



# Chapter 1: Introduction



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Project Overview

This Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) examines the potential environmental effects of the proposed Valley Link Rail Project (Proposed Project) for the Tri-Valley – San Joaquin Valley Regional Rail Authority (the Authority). The Proposed Project’s background and the legal basis for preparing this SEIR are described below.

### 1.1.1 Proposed Project

The Proposed Project would establish a new passenger rail service along a 22-mile corridor in Northern California between the existing Dublin/Pleasanton Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Station in Alameda County and

the proposed Mountain House Community Station in San Joaquin County with all-day bidirectional service at frequent intervals using zero-emission multiple unit vehicles (ZEMUs). The Proposed Project alignment would be constructed within a combination of the existing Interstate 580 (I-580) freeway median, the existing transportation corridor owned by Alameda County (formerly Southern Pacific Transcontinental Railroad alignment), existing California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) right-of-way (ROW) adjacent to westbound I-580, and new ROW to be acquired for the Proposed Project.

As shown in Figure 1-1, the Proposed Project includes four new stations and three support facilities.

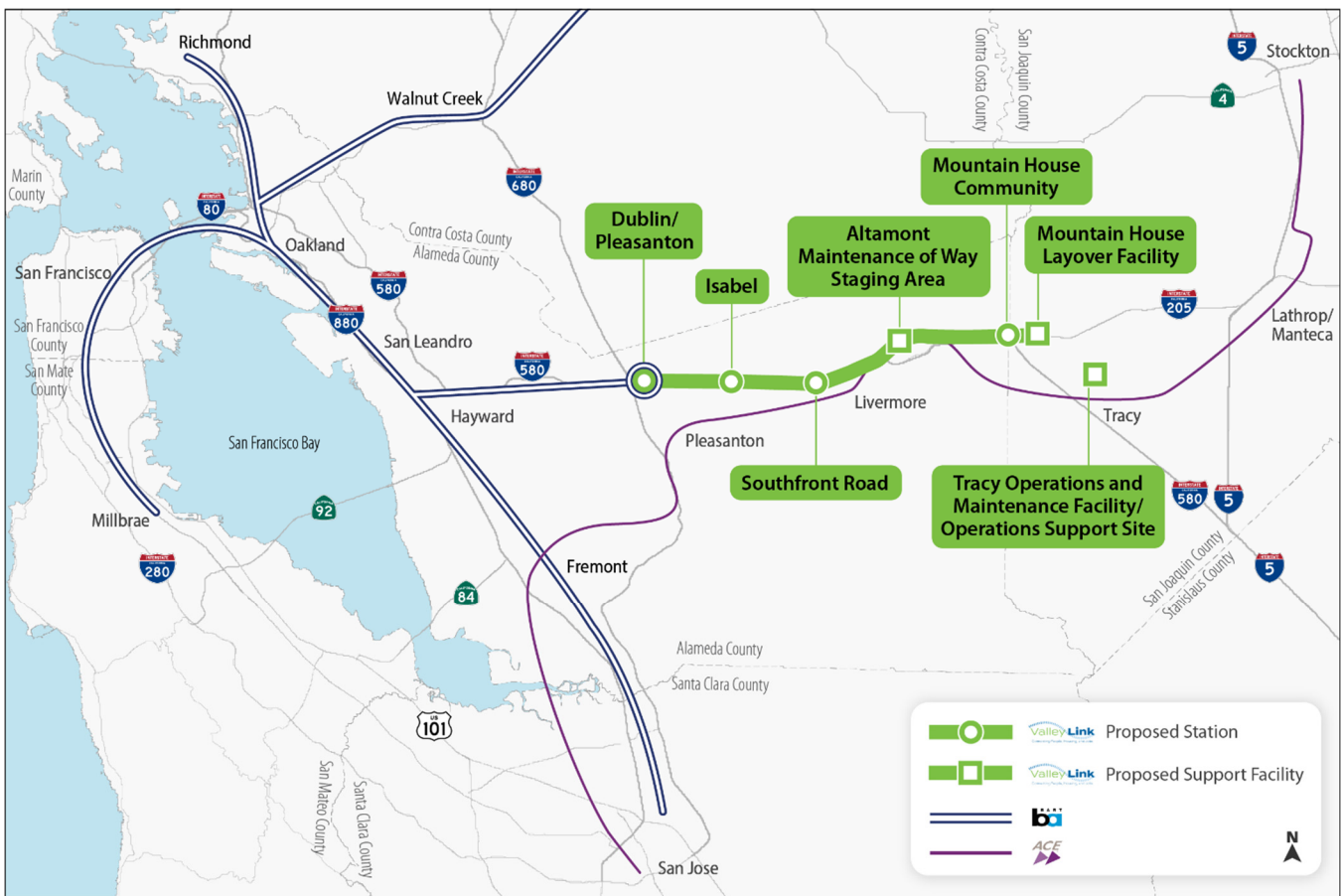


Figure 1-1: Proposed Project



The Proposed Project includes the construction and operation of four stations listed below:

- **Dublin/Pleasanton Station** would be constructed south of the eastbound I-580 freeway lanes in proximity to the existing Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station and would be designed to provide efficient intermodal passenger service between Valley Link, BART, and local bus transit services.
- **Isabel Station** would be constructed within the I-580 median with adjacent parking on a 24-acre site along East Airway Boulevard south of I-580 and east of the Isabel Avenue I-580 overcrossing in Livermore.
- **Southfront Road Station** in Livermore would be constructed within the I-580 median with adjacent parking located south of I-580 on a 7-acre site along Southfront Road between McGraw Avenue and Franklin Lane.
- **The Mountain House Community Station** would be constructed north of Interstate 205 (I-205) on an approximately 54-acre site west of Mountain House Parkway near the I-205/Mountain House Parkway interchange. The location of this station is a result of stakeholder requests for a station in closer proximity to or within the Mountain House community.

Facilities to support the operations and maintenance and ancillary project activities are planned at the three locations described below:

- **Altamont Maintenance of Way (MOW) Staging Area** would be constructed on a 10-acre portion of the Alameda County Transportation Corridor ROW, approximately 2,250 feet east of Dyer Road. The MOW may be used as a contractor staging area during construction and would ultimately be designed to support the short-term storage of vehicle rolling stock, non-revenue vehicles, and material laydown areas for maintenance of rail and systems infrastructure during the revenue operations period.
- **Mountain House Layover Facility (LF)** would be constructed on an approximately 75-acre site east of Mountain House Parkway and north of I-205 to support train layovers, storage, and light maintenance. Access to the site would be provided from Mountain House Parkway at a proposed four-way intersection that provides access to the

Mountain House Community Station to the west and the Mountain House LF to the east. The Mountain House LF would also contain an Operations building and a vehicle maintenance building.

- **Tracy Operations and Maintenance Facility/Operations Support Site (OMF/OSS)** would be constructed on part of an approximately 200-acre property along West Schulte Road just west of the Owens-Brockway Glass Container Plant west of Tracy. The site would accommodate heavy maintenance vehicle and component rebuilds, non-revenue vehicle maintenance, buildings and stations maintenance, warehouse storage, as well as a Backup Control Center (BCC) The OMF/OSS would also include a material laydown area.

The Proposed Project includes the use of ZEMUs. The use of hydrogen vehicles is assumed for environmental documentation given recent State procurement activities and consistency with the State Rail Plan.

## 1.1.2 Background

Beginning with scoping in 2019, the Authority, acting as lead agency under CEQA, prepared a Draft EIR for the Valley Link Project. The Authority Board certified the Final EIR and approved the staff recommended CEQA-Certified Alternative on May 12, 2021.

As shown in Figure 1-2, the Project cleared in the Final EIR (previous project) was a 42-mile, seven-station passenger rail project that would connect the existing Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station in Alameda County to the approved Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) North Lathrop Station in San Joaquin County. The previous project also included two initial operating segments (IOS). The IOS would establish initial service from the Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station to either the Southfront Road Station Alternative or the Mountain House Station Alternative. The previous project did not include a preferred vehicle technology. Four vehicle variants were considered in the review of alternatives: Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU), Hybrid Battery Multiple Unit (HBMU), Battery-Electric Multiple Unit (BEMU) with overhead catenary, and Diesel Locomotive Haul (DLH). The choice of a ZEMU vehicle was determined to best meet the project purpose and need.

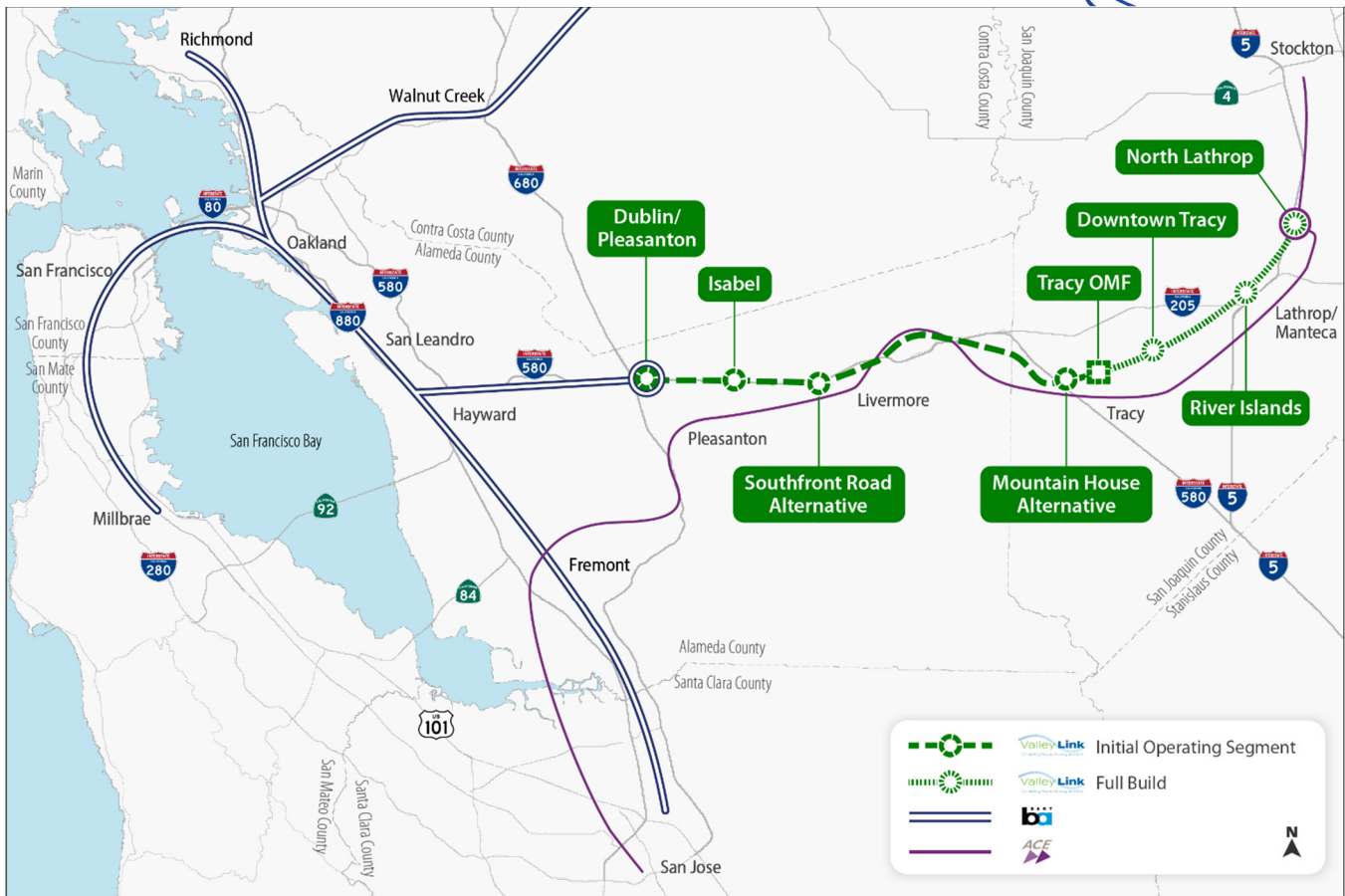


Figure 1-2: Valley Link 2021 CEQA-Certified Alternative

Subsequent to the Board certification of the Final EIR in 2021, the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) began CEQA review of improvements to I-205 with plans to accommodate rail transit in the freeway median. Concurrent with the SJCOG plans, the Authority has advanced design and analysis on a revised IOS that would extend from the existing Dublin/Pleasanton BART Station to include a new alignment that would align with the longer term I-205 rail corridor and also responds to requests by the community of Mountain House for a relocated Mountain House station. This new plan would enable improved station access and facilitate the advancement of transit-oriented development and also includes a new Layover Facility at the east end of the alignment. These revisions to the previous project are now part of the Authority’s Proposed Project. Extension of service beyond Mountain House would be the subject of a future environmental process. The Proposed Project does not preclude the possibility of extending service along an alignment to serve a potential future Downtown Tracy station.

The existing conditions of the Proposed Project are consistent with those in the 2021 EIR, which is therefore incorporated by reference. The impacts and mitigation measures previously identified remain substantially valid. However, the setting for each resource has been updated to reflect changes in applicable regulations and additional analysis has been provided where regulations or conditions have changed.

## 1.2 Environmental Review Process

The development of the Valley Link Project Feasibility Report, which was published in October 2019, included extensive public outreach and community engagement such as outreach meetings, pop-ups, advisory and steering committees, and one-on-one meetings throughout 2018 and 2019. These activities and the corresponding feedback and outcomes are discussed in detail in the Valley Link Project Feasibility Report (October 2019). The report culminated in a 45-day public review period and a final report summarizing the



extensive comments received by key stakeholders and the public.

The Authority further progressed the Proposed Project through development of a CEQA EIR, completed in 2021, which also included a robust public, agency, and stakeholder outreach process. Below is a summary of the outreach completed for the 2021 effort:

- Notice of Preparation (NOP) of EIR, September 13, 2018
- Scoping meeting on October 2, 2018, at the Robert Livermore Community Center
- Scoping meeting on October 3, 2018, at the Tracy City Hall Lobby

Between September 13 and October 15, 2018, 61 written comments were received from public agencies, local organizations, and individuals.

The Authority also held a total of 23 public outreach open houses, workshops, and pop-up events at various locations along the Proposed Project corridor to notify the public about the Proposed Project and to solicit community feedback.

Ongoing public and stakeholder engagement activities are being conducted in compliance with the Authority's Public Participation Plan (March 2021), Language Assistance Plan for Individuals with Limited English Proficient (March 2021), and Sustainability Policy (December 2018)—all of which outline extensive engagement methods, guiding principles, and specific focus on disadvantaged communities and overall accessibility.

As part of the initiation of the CEQA process in 2022 and 2023, the Authority reengaged the public and stakeholders to solicit input. In compliance with CEQA, a NOP was filed with the State Clearinghouse on November 14, 2022, for a SEIR for the Proposed Project. The filing of the NOP began a 30-day public scoping period. Two public scoping meetings were held on December 5 and 6, 2022. The meeting presentation materials were available in both English and Spanish and live language interpretation provided attendees the opportunity to listen and participate in either language.

As part of the public scoping process, the public was invited to submit written comments on the scope and content of the environmental document during the

public comment period that began on November 14, 2022, and ended on December 19, 2022. During this period the Authority received a total of 17 written comment letters by mail, email, and through the online comment submission form on the project website. Of these submissions, nine were received from individuals, community organizations and businesses and a total of eight public agencies submitted written letters of comment. Activities related to the 2022 CEQA public scoping process are summarized in Appendix A, *Scoping Report*.

A summary of these written comments is presented below:

- CEQA evaluation regarding biological resources, land use/agriculture, noise, hazardous materials, geological, traffic, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and visual impacts.
- Consider Mountain House Community Services District (MHCS D) and Mountain House Specific Plan.
- Consider other alternatives such as connecting ACE to BART, establishing a well-integrated network of long-distance and express buses, Mococo Line.
- Hydrogen as a mode of power.
- Effects of the Proposed Project on private properties, property access, property acquisitions, and compensation.
- Early agency consultation.

During the period leading up to the NOP, and in combination with the NOP formal scoping period, approximately 250 meetings with stakeholders took place, which resulted in additional refinements to the Proposed Project to be responsive to this feedback.

Public engagement activities related to the CEQA process are ongoing, including project website updates at key milestones ([www.getvalleylinked.com](http://www.getvalleylinked.com)) and maintenance of a stakeholder email list that is utilized for notable project announcements. The Draft SEIR will be available for public review and comment in April/May 2024; corresponding public hearings will be held during that time to further inform the public on the draft document and gather comments. The comments received will be documented and addressed in the Final SEIR decision document.



## 1.3 EIR Adequacy

The level of detail contained throughout this EIR is consistent with the CEQA Guidelines and recent court decisions, which provide the standard of adequacy on which this document is based. The Guidelines state:

### Section 15151:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information, which enables them to make a decision, which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection, but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

### Section 15162:

When an EIR has been certified or negative declaration adopted for a project, no subsequent EIR shall be prepared for that project unless the lead agency determines, on the basis of substantial evidence in the light of the whole record, one or more of the following:

1. Substantial changes are proposed in the project which will require major revisions of the previous EIR or negative declaration due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects;
2. Substantial changes occur with respect to the circumstances under which the project is undertaken which will require major revisions of the previous EIR or negative declaration due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects; or
3. New information of substantial importance, which was not known and could not have been known with the exercise of reasonable diligence at the time the previous EIR was certified as complete or the negative declaration was adopted, shows any of the following:

- a. The project will have one or more significant effects not discussed in the previous EIR or negative declaration;
- b. Significant effects previously examined will be substantially more severe than shown in the previous EIR;
- c. Mitigation measures or alternatives previously found not to be feasible would in fact be feasible and would substantially reduce one or more significant effects of the project, but the project proponents decline to adopt the mitigation measure or alternative; or
- d. Mitigation measures or alternatives which are considerably different from those analyzed in the previous EIR would substantially reduce one or more significant effects on the environment, but the project proponents decline to adopt the mitigation measure or alternative.

## 1.4 Intended Use of the EIR

This SEIR is intended to provide decision-makers and the public with information that enables them to consider the environmental consequences of the Proposed Project and additional project alternatives to which comparison can be made. EIRs not only identify significant or potentially significant environmental effects, but also identify ways in which those impacts can be reduced to less than significant levels, whether through the imposition of mitigation measures or through the implementation of specific alternatives to the project. In a practical sense, EIRs function as a technique for fact-finding, allowing the applicant, concerned citizens, and agency staff an opportunity to collectively review and evaluate baseline conditions and project impacts through a process of full disclosure.

To gain the most value from this report, certain key points should be kept in mind:

- This report should be used as a tool to give the reader an overview of the possible ramifications of the Proposed Project.
- A specific environmental impact is not necessarily irreversible or permanent. Most impacts, particularly in urban, more developed areas, can be wholly or partially mitigated by incorporating conditions of approval and/or changes recommended in this



report during the design and construction phases of project development.

- This report, while a summary of facts, reflects the professional judgment of the authors. The EIR was prepared by consultants retained by the Authority and was subject to the independent review and judgment of the Authority. The Authority independently reviewed and analyzed the EIR for the Proposed Project, and the EIR reflects the independent judgment of the Authority.

## 1.5 Scope of the Subsequent EIR

This SEIR provides a project-specific analysis of the potential environmental effects of the Proposed Project. The scope of the SEIR includes issues identified by the Authority during the preparation of the NOP, comment letters received during the NOP review period, comments received during public outreach and as analyzed in the Draft EIR.

Based on the potential impacts of the Proposed Project, this SEIR evaluates the following environmental issues as identified in the 2024 CEQA Guidelines Appendix G:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Noise and Vibration
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Safety and Security (includes wildfire, emergency access, and airport hazards)
- Transportation and Traffic
- Utilities and Service Systems

Where information or conditions have changed since preparation of the 2021 EIR, this circumstance is noted. If changes in circumstances have not occurred, the analysis typically was not altered because the existing setting characteristics of the Proposed Project have not changed. In preparing the SEIR, pertinent County of Alameda, County of San Joaquin, City of Dublin, City of Pleasanton, City of Livermore, City of Tracy policies and guidelines, existing EIRs, and background documents prepared by the counties and cities were all evaluated for its applicability to the Proposed Project. A list of references is provided in Chapter 6 (References).

## 1.6 Project Sponsors and Contact Persons

The Authority is both the applicant and the lead agency for the preparation of this SEIR. AECOM is the environmental consultant to the Authority and the principal preparer of this SEIR. Key contact persons are as follows:

**Lead Agency:**

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**Lead Agency Contact:** Marianne Payne

**Project Applicant:**

Tri-Valley – San Joaquin Valley Regional Rail Authority

**EIR Consultant:** AECOM

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Oakland, CA 94612

**EIR Consultant Contact:** Jen McNeil Dhadwal, AICP

## 1.7 Areas of Controversy and Issues to be Resolved

The discussion of environmental effects, mitigation measures, and alternatives, as summarized in Table ES-1 (Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures) in the Executive Summary and evaluated in detail in this SEIR, constitutes the identification of issues to be resolved and areas of controversy, as required for compliance with CEQA Guidelines Sections 15123(b)(2) and 15123(b)(3). Additionally, oral and written comments received for the Proposed Project indicated that areas of controversy and



potential issues to be resolved included the following: 1) aesthetics, 2) agricultural resources, 3) biological resources, 4) energy 5) geology and soils, 6) greenhouse gas emissions, 7) hazardous materials, 8) land use and planning, 9) noise and vibration, and 10) transportation and traffic. These issues are addressed within Section 3.1 (Aesthetics), Section 3.2 (Agricultural Resources), Section 3.4 (Biological Resources), Section 3.6 (Energy), Section 3.7 (Geology, Soils, Mineral, and Paleontological Resources), Section 3.8 (Greenhouse Gas Emissions), Section 3.9 (Hazardous Materials), Section 3.11 (Land Use and Planning), Section 3.12 (Noise and Vibration), and Section 3.17 (Transportation and Traffic), respectively.

## 1.8 Document Organization

This SEIR is structured for easy use and reference. To help the reader locate information of particular interest, a brief summary of the contents of each chapter of the SEIR is provided. The following chapters are contained within the EIR:

- Executive Summary — This chapter summarizes the characteristics of the Proposed Project, the environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and residual impacts with the Proposed Project.
- Chapter 1: Introduction — This chapter provides an overview of the Proposed Project, the project and legal background, the environmental process, and document organization.
- Chapter 2: Project Description — This chapter includes the location and boundaries of the Proposed Project; Project objectives; a general description of technical, economic, and environmental characteristics; and intended uses of the SEIR.
- Chapter 3: Environmental Impact Analysis — This chapter describes and evaluates the environmental issue areas, including the existing environmental setting, applicable environmental thresholds, environmental impacts (short term, long term, direct, and indirect), policy considerations related to the particular environmental issue area under analysis, and feasible mitigation measures capable of minimizing environmental harm. This chapter has been updated to reflect the current existing conditions to identify any potentially new impacts.
- Chapter 4: Other CEQA Considerations — This chapter provides a summary of the Proposed Project's potential to lead to population growth and the indirect implications of that growth on the city; summarizes the discussion of cumulative impacts, provides a list of Proposed Project impacts that are significant and unavoidable by issue area; and identifies the irreversible changes to the natural environment resulting from the Proposed Project. This chapter also identifies all individuals responsible for the preparation of this report.
- Chapter 5: Alternatives to the Proposed Project — This chapter provides the No Project Alternatives analysis for this SEIR.
- Chapter 6: References — This chapter provides a list of references for the report.