

Chapter 5

Alternatives

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and describe the alternatives to the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan. Project alternatives are developed to reduce or eliminate the potentially significant adverse environmental effects of the proposed project while still meeting most if not all of the basic project objectives.

California Environmental Quality Act Requirements

An EIR must evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project, or to the location of the proposed project, which could feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6). An EIR need not evaluate the environmental effects of alternatives in the same level of detail as the proposed project, but must include enough information to allow meaningful evaluation, analysis, and comparison with the proposed project. CEQA provides the following guidelines for discussing alternatives to a proposed project:

The specific alternative of the “no project” shall also be evaluated along with its impacts...If the environmentally superior alternative is the “no project” alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2)).

The discussion of alternatives shall focus on alternatives to the project or its location which are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the project, even if these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the proposed objectives, or would be more costly (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(b)).

If an alternative would cause one or more significant effects in addition to those that would be caused by the project as proposed, the significant effects of the alternative shall be discussed, but in less detail than the significant effects of the project as proposed (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(d)).

The range of alternatives required in an EIR is governed by a “rule of reason” that requires the EIR to set forth only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice...The range of feasible alternatives shall be selected and discussed in a manner to foster meaningful public participation and informed decision making...An EIR need not consider an alternative whose

effect cannot be reasonably ascertained and whose implementation is remote and speculative (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(f)).

The requirement that an EIR evaluate alternatives to the proposed project or alternatives that address the location of the proposed project is a broad one; the primary intent of the alternatives analysis is to disclose other ways that the objectives of the project could be attained while reducing the magnitude of, or avoiding, the environmental impacts of the proposed project. Alternatives that are included and evaluated in the EIR must be feasible alternatives. However, the Public Resources Code and CEQA Guidelines direct that the EIR need “set forth only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice.” The CEQA Guidelines provide a definition for “a range of reasonable alternatives” and, thus, limit the number and type of alternatives that need to be evaluated in a given EIR. Alternatives in an EIR must be feasible. In the context of CEQA, “feasible” is defined as:

...capable of being accomplished in a successful manner within a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social, and technological factors.

Further, the following factors may be taken into consideration in the assessment of the feasibility of alternatives: site suitability, economic viability, availability of infrastructure, general plan consistency, other plans or regulator limitations, jurisdictional boundaries, and the ability of the proponent to attain site control (Section 15126.6(f)(1)). Finally, an EIR is not required to analyze alternatives when the effects of the alternative “cannot be reasonably ascertained and whose implementation is remote and speculative” (Section 15126.6(f)(3)).

The selection of alternatives takes into account the project objectives in Chapter 2, Project Description. The project objectives are to:

- Provide highway capital improvements and maintenance and meet Napa County’s transportation needs in a timely manner.
- Provide congestion relief and improve safety within the Jamieson Corridor.
- Generate funding for a countywide transportation demand management program.
- Provide funds to the cities and Napa County to supplement local revenue for local street and road improvements.

Equally important to attaining the project objectives is the reduction of some or all significant impacts, particularly those that could not be mitigated to a level below the threshold of significance. The project-specific and cumulative significant and unavoidable impacts of the proposed project, after mitigation, are:

AQ-3. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan programs could result in permanent increases in air emissions that could expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations.

- NO-1. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan programs could result in permanent increases in ambient noise levels that exceed established local noise standards or other applicable standards.
- NO-2. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan programs could result in short-term increase of ambient noise and groundborne vibration levels.
- AG-1. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan programs could permanently convert Important Farmlands to non-agricultural use.
- AG-3. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan programs could conflict with areas zoned or used for agricultural use.
- BR-1. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan could result in permanent disturbance or loss of special status plant populations.
- BR-2. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan could result in the introduction or spread of noxious weeds.
- BR-3. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan could result in permanent disturbance or loss of riparian habitats.
- BR-4. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan could result in permanent disturbance or loss of Waters of the United States, including wetlands.
- BR-5. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan could result in permanent disturbance or loss of special status wildlife species and their habitat.
- CR-1. The proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan programs could result in the permanent loss of a historic resource.

Alternatives Considered and Dismissed from Further Consideration

Consistent with CEQA, primary consideration was given to alternatives that would reduce significant impacts while still meeting most of the project objectives. Those alternatives that would have impacts identical to or more severe than the proposed project, or that would not meet most of the project objectives, were rejected from further consideration.

Alternatives considered and dismissed are briefly described below.

- **Previous Failed Plan:** The previously proposed tax ordinance and expenditure plan was rejected by Napa County voters because it lacked political support, provided too much time and funding to numerous projects, and failed to meet local general plan objectives.

- **Major Highway Improvement Alternative:** This alternative would use funds generated by the tax ordinance only for roads and widenings necessary to achieve LOS C throughout Napa County. This alternative was rejected because it was economically infeasible (the necessary improvements cost more than the tax ordinance would generate), it would be inconsistent with local general plans, it would damage Napa's unique character, and it fails to provide transportation demand management or fix existing roads.
- **Road Maintenance Tax:** This alternative would providing funding only for maintenance of existing roads. This alternative was rejected because it would not relieve existing congestion and would not implement policies of local general plans that govern transportation in the county.

Alternatives Considered in this EIR

- The **No Project Alternative** assumes the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan would not be implemented and no additional funding would be available for the proposed transportation improvements in Napa County.
- The **15-Year Tax Ordinance and Transportation Improvement Expenditure Plan Alternative** assumes a reduced program would be implemented under the transportation improvement expenditure plan and the tax ordinance would be expected to generate approximately \$208 million over a 15-year time period.
- The **Transit Program Alternative** assumes the proposed tax ordinance would be implemented over a 20-year time period to generate approximately \$300 million, of which \$100 million would be allocated to transit-related improvements throughout Napa County, and \$200 million would be allocated to the Safe Streets and Road Maintenance and Congestion Relief Program, including the local star projects list.

Each of the alternatives is described in more detail below, followed by an assessment of the alternative's impacts relative to the proposed project. The focus of this analysis is the difference between the alternative and the proposed project, with an emphasis on addressing the significant impacts identified under the proposed project. For each issue area, the analysis indicated which mitigation measures would be required of the alternative and which significant and unavoidable impacts would be avoided. In some cases, the analysis indicates what additional mitigation measures, if any, would be required for the alternative being discussed, and what significant and unavoidable impacts would be more (or less) severe. Unless otherwise indicated, the level of significance and required mitigation would be the same for the alternative as for the proposed project and no further statement of the level of significance is made.

No Project

Under this alternative, the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan would not be implemented and no additional funding would be available for the proposed transportation improvements in Napa County through the voter approved tax ordinance. The estimated \$537 million needed to address transportation inadequacies (e.g., deteriorated local roads and highways, inadequate transit services, inadequate highway capacity, and unsafe roadways) proposed under the transportation improvement expenditure plan would not be provided. Existing roadway safety hazards associated with the Jamieson Canyon Corridor, local areas identified in the Safe Streets and Road Maintenance and Congestion Relief Program, and the local star projects list would remain. The SR 12/29 interchange would still be constructed as a separate project.

The No Project Alternative would reduce impacts related to the construction or expansion of transportation facilities, including the significant and unavoidable impacts related to air quality, noise, agricultural resources, and cultural resources. While the No Project Alternative would avoid these impacts, it would fail to improve upon existing public safety shortcomings associated with unsafe roadways. In addition, this alternative would not reduce significant traffic and transportation impacts anticipated as the area grows and as existing congested conditions worsen. Also, as described in Chapter 2, Project Description, the level of maintenance, construction, and transit operations in the county's communities is highly dependent on added funding and without additional funding the level of congestion and operating costs for the driving public would be expected to increase greatly, while the level of road maintenance and transit service to not only the elderly and transit-dependent, but as a viable alternative to the private automobile, would be expected to greatly decrease. Furthermore, the No Project Alternative would not achieve any of the project objectives.

15-Year Tax Ordinance and Transportation Improvement Expenditure Plan

Under this alternative, a reduced transportation improvement expenditure plan and the tax ordinance would be implemented and would be expected to generate approximately \$208 million over a 15-year time period. Within the 15-year time period, the transportation improvement expenditure plan components would include the Jamieson Canyon Corridor Program or the TDM Program as currently proposed, but less funding in the Safe Streets and Road Maintenance and Congestion Relief Program (\$115 million versus \$356 million with the proposed project) and the local star projects. The main difference from the proposed project would be in a reduced time period for collection of future tax revenue and the associated reduction in funding of local road rehabilitation and maintenance and local and regional road safety and operational improvements.

Because the 15-Year Tax Ordinance and Transportation Improvement Expenditure Plan Alternative would occur over a shorter time period and would result in the construction of fewer projects and the implementation of fewer programs, the significant and unavoidable environmental impacts associated with the plan as proposed would be less severe. However, this alternative would likely still result in significant impacts to air, noise, agriculture, and cultural resources, requiring mitigation where applicable. In addition, this alternative would allow existing conditions to remain unimproved in certain areas depending on which specific projects are eliminated, which could result in continued or

worsening roadway safety hazards and traffic congestion. The 15-Year Tax Ordinance and Transportation Improvement Expenditure Plan Alternative would achieve the project objectives at a reduced level. Although this alternative would achieve some of the project objectives, as described in Chapter 2, Project Description, the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan would fully fund necessary capital, transit, and local maintenance and rehabilitation projects in the county for 30 years such that existing and future projected traffic operational and roadway structural inefficiencies could be minimized or avoided.

Transit Program

Under this alternative, the proposed tax ordinance would be implemented over a 20-year time period to generate approximately \$300 million, \$100 million of which would be allocated to transit-related improvements throughout Napa County, and \$200 million would be allocated to the Safe Streets and Road Maintenance and Congestion Relief Program, including the local star projects list. The transit-related improvements would include purchase and operation of express bus service in three corridors: Calistoga to Santa Rosa (using a limited daily schedule and smaller vehicle), Calistoga to Vallejo Express Bus, and Napa to Solano County (Fairfield) Express Bus. The express service would be provided by commuter-oriented comfort coaches, which would operate on existing roadways and along potential rail corridors. Signal preemption would be made available to buses at critical intersections to ensure the efficient movement of buses through congested areas. Advanced transit technologies would be used to provide passengers on buses and at stations with information regarding transfers and arrival and departure times. A series of park and ride lots and transit stations would be built to provide convenient access to the express lines. The transit stations/park and ride lots would be built in such a way that they would be compatible with a future rail system. This option provides funding to complete design, engineering, and environmental studies on rail, as well as to purchase rail right-of-way if it becomes available. Funding for the Safe Streets and Road Maintenance and Congestion Relief Program would be less than under the proposed project (approximately \$56 million less), but similar improvements would occur and the 20 star projects would likely be implemented. The main difference from the proposed project would be that funding would not be allocated to the Jamieson Canyon Corridor program or the TDM Program.

The Transit Program Alternative would result in physical impacts associated with the construction of new park and ride lots and transit stations, and road widening and realignments associated with the Safe Streets and Road Maintenance and Congestion Relief Program. The alternative could result in significant and unavoidable impacts related to air quality, noise, agricultural resources, and cultural resources. However, the impacts associated with this alternative would be less severe than under the proposed plan because the alternative would not make physical improvements in the Jamieson Corridor. This alternative would result in continued or worsening safety and roadway operation hazards and congestion that would not occur under the proposed project because it would not make needed physical improvements to roadways, particularly within the Jamieson Corridor. The Transit Program Alternative would also fail to meet the project objectives to improve conditions in the Jamieson Corridor and to create a TDM Program. Furthermore, as described in Chapter 2, Project Description, the Jamieson Canyon Corridor Program projects are necessary for access to and from

I-80 – the main economic transportation corridor in the North Bay. Implementation of these projects would provide a direct and improved connection for all three of the major industrial tracts in the county’s communities and would also provide a better connection for employees commuting into Napa County, of which many are employed by key jobs in fire, police and health care services. Additionally, without the provision for the TDM Program component, the NCTPA’s existing short-range transit plan’s \$2 million dollar shortfall would not be met and the existing transit programs would not be able to be implemented as programmed.

Environmentally Superior Alternative

An EIR is required to identify the environmentally superior alternative from among the range of reasonable alternatives that are evaluated. Section 15126.6(e) of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an environmentally superior alternative be designated and states that “if the environmentally superior alternative is the ‘no project’ alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives.”

From the alternatives analyzed for the proposed transportation improvement expenditure plan, the environmentally superior alternative would be the No Project Alternative. This alternative would avoid all significant impacts associated with the proposed project. As stated above, however, in accordance with the CEQA Guidelines, an environmentally superior alternative must also be selected from the remaining alternatives. The 15-Year Tax Ordinance and Transportation Improvement Expenditure Plan Alternative and the Transit Program Alternative would both result in less severe impacts than the proposed project and would reduce some of the existing hazards (unsafe roadways and congestion). Although each alternative would result in slightly different impacts in different locations, given the absence of details on the alternatives, including the physical location and footprint of any facilities, the operational plans, and the timing, it is not feasible to determine which of the two alternatives would avoid more impacts. Therefore, both the 15-Year Tax Ordinance and Transportation Improvement Expenditure Plan Alternative and the Transit Program Alternative would be considered the environmentally superior alternative.