

1.1 Background and Overview

This draft program environmental impact report (PEIR) has been prepared by Los Angeles County (County) through Los Angeles County Public Works (Public Works) to assess the potential environmental impacts that could result from the implementation of the proposed *2020 LA River Master Plan* (Project) in Los Angeles County, California. The County is the lead agency for the proposed Project, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Design information for the proposed *2020 LA River Master Plan* is at a conceptual level; therefore, the environmental impact analysis is presented at a programmatic level and does not include project-specific or site-specific analysis.

The Draft *2020 LA River Master Plan* was released to the public on January 13, 2021 for review and comment. The proposed Project is along a 51-mile-long, approximately 2-mile-wide (i.e., 1 mile on each side) corridor of the Los Angeles River (LA River) in Los Angeles County and spans through 18 jurisdictions (17 cities and unincorporated County areas). The river encompasses an 834-square-mile watershed and flows from its headwaters at river mile 51.0 in Canoga Park within the City of Los Angeles to river mile 0.0 in Long Beach, where the river meets the Pacific Ocean. The LA River was channelized between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries to protect lives and property from flooding as the Los Angeles region rapidly grew and transformed to a largely urbanized area. Today, 1 million people live within 1 mile of the river.

1.1.1 LA River Master Plan History

The proposed *2020 LA River Master Plan* is the culmination of planning efforts spanning 90 years. In the past 30 years, planning efforts including technological advances, geographic information systems (GIS), new data sources, new regulatory requirements, climate data, advanced mapping, needs assessments, and health surveys have helped contribute to the goals, actions, and methods of the *2020 LA River Master Plan*. These early and more recent plans are briefly described below.

1.1.1.1 Early Planning Efforts

Planning for recreation and open space in the Los Angeles region formally started with the 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan, commissioned by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce entitled, *Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region*. The plan identified the ways in which the region was then lacking in open space and laid out a detailed plan for creating new parks, parkways, and permanent “reservations.” The plan—which recognized that parks, open spaces, and connection to nature would be essential to the health, environment, and economy of the region—foresaw the rapid urbanization that was to come in the Los Angeles Basin and was published just before the catastrophic floods of the 1930s.

Although this plan was considered visionary and sweeping for its time, priorities were shifted following the flooding of the 1930s, when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD) channelized the river in an effort to protect the

growing population and property from flooding. The channelization tended to be focused on the single-purpose benefit infrastructure (i.e., flood management facilities) and did not follow the broad-based approach to open space, health, and the economy outlined in the 1930 Olmstead-Bartholomew Plan. It was not until the 1980s that efforts to integrate the flood-management functions of the river with broader water resources management, open space, recreation, and communities began to emerge. Public interest in improving river conditions expanded, and Friends of the LA River was founded in 1986, with the intent of improving river stewardship and restoring community connections to the river in an ecologically, equitable, and sustainable manner.

1.1.1.2 1996 LA River Master Plan

In 1996, the County approved the *Los Angeles River Master Plan* (1996 Master Plan), which expanded the originally single-purpose flood-management efforts on the river to a multi-benefit community amenity that reflected aesthetic, environmental, economic, and recreational values of local residents. The 1996 Master Plan focuses on the approximately 51-mile-long LA River, 9 miles of the Tujunga Wash from Hansen Dam to the LA River, as well as the adjacent lands of these two water resources in the County. Specifically, locations within approximately 0.5 mile on each side of the centerline of the river comprise the study area in the 1996 Master Plan. This master plan identified ways to revitalize public rights-of-way along the LA River while ensuring the continued primary purpose of the LA River as a flood risk reduction facility. The 1996 Master Plan was a first step in developing an inclusive vision of shared open spaces and parks, stewardship of water resources, and safety from hazardous floods.

1.1.1.3 Recent Planning Studies and Adopted Plans

Since the approval of the 1996 Master Plan, numerous planning studies have been conducted and plans adopted that call for a more integrated approach to improving water quality, stormwater, flood management, habitat, open space, and recreation conditions along the LA River. In 2001, California Resources Agency and the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), in conjunction with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC), jointly developed *Common Ground from Mountains to the Sea: Watershed and Open Space Plan San Gabriel and Los Angeles Rivers*, which identified continuous tracts of open space, trails, and recreation areas along the San Gabriel and LA River corridors. The City of Los Angeles adopted the *Los Angeles River Revitalization Master Plan* in 2007, which identified four core values for the stretch of the LA River that flows through the City: revitalize the river, green the neighborhoods, capture community opportunities, and create value. That same year, the City of Long Beach adopted the *Long Beach River Link*, which called for restoring native habitat along the LA River, creating pedestrian and bike pathways, and improving aesthetics of the river.

Nearly a decade later, in 2015, the City of Los Angeles prepared the *Stormwater Capture Master Plan*, which identified new projects, programs, and policies in the City, including along reaches of the upper and lower LA River, that could substantially increase stormwater capture for water supply before it flowed into storm drains and to the ocean through 2035. That same year, the City of Los Angeles and USACE prepared the *Los Angeles River Ecosystem Restoration Integrated Feasibility Report* to develop several ecosystem restoration projects along approximately 11 miles of the LA River from Griffith Park to downtown Los Angeles by reestablishing riparian strand, freshwater marsh, and aquatic habitat communities and reconnecting the river to major tributaries, its historic floodplain, and the regional habitat zones of the Santa Monica, San Gabriel, and Verdugo Mountain

ranges while maintaining existing levels of flood risk management. A secondary objective was to provide recreational opportunities consistent with the restoration projects.

The *Countywide Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment* was prepared by the County in 2016 and inventoried and assessed the need for parks and recreation facilities in cities and unincorporated County communities. The report established a new way to understand parks, recreation, and open space by identifying parks as key infrastructure needed to maintain and improve the quality of life for all County residents, using a new series of metrics to determine park need, supporting a need-based allocation of funding for parks and recreation, and emphasizing both community priorities and deferred maintenance projects.

In 2017, the City of Los Angeles prepared the *LA River Low Flow Study*, as part of the *One Water LA 2040 Plan*. The study identified considerations, assumptions, and areas of future study necessary to determine optimal flow conditions in the LA River. These conditions would balance the City's water supply needs with the LA River's water-dependent uses and regulatory requirements. The study summarized LA River inflow sources, low flow conditions, an adaptive water management alternatives, as well as the benefits, challenges, limitations, and costs of different alternatives. Also in 2017, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), in conjunction with the City of Los Angeles and the Colorado School of Mines, released the *Los Angeles Sustainable Water Project: Los Angeles River Watershed* report, which identified the potential to improve water quality standards while integrating the City of Los Angeles' One Water Management practices that can increase potential local water supplies for the City of Los Angeles in the highly urbanized LA River watershed. The report was undertaken as part of a larger goal of the Sustainable LA UCLA Grand Challenge, which is a necessary step toward realizing 100% locally sourced water for the County by 2050.

The *Lower LA River Revitalization Plan* was completed in 2017 and encompasses areas within 1 mile on each side of the 19-mile section of river starting from the City of Vernon to its outlet in the City of Long Beach, including unincorporated County communities and 14 southeast County cities. This plan describes opportunities for improving the environment and residents' quality of life along the river and ensures locals' input as the lower river is reimagined and revitalized into an integral part of a healthy, equitable, and sustainable community.

The *Los Angeles County Annual Affordable Housing Outcomes Report*, published in 2018, provides an understanding of housing needs and investments in the County, and highlights the County's shortfall of more than a half million affordable housing units. The report includes recommendations of public expenditures to support production and preservation of affordable housing.

In 2020, the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Working Group assessed the needs of communities along the upper LA River channel and its six key tributaries within its upper watershed. The group developed project concepts to enhance the quality of life of the communities with a focus on people, recreation, water, and the environment. The *Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Plan* was released April 16, 2020.

1.1.2 2020 LA River Master Plan

The County began a comprehensive update to the 1996 Master Plan in 2018 with a motion adopted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 2016. The update process, led by Public Works, was supported by several additional County departments and a 41-member steering committee of representatives of municipalities, non-profit organizations, and other governmental and non-governmental entities that provided input and expertise related to water, people, and the

environment, the three themes of the master plan. The foundation for the proposed *2020 LA River Master Plan* includes more than 140 planning efforts from across the watershed, including those summarized above. The *2020 LA River Master Plan's* approach is unique from previous efforts because the analyses—including ecosystem, demographic, and hydrologic studies—were conducted for the entire 834-square-mile watershed of the LA River to better inform the various needs underlying the nine goals, referred to as objectives under CEQA, as identified for the *2020 LA River Master Plan*.

The *2020 LA River Master Plan* builds on the adopted 1996 Master Plan and other regional planning studies since then. It is intended to improve 51 miles of connected open space along the LA River to improve health, equity, access, mobility, and economic opportunity for the diverse communities of the County while still providing flood risk management. The project themes of water, people, and the environment capture the 1996 Master Plan key issues as well as other regional planning studies and recognize that infrastructure planning cannot be isolated from equally important social and environmental needs. The project website provides more detailed information on the Project and the community outreach conducted to date for development of the master plan:

<http://www.larivermasterplan.org/>.

1.1.3 Master Plan Objectives

The *2020 LA River Master Plan* identifies nine goals, referred to as objectives under CEQA:

1. Reduce flood risk and improve resiliency.
2. Provide equitable, inclusive, and safe parks, open space, and trails.
3. Support healthy, connected ecosystems.
4. Enhance opportunities for equitable access to the river corridor.
5. Embrace and enhance opportunities for arts and culture.
6. Address potential adverse impacts on housing affordability and people experiencing homelessness¹.
7. Foster opportunities for continued community engagement, development, and education.
8. Improve local water supply reliability.
9. Promote healthy, safe, clean water.

The *2020 LA River Master Plan* is founded on a community and data-based goal-driven framework that closely ties the plan's recommendations to their potential to achieve the broader master plan's nine objectives. This was achieved through a comprehensive evaluation of criteria identified in the plan's existing conditions inventory and analysis for assessing each goal along the 51 miles of the LA River, subsequently identifying areas of general to very high need relative to that objective.

¹ The aim of the *2020 LA River Master Plan* objective "Address potential adverse impacts on housing affordability and people experiencing homelessness" is to maintain strategies for ensuring continuing housing affordability in LA River adjacent communities. Therefore, the use of "impacts" in objective 6 is distinct from the use of "impacts" under CEQA where, per CEQA Guidelines Section 15358 (b), impacts analyzed under CEQA must be related to a physical change in the environment.

Each of the nine objectives is an active priority for the future of the river and was developed based on an extensive community engagement and GIS-based needs analysis, with input from the community, the steering committee, and technical experts, as detailed in the *2020 LA River Master Plan*. Each objective identified in the *2020 LA River Master Plan* is supported by a recommended set of actions that work toward achieving each objective. Each action is, in turn, supported by a set of methods that provide specific, tangible implementation steps. Together, the objectives, actions, and methods form the strategic directions of the *2020 LA River Master Plan*.

A brief summary of the objectives is provided below.

1.1.3.1 Reduce Flood Risk and Improve Resiliency

The *2020 LA River Master Plan* is intended to reduce flood risk and improve resiliency along the river. However, not all areas of the river have equal conveyance capacity. In some areas, low-channel capacity makes the probability of flooding of the river adjacent communities in any given year as high as 25 percent. Development along the LA River has nearly completely encroached up to the channel. It is critical to maintain the overall existing capacity, as well as increase the conveyance capacity of the river in high-risk areas, to manage flood risk for people and property during storm events. In addition, a changing climate is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme precipitation events that result in flows that may exceed the channel's current capacity. New projects along the LA River will need to consider the long-term impacts of climate change and the need to incorporate resilient infrastructure to manage these extreme events.

1.1.3.2 Provide Equitable, Inclusive, and Safe Parks, Open Space, and Trails

Members of the community identified walking and bicycling as the top two activities they participate in along the LA River, with participation in these two activities together greater than the participation in all other activities combined. However, 61 percent said they do not use the river due to safety concerns. Along the LA River, 12 of the 17 cities do not meet the World Health Organization's minimum standards of 2.2 acres of parks per thousand people, and only 32 of the river's 51 miles have trails alongside them. By aiming to provide 51 miles of safe, connected open space, the LA River can be a valued recreational resource for the surrounding communities in the County.

1.1.3.3 Support Healthy, Connected Ecosystems

The LA River watershed sits within one of the world's most diverse Mediterranean biodiversity hotspots and along the Pacific Flyway. Due to urbanization, the region has the largest number of endangered and threatened species and species of special concern in the contiguous 48 states. The river ecosystem has been altered from its historic state, first through agriculture and irrigation, and later through channelization. In community meetings and surveys, 52 percent of participants said the issue most important was protecting vulnerable plants and animals. Planning and development efforts along the river must create habitat areas large enough to support native functioning ecosystems.

1.1.3.4 Enhance Opportunities for Equitable Access to the River Corridor

Today, ease and availability of access to trails along the LA River is highly variable. About 90 access points connect people to trails that serve 32 of the river's 51 miles. Yet, only one-third of these access points have signs and only 70 percent connect to sidewalks. Many access points are well served by bus, but only two metro rail stops fall within a half mile of an access point to the river. It is therefore not surprising that one of the top five reasons community residents cited for not visiting the LA River is simply not knowing where to go. The LA River is intended to be a resource for use by all of the County. To be a resource, the river must be accessible and usable.

1.1.3.5 Embrace and Enhance Opportunities for Arts and Culture

The LA River has long been at the cultural and historical heart of Los Angeles. From its first Indigenous Peoples to the many neighborhoods it runs through, engages, and enhances today, the river has long been a valued community resource. The County has the opportunity to advance culture, arts, creativity, and community pride throughout the County and to inspire by recognizing, fostering, and preserving the rich tangible and lived cultural heritage along the LA River corridor. The river presents an opportunity to incubate new ideas and talent among the next generation of cultural practitioners, offering new cultural opportunities, experiences, and spaces where the arts can flourish and be shared. Interventions that are permanent or temporary, or reflect socially based practices of art, design, and gathering are all waiting to be realized. As a local cultural resource with global influence and stature, the LA River corridor can be a major destination that draws residents and tourists alike, that promotes the equitable inclusion of the County's diverse people, and that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the local communities through which it flows.

1.1.3.6 Address Potential Adverse Impacts on Housing Affordability And People Experiencing Homelessness

Housing costs for County residents have been steadily increasing for decades. The median owner-occupied home value has increased by over 50 percent, from \$298,800 to \$465,900 between 2000 and 2016 (in 2016 dollars). Among renters, the percentage of household income spent on housing increased from 28 to 35 percent in the same period. About a third (32 percent) of renters in the County are severely rent-burdened, meaning they spend more than half of their income on rent. As the affordable housing shortfall has risen, so has the number of people experiencing homelessness, which exceeded 50,000 people across the County. Approximately 8,800 persons experiencing homelessness are living in neighborhoods adjacent to the river. As the LA River moves toward the vision of becoming 51 miles of connected open space, it is critical to consider how this vision will affect housing and homelessness. With the goal of increasing parks and open space, there is potential to negatively affect housing affordability. It is therefore important to proactively implement a meaningful strategy for preventing displacement and ensuring continuing affordability of housing in river adjacent communities. The *2020 LA River Master Plan* seeks to improve neighborhoods without causing negative effects of displacement.

1.1.3.7 Foster Opportunities for Continued Community Engagement, Development, and Education

Among the hundreds of community groups that are present along the river, there are more than three dozen organizations and initiatives that focus on the river itself, some of which have been active for over three decades. Healthier, more socially connected communities were the third most

important river-related issue for community members. The LA River's connection to the region's history, ecology, and culture makes it a prime venue and tool for both community engagement and education. Community members felt it was most important for people to learn about how the river benefits and supports the environment (38 percent); its ecology, habitat, and vegetation (33 percent); and the current hydrology and uses of the river (21 percent). Though some adjacent communities currently take advantage of the river, the *2020 LA River Master Plan* would help reimagine the river and increase opportunities for engagement and education activity, serving as a platform and front door for all surrounding communities.

1.1.3.8 Improve Local Water Supply Reliability

More than 50 percent of the region's water supply is imported from the Colorado River, the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta, and the Eastern Sierras. In the Los Angeles Basin, 57 percent of water is imported, 34 percent comes from groundwater, and 9 percent is sourced from recycled water, water conservation measures, and local surface water diversions. In community meetings and surveys, supplementing water supply was the second most important issue related to the LA River for participants, identified by 48 percent of participants. Increasing population, regulatory requirements, natural disasters, and demands on the water system accentuate the decreasing reliability of the sources of imported water supplies that is caused by cyclical droughts and climate change. Dry weather and wet weather flows in the LA River present opportunities to develop and diversify local water resources to reduce dependence on imported water and increase the reliability and resiliency of the region's water supply.

1.1.3.9 Promote Healthy, Safe, Clean Water

The LA River is a water body with multiple beneficial uses, impairments, and regulated pollutants. While over 800 water quality improvement projects are planned, are in development, or have been completed within the river's watershed, additional efforts are needed to meet established water quality targets. In many locations, there are projects proposed or constructed to meet the river's water quality requirements. However, there is much uncertainty in the funding and implementation of the proposed projects to keep pace with approved regulatory milestones. In 2018, the County passed Measure W, the Safe Clean Water Program, to provide a new source of funding to help implement local and regional water quality projects. The *2020 LA River Master Plan* would facilitate the development of corridor-based water quality projects and programs to help promote healthy, safe, clean water.

1.1.4 Draft 2020 LA River Master Plan - Public Involvement and Review

The *2020 LA River Master Plan* development process included a comprehensive community engagement program, in addition to input from the 41-member steering committee and expertise from the technical design team. The three-pronged approach was designed to represent the broad range of interests along the LA River. Community outreach included digital surveys and extensive partnerships with local grassroots organizations, as well as outreach methods like the first LA River Youth Summit attended by 800 high school students from river-adjacent high schools around the County, and telephone town halls where over 5,000 residents participated. Thirteen community meetings specifically focused on master plan content were held in diverse geographies along the 51 miles of the LA River. The large-scale community engagement process—along with the robust

data-driven analysis of existing conditions along the river—helped establish the community needs and inform the *2020 LA River Master Plan* objectives and design considerations. In addition to the thousands of people who engaged in person, nearly one million people engaged with the website, social media, or other digital aspect of the Project.

Eight public meetings of the Steering Committee were held between April 2018 and December 2019 and included public comment opportunities. The Steering Committee also formed three subcommittees that met 27 times for follow-up discussions. The slide content of the Steering Committee meetings as well as meeting summaries and additional technical data were made publicly available at LARiverMasterPlan.org. Upon completion of the Steering Committee meeting process, the draft master plan was reviewed by the subcommittees. The Draft Master Plan was made available to the public on January 13, 2021 for review.

1.2 Overview of the CEQA Process

CEQA requires a lead agency to disclose the significant environmental effects of proposed actions to decision-makers and the public. CEQA applies to all discretionary activities proposed to be carried out or approved by public agencies. Approval of the proposed Project (*2020 LA River Master Plan*) would be a discretionary action by a public agency, in this case the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, acting on behalf of the County as the lead agency for the Project. Therefore, compliance with CEQA is required.

An EIR is an informational document prepared in compliance with CEQA that describes a proposed project's significant environmental effects, measures to mitigate those effects, and alternatives for avoiding or minimizing the effects. A PEIR is a type of EIR that can be prepared on a series of actions that can be categorized as one large project and are related geographically; as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions; in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plan, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168). Therefore, this PEIR is being prepared for the *2020 LA River Master Plan* because it is the appropriate environmental document for a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related geographically (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168). The *2020 LA River Master Plan* includes consideration of a multitude of actions that could be implemented in the future, and all of them are geographically related to the LA River. While this PEIR provides an initial program-level CEQA clearance for the *2020 LA River Master Plan*, all subsequent projects proposed under the *2020 LA River Master Plan* will be examined in light of this PEIR to determine whether subsequent or new CEQA documentation must be prepared (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168 (c)(2)).

The major steps that have been and will be taken by the County in preparing the PEIR in compliance with CEQA are described below.

1.2.1 Notice of Preparation and Scoping Period

The County, in accordance with CEQA, prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP), which was released to the public and filed with the State Clearinghouse (SCH No. 2020070128) in the Office of Planning and Research on July 7, 2020. The NOP provided notice to the public and public agencies that a PEIR would be prepared, described the proposed Project that would be evaluated in detail in the PEIR,

listed the probable environmental effects of the Project, and identified the date, time, and location for an online scoping meeting, which was held on July 29, 2020.

The NOP was distributed to involved public agencies and interested parties for a 30-day public review period, which began on July 7, 2020 and ended on August 6, 2020.

A copy of the NOP is included in Appendix A of this PEIR, along with written comments provided by the public and public agencies in response to the NOP. Comments received in response to the NOP during the scoping period were considered in preparing this PEIR.

1.2.2 PEIR Public Review and Comment Period

Notification of the availability of the PEIR was sent to the public and interested or affected agencies for review. Release of the PEIR to the public begins a 45-day comment period, extending from February 1, 2021 to March 18, 2021. During that timeframe, members of the public and public agencies are asked to review the PEIR and provide comments on the document, including adequacy of the impact analyses.

The PEIR can be reviewed on Public Works' website (pw.lacounty.gov/go/larmnceqa). Following Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-28-20 relating to the threat of COVID-19, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors announced that all Los Angeles County facilities were be closed to members of the public beginning March 16, 2020. Since then, Public Works has closed all public buildings and in-person services. Additionally, the County, City of Los Angeles, and City of Long Beach library locations have been closed to the public until further notice and only select locations have been offering curbside pickup.

Public Works is soliciting the views of interested persons and agencies on the content of this PEIR. In accordance with CEQA, agencies are requested to provide their comments on environmental issues related to the statutory responsibilities of the agency. The PEIR will be used by the County's governing Board—the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors—when considering approval of the proposed *2020 LA River Master Plan* as well as any related discretionary actions. Any interested individuals or entities can provide written comments on the PEIR. Written comments on the PEIR must be postmarked by March 18, 2021 and should be addressed to:

Grace Komjakraphan-Tek
Los Angeles County Public Works, Stormwater Quality Division
900 South Fremont Avenue, 11th Floor
Alhambra, CA 91803
LARiverCEQA@pw.lacounty.gov

Public notice of the availability of the PEIR was provided in the following publications:

- *Glendale Independent*
- *Grunion Gazette*
- *L.A. Watts Times*
- *Long Beach Press Telegram*
- *Paramount Journal*
- *Los Angeles Times*

- *Excelsior LA*
- *The Canyon News*
- *Monterey Park Press*
- *The Downey Patriot*
- *The Signal Tribune*
- *South Bay Daily Breeze*
- *La Opinion*
- *Los Angeles Times en Español (Hoy Los Angeles)*
- *Los Angeles Daily News*

1.2.3 Preparation of the Final EIR and Project Approval

Upon completion of the 45-day PEIR public review period, a Final PEIR will be prepared, which, among other documents will include comments on the Draft PEIR received during the formal public review period, as well as the County's written responses to those comments. The Final PEIR will also contain corrections to the text of the PEIR, if needed. This Draft PEIR and the Final PEIR will make up the PEIR for the *2020 LA River Master Plan*.

If the decision-making body of the lead agency (here, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors) approves the proposed Project, CEQA requires the board to adopt findings with respect to each significant effect identified in the PEIR (Public Resources Code Section 21081, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15091). For each significant effect, CEQA requires the approving agency to make one or more of the following findings:

- Changes or alterations have been required for, or incorporated into, the Project that avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect, as identified in the Final PEIR.
- Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
- Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the Final PEIR.

In the event that the County, as the lead agency, concludes that the proposed Project would result in significant effects that would not be reduced to less-than-significant levels or avoided by feasible mitigation measures and alternatives, the County must adopt a statement of overriding considerations (Public Resources Code Section 21081, subd. (b); State CEQA Guidelines Section 15093). Under CEQA, such statements are intended to provide a written means by which the lead agency balances the benefits of a proposed project and any significant and unavoidable environmental impacts arising from its implementation. Where the lead agency concludes that the economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits outweigh the unavoidable significant environmental impacts, the lead agency may find such impacts acceptable and approve the project. In addition, pursuant to Section 21081.6 of the Public Resources Code, public agencies, when approving a project, must also adopt a program for monitoring or reporting the changes that were

incorporated into the project or made a condition of project approval, for mitigating or avoiding significant effects on the environment. The purpose of the monitoring and reporting program is to ensure mitigation measures and project revisions identified in the PEIR are implemented. The program, which will be referred to as the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) for the proposed Project, will be recommended for adoption by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors at the time it considers its project approval.

1.3 About This PEIR

1.3.1 PEIR

As introduced in Section 1.2 above, this EIR for the *2020 LA River Master Plan* is a PEIR, which is described in Section 15168 of the State CEQA Guidelines as an EIR that:

May be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either geographically, as logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions, [or] in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program...

Because the proposed Project consists of the *2020 LA River Master Plan* with components that would be implemented over a period of years, the County determined that a PEIR would be the appropriate document for the proposed Project.

According to the State CEQA Guidelines (Section 15168[b]), a PEIR can provide the following advantages:

- Provide an occasion for a more exhaustive consideration of effects and alternatives than would be practical in an EIR on an individual action.
- Ensure consideration of cumulative impacts that may be slighted on a case-by-case basis.
- Avoid duplicative reconsideration of basic policy considerations.
- Allow the lead agency to consider broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures at an earlier time, when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative impacts.
- Allow a reduction in paperwork.

1.3.1.1 Enforceability of Mitigation Measures

The analyses in this this PEIR includes impact determinations under CEQA for the *2020 LA River Master Plan* that are applicable to all 18 jurisdictions in the study area, including the County and non-County jurisdictions (17 cities). Except for significant and unavoidable impacts, all identified significant environmental effects of the proposed *2020 LA River Master Plan* can be avoided or reduced to a less-than-significant level if the mitigation measures identified in this PEIR are implemented. These mitigation measures will be implemented for subsequent projects that are carried out by the County. Because some later activities under the *2020 LA River Master Plan* would not be carried out by the County, the County cannot enforce or guarantee that the mitigation measures would be incorporated. Therefore, where this PEIR concludes a less-than-significant impact for later activities carried out by the County, the impact would be significant and

unavoidable when these activities are not carried out by the County. However, the identification of a significant and unavoidable program-level impact in this PEIR does not preclude the finding of a future less-than-significant impact for individual projects that will tier from the PEIR.

1.3.1.2 PEIR and Later Activities

A PEIR can act as the first level of analysis at the program-level that streamlines later, more detailed project-specific and site-specific environmental reviews. When later activities are proposed after the PEIR is certified and the *2020 LA River Master Plan* is approved, a determination will be made at that time by the implementing agency² a) whether the activity is covered “within the scope” of the PEIR, and b) if new or worsened significant effects not examined in the PEIR could occur. Factors that an agency may consider in making the determination of being within the scope of the PEIR could include geographic area analyzed for environmental impacts, consistency of the later activity with the type of allowable land use, overall planned density and building intensity, and covered infrastructure described in the PEIR (CEQA Guidelines Section 15168[c][2]).

If an agency determines that a later activity is covered in the scope of the PEIR and new or substantially more severe significant impacts would not occur, no further environmental documentation would be required. If new or more severe impacts beyond those disclosed in the PEIR could occur, the agency would prepare the appropriate level of subsequent CEQA documentation needed (e.g., mitigated negative declaration, or a site-specific supplemental or subsequent EIR) and the subsequent CEQA clearance can focus solely on new or substantially more severe significant effects that were not considered in the original PEIR (CEQA Guidelines Section 15168[d][2]).

This concept, referred to as “tiering,” addresses the coverage of general matters in broader PEIRs with subsequent CEQA compliance. These subsequent, project-specific environmental reviews would incorporate by reference the general discussions from the previously prepared PEIR and would focus solely on the issues specific to the environmental analysis subsequently prepared for the later activities.

In the case of the proposed Project, multiple subsequent project-specific activities from the *2020 LA River Master Plan* would be designed and implemented over time. This PEIR would provide the County, as the lead agency, and the 17 cities through which the proposed Project extends, with a base reference of facts and analyses that would avoid unnecessary repetition for future project-specific assessments by agencies on individual projects, and would allow for a comprehensive approach to the consideration of regional and cumulative impacts.

1.3.1.3 Organization and Content of This PEIR

This PEIR conforms to the content requirements of the State CEQA Guidelines. A list of the chapters and a brief description of their content is provided here to assist the reader in locating information. Cumulative impacts are analyzed in each respective section.

- **Executive Summary:** Provides a brief description of the *2020 LA River Master Plan*, including an overview of the impact analysis, recommended mitigation measures, and net residual impact. Summary information regarding the proposed Project and key conclusions is also provided.

² An implementing agency is defined in this PEIR as any public agency intending to tier from the PEIR to comply with CEQA for their discretionary action associated with a later activity under the 2020 LA River Master Plan PEIR.

- **Chapter 1, *Introduction*:** Provides a general orientation regarding the purpose of CEQA, as well as this PEIR, and includes information on the CEQA PEIR process.
- **Chapter 2, *Project Description*:** Presents a statement of the proposed project objectives; a description of the location and setting for the Project; a detailed description of the proposed Project's components, including Typical Projects, kit of parts, and *2020 LA River Master Plan Design Guidelines*; and related information regarding implementation.
- **Chapter 3, *CEQA Environmental Impact Assessment*:** Analyzes potential impacts under CEQA that could occur as the result of approval and implementation of the proposed Project. The impact discussion is organized into 18 topical issues that have the potential to result in impacts on the environment. This chapter also addresses cumulative impacts from the Project and related projects.
- **Chapter 4, *Other CEQA Considerations*:** Discusses other topics required by CEQA, including a listing of impacts found not to be significant, growth-inducing impacts, and irreversible changes that might occur as a result of the Project.
- **Chapter 5, *Alternatives*:** Discusses proposed alternatives to the proposed Project and the comparative merits of each, in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6. The chapter also discusses alternatives that were considered, but rejected as infeasible, and identifies the environmentally superior alternative.
- **Chapter 6, *List of Preparers*:** Lists persons who contributed directly to the preparation of this PEIR.
- **Chapter 7, *References*:** Lists the sources of information that were referenced for the analyses contained within this PEIR.

This PEIR also includes a number of appendices, including copies of the NOP, public responses to the NOP, and the technical analyses that were the basis for the evaluation of project impacts presented in Chapter 3, *CEQA Environmental Impact Assessment*, of this PEIR.

1.4 Agency Actions Anticipated for the PEIR

Because this is a PEIR, and project-level approvals are not anticipated at this point, no other permits or approvals (and hence, no responsible agency actions) are anticipated for the PEIR. After the final PEIR is certified, more detailed project-level review can proceed along the *2020 LA River Master Plan* study area by the County or the 17 other jurisdictions. The PEIR will serve as a first-tier analyses for later project-level and site decisions by these agencies. Individual entities with jurisdiction along the river corridor—including the LACFCD, USACE, and the cities—will continue having decision-making authority associated with any master plan implementation activities affecting their respective jurisdictions.

1.4.1 Lead Agency Actions

The County will serve as the lead agency under CEQA for the PEIR and will be responsible—through its governing board, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors—for approving the *2020 LA River Master Plan*. Similar to the 1996 Master Plan, the *2020 LA River Master Plan* will guide County in decision-making for LA River projects and facilities owned, operated, funded, permitted, or

maintained by the County. As part of the decision-making process, the County will take the following specific actions:

- Certify the final PEIR.
- Adopt Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations.
- Adopt an MMRP.
- Adopt the *2020 LA River Master Plan*.

The County will establish an implementation team responsible for ongoing coordination after the adoption of the *2020 LA River Master Plan*.

1.4.2 Later Activities

The 17 cities and unincorporated County communities through which the proposed Project extends are encouraged to adopt the *2020 LA River Master Plan* and partner with the County in making the reimagined river a reality. It is anticipated that the *2020 LA River Master Plan* will eventually result in later projects that will require other local and regulatory agency approvals. In addition to future County proposed projects in the unincorporated areas, the 17 other jurisdictions in the study area may carry out future development of specific projects that would be a part of the master plan. These later activities will be carried out at the discretion of the other jurisdictions in which the later activities are located and may or may not require subsequent CEQA analysis. If these other jurisdictions choose to rely on this PEIR wholly or in part, or tier from it for subsequent CEQA compliance of later activities over which they have discretionary authority, they will need to adopt the relevant mitigation measures from the MMRP developed for the *2020 LA River Master Plan*. They will also need to adopt their own findings to ensure compliance with the requirements of this PEIR pursuant to CEQA.