

May 28, 2004

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION (NOP) of a
DRAFT PROGRAM
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
for the
2005 Monterey Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan,
2005 Monterey County Regional Transportation Plan,
and
2005 Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan**

The Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) is the federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties. The Monterey Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is the metropolitan long-range transportation plan for Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz counties. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) and the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) are the state-designated Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) for Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, respectively. The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), prepared by each RTPA, is the respective county-level long-range transportation plan.

In partnership with SCCRTC and TAMC, AMBAG will be the lead agency for the preparation of one Environmental Impact Report (EIR) covering the three, aforementioned 2005 plans. AMBAG, SCCRTC and TAMC are collectively responsible agencies under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). AMBAG, SCCRTC and TAMC hereby request your comments on the scope and content of the environmental information and assessment proposed in connection with the project, as described in the attached summary. As the three agencies have already agreed to prepare an EIR, an Initial Study is not attached.

EIR scoping meetings will be held June 22 and 24 in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, respectively. Your response to this Notice of Preparation is requested at the earliest possible date but no later than 30 days after the receipt of this notice, or Tuesday, July 6, 2004. Please send your written response to Kathy Urlie at the address above or deliver your comments to AMBAG between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday. Please include the contact person in your agency regarding this EIR.

Signature: _____

Kathy Urlie, Principal Planner

Date: _____

2005
Monterey Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan,
Monterey County Regional Transportation Plan,
and
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan

The proposed actions are updates to the: a) federally-required Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) covering the counties of Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz; b) the state-required Monterey County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP); and c) the state-required Santa Cruz County RTP. These updates will be conducted in consultation with the following partner agencies:

- < Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG – Federal Metropolitan Planning Organization)
- < California Air Resources Board (CARB)
- < Caltrans, District 5
- < Council of San Benito County Governments (SBtCOG – State RTPA)
- < Environmental Protection Agency, Region IX (EPA)
- < Federal Highway Administration, California Division (FHWA)
- < Federal Transit Administration, Region IX (FTA)
- < Local Jurisdictions
- < Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD)
- < Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST)
- < Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC – State RTPA)
- < Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (SCMTD)
- < Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC – State RTPA)

The federally-required Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is a planning document that establishes the general goals, policies and strategies governing the conduct of a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive transportation program in effect for the three counties. In general, the MTP is a multimodal, financially constrained metropolitan transportation plan outlining the Monterey Bay region transportation direction for at least a twenty year-period. The purpose of the plan is to coordinate and facilitate the programming and budgeting of all transportation facilities and services within the three-county Monterey Bay region in accordance with Federal regulations. The MTP, upon adoption by the AMBAG Board of Directors, will become the basis for the Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP), the transportation projects financial programming document, for the three-county region.

The transportation projects enfolded into the MTP constrained and unconstrained elements are solicited, prioritized and selected by the Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) for their county-level, state-required RTPs. AMBAG receives the project lists from them and develops the MTP based on this collective list of constrained and unconstrained projects. For this environmental review, AMBAG and the Monterey and Santa Cruz County RTPAs (TAMC and SCCRTC, respectively) have elected to conduct one environmental document to cover their

three long-range transportation plans.

The MTP and RTPs do not provide project designs or a construction schedule, and adoption of the MTP and RTPs does not represent an approval action for any of the individual transportation programs and projects listed in the financially constrained Action Element. Detailed site-specific alignment, location, design and scheduling of the improvement projects which are identified in the MTP and RTPs are not fixed by the MTP and RTPs, and these individual projects may be modified substantially from their initial description in the MTP and RTPs at the time at which they are implemented. The last environmental reviews for the MTP and RTPs were conducted as “program” ones.

As both SCCRTC and TAMC conducted substantive updates to their RTPs in 2001 and 2002, respectively, both agencies have indicated that their 2005 updates will be minor ones. We are experiencing delay in the timeframe of the implementation of various transportation projects in the region as originally projected in the 2001 and 2002 RTPs due to the State of California’s unparalleled budget crisis. Consequently, much of the transportation revenue projected within the region has been either suspended or is no longer available in the earlier years of the former plans, making a shift to outlying years inevitable.

Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties are also considering the submittal of local transportation sales tax measures to their constituents at the November 2004 Presidential and General Elections. The measures are accompanied by an Expenditure Plan for the use of the revenue for specific projects if the measures are passed. Both Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties are currently undergoing, consistent with their Legal Counsels’ opinions, environmental review specific to each of their Expenditure Plan project lists. The Expenditure Plans’ projects become a subset of projects within each RTP and the MTP.

Although this project will include the assumption of passage of each County’s sales tax measure and the resultant Expenditure Plan projects into the financially constrained Action Element of each respective RTP and the 2005 MTP itself, this project is more broad in scope than the Expenditure Plans as it includes all potential transportation projects, both funded and unfunded, in its universe of projects for Monterey, San Benito and Santa Cruz Counties through 2030.

AMBAG, SCCRTC and TAMC staff are projecting the need for a minimum four EIR alternatives (not in priority order): 1) no-build (no new projects); 2) financially constrained, including projects funded with sales tax measures funds; 3) financially constrained, not including sales tax measures funds; and 4) financially unconstrained (all projects, including those without an identified source of funding). The Recommended Plan (to be evaluated as the Project in the EIR) will be financially constrained to include projects funded with sales tax measures funds. The plan life is through the year 2030.

The 2002 MTP SEIR identified the following fifteen potential impacts, associated with the construction of several of the proposed transportation system improvement projects, which would not, or may not, be mitigated to a less than significant level:

- < Substantial adverse effects on scenic vistas;
- < Substantial damage to scenic resources;

- < Substantial degradation of visual character;
- < Conversion of prime farmland, unique farmland and farmland of statewide importance;
- < Potential conflicts with Williamson Act Contracts;
- < Fragmentation of agricultural lands and changes in land uses adjacent to agricultural lands;
- < Modification of habitat;
- < Modification of riparian areas/wetlands;
- < Interference with wildlife movement;
- < Conflicts with protective ordinances and policies;
- < Increased impervious surface/storm water runoff;
- < Increased noise related to increased traffic volumes;
- < Increased noise levels along rail corridors;
- < Indirect growth inducement; and
- < Deterioration in traffic operations (due to the potential for increased localized congestion for several projects)

AMBAG refers the reviewer to the following documents as background for this proposed EIR if additional background information is required:

- < *2002 Monterey Bay Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update*, May 8, 2002
- < *Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the Monterey Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update*, March 6, 2002
- < *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (Responses to Comments) for the Monterey Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update*, May 8, 2002
- < *2001 Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Plan*, December 2001
- < *Draft Environmental Impact Report for the 2001 Regional Transportation Plan* (Santa Cruz County), June 2001
- < *Final Environmental Impact Report for the Santa Cruz County 2001 Regional Transportation Plan*, October 2001
- < *2002 Monterey County Regional Transportation Plan*, February 27, 2002
- < *Draft Program EIR Draft 2002 Regional Transportation Plan* (Monterey County), November 2001.
- < *Final Program Environmental Impact Report Draft 2002 Regional Transportation Plan* (Monterey County), February 8, 2002
- < *San Benito County Regional Transportation Plan*, March 7, 2002
- < *Draft Environmental Impact Report for the San Benito County 2001 Regional Transportation Plan*, December 2001
- < *Final EIR for the San Benito County 2001 Regional Transportation Plan*, March 7, 2002

These aforementioned documents are available at the following respective agency offices:

AMBAG (for MTP and SEIR and others): 445 Reservation Road, Suite G, Marina 831/883-3750
 SBtCOG (for San Benito County RTP and EIR): 3216 Southside Road, Hollister 831/637-7665
 SCCRTC (for Santa Cruz County RTP and EIR): 1523 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz 831/460-3200
 TAMC (for Monterey County RTP and EIR): 55-B Plaza Circle, Salinas 831/775-0903