



StanCOG
Stanislaus Council of Governments

Notice of Preparation for a Environmental Impact Report

2022 Regional Transportation Plan & Sustainable Communities Strategy

Notice is hereby given that the Stanislaus Council of Governments (StanCOG) will be the lead agency for the preparation of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for StanCOG's 2022 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), hereby referred to as the 2022 RTP/SCS or "project." The 2022 RTP/SCS is an update to the 2018 StanCOG RTP/SCS that was previously adopted on August 15, 2018 by the StanCOG Policy Board. Pursuant to Section 15082 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), StanCOG is soliciting comments from all interested persons, responsible and trustee 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 Stanislaus 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 2022 RTP/SCS will address all transportation modes, including highways, streets and roads, transit, rail, bicycle and pedestrian, and aviation, as well as transportation demand management measures and intelligent transportation systems to the horizon year of 2046.

The 2022 RTP will include an update to the SCS, which 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) is required to update 2020 and 2035 GHG reduction targets every eight years for each region covered by one of the state's metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). As the MPO for Stanislaus County, StanCOG is required to prepare an SCS that demonstrates how GHG reduction targets will be met through integrated land use, housing, and transportation planning. If the SCS does not meet GHG emission reduction targets, StanCOG would prepare an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS), which would show how the GHG emission targets could be achieved through means outside of the fiscally constrained RTP. In 2018 StanCOG identified multiple potential growth scenarios that met the goals of SB 375.

StanCOG will host a Virtual Programmatic EIR Scoping Meeting via Zoom. The purpose of the Scoping meeting is to solicit input on the scope and content of the environmental analysis that will be included in the Draft Programmatic EIR. The date, time and location of the meeting are as follows:

Virtual Scoping Meeting

Thursday, January 13, 2022

12:00 PM to 1:00 PM

Via Zoom:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87933811185>

Meeting ID: 879 3381 1185

Passcode: 551167

One tap mobile

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Direct comments to Isael Ojeda, Senior Planner, at Stanislaus Council of Governments at iojeda@stancog.org no later than 30 days after receipt of this notice, or by Thursday, February 3, 2022.

For more information, visit <http://www.valleyvision2046.com/> and <http://www.stancog.org/rtp.shtm/> or call 209-525-4600.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Project Title

The update is referred to as the 2022 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (2022 RTP/SCS).

Project Location

The geographical extent of the 2022 RTP/SCS includes the area within the corporate limits of Stanislaus County, California, including the incorporated cities of Ceres, Hughson, Modesto, Newman, Oakdale, Patterson, Riverbank, Turlock, and Waterford, and all unincorporated areas under the jurisdiction of the County of Stanislaus. Capital improvement projects identified in the 2022 RTP/SCS are located on state highways, county roads and local streets, as well as on airport property, transit district property, and public utility lands.

Project Description

The proposed project is the StanCOG 2022 RTP/SCS. StanCOG's previous RTP/SCS was adopted in August 2018. The 2022 RTP/SCS is the culmination of a multi-year effort that aims to improve access and mobility and facilitate the movement of people and goods efficiently. Furthermore, the SCS will seek to balance land use and transportation systems to reduce emissions from cars and light trucks. StanCOG is required by federal law to develop an RTP/SCS that meets national ambient air quality standards and determines the needs of the transportation system and prioritizes proposed transportation projects. The RTP/SCS is also necessary to obtain and allocate federal funding for regional transportation projects.

StanCOG is in the process of updating the RTP/SCS which will cover the planning period through the year 2046. The EIR for the 2022 RTP/SCS is intended to comply with CEQA. It will also require coordination with or reference to the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (Title 23 CFR Parts 450 and 500) (FAST Act), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (as applicable), the Federal Clean Air Act, the California Clean Air Act, California SB 375, California SB 743, California Assembly Bill 32, and California SB 32. The EIR will consider the 2022 RTP programmed projects and preferred SCS scenario, a No Project alternative, the SCS alternative scenarios carried forward, and any alternatives to address identified significant impacts. The EIR will evaluate the potential impacts of implementing the policies and programs in the RTP/SCS in accordance with CEQA and will concentrate on the long-term environmental impacts of the RTP/SCS that extend to the 2046 planning horizon.

Issues to Be Addressed in the EIR

The impact categories listed below have been preliminarily identified for analysis in the 2022 RTP/SCS EIR.

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural and Forest Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Environmental Justice
- Geology/Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards/Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Land Use/Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population/Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Tribal Resources
- Utilities/Service Systems
- Wildfires

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

Through the Notice of Preparation (NOP), StanCOG is seeking input on further categories of analysis or areas of focus within the specified categories above.

RTP Framework

The 2022 RTP/SCS's unified strategy would include the following key elements:

- A comprehensive description of the region's current and future challenges in accommodating growth and meeting mobility needs.
- A fiscally constrained transportation network that consists of US and State Highways, local streets and roadways, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, public transit, and airports.
- An integrated land use capacity analysis that accommodates the region's future employment and housing needs, and that protects sensitive habitat and resource areas.
- Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) measures that improve system efficiency by influencing individual travel behavior. TDM measures typically offer programs and incentives to encourage alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle travel. ITS measures typically involve the use of technology to maximize the efficiency of the transportation network.
- A financial plan that lays out the funding sources and mechanisms required to implement the strategies of the RTP/SCS. The financial plan will also recommend additional innovative financing strategies that can be implemented to carry out additional needed projects and programs.
- A transportation system performance evaluation that lays out the ability of the proposed strategies to address challenges.
- Additional strategies and "planned projects" that have little or no money programmed for funding. Funding sources have, however, been identified and the projects are expected to receive funding within the timeframe of the RTP.

The compendium of projects, policies, and programs which aim to meet the transportation needs of the region while reducing VMT and improving air quality comprise the 2022 RTP.

Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)

The 2022 RTP will include an update to the SCS contained in the 2018 RTP/SCS, pursuant to the requirements of SB 375. Under SB 375, MPOs such as StanCOG are required to develop an SCS as part of the RTP to reduce, to the extent feasible, GHG emissions from cars and light trucks to meet a specified target for 2020 and 2035. In 2018, CARB updated its regional GHG target for StanCOG to a 12 percent reduction by 2020 and a 16 percent reduction by 2035, as compared to baseline per capita emissions levels in 2005. CARB is required to update 2020 and 2035 GHG reduction targets every eight years for each region covered by one of the state's MPOs. If the targets cannot be feasibly met through the 2022 RTP/SCS, an APS will be prepared by StanCOG to show how the targets would be achieved through alternative development patterns, infrastructure, or additional transportation measures or policies. StanCOG's intent is to achieve adopted targets with the RTP/SCS. The GHG reductions are to be derived from fewer and/or shorter automobile and light truck trips resulting from integrated transportation, land use, housing, and environmental planning.

Furthermore, SB 375 requires that the SCS shall identify general land uses, residential densities, and building intensities as well as areas to house future residents (see California Government Code Section 65080(b)(2)(B) for a more complete list of SB 375 requirements).

CEQA Streamlining

SB 375 contains CEQA incentives, or streamlining provisions at the project level, to encourage the implementation of coordinated land use and transportation planning within the RTP/SCS. 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 the proposed project seeking to utilize the CEQA incentives is determined to be consistent with an approved SCS. Consistency will be determined by the local jurisdiction that is the lead agency for each project to be streamlined. StanCOG'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.

The programs and projects to be included in the 2022 RTP/SCS will be programmatically addressed in the EIR. This will allow StanCOG to analyze the regional or general impacts of the program and projects. A more detailed or project level environmental assessment, if required, will be provided by the various responsible agencies, including Caltrans, Stanislaus County, and the cities within the County, for the various projects included in the 2022 RTP/SCS, before the projects are approved for construction.

