

III. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

III.A. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The County of San Luis Obispo (County) proposes to construct the extension of Willow Road and connect it with U.S. Route 101 (US 101) in the community of Nipomo, south San Luis Obispo County (Figure III-1 and III-2). The proposed project includes the extension of Willow Road east (including minor realignment from its existing terminus approximately 1,000 feet west of Pomeroy Road) to Thompson Avenue; construction of a frontage road between Willow Road and Sandydale Drive; construction of a new US 101/Willow Road interchange between postmile (PM) 5.75 and PM 6.0; and related cross street and drainage improvements. The County will be the Lead Agency for environmental approval under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

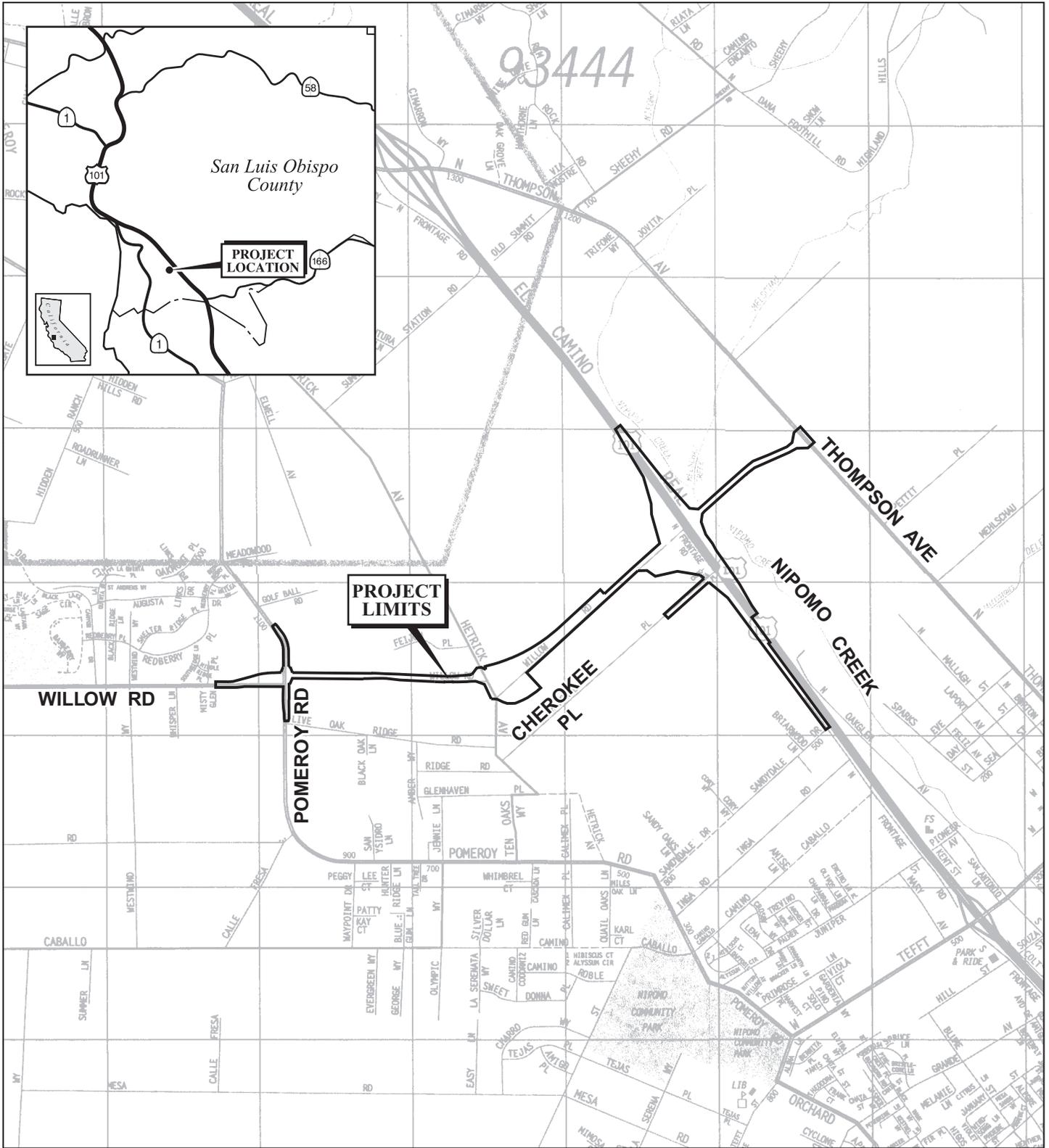
The proposed alignment and interchange are shown in the Route 101 Corridor Study (1988), the South County Circulation Study (1994/1995) and again in the 2000 model update, and the Circulation Element of the County General Plan. The proposed extension of Willow Road and the interchange are identified in the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) as a major proposed short-term project. The Willow Road interchange is listed in SLOCOG's Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) (Project ID #RPSTPL-5949[072]). The project represents a part of the long-range circulation program for the South County planning area. The proposed project provides an integral component of the area's future transportation network and facilitates the efficient movement of people and goods through the community of Nipomo.

The Board of Supervisors originally considered seven alternative alignments for the extension of Willow Road, six of which were brought forward for the Board's consideration at its January 10, 1995 meeting. Two of the considered alignments (Alignments 2 and 4) were selected for further analysis and design leading to a final route selection. A Tier 1 Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared by Douglas Wood and Associates, Inc. on behalf of the County in 1998 for Alignments 2 and 4 and the frontage road alignment. In March 1999, the Board certified the Final EIR and selected Alignment 2 as the preferred project alignment. The FEIR specified that subsequent design refinements for the road extension, interchange, and frontage road would be evaluated in a Tier 2 construction-level environmental document. The second-tier evaluation is described in more detail below.

III.B. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

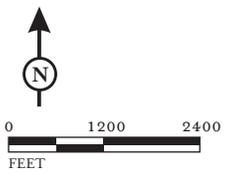
The primary goal of the proposed project is to provide a new direct connection between State Route 1 (SR 1) and US 101. In doing so, the proposed project will also achieve the following objectives:

- Relieve traffic congestion in order to improve traffic flow and levels of service (LOS) at the US 101 interchanges at Tefft Street and Los Berros Road;
- Provide circulation improvements to support planned land uses as identified in the South County Area Plan;
- Reduce future traffic levels on Los Berros Road, West Tefft Street, and Pomeroy Road;



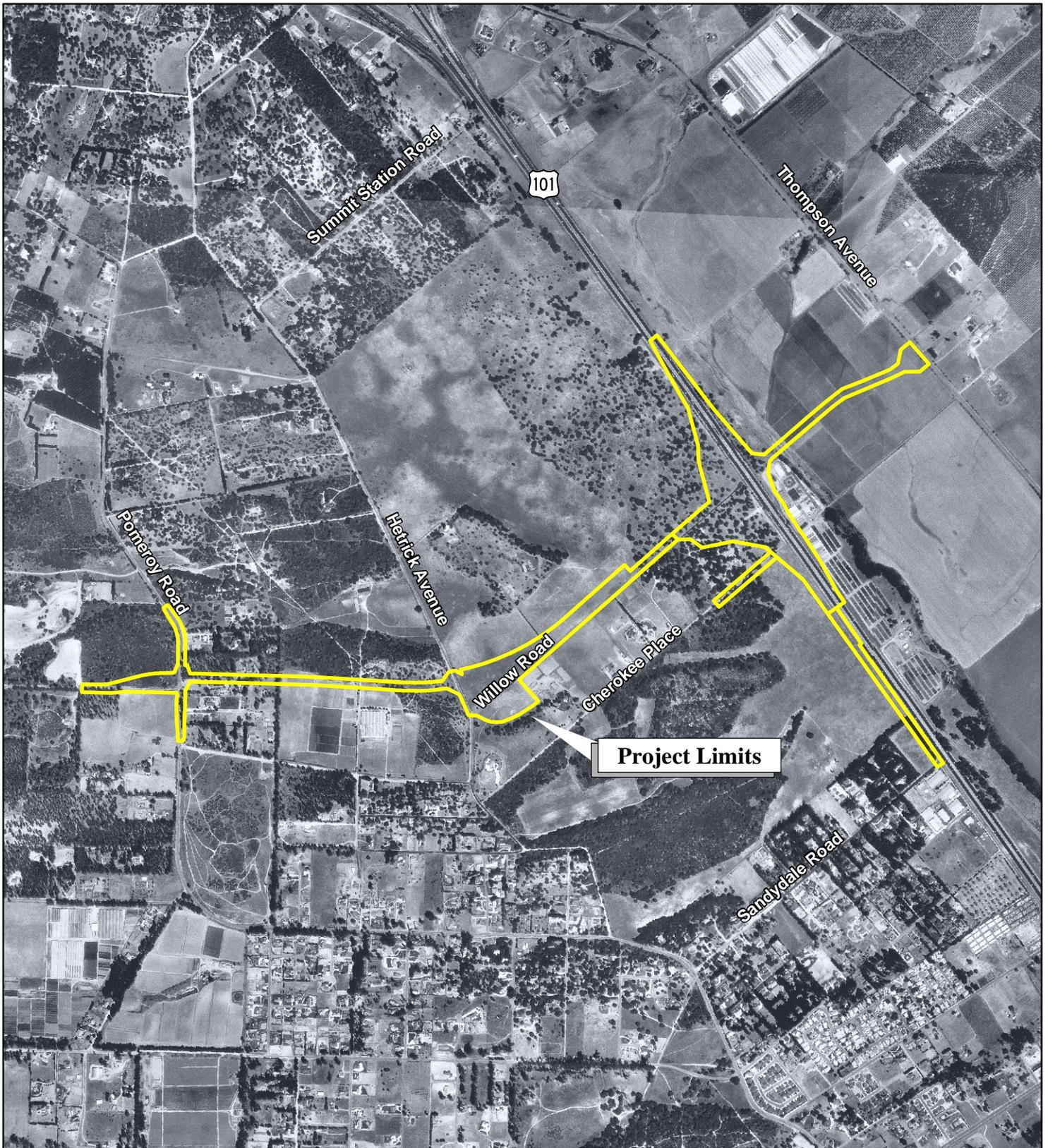
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FIGURE III-1



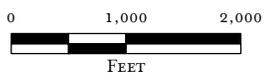
SOURCE: THE THOMAS GUIDE

Willow Road Extension/U.S. 101 Interchange Project
Project Vicinity



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FIGURE III-2



*Willow Road Extension/U.S. 101 Interchange Project
Project Location Map*

SOURCE: DOQQ (1m)

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- Reduce travel length and time in the Nipomo area;
- Reduce the need for major modification of the US 101/Tefft Street and Los Berros-Thompson Road interchanges;
- Improve traffic safety by diverting future traffic from nonstandard County roadways to a full standard roadway;
- Provide enhanced emergency access to the residents and businesses of the Nipomo area through the provision of an alternative east-west access and a connection to US 101;
- Provide a new recreational trail from Thompson Avenue to SR-1, improving access to the coastal zone

Traffic generally flows freely in the area between the Los Berros Road/Thompson Street interchange and the Tefft Street interchange. The freeway ramps operate at acceptable levels during the a.m. and p.m. peak hour. Most arterial intersections are also operating at acceptable levels during the a.m. and p.m. peak hour. The southbound US 101 ramp intersection with Tefft Street, however, experiences unacceptably poor traffic conditions during both the a.m. and p.m. peak hours. The relatively high traffic volumes and the existing intersection configuration contribute to poor operations at this location.

Traffic operations at both the Tefft Street interchange and the Los Berros Road interchange are expected to worsen as traffic volumes increase throughout the area. Anticipated increases in traffic volume result from population and employment growth at local and regional levels. The existing local street network does not have sufficient capacity to handle future traffic volumes either to or from US 101.

The proposed project will allow the County to concentrate limited funds on providing a transportation improvement that will lessen the impacts to the existing roadway network as the area continues to develop. The project will help to ease congestion at both the Tefft Street and Los Berros/Thompson Street interchanges by creating another interchange that lies close to planned development. The project will provide a direct route to several developed or approved Specific Plans in South County, such as Cypress Ridge, Black Lake, and Woodlands. The new link between US 101 west to the Black Lake-Calendar area will also provide substantial benefits to local traffic circulation, including a reduction in future vehicle miles traveled on the Nipomo Mesa and reduced traffic loads on nonstandard roadways.

Portions of the Nipomo Mesa are not easily accessible from US 101 due to the distance between existing interchanges and the amount of unpaved roads within the local roadway network. As a result, access for fire protection and emergency response services in the Nipomo area is limited. Nipomo Station 20 (located at 450 Pioneer Street) provides fire protection and emergency response services to the Nipomo Mesa. The proposed US 101/Willow Road interchange will provide a direct route from Nipomo Station 20 to existing and proposed developments east and west of US 101, reducing emergency response times in this area. This interchange will also provide for better emergency access to US 101 in the event that the Tefft Street or Los Berros Road interchanges are closed.

Besides improving circulation and safety within the area, the proposed project may also improve recreational access to the coast. The County Trails Plan indicates a trail along Willow Road in the vicinity of the proposed project. The project design provides space for a future equestrian path.

III.C. PROJECT LOCATION

Figure III-1 depicts the proposed project's regional location and project vicinity. Figure III-2 provides an aerial photograph of the project area and the immediate surroundings. This project area centers on US 101. The Tefft Street interchange defines the southern boundary, and the Los Berros/Thompson Road interchange defines the boundary to the north. To the west, the project begins near the intersection of Pomeroy Road and Willow Road. Thompson Avenue forms the eastern boundary of the project area.

III.D. PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

1. Extension of Willow Road

The proposed extension of Willow Road begins approximately 1,000 feet west of Pomeroy Road, running east and northeast approximately 2.5 miles to its termination at Thompson Road, located east of US 101 (Figure III-3). The Willow Road extension will be a two-lane roadway (one lane in each direction) within a 100-foot right-of-way to accommodate a 40-foot-wide roadway with two 12-foot travel lanes, a 14-foot-wide center turn (auxiliary) lane in selected areas, two 8-foot shoulders, and an 8-foot area set aside for a future equestrian path.

Local access to the proposed Willow Road extension will be via local roadways and limited driveway access. A center turn (auxiliary) lane will be provided at the intersections with Pomeroy Road, Hetrick Avenue, Thompson Road, the proposed frontage road west of US 101, and the proposed US 101/Willow Road interchange ramps. Based upon future project traffic generation from the build out of the area's land use plan, the roadway is expected to carry over 15,000 trips per day and will have a minimum design speed of 55 miles per hour. No substantive changes to the configuration of the existing segments of Willow Road are anticipated except at its connection with Hetrick Road. Improvements planned for Pomeroy Road where it intersects with Willow Road include widening of Pomeroy (both the north and south legs of the intersection) to accommodate left turn lanes, two travel lanes, and shoulders on both sides of the road. The left turn segment of each leg will be approximately 250 feet in length. A two-lane bridge is proposed to be constructed at the crossing of Willow Road over Nipomo Creek, east of US 101.

2. US 101/Willow Road Interchange

An interchange is proposed where the extension of Willow Road would cross US 101, between US 101 Post Mile (PM) 5.75 and PM 6.0 (Figure III-3). The interchange will be constructed as an undercrossing and includes the construction of two two-lane concrete bridges to carry northbound and southbound US 101 traffic over Willow Road, approach slabs, and on- and off-ramps. The interchange will be constructed to accommodate any future widening of US 101 to six lanes and Willow Road to four lanes, as well as the 8 foot set-aside for a future equestrian trail.

3. Frontage Road

The proposed frontage road, with a 60 foot right-of-way, between Willow Road and Sandydale Drive is proposed to be located adjacent to the US 101 right-of-way (Figure III-3). The new 0.8-mile roadway will be located within a 60-foot right-of-way to accommodate a 40-foot-wide two-lane roadway with two 12-foot travel lanes and two 8-foot bicycle lanes.

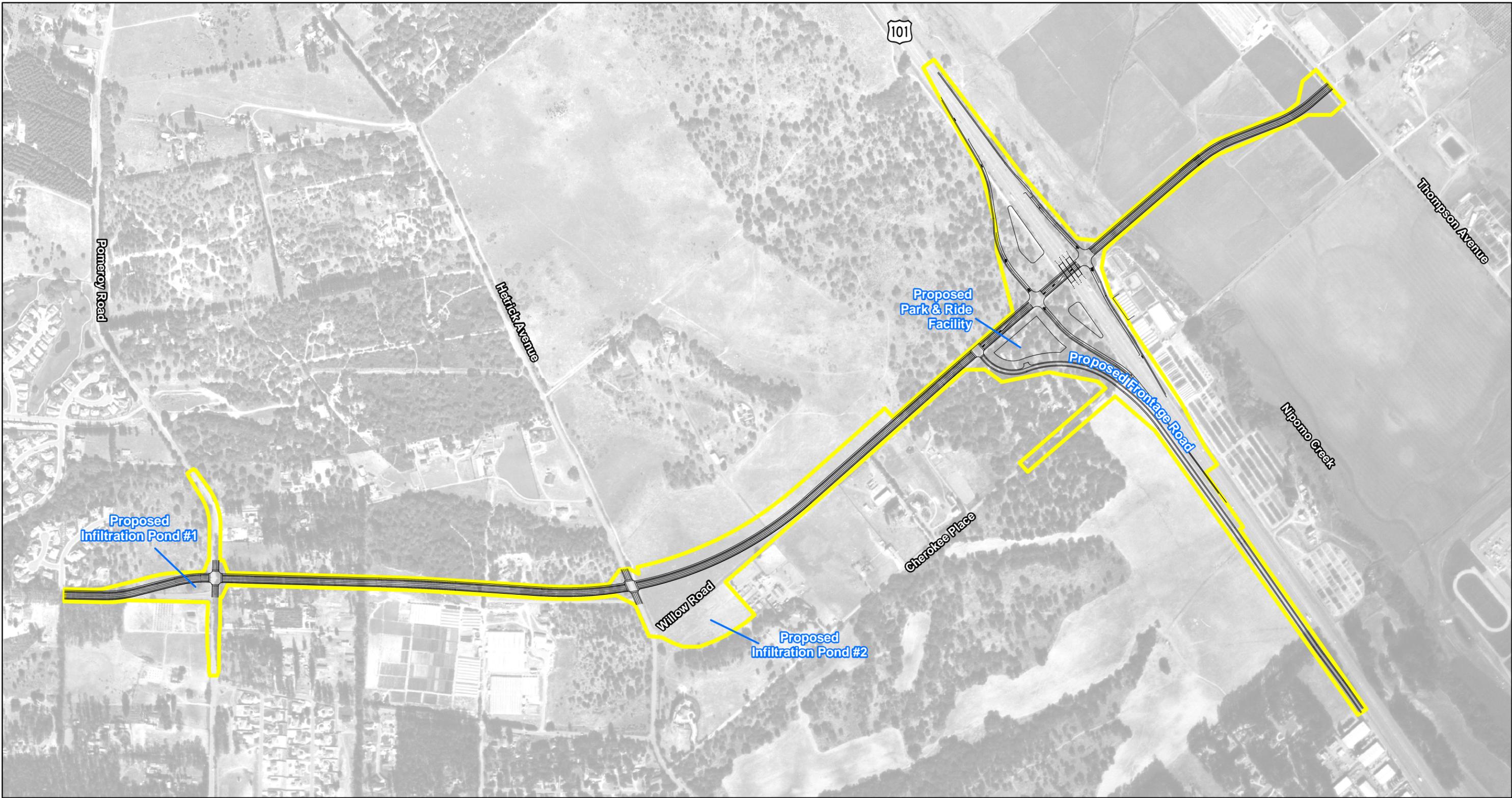
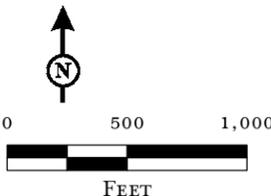


FIGURE III-3

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Legend

- Project Limits
- Geometrics

Willow Road Extension/U.S. 101 Interchange Project
Conceptual Site Plan

SOURCE: Geometrics - Rajappan & Meyer Consulting Engineers Inc. and Aerial - County of San Luis Obispo.
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4. Park and Ride Facility

The southwest quadrant of the proposed future interchange at US 101/Willow Road, outside of the southbound on-ramp, is the proposed location for a future park and ride facility (Figure III-3). The park and ride lot would provide approximately 50 spaces and will include a bus drop-off area and bicycle racks.

5. Infiltration Basins

The proposed extension of Willow Road will add an additional 2.5 miles of roadway between Pomeroy Road and Thompson Road, in addition to 0.8 mile of frontage road between the new extension of Willow Road and Sandydale Drive. This new roadway will not only add to the volume of runoff to the current drainage systems due to the imperviousness of the asphalt, but it will also essentially bisect natural drainage basins, thus causing a man-made barrier to natural runoff. The County dictates in its Standard Specifications Manual that all runoff caused by impervious bituminous asphalt must be routed into infiltration basins to ultimately be absorbed by the soil. The remaining natural runoff must be routed across the proposed roadway and is to continue downgrade on its current course. Infiltration basins will serve to capture and dispose of the natural runoff caused by precipitation on the new asphalt so as to not affect the natural drainage patterns.

Two separate basins along the Willow Road alignment are required to accommodate the increased runoff. Infiltration Basins (IB) 1 and 2 are identified on Figure III-3. Each basin has distinct design characteristics, and therefore each basin has a unique configuration. The depth of the infiltration basins will be up to two feet with 5:1 sideslopes.

Drainage swales will be provided along the extended segment of Willow Road, at the interchange, and at the frontage road north of Sandydale Drive. The swales will perform similar functions as detention basins. Buffer strips off the edge of pavement will be earthen and vegetated with native grasses. The native vegetation will be designed to capture the oils and fluids from the roadway surface runoff during storm events.

6. Cherokee Place

The project also includes the construction of Cherokee Place east for a distance of 1,000 feet to connect with the proposed frontage road west of US 101. Cherokee Place will be graded and paved to meet County standards. The proposed roadway is shown in Figure III-3.

III.E. REQUIRED PERMITS AND APPROVALS

The proposed extension of Willow Road entails the following decisions by the County:

- Certification of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Willow Road extension and associated facilities by the Board of Supervisors; and
- Approval of the Mitigation Monitoring Program for the proposed Willow Road extension and associated facilities by the Board of Supervisors;

The proposed extension of Willow Road crosses Nipomo Creek. This project may therefore result in the discharge of dredged or fill material into “waters of the United States” and/or adjacent wetlands. Consequently, the project also requires the County to obtain the following permits prior to project construction:

- A Section 404 permit under the federal Clean Water Act from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;
- A Public Resources Code Section 1602 Streambed Alteration Agreement from the State of California, Department of Fish and Game;
- A Section 401 water quality certification from the Regional Water Quality Control Board;
- A National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit to comply with Section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act from the State Water Quality Control Board;
- An Encroachment Permit from the State of California, Department of Water Resources (DWR) for construction of the project across the DWR Coastal Aqueduct Pipeline running along the east side of Nipomo Creek; and
- An Encroachment Permit from the State of California, Department of Transportation for construction of the US 101/Willow Road interchange.

III.F. PROJECT PHASING

The following provides the anticipated phasing of the proposed project design, right of way acquisition and construction.

2003/2005 Project Approval and Environmental Document
Willow Road Extension Design
US 101 Interchange Design

2006/2007 Right of Way Acquisition

Construct Willow Road Extension

2008/2009 Phase I - 1,000 feet east of Pomeroy Road to Hetrick Road

Phase II - Hetrick Road to US 101

2009/2010 Construct Frontage Road

2010/2011 Construct US 101 Interchange

Construct Willow Road under 101

Future Phase III - US 101 to Thompson Avenue