



## Notice of Preparation

**Date:** March 30, 2017

**To:** Reference List of Recipients

**From:** Meg Prince, Assistant Regional Planner  
Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) – Lead Agency  
2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201, Fresno, CA 93721  
(559) 233-4148  
[mprince@fresnocog.org](mailto:mprince@fresnocog.org)

**Subject:** Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting for a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Fresno Council of Governments 2018 Regional Transportation Plan/ Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)

Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the 2018 RTP/SCS. Fresno COG is requesting input regarding the scope and content of the environmental information, which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project.

The project title, location, environmental review requirements, agency background and overview, project description, and probable environmental issues to be addressed in the PEIR are attached. An Initial Study is not attached and is not required pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines section 15060(d).

Your response is requested at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice or by **Monday, May 1, 2017**. Please send your response to Ms. Meg Prince, Assistant Regional Planner, at the office or email (preferred) address shown above. Please identify the name and phone number of a contact person at your agency.

The project is of regional significance; therefore, your comments regarding preparation of the PEIR are requested. A scoping meeting will be held on **April 26, 2017** beginning at 10:00 AM in the Sequoia Conference Room located in Fresno COG offices at the address shown above. Agency and/or public input can be provided in writing at the Scoping Meeting.

Fresno COG looks forward to receipt of your comments regarding this important project for our region.

Attachment

City of Clovis  
City of Coalinga  
City of Firebaugh  
City of Fowler  
City of Fresno  
City of Huron  
City of Kerman  
City of Kingsburg  
City of Mendota  
City of Orange Cove  
City of Parlier  
City of Reedley  
City of San Joaquin  
City of Sanger  
City of Selma  
County of Fresno

**Notice of Preparation & Scoping Meeting**  
**Program Environmental Impact Report**  
**Project Overview and Scope of Environmental Analysis**  
**2018 Regional Transportation Plan &**  
**Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)**  
March 30, 2017

**Project Title**

Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Fresno Council of Governments 2018 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

**Location**

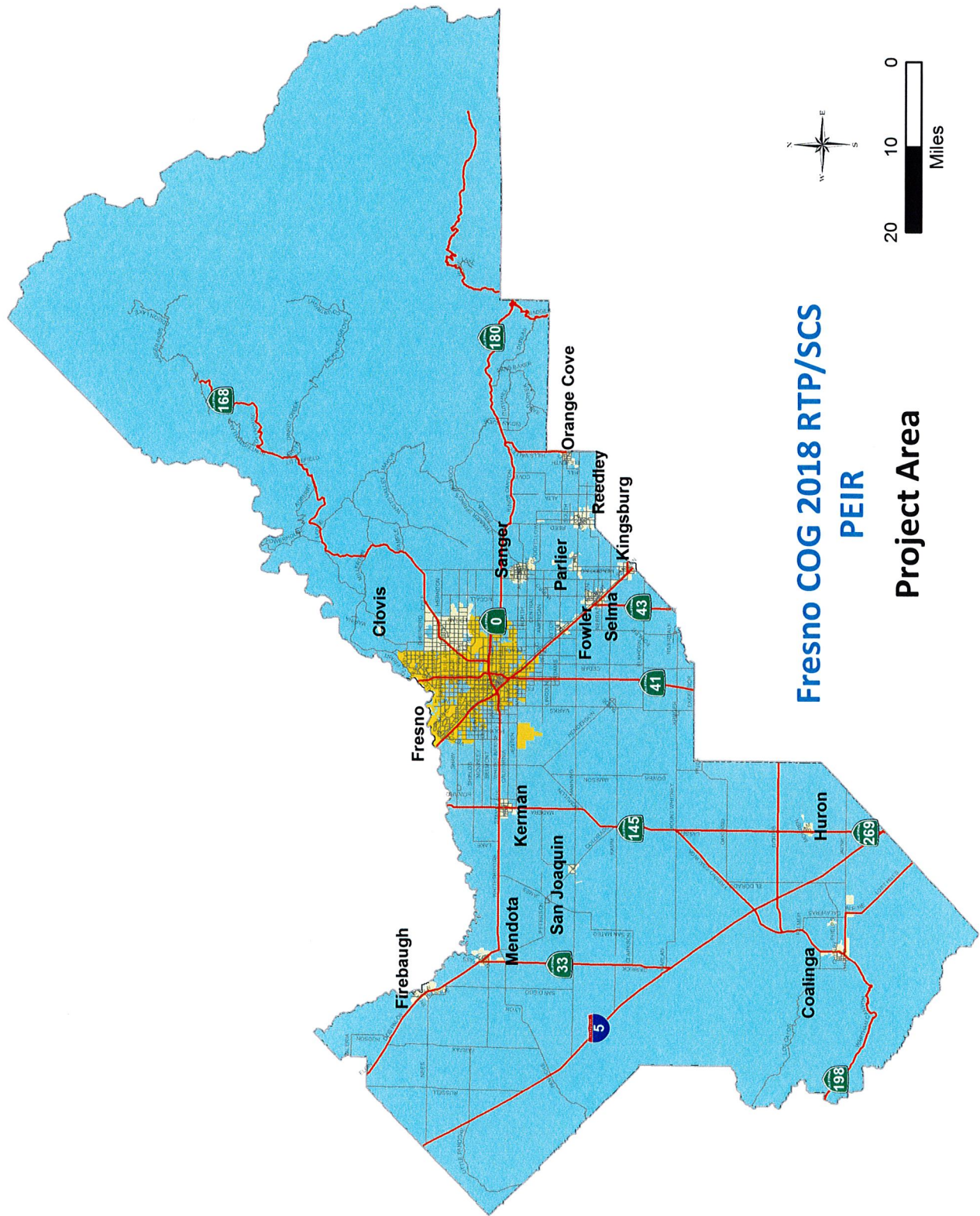
Within the corporate limits of Fresno County, California, including the fifteen (15) incorporated cities (Clovis, Coalinga, Firebaugh, Fowler, Fresno, Huron, Kerman, Kingsburg, Mendota, Orange Cove, Parlier, Reedley, San Joaquin, Sanger and Selma) and all unincorporated areas under the jurisdiction of the County of Fresno (reference the attached map of Fresno County identifying the area to be addressed by the PEIR and the RTP/SCS). Fresno County is the second largest county in the San Joaquin Valley region of the State of California encompassing approximately 6,000 square miles. Based on the most recent estimates from the State Department of Finance (DOF), the estimated population in January 2016 was 984,500, placing Fresno as the tenth most populous county of the 58 counties in California. The City of Fresno is the fifth largest city in the State, with a current (2016) population of approximately 520,500.

**CEQA Requirements**

The RTP/SCS PEIR will be prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State CEQA Guidelines. CEQA requires public agencies, such as the Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG), to consider the potential environmental impacts of the proposed 2018 RTP/SCS. The objectives of CEQA are to:

- ✓ Disclose to the Fresno COG Board and the public the potential environmental impacts of the proposed RTP/SCS
- ✓ Propose feasible alternatives or mitigation measures that avoid, eliminate or reduce project-related environmental effects
- ✓ Describe the analytical process, which leads to Fresno COG's decision on the project
- ✓ Promote interagency coordination
- ✓ Provide a mechanism for increasing public participation in the planning process





**Fresno COG 2018 RTP/SCS  
PEIR**

**Project Area**

The environmental document will be prepared as a “Programmatic” or “Program” EIR (PEIR), which is a type of first-tier document as defined in CEQA Guidelines Sections 15152 (Tiering) and 15168 (Program EIR). A Program EIR is prepared for an agency program or series of actions that can be characterized as one large project. Typically, such a project involves actions that are closely related geographically and are logical parts of a chain of contemplated events, rules, regulations, or plans that govern the conduct of a continuing program with generally similar environmental effects and mitigation measures. The RTP/SCS would be such a project.

For purposes of this effort, a Supplemental PEIR may be prepared to reflect minor additions or changes in the 2014 RTP/SCS PEIR (State Clearinghouse No. 2012081070), which will result from the 2018 RTP/SCS and that only affect certain environmental issue areas such as air quality, climate change, transportation, and others noted on Page 8. In addition, the Supplemental PEIR would address cumulative impacts, growth inducing impacts, and other issues required by CEQA. Referencing CEQA Guidelines Section 15163, a lead or responsible agency may choose to prepare a supplement to an EIR if “only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation, and the supplement to the EIR need contain only the information necessary to make the previous EIR adequate for the project as revised.” Section 15163 also states that “when the agency decides whether to approve the project, the decision-making body shall consider the previous EIR as revised by the supplemental EIR. A finding under Section 15091 shall be made for each significant effect shown in the previous EIR as revised.” As a result, Fresno COG may ultimately consider a Supplemental EIR in combination with the previous Program EIR for the 2014 RTP-SCS, which was certified in June 2014 should only minor changes or corrections be necessary to make the previous Program EIR adequate to reflect the 2018 RTP/SCS.

It is noted that additional environmental analysis by local jurisdictions or other agencies of individual projects contained in the 2018 RTP/SCS may be required. The tiering concept is a multi-level approach to streamlining subsequent environmental reviews. This first-tier RTP/SCS PEIR will include an analysis of general matters (i.e., broad policies, the planned regional multi-modal transportation system and related impacts, and program-wide mitigation measures). Subsequent tiers prepared by local jurisdictions or other agencies (later EIRs and Negative Declaration) will include an analysis of narrower, subsequent projects by “incorporating by reference” the general discussions from the broader first-tier RTP/SCS PEIR. Second-tier environmental reviews will focus on the impacts of individual improvement projects that implement the RTP/SCS, related programs, and/or policy(ies).

## Regional Planning Background and Overview

Fresno COG is a voluntary association of local governments and is one of California’s 38 regional transportation planning agencies (RTPAs). Fresno COG was created in 1967 through a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) composed of elected officials of Fresno County and its fifteen (15) incorporated cities. In addition, Fresno COG is a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which qualifies it for Federal transportation funding as identified in Title 23 U.S.C. Section 134 and Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450.300. MPOs are federally designated while the State designated RTPAs are described under California Government Code Section 29532 et seq. Fresno COG is both an MPO and an RTPA.



As part of the regional transportation planning process, Fresno COG studies potential transportation improvements, forecasts future conditions and needs, and pools the planning resources and expertise of its member agencies to facilitate development of a shared strategic vision for transportation and development in the region. These responsibilities enable Fresno COG to fulfill federal and State planning requirements and maintain the eligibility of the Fresno region for federal and State funding for transportation planning and improvements.

According to the 2017 California Regional Transportation Planning Guidelines, prepared by the California Transportation Commission (CTC), Fresno COG is required to adopt and submit an updated RTP to the CTC and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) every four years. The 2018 RTP is a planning document to be developed by Fresno COG in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Caltrans and other stakeholders, including transportation system users. Following the passage of *Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32) – The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006*, which specifies that by the year 2020, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within the State must be at 1990 levels, *Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) – The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008* was signed into law as the framework for achieving greenhouse gas emissions reductions from land use and transportation planning.

SB 375 includes four primary findings related to the RTP/SCS development process:

- ✓ That the California Air Resource Board (ARB) develop regional GHG emission reduction targets for cars and light trucks for each of the 18 MPOs in California, including Fresno COG
- ✓ That Fresno COG, during the next RTP update, is required to prepare an SCS that specifies how the GHG emissions reduction target set by ARB will be achieved. If the target cannot be met through the SCS, then an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) shall be prepared by Fresno COG
- ✓ Streamlines CEQA requirements for specific residential and mixed-use developments that are consistent with the Fresno County SCS or APS (as determined by ARB) to achieve the regional GHG emissions reduction target
- ✓ Requires that Fresno COG conduct the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process consistent with the RTP/SCS process and that the RHNA allocations be consistent with the development pattern in the SCS

## Project Description

The project, as defined pursuant to Public Resources Code, Section 21065, is the preparation of the 2018 RTP/SCS. Fresno COG is in the process of preparing the RTP/SCS as required by Section 65080 et seq., of Chapter 2.5 of the California Government Code, federal guidelines pursuant to new requirements established in the federal surface transportation reauthorization, “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (MAP-21) and the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Acts, Transportation Conformity for the Air Quality Attainment Plan per 40 CFR Part 51 and 40 CFR Part 93, and requirements set forth in *Assembly Bill 32, The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006*, and *Senate Bill 375 The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008*. Finally, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) has

prepared guidelines (most recently adopted by the CTC on January 18, 2017) to assist in the preparation of the RTP/SCS.

The last comprehensive EIR on the RTP/SCS was completed in June 2014, which addressed transportation improvement projects, programs, and funding sources including additional funding from the approved ½ Cent Sales Tax Measure Extension (Measure “C”).

The 2018 RTP/SCS will address all transportation modes including motor vehicles, transit (commuter and local), rail (commuter and interregional), goods movement (rail freight and trucking), bicycle and pedestrian facilities, aviation systems, and transportation systems management (TSM) programs and projects considering the horizon year of 2042. In addition, the 2018 RTP/SCS will:

- ✓ Identify the region’s transportation goals, objectives, and policies
- ✓ Include the SCS, which demonstrates how the region will meet its GHG reduction targets (currently being discussed by the California Air Resources Board and the eight San Joaquin Valley Regional Transportation Planning Agencies) through integrated land use, and housing and transportation planning. *Once adopted by Fresno COG, the SCS becomes an integral part of the RTP*
- ✓ Set forth an action plan of projects and programs to address the needs consistent with the Policy Element such as:
  - Allocating growth along transportation corridors in support of high capacity transit systems
  - Facilitating the development of mixed land use districts, which promote living, working, shopping and recreation accessible by foot or bicycle, and which are served by centrally located transit routes (the Tower District in Fresno, Clovis’ Old Town, and many of the County’s small cities serve as examples built more than 40 years ago)
  - Maintaining and improving the regional street system, connecting local jurisdictions within the County and connecting Fresno County to adjacent counties, consistent with Measure “C” and its re-authorization
  - Enhancing and maintaining existing transit systems and the frequency of current services
  - Developing connecting bikeway systems and facilitating and encouraging their use
  - Improving connectivity between highways, streets and roads, transit and rail, transit and air travel, cycling and transit, etc.
  - Reservation of future “park and ride” opportunities
  - An organized public education effort
  - Appropriate financing, including both operations and capital investment
- ✓ Integrate results reflected in the Congestion Management Program (CMP)
- ✓ Document the financial resources needed to implement the plan
- ✓ Reflect results of the Transportation Conformity Analysis
- ✓ Highlight the 2018 RTP/SCS EIR process and results
- ✓ Detail the RTP/SCS public outreach process
- ✓ Include the Environmental Justice analysis process



Specifically, the RTP/SCS will include the following sections, which may be reorganized or modified:

Chapter 1:	Building the RTP: Putting the Pieces Together
Chapter 2:	Public Participation: Working Together for a Better Plan
Chapter 3:	Environmental Justice Report: Ensuring Meaningful Involvement for All People
Chapter 4:	Sustainable Communities Strategy: People. Choices. Community
Chapter 5:	Actions: Assessing Our Transportation Needs
Chapter 6:	Policies: Foundations of the Plan
Chapter 7:	Financing Mobility: Funding Our Transportation System
Appendices	

## **Preliminary 2018 RTP Project Alternatives & SCS Alternative Scenarios**

The following preliminary project alternatives are currently addressed in the 2014 PEIR and will also be addressed in the 2018 RTP/SCS PEIR:

- ✓ No Project
- ✓ Programmed Projects Plus the Preferred SCS Scenario
- ✓ Planned Multimodal Projects
- ✓ An Alternative SCS Scenario

## **CEQA Streamlining (SB 375 and SB 226)**

SB 375 and newly enacted SB 226 provide “exemptions” for certain types of projects from CEQA review or projects may qualify for streamlined review if they conform to the regional SCS or the APS (if applicable). Projects qualify for streamlined CEQA review even if they conflict with local plans following adoption of the SCS.

## **Environmental Issues to be Addressed in the PEIR**

The programs and projects to be included in the 2018 RTP/SCS will be analyzed through development of the PEIR. This will allow Fresno COG to analyze the regional or general impacts of the programs and projects. A more detailed or project level environmental assessment (if required) of the various projects included in the RTP/SCS will be conducted by the various responsible agencies including Caltrans, Fresno County, and the cities within the Fresno Region before the projects are approved for construction and implementation.

Potential environmental impacts that could result from the Project include project impacts to:

- ✓ Aesthetics
- ✓ Agricultural & Forestry Resources
- ✓ Air Quality
- ✓ Biotic Resources
- ✓ Climate Change/Greenhouse Gases
- ✓ Cultural Resources & Tribal Cultural Resources
- ✓ Energy & Energy Conservation
- ✓ Geology/Soils/Minerals
- ✓ Hazardous Materials
- ✓ Hydrology & Water Resources
- ✓ Land Use & Planning
- ✓ Noise
- ✓ Population, Housing & Employments
- ✓ Public Utilities, Other Utilities, & Services
- ✓ Social & Economic Effects
- ✓ Transportation/Traffic

**Prepared by:** Georgiena M. Vivian, President  
VRPA Technologies, Inc.  
March 30, 2017

Date: March 30, 2017

Signature:   
Tony Boren

Title: Executive Director

Phone: 559 233-4148