

3.5 Irreversible and Irrecoverable Commitments of Resources that Would be Involved in the Proposed Project

No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not result in the irretrievable commitment of the resources required to construct the HDC Project; however, with this alternative, resources would be committed for road and highway improvement projects that are planned or proposed by Caltrans and local agencies in the High Desert over the next 25 years. Nevertheless, the irretrievable commitment of resources associated with the build alternatives is expected to far exceed the resources commitment associated with the No Build Alternative. These losses should be considered in the context of the benefits of reduced travel times and improved efficiency for the movement of vehicles, people, and goods that would result from implementation of the HDC Project.

Build Alternatives

Implementation of the proposed project would involve the commitment of a range of natural, physical, human, and fiscal resources. The commitment of these irretrievable resources for the build alternatives would vary in degree and amount; the two alternatives with rail components and their variations would consume more land and physical resources than the two highway-only alternatives and their variations. For all practical purposes, land used in construction of the HDC Project is considered an irreversible commitment of resources. In addition to these direct impacts on land resources, there would be irretrievable secondary project impacts associated with opening up new lands for development in areas that were previously inaccessible. These properties would mostly be in the immediate vicinity of proposed HDC interchanges and intersections, where highway-serving commercial uses are most likely to locate; however, with improved mobility and accessibility, residential developers could potentially be attracted to lands in the vicinity of HDC interchanges and intersections.

The following additional irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources from the physical and natural environment would occur as a result of the build alternatives:

The build alternatives would require acquisition of developed residential and nonresidential properties for right-of-way (ROW). Loss of these properties and their reuse for transportation purposes would be an irreversible and long-term commitment of resources. As discussed in Section 3.1.4.2, Relocation and Property Acquisition, the demolished residential and nonresidential uses would, in most cases, be replaced within the High Desert region. While adequate replacement opportunities are available, the relocation of land uses would also result in a commitment of available resources as replacement opportunities. Although the number of replacement structures needed is a very small percentage of the projected long-term growth for the region, the relocated uses would reduce the amount of available inventory. New

development would be needed to serve the projected growth for the region, so the loss of the current inventory may encourage new development, which would also require a commitment of similar nonrenewable resources.

In addition to the commitment of resources from the physical and natural environments, considerable amounts of fossil fuels, water, labor, and highway construction materials, such as concrete cement, aggregates (i.e., sand and gravel), asphalt, steel, paint, fencing, and plastics, would be expended during construction and would not be retrievable. Large amounts of labor and natural resources are used in the making of construction materials, and these materials are generally not retrievable; however, these resources are not in short supply, and their use for the proposed project would not have an adverse effect on their continued availability in the High Desert region.

Construction of the HDC Project would also require a substantial one-time expenditure of local, state, and federal funds, which are not retrievable; however, anticipated savings in energy consumption, travel time, improved transportation system efficiency, and improved public health and safety would offset this use of funds. In addition to the initial ROW and construction costs, there would be ongoing costs for roadway maintenance, including pavement, landscaping, roadside litter/sweeping, signs and markers, and electrical and storm drain maintenance; however, this long-term financial commitment would be balanced by the overall transportation benefits that the project would provide, as discussed in Chapter 1, Purpose and Need.

The commitment of these resources to the HDC Project should be considered in the context that residents, workers, travelers, and others in the immediate area, region, and state would benefit from the improved quality of the transportation system in the High Desert region of Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties. As such, improvements to local and regional mobility and accessibility are expected to outweigh the irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources to construct and implement the project.