

Notice of Preparation

Date: April 1, 2021

To: Reference List of Recipients

From: Meg Prince, Senior Regional Planner
Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) – Lead Agency
2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201, Fresno, CA 93721
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Subject: Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting for a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Fresno Council of Governments 2022 Regional Transportation Plan/ Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)

Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the 2022 RTP/SCS. Fresno COG is requesting input regarding the scope and content of the environmental information, which is germane to your agency’s statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project.

The project title, location, environmental review requirements, agency background and overview, project description, and probable environmental issues to be addressed in the PEIR are attached. An Initial Study is not attached and is not required pursuant to State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines section 15060(d).

Your response is requested at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice or by **Monday, May 3, 2021**. Please send your response to Ms. Meg Prince, Senior Regional Planner, at the email (preferred) address, office address, or facsimile number shown below. Please identify the name, phone number, and email address of a contact person at your agency.

By E-Mail	By Mail	By Facsimile
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The project is of regional significance; therefore, in addition to your written comments provided, your verbal comments regarding preparation of the PEIR are also requested. A scoping meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 21, 2021 beginning at 10:00 AM via the Zoom platform at https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ZKYORu6USMCCzHs0dh79cw

Fresno COG looks forward to receipt of your comments regarding this important project for our region.

Attachment

- City of Clovis
- City of Coalinga
- City of Firebaugh
- City of Fowler
- City of Fresno
- City of Huron
- City of Kerman
- City of Kingsburg
- City of Mendota
- City of Orange Cove
- City of Parlier
- City of Reedley
- City of San Joaquin
- City of Sanger
- City of Selma
- County of Fresno

Notice of Preparation & Scoping Meeting

Program Environmental Impact Report

Project Overview and Scope of Environmental Analysis

2022 Regional Transportation Plan & Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)

April 1, 2021

Project Title

Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Fresno Council of Governments 2022 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

Location

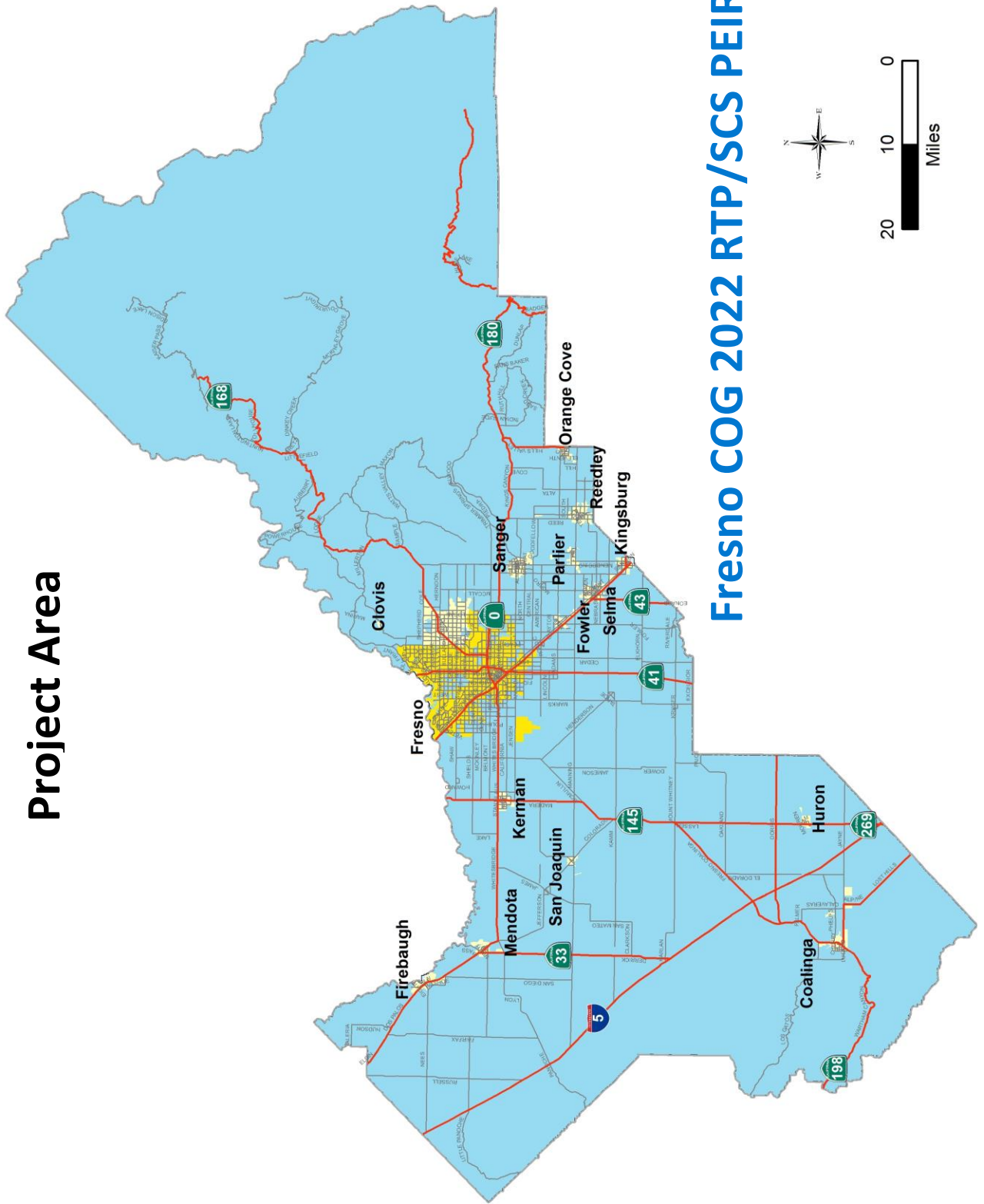
Within the corporate limits of Fresno County, California, including the fifteen (15) incorporated cities (Clovis, Coalinga, Firebaugh, Fowler, Fresno, Huron, Kerman, Kingsburg, Mendota, Orange Cove, Parlier, Reedley, San Joaquin, Sanger, and Selma) and all unincorporated areas under the jurisdiction of the County of Fresno (reference the attached map of Fresno County identifying the area to be addressed by the PEIR and the RTP/SCS). Fresno County is the second largest county in the San Joaquin Valley region of the State of California encompassing approximately 6,000 square miles. Based on the most recent estimates from the State Department of Finance (DOF), the estimated population in January 2021 was 1,013,400, placing Fresno as the tenth most populous county of the 58 counties in California. The City of Fresno is the fifth largest city in the State, with a current (2021) population of approximately 537,100.

CEQA Requirements

The RTP/SCS PEIR will be prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State CEQA Guidelines. CEQA requires public agencies, such as the Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG), to consider the potential environmental impacts of the proposed 2018 RTP/SCS. The objectives of CEQA are to:

- ✓ Disclose to the Fresno COG Board and the public the potential environmental impacts of the proposed RTP/SCS
- ✓ Propose feasible alternatives or mitigation measures that avoid, eliminate or reduce project-related environmental effects
- ✓ Describe the analytical process, which leads to Fresno COG's decision on the project
- ✓ Promote interagency coordination
- ✓ Provide a mechanism for increasing public participation in the planning process

Project Area



Fresno COG 2022 RTP/SCS PEIR

The environmental document will be prepared as a “Programmatic” or “Program” EIR (PEIR), which is a type of first-tier document as defined in CEQA Guidelines Sections 15152 (Tiering) and 15168 (Program EIR). A Program EIR is prepared for an agency program or series of actions that can be characterized as one large project. Typically, such a project involves actions that are closely related geographically and are logical parts of a chain of contemplated events, rules, regulations, or plans that govern the conduct of a continuing program with generally similar environmental effects and mitigation measures. The RTP/SCS would be such a project.

It is noted that additional environmental analysis by local jurisdictions or other agencies of individual projects contained in the 2022 RTP/SCS may be required. The tiering concept is a multi-level approach to streamlining subsequent environmental reviews. This first-tier RTP/SCS PEIR will include an analysis of general matters (i.e., broad policies, the planned regional multi-modal transportation system and related impacts, and program-wide mitigation measures). Subsequent tiers prepared by local jurisdictions or other agencies (later EIRs and Negative Declaration) will include an analysis of narrower, subsequent projects by “incorporating by reference” the general discussions from the broader first-tier RTP/SCS PEIR. Second-tier environmental reviews will focus on the impacts of individual improvement projects that implement the RTP/SCS, related programs, and/or policy(ies).

Regional Planning Background and Overview

Fresno COG is a voluntary association of local governments and is one of California’s 38 regional transportation planning agencies (RTPAs). Fresno COG was created in 1967 through a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) composed of elected officials of Fresno County and its fifteen (15) incorporated cities. In addition, Fresno COG is a designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which qualifies it for Federal transportation funding as identified in Title 23 U.S.C. Section 134 and Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450.300. MPOs are federally designated while the State designated RTPAs are described under California Government Code Section 29532 et seq. Fresno COG is both an MPO and an RTPA.

As part of the regional transportation planning process, Fresno COG studies potential transportation improvements, forecasts future conditions and needs, and pools the planning resources and expertise of its member agencies to facilitate development of a shared strategic vision for transportation and development in the region. These responsibilities enable Fresno COG to fulfill federal and State planning requirements and maintain the eligibility of the Fresno region for federal and State funding for transportation planning and improvements.

According to the 2017 California Regional Transportation Planning Guidelines, prepared by the California Transportation Commission (CTC), Fresno COG is required to adopt and submit an updated RTP to the CTC and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) every four years. The 2022 RTP is a planning document to be developed by Fresno COG in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Caltrans and other stakeholders, including transportation system users. Following the passage of *Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32) – The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006*, which specifies that by the year 2020, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within the State must be at 1990 levels, *Senate Bill 375*

(SB 375) – *The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008* was signed into law as the framework for achieving greenhouse gas emissions reductions from land use and transportation planning.

SB 375 includes four primary findings related to the RTP/SCS development process:

- ✓ That the California Air Resource Board (ARB) develop regional GHG emission reduction targets for cars and light trucks for each of the 18 MPOs in California, including Fresno COG
- ✓ That Fresno COG, during the next RTP update, is required to prepare an SCS that specifies how the GHG emissions reduction target set by ARB will be achieved. If the target cannot be met through the SCS, then an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) shall be prepared by Fresno COG
- ✓ Streamlines CEQA requirements for specific residential and mixed-use developments that are consistent with the Fresno County SCS or APS (as determined by ARB) to achieve the regional GHG emissions reduction target
- ✓ Requires that Fresno COG conduct the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process consistent with the RTP/SCS process and that the RHNA allocations be consistent with the development pattern in the SCS

Project Description

The project, as defined pursuant to Public Resources Code, Section 21065, is the preparation of the 2022 RTP/SCS. Fresno COG is in the process of preparing the RTP/SCS as required by Section 65080 et seq., of Chapter 2.5 of the California Government Code, federal guidelines pursuant to new requirements established in the federal surface transportation reauthorization, “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century” (MAP-21) and the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Acts, Transportation Conformity for the Air Quality Attainment Plan per 40 CFR Part 51 and 40 CFR Part 93, and requirements set forth in *Assembly Bill 32, The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006*, and *Senate Bill 375 The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008*. Finally, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) has prepared guidelines (most recently adopted by the CTC on January 18, 2017) to assist in the preparation of the RTP/SCS.

The last comprehensive EIR on the RTP/SCS was completed in July 2018, which addressed transportation improvement projects, programs, and funding sources including additional funding from the approved ½ Cent Sales Tax Measure Extension (Measure C).

The 2022 RTP/SCS 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, and transportation systems management (TSM) programs and projects considering the horizon year of 2046. In addition, the 2022 RTP/SCS will:

- ✓ Identify the region’s transportation goals and policies
- ✓ Include the SCS, which demonstrates how the region will meet its GHG reduction targets (currently being discussed by the California Air Resources Board and the eight San Joaquin Valley Regional Transportation Planning Agencies) through integrated land use, and housing and transportation planning. *Once adopted by Fresno COG, the SCS becomes an integral part of the RTP*

- ✓ Set forth an action plan of projects and programs to address the needs consistent with the Policy Element such as:
 - Allocating growth along transportation corridors in support of high-capacity transit systems
 - Facilitating the development of mixed land use districts, which promote living, working, shopping and recreation accessible by foot or bicycle, and which are served by centrally located transit routes (the Tower District in Fresno, Clovis’ Old Town, and many of the County’s small cities serve as examples built more than 40 years ago)
 - Maintaining and improving the regional street system, connecting local jurisdictions within the County and connecting Fresno County to adjacent counties, consistent with Measure C and its re-authorization
 - Enhancing and maintaining existing transit systems and the frequency of current services
 - Developing connecting bikeway systems and facilitating and encouraging their use
 - Improving connectivity between highways, streets and roads, transit and rail, transit and air travel, cycling and transit, etc.
 - Reservation of future “park and ride” opportunities
 - An organized public education effort
 - Appropriate financing, including both operations and capital investment
- ✓ Integrate results reflected in the Congestion Management Program (CMP)
- ✓ Document the financial resources needed to implement the plan
- ✓ Reflect results of the Transportation Conformity Analysis
- ✓ Highlight the 2022 RTP/SCS EIR process and results
- ✓ Detail the RTP/SCS public outreach process
- ✓ Include the Environmental Justice analysis process

Specifically, the RTP/SCS will include the following recommended and required sections:

- ✓ Executive Summary – Provides a regional perspective & identifies challenges & objectives
- ✓ Regional environmental issues
- ✓ Air quality documentation needs
- ✓ Potential environmental mitigation activities to maintain/restore the affected environment
- ✓ *Policy Element* - Identifies legislative, planning, financial & institutional issues & requirements, & areas of regional consensus
- ✓ *Action Element* - Describes programs & actions to implement the RTP, including the SCS, & assigns implementation responsibilities
- ✓ *Financial Element*: Identifies current & anticipated revenue sources & financing techniques to fund planned investments described in the Action Element
- ✓ *Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)*: A forecasted development pattern integrated with the transportation network, measures & policies, resulting in reduced GHG emissions

Preliminary 2022 RTP Project Alternatives & SCS Alternative Scenarios

The following 2022 RTP/SCS project alternatives may be addressed in the PEIR:

- ✓ No Project
- ✓ Preferred SCS Scenario
- ✓ Two (2) other Alternative SCS Scenarios

CEQA Streamlining (SB 375 and SB 226)

SB 375 and newly enacted SB 226 provide “exemptions” for certain types of projects from CEQA review or projects may qualify for streamlined review if they conform to the regional SCS or the APS (if applicable). Projects qualify for streamlined CEQA review even if they conflict with local plans following adoption of the SCS.

Environmental Issues to be Addressed in the PEIR

The programs and projects to be included in the 2022 RTP/SCS will be analyzed through development of the PEIR. This will allow Fresno COG to analyze the regional or general impacts of the programs and projects. A more detailed or project level environmental assessment (if required) of the various projects included in the RTP/SCS will be conducted by the various responsible agencies including Caltrans, Fresno County, and the cities within the Fresno Region before the projects are approved for construction and implementation.

Potential environmental impacts that could result from the Project include project impacts to:

- ✓ Aesthetics
- ✓ Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- ✓ Air Quality
- ✓ Biological Resources
- ✓ Climate Change
- ✓ Cultural Resources & Tribal Cultural Resources
- ✓ Energy and Energy Conservation
- ✓ Geology/Soils/Mineral Resources
- ✓ Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- ✓ Hydrology and Water Quality
- ✓ Land Use, Planning, and Recreation
- ✓ Noise and Vibration
- ✓ Population, Housing, and Employment
- ✓ Public Utilities, Other Utilities, and Services Systems
- ✓ Social and Economic Effects
- ✓ Transportation/Traffic
- ✓ Alternatives (noted above), Cumulative Effects, Growth Inducing Impacts, and Other Issues required by CEQA
- ✓ Mandatory Findings of Significance

Prepared by: Georgiena M. Vivian, President
VRPA Technologies, Inc.
April 1, 2021

Date: April 1, 2021

Signature: 
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