

**Response to Comments**  
**Parsons Avenue Bridge Over Bear Creek**  
**Mitigated Negative Declaration**  
**February 14, 2014**

**Letter 1**  
**Karl Libsch**

**Comment 1:** *It was indicated that the traffic control would be stop signs and would be evaluated subsequently. I feel that the traffic control system for the McKee bridge is dysfunctional and would be disappointed if that system were used for the proposed bridge. The Parsons bridge, by my read of the MND, will be a major North-South conduit and will be used by people who do not dwell in Merced. As a resident, I understand the McKee bridge stop sign system but when I first got to town it was extremely confusing.*

**Response:** The comment is noted. The project is currently designed for 3-way stops at the intersections of Parsons Avenue/N. Bear Creek Avenue and Parsons Avenue/S. Bear Creek Avenue. At this time, signals would not be warranted at these locations. As traffic levels increase as a result of growth in the City, the City Traffic engineer may initiate a warrant study to evaluate the need for traffic signals.

The Parsons Avenue extension was identified in the City's General Plan Circulation Element as a major north/south route that will be utilized by existing and future residents of the City as well as for pass-through traffic.

**Comment 2:** *I visited the Merced Public Library yesterday (12/20/2013). The librarian could not find a hard copy of the Draft MND. She was able to locate it through Google.*

**Response:** Hard copies of the Draft MND were on file at the Merced County Public Library starting on 12/3/13. This was confirmed by City staff during a visit to the library on 12/12/13.

**Letter 2**  
**David Warner, Director of Permit Services**  
**San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District**

**Comment 1:** *Based on information provided to the District, project specific emissions of criteria pollutants are not expected to exceed District significance thresholds of 10 tons/year NOX, 10 ton/year ROG, and 15 tons/year PM10. Therefore, the District concludes that project specific criteria pollutant emissions would have no significant adverse impact on air quality.*

**Response:** Comment noted.

**Comment 2:** *Based on information provided to the District, per District Rule 9510 (Indirect Source Review) section 2.2; this rule applies to any transportation or transit project where construction exhaust emissions equal or exceed two tons of NOx or two tons of PM10.*

*Therefore, the District concludes that the proposed project is subject to District Rule 9510 (Indirect Source Review).*

*District Rule 9510 is intended to mitigate a project's impact on air quality through project design elements or by payment of applicable off-site mitigation fees. Any applicant subject to District Rule 9510 is required to submit an Air Impact Assessment (AIA) application to the District no later than applying for final discretionary approval, and to pay any applicable off-site mitigation fees before issuance of the first building permit. If approval of the subject project constitutes the last discretionary approval by your agency, the District recommends that demonstration of compliance with District Rule 9510, including payment of all applicable fees before issuance of the first building permit, be made a condition of project approval. Information about how to comply with District Rule 9510 can be found online at: <http://www.valleyair.org/ISR/ISRHome.htm>.*

**Response:** The City will comply with Rule 9510 as required.

**Comment 3:** *The proposed project may be subject to District Rules and Regulations, including: Regulation VIII (Fugitive PM10 Prohibitions), Rule 4102 (Nuisance), Rule 4601 (Architectural Coatings), and Rule 4641 (Cutback, Slow Cure, and Emulsified Asphalt, Paving and Maintenance Operations). In the event an existing building will be renovated, partially demolished or removed, the project may be subject to District Rule 4002 (National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants). The above list of rules is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. To identify other District rules or regulations that apply to this project or to obtain information about District permit requirements, the applicant is strongly encouraged to contact the District's Small Business Assistance Office at (559) 230-5888. Current District rules can be found online at [www.valleyair.org/rules/1ruleslist.htm](http://www.valleyair.org/rules/1ruleslist.htm).*

**Response:** The City understands that it is subject to, and will comply with Regulation VIII, Rule 4102, Rule 4601 and Rule 4641. Since an existing residential structure will be removed as part of the project, the City will be required to comply with Rule 4002.

**Comment 4:** *The District recommends that a copy of the District's comments be provided to the project proponent.*

**Response:** The project proponent (City of Merced) has received the District's comments.

### **Comment Letter 3** **Peter Padilla**

**Comment 1:** *Page 2-1 stated the city council approved the final environmental report for the Parsons Ave corridor project on June 21, 1993. The foundation for this draft consists of decisions and information that is a minimum of 20 years old. In the General Plan Section 4.4.2, it indicates that Parsons Ave has been shown as a major roadway in the city's general plan maps since 1959. The 1993 document is the basic foundation for this draft and the justification for the*

*Parsons Ave corridor. Given that the general plan map calls for "a major road" and this draft refers to Parsons Ave as a "continuous 4 lane arterial street" and the city's continuous violations of the general plans requirements for an arterial road (i.e., driveways backing into the flow of traffic, Parsons Ave fronting schools and churches, etc.), I find that the draft is totally inadequate to address the project of the Parsons Ave bridge over Bear Creek and believe that a new environmental impact report should be required before any approval or requests for grant funds be given.*

**Response:** The reference to the 1993 Parsons Avenue Corridor EIR was provided for historical context only. Part of this historical context is the fact that on June 21, 1993, the City Council (pursuant to City Council Resolution No. 93-73) adopted findings, a mitigation plan, a statement of overriding consideration and certified the EIR for the Parson's Avenue Project that specifically referred to the project as a "four-lane arterial." The record is clear that the City Council understood the extent of project impacts to neighborhoods, examined the alternate "eastern beltway" road (currently referred to as the Campus Parkway), rejected the option of Parsons to be designed and utilized as a "collector" road, and identified the Parsons Bridge over Bear Creek as a component of the overall project.

The current Mitigated Negative Declaration did not tier from, or utilize information from the 1993 document for purposes of current environmental evaluation. However, the proposed project was evaluated with respect to the provisions of the adopted *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and the corresponding potential adverse environmental impacts, adopted environmental impact mitigation measures and determinations of overriding considerations established by the certification of the related Final Program Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) (SCH #2008071069). The proposed project has been determined to be fully in the scope of the approved General Plan and FEIR as provided by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as codified in the Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 21157.1 (d) and the CEQA Guidelines Section 1577.

The current Mitigated Negative Declaration evaluated all environmental impacts under CEQA and is therefore adequate for purposes of the proposed project.

**Comment 2:** *The notification of this draft report and the period for comments, at the minimum is inadequate and very well may violate state and federal laws for proper notification. At minimum, the notification and comment period lacks the transparency necessary to have confidence in local government and local officials. The construction of a major bridge and the completion of a major corridor within the city of Merced requires more than 300 feet of property owner notification and a 45 day review period during the time of year when most people and a number of the respondents who's comments have been requested are working on limited hours due to the Christmas and New Year holidays and furloughs by numerous government agencies. Notification of this draft should have included pre-notification, so that the review could be properly assigned to those government agencies that were solicited and so the citizens of Merced had adequate time to prepare to respond to the draft. Since the completion of any bridge across Bear Creek would affect more than just property owners within 300 feet of the creek banks, the*

*city should have been required to notify every property owner along the Parsons Ave corridor, place notification on the city website and in its newsletter, and notify through local news media.*

**Response:** The project was assessed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a state law. No federal notice requirements are applicable. CEQA requires a public review period of 20-days, and a 30-day notice to agencies for negative declarations. A 45-day review period was provided to both. Since the bridge project is one component of the overall Parsons Avenue project, the reach of the public notice mailing was commensurate with the geographic extent of the project, and exceeded the typical 300-foot notice area. Nonetheless, even broader and additional public noticing, not required by CEQA, was provided, including: (1) posting the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) on the City's website; (2) advertising in the Merced Sun-Star about the negative declaration, public review period and project public meeting; and (3) availability of the document at the library in addition to the Civic Center.

The following is an overview of the public outreach performed:

12/3/13                Copy of the MND provided to Merced County Public Library

12/3/13                Weblink to MND on the City Planning Department Page

### **Original Review Period from 12/9/13, to 1/7/2014.**

12/7/2013            5-inch Display Ad in Merced Sun-Star

11/26/2013          85 Mailed Notice of Intent Letters to Area Property Owners

11/26/2013          23 Distributed Notice of Intent Letters to affected agencies

### **Extended Review Period from 1/7/14 to 1/22/14**

12/13/2013          85 Mailed Notice of Intent Letters to Area Property Owners

12/13/2013          23 Distributed Notice of Intent Letters to affected agencies

12/21/2013          5-inch Display Ad in Merced Sun-Star

12/19/2013          Public Meeting, Sam Pipes Room, 7 p.m.

NOTE: The City did not provide official public notification requirements by leaving notices on doorsteps or driveways. Notifications were provided in the manner described above.

The above-described public notification procedures are in excess of required public notification requirements and therefore are determined to be sufficient for purposes of the proposed project.

**Comment 3:** *Under Section 3 - Evaluation of Environmental Impacts, air quality was addressed in several sections and was found by this draft to be "less than significant impact". In areas such as CO hotspot, the discussions of the amount of pollutants in the air are generally dismissed as insignificant, yet the draft readily admits that the closest monitoring station is more than 3 miles away. There is no possible way to make a determination of air quality without localized monitoring. In fact, on page 3-15 the draft states "the additional travel lanes contemplated as part of the project will have the effect of moving some traffic closer to nearby residences; therefore, under the project alternative there may be localized areas where ambient concentrations of MSATs could be higher with the project than without". The draft further states "this would be offset due to increases in speeds and reductions in congestions (which are associated with lower MSAT emissions)". How would this be possible since the construction of the bridge would require traffic constraints such as stop signs or stop lights hence the introduction of idling and acceleration of vehicles in these "localized areas". In addition, as noted in a previous bullet point, the goal is to make Parsons Ave a major roadway and/or arterial within the city of Merced. By definition arterials are roadways meant to carry large volumes of traffic & numerous heavy trucks. It is inconceivable that there would not be significant increase in pollutants along the entire Parsons Ave corridor. Since the draft is only addressing localized pollutants and admits to an increase of said pollutants, it fails to address the possible ways to mitigate the effects on the homeowners bordering the proposed site such as concrete walls, substantial landscaping, or other possible solutions.*

**Response:** CO hot spots are very rare and occur mostly in major cities with extreme traffic congestion. The location of the nearest monitoring stations does not impact the analysis as to whether or not the proposed project, or corridor would result in significant hazardous pollutants. Hazardous pollutants are more associated with vehicle types and number of trips. As described in the Draft MND, a PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub> Hotspot Analysis is not required for the project because it is not a Project of Air Quality Concern (PAQC).

A traffic study has been completed for the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan* and traffic counts have been projected in Table 3.3-2 of the Draft MND. The AADT traffic counts in the table are representative of Parsons Avenue from Olive Avenue to SR 140. Because this total number was well under the AADT threshold of 125,000, further analysis to determine the projected percentage of traffic volume that would cross the future bridge is not required and thus the project would not meet the definition of a PAQC.

**Comment 4:** *In Section 3.12 on page 3-59 the draft addresses the noise element that would be generated on the completion of the project. The draft readily admits that the noise level would exceed the "normally acceptable" limits for unshielded single family residences and suggests using a 2011 base allowing \$55,000 per residence to mitigate said noise. However, it also acknowledges the money for such mitigation may not be available and the allowance would be modified to meet available funds. Given that the draft predicts after build out that noise levels*

*will exceed those recommended by the general plan for single family residences and that the noise level would be "less than significant with mitigation incorporated" makes this draft unacceptable in that it provides no permanent guaranteed solution to the residents nor establishes the number of residences or what the affected area would be.*

**Response:** The Draft MND did not identify a significant noise impact from the proposed project that would require mitigation. The \$55,000 figure is a Federal Highway Association (FHWA) Standard that is used when mitigation is required. The information was provided as regulatory background information. Since this project does not require mitigation, the FHWA standard does not apply. The mitigation included in the Noise Section of the Draft MND is for temporary construction noise impacts.

**Comment 5:** *On page 3-61 the draft addressed vibrations and generally suggests that a standard of 70 vibration events per day might be acceptable. However, the estimated vibrations during construction could well exceed 100 and makes no evaluation of heavy truck traffic if Parsons Ave were to become a major arterial road. If the study is going to evaluate an exposure such as vibrations, it needs to properly assess the risk and offer mediation solutions. This draft, while broaching the subject of vibrations and discussing the risks of vibrations, fails to provide any mitigation for those vibrations.*

**Response:** As with all construction in the City, construction vibrations are temporary and therefore are not determined to be excessive or significant. The project itself would not result in excess of thresholds for noise or vibration.

**Comment 6:** *The draft report states under Section 1.2 "Intended Uses of the Mitigated Negative Declaration" "the proposed project has been evaluated with respect to the provisions of the adopted Merced Vision 2030 General Plan". In referring back to the general plan, that plan has several stated goals. One is to use the village concept for future neighborhoods. Given that the city is implementing the village concept in future home construction, the need for further arterial roadways would be minimal. Added to the fact, that the general plan does not call for Parsons Ave to be an arterial, only a major roadway, defined as an arterial or collector, and that the purpose of Parsons Ave would be to increase the North/South circulation but the general plan concedes that there are limited number of East/West routes to receive such traffic. While the draft determines that the bridge project is feasible, the real question is will the construction of the bridge be the answer. Those same congested East West routes would continue to receive the fore mentioned traffic. The definition of an arterial roadway includes its ability to move traffic to & from highways, to & from major destination points, and to do so in such a manner that the traffic is unimpeded by the amount of neighborhood access to such a roadway (i.e. driveways interfering with traffic flow, dangerous crossings at school yards, etc.). The completion of this bridge project and in fact the completion of the entire Parsons Ave corridor project would fail to accomplish that goal. In reviewing the East West connections on Parsons Ave, it would provide no relief for such said streets. No access to Highway 99, no access to UC Merced that does not already exist, and the expenditure of any further effort and money would limit the Merced city council from its stated goal of having Campus Parkway as the highest priority in road*

*construction. The Campus Parkway is being constructed as a pure arterial road and would accomplish all the goals of an arterial road. Parsons Ave would accomplish none of them, so the acceptance of this draft report would mean that the city of Merced is failing to follow the stated goals of its elected leaders.*

**Response:** As part of the City's General Plan update, a comprehensive traffic impact study was prepared that analyzed short term, near term and long term build-out of the General Plan. The traffic study analyzed existing north/south and east/west routes (including the Campus Parkway) and what road infrastructure would be needed to accommodate City growth over the next 20 years and beyond. The results of the study were included in the City's Circulation Element (which included the Parsons Avenue extension project as a key component of the City's future circulation needs). The City's Official Circulation Plan (Figure 4.1 of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*) identifies Parsons Avenue as an arterial road. The City has therefore determined that the project is necessary in order to implement the City's adopted General Plan. Also see Response to Letter 3, Comment 1.

Although analysis of the Campus Parkway is outside the scope of this environmental document, it is worthwhile to note that the Parsons Avenue 1993 EIR included the "Eastern Beltway" (currently referred to a Campus Parkway) as an alternate, and found that "it would not serve the near- and longer-term needs of east-central Merced for ease of movement between the City's major land uses and districts, and for commuting purposes" (page 15, City Council Resolution No.93-73).

#### **Comment Letter 4**

##### **Blithe and Clifford Blauert**

**Comment 1:** *We live on Oregon Drive one block west of Parsons Avenue. We were not included in the notice sent to residents potentially impacted by the Parsons Avenue bridge. Our neighborhood will be impacted by developing Parsons Avenue into a major north south arterial route and we should have been included in the notification process. In fact, all residents along the route between Santa Fe Drive and Yosemite Avenue should have received notice. We only learned of the hearing from a neighbor and we were unable to attend because of a previous commitment. Holding a public hearing one week before Christmas on a very significant issue is poor planning. The Parsons Avenue bridge is an important land policy use and it requires a fair discussion.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 2.

**Comment 2:** *The bridge should require a new EIR review. The commonly shared vision of the Parsons Avenue bridge in the 1990s is different from the current proposal. How can data on air quality, traffic noise and traffic flow collected twenty years ago be relevant to the proposed bridge/ causeway?*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 1.

**Comment 3:** *The bridge dwarfs any of the existing bridges spanning Bear Creek. While the planning goal may be to create a major north south arterial route, one must question if it is anything but a bridge to nowhere. Where are the major east west routes that easily feed onto Parsons Avenue south of Bear Creek? The cost of construction from Childs Avenue to Yosemite Avenue is beyond any reasonable financing mechanism available to the city. The neighborhood destruction would be great, as it would require the deconstruction or removal of long established neighborhoods between Yosemite Parkway and Yosemite Avenue. It seems the bridge would be a major edifice spanning Bear Creek with little practical use. The fact that some have long dreamed of a Parsons Avenue arterial route doesn't make it a dream worth pursuing regardless of cost or feasibility.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 6.

## **Letter 5**

### **Bill Spriggs**

**Comment 1:** *I do have two major concerns regarding the project; While the bridge is definitely needed it seems to me that it must be constructed in conjunction with the construction of a separated grade crossing under the BNSF right of way and the extension of Parsons Avenue to Yosemite Parkway. Without constructing both the Parsons Avenue bridge and a separated grade crossing at the BNSF traffic will be forced into the Ragsdale area and onto E. 26<sup>th</sup> Street.*

### **Response:**

The Parsons Avenue Bridge over Bear Creek is one of the necessary elements of the Parsons Avenue extension that was identified in the City's General Plan Circulation Element as a north/south route to be utilized by existing and future residents of the City as well as for pass-through traffic. The Project does not specify a particular order of improvement projects, but rather, is expected to be completed in phases over an unspecified number of years as funding becomes available. Funding is now available to complete the environmental review step for the bridge component. Completion of this step does not trigger its construction.

Need for the larger Parsons Avenue Project is based on the recognition that existing intersections and roadways in central/east Merced are burdened by traffic that will be relieved by the Parsons Avenue Project. While construction of each component may shift the location of this traffic, each component brings the overall project closer to completion and goal to reduce traffic congestion in the broader area.

The City is also in the process of acquiring necessary right-of-way both north and south of the BNSF right of way to be utilized for the separated grade crossing under or over the BNSF right of way. This over or undercrossing can be constructed once the necessary right-of-way is acquired and funding is obtained.

**Comment 2:** *Construction of the bridge will increase traffic on Parsons Avenue and result in an increase in noise to those parcels which abut Parsons. In the 1980's when Mission Trails was being developed the city allow the developer to construct a wood fence along Parsons as opposed to the originally required concrete block fence. I would suggest that the project include the construction of a concrete block wall along Mission Trails to mitigate the increase in noises that the residence adjoining Parsons Avenue will experience.*

**Response:** See response to Letter 3, Comment 4.

**Letter 6**  
**Marcus and Mary Minor**

**Comment 1:** *My husband and I found an Updated Review Period document for the Notice of Intent to Adopt a MND ERC #13-30 for Parsons Avenue Bridge Over Bear Creek Project on our doorstep at 2801 N Parsons Ave, Merced on Friday afternoon, January 17, 2014. We do not know whether this notice was left on our doorstep by the City of Merced or by an interested citizen of our neighborhood. Attached to the notice was a letter to you from Mr. Peter Padilla.*

**Response:** See response to Letter 3, Comment 2.

**Comment 2:** *At any rate, we object to this project today based solely on the lack of proper notification by the City of Merced and would like to be notified of any scheduled meetings on this project. Mr. Padilla was probably aware of it because he is a City Planning Commissioner. It appears Mr. Padilla has brought up some very relevant points about the Draft MND and a very outdated Environmental Impact Report. Since we only became aware of the MND on Friday afternoon on the eve of a holiday weekend for City staff, we feel like all of the residents of this area who will be affected have not been properly notified or been given the opportunity to review the proposed project materials and information.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comments 1 and 2.

**Letter 7**  
**Gary and Silvana Polgar**

**Comment 1:** *We agree with Peter Padilla's list of wrong conclusions and inadequacies in the Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (the study) in his letter to you of January 15, 2014 and add additional emphasis to some of his concerns and other concerns.*

**Response:** See responses to Mr. Padilla's comments (Letter 3).

**Comment 2:** *Because of the study's stated projected increased traffic and traffic noise, the notification of the study should have been sent to all property owners along and at some depth from Parsons Avenue (where there can be noticeable traffic or sound impact. e.g. 5 decibels greater than existing traffic noise). Traffic is already slow during various times of the day on*

*Parsons Avenue in front of and approaching Chenoweth Elementary School. The short notice of a meeting left some impacted parties, such as us, no opportunity to review the study before the meeting and/or to attend the meeting due to previously scheduled plans. A new notice and new meeting date should be widely distributed.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 2.

**Comment 3:** *The study's vague reference to sound mitigation, post construction, with no assurance that any amount up to \$55,000 per residence may be available for such mitigation is inadequate and needs firm provisions for specific remediation measures (e.g. installation of triple-pane sound insulated windows to those properties within 300 feet of Parsons). The study projects traffic noise increases north of Bear Creek from an existing 56.1 db to 64.5 dBA at 100 feet (Table 3.12.3). This is an increase of 8.4dBA or 5.4 dBA higher than the "substantial" impact of a project (3-65). 64.5 dBA is only 2.5dBA shy of the NAC standard of 70dBA for significant sound impact (3-63). The study projects an increase in South of Bear Creek traffic noise level to 65.3 (Table 3.12.3) or 1.7dBA shy of the NAC standard. Some houses are closer than 100 feet to the curb, what is the sound level for them? What is the sound level for existing traffic on G, M and R Streets near Bear Creek? Are those sound levels higher than the projected sound level for Parsons? If so, why are they different? We are personally sensitive about sound both during and after construction of the bridge and widening of Parsons, because one of us often has to sleep during the day due to a medical condition. We have similar concerns about vibrations both during and after the completion of the project.*

**Response:** The noise increases of 8.4 and 5.0 dBA identified in Table 3.12-3 of the Draft MND are based on build-out of the City's General Plan that may occur over the next 20 years. This proposed project itself will not result in increases that are considered significant. Future build-out of the City's General Plan may result in significant increases in traffic noise in the project area. However, future projects that may occur as a result of build-out of the General Plan may be required to implement mitigation measures related to noise impacts along the Parsons Corridor. This will be determined by future noise studies.

Sound levels at G, M and R Streets are outside the scope of this Draft MND and were therefore not analyzed.

The City understands, and is sensitive to noise impacts to residents that occur as a result of construction projects throughout the City. As such, mitigation measures 3.12-1 and 3.12-2 were included in the Draft MND to minimize construction noise impacts to the extent feasible.

**Comment 4:** *The study provides for underpasses for the Bear Creek walking/bike paths (2-5). Will the underpasses become places for criminal activities or for transient living quarters? Will transients use them to relieve themselves and, if so, doesn't the environmental impact from their waste have to be considered?*

**Response:** As with other bridges and public infrastructure projects in the community, the Parsons Bridge Project will be designed with features to deter this type of activity. As in other parts of the community, the City Police Department will enforce applicable rules, regulations and laws.

**Comment 5:** *Will the project create a greater risk of damming up or flooding from Bear Creek in the Parsons Avenue area?*

**Response:** The proposed bridge will be designed to be outside of a flood hazard event and will not increase the risk of damming or flooding.

**Comment 6:** *Sometimes when walking on Bear Creek, we see white birds that look like egrets. Will the bridge adversely impact them during or after construction? Isn't an environmental impact review necessary for them (excuse me if they are already included in the study)?*

**Response:** The Draft MND includes protective measures for all sensitive animal and plant species located in the proposed project vicinity, including impacts to birds. See Draft MND mitigation measures 3.4-1 through 3.4-9.

**Comment 7:** *Is this project actually necessary to alleviate traffic on other streets? Isn't it questionable whether Parsons Avenue will draw away significant traffic from McKee Avenue or from G Street? McKee traffic is not heavy now and G Street traffic has flowed well since the underpass was completed. Before considering a Parsons Avenue bridge, might money be better spent constructing underpasses on M and R Streets?*

**Response:** As part of the City's General Plan update, a comprehensive traffic impact study was prepared that analyzed short-term, near-term and long term build-out of the General Plan. The traffic study analyzed existing north/south and east/west routes and what road infrastructure would be needed to accommodate City growth over the next 20 years and beyond. The results of the study were included in the City's Circulation Element (which included the Parsons Avenue extension project as a key component of the City's future circulation needs). The City has therefore determined that the project is necessary in order to implement the City's adopted General Plan. Analysis of underpasses on M and R streets is outside the scope of this environmental document.

## **Letter 8**

**Larry Masengale**

**Comment 1:** *Having received the Negative Declaration, I find that it fails to answer any of the questions in regards to the devastating damage to the neighborhoods. Any study that would have this much impact on pedestrians, vehicles, and bicycle traffic needs to address the impact on not just 1 or 2 houses next to the bridge, but how that traffic would affect the neighborhood up and down the entire Parsons Ave corridor. Based on the study's*

*own figures, you're anticipating large volumes of traffic, yet you failed to address any of the impact the residents will deal with if this bridge is completed.*

**Response:** The Draft MND analyzed 17 environmental impact areas and focused on the proposed project site and surrounding areas. Broader analysis is also included in the City's General Plan EIR. Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and bicycle traffic. Also see Response to Letter 3, Comment 1. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

**Comment 2:** *The notification of the comment period is heavily flawed. The City choose to notify the bare minimum number of residents required by city ordinance and choose a time of year that made it extremely difficult for residents to respond who did receive notification and almost impossible for other government agencies to respond. The choice of the Christmas and New Year holidays seems to be the way of soliciting the minimum number of responses.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 2.

**Comment 3:** *In summary I believe that the conclusion the study has drawn in regards to noise and air pollution are inconsistent with reality and the notification process is heavily flawed and definitely not transparent.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comments 2, 3 and 4. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the analysis and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

**Letter 9**  
**Ann Pike**

**Comment 1:** *I would like to go on record as objecting to the Parsons Avenue Extension. I have two strong reasons. The first is that we need to keep our residential areas away from speeding cars and noise as much as possible. My second reason concerns school children. I taught Kindergarten for years and there was never a year that I didn't have a few children run in to the street. It is too dangerous having heavy traffic going by a school especially a school with younger children.*

**Response:** Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and bicycle traffic. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

**Letter 10**  
**John F. Fowler**

**Comment 1:** *On Friday Jan 17, 2014, a notice regarding this project and the intent to adopt a mitigated negative declaration (MND) was deposited on my driveway. I further noted that*

*the notice was attached to a letter from Peter Padilla. Regarding the project, I do not object to the bridge but I do object to Parsons Ave being declared an "Arterial" road. Further, if this MND is based only on the bridge then it should be expanded to include impacts such as heavy truck traffic/noise/environmental elements that evidently have not been updated since 1993.*

**Response:** The Draft MND analyzed 17 environmental impact areas and focused on the proposed project site and surrounding areas. Broader analysis is also included in the City's General Plan EIR. Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and bicycle traffic. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis and therefore a specific response cannot be provided. See also Response to Letter 3, Comment 1 and 6.

**Comment 2:** *I realize the concept of a major arterial roadway was first put forward in the 1959 general plan and reinforced in 1993 but your 2030 plan does not use the same language regarding Parsons Ave. Why the difference? Why were residents along Parsons and connecting roadways not notified about the latest MND by the city? Is the city not concerned with the current tranquility of neighborhoods along Parsons or the quality of life for its residents?*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comments 1, 2 and 6.

**Comment 3:** *As stated above, the bridge is not the problem – it is needed, but not for heavy truck traffic.*

**Response:** Comment noted. The comments have been included in the public record.

**Comment Letter 11**  
**Sharon Ziccone**

**Comment 1:** *I was made aware of your intent just a week ago and am shocked! This issue of what was a road now called "arterial" and bridge was put to rest some 20 years ago. Then City Manager, Mayor, City Council and Citizens all agreed. The issue being to keep huge amounts of traffic out of residential neighborhoods. Maybe you weren't around then or don't remember. Your particular plan would become a major thoroughfare passing 3 schools and a park. Noise pollution, air pollution, and safety are serious problems. The fauna and flora would be impacted. As well as all the bikers, walkers, runners and events on the bike path. Visual beauty would be diminished. Bear Creek is a shining star in Merced's planning, a place that I show off to visitors with pride. Your current plan doesn't take these features into account.*

**Response:** The Draft MND analyzed 17 environmental impact areas and focused on the proposed project site and surrounding areas. Broader analysis is also included in the City's General Plan EIR. Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and

bicycle traffic. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis contained in the Draft MND and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

**Comment 2:** *A better plan was conceived, also taking into account the moving of traffic to UC Merced, now educating close to 9000 students. This was a beltway around the outskirts (that would not be subject to so many lights and soon to be 15 mile traffic laws around the schools.) Campus Parkway now has an on ramp south of Merced. But the road ends...a road to nowhere. It would be speedy, accessible and forward thinking. And the least intrusive to the well being of so many lives in so many ways.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comments 1 and 6.

**Comment 3:** *I urge you to step back, rethink, and make it a goal to finish Campus Parkway. With your expertise I'm sure you can do it!*

**Response:** Comment noted.

**Comment Letter 12**  
**Pamela Robert**

**Comment 1:** *We are homeowners on San Juan Ct., just adjacent to Parsons Ave. This is a nice residential area in Mission Trails. When we built our home, we didn't bargain for the noise or traffic this project would create in our quiet neighborhood. The idea of a 4 lane highway coming through this area scares me to death. It would have a major negative impact on at least 3 schools that would be in the line of fire. Does the safety of these students mean anything at all?*

**Response:** The Draft MND analyzed 17 environmental impact areas and focused on the proposed project site and surrounding areas. Broader analysis is also included in the City's General Plan EIR. Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and bicycle traffic. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis in the Draft MND and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

**Comment 2:** *Why has nothing being done to complete the Campus Parkway project? We have a very nice freeway off ramp and a road that leads to nowhere! Where did we get the money to start construction on a new project when we have other projects waiting for completion?*

**Response:** Environmental analysis of the Campus Parkway and other projects is outside the scope of this Draft MND. See Response to Letter 3, Comments 1 and 6.

**Comment Letter 13**  
**Nancy Von Gunten**

**Comment 1:** *The flyer just came to my house today. Since I have recently had hip surgery my neighbors brought it to me but it was after 5:00. I hope you will consider my point of view though it is after 5:00 on Jan. 22. I would have appreciated receiving the notice before the deadline was about to end.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 2. The comments made are included in the public record.

**Comment 2:** *I live off Parsons and am not happy with the concept of Parsons becoming a 4 lane speedway. We have a quiet community which will change in a negative manner if this project is completed. It will be difficult to turn on to Parsons and there will be a lot more traffic and noise. I see no need for another bridge since McKee is so close. I doubt that my view will make an impact on the outcome but wanted to let you know of my displeasure. Thank you, Nancy Von Gunten 1565 Santa Inez Ct. Merced, CA 725-1852.*

**Response:** As part of the City's General Plan update, a comprehensive traffic impact study was prepared that analyzed short-term, near term and long term build-out of the General Plan. The traffic study analyzed existing north/south and east/west routes and what road infrastructure would be needed to accommodate City growth over the next 20 years and beyond. The results of the study were included in the City's Circulation Element (which included the Parsons Avenue extension project as a key component of the City's future circulation needs). The City has therefore determined that the project is necessary in order to implement the City's adopted General Plan.

The Draft MND analyzed 17 environmental impact areas and focused on the proposed project site and surrounding areas. Broader analysis is also included in the City's General Plan EIR. Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and bicycle traffic. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis in the Draft MND and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

#### **Comment Letter 14**

**Vicki Wajdak**

**Comment 1:** *I'm usually embarrassed to use my email address, which was created long ago based on my formative years...but under these current circumstances, it seems appropriate. I'm not happy about the abovementioned proposed project and have concerns similar to those stated by Peter Padilla (letter addressed to you dated 1/15/14). I personally don't mind having a bridge over Bear Creek at Parsons, but only a less intrusive one like the one on McKee. I'm especially concerned about the city turning Parsons into a major thoroughfare. I just moved from Fresno in July 2013 after looking for years for the perfect custom home in a lovely, elegant and quiet neighborhood, which I found on a street just off Parsons. The proposed busy street will change the whole neighborhood.*

**Response:** As part of the City's General Plan update, a comprehensive traffic impact study was prepared that analyzed short term, near term and long term build-out of the General Plan. The traffic study analyzed existing north/south and east/west routes (including the Campus Parkway) and what road infrastructure would be needed to accommodate City growth over the next 20 years and beyond. The results of the study were included in the City's Circulation Element (which included the Parsons Avenue extension project as a key component of the City's future circulation needs). The City's Official Circulation Plan (Figure 4.1 of the *Merced Vision 2030 General Plan*) identifies Parsons Avenue as an arterial road. The City has therefore determined that the project is necessary in order to implement the City's adopted General Plan.

The Draft MND analyzed 17 environmental impact areas and focused on the proposed project site and surrounding areas. Broader analysis is also included in the City's General Plan EIR. Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and bicycle traffic. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis in the Draft MND and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

**Comment 2:** *I have concerns about the project as a result of all of Peter Padilla's comments. The draft report seems to be unclear as to the specific impacts that will arise from the additional noise, pollution, vibrations, etc. Based on this, I agree that the draft report seems to be inadequate to address the Parsons bridge/roadway project and believe that a new environmental impact report should be required before any approval or requests for grant funds be given.*

**Response:** See Responses to Mr. Padilla's letter (Letter 3).

**Comment 3:** *In addition, why can't the City focus on and complete the Campus Parkway project. I've been told that that was supposed to be a major road on the periphery of Merced from Highway 99 to UC Merced. That seems better than running a busy road through Merced's quiet and established neighborhoods. According to Mr. Padilla's comments, the Campus Parkway project is supposed to be the City Council's highest priority goal, and the Parson's project seems to conflict with the City's General Plan in that the need for such major arterial roads within the City neighborhoods may be minimal.*

**Response:** Environmental analysis of the Campus Parkway and other projects is outside the scope of this Draft MND. See Response to Letter 3, Comments 1 and 6.

**Comment 4:** *Furthermore, the notification of this large and impactful project has been very inadequate. I'm lucky a neighbor came to my house today with information about it and let me know that today was the deadline to respond to the draft MND. I obviously didn't have time to acquire and read it or the City's General Plan to determine the city's planning goals and if there are really any conflicts regarding this project. According to Mr. Padilla's comments, it seems that I should have been notified and given a 45 day review period. It appears that the City is not being forthcoming with the necessary and clear information, which doesn't give me faith in the government of the City to which I just moved. Thank goodness for the diligence of one of my neighbors and the efforts of Mr. Padilla to help ensure transparency of the project impacts.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 2.

**Comment Letter 15**  
**Steven Crandall**

**Comment 1:** *I'm opposed to this project mainly because of all the traffic it will bring to Parsons, a residential street. There are lots of people walking, jogging and biking along Parsons and it will surely result in a serious accident. Also bear Creek trail is the best outdoor recreation in the city and will surely be adversely affected. Please consider your plan.*

**Response:** Design of the project includes city-wide standards for traffic, pedestrians and bicycle traffic. Also refer to the Response to Letter 3, Comments 1 and 6. The commenter does not provide a specific comment on the environmental analysis in the Draft MND and therefore a specific response cannot be provided.

**Comment Letter 16**  
**Helen Minor**

**Comment 1:** *I do have one more question. Is the section of Parsons between So. Bear Creek Drive and Stretch Road planned to be a four lane road and bike lanes and if so, are the residents here losing parking in front of their homes?*

**Response:** This issue is outside the scope of this MND. Relevant information was provided in the Response to Letter 3, Comment 1, however.

**Comment Letter 17**  
**Bill Wolcott**

**Comment 1:** *I thought this project had been discussed 20 years ago and all of the neighbors, Mayor, City Council agreed that it would be a waste of money....Now just because we have new people in office they want to waste our tax dollars on a bridge that will go nowhere....*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comment 1.

**Comment 2:** *If I remember correctly the increased traffic would go by two or three schools and a city park, this would increase traffic and pollution and noise. Another reason we voted against the bridge project is the fact that it will not go anywhere. Where are we going to get the bridge to go over the train tracks??? We are still in the process of replacing the bridge on Highway 140*

*over the train tracks and I don't want to waste the time and tax dollars building another one within less than a mile!!!*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comments 1, 3, and 4, and Response to Letter 5, Comment 1.

**Comment 3:** *If we are going to build any new bridges over Bear Creek, I feel it should connect the University Parkway with the projected roadway to the University. This has all been studied and approved by the voters years ago and would keep more traffic out of the residential areas.*

**Response:** See Response to Letter 3, Comments 1 and 6

**Comment 4:** *I would like to vote NO on building a bridge across Bear Creek on Parsons Ave.!!*

**Response:** There is no formal vote proposed for the project.