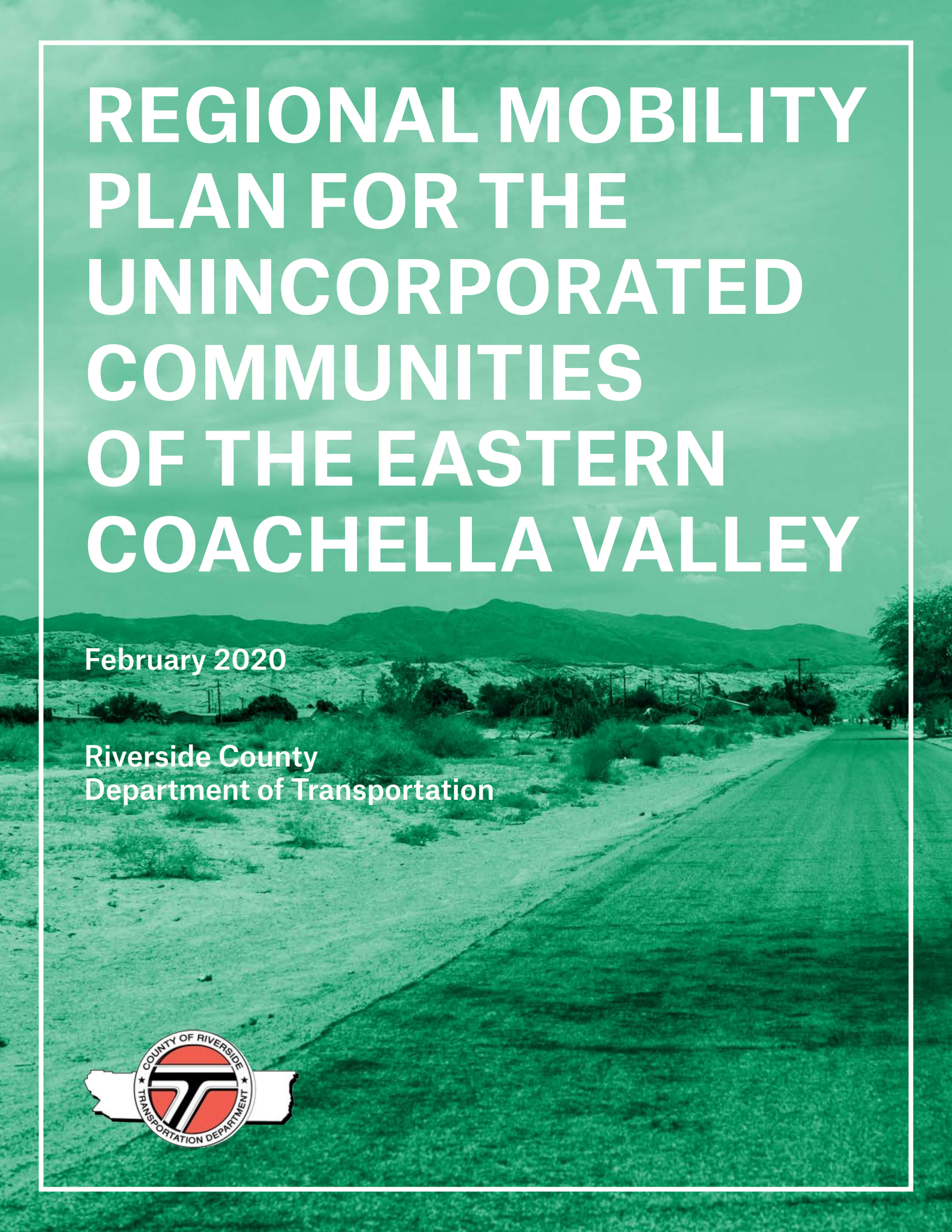
REGIONAL MOBILITY PLAN FOR THE UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES OF THE EASTERN COACHELLA VALLEY



February 2020

Riverside County
Department of Transportation

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REGIONAL MOBILITY PLAN FOR THE UNINCORPORATED COMMUNITIES OF THE EASTERN COACHELLA VALLEY

February 2020

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Acknowledgments

Project Team

Riverside County Transportation Department
Patricia Romo, Director of Transportation
Jan Bulinski, Senior Transportation Planner
Frances Segovia, Senior Transportation Planner
Susan Vombaur, Senior Civil Engineer
Brett Craig, Associate Civil Engineer

California Department of Transportation-District 8
Rebecca Forbes, Associate Transportation Planner
Kwasi Agyakwa, Transportation Planner
Ricky Rivers, Transportation Planner
Stephanie Gallegos, Transportation Planner

Kounkuey Design Initiative
Chelina Odbert, Executive Director
Jerome Chou, Planning Director
Lauren Elachi, Senior Design Coordinator
Paola Mendez, Planning Associate
Christian Rodriguez, Community Associate
Nereida Montes, Community Associate

Local Government Commission
Paul Zykofsky, Associate Director
Josh Meyer, Director of Community Planning Programs
Tony Leonard, Project & IT Manager

Inland Congregations United for Change
Karen Borja, Community Organizer
Rosa Bustamante, Community Organizer
Aron de la O, Community Organizer

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability
Mariela Magaña, Policy Advocate
Rebecca Zaragoza, Policy Advocate
Kaylon Hammond, Director of Operations

Lideres Campesinas
Suguet Lopez, Executive Director
Manuela Ramirez, Community Organizer
Maricruz Ramirez, Community Organizer

Stakeholders

Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Robert Powell, Planning Director
Daniel Tirado-Lopez, Environmental Specialist
Beverlyann Cedeno, Council Member Proxy
Columba Quintero, Tribal Grants Administrator

Riverside County Planning Department
Phayvanh Nanthavongdouangsy, Principal Planner
Peter Hersh, Planning Consultant
Jay Olivas, Urban / Regional Planner IV
Roberto Flores, Urban / Regional Planner III
Dionne Harris, Urban / Regional Planner I

Office of Supervisor V. Manuel Perez, Fourth District Riverside County
Shayra Hernandez, East Valley Liason and Agriculture Advisor

Riverside University Health System-Public Health
Miguel A. Vazquez, Healthy Communities Urban Regional Planner
Daisy Ramirez, Health Education Assistant II

SunLine Transit Agency
Victor Duran, Transit Planning Manager
Anita M. Petke, Transit Communications Service Specialist

Coachella Valley Unified School District
Apolonio Del Toro, Director of Transportation

Thermal Oasis Community Council
Ernie Rios, Chair
Mike Wells, Secretary
Jeronimo Contreras
Sergio Duran
Matthew Melkesian
Marco Celedon

Mecca North Shore Community Council

Adrian Rodriguez, Chair
Jaime Gonzales
Janet Rodriguez
Larry French
Rogelio Mendez Estrada

Desert Recreation District

Kevin Kalman, General Manager
Christine Pimentel, Community Services Coordinator

Coachella Valley Association of Governments

LeGrand Velez, Transportation Program Manager

Alianza Coachella Valley

Silvia Paz, Executive Director
Sahara Huazano, Director of Capacity Development

California Walks

Tony Dang, Executive Director
Wendy Ortiz, Community Programs Manager

A special thank you to workshop participants and residents from the communities of Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca.

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Executive Summary

The Regional Mobility Plan for the Unincorporated Communities of the Eastern Coachella Valley (Plan) summarizes the community's input for mobility options and outlines a plan to meet the desire and need for a complete regional transportation network. The Plan envisions an Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV)—consisting of the unincorporated communities of Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca— that is accessible and connected, shaped directly by residents in partnership with agencies and stakeholders.

The goals of this Plan are to:

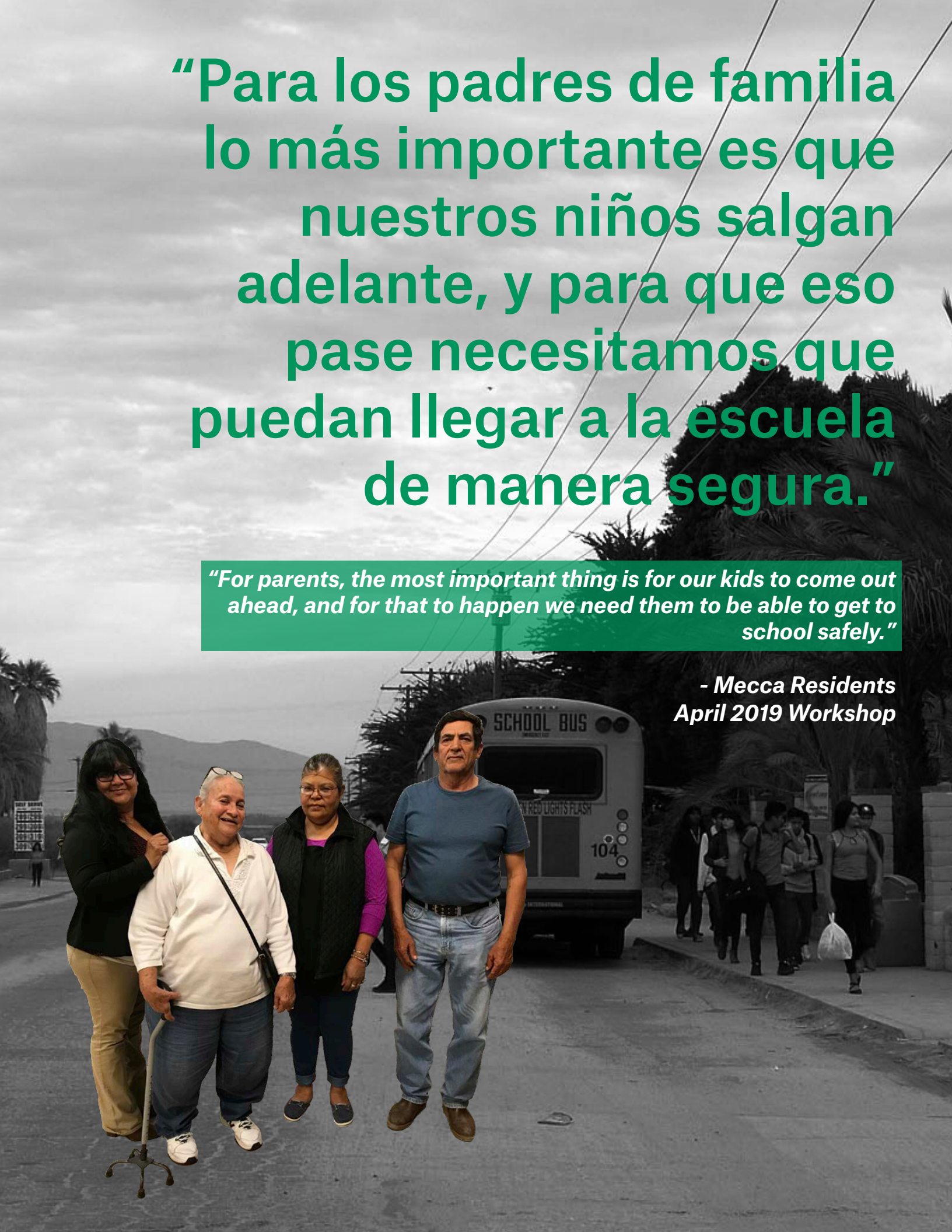
- Promote multi-modal mobility at both the regional and neighborhood scales
- Promote bicyclist and pedestrian safety
- Promote shared mobility and transit use
- Improve communication between transit agencies, stakeholders, and community members and organizations
- Enhance public health and environmental justice
- Decrease greenhouse gas emissions

This Plan builds on planning efforts at the neighborhood level as documented in the *Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of Thermal and Oasis* (Thermal-Oasis Mobility Plan) and the *Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of North Shore and Mecca* (North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan), incorporated into this Plan. This Plan considers mobility for the region, connecting both sets of communities to each other and to the broader Coachella Valley. All three plans should be considered in conjunction with one another.

This Plan is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 introduces the purpose of the Plan and summarizes the planning process.
- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the physical context of the region and each of the four unincorporated communities, as well as the local and regional planning context.
- Chapter 3 assesses the ECV region's mobility needs.
- Chapter 4 provides recommendations for multimodal facility improvements, intersection improvements, and programs.

This Plan envisions an Eastern Coachella Valley that is **accessible** and **connected**, shaped directly by residents in **partnership** with agencies and stakeholders. To achieve this vision, the Plan aims to improve the **physical infrastructure** and transportation services within the region, while also working toward **environmental justice** and **community empowerment** in the Eastern Coachella Valley.



“Para los padres de familia lo más importante es que nuestros niños salgan adelante, y para que eso pase necesitamos que puedan llegar a la escuela de manera segura.”

“For parents, the most important thing is for our kids to come out ahead, and for that to happen we need them to be able to get to school safely.”

- Mecca Residents
April 2019 Workshop

I. Introduction

The Regional Mobility Plan for the Unincorporated Communities of the Eastern Coachella Valley (Plan) seeks to meet the community's desire and need for more mobility options and a complete regional transportation network. This Plan sets clear, attainable goals for the future development of transportation and mobility infrastructure within the unincorporated communities of the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV). The recommendations in this Plan will shape future transportation planning in these communities, while improving connections to the region at-large and examining ways in which mobility can evolve in the future within the ECV.

The unincorporated communities of the ECV—specifically Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca—have been historically under-resourced and have experienced lower levels of investment in infrastructure relative to their counterparts in the Western Coachella Valley.[1] Complex challenges face the region, including economic opportunity, social cohesion, and environmental justice. Though the issues facing the ECV are significant and, in many ways, unique to their context, they are similar to those faced by other rural and low-income communities throughout Riverside County and the State of California.

1 London, J., Greenfield, T., Zagofsky T. (2013). Revealing the Invisible Coachella Valley: Putting Cumulative Environmental Vulnerabilities on the Map. Davis CA: UC Davis Center for Regional Change.

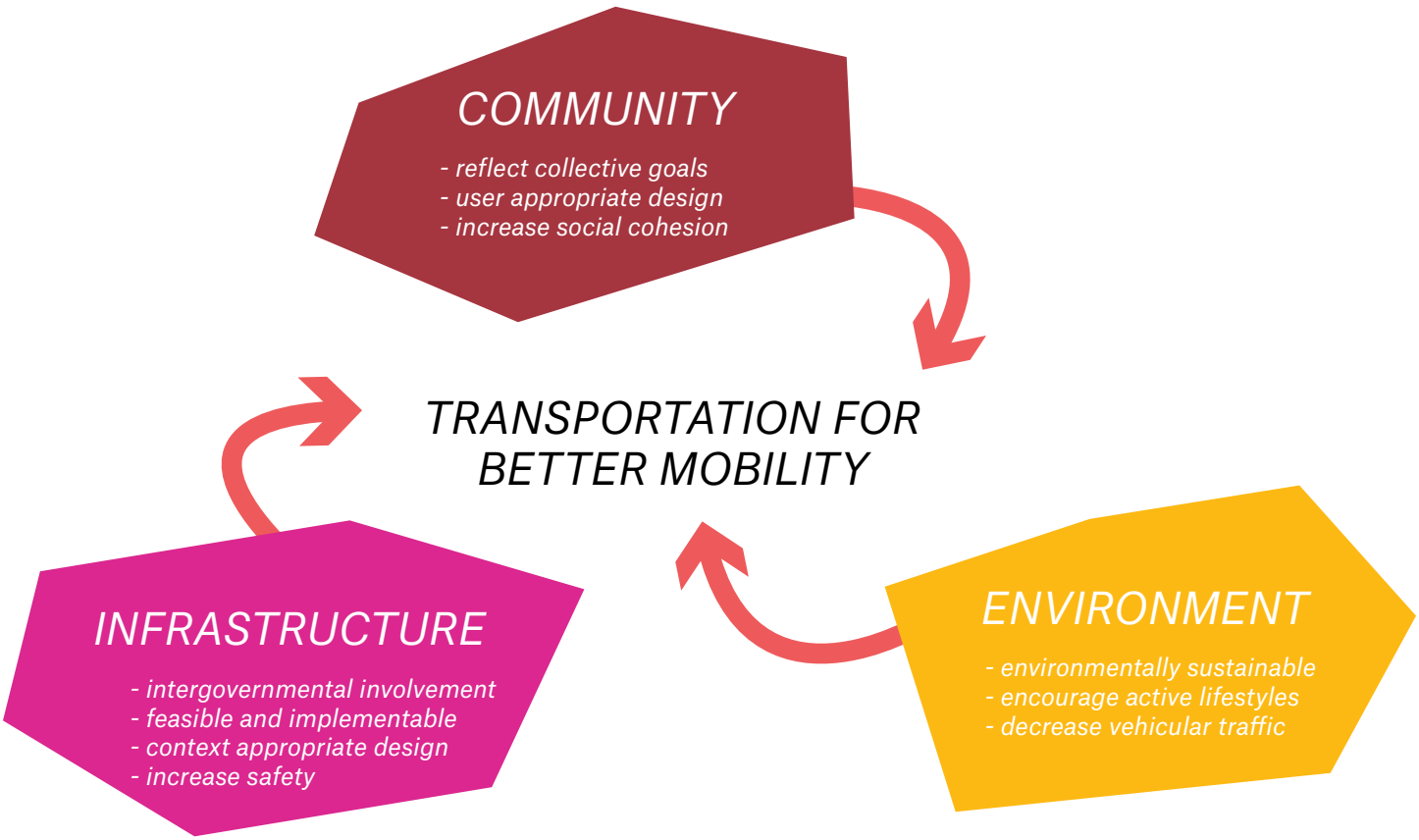


Figure 1. The Plan's Approach

Given the various interrelated challenges faced by these communities, the key to successful multi-modal transportation is a three-pronged participatory approach that values community and environment as well as infrastructure, as shown in Figure 1. Grounding the development of physical infrastructure in the social and environmental context of the ECV will ensure that these improvements are appropriate for the long-term wellbeing of these communities. To create a plan that embodies this approach, the County of Riverside Transportation Department organized a highly participatory planning process to address the concerns of Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca residents. The County partnered with residents, nonprofits, local organizations and stakeholders, government agencies, and schools to create a plan that is a reflection of community priorities.

The Plan was funded by two Caltrans Sustainable Communities Planning Grants awarded to the County of Riverside in March 2017 (for Thermal and Oasis) and December 2017 (for North Shore and Mecca). The Sustainable Communities Planning Grant has a mission to promote a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California's economy and livability. In applying for these funds, the County's goal was to initiate planning for Thermal and Oasis, using a comprehensive community-based planning process, and subsequently expanding this approach to North Shore and Mecca, ultimately merging these individual plans to accomplish a regional plan for the ECV.

Purpose of the Plan

The Plan serves to provide the vision for improved transportation access, multi-modality, and healthy lifestyles within the ECV and supports the overall goals of Riverside County's General Plan Circulation Element, building off other regional efforts in the Coachella Valley. The primary purpose of the Plan is to propose implementable, environmentally sustainable, and context-sensitive solutions to identify and remove barriers to transportation in the community.

The goals of this Plan are:

- Promote multi-modal mobility at both the regional and neighborhood levels
- Promote bicyclist and pedestrian safety
- Promote shared mobility and transit use
- Improve communication between transit agencies, stakeholders, and community members and organizations
- Enhance public health and environmental justice
- Decrease greenhouse gas emissions

The Plan contributes to making Riverside County's transportation system more multi-modal as per the State of California's 2008 Complete Streets Act (AB 1358). This law requires local governments to consider all users— including bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users in addition to motorists, as well as users of all ages and abilities— in planning for all streets. Furthermore, the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32, 2006) and the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act (SB 375, 2008) aim to reduce greenhouse emissions, including from transportation. By improving transportation options for lower emission travel by bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users, Riverside County will be making progress toward the objectives of these bills. Many strategies here address basic mobility needs; therefore, this Plan will serve as the first step towards broader, more diverse mobility improvements needed in the unincorporated communities of the ECV.

Regional Mobility Plan Development Process

The County of Riverside and local grassroots organizations recognized the need for a regional mobility plan in the ECV. In June of 2017, the County began work on a mobility plan in the ECV with the preparation of the *Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of Thermal and Oasis* (Thermal-Oasis Mobility Plan). This neighborhood plan aimed to identify the mobility needs of residents in Thermal and Oasis and developed corresponding solutions that would begin to address the challenges faced by the region. This neighborhood plan was adopted by the County of Riverside Board of Supervisors in January of 2019.

A parallel plan for North Shore and Mecca, seen as an expansion of the Thermal-Oasis Mobility Plan effort, followed in November 2018; the plan has been finalized and is proposed for approval by the County of Riverside

Board of Supervisors in early 2020. This *Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of North Shore and Mecca* (North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan) applied the same comprehensive community-based planning process to those communities. The North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan process identified similar mobility needs and synthesized a plan specific to these neighborhoods. Mobility challenges and recommendations for the unincorporated ECV at the regional scale were also identified through the North Shore-Mecca process, bridging the needs of Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca residents and connecting to the broader Coachella Valley region. These findings are the basis for this Plan. Each of these plan areas are shown in Figure 2.

Throughout the entire Plan development, a community-based planning process was utilized. Residents expressed a desire for this type of planning process and assisted in developing a mobility plan to address challenges of transportation and mobility within their communities in addition to increasing access to better socio-economic opportunities, amenities, and community resources. This Plan reflects these multiple priorities, and lays out a path to build social resilience and community cohesion alongside needed infrastructure improvements.

Within the community, an active Transportation Justice Coalition made up of local grassroots organizations- including Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC), Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability (LCJA), Lideres Campesinas, and Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI)— has been working with residents for several years, as part of an initiative of The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities campaign (now called Alianza) in the ECV. Many of those nonprofits were included as part of the project team for this Plan. Their inclusion ensured that many of the basic needs of the community that had already been expressed were integrated into the Plan from day one, allowing for a productive and more focused set of stakeholder engagement events.

The Plan was developed through community support, built through a series of workshops that were held to not only solicit feedback on the planning framework but to invite residents into the decision-making process. Three rounds of workshops were held in each of the unincorporated communities of the ECV— Thermal and Oasis between fall 2017 and fall 2018, and North Shore and Mecca between spring and fall 2019— supplemented by a variety of mobile community engagement events and an on-street demonstration event in Oasis. The first set of public workshops in each community asked residents to share what type of infrastructure they thought was needed and where. The second set of workshops engaged residents around the desired phasing and prioritization of the Plan and asked residents to think about regional priorities. Prior to the third set of workshops, the draft Plan was vetted through an Advisory Group consisting of stakeholders at the community, regional, and County level. During the third and final set of workshops, the draft Plan was presented to residents to ensure that all community input was integrated into the final Plan.

Compliance with Other Planning Efforts

This Plan is consistent with Riverside County's stated priorities via the General Plan Circulation Element and the ECV Area Plan, both of which aim to make the County more welcoming to active transportation usage and less automobile-centric. Additionally, the Plan contributes to improving the mobility of Riverside County's transportation system per the State of California's Complete Streets Act (AB 1358).

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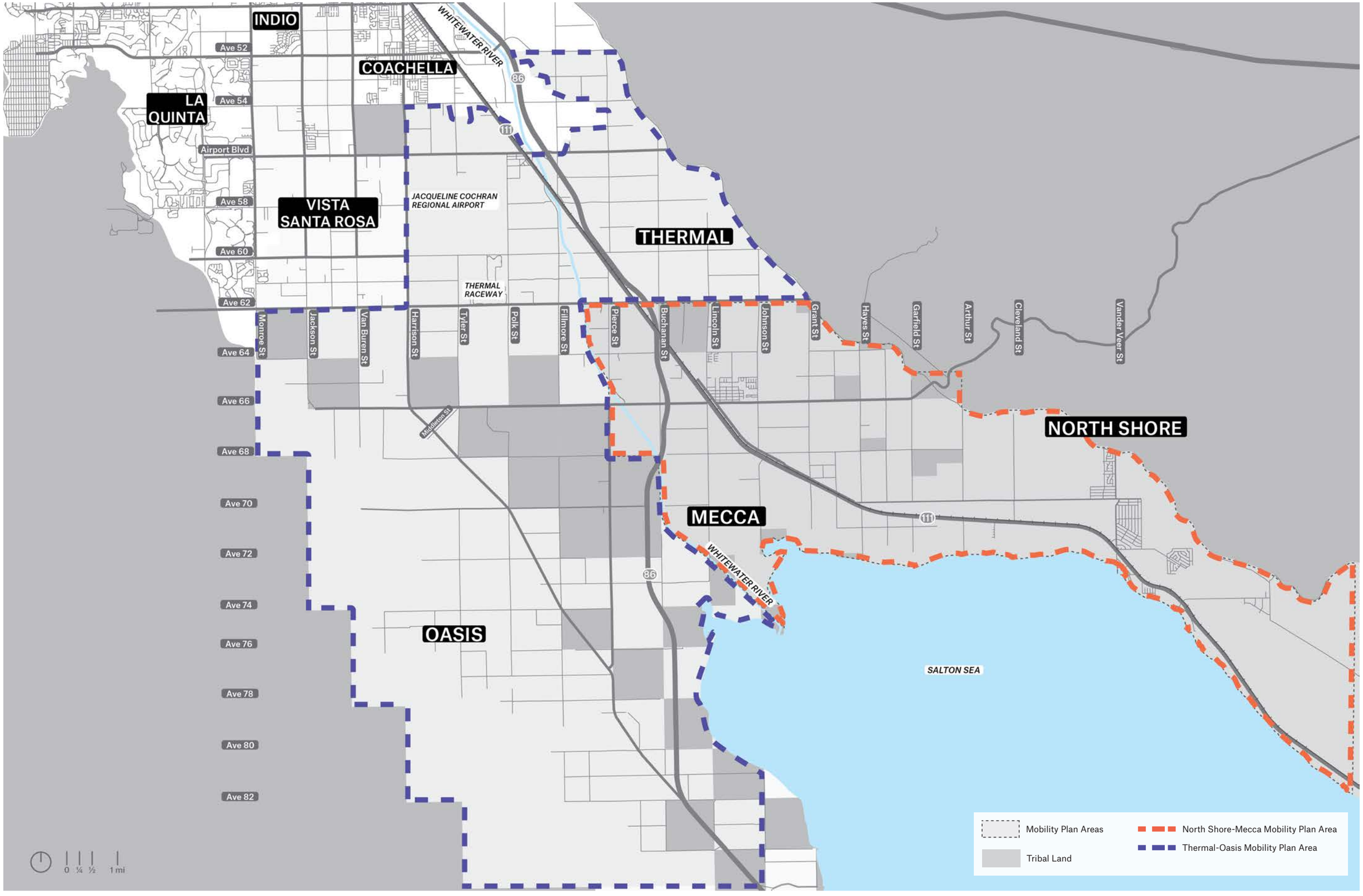

Figure 2. ECV Communities making up the Regional Mobility Plan Area

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“[El transporte] sinceramente nos para de seguir adelante porque el transporte tiene mucho que ver con el tiempo y nuestras [vidas diarias]...”

“Transportation sincerely holds us back from moving forward because transportation has a lot to do with our time and our everyday lives...”

- Oasis Resident
Video Voice Interview, March 2018

II. Regional Overview and Planning Context

Regional Overview

The Coachella Valley in Riverside County covers approximately 675 square miles, bounded to the south by the Salton Sea, to the north by Joshua Tree National Forest, to the east by the Little San Bernardino Mountains and to the west by the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa Mountains. Desert throughout, the Western and Eastern sides of the valley vary widely in terms of demographic makeup, income distribution, and infrastructure development.

The Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) is defined by locals and advocates as including the cities of Indio and Coachella as well as the unincorporated communities of Thermal, Oasis, Mecca, and North Shore to the southeast.[1] The more highly populated tourist area of the Western Coachella Valley, which includes cities like Palm Springs, has experienced steady economic development and has largely been able to provide the infrastructure required to adequately serve its residents and visitors.[2] However, the ECV, though close in proximity and interconnected economically with the Western Coachella Valley, has not experienced the same level of development.

This Plan addresses the needs of the four unincorporated communities of the ECV—Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca— from a regional perspective. This Regional Plan builds on the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca planning efforts, using the information gathered through those processes to summarize and propose findings at the regional scale. This planning effort by Riverside County only covers the unincorporated communities of the ECV over which the County has direct jurisdiction, however the interconnected nature of the Coachella Valley region requires that the future of mobility, economy, and environment of the various communities of the Coachella Valley be addressed together.

1 London, J., Greenfield, T., Zagofsky T. (2013).

2 Ibid.

The ECV, like many other parts of the Coachella Valley, includes land belonging to Native American Tribes— primarily the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, the St. Augustine Band of Mission Indians (St. Augustine) and the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians (Cabazon). While all three Tribes have land within the area covered by this Plan, the project team primarily coordinated with the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians due to their active participation. Continued efforts to keep the St. Augustine and Cabazon Tribes informed were facilitated through the Advisory Group communications.

Detailed demographic data, photographs, and existing conditions data, in addition to neighborhood mobility needs assessments for each unincorporated community, is available in the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans. Key information about each community is summarized below to provide context for the regional recommendations that follow in the remainder of this Plan.

Thermal Overview

Of the unincorporated ECV communities, Thermal is the furthest to the north, lying just south and east of the cities of Coachella and La Quinta, respectively. Thermal has the second densest central area in the ECV, next to Mecca, though it also has the smallest population. This central area, near the intersection of Airport Boulevard and Polk Street, includes important local resources, such as an elementary school, community center, and municipal buildings. The majority of Thermal residents live in this central area and much of the existing pedestrian infrastructure within this community is here. Additional housing is located on the eastern side of Highway 86, as is a College of the Desert campus. Residents routinely travel between Thermal and the other ECV communities, as well as throughout the

region, highlighting the need for more connective infrastructural networks.

Oasis Overview

Oasis is the least centralized of the four unincorporated communities, but still has denser pockets of housing and key destinations spread throughout. Within Oasis, most commercial amenities are found at the intersections of Harrison Street and Avenue 66, and Pierce Street and Avenue 70. The corridor along Martinez Road is also a major destination because of the location of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians headquarters and clinic. These facilities not only serve the Tribal community but also provide services to the general public. The largest school complex in the ECV is nearby, at the intersection of Avenue 66, Tyler Street, and Martinez Road, and includes Desert Mirage High School, Toro Canyon Middle School, and Las Palmitas Elementary.

Dense housing along Harrison Street and Polk Street make these areas key when thinking about a complete transportation network that connects residents' homes to markets, schools (including Oasis Elementary at Harrison Street and Avenue 74), and other important destinations. The southernmost pocket of density in Oasis can be found near the intersection of Pierce Street and Avenue 76; here, there are a couple mobile home parks, along with the Oasis community park and the Borrego Clinic.

North Shore Overview

North Shore is the easternmost community in the ECV on the shoreline of the Salton Sea. Many of its transportation challenges arise from the few connections that currently exist between the community and the rest of the region. North Shore is relatively segmented and residents refer to different portions of North Shore as being distinct neighborhoods. Refer to Figure 3 for North Shore's neighborhoods:

- Costa Mesa neighborhood— the northernmost portion of North Shore found above Avenue 70
- Miramar neighborhood— south of Avenue 70 and north of Avenue 72
- Yacht Club neighborhood— found nearest the Salton Sea to the southwest of Highway 111
- Old Church neighborhood— the portion immediately south of Avenue 72 and east of Windlass Drive
- Parkside neighborhood— the small portion found furthest to the southeast along Parkside Drive as the black directional arrow indicates

Currently, the only connection points between North Shore and the ECV region are Avenue 70, connecting across a crucial bridge at Cleveland Street, and Highway 111, connecting across the railroad tracks via Bay Drive. Most of the land uses in the North Shore community are residential. Community assets include a playground on Miramar Drive, the North Shore Community Park on Avenue 70 near Sea View Way, a small commercial center at Avenue 70 and Vander Veer Road, and the Yacht Club at the Salton Sea, which is the main community center. Residents note that there is little to no work available within the community. According to Coachella Valley Unified School District, all students in this area must be bused to schools in Mecca or other neighboring communities, since there are no schools currently existing in North Shore. As a result, the few connections into and out of the North Shore community are crucial to residents' ability to access these vital necessities.

Mecca Overview

Mecca is the most populous and most densely developed of the ECV communities. Its housing stock varies widely and includes residential homes, mobile homes, apartments (most of which are affordable housing developments), and Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) such as mobile homes co-located on single family residential lots. The central area of Mecca to the northeast of the intersection of Avenue 66 and Highway 111 has the greatest concentration of community resources, including: a library, post office, clinics, schools, businesses, and other community centers. As a result, residents from other ECV communities must come here to access key resources, or otherwise must travel to cities further west. Mecca has the most developed network of sidewalks and SunBus shelters, though gaps in both still persist.

Mecca is also home to a large travel center on Avenue 66 just east of Highway 86, which includes a large gas station, an AMPM convenience store, some fast food restaurants, and, most importantly to local residents,

a Starbucks, which is one of the few local sources of reliable free Wi-Fi. As ubiquitous as they may be in other communities, Mecca's Starbucks is particularly important for students throughout the unincorporated ECV who need internet access for homework and may not otherwise have reliable access to it. The Starbucks is also seen by locals as a central gathering point within the ECV (even if it is not exactly central geographically) due to its accessibility from the various communities.

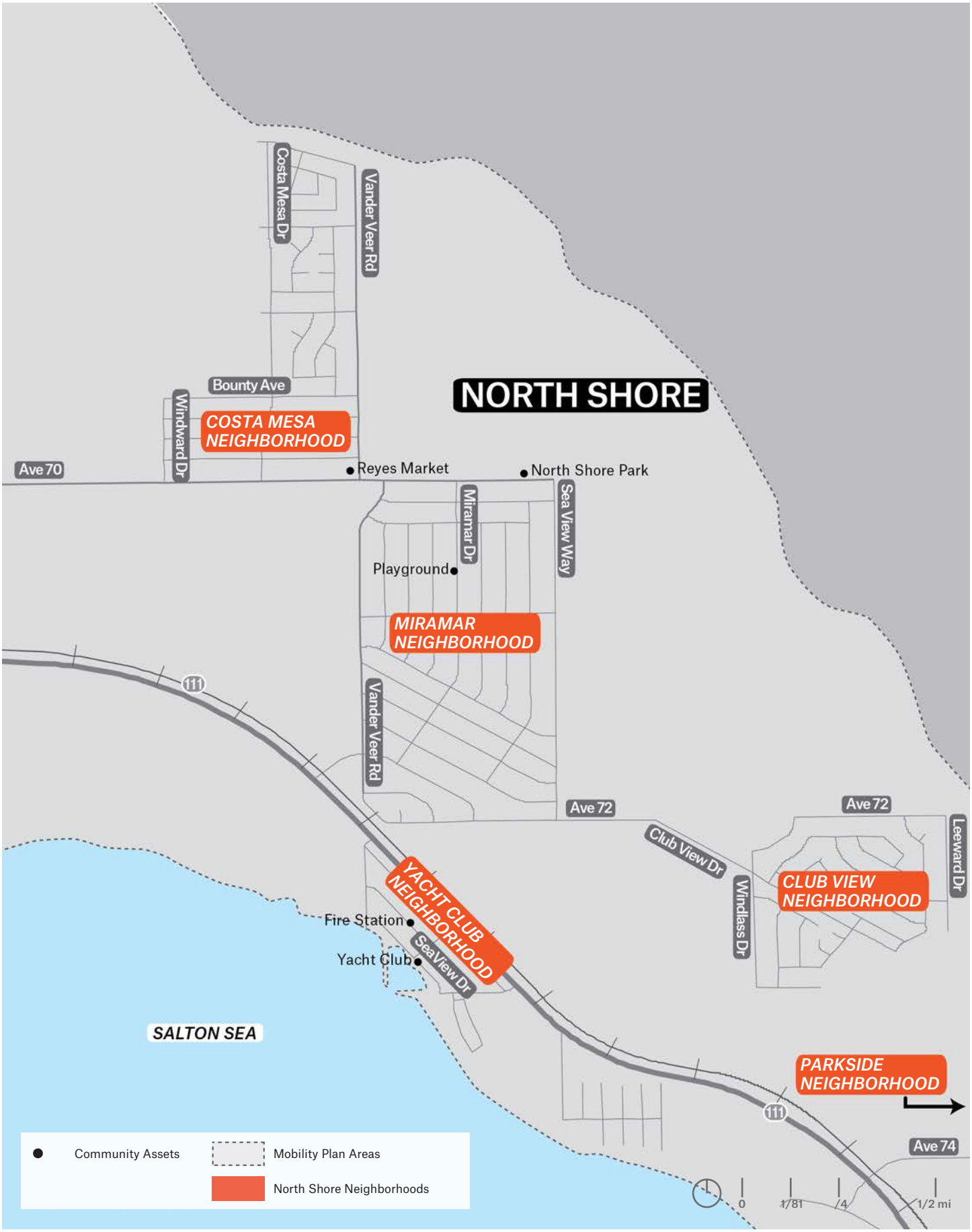

Figure 3. North Shore Neighborhoods

Local Plans and Programs

Local plans and programs relating to mobility and active transportation in the ECV were reviewed to ensure this Plan was consistent with these existing planning documents. Relevant plans and policies prepared by agencies with immediate jurisdiction over this area are described below.

Riverside County

Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of Thermal and Oasis (Thermal-Oasis Mobility Plan) was adopted in January 2019 and revised in late 2019 for consistency with this Plan, documents the first half of the planning process for the unincorporated Eastern Coachella Valley with a focus on the communities of Thermal and Oasis. Information gathered from this plan has been synthesized and used to develop the regional recommendations.

Find the Thermal-Oasis Mobility Plan at http://rctlma.org/trans/Project-Information/Transportation-Planning-Projects

Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of North Shore and Mecca (North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan) was prepared in conjunction with this Plan and is proposed for approval by the County of Riverside Board of Supervisors in early 2020. The North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan expanded on the planning process used in the Thermal-Oasis Mobility Plan. Information gathered from the North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan has been synthesized and used to develop the regional recommendations.

Find the North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan at http://rctlma.org/trans/Project-Information/Transportation-Planning-Projects

Riverside County's General Plan, especially:

- Eastern Coachella Valley Area Plan
- Circulation Element
- Land Use Element
- Housing Element
- Multipurpose Open Space Element

Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP) Vision for 2020, as adopted in 1998, guides the General Plan (updated in 2015). In part, it envisions Riverside County as having:

- A transportation system that keeps pace with growth and new demands for mobility, including for varied forms of transit, and that is also designed with a high regard for the environment
- A range of choices in communities and neighborhoods, from sophisticated urban villages to quality suburban neighborhoods to spacious rural enclaves, all centered around high quality schools and programs
- Thriving agriculture that continues to play an important part in the County's economy

Specific to transportation, the Circulation Element intends to "provide a plan to achieve a balanced, multimodal transportation network that meets the needs of all users of the streets, roads, and highways for safe and convenient travel in a manner that is suitable to the rural, suburban, or urban context of the General Plan."

To achieve the RCIP Vision as it relates to multimodal transportation and to encourage compact development, the ECV Area Plan:

- Seeks to provide numerous alternatives to the automobile, such as transit, pedestrian and equestrian systems, and bicycle facilities so that residents can access the region by a number of transportation options
- Designates community development land uses in areas adjacent to the existing urban fabric, leaving agriculture and open space uses on the periphery
- Identifies and designates additional lands with the potential to accommodate farmworker housing for residential uses

For the ECV, the Circulation Element and Area Plan propose the future development of a network of bicycle and multi-use trails in tandem with development.

In addition, to comply with State Bill 1000—which requires cities and counties to adopt an Environmental Justice element, or integrate Environmental Justice-related policies, objectives, and goals throughout other elements of their General Plan— the Riverside County Planning Department is developing Environmental Justice policies. As discussed in Chapter 2 of the North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan, North Shore and Mecca are designated as Environmental Justice communities and will be impacted by the forthcoming policies. The Environmental Justice policies will (1) reduce unique

or compounded health risks in these disadvantaged communities, (2) promote civic engagement in public decision-making processes, and (3) prioritize improvements and programs that address the needs of these disadvantaged communities, as per Gov. Code §65302.

Overall, this Plan is consistent with the General Plan's stated goals, and its adoption will work toward achieving the RCIP Vision and making Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca more integrated with the broader Coachella Valley region.

Find the General Plan at http://planning.rctlma.org/ZoningInformation/GeneralPlan.aspx

Thermal and Mecca Design Guidelines (2009). While no design guidelines currently exist for Oasis or North Shore, the Thermal and Mecca Design Guidelines provide recommendations for the design of architecture and community spaces, along with sidewalks, trails, and pathways, in each community. Chapter 4 of this Plan proposes a new menu of concepts for active transportation facilities.

Find the design guidelines for Thermal and Mecca at http://planning.rctlma.org/DevelopmentProcess/DesignGuidelines.aspx

Mecca Community Revitalization Strategy (2008). This plan provides design recommendations for key streets in the central area of Mecca, and for building and open space typologies, as developed in collaboration with community residents. An early precursor to the North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plan, the Mecca Community Revitalization Strategy laid the initial foundation for planning or active transportation in the ECV at the neighborhood scale. This Plan builds on those initial recommendations and connects them to larger portions of the region.

Find the Mecca Community Revitalization Strategy at https://www.lgc.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/ME_Rpt_ExecSum_063008.pdf

Upcoming developments was identified per consultation with the Riverside County Planning Department. There is minimal upcoming development in the ECV in the near term—mostly a few Polanco mobile home parks and some Conditional Use Permits (CUPs).

In addition, the General Plan designates Town Centers in each of the four unincorporated ECV communities. Each is composed of Mixed Use Area neighborhoods (MUA) and Highest Density Residential Development areas (HHDR), as designated by the County's Land Use and Housing Elements. These are expected to house significant populations of new residents in the long term, should they be fully built out. Similarly, there are four Specific Plans (SP) approved by the County for Thermal and Oasis:

- SP 303—Kohl Ranch: adopted 1999
- SP 362—Panorama: adopted 2009
- SP 369—Thermal 551: adopted 2010
- SP 375—Travertine Point: adopted 2012

SPs 303, 362, and 369 are located within Thermal, while SP 375 is located in the southern end of Oasis. All four Specific Plans are for master planned communities with various mixes of residential, commercial, and recreational uses.

Find Riverside County's Specific Plans at http://planning.rctlma.org/SpecificPlans/ApprovedSpecificPlansDocuments.aspx

Upcoming transportation infrastructure improvements are identified in the Riverside County Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and in the Riverside County Projects portal. The TIP is a multi-year document used by the Riverside County Transportation Department to help manage its numerous projects and financial resources and to serve as a funding roadmap to assist in the delivery of Capital Projects.

The ECV Regional Mobility Plan is within the Supervisorial District 4 (4th District). There are currently 78 projects programmed in the 4th District totaling roughly $43 million in fiscal year 2019/2020, $63 million in fiscal year 2020/2021 and utilizing over 20 fund sources during that time. The projects range from the reconstruction and resurfacing of roads, sidewalk and trail installation, widenings and traffic signal installation to bridge construction and grade separations.

Upcoming transportation projects within the ECV Regional Mobility Plan include:

- Avenue 66 Grade Separation is proposed for construction in spring 2020. This project will construct a new grade separation and roadway to cross the Union Pacific Railroad, State 111 and Hammond Road from a realigned Avenue 66 in the Community of Mecca. The project will provide a secondary access point to the Community of Mecca, improve goods movement, provide pedestrian facilities, improve safety by reducing train and vehicle/pedestrian conflicts and reduce congestion which will also reduce vehicle emissions.
- Lincoln Street Project is proposed for construction at the end of 2020 in the Community of Mecca. This project will reconstruct pavement from 5th Street to 62nd Avenue. Additionally, improvements include widening pavement, curb and gutter and sidewalk on east side of street from 5th Street to 7th Street.
- Hammond Road, 66th Ave and Date Palm Street Project is proposed for construction in 2021 in the Community of Mecca. The proposed improvements along these streets include reconstruction and widening of pavement, curb and gutter and sidewalks. Along Hammond Road sidewalk is proposed on the east side from 2nd Street to south of 66th Avenue. On 66th Avenue, sidewalk is proposed on both sides from Hammond Road to east of Date Palm Street. A raised median with flashing beacons will be installed from Date Palm Street easterly.
- Thermal/Oasis Active Transportation Program Project is proposed for construction in 2022/2023. This project includes the installation of multi-modal trails (10 feet wide asphalt pavement path) and pedestrian infrastructure (5 foot wide concrete sidewalk and curb and gutter/paved pathways) within the Thermal and Oasis communities.
- Airport Boulevard Bridge is proposed for construction in 2024. The project will seismically retrofit the existing Airport Blvd Bridge over Whitewater River located between Highway 111 and SR-86 in the Community of Thermal.

Find the Riverside County TIP at http://rctlma.org/trans/Project-Information/TIP/Transportation-Improvement-Document

Find the Riverside County Projects portal at http://rcprojects.org/

Riverside University Health System-Public Health's **Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Program** for the ECV was recently funded via an Active Transportation Program (ATP) Cycle 3 non-infrastructure grant. The program aims to address barriers and difficulties for children walking to schools primarily via encouragement and education. The program will work with Active Transportation Ambassadors (ATA) who will earn certificates and become community role models for active transportation. Other components of the program include:

- Pedestrian and bicycle instructor training
- Pedestrian and bicycle safety rodeos
- Promotion of SCAG's "Go Human" campaign
- Implementing pedestrian and bike safety campaigns on school campuses
- International Walk to School Day
- International Bike to School Day
- Frequent Walker Program and Bike Trains
- Active transportation meetings
- Walkability workshops and walk audits
- Partnership with California Highway Patrol
- Monitoring and evaluation via pre- and post-surveys

The SRTS program for the ECV is currently funded from July 2018 to July 2020.

Find information on Public Health's SRTS programs at http://www.rivcoips.org/Safe-Routes-to-School/About-SRTS

SunLine Transit Agency

SunLine's **Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP)**, updated annually, is intended to serve the following purposes:

1. Identify the transit services and capital improvements required to meet SunLine's transit needs over a three year period and the proposed sources of funding to carry out the plan.
2. Serve as a management tool to guide activities over the next year.
3. Provide justification for operating and capital assistance for grant applications to be submitted to state and federal funding agencies.

Find SunLine's FY 2018-19 SRTP at https://www.sunline.org/planning-department

Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians

The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians (Torres Martinez) provided their **Tribal Transportation Safety Assessment (T2SA) technical report** (March 2017). The T2SA was prepared in coordination with the UC Berkeley's Institute for Transportation Studies with the primary objective of improving traffic safety on Torres Martinez tribal land. The T2SA examines traffic collisions that occurred on Tribal Land between January 1, 2013 and August 31, 2016, according to SWITRS, and suggests 12 traffic engineering improvements for the 12 locations with the highest collision rates to correct existing patterns and reduce the frequency of collisions at those intersections. These recommendations range from the short term (6-12 months) to medium term (12-24 months) and long term (2-5 years).

This Plan took the findings of the T2SA into account in assessing the region's mobility needs and came to many of the same conclusions regarding intersection safety in Thermal and Oasis, particularly highlighting the need for improvements at the intersection of Avenue 70, Polk Street, and Harrison Street in Oasis.

Torres Martinez also indicated that they are expanding their long-range planning efforts and will soon begin a master planning process.

Regional Plans

Plans prepared by regional planning agencies that incorporate the Eastern Coachella Valley region include the following:

Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG)

The **Eastern Coachella Valley Climate Resilience Action Plan** (2019) recommends numerous community-identified projects that will advance climate resiliency in the Eastern Coachella Valley. Recommended projects include affordable housing, water and wastewater infrastructure, urban greening and parks. The plan identifies key corridors that require better transit-oriented infrastructure as well as a micro-transit rideshare program that would provide a cleaner and more efficient way of traveling within the region to all residents. The plan highlights the intersectionality of these various projects and links affordable housing to transit and infrastructure in ways that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve public health and quality of life in the ECV.

CVAG's **Transportation Project Prioritization Study (TPPS)** (2016)serves as the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for the Coachella Valley. It identifies and prioritizes transportation projects in the region, including some regional active transportation projects, and feeds into SCAG's RTP. Within the Eastern Coachella Valley, the TPPS lists projects such as the East Valley Community Connectors for the CV Link, bike lanes and routes on Grapefruit Boulevard, Airport Boulevard, Harrison Street, Pierce Street, Polk Street, Monroe Street, and Jackson Street. These projects are concentrated in the portions of Thermal and Oasis near the CV Link or bordering incorporated cities in the Coachella Valley, particularly La Quinta, Indio, and Coachella.

CVAG's **Active Transportation Plan (ATP)** (2015) compiles active transportation plans from the various jurisdictions and governments within the Coachella Valley to create a regional ATP and coordinate local and regional efforts. For the unincorporated ECV, CVAG's ATP drew from the Riverside County bicycle and trail planning in existence at the time. This Plan along with the Thermal-Oasis and Mecca-North Shore Mobility Plans are meant to complement and expand upon the CVAG ATP. The improvements proposed by CVAG are of a regional nature that focuses on projects that provide benefit to multiple jurisdictions.

The **Coachella Valley Link (CV Link) Master Plan** (2016) lays out a vision to connect the Coachella Valley via a 50-mile multi-purpose recreational trail along the Whitewater River. The core alignment of the CV Link reaches the northern edge of Thermal at Airport Boulevard, with future extensions to the Salton Sea and Mecca-North Shore planned to reach into the ECV. The CV Link proposals for the ECV are shown in Figure 4.

Additionally, community connectors are proposed from the edge of the core alignment into central Thermal, the College of the Desert's East Valley Campus, and the Salton Sea State Park. Chapter 4 of this Plan recommends an additional set of community connectors to more cohesively link the unincorporated ECV to the CV Link's core alignment and future extensions. The improvements recommended in this

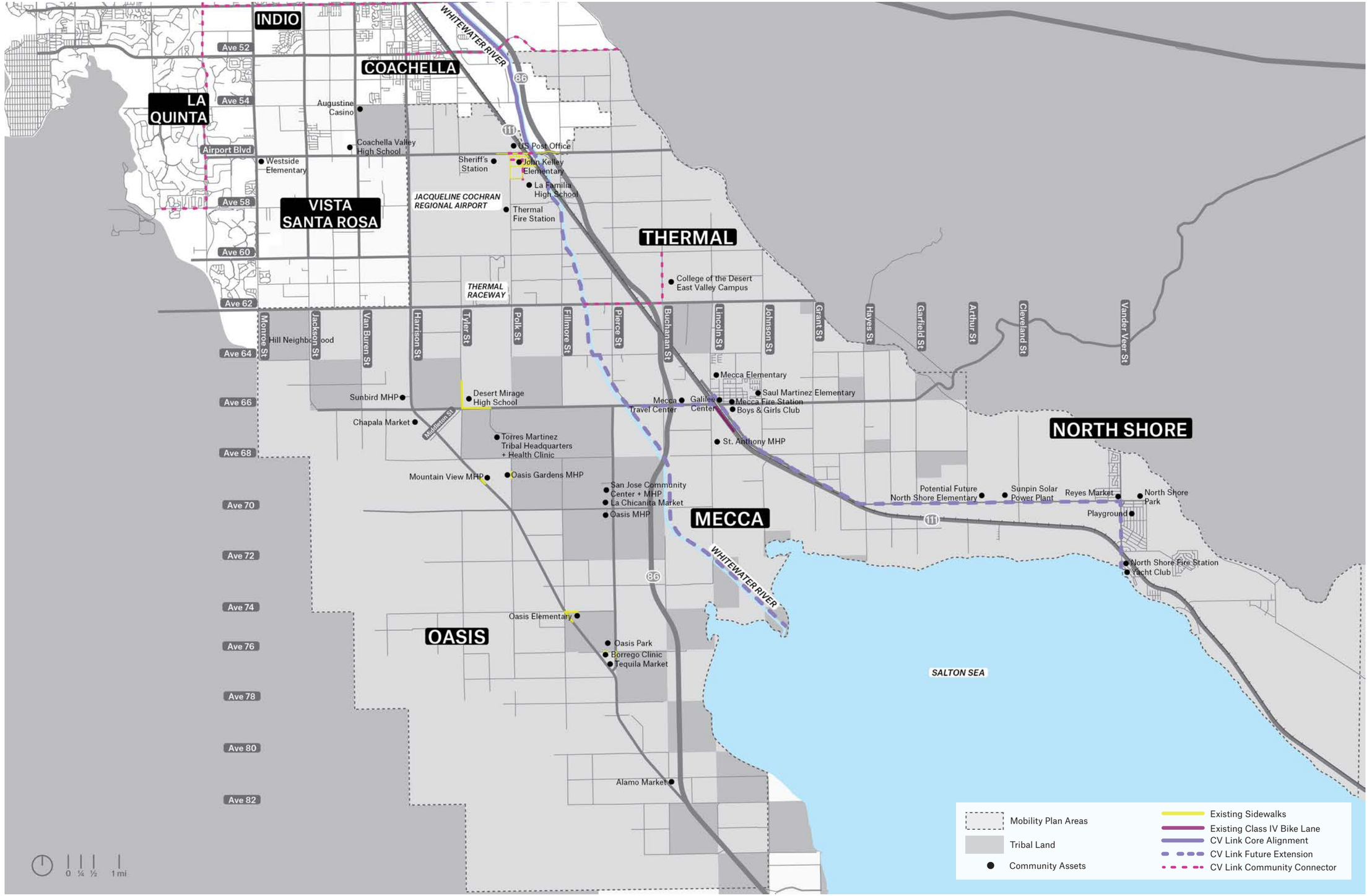

Figure 4. Proposed Coachella Valley Link Improvements for the ECV

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Plan in conjunction with the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans will build a multimodal network that would be significantly strengthened by the connection the CV Link will provide to the broader Coachella Valley.

Find all of CVAG's plans at http://www.cvag.org

Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)

SCAG's **Regional Transportation Plan / Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)**, is the long-range transportation plan that provides a vision for major transportation investments in the Southern California region. In addition, the SCS portion is a newly required element that integrates land use and transportation strategies to achieve emissions reduction targets.

Find the RTP/SCS at http://rtpscs.scag.ca.gov/

Conclusions

Overall, while there are a variety of local and regional plans in existence, more needs to be done to address the specific needs of the ECV. Building on the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans, this Plan is the third by the County of Riverside to address active transportation in unincorporated areas of the County.

Recommendations for Local and Regional Planning Agencies

Based on the plans discussed in this chapter, the following are recommended:

- Keep the Thermal and Mecca Design Guidelines current and up to date to better reflect the communities' current design preferences and cultural identity in the built environment; and develop parallel design guidelines for Oasis and North Shore. Continue to build plans with direct participation of community members, as was done in this planning process, as these communities develop.
- In order to best serve the mobility needs of these disadvantaged communities, residents must be directly involved in planning and conceptual design as the extensions of the CV Link into the unincorporated ECV and the corresponding community connectors are developed. If feasible, implement the additional community connectors proposed in Chapter 4 of this Plan to better connect the disadvantaged communities to this critical piece of infrastructure. Work with CVAG to modify the TPPS criteria to consider each of the unincorporated communities to be separate jurisdictions. This would allow corridors connecting two or more of the communities to each other to be identified as being of regional significance, as is true to their nature.

“Necesitamos más conexiones agiles y rápidas entre North Shore y el resto del valle para poder acceder oportunidades de trabajo y para estar preparados en caso de emergencias.”

“We need more quick and agile connections between North Shore and the rest of the valley to be able to access employment opportunities and to be prepared in case of emergencies.”

- North Shore Residents
April 2019 Workshop

III. Regional Mobility Needs Assessment

Overview

This Regional Mobility Needs Assessment was undertaken during the development of the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Plans. This assessment considered the existing conditions analyses, data and photographs gathered when the neighborhood plans were being prepared. The assessment summarizes the mobility challenges identified by local groups and residents of all four unincorporated communities throughout their respective neighborhood-level engagement processes, as shown in Figure 5 and Figure 6. Refer to Chapter 4 of each of the separate neighborhood plans for an overview of the engagement processes.

This chapter reflects the regional needs in the unincorporated area of the ECV and expands it to broader considerations for the Coachella Valley as a whole. This assessment serves as a baseline for the goals and proposed improvements that follow in the remainder of this Plan.

Regional Mobility Needs and Challenges

Identifying transportation challenges was one of the first tasks undertaken during the engagement process as a whole. Residents were presented with statements that identified large-scale mobility challenges and asked to vote on those that they agreed with. The results of this exercise are shown in Figure 5.

These challenges broke down into four major categories:

1. More transportation options that improve safe multimodal use;
2. Improved connections between the communities of the ECV and to the broader Coachella Valley region;
3. Prioritization of school connectivity; and
4. Transportation options that promote social cohesion by allowing residents to spend time with friends and family while being active.

There are multiple barriers to overcoming the above challenges, primarily the absence of infrastructure for travel other than by vehicle. When asked what areas of Thermal, Oasis, North Shore, and Mecca were challenging to walk or bicycle in, residents of each community answered that essentially all areas were challenging because of the lack of infrastructure to enable walking and bicycling. Main thoroughfares such as Harrison Avenue, Airport Boulevard, Vander Veer Road, Avenue 66, and Avenue 70 were identified in particular because of the relatively high speed of cars that drive along these main thoroughfares. Residents in the central areas of Mecca and Thermal described their communities as being more comfortable for walking given the presence of some sidewalks, but identified gaps in the pedestrian network where connections were needed, as well as the need for additional infrastructure to ensure safe pedestrian crossings and bicycling.

Local and Regional Travel Destinations

Figure 7 depicts the primary destinations residents travel to within the ECV and the broader Coachella Valley to access the amenities and resources necessary for a good quality of life. This figure was developed based the results of an activity conducted in each of the four communities during the first set of workshops held for the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans— in November 2017 and January 2019 respectively— that asked residents to identify the locations of destinations in the region that they travel between on a regular basis, including:

- their homes;
- places of employment;
- businesses or other places where they purchase groceries or run errands;
- schools or other places for learning;
- churches or other places for worship; and
- doctors or other medical facilities they visit regularly.

These key destinations are overlain with specific labels of community assets identified by the Project Team, Advisory Group, and local residents, highlighting the locations of schools, churches, markets, clinics, and recreational areas such as parks.

Currently, these amenities or community centers are spread widely throughout the communities. In particular, the results of the destinations activity show that while residents' homes are spread throughout the ECV region, most of the resources residents need to regularly access are not necessarily distributed in the same manner or located close to residents' homes. The majority of residents regularly need to access key resources in central Mecca, such as schools and the library. Furthermore, nearly all residents travel to the more developed cities of Coachella, Indio, La Quinta and Palm Desert for shopping, errands, doctors, education and employment opportunities. For example, Palm Desert is an important destination for advanced educational opportunities due to the public community college, College of the Desert. A survey conducted by SunLine found that approximately one-quarter of all bus trip users were traveling to Palm Desert, many of those being students at the College.[1]

The dispersed landscape of the ECV is a significant challenge to navigate with the current transportation system, as the lack of alternative mobility options makes it necessary to use a car to access these distant

1 Riverside County Transportation Commission (2016). Task 2: Existing and Future Transportation Conditions: Strategic Assessment.

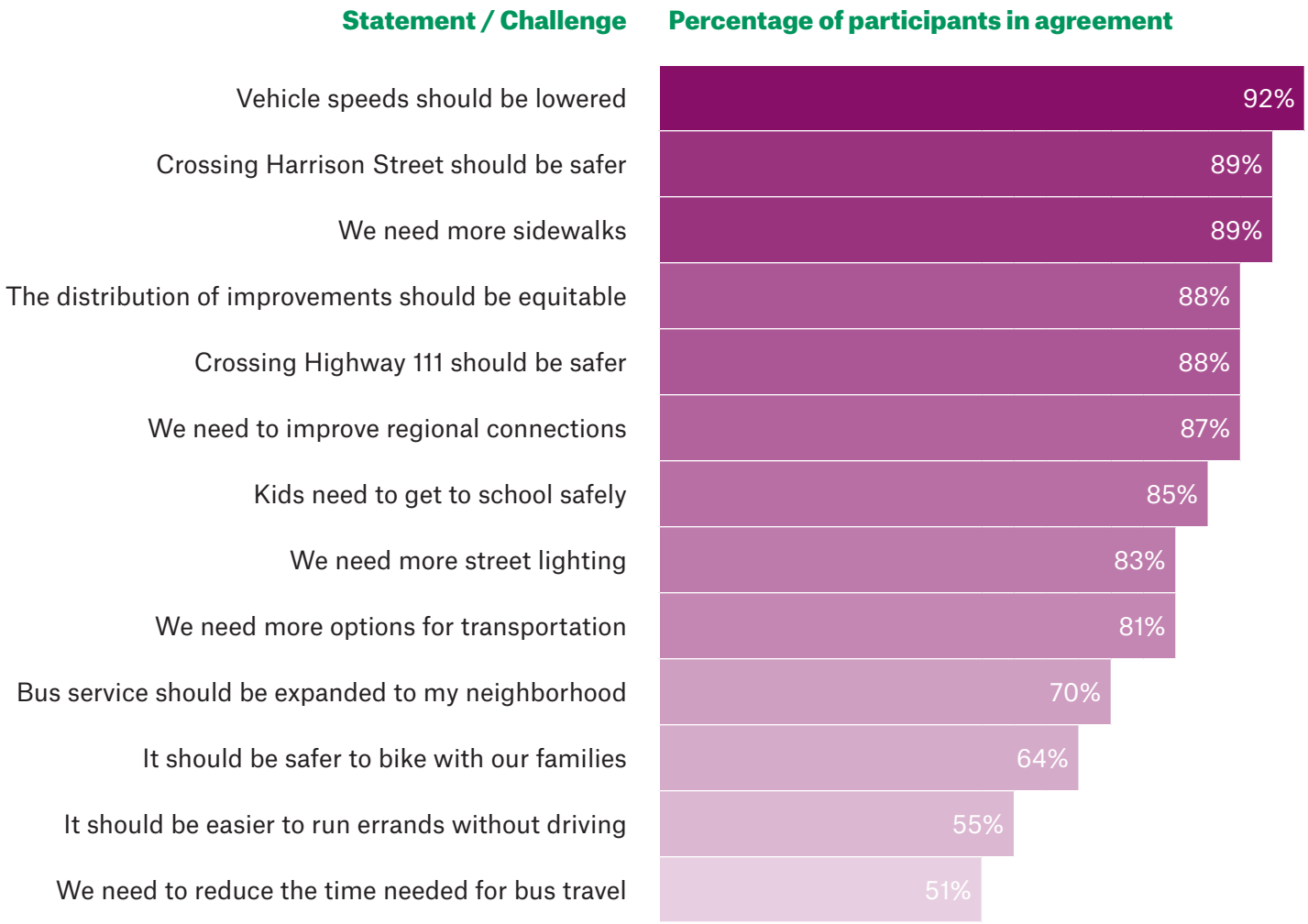

Figure 5. Combined Results from Mobility Challenges Exercise, November 2017 and January 2019

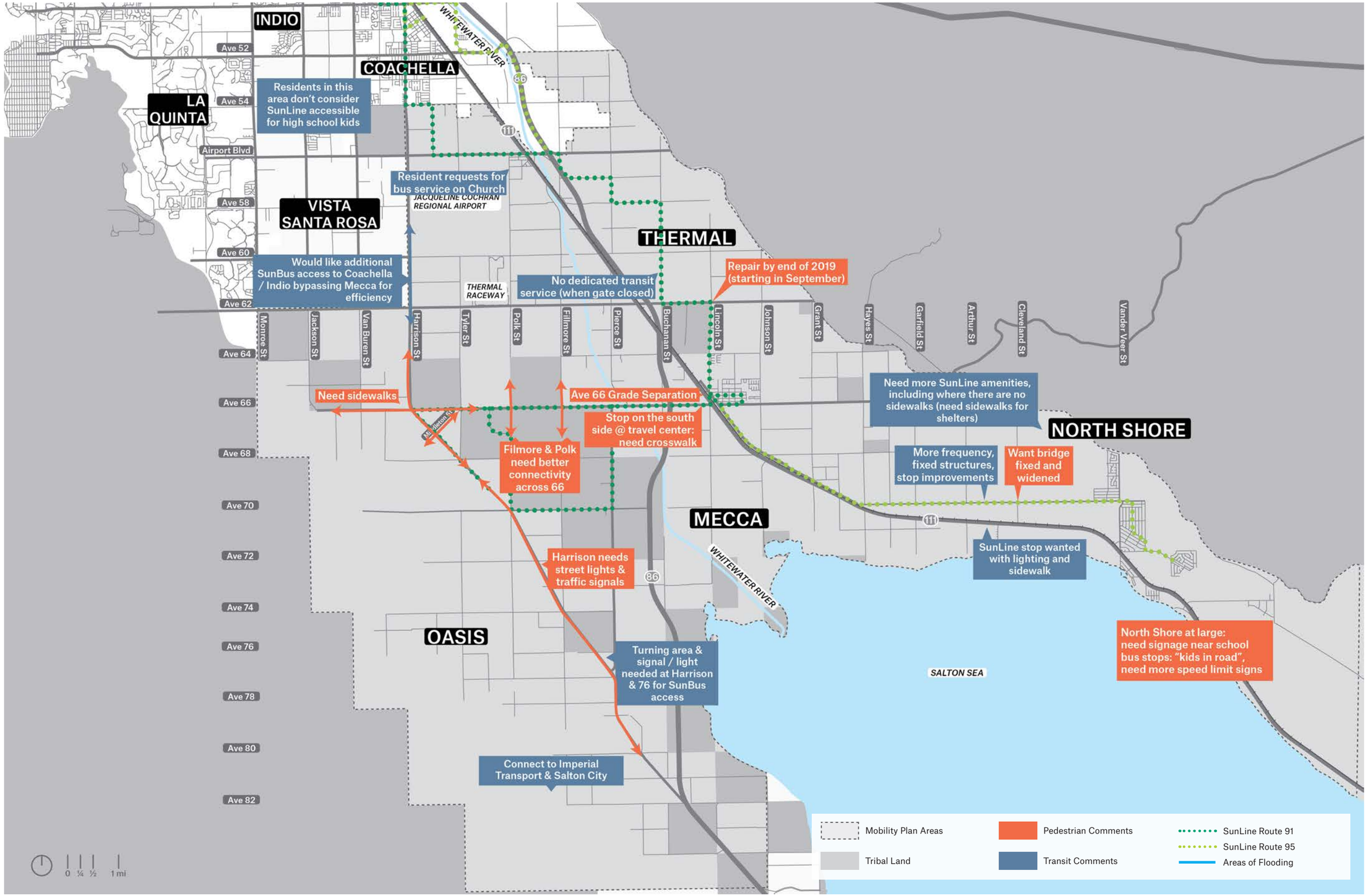

Figure 6. Regional Needs of Residents Identified by the Project Team and Advisory Group

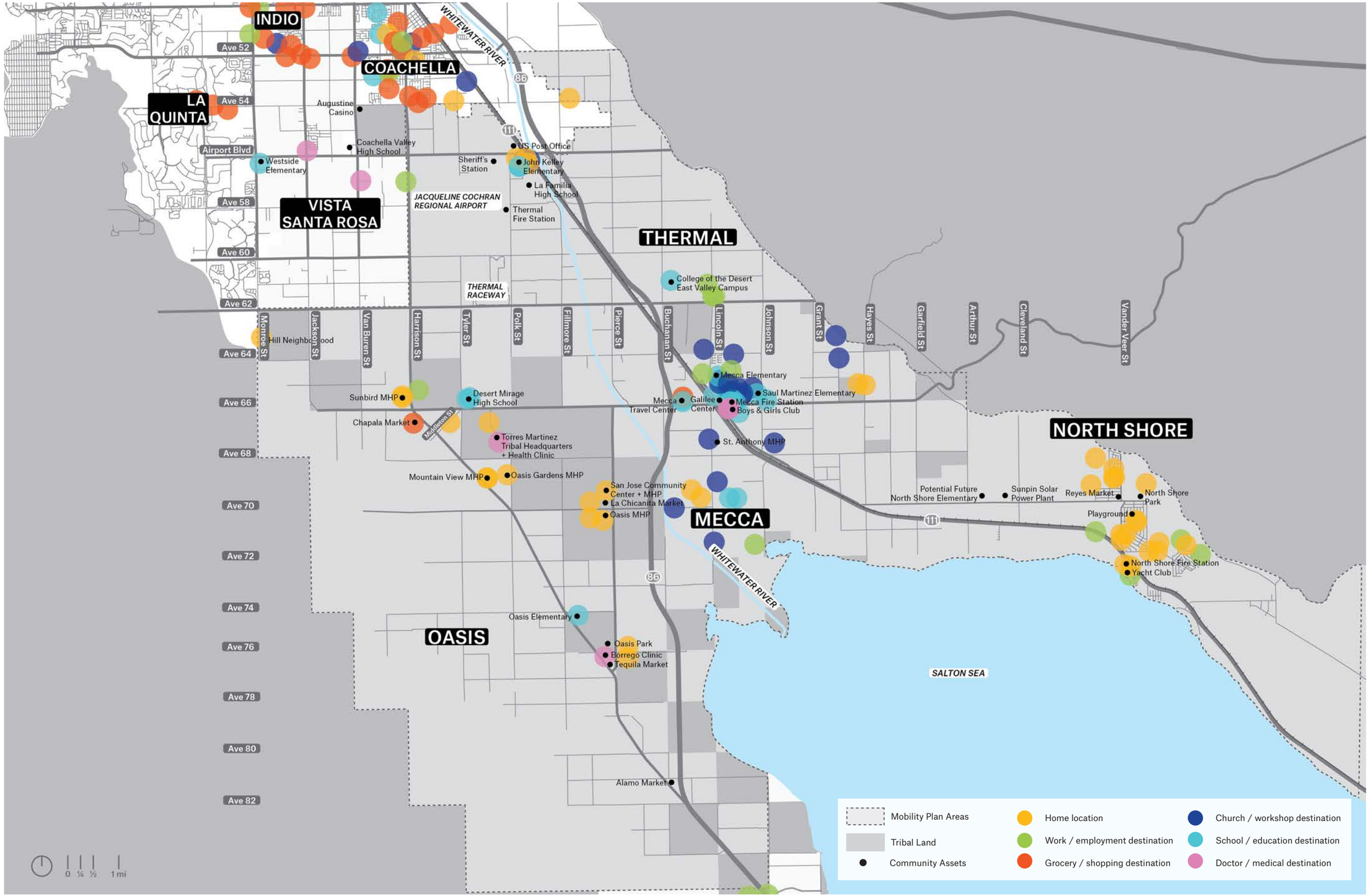

Figure 7. Local and Regional Travel Destinations

destinations, and not all residents have the means to own a vehicle. According to residents and local organizations, many families that do own a car are only able to afford one, which is used by the primary breadwinner to travel to work. Meanwhile, the rest of the family is left to travel to school, errands, and other important destinations by other modes of travel which may be less reliable, accessible, and/or safe. Multimodal connections and larger-scale connectivity frameworks between communities promote social cohesion in the region, long-term resiliency, and sustainable communities.

Some residents expressed interest in potentially connecting south to Imperial County or even further to Calexico and Mexicali. These connections should be explored further in future planning efforts and in coordination with Imperial County agencies and other relevant stakeholders.

Major Areas for Improvements

Residents and stakeholder agencies alike stressed that multi-functional infrastructure in the ECV could raise the quality of life for residents, enable a more varied menu of transportation options, and improve air quality and health benefits. This approach rooted in community-based priorities, context-sensitive infrastructural responses, and active modes of transportation shaped the opportunities identified in the region. Layered onto this approach, residents identified improved safety, better connections to schools, and access to multimodal travel as driving factors within their vision for improvements. Residents were particularly focused on providing better school connections within Thermal, Oasis, and Mecca, especially to the school complex at Avenue 66 and Tyler Street consisting of Desert Mirage High School, Toro Canyon Middle School, and Las Palmitas Elementary School.

Another major priority for residents was creating better connectivity between North Shore and Mecca. As the easternmost community in the region, North Shore residents expressed feeling particularly isolated. These feelings were especially acute during the development of this Plan as one of the two access points into the community was severed when the bridge along Avenue 70 at Cleveland Street was damaged due to a heavy storm event in October 2018. As a result of this intersection closure, Avenue 70 could not provide access into North Shore and only one route into the community remained accessible—via Highway 111, entering North Shore along Bay Drive. Residents noted that commute times increased by approximately 30 minutes, particularly at peak hours in the early morning, when many residents departed for work in the fields, and in the afternoon, when many residents returned from work or school. The intersection of Highway 111 and Bay Drive also includes the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) crossing, further extending travel times during the passing of trains. Residents of North Shore, with the support of their neighbors in Mecca, requested more connections between the two communities so that more alternative routes are available.

Another concern in local and regional travel identified by the communities was around Avenue 66 and Grapefruit Boulevard in Mecca. Residents of Mecca noted that significant automobile traffic tends to be congested in this area, particularly due to cars that need to turn right from eastbound Avenue 66 onto Grapefruit Boulevard to head south into the North Shore area. In spring 2020, the Riverside County Transportation Department will begin construction of Avenue 66 Grade Separation consisting of a grade separated crossing over the existing UPRR, Highway 111 and Hammond Road in Mecca. This project will provide a secondary access point to the community and emergency vehicles crossing the railroad tracks. With the construction of the new Avenue 66 grade separation, there will be two access points connecting the west side of the ECV to the east side, addressing a chokepoint for travel between the communities

Overall Community Mobility Priorities

Figure 8 was created based on what community members identified as their top improvement priorities during the first round of workshops in each of the four unincorporated communities, as described in the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans. Each of the priority intersections or corridors shown on Figure 8 are a result of the infrastructure budgeting and prioritization exercise conducted during the workshops. Resident prioritization from the first set of workshops held for each of the neighborhood-scale plans independently matched one another, highlighting

common needs within the region. Community members served as local experts, sharing lived experience and providing a greater level of detail than could be gathered through secondary research.

Main ideas from the workshops included:

- A connective “triangle” in Oasis that would provide connectivity between the new Oasis Park at Avenue 76 and Pierce Street, up to Avenue 66, and down Harrison Street. This would serve to link many of the more densely populated Polancos with markets, parks, and other necessary amenities on the westernmost side of the ECV.
- North-South connections between the communities of Thermal, Oasis, and Mecca, and East-West connections between Oasis, Mecca, and North Shore. Residents were especially interested in thinking long-term about how to create more points of entry and connection between the communities, for example, by paving the portion of Avenue 70 east of Pierce Street and south of Highway 111 that is currently unimproved, or Avenue 68 east of Johnson Street through to North Shore.

Figure 9, the "Overall Regional Mobility Priorities" map, shows the overall prioritization of corridors and intersections guiding the recommendations in Chapter 4. This map takes into consideration the community input shown in Figure 8 and factors in existing conditions, policies and planning, best practices research, stakeholder and agency guidance, and overall connectivity of the transportation network.

Overall mobility priorities were ranked through the community workshop process. Many of the intersections that were identified as needing improvement are along Harrison Street, Avenue 66, and Highway 111, as there are currently few traffic signals on these roads. Additional street and intersection lighting along these corridors was highly desired by residents, who indicated that it would help increase visibility of stop signs that are prevalent throughout much of the ECV. Corridors that are coded as first priority are main connector roads that support more local community amenities in the area such as schools, clinics, and commercial areas.

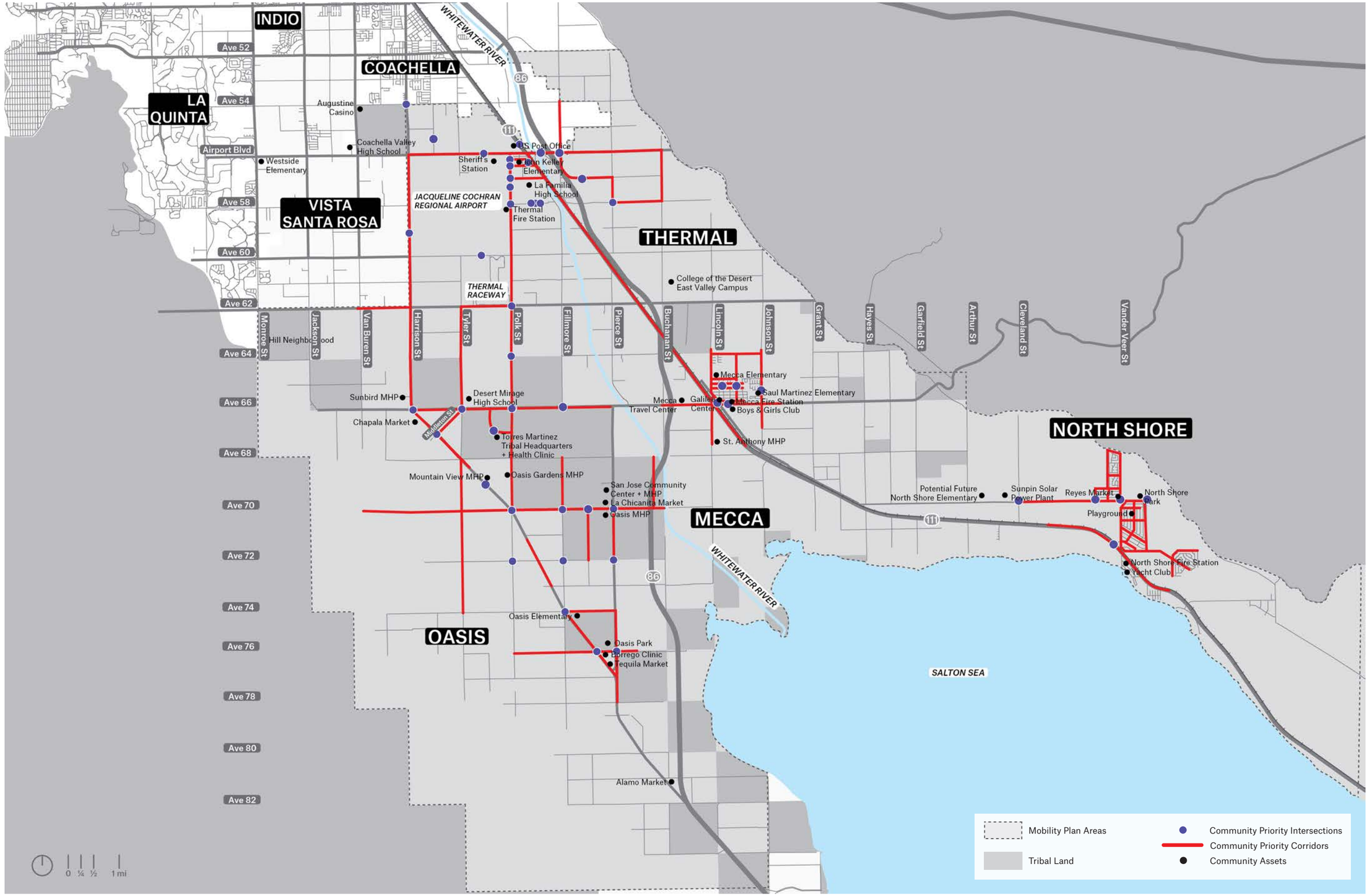

Figure 8. Synthesized Regional Priorities from Community

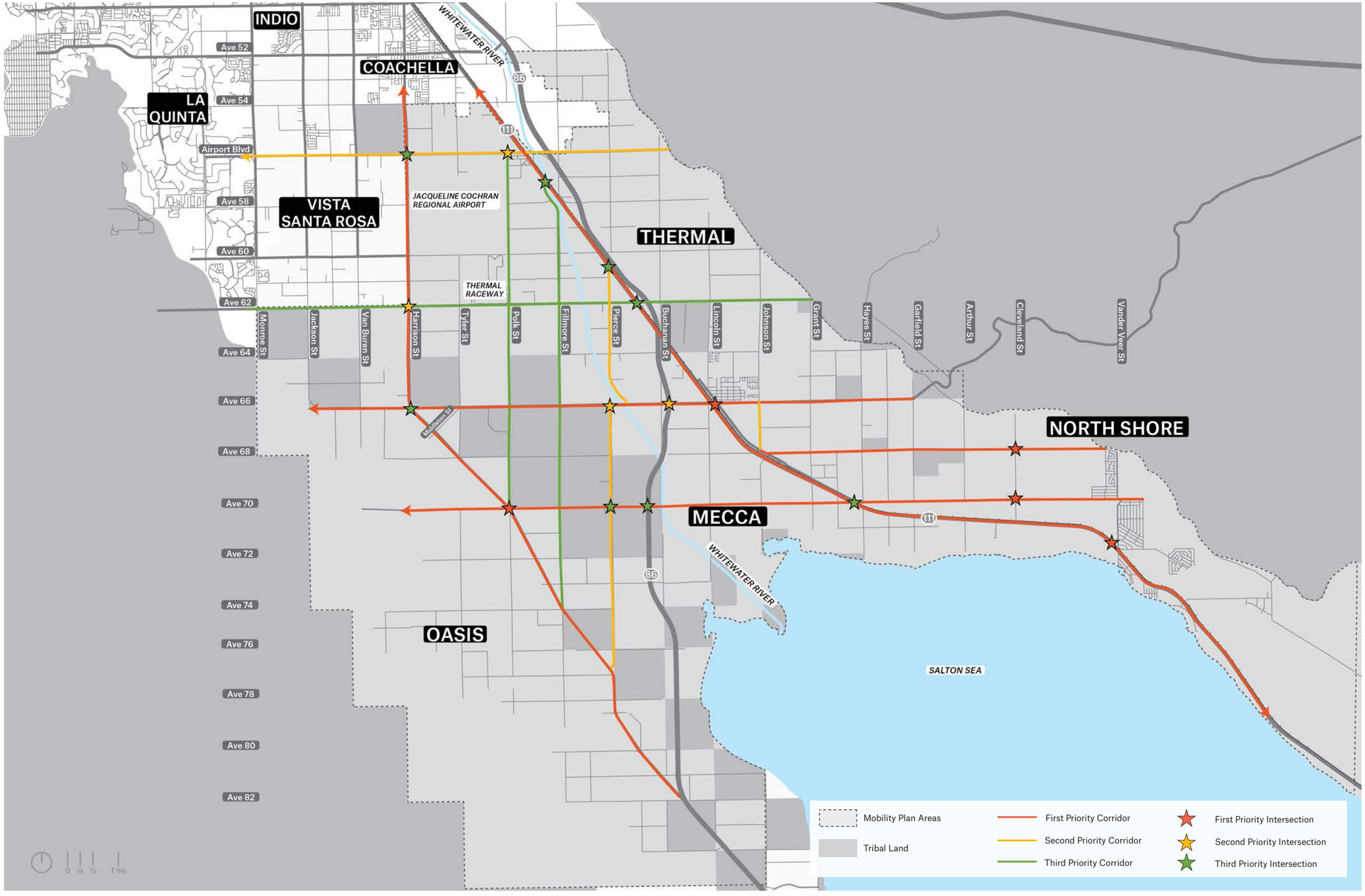

Figure 9. Overall Regional Mobility Priorities

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“Es muy importante la conectividad entre las comunidades del valle.”

“The connectivity between the communities of the valley is very important.”

- Juana Garcia, Mecca Resident
April 2019 Workshop

IV. Regional Recommendations and Programs

Overview of Recommended Regional Improvements

This chapter summarizes and recommends network improvements for the ECV at the regional scale based on community input, needs analysis findings, research, observations, and existing infrastructure. These improvements at the regional scale consist of Class I multimodal paths and traffic devices, as shown in Figure 10, which were obtained from the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans. Recommendations from these plans are studied at a regional scale, and complement planned facilities through other municipalities and regional agencies.

The construction of recommended facilities will require additional field work to verify conditions. These include but are not limited to: roadway width, travel lanes, actual motor vehicle speeds, motor vehicle volumes, bicycle and motor vehicle travel patterns and conflicts, right of way, and pavement conditions. Final treatments should be selected based on verified conditions. Furthermore, construction of recommended facilities is dependent on securing funding for the improvements.

Multimodal Facilities

The facilities shown in Figure 11 are intended to support multimodal transportation infrastructure in the ECV, connect the unincorporated communities to each other and to the region, and provide actionable solutions to transportation issues within the ECV. The improvements shown in this chapter are fully consistent and integrated with those recommended at the neighborhood scale in the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans.

More detailed concepts of each of these corridors, along with design recommendations— including a menu of design options for potential improvements, the space they require, their ideal application context, and advantages and disadvantages— can be found in the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans. These concepts are also relevant at the regional scale and should be considered as improvements are programmed for implementation.

Regional Class I multimodal paths, as show in Figure 10, aim to lay a network of wide paths throughout the community to facilitate trips by alternative modes of transportation throughout the region. These paths would be open to bicyclists as well as pedestrians, while being safely separated from the road. Residents have expressed that wide paths are particularly desirable, especially near the schools where larger groups of students walk together.

Additional infrastructure supporting a comfortable and safe walking experience is desired in order to have a fully functional multimodal network. Improvements could include shade structures that can serve as areas of respite during hot summer days, street lighting to allow for safe travel in the early morning hours or during the evening, and benches for creating public gathering spaces and opportunities for rest. Residents expressed preference for paths that do not meander, as they prefer to be able to reach their destinations quickly in the hot climate.

Important for regional connectivity, some of these improvements are recommended on key corridors that are unpaved in some segments, particularly Avenue 68 in North Shore and Avenue 70 between Oasis and North Shore. Pedestrian facility improvements should be included as part of any improvements to these road segments should paving occur. Paving Avenue 70 and Avenue 68 is especially important to the community for providing additional connections into North Shore. A fully paved Avenue 70 would allow residents to travel directly between Oasis and North Shore without having to travel through Mecca to access Avenue 66. A fully paved Avenue 68 would create a third entry point into North Shore, allowing for alternate routes into and out of the community. Class I multimodal paths along both of these corridors would achieve multimodal mobility throughout the ECV region.

Intersection Improvements

Figure 11 also depicts the intersection improvements recommended in the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans that are relevant at the regional scale. Improvements at intersections are desired to ensure that travel in the ECV is safe for all users, from automobile drivers to pedestrians to bicyclists. By reducing speeds at currently uncontrolled crossings, the number of collisions in the area could be reduced, improving safety for motorists, pedestrians, and cyclists alike. The recommendations for intersection improvements include the following:

- **Roundabouts, signals, or other major improvements**, if warranted in the locations recommended here, would accommodate more forms of travel throughout the ECV. For example, the intersection of Harrison Street, Avenue 70, and Polk Street in Oasis. Three intersections along Highway 111 might benefit from a signal to allow for safer turning onto and off the highway. Residents voiced a strong desire for the widening of the bridge at Avenue 70 and Cleveland Street, which could be beneficial to accommodate future multimodal facilities; the same would be true at Avenue 68 and Cleveland Street, were it to be paved.
- **Flashing stop signs** may be appropriate at intersections along key corridors shown here that do not yet warrant a signal or other major improvement, but still need visibility improvements. Flashing stop signs increase visibility of a stop condition, decreasing the likelihood of vehicles running the stop signs and the potential for pedestrian-involved collisions, according to Caltrans' Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). In conjunction with this, public lighting is desired for nighttime visibility in as many locations as possible.
- **Existing signals** are already installed in some ECV intersections. These have been equipped with crosswalks, curb returns, and pedestrian ramps as required by ADA standards, but no sidewalks are attached to many of these pads. As recommended via the corridors shown, it is recommended to extend the pedestrian facilities to connect to community destinations. In few cases, such as the intersection of Highway 86 and Avenue 66, signalized intersections are not currently equipped with any pedestrian or multimodal facilities and would need to be retrofitted as improvements are implemented.

The Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans discuss each of these intersections in more detail, including a menu of concepts for potential improvements, the space they require, their ideal application context, and advantages and disadvantages. Any recommended improvement would need to be assessed through an analysis conducted by traffic engineers within Riverside County.

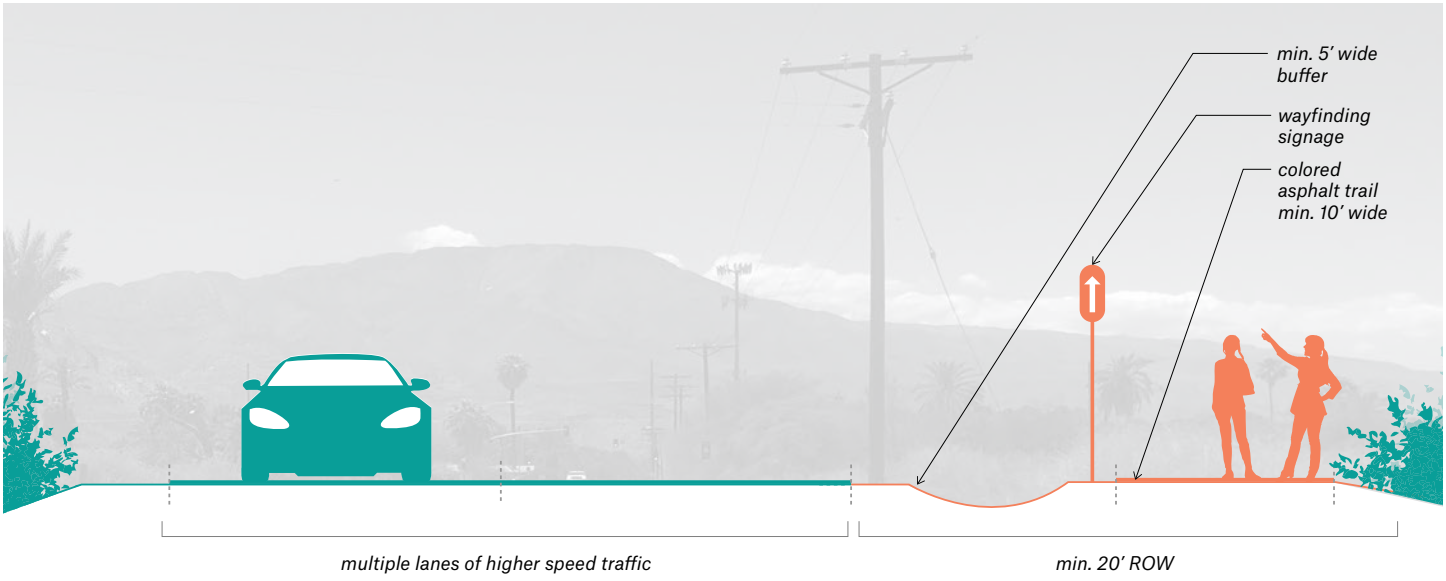

Figure 10. Typical Cross-Section: 10-foot Wide Class I Multimodal Path

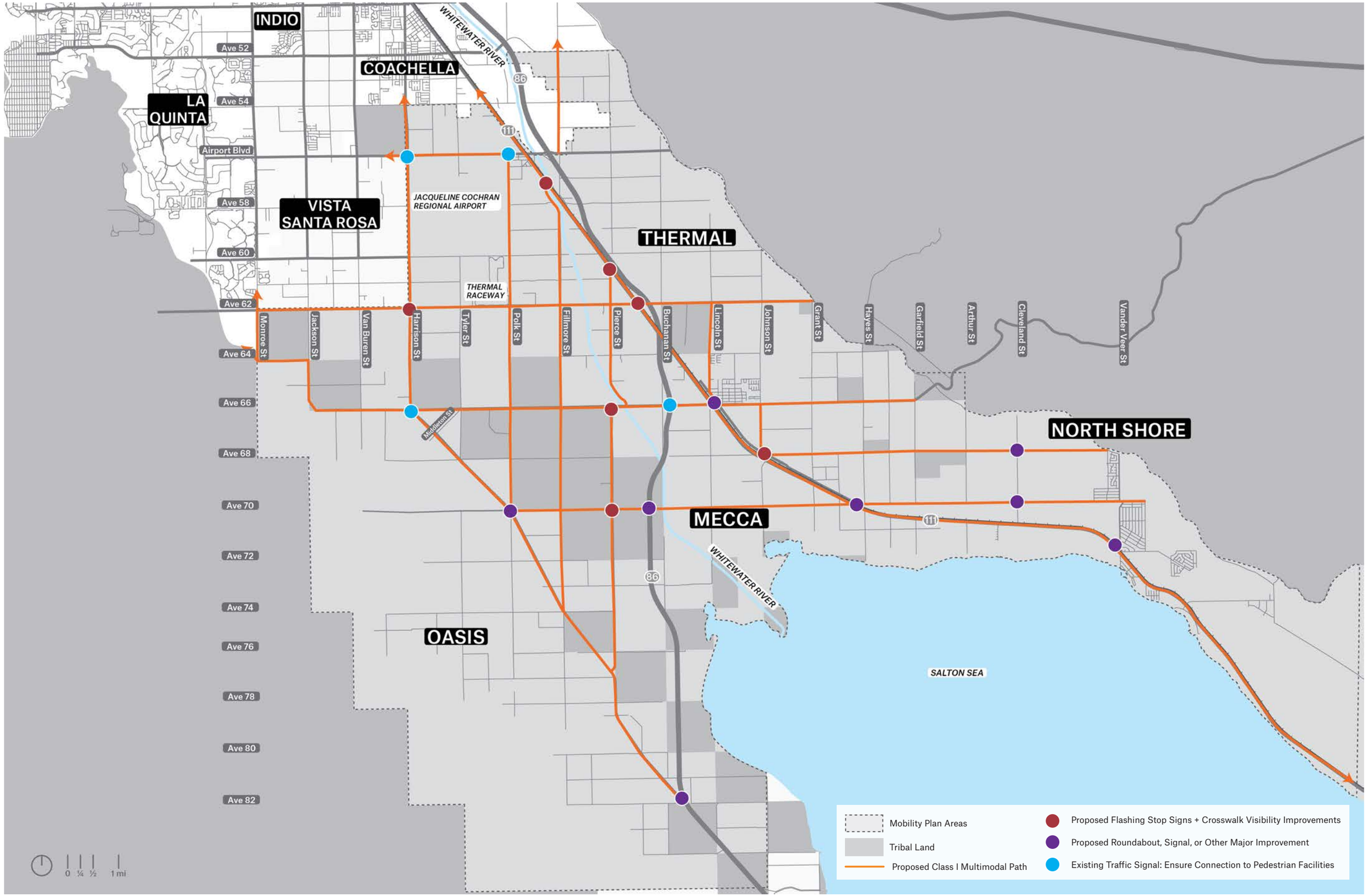

Figure 11. Regionally Important Multimodal Facility and Intersection Improvements from Neighborhood Plans

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Recommendations for Regional Multimodal Connectivity

Figure 12 shows how the proposed multimodal facilities complement similar facilities proposed by nearby jurisdictions. Figure 12 combines the General Plan elements of three adjacent municipalities— the City of Coachella's Mobility Element, the City of Indio Mobility Element, and the La Quinta Circulation Element— with the Coachella Valley Link Master Plan.

As the figure shows, the vast majority of the facilities proposed adjacent to the unincorporated ECV are Class II bike lanes. Once all of these facilities are built, residents of the unincorporated ECV will be able to connect directly from the ECV's network of Class I trails to dedicated on-street facilities in adjacent cities at all connection points.

Figure 12 also shows CV Link's core alignment, the future Salton Sea and Mecca-North Shore extensions, and the community connectors to central Thermal and the College of the Desert East Valley Campus. In order to best integrate with the multimodal network proposed by this Plan, additional community connectors are also recommended here for exploration as the CV Link and its extensions and connections are built out. Residents of the unincorporated ECV believe that they would greatly benefit from further connections along key community corridors, including Airport Boulevard, Harrison Street, Avenue 62 west of the Whitewater River, Polk Street, and Avenue 66. These should also connect to other regional trails, such as the one off Box Canyon Road east of Avenue 66.

The implementation of the CV Link is important to the disadvantaged communities of the unincorporated ECV. If a more complete network of community connectors is implemented, as recommended here and in alignment with the recommendations of the Thermal-Oasis and North Shore-Mecca Mobility Plans, community members will have more mobility options to better access the broader Coachella Valley region and the many opportunities and resources that the Western Coachella Valley holds.

Recommendations for Public Transportation and Shared Mobility

In addition to the options for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, community members provided recommendations through the public outreach process to improve SunBus and other public transit services in the ECV. As SunLine reevaluates their SunBus routes within the ECV, residents recommend the following changes as shown on Figure 13:

- Improving more SunBus stops throughout the region, especially by installing benches and shelters wherever possible as new sidewalks or multimodal facilities are built.
- Reducing the time between SunBus vehicles (currently around one hour) to improve riders' experiences and convenience. Many residents expressed that if they didn't have to wait as long for public transit, particularly at stops without benches or shelters, they would ride more often.
- Considering the introduction of an express line connecting Thermal and Oasis directly to the cities of Coachella, Indio, and Palm Desert via Harrison Street without going through Mecca.
- Expanding service further south into Oasis, particularly to the Borrego Clinic and future Oasis Park on Avenue 76 between Harrison Street and Pierce Street.
- Expanding service further north into the Costa Mesa neighborhood of North Shore, particularly to the concentration of homes near Avenue 69 and Costa Mesa Drive.

Residents have also expressed support for the exploration and expansion of newer transit programs such as SunVans or additional flexible on-demand services that can serve the geographically large expanse of the ECV in a more flexible manner than traditional fixed-route bus service. These flexible services could better reach the variety of destinations regularly frequented by residents, as previously shown in Figure 7.

Recommended Programs

While programs to support active transportation and multimodal travel should be further developed in

the ECV more broadly, this Plan places importance on capital improvements based on feedback from the community for more infrastructure in the region. However, programs should be considered and implemented in tandem with infrastructure improvements moving forward. Given residents' concern for the mobility of students, programs centered on the youth population and schools complement this Plan.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Count Program

As noted in the Thermal Oasis and Mecca North Shore Mobility Plans, Riverside County currently does not have a bicycle and pedestrian count program. Data available on the subject comes from the 2017 American Community Survey ("ACS"), which reports percentages of residents biking and walking to work; local organizations have indicated that these rates underestimate the actual number of people walking and biking in the ECV. Furthermore, local organizations indicated that people in the ECV walk and bike to access formal and informal work opportunities, as well as for non-commute trips.

The ECV region currently lacks infrastructure for walking and biking such as sidewalks and bike lanes/bikeways, which this Plan will address. The lack of comfortable facilities can be a barrier for people who walk and bike or who would otherwise utilize walking and biking facilities more regularly and in greater numbers. It is recommended that a pedestrian and bicycle count program be established to understand active transportation behavior in the ECV and support the informed expansion of facilities moving forward.

Pedestrian and bicycle counts could be conducted according to nationwide standard methodologies, such as that established by the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Documentation Project (NBPD)[1] or the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC).[2] Counts should focus on key areas where there is a concentration of pedestrian and bicycle travel, such as near the Desert Mirage school complex; in central Mecca and Thermal; and along Avenue 70 or Miramar Drive in North Shore where SunBus and schoolbus stops are concentrated.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS)

It is recommended that the County of Riverside continues its coordination and support of the Riverside University Health System Public Health (RUHS-PH) work on SRTS. RUHS-PH received funding via an Active Transportation Program (ATP) Cycle 3 non-infrastructure grant and established a SRTS program in the ECV in 2018.

SRTS Best Practices[3]

- **Encouragement:** Events, activities and contests that spark interest in both students and parents in walking and biking to school and reward participation, promote the personal and community benefits of SRTS, and make walking or biking to school fun.
- **Education:** Classes and activities that teach students, parents, and community members safe walking and bicycling skills, including safe driving behavior. In addition, programs for parents and school staff to learn about safety tips and how to develop and sustain a SRTS program could be included.
- **Engineering:** Infrastructure improvements (signage, crosswalks, traffic signals, etc.) designed to improve the safety of people walking, bicycling, and driving along school routes.
- **Enforcement:** Strategies to deter unsafe behavior of drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians, and educate all users on obeying traffic laws and following appropriate drop-off and pick-up procedures.
- **Evaluation:** Tracking progress through regular counts, surveys, and other data collection to determine impact on student travel behavior as well as effectiveness of specific program elements.
- **Equity:** Should be integrated into all aspects of SRTS. Acknowledgment of the different challenges

1 http://bikepeddocumentation.org/

2 http://www.pedbikeinfo.org/cms/downloads/PBIC_Infobrief_Counting.pdf

3 Los Angeles Metro, Safe Routes to School Resource Manual (2016)

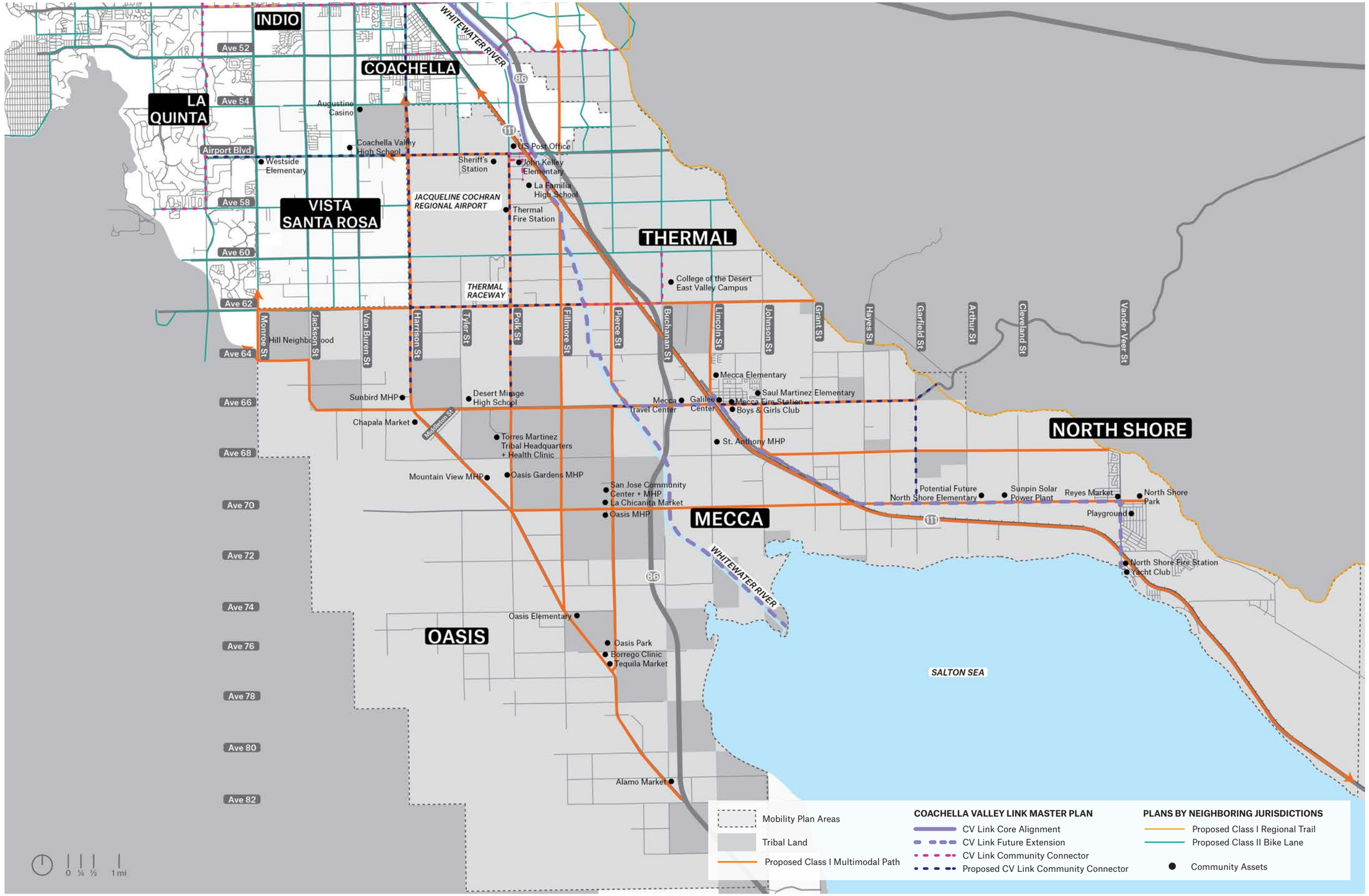

Figure 12. Regional Multimodal Connections

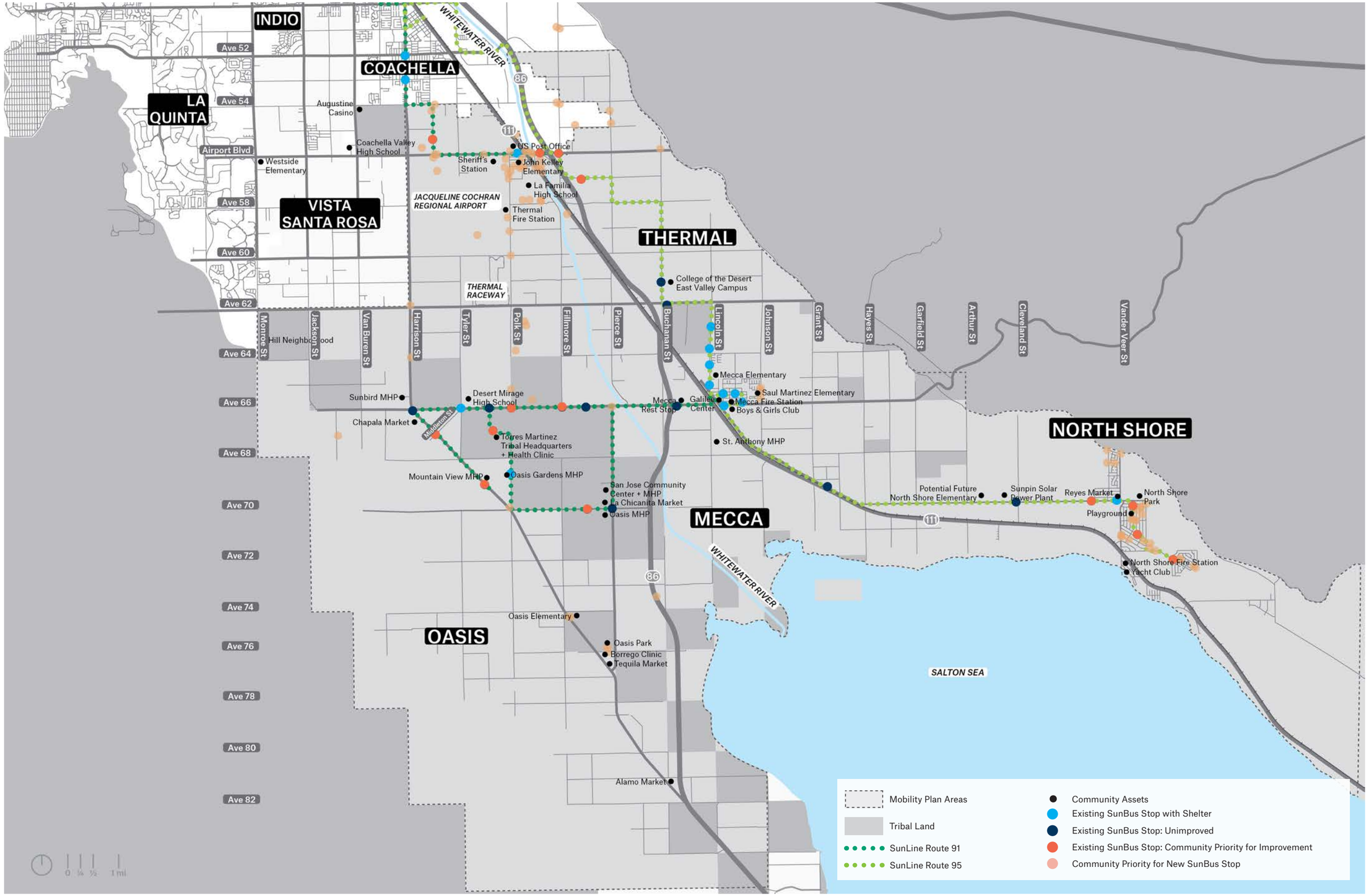

Figure 13. Community Recommendations for SunLine Improvements

and barriers that students face is important to ensure that Safe Routes to School initiatives are benefiting all demographic groups. Equity, as it relates to SRTS, is about ensuring all students have safe access to and from school.

Clean Mobility Voucher Pilot Program

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) will soon make available $17 million to fund car share and ridesharing projects serving low-income residents.[4] The feasibility of implementing this type of project using these funds in the ECV should be explored to fulfill residents' needs for more mobility options and connections to the broader Coachella Valley region.

CALSTART has been selected to administer the program with the Shared-Use Mobility Center (SUMC) in partnership with GRID Alternatives and the Local Government Commission. Program guidelines are under development and should be finalized in early 2020. The solicitation for applications to fund projects is anticipated in April 2020. The program administrative team will be providing extensive workshops, resources and direct technical assistance to help with project and application development and implementation if awarded.

Eligible applicants include:

- Local or regional public agencies
- Federally-recognized tribes
- Non-profit organizations with at least one year of incorporation and an office in California
- Sub-Applicants may include other public, private, or non-profit organizations, including mobility service providers

Funding will be provided in the form of vouchers to pay for zero emission vehicles and equipment, operations, marketing and outreach for clean mobility projects, including:

- Carsharing
- Bike & Scooter-sharing
- Carpooling and Vanpooling
- Innovative Transit Services
- Ride on Demand Services (high-occupant).

Though not currently funded by CARB, Sunline Transit Agency's SolVan vanpool program may also suggest a model for shared mobility through vanpooling that might be expanded, modified or replicated in the region to increase mobility options for community members in North Shore and Mecca.

Potential Funding Sources

The following are potential funding sources for implementation of the recommended improvements in this Plan.

State Funds

Local Gas Tax

The state of California imposes per-gallon excise taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel, sales taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel and registration taxes on motor vehicles with allocations dedicated to transportation purposes. The local (city and county) portions of these allocations flow through the Highway Users Tax Account (HUTA), the familiar gasoline tax revenues that have been in place for decades, and the Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account (RMRA) which allocates much of the revenue from the Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017 (SB1 Beall).[5]

State Bill 821

This program is provided through the Transportation Development Act (TDA), funded through a ¼ cent of the general sales tax collected statewide. Two percent of this revenue is made available for bicycle and pedestrian facilities under TDA Article 3, also known as SB 821. Eligible projects include sidewalks, access ramps, bicycle facilities, and bicycle plan development.[6]

Active Transportation Program (ATP)

As of September 26, 2013, existing federal and state transportation programs, including the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Bicycle Transportation Account (BTA), and State Safe Routes to School (SR2S), consolidated into a single ATP program with

4 Shared-Use Mobility Center, "CARB Announces $17 Million Award" Press Release (2019)

5 http://californiacityfinance.com/LSR1905.pdf

6 http://www.rctc.org/funding-and-planning/

a focus to make California a national leader in active transportation. The ATP is administered by the Division of Local Assistance, Office of Active Transportation and Special Programs. ATP successfully funded much of the first phase of improvements recommended for Oasis in Cycle 4, as shown in Figure 14. Further improvements in this area are likely to be similarly competitive in future ATP rounds.

The purpose of ATP is to encourage increased use of active modes of transportation by achieving the following goals:

- Increase the proportion of trips accomplished by biking and walking
- Increase safety and mobility for non-motorized users,
- Advance the active transportation efforts of regional agencies to achieve greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals,
- Enhance public health,
- Ensure that disadvantaged communities fully share in the benefits of the program
- Provide a broad spectrum of projects to benefit many types of active transportation users

Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) Grant

Office of Traffic Safety Grants (OTS) funds safety programs and equipment. Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety is a specifically identified priority. This category of grants includes enforcement and education programs, which can encompass a wide range of activities, including bicycle helmet distribution, design and printing of billboards and bus posters, other public information materials, development of safety components as part of physical education curriculum, or police safety demonstrations through school visitations.

Federal Funds

Highway Safety Improvement (HSIP)

The purpose of the HSIP program is to achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads, including non-State-owned public roads and roads on tribal land. HSIP funds are competitive statewide.

HSIP projects on rural roads can qualify as High Risk Rural Roads Program (HR3) projects. HR3 funds improvements on roads that are functionally classified as rural major collectors, rural minor collectors, or rural local roads to correct or improve hazardous roadway locations or features to reduce the frequency and severity of collisions. Some roads in the ECV may be eligible for this funding.[7]

Conclusion

Given the current state of multimodal infrastructure in the ECV, implementation of this Plan's recommended improvements could have a significantly positive impact not only on mobility in the communities, but also on various socioeconomic issues that hinge on transportation in the area, including access to employment, education, health, and other opportunities and necessities.

Improving facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users could improve residents' ability to travel to high priority destinations (such as schools, workplaces, churches, stores, etc.) throughout the communities safely and efficiently with or without an automobile. Improving facilities for active transportation will provide recreational opportunities for residents, particularly those who aspire to walk and bike with their families for recreation and exercise. Focusing high-priority facilities around schools, will enable students near schools to walk and bike in a safer manner. In addition to these infrastructure improvements, continued coordination with Riverside University Health System-Public Health on Safe Routes to School will foster a multimodal culture in the ECV and make transportation safer for all residents.

This Plan will be used by the County of Riverside, in conjunction with the *Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of Thermal and Oasis* and *Neighborhood Mobility Plan for the Communities of North Shore and Mecca* to: plan for future active transportation and multimodal improvements; to apply for various funding sources for planning, engineering, and construction; and to condition future development.

7 Ibid.

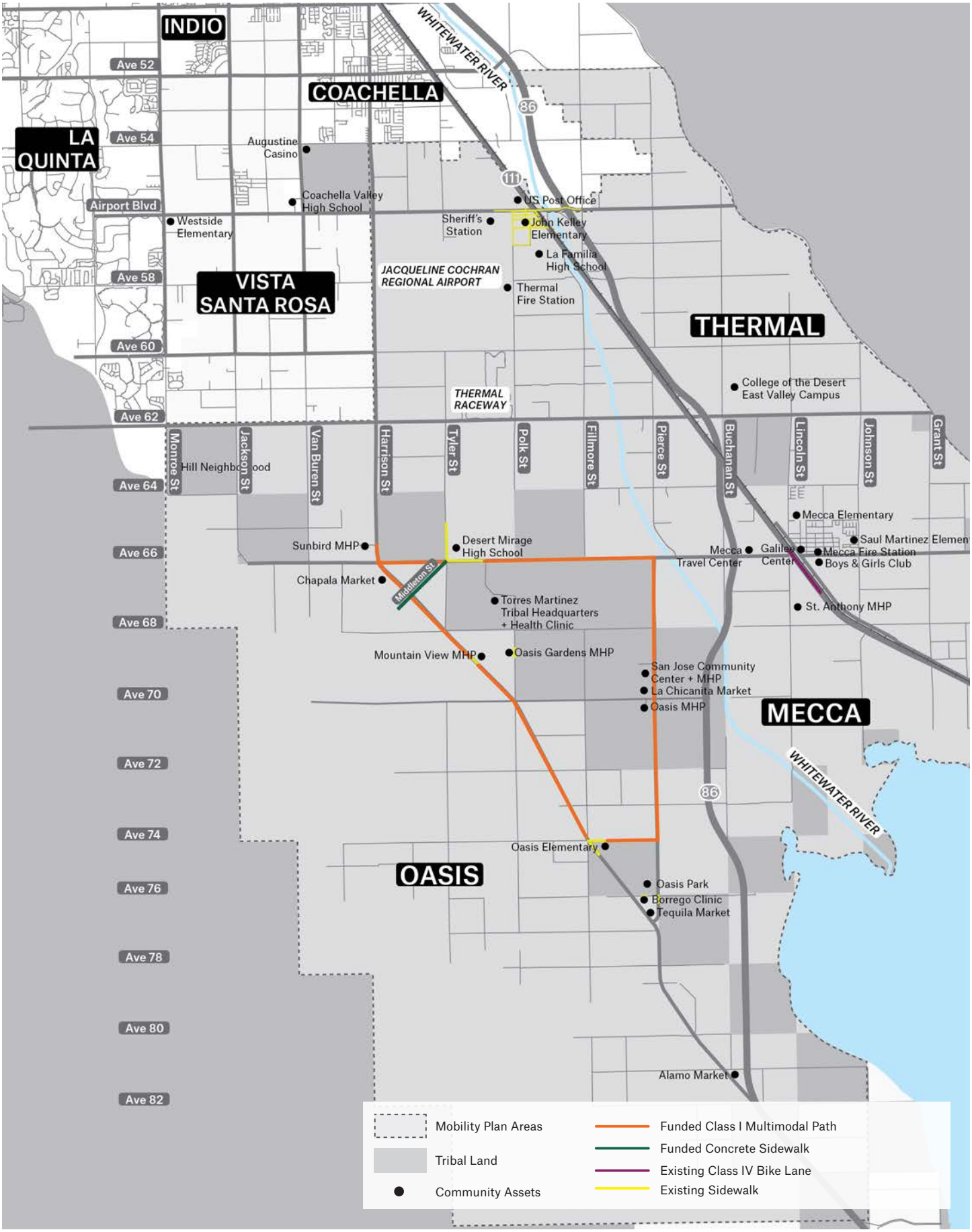

Figure 14. Multimodal Facility Improvements Funded by ATP Cycle 4

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