MEMO

DATE: July 12, 2007

TO: Energy and Environmental Committee

FROM: Jessica Kirchner, (213) 236-1983, kirchner@scag.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation for the 2008 RTP/RCP Program Environmental Impact Report

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BACKGROUND:
In late June 2007, SCAG released the Notice of Preparation for the 2008 RTP/RCP Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). The NOP is the formal announcement that a PEIR will be prepared, jointly, for the 2008 RTP and the 2008 RCP. The NOP includes the project location, description, and the expected scope of environmental analysis, and it solicits relevant comments pertaining to the scope and content of the anticipated analysis for the PEIR. The NOP is an important step in the CEQA process and helps to ensure active participation from agencies, decision-makers, other stakeholders, and the public in the development of the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR.

The NOP was mailed to interested individuals and agencies and posted on the SCAG website. Substantive comments from these individuals and agencies will be incorporated into the Draft PEIR as appropriate. A copy of the NOP is attached for the committee's information.

FISCAL IMPACT:
Activities related to development of the PEIR are contained in the OWP under the work element 07-020.SCGS1.

Reviewed by:

Division Manager

Reviewed by:

Department Director

Reviewed by:

Chief Financial Officer

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION of GOVERNMENTS

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Kirchner/6/13/2007

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Tribal Government Representative: Andrew Masiel Sr., Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians

Ventura County: Linda Parks, Ventura County • Glen Becerra, Simi Valley • Carl Morehouse, San Buenaventura • Toni Young, Port Hueneme

Orange County Transportation Authority: Art Brown, Buena Park

Riverside County Transportation Commission: Robin Lowe, Hemet

Ventura County Transportation Commission: Keith Millhouse, Moorpark

6/21/07

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

TO: **Interested Agencies and Individuals**

SUBJECT: **NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (PEIR) FOR THE 2008 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN (RTP) AND 2008 REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (RCP)**

DATE: **JUNE 27, 2007**

LEAD AGENCY:
Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)
818 West Seventh Street, 12th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90017-3435

The Southern California Association of Governments, as Lead Agency, will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and 2008 Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP).

The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to obtain input into the scope and content of the environmental information that will be evaluated in the PEIR. The project location, description, and the expected scope of environmental analysis are attached on the following pages.

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but **not later than 30 days** after receipt of this notice.

Two regional scoping meetings will be held to help refine the scope and content of the PEIR:

Tuesday, July 24
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

SCAG Office - Riverside
3600 Lime Street, Suite 216
Riverside, California 92501

Wednesday, July 25
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

SCAG Office - Los Angeles
(San Bernardino A & B rooms)
818 W. 7th Street, 12th Floor
Los Angeles, California 90017

All agencies, interested parties and members of the public are encouraged to attend. The scoping meeting and the NOP provide agencies and the public with opportunity to comment on the scope and content of the PEIR. Oral and written comments will be accepted at the scoping meeting. Written comments on the NOP will be accepted until July 31st. A copy of the NOP is attached and available on the SCAG website: www.scag.ca.gov.

Please send your response to **Jessica Kirchner** at the address shown below or visit our website at http://www.scag.ca.gov. Please include a return address and the name of a contact person in your agency. Please send your comments electronically, if possible.

Jessica Kirchner
Associate Environmental Planner
(213) 236-1983
kirchner@scag.ca.gov

Attachments: Location and Background, Project Description, and Scope of Environmental Analysis

Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (PEIR) FOR THE 2008 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN AND REGIONAL COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

PROJECT LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), is comprised of six counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura) and 186 cities in Southern California, and is the agency charged with addressing and resolving short- and long-term regional policy issues. The SCAG region has more than 18 million residents and encompasses more than 38,000 square miles, representing the largest and most diverse region in the country.

SCAG's governing body, the Regional Council, is composed of over 70 elected officials representing cities and counties, tribal governments, the county transportation commissions, and subregional organizations throughout the region. In addition to the Regional Council, there are four standing committees: Administration Committee, Transportation and Communications Committee; Community, Economic and Human Development Committee; and Energy and Environment Committee. In addition to the four standing committees, there are various task forces, subcommittees, and groups that address specific regional policy, technical planning, and air quality conformity issues.

SCAG is officially designated under federal law as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Southern California region. Additionally, under state law, SCAG is designated as a Council of Governments (COG) and a Multi-County Designated Transportation Planning Agency. As such, SCAG has a number of formal authorities and responsibilities, including:

- Conducting comprehensive transportation planning and programming processes that result in a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and a Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). Together these documents serve as the legal basis for transportation decision-making in the region.
- Conducting a comprehensive environmental planning process, including a Program Environmental Impact Report for the RTP and reviewing and assessing Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) for all projects of regional significance.
- Determining, pursuant to the federal Clean Air Act, the conformity of SCAG transportation projects, plans, and programs to air quality requirements.
- Developing demographic projections and the integrated land use, housing, employment, and transportation programs, measures, and strategies portions of the South Coast Air Quality Management Plan.
- Conducting inter-governmental review of programs proposed for federal assistance.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is undertaking an integrated and innovative approach to land use and transportation planning. SCAG is simultaneously preparing the 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the 2008 Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) for the SCAG region. Together, the RTP and RCP provide a long-term comprehensive land use and transportation planning blueprint for the region. One Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), referred to herein as the "2008 RTP/RCP PEIR," will be prepared to address the environmental implications of these two companion plans.

Although both Plans have a long-term time horizon of 2035, under which policies and projects are planned and proposed to be implemented, federal and state mandates ensure that the RTP in particular is both flexible and responsive in the near term. Therefore, these Plans are regarded as both long-term regional planning blueprints and as dynamic planning tools subject to continuous refinement as regional conditions change. SCAG, acting in its capacity as a Lead Agency under CEQA, will prepare the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR to evaluate the potential environmental effects associated with implementation of the RCP and RTP.

RTP

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is the culmination of a multi-year effort with a focus on improving the balance between land use and transportation systems, both current and future. SCAG is required by federal law to create a RTP that determines the needs of the transportation system and prioritizes proposed transportation projects. The RTP is also necessary to obtain and allocate federal funding for regional transportation projects. Under new metropolitan planning law as contained in the federal "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act – a Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA-LU), the RTP must be comprehensively updated once every four years (previously the plan has been updated every three years; SAFETEA-LU extended the update period to four years) to ensure that the plan adequately addresses future travel needs and is consistent with the federal Clean Air Act. SCAG does not implement individual projects in the RTP; these projects will be implemented by agencies other than SCAG.

The RTP is a compendium of policies, strategies, and projects that serve as the transportation action plan for the SCAG region. The 2008 RTP is a multi-modal Plan representing a vision for a better transportation system, integrated with the best possible growth pattern for the region over the Plan horizon of 2035. The Plan provides the basic policy and program framework for long term investment in our vast regional transportation system in a coordinated, cooperative and continuous manner.

SCAG develops the RTP in coordination and consultation with the county transportation commissions, subregional organizations, transit operators and other transportation stakeholders. To ensure a balanced, multi-modal plan that meets regional as well as county-specific goals, SCAG integrates the planning activities of

each of the counties in the region. The 2008 RTP includes a comprehensive strategy for carrying out policies and projects that include the following:

- Goods Movement;
- Maglev;
- Aviation;
- Transit;
- Rail systems (light rail/heavy rail);
- Toll Roads;
- Highway and Strategic Arterial Improvements; and,
- Intelligent Transportation Systems.

SAFETEA-LU modified existing State and MPO transportation planning processes. Specifically, SAFETEA-LU requires that "a long-range transportation plan shall include a discussion of the types of potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities, including activities that may have the greatest potential to restore and maintain the environmental functions affected by the plan." Pursuant to these new planning requirements, SCAG conducted expanded consultation associated with the 2004 RTP PEIR mitigation measures as part of its "Gap Analysis." As a result of this process, mitigation measures have been refined since the 2004 RTP. These changes were made based on review and input from Federal, State, and Tribal as well as wildlife, land management and regulatory agencies. Consultation activities will continue as part of the 2008 RTP, 2008 RCP and PEIR development processes to the maximum extent practicable.

Additional new requirements under SAFETEA-LU and federal regulations include:

- Developing in consultation with all interested parties, an expanded public participation plan to provide interested parties with reasonable opportunities for involvement in the metropolitan transportation planning and programming processes.
- Adding the phrase "promote consistency of transportation plan and transportation improvements with State and local planned growth and economic development patterns" to the environmental planning factor.

SCAG is coordinating efforts to comply with the new SAFETEA-LU planning requirements described above with efforts undertaken through the state CEQA process. As such, particular emphasis in the RTP and RCP will be placed on these new planning requirements, including those that prescribe coordinated planning and consideration of environmental resources.

RCP

SCAG is also preparing the Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP), a bold visionary plan that addresses nine topic areas. Borne from SCAG's own initiative, the RCP contains policies and actions that promote a coordinated strategy for growth, development and environmental protection. As such, the RCP will function as a (voluntary) companion document to the federally mandated RTP. The RTP describes the region's strategy for transportation system function and infrastructure

enhancement, while the RCP expands on the RTP's assumptions regarding growth, land use, and urban form.

SCAG does not have local land use approval jurisdiction, rather implementation of the RCP policies will be achieved at the local level. SCAG member agencies are encouraged to apply these policies and principles by incorporating them into General Plan updates and through the approval process for individual development projects. The RCP advocates a land use development pattern that promotes infill and transit oriented developments. The RCP proposes regional policies supporting intensification of land-use along major transit corridors and other urbanized parts of the region to accommodate future growth and preserve undeveloped land. The RCP also advocates a more effective utilization of the existing transportation system, particularly the public transit system.

The RCP will include visionary goals, outcomes and action plans for the following areas:

- Open Space and Habitat
- Energy
- Air Quality
- Solid Waste
- Land Use and Housing
- Safety and Security
- Transportation
- Water

PRELIMINARY PLAN ALTERNATIVES

It is anticipated that the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR will evaluate at least three (3) Plan Alternatives. Each Alternative, except the No Project Alternative, will include a wide range of policies and projects including, but not limited to variations in land use density and intensity, aviation, bus routes, freight rail, high-speed passenger rail, highway/roadway construction and widening, and passenger rail construction.

SCAG has the discretion to select an Alternative in its entirety or to combine elements of various Alternatives to develop the final Alternative selected for the RTP and PEIR. Initial Alternatives include:

NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

The No Project Alternative consists of all policies and major projects that are reasonably foreseeable and reasonably expected to go forward without the 2008 RTP or 2008 RCP, including all projects that have already received funding, are scheduled to receive funding, and/or have received environmental clearance by December 2006. The No Project Alternative will assume that no safety-related maintenance would be deferred, but the overall appearance and function of the transportation system would be expected to deteriorate.

THE ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE

The Environmentally Superior Alternative will explore land use and transportation policies designed to further sustainability objectives including reduced consumption of resources, particularly energy resources, and with a focus on reducing emission of Greenhouse Gases in accordance with AB 32, the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006

MODIFIED 2004 RTP

The Modified 2004 RTP Alternative will include the policies and projects from the 2004 RTP, updated with more recent population information.

SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and *CEQA Guidelines* require an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for any discretionary government action, including programs and plans that may cause significant environmental effects. Specifically, the RTP and RCP necessitate preparation of a PEIR, which is a "first-tier" CEQA document designed to consider "broad policy alternatives and program wide mitigation measures" (*CEQA Guidelines* §15168). The programmatic environmental analysis for the PEIR will evaluate environmental effects, including direct and indirect effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts, and will include available, feasible mitigation measures to offset any identified potentially significant adverse environmental effects. In addition, the PEIR will supply the foundation for the subsequent, site-specific environmental reviews that will be conducted by implementation agencies, as projects in the RTP and RCP are developed (*CEQA Guidelines* §15385).

In addition to fulfilling legal requirements, the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR will provide an opportunity to inform decision-makers and the public about potential environmental effects associated with the implementation of the RTP, RCP and Alternatives. This environmental analysis will ultimately support the selection of the Preferred Project, and will provide a useful regional-scale environmental planning tool to help local agencies evaluate and reduce cumulative environmental effects.

The impact categories listed below have been preliminarily identified for analysis in the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR.

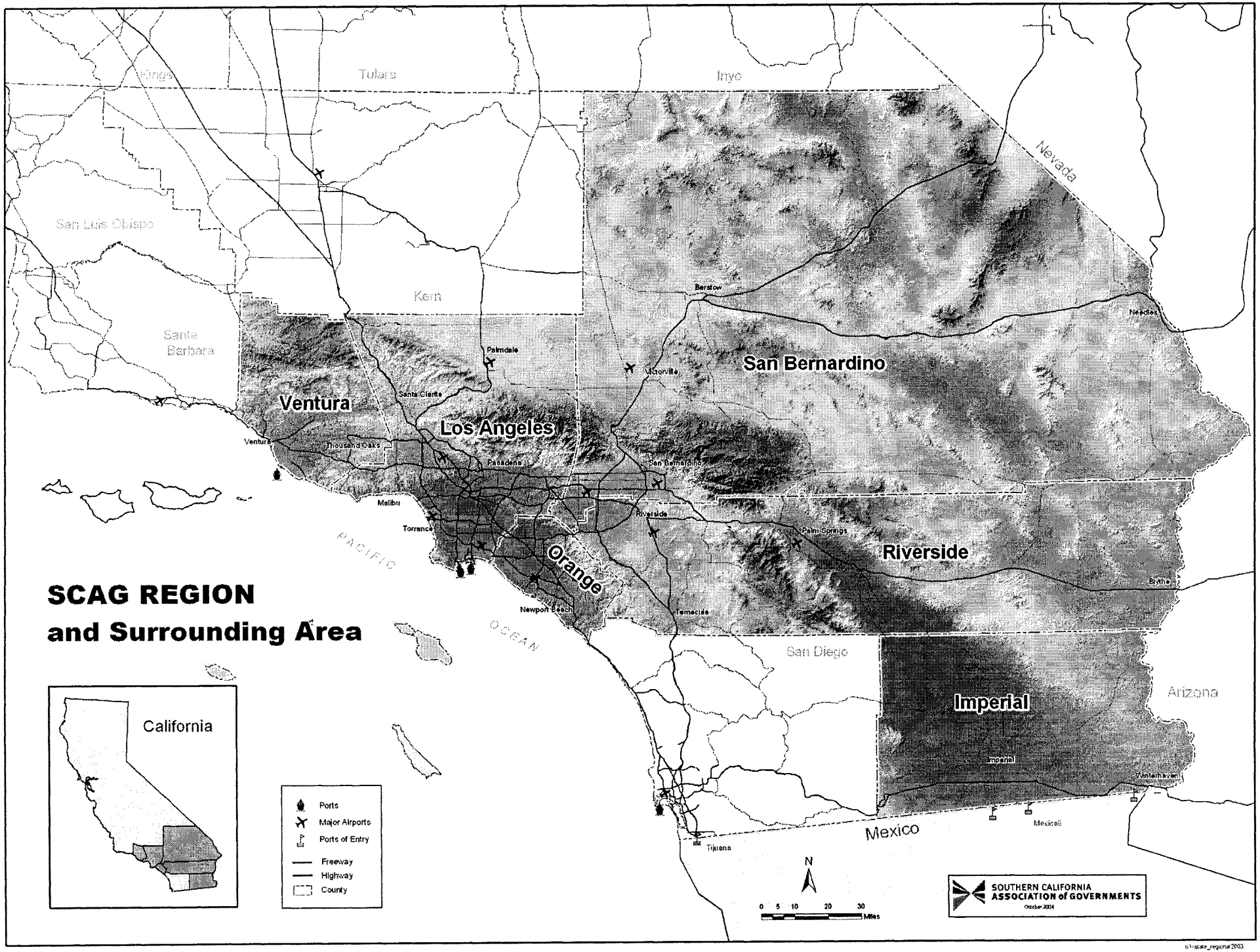
- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Land Use
- Noise
- Population, Employment, and Housing
- Public Service and Utilities

- Transportation
- Water Resources

For additional background information, the PEIR for the 2004 RTP is available at the SCAG website: http://www.scag.ca.gov/peir/. Although many of the significant impacts identified in the 2004 RTP PEIR will be relevant in the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR, the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR will provide additional evaluation of alternatives, cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and mitigation measures, as feasible.

SUMMARY

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) is intended to inform agencies and individuals of the preparation of the 2008 RTP/RCP PEIR. Comments regarding the scope of the PEIR received during the 30-day NOP review period will be used to refine the scope and content of the PEIR. Active participation from agencies, decision-makers, stakeholders and the public will help ensure that the PEIR is adequate, objective and useful.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