

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Solano Transportation Authority (STA) is the Lead Agency for the project under CEQA and as such has prepared this Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which examines the potential environmental impacts of the North Connector Project (Project) located in Solano County, California. This document evaluates the Project and examines a reasonable range of Project alternatives. The document includes discussion of the existing environment that could be affected by the Project, the potential impacts that are associated with implementation of the Project, and proposed avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation measures.

PURPOSE OF THE EIR

The EIR is intended to inform decision makers, responsible agencies, and the public of the potential environmental consequences of implementing the Project. It does not recommend approval or denial of the Project. The EIR has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines, as amended. CEQA requires all state and local government agencies to consider the environmental consequences of a project over which they have discretionary authority, and to balance the benefits of a proposed project against potentially significant environmental effects. The STA is the lead agency for this EIR.

This EIR proposes mitigation measures to reduce potentially significant environmental impacts; discloses significant impacts that cannot be avoided, and also discusses growth-inducing impacts, cumulative impacts, and effects found not to be significant. It also addresses alternatives that may avoid or substantially lessen potential environment impacts, including the No-Project Alternative as required by CEQA § 15126.6.

USE OF THE EIR

The EIR prepared for the Project will serve as the primary environmental document for the Project and all future development that is undertaken on the Project site pursuant thereto. The EIR is anticipated to be the definitive environmental document for Project implementation. It will serve as a Project EIR for the development of the proposed roadway improvements. A Project EIR is appropriate because it analyzes the environmental effects of a specific project and contains a detailed level of information regarding development and construction of the proposed uses. Furthermore, this environmental document may be used as the environmental basis for which General Plan Amendments (GPAs) by the City of Fairfield (related to the Fairfield Linear Park) and Solano County (designed to clarify the intent of Policy 2 of Chapter III Land Use and Circulation Element, Agriculture and Open Space Land Use) are pursued to facilitate development of this Project.

SCOPE OF THIS EIR

As provided for in CEQA § 15063 and 15126, the focus of this EIR is limited to specific issues and concerns identified by the STA as causing potentially significant effects on the environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

Review Process Activity	Date
Notice of Preparation	January 2003
Public Scoping Meeting(s)	March 2003 and May 2003
Property Owner Meeting	February 2004
Newsletter	Fall 2004
Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration	November 2006
Public Meeting	December 2006
Circulation of the Environmental Impact Report	September 2007
Public Hearing	October 2007
Recirculation of the Environmental Impact Report	January 2008

Public Scoping Meeting

A public scoping meeting was held on March 6, 2003 from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM at Nelda Mundy Elementary School in the City of Fairfield. The public scoping comment period was for 30 days, from February 28 to April 1, 2003. A meeting notice was mailed to more than 2,300 property owners, elected officials, City of Fairfield (City) and Solano County (County) staff, special interest organizations and neighborhood groups in the Project area. In addition, a meeting notice display advertisement was printed in area newspapers, meeting information was posted on the STA, City and County web sites and a media release and Public Service Announcement were distributed to local media outlets. Comments taken during the public scoping meeting include topics related to traffic congestion, cut-through traffic, funding, bicycle access, and flood control.

Other Public Meetings at which the North Connector Project was Discussed

Information on the Project was also presented at the I-80/I-680/SR12 Interchange Project Open House and Public Scoping Meeting on May 12, 2003.

A second meeting for affected property owners was held on February 5, 2004 from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM at the City of Suisun City Council Chambers. This meeting was targeted toward property owners that may be directly affected by one or more of the proposed alternatives and alignment options for the Project being studied at that time (see Chapter 6.0 Alternatives, Alignment Evaluation Process). The purpose of the meeting was to provide these property owners with an opportunity to review the alignment options for the Project and provide comments.

A meeting invitation letter was mailed to potentially impacted property owners approximately two weeks prior to the meeting. Local elected officials and key representatives from homeowner associations, business associations and special interest groups were also invited to attend the meeting by letter.

Comments received during the question and answer session and from the comment sheet included those related to funding, property concerns, construction phasing, traffic impacts, and proposed traffic infrastructure.

Newsletters

Due to the proximity of the Project to other transportation projects being planned in the County, information about the Project was included in the February and October 2004 issues of the *Corridor Progress*, a newsletter for the I-80/I-680/SR12 Interchange Project which highlighted the Project and its current status. The newsletter was mailed out to approximately 2,300 contacts including property owners and residents, special interest groups, elected officials, and agency representatives. Additional newsletters were published and distributed in April 2006 and June 2007.

Initial Study and Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration

A Notice of Completion (NOC) was filed with the California State Clearinghouse on November 9, 2006, initiating the public review period for an Initial Study (IS)/Proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND), which ended December 29, 2006. During this time, the public was encouraged to submit comments regarding the Project or the analysis contained within the document. In addition, a public meeting was held at the Nelda Mundy Elementary School in Fairfield on December 14, 2006. Notification for this meeting included two display ads in the *Daily Republic*; mailed meeting notices to approximately 1,084 residents, property owners, homeowner associations, environmental organizations, business associations, and key jurisdictional agencies; and telephone calls to approximately 10 key stakeholders.

During the public meeting on December 14, 2006, verbal comments and questions were received. Comments taken during the verbal comment period included concerns about traffic, alternatives, construction phasing, the Fairfield Linear Park, safety and health concerns, impacts to noise, air quality, biological resources, impacts to farmlands, funding, and the proposed truck scales. In addition to the Public Meeting, 25 comment letters were received during the review period; 9 from public agencies and organizations and 16 from the general public. Comments received during the public review period are available at the STA.

Decision to Prepare an EIR

In order to fully address comments received during the public review period, STA decided to expand the analysis and prepare an EIR. Preparation of the EIR would also reflect that environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was no longer necessary because the Project would be funded through local and state funding sources.

Expansion of the environmental document from a IS/MND to an EIR does not require recirculation of the NOP. The original NOP for the North Connector Project environmental document was distributed in accordance with CEQA guidelines.

The Draft EIR was published on September 10, 2007 and circulated for a 45-day public review and comment period. A Public Hearing for the Draft EIR was held on October 2, 2007. After review of the public comments, the Solano County Transportation Authority (STA) determined the EIR should be revised to include additional information and recirculated for public review and comment.

CONTENTS OF THE RECIRCULATED EIR

All of the environmental topics analyzed in the prior EIR and the issues identified during the public review period have been incorporated into this revised and recirculated EIR. For each environmental issue, the EIR describes the environmental setting (current conditions), then discusses and analyzes the potential related impacts that could be caused by Project implementation.

- For each environmental topic area, the EIR provides a discussion of existing objectives, policies, and programs of the City and County general plans. For each significant or potentially significant impact, a Project-specific mitigation measure designed to mitigate one or more Project impacts is provided.

The STA must implement all mitigation measures identified in this EIR and set forth in the mitigation monitoring and reporting program, or their environmental equivalent. "Environmental equivalent" means any mitigation measure and/or timing thereof, subject to the approval of the STA, that compared to the prescribed mitigation measure, would have the same or superior result and would have the same or superior effect on the environment. The STA in conjunction with appropriate agencies and/or jurisdictions shall determine the adequacy of any proposed environmental equivalent. The STA would ensure compliance with an environmental equivalent through the mitigation monitoring process.

ORGANIZATION OF THE EIR

The EIR is organized into the following chapters and sections:

Chapter 1.0-Executive Summary: A summary of the Project and environmental consequences that would result from the Project, including a table of the significant environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and level of significance after mitigation.

Chapter 2.0-Introduction: An introduction and overview of the Project and the environmental review process.

Chapter 3.0-Project Description: A description of the proposed Project features.

Chapter 4.0-Existing Conditions, Project Impacts, and Mitigation Measures: The existing conditions, discussion of potential impacts, and proposed mitigation measures for each of the required environmental topic areas.

Chapter 5.0-Alternatives: A description of the Project alternatives analyzed, including the No-Project Alternative.

Chapter 6.0-CEQA Required Conclusions: A discussion of cumulative impacts, significant and unavoidable impacts, and all other CEQA required conclusions.

Chapter 7.0-List of Preparers.

Chapter 8.0-Distribution List.

Chapter 9.0-References.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE EIR

This EIR uses the following terminology to denote the significance of environmental impacts of the proposed Project:

- A “beneficial impact” is a positive contribution or improvement to the physical conditions that exist in the area affected by the Project.
- An “environmental impact” is a direct or indirect effect that would be caused the Project that constitutes a physical change to the existing natural or man-made conditions within the area affected by the Project.
- A “no impact” would result in no environmental impact and no mitigation would be required.
- A “less than significant” impact or an impact that is “not significant” would cause no substantial change in the environment. As such, no mitigation is required.
- A “potentially significant” or “significant” impact could or would cause a substantial adverse change in the environment. In this case, an impact has been identified that, although potentially significant, can be avoided or reduced to less-than-significant levels through mitigation. Such mitigation may either be Project design features that have been incorporated into the Project or existing requirements, such as conformance with City and County codes and ordinances, engineering and design requirements (e.g., the Uniform Building Code), and standards set by regional, state, and federal agencies.
- A “significant and unavoidable” impact is one that could or would cause a substantial adverse change in the environment and cannot be avoided if the Project is implemented; mitigations may be recommended, but it would not reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level.
- “Mitigation Measures” as defined in CEQA § 15370 is:
 - Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action;
 - Minimizing the impact by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation;
 - Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
 - Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the actions; and,
 - Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

OTHER AGENCIES THAT MAY USE THE EIR

This EIR is intended to be used by trustee and responsible agencies (as defined in CEQA § 15381 and 15386) that may have review or discretionary authority over the proposed Project, or some component of the Project. These include:

- City of Fairfield – Adoption of a General Plan Amendment regarding the Fairfield Linear Park, approval of encroachment or other permits, and project funding.
- Solano County – Adoption of a General Plan Amendment, project funding, and potential right of way acquisition.

- California Department of Fish and Game (1602 agreement for work with local creeks)
- California Regional Water Quality Control Board (401 certification for stormwater discharge)
- Caltrans (encroachment or other permits for work within the state-owned right-of-way)

Federal agencies that may also use this EIR in their review of the Project or that may have responsibility over approval of certain Project elements include, but are not limited to, the following:

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (404 permit for activities within Waters of the US)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (take permit for endangered species)
- Caltrans (encroachment or other permits for work within the state-owned right-of-way)

PUBLIC REVIEW OF THE RECIRCULATED DRAFT EIR

In accordance with CEQA, a good-faith effort has been made during the preparation of this EIR to contact affected agencies, organizations, and person who may have an interest in the Project.

This recirculated Draft EIR with an accompanying NOC shall be provided to the California State Clearinghouse, trustee agencies, responsible agencies, and interested members of the public for a 45-day review period as required by CEQA. During the review period, public agencies and members of the public may provide written comments on the analysis and contents of the EIR. In reviewing the EIR, readers should focus on the sufficiency of the document in identifying and analyzing the possible impacts on the environment and on ways in which the significant effects of the Project might be avoided or mitigated.

All written comments on this EIR should be mailed to:

Solano Transportation Authority
c/o Janet Adams
One Harbor Center, Suite 130
Suisun City, CA 94585

Any comments received during the 45-day review period will be responded to by the STA in the Final EIR.

The STA will hold a public hearing at 6:30 p.m. on February 19, 2008 at the Solano County Administration Center, 675 Texas Street, First Floor, Room 1600, Fairfield, CA 94533.

CONTENTS OF THE FINAL EIR

The following elements will collectively compose the Final EIR:

- EIR (or EIR by reference if revisions are minimal)
- A list of the persons, organizations, and public agencies that commented on the EIR
- Copies of all comments received
- Written responses to those comments

CERTIFICATION OF THE FINAL EIR AND APPROVAL PROCESS

For a period of at least 10 days prior to a publicly noticed Board Meeting during which the lead agency will take action to certify the EIR, the Final EIR will be made available to, at a minimum, the trustee and responsible agencies that provided written comments on the EIR. Pursuant to CEQA § 15090(a) the Final EIR must be certified before the lead agency can take action on the Project.

Following Final EIR certification, but prior to the public agency taking action on the Project, the lead agency will prepare a MMRP. Furthermore, before approving (or conditionally approving) the Project, the STA must prepare CEQA findings, in accordance with CEQA § 15091. The findings must briefly state the rationale behind each finding for each significant environmental impact identified for the Project. If significant environmental impacts cannot be reduced to a less-than-significant level are identified for the Project, the lead agency must prepare a Statement of Overriding Considerations, pursuant to CEQA § 15093.

Certification of the Final EIR and approval of the CEQA findings, MMRP and the Statement of Overriding Considerations may be considered during one final Board Meeting. The certification of the Final EIR must be the first in this sequence of approvals.

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