



CHAPTER FIVE: ENVIRONMENTAL AND AIR QUALITY REVIEW OF THE 2005 RTP

To evaluate the environmental effects of the 2005 RTP, including the complete list of *Within Projected Funds* projects, a separate Environmental Impact Report (EIR) is necessary.



The EIR, prepared by environmental review specialists, complies with the amended California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 and includes an extensive public input process. Recognizing an opportunity to achieve efficiencies, the Commission, the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments and the Transportation Agency for Monterey County decided to merge their program-level environmental analysis for the 2005 RTP, the 2005 *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* (MTP) and the 2005 *Monterey County Regional Transportation Plan* (MC-RTP).

PROGRAM-LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The EIR analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the three plans and alternative transportation investment scenarios. The EIR also identifies potential mitigation measures for impacts of the transportation program as a whole. Since the plans do not provide project designs or a construction schedule, and adoption of any of the plans does not represent an approval action for any of the individual transportation programs and projects, the EIR does not analyze impacts of or mitigation measures for individual projects. Projects will undergo a separate environmental review process, conducted by their agency sponsors, once they actually receive funding and are ready to proceed.

The Program EIR is intended to focus, in general terms, on those probable regional environmental effects associated with the implementation of the financially constrained (*Within Projects Funds*) action element of the 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 that are identified in the project lists.



ALTERNATIVES STUDIED IN THE EIR

In addition to identifying potential environmental effects associated with implementation of the plans on a regional, system-wide basis, the EIR also provides an evaluation of the following three alternatives to implementation of only the *Within Projected Funds (Constrained)* list of projects:

- “Financially Unconstrained” alternative—Implementation of both the *Within Projected Funds* and *Need New Funds* investment programs described in this document.
- “Financially Constrained --No New Revenues” alternative—Implementation of the *Within Projected Funds (Constrained)* projects, but without the addition of new revenues from a new half-cent sales tax in either Santa Cruz or Monterey County.
- A “no-build” alternative—Assumes no new construction on transportation projects, although maintenance of the existing transportation infrastructure and previously programmed projects would continue.

FINDINGS OF THE EIR

The EIR identifies the following potentially significant and unavoidable impacts that may result from implementation of one or more of the projects listed in the *2005 RTP* for Santa Cruz County, the Monterey County RTP, and/or the MTP, which also includes projects from the San Benito County

RTP:

- Adverse Effects on Scenic Vistas
- Damage to Scenic Resources
- Degradation of Visual Character
- Conversion of Farmlands
- Conflicts with Williamson Act Contracts
- Fragmentation of Agricultural Lands and Changes in Land Uses Adjacent to Agricultural Lands
- Toxic Air Contaminant Emissions
- Increased Exposure to Diesel Exhaust Fumes
- Modification of Habitat
- Modification of Riparian Areas/Wetlands
- Interference with Wildlife Movement
- Conflicts with Protective Ordinances and Policies
- Increased Impervious Surface/Storm Water Runoff
- Conflicts with Land Use Plans/Polices/Regulations
- Increased Noise Related to Increased Traffic Volumes
- Increased Noise Levels along Rail Corridors
- Indirect Growth Inducement
- Deterioration in Traffic Operations
- Temporary Increase in Traffic Congestion during Construction

The Commission considered these impacts during review of the *2005 RTP* and EIR and adopted a Statement of Overriding Consideration finding that



the benefits of the 2005 RTP outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects. In several instances, these impacts may not actually be specifically relevant to any of the projects proposed in the 2005 RTP.

Impacts of the 2005 RTP will need to be mitigated through implementation of the Goals and Policies included in Chapter Three and consideration of the identified mitigations during implementation of projects by responsible agencies.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

This plan has been prepared in consideration of California Transportation Commission's RTP Guidelines and Federal Law related to Environmental Justice. Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. **Fair treatment** means that no group of people, including a racial, ethnic, or a socioeconomic group, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences of implementation of projects.

The 2005 RTP accomplishes this by enhancing the public-involvement process, building on strong community-based partnerships, and identifying projects that fit harmoniously within communities without sacrificing safety or mobility. This plan has been devel-

oped to address the transportation needs of the entire community, and attempts to ensure that no one community bears more of the benefits or burdens of transportation investments than any other.

AIR QUALITY CONFORMITY DETERMINATION

In addition to the EIR's evaluation of Program-level air quality impacts of the plans, an air-quality assessment of the 2005 RTP was prepared by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) as part of the development of its *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* for Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito Counties. Together these three counties comprise the regional air basin. AMBAG's *Metropolitan Transportation Plan*, including the Santa Cruz County projects, conforms to the 1994 Federal Maintenance Plan budget for ozone precursors. Several projects in the plans implement the Air District's approved Transportation Control Measures (TCM's) for the region.

Notably, revised air quality conformity standards were proposed in 2004. Santa Cruz County, as part of the larger North Coast Central Air Basin, had been designated as a federal "air-quality maintenance area" for the one-hour ozone standards. In 2005, the one-hour standard will be replaced with eight-hour ozone averaging standards. According to air quality monitoring data collected by the



Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District, the region will be considered in attainment with this new pollutant standard. As such, by June 15, 2005, under currently promulgated U.S. EPA guidance, the region will no longer be beholden to the performance of air quality conformity of its plans and programs. The downside of the change in standards is that the Monterey Bay region may no longer be eligible to receive CMAQ funds, approximately \$1.5 million annually for Santa Cruz County.