



NOTICE OF PREPARATION

October 16, 2018

To:

Reviewing Agencies and
Organizations

From:

Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and
Transportation District
1011 Andersen Drive
San Rafael, CA 94901-5318

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project and Notice of Scoping Meeting

The Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (District), as the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project (project). We are interested in your agency's views regarding the scope and content of the environmental documentation that is germane to your statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. The project description, location, overview, EIR scope, and potential environmental effects are provided in the attached materials.

Comments focusing on your area of expertise, your agency's area of jurisdiction, or issues relative to the environmental analysis should be addressed to Raymond Santiago, Principal Planner, Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, at the address shown above, or email to SRTC@goldengate.org. Requests to be included on the project mailing list and receive additional information about the project should also be directed to SRTC@goldengate.org. Because of time limits mandated by state law, your written response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than the later of 30 days after this notice or November 19, 2018. Please include a name and phone number of a contact person in your organization.

The District will hold a scoping meeting in an open-house format to discuss the proposed project and review environmental issues to be addressed in the draft EIR on Tuesday, October 30, 2018, from 5:30–7:00 p.m. at Whistlestop, 930 Tamalpais Avenue, San Rafael, CA. Persons with disabilities will be able to access the buildings used for the scoping meeting. Any individual who requires special assistance, such as a sign language interpreter, to participate in a scoping meeting should contact the dedicated project line at (415) 257-4444 by 5:00 p.m. no later than October 25, 2018. A Spanish interpreter will be available at the meeting.

If the project receives federal funding, it is anticipated that a joint EIR/National Environmental Policy Act document would be prepared and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) will serve as the federal lead agency.

Date: 10/16/18

Signature:



Name: Raymond A. Santiago

Title: Principal Planner

Telephone: (415) 257-4443

Email: SRTC@goldengate.org

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (State CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

**GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE, HIGHWAY AND TRANSIT DISTRICT
1011 Andersen Drive, San Rafael, CA 94901-5318**

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION
ATTACHMENT**

Project Title

San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency

Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District

Project Information available at:

1011 Andersen Drive
San Rafael, CA 94901-5318

or via website:

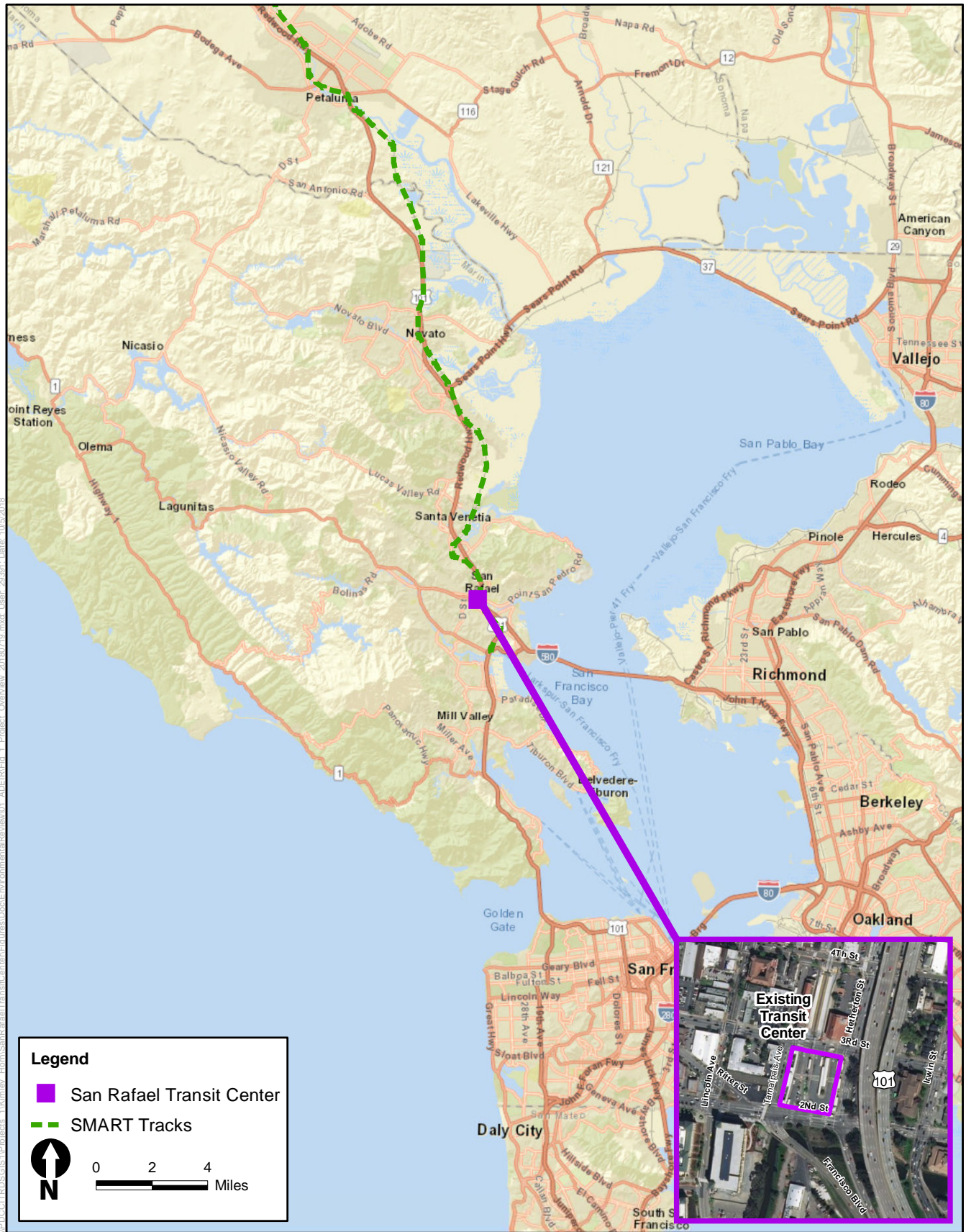
<http://goldengate.org/SRTC/>

Project Location and Background

The San Rafael Transit Center, also known as the C. Paul Bettini Transit Center, is owned by the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (District), which operates Golden Gate Transit regional and inter-county bus transit services. The transit center is located in downtown San Rafael at the intersection of 3rd Street and Hetherton Street (see Figure 1). With more than 500 bus trips daily and 17 operating bus bays, the transit center is the largest regional transit hub in Marin County, providing access to the regional transportation network for area residents and a key transfer point for employees, visitors, and students in San Rafael and the greater North Bay region. The transit center primarily serves bus routes operated by Golden Gate Transit and Marin Transit, but it is also served by Sonoma County Transit, Sonoma County Airport Express, Marin Airporter, Greyhound, and paratransit services. On weekdays, nearly 9,000 people board or alight buses at the transit center to make their necessary transportation connections. Downtown San Rafael is an important destination, with nearly half of the passengers travelling to or from downtown, and the remaining riders making transfers to other destinations. The 17 bus bays are well-utilized during most peak-period pulse times, leaving little room for growth in bus service.

In August 2017, the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) District commenced passenger rail service on its initial corridor, consisting of 43 miles of rail and 10 stations (Phase 1) in Sonoma and Marin Counties. SMART's Phase 1 corridor parallels U.S. Highway 101 (US-101) beginning at the Sonoma County Airport and terminating in downtown San Rafael just north of the transit center. SMART riders transferring from the downtown San Rafael SMART station—located north of 3rd Street—to access the current transit center south of 3rd Street, as well as riders originating from downtown San Rafael, must navigate congested vehicle traffic passing through local intersections and accessing the US-101 on-ramps adjacent to the transit center.

San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project



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Figure 1
Regional Location

In addition, Phase 2 of the SMART project, which was approved in 2015 and began construction in early 2018, will extend passenger rail service from its current downtown San Rafael terminus to Larkspur. The southward extension of SMART will require the construction of two sets of tracks through the middle of the existing transit center site south of 3rd Street. The SMART Phase 2 line will bisect the existing transit center, reconfigure Platforms C and B, negatively impact bus circulation and bus bay flexibility within and around the transit center, and disrupt pedestrian access and transfer activity among the remaining platforms at the site. This change will affect how buses and people access and travel through the transit center as well as the reduction in the amount of space available for buses and riders, which will be detrimental to bus, vehicle, and pedestrian access and safety. As a result, the transit center must be relocated to another location in downtown San Rafael.

Project Objectives

The District, in coordination with the City of San Rafael, Marin Transit, Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), and SMART, plans to replace the transit center in downtown San Rafael. The proposed San Rafael Transit Center Replacement Project (project) is needed primarily to preserve and enhance the functionality and effectiveness of the transit center following the implementation of the SMART Phase 2 line to Larkspur and the resulting loss of some of the transit center facilities. Specifically, the purpose of the project is to:

- Provide improved transit connectivity and ease of use in and around downtown San Rafael.
- Enhance local and regional transit use by bringing together multiple modes of the transportation network—including the SMART-bus connection—into a hub that affords transit users the safest, most efficient means of using bus and rail services.
- Efficiently accommodate transit users and services and optimize operating costs and improve transit desirability.
- Design a functional, attractive, cost-effective facility that can meet long-term projected service levels and be implemented in an expeditious manner, so as to minimize the period of use of the interim facility.
- Provide a transit facility that is readily accessible to individuals with disabilities, transit users, and transit-dependent populations, including those with low incomes.
- Provide a secure, safe, and inviting space for transit patrons.
- Create a more accessible transit facility for all users by reducing vehicular, rail, bicycle, and pedestrian conflicts and improving safety.
- Provide convenient, pedestrian connections to surrounding land uses.

A new transit center solution in downtown San Rafael would address near-term and long-term transit needs while improving the desirability and usability of transit for both local residents and regional commuters. It would also, to the extent feasible, minimize traffic congestion and facilitate smooth transit operations while also promoting pedestrian safety.

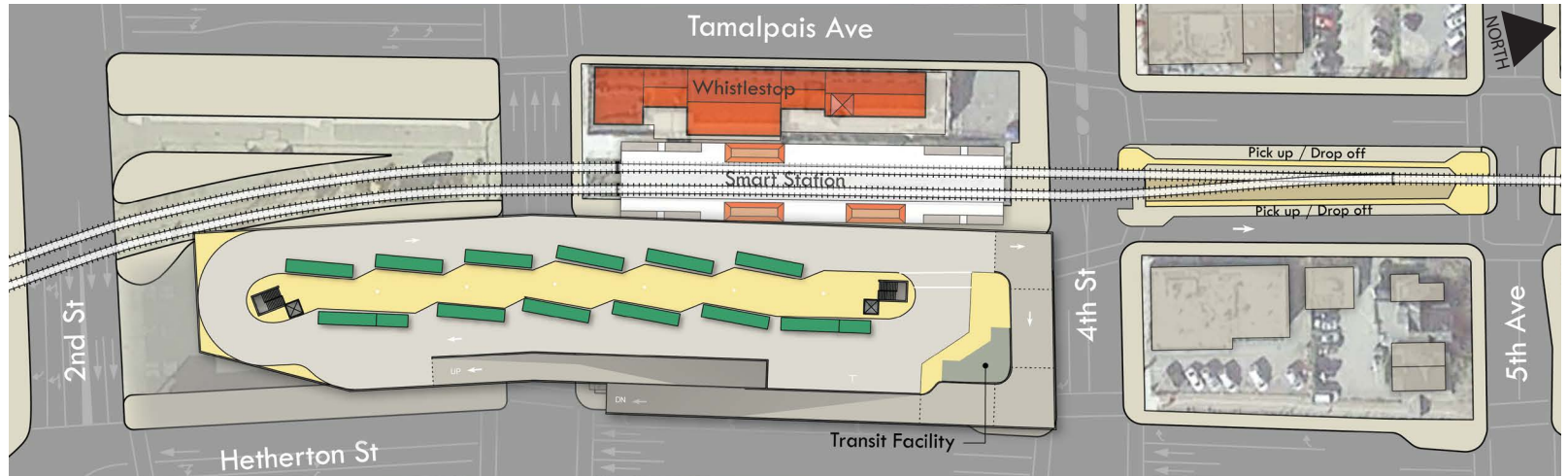
Preliminary Project Alternatives to Be Analyzed in the Draft Environmental Impact Report

The District has identified five preliminary alternatives. The alternatives are described below and the conceptual design for each alternative is shown in Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, respectively. The District also will study a No Project Alternative pursuant to CEQA requirements. These preliminary alternatives will be further refined and screened based on agency and public input.

- ***Two-Story Concept*** is bounded by 4th Street to the north, Hetherton Street to the east, 2nd Street to the south, and Tamalpais Avenue to the west (Figure 2). This concept includes the parcel to the east of the SMART station as the ground-level of a proposed two-story transit center. This alternative includes 6 bus bays on the ground level and 12 bus bays on the upper level. This alternative has the smallest footprint, only requiring the acquisition of one parcel, but also would cost more due to the two-story construction.
- ***Across-the-Freeway Concept*** is bounded by 5th Avenue to the north, Irwin and Hetherton Streets to the east, 3rd Street to the south, and Tamalpais Avenue to the west (Figure 3). This alternative has two options: the first would include a three-bay transit island on Hetherton Street between 3rd and 4th Streets, and the second would shift Hetherton Street to the west to allow for on-street bays on the east side of Hetherton Street between 3rd and 4th Streets. This concept incorporates the area underneath US-101, which would eliminate some existing California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Park and Ride lot parking stalls and require covering Erwin Creek (a tributary of San Rafael Creek), across a portion of the block.
- ***4th Street Gateway Concept*** is bounded by 5th Avenue to the north, Hetherton Street to the east, 3rd Street to the south, and the SMART tracks to the west (Figure 4). In order to accommodate three curbside bus bays, southbound right-turn movements from Hetherton Street to 4th Street would be precluded.
- ***Whistlestop Block Concept*** is bounded by 4th Street to the north, Hetherton Street to the east, 3rd Street to the south, and Lincoln and Tamalpais Avenues to the west (Figure 5). This concept co-locates the proposed transit center on the same block as the existing SMART station. The Whistlestop building would either be relocated, reconfigured, or restored and used for customer service functions with the proposed transit center.
- ***North of 4th Street Concept*** would occupy the entire block bounded by 5th Avenue to the north, Irwin Street to the east, 4th Street to the South, and Hetherton Street to the west. It is generally located beneath US-101 (Figure 6) and would eliminate some existing parking stalls in the Caltrans Park and Ride lot, and require covering Erwin Creek (a tributary of San Rafael Creek), across the full length of the block. While this concept would accommodate 17 bus bays within this block, it would require customer service, restrooms, and pick-up/drop-off functions to be located off site.

Features common to all five alternatives include the provision of at least 17 bus bays, pick-up/drop-off areas for passenger vehicles or taxis, bicycle parking, customer service and security space, bus operator restrooms, and parking for operations staff. Some of these facilities could be provided at locations outside of the extents of the concepts shown in Figures 2 through 6 below. The project website provides more detailed information on the project and the public outreach conducted to date: <http://goldengate.org/SRTC/>.

Upper Level



Lower Level

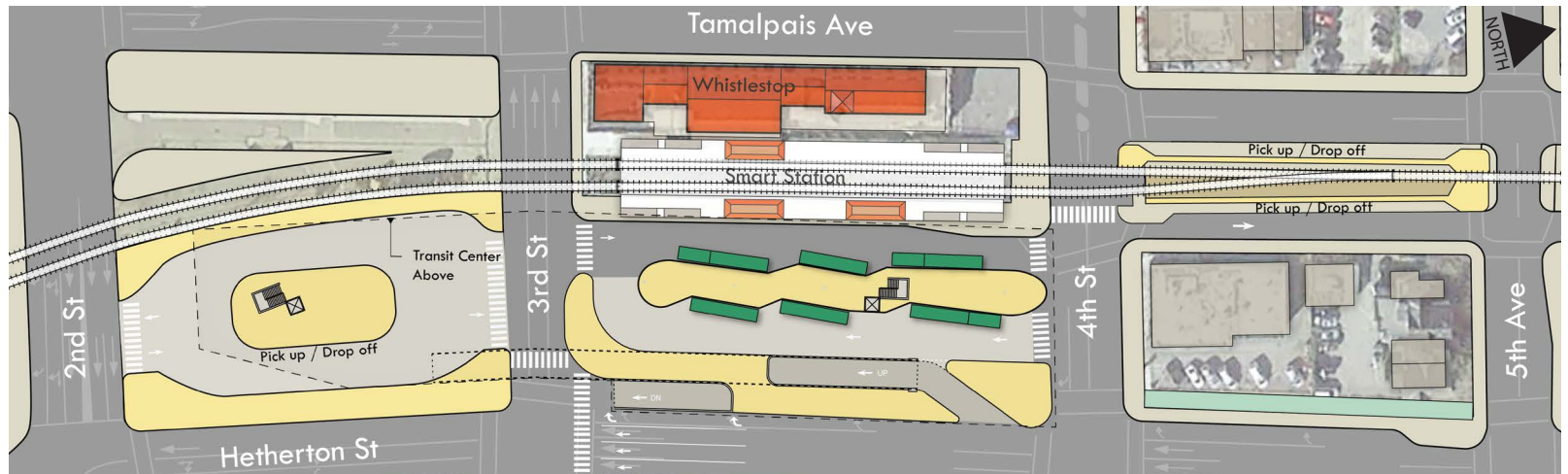


Figure 2
Two-Story Concept

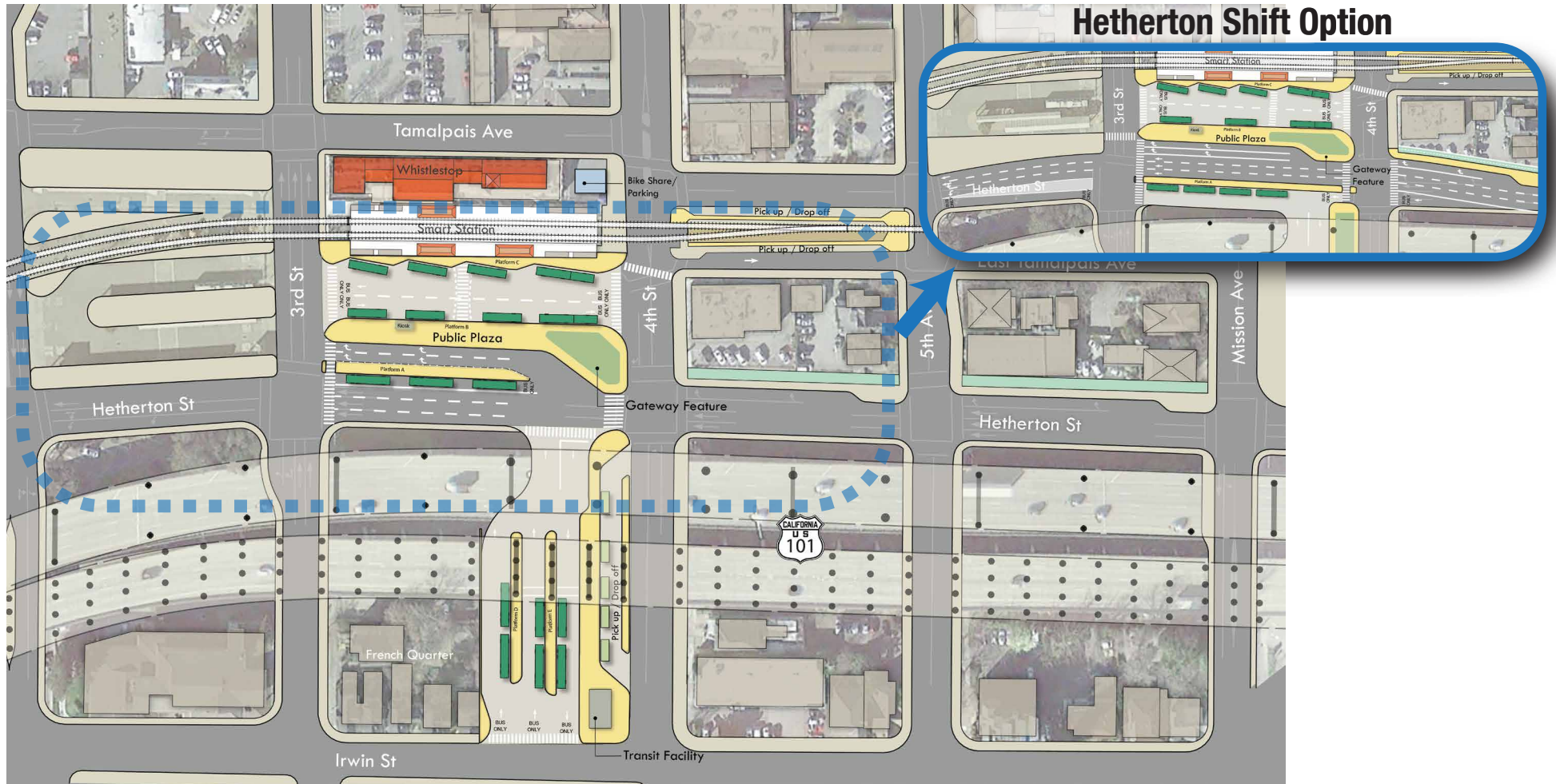


Figure 3
Across the Freeway Concept

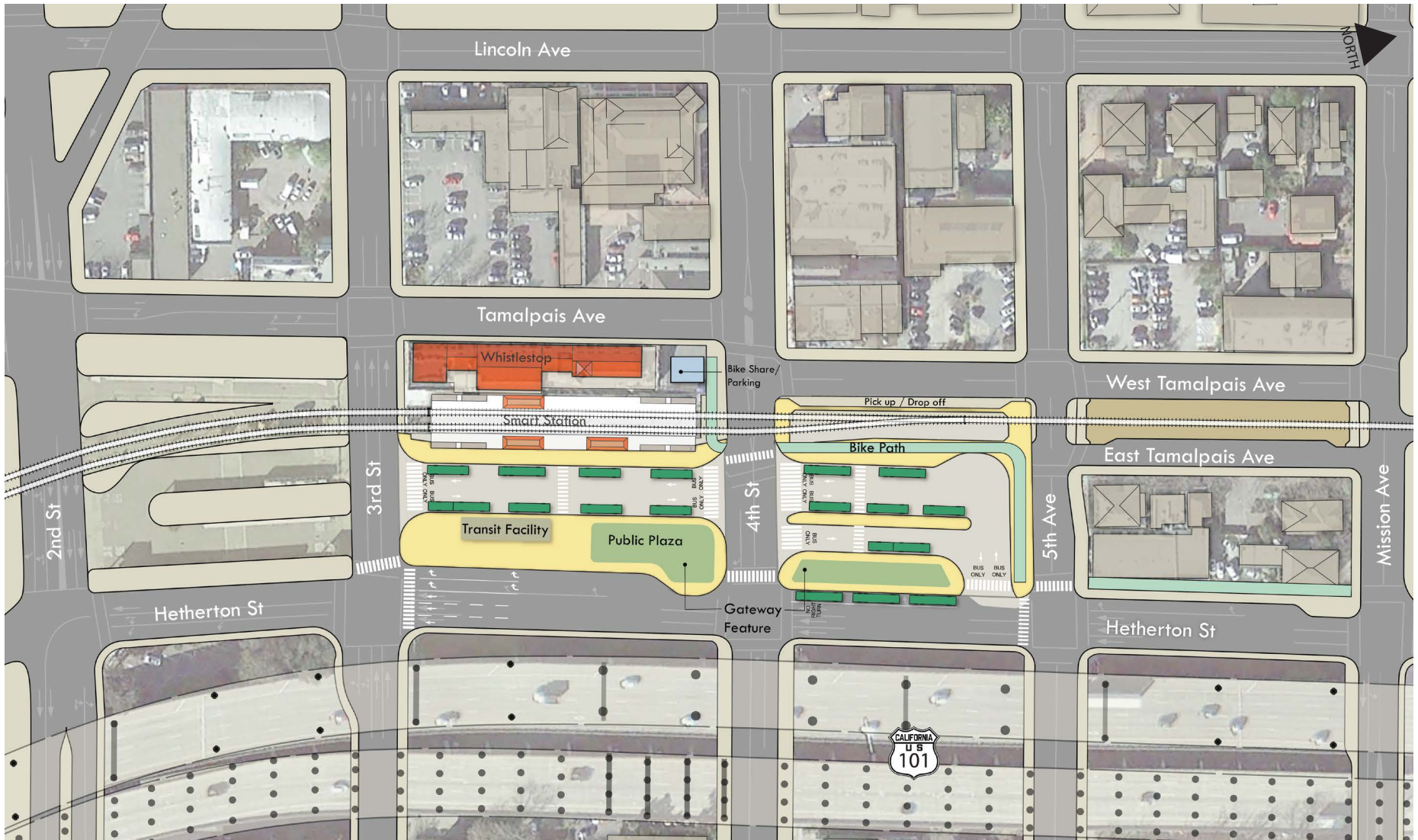


Figure 4
4th Street Gateway Concept

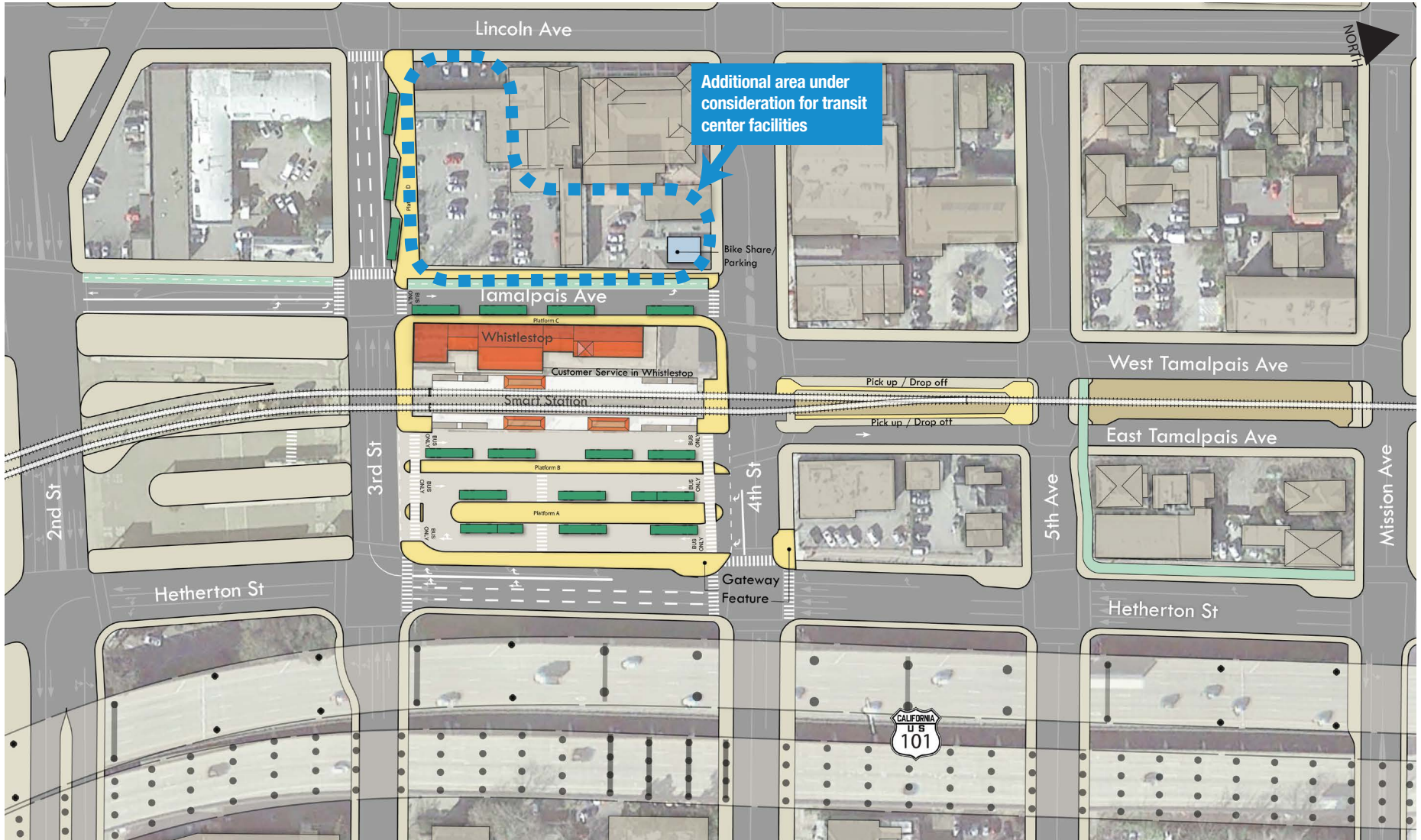


Figure 5
Whistlestop Block Concept



Figure 6
North of 4th Street Concept

Project Schedule

The District expects to complete the environmental review process by early 2020, and preliminary project design (30%) by the Fall of 2020; the final design, permitting, and construction would commence thereafter.

EIR Scope and Potential Environmental Effects

The purpose of the EIR will be to disclose the environmental impacts of the project. Potential environmental effects to be examined in the EIR are those related to aesthetics, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions; biological resources; cultural resources; geology, soils, and seismicity; hazards and hazardous materials; hydrology and water quality; land use and planning; noise and vibration; population and housing; transportation and transit; and utilities and public services (including recreation). Cumulative impacts, alternatives to the project, and growth-inducing impacts will also be analyzed. Impacts resulting from both short-term construction and long-term operation of the project will be identified. A brief discussion of the anticipated environmental impacts and what will be examined in the EIR is presented below. Mitigation measures will be identified for significant impacts, as appropriate.

Aesthetics

The project is located in downtown San Rafael. The EIR will describe the existing visual character of the project site and surrounding areas, and identify key visual resources and scenic views. The EIR will analyze impacts on these key visual resources and scenic views as a result of the proposed project. Lighting and glare impacts on any sensitive viewers/viewsheds will also be addressed.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The EIR will describe the existing air quality conditions in the San Francisco Bay Area basin and evaluate the impacts of the project, in accordance with current Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) CEQA Guidelines. The construction and operational greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the project vicinity related to implementation of the project will be quantified. Potential impacts related to climate change will be addressed consistent with the BAAQMD's current guidance. The project's consistency with the City of San Rafael's Climate Action Plan will also be discussed.

Biological Resources

The EIR will describe the existing biological resources on the site, discuss the impacts of the project on biological resources (plants, wildlife, and waters), and identify any conflicts with local policies and ordinances protecting biological resources, such as impacts on protected or heritage trees.

Cultural Resources

The EIR will evaluate potential impacts on historical, archaeological, and paleontological resources. The Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) and any tribes it identifies will be contacted and consulted about the presence of traditional lands or cultural places in the project vicinity.

Geology, Soils and Seismicity

The EIR will describe the geologic and soil constraints that may affect the project design, including seismicity, landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or potential for expansive soils.

Hazards and Hazardous Materials

The EIR will describe the existing conditions on and adjacent to the project site—including the potential for existing soil and/or groundwater contamination near the site to affect future uses on the site—and will identify hazardous impacts from both construction and operations.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The EIR will discuss the potential for project-related flooding on the project site, and will describe construction and operational impacts related to stormwater runoff and drainage infrastructure, and water quality.

Land Use and Planning

The EIR will evaluate the compatibility of the project with neighboring areas, change to or displacement of existing uses, compliance with zoning regulations, and consistency of the project with relevant local land use policies that have been adopted in the City of San Rafael General Plan 2020 and the 2012 Downtown Station Area Plan.

Noise and Vibration

The EIR will identify sensitive noise receptors and sources of noise and vibration in the project area and analyze short-term construction and long-term operational noise and vibration impacts associated with moving the transit center to a new location. Noise from changes in traffic patterns associated with operations at the new location would also be evaluated.

Population and Housing

The EIR will address the project's potential for inducing population growth and displacing people and housing.

Transportation and Transit

A transportation impact analysis will be prepared for the EIR to describe the existing local and regional transportation network and to evaluate the proposed project's construction- and operations-related traffic impacts for vehicular, transit, bike, and pedestrian circulation.

Utilities and Public Services (including Recreation)

The EIR will describe the existing utilities at the project site and will address the ability of existing and planned public facilities and service systems to meet demands generated by the project. Physical impacts on public utilities—including sanitary sewers, storm drains, and solid waste—will be identified, as will any need to construct new facilities. The EIR will describe the existing water supply serving the project site and evaluate the impacts of the project on water supply.

Cumulative Impacts

Consistent with CEQA, this section will address the impacts of implementing the project in combination with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects in the project vicinity.

Alternatives to the Project

Alternatives to the project will be evaluated, including the No Project Alternative. Other alternatives analyzed in the EIR will be identified based on their ability to reduce or avoid environmental impacts.

Growth-Inducing Impacts

The EIR will discuss the ways in which the project could foster growth in the surrounding environment, including potential for growth from enhanced transit facilities and land use development surrounding the project site; growth-related secondary impacts also will be discussed.

Other CEQA-Required Analysis

The EIR will include other issues required by CEQA, including Significant Unavoidable Impacts, Significant Irreversible Environmental Change, Persons Consulted and List of Preparers, References, and technical appendices.