April 28, 2010

TO: Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Parties

FROM: SANDAG Staff

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement/Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (SEIS/SEIR) for the Mid-Coast Corridor Transit Project

PROJECT LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The proposed project would provide for transit improvements within the Mid-Coast Corridor, generally defined as the area centering on Interstate 5 (I-5) and extending from downtown San Diego on the south to University City on the north. The corridor is bound by the Pacific Ocean on the west and Interstate 805 and State Route 163 on the east. The corridor is located entirely within the City of San Diego and includes the following communities (either in entirety or in portions of): downtown San Diego, Uptown, Old Town, Mission Beach, Pacific Beach, Linda Vista, Clairemont Mesa, La Jolla, and University City. The Mid-Coast Corridor is similar to the corridor considered in the Mid-Coast Corridor Alternatives Analysis/Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Draft Environmental Impact Report (AA/DEIS/DEIR). A map of the project study area, located within the Mid-Coast Corridor, is attached.

A variety of land uses exist within the corridor, including single- and multi-family residential, institutional, commercial (employment, retail, and visitor), and industrial. Key employment and activity centers also are located within the corridor, particularly within the downtown San Diego and University City areas.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) are preparing a Draft SEIS/SEIR for the Mid-Coast Corridor Transit Project in San Diego, California. The FTA is serving as lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act, and SANDAG is serving as lead agency for the California Environmental Quality Act.
The Draft SEIS/SEIR will build upon and update previous transit planning, engineering, and environmental studies and decisions for the Mid-Coast Corridor. These include:

- The AA/DEIS/DEIR, completed in February 1995
- The Final Environmental Impact Report, completed in December 1995
- Adoption, in 1995, of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)—an 11-mile extension of the Trolley light rail transit (LRT) system from Old Town Transit Center (OTTC) to University City
- The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the first portion of the LPA, extending from OTTC to Balboa Avenue, completed in 2001
- An update to the 1995 LPA alignment, adopted in December 2003, to serve the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) campus on both the sides of I-5 and to connect the Trolley with the University Towne Centre (UTC) Transit Center
- Inclusion of the Mid-Coast Corridor Transit Project in the TransNet extension, the county’s half-cent transportation sales tax measure voters approved in November 2004

The Draft SEIS/SEIR also will include an analysis of changed conditions in the Mid-Coast Corridor since the previous environmental studies were completed.

**PURPOSE OF PROJECT**

The purpose of the proposed project is to implement a transit project that addresses the identified transportation needs for the Mid-Coast Corridor. The Mid-Coast Corridor Transit Project would improve public transit services between University City, Old Town, and downtown San Diego and would connect corridor residents with other Trolley lines, thereby enhancing direct public access to other regional activity centers. The project would improve travel options to employment, education, medical, and retail centers for corridor residents, commuters, and visitors. The Mid-Coast Corridor LRT Project is included in the SANDAG 2030 San Diego Regional Transportation Plan: Pathways for the Future (RTP) under both the Revenue Constrained and the Reasonably Expected Revenue Scenarios (www.sandag.org/programs/transportation/comprehensive_transportation_projects/2030rtp/2007rtp_A_final.pdf).

**ALTERNATIVES UNDER CONSIDERATION**

The transit alternatives under consideration include:

*No-Build Alternative:* This alternative (and all other alternatives) would include existing transit services and the highway and transit improvements from the RTP Revenue Constrained Scenario, including major capital improvements and transit operating improvements.

*LRT Alternatives:* These alternatives would utilize LRT and operate via the I-5/Voigt Drive/Genesee Avenue, Genesee Avenue Tunnel, or I-5/Thornton Hospital alignments described below (see attached map of LRT alternatives).
• I-5/Voigt Drive/Genesee Avenue Alternative (LRT Alternative 1): A variation of the 2003 adopted LPA, this alternative would follow I-5, Voigt Drive, and Genesee Avenue, from OTTC to University City. From OTTC to north of State Route 52 (SR 52), the alternative would travel within the existing Metropolitan Transit System (MTS)/San Diego Northern Railway (SDNR) Right-of-Way, which is currently owned by MTS. North of SR 52, the alternative would travel adjacent to both the east and west sides of I-5 to the UCSD West Campus, then travel along Voigt Drive and Genesee Avenue to terminal station at the UTC Transit Center. Alignment options would be provided along Voigt Drive.

• Genesee Avenue Tunnel Alternative (LRT Alternative 3): This alternative would follow the existing MTS/SDNR Right-of-Way from OTTC to University City (Genesee Avenue), and then follow Genesee Avenue north and Executive Drive and Miramar Street west, with a terminal station at the UCSD West Campus.

• I-5/Thornton Hospital Alternative (LRT Alternative 6): Like the I-5/Voigt Drive/Genesee Avenue Alternative, this alternative would follow I-5 from OTTC to the UCSD West Campus, utilizing mostly the existing MTS/SDNR Right-of-Way. From the UCSD West Campus, this alternative would turn east, looping around Thornton Hospital on the south, and then following Miramar Street and Executive Drive east and Genesee Avenue south to the UTC Transit Center station terminus.

In addition to the alternatives described above, other transit alternatives identified through the scoping process that would satisfy the project purpose and need with fewer costs, greater effectiveness, or fewer potential environmental impacts will be evaluated for inclusion in the Draft SEIS/SEIR. The Transportation System Management Alternative, which will be included in the Draft SEIS/SEIR as an FTA New Starts baseline, not a reasonable transit alternative, would emphasize transportation system upgrades and would serve as an enhancement to the No-Build Alternative.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The purpose of the SEIS/SEIR environmental analysis/review process is to explore, in a public setting, the effects of the proposed project and its alternatives on the physical, human, and natural environment. SANDAG and the FTA will evaluate all significant environmental, social, and economic impacts of the construction and operation of the proposed project. Impact areas to be addressed include: transportation; land use, zoning and economic development; secondary development; land acquisition, displacements and relocations; cultural resources (including historical, archaeological, and paleontological resources) and parklands/recreation areas; neighborhood compatibility and environmental justice; visual and aesthetic impacts; natural resources (including air quality, noise and vibration, wetlands, water resources, geology/soils, and hazardous materials); energy use; safety and security; and wildlife and ecosystems (including endangered species). Feasible measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate all adverse impacts will be identified and evaluated.

SCOPING MEETINGS

The FTA and SANDAG invite all interested individuals and organizations, public agencies, and Native American Tribes to comment on the scope of the Draft SEIS/SEIR, including the project’s purpose and need, the alternatives to be studied, the impacts to be evaluated, and the evaluation methods to be used. Comments should focus on: alternatives that may be less costly or have less
environmental or community impacts while achieving similar transportation objectives, and the identification of any significant social, economic, or environmental issues relating to the alternatives.

Written comments on the scope of the Draft SEIS/SEIR, including the project’s purpose and need, the alternatives to be considered, the impacts to be evaluated, and the methodologies to be used in the evaluations should be sent to SANDAG on or before June 1, 2010, at the address below. See ADDRESSES below for the address to which written public comments may be sent. Scoping meetings to accept comments on the scope of the Draft SEIS/SEIR will be held on the following dates:

- Public Meeting: Wednesday, May 5, 2010, from 4 to 7 p.m., at SANDAG, Boardroom, 401 B Street, Suite 700, San Diego, CA 92101
- Public Meeting: Tuesday, May 11, 2010, from 3 to 6 p.m., at UCSD, Price Center East Ballroom/John Muir Conference Room, 9500 Gilman Drive, La Jolla, CA 92093
- Public Meeting: Wednesday, May 12, 2010, from 4 to 7 p.m., at Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, Theater/Gallery, 4126 Executive Drive, La Jolla, CA 92037
- Public Meeting: Thursday, May 20, 2010, from 4 to 7 p.m., at Clairemont High School, Cafeteria, 4150 Ute Street, San Diego, CA 92117
- Public Meeting: Tuesday, May 25, 2010, from 4 to 7 p.m., at Caltrans, Garcia Conference Room, 4050 Taylor Street, San Diego, CA 92110

The project’s purpose and need and the conceptual alternatives proposed for study will be presented at the scoping meetings. The buildings used for the scoping meetings are accessible to persons with disabilities. Any individual who requires special assistance to participate in the scoping meetings, such as a sign language interpreter, should contact Anne Steinberger, SANDAG, at (619) 699-1937 or ast@sandag.org.

Scoping materials will be available at the meetings and are available on the SANDAG Web site (www.sandag.org/midcoast). Hard copies of the scoping materials also may be obtained from Ms. Steinberger.

ADDRESSES: Written comments should be sent to Anne Steinberger, 401 B Street, Suite 800, San Diego, CA 92101 or ast@sandag.org. The locations of the scoping meetings are provided above.

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Attachments