

## **4. ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS**

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## **4.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS**

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### FORMAT OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

The technical sections of the environmental analysis are comprised of three primary topic areas: environmental setting, regulatory setting, and impacts and mitigation measures. Each topic area is described in more detail below.

### ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

According to section 15125 of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must include a description of the existing physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project to provide the “baseline condition” against which project-related impacts are compared. Normally, the baseline condition is the physical condition that exists when the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published. The NOP for the proposed project was published in August 2006. The CEQA Guidelines recognize that the date for establishing an environmental baseline cannot be rigid. Because physical environmental conditions may vary over a range of time periods, the use of environmental baselines that differ from the date of the NOP is reasonable and appropriate when doing so results in a more accurate or conservative environmental analysis.

For analytical purposes, impacts associated with implementation of the proposed project are derived from three fundamental components of the existing baseline environmental setting 1) existing conditions at the time the NOP was published, 2) conditions that exist at buildout of the Yuba City General Plan, and 3) conditions that exist upon buildout of the proposed project. It is appropriate to evaluate project-level impacts against the conditions that exist when the NOP was published for most issue areas. For issue areas either directly or indirectly related to infrastructure, project-level impacts are more conservatively analyzed against future baseline conditions that consider General Plan and approved growth, because improvements (e.g., roadway widenings, intersection improvements, wastewater distribution and conveyance, solid waste disposal, water supply, electricity and natural gas supplies) must consider and accommodate ultimate demand. For this EIR the existing conditions for traffic are based on traffic counts taken in August 2007. The assumptions inherent in the Air Quality and Noise analysis are derived from the Transportation and Circulation analysis; therefore, the baseline year is the same as the other issue areas related to infrastructure.

### REGULATORY SETTING

The Regulatory Setting provides a summary of regulations, plans, policies, and laws that are relevant to each issue area.

### IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES

This section analyzes both project-specific and cumulative environmental impacts of the project. Information included in this section is described in more detail below.

## **Methods of Analysis**

This subsection identifies the methodology used to analyze potential environmental impacts.

## **Standards of Significance**

The CEQA Guidelines define a significant effect on the environment as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15382). Definitions of significance vary with the physical conditions affected and the setting in which the change occurs. The CEQA Guidelines set forth physical impacts that trigger the requirement to make “mandatory findings of significance” (CEQA Guidelines, section 15091). For all environmental issues, this EIR identifies specific standards of significance.

Where explicit quantification of significance is identified, such as a violation of an ambient air quality standard, this quantity is used to assess the level of significance of a particular impact in this EIR. For less easily quantifiable impacts, events or occurrences that would be regarded as significant or potentially significant were identified. For example, growth-inducing impacts would be identified as significant if the project results in a level, rate, or character of growth that (among other criteria) exceeds the capacity of existing infrastructure and services. Where the “substantial” effect of an impact is not identified in the CEQA Guidelines, the criteria for evaluating the significance of potential impacts were determined and identified in this document.

## **Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

The project impact and mitigation measure section analyzes the environmental impacts of the project. This subsection describes the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and, based upon the thresholds of significance, concludes whether the environmental impacts would be considered significant, potentially significant, or less than significant. Each impact is summarized in an “impact statement,” followed by a more detailed discussion of the potential impacts and the significance of each impact before mitigation.

Each impact statement also includes the finding of significance prior to mitigation before the impact discussion to allow for easy reference. The impact number consists of the section of the EIR in which that impact is identified followed by a “-” to indicate the number of the impact in that section. For example, Impact 4.1-1 is the first impact identified in Section 4.1.

Following the description of applicable policies and regulations, the impact analysis concludes with a statement regarding whether the impact would be less than significant or significant prior to mitigation. If the impact is significant and mitigation is required the finding of significance after mitigation is also identified.

The analysis of environmental impacts considers both the construction and operational phases associated with implementation of the proposed project. As required by section 15126.2(a) of the

CEQA Guidelines, direct, indirect, short-term, long-term, on-site, and/or off-site impacts are addressed, as appropriate, for the environmental issue area being analyzed.

A “significant effect” is defined by section 15382 of the CEQA Guidelines as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment...[but] may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant.” The Draft EIR uses the following terms to describe the level of significance of impacts identified during the course of the environmental analysis:

- **Significant and Unavoidable Impact (SU)**—Impact that exceeds the defined threshold(s) of significance and cannot be eliminated or reduced to a less-than-significant level through the implementation of feasible mitigation measures.
- **Significant Impact (S)**—Impact that exceeds the defined threshold(s) of significance. For purposes of this document, pre-mitigation impacts that exceed the defined threshold(s) of significance are referred to as significant; however, when the impacts cannot be eliminated or reduced to a less-than-significant level through the implementation of feasible mitigation measures, these impacts are referred to as significant and unavoidable.
- **Less-Than-Significant Impact (LS)**—Impact that does not exceed the defined threshold(s) of significance. This term is used for impacts for which mitigation measure(s) identified can reduce a pre-mitigation impact to a less-than-significant level.

## **Mitigation Measures**

This subsection includes feasible mitigation measures that could reduce the severity of the impact. In addition to feasible mitigation measures, it is assumed that the project applicant would also continue to comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws and regulations, and these laws and regulations are considered to be part of the project description. In many instances, the actions that are necessary to reduce a project impact are already required by local, state, or federal law. Similarly, established design guidelines or other requirements that the City regularly recognizes and follows for development projects are also considered part of the project description. In this Draft EIR, such requirements are identified and considered in the impact assessment *prior to* the identification of additional project-specific mitigation measures that would reduce the level of significance of impacts.

## **Cumulative Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

The cumulative context of a specific issue area is defined (e.g., a specific watershed for drainage and hydrology impacts) and the cumulative effects of the project are analyzed to determine if the project’s contribution to the cumulative effect or impact are “considerable.” If applicable, feasible mitigation measures are also included to reduce the severity of an impact.