

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) identifies and describes potential environmental impacts associated with implementation of the 2001 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) proposed by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC).

The Project's background, as well as the legal basis for preparing an EIR, are described below. It should be noted that the 2001 RTP will be referred to throughout this document as the "Project" (capitalized), while the individual improvements contemplated under the 2001 RTP are referenced as "projects" (lower case).

1.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND LEGAL AUTHORITY

Section 21000 of the California Government Code, commonly referred to as the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), requires the evaluation of environmental impacts associated with all planning programs or development projects proposed. This EIR has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the *State CEQA Guidelines*. In accordance with Section 15121(a) of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, the purpose of this EIR is to serve as an informational document that:

"...will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project..."

As such, this EIR is an informational document for use by SCCRTC, other agencies, and the general public in their consideration and evaluation of the environmental consequences of implementing of the RTP.

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The 2001 RTP is an update of the previous RTP, adopted by SCCRTC in 1994. A comprehensive program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for the 1994 Monterey Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), which was utilized as the EIR for the 1994 RTP.

The 1994 RTP listed 137 constrained and 217 unconstrained projects to improve the transportation system during the 1993-2013 planning period. Among these were 30 constrained and 21 unconstrained State highway projects. RTP projects also included 45 constrained and 111 unconstrained local street and roadway projects, 21 constrained and 38 unconstrained bikeway projects, two constrained and one unconstrained aviation projects, eight constrained and 12 unconstrained transit projects, and eleven constrained and six unconstrained transportation demand management projects. As discussed in the 2001 RTP, a number of



projects in the 1994 RTP have been completed. Some projects yet to be completed have been incorporated into the 2001 RTP.

In compliance with the *CEQA Guidelines* (Section 15063), SCCRTC, as the Lead Agency responsible for the Regional Transportation Plan, prepared an Initial Study for the Project to determine whether or not the 2001 RTP has the potential to create significant environmental impacts. Preliminary public agency comments on the Project were solicited through distribution of a Notice of Preparation (Appendix A). The Initial Study and comments received in response to the Notice of Preparation determined that the currently proposed RTP could create additional significant environmental impacts and form the basis of the technical focus of this EIR.

1.3 TYPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

This document is a program EIR. Section 15168(a) of the *CEQA Guidelines* states that "a program EIR is an EIR which 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 in a 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." As such, this EIR presents a region-wide assessment of the RTP's potential impacts. Though the EIR identifies some of the possible impacts of individual projects, it does not evaluate site-specific impacts of individual projects. The lead agencies for individual projects identified in this program EIR are required to prepare project level CEQA documents.

Section 15151 of the California Environmental Quality Act provides the following standards related to the adequacy of an Environmental Impact Report:

"An Environmental Impact Report should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among experts. The courts have looked not for perfection; but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure."

1.4 EIR CONTENT AND FORMAT

This document includes discussions of each of the issue areas identified as potentially significant in the Initial Study. The analysis of environmental impacts identifies impacts by category: significant and unavoidable (Class I), significant but mitigable (Class II), adverse but



less than significant (Class III), and beneficial (Class IV). It proposes mitigation measures, where feasible, for identified significant environmental impacts.

The *CEQA Guidelines* also require the analysis of the cumulative effects of a project in combination with other foreseeable development in the area. Section 15130 of the *CEQA Guidelines* prescribes two methods for analyzing cumulative impacts: (1) use of a list of past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects producing related or cumulative impacts; or (2) use of a summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document. However, this document is a Program EIR that analyzes the effects of cumulative buildout of the 2001 RTP, including both the “Within Projected Funds” (constrained) and “Need New Funds” (unconstrained) project lists. In particular, it focuses on the “Within Projected Funds” (constrained) projects in the RTP, which are the actions most likely to be implemented by 2025. The RTP considers the past, present, and future projects described in method 1 above and proposes a range of specific projects designed to meet current and projected future needs. The Project also constitutes the cumulative scenario described in method 2. Therefore, the cumulative effects of all circulation system improvements in the county are included in the analysis of the Project's impacts. The analysis of Project impacts contained in this "first tier" environmental review document may be used as the basis for the cumulative analysis contained in any subsequent environmental documentation for specific projects included in the 2001 RTP.

This EIR has been organized into eight sections. These include:

- 1.0 Introduction – Provides the Statement of Purpose and a discussion of the Project background, type of environmental document, and EIR format and content.
- 2.0 Project Description – Identifies the Project applicant, presents and discusses the Project objectives, Project location and specific Project characteristics.
- 3.0 Environmental Setting – Provides a description of the existing physical setting of the Project area.
- 4.0 Analysis of Environmental Issues – Describes existing conditions found in the Project area and assesses potential environmental impacts that may be generated by implementing the Project and cumulative development in Santa Cruz County. These potential Project impacts are compared to “thresholds of significance” in order to determine the nature and severity of the direct and indirect impacts. Mitigation measures, intended to reduce adverse, significant impacts to less than significant levels, are proposed where feasible. Impacts that cannot be eliminated or mitigated to less than significant levels are also identified.



- 5.0 Growth-Inducing Impacts – Identifies the spatial, economic, or population growth impacts that may result from implementation of the Project.
- 6.0 Alternatives - Presents and assesses the potential environmental impacts of three alternatives analyzed in addition to implementation of the RTP. These additional alternatives are:
- *Alternative 1: Agency Preferred Alternative (implement constrained projects only)*
 - *Alternative 2: Modified Project Alternative (elimination of individual improvements with unavoidable impacts)*
 - *Alternative 3: Programmed Project Alternative (only currently funded improvements)*
 - *Alternative 4: No Project Alternative (no new transportation system improvements)*
- 7.0 References/Preparers - Lists all published materials, federal, state, and local agencies, community groups, and other organizations and individuals consulted during the preparation of this EIR. It also lists the EIR preparers.

1.5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REVIEW PROCESS

The environmental impact review process, as required under CEQA, is outlined below. The steps are presented in sequential order.

1. **Notice of Preparation (NOP) Distributed.** Immediately after deciding that an EIR is required, the lead agency must file a NOP soliciting input on the EIR scope to "responsible," "trustee," and involved federal agencies; to the State Clearinghouse, if one or more state agencies is a responsible or trustee agency; and to parties previously requesting notice in writing (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15082; Public Resources Code Section 21092.2). The NOP must be posted in the County Clerk's office for 30 days. A scoping meeting to solicit public input on the issues to be assessed in the EIR is not required, but may be conducted by the lead agency.
2. **Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) Prepared.** The DEIR must contain: a) table of contents or index; b) summary; c) project description; d) environmental setting; e) significant impacts (direct, indirect, cumulative, growth-inducing and unavoidable impacts); f) alternatives; g) mitigation measures; and h) irreversible changes.



3. **Public Notice and Review.** A lead agency must prepare a Public Notice of Availability of an EIR. The Notice must be placed in the County Clerk's office for 30 days (Public Resources Code Section 21092). The lead agency must send a copy of its Notice to anyone requesting it (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15087). Additionally, public notice of DEIR availability must be given through at least one of the following procedures: a) publication in a newspaper of general circulation; b) posting on and off the project site; and c) direct mailing to owners and occupants of contiguous properties. The lead agency must consult with and request comments on the DEIR from responsible and trustee agencies, and adjacent cities and counties (Public Resources Code Sections 21104 and 21253). The minimum public review period for a DEIR is 30 days. When a DEIR is sent to the State Clearinghouse for review, the public review period must be 45 days unless a shorter period is approved by the Clearinghouse (Public Resources Code 21091). Distribution of the DEIR may be required through the State Clearinghouse (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15305).
4. **Notice of Completion.** A lead agency must file a Notice of Completion with the State Clearinghouse as soon as it completes a DEIR.
5. **Final EIR (FEIR).** A FEIR must include: a) the DEIR; b) copies of comments received during public review; c) list of persons and entities commenting; and d) responses to comments.
6. **Certification of FEIR.** The lead agency shall certify: a) the FEIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA; b) the FEIR was presented to the decision-making body of the lead agency; and c) the decision-making body reviewed and considered the information in the FEIR prior to approving a project (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15090).
7. **Lead Agency Project Decision.** A lead agency may: a) disapprove a project because of its significant environmental effects; b) require changes to a project to reduce or avoid significant environmental effects; or c) approve a project despite its significant environmental effects, if the proper findings and statement of overriding considerations are adopted (*CEQA Guidelines* Sections 15042 and 15043).
8. **Findings/Statement of Overriding Considerations.** For each significant impact of the project identified in the EIR, the lead or responsible agency must find, based on substantial evidence, that either: a) the project has been changed to avoid or substantially reduce the magnitude of the impact; b) changes to the project are within another agency's jurisdiction and such changes have or should be adopted;



or c) specific economic, social, or other considerations make the mitigation measures or project alternatives infeasible (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15091). If an agency approves a project with unavoidable significant environmental effects, it must prepare a written Statement of Overriding Considerations that set forth the specific social, economic or other reasons supporting the agency's decision.

9. **Mitigation Monitoring/Reporting Program.** When an agency makes findings on significant effects identified in the EIR, it must adopt a reporting or monitoring program for mitigation measures that were adopted or made conditions of project approval to mitigate significant effects.
10. **Notice of Determination.** An agency must file a Notice of Determination after deciding to approve a project for which an EIR is prepared (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15094). A local agency must file the Notice with the County Clerk. The Notice must be posted for 30 days and sent to anyone previously requesting notice. Posting of the Notice starts a 30-day statute of limitations on CEQA challenges (Public Resources Code Section 21167[c]).

In accordance with CEQA, a good faith effort has been made during the preparation of this EIR to contact affected agencies, organizations and persons who may have an interest in this Project. This included the circulation of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) in compliance with the State CEQA Guidelines § 15082. The public review period began on December 8, 2000 and ended January 19, 2001. In addition, a public scoping meeting was held on January 4, 2001 at the SCCRTC offices. The NOP and comments received from public agencies and interested parties on the NOP are contained in Appendix A.

Representatives from various agencies, including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD), City of Scotts Valley, Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), Native American Heritage Commission, and California Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) have communicated in writing regarding the Project. Comments received from these agencies have been addressed in this EIR.

This Draft EIR has been distributed to Responsible Agencies, other affected agencies, and interested parties. The Notice of Availability of the Draft EIR has been distributed as required by CEQA, including publication in the newspaper. The notice of availability commences a minimum 45-day public review period. During the 45-day public review period, the Draft EIR, including appendices, is available for review at the SCCRTC, (1523 Pacific Avenue, Santa Cruz, California, 95060), online at www.sccrtc.org, and at most local libraries.



Comments may be made on the Draft EIR in writing on or before August 6, 2001, the end of the comment period. Comments may also be made verbally at public hearings (to be held on July 16, 2001 and August 2, 2001 and following preparation of the Final EIR). Following the close of the comment period, responses to comments on the Draft EIR will be prepared and published as a separate document. The Final EIR text and technical appendices, together with the Draft EIR comments and written responses to comments will constitute the Final EIR. Written comments on the Draft EIR should be sent to:

Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, California 95060
Contact: Rachel Moriconi, Transportation Planner

