

31. Find that the Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines as replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities pursuant to Class 2, 14 CCR 15302(c), and as a declared emergency pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(3) and 14 CCR 15304(f) Minor Alterations of Land. Authorize the Environmental Assessment Officer, or designee, to sign and file the Notice of Exemption with the Clerk-Recorder and the appropriate state agency.



Resource Management Agency

COUNTY OF TULARE AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

LARRY MICARI
District One

PETE VANDER POEL
District Two

AMY SHUKLIAN
District Three

EDDIE VALERO
District Four

DENNIS TOWNSEND
District Five

AGENDA DATE: June 3, 2025 - REVISED

Public Hearing Required	N/A
Scheduled Public Hearing w/Clerk	N/A
Published Notice Required	N/A
Advertised Published Notice	N/A
Meet & Confer Required	N/A
Budget Transfer (Aud 308) attached	N/A
Personnel Resolution attached	N/A
Agreement(s) attached	N/A

CONTACT PERSON: Celeste Perez PHONE: (559) 624-7010

SUBJECT: Adopt the Categorical Exemption for the Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Project

REQUEST(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Find that the Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines as replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities pursuant to Class 2, 14 CCR 15302(c), and as a declared emergency pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(3) and 14 CCR 15304(f) Minor Alterations of Land.
2. Authorize the Environmental Assessment Officer, or designee, to sign and file the Notice of Exemption with the Clerk-Recorder and the appropriate state agency.

SUMMARY:

It is requested that the Board approve the Notice of Exemption for the Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Project. Additionally, staff is requesting that the Board authorize the Environmental Assessment Officer, or designee, to sign and file the Notice of Exemption with the Clerk-Recorder and the appropriate state agency.

Tulare County (County), in cooperation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), proposes to replace the former one-lane bridge on Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek, located approximately eight (8) miles northwest of the City of Woodlake, with a permanent crossing. The former structure, consisting of simply supported 4-span timber girders with a cast-in-place concrete deck on laminated timber flooring on timber column/pile extensions, was constructed in 1939.

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DATE: June 3, 2025

In March of 2023, the County of Tulare experienced a series of severe rainstorms (atmospheric rivers) causing significant and widespread flooding and damage to numerous roads, bridges, and related infrastructure. As a result of the significant flows along Cottonwood Creek, the Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge was structurally compromised, and thereafter closed to public access/use per Caltrans recommendation. To reinstate access over Cottonwood Creek, the County demolished the damaged bridge and established a temporary structure approximately 65 feet downstream of the former bridge, designed to accommodate a 25-year storm discharge. Cottonwood Creek falls under the jurisdiction of the Central Valley Flood Board Protection (CVFPB), and the temporary crossing does not meet the board's flood protection requirements. Therefore, a new permanent bridge is necessary and will be designed to accommodate a 100-year storm event.

The proposed replacement bridge would be a multi-span cast-in-place reinforced concrete slab bridge or a multi-span precast prestressed (PC/PS) voided slab bridge, measuring approximately 105-feet long by 19-feet wide. The creek banks would be stabilized with riprap, and the new replacement bridge would be built in the same location as the original bridge. During construction, Avenue 404 will remain open since the temporary bridge is located downstream of the proposed replacement bridge.

A consultant team, managed by Moffatt & Nichol (previously selected and authorized to perform the work), will lead the geotechnical investigation efforts for this project.

The purpose of the geotechnical investigations is to assess existing soil conditions and to test the suitability of the ground to support future abutments for the replacement bridge structure. Geotechnical investigations will consist of four (4) exploratory borings: one boring at each proposed pier and abutment location. Staff does not anticipate any resulting permanent impacts due to the geotechnical investigations. Upon completion, the borings will be backfilled with soil cutting and natural materials to maintain existing conditions consistent with applicable County standards/requirements.

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the County of Tulare, acting as the lead agency, must make a determination whether the project is subject to CEQA (CEQA Guidelines Sections 150002(k)(1)), and if so whether the project is exempt from CEQA (CEQA Guidelines Section 15061). The County has determined that the Project qualifies for Declared Emergency Section 21080(b)(3); Class 2 Section 15302(c), Replacement or Reconstruction; Class 4 Section 15304(f), Minor Alterations to Land; Class 6 Section 15306, information collection; and Statutory Exemption, Section 15269(a)(b) Emergency Projects.

Once this Categorical Exemption is adopted and Notice of Exemption filed, environmental clearance for this project will be pending completion of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Environmental studies required for NEPA are currently in progress and will be submitted to Caltrans for review upon completion. NEPA clearance is anticipated by December 2025. Following that, County staff will proceed with securing all required permits, notifications, and right-of-way acquisitions for the project.

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DATE: June 3, 2025

Construction is anticipated to begin in the fall of 2027 and should be completed in approximately eight (8) months.

FISCAL IMPACT/FINANCING:

No Net County Cost to the General Fund.

This Project (RMA No. 28000040-002) was approved by the Board as part of the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 County Transportation Improvement Program (CTIP). A summary of the estimated project costs for the Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Project is as follows:

Preliminary Engineering:	\$600,000
Right of Way:	\$20,000
Construction:	\$2,100,00
Total:	\$2,720,000

Funding Source Breakdown:	
Highway Bridge Program (88.53%):	\$2,408,016
Measure R Local Match (11.47%):	\$311,984
Total:	\$2,720,000

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF TULARE STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN:

Safety and Security and Economic Well Being – This project will enhance the safety and security of the public by improving the transportation infrastructure for both the general population in the region and the motorists using this facility.

ADMINISTRATIVE SIGN-OFF:

/s/ Ahmad Alkhayyat

Ahmad Alkhayyat, P.E., MBA
Assistant Director – Public Works

/s/ Reed Schenke

Reed Schenke, P.E.
Director

Cc: County Administrative Office

Attachment A: Vicinity Map
Attachment B: Notice of Exemption

**BEFORE THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF TULARE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

IN THE MATTER OF Adopt the)
Categorical Exemption for the Avenue) Resolution No. 2025-0422
404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge) Agreement No.
Project)
)

UPON MOTION OF SUPERVISOR _____, SECONDED BY
SUPERVISOR _____, THE FOLLOWING WAS ADOPTED BY THE
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, AT AN OFFICIAL MEETING HELD _____
_____, BY THE FOLLOWING VOTE:

AYES:
NOES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT:

ATTEST: JASON T. BRITT
COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/
CLERK, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

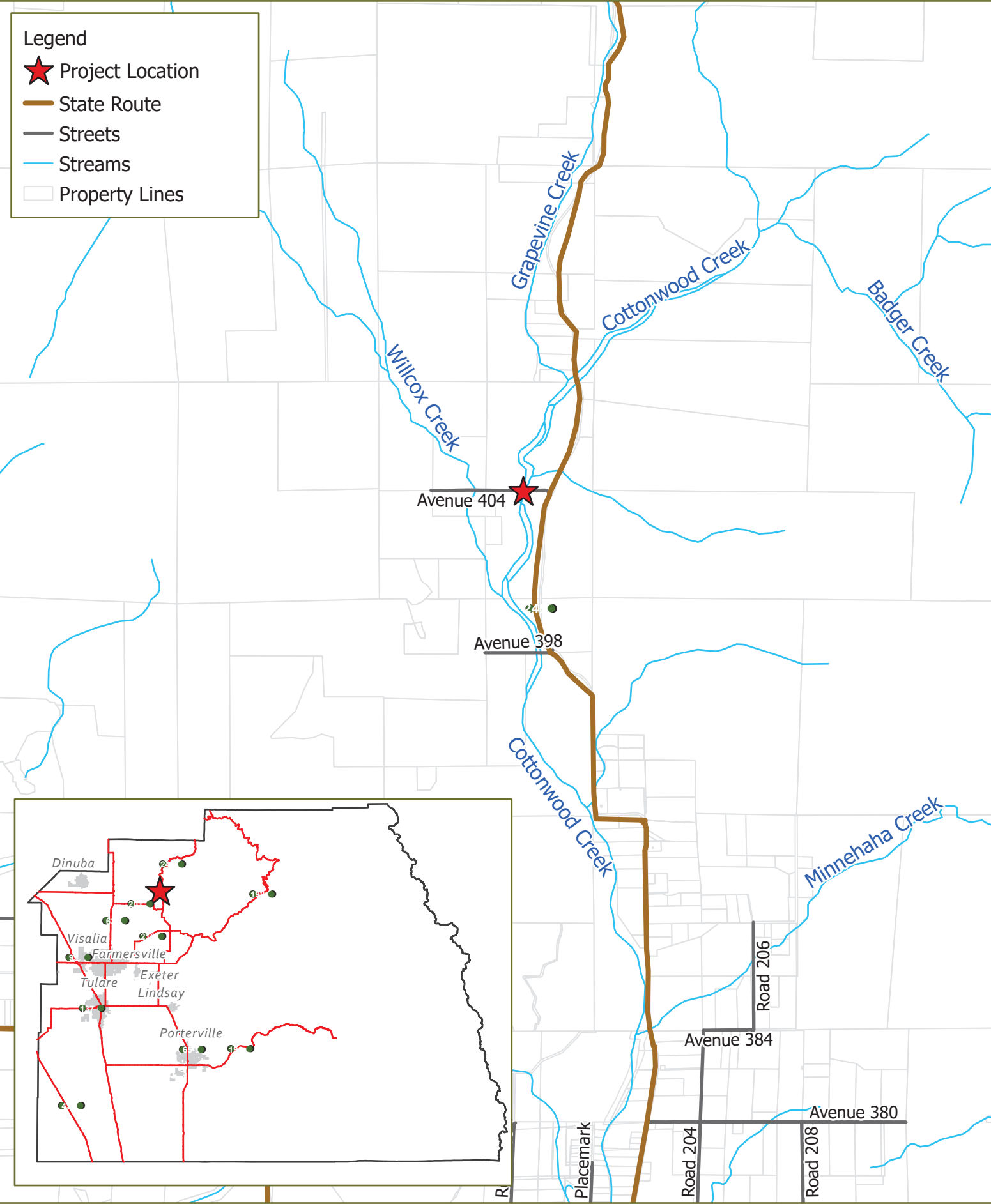
BY: _____
Deputy Clerk

* * * * *

1. Find that the Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines as replacement or reconstruction of existing structures and facilities pursuant to Class 2, 14 CCR 15302(c), and as a declared emergency pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(3) and 14 CCR 15304(f) Minor Alterations of Land.
2. Authorize the Environmental Assessment Officer, or designee, to sign and file the Notice of Exemption with the Clerk-Recorder and the appropriate state agency.

Attachment A

Vicinity Map



Avenue 404 Over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Project
Vicinity Map

Attachment B

Notice of Exemption

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION

Fee Exempt per Government Code Section 6103

To: ☒ Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
1400 Tenth Street, Room 121
Sacramento, CA 95814

☒ Tulare County Clerk
Room 105, Courthouse
221 South Mooney Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93291

Lead Agency: County of Tulare c/o Resource Management Agency
5961 S. Mooney Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93277 (559) 624-7000
Attn: gmills@tularecounty.ca.gov and jwillis@tularecounty.ca.gov

DATE RECEIVED FOR FILING AT TULARE COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE

Applicant(s): Tulare County Public Works
5961 South Mooney Blvd.
Visalia, CA 93277 (559) 624-7000

Project Title: Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek Bridge Replacement Project

Project Location - Specific: The project site is located approximately 8 miles northwest of the City of Woodlake within unincorporated Tulare County.

Project Location - Section, Township, Range: Section 22, Township 16S, Range 26E, MDBM

Project Location - City: northwest of Woodlake **Project Location - County:** Tulare

Description of Nature, Purpose, and Beneficiaries of Project: The proposed Project aims to replace the 1939 bridge over Cottonwood Creek that was damaged and failed due to catastrophic floodwater flows in March of 2023. In response, a temporary one-lane bridge was installed in 2023 on Avenue 404 over Cottonwood Creek. The temporary single span bridge was built approximately 65 feet downstream from the former bridge to provide temporary access across Cottonwood Creek until a permanent structure can be constructed.

The proposed replacement bridge would be a multi-span cast-in-place reinforced concrete slab bridge or a multi-span precast prestressed (PC/PS) voided slab bridge, measuring approximately 105-feet long by 19-feet wide. The creek banks would be stabilized with riprap, and the new replacement bridge would be built in the same location as the original bridge. Construction is anticipated to start in the fall of 2027 and should be completed in approximately 8 months. During this time, Avenue 404 would remain open since the temporary bridge is located downstream of the proposed replacement bridge. Thus, this Project would enhance public safety, provide emergency access and security, and improve transportation infrastructure for the general population in the region, accommodating both general traffic and large agricultural equipment, vital to the area.

Prior to construction, geotechnical investigations will be performed to determine existing conditions and to test the suitability of the ground to support replacement piers and abutments of the new replacement bridge structure. Geotechnical investigation would include four (4) borings, one boring at each proposed pier and abutment location. No permanent impacts from the geotechnical investigation are anticipated to occur. The borings will be approximately 80 feet deep and 8-10 inches wide. Upon completion, borings will be refilled with soil cutting and natural materials to maintain existing conditions and in accordance with County requirements. Boring activities will take place during the dry season. Beneficiaries of the Project include users of the bridge crossing.

Exempt Status: (check one)

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☒ Declared Emergency (**Sec. 21080(b)(3);**
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- ☐ Common Sense Rule: CEQA guidelines 15061(b)(3)
- ☒ Categorical Exemption: **Class 2 Section 15302(c) Replacement or Reconstruction; Class 4 Section 15304(f) Minor Alterations to Land; and Class 6 Information Collection 15306**
- ☒ Statutory Exemptions: **Emergency Projects 15269(a)(b);**

Reasons why project is exempt: The Project is consistent with the following CEQA exemptions: Statutory Exemption 15269 (a)(b) for emergency projects to repair or replace property or facilities damaged or destroyed as a result of a disaster and necessary to maintain service essential to public health, safety, or welfare; Class 2 Section 15302(c), Replacement or Reconstruction, as activities associated with the Project would include replacement of an existing facility with negligible or no expansion of capacity; Class 4 Section 15304(f), Minor Alterations to Land minor public or private alterations in the conditions of land, water, and/or vegetation which may involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees, and minor trenching and backfilling where the surface is restored to current conditions; and a Class 6 15306 Information Collection for geotechnical investigations as the data collection would not result in serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource, and whereas the boring activities would be backfilled and surfaces would be restored to existing conditions. Additionally, consistent with Section 15304, Application by Public Agencies, the County of Tulare Board of Supervisors adopted an exemption for the construction of the aforementioned facilities per the Tulare County Guidelines for the Implementation of California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, Number 300 Section 111. CATEGORICAL EXEMPTIONS Class 2: Replacement or Reconstruction (c). As such, Sections 15302 and 15304 are applicable and appropriate for this Project.

Environmental Assessment Officer: Reed Schenke, P.E., RMA Director/ EAO

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: County of Tulare

Project Planner/Representative: Jennifer Cervantes, Engineer I **Telephone:** 559-624-7169

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Title: Chief Environmental Planner
Gary A. Mills

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Title: Associate RMA Director, Designee
Michael G. Washam, A.C.E.

☒ Signed by Lead Agency

Date submitted to LCI: _____