

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The Martin Luther King Jr. Way Corridor Revitalization Plan was initiated by the City of Merced to establish a long-term Vision for the future of this gateway arterial street and adjacent neighborhoods. The Martin Luther King Jr. Way study area is bounded by Highway 99 to the north, Childs Avenue to the south, and M and G Streets to the west and east respectively. The area exhibits a varied character that includes the Merced County Fairgrounds, residential neighborhoods, and a variety of commercial land uses located on Martin Luther King Jr. Way. Like many streets that traverse older neighborhoods in cities such as Merced, increased truck traffic and overall traffic volumes have placed a heavier burden on Martin Luther King Jr. Way than it was originally designed to accommodate. The age, scale, and condition of structures along the corridor vary widely, and there are some incompatibilities between land uses that have evolved over time. In response to increasing traffic and aging infrastructure conditions, changing patterns of retail development that favor newer sites in outlying areas, and the evolving needs of the general commercial sector, many properties along Martin Luther King Jr. Way are suffering from ongoing disinvestment. While many well-maintained properties are present along the corridor, the overall perception of blighted conditions has stifled interest in reinvestment.

The Martin Luther King Jr. Way Corridor Revitalization Plan will provide a consensus-based strategy to undertake targeted public investment and foster public-private partnerships that will stabilize and enhance the corridor. The Plan is based upon the results of a community planning process, involving local stakeholders and the community at large in discussing creative solutions to stem further decline along Martin Luther King Jr. Way and foster a viable and sustainable pattern of development in the future. The Plan builds upon the findings of the Existing Conditions Analysis to re-imagine the future of the Martin Luther King Jr. Way Corridor, and is focused on four overriding objectives that are discussed later in this chapter.

This report establishes a Vision for the future that recognizes the historical role of the Corridor as a commercial “Gateway to Merced” while acknowledging the existing mixture of land uses and the current vulnerability of the existing residential neighborhoods within the study area. This Vision is supported by several Planning Principles which will be achieved through key redevelopment opportunities, public realm improvements, and economic development initiatives. This report concludes with a list of organizational and administrative initiatives that the City can undertake to further support the realization of this Vision. This Vision can only be achieved through the coordinated and sustained efforts of both the public and private sectors and stakeholders throughout the Corridor.

Martin Luther King Jr. Way Revitalization Strategy  
"Focus Area"



## **SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WAY REVITALIZATION PLAN**

The City of Merced planning team set out to develop a plan that would meet the objectives summarized below:

### **1. Improve Transportation Options for Travelers (vehicles, bikes, pedestrians, transit)**

One of the key action items that will likely result from the study will be the inclusion of multi-modal choices for travelers of the corridor. Presently, the corridor does not have a complete sidewalk system, nor does it contain appropriate bicycle facilities. This is highly unfortunate as the socio-economic realities of the neighborhood necessitate residents to use non-auto sources of transportation. The lack of improvements and the economic conditions of the communities force many residents to walk or ride bicycles on the shoulder of the state highway. In addition, sites will be identified for possible future intra-city bus stops. This study will result in a complete strategy that prioritizes needed improvements and includes a funding plan for the eventual construction of these facilities.

### **2. Enhance the Safety Performance of the State Highway for all Travelers/Support Economic Growth Through Enhancing the Movement of Goods and People**

The highway is a heavily traversed truck route throughout the year. In addition, Highway 59 currently serves as the primary north-south arterial through this community. Throughout the day, this heavy use causes severe strains on its overall efficiency. The study will identify where projects are needed to enhance the performance of the current state highway. Specifically, many of these improvement projects will allow for safe multimodal use. In addition to identifying where improvements are needed, the study will develop a logical phasing plan for the needed improvements. The misaligned intersections and lack of pedestrian and bicycle features limit the full functionality of the highway. Currently, there is no plan to address these needs. A thorough study will provide clear objectives and priorities, allowing progress to be made in highway system issues.

### **3. Feasibility Assessment of New Office, Commercial and Residential Uses**

A comprehensive revitalization plan promotes more efficient land uses immediately adjacent to the roadway. These potential projects will immediately be addressed by the Redevelopment Agency. Of particular interest, this study will locate appropriate sites for regional retail and professional centers. This effort is currently compromised by the traffic congestion, parcel assembly and misalignment of local roads. This study will investigate the most efficient placement of centers and construct a potential financing source for an eventual development. In addition to retail and professional centers, the same analysis will be conducted for affordable housing developments along the corridor.

### **4. Identify Opportunities to Design and Install Improvements that Provide Safe Crossing Sites**

In its present condition, the corridor presents a significant safety hazard for cross-highway automobiles, pedestrians and bicyclists. It is unfortunately a common sight to see mothers pushing strollers and senior citizens walking along the shoulder of the highway as traffic rushes by at 40 miles per hour. This dangerous situation is further exacerbated by the lack of controlled pedestrian crossings. Throughout the day, an onlooker can see numerous pedestrians running across four lanes of highway traffic attempting to dodge high speed trucks in an effort to cross the highway. This study will identify these deficiencies and develop a strategy to address these present safety concerns.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN**

The development of the Martin Luther King Jr. Way Revitalization Plan was carried out over the following four principle phases:

- Phase 1—Organize resources and involve the public
- Phase 2—Describe the Existing Setting
- Phase 3—Develop the Action Strategy Matrix
- Phase 4—Implement, evaluate, and revise the plan.

## **Phase 1—Organize Resources and Involve the Public**

Under this phase, a 14-member Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee was assembled to oversee the development of the plan. The diverse Committee consists of long-term residents, business owners, property owners/managers, or representatives from various organizations, such as a non-profit, educational, health or faith-based, that is located within the project area and other stakeholders in the planning area. A Technical and Plan Preparation Team, consisting of key City staff from City departments and utilities was also assembled to provide technical support to the advisory committee and to prepare draft and final plan elements (maps, tables, text, images, and formatting) of the Martin Luther King Jr. Way Revitalization Plan. The planning process and Ad-hoc Advisory Committee were formally recognized by the City of Merced City Council. Full coordination with other local, county, and state agencies having an interest or responsibility in the study area occurred from the onset of this plan’s development through its completion. A public outreach and involvement strategy was initiated in this phase.

The writing effort began with the drafting of the “Plan Overview” and “Planning Process” which set the tone and approach for the Project. The other sections were drafted in preparation of committee and public meetings, and finalized upon receipt of input at these events. The draft plan was reviewed and commented on by the Technical and Plan Preparation Team, the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee, and affected and interested public agencies. Additionally, the Redevelopment Advisory Committee (RDAC) appointed a representative from their Committee to participate on the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee for the Revitalization Strategy for Martin Luther King Jr. Way, as well as staff updates to RDAC every other month (opposite of the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee Meetings). The public was also provided opportunities to review and comment (see Chapter 3). An administrative draft was prepared incorporating these comments, and completed on [REDACTED]. Finally, a copy of the administrative draft was provided to the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee and the City of Merced Redevelopment Advisory Committee on [REDACTED] for review. A final draft was then prepared and completed on [REDACTED], and then provided to the City of Merced City Council for final adoption.

## **Phase 2—Identify and Describe the Existing Conditions**

To identify study area assets, opportunities, and constraints; an assessment of the plan area’s existing conditions was performed by the Technical and Plan Preparation Team with input from the public, stakeholders, and Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee. A huge part of this undertaking involved the collection of pedestrian/bicycle and big rig data along the Martin Luther King Jr. Way Corridor between Childs Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street. Additional information can be found in Chapter 8 – Crossing Sites and Patterns of the Corridor. Consistent with the objectives of the plan, the assessment focused on the following parameters:

- Land Use;
- Transportation
- Crossing Sites of the Corridor
- Corridor Design and Safety

### **Phase 3—Develop the Action Strategy Matrix**

Using the organization and information established in Phases 1 and 2, the foundation was set for developing the Action Strategy Matrix. With support from the Technical and Plan Preparation Team, the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee performed a series of facilitated exercises in order to generate the following parameters of this plan:

- Confirm Existing Conditions Report (Amend/Update as Appropriate)
- Identify capabilities of participating public agencies
- Create a catalog of potential action alternatives
- Select implementation actions and prioritize them, emphasizing benefits vs. costs when appropriate

### **Phase 4—Implement, Evaluate, and Revise the Plan**

This plan includes a plan implementation and maintenance section that details the formal process for ensuring that the Martin Luther King Jr. Way Strategic Plan remains an active and relevant document. The plan maintenance process includes a schedule for monitoring and evaluating the plan's progress annually. This phase includes strategies for continued public involvement and incorporation of the recommendations of this plan into other planning mechanisms of the City, such as the General Plan, Capital Improvement Plan, Building Code, and Development Design Guidelines.

## **IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS**

The Action Strategy Matrix is a key element of this plan. It is through the implementation of these actions that the City of Merced can strive to attain the community vision expressed in the Plan. The Action Strategy Matrix includes the following information:

- Listing of Actions
- Estimated Costs / Funding Sources
- Prioritization / Timeline for Implementation
- Lead Implementation Agency (or agencies)