



AGENDA ITEM 8
REPORT

Southern California Association of Governments
Hybrid (In-Person and Remote Participation)
900 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1700 - k # Room
Los Angeles, CA 90017
March , 2022

To: Community Economic & Human Development Committee (CEHD)
Energy & Environment Committee (EEC)
Transportation Committee (TC)
Regional Council (RC)
From: Karen Calderon, Senior Regional Planner
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Subject: Connect SoCal’s Program Environmental
Impact Report (PEIR) 101

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S
APPROVAL

RECOMMENDED ACTION FOR EEC:

Information Only – No Action Required

RECOMMENDED ACTION FOR CEHD, TC, AND RC:

Receive and File

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This item supports the following Strategic Plan Goal 2: Advance Southern California’s policy interests and planning priorities through regional, statewide, and national engagement and advocacy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The SCAG region’s long-range regional transportation plan/sustainable communities strategy (RTP/SCS) (entitled Connect SoCal 2024) is currently in development. This will require preparation of the Connect SoCal 2024 Program Environmental Impact Report (2024 PEIR or PEIR). The purpose of the PEIR is to provide information to the public and decisionmakers about the potential significant environmental impacts of the RTP/SCS and identify ways to avoid or reduce significant impacts by using feasible alternatives and mitigation. In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the programmatic environmental analysis for the Connect SoCal PEIR evaluates potential environmental effects consisting of direct and indirect effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts resulting from the Plan, and includes mitigation measures to offset any identified potentially significant adverse environmental effects.

The 2024 PEIR will be under the oversight of the Energy and Environment Committee (EEC), who will be responsible for reviewing the Draft and Final PEIR (including mitigation measures and feasible alternatives) and approving release of all associated documents and notices. This staff report clarifies the relationship between Connect SoCal and the PEIR and provides an overview of

what to expect in the upcoming 2024 PEIR to provide context for future PEIR updates. A summary of the contents and environmental factors considered, approach to alternatives, and key milestones for the PEIR is described below. Staff is currently working on the acquisition of a CEQA Consultant to assist SCAG with the preparation of a legally defensible PEIR. The 2024 PEIR is tentatively scheduled to officially begin in the fall this year, with the Notice to Proceed. Staff is currently preparing a detailed policy committee agenda outlook which will include details of how this body will be kept informed of key PEIR updates.

BACKGROUND:

CEQA and its implementing regulations (CEQA Guidelines) require SCAG as the Lead Agency to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for any discretionary government action, including programs and plans, that may cause significant environmental effects. Connect SoCal is a long-range comprehensive plan for the region's multi-modal transportation system, with the next update scheduled for 2024. Preparing the Plan is one of SCAG's primary statutory responsibilities under federal and state law. A regional transportation plan is the mechanism used in California by both Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies to conduct long-range (at least 20-year) planning in their regions. SCAG must adopt an RTP and update it every four years, or more frequently, if the region is to receive federal and/or state transportation dollars for public transit, streets/roads, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements As SCAG is responsible for developing. In addition, per state law, Connect SoCal must include a Sustainable Communities Strategy that demonstrates compliance with California Air Resources Board greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets from cars and light duty trucks.

Given the regional level of analysis provided in Connect SoCal, a PEIR is the appropriate CEQA document for Connect SoCal and is prepared every four years, concurrent with the Plan. An EIR is a disclosing document that provides information to the public and decisionmakers about the potential significant environmental impacts of a proposed project and the reasons a project is approved even if it will have some significant adverse impacts. The purpose of an EIR is to identify ways to avoid or reduce significant impact(s) by using feasible alternatives and mitigation.

Development of the next Connect SoCal is underway, which requires preparation of the 2024 PEIR. The 2024 PEIR will be a "first-tier" CEQA document designed to consider "broad policy alternatives and program wide mitigation measures" (CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15168). The programmatic environmental analysis for the 2024 PEIR will evaluate potential environmental effects consisting of direct and indirect effects, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts resulting from the Plan, and include mitigation measures to offset any identified potentially significant adverse environmental effects. As a first-tier document, the PEIR may serve as a foundation for subsequent, site-specific environmental review documents (including Addendums, Supplemental EIRs, Subsequent EIRs) for individual transportation and development projects in the region (CEQA

Guidelines Sec. 15385). This first-tier regional-scale environmental analysis also helps local agencies evaluate and reduce direct and indirect impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative environmental effects with respect to local projects.

The 2024 PEIR will be under the oversight of the EEC, who will be responsible for reviewing the Draft and Final PEIR (including mitigation measures and feasible alternatives) and approving release of all associated documents and notices.

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS FOR THE CONNECT SOCIAL PEIR:¹

Below is an overview of what to expect in the upcoming 2024 PEIR. A summary of the content typically included in the Connect SoCal Draft PEIR is provided below:

- **Executive Summary:** This summarizes key information presented in the Connect SoCal PEIR, including a table depicting significant impacts and proposed SCAG and potential project-level mitigation measures for each significant impact discussed in Chapter 3.0 – Environmental Impact Analysis.
- **Chapter 1.0 – Introduction:** This chapter provides background information on SCAG’s roles and responsibilities. The introduction summarizes the results of the scoping process and describes the PEIR as a first tier Program EIR. This Chapter describes the CEQA process, emphasizing the early identification of stakeholders and engagement through the scoping process. Supplemental materials, including the Notice of Preparation (NOP) of the Draft PEIR and comments received on the NOP will be attached, as appropriate, in appendices to the Draft PEIR document. It also describes consideration of CEQA streamlining opportunities, the environmental review process, and an overview of the contents of the Draft PEIR.
- **Chapter 2.0 – Project Description:** This chapter provides the location and boundaries of the Draft Plan; states the Draft Plan’s objectives; a general description of the Draft Plan; and includes a statement briefly describing the intended uses of the PEIR.
- **Chapter 3.0 – Environmental Impact Analysis–** This analysis includes Regulatory Framework; Environmental Setting; Significance Thresholds; Analysis of Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts; Mitigation Measures; and Level of Significance after Mitigation. Twenty (20) resource categories included in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines are analyzed in this section. (See discussion under *Environmental Factors Considered* for further details)
- **Chapter 4.0 – Alternatives -** This chapter describes a range of reasonable alternatives to the Draft Plan, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the Plan but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the Plan at a programmatic and region-wide level. (See discussion under *Alternatives* for further details)
- **Chapter 5.0 – Other CEQA Considerations:** This chapter identifies the significant

¹ Table of Contents are subject to change prior to the release of the Draft PEIR. However, it is representative of all the major components that will be considered and is in accordance with the *CEQA Guidelines*.

unavoidable environmental effects, significant irreversible environmental effects, irreversible damage from environmental accidents, and growth inducing impacts of the Plan.

- **Chapter 6.0 – Persons and Sources Consulted:** This chapter lists the contributors to the preparation of the PEIR and includes a list of sources consulted and used in preparing the Draft PEIR.
- **Chapter 7.0 – Glossary:** This chapter includes acronyms used in the Draft PEIR document.

A summary of contents of the Connect SoCal Final PEIR is provided below:

- **Chapter 8.0 – Introduction to the Final PEIR:** This chapter provides a brief summary of overview of what has occurred since the Draft PEIR and a brief overview of the Final PEIR process.
- **Chapter 9.0 – Response to Comments:** This chapter provides background information on the Final PEIR for the Connect SoCal PEIR and includes public written comments on the Draft PEIR and its responses. It includes Master Responses to comments that recurred in a number of comment letters, and responses to written comments made by public agencies, organizations, and interested parties.
- **Chapter 10.0 – Clarifications and Revisions:** This chapter provides clarifications and revisions to the Draft PEIR including staff-initiated corrections and revisions made because of public comments.
- **Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program** - The Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) is a standalone document that is prepared in compliance with the requirements of §21081.6 of the California Public Resources Code and CEQA Guidelines § 15091 (d) and § 15097. The MMRP, the monitoring plan, applies to the goals, policies, and strategies articulated in the RTP/SCS and related mitigation measures to be implemented by SCAG, and project-level performance standards-based mitigation measures which are within responsibility, authority, and/or jurisdiction of project-implementing agency or other public agency serving as lead agency under CEQA in subsequent project- and site- specific design, CEQA review, and decision-making processes, to meet the performance standards for each of the CEQA resource categories.
- **Findings of Fact** - The statement of Findings of Fact is prepared in compliance with the requirements of § 21081.6 of the California Public Resources Code and CEQA Guidelines § 15091. It describes facts, discussions, and conclusions reached in the environmental review relative to impacts, mitigation measures, and selection of an alternative.
- **Statement of Overriding Considerations** - The Statement of Overriding Considerations is prepared in compliance with § 21081 of Public Resources Code and CEQA Guidelines § 15093. The existence of significant unavoidable impacts as identified in the Draft PEIR requires the preparation of a Statement of Overriding Considerations. The Statement of Overriding Consideration explains why SCAG is willing to accept the residual significant

impacts. It describes the economic, social, environmental, and other benefits of the RTP/SCS that override the significant unavoidable environmental impacts. It “reflect[s] the ultimate balancing of competing public objectives when the agency decides to approve a project that will cause one or more significant effects on the environment” (CEQA Guidelines § 15021 (d)).

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS CONSIDERED:

The PEIR is a programmatic document that analyzes the potential effects of the Plan on the environment. Although Connect SoCal will include individual transportation projects, 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 projects proceed through the design and decision-making process.

The scope of environmental effects analyzed in the Connect SoCal PEIR are as follows:

- Aesthetics
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology & Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services (Police, Fire, Schools, Library)
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems (Solid Waste, Wastewater, Water Supply)
- 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 project. The Connect SoCal PEIR includes 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 for lead agencies to consider, as applicable and feasible, in subsequent project-specific design, CEQA review, and decision-making processes. It is ultimately up to the lead agency to determine the appropriateness of the mitigation measure based on project-specific circumstances.

The project-level mitigation measures identified by SCAG “can and should” be considered by lead agencies in project-specific environmental review documents as appropriate and feasible. This language mirrors CEQA Guidelines section 15091(a)(2), and it is assumed that each lead agency for specific projects would have the ability to impose and enforce these measures (i.e., that they can implement them). Lead agencies for specific projects are responsible for developing project specific mitigation measures and ensuring adherence to such mitigation measures.

Overall, mitigation measures used in the PEIR recognize the limits of SCAG’s authority; distinguish between SCAG commitments and project-level responsibilities and authorities; optimize flexibility for project implementation; and facilitate CEQA streamlining and tiering where appropriate on a project-by-project basis determined by each lead agency.

ALTERNATIVES:

The development of alternatives in a PEIR is focused on avoiding or reducing potentially significant impacts of the Plan while achieving most of the project objectives. The PEIR evaluates three potential alternatives to Plan: a No Project Alternative and another two alternatives that meet the CEQA alternatives criteria. The No Project Alternative is required by Section 15126.6(e)(2) of the CEQA Guidelines and assumes that the Plan would not be implemented.

The No Project Alternative considers continued implementation of the goals and polices of the adopted RTP/SCS and is based on the adopted RTP/SCS regional population, housing, and employment data. The No Project Alternative includes only those transportation projects that are in the first year of the previously conforming FTIP. The growth scenario included in the No Project Alternative, and all alternatives, includes the same regional totals for population, housing and employment.

Each Alternative, except the No Project Alternative, will vary in terms of land use and transportation assumptions and may include variations in land use development patterns or transportation network.

Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an “environmentally superior” alternative be selected among the alternatives evaluated in the PEIR. In general, the environmentally superior alternative is the alternative that would be expected to generate the fewest adverse impacts. If the No Project Alternative is identified as environmentally superior, then another environmentally superior alternative shall be identified among the other alternatives.

When approving the Plan, SCAG has the discretion to select one or more alternatives as long as they are within the range of impacts identified in the PEIR.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE 2024 PEIR:



Staff is working on the acquisition of a CEQA Consultant to assist SCAG with the preparation of a legally defensible PEIR. The CEQA Consultant RFP was release February 2nd, 2022 and the Consultant is expected to be selected and onboarded by August 2022, pending funding approval. The Consultant will assist SCAG in completing the PEIR and provide services to ensure compliance with federal and state planning and environmental laws.

NEXT STEPS:

Below are the list upcoming milestones for the 2024 Connect SoCal PEIR. Staff is also preparing a detailed policy committee agenda outlook which will include details of how to keep this body informed of key PEIR updates.

Milestones	Tentative Schedule
Release of the Initial Study/Notice of Preparation	Fall 2022
Scoping Meetings and Comment Period	Winter 2023 (minimum of 30-day scoping comment period)
Stakeholder Outreach	Winter and Spring 2023
Release Connect SoCal Draft PEIR	Within 30-days after Connect SoCal Release
Connect SoCal PEIR Workshop	Within 30-days after Draft PEIR Release
Public review and comment period of the Connect SoCal PEIR	At least 45 days after Draft PEIR Release
Certification for Connect SoCal and Final PEIR	April 2024

FISCAL IMPACT:

Work associated with this item is included in the current Fiscal Year 2021/22 Overall Work Program (22-020.0161.04: Environmental Compliance, Coordination & Outreach).

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. PowerPoint Presentation - PEIR 101 2spp



Connect SoCal's Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) 101

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March 3, 2022

www.scag.ca.gov



Introduction



- SCAG is the lead agency for the Connect SoCal PEIR.
 - Identifies ways to avoid or reduce significant impact(s) by using feasible alternatives and mitigation
 - Disclosing document that evaluates the potential environmental impacts of implementing Connect SoCal
 - Certification of the PEIR is required before Connect SoCal adoption
- PEIR provides a region-wide program level assessment of potential effects of implementing projects, programs, and policies included in the RTP/SCS.

Summary of Contents



- **Draft PEIR:**
 - Executive Summary
 - Chapter 1.0 – Introduction
 - Chapter 2.0 – Project Description
 - **Chapter 3.0 – Environmental Impact Analysis**
 - Chapter 4.0 – Alternatives
 - Chapter 5.0 – Other CEQA Considerations
 - Chapter 6.0 – Persons and Sources Consulted
 - Chapter 7.0 – Glossary
- **Final PEIR:**
 - Chapter 8.0 – Introduction to the Final PEIR
 - Chapter 9.0 – Response to Comments
 - Chapter 10.0 – Clarifications and Revisions
 - Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
 - Findings of Fact
 - Statement of Overriding Considerations

Chapter 3.0 – Environmental Impact Analysis



20 Environmental Factors

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

Example: Aesthetics



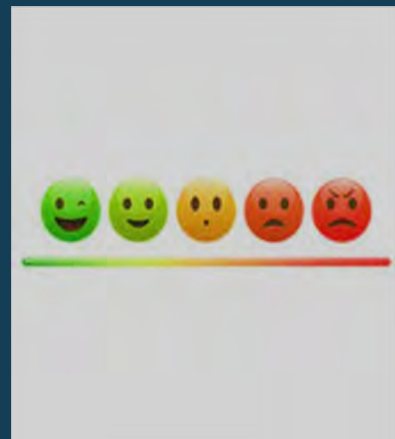
I. AESTHETICS

Would the project:

- a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?
- b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
- c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
- d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

Determination of Significance

- No Impact
- Less than Significant
- Less than Significant with Mitigation
- Significant and Unavoidable Impact



Mitigation Measures



Mitigation Measures

- SCAG Mitigation Measures
 - Implemented by SCAG
- Project-Level Mitigation Measures
 - Implemented by local agencies/developers, as applicable
 - Useful for tiering



Chapter 4: Alternatives



Three Alternatives:

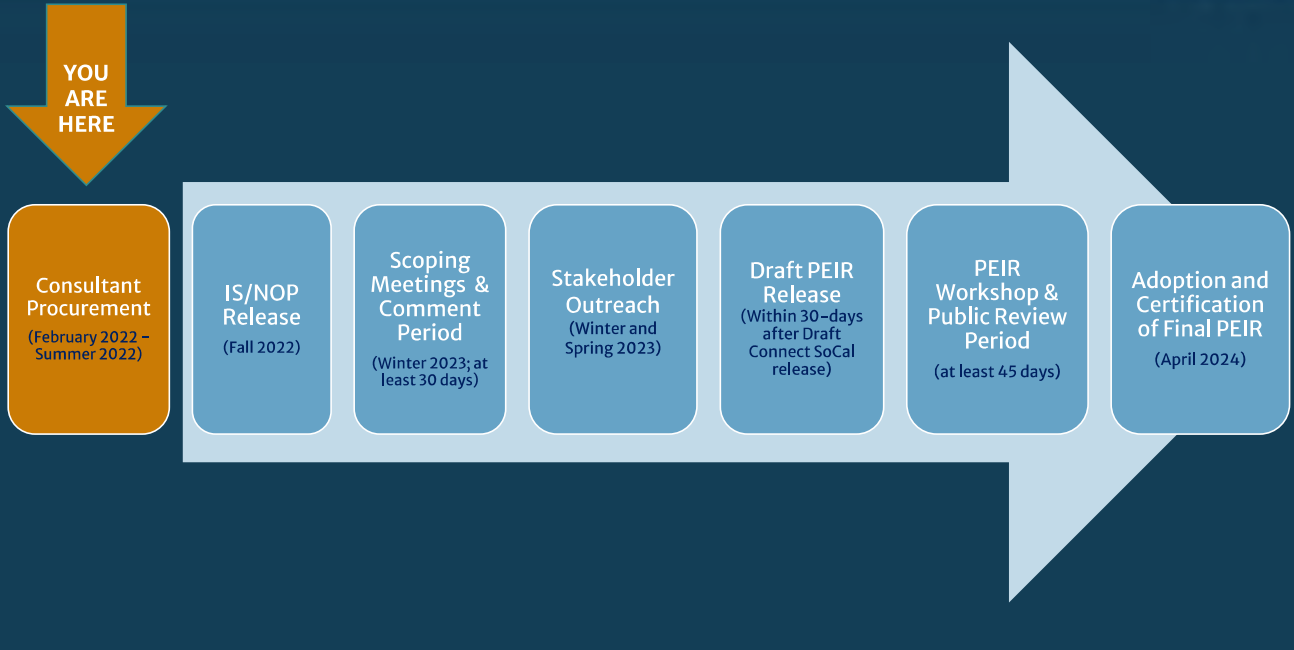
- Alternative 1 – No Project Alternative (CEQA requirement)
- Alternative 2
- Alternative 3



Alternatives CEQA criteria :

- Feasible
- Meet most of the basic project objectives (Plan Goals)
- At least one needs to be environmentally superior

PEIR Process and Timeline



Thank You

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Attachment: PowerPoint Presentation - PEIR 101 2spp (Connect SoCal's Program Environmental Impact