

3 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING, IMPACTS, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

3.0 APPROACH TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines (CEQA Guidelines) require the environmental analysis for an EIR to include an evaluation of impacts associated with a proposed project and to identify mitigation for any potentially significant impacts. CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(a) states:

An EIR shall identify and focus on the significant environmental effects of the proposed project. In assessing the impact of a proposed project on the environment, the lead agency should normally limit its examination to changes in the existing physical conditions in the affected area as they exist at the time the notice of preparation is published, or where no notice of preparation is published, at the time environmental analysis is commenced. Direct and indirect significant effects of the project on the environment shall be clearly identified and described, giving due consideration to both the short-term and long-term effects. The discussion should include relevant specifics of the area, the resources involved, physical changes, alterations to ecological systems, and changes induced in population distribution, population concentration, the human use of the land (including commercial and residential development), health and safety problems caused by the physical changes, and other aspects of the resource base such as water, historical resources, scenic quality, and public services. The EIR shall also analyze any significant environmental effects the project might cause by bringing development and people into the area affected.

3.0.1 SECTION FORMAT AND CONTENTS

The environmental setting, impacts, and required mitigation measures for the proposed project are organized by issue area, corresponding to topics in the CEQA Environmental Checklist (CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, as amended). Each section follows the same format:

- ▶ The **“Environmental Setting”** subsection provides an overview of the existing physical environmental conditions (i.e., the environmental baseline) for each issue area at the time this analysis was prepared. The environmental baseline at the time of the release of the NOP (March 2016) is the context against which potential project impacts are evaluated.
- ▶ The **“Regulatory Framework”** subsection identifies the federal, State, regional, and local plans, policies, laws, regulations, and ordinances that are relevant to each issue area. This subsection describes required permits and other approvals necessary to implement the proposed project.
- ▶ The **“Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures”** subsection presents the following information:
 - The **“Methodology”** subsection describes the methods, process, procedures, and assumptions used to formulate and conduct the impact analysis.
 - The **“Thresholds of Significance”** subsection identifies the criteria established by the lead agency to define at what level an impact would be considered significant. Criteria may be defined by a lead agency based on examples found in CEQA or the CEQA Guidelines, scientific and factual data relative to the

lead agency jurisdiction, views of the public in the affected area, the policy/regulatory environment of affected jurisdictions, or other factors.

- If applicable, the “**Issues Not Discussed Further**” subsection identifies issues for which the proposed project would not affect the physical environment. An explanation is provided of how the determination of “no impact” was reached. These issues are not discussed further in the impact analysis that follows.
- The “**Impact Analysis**” subsection first presents a summary of the environmental impact conclusions. The impact analysis then presents an assessment of the potential direct and indirect impacts of the proposed project and specifies why impacts are found to be “significant and unavoidable,” “significant,” “potentially significant,” or “less than significant” (see Section 3.0.2 Terminology Used in the EIR) or why there is no environmental impact.

If there is found to be a potentially significant impact, mitigation measures are provided, where available and feasible. The measures are numbered to correspond with the impacts they mitigate. In accordance with Public Resources Code Section 21081.6(b), mitigation measures must be fully enforceable through permit conditions, agreements, other legally binding instruments, or by incorporating the measures into the project design. Section 15370 of the CEQA Guidelines defines mitigation as:

- ▶ avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action;
- ▶ minimizing impacts by limiting the degree of 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 operation during the life of the action; or
- ▶ compensating for the impacts by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

Where no feasible mitigation is available to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level, the impacts are identified as significant and unavoidable. (The analysis of cumulative impacts is presented in Chapter 5, along with the analysis of growth-inducing impacts.)

3.0.2 TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS RECIRCULATED EIR

IMPACT LEVELS

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

- ▶ **No impact** would occur if the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed project would not have any direct or indirect effects on the environment. It means that no change from existing conditions would result. This impact level does not require mitigation.
- ▶ A **less-than-significant impact** is one that is not a substantial and adverse change in the physical environment. This impact level does not require mitigation, even if feasible mitigation measures are available.

- ▶ A ***significant impact*** is defined by Public Resources Code Section 21068 as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project.” Mitigation measures or alternatives to the proposed project must be identified, where applicable and feasible, in an attempt to avoid, minimize, or reduce the magnitude of significant impacts.
- ▶ A ***potentially significant impact*** is one that, if it were to occur, would be considered a significant impact as described above; however, the occurrence of the impact cannot be immediately determined with certainty. For CEQA purposes, a potentially significant impact is treated (i.e., mitigated) as if it were a significant impact.
- ▶ A ***significant and unavoidable impact*** is a substantial or potentially substantial adverse effect on the environment that cannot be reduced to a less-than-significant level even with implementation of feasible mitigation. A project with significant and unavoidable impacts could proceed, but the lead agency would be required to required (i) to conclude in findings that there are no feasible means of substantially lessening or avoiding the significant impact in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15091(a)(3) and (ii) to prepare a statement of overriding considerations, in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15093, explaining why the CEQA lead agency has chosen to proceed with the project in spite of the potential for significant impacts.

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