

Introduction to the Environmental Analysis

3.0 Overview

Chapters 4 through 19 of this draft environmental impact report (DEIR) describe the environmental resources and potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project. These environmental resource topics are discussed in accordance with Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines (State CEQA Guidelines). Each chapter describes the existing setting and background information for the resource topics to help the reader understand the conditions that could be affected by the Project. The potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Project are then discussed in relation to the significance criteria contained in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines. Mitigation measures are included and described in the resource chapters where appropriate and feasible to reduce the adverse effects of significant impacts.

This chapter describes the overall approach to the environmental analysis contained in Chapters 4 through 19, and the significance criteria and terminology used in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This chapter also describes the baseline conditions for evaluating impacts to environmental resources under CEQA.

3.1 Approach to Analysis

As described in Chapter 1, *Introduction*, a DEIR is an informational document that assesses potential environmental effects of a proposed project, and identifies mitigation measures and alternatives to the project that could reduce or avoid potentially significant environmental impacts. In accordance with the basic purposes of CEQA, the impacts analysis in Chapters 4 through 19 seeks foremost to identify and disclose potential environmental impacts that could result from the Proposed Project. The basic approach taken in the impacts analysis is as follows:

1. Describe and characterize the existing environmental and regulatory settings in the Project area or the area of potential impact (i.e., the physical conditions that existed at the time of publication of the Notice of Preparation (NOP) and the existing applicable laws and regulations that may govern or affect implementation of the Proposed Project);
2. Consider the significance criteria contained in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines for each resource topic; dismiss from further consideration or add additional criteria, as appropriate;
3. Analyze impacts to environmental resources in light of the existing conditions (i.e., environmental and regulatory settings) and the Appendix G significance criteria; employ quantitative and/or qualitative analytical methods as appropriate;

- 1 4. Identify any feasible mitigation measures that could reduce identified significant
2 environmental impacts.

3 Specific approaches or methods of analysis may differ based on the environmental resource
4 topic, but the basic approach is the same for all. Some of the key concepts alluded to above
5 are described further below.

6 **3.1.1 Baseline Conditions**

7 Under CEQA, the environmental setting or “baseline” serves as a gauge to assess changes to
8 existing physical conditions that will occur as a result of a proposed project. As noted above,
9 per the State CEQA Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15125), for purposes of an EIR, the
10 environmental setting is normally the existing physical conditions in and around the vicinity
11 of the proposed project as those conditions exist at the time the NOP is published. In other
12 words, the environmental characteristics (e.g., air quality, water quality, traffic conditions)
13 that existed at the time of publication of the NOP are to be used for comparison and
14 consideration of potential project impacts.

15 **3.1.2 Significance of Environmental Impacts**

16 According to CEQA, an EIR should define the threshold of significance and explain the criteria
17 used to determine whether an impact is above or below that threshold. As described above,
18 this DEIR generally uses the significance criteria in Appendix G of the State CEQA Guidelines.
19 The Appendix G significance criteria constitute the threshold for significance of
20 environmental impacts, in that identified effects of the Proposed Project that trigger or meet
21 one of the Appendix G criteria would be considered significant without adequate mitigation.
22 If no feasible mitigation measures can be identified for an effect that meets one of the
23 significance criteria, an impact may be identified as significant and unavoidable. The specific
24 terminology used to describe levels of significance in the impacts analysis are described
25 further below.

26 **3.2 Impact Terminology and Use of Language in CEQA**

27 This DEIR uses the following terminology to describe environmental effects of the Proposed
28 Project:

- 29 ▪ A finding of ***no impact*** is made when the analysis concludes that the Project would
30 not affect the particular environmental resource or issue.
- 31 ▪ An impact is considered ***less than significant*** if the analysis concludes that there
32 would be no substantial adverse change in the environment and that no mitigation is
33 needed.
- 34 ▪ An impact is considered ***significant*** or ***potentially significant*** if the analysis
35 concludes that there could be a substantial adverse effect on the environment.
- 36 ▪ An impact is considered ***less than significant with mitigation*** if the analysis
37 concludes that there would be no substantial adverse change in the environment with
38 the inclusion of the mitigation measures described.

- 1 ▪ An impact is considered ***significant and unavoidable*** if the analysis concludes that
2 there could be a substantial adverse effect on the environment and no feasible
3 mitigation measures are available to reduce the impact to a less than significant level.
- 4 ▪ Mitigation refers to specific measures or activities adopted to avoid, minimize, rectify,
5 reduce, eliminate, or compensate for an impact.
- 6 ▪ A cumulative impact can result when a change in the environment results from the
7 incremental impact of a project when added to other related past, present, or
8 reasonably foreseeable future projects. Significant cumulative impacts may result
9 from individually minor but collectively significant projects. The cumulative impacts
10 analysis in this DEIR focuses on whether the Proposed Project's incremental
11 contribution to other significant cumulative impacts caused by past, present, or
12 probable future projects is cumulatively considerable (i.e., significant).
- 13 ▪ Because the term “significant” has a specific usage in evaluating impacts under CEQA,
14 it is used only to describe the significance of impacts and is not used in other contexts
15 within this document. Synonyms such as "substantial" have been used when not
16 discussing the significance of an environmental impact.

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