

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

Introduction. This section contains a discussion of the possible environmental effects of the RTP Project for the specific issue areas that were identified through the Initial Study process as having the potential to experience significant impacts.

“Significant effect” is defined by the *State CEQA Guidelines* §15382 as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment, but may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant.”

The assessment of each issue area begins with an italicized introduction that summarizes the environmental effects considered for that issue area. This is followed by the setting and impact analysis. Within the impact analysis, the first subsection identifies the methodologies used and the “significance thresholds”, which are those criteria adopted by the SCCRTC, other agencies, universally recognized, or developed specifically for this analysis to determine whether potential effects are significant. The next subsection describes each impact of the project, mitigation measures for significant impacts, and the level of significance after mitigation. Each effect under consideration for an issue area is separately listed in bold text, with the discussion of the effect and its significance following. Each bolded impact listing also contains a statement of the significance determination for the environmental impact as follows:

Class I. Significant and Unavoidable: An impact that cannot be reduced to below the threshold level given reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires a Statement of Overriding Considerations to be issued if the project is approved per §15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Class II. Significant but Mitigable: An impact that can be reduced to below the threshold level given reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires findings to be made under §15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines.

Class III. Not Significant: An impact that may be adverse, but does not exceed the threshold levels and does not require mitigation measures. However, mitigation measures that could further lessen the environmental effect may be suggested if readily available and easily achievable.

Class IV. Beneficial: An effect that would reduce existing environmental problems or hazards.



Following each environmental effect discussion is a listing of recommended mitigation measures (if required) and the residual effects or level of significance remaining after the implementation of the measures. In those cases where the mitigation measure for an impact could have a significant environmental impact in another issue area, this impact is discussed as a residual effect. The impact analysis concludes with a listing of specific RTP projects that could contribute to one or more the general impacts described.

The State *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 State *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. 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 will form the basis for the cumulative analysis contained in any subsequent environmental documentation for specific projects proposed under the 2001 RTP.

Although the RTC has prioritized the "constrained" projects, under CEQA the "proposed project" as defined in this EIR must examine the entirety of the contemplated actions under the RTP. For that reason, it examines both the constrained and unconstrained projects in the analysis. However, it should be noted that several of the unconstrained projects, which represent lower priority projects that are less likely to be implemented, were placed on the unconstrained list due to environmental constraints. Please refer to Alternative 1 in Section 6.0 of this EIR for an examination of the constrained projects only.

The State *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15145 notes that "If, after thorough investigation, a Lead Agency finds that a particular impact is too speculative for evaluation, the agency should note its conclusion and terminate discussion of the impact." Several of the "projects" contained in the RTP do not propose a specific development project on a specific site, but rather identify the need for future undefined projects or further studies for projects, for which a site or sites have not been specified. For example, project RTC-P14, Park and Ride Lot Development, which would identify, purchase land and construct park and ride lots for commuters throughout the county, does not specify proposed development sites for park and ride lots in the county. An evaluation of the site-specific impacts of such projects would be speculative, as neither the existing nor the post-project conditions of the sites can be assessed.

Effects Found Not to Be Significant. Pursuant to Section 15128 of the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR "shall contain a statement briefly indicating the reasons that various



possible significant effects of a project were determined not to be significant and were therefore not discussed in detail in the EIR.” The Project would not cause or otherwise result in significant environmental effects in the resource areas discussed below. As indicated in the State CEQA Guidelines, no further environmental review of these issues is necessary for the reasons summarized in the following discussion.

Air Quality

- ❖ *Could the project expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?:* Some RTP projects (e.g., rail stations, ferry stations, etc.) could result in localized traffic concentrations. However, while these projects may result in vehicle emissions, pollutant concentrations would be experienced on a dispersed, regional basis, and would therefore not be considered substantial at sensitive receptors in the area. The RTP would not involve projects that would result in stationary sources of toxic air contaminants or other substantial pollutant concentrations. The RTP projects would be expected to improve traffic flow in the county. Implementation of the 2001 RTP would reduce vehicle emissions as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented. Less than significant impacts would result.
- ❖ *Could the project create objectionable odors affecting a substantial number of people?:* RTP projects that involve roadway expansions or realignments could result in the transfer of vehicle emissions and/or could result in emissions sources being located closer to receptors. In addition, some RTP projects (e.g., rail stations, ferry stations, etc.) could result in localized traffic concentrations. However, these projects would not be expected to result in substantial odor emissions or affect a substantial number of people when compared to existing conditions. Implementation of the 2001 RTP would reduce vehicle emissions as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented. In addition, the RTP projects would not result in stationary sources of odors. Therefore, less than significant impacts related to odor would result.
- ❖ *Could the project result in changes in air movement or temperature?:* Air movements and temperature are influenced by several meteorological phenomena. Additional buildings and pavement contemplated in the RTP could marginally contribute to a change in air movement and temperature. However, since the RTP projects would be spread throughout the county, and would not involve stationary emissions, implementation of the projects would not be expected to result in a significant change in air movement and temperature.

Geology and Soils



- ❖ *Could the project result in the loss of a unique geologic feature?:* Four unique geological features are identified in the Santa Cruz County General Plan, all of which are located in the Bonny Doon Planning Area. These features include: Majors Creek Canyon, Martin Road sandhill outcroppings, Wilder Creek limestone caves, and Table Rock. No RTP projects would affect any designated unique geologic feature. The majority of RTP projects are located along within existing roadway right-of-ways, where no such features are known to occur. Therefore, no impacts related to such features would result.

Hydrology and Water Quality

- ❖ *Could the project substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, in a manner which would result in substantial erosion, siltation, or flooding on- or off-site?:* Several RTP projects would require alterations of the existing drainage patterns of the respective project sites. However, RTP roadway projects or other projects that involve substantial grading [i.e., more than five acres of ground disturbance (one acre after March 2003)] would be required to develop a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) prior to the initiation of grading and implement the SWPPP for all construction activity on the project site [refer to Mitigation W-2(c)]. No RTP projects, including bridge projects would substantially alter the course of a stream or river. Therefore, the RTP projects would not result in substantial erosion, siltation, or flooding on- or off-site. Less than significant impacts would result.

Land Use and Agriculture

- ❖ *Could the project physically divide an established community?:* The RTP includes several projects that would widen, realign and/or extend roadways. Road widenings would occur along state highways and along local arterials in the cities of Watsonville, Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, and Capitola, as well as unincorporated portions of the County of Santa Cruz. Road extensions would occur in the cities of Scotts Valley and Capitola, and unincorporated portions of the county of Santa Cruz. These extensions would cross primarily undeveloped agricultural and /or open space areas. Most RTP projects would only affect narrow strips of agricultural land along existing right-of-way, and would therefore not physically divide an established community. Road realignment and extension RTP projects in the City of Scotts Valley, including the El Pueblo Road extensions, Bean Creek Road and Erba Lane/Terrace View/Scotts Valley Drive realignments, and the Granite Creek/ Highway 17, Scotts Valley Drive/Upper Willis Drive, Whispering Pines Drive/Manana Woods Drive, Bethany Drive/Glenwood Drive, Sunridge Drive/Pueblo Road emergency access projects, would result in new or realigned roadways that could traverse



residential areas. However, these roadway projects would represent logical extensions or expansions of existing roadways, and would increase access to community facilities. Therefore, the RTP would not result in projects that would present access barriers or physically divide an established community. Less than significant impacts would result. RTP project impacts that relate to

displacement and/or disruption of existing residences and businesses are described in impact LU-3, in Section 4.2 of this EIR.

Transportation/Traffic

- ❖ *Could the project result in a change in air traffic patterns, including either an increase in traffic levels or a change in location that results in substantial safety risks?:* The RTP includes one airport project that involves aviation improvements at Watsonville Municipal Airport, such as new access, lights, runway extensions, and maintenance. These improvements could slightly increase air traffic levels. However, this slight increase in the volume of air traffic would not be expected to result in substantial safety risks. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Could the project conflict with adopted policies supporting alternative transportation (e.g., bus turnouts, bicycle racks)?:* Implementation of the RTP would result in beneficial impacts related to alternative transportation, since the RTP includes several projects that encourage the use of alternative transportation.

