

STAFF REPORT

DATE: June 12, 2023
TO: Sacramento Regional Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Laura Ham, VP, Planning and Engineering
SUBJ: ADOPTING A CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION FOR THE REVISED
WATT AVENUE/INTERSTATE 80 TRANSIT CENTER
IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt the Attached Resolution.

RESULT OF RECOMMENDED ACTION

Approves adoption of a Categorical Exemption for the Revised Watt Avenue/Interstate 80 Transit Center Improvements Project, which will allow the project to proceed to construction based on the revised design.

FISCAL IMPACT

None

DISCUSSION

The current Watt I-80 Transit Center (Transit Center) is one of the busiest transfer centers in the Sacramento region. It has been prone to safety and security issues throughout the years because of the location of the Transit Center, which is situated both above and below a major freeway, with steep enclosed stairwells, and in a high-crime community.

SacRT completed a visioning effort to re-imagine the Transit Center in 2018 with participation by a range of community stakeholders. With the community-envisioned upgrades, this facility will attract and accommodate more riders, as well as accommodate additional bus service from regional operators and expansion of high-capacity transit connecting to American River College, Arden-Arcade, Citrus Heights, McClellan Park, and North Highlands.

On September 14, 2020, the Board approved a Resolution adopting a Categorical Exemption for the Watt/I-80 Transit Center Improvement Project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Section 15301 Existing Facilities (Class 1(c)) for minor alteration to existing highways and streets, and sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities that do not result in an expansion of use.

After internal review of the preliminary engineering, the design was updated to expand the scope to address staff recommendations, including adding a new open stairwell on the east side of Watt Avenue and removing existing stairwells to increase safety and security at the transit center.

An updated Project Analysis (Attachment 1) was prepared pursuant to CEQA, resulting in a determination that the project revisions do not affect the determination that the project is consistent with the exemption set out in CEQA Section 15301 Existing Facilities (Class 1(c)). A Notice of Exemption (Attachment 2) was prepared and will be submitted to the State Clearinghouse once it is adopted by the Board.

Review and approval of the updated Project Analysis will also be undertaken by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) which is also providing funding for the project. FTA has indicated that it will likely consider the revised project using a Documented Categorical Exclusion (DCE) under 23 CFR Section 771.118, which is similar to the Class 1 exemptions. SacRT is preparing and will provide the DCE documentation for FTA's use.



AECOM
300 Lakeside Drive, Suite 400
Oakland, CA 94612
aecom.com

RE:
Watt/I-80 Transit Station
Improvements Project

To:
Jenny Niello
Principal Civil Engineer
Sacramento Regional Transit District
2811 O St, Sacramento, CA 95816

From:
Rod Jeung, Project Director
Anne Ferguson, Project Manager

cc: Craig Norman, Director, Construction and
Engineering

Date:
May 25, 2023

CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION ANALYSIS

Introduction

The Sacramento Regional Transit District (SacRT) is the project sponsor for the proposed Watt Avenue/Interstate 80 (I-80) Transit Center Improvements Project (project). The project would improve safety and multimodal access to the Watt/I-80 Transit Center, in unincorporated Sacramento County, adjacent to the northeast portion of the City of Sacramento.

Watt Avenue, a major north-south arterial, crosses over I-80 and the SacRT Blue Line light rail tracks. Transit riders desiring to travel on the Blue Line or transfer to a connecting bus must go down a stairwell on the west side of Watt Avenue to the station platform level and bus stops below. Heavy traffic, narrow sidewalks, limited pedestrian and bicycle connections, a noisy exposed atmosphere, and a lack of amenities characterize the Watt Avenue entrance to the transit center.

In March 2018, SacRT completed a visioning effort to “Re-imagine the Watt/I-80 Transit Center.” SacRT, in partnership with Sacramento County and Mercy Housing, an affordable housing developer, is now making efforts to implement the grand vision for this area. SacRT, using Community Design Grant funds approved by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), completed 65 percent design plans and environmental clearance for its portion of the improvements along Watt Avenue—the Watt / I-80 Transit Center in 2020. With the community-envisioned upgrades to the station, it would be more accessible, user friendly, and able to attract and accommodate more riders.

The SacRT Board approved the project in September 2020 in conjunction with a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Categorical Exemption; specifically CEQA Section 15301 Existing Facilities (Class 1[c]), which permits minor alterations to existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities that do not result in an expansion of use. Approval of the project by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) was secured at the end of 2021, following additional consultation with interested Native American tribes and approval of a National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion.

In advancing the design work to 95 percent, SacRT is proposing minor revisions to the previously approved project, primarily along the east side of Watt Avenue at the transit center. The purpose of this memorandum is to identify those revisions and to provide the necessary documentation and evidence that the revised project continues to qualify for a CEQA Class 1 Categorical Exemption. The previous 2020 CEQA memorandum is reproduced here, and additions to that document are denoted in *italics* and underlining.

Project Description

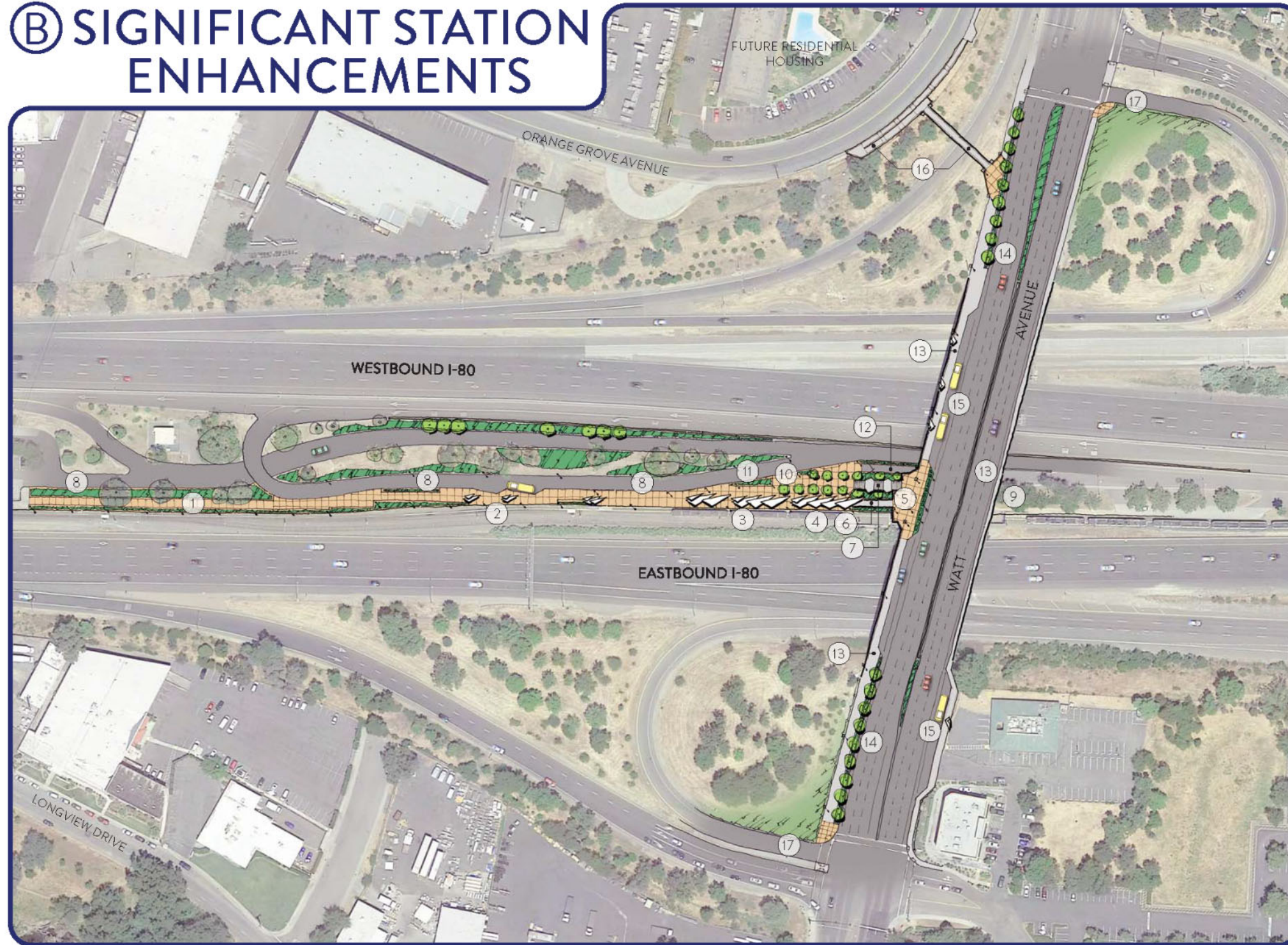
The project includes the following components to improve safety and multimodal access to the Watt/I-80 Transit Center (items 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17 on Figure 1), all of which would occur entirely within existing State and County rights-of-way developed with highways and streets:

- Relocating the concrete median barrier and narrowing vehicle travel lanes on Watt Avenue on the I-80 overcrossing structure to accommodate wider sidewalks and future bicycle lanes (see item 14 on Figure 1).
- Enhancing pedestrian amenities on the west side of Watt Avenue, by installing pedestrian-level lighting, landscape buffers, and new ornamental metal security fencing along the overcrossing (see item 14 on Figure 1).
- Expanding the light rail station entrance plaza on the west side of Watt Avenue by *closing and demolishing the existing stairway and* including a new stairway connection to the light rail platform area; installing new pedestrian lighting; removing concrete barriers; adding wayfinding and station monument signage; and providing trash and recycling receptacles, seating, shade/rain shelters, and a landscape buffer (with guardrail) between the plaza and vehicular traffic (see items 5 and 7 on Figure 1).
- *Adding amenities (e.g., lighting, wayfinding and station monument signage, and seating) and closing, demolishing, and replacing the existing stairway on the east side of Watt Avenue at the transit center (see item 9 on Figure 1).*
- Relocating bus stops on both sides of Watt Avenue to shorten crossing distances and providing space for new bus shelters at the new locations (see item 15 on Figure 1; *with the improvements proposed at the east side station entrance, the bus stops on the east side of Watt Avenue would be revised to include two stops approaching the entrance and one stop on the far side [north] of the entrance and mirror the stops along the west side of Watt Avenue, resulting in a total of six bus stops connecting to the transit center entrances*).
- Squaring up the on-ramps to eastbound and westbound I-80 for safer pedestrian crossings and adding a new pedestrian crossing on the north leg of Watt Avenue at the I-80 eastbound ramp intersection (see item 17 on Figure 1).

The design of the improvements would incorporate crime prevention through environmental design guidelines, current Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, and requirements for future SacRT low-floor light rail vehicles that are being acquired to make passenger boardings and alightings more convenient. In addition, it is proposed that non-irrigated hydroseed would be applied to the areas where on-ramp concrete has been removed; no ornamental plantings or irrigation are anticipated for the on-ramp areas. *Previously approved improvements that are no longer part of the project include pull-out spaces along the Watt Avenue overcrossing for temporary pick-up and drop-off by automobiles and transportation network companies (e.g., Lyft and Uber).*

Re-Imagine Watt/I-80 Transit Center Conceptual Site Plan

② SIGNIFICANT STATION ENHANCEMENTS



LEGEND

- ① Pedestrian promenade leading from parking lot to station
 - Pedestrian lighting
 - Wide walkway
- ② Reduction of bus bays to two and relocation
- ③ Lighter, more open architecture for station structures
 - White or lighter color
 - Angled, sawtooth/louvered design lets natural light in while providing shade and rain shelter
 - Lighter roof allows for a smaller support structure and columns reducing hiding spaces, blind corners, and visual "weight" of the structure
- ④ New elevator and restroom structure
 - Maximize visibility around the structure
 - Eliminate the visual obstruction by the new staircase.
- ⑤ **Watt Ave station plaza**
 - Pedestrian lighting
 - Removal of concrete barriers to improve visibility
 - Pilasters to break up the space and protect peds from errant cars
 - Wayfinding
 - RT station monument
 - Concrete and bollards between plaza and roadway
- ⑥ Bridge extends to the new elevator structure
- ⑦ **Removal and replacement of existing stairs on west side of Watt**
- ⑧ Low maintenance landscaping and lighting around the station
- ⑨ **Removal and replacement of existing stairs on east side of Watt and station plaza amenities similar to item 5***
- ⑩ **Pedestrian friendly station plaza**
 - Lots of lighting
 - No obstructions
 - Plaza trees provide shade in the summer and allow light through during the winter
- ⑪ **Bus on-ramp shortened to merge with main on-ramp before crossing under Watt Ave**
- ⑫ Maintenance vehicle access under Watt Ave overcrossing
 - Ornamental metal fence and gate restricts access under the overcrossing to official use only
- ⑬ **Wider sidewalks on both sides of Watt Ave**
 - Minimum 8ft on each side
- ⑭ **A more pedestrian friendly entrance on both sides of Watt Ave**
 - Pedestrian level lighting
 - Vehicular lanes reduced to 11ft wide
 - 5ft shoulders allow for future conversion into bike lanes
 - Concrete barrier to deter jaywalking
 - Plant strips and street trees for pedestrian safety
- ⑮ **Three bus stops with shelters on either side of Watt Ave to match new station architecture***
- ⑯ Pedestrian bridge and ramp
- ⑰ Squared up on-ramps for safe pedestrian crossing

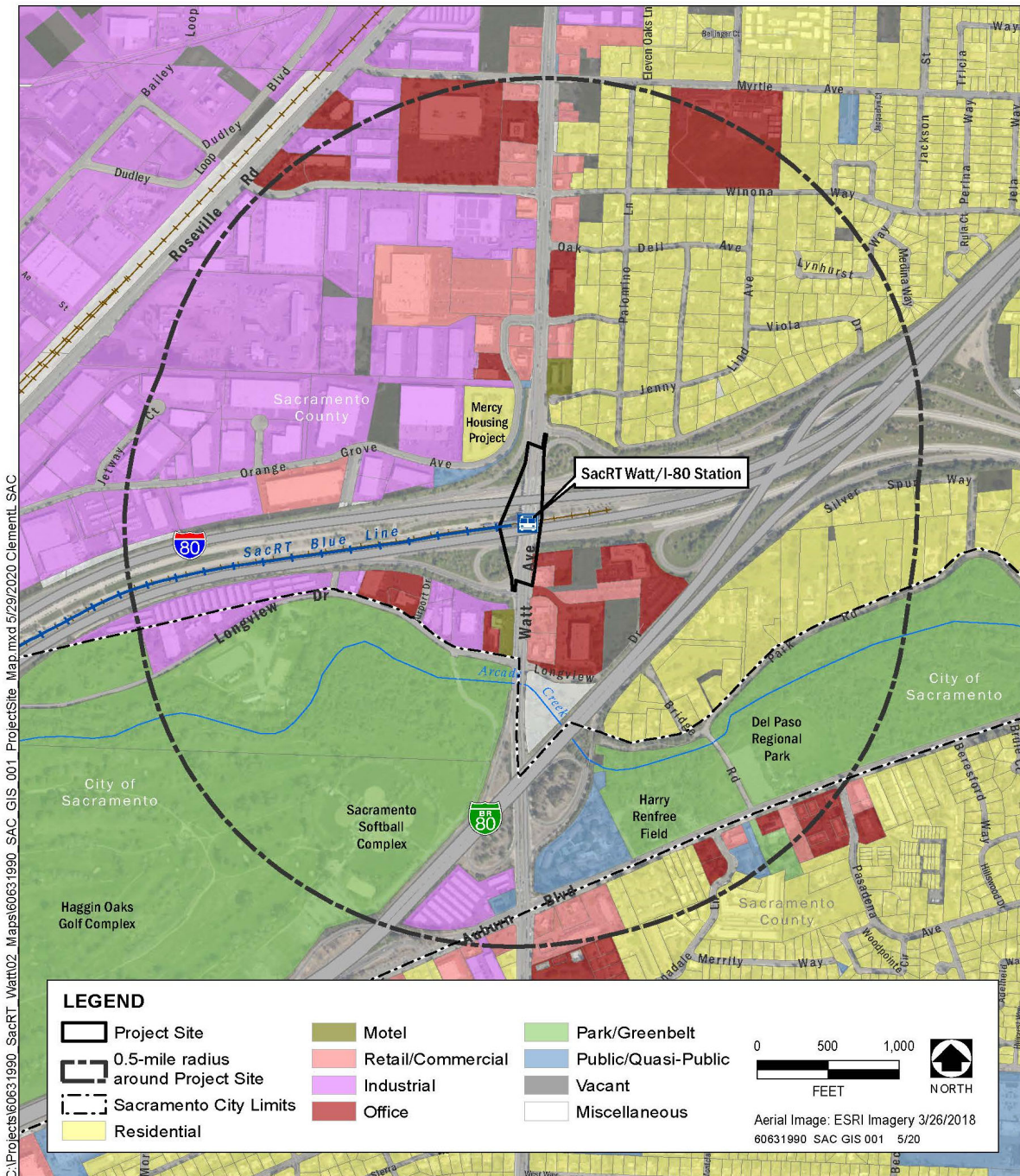
Scope of this project is highlighted in bold.

* This item not displayed in detail on figure

Figure 1. SacRT Project Components of the Watt/I-80 Transit Center Improvements Project

Project Location

The project site in unincorporated Sacramento County includes a portion of the Watt/I-80 Transit Station, the Watt Avenue overpass (over I-80 and the SacRT Blue Line), and Watt Avenue crossings of both the eastbound and westbound I-80 on-ramps (see Figure 2). The immediately surrounding area includes a Walmart, future Mercy affordable housing project, and industrial uses to the northwest; existing lower density housing to the northeast; Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) offices and retail to the southeast; and industrial and community and regional recreation areas to the southwest.



Source: Sacramento County 2020

Figure 2. Project Location

Categorical Exemption Analysis

The project qualifies for a Categorical Exemption under Class 1, CEQA Section 15301(c), Existing Facilities. Class 1 is appropriate because it covers relatively minor alterations to existing facilities, including transit facilities. The discussion below provides an analysis of why this project meets the conditions for a Class 1 exemption, as well as the reasons why the exceptions outlined in CEQA Section 15300.2 do not apply to the project.

15301(c) Existing Facilities

Class 1 consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures and facilities, including existing highways and streets, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and similar facilities (this includes road grading for the purpose of public safety), and other alterations such as the addition of bicycle facilities, including but not limited to bicycle parking, bicycle-share facilities and bicycle lanes, transit improvements such as bus lanes, pedestrian crossings, street trees, and other similar alterations that do not create additional automobile lanes.

The project meets these features / characteristics. Class 1 covers minor alterations to existing facilities including existing highways, sidewalks, gutters, bicycle lanes and facilities, and transit facilities. The project would include alteration of existing public highways (on-ramps and highway overcrossing), sidewalks, and transit improvements to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the Watt/I-80 Transit Center. Specific project components include modifying vehicle travel lanes to include wider sidewalks and bicycle lanes; closing, demolishing, and replacing the existing stairways on the east and west sides of Watt Avenue; installing improved lighting, landscape buffers, and ornamental fencing for safety and aesthetics; expanding the existing Watt Avenue plaza entrances and providing trash and recycling receptacles, seating, shade/rain shelters, and concrete and bollards as a separation from vehicular traffic; installing bus stops and bus shelters; and improving pedestrian crossings of highway on- and off-ramps. The proposed pedestrian, bicycle, and transit enhancements would occur entirely within existing road rights-of-way, and would not require changes to the existing land uses, zoning, or general plan land use designations. Therefore, the project meets the definitions of the Class 1, Section 15301(c) exemption.

Exceptions to Categorical Exemption Analysis

None of the exceptions listed in Section 15300.2 would apply to the project for the following reasons:

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

This exception only applies to Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11. These classifications do not apply to this project (i.e., Class 1); therefore, this exception is not discussed further.

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

Cumulative impacts refer to two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts (State CEQA Guidelines

Section 15355). The project would involve installing minor upgrades to the existing Watt/I-80 Transit Center and squaring-up a small portion of the existing Watt Avenue/I-80 on-ramps. Due to the nature of the project, its small size, and its location, the project would not affect agricultural or forestry resources, air quality, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, land use planning, geology, minerals, public services, recreation, utilities, or wildfire. As discussed in further detail in Sections c–f below, the project would not have significant effects on biological resources, hydrology and flooding, noise, transportation, scenic highways/resources, hazardous waste sites, or historical/archaeological resources. The project’s impacts on these resources are highly localized and would not have a considerable contribution to cumulative impacts. There are few other projects in the vicinity that could have a cumulative impact with the Watt/I-80 Transit Center upgrades. A review of pending projects in the adjacent North Highland community (<https://planningdocuments.saccounty.net/>) shows reasonably foreseeable development is primarily related to minor permits, design reviews, and zoning verification letters. The relatively few projects that could contribute impacts would be *the McClellan Park Special Planning Area and the North Watt Avenue Corridor Plan*. *The McClellan Park Special Planning Area includes the ongoing conversion of the former McClellan Air Force Base from a military facility to new industrial buildings at McClellan Park (Sacramento County 2019)*. *The North Watt Avenue Corridor Plan will guide infill growth and public improvements along North Watt Avenue and the Corridor Plan Area for the next 20 years (Sacramento County 2012)*. It is expected that potential impacts from these projects would be associated with traffic, employment growth, air quality/noise, and utility demand. *These impacts could have a cumulative impact with the Watt/I-80 Transit Center upgrades if construction of the projects occurred at the same time. However, the McClellan Park Special Planning Area and the North Watt Avenue Corridor Plan Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Programs (MMRP) each contain mitigation measures adopted by Sacramento County to address significant project impacts. The proposed project impacts would primarily occur during construction and would not overlap with the longer planning horizons of the McClellan Park Special Planning Area and the North Watt Avenue Corridor Plan*. The proposed project would not contribute to long-term impacts on any of the resources/topics *listed above*. Therefore, cumulative impacts with the project *would* be less than significant.

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

There are no unusual circumstances at the project site or as part of project operations that would result in significant effects on the environment. The project site is developed as a Transit Center; a small portion of the existing Watt Avenue/I-80 on-ramps are also part of the project site. The project proposes minor alterations to existing transit facilities, would be located entirely within existing road rights-of-way, and would not result in any changes to land use designations or zoning. Furthermore, the project would be consistent with the adopted North Watt *Avenue* Corridor Plan, which provides a comprehensive policy framework to promote infill growth, transportation choices, and infrastructure improvements (Sacramento County 2012). There is nothing about the project site or operations that present unusual circumstances. Thus, and as described in detail below, the project would not have any significant impacts requiring mitigation and this exception to the exemption would not apply.

Biological Resources

Based on a review of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) National Wetland Inventory data (USFWS 2023a) and current and historic Google Earth satellite images of the project site, aquatic features, including wetlands, are not present in the project vicinity. All ground disturbances would be limited to the existing, developed areas only and would not involve modification to, or loss of, wetlands. Stormwater from the project site would continue to be routed to the existing storm drainage system and therefore would not directly drain into a waterway supporting wetlands. In addition, no project activities are proposed within a water body/water course and the project would not require alterations to any surface water features, navigable waterways, or waters of the U.S. Therefore, project-related activities would cause no direct fill or indirect temporary or permanent loss of federally protected wetlands or wetland quality, and would not require related permits.

The project area is in a previously disturbed, highly urbanized, and landscaped area. No known occurrences of threatened or endangered species are present on or adjacent to the project site (California Department of Fish and Wildlife [CDFW] 2023). The nearest records of threatened and endangered species consist of two records of vernal pool fairy shrimp (listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act) (USFWS 1994) in vernal pool and ephemeral ditch habitats surrounded by annual grassland near the McClellan Business Park, approximately 0.5 mile northwest of the project site. No suitable habitat for vernal pool fairy shrimp (i.e., seasonal wetlands, ditches, or vernal pools in annual grassland) are present on or adjacent to the project site.

The project site is not located in any designated critical habitat or wildlife corridors (Spencer, et al. 2010; USFWS 2023b). The nearest critical habitat to the project site is more than 3 miles to the southwest along the south bank of the American River and consists of the American River Zone critical habitat for the valley elderberry longhorn beetle (VELB) (*Desmocerus californicus dimorphus*). No suitable habitat for the VELB (i.e., elderberry shrubs) is present in the project site. Wildlife movement corridors in the region typically are associated with rivers and creeks supporting riparian vegetation, which do not occur in the project site and are available elsewhere. The nearest riparian corridor is along Arcade Creek approximately 600 feet south of the project site, south of I-80 and commercial/industrial development. The project site is already used for light rail and bus service and is heavily trafficked, so that project construction would be unlikely to interfere with any existing, limited wildlife movement through or along the project area.

There is no fish habitat within the project site. Existing stormwater drainage systems eventually discharge to the Lower American River, which provides essential fish habitat for Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) (NOAA 2014). However, SacRT would implement Best Management Practices from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and Sacramento County to reduce any construction-related erosion and control stormwater runoff. Implementation of these practices would result in control of pollutants (including downstream sediment transport) during the project's construction and operational phases, such that degradation of downstream essential fish habitat would not occur. Therefore, impacts on essential fish habitat would be less than significant.

The project would require the removal of four mature trees at the interior of the on-ramp to I-80 westbound in the northeast quadrant of the Watt Avenue/I-80 interchange. The removal would be for the proposed squaring up of the on-ramp for safer pedestrian crossings. Because the ramp is within the Caltrans right-of-way and therefore subject to Caltrans requirements, changes to it and the area within the loop ramp must adhere to the Caltrans Standard Specifications. Section 14-6, Biological Resources, of the 2018 edition, which requires protection of regulated species and identifies specific measures to protect migratory and nongame birds, their occupied nests, and their eggs. These measures include

delineating a study area, halting work upon discovery of a regulated species, implementing protection measures as directed by Caltrans, and monitoring and reporting.

Therefore, with implementation of this standard specification, the project would not affect nesting or migratory birds protected by the state Fish and Game Code and the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In addition, SacRT would apply for tree removal permits per the Sacramento County Tree Protection Ordinance, as needed (Sacramento County 2020a).

Hydrology and Water Quality

According to the current Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), the project is not located within the 100-year floodplain. The project site is in Zone X, an area of minimal flood hazard (FEMA 2012). Therefore, the project would not increase flooding hazards and would not change floodplain elevations or floodways.

There are no surface water bodies within or adjacent to the project site. The closest surface water body is Arcade Creek, approximately 600 feet to the south. Arcade Creek flows southwest into the Natomas East Main Drainage Canal/Steelhead Creek, which discharges into the Sacramento River just upstream from the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers. SacRT would implement BMPs contained in the Sacramento County (Sacramento County 2018) Improvement Standards (Section 11 "Erosion and Sediment Control") and Caltrans BMPs to reduce any construction-related erosion and to control stormwater runoff. Construction techniques that could be implemented to reduce the potential for stormwater runoff may include minimizing site disturbance, controlling water flow over the construction site, stabilizing bare soil, and ensuring proper site cleanup. BMPs that could be implemented to reduce erosion at the off-ramp squaring up areas may include silt fences, staked straw bales/wattles, silt/sediment basins and traps, geofabric, trench plugs, terraces, water bars, soil stabilizers and re-seeding and mulching to revegetate disturbed areas.

Most of the project site is already covered with impervious surfaces, consisting of roadways, sidewalks, stairways, and roofs. Overall, the project would not increase the amount of impervious surfaces and, consequently, runoff volumes from the project site would be similar to existing conditions. Therefore, the stormwater runoff quality is not expected to change from existing conditions. The project would not alter or create a new direct or indirect connection to Arcade Creek or further impair it or other downstream waterbodies. Therefore, the project impacts on hydrology (including flooding) or water quality would be less than significant.

Noise

The closest noise-sensitive receptor is a residence that is 189 feet from the on-ramp squaring-up area and over 500 feet from the new bus stops on the overpass. The existing noise environment in the project vicinity is heavily influenced by transportation noise sources: light rail and freight train operations alongside the I-80 right-of-way, and vehicular traffic noise primarily from Watt Avenue and I-80, including the on- and off-ramps. There are no existing noise barriers (walls, berms, etc.) between I-80, including on and off-ramps, and homes just north of the I-80 right-of-way.

Based on the types of construction equipment that would be used, the estimated construction noise level at the nearest noise-sensitive receptor (i.e., the residence north of the Watt Avenue/I-80 westbound on-ramp) the project could generate a maximum noise level of 75 Leq dBA at this residence. Sacramento County Code section 6.68.090(e) provides that noise sources associated with construction, repair, remodeling, demolition, paving or grading of any real property, are exempt from

maximum noise level requirements, provided those activities comply with the hour restrictions specified in the ordinance (i.e., weekdays from 6am to 8pm and weekends from 7am to 8pm) (Sacramento County 2020b). SacRT will comply with these construction hour restrictions and, therefore, short-term, temporary construction noise impacts would be less than significant.

The project would relocate bus stops but would not increase the volume of buses. Therefore, the project would not involve activities or equipment that would contribute to operational noise impacts, and, consequently, noise impacts from long-term, permanent project operation would be less than significant.

A vibration analysis was performed based on two criteria recommended by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in its 2018 noise and vibration impact assessment manual: groundborne vibration for infrequent and occasional events (in VdB), and construction vibration damage criteria (in PPV, inches per second). Based on the types of construction equipment and the distance to commercial and residential receptors, the amount of vibration generated by the project would be below the FTA thresholds for (1) structural damage and (2) human annoyance from infrequent and occasional vibration events. Therefore, the project would not result in significant vibration impacts.

Transportation

The project would result in relocation of medians and shifting/restriping of lanes along Watt Avenue to accommodate wider sidewalks and future bicycle lanes, and relocated bus stops. In addition, the Watt Avenue/I-80 on-ramps would be slightly adjusted to allow safer pedestrian crossings and a new pedestrian crossing on the north leg of Watt Avenue at the I-80 Eastbound Ramp intersection. There would be no removal of traffic lanes, only restriping and narrowing of lanes, as well as squaring of the on-ramps. Therefore, roadway capacity of Watt Avenue would not be affected by the project. The project does not include traffic signal work. All project work would meet Sacramento County Department of Transportation and Caltrans design requirements and therefore would not result in significant traffic safety operational impacts.

During construction, there could be short-term and temporary lane closures to install proposed improvements. A traffic control plan and/or detour plan would be submitted to Sacramento County as required for construction work within the road right-of-way because vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian patterns would be modified. A traffic control/management plan would also be required by Caltrans as part of its encroachment permit.

The removal of the stairways would not affect life-safety systems or impose safety or security hazards for transit passengers. Construction would be phased to maintain vertical access to the light rail station from Watt Avenue at all times using the existing stairways prior to constructing the new stairways. Passenger elevators will remain.

The project would not result in temporary or permanent impacts to parking. The only parking within the project site is for buses at the bus stops by the transit station. The bus stops on both sides of the Watt Avenue overcrossing would be relocated to shorten pedestrian crossing distances and provide space for new bus shelters at the new locations. The relocated bus stops, which provide the same amount of curb space, would accommodate existing bus service/routes; there would be no increased bus service as part of the project. Therefore, the project would not have a significant impact on transportation facilities or parking.

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

There are no designated scenic vistas at the project site or in the project area. The nearest State-designated scenic highway is State Route 160 near Freeport, approximately 13.5 miles southwest of the project site (Caltrans 2023). The closest Sacramento County-designated scenic highway is Garden Highway, approximately 7 miles southwest of the project site (Sacramento County 2022). Since the topography in the Sacramento area is nearly flat, the project site is not visible from these scenic roadways.

All highway corridors in Sacramento County, including I-80, are protected by designated scenic corridors that extend 660 feet to each side beyond the right-of-way. The purpose of the highway scenic corridor designation is to better control the visual appearance of highway corridors, particularly related to design review of signage and other structures, and to encourage landscaping with native plants and maintenance of natural roadside vegetation (Sacramento County 2022). The project site includes an existing light rail station and elevated entrance plaza, with landscaping, lighting, seating, signage, and trash receptacles. The project would include several new and improved features that would enhance the existing viewshed at the project site, including additional landscaping, ornamental railings for additional pedestrian safety, *demolishing and replacing the existing stairways on both sides of Watt Avenue*, new seating, and new rain shelters and new bus stops that would include small areas of new roofing. These elements would be visually similar to and consistent with the existing light rail facilities. Modifying the Watt Avenue overcrossing lane configurations and squaring up the on-ramps for pedestrian safety along with hydroseeding would be visually similar to and consistent with the existing roadway facilities and the existing vegetation in the on-ramp areas. All of the new facilities would be designed to provide a visually improved appearance that would complement the existing station facilities. Therefore, the project would not substantially change the appearance of the County-designated scenic corridor along I-80 in the project area, and would not degrade the existing visual character or quality of the project site and its surroundings.

New lighting associated with the additional facilities would be installed according to SacRT design criteria for public safety, as well as with local policies on light pollution and design guidelines requiring light fixtures to be shielded and directed downward, to reduce light pollution. Roofing on the new pedestrian shelters would be designed according to SacRT design criteria to reduce glare. The project does not include tall or wide buildings that could cast adverse shade or shadows on adjacent land uses. Therefore, the project would not result in significant impacts on state or County scenic resources.

- e) **Hazardous Waste Sites.** *A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.*

There is no known or potential hazardous materials contamination at the project site. The project site is not on the list of hazardous materials sites, compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5. This list, known as the "Cortese List," was reviewed through the record search of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control's (DTSC 2023) online EnviroStor database and the State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB 2023) online GeoTracker database. There is only one active known hazardous materials site on the "Cortese List" within 0.5 mile of the project site: the federal Superfund site at the former McClellan Air Force Base (AFB). A small portion of this Superfund site is located southeast of Roseville Road, approximately 1,800 feet northwest of the project site. In this area, fuels were stored during former AFB operations, and the soil and groundwater became contaminated. This

area is currently used by Sacramento County as the North Area Recovery Station. Groundwater remediation is ongoing, and the contaminated groundwater plume is confined to the refuse transfer station site. Controls are in place at the North Area Recovery Station that prevent land use changes or soil excavation. Two closed hazardous materials sites are also listed in the GeoTracker database, approximately 700 feet north and approximately 350 feet south of the project site, respectively, at existing Union 76 and Chevron fuel stations. In both instances, minor fuel spills resulted in soil contamination, which was excavated and removed. The cases were closed in 1999 and 1987, respectively.

Because the Superfund site is distant from the project site, the contaminated groundwater plume is confined to the recovery station site, and the depth to groundwater at the project site is approximately 120 feet below the surface (California Department of Water Resources [DWR] 2018), the likelihood of encountering contaminated groundwater beneath the project site is very low. The two nearby closed hazardous materials sites only involved soil contamination and were remediated many years ago; thus, they do not represent a hazard for project-related excavation or construction activities.

Project construction and operation would involve the storage, use, and transport of small quantities of hazardous materials such as fuels, oils, lubricants, and paint, which are typical for transit station upkeep and maintenance. However, SacRT and its construction contractors are required to use, store, and transport hazardous materials in compliance with applicable federal, state, and local regulations during project construction and operation. Workers who handle hazardous materials are required to adhere to federal and state Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements. Thus, no impacts related to hazardous materials would occur.

- f) **Historical Resources.** *A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource*

Historical Resources

The sole historic-age built environment resource in the “Area of Potential Effects (APE)” is the Watt Avenue overcrossing (OC) (State Bridge No. 24 0290) that was built in 1971. The Watt Avenue OC (State Bridge No. 24 0290) was found not eligible for listing as part of a state-wide screening effort, and Caltrans has designated Watt Avenue OC a Category 5 bridge (not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places). *Additionally, the stairways to be demolished are within the existing transit center structure that was constructed in April 1987 and is not of historic age or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic resource.* Thus, there would be no impact on historical resources.

Archeological Resources

No previously-recorded archaeological resources were identified in the APE during the background research. Two prior studies that included the current APE noted that the area has been heavily modified by development, including the construction of the Watt Avenue overpass and transit station. Any prehistoric archaeological resources that might have been present prior to development would have been on the surface of original native soils; if present, they would have been disturbed or destroyed during cutting and filling episodes to construct I-80 and the Watt Avenue overpass. Thus, there would be no impact on archaeological resources.

Tribal Cultural Resources

Archival research conducted by AECOM indicated that the APE does not contain any previously recorded Native American sites, precontact archaeological sites, historic-period cemeteries, or human skeletal remains. AECOM requested a Sacred Lands File (SLF) search and a list of Native American tribes with potential interest in the undertaking from the California Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC). The NAHC responded that the SLF search was positive for the project. The identified Sacred Land is affiliated with the United Auburn Indian Community of the Auburn Rancheria (UAIC). The following eight tribes were notified of the proposed project:

- Buena Vista Rancheria of Me-Wuk Indians
- Colfax-Todds Valley Consolidated Tribe
- Lone Band of Miwok Indians
- Nashville Enterprise Miwok–Maidu–Nishinam Tribe
- Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians
- Tsi Akim Maidu
- UAIC
- Wilton Rancheria

Because the SLF search was positive for the UAIC, SacRT and its consultants engaged in multiple email communications to understand the potential concerns and the potential to affect sacred lands and tribal cultural resources (TCRs) (*Starkey 2020*). SacRT provided more detailed information on the locations and depths of ground disturbance and excavations needed for the foundations of the proposed improvements. On August 20, 2020, the UAIC indicated that it did not believe the project construction would impact tribal cultural resources; however, it did request that avoidance and minimization measures be implemented to address unanticipated discoveries of TCRs. These measures, agreed to by SacRT, are:

- If any suspected TCRs are discovered during ground-disturbing construction activities, all work shall cease within 100 feet of the find, or an agreed upon distance based on the project area and nature of the find. A Tribal Representative from UAIC shall be immediately notified.
- A minimum of seven days prior to beginning earthwork, clearing and grubbing, or other soil-disturbing activities, SacRT or its contractor shall contact the UAIC with the proposed earthwork start-date and a UAIC Tribal Representative or Tribal Monitor shall be invited to inspect the project site, including any soil piles, trenches, or other disturbed areas, within the first five days of groundbreaking activity, or as appropriate for the type and size of project. During this inspection, a UAIC Tribal Representative or Tribal Monitor may provide an on-site meeting for construction personnel information on TCRs and workers awareness brochure.
- A Tribal Cultural Resource Awareness brochure and training program for all personnel involved in project implementation shall be developed in coordination with UAIC. The brochure will be distributed, and the training will be conducted by UAIC representatives before any stages of project implementation and construction activities begin on the project site. The training may be done in coordination with the project archaeologist.

With the above avoidance and minimization measures to be incorporated into contractor construction specification, potential impacts on tribal cultural resources would be less than significant.

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Notice of Exemption

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk

County of: _____

From: (Public Agency): _____

(Address)

Project Title: _____

Project Applicant: _____

Project Location - Specific:

Project Location - City: _____ Project Location - County: _____

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: _____

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: _____

Exempt Status: **(check one):**

- Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: _____
- Statutory Exemptions. State code number: _____

Reasons why project is exempt:

Lead Agency

Contact Person: _____ Area Code/Telephone/Extension: _____

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Title: _____

Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

RESOLUTION NO. 2023-06-063

Adopted by the Board of Directors of the Sacramento Regional Transit District on this date:

June 12, 2023

ADOPTING A CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION FOR THE REVISED WATT AVENUE/INTERSTATE 80 TRANSIT CENTER IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT

WHEREAS, on September 14, 2020, by Resolution 20-09-0100, the Board adopted a Categorical Exemption for the Watt/Interstate 80 Transit Center Improvements Project; and

WHEREAS, due to changes in the design since the time of Project approval, the Sacramento Regional Transit District has prepared an updated Categorical Exemption analysis to determine if the project, as revised, still meets the criteria for a Categorical Exemption.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this Board does hereby adopt the following findings, which this Board finds are supported by substantial evidence in light of the entire record:

THAT, a Notice of Exemption has been prepared pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA);

THAT, the Revised Watt Avenue/Interstate 80 Transit Center Improvements Project ("Revised Project") is Categorically Exempt consistent with state and SacRT guidelines implementing CEQA;

THAT, the Revised Project would not trigger any exceptions to the application of a Categorical Exemption and would not have unusual circumstances that may result in a significant impact on the environment;

THAT, the Board certifies the Categorical Exemption has been completed and is in compliance with CEQA and is consistent with state and SacRT guidelines implementing CEQA;

THAT, the Board has reviewed and considered the Categorical Exemption;

THAT, the Board has before it all of the necessary environmental information required by CEQA to properly analyze and evaluate any and all of the potential environmental effects of the Revised Project;

THAT, the Board has reviewed and considered the Categorical Exemption, which reflects the Board's independent judgment; and

THAT, based on the evidence presented and the records and files presented, the Board determines that the Revised Project will not have a significant effect on the environment;

RESOLVED FURTHER THAT, the Board approves and adopts a Categorical Exemption for the Revised Watt Avenue/Interstate 80 Transit Center Improvements Project; and

RESOLVED FURTHER THAT, the Board approves the Revised Project and directs staff to file a Notice of Exemption with the California State Clearinghouse within five working days of this approval; and

RESOLVED FURTHER THAT, the Board designates the Director, Engineering and Construction, or their designee, located at 1400 29th Street, Sacramento, CA 95816, as the custodian of the records in this matter.

PATRICK KENNEDY, Chair

A T T E S T:

HENRY LI, Secretary

By: _____
Tabetha Smith, Assistant Secretary