

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

The subsequent sections in this chapter discuss each of the impacts of implementing the 2050 RTP/SCS and identify mitigation measures, if any, aimed at reducing impacts found to be significant. In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines and public scoping discussed in Section 1.0, implementation of the 2050 RTP/SCS may result in significant adverse effects for a number of environmental issue areas. These issue areas are listed below and are the focus of this EIR.

Environmental Issue Areas Analyzed

The environmental issues analyzed in this EIR are as follows:

- Aesthetics and Visual Resources
- Agriculture and Forest Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources and Paleontology
- Environmental Justice
- Geology, Soils, and Minerals
- Global Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services, Utilities, and Energy
- Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Water Supply

Analysis Methodology

The programmatic nature of the 2050 RTP/SCS necessitates a general approach to the evaluation of existing conditions and impacts associated with the proposed project. As a programmatic document, this EIR presents a regionwide assessment of the impacts of the 2050 RTP/SCS. These impacts are examined for both transportation network improvements and the regional growth and land use changes forecasted. Because the EIR is a long-term document intended to guide actions over 40 years into the future, program-level and qualitative evaluation is involved. Quantitative analyses are provided where applicable with available information. During future stages in planning and implementation of specific elements of the 2050 RTP/SCS, including land development resulting from regional growth and transportation improvements identified in the 2050 RTP/SCS, project-specific CEQA documents will be prepared by the appropriate project implementation agency.

For analytical purposes, the baseline year (existing conditions) examined throughout this EIR is 2010, corresponding with the release of the NOP. While the year 2050 is considered the horizon year, future conditions and impacts are also analyzed for the target years of 2020 and 2035. The impact analyses are organized in this manner to disclose impacts of the 2050 RTP/SCS meeting the greenhouse gas emission reductions targets established for 2020 and 2035 under SB 375.

Each issue area is analyzed according to the following:

Existing Conditions, consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15125(a), described in the EIR serve as the baseline physical conditions for the analysis of project impacts. Although the 2050 RTP/SCS primarily provides existing setting information corresponding to the year 2008, the “Existing Conditions” sections of the EIR describe conditions existing in 2010, which is consistent with the release date of the NOP.

Regulatory Setting provides a summary of the applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, plans, or policies that are relevant to each environmental issue area.

Significance Criteria define and list specific criteria used to determine whether an impact is or is not considered to be significant. Major sources used in crafting criteria appropriate to the specific characteristics of the 2050 RTP/SCS include CEQA Guidelines Appendix G and local, state, federal, or other standards applicable to an impact category. Per CEQA, "...an ironclad definition of significant effect is not possible because the significance of an activity may vary with the setting" (CEQA Guidelines Section 15064 [b]). Principally, "... a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within an area affected by the project, including land, air, water, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance" constitutes a significant impact (CEQA Guidelines Section 15382).

Impact Analysis presents evidence, based to the extent possible on scientific and factual data, for the cause and effect relationship between the 2050 RTP/SCS and the expected changes in the environment. The magnitude, duration, extent, frequency, range, or other parameters of an impact are ascertained, to the extent possible, to determine whether impacts will be significant; all of the potential effects, including direct effects and reasonably foreseeable indirect effects are considered. Impacts are analyzed in three target years as described above: 2020, 2035, and 2050. A cumulative impacts analysis is provided in Section 5 of the EIR. This section analyzes whether an impact is created as a result of the combination of the proposed project together with other projects causing related impacts (CEQA Guidelines Section 15130).

As mentioned above, the impact analysis identifies both impacts caused by 2050 RTP/SCS growth/land use changes and impacts caused by transportation network improvements. Impacts caused by 2050 RTP/SCS growth/land use changes are typically ascribed to "development projects" that implement the 2050 RTP/SCS growth forecast; the term "development projects" encompasses both local government land use plans (e.g., General Plan amendments, Specific Plans) and site-specific land development projects requiring local government approval.

Mitigation Measures identify the means by which significant impacts could be reduced or avoided in cases where the EIR analysis determines such impacts to be significant. Standard existing regulations, requirements, programs, and procedures that are applied to all similar projects are taken into account in the impact analysis. Mitigation measures describe additional, potentially feasible actions to reduce significant impacts to less than significant levels. Mitigation can also include measures that are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency, in addition to measures that the lead agency would implement (CEQA Guidelines Section 15091 [a][2]). It should be recognized in certain instances, that implementation of mitigation measures included in this EIR would be performed by other project implementation agencies rather than under the authority of SANDAG. Since other project implementation agencies would be responsible for certain mitigation measures identified in this EIR, those measures, if found feasible by SANDAG, can and should be adopted by those other agencies, as authorized by CEQA Guidelines Section 15091(a)(2).

Significance after Mitigation identifies the impacts that will remain after application of mitigation measures, and whether the remaining impacts are or are not considered significant. When these impacts, even with the inclusion of mitigation measures, cannot be mitigated to a level considered less than significant, they are identified as "significant and unavoidable impacts." To approve a project with significant unavoidable impacts, the lead agency must adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations. In adopting such a statement, the lead agency finds that it has reviewed the Program EIR, has balanced the benefits of the project against the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, and determines that the

benefits outweigh the adverse environmental effects. Thus, the adverse environmental effects may be considered “acceptable” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15093 [a]).

Project-level Environmental Documentation for Subsequent Projects

Due to the programmatic nature of the 2050 RTP/SCS and this EIR, project-level environmental documentation, separate from this EIR, may be currently underway or required in the future as individual transportation improvement projects included as part of the 2050 RTP/SCS are proposed for implementation (e.g., Mid-Coast Corridor Transit Project or double-tracking of the COASTER), and as specific land use plans and development projects are proposed to implement the generalized land use patterns included in the RTP/SCS . Based on the project-specific environmental analysis, actual project-level impacts will be more clearly defined at the time this subsequent documentation is prepared.

SB 375 includes new CEQA streamlining provisions for residential or mixed-use projects or transit priority projects if they are consistent with certain provisions of the RTP/SCS. See Section 2.0.5 for further details.

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