



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 24-468, **Version:** 1

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**SUBJECT:** Adoption of Resolution to Approve the Multi-Jurisdictional Merced County Regional Active Transportation Plan and Approval of Environmental Review #24-18 Statutory Exemption for Feasibility and Planning Studies Pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15262

### REPORT IN BRIEF

Considers adopting a resolution to approve the Multi-Jurisdiction Merced County Active Transportation Plan and approving Environmental Review #24-18 - Statutory Exemption for Feasibility and Planning Studies Pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15262.

### RECOMMENDATION

**City Council** - Adopt a motion adopting **Resolution 2024-60**, a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Merced, California, Adopting a Statutory Exemption Per the California Environmental Quality Act and the Merced County Association of Governments Multi-Jurisdictional Merced County Regional Active Transportation Plan.

### ALTERNATIVES

1. Adopt the Plan, as recommended with conditions by the Bicycle Advisory Commission and staff; or,
2. Adopt the Plan, subject to modification by City Council (identify specific items to be amended in the motion); or,
3. Deny; or,
4. Refer to staff for reconsideration of specific items (to be addressed in the motion); or,
5. Continue to a future City Council meeting (date and time to be specified in the motion).

### AUTHORITY

City of Merced Charter, Section 200.

### CITY COUNCIL PRIORITIES

Fiscal Year 2023/2024 Council Goals and Priorities, item entitled "Parks & Recreation mentions continuing to explore opportunities for increased accessibility for all residents and providing enhanced maintenance - a goal of well-maintained, greener, vibrant park spaces and pathways. Also, under the item entitled "Public Works & City Beautification" a priority is to produce current projects including repaving streets, sidewalk replacement & expansion.

### DISCUSSION

Overview

The Multi-Jurisdiction Merced County Regional Active Transportation Plan (ATP) was facilitated by the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) and outlines the goals, policies and projects that support active transportation in Merced, and throughout the County. Active transportation refers to human-powered modes of travel, like walking and biking. It can also refer to modes of transportation like scooters, wheelchairs, and skateboards. An Active Transportation Plan (ATP) focuses on increasing these 'active' modes of transportation or supporting these modes through transportation infrastructure and programs.

This Plan is a regional document that takes a countywide look at the pedestrian and bicycle networks and how MCAG and its member agencies can support active transportation through education, equity, policy, and implementation. Walking and biking recommendations are made for the following jurisdictions in the region:

The cities of:

- Atwater
- Dos Palos
- Livingston
- Los Banos
- Merced

Larger unincorporated communities within Merced County:

- Delhi
- Hilmar
- Planada
- Santa Nella
- South Dos Palos
- Winton

Though the Plan evaluates the support of an active transportation network regionwide, the Plan does provide a focus on the individual communities, as well, including potential project sites within the City of Merced. The Plan was founded on and informed by adopted State, Regional and local plans including the 2013 City of Merced Bike and Transportation Plan and the 2019 City of Merced Active Transportation and Safe Routes to School Plan.). It was also founded on evaluating existing data related to walking and biking, identified barriers to walking, biking, and accessing transit through walk audits, benchmark on Safe System best practices and where challenges may exist and input from community members through a thorough engagement process.

The benefits of Active Transportation include:

- Connecting people to schools, retail, recreational, and transit centers, jobs, and other members of the community
- Improving health and reducing the incidence of disease and obesity
- Reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas production
- Supporting local businesses and economic vitality
- Creating more vibrant and lively streets
- Saving people money on gas and car maintenance

To achieve these goals, the ATP recommends a comprehensive network of citywide bikeways, trails, and sidewalks that connect all parts of the City of Merced. Since this process will take many years to complete, the ATP identifies priority projects based on a set of criteria derived with the help of the public. This ensures that the most important links and nodes in the Merced active transportation network are clearly identified and that agencies are able to advocate for funding, design, and construction of the most critical pieces of infrastructure when the opportunities to do so arise.

The Plan provides an intensive examination of existing conditions, hazards, future needs, best practices from around the country, and other data points serve as the background and support for the recommendations made. The Plan prioritized the bicycle and pedestrian project lists with both the input of the public and technical expertise to ensure that high-scoring projects are those that both align with community priorities and are likely to be competitive for future funding.

### Need for the Plan

Having a current, structured plan increases the likelihood of project funding. This plan has been created to be used in competitive fundraising activities. Funding provides the opportunity for implementation. Implementing some of the suggested projects will give community members and infrastructure users more enjoyment and keep them safer.

### Public Involvement

The ATP has been developed with extensive assistance from the public. Input from residents and stakeholders of the diverse communities across the region was a fundamental part of the ATP development process. Comprehensive engagement is critical to ensure that recommended projects serve the walking and biking needs of the community. Outreach to the public helped to identify locations for needed improvements, important destinations for access, and refine preferences for types of treatments. Participation was solicited through in-person and virtual workshops and focus groups with community members, a landing page on the MCAG website that links to the project website, which was produced in English and Spanish and includes a link to a survey and interactive web map, as well as various in-person events throughout the region. After a 30-day public comment period in March, changes were incorporated into the Draft-Final version of the Plan. That plan was presented for review to the MCAG Governing Board on April 18, 2024, and the document was unanimously adopted. The City of Merced Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission, after having been updated regularly about the project, considered the ATP at their April 23, 2024, meeting and voted for the City Council to adopt the plan with the condition that the routes to and the area around the proposed High-Speed Rail station be reconsidered for additional Active Transportation supportive design.

### Organization of the Plan

The Plan, seen at Attachment 1, is organized into six Chapters with a number of appendices.

- Vision and Guiding Principles - the purpose and need for an ATP, the Plan development process, its vision, and its goals.
- Where the Region Stands - including a summary of the existing bicycle and pedestrian

infrastructure, major barriers, bicycle/pedestrian collision trends and an equity analysis.

- Engaging the Community - outreach efforts to solicit feedback and input on the development of this Plan.
- Active Transportation Toolbox - national best practices in design and policy as well as infrastructure and non-infrastructure countermeasures.
- Building out a Regional Network - project list of recommended improvements to consider with project prioritization based on considerations like feasibility, safety, access, equity and connectivity.
- Implementation and Accountability - potential funding opportunities, progress tracking, coordination, strategies, and support by MCAG

Appendix A: Land Use Maps

- Appendix B: Survey Results
- Appendix C: Prioritization Process
- Appendix D: Project List
- Appendix E: Sample Resolution
- Appendix F: ATP Checklist

### Proposed Projects/Programs

The ATP proposes 68 projects throughout Merced; these recommendations vary between specific spot improvements to corridor-wide changes. The projects range from \$20,000 for .10 of a mile of a Class 3B facility on Orion Drive to \$20,000,000 for 4.20 miles of a Class 1 on Rascal Creek Bike Path. Some of these projects have been flagged in the ATP Checklist for importance. Network improvements within the City are estimated to cost \$121,020,000.00 dollars. Spot improvements, including the proposed Parsons Bridge, are estimated to cost \$15,640,000.00 dollars. The total of all proposed projects is estimated to be \$136,660,000.00 dollars.

Staff will work to develop an implementation plan that integrates these recommended projects into the annual Capital Improvement Plan and budget. Staff will also seek other funding sources for project implementation.

In addition to projects, the ATP also includes recommendations for updates to City of Merced policies and implementation of programs that would benefit the travelling public, particularly as they relate to active transportation users. Staff will transfer over appropriate policies to the updated General Plan's Circulation Element, once that effort is underway.

Staff is recommending that the City Council adopt the Resolution approving the Multi-Jurisdictional Merced County Regional Active Transportation Plan as recommended by the Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, with the condition that the ways to and area around the High-Speed Rail Station be re-evaluated to support active transportation use and connections.

### **IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES**

No appropriation of funds is needed at this time. Implementation of the Plan and its proposed projects will be programmed through the use of competitive grant funding and as part of City infrastructure rehabilitation and Capital Improvements.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

1. Multi-Jurisdiction Merced County Regional Active Transportation Plan
2. Resolution 2024-60
3. Environmental Review #24-18
4. Presentation