



Notice of Preparation

Date: August 27, 2012

To: Reference List of Recipients

From: Rob Terry, Associate Regional Planner
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Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Fresno Council of Governments 2014 Regional Transportation Plan and 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 2014 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 September 28, 2012**. Please send your response to Mr. Rob Terry, Associate 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 Monday, September 10, 2012 beginning at 1:30 PM in the Sequoia Conference Room at the Fresno COG offices located at the address shown above. The meeting will also be available by teleconference by dialing our Toll Free Number: 877-455-8695, Participant Code: 740166. 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

Program Environmental Impact Report

Project Overview and Scope of Environmental Analysis

2014 Regional Transportation Plan & Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)

August 27, 2012

Project Title

Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Fresno Council of Governments 2014 Regional Transportation Plan and 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. The estimated population in 2012 is 945,711, placing Fresno as the tenth most populous county of the 58 counties in California. The Fresno-Clovis Metropolitan Area (FCMA) has a population of about 677,400 and the City of Fresno is now the fifth largest city in the state, with a population of approximately 505,000.

CEQA Requirements

The RTP/SCS PEIR will be prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State CEQA Guidelines published in 2012. CEQA requires public agencies, such as the Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG), to consider the potential environmental impacts of the proposed 2014 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

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.

The tiering concept is a multi-level approach to streamlining subsequent environmental reviews. This first-tier 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 (later EIRs and Negative Declarations) 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 2010 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 Guidelines state that “Regional transportation improvement projects proposed to be funded, in whole or in part, in the state Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) must be included in an adopted RTP.”

The 2014 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 2014 RTP and 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 21st Century” (MAP-21), the 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 April 7, 2010) to assist in the preparation of the RTP and SCS.

The last comprehensive EIR on the RTP was completed in July 2010, which addressed transportation improvement projects, programs, and funding reflected in the 2007 RTP including additional funding from the approved ½ Cent Sales Tax Measure Extension (Measure “C”).

The 2014 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 2040. In addition, the 2014 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 target 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
- ✓ 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 2014 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 as a result of staff and consultant review:

1. San Joaquin Valley Regional Transportation Overview
2. Regional Context
3. Policy Element
4. Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)
5. Action Element
6. Financial Element
7. Conformity
8. Environmental Impact Report
9. Public Outreach
10. Environmental Justice Analysis Process

Preliminary 2014 RTP Project Alternatives & SCS Alternative Scenarios

The following preliminary 2014 RTP/SCS project alternatives may be addressed in the PEIR:

- ✓ No Project
- ✓ Programmed Projects Plus the Preferred SCS Scenario
- ✓ Planned Multimodal Projects
- ✓ An Alternative Planning Scenario (APS)

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 2014 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 County before the projects are approved for construction and implementation.

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

- ✓ Aesthetics and Visual Resources
- ✓ Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- ✓ Air Quality
- ✓ Biological Resources
- ✓ Cultural Resources
- ✓ Energy
- ✓ Environmental Justice
- ✓ Geology and Soils
- ✓ Green House Gas Emissions (GHG)
- ✓ Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- ✓ Hydrology and Water Quality
- ✓ Land Use and Planning
- ✓ Mineral Resources
- ✓ Noise
- ✓ Population and Housing
- ✓ Public Services
- ✓ Recreation
- ✓ Transportation and Traffic
- ✓ Utilities and Service Systems
- ✓ Mandatory Findings of Significance

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August 27, 2012

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