

Chapter 1

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

The Napa County Transportation Planning Agency (NCTPA) is proposing a Sales Tax Ordinance and accompanying Transportation Improvement Expenditure Plan (proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan) to fund and implement future transportation improvements throughout incorporated and unincorporated Napa County. Upon approval by the Napa County Board of Supervisors, the Napa Valley Transportation Agency (NVTVA) would administer the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan contains three programs, which encompass different categories of improvements proposed for implementation. These programs include the Jamieson Canyon Corridor Program, the Transportation Demand Management Program, and the Safe Streets and Roads Maintenance and Congestion Relief Program (including specific “star projects” identified by local jurisdictions in Napa County). Each of these programs includes specific projects or improvements that would be implemented under the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan. These programs are described in detail in Chapter 2, Project Description.

PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

The NCTPA has determined that the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan may have potentially significant environmental impacts and is requiring the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The purpose of the EIR is to provide the NCTPA, public agencies, and the public in general with information about the environmental effects of implementing the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan, to examine and institute feasible methods of mitigating adverse environmental impacts should the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan be approved, and to consider alternatives to the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan. This EIR has been prepared in conformance with the provisions of CEQA Guidelines as amended.

CEQA provides that public agencies should not approve projects until all feasible means available have been employed to substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of such projects. “Feasible” means capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time taking into account economic, environmental, social, and technological factors.

A main purpose of CEQA is to establish opportunities for the public to review and comment on projects that may affect the environment. CEQA provides for public participation through:

- Project scoping;
- Publication of a Notice of Preparation and/or Initial Study (NOP/IS);

- Public review of environmental documents; and
- Public hearings.

CEQA also requires that a final EIR include responses to all comments received from the public review of the draft EIR.

The NCTPA distributed an NOP/IS for the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan for public review and comment on March 24, 2005 and October 3, 2005. The subsequent NOP/IS was issued to reflect project revisions from a 15-year timeframe to a 30-year time frame for the proposed tax ordinance. The NOP/IS was distributed to identify issues of concern regarding the transportation improvement expenditure plan and to incorporate comments into the analysis for the draft program EIR. No written comments were received on either NOP/IS. Opportunities for public participation during the transportation improvement expenditure plan process were provided by the NCTPA on June 20, 2005 in Napa, June 21, 2005 in American Canyon, and June 23, 2005 in Calistoga. Four additional meetings were held with the Napa County League of Government Ad-Hoc Transportation Sales Tax Sub-Committee where opportunities for public participation were available. Other opportunities for public participation occur on a monthly basis during the regular meetings of the NCTPA Board of Directors and the NCTPA Technical Advisory Committee.

This draft program EIR will be circulated for a 45-day public review period, from November 20, 2005 to January 3, 2006, to provide agencies and the public with opportunities to comment on the draft program EIR. These comments will be addressed in the final program EIR.

PROGRAM-LEVEL ANALYSIS AND TIERING

Future environmental analyses of individual projects under the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan may be “tiered” from this program EIR. CEQA Guidelines Section 15152 describes tiering as “using the analysis of general matters contained in a broader EIR (such as one prepared for a general plan or policy statement) with later EIRs and negative declarations on narrower projects; incorporating by reference the general discussions from the broader EIR; and concentrating the later EIR or negative declaration solely on the issues specific to the later projects.” The CEQA Guidelines further state, “Agencies are encouraged to tier the environmental analyses which they prepare for separate but related projects...This approach can eliminate repetitive discussions of the same issues and focus the later EIR or negative declaration on the actual issues [that need to be considered by decision makers] at each level of environmental review.”

The preparation of this program EIR does not relieve the lead agencies of individual projects proposed in the transportation improvement expenditure plan of the responsibility of complying with the requirements of CEQA (and/or the National Environmental Policy Act [NEPA] for projects requiring federal funding or other federal approvals). This draft program EIR represents the initial tier of environmental review for the projects proposed in the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan. The appropriate lead agency responsible for reviewing individual projects shall

determine the necessary, project-level environmental review needed as individual project details are defined. The agencies may use as a reference the discussion of region-wide impacts in this program EIR as a basis of their assessment of region-wide or cumulative transportation impacts.

REQUIRED APPROVALS FOR THE PROGRAM EIR

As the lead agency under CEQA, the NVTA Board of Directors will certify the final program EIR. This draft program EIR is intended for the sole use in the consideration for approval of the transportation improvement expenditure plan and should not be used for the approval of individual projects included in the transportation improvement expenditure plan. However, information from this document may be referenced as applicable.

STANDARDS OF ADEQUACY

Section 15151 of the CEQA Guidelines specifies that an EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information that enables them to make a decision that intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. The standards of adequacy as described in CEQA state the following:¹

- An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible.
- Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts.
- The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

EFFECT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

In accordance with Sections 15143 and 15145 of the CEQA Guidelines, this EIR focuses on the potential significant effects on the environment resulting from the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan. Each major topic (e.g., Hydrology and Water Quality, Biological Resources) provides criteria for evaluating whether an environmental impact is significant or less than significant. As explained in Section 15002(g) of the CEQA Guidelines, a significant effect on the environment is defined as a substantial adverse change in the physical conditions, which exist in the area affected by the proposed project.

¹ CEQA Guidelines Section 15151.

The definition of impacts using terms such as “less than significant” is not found in the CEQA Guidelines, but for purposes of this draft program EIR, a less-than-significant environmental impact is one in which there is no long or short-term significant adverse change to the environmental settings. Significant impacts are substantial adverse effects that exceed significance criteria as established by CEQA, state or federal regulations, or professional judgment. For all significant impacts identified in the EIR, mitigation measures are proposed to avoid or reduce impacts to less than significant.

If the mitigation measure cannot reduce the significant impact to less than significant, the impact is termed significant and unavoidable. For one or more significant unavoidable impacts that cannot be substantially mitigated, the NVTa must prepare a Statement of Overriding Considerations in which it sets forth its views in writing on the ultimate balancing of the merits of approving a project despite the environmental impacts which would result from project implementation. This process requires consideration of the NVTa to weigh the benefits of the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan against its unavoidable environmental risks in determining whether to approve the plan.

ORGANIZATION OF THE EIR

The EIR is organized into the following five chapters:

- Chapter 1, Introduction, provides an overview to the EIR, its purpose and its intended uses.
- Chapter 2, Project Description, provides the project background, a description of the three programs included in the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan, alternatives considered, and required regulatory approvals.
- Chapter 3, Environmental Analysis, describes the environmental setting and presents the evaluation of potential impacts resulting from implementation of the proposed transportation improvements expenditure plan.
- Chapter 4, Other CEQA Considerations, discusses other topical issues required by CEQA, such as significant unavoidable adverse effects, growth-inducing effects, and cumulative impacts.
- Chapter 5, Alternatives, describes alternatives to the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan and compares the environmental aspects of the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan to the alternatives. The environmentally superior alternative is identified.
- Chapter 6, Report Preparers, lists the individuals involved in preparing this draft program EIR.
- Technical Appendices are included at the end of the report.

SCOPE OF THIS EIR

As lead agency, and based on the IS, the NVTa identified potentially significant impacts that could result from implementation of the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan (see Appendix A). The NVTa determined that this program EIR evaluate the following environmental resource topics:

- Land Use and Planning
- Visual Quality
- Population and Housing
- Transportation (including emergency response and evacuation)
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Agricultural Resources
- Geology and Seismicity
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Cultural Resources

Based on the IS, the following environmental resource topics were identified as having less-than-significant or no impacts and thus, are not discussed in the draft program EIR:

- Mineral Resources
- Public Services
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Recreation
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials (except emergency response or evacuation plans, see Transportation)

For a complete discussion of the environmental resource topics scoped out of the draft program EIR, see Appendix A.