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NOTICE OF PREPARATION

TO: Interested Agencies, Organizations, and Individuals

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report for Connect SoCal 2024 (2024-2050 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy) (State Clearinghouse No. TBD)

DATE: October 17, 2022

LEAD AGENCY: Southern California Association of Governments
900 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 1700
Los Angeles, California 90017

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), as Lead Agency, is publishing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to prepare a Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (Draft PEIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed 2024-2050 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS), referred to alternatively as “2024 RTP/SCS”, “Connect SoCal 2024”, “Plan”, or “Project”.

To ensure full consideration of environmental issues with potential significant adverse impacts when preparing the Draft PEIR, **all written comments on the NOP must be received within thirty (30) days of the start of the required 30-day public review and comment period, which begins October 17, 2022, and ends November 16, 2022 at 5:00 PM (PST).**

Two (2) virtual public scoping meetings for the NOP, each providing the same information, will be held on **Wednesday, November 9, 2022, from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM**, and **Thursday, November 10, 2022, from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM**. The meetings will be held in an online format using Zoom. You may join, view, and participate in the meetings by using the Zoom application, by your web browser, or by phone. Information for the webcast is provided below:

<https://scag.zoom.us/j/81023287939>

Dial by location: +1 669 900 6833 US Toll or +1 669 444 9171 US Toll

Meeting ID: 810 2328 7939

Please send your comments on the NOP to Ms. Karen Calderon, Senior Regional Planner, either electronically to: ConnectSoCalPEIR@scag.ca.gov or by mail to the address shown above. If you wish to be placed on the mailing list to receive CEQA notices regarding the PEIR for the Plan, need additional information, or require special accommodations or translation services for a scoping meeting, please email Ms. Karen Calderon at least 72 hours prior to the scoping meeting or call (213) 236-1983 so that SCAG has sufficient time to make arrangements.

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INTRODUCTION

CEQA and its implementing regulations (CEQA Guidelines) require SCAG as the Lead Agency to evaluate the potential environmental impacts for any discretionary governmental action and disclose the evaluation in a CEQA document that is appropriate for the proposed governmental action. Connect SoCal 2024 is a regional planning document updated every four years (see further discussion below) and will update the 2020 RTP/SCS, as amended. Given the regional level of analysis provided in a RTP/SCS for a large geographic area with a minimum 20-year planning horizon, a Program EIR (PEIR) is the appropriate type of EIR for Connect SoCal 2024.

A PEIR is a “first-tier” CEQA document designed to consider “broad policy alternatives and program wide mitigation measures” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15168). The programmatic environmental impact analysis for the Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR will evaluate potential environmental effects consisting of direct and indirect effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts resulting from the Plan, and will include feasible mitigation measures and a range of reasonable alternatives to the Plan, including a No Project Alternative, to avoid or reduce any identified potentially significant adverse environmental effects of the Plan. As a first-tier document, the PEIR may serve as a foundation for subsequent, site-specific environmental review documents (including EIRs, Supplemental EIRs, Subsequent EIRs, and Addenda) that may be conducted by implementing agencies serving as CEQA lead agencies for subsequent individual transportation and development projects in the region (CEQA Guidelines Section 15385).

This NOP is intended to serve the following purposes: (1) to notify responsible agencies, interested agencies, organizations, and individuals that SCAG is preparing the Draft PEIR which will assess the potential adverse environmental impacts that may result from implementing the proposed Plan; and (2) to provide information on the proposed Plan and allow the public the opportunity to review and comment on the scope and content of the environmental information to be considered and evaluated in the Draft PEIR. Written comments regarding the scope and contents of the environmental impact analysis in the Draft PEIR received during the required 30-day NOP review period will be considered to refine the scope and content of the Draft PEIR, as appropriate and included in an appendix of the Draft PEIR.

The NOP is filed for posting with county clerks of Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties and is published in local newspapers, including ethnic press that address the large geographic reach and diverse population within the six-county SCAG region. The NOP is also available for public review from (1) SCAG’s website at: <https://scag.ca.gov/peir>; (2) Governor’s Office of Planning and Research – State Clearinghouse website at: <https://ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/>; and (3) [the county clerk’s website for the six counties in the SCAG region](#).

PROJECT LOCATION AND BACKGROUND

Project Location

SCAG is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) under Title 23, United States Code (U.S.C.) 134(d)(1). The SCAG region consists of six counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura), and 191 cities (Figure 1, *SCAG Region*). To the north of the SCAG region are the counties of Kern and Inyo; to the east is state of Nevada and state of Arizona; to the south is the county of San Diego; and to the northwest is the Pacific Ocean. The SCAG region also consists of 15 subregional entities that serve as partners in the regional planning process. (Figure 2, *SCAG Subregions*).

SCAG is one of 18 MPOs in the State of California. The total area of the SCAG region is approximately 38,000 square miles. The region includes the county with the largest land area in the nation, San Bernardino County, as well as the county with the highest population in the nation, Los Angeles County. The SCAG region is home to approximately 18.8 million people, or 48 percent of California’s population, according to the 2020 Census, representing the largest and most diverse region in the country.



Figure 1: SCAG Region

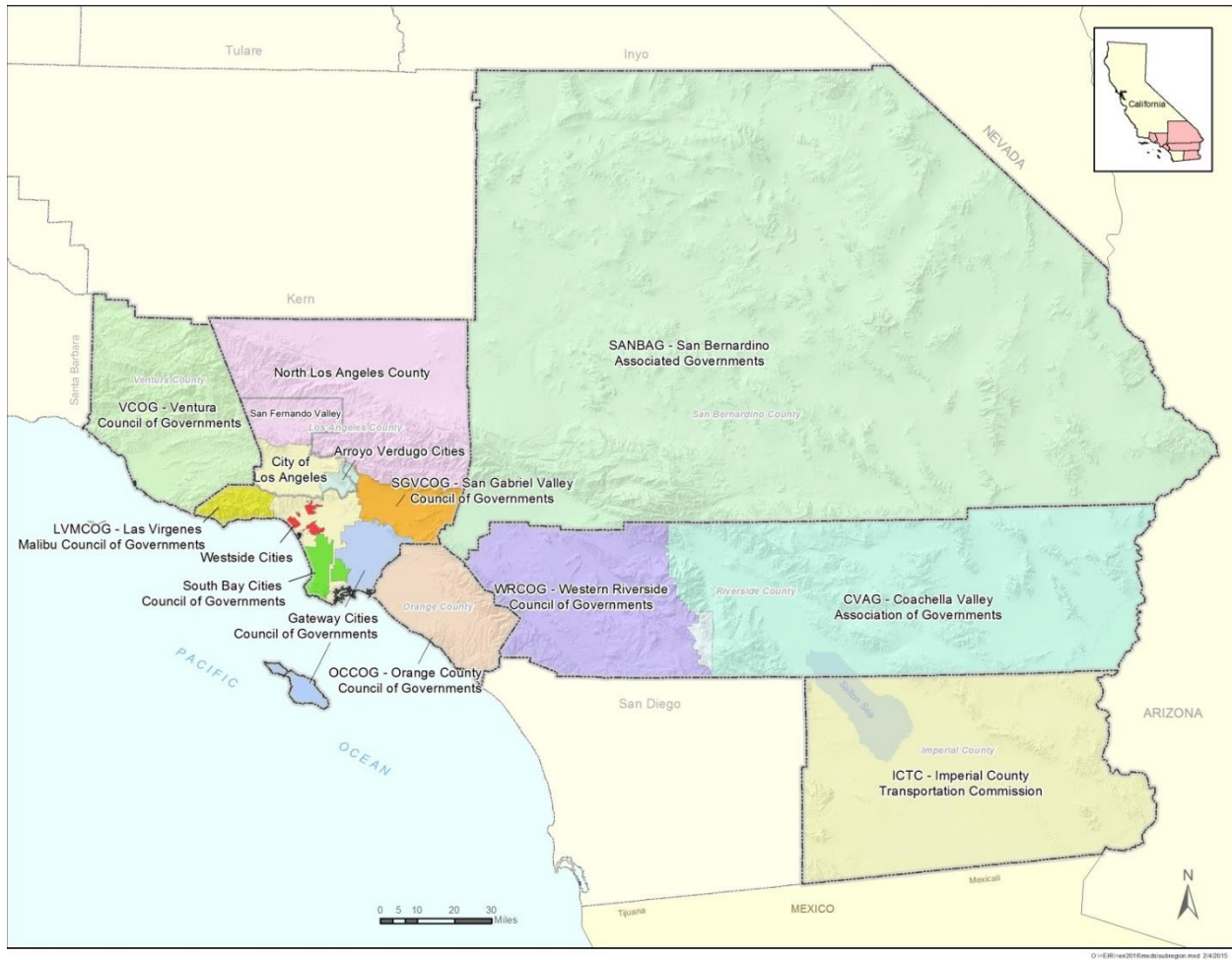


Figure 2: SCAG Subregions

SCAG Roles and Responsibilities

In addition to federal designation as a MPO, SCAG is designated under California state law as the Multicounty Designated Transportation Planning Agency and Council of Governments for the six-county region. Founded in 1965, SCAG is a Joint Powers Authority, established as a voluntary association of local governments and agencies.

SCAG serves as the regional forum for cooperative decision making by local government elected officials and its primary responsibilities in fulfillment of federal and state requirements include the development of the RTP/SCS; the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP); the annual Overall Work Program; and transportation-related portions of local air quality management plans. SCAG’s other major functions include determining the RTPs and programs are in conformity with state air quality plans; preparation of a Regional Housing Needs Assessment; and intergovernmental review of regionally significant projects.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Connect SoCal 2024 (2024-2050 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy)

Pursuant to federal and state planning requirements, SCAG updates and adopts a long-range RTP every four years. SCAG's last Plan was approved for transportation conformity purposes in May 2020 and adopted in its entirety in September 2020 and an updated Plan is anticipated to be adopted by April 2024.

Connect SoCal 2024 will be a long-range visioning plan that balances future mobility and housing needs with economic and environmental goals. Connect SoCal 2024 represents the vision for Southern California's future through 2050, including policies, strategies, and projects. The Plan details how the region will address its transportation and land use challenges and leverage opportunities in order to support attainment of applicable federal ambient air quality standards and achieve state's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction targets. Connect SoCal 2024 will build from the policy directions established in Connect SoCal 2020 as well as more recent policy directions from SCAG's Regional Council to reflect emerging issues such as equity, resilience, and the economy. It is important to note that SCAG does not have authority to implement individual transportation projects in the RTP, nor does the SCS supersede the land use authority of cities and counties in the region. Specific projects and policies will be implemented by local jurisdictions, state agencies, and other agencies, such as County Transportation Commissions (CTCs). SCAG has already initiated the development of Connect SoCal 2024 and is working closely with all 197 local jurisdictions to collect land use data and determine a forecasted regional development pattern. SCAG is also working with CTCs to compile a regional project list that will build upon the list identified in the Connect SoCal 2020, as amended.

Sustainable Communities Strategies

In accordance with the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, or SB 375 (Steinberg) and codified in California Government Code Section 65080(b)(2)(B), the Plan will include a SCS which "set[s] forth a forecasted development pattern for the region, which, when integrated with the transportation network, and other transportation measures and policies" will reduce GHG emissions from passenger vehicles (automobiles and light-duty trucks).

Pursuant to SB 375, SCAG's SCS is required to meet GHG emissions reduction target of 19 percent per capita by 2035 compared to 2005 emission levels, as set by the California Air Resources Board (ARB). According to Section 65080(b)(2)(B) of the California Government Code, the SCS shall:

- Identify the general location of land uses, residential densities and building intensities in the region;
- Identify areas to house all of the population of the region, including all economic segments, over the course of the planning period;
- Identify areas to accommodate an eight-year projection of regional housing needs;
- Identify a transportation network to service the transportation needs of the region,
- Gather and consider information regarding resource areas and farmland;
- Consider state housing goals;

- Set forth a forecasted development pattern which, when integrated with the transportation network, and other transportation measures and policies, will reduce the GHG emissions from automobiles and light trucks to achieve the GHG targets set by CARB; and
- Comply with the federal Clean Air Act.

If the combination of measures in the SCS would not meet the regional targets, the MPO must prepare a separate “Alternative Planning Strategy” to meet the regional GHG emission reduction target.

Local Data Exchange

A critical component to developing a successful Plan is the participation and cooperation of SCAG’s local government partners and stakeholders within the SCAG region. Beginning in February 2022, SCAG began the Local Data Exchange (LDX) process wherein local jurisdictions can provide feedback and edits on roughly 25 datasets, including land use data and preliminary growth projections, which serve as technical foundation for developing the land use component of the Connect SoCal 2024. LDX is associated with SCAG’s Regional Data Platform (RDP). By also providing tools and data back to local jurisdictions for their own plan updates through the RDP, the LDX process ensures participation of local jurisdiction, improves data accuracy, and improves coordination between local and regional long-range-plans.

SCAG’s Public Participation Plan and Process

Another key aspect of Plan development is public participation. To provide early and meaningful public participation in the Plan’s development and decision-making processes, SCAG has developed and adopted a Public Participation Plan (PPP).¹ The adoption of the PPP demonstrates SCAG’s commitment in increasing awareness and involvement of interested persons in SCAG’s governmental processes and regional transportation and land use planning. SCAG will provide information and timely public notice, ensuring full public access to key decisions, and supporting early and continuing public involvement in the development of the Plan. To this end, SCAG will continue to engage a wide range of stakeholder groups, elected officials, special interest groups, the general public, and other interested parties through a series of workshops and public meetings, as well as SCAG’s policy committees, task forces, and subcommittee structure during the development of the Plan and its associated PEIR. To stay informed on the Connect SoCal 2024 development process please visit: <https://scag.ca.gov/connect-socal>.

SCOPE AND CONTENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS IN THE DRAFT PEIR

The Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR is a programmatic document that will analyze potential effects of the proposed Plan on the environment. Although Connect SoCal 2024 will include a list of transportation projects and development patterns resulting from transportation and land use policies in the Plan, the PEIR does not specifically analyze environmental effects of any individual transportation or development project. Project-level environmental analyses will be prepared by implementing agencies on a project-by-project basis as individual projects proceed through the design, development, and decision-making process.

¹ Southern California Association of Governments. Public Participation Plan. Adopted April 7, 2022. <https://scag.ca.gov/community-participation-public-participation-plan>.

Environmental Setting

The Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR must identify significant environmental impacts that would be expected to result from implementation of the proposed Plan. Significant environmental impacts must be determined by applying explicit significance criteria to compare the future Plan conditions to the existing environmental setting (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(a)). The CEQA Guidelines provide that the existing physical conditions at the time the Notice of Preparation is published will “normally” constitute the baseline. However, CEQA Guidelines Section 15125(a)(1) indicates that, “where existing conditions change or fluctuate over time, and where necessary to provide the most accurate picture practically possible of the project’s impacts, a lead agency may define existing conditions by referencing historic conditions...that are supported by substantial evidence.”

SCAG will use a CEQA baseline that is considered the most appropriate for use to analyze the regional environmental impacts from Connect SoCal 2024 in the Draft PEIR. Considerations would include, for instance, availability of comprehensive data for land use, demographics, traffic count, and vehicle miles traveled (VMT), as well as technical and modeling assumptions for the proposed Plan. Where appropriate and identified throughout the Draft PEIR, the base year of the environmental and regulatory settings of some resource areas may vary to better characterize baseline conditions.

Environmental Issues and Topics

The potential content of environmental effects that warrant analysis in the Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR are as follows:

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

Mitigation Measures

CEQA requires that SCAG identify all feasible mitigation measures in the PEIR that will avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of the Plan. As SCAG has no concurrent authority/jurisdiction to implement mitigation related to transportation and land use projects or plans that implement Connect SoCal 2024, the 2024 PEIR is expected to employ the same approach to mitigation measures as those in the previously certified PEIRs for the 2016-2040 RTP/SCS and Connect SoCal (2020-2045 RTP/SCS), i.e., the 2024 PEIR will include two types of mitigation measures: SCAG mitigation measures and project-level mitigation measures.

SCAG mitigation measures are program wide measures for implementation by SCAG that address the large-scale regional impacts from the variety of projects spread over more than 20 years. In addition, the PEIR identifies project-level mitigation measures as resources for implementing agencies serving as CEQA lead agencies for later projects to consider, as applicable and feasible, when these agencies conduct and carry out subsequent, project-specific design, environmental analyses, and decision-making processes.

Preliminary Consideration of Alternatives to the Proposed Connect SoCal 2024

CEQA requires a discussion of alternatives to the Plan. The development of alternatives is focused on avoiding or reducing potentially significant adverse environmental impacts of the Plan while achieving most of the basic objectives of the Plan. The discussion of alternatives provides a means for evaluating the comparative merits of each alternative. The range of alternatives must be sufficient to permit a reasoned choice, and it need not include every conceivable project alternative. In addition, a CEQA document need not consider an alternative whose effect cannot be reasonably ascertained and whose implementation is remote and speculative. The key consideration for alternatives is whether the selection and discussion of alternatives foster informed decision making and public participation.

The Draft PEIR for Connect SoCal 2024 will evaluate a range of reasonable alternatives to the Plan, including a No Project Alternative. The No Project Alternative is required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2) and assumes what would reasonably be expected to occur in the foreseeable future if Connect SoCal 2024 were not adopted. The No Project Alternative assumes continued implementation of goals and policies of the adopted 2020 RTP/SCS, as amended and is based on trending 2020 RTP/SCS regional population, housing, and employment growth projection to the future. The No Project Alternative includes those transportation projects that are included in the first year of the previously conforming FTIP (i.e., 2023 FTIP). As with previous cycles, each alternative for the 2024 PEIR, except the No Project Alternative, will vary in terms of policies related to regional land use development patterns. It is also anticipated that the transportation network would be generally the same for the Plan and all alternatives, except for the No Project Alternative.

Based on SCAG staff's preliminary evaluation of previous RTP/SCSs and respective alternatives analysis in the associated PEIRs, SCAG staff has generally observed that as local agencies incorporate RTP/SCS concepts into their own general/local plans, the previously analyzed no project alternatives are showing signs of converging with previous regional plans. Additionally, as the plan is updated and improves each cycle, it also gets closer to regional policies for more compact development patterns in high-quality transit areas (HQTAs). As such, SCAG has found that using a scenario planning process to identify alternative land use patterns for the 2024 RTP/SCS to be less useful and instead incorporated regional growth strategies in datasets for review by local jurisdictions which will then be incorporated into the Plan. Given this shift in approach and the converging of alternative scenarios, SCAG is currently considering a qualitative analytical approach for the alternatives other than the No Project Alternative.

SCAG anticipates that it will consider an Intensified Land Use Alternative which would be based on a transportation network for the 2024 RTP/SCS with more aggressive land use development patterns. Land use development patterns in this alternative would build on land use strategies as described in the Plan by maximizing growth around HQTAs. Potential growth patterns associated with this alternative would optimize urban areas and suburban town centers, livable corridors, and neighborhood mobility areas. The No Project Alternative and the Intensified Land Use Alternative are expected "book-ends" of the range of

potential alternatives to provide a framework for understanding the greatest potential impacts from alternatives when compared to the proposed Plan.

SCAG is seeking input on these preliminary alternatives as well as any other potential alternatives during the scoping process. Changes to the alternatives as a result of the scoping process could result in modifications to the number, content and scope of alternatives analyzed in the PEIR. Furthermore, the PEIR will identify alternatives that were initially considered, but rejected for reasons including infeasibility or inability of a particular alternative to meet the project objectives or reduce environmental impacts beyond that of the Project.

CEQA Streamlining and Tiering

SB 375 includes 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. Consistency will be determined by the local jurisdiction that is the lead agency for each project to be streamlined. SCAG'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.

In addition to providing for streamlining CEQA documentation in accordance with SB 375, the PEIR will support other CEQA streamlining options including those provided for in other regulations such as SB 743 (transit-oriented infill development), SB 226 (CEQA streamlining for infill development) as well as provisions of the CEQA Guidelines that provide for tiering and other streamlining mechanisms.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETINGS AND COMMENTS

As mentioned previously, SCAG will host two (2) virtual public scoping meetings for the NOP, each providing the same information, on **Wednesday, November 9, 2022 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM and Thursday, November 10, 2022 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM.**

The meetings will be held in an online format using Zoom to share information regarding the proposed Plan and the environmental review process. You may join, view, and participate in the meetings by using the Zoom application, by your web browser, or by phone. Information for the webcast is provided below:

<https://scag.zoom.us/j/81023287939>

Dial by location: +1 669 900 6833 US Toll or +1 669 444 9171 US Toll

Meeting ID: 810 2328 7939

Each meeting will begin with a presentation and be followed by a question-and-answer session. The meetings will be open to the public and all stakeholders. Questions may be submitted via email in advance of the meeting at ConnectSoCalPEIR@scag.ca.gov, however there will also be opportunities for verbal questions taken at the meetings.

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, SCAG is committed to providing special accommodations to those who are interested in participating in the scoping meetings. SCAG is also committed to helping those with limited proficiency in the English language by providing translation

services in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. We ask that you provide your request for special accommodations or translation services at least 72 hours prior to the scoping meetings so that SCAG has sufficient time to make arrangements.

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Southern California Association of Governments
Attn: Ms. Karen Calderon
900 Wilshire Blvd, Suite 1700
Los Angeles, California 90017

Please include a return address, the name, phone number, and email address of a contact person in your agency/organization, and the agency/organization name, if applicable.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions on the NOP or PEIR, would like to make a special accommodations request for a scoping meeting including translation, or wish to be placed on the mailing list to receive notices regarding the Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR, please contact Ms. Karen Calderon, Senior Regional Planner, at (213) 236-1983 or email ConnectSoCalPEIR@scag.ca.gov.



Sarah Jepson, Director, Planning and Programs
Southern California Association of Governments

Date: 10/6/2022