

**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street

San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

December 11, 2006

Mr. Maiser Khaled, Director
Project Development and Environmental
Federal Highway Administration
650 Capitol Mall, Suite 4-100
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Final Environmental Impact Statement for the U.S. 101 Willits Bypass
project in Mendocino County, California (CEQ #20060453)

Dear Mr. Khaled:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the above-referenced document pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

EPA reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), and provided comments to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on September 9, 2002. We rated the DEIS as Environmental Objections-Insufficient Information (EO-2) due to the magnitude of impact to waters of the U.S., and insufficient information to demonstrate the feasibility and commitment to mitigation appropriate for the extent of impact. EPA has actively coordinated with FHWA and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) under the NEPA/Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 Integration Process Memorandum of Understanding since publication of the DEIS. Based on the results of this collaboration and the changes reflected in the Final EIS (FEIS) we no longer have environmental objections to this project.

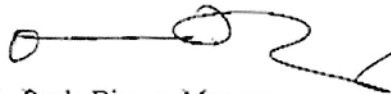
We commend FHWA and Caltrans for addressing EPA's objections to the potential "least environmentally damaging practicable alternative" (LEDPA) and the conceptual mitigation plan described in the DEIS by: 1) identifying and selecting an alternative, Modified Alternative J1T, that reduces environmental impacts; and 2) creating a more robust conceptual mitigation plan. Caltrans welcomed EPA's extensive input and worked collaboratively with EPA and other resource and regulatory agencies to resolve environmental objections.

EPA recommends that Caltrans continue its collaborative approach to this project by working with the City of Willits and resource and regulatory agencies during the development of the final detailed mitigation plan for the Bypass. As noted in the FEIS, the City of Willits is undertaking a study to upgrade their wastewater treatment facility,

which will likely entail impacts to wetlands and require wetland mitigation. We encourage Caltrans to explore mitigation opportunities presented by both the bypass and wastewater treatment projects to maximize environmental benefits, and request that Caltrans include EPA in these discussions.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this FEIS. When the Record of Decision is signed, please send one copy to the address above (mail code: CED-2). If you have any questions, please contact Michael Monroe of EPA's Wetlands Regulatory Office at 415-972-3453 or monroe.michael@epa.gov, or Nancy Levin of my staff at 415-972-3848 or levin.nancy@epa.gov.

Sincerely,



for Paula Bisson, Manager
Environmental Review Office

cc: Jeremy Ketchum, Caltrans
Pete Straub, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Ray Bosch, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Tom Daugherty, National Marine Fisheries Service
Corinne Gray, California Department of Fish and Game
Dean Prat, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
Ross Walker, City of Willits