



NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: Interested agencies and individuals

Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Program Environmental Impact Report for the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan (including a Sustainable Communities Strategy)

Date: March 10, 2017

Lead Agency: San Joaquin Council of Governments
555 East Weber Avenue
Stockton, California 95202

The San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOC), as Lead Agency, is publishing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which will include a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS).

This NOP is being circulated to obtain input regarding the scope and content of the environmental analysis to be included in the Program EIR for the 2018 RTP. SJCOC seeks input from local, state, and federal agencies, as well as other interested parties, on issues relevant to the RTP (including the SCS).

The project location, description, and the expected scope of environmental analysis are described on the following pages.

A scoping meeting for this project will be held at SJCOC's office (see location above), March 30, 2017; 4:00 PM.

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

Please send your response to Kevin Sheridan, Project Manager, either electronically to: sheridan@sjcog.org; or at the mailing address shown above. Please include a return address and the name of a contact person in your agency or organization.

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ESCALON,
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AND
THE COUNTY OF
SAN JOAQUIN

Introduction

Notice is hereby given that the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) will be the lead agency for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the update of SJCOG's Regional Transportation Plan ("RTP"). Pursuant to section 15082 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), SJCOG is soliciting comments from all interested persons, responsible and trustee agencies and organizations concerned with the project as to the scope and content of the EIR and the environmental information to be analyzed in connection with the proposed project. The Final EIR for the 2014 SJCOG RTP was certified in June 2014 and can be found at the following link: <http://www.sjcog.org/index.aspx?NID=222>

The project description, location, environmental review requirements, and probable environmental issues to be addressed in the EIR for the 2018 RTP are attached. The RTP will guide the development of the Regional and Federal Transportation Improvement Programs (RTIP and FTIP) as well as other transportation programming documents and plans throughout San Joaquin County. Specifically, the project is to update the County's goals and policies for meeting current and future mobility needs and identify programs, actions, and a revised plan of projects intended to address these needs consistent with adopted goals and policies.

The 2018 RTP will include a Sustainable Communities (SCS) element. The SCS is required by California Senate Bill 375, the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 ("SB 375"). SB 375 mandates regional greenhouse gas ("GHG") reduction targets for passenger vehicles and, pursuant to that law, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has established 2020 and 2035 GHG reduction targets for each region covered by one of the state's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). Current greenhouse gas reduction targets for San Joaquin County are 5% per capita reduction from 2005 levels by 2020 and a 10% per capita reduction from 2005 levels by 2035. These targets are currently undergoing review by CARB. Revisions for the targets are expected in summer 2017. As the MPO for San Joaquin County, SJCOG is required to prepare an SCS that demonstrates how GHG reduction targets will be met through integrated land use, housing, and transportation planning. If the SCS does not meet greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, SJCOG would prepare an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) which would show how the greenhouse gas emission targets could be achieved through means outside of the fiscally constrained RTP. In 2014 SJCOG identified multiple potential growth scenarios that met the goals of SB 375.

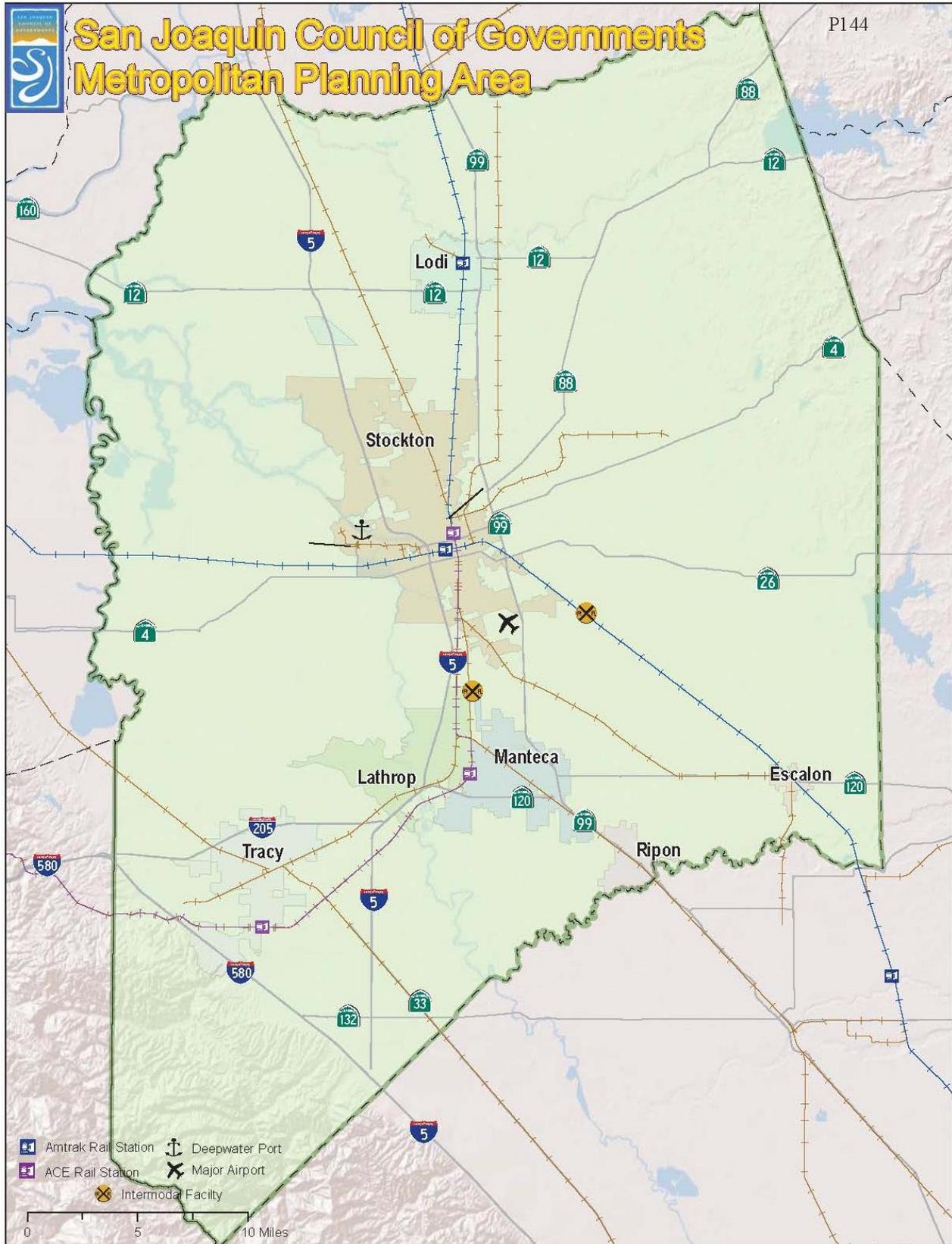
Project Location and Background

San Joaquin County is located in the northern portion of the San Joaquin Valley and covers approximately 1,440 square miles. The geographical extent of the updated RTP/SCS includes the area within the limits of San Joaquin County, California, including the incorporated cities of Escalon, Lathrop, Lodi, Manteca, Ripon, Stockton, Tracy, and all unincorporated areas under the jurisdiction of the County of San Joaquin. Capital improvement projects identified in the RTP/SCS are primarily located on state highways, county roads and locally owned streets, as well as on airport property, transit district property and public utility lands. A map of the planning area is attached.

SJCOG is a Joint Powers Authority comprised of city and county governments created to address regional transportation issues. The Board of Directors is composed of one council member from each of the six cities, three members of the Stockton City Council, and three members from the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors. Supplementing these voting members are advisory representatives from Caltrans District 10, San Joaquin Regional Transit District, and the Port of Stockton. SJCOG's planning and programming efforts secure transportation funding for the region's highways, transit, streets and roads, pedestrian, and other transportation system improvements throughout the region.

SJCOG is officially designated by federal law as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for San Joaquin County. Additionally, under Section 29532 of the California Government Code, SJCOG is designated as a Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA). As such, SJCOG has a number of formal authorities and responsibilities, including:

- Conducting continued, comprehensive, and coordinated transportation planning and programming processes that result in a Regional Transportation Plan and a Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) for the region. Together these documents serve as the legal basis for transportation decision-making in the region.
- Preparing a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) in accordance with the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 (SB 375), as part of the RTP. If the SCS does not meet greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets, SJCOG would prepare an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) which would show how the greenhouse gas emission targets would be achieved through alternative development patterns, infrastructure, or additional transportation measures or policies
- Conducting a comprehensive environmental planning process, including a Program Environmental Impact Report for the RTP and conducting inter-governmental review for all projects of regional significance.
- Determining, pursuant to the Federal Clean Air Act (Section 176 (c)(4)), the conformity of SJCOG RTPs and FTIPs to air quality planning requirements.



Project Description

The proposed project is the 2018 SJCOG RTP/SCS. SJCOG is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and state recognized Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for San Joaquin County, and has the statutory responsibility to develop a comprehensive minimum 20-year vision of the region's transportation system. The 2018 RTP will cover the planning period through the year 2042. The EIR is intended to comply with CEQA. It will also require coordination with or reference to: the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (Title 23 SFR Parts 450 and 500) (FAST Act); the Federal Clean Air Act; the California Clean Air Act; California SB 375; California SB 743; and California Assembly Bill 32. The EIR will consider the 2018 RTP programmed projects and preferred SCS scenario, a No Project alternative, the SCS alternative scenarios carried forward, and any alternatives to address identified significant impacts. The EIR will evaluate the potential impacts of implementing the policies and programs in the RTP in accordance with CEQA and will concentrate on the long-term environmental impacts of the RTP that extend to the 2042 planning horizon.

The 2018 RTP EIR will be prepared as a program-level document that analyzes the effects of proposed actions for all modes of transportation, as well as other issues and concerns such as transportation control measures and demand management, congestion management, and intelligent transportation systems. As a programmatic EIR, it will be prepared at a level of detail necessary to facilitate effective tiering by lead agencies for future transportation and development projects, particularly with regard to potential SB 375 CEQA streamlining

Regional Transportation Plan

The RTP defines the region's mobility needs and issues through 2042, sets forth an action plan of projects and programs to address the needs consistent with the adopted policies, and documents the financial resources needed to implement the plan. The 2018 RTP will address all transportation modes including motor vehicles, transit (commuter and local), rail (commuter and interregional), goods movement (rail freight and trucking), bicycle and pedestrian facilities, aviation systems, transportation systems management (TSM) and transportation demand management (TDM) programs and projects considered over the planning horizon to the year 2042. Regional transportation improvement projects proposed to be funded, in whole or in part, in the state transportation improvement program must be included in the adopted RTP.

The RTP is anticipated to include the following key elements:

- Transportation Planning Policies / Policy Element
- Planning Assumptions and Growth Trends
- Sustainable Communities Strategy Element
- Strategic Investments / Action Element
- Financial Constraints / Financial Element
- Future Transportation Planning (beyond 2042)
- Monitoring Process

The compendium of projects, policies and programs together comprise the 2018 RTP/SCS.

Sustainable Communities Strategy

The 2018 RTP will include an update to the SCS in the 2014 RTP-SCS pursuant to the requirements of SB 375. Under SB 375, metropolitan planning organizations such as SJCOG are required to develop an SCS or APS as part of the RTP to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles and light trucks through reduced vehicle miles travelled (VMT), as feasible, to meet specified targets for 2020 and 2035. In 2010, the California Air Resources Board (ARB) issued SJCOG a regional GHG target of a 5% reduction in per capita GHG emissions for the planning year 2020. The reduction target for 2035 is a 10% reduction in per capita GHG emissions. These targets are currently under review by CARB; updated targets are expected in summer 2017. If the targets cannot be feasibly met, an APS will be prepared by SJCOG to show how the targets would be achieved through alternative development patterns, infrastructure, or additional transportation measures or policies. The GHG reductions are to be derived, in part, from fewer (and/or shorter) automobile and light truck trips resulting from integrated transportation, land use, housing and environmental planning.

The transportation component of the SCS will include the network of road and transit networks, non-motorized transportation and transportation policies, as discussed in the RTP framework. Furthermore, SB 375 requires that the SCS identify general land uses, residential densities, and building intensities as well as areas to house future residents (see California Government Code Section 65080(b)(2)(B) for the full list of SB 375 requirements).

CEQA Streamlining

SB 375 contains CEQA incentives, or streamlining provisions, to encourage coordinated land use and transportation planning. Certain types of development projects (i.e., transit priority projects or residential/mixed use residential projects, as defined by the statute) may qualify for CEQA streamlining as long as the requisite criteria are met. Generally, meeting such criteria means that the proposed project is determined to be consistent with an adopted SCS. Consistency will be determined by the local jurisdiction that is the lead agency for each project to be streamlined. SJCOG's primary role is to include appropriate information in the SCS, such as land use information as required by SB 375, and/or guidance to aid in interpreting land use information that will allow a jurisdiction to make a consistency determination with respect to appropriate streamlining options on a project-by-project basis.

Scope of Environmental Analysis

The impact categories listed below have been preliminarily identified for analysis in the 2018 RTP/SCS EIR.

- Aesthetics/Visual Resources
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Environmental Justice
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions/Climate Change
- Hydrology and Water Resources
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise
- Transportation (including Security)

In addition, the EIR will include all other sections and issue areas required by the CEQA Guidelines, including discussions of alternatives, growth-inducing impacts and significant irreversible changes. Drawing on the information provided in the environmental setting and preceding issue discussions, the growth-inducing impacts will address the potential for the RTP to directly induce economic growth and remove obstacles to growth in the County. The significant irreversible changes discussion will summarize the significant environmental effects of the RTP, focusing on the plan's unavoidably significant effects.