



Legislation Text

File #: 19-300, Version: 1

Report Prepared by: Michael Hren, Principal Planner, Development Services Department

SUBJECT: Approval of Environmental Review #19-17 - Statutory Exemption for Feasibility and Planning Studies Pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15162 and Adoption of Resolution to Approve the City of Merced Active Transportation and Safe-Routes-to-School Plan

REPORT IN BRIEF

Considers approving environmental review #19-17 and adopting a resolution to approve the Active Transportation and Safe-Routes-to-School Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

City Council - Adopt a motion approving Environmental Review #19-17 - Statutory Exemption for Feasibility and Planning Studies Pursuant to CEQA Guideline Section 15162 and adopting **Resolution 2019-40**, a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Merced, California, adopting the City of Merced Active Transportation and Safe-Routes-to-School Plan.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Adopt the Plan, as recommended 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 2019/2020 Council Goals and Priorities, Item 4: Local Streets mentions "Sidewalks," "Safe Routes to School," and "Traffic/Pedestrian Safety."

DISCUSSION

Overview

The City of Merced's Active Transportation and Safe-Routes-to-School Plan (ATP) outlines the goals for active transportation in Merced, and provides recommendations for how to make that vision into reality. The ATP envisions a safe, enjoyable, and interconnected network of facilities serving residents and visitors alike, while allowing users of all modes of transportation equitable access to clean, well-maintained, and well-designed facilities. The ATP has a number of goals, some of the

most important are:

- Improve the safety and perceived safety of using active transportation in Merced
- Increase active transportation trips in Merced
- Improve the connectivity of the active transportation network in Merced
- Promote a data-driven approach to maintaining existing active transportation facilities and creating new ones in Merced

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. For example, based upon the community input, safety of active transportation near schools was noted as a major priority for projects; proximity to schools is therefore the criteria with the most possible points that could be given in the prioritization rubric.

Need for the Plan

The *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and the 2013 Bicycle Transportation Plan (BTP) serve as the foundational documents and building blocks for the ATP. As pertaining to funding opportunities from the State of California, many of the evaluation criteria are likely to score more strongly with a comprehensive ATP rather than a stand-alone bike or pedestrian plan, therefore improving the chances for higher scores and increasing the likelihood of project funding. Examples of these criteria include: increase in walking and bicycling including students, crash reduction for bicyclists and pedestrians, and robust public outreach.

Public Involvement

The ATP has been developed with extensive assistance from the public. The Citizens Focus Group has met, both separately and in conjunction with the Technical Advisory Committee, six times since the Kick-Off meeting for the project in December 2016. The City has also hosted a Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Workshop, outreach at local events such as the Street Faire in July 2017, and Public Workshops to gather information and feedback. Public Workshops were designed to meet the public in their community, and the most successful of these was the November 30, 2017, Workshop held at Tenaya Middle School in South Merced. This event was held primarily in Spanish, with English and Hmong interpretation available as well. The ATP has also been a frequent topic at public meetings of the City's Bicycle Advisory Commission. The Commission has been regularly updated on the progress of the ATP, and has been a part of two formal presentations from the team putting together the Plan, voting 4-0 at its April 23, 2019 meeting to endorse the draft ATP and recommend it to the City Council.

Organization of the Plan

The Plan, seen at Attachment 1, is organized into eleven sections, along with six appendices.

- Foundations of the Active Transportation Plan
- Existing Active Transportation Users: The Count
- Existing Facilities
- Hazards
- Solutions
- Implementation
- Low-Cost Improvements and Safety Countermeasures
- Infrastructure Projects
- Programs
- Policies
- Public Participation and Community Engagement
- Appendix A: Bicyclist Count Data
- Appendix B: Pedestrian Count Data
- Appendix C: Bicycle Prioritized Projects Table
- Appendix D: Pedestrian Prioritized Projects Table
- Appendix E: Existing Programs
- Appendix F: Public Participation Documents

Proposed Projects/Programs

The ATP proposes 50 pedestrian improvements or studies throughout Merced; these recommendations vary between specific spot improvements to corridor-wide changes. The total recommended cost is \$11.7 million. This includes:

- \$9.4 million in construction costs
 - \$1.3 million of sidewalk construction, approximately 7,500 linear feet
 - \$6.5 million for two projects including about 3 miles of pedestrian-scale lighting
 - \$1.6 million of other improvements including 28 pedestrian spot improvements
- \$2.3 million in pedestrian studies: accessibility, corridor, intersection, crossing

The ATP is also proposing 90.4 miles of both enhanced and new bikeways throughout Merced. In total, these bikeways have a total estimated construction cost of \$14,122,000. This includes:

- \$9.4 million for Class I off-street bike path facilities
- \$4.7 million for Merced's on-street network
- 9.7 miles of bicycle boulevards
- 4.2 miles of separated bikeways

In all, the total estimated costs of the infrastructure recommendations is \$25.8 million. These construction estimates do not include the costs of engineering, design, right-of-way acquisition, or labor. Staff will work to develop an implementation plan that integrates these recommended projects into the annual SB 1 and Measure V priority lists for Council approval on an annual basis.

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. Examples of policy recommendations from the Plan include an update to the City's bicycle parking requirements and performing a study on the needs of the City as it relates to electric scooter and bicycle rentals. Examples of program recommendations include a bicycle-related ticket diversion class and the evolution of the City's Bicycle Advisory Commission to cover all active transportation-related matters holistically, concurrently, and comprehensively.

Staff is recommending that the City Council adopt the Resolution approving the Active Transportation Plan as recommended by the Bicycle Advisory Committee.

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

No appropriation of funds is needed at this time. The City was awarded a grant of \$135,000 through the State's Active Transportation Program during Cycle II of the program to assist with creating the plan, the reimbursement for which expires later in 2019. Implementation of the Plan and its proposed projects will be programed through the use of SB 1 and Measure V funding.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Active Transportation and Safe-Routes-to-School Plan
2. Resolution Adopting ATP
3. Environmental Review #19-17
4. Presentation for City Council