NOP for PEIR for 2004 RTP

REGIONAL COUNCIL ATTACHMENT #3.1.6
Thursday, June 5, 2003

REPORT

TO: Regional Council

FROM: Ted Harris, SCAG Associate Regional Planner, 213-236-1916, harrist@scag.ca.gov

DATE: June 5, 2003

SUBJECT: Approval of the Notice of Preparation for the Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the 2004 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S APPROVAL:

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Approve the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the 2004 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

SUMMARY:

A draft NOP for the 2004 RTP PEIR is included for consideration and approval. The NOP is the formal announcement that a PEIR will be prepared for the 2004 RTP. 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 process because it helps ensure active participation from agencies, decision-makers, other stakeholders, and the public in the development of the 2004 RTP PEIR.

On May 1, 2003, the Energy and Environment Committee approved the attached Draft NOP. After approval by the Regional Council, the NOP will be 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.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Development and release of the NOP was programmed into the FY 2002/2003 OWP (WBS Element 03-020). Thus, approval of the NOP is expected to have no additional fiscal impact on SCAG.

Document Name: 2004 RTP EIR NOP to RC
Document #: 85201
Author_Id: HARRIST

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

TO: **Interested Agencies and Individuals**

SUBJECT: **NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (PEIR) FOR THE 2004 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN (RTP)**

DATE: **XXXX XX, 2003**

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 2004 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to help seek all relevant comments pertaining to 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 contained in the materials below.

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.

Please send your response to Ted Harris at the address shown above 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, if appropriate.

Ted Harris
Regional Environmental Planner
(213) 236-1916
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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 2004 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), which is comprised of six counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura) and 186 cities in southern California, is the organization charged with examining and helping to resolve short- and long-term issues affecting the region, particularly those related to transportation. The region has more than 16 million residents and encompasses more than 38,000 square miles, representing the largest and most diverse region in the country.

Decision-making happens through SCAG's Regional Council, a governing body of over 70 city and county elected officials and county transportation commissioners. In addition to the Regional Council, there are four committees: Administration Committee, Transportation and Communications Committee, Community, Economic and Human Development Committee, and Energy and Environment Committee. These committees are comprised of Regional Council members, elected official representatives from subregional organizations, single-purpose regional planning organizations, county transportation commissions, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and members representing the Regional Advisory Council -- SCAG's community and private sector advisory group. In addition to the four policy committees, there are various task forces and subcommittees which address specific regional policy and technical planning issues.

SCAG is officially designated by the Federal and State governments as a Council of Governments (COG), a Multi-County Designated Transportation Planning Agency, and the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the southern California region. As such, SCAG has a number of formal authorities and responsibilities, including:

- Conducting a comprehensive transportation planning process that results 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 (PEIR) for the Regional Transportation Plan and reviewing and assessing Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) for all projects of regional significance.
- Determining, pursuant to the Clean Air Act, the conformity of SCAG projects, plans, and programs to air quality requirements.
- Serving as the Areawide Waste Treatment Management Planning Agency under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.
- 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.
- Preparing Regional Housing Needs Assessment allocations for cities and counties.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for Southern California, last updated in April 2001, provides an assessment of the overall growth and economic trends in six counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura), and provides a blueprint for a cohesive, balanced, and multi-modal transportation system. The RTP is intended to serve as a catalyst for linking transportation agency investments within the SCAG region, and it addresses regional goals and is consistent with Federal and State requirements. Major transportation projects receiving either Federal or State funding must be consistent with the provisions of the latest Plan, and, thus, the RTP is a critical document to help ensure adequate Federal and State funding needed to maintain and improve mobility and accessibility throughout Southern California.

SCAG is required to update and revise the RTP and the RTP PEIR at least once every three years. SCAG is currently preparing the 2004 RTP and the RTP Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR).

The 2004 RTP and PEIR are being developed as part of an innovative planning process that integrates transportation, land-use, and the environment. The process, known as PILUT—Planning for Integrated Land Use and Transportation—is being guided by Compass Growth Visioning, which is a participatory effort to help move Southern California towards a more sustainable future (http://www.socalcompass.org).

The PILUT Process will evaluate a range of 2004 RTP/PEIR Alternatives, which are currently being developed. During the initial planning phase, each Alternative will be evaluated with a multi-criterion analysis that considers transportation, land use, environmental, economic, and social factors. These factors will be presented to the Regional Council in summer/autumn 2003 to inform the selection of the Preferred Alternative.

PRELIMINARY PLAN ALTERNATIVES

It is anticipated that the 2004 RTP and RTP PEIR will evaluate at least four Alternatives. These Alternatives will change and mature as the 2004 RTP planning process proceeds. Each Alternative, except the No Project Alternative, will include a distinct, cohesive set of 1) transportation investments 2) transportation policies 3) growth policies, and 4) a growth projection. Each Alternative will include a wide range of projects including, but not limited to, 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 EIR. Initial Alternatives include:

NO PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

The No Project Alternative consists of all major projects that are reasonably foreseeable and reasonably expected to go forward without the 2004 RTP, including all projects that have already received funding, are scheduled to receive funding, and/or have received environmental clearance. 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.

MODIFIED 2001 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN (RTP) ALTERNATIVE

The 2001 Regional Transportation Plan, adopted in April 2001, will be updated and revised to serve as a 2004 RTP/PEIR Alternative. The base year will be adjusted to year 2000, the planning horizon will be extended to year 2030, and some projects will be changed. A complete listing of original projects in the 2001 RTP is available in the SCAG database, and the 2001 RTP is available at the SCAG website: http://www.scag.ca.gov/rtp/mainrtp.html

PILUT ALTERNATIVE ONE

The PILUT Alternatives will be developed and evaluated through the PILUT Process (Planning for Integrated Land Use and Transportation). Each PILUT alternative will include aviation, bus routes, freight rail, high-speed passenger rail, highway/roadway construction and widening, and passenger rail construction throughout the SCAG region. However, PILUT1 will include projects and policies designed to help guide growth toward a more centralized urban form. Specifically, PILUT1 will focus on more efficiently utilizing the existing transportation infrastructure and improving connectivity and transit to support more infill, mixed-used, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods.

PILUT ALTERNATIVE TWO

As stated above, each PILUT alternative will include aviation, bus routes, freight rail, high-speed passenger rail, highway/roadway construction and widening, and passenger rail construction throughout the SCAG region. However, PILUT2 will include projects and policies designed to help guide growth toward a more decentralized urban form. Specifically, PILUT2 will focus on improving and expanding infrastructure to utilize undeveloped land on the outer edges of the urbanized area.

After finalizing and evaluating these preliminary Alternatives (and additional Alternatives if time and resources allow), the Regional Council will select a single Preferred Alternative before autumn 2003. The Draft RTP and Draft PEIR are expected to be available by late autumn of 2003, followed by a 45-day public comment period. A joint public hearing on the RTP and the PEIR will be scheduled for autumn 2003 or winter 2004. The Final RTP and PEIR will be adopted by the Regional Council in April 2004.

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 necessitates a Program EIR (PEIR), which is a "first-tier" CEQA document designed to consider "broad policy alternatives and programwide mitigation measures" (CEQA Guidelines §15168). The programmatic environmental analysis for the PEIR will evaluate environmental effects, such as direct and indirect effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts, and will include mitigation measures to offset potentially significant 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 are developed (CEQA Guidelines §15385).

In addition to fulfilling legal requirements, the RTP EIR will provide an opportunity to inform decision-makers and the public about potential environmental effects of the RTP Alternatives. This environmental analysis will ultimately support the selection of the Preferred Plan, 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 2004 RTP PEIR.

1) Land Use
2) Population, Employment, and Housing
3) Transportation
4) Air Quality
5) Water Resources
6) Noise
7) Public Service and Utilities
8) Cultural Resources
9) Biological Resources
10) Geology
11) Energy
12) Visual/Aesthetic Resources

The PEIR for the 2001 RTP is available at the SCAG website for additional background information: http://www.scag.ca.gov/peir/. Although many of the significant impacts identified in the 2001 RTP PEIR will be relevant in the 2004 RTP PEIR, the 2004 RTP PEIR will provide additional evaluation of alternatives, cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and mitigation measures, as feasible.

SUMMARY

This Notice of Preparation is intended to inform agencies and individuals of the preparation of the 2004 RTP PEIR. Comments regarding the scope of the PEIR received during the 30-day NOP review period will be incorporated, as appropriate, into the documents. Active participation from agencies, decision-makers, other stakeholders, and the public will help ensure that the PEIR is adequate, objective, and useful.