

7.0 LONG-TERM IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROJECT

This section discusses several topics statutorily required by CEQA that summarize how the proposed 2009 Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) would affect the environment. The topics discussed include significant irreversible environmental changes/irretrievable commitment of resources, significant and unavoidable environmental impacts, and growth-inducing impacts.

7.1 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES/IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

CEQA Section 15126.2(c) and Public Resources Code Sections 21100(b)(2) and 21100.1(a) require that an EIR include a discussion of significant irreversible environmental changes which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented. Irreversible environmental effects would occur if:

- The project would involve a large commitment of nonrenewable resources;
- The primary and secondary impacts of a project would generally commit future generations to similar uses (e.g., a highway provides access to a previously remote area);
- The project involves uses in which irreversible damage could result from any potential environmental accidents associated with the project; or
- The phasing of the proposed consumption of resources is not justified (e.g., the project involves the wasteful use of energy).

Determining whether the proposed project would result in significant irreversible effects requires a determination of whether key resources would be degraded or destroyed such that there would be little possibility of restoring them. Irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to ensure that such current consumption is justified.

ANALYSIS

The proposed project entails a series of future actions to implement the policies, goals, and objectives described in the 2009 CTP. These include capital highway and transit improvements listed in the Measure M Strategic Plan and constrained programs identified in the Metropolitan Transportation Commission's pending Transportation 2035 Plan. Details regarding the included highway, capital, local road, and transit improvements are provided in Section 3.0 of this Draft EIR.

Significant irreversible changes are actions resulting from the adoption of the CTP that provide non-renewable resource commitments for future generations that are unlikely reversible. The commitments of resources within the CTP include:

- Consumption of a variety of resources, including land, energy, water, construction materials, and human resources, would be irretrievably committed for the construction of these projects. The 2009 CTP projects would require the commitment of non-renewable or slowly renewable natural resources such as lumber and other forest products, sand and gravel, asphalt, metals, and fuel during construction, and energy resources during operation.

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- Any indirect increase in the intensity of development along major transportation corridors and other local roads would result in an increase in regional energy consumption. Fossil fuels are the principal source of energy, and the project will increase consumption of available supplies, including natural gas and electricity. These energy resource demands relate to initial project construction and the transport of people and goods.

7.2 SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(b) requires an EIR to discuss unavoidable significant environmental effects, including those that can be mitigated but not reduced to a level of insignificance. In addition, Section 15093(a) of the CEQA Guidelines allows the decision-making agency to determine that the benefits of a proposed project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental impacts of implementing the project.

Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA) is the lead agency for this project. Projects can still be approved if it would have unavoidable adverse impacts if the entity with jurisdiction over the project prepares a "Statement of Overriding Considerations" setting forth the specific reasons for making such a judgment. The environmental effects listed below are those that cannot be avoided if the 2009 CTP is implemented. They include impacts that can be mitigated, but not reduced to a level of insignificance. The economic, social, technological, or other benefits of the 2009 CTP will be considered when balancing these impacts in the Statement of Overriding Considerations. The following significant and unavoidable impacts (project and cumulative) have been identified in Sections 4.1 through 4.13 and Section 5.0 of this EIR.

SECTION 4.3 TRAFFIC AND CIRCULATION

Increase Daily Vehicle Miles Traveled

Impact 4.3-1 Implementation of the 2009 CTP would not directly cause increases in traffic or vehicle miles traveled. However, the 2009 CTP would support growth in Sonoma County that would substantially increase daily vehicle miles traveled in 2035 by 2,976,144 over existing conditions. The traffic impacts associated with the anticipated growth within the county (through 2020) were identified as significant and unavoidable in the County's General Plan 2020 EIR. This impact is therefore considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Increase Daily Vehicles Hours Traveled

Impact 4.3-2 Implementation of the 2009 CTP would not directly cause increases in daily vehicle hours traveled. However, the 2009 CTP would support growth in Sonoma County that would substantially increase daily vehicle miles traveled in 2035 by 282,874 over existing conditions. The impacts associated with the anticipated growth within the county (through 2020) were identified as significant and unavoidable in the County's General Plan 2020 Draft EIR. This impact is considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Reduce Average Daily Vehicle Speeds

Impact 4.3-3 Implementation of the 2009 CTP would not directly cause a reduction of average daily vehicle speeds. However, the 2009 CTP would support growth in Sonoma County that would substantially reduce average daily vehicle

speeds in 2035 by 11 miles per hour over existing conditions. The traffic impacts associated with the anticipated growth within the county (through 2020) were identified as significant and unavoidable in the County's General Plan 2020 Draft EIR. This impact is therefore considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Increase Person Hours of Delay or Person Hours of Travel

Impact 4.3-4 Implementation of the 2009 CTP would not directly increase PHD or PHT on the county's roadway system. However, the 2009 CTP would support growth in Sonoma County that would substantially increase daily PHD by 250,102 and PHT by 335,166 over existing conditions. The traffic impacts associated with the anticipated growth within the county (through 2020) were identified as significant and unavoidable in the County's General Plan 2020 Draft EIR. This impact is therefore considered **significant and unavoidable**.

SECTION 4.6 GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Loss, Injury, or Death to Travelers Due to Earthquakes, Landslides, Ground Failure, or Liquefaction

Impact 4.6-1 The proposed Comprehensive Transportation Plan invests in new capital roadway and transit improvements that will increase the capacity of the county's transportation infrastructure to move people and goods. This would increase the risk of loss, injury, or death to travelers or structures due to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or liquefaction. These impacts are considered **significant and unavoidable**.

SECTION 4.10 NOISE

Increased Ambient Noise from Roadway Improvements

Impact 4.10-2 Proposed roadway improvements in the CTP, particularly new, realigned, or expanded roadways, could indirectly result in a substantial increase in ambient noise in areas that would exceed standards established in local general plans or noise ordinances and/or increase local noise levels by three or more dBA over existing conditions. This impact would be considered **significant and unavoidable**.

Noise from Train Horns Along the Railroad Right-of-Way

Impact 4.10-4 Proposed rail service on the railroad right-of-way will require use of train horns that will produce substantial increases in ambient noise that would exceed applicable noise exposure standard of 60 dBA Ldn. Unless Quiet Zones are implemented at grade crossings, the impact of train horns would be considered **significant and unavoidable**.

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4.13 ENERGY

Increase in Fuel Consumption from Transportation Sector

Impact 4.13-1 Implementation of the 2009 CTP would not directly cause increases in energy consumption from the transportation sector. However, in addressing current and projected mobility challenges, the 2009 CTP would accommodate planned growth in Sonoma County that will substantially increase the consumption of nonrenewable petroleum-based products like gasoline and diesel fuel by 2035. By 2035, motor vehicles would consume 159,000 more gallons of gasoline and 5,000 more gallons of diesel fuel per day than under existing conditions. This represents a 20 percent increase in gasoline consumption and a 7 percent increase in diesel fuel. In addition, proposed commuter rail service and freight service on the SMART corridor will consume 916,000 gallons of diesel fuel daily starting in 2014. This impact is **significant and unavoidable**.

7.3 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(d) requires that an environmental impact report (EIR) evaluate the growth-inducing impacts of a proposed action. A growth-inducing impact is defined by the CEQA Guidelines as:

The way in which a proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Included in this are projects which would remove obstacles to population growth...It is not assumed that growth in an area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.

A project can have direct and/or indirect growth inducement potential. Direct growth inducement would result if a project, for example, involved construction of new housing. A project would have indirect growth inducement potential if it established substantial new permanent employment opportunities (e.g., commercial, industrial, or governmental enterprises) or if it would involve a construction effort with substantial short-term employment opportunities that would indirectly stimulate the need for additional housing and services to support the new employment demand. Similarly, a project would indirectly induce growth if it would remove an obstacle to additional growth and development, such as removing a constraint on a required public service. A project providing an increased water supply in an area where water service historically limited growth could be considered growth inducing.

The CEQA Guidelines further explain that the environmental effects of induced growth are considered indirect impacts of the proposed action. These indirect impacts or secondary effects of growth may result in significant, adverse environmental impacts. Potential secondary effects of growth include increased demand on other community and public services and infrastructure, increased traffic and noise, and adverse environmental impacts such as degradation of air and water quality, degradation or loss of plant and animal habitat, and conversion of agricultural and open space land to developed uses.

Growth inducement may constitute an adverse impact if the growth is not consistent with or accommodated by the land use plans and growth management plans and policies for the area affected. Local land use plans provide for land use development patterns and growth policies that allow for the orderly expansion of urban development supported by adequate urban public services, such as water supply, roadway infrastructure, sewer service, and solid waste service. A project that would induce “disorderly” growth (conflict with the local land use plans) could indirectly cause additional adverse environmental impacts and other public service impacts. Thus, to assess whether a growth-inducing project would result in adverse secondary effects, it is important to assess the degree to which the growth accommodated by a project would or would not be consistent with applicable land use plans.

ANALYSIS

Transportation investments have historically lagged behind population growth in most growing areas, including Sonoma County. Locally, population growth and resulting increases in travel demand affected the capacity of U.S. 101 and necessitated improvements such as interchange improvements and widening in the central and southern portions of the county. The ability to expand the transportation system has often been limited by fiscal resources.

As described in Section 3.0, the proposed project is intended to address existing and projected deficiencies in the countywide transportation system. As such, it responds to the challenge of planned growth throughout Sonoma County that will continue to challenge the multi-modal transportation system of the region. Therefore, the Draft 2009 CTP is not expected to induce growth in the region beyond that projected in ABAG's Projections 2007 or what is anticipated under applicable general plans in Sonoma County. Growth-inducing effects may occur at the local level near individual projects (e.g., transit-oriented development near a transit station or hub), but these effects would be consistent with Projections 2007, which anticipates more infill and densification in urban areas. The physical environmental effects of planned general plan growth have been addressed and disclosed in their associated general plan EIRs.

The socioeconomic forecasts used in the CTP are based on ABAG's Projections 2005 with adjustments based on local forecasts and the release of ABAG's Projections 2007. ABAG population and employment forecasts were used as control totals for jurisdictions and County planning areas. Sub-allocation of control totals to traffic analysis zones within jurisdiction boundaries were based on input from local planning agencies and SCTA staff.

The causes of growth typically involve a complex and varied relationship between a number of factors, including economic conditions and employment opportunities, natural population increase, public policies, and the local government setting. Because population and/or economic growth generally produce a varied range of effects that occur simultaneously, attempts to label growth as categorically adverse or beneficial are considered subjective. Furthermore, CEQA does not assume that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.2[d]). The 2009 CTP would have the following direct and indirect growth-inducing impacts:

- **Mass Transit.** Constructing transit improvements listed in the Measure M Strategic Plan and the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) passenger rail project (30-minute headways during peak periods) and expanding services to various points in the county are not expected to attract a substantial number of new residents to the area. A primary purpose of the SMART rail project is to alleviate the already congested commuter travel along U.S. 101 through Sonoma and Marin counties. While an indirect impact of the SMART rail project may be the attraction of some new residents to Sonoma

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County, no significant population increases will occur in the county due to construction of the rail system. Improving the efficiency and range of bus service generally does not attract new residents to an area, though improved service could attract more local development near a transit station or stop.

- **Non-motorized Transportation Improvements.** Improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities would increase safety for those users, expand recreational opportunities, and improve the ability to bike or walk to work, school, shopping, and other destinations. The construction of these facilities will not induce a significant number of new residents to Sonoma County.
- **Roads and Highways.** Many of the projects included in the 2009 CTP are minor improvements of existing roads and highways and their support facilities (e.g., bridges, shoulders, park-and-ride facilities, and other safety improvements). This class of projects is not expected to have any significant growth-inducing impacts; rather, it will help maintain existing or projected levels of service at acceptable levels.

As discussed in Chapter 4.11, the general plans for Sonoma County and its nine incorporated cities account for growth. The proposed improvements in the 2009 CTP will not modify the current system and will play a minimal role in attracting, inducing, or altering the location of new residents beyond projected general plan levels.

7.4 IMPACTS FOUND NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT

CEQA requires that an EIR indicate why potentially significant impacts were determined not to be significant and therefore were not analyzed or discussed in detail in the EIR. For the impact areas discussed in Section 4.1 through 4.13, all potentially significant impacts were identified and discussed, based on the direction of the Initial Study prepared for this proposed project. At that time, two issue areas were determined not to be significant and therefore were not addressed in the Draft EIR.

- **Mineral Resources:** The proposed 2009 CTP will not have an impact on mineral resources, as no mineral resources were identified within the areas of proposed projects.
- **Recreation:** The proposed 2009 CTP will not have a significant adverse effect on recreational facilities or their uses. If the construction of proposed projects in the CTP occurs near recreational facilities, minor short-term impacts may occur. However, the impacts would be short-term and related to facility access, not degradation of the public transportation system.