

Notice of Preparation for a Environmental Impact Report

2022 Tulare County Association of Governments Regional Transportation Plan & Sustainable Communities Strategy (2022 TCAG RTP/SCS)

The Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG), 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 2022 Regional Transportation Plan (“RTP”) and Sustainable Communities Strategy (“SCS”) hereby referred to as the 2022 RTP/SCS. Pursuant to Section 15082 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), TCAG is soliciting comments from all interested persons, responsible and trustees 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 project description, location, environmental review requirements, and probable environmental issues to be addressed in the EIR 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 the Tulare County region. Specifically, the project will update the region’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 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). As the MPO for the Tulare County region, TCAG is required to prepare an SCS or Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) that demonstrates how GHG reduction targets will (or, in the case of an APS, can) be met through integrated land use, housing, and transportation planning. TCAG will identify multiple potential growth scenarios to meet the goals of SB 375.

A scoping meeting for this project will be held on **Wednesday March 17, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.** via Zoom. The following option is available to members of the public to attend the scoping meeting via Zoom:

By Teleconference: Zoom Meeting Direct Link:

<https://tularecounty-ca.zoom.us/j/99317936602?pwd=MUMzTlAxMzFPTk4xYzVXMzhDVnIndz09>

Click the link above and following the prompts to join the meeting (see Meeting ID and Passcode below).

Meeting ID: 993 1793 6602

Passcode: 226234

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, or **April 7, 2021**.

Please send your response(s) to Gabriel Gutierrez, Senior Regional Planner, either electronically to: ggutierrez@tularecog.ca.gov; or at the Lead Agency mailing address shown above. Please include a return address and the name of a contact person in your agency/organization.

For more information, visit <https://tularecog.org/tcag/planning/regional-transportation-plan-rtp/rtp-2022/> or call (559) 623-0450.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Project Title

The project is referred to as the 2022 TCAG RTP/SCS. This Programmatic EIR will be prepared to evaluate the update to the TCAG Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy.

Project Location

The project will be located in all of Tulare County. TCAG, as both the federally-designated MPO and the State-designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Tulare County, is required by both federal and State law to prepare a long-range (at least 20- year) transportation planning document known as a RTP. The RTP/SCS is an action-oriented document used to achieve a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system. TCAG member agencies include the County of Tulare, the eight incorporated cities, and the Tule River Reservation. Figure 1 illustrates the TCAG region.

Project Description

The project consists of the 2022 RTP/SCS, which is an update to the 2018 RTP/SCS. The RTP will be used to allocate federal and state funding for regional transportation projects. The SCS component of the project identifies policies and strategies to balance land use and transportation systems to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and light trucks. TCAG does not implement individual projects in the RTP/SCS; these projects are implemented by local jurisdictions and other implementing agencies.

CEQA and its implementing regulations (*State CEQA Guidelines*) require TCAG as the Lead Agency to prepare an EIR for any discretionary government action, including programs and plans that have the potential to cause significant adverse environmental effects. The 2022 RTP/SCS is a regional planning document that provides policy guidance to local jurisdictions within Tulare County. It does not provide project-level CEQA compliance planning guidance. Therefore, given the regional nature of the RTP, preparation of a Program EIR, which is a “first tier” CEQA document designed to consider “broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures,” is appropriate (*State CEQA Guidelines* Sec. 15168). The Program EIR will programmatically evaluate environmental effects, including direct and indirect effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts, and will include alternatives to the project as well as mitigation measures, as needed; to offset any identified significant adverse environmental effects. In addition, the Program EIR can be used as a foundation for subsequent, local/site-specific environmental reviews to be conducted by local agencies (for planning and land use projects) and implementation agencies (for transportation projects), as individual projects in the region move forward through the environmental review process (*State CEQA Guidelines* Sec. 15385).

In addition to fulfilling legal requirements, the 2022 RTP/SCS Program EIR will provide an opportunity to inform decision makers and the public about potential significant environmental effects associated with the implementation of the RTP/SCS and alternatives. This first-tier regional-scale environmental analysis will also help local agencies evaluate and reduce direct and

indirect impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative environmental effects with respect to local projects.

This NOP is intended to inform responsible agencies, interested agencies, organizations, and individuals of the preparation of the 2022 RTP/SCS Program EIR. Comments regarding the scope of the Program EIR received during the 30-day NOP review period will be used to refine the scope and content of the Program EIR, as appropriate.

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. TCAG'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.

Public Outreach

Community engagement and outreach are fundamental to the development of the 2022 RTP/SCS. As an MPO, TCAG is required to adopt a public participation plan for the development of the SCS. TCAG has solicited and will continue to solicit community involvement and input on the 2022 RTP/SCS through several committees, as outlined in the 2022 TCAG Public Participation Plan. Two such committees are the Tulare County Transportation Authority (TCTA) and the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). TCTA and TAC are comprised of representatives from across the County, and they evaluate transportation and transportation planning issues and make recommendations to the TCAG Board of Governors about potential Board agenda items. Other committees will include the Social Service Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC), which represents disabled and senior transit users, persons of limited means, transit operators, and local youth, the Measure R Citizen's Oversight Committee, the Sustainable Corridor Committee, and the Tulare County Regional Transit Agency that all serve as venues for informing the public on a variety of issues, projects and programs.

Issues to Be Addressed in the EIR

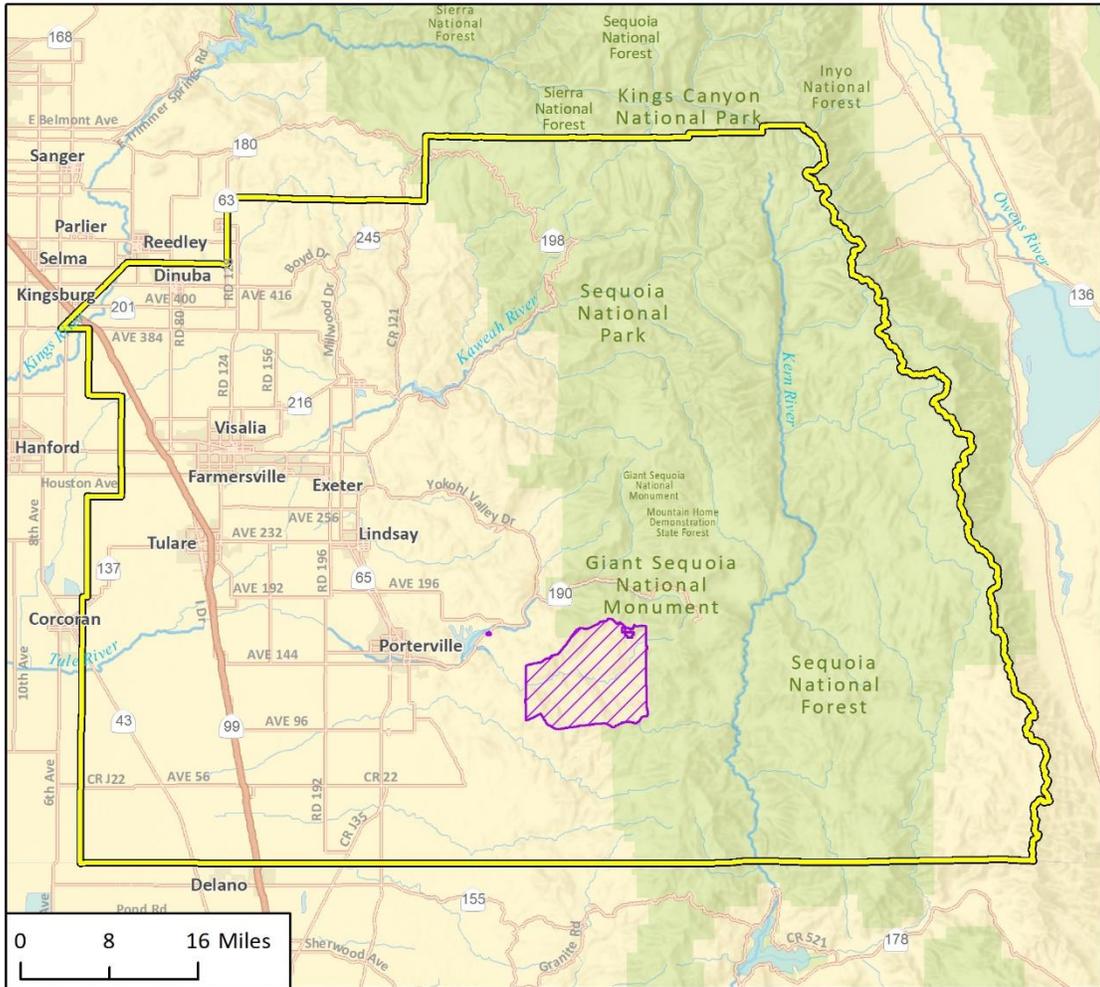
The impact categories listed below have been preliminarily identified for analysis

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture & Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Energy
- Hazards & Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology & Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resource
- Noise
- Population & Housing
- Public Services & Utilities
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources

In addition, the EIR will address cumulative impacts, growth inducing impacts, and other issues required by CEQA.

After the Draft EIR is circulated for public review, responses are provided to all public comments received, and Final EIR is prepared, the TCAG Board will ultimately consider the Programmatic EIR for the 2022 TCAG RTP/SCS and make a determination on the adoption of the EIR.

**Figure 1
Project Location Map**



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- Tulare County
- Tule River Reservation



Fig 1 Project Location