

CHAPTER 9

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

SAFETEA-LU requires that the RTP include an environmental mitigation program that links transportation planning to the environment. This chapter serves this purpose. This chapter summarizes environmental considerations in the developing the 2035 RTP, including prior CEQA reviews and alternatives previously considered. This chapter also discusses program and project level activities that may potentially affect the environment; the recommended strategies needed to mitigate any resultant impacts; and summarizes potential growth related impacts of the Plan. Further, air quality documentation requirements to demonstrate the RTP's conformity to the SIP is described.

9.1 CEQA Review

CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT (CEQA)

To meet the requirements of CEQA and decision-making processes, state, regional, and local planning processes typically prepare an informational document known as an environmental impact report (EIR). An EIR can be used to provide a general environmental assessment of an overall program, such as the RTP, which would be subsequently implemented through a series of later actions or projects. This type of EIR is known as a Program EIR. Each of the later actions or projects would be required to comply with CEQA through appropriate environmental documentation that would “tier” off of the Program EIR.

Supplement to the 2027 RTP Program EIR and 2035 MTP Program EIR

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines, a Final Supplemental Program EIR (State Clearinghouse #2001052072) for the 2027 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) was prepared and certified by the PCTPA, the lead agency, in September 2005. The environmental effects of the 2027 RTP were discussed in this EIR. An Addendum #1 to the Final Supplemental Program EIR was approved in May 2006. Addendum #1 provided environmental clearance for a proposed Transportation Expenditure Plan and Retail Transaction and Use Ordinance, a local funding mechanism that would facilitate implementation of RTP projects.

A Final Program EIR (State Clearinghouse #2007012050) for the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan was prepared and certified by the SACOG, the lead agency, in March 2008. SACOG prepares the MTP for the entire six-county region, and under Memorandum of Understanding with the PCTPA incorporates the Placer County RTP into the MTP. The environmental effects of the 2027 RTP projects, as updated and refined, plus several new projects, were discussed in this EIR.

Supplemental EIR for the 2035 RTP

CEQA Guidelines require that environmental documentation be prepared for any subsequent revisions, amendments, or updates to the RTP as well.

When an EIR has been prepared for a project or program, CEQA Guidelines provide several options for complying with succeeding environmental documentation. §15152(f) of the State CEQA Guidelines states in part:

“(f) A later EIR shall be required when the initial study or other analysis finds that the later project may cause significant effects on the environment that were not adequately addressed in the prior EIR.

Significant environmental effects have been adequately addressed if the lead agency determines that:

- (A) they have been mitigated or avoided as a result of the prior environmental impact report and findings adopted in connection with that prior environmental report; or*
- (B) they have been examined at a sufficient level of detail in the prior environmental impact report to enable those effects to be mitigated or avoided by site specific revisions, the imposition of conditions, or by other means in connection with the approval of the later project.”*

A supplement to an EIR may be prepared if one or more of the following apply:

- substantial changes are proposed in the project (§15162(a)(1));
- substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is undertaken (§15162(a)(2));
- there is new information of substantial importance that changes the previous EIR’s determinations of potential significance and/or the feasibility of mitigation measures or alternatives (§15162(a)(3)); and
- only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation. (§15163(a) (2)).

PCTPA’s 2035 RTP update meets the criteria for preparation of a “supplement” to the 2027 RTP Program EIR because certain projects identified in the 2035 MTP and the 2035 RTP have not yet been implemented and were determined in the 2035 MTP to result in or contribute to significant and unavoidable impacts, and these impacts would not be mitigated or avoided by the 2035 RTP or by the imposition of conditions or mitigation measures likely to be established by the CEQA review.

While the 2035 RTP Update includes both revisions to projects and programs contained in the 2027 RTP as well as several new projects in the 2035 MTP, there are limited financial resources to deliver the proposed projects. The majority of the programmed projects have been proposed in previous RTPs, and are the candidates for any future limited funding. Further, the projects in the 2035 RTP cover the same transportation modes as identified in previous RTPs. Therefore,

preparation of a Supplemental Program EIR, based on the certified 2027 RTP Program EIR and the certified 2035 MTP Program EIR, meets CEQA guidelines.

Project Level Environmental Review of RTP Projects

The 2035 RTP is a long range planning and policy document that identifies both short and long term transportation needs and funding priorities for Placer County. The RTP is implemented through subsequent actions, or specific projects and programs, by local jurisdictions, transportation agencies and Caltrans.

The environmental analysis on the RTP concentrates on the long-term environmental countywide impacts of plan components. This environmental analysis provides the basis for further project level CEQA (and NEPA) compliance for implementation of specific projects and programs. Before commencing with any specific project or program an environmental review by the lead agency responsible for implementing the project would be required under CEQA. Under certain circumstances some projects may also be subject to environmental evaluation under NEPA when federal monies are involved in funding the project. It is anticipated that the RTP Supplemental EIR will assist PCTPA's member jurisdictions, transportation agencies, and Caltrans in future project specific environmental reviews through "tiering" once precise project scopes, designs, and locations are more clearly defined.

Inclusion of a project in the RTP does not foreclose meaningful consideration of project alternatives or mitigation measures before conducting the project level environmental review. Projects included in the 2035 RTP may be modified or not implemented depending upon on a number of factors considered during the environmental review.

Summary of Environmental Impacts and Recommended Mitigation

Appendix R summarizes and compares the environmental analysis incorporated in the 2027 RTP EIR and the 2035 MTP EIR. The table identifies the environmental impacts; the level of impact; and the recommended mitigation measures, which should be incorporated into the environmental documentation for specific projects. Lead agencies responsible for implementing projects will also be responsible for implementing and monitoring the recommended mitigation measures identified in the RTP and MTP EIRs for those projects, as applicable. Appendix R also provides the relationship between the mitigation measures to the goals and objectives of the 2035 RTP.

9.2 NEPA Review

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA)

The RTP itself is not subject to NEPA review. However, the RTP contains individual projects that when subsequently implemented, will use federal funds or will require federal approvals or

permitting actions. Any such projects will undergo individual NEPA evaluation by the appropriate lead agency at the time projects are initiated.

9.3 Air Quality Documentation

An air quality assessment is required for RTPs prepared by MPOs in nonattainment and maintenance areas. As described earlier (see Chapter 7), SACOG acts as the MPO for those portions of Placer County excluding Lake Tahoe and within the Federal Ozone Non-attainment Area. The PCTPA submits its RTP for inclusion into the SACOG Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

For air quality conformance, the PCTPA coordinates planning as follows:

- For federal air quality programs, SACOG is the lead agency.
- For state air quality programs, the county falls within the jurisdiction of the Placer County Air Pollution Control District (APCD).
- For monitoring purposes, portions of Placer County are within the boundaries of three Air Basins: the Sacramento Valley Air Basin, the Mountain Counties Air Basin, and the Lake Tahoe Air Basin.

FEDERAL NONATTAINMENT AND MAINTENANCE AREAS

The PCTPA jurisdiction and the RTP planning area covers Placer County exclusive of the Lake Tahoe Air Basin. Thus, the RTP planning area includes the Mountain Counties Air Basin and the Sacramento Valley Air Basin. These Air Basins are in nonattainment as follows:

- severe nonattainment (federal standard) and nonattainment (state standard) for ozone;
- nonattainment (federal standard) for PM_{2.5}; and
- nonattainment (state standard) for PM₁₀.

See Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion of air quality attainment status.

Conformance to the State Implementation Plan (SIP)

Because of the nonattainment status within its planning area, the Placer County RTP must indicate how the plan will conform to the SIP (State Implementation Plan), which is required by the federal Clean Air Act.

Chapter 7 of the 2035 RTP documents “air quality conformance.” It discusses the environmental and regulatory setting for air quality in the planning area, including local and regional plans and programs and conformance standards. As described in Chapter 7, it is SACOG’s responsibility to make the air quality conformity determination for the region, and to ensure that the RTP conforms to the SIP. Accordingly, it is SACOG’s role to coordinate with

the regional Air Pollution Control District and the California Air Resources Board (ARB) to ensure conformity with the SIP.

TRANSPORTATION CONTROL MEASURES (TCMs)

Chapter 5 - Policy Element of the RTP contains goals and policies that promote transportation control measures (TCMs), i.e. projects or activities designed to reduce on-road vehicle emissions by reducing vehicular travel demand and traffic congestion. The following goals, in particular, contain policies supportive of TCM implementation (see Chapter 5 - Policy Element for complete goal statements, objectives, and policies):

- Goal 1: Highways/Streets/Roadways
- Goal 2: Public Transit
- Goal 3: Passenger Rail Transportation
- Goal 4: Aviation
- Goal 6: Non-motorized Transportation (Pedestrian, Bicycle, and Low Speed Vehicles)
- Goal 7: Transportation Systems Management (TSM)
- Goal 8: Recreational Travel
- Goal 9: Integrated Land Use, Air Quality, and Transportation Planning

The 2035 RTP includes short and long-term actions for implementing transportation control measures (TCMs) in the planning area. Applicable actions leading to TCM implementation can be found in Chapter 6 - Action Element under individual Action Plans (discussed by mode: Regional Road Network; Public Transit; Rail; Aviation; Goods Movement; Non-Motorized Transportation; Intelligent Transportation Systems; Recreational Travel; and Integrated Land Use, Air Quality, and Transportation Planning).

9.4 RTP ALTERNATIVES

The CEQA Guidelines require that an EIR describe a reasonable range of alternatives to the project, or alternative locations for the project, which could feasibly attain the basic objectives of the project; and evaluate the relative merits of the alternatives, with the discussion focusing on alternatives capable of either eliminating any of the project's significant adverse environmental effects, or reducing them to less-than-significant levels. CEQA Guidelines also require that the "No Project" alternative be included among the range of alternatives of considered.

SACOG launched the Blueprint process in 2002 to examine the impacts of alternative land use scenarios and the impacts on transportation and air quality. This effort culminated in a Blueprint concept map for year 2050 and a set of growth principles adopted by SACOG in December 2004. The land use pattern that forms the foundation for the adopted 2027 RTP and the 2035 MTP, and the proposed 2035 RTP is consistent with the Blueprint growth principles.

ALTERNATIVES FOR 2027 RTP

PCTPA's 2027 RTP EIR examined the impacts to five transportation alternatives identified below. Travel forecasts for these alternatives are summarized in Appendix S.

- Alternative 1 – Unconstrained Projects List: Alternative 1 is based on a scenario of unconstrained funding.
- Alternative 2 – Road Emphasis: Alternative 2 is based on a scenario that implements projects based on a road emphasis.
- Alternative 3 – Transit Emphasis: Alternative 3 is based on a scenario that implements projects with a transit and rail emphasis.
- Alternative 4 – No Project: The No Project Alternative consists of build-out of PCTPA's existing adopted RTP.
- 2027 RTP – Funding Constrained: This alternative represents the proposed and subsequently adopted 2027 RTP.

ALTERNATIVES FOR 2035 MTP

SACOG's 2035 MTP EIR examined the impacts to four regional transportation alternatives. These alternatives included the projects contained in PCTPA's 2027 RTP. The alternatives represented multi-modal scenarios focused on nine key corridors that comprise a large percentage of the region's existing travel. For Placer County, the I-80 and SR65 represented two of the nine corridors evaluated in the MTP alternatives.

The four MTP alternatives examined were the:

- No Project Alternative: The No Project Alternative represents the build-out of SACOG's 2006 MTP.
- Regional Alternative 1: Regional Alternative 1 is based on a scenario that emphasizes new and expanded auxiliary lanes, streetcars and bus rapid transit.
- Regional Alternative 2: Regional Alternative 2 is based on a scenario that emphasizes new and expanded major roads, freeways, including an extensive carpool network, and expansion of the light rail system
- Regional Alternative 3: Regional Alternative 3 is based on a scenario that emphasizes parallel road capacity development, freeway system optimization, an extensive carpool network (larger than Regional Alternative 2), and new and expanded express bus, streetcars and light rail network.

SCENARIO PLANNING FOR MTP UPDATE

SACOG is currently creating alternative land use and transportation scenarios for the next MTP update, scheduled for adoption in December 2011. This update will incorporate the Placer County 2035 RTP, and reflect development of an SB375 compliant MTP, including

recommendations on a regional Greenhouse Gas emissions target to the CARB and creating a sustainable communities strategy and alternative planning scenario, as necessary.

Several policy planning scenarios and combinations thereof are under current consideration in the development of the MTP update. The evaluation of the planning scenarios has been coordinated with the other large metropolitan planning organizations in California involved in setting Greenhouse Gas emission reduction targets required by SB375. This is being done to ensure some level of consistency and reasonableness in implementation.

The policy options under consideration by SACOG include the adopted 2035 MTP; as well as six other options that evaluate land use measures, further transportation system development and transit expansion, enhancement of TSM and TDM strategies, and transportation pricing policies, each which expands and enhances implementation over and above the 2035 MTP.

ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL GROWTH RELATED IMPACTS OF 2035 RTP

Generally, it is land use development that generates the new travel demand and patterns that may require the need for new transportation facility capacity. Transportation is just one component of an overall infrastructure that serves to accommodate planned growth and land use development. An individual transportation project may remove an existing obstacle to growth and development; may accelerate growth in certain areas; slow growth in other areas; intensify growth in certain locations; or shift growth from one location to another, for example, into previously unserved or underserved areas. These potential growth related impacts would be evaluated in the environmental documentation of the individual transportation project or specific land use development.

The 2035 RTP has been developed as a response to the projected population of 570,709 persons in Placer County by 2035, which represents a 90 percent increase over year 2005 levels at 299,872. This increase of 270,837 persons in Placer County was assumed in SACOG's regional housing needs assessment. The 2035 RTP's consistency with SACOG growth forecasts and consequently, applicable Placer County jurisdiction housing elements, would constitute a growth accommodating transportation strategy rather than a growth inducing impact. The RTP provides improvements to keep pace, to the extent financially feasible, to accommodate the projected population growth, with no additional capacity that could induce growth beyond that projected by SACOG and in accordance with adopted local general plans. The RTP projects will likely make areas of potential growth more accessible through alternation and development of roadway and other transportation facilities. However, given the limited financial resources documented in this RTP, additional improvements may ultimately be needed to fully accommodate all of the transportation needs of this growing population.

Incorporation of Blueprint planning principals into local general plans has created a smart growth approach to land use and transportation planning. This will lead to a more compact development focus; a lower amount of urbanized land used for the forecast population; more land remaining in a naturalized state; more efficient use of existing infrastructure; shorter vehicle trips for urban activities; and fewer overall vehicle trips.

According to SACOG, the Blueprint land use pattern is directly responsible for about 75 percent of the improved performance of the 2035 MTP transportation system and not to specific transportation projects. The Blueprint land uses therefore become an important part of successfully implementing the 2035 RTP, and the integration of land uses (see Chapter 6.11) become a critical part of the RTP.