

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Summary

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) prepared this Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), for the 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (2008 RTP, Plan or Project). The 2008 RTP is a long-range regional transportation plan that provides a blueprint to help achieve a coordinated regional transportation system. The 2008 RTP includes a policy element that is shaped by goals, policies and performance indicators, an action element that identifies specific projects, programs and implementation, and a description of regional growth trends that identifies future needs for travel and goods movement. The PEIR for the 2008 RTP serves as an informational document to inform decision makers and the public of the potential environmental consequences of approving the proposed Plan. The PEIR includes mitigation measures designed to help avoid or minimize significant environmental impacts.

Individual projects are preliminarily identified in the 2008 RTP; however, this PEIR is programmatic in nature and does not specifically analyze these projects. Project-level analyses will be prepared by implementing agencies on a project-by-project basis. Project specific planning and implementation undertaken by each implementing agency will depend on a number of issues, including: policies, programs and projects adopted at the local level; restrictions on federal, state and local transportation funds; the results of feasibility studies for particular corridors; and further environmental review of proposed projects.

Scope and Methodology

This PEIR fulfills the requirements of CEQA. It is a programmatic document that provides a region-wide assessment of the potential significant environmental effects of implementing the projects, programs and policies included in the 2008 RTP. A PEIR “may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either: (1) geographically, (2) as logical parts of the chain of contemplated actions, (3) in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.” (CEQA Guidelines §15168) A PEIR provides a regional consideration of cumulative effects and includes broad policy alternatives and program wide mitigation measures. This PEIR offers useful regional scale analysis and a framework of mitigation measures for subsequent, site

specific environmental review documents prepared by implementing agencies as individual projects in the 2008 RTP are developed. The PEIR mitigation measures similarly provide a framework of mitigation to be imposed by various Lead Agencies for individual development projects that comprise the assumed regional growth.

The focus of the environmental analysis in the PEIR is on the potential regional-scale and cumulative impacts of implementation of the 2008 RTP (Project) and the alternatives. The long range planning horizon of more than 25 years necessitates that many of the highway, arterial goods movement, and transit projects included in the 2008 RTP (and the alternatives) are identified at the conceptual level, and this document addresses environmental impacts to the level that they can be assessed without undue speculation. This PEIR acknowledges this uncertainty and incorporates these realities into the methodology to evaluate the environmental effects of the 2008 RTP, given its long term planning horizon.

The potential significant environmental effects of the Plan were identified by employing multiple analytical methods, including spatial analysis; transportation, noise, land use and air quality modeling and other quantitative, ordinal and qualitative techniques. Spatial analysis using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) was employed to evaluate the potential effects of the major freeway, rail and transit projects on resource categories such as land use, biological/open space and water resources. Transportation, noise and air quality simulation models were used to estimate the transportation, noise and air quality impacts. Project and policy elements of Plan and alternatives were incorporated into the modeling analysis and into the socioeconomic projections. The specific techniques used to evaluate each potential environmental effect are fully described in each resource section in Chapter Three of this document.

Baseline for Determining Significance

The PEIR must identify significant impacts that would be expected to result from implementation of the 2008 RTP. Significant impacts are defined as a “substantial or potentially substantial, adverse change in the environment” (Public Resources Code § 21068). Significant impacts must be determined by applying explicit significance criteria to compare the future Plan conditions to the existing environmental setting (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.2(a)). The existing setting is described in detail in each resource section of Chapter Three of this document, and represents the most recent, reliable, and representative data to describe current regional conditions. The criteria for determining significance are included in each resource section in Chapter Three of this document.

Comparison with the No Project

It is important to emphasize the urbanization in the SCAG region will increase substantially by 2035, with or without implementation of the 2008 RTP, and the CEQA required environmental baseline of current conditions means that the impact assessment for many of the resource categories is cumulative in nature. Therefore, the analysis for each resource category also includes a direct comparison between the expected future conditions with the Plan and the

expected future conditions if no Plan were adopted. This evaluation is not included in the determination of significant of impacts; however, it provides a meaningful perspective on the effects of implementing the 2008 RTP. A direct comparison between the Plans and the No Project Alternative (described below) is included in each resource section of Chapter Three of this document.

Proposed Plan and Alternatives to the RTP

This PEIR evaluates a reasonable range of alternatives to the 2008 RTP, each at an equal level of detail. The alternatives evaluated include:

The **Proposed 2008 Plan** is a blueprint to help achieve a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system. The Plan contains transportation and urban form strategies that encourage compact growth, increased jobs/housing balance and centers-based development, where feasible, in all parts of the region. The proposed Plan is fully described in the Project Description (Chapter Two).

The **No Project Alternative** includes only those transportation projects that were programmed and/or received federal environmental clearance by December 2006, and projects in the first year of the 2006 TIP and projects under right-of-way acquisition or under construction. These reasonably foreseeable projects fulfill the definition of the mandated CEQA No Project Alternative (CEQA Guidelines § 15126.6(e)).

The **2004 Modified RTP** Alternative is an update of the adopted 2004 RTP to reflect the most recent growth estimates and transportation planning decisions and assumptions. This alternative does not include all the urban form strategies included within SCAG's Compass Blueprint to the extent included within the Plan.

The **Envision** Alternative builds on the enhanced density and ideas of the SCAG Compass Blueprint and described in the Plan and goes further. It includes far more aggressive densities than the proposed plan and limits the single family housing that would be built in the region.

Each alternative maintains a constant total for population, households and jobs for the region in 2035. The year 2035 growth projections for each alternative differ only in the distribution of people, households and jobs such that some counties have higher totals for a given alternative while other counties will have lower totals. The alternatives differ in terms of the distribution because the different transportation investments and urban form strategies would be expected to support different regional distributions of population, households and employment.

Growth Scenarios

The RTP includes growth polices from the Compass Blueprint that encourage a more compact landform, with growth focused at transit nodes, centers and in areas to balance out the ratio of jobs to housing. This growth pattern results in substantially less consumption of vacant, open

space/recreation and agricultural land compared to the No Project (referred to as Baseline growth forecast in the Plan) -- 200,000 acres compared to up to 655,000 acres under the Plan. This EIR analyzes in detail the impacts of the Plan growth forecast as well as the No Project growth forecast. If 2008 RTP projects were combined with the No Project growth forecast, impacts would fall within the range of impacts analyzed in this document, or in the case of some of the modeled parameters (traffic, noise, air quality) within the error margins (estimated to be anywhere between 5 percent and 15 percent) of the analytical tools (GIS and computer models) used to prepare the analyses contained herein.

HSRT Orangeline

On December 6, 2007, SCAG's Regional Council voted in favor of including the HSRT Orangeline (from Irvine to Palmdale) in the 2008 RTP. While the Orangeline route has been analyzed in a qualitative manner; it was not included in the detailed GIS mapping and quantitative modeling for the 2008 RTP. Due to the size of the region and the complex nature of the analysis completed for the PEIR, the addition of this one component to the 2008 RTP does not make a sufficient difference such that it would change any of the conclusions presented herein. In general, the addition of this component to the 2008 RTP is within the error margin of the regional-scale modeling techniques and data presentation.

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measures proposed in this PEIR can be incorporated as policies in the Final 2008 RTP and will help ensure that feasible mitigation measures are implemented at the project level. The implementing agencies and local Lead Agencies shall be responsible for ensuring adherence to the mitigation measures as RTP projects are considered for approval over time. Lead agencies shall provide SCAG with documentation of compliance with mitigation measures through SCAG's monitoring efforts, including SCAG's Intergovernmental Review (IGR) process.

Public Participation Process

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), SCAG is required to adopt and implement a Public Participation Plan to provide reasonable opportunities for interested parties to comment and be involved in the metropolitan transportation planning process. SCAG's Public Participation Plan, as amended in October 2007, addresses new requirements of the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU) (August 10, 2005). Further, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and associated regulations and policies, including President Clinton's 1994 Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice, seek to assure that minority and low-income populations are involved in the planning process.

To fulfill these expectations, SCAG has used a combination of methods to stimulate public involvement. For the development of the 2008 RTP, the following public outreach methods were used:

- Presentations on the 2008 RTP to established organizations throughout the region
- Public workshops on the 2008 RTP throughout the region
- Posting of all public outreach events via an outreach calendar on SCAG's website
- Development of written and visual material to communicate the status and content of the 2008 RTP, including fact sheets and presentations
- A public comment form used throughout the outreach program (in person, at public meetings and online)
- SCAG's website, featuring a section dedicated to the 2008 RTP, including public meeting notices and the latest written information on the plan
- Outreach to media including newspapers editorial boards, local television and radio stations and ethnic media
- Selected radio and television appearances by elected officials and senior SCAG staff.

In addition to these targeted outreach efforts, all regular and special meeting of the RTP task forces, the Transportation and Communications Committee, the Energy and Environment Committee, the Community and Human Development Committee and the SCAG Regional Council are publicly noticed and opportunities for public comment are provided. Specific public comments on the RTP are being recorded and considered by SCAG in the development of the 2008 RTP.

In preparing the 2008 RTP, numerous task force committees (e.g. Goods Movement, Transit, etc.) worked for more than three years to identify and refine components of the Plan. Each assigned task force, comprised of elected officials and regional stakeholders, held numerous meetings focused on development of specific transportation modes, urban form strategies and environmental mitigation.

Environmental Review Process

The PEIR for the RTP was originally conceived as a joint PEIR for both the RTP and the RCP. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines § 15082, the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the 2008 RTP and RCP PEIR was released on June 27, 2007 and was received and circulated by the State Clearinghouse (SCH) on June 28, 2007. In response to NOP comments and a desire to encourage additional participation in the PEIR process, SCAG convened two PEIR scoping meetings that also included RTP and RCP workshops. These workshops were held on July 24 in Riverside and July 25 in Los Angeles. A copy of the original NOP is included in the Technical Appendix, along with transcripts from the scoping meetings. Written comments received on the NOP are also included in the Technical Appendix.

As a result of discussion and debate by SCAG's Regional Council, the project was rescoped to include only the RTP. A NOP was recirculated on November 7, 2007 describing this change in scope. The recirculated NOP and comments received in response to the second NOP are also

included in the Technical Appendix. Where appropriate and feasible, SCAG incorporated comments received into the scope and methodology of the environmental analysis of this document. Continuing participation from interested agencies and individuals is encouraged throughout the PEIR process.

Organization of the PEIR

This document is organized into eight chapters plus an Executive Summary. The Executive Summary contains a review of the expected environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed 2008 RTP and the measures recommended to mitigate those impacts. The summary also includes a comparison of the expected environmental effects of each RTP alternative.

Chapter 1: Introduction. This chapter is comprised of this introduction and the PEIR analytical approach. It describes the purpose, scope and methodology of the PEIR, the Environmental Review Process, and an overview of the contents of the PEIR.

Chapter 2: Project Description. In this chapter the background and location of the RTP is given, including a review of state and federal legislation that guides the process of developing an RTP. A discussion of the purpose and need for the 2008 RTP is presented with the projected growth in the region. An overview of the major components of the 2008 RTP is also presented.

Chapter 3: Environmental Settings, Impacts and Mitigation Measures. This chapter identifies the setting for the 2008 RTP and provides a detailed analysis of the 2008 RTP for the region. It examines the environmental impacts of the 2008 RTP on the following resource categories: Aesthetics and Views, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Energy, Geology, Soils and Seismicity, Hazardous Materials, Land Use, Noise, Open Space, Population, Housing and Employment, Public Services and Utilities, Security, Transportation and Water Resources. For each of these environmental areas the analysis addresses the Environmental Setting, Regulatory Setting, Methodology, Significance Criteria, and Impacts and Mitigation.

Chapter 4: Comparison of Alternatives. In this chapter the RTP Alternatives are evaluated and compared to the 2008 RTP for each resource described above.

Chapter 5: Long Term Effects. This chapter identifies the significant unavoidable environmental changes, significant irreversible impacts, growth inducing impacts and cumulative impacts of the 2008 RTP.

Chapter 6: Report Authors, Organizations and Persons Consulted. This chapter lists the contributors to the preparation of this PEIR.

Chapter 7: Glossary. This chapter includes the acronyms used in the document.

Chapter 8: Map Chapter. This chapter includes all of the maps referenced throughout the PEIR.

Technical Appendices. The appendices include: the Notice of Preparations, Responses to Notices of Preparation, Air Quality Appendix including the Screening-level Health Risk Assessment (HRA), Attorney General Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Mitigation, and Greenhouse Gas calculations, Biological Resource Tables – including the California Department of Fish and Game Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), Cultural Resources tables including Sites in the SCAG Region Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, national Historic landmarks and California Points of Historic Interest, and a Water Resources appendix with a water balance summary.

