and transportation.

Moreover, even if Caltrans were to move forward to implement Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b, the cost of implementing the Mitigation Measure -5b would likely be prohibitive for the SFPUC to undertake in light of the limited nature of this Project. Based on preliminary estimates, the total project cost of the Project is estimated to be \$21.8 million.⁶ The project cost to construct a pedestrian and bicycle overcrossing along with reconfiguration of lanes on Highway 101 is currently estimated at \$35 million⁷, while a pedestrian and bicycle overcrossing on Highway 17 is estimated at \$28.9 million⁸. A pedestrian and bicycle highway crossing project similar to the transportation modifications required by Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b is likely to exceed the cost of the Project itself. The total cost to the SFPUC of implementing its share of the Mitigation Measure is uncertain, but would likely be significant, particularly in comparison to the cost of the Project itself.

Furthermore, even if the SFPUC were able to secure funding for its contribution to a bridge or roundabout project, and Caltrans and other partner agencies agreed to implement such transportation modifications, the time required to design, permit, and construct the TR-5b transportation modifications are such that the measure could not be implemented until years after completion of Project construction.⁹ This would delay the SFPUC's ability to provide the Project's recreational and educational opportunities on watershed lands and otherwise meet the Project objectives.

⁶ Email from Scott MacPherson (SFPUC) to Mary Tienken (Project Manager, SFPUC), re: Cost of Ridge Trail project, April 30, 2021.

⁷ Valley Transportation Authority, <https://www.vta.org/projects/us-101blossom-hill-road-interchange-improvement-project>, accessed on April 30, 2021.

⁸ Town of Los Gatos, Highway 17 Bicycle and Pedestrian Overcrossing Feasibility Study, page 75, November 2020. Accessed at <https://www.losgatosca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/26418> on April 30, 2021.

Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b would add a great deal of cost, complexity, and uncertainty to the Project. After balancing these factors with competing policy considerations, the SFPUC rejects Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b at this time, and the impact would remain significant and unavoidable. Nonetheless, this Commission finds that the Project is desirable, based on a reasonable balancing of the relevant economic, environmental, social, legal, and technological factors discussed in Section VI Statement of Overriding Consideration of these Findings and the EIR.

V. Evaluation of Project Alternatives

This section describes the Project as well as alternatives and the reasons for approving the Project and for rejecting the alternatives as infeasible. CEQA mandates that an EIR evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives to the Project or the Project location that generally reduce or avoid potentially significant impacts of the Project. CEQA requires that every EIR also evaluate a “No Project” alternative. Alternatives provide a basis of comparison to the Project in terms of their significant impacts and their ability to meet Project objectives. This comparative analysis is used to consider reasonable, potentially feasible options for minimizing environmental consequences of the Project.

A. Reasons for Approval of the Project

The overall goals of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan are:

- Primary goal:
 - Maintain and improve source water quality to protect public health and safety.
- Secondary goals:
 - Maximize water supply;
 - Preserve and enhance the ecological and cultural resources of the watershed;
 - Protect the watersheds, adjacent urban areas, and the public from fire and other hazards;
 - Continue existing compatible uses and provide opportunities for potential compatible uses on watershed lands, including educational, recreational, and scientific uses;
 - Provide a fiscal framework that balances financial resources, revenue-generating activities, and overall benefits, and an administrative framework that allows implementation of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan; and
 - Enhance public awareness of water quality, water supply, conservation, and watershed protection issues.

The Project would help meet management plan goals related to maintain water quality, protecting natural and cultural resources, providing opportunities for compatible uses on watershed lands, and enhancing public awareness and education around water issues. The specific objectives of the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project are as follows:

1. Enhance public awareness of water quality, water supply, ecological, and watershed protection issues by providing compatible recreational opportunities in the Peninsula Watershed;
2. Provide opportunities to educate the general public about the SFPUC's responsibilities as a regional water supplier and owner of the Peninsula Watershed, including its unique and diverse habitats;
3. Extend the Bay Area Ridge Trail south from S.R. 92 to the GGNRA's Phleger Estate;
4. Improve the existing Fifield-Cahill ridge trail to enhance access (including access for people with disabilities), parking, and restroom facilities; and
5. Support the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council's goal of creating a continuous multi-modal (pedestrian, bicycle, equestrian) trail that loops the San Francisco Bay.

The Project would help meet the management plan goals by providing new and expanded opportunities for the public to engage in compatible educational and recreational activities within the watershed. The expanded docent program along Fifield-Cahill ridge trail would increase the number days per week people could visit the watershed under the guidance and supervision of a trained docent. Similarly, the permit program for a new southern skyline ridge trail would create new opportunities for people to visit previously inaccessible portions of the watershed, provided they first complete, or visit with someone who has completed, a mandatory educational program about the watershed's purpose and function, its sensitive resources, and visitor rules and restrictions. Regarding the management plan's goals concerning water quality and ecological and cultural resources protection, the Project would limit public access to a relatively small portion of the watershed, distant from areas of potential concern for water quality; expand awareness of resources sensitivity through the docent and permit programs, and further protect these resources through enhanced security and enforcement measures (e.g., barbed wire fencing, increased patrols). Finally, the Project would increase public awareness of water quality, water supply, conservation, and watershed protection issues through its educational programming and interpretive/educational signage.

B. Alternatives Rejected and Reasons for Rejection

This Commission rejects the Project alternatives set forth in the Final EIR and listed below because this Commission finds that there is substantial evidence, including evidence of economic, legal, social, technological, and other considerations described in this section in addition to those described in Section VI below under CEQA Guidelines 15091(a)(3), that make such alternatives infeasible. In making these infeasibility determinations, this Commission is aware that CEQA

defines “feasibility” to mean “capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, social, legal, and technological factors.” This Commission is also aware that under CEQA case law the concept of “feasibility” encompasses (i) the question of whether a particular alternative promotes the underlying goals and objectives of a project, and (ii) the question of whether an alternative is “desirable” from a policy standpoint to the extent that desirability is based on a reasonable balancing of the relevant economic, environmental, social, legal, and technological factors.

Alternative A: No Project

Under the No Project Alternative, there would be no changes in the existing docent program for the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail improvements would not be implemented, and the southern skyline ridge trail would not be constructed. The SFPUC would continue to operate and maintain the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail and associated existing facilities as under current conditions and watershed management procedures. Visitation under the No Project Alternative would be similar to existing visitation levels.

The No Project Alternative would fail to meet all of the basic SSB RTE Project objectives. The alternative would not enhance public awareness of water resources issues through expanded compatible recreational opportunities within the watershed, would not provide expanded or new opportunities to educate the public, would not extend the Bay Area Ridge Trail south from S.R. 92 to the Phleger Estate, would not enhance access or visitor amenities along the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, and would not support the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council’s goal of creating a continuous multi-modal (pedestrian, bicycle, equestrian) trail that loops the San Francisco Bay. This Commission rejects the No Project Alternative as infeasible because it would not meet these Project objectives.

Alternative B: Relocated Parking Lot and Trailhead South of S.R. 92

Under this alternative, the SFPUC would relocate the parking lot and trailhead for the southern skyline ridge trail from the proposed location at the S.R. 35/S.R. 92 intersection to a new location approximately 1.5 miles south of S.R. 92, near the site of a proposed permanent access drive and temporary construction staging. The parking lot and trailhead would each be the same size and type as described for the Project. The trail would begin at this location and extend southward approximately 4.5 miles to the Phleger Estate. The southern skyline ridge trail would not extend north toward S.R. 92. This reduced trail alignment would accommodate multi-modal access and inclusion of docent-led and permit access programs. This alternative would not require construction of a prefabricated bridge because the southern skyline ridge trail would begin south of the trail segment that requires a bridge crossing. Along this shorter trail alignment, construction and operation of all other associated facilities would be the same as for the Project. All other operational details, including educational programming, would be the same as described for the Project. Visitation under Alternative B would be similar to that for the Project.

Alternative B would meet objective 1 by attracting new trail users to the watershed, and the trail users would be made aware of watershed issues via docents, new informational and educational

signage, and information obtained via the permit process. Similarly, for Project objective 2, the new/enhanced trails and facilities would provide opportunities for new visitors to become educated about the SFPUC, its water-related responsibilities, and watershed resources via the same methods described for objective 1. Alternative B would support objective 4 because it would implement the same improvements to the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail as the Project, including access for people with disabilities, parking, and restroom facilities. The alternative would not fully meet objective 3, because the trail would not extend south from S.R. 92, but rather would begin approximately 1.5 miles south of the highway. For the same reason, Alternative B would not fully meet objective 5, which calls for a continuous multi-modal trail.

Alternative B would avoid the significant and unavoidable transportation and circulation impacts identified for the Project, but would retain the significant and unavoidable impact related to the spread of plant pathogens. Due to the relatively shorter trail length south of S.R. 92, other construction and operations effects would be slightly reduced. However, because the key drivers of such impacts under this alternative would be substantially similar to those of the Project, the same types of significant effects would result and the same mitigation would be required.

This alternative would not meet the basic Project objectives related to the trail's extension south from S.R. 92 and regional continuity, and would retain a significant and unavoidable impact related to spread of plant pathogens. And while slightly reduced, all of the significant-but-mitigable impacts would also remain, and the mitigation measures identified for the Project would be required to reduce those impacts to less-than-significant levels. For these reasons, the SFPUC rejects Alternative B as infeasible.

Alternative C: Pedestrian-Only Trail Access

Under this alternative, the SFPUC would limit visitor access on the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail and southern skyline ridge trail to pedestrians only (by eliminating bicycle and equestrian use), while constructing all of the same trail and facility components as the Project. Trail facilities would permit alternative modes of transportation, as needed, to accommodate disabled visitor access. Because the alternative would accommodate only pedestrian trail users, new parking facilities would not include equestrian parking. Construction of all other facilities would be the same as for the Project. All other operational details, including educational programming, would be the same as described for the Project. The pedestrian-only alternative would accommodate docent-led and permit access programs. Visitation under Alternative C would likely be less than for the Project because of restrictions on bicyclists and equestrians.

Alternative C would meet objective 1 by attracting new trail users to the watershed, and the trail users would be made aware of watershed issues via docents, new informational and educational signage, and information obtained via the permit process. Similarly, for Project objective 2, the new/enhanced trails and facilities would provide opportunities for new visitors to become educated about the SFPUC, its water-related responsibilities, and watershed resources via the same methods described for objective 1. Alternative C would support objectives 3 and 4 because it would implement the same trail improvements as the Project, including extending the southern skyline ridge trail south from S.R. 92 and expanding Fifield-Cahill ridge trail access, parking, and

restroom facilities. The alternative would not fully meet objective 5, because the trails would not provide multi-modal access (i.e., would not provide access for equestrians and cyclists).

While Alternative C would avoid significant and unavoidable impacts identified for Project variants, it would not avoid or substantially reduce the significant and unavoidable transportation and circulation or biological resources (plant pathogens) impacts identified for the Project. Because the physical elements of this alternative would be the same as for the Project, the types of construction impacts and mitigation would be the same. As Alternative C would provide access to pedestrians only, the other operational effects associated with bicycle and equestrian access would be reduced. However, because the key drivers of such impacts under this alternative would be substantially similar to those of the Project, the same types of significant effects would result and the same mitigation would be required.

This alternative would meet most of the basic Project objectives, but would not provide multi-modal access to the Project's new and enhanced recreational opportunities, and would still retain both significant and unavoidable impacts related to transportation hazards and spread of plant pathogens. And while slightly reduced, all of the significant-but-mitigable impacts would also remain, and the mitigation measures identified for the Project would be required to reduce those impacts to less-than-significant levels. For these reasons, the SFPUC rejects Alternative C as infeasible.

Alternative D: Alternative Trail Alignment

Under Alternative D, the SFPUC would construct new trails in two separate areas to provide improved access between Sweeney Ridge and the Phleger Estate via the existing Crystal Springs Regional Trail and Huddart County Park trail system. In the northern portion of this alternative project area, the SFPUC would repurpose an approximately 1.2-mile restricted segment of existing, paved watershed maintenance road as a multi-modal connector between the Sweeney Ridge Trail and the Crystal Springs Regional Trail's San Andreas segment. In the middle portion of the alternative project area, the SFPUC would construct approximately 1.3 miles of new, multi-modal trail between the Sawyer Camp segment in the north and the Crystal Springs segment in the south. The new trail segments would extend to the S.R. 35/S.R. 92 intersection, but no highway crossing would be constructed. This alternative would also include two new parking lots, each with a prefabricated restroom. Given existing visitation along the Crystal Springs Regional Trail, along with the Alternative D access improvements, visitation among new trail segments would be greater under this alternative than for the Project. Alternative D would include interpretive/educational signage and educational programs along the new trail segments, including new interpretive signage on Crystal Springs Regional Trail.

Alternative D would meet objective 1 by attracting new trail users to the watershed, and the trail users would be made aware of watershed issues via docents and existing and new educational signage and programming. Similarly, for Project objective 2, the new/enhanced trails and facilities would provide opportunities for new visitors to become educated about the SFPUC, its water-related responsibilities, and watershed resources via the same methods described for objective 1. Alternative D would not meet objectives 3 and 4 because it would not extend the

southern skyline ridge trail south from S.R. 92 or expand Fifield-Cahill ridge trail access, parking, and restroom facilities. The alternative would not fully meet objective 5, because the alternative alignment would not be contiguous with the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail (part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail), and the Bay Area Ridge Trail would continue to be disjointed in this area; and due to existing bicycle restrictions along the Crystal Springs segment, the alternative alignment would not provide continuous multi-modal access.

Alternative D would avoid the significant and unavoidable transportation and circulation impact and the biological resources impact (plant pathogens) identified for the Project. However, this alternative would result in a similar significant and unavoidable transportation and circulation impact, a new significant and unavoidable impact on San Francisco garter snake and California red-legged frog. Alternative D construction impacts related to special-status species and sensitive natural communities would be similar or increased relative to those identified for the Project. With similar design modifications and implementation of the relevant project mitigation measures the impacts of the alternative could be reduced to less-than-significant levels.

Due to its smaller footprint relative to the Project's, Alternative D construction would have relatively less extensive effects related to other biological resources, cultural and tribal cultural resources, noise, air quality, and hazards. While reduced in extent, the key drivers of Alternative D impacts would be similar to those identified for the Project. For these reasons, Alternative D would result in similar types of other significant biological cultural and tribal cultural resources, noise, air quality, and hazards construction impacts as the Project, and require similar mitigation measures. Alternative D operation could result in adverse effects on two special-status plant species that would not be expected under the Project. Other Alternative D operational impacts related to cultural and tribal cultural resources, and fire hazards would be reduced relative to those identified for the Project. The key drivers of the above-referenced operations-related impacts would be substantially similar to those identified for the Project. For these reasons, Alternative D would result in similar types of significant impacts as the Project and require similar mitigation measures.

This alternative would not meet the basic Project objectives related to the trail's extension south from S.R. 92, improving access and amenities along Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, and regional trail continuity. Alternative D would avoid significant and unavoidable impacts related to the spread of plant pathogens, but would retain the significant and unavoidable transportation hazards impact and result in a new significant and unavoidable impacts on California red-legged frog and San Francisco garter snake. For these reasons, the SFPUC rejects Alternative D as infeasible.

Environmentally Superior Alternative. Alternative B, Relocated Parking Lot and Trailhead South of S.R. 92, would be considered environmentally superior relative to the Project. The environmental analysis presented in the EIR determined that Alternative B would have the greatest impact reduction because it would avoid a significant traffic hazard impact, and have a greater reduction in significant-but-mitigable impacts.

C. Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail

The Draft EIR, Section 6.5 explains the process for selecting the SSB RTE Project and the alternatives considered and evaluated in the Draft EIR. As explained in the Draft EIR, the SFPUC identified and analyzed a number of project concepts and locations. The Planning Department reviewed the initial project concepts and locations as potential strategies for reducing or avoiding the significant adverse impacts identified for the Project. In some cases, the SFPUC designed the Project to incorporate these strategies, including for example through modifying the trail alignment to avoid wetlands and designing the fencing installation approach to minimize vegetation clearing. Additional concepts presented by the public during the scoping period or considered by the Planning Department included: 1) making Skyline Quarry the primary Fifield-Cahill ridge trail access point, as opposed to Cemetery Gate under the Project; and 2) re-routing the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail to avoid impacts on special-status butterfly habitat.

The Draft EIR explains that the alternative concepts or locations were determined to either be infeasible or to result in the same or more severe environmental impacts compared to those of the SSB RTE Project. The process the SFPUC undertook to consider the alternatives and a detailed analysis of these alternatives considered and the reasons they have been rejected from further analysis is described in the Draft EIR, Section 6.5. The SFPUC finds each of these reasons provide sufficient independent grounds for rejecting these alternatives.

The Planning Department received comments on the Draft EIR suggesting that the Draft EIR should have analyzed two additional alternatives in detail. The Responses to Comments (Section 11.10) explains that one of the commenters' proposed alternatives is similar to Alternative D and the other is similar to the proposed Project, and neither would avoid or substantially lessen environmental effects relative to those of the Project. The SFPUC finds that the Final EIR evaluated a reasonable range of alternatives, as required by CEQA that allows Project decision-makers and the public to evaluate and compare the potential impacts of the Project with alternatives designed to avoid or lessen the Project's environmental effects. The SFPUC finds each of these reasons provide sufficient independent grounds for rejecting these alternatives.

VI. Statement of Overriding Considerations

Pursuant to CEQA Section 21081 and CEQA Guidelines Section 15093, this Commission hereby finds, after consideration of the Final EIR and the evidence in the record, that each of the specific overriding economic, legal, social, technological and other benefits of the Project as set forth below, independently and collectively outweighs the significant and unavoidable impacts and is an overriding consideration warranting approval of the Project. Any one of the reasons for approval cited below is sufficient to justify approval of the Project. Thus, even if a court were to conclude that not every reason is supported by substantial evidence, this Commission will stand by its determination that each individual reason is sufficient. The substantial evidence supporting the various benefits can be found in the preceding findings, which are incorporated by reference into this section, and in the documents found in the Record of Proceedings, as defined in Section I.

On the basis of the above findings and the substantial evidence in the whole record of this proceeding, this Commission specifically finds that there are significant benefits of the Project in spite of the unavoidable significant impacts, and therefore makes this Statement of Overriding Considerations. This Commission further finds that, as part of the process of obtaining Project approval, all significant effects on the environment from implementation of the Project have been eliminated or substantially lessened where feasible. All feasible mitigation measures identified for the proposed project in the Final EIR for the Project are adopted as part of this approval action. As explained in Section IV., above, this Commission declines to adopt Mitigation Measure M-TR-5b as infeasible. Furthermore, this Commission has determined that any remaining significant effects on the environment found to be unavoidable, including the increased risk of potentially hazardous conditions involving vehicles and pedestrians, bicyclists, or equestrians attempting to cross State Route 92, are acceptable due to the following specific overriding economic, technical, legal, social, and other considerations.

As explained in Section 1.1, Background, of the EIR, in the 1990s, the SFPUC included public access to watershed trails in its Peninsula Watershed Management Plan as part of its overall strategy for managing watershed lands in a comprehensive and integrated manner. As discussed in that section, through the management plan process and its corresponding environmental review, the SFPUC and Planning Department identified and analyzed a range of trail and access management program alternatives that would meet the SFPUC's watershed management objectives and minimize adverse environmental effects. Through these processes, and with input from community members, the SFPUC developed management actions calling for public access improvements along Fifield-Cahill ridge trail and S.R. 35 (Skyline Boulevard) that are substantially similar to the proposed project, but with notably less detail for elements along S.R. 35.

The SFPUC adopted the plan in 2001, and approved implementation of limited improvements along Fifield-Cahill ridge trail in 2002. As envisioned in the management plan, public access improvements along Fifield-Cahill ridge trail were to be completed within five years of the plan's adoption, while improvements south of S.R. 92 were to be completed on an as-needed basis, or as staff time and funding allows. The approved Fifield-Cahill ridge trail improvements were constructed and docent-guided tours began in 2003. As explained in EIR Section 4.8, Biological Resources, the SFPUC has not observed adverse effects on sensitive watershed resources from docent-led public access program.

The SFPUC has identified funding opportunities that now make implementation of trail improvements south of S.R. 92 more feasible. Accordingly, the southern skyline ridge trail concept has been refined, and details of location, construction, and operation are now available. In addition, the SFPUC has identified a number of additional access improvements for the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail. The potential environmental effects of these improvements are addressed in the SSB RTE Project EIR.

As also explained in EIR Section 1.1, in response to public comments requesting the SFPUC consider multiple access options, and to allow flexibility in crafting an access program that responds to ongoing watershed management requirements as well as environmental and economic considerations, the EIR evaluates multiple access program configurations, or variants, with

differing levels of restrictiveness, ranging from supervised to unsupervised. The SFPUC has determined the Project with the proposed access program is the configuration that is most consistent with the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan goals, and best meets the Project objectives.

The Project would meet all of the stated objectives and provide the following benefits:

1. The Project would provide more equitable access to the watershed and watershed educational opportunities through implementation of the Interpretive Master Plan for the Peninsula Watershed, increasing the number of days per week visitors can schedule docent-led trips along the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail, and providing access along the new southern skyline ridge trail without a reservation.
2. Through its public educational programming and new parking area with a school bus parking space and turnaround, the Project would provide increased outdoor educational opportunities and access for school children, some of whom who may not otherwise be able to visit the watershed.
3. Through its Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant universal access loop trail and new parking stalls, the Project would provide greater opportunity for disabled persons to engage in outdoor watershed recreational opportunities.
4. Through its educational programming and interpretive signage, the Project would increase public awareness of water quality, water supply, ecological, and watershed protection issues.
5. The Project would promote public health and wellbeing by increasing opportunities for low-cost passive and active recreation on public lands.
6. The Project would further the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan goal of maintaining source water quality.
7. The Project has been designed to minimize environmental impacts, including through utilization of existing access routes, service roads, trail segments, and fencing. In addition, new project elements have been sited to avoid or minimize impacts on drainages and sensitive habitats areas.
8. The proposed access program balances public access and resource protection interests by applying greater restrictions in areas of higher resource sensitivity (i.e., docent-led access along the Fifield-Cahill ridge trail), and lesser restrictions in areas of lower resource sensitivity (i.e., permit access along the southern skyline ridge trail).
9. The Project would help to reduce a gap in the Bay Area Ridge Trail by creating multi-modal access opportunities along new segments of the trail and, and enhancing such opportunities along existing segments of the trail.

Having considered these benefits, including the benefits discussed in Section I above, this Commission finds that the benefits of the Project and the Project's furtherance of the Peninsula Watershed Management Plan goals outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, and that the adverse environmental effects are therefore acceptable.