

# MEMORANDUM

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**From:** Amie Ashton  
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**Re: San Mateo Bicycle Master Plan Update – Categorical Exemption**

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2011, the City of San Mateo adopted a Bicycle Master Plan. Given the changes to the bicycle network that have occurred based on the 2011 plan and changes in bicycling trends and technology, the City of San Mateo is now updating its plan. The Bicycle Master Plan Update (project) describes existing and proposed bicycle facilities to be provided within the city. This memorandum evaluates the applicability of a categorical exemption for the improvements described within the plan in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The project is categorically exempt from CEQA under Guidelines Section 15304 (h), as described below.

## CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION OVERVIEW

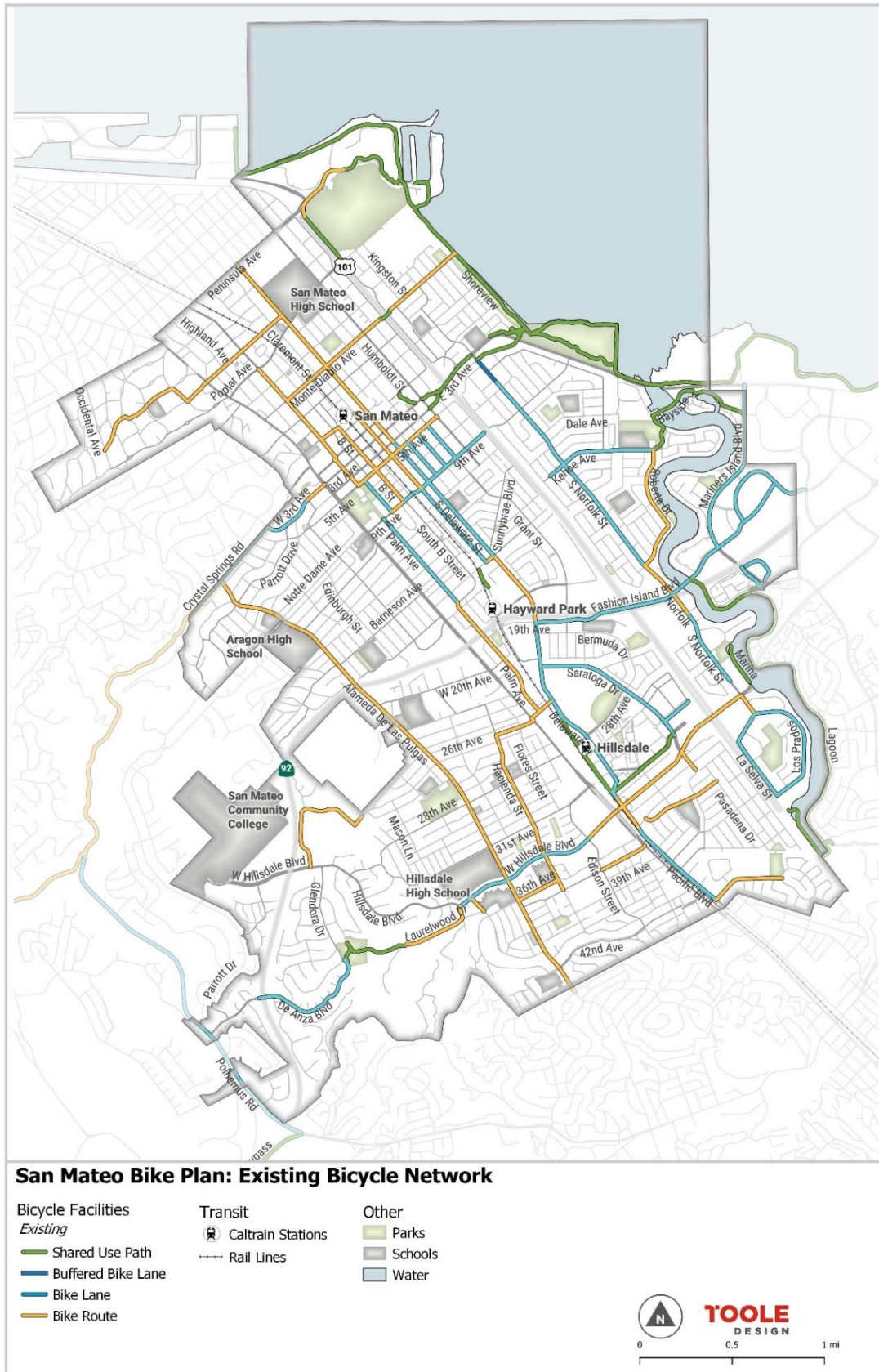
Section 21084 of the California Public Resources Code specifically requires the CEQA Guidelines to include a list of classes (or categories) of projects that have been determined not to have a significant effect on the environment and are therefore exempt from the provisions of CEQA. The CEQA Guidelines Sections 15301 through 15333 constitute the list of categorically exempt projects and contain specific criteria that must be met in order for a project to be found categorically exempt. Additionally, the CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 includes a list of exceptions to the use of categorical exemptions, none of which may apply to a project for it to qualify for a categorical exemption.

The improvements associated with the Bicycle Master Plan Update meet the requirements for a categorical exemption under Section 15304. Minor Alterations to Land - Class 4, with Subsection (h) specifically covering the creation of bicycle lanes on existing rights-of-way. A detailed discussion of the Bicycle Master Plan Update and its consistency with the categorical exemption requirements follows.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In 2011, the City of San Mateo developed a Bicycle Master Plan in order to implement a safe, logical, and complete bikeway system. Since adoption, a number of improvements recommended in the plan have been completed. The existing bicycle network within the city is shown in Figure 1.

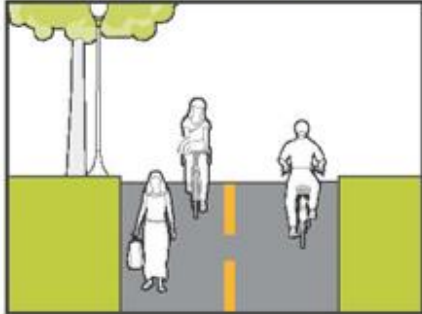
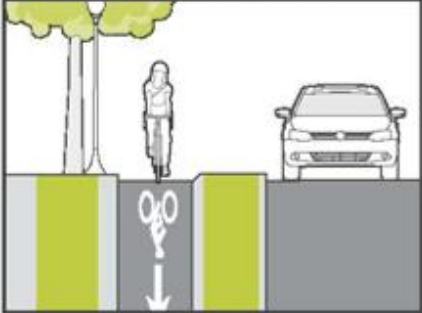
**Figure 1: Existing Bicycle Network**

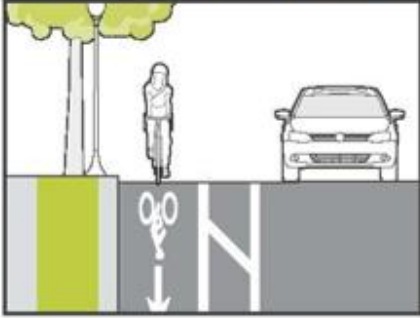
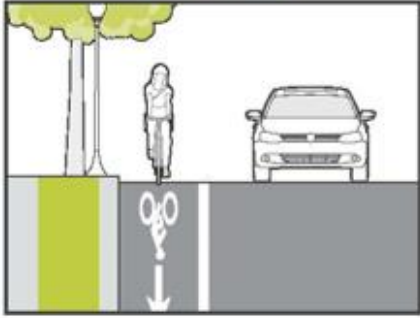

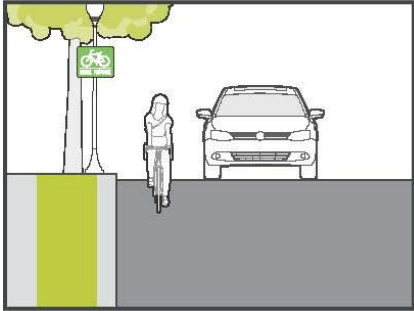


There have been innovations in bicycle programs and infrastructure since 2011, including new facilities, such as Class IV Separated Bicycle Lanes, the use of electric bicycles, implementation of a Bike Share program in the city, and the City’s interest in providing wayfinding signage. As part of its goal of increasing the city’s bicycle and pedestrian mode share to 30 percent by 2020, the City is updating its bicycle network to show additions since the prior 2011 Bicycle Master Plan adoption and to include additional key linkages needed to complete the network (refer to Figure 2: Existing and Proposed Bicycle Network). Bicycle improvements and their locations have been chosen based on availability of right of way, connectivity and directness, lack of barriers, multi-mode linkages, and safety.

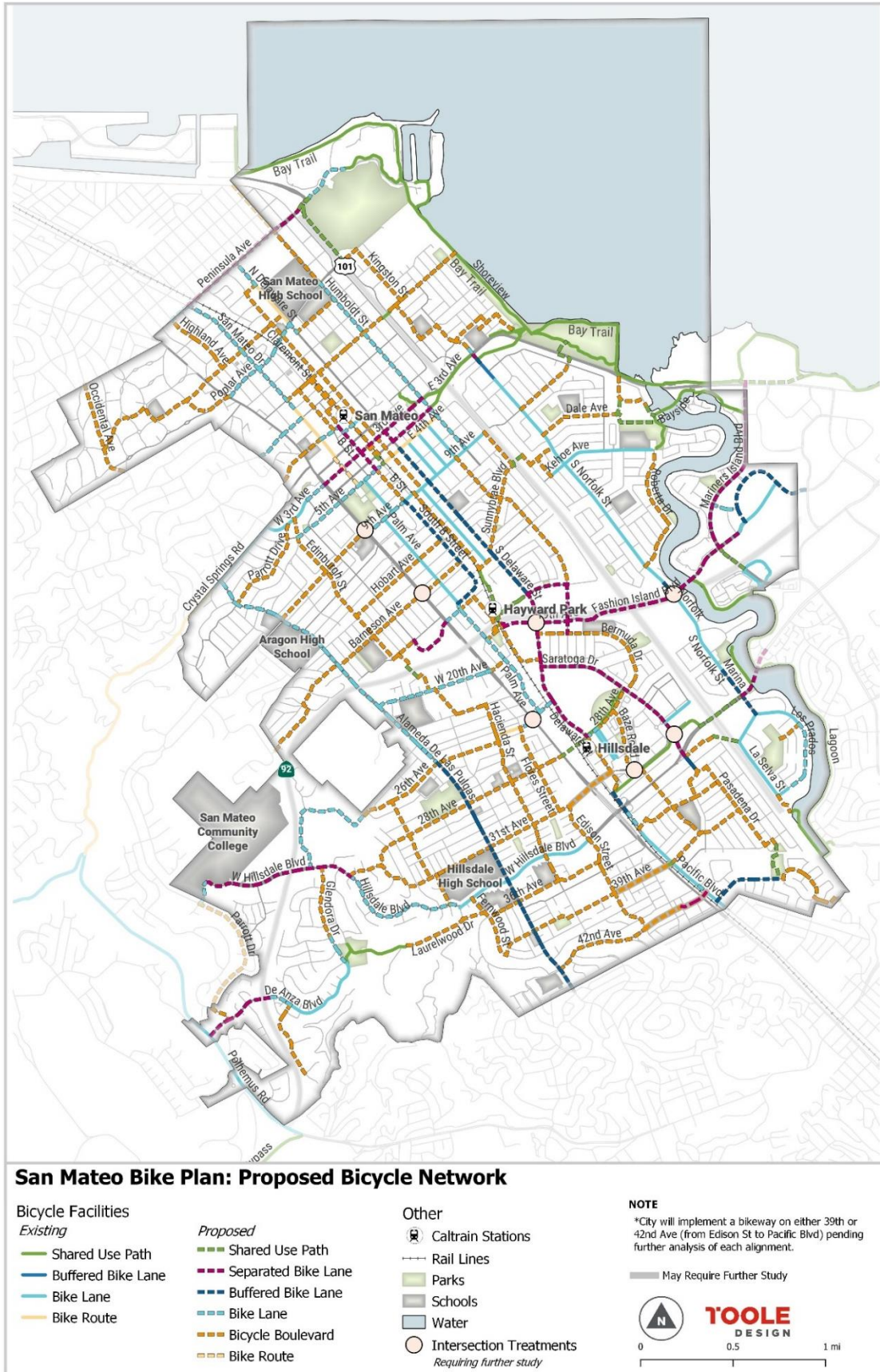
Identified bicycle network improvements shown in the Bicycle Master Plan Update will be incorporated into the existing public right-of-way. These improvements include painting/stripping of bicycle lanes, placement of barriers (such as bollards and raised curbs), bike parking facilities, and wayfinding signage. The various facilities described in the plan update will be implemented over one to fifteen years based on the facility priority ranking within the plan. It should be noted that while, intersection improvements are called out in the plan at several key locations in the city, these improvements require further study and are not included as part of this categorical exemption.

The following bicycle facility types are recommended for the proposed bicycle network.

| Facility Type   | Facility Description   |
|---|--|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Shared Use Path</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicyclists ride on off-road pathways designed for both bicyclists and pedestrians</li> <li>• This low-stress facility type has the least interaction between bicyclists and vehicles</li> <li>• Caltrans classification: Class I</li> </ul>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Separated Bike Lane</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicyclists ride in a designated lane separated from vehicular traffic by a buffer with vertical protection (e.g., flexible posts, planters, parked vehicles, curbs, etc.)</li> <li>• Separated bike lanes provide a low-stress facility, even on roadways with high vehicle speeds and volumes</li> <li>• The more robust the buffer’s vertical and horizontal separation, the more comfortable the separated bike lane is for bicyclists</li> <li>• Caltrans classification: Class IV</li> </ul> |

| Facility Type  | Facility Description   |
|--|--|
| <p data-bbox="256 212 597 247"><b>Buffered Bike Lane</b></p>    | <ul data-bbox="732 226 1404 531" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicyclists ride adjacent to vehicular traffic in a designated lane augmented with a striped buffer area that neither vehicles nor bicyclists should use</li> <li>• Because the buffer provides additional horizontal separation between vehicles and bicyclists, buffered bike lanes are appropriate for roadways with medium vehicle speeds and volumes</li> <li>• Caltrans classification: Class II</li> </ul> |
| <p data-bbox="342 594 516 630"><b>Bike Lane</b></p>             | <ul data-bbox="732 615 1377 835" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicyclists ride adjacent to vehicular traffic in a designated lane</li> <li>• In order to be low-stress, bike lanes must only be installed on roadways with medium-to-low vehicle speeds and volumes.</li> <li>• Caltrans classification: Class II</li> </ul>  |
| <p data-bbox="264 982 592 1018"><b>Bicycle Boulevard</b></p>  | <ul data-bbox="737 1003 1404 1182" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicyclists share lanes with vehicular traffic; however, bicycle boulevards include traffic calming treatments and are solely implemented on low-speed and low-volume streets to ensure they are low-stress facilities</li> <li>• Caltrans classification: Class III</li> </ul>   |
| <p data-bbox="329 1371 521 1407"><b>Bike Route</b></p>        | <ul data-bbox="732 1392 1417 1696" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bicyclists share lanes with vehicular traffic</li> <li>• Bicycle signage and pavement markings may be included to increase driver awareness of bicyclists and aid bicyclists with navigation</li> <li>• To remain low-stress, bike routes must only be applied on corridors with low vehicular traffic speeds and volumes</li> <li>• Caltrans classification: Class III</li> </ul>                             |

**Figure 2: Existing and Proposed Bicycle Network**



## CATEGORICAL EXEMPTION STATUS

The Bicycle Master Plan qualifies for a categorical exemption under the following section of the CEQA Guidelines:

*Section 15304. Minor Alterations to Land - Class 4. This exemption consists of minor public or private alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Subsection (h) specifically covers the creation of bicycle lanes on existing rights-of-way.*

As described previously, implementation of projects discussed within the Bicycle Master Plan Update involve minor improvements of the existing, paved public right-of-way to implement bicycle facilities and associated signage. No scenic trees would be removed as part of the project. No areas designated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as Critical Habitat are present in the areas where bicycle improvements would be implemented.<sup>1</sup>

While the San Francisco Bay is designated as Essential Fish Habitat by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, no in-water work or work adjacent to water such that sedimentation or noise disturbance would occur as part of implementation of the Bicycle Master Plan Update.<sup>2</sup>

### ***CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 – Exceptions***

This section documents that none of the exceptions in CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 would disqualify the project from being found categorically exempt. As described below, use of a categorical exemption under Section 15304. Minor Alterations to Land - Class 4 Subsection (h) to cover the Bicycle Master Plan Update improvements would not meet any of the exception criteria.

*(a) Location: Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply in all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.*

The improvements associated with the Bicycle Master Plan Update would be located within existing paved rights-of-way in developed environments (primarily roadways) and not in sensitive environments or habitat areas. The project would not impact an environmental resource of hazardous concern, as described further below under Exception (e). Therefore, the project is not disqualified from the Class 4 categorical exemption by this exception.

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<sup>1</sup> USFWS. “Critical Habitat for Threatened & Endangered Species.” Accessed October 16, 2019. <https://fws.maps.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=9d8de5e265ad4fe09893cf75b8dbfb77>.

<sup>2</sup> NOAA Fisheries. “Essential Fish Habitat on the West Coast.” Accessed October 16, 2019. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/habitat-conservation/essential-fish-habitat-west-coast>.

*(b) Cumulative Impact: All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.*

The improvements proposed in the Bicycle Master Plan Update would occur within the public right-of-way and involve paint/stripping of bicycle lanes, placement of barriers (such as bollards and raised curbs), and bicycle wayfinding signage. These improvements build on and enhance the elements of the bicycle network already constructed as part of the 2011 Bicycle Master Plan. The proposed improvements are minor in nature with limited or no ground disturbance. The individual improvements would be phased over one to fifteen years such that a cumulative impact would not occur in combination with other project in the vicinity; rather, the improvements would result in an improvement of the overall bicycle network in the city when assessed cumulatively. Therefore, the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place over time would not be significant.

*(c) Significant Effect: A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.*

There are no unusual circumstances associated with the Bicycle Master Plan Update improvements that would result in a significant effect on the environment. There are no sensitive habitats in the public right-of-way that would be impacted by the project. The project site does not contain unusual geologic characteristics that might create a hazard to future users of the bike lanes or facilities. Standard measures that are required by local, state, and federal law would be implemented as part of the project to minimize and avoid construction-related impacts; such as those related to nesting birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and California Department of Fish and Game Code or potential disturbance of unknown archaeological resources or human remains (both would be unlikely given the location of the proposed bicycle facilities in the existing public right-of-way and limited amount of ground disturbance required, which would occur in developed areas). The proposed project would, therefore, not result in a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.

*(d) Scenic Highways: A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified environmental impact report.*

There are three officially designated state scenic highways in San Mateo County: State Route (SR) 1, SR 35, and Interstate 280.<sup>3</sup> Improvements associated with the Bicycle Master Plan Update would not be visible from these state scenic highways due to the distance of separation and the relatively limited scope of the Bicycle Master Plan Update improvements. The improvements would not be located within those three scenic highways, and so would not damage scenic resources within those highways.

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<sup>3</sup> California Department of Transportation. *California Scenic Highway Mapping System – San Mateo County*. Accessed October 16, 2019. [http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/16\\_livability/scenic\\_highways/](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/16_livability/scenic_highways/).

*(e) Hazardous Waste Sites: A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.*

The Bicycle Master Plan Update improvements would be located within the public right-of-way and not on sites or at facilities included on lists compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code; therefore, no exceptions to the categorical exemption apply.<sup>4,5</sup>

*(f) Historical Resources: A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.*

While the Bicycle Master Plan Update improvements would be implemented in the vicinity of identified historic resources, the improvements would occur in the existing, paved right-of-way (away from any structures) and would not involve pile driving or other disturbance that would adversely affect any historic resources during construction.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, due to the minor improvements associated with plan (e.g., paint/stripping of bicycle lanes, placement of bollards and raised curbs, new pedestrian and bicycle wayfinding signage), a substantial adverse change to the significance of surrounding historic resources would not occur.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis above, none of the exceptions to categorical exemptions detailed in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15300.2 apply to the improvements associated with the Bicycle Master Plan Update. Thus, the project would be categorically exempt under CEQA Guidelines Section 15304. Minor Alterations to Land - Class 4, Subsection (h).

If during final design and engineering, the nature of disturbance or extent of improvements were to change such that new or additional impacts would occur (i.e., removal of significant trees, significant demolition or excavation, work outside of the public right-of-way, etc.), then additional CEQA review would be required.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Toxic Substances Control. *Geotracker*. Accessed October 16, 2019.

[https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/search.asp?cmd=search&reporttype=CORTESE&site\\_type=CSITES,OPE,N,FUDS,CLOSE&status=ACT,BKLG,COM&reporttitle=HAZARDOUS+WASTE+AND+SUBSTANCES+SITE+LIST](https://www.envirostor.dtsc.ca.gov/public/search.asp?cmd=search&reporttype=CORTESE&site_type=CSITES,OPE,N,FUDS,CLOSE&status=ACT,BKLG,COM&reporttitle=HAZARDOUS+WASTE+AND+SUBSTANCES+SITE+LIST).

<sup>5</sup> California Environmental protection Agency. "Cortese List Data Resources."

<https://calepa.ca.gov/SiteCleanup/CorteseList/>

<sup>6</sup> City of San Mateo. Historic Resources. Accessed October 16, 2019.

<https://www.cityofsanmateo.org/DocumentCenter/View/64534/Historic-Resources-Info-Handout>.