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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

January 8 2024

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

January 8, 2024

David Peterson
City of Santa Clarita
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 302
Santa Clarita, CA 91355

RE: Santa Clarita Town Center Specific Plan –
Notice of Preparation (NOP)
SCH# 2023120123
GTS# 07-LA-2023-04399
Vic. LA-5 PM 52.463
LA-5 PM 53.585

Dear David Peterson,

Thank you for including the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the environmental review process for the above referenced project. The proposed Town Center Specific Plan (TCSP) is a long-range land use plan that establishes the City's vision for the TCSP area as a regional destination incorporating a balanced mix of uses. The City's goals for the TCSP are to create a balance of residential, commercial, dining, and entertainment uses; facilitate the creation of great placemaking; create a flexible framework for future development; and create a practical and buildable plan.

The nearest State facility to the proposed project is I-5. After reviewing the NOP, Caltrans has the following comments:

Caltrans acknowledges and supports mixed-use, infill development that prioritizes walking, biking, and transit. The Project's goals appear to be in alignment with State-level sustainable transportation policy goals which seek to reduce the number of trips made by driving, reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, and encourage alternative modes of travel. Caltrans' Strategic Management Plan has set targets of tripling trips made by bicycle and doubling trips made by walking and public transit, as well as achieving a reduction in statewide, per capita, vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Similar goals are embedded in the California Transportation Plan 2050, California Transportation Plan 2050, and Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Connect SoCal (2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy). Statewide legislation such as AB 32 and SB 375, as well as Executive Order S-3-05 and N-19-19, echo the need to pursue more sustainable development. Projects, like the one proposed, can help California meet these goals.

Caltrans has the following recommendations for the Specific Plan that should be addressed while developing the Draft Environmental Impact Report:

1. Street Designations and Standards:

Caltrans recommends creating the safest streetscape possible for pedestrians and people on bikes. Wide roadways with numerous travel lanes are associated with higher vehicle speeds and less safe conditions for people walking and biking. Elements should be considered to create the most comfortable environment possible for all the people who will be walking and biking within the specific plan area. The most effective methods to reduce pedestrian and bicyclist exposure to vehicles is through physical design and geometrics. These methods include the construction of physically separated facilities such as Class IV bike lanes, curb extensions or bulb-outs, sidewalks, pedestrian refuge islands, landscaping, street furniture, and reductions in crossing distances through roadway narrowing. Visual indicators such as, pedestrian and bicyclist warning signage, flashing beacons, crosswalks, signage, and striping should be used in addition to physical design improvements to indicate to motorists that they can expect to see and yield to pedestrians and people on bikes.

2. Circulation and Parking Standards:

Caltrans encourages the lead agency to seriously consider eliminating car parking requirements. Research looking at the relationship between land-use, parking, and transportation indicates that the amount of car parking supplied can undermine a project's ability to encourage public transit and active modes of transportation. There is sufficient justification to consider eliminating parking requirements to promote affordability and achieve the project's goals.

Caltrans also recommends that at least one long-term bicycle parking space be provided per residential unit, allowing residents to take advantage of the Specific Plan's central location and choose the bicycle as their mode of travel more easily. Long-term bicycle parking should be located onsite, indoors, on the ground floor, and within 200 feet of primary pedestrian entrances.

3. Residential Density:

The TCSP currently states that it will maintain the existing FAR and residential units per acre of the existing CR zoning. Since the goal of the TCSP is to be a lively hub of commercial and residential spaces that seamlessly integrate into a multimodal transportation system, Caltrans highly recommends increasing the allowable density. Increasing the FAR and dwelling units per acre greatly enhances the TCSP's ability to meet its own goals of a thriving city center, allowing more people to live near the employment, commercial services, and social interactions needed for everyday life.

While Caltrans does not expect project approval to result in a direct adverse impact to the existing State transportation facilities, if the urban form encouraged by the Santa Clarita TCSP still prioritizes the personal automobile, it has the potential to impact the larger transportation network via regional VMT. Caltrans looks forward to the forthcoming Draft Environmental Impact Report to confirm that the Project will result in a net reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled.

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If you have any questions, please contact project coordinator Anthony Higgins, at anthony.higgins@dot.ca.gov and refer to GTS# 07-LA-2023-04399.

Sincerely,

Frances Duong

Frances Duong
Acting LDR Branch Chief

Cc: State Clearinghouse