
OVERVIEW

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The three plans do not provide project designs or a construction schedule, and adoption of the three plans does not represent an approval action for any of the individual transportation programs and projects listed in the financially constrained Action Elements. While the adoption of the three plans is an essential first step in qualifying for the receipt of the funding necessary to permit the implementation of the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans, this action, in itself, would not be sufficient to enable any of these programs or projects to proceed without additional actions on the part of the appropriate agencies responsible for the actual implementation of each individual program and project. The Program EIR is intended to focus on those probable regional environmental effects associated with the implementation of the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans that can be identified now, while deferring analysis of those site-specific impacts which cannot be predicted prior to the preparation of detailed design and/or construction plans for the individual transportation system improvement projects which are identified in the three plans. Upon submittal of formal plans for the individual transportation system improvement projects which are identified in the three plans, the Lead Agency for each proposed project would need to determine whether or not the particular construction project would require additional project-level environmental review to define in detail how the impacts of that project might differ from those identified as resulting from the implementation of the three plans, as described in the Program EIR.

Because the act of adopting the three plans would not, in itself, result in the implementation of any transportation system improvement programs or projects identified in that document, no environmental impacts would be directly associated with this action. Although adoption of the three plans would not, in and of itself, result in any significant unavoidable adverse environmental impacts, full implementation of the three plans would result in the completion of a number of transportation system improvement projects, some of which would be built in areas where transportation facilities do not currently exist. The significance of potential environmental impacts which may be associated with each of the projects listed in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans will need to be evaluated on a project-level, site-specific basis by the appropriate agency responsible for the actual implementation of each individual project as it is proposed.

5.2 SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

Some of the projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans may be expected to entail one or more of the following potentially significant environmental impacts which may prove to be unavoidable:

IMPACT 3.1.1: Substantial Adverse Effects on Scenic Vistas

IMPACT 3.1.2: Substantial Damage to Scenic Resources

IMPACT 3.1.3: Substantial Degradation of Visual Character

IMPACT 3.2.1: Conversion of Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance

IMPACT 3.2.3: Potential Conflicts with Williamson Act Contracts

IMPACT 3.2.4: Fragmentation of Agricultural Lands and Changes in Land Uses Adjacent to Agricultural Lands

IMPACT 3.3.3: Toxic Air Contaminant Emissions

IMPACT 3.3.4: Increased Exposure to Diesel Exhaust Fumes

IMPACT 3.4.1: Modification of Habitat

IMPACT 3.4.2: Modification of Riparian Areas/Wetlands

IMPACT 3.4.3: Interference with Wildlife Movement

IMPACT 3.4.4: Conflicts with Protective Ordinances and Policies

IMPACT 3.8.3: Increased Impervious Surface/Storm Water Runoff

IMPACT 3.9.2: Conflict with Land Use Plans/Policies/Regulations

IMPACT 3.11.1: Increased Noise Related to Increased Traffic Volumes

IMPACT 3.11.2: Increased Noise Levels Along Rail Corridors

IMPACT 3.12.1: Indirect Growth Inducement

IMPACT 3.15.1: Deterioration in Traffic Operations

IMPACT 3.15.2: Temporary Increase in Traffic Congestion during Construction

5.3 IMPACTS DETERMINED TO BE LESS THAN SIGNIFICANT

The act of adopting the three plans would not, in and of itself, entail any significant environmental impacts, since this action alone would not be sufficient to enable any of the individual transportation system improvement programs or projects listed in the financially constrained Action Elements to proceed. However, the program-level evaluation of potential impacts which may be associated with implementation of the programs and projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans indicates that these programs and projects would not be expected to:

- Conflict with or obstruct the implementation of the Air Quality Management Plan.
- Result in any exposure of sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations.
- Create any objectionable odors affecting a substantial number of people.
- Result in the destruction of any unique paleontological resource.
- Result in the destruction of any unique geological feature.
- Result in any development in areas where soils are incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater.
- Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transportation, use or disposal of hazardous materials.
- Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment.
- Result in hazardous emissions within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school.
- Result in development in an area which has been identified as a native wildlife nursery.
- Result in the handling of hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school.
- Result in development located in an area covered by an airport land use plan (or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport), if it would result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the project area.
- Result in development within the vicinity of a private airstrip, if it would result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the project area.
- Impair or physically interfere with the implementation of an adopted emergency response plan. Impair or physically interfere with the implementation of an adopted emergency evacuation plan.

- Expose people or structures to significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires (including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands).
- Place housing within a 100-year flood hazard area as mapped on the federal Flood Hazard Boundary or Flood Insurance Rate Map or other flood hazard delineation map.
- Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state.
- Result in the loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan.
- Result in development located in an area covered by an airport land use plan (or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport), which would result in exposure of people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels.
- Result in development within the vicinity of a private airstrip, which would result in exposure of people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels.
- Result in an increase in the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facilities would occur or be accelerated.
- Change air traffic patterns, resulting in substantial safety risks.
- Conflict with adopted policies, plans or programs supporting alternative transportation.
- Exceed wastewater treatment requirements of the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board.
- Result in the construction of new water or wastewater treatment facilities (or the expansion of existing facilities) which could cause significant environmental effects.
- Require new or expanded entitlements to water supply resources.
- Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves (or may serve) the project sites that it would not have adequate capacity to serve the projects' anticipated demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments.
- Result in development which could not be served by a landfill with sufficient permitted capacity to accommodate the project's solid waste disposal needs.
- Fail to comply with federal, state, and local statutes and regulations related to solid waste.

5.4 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE MODIFICATIONS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Adoption of the three plans would not, in and of itself, result in any irreversible environmental changes. However, full implementation of the three plans would result in the completion of a number of transportation system improvement projects, some of which would be built in areas where transportation facilities do not currently exist. The significance of the potential environmental impacts which may be associated with each of the projects listed in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans will need to be evaluated on a project-level, site-specific basis by the implementing agency for each individual project as it is proposed. However, the completion of some of the proposed transportation system improvement projects could result in irreversible environmental changes, including:

- The permanent modification of scenic vistas, scenic resources and the existing visual character of certain areas within the region.
- The permanent conversion of land currently in agricultural use to non-agricultural, transportation-related uses.
- The permanent modification of habitats, riparian areas and/or wetlands and wildlife migration routes.
- The disturbance of cultural resources.
- The permanent modification of existing drainage patterns.

Any and all of these effects could be considered irreversible adverse impacts associated with such projects, to the extent to which they would be unable to be mitigated.

Construction and operation of the transportation system improvement project identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans would irreversibly commit construction materials and non-renewable energy resources to the purposes of the projects. These energy resources would be used for construction, the heating and cooling of buildings, the transportation of people and goods, as well as lighting and other associated energy uses. Non-renewable and slowly renewable resources used by transportation system improvement project would include (but are not limited to) lumber and other forest products, sand and gravel, asphalt, petrochemical construction materials, steel, copper, lead and other metals, water, etc. A marginal increase in the commitment of facility maintenance services would also be required. Primary project impacts related to the consumption of non-renewable and slowly renewable resources are considered less than significant, because implementation of transportation system improvement projects would not be expected to require unusually high levels of energy or unusually large quantities of construction materials.

5.5 GROWTH INDUCING IMPACTS

A relatively high level of residential and non-residential development is anticipated within the region through the year 2030. Much of the anticipated growth is likely to occur regardless of the extent to which the three plans are implemented. Implementation of the programs and projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans is intended to provide a regional transportation system which can accommodate the projected level of travel more effectively than would be possible through the maintenance of the existing transportation system. While individual transportation system improvement projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans might, if completed, exert some influence on the location of projected residential and non-residential development within the region, adoption of the three plans, in itself, would not be expected to alter the projected magnitude of regional residential and non-residential growth.

Although the implementation of the three plans will not directly generate population (since these plans do not involve the construction of residential units), it does have the potential to facilitate population growth. Transportation system improvement projects identified in the three plans are expected to respond to growth anticipated by adopted local General Plans, but some of them may indirectly increase growth pressure by increasing transportation system capacity. Some projects identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans could also remove obstacles to growth if they were to provide the capacity to accommodate growth beyond that already planned for (in local General Plans or the Fort Ord Reuse Plan), if they were to be constructed before they are actually needed, or if they were to significantly improve vehicular access in areas where development is not currently anticipated.

5.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Although the adoption of the three plans, in and of itself, would result in no direct cumulative impacts, the implementation of the transportation system improvement projects listed in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans would contribute to:

- A cumulative reduction in the total area within the region that currently provides visual features associated with rural land uses;
- A cumulative reduction in the regional acreage in active agricultural uses;
- A cumulative reduction in the total area within the region that may currently provide wildlife habitat;
- A cumulative increase in the amount of paved surface area within the region;
- A cumulative increase in traffic-related or rail-related noise in the vicinity of some existing or proposed transportation facilities; and

- A cumulative increase in traffic congestion along some roadway segments or at some intersections within the region due to implementation of some projects which may lead to localized concentrations of additional traffic (i.e., rail stations, park and ride lots, etc.).

As indicated above, some of the transportation system improvement project identified in the financially constrained Action Elements of the three plans may indirectly contribute to a cumulative increase in growth pressure within the region by increasing transportation system capacity, or by removing existing growth constraints (particularly in areas where future development may currently be constrained by traffic congestion).

5.7 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Executive Order 12898 (Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low Income Populations) directs all federal agencies to identify and address the effects of all programs, policies and activities on minority and low-income populations. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) requires that all federally-funded transportation planning and actions involve an assessment of environmental justice issues that considers potential adverse effects on minority and low-income populations. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), AMBAG (as the Monterey Bay region's Metropolitan Planning Organization) and TAMC and SCCRTC (as the State-designated Regional Transportation Planning Agencies) are required to comply with this Federal Executive Order.

The FHWA environmental justice policy has three major elements:

- To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionate high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects on minority populations, and low-income populations;
- To ensure full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and;
- To prevent the denial of reduction in, or significant delay in, the receipt of benefits by minority populations and low-income groups.

As part of the transportation planning process, planners must: determine the benefits to, and potential negative impacts on, minority populations and low-income populations from proposed investment or actions; quantify the expected effects (total, positive, and negative); and determine the appropriate course of action, whether avoidance, minimization, or mitigation.

Under Executive Order 12898, minority populations include Hispanics (persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race), Blacks (persons having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa), Asian Americans (persons having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, and the Indian

Subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands, and American Indians (persons having origins in any of the original people of North America and who maintain cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.

Low-income populations are defined in Executive Order 12898 as those households earning a combined income at or below the current U.S. department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines.

Through public noticing, the staff and boards of AMBAG, SBtCOG, TAMC and SCCRTC have attempted to make contact with all residents of the three counties in their outreach and planning efforts.

Transportation system improvement projects identified in the three plans are located in most of the settled areas of Monterey County, San Benito County and Santa Cruz County, most frequently in areas where transportation infrastructure already exists. Adoption of each of these three plans, in itself, would not result in disproportionately high adverse health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations, as this action would not result in any direct physical changes in the environment. For this reason, these three plans are considered to be consistent with the objectives of Executive Order 12898 (Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority and Low Income Populations). However, some individual transportation system improvement projects identified in the transportation plans could have adverse effects on these populations, depending on the demographic characteristics of the area surrounding the proposed improvements at the time they are formally brought forward for environmental review. Potentially disproportionate adverse effects on minority or low-income populations would need to be evaluated on the project-by-project basis as appropriate during the environmental review process for each of the individual transportation system improvement projects identified in the three transportation plans.