



## **A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO READING A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT**

January 2007

### **What is an EIS/EIR?**

**Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)** and **Environmental Impact Reports (EIR)** are reports that document the potential environmental impacts of a proposed project or action. Under federal and state laws, certain proposed projects or actions require that formal environmental studies be conducted and documented. An EIS is prepared pursuant to the requirements of the federal **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**. An EIR is prepared pursuant to the requirements of the state's **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**. Often a "joint document" is prepared that fulfills both federal and state requirements. While very similar in what they prescribe, the two Acts, NEPA and CEQA, each have some unique requirements.

### **What is the purpose of an EIS/EIR?**

An EIS/EIR is referred to as a "full disclosure document." It addresses the following requirements:

1. inform agency decision makers and the general public of the direct and indirect environmental effects of the proposed action
2. provide mitigation measures to avoid or substantially lessen the significant effects, and
3. identify and evaluate reasonable alternatives that could avoid or substantially lessen one or more of such effects

### **What is contained in an EIS/EIR?**

An EIS/EIR contains the results of the studies and evaluations conducted on project alternatives. The Draft EIS/EIR for the South Sacramento Corridor Phase 2 Project contains the following nine sections:

Summary

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need for Transportation Improvements

Chapter 2: Alternatives

Chapter 3: Transportation and Parking: Affected Environment, Impacts and Mitigation

Chapter 4: Affected Environment, Environmental Consequences, and Mitigation

Chapter 5: Construction Phase Effects

Chapter 6: CEQA Considerations and Findings of Significance

Chapter 7: Financial Analysis and Evaluation

Chapter 8: Consultation and Coordination

The Summary Chapter at the beginning of the document is a good way to get a broad overview of results presented in the draft EIS/EIR.

Chapter 4 presents the project's potential impacts in 19 distinct areas:

- |                          |                                     |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 4.1 Aesthetics           | 4.5 Historic and Cultural resources |
| 4.2 Agriculture          | 4.6 Electromagnetic Fields /        |
| 4.3 Air Quality          | Interference                        |
| 4.4 Biological Resources | 4.7 Geology, Soils and Seismicity   |

4.8	Hazardous Wastes	4.14	Public Services and Facilities
4.9	Hydrology, Floodplain, and Water Quality	4.15	Recreational facilities
4.10	Land Use and Planning	4.16	Safety and Security
4.11	Mineral and Energy Resources	4.17	Utilities
4.12	Noise and Vibration	4.18	Section 4(f) (public parks and recreational lands)
4.13	Population, Housing and Environmental Justice	4.19	Cumulative Impacts

In many of these topic areas, the methods used to evaluate impacts are prescribed by regulatory agencies. In some cases the methods are specifically tailored to the project.

While some people may be interested in reviewing the entire document, others may have specific areas of interest. For example, people with interest in noise related issues can look at Chapter 4 and the section devoted to Noise and Vibration (Section 4.12).

### **How can the community comment on the draft environmental document?**

The Draft EIS/EIR is expected to be released for public review in early 2007. The public review period will last 45-days. During this time the Draft EIS/EIR will be available on line, at RT offices and at local repositories in the community. During the formal review period, responsible and trustee agencies and other interested parties, including the general public, are asked to review and provide comments on the Draft EIS/EIR. Anyone wishing to comment on the Draft EIS/EIR must submit their comments in writing prior to the end of the formal public comment period or provide oral comments during a public hearing to be held during a Regional Transit District Board meeting. Oral comments provided during the public hearing will be recorded and have the same standing as written comments.

### **How are comments addressed?**

Upon the close of the public review and comment period, the Sacramento Regional Transit District, in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration, will evaluate and prepare responses to written and oral *substantive* comments received from both citizens and public agencies. In some cases this may result in the need for additional analysis or possibly even adjustments or refinements to the proposed project. Responses to comments will be published in a Final EIS/EIR that will be subject to certification and a formal *Notice of Determination* by the RT Board and a formal *Record of Decision* by the Federal Transit Administration.

### **What role does the EIS/EIR play in project decision making?**

The Regional Transit District Board must certify the Final EIS/EIR before approval of any final project. In making a determination of about project approval, the Board will consider the comments received during the public comment period, and will also rely upon its own assessment and findings regarding the environmental analyses. In addition, a formal Record of Decision by the lead federal agency, the Federal Transit Administration, is also necessary to move forward with future project steps, e.g., final design, full funding grant agreement, project construction and operation.