Background and Overview

SANDAG is the lead agency and will prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The EIR will be prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The 2050 RTP will rely upon the Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) and other planning efforts as the foundation for integrating land uses, transportation systems, infrastructure needs, and public investment strategies within a regional smart growth framework.

With each RTP update, SANDAG starts the planning process by establishing a framework of goals, policy objectives, and performance measures to guide the development of the Plan. This is a key first step, as it is the policy foundation for the RTP and identifies the “big picture” of what the region hopes to achieve.

The 2050 RTP goals are structured into two overarching themes: Quality of Travel & Livability, and Sustainability. Quality of Travel & Livability relates to how the transportation system functions from the individual customer perspective (Mobility, Reliability, and System Preservation & Safety), while Sustainability relates to making progress simultaneously in each of the Three “Es” (Social Equity, Healthy Environment, and Prosperous Economy) from a regional perspective.

Project Location

The RTP focuses both on the movement of people and goods within the San Diego region, including marine terminals, air cargo facilities, freight rail, and land ports of entry that link our region with Mexico. This geographic extent includes the cities of Carlsbad, Chula Vista, Coronado, Del Mar, Encinitas, El Cajon, Escondido, Imperial Beach, La Mesa, Lemon Grove, National City, Oceanside, Poway, San Diego, San Marcos, Santee, Solana Beach, Vista, and the unincorporated County of San Diego.

Senate Bill (SB) 375

SANDAG is the first major Metropolitan Planning Organization preparing an RTP that will comply with provisions of SB 375. A new regional growth forecast and the results of other studies currently underway will be used in the development of the 2050 RTP, including the Climate Action Strategy, Regional Energy Strategy, Regional Bicycle Plan, Urban Area Transit Strategy, Comprehensive Freight Gateway Forecast, airport multimodal planning, high speed rail planning, and corridor and subregional studies.

Pursuant to SB 375, the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) is a new element of the RTP, and will be designed to achieve, to the extent feasible, regional greenhouse gas (GHG) emission targets through development patterns, infrastructure investments, and transportation measures or policies. Additionally, the SCS will identify areas sufficient to
house an eight-year projection of the regional housing needs and address protection of sensitive resource areas. If the SCS is unable to achieve the GHG emission targets, an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) must be developed to demonstrate how the targets could be achieved.

The EIR for the 2050 RTP will require analysis beyond what has been included in previous RTP EIRs. The RTP environmental analysis will include GHG emissions baseline measurements and projections, as well as potential mitigation measures to reduce those emissions. The EIR also will include analysis of the environmental effects of the SCS.

In accordance with state and federal guidelines, the RTP is updated every four years. The last comprehensive EIR on the RTP was conducted in 2007 for the 2030 RTP. A new EIR for the 2050 RTP is necessary to adequately evaluate potentially significant environmental effects of the plan and to indicate the manner in which such significant effects can be reduced, avoided, or mitigated. The 2050 RTP is scheduled for adoption by the Board of Directors in July 2011.

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) is intended to alert regulatory and trustee agencies, interested agencies, organizations, and individuals of the preparation of the 2050 RTP EIR. Comments regarding the scope of the EIR received during the 30-day NOP review period will be incorporated, as appropriate, in the environmental document.

**Issues Addressed in the EIR**

The EIR will analyze the impacts of the RTP on the physical environment. The EIR will address the RTP's potential impacts to the following environmental resource areas:

1. Agricultural & Forest Resources
2. Air Quality
3. Biological Resources
4. Cultural Resources
5. Energy
6. Geology & Soils/Mineral Resources
7. Greenhouse Gas Emissions
8. Hazardous Materials
9. Hydrology/Water Resources Quality
10. Land Use/Population & Housing
11. Noise
12. Public Services/Utilities
13. Recreation
14. Regional Water Supply
15. Socioeconomics/Environmental Justice
16. Transportation
17. Visual Resources

In addition, the EIR will address cumulative impacts, growth inducing impacts, and other issues required by CEQA.
Alternatives Analyzed in the EIR

SANDAG will evaluate several alternatives to the project in the EIR. Each alternative will be compared to the proposed project for its potential to achieve the goals of the 2050 RTP while reducing the significant regional environmental impacts. In addition to the project, which will assume a transportation network and transportation policies that are developed from the Revenue Constrained Scenario, it is proposed that the EIR will include the evaluation of the four alternatives described below.

1. No Project Alternative – The No Project Alternative is required by CEQA. For this EIR, the No Project Alternative is defined as a transportation network that includes those projects that have already received funding, are scheduled for funding, and/or have received environmental clearance.

2. Intensified Land Use Distribution Alternative – The Intensified Land Use Distribution Alternative will analyze a land use pattern that further concentrates population and employment densities along existing and planned transportation corridors.

3. Modified Transit Network Alternative – The Modified Transit Network Alternative will evaluate additional transit investments and/or transit system improvements that would further implement the region’s transportation goals.

4. Transportation Demand Management/System Management Alternative – The Transportation Demand Management/System Management Alternative will evaluate the additional transportation demand management measures and additional transportation system management measures that could be implemented in the region to reduce environmental impacts associated with the 2050 RTP.

Although these alternatives have been preliminarily identified, SANDAG is seeking input on the alternatives in the NOP process which could result in modifications to the number of alternatives analyzed in the EIR, or modifications to the alternatives identified above. In addition, the EIR will identify other alternatives that were initially considered, but rejected for reasons including infeasibility or inability for a particular alternative to meet the project objectives or reduce environmental impacts beyond that of the project.