

ADDENDUM TO THE MERCED VISION 2030 GENERAL PLAN FINAL PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

General Plan Amendment #22-03
Environmental Review #22-25

LEAD AGENCY:

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) recognizes that between the date an environmental document is completed and the date that the project is fully implemented, CEQA Section 15164 provides that “the lead agency or responsible agency shall prepare an addendum to a previously certified EIR if some change or additions are necessary but none of the conditions described in Section 15162 calling for the preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred.

On January 3, 2012, the Merced City Council approved the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* Program Environmental Impact Report (“FEIR”). The FEIR analyzes the implementation and buildout of the General Plan through the 2030 planning period and includes a circulation plan that addresses the City’s major road system, local street patterns, air facilities, bus and rail transit, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. As a Program level EIR, the FEIR did not review specific proposals, but rather analyzed the development potential of approximately 33,462 acres of land within the Specific Urban Development Planning Area (SUDP) and the Sphere of Influence (SOI). The Transportation/Traffic section of the FEIR identified transportation impacts associated with implementation of General Plan. A traffic analysis was prepared (Fehr and Peers, May 9, 2009) to investigate anticipated traffic conditions with implementation of the proposed General Plan.

The proposed General Plan Amendment would redesignate the section of Mission Avenue from Coffee Street east to Plum Drive (extended) from a Divided Arterial road to a Collector road, thus reducing the right-of-way from 118 feet to 74 feet (not including landscape areas). This reduction is requested as part of the Merced Gateway Marketplace Shopping Center that was approved in 2017. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (SCH #2015101048) was approved by the Merced City Council on August 9, 2017, for the Merced Marketplace. This EIR did not consider the reduction in the roadway classification for Mission Avenue.

1.1 - CEQA Authority for an Addendum

The California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) Guidelines Section 15162 through 15164 specify the type of documentation required when changes are proposed to a project that has been previously approved pursuant to a certified EIR. State CEQA Guidelines Section 15162 states:

“a) When an EIR has been certified or a negative declaration adopted for a project, no subsequent EIR shall be prepared for that project unless the lead agency determines, on the basis of substantial evidence in the light of the whole record one or more of the following:

- (1) *Substantial changes are proposed in the project, which will require major revisions of the previous EIR or negative declaration due to the involvement of new environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects;*
 - (2) *Substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is undertaken which will require major revisions of the previous EIR or negative declaration due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects; or,*
 - (3) *New information of substantial importance, which was not known and could not have been known with the exercise of reasonable diligence at the time of the previous EIR was certified as complete or the negative declaration was adopted, shows any of the following:*
 - A. *The project will have one or more significant effects not discussed in the previous EIR or negative declaration;*
 - B. *Significant effects previously examined will be substantially more severe than shown in the previous EIR;*
 - C. *Mitigation measures or alternatives previously found not to be feasible would in fact be feasible and would substantially reduce one or more significant effects of the project, but the project proponents decline to adopt the mitigation measure or alternative; or*
 - D. *Mitigation measures or alternatives which are considerably different from those analyzed in the previous EIR would substantially reduce one or more significant effects on the environment, but the project proponents decline to adopt the mitigation measure or alternative.*
- b) *If changes to a project or its circumstances occur or new information becomes available after adoption of a negative declaration, the lead agency shall prepare a subsequent EIR if required under subdivision (a). Otherwise, the lead agency shall determine whether to prepare a subsequent negative declaration, an addendum, or no further documentation.*
 - c) *Once a project has been approved, the lead agency's role in project approval is completed, unless further discretionary approval on that project is required. Information appearing after an approval does not require reopening of that approval. If after the project is approved, any of the conditions described in subdivision (a) occurs, a subsequent EIR or negative declaration shall only be prepared by the public agency, which grants the next discretionary approval for the project, if any. In this situation, no other responsible agency shall grant an approval for the project until the subsequent EIR has been certified or subsequent negative declaration adopted.*
 - d) *A subsequent EIR or subsequent negative declaration shall be given the same notice and public review as required under Section 15087 and 15072. A*

subsequent EIR or negative declaration shall state where the previous document is available and can be reviewed.”

Section 15163 addresses when a supplemental EIR is required:

- “a) The Lead or Responsible Agency may choose to prepare a supplement to an EIR rather than a subsequent EIR if:
 - (1) Any of the conditions described in Section 15162 would require the preparation of a subsequent EIR, and*
 - (2) Only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation.**
- b) The supplement to the EIR need contain only the information necessary to make the previous EIR adequate for the project as revised.*
- c) A supplement to an EIR shall be given the same kind of notice and public review as is given to a draft EIR under Section 15087.*
- d) A supplement to an EIR may be circulated by itself without recirculating the previous draft or final EIR.*
- e) When the agency decides whether to approve the project, the decision-making body shall consider the previous EIR as revised by the supplemental EIR. A finding under Section 15091 shall be made for each significant effect shown in the previous EIR as revised.”*

Section 15164 of the State CEQA Guidelines allows for an addendum when a subsequent or supplemental EIR is not required. State CEQA Guidelines Section 15164 states:

- “a) The lead agency or responsible agency shall prepare an addendum to a previously certified EIR if some change or additions are necessary, but none of the conditions described in Section 15162 calling for preparation of a subsequent EIR have occurred.*
- b) An addendum to an adopted negative declaration may be prepared if only minor technical changes or additions are necessary or none of the conditions described in Section 15162 calling for the preparation of a subsequent EIR or negative declaration have occurred.*
- c) An addendum need not be circulated for public review, but can be included in or attached to the final EIR, or adopted negative declaration.*
- d) The decision-making body shall consider the addendum with the final EIR or adopted negative declaration prior to making a decision on the project.*
- e) A brief explanation of the decision not to prepare a subsequent EIR pursuant to Section 15162 should be included in an addendum to an EIR, the lead agency’s findings on the project, or elsewhere in the record. The explanation must be supported by substantial evidence.”*

1.2 – Previous CEQA Environmental Documents

Merced Vision 2030 General Plan EIR

The City's General Plan includes forecasts of long-term conditions, outlines development goals and policies, and includes exhibits and diagrams. It guides growth and development within the City by designating land uses on the proposed land use map and through implementation of the goals and policies of the City's General Plan. It also provides a long-term vision for the City, and through its implementation goals and policies, indicates how that vision may be achieved over time.

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan EIR* (SCH #2008071069) was certified on January 4, 2012, and addresses the environmental effects associated with the implementation of the City's General Plan.

1.3 – Findings

For purposes of the Addendum, the project includes amending the Circulation Element by changing the roadway classification for a portion of Mission Avenue (from Coffee Street east to the easterly side of the future Pluim Drive) from "Divided Arterial" to "Collector." The proposed change does not require preparation of a new subsequent or supplemental EIR, due to neither the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects. Therefore, the completion of an Addendum is appropriate CEQA compliance for the project.

1.4 – CEQA Approach

Pursuant to State CEQ Guidelines, this Addendum has been prepared to determine whether changing the roadway classification for a portion of Mission Avenue (from Coffee Street east to the easterly side of the future Pluim Drive) would result in new impacts or new information of substantial importance requiring the preparation of a subsequent or supplemental EIR. As documented within this Addendum, none of the criteria outlined in State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15162 or 15163 have been identified. Thus, this Addendum is sufficient to approve the minor revisions to the Circulation Element of the City's General Plan.

SECTION 2: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project Name:

General Plan Amendment #22-03

Project Location:

Mission Avenue, from the east side of Coffee Street, east to the east side of the future Pluim Drive (Figure 1)

Project Applicant:

Eric Pluim, on behalf of Gateway Park Development Partners, LLC
133 Old Wards Ferry Road, Ste. G
Sonora, CA 95370-7822

Figure 1 – Location Map



Setting:

The Circulation Element of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* is Chapter 4 of the General Plan. This element addresses the City's major road system, local street patterns, air facilities, bus and rail transit, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The goal is to identify the most effective ways to plan for circulation while enhancing the community and protecting the environment.

City and regional streets and highways are classified by categories that reflect their importance and function. Freeways are the highest level of roadway, with fully controlled access, high operating speeds and volumes, and highest design standards. Local streets and alleys are the lowest function classification, with low speeds and volumes and direct access to adjacent property. Other roadway classifications include:

Road Classification	Right-of-Way	# of Lanes
Major Arterial	128 Ft.	4-6
Arterial	128 Ft.	4-6
Divided Arterial	118 Ft.	4-6
Minor Arterial	94 Ft.	2-4
Major Collector	68-74 Ft.	2-4
Collector	68 Ft.	2
Local	51-62 Ft.	2

Figure 4.1 of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* provides the Circulation Plan for the City (refer to Figure 2 of this document). This map shows the major roadways and their classifications according to the Circulation Plan.

Mission Avenue is an east/west road that extends from SR Hwy 59 to Arboleda Road. West of SR Hwy 59, Mission Avenue becomes Dickenson Ferry Road and extends west to Quinley Road. The sections of Mission Avenue between SR Hwy 59 and Tyler Road and Hwy 99 and Tower Road are within the City Limits (Figure 2.1). The rest of Mission Avenue/Dickenson Ferry Road is in the unincorporated areas of the County.

According to the Circulation Map at Figure 2, Mission Avenue is classified as a Major Arterial (128-foot right-of-way) from the west side of Hwy 99 to SR Hwy 59. On the east side of Hwy 99, Mission Avenue is classified as a Divided Arterial (118-foot right-of-way). The proposed change would reduce the classification for Mission Avenue from Coffee Street to the east side of the future Pluim Drive from a Divided Arterial to a Collector Road (74-foot right-of-way). The section of Mission Avenue between Coffee Street and Hwy 99 was abandoned in 2018 as the road came to a dead-end and this section was no longer needed.

In 2008, the Mission Avenue/Hwy 99 interchange was constructed. This interchange connects to Campus Parkway, which in turn connects north to Yosemite Avenue and will eventually connect to the UC Merced Campus.

In July 2022, the Campus Parkway (a four-lane expressway) opened the second segment of the expressway. This expressway provides cross-town access from Hwy 99 to Yosemite Avenue in North Merced. This expressway has easy access to North and South Hwy 99 as well as connections to East SR Hwy 140. Connections to SR Hwy 59 North and South as well as West SR Hwy 140 can be made via Hwy 99.

Figure 2 Circulation Map

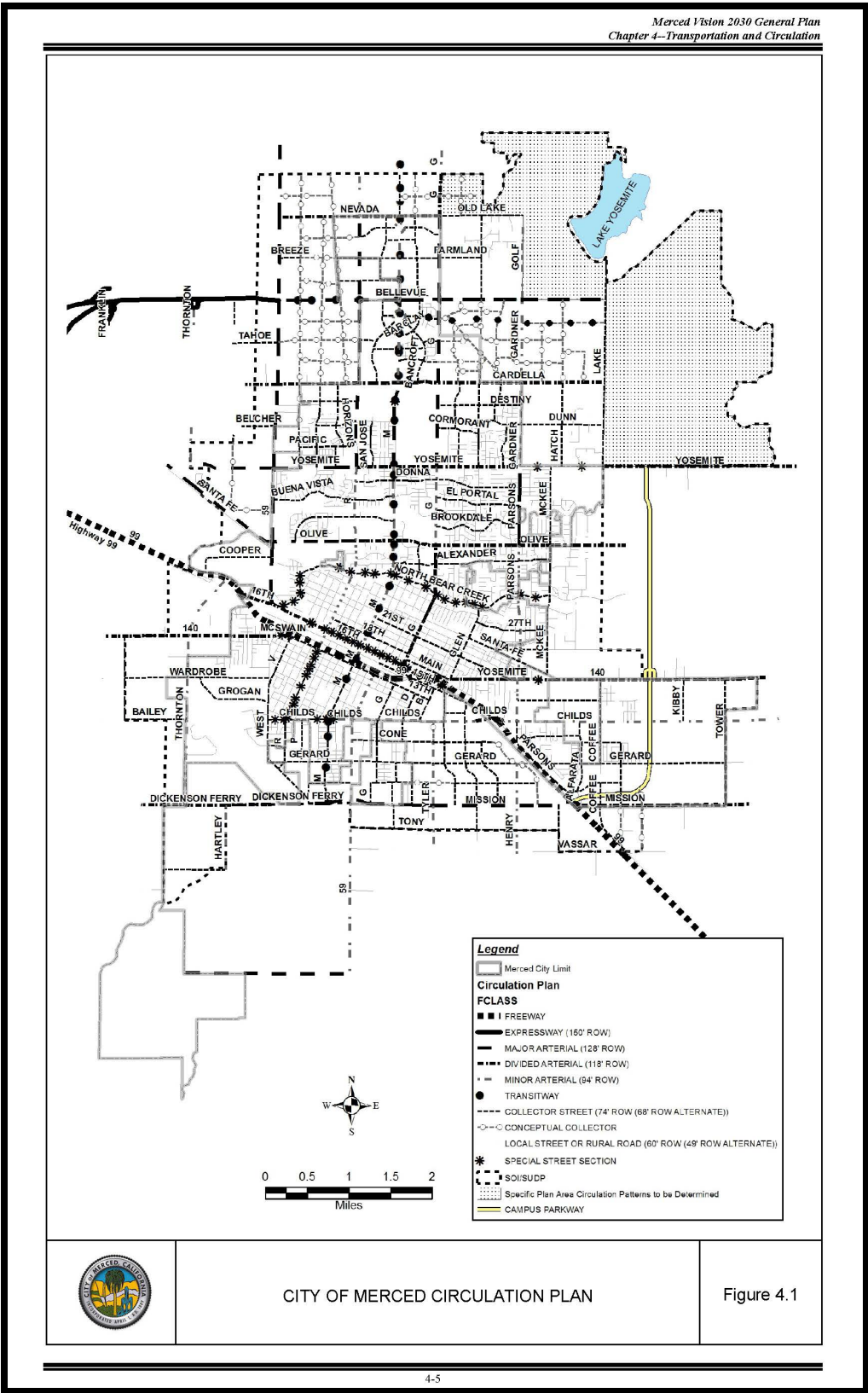
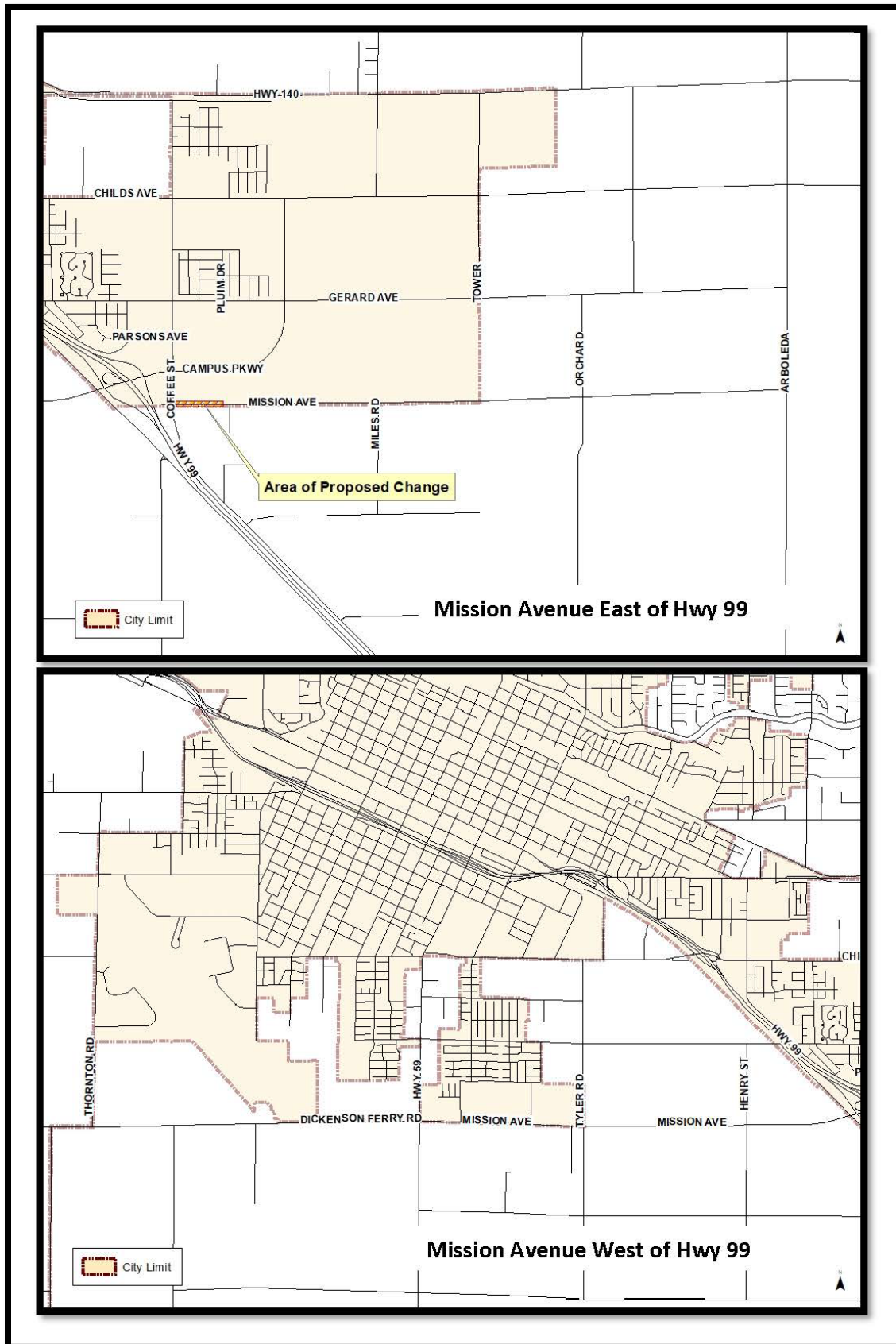


Figure 2.1 – Mission Avenue



With the opening of Campus Parkway, the need for Mission Avenue to be a Divided Arterial on the north side of Hwy 99 was diminished. Mission Avenue no longer provides access to Hwy 99. Campus Parkway now provides access as previously described.

Campus Parkway would provide access to the future Pluim Drive (Collector) which would connect to Mission Avenue, which would remain a Divided Arterial east of Pluim Drive.

Mission Avenue is the southern boundary for the Merced Gateway Marketplace shopping center. This shopping center extends north to Gerard Avenue and is bisected by Campus Parkway. As this shopping center developed, the developers realized that Mission Avenue would no longer need to be a Divided Arterial along their project frontage due to the access provided by Campus Parkway and Pluim Drive (extended). The Merced Gateway Marketplace Shopping Center site consists of 77.5 acres. The shopping center will include over 600,000 square feet of commercial uses and approximately 200 multi-family apartments. Construction of the first phase of the shopping center has begun between Campus Parkway and Mission Avenue. Currently, this phase includes an Arco AM/PM Mini-Mart/Gas Station, Starbuck's, McDonald's, and Tractor Supply.

SECTION 3: Environmental Impact Analysis

3.1 – Summary

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* analyzed potential impacts related to the following sections: Aesthetics, Agriculture and Forest Resource, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology and Soils, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Land Use and Planning, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population and Housing, Recreation, Public Services, Transportation, Utilities and Services, Public Services, Transportation, Utilities and Services, and Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

The proposed project only seeks to amend the information found in the Circulation Element of the General Plan. The City's preliminary review of the project determined that Traffic and Transportation is the only environmental issue potentially affected by the proposed change to the classification of a segment of Mission Avenue. Therefore, this analysis only addresses potential impacts related to the Transportation section of the EIR.

3.2 - Merced Vision 2030 General Plan EIR: Transportation and Traffic

Section 3.15 of the City's General Plan EIR evaluates the potential transportation and traffic impacts resulting from the implementation of the City's General Plan. Implementation of the proposed *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* will generate increased traffic that will affect circulation conditions on the local and regional roadway network. The General Plan Circulation Element includes a broad range of policies for managing and optimizing the function of the transportation system to accommodate this additional traffic, and the proposed Circulation Plan included in the Circulation Element identifies the location of the physical circulation system planned throughout the City.

As part of the EIR, a traffic analysis was prepared. The traffic analysis investigated anticipated traffic conditions with implementation of the proposed General Plan. The analysis focused on the projected roadway and intersection operations at buildout of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and investigated the adequacy of the proposed Circulation Plan, primarily as it pertains to vehicle traffic on the planned roadways and intersections.

As a result of the traffic analysis, traffic volumes and the Level of Service (LOS) on key roadway segments were included in the EIR and subsequently in the Transportation Section of the General Plan. Table 3.15-4 of the EIR provided the traffic volumes and LOS results. It should be noted that the LOS results presented in Table 3.15-4 represent a worst-case scenario, as the roadway segment analysis was based on buildout of the Merced Vision 2030 General Plan, which most likely will not occur in its entirety by the year 2030, and the analysis does not consider the additional capacity that is provided at intersections for additional turn pockets (i.e. dual left-turn pockets), nor the benefits of signal timing coordination and advanced traffic signal technology that will be phased in over the life of the General Plan.

According to the Transportation Element of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*, Level of Service (LOS) standards are a method for expressing how well traffic is moving on a road or through an intersection in relation to the capacity of that road or intersection. LOS ranks the quality of traffic movement on a scale of A through F, with A being the best.

The traffic analysis prepared for the General Plan included the section of Mission Avenue proposed to be changed [from Coffee Street east to the east side of Pluim Drive (extended)]. The analysis considered this section of Mission Avenue as a Divided Arterial, but it currently only has two lanes. The analysis showed that Mission Avenue from Coffee Street to Tower Road currently operates at a Level of Service (LOS) C+. At build-out of the General Plan, this section of Mission Avenue was considered to be a four-lane Divided Arterial and continued to operate at LOS C+. The average daily trips expected at build-out was 1,890.

3.2 – Updated Analysis of Proposed Change

An updated traffic analysis to consider the proposed change to the segment of Mission Avenue from Coffee Street to the east side of Pluim Drive (extended) was prepared by Ken Anderson & Associates (Attachment 1). This analysis considered the long-term traffic conditions that represent full buildout of land uses in the area that will be tributary to E. Mission Avenue.

Approach

The analysis presented long-term daily traffic volumes and resulting traffic conditions under the current General Plan circulation plan. This work has involved identifying long term land use assumptions for the southeastern Merced area, including the Industrial areas east of Campus Parkway. The travel demand forecasting model created for the *Merced Gateway EIR (SCH #2015101048)* was modified for this purpose, including incorporating relevant future roadways (i.e., Coffee Street and Pluim Drive extensions to Marino Way). The applicable roadway section for Mission Avenue was then determined based on daily traffic volume and the General Plan's applicable LOS thresholds (refer to the excerpt from Table 1 of the analysis Prepared by Ken Anderson & Associates, Inc. – Attachment 1).

Table 1 (excerpt)

Level of Service Thresholds for Roadway Segments					
Roadway Type	Daily Roadway Segment Level of Service Thresholds				
	LOS A	LOS B	LOS C	LOS D	LOS E
2 lane Arterial	-	-	11,600	16,000	16,800
4 lane Arterial	-	4,100	26,800	33,700	35,400
6 lane Arterial	-	6,600	41,800	50,700	53,200
2 lane Collector	-	-	4,800	10,300	13,200
4 lane Collector	-	-	11,300	22,200	26,400

A new 24-hour count collected on May 28, 2021, revealed that Mission Avenue from Coffee Street to Arboleda Drive currently operates at LOS C. The section of Mission Avenue from Coffee Street to Tower Road had 375 average daily trips (ADT's), of which 28 (7%) were trucks. Mission Avenue from Tower Road to Arboleda had 109 ADT's with 14 trucks (13%).

Development Characteristics

Because a lot of the land in the area of Mission Avenue and Coffee Street is vacant, the traffic analysis assumed certain land uses. These assumptions were based on the previous EIR prepared for the Merced Gateway Shopping Center (SCH #2015101048), but were modified to create a "worst case" assessment of the areas traffic volumes. The land uses assumed included the Merced Gateway Shopping Center, Business Park, and Industrial. Table 3 of Attachment 1 provides more details on the assumptions made in the analysis.

Circulation System Assumptions

The traffic analysis at Attachment 1 assumed certain roadways were either existing or would be constructed at buildout of the General Plan (refer to Table 4 of Attachment 1). Consistent with the proposed change, Mission Avenue was assumed to be a Collector rather than a Divided Arterial in these assumptions.

Results

The analysis used the Merced County Association of Government's (MCAG) traffic model. When the model was run, assuming Mission Avenue from Coffee Street, east to the east side of Pluim Drive (extended) is a 2-lane Collector road instead of a Divided Arterial, this section continued to operate at LOS C.

Because this segment would maintain the same level of service as a two-lane Collector as it was expected to as a Divided Arterial in the General Plan EIR, there are no impacts associated with the proposed change in the classification of this segment of Mission Avenue.

SECTION 4: Conclusion

As described in Section 3 above, the proposed change to the classification of Mission Avenue from Coffee Street to the east side of Pluim Drive (extended) would not decrease the level of service for this segment or create other traffic-related impacts. Therefore, the Circulation Element of the General Plan would remain consistent with the assumptions in the General Plan Circulation Traffic Study. Additionally, there are no new impacts

associated with air quality, noise, or greenhouse gas emissions. All applicable mitigation from the City's General Plan EIR will continue to be applied.

Based on the information provided above, the proposed General Plan Amendment to change the classification of a segment of Mission Avenue from Divided Arterial to Collector does not require revisions to the City's General Plan EIR.

Attachments:

- 1) Traffic Analysis

Please refer to Attachment E of Planning Commission Staff Report #22-922 for Attachment 1 to the Addendum to the General Plan EIR (Environmental Review #22-25).