



# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

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The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) prepared this Connect SoCal 2024 Program Environmental Impact Report (2024 PEIR), pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), for the proposed 2024–2050 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS), referred to as “Connect SoCal 2024”, “Plan” or “Project”.

SCAG’s jurisdiction comprises a six-county region that includes the counties of Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura, as well as 191 cities. SCAG is the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for this region, designated pursuant to Title 23 United States Code (USC) 134(d)(1), and has the primary responsibility, through its Regional Council, for consideration of Connect SoCal 2024 for approval, and thus serves as the Lead Agency under CEQA. SCAG published a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for this 2024 PEIR, pursuant to CEQA Section 21080.4 and CEQA Guidelines (Association of Environmental Professionals, 2023) Sections 15082 and 15375 on October 17, 2022 (SCAG 2022a). Given the regional level of analysis provided in a RTP/SCS for a large geographic area with a minimum 20-year planning horizon, SCAG determined a Program EIR (PEIR) is the appropriate type of EIR for Connect SoCal 2024.

Connect SoCal 2024 is a long-range regional transportation plan that provides a vision for regional transportation investments, integrated with land use strategies, over a 20-year period. Connect SoCal 2024 includes a vision and goals for the region. Key components include a growth forecast and regional development pattern based on population, household, and employment growth projections for the SCAG region through the year 2050 as well as a transportation network including a list of transportation projects and investments. The Plan also identifies Regional Planning Policies and Implementation Strategies that the region could pursue over the Plan horizon. Other components include financial assumptions and expenditures, key transportation investments, and an evaluation of the Plan’s performance. As part of Connect SoCal 2024, SCAG developed the Local Data Exchange (LDX) process to form the basis for the regional growth forecast. SCAG developed the LDX process to engage local partners and get information needed to fulfill state planning requirements. This included information on land use, transportation, priority development areas (PDAs), geographical boundaries, resource areas, and growth that was shared and exchanged through a combination of one-on-one meetings and data submissions with local jurisdictions. In consultation with the Technical Working Group (TWG), SCAG developed growth forecast guiding principles to ensure that the regional growth forecast yields a technically robust forecasted regional development pattern which meets its statutory objectives, which are incorporated as part of the SCS.

Although not required to do so, SCAG encourages local jurisdictions to consider the Plan’s regional vision and the policies and strategies provided in the Plan related to land use, the transportation network, Transportation Demand Management (TDM), Transportation System Management (TSM) and clean vehicle technology. More information about the Plan is included in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, of this 2024 PEIR.

This 2024 PEIR fulfills the requirements of CEQA of Connect SoCal 2024 by providing a region-wide assessment of the potential significant environmental effects of implementing the Plan. As specified in CEQA Guidelines Section 15168, a PEIR “may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either (1) geographically, (2) as logical parts of the chain of contemplated actions, (3) in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.” A PEIR provides a regional consideration of cumulative effects and includes land use policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures that are capable of avoiding, reducing, and compensating for the potentially significant impacts of the Plan.

This 2024 PEIR provides a first-tier, programmatic environmental analysis, for a long-range, regional-scale plan document that will support local agencies in the evaluation of subsequent projects (including planning projects, transportation projects and development projects), and facilitate avoidance, reduction, and minimization of direct and indirect impacts, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative environmental impacts. That is, although individual transportation projects are primarily (conceptually) identified in the Plan, this 2024 PEIR analyzes potential environmental impacts of both transportation projects and land use development from a regional perspective and is programmatic in nature.

Lead agencies for individual projects are responsible for determining the appropriate level of environmental review for subsequent project-level evaluation of individual projects. Consistent with the provisions of CEQA Guidelines Section 15050(a), the determination of the appropriate second-tier level of environmental review will be determined by the lead agency with primary discretion and decision-making authority. Where a project involves only a federal action, there will be a federal lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); where there is both a federal and state/local agency action there may be individual review under NEPA and CEQA or joint federal and state/local review.

Project- and site-specific planning and implementation undertaken by each local jurisdiction/project proponent will depend on a number of issues, including policies, programs, and projects adopted at the local level; restrictions on federal, state and local transportation funds; the results of feasibility studies for particular corridors; and further environmental review of projects.

## 1.1 SCAG REGION AND AUTHORITY

SCAG is one of 18 MPOs in the State of California and is comprised of the following counties: Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura. To the north of the SCAG region are the counties of Kern and Inyo; to the east are the States of Nevada and Arizona; to the south is the County of San Diego as well as the U.S.-Mexico border; and to the west is the Pacific Ocean. The SCAG region also consists of 15 subregional entities that have been recognized by the Regional Council, SCAG's governing body, as partners in the regional policy planning process. According to the California Native American Heritage Commission, there are 54 California Native American tribes who are culturally affiliated with the SCAG region, 16 of which are federally recognized tribal sovereign nations located within the SCAG region (see **Appendix G, Assembly Bill 52 Consultation Summary Report**, of this 2024 PEIR).

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 19 million people powering the 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world. The region is home to the two largest container ports in the Western Hemisphere (Los Angeles and Long Beach), and the world's fourth busiest airport system (Los Angeles World Airports).

In addition to the federal designation as an MPO, SCAG is designated under California state law as the Multicounty Designated Transportation Planning Agency and Council of Governments (COG) 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 Plan; 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 developing the Regional Transportation Plans/Sustainable Communities Strategies and ensuring programs are in conformity with state air quality plans; periodic preparation of an RHNA; and intergovernmental review of regionally significant projects. SCAG is just one part of a large body of governments and public organizations that collectively plan, construct, operate and maintain the region's transportation system. SCAG's work helps facilitate implementation, but the agency does not directly implement or construct projects.

Currently, the Regional Council consists of 86 elected officials, representing 67 Districts that include an elected representative of one or more cities of approximately equal population levels. Membership in SCAG's Regional Council also includes representation from each county Board of Supervisors and one representative from the Southern California Native American Tribal Governments. Additionally, SCAG Bylaws provide for representation of transit interests of all of the operators and Air Districts in the region on the Regional Council and Policy Committees.

The Regional Council has general authority to conduct the affairs of SCAG and directs the actions of the agency throughout the year. Additionally, the Regional Council implements the policy direction provided at the annual General Assembly of the membership, acts upon policy recommendations from SCAG's standing policy committees and external agencies, and appoints standing or ad-hoc subcommittees to study specific programs or issues.

### **1.1.1 REGIONAL COOPERATION AND SUBREGIONS**

SCAG places great importance on local input in the regional planning process and, therefore, seeks feedback from local elected officials and their staff through the subregional organizations that have been recognized by the Regional Council as partners in the regional policy planning process. The subregional organizations represent various parts of the SCAG region that have identified themselves as having common interests and concerns. The subregions vary according to geographical size, number of local member jurisdictions, staffing, decision-making structure, and legal status.

SCAG provides opportunities to participate in regional planning through collaboration and participation in regional programs and dialogs. Responsible for regional policy direction and review, standing committees at SCAG include the Transportation Committee, the Community, Economic and Human Development Committee, the Energy and Environment Committee, Joint Policy Committees on an as-needed basis several times a year, Emerging Technologies Committee, Special Committee on Equity and Social Justice, and Legislative/Communications and Membership Committee. In addition to the standing committees, there are various subcommittees, technical advisory committees, working groups, and task forces that report to the standing committees, while other groups are established on an ad hoc basis to assist with specific projects or address specific regional policy.

### **1.1.2 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN/SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES STRATEGY**

#### **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN AND FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

As an MPO—the largest in the nation—SCAG is responsible for developing long-range transportation plans and sustainability strategies for the region. The centerpiece of that planning work is the Regional Transportation Plan

/ Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) that contains both the federally required RTP and the state-required SCS (discussed below). As previously mentioned, the 2024–2050 RTP/SCS is referred to as Connect SoCal 2024.

In accordance with federal and state transportation planning laws, SCAG is required to adopt and update a long-range RTP every four years. The RTP is used to guide the development of the Federal Transportation Improvement Plan (FTIP) as well as other transportation programming documents and plans. The RTP outlines the region’s goals and policies for meeting current and future mobility needs, providing a foundation for transportation decisions by local, regional, and state officials that are ultimately aimed at achieving a coordinated and balanced transportation system. The RTP must include, among other things: the identification of transportation facilities such as roadways, transit, intermodal facilities, and connectors that function as an integrated metropolitan system over at least a 20-year forecast period; a financial plan demonstrating how the RTP can be implemented with “reasonably available” resources and additional financial approaches; strategies to improve existing facilities and relieve vehicular congestion and maximize the safety and mobility of people and goods; and environmental mitigation activities.

Transportation investments in the SCAG region that receive funding for which federal approval is required must be consistent with the Plan and must be included in SCAG’s Federal Transportation Improvement Plan when funded. The Federal Transportation Improvement Plan covers six years and is updated biennially on an even-year cycle. It represents the immediate, near-term commitments of the Plan. SCAG does not implement individual projects in the Plan, as these projects will be implemented by local and state jurisdictions, and other agencies. To continue receiving funding for which federal approval is required, the SCAG region must have an RTP with an approved transportation conformity determination in accordance with federal transportation conformity requirements, approved by the federal agencies by June 5, 2024. Chapter 2, *Project Description*, provides additional detail on Connect SoCal 2024.

## **MOVING AHEAD FOR PROGRESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ACT**

With the passage of the ‘Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century’ (MAP-21) federal transportation authorization legislation in 2012, transportation system performance planning and monitoring also became a federal mandate (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2018). This commitment to a national performance management and reporting system was further solidified with the passage of the subsequent federal transportation authorization package (the ‘FAST Act’) in 2015. Starting with the 1998 Regional Transportation Plan, SCAG has been using quantitative performance measures to evaluate how well the RTP may achieve the regional goals established in the Plan.

Further, MAP-21 continues to require, as under prior planning law, that “a long-range transportation plan shall include a discussion of the types of potential environmental mitigation activities and potential areas to carry out these activities, including activities that may have the greatest potential to restore and maintain the environmental functions affected by the plan” (23 USC Section 134(i)(2)(B)) (FHA, 2012). Consultation and public outreach activities have been undertaken in conjunction with the Plan and PEIR development processes.

## **CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT CODE SECTION 65080**

SCAG is also required to prepare an RTP pursuant to California Government Code Section 65080. The state requirements largely mirror the federal requirements and require each transportation planning agency in urban areas to adopt and submit an updated RTP to the County Transportation Commission (CTC) and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) every four years. To ensure a degree of statewide consistency in the development of RTPs, the CTC under Government Code Section 14522 prepared RTP Guidelines. The adopted

guidelines include a requirement for program level performance measures, which include objective criteria that reflect the goals and objectives of the RTP. In addition, the initial years of the Plan must be consistent with the Federal Transportation Improvement Plan.

## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES AND CLIMATE PROTECTION ACT OF 2008**

State planning law further requires, pursuant to the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, Senate Bill (SB) 375 (Chapter 728, Statutes of 2008) that an RTP include an SCS component to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from passenger vehicles (automobiles and light-duty trucks). SB 375 is part of California's overall strategy to reach GHG emissions reduction goals required by Assembly Bill (AB) 32, in the development of regional transportation plans by metropolitan planning organizations by promoting integrated regional transportation planning with the goal of creating more sustainable communities.

Pursuant to SB 375, the SCS prepared by SCAG is required to meet reduction targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from passenger vehicles by 8 percent per capita by 2020 and 19 percent per capita by 2035 compared to 2005, as set by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). The most recent targets were established by CARB in October 2018 (CARB 2023).

According to California Government Code Section 65080(b)(2)(B), the SCS must:

- Identify existing land use.
- Identify areas to accommodate long-term housing needs.
- Identify areas to accommodate an eight-year projection of regional housing needs.
- Identify transportation needs and the planned transportation network.
- Consider resource areas and farmland.
- Consider state housing goals and objectives.
- Set forth a forecasted growth and development pattern.
- Comply with federal law for developing an RTP.

The Plan outlines SCAG's plan for attaining the SB 375-required GHG emissions reductions targets set forth by CARB, by integrating planned transportation investments, policies, and strategies with the forecasted development pattern that responds to projected growth, housing needs and changing demographics, and transportation demands.

In addition, under SB 375, after adoption of the Plan, SCAG shall submit the SCS to CARB for review. Review by CARB shall be limited to acceptance or rejection of SCAG's determination that the strategy submitted would, if implemented, meet the region's 2035 19 percent per capita GHG reduction target. Furthermore, the Act specifically states that the SCS developed as part of the RTP cannot and do not regulate local land use policies, including General Plans. Rather, the Act is intended to provide a regional policy foundation that local government may build upon if they so choose and generally includes the quantitative growth projections from each city and county in the region going forward. Qualifying projects that meet criteria established by SB 375 and are consistent with the

SCS are eligible for streamlined environmental review under CEQA.<sup>1</sup> See discussion under Section 1.9, *Streamlining Environmental Review*, below, for additional details.

SB 32 (Statutes of 2016, Chapter 249), extended the state's GHG reduction target under AB 32, requiring achievement of an at least 40 percent reduction from 1990 levels of GHG emissions by 2030, as initially directed by Executive Order B-30-15. Through successive scoping plan updates (see Section 3.3, *Air Quality*), CARB, the state agency tasked with furthering the state toward its long-term GHG reduction targets, provides the framework for the state to achieve its 2030 target as mandated by SB 32. The 2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality (2022 Scoping Plan) identifies a technologically feasible, cost-effective, and equity-focused path to achieve new targets for carbon neutrality by 2045 and to reduce anthropogenic GHG emissions to at least 85 percent below 1990 levels, while also assessing the progress California is making toward reducing its GHG emissions by at least 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, as called for in SB 32 (CARB, 2017). CARB identifies passenger vehicle-sourced GHGs as a sector where notable reductions are required, which can be partially achieved through implementation of the land use and transportation strategies in RTP/SCSs.

## NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

Adoption of the Plan is solely at the discretion of SCAG's Regional Council and does not require approval by any federal agency, therefore it not subject to NEPA (Public Law 91-190). However, SCAG recognizes that lead agencies that pursue construction and operation of the transportation projects that are included in the Plan may seek federal funding; federal permits; federal approvals; or authorization to cross over lands administered by an agency of the federal government that would constitute a federal action, thus triggering the procedural provisions of NEPA. Therefore, SCAG has chosen to include a statement of purpose and need (see Chapter 2, *Project Description*) to enable proponents of individual projects included in the Plan to use this 2024 PEIR in full or in a part to serve as a functional equivalent environmental review, as appropriate, for individual projects that may involve a subsequent federal action triggering the procedural provisions of NEPA. Activities that constitute a federal action, include but are not limited to use of federal funds, right-of-way permits on federal lands, federal leases, and discretionary permits issued by federal agencies. To the extent that the proposed action is adequately characterized, analyzed, and sufficient mitigation measures have been considered to avoid or reduce the anticipated adverse direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the proposed federal action.

## 1.2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

SCAG has prepared this 2024 PEIR to fulfill the basic purposes of CEQA (CEQA Guidelines Section 15002), which are:

- To disclose to the decision-makers and the public significant environmental effects of the proposed activities
- To identify ways to avoid or reduce environmental damage
- To prevent environmental damage by requiring implementation of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures
- To disclose to the public reasons for agency approvals of projects with significant environmental effects

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<sup>1</sup> CEQA streamlining provisions are also available for eligible projects meeting the criteria established by Senate Bill 226, CEQA Guidelines Section 15183.3 (Streamlining for Infill Projects) and for eligible projects meeting the criteria established by Senate Bill 743 (Steinberg, 2013), Public Resources Code Section 21155.4 (Exemptions).

- To foster interagency coordination in the review of projects
- To enhance public participation in the planning process

Although the 2024 PEIR neither controls nor anticipates the ultimate decision of approval on the Plan, SCAG (and other agencies that rely on this PEIR) must consider the information in this 2024 PEIR and make one or more written findings concerning each of those significant impacts, as identified in the 2024 PEIR (CEQA Guidelines Section 15091).

### 1.2.1 PROGRAMMATIC LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

The focus of the environmental analysis in the 2024 PEIR is on regional-scale impacts of Plan implementation (which are inherently cumulative as the analysis of the Plan includes a multitude of potential individual projects in the region) and the alternatives. The long-range planning horizon of more than 20 years necessitates that many of the projects included in the Plan (and the alternatives) are identified at the conceptual level. This document addresses environmental impacts to the level that they can be assessed without undue speculation (CEQA Guidelines Section 15145). This 2024 PEIR acknowledges this uncertainty and incorporates these realities into the methodology to evaluate the environmental effects of the Plan, given its long-term planning horizon.

The degree of specificity in an EIR corresponds to the degree of specificity of the underlying activity being evaluated (CEQA Guidelines Section 15146). Drafting an EIR [...] necessarily involves some degree of forecasting (CEQA Guidelines Section 15144). While forecasting the unforeseeable is not possible, an agency must use its best efforts to find out and disclose all that *it reasonably can* (*emphasis added*). While lead agencies must use their best efforts to find out and disclose all that they reasonably can about a project's potentially significant environmental impacts, they are not required to predict the future or foresee the unforeseeable (CEQA Guidelines Section 15144). The adequacy of an EIR is determined in terms of what is reasonably feasible, in light of factors such as the magnitude of the project at issue, the severity of its likely environmental impacts, and the geographic scope of the project (CEQA Guidelines Sections 15151, 15204(a)). While the environmental analysis should consider a reasonable range of environmental, economic, and technical factors, an agency is not required to engage in speculation or conjecture and may choose to utilize numerical ranges and averages where specific data is not available (CEQA Guidelines Section 15187). The activity being evaluated in this 2024 PEIR is the long-term RTP including the SCS. This 2024 PEIR strives to provide as much quantitative detail as feasible regarding the regional environmental impacts of the Plan. Not all impacts can be feasibly and/or accurately quantitatively analyzed at a regional level and/or up to the year 2050.

The geographic scope, consisting of over 38,000 square miles, and complexity represented by the diverse needs of six counties, 15 subregional areas, 191 cities, and 16 federally recognized tribes that comprise the SCAG region, that are addressed by the Plan, played an important role in determining the appropriate level of detail to include in this 2024 PEIR.

Potential significant environmental effects of the Plan were identified by employing multiple analytical methods, including 1) spatial analysis, 2) transportation, land use, and air quality modeling and 3) other quantitative, ordinal, and qualitative techniques. Transportation and air quality simulation models were used to estimate the transportation, air quality, and GHG impacts. Transportation projects, anticipated growth distribution pattern, and policies and strategies of the Plan and alternatives were incorporated into the modeling analysis and the socioeconomic projections.



## 1.2.2 LIMITATIONS ON THE SCOPE OF ANALYSIS

While this 2024 PEIR analyzes potential impacts from the Plan utilizing available sources of data and models, SCAG recognizes that there are limitations on the scope of analysis for the 2024 PEIR. For example, assessing the effects of global climate change impacts from regional GHG emissions is well beyond the scale of any other types of impacts considered under CEQA, such as regional conditions relating to air basins, streams or watersheds, or localized conditions such as cultural and biological resources. The global consequences of regional GHG emissions are also dependent on a wide range of factors such as the willingness of federal, state, regional and local governments in the United States and worldwide to adopt or implement meaningful measures to reduce their own GHG emissions; the development and deployment of technologies that reduce GHG emissions; and the many factors that affect the pricing and availability of fuels that result in GHG emissions such as global conflict and taxes. On the other end of the CEQA analytical spectrum, many CEQA thresholds in most topical areas relate to localized environmental conditions and Plan impacts, such as:

- Aesthetics (e.g., degradation of existing visual character of the site and/or creation of new sources of light or glare that affect day or nighttime views)
- Air Quality (e.g., localized air pollutant and toxics effects from construction)
- Agriculture and Forestry Resources (e.g., loss of farmland of local importance)
- Biological Resources (e.g., conflict with local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance)
- Cultural Resources (e.g., impacts to individual historical resources)
- Energy (e.g., inefficient use of energy)
- Geology and Soils (e.g., exacerbating, or making soil conditions more unstable)
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials (e.g., exacerbating existing hazards)
- Hydrology and Water quality (e.g., provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff)
- Land use (e.g., conflict with adopted land use plans such as General Plans and zoning codes)
- Mineral Resources (e.g., loss of known mineral resources)
- Noise (e.g., cause a substantial permanent or temporary increase in ambient noise above preexisting levels)
- Population and Housing (e.g., induce substantial population growth in an area, or displace substantial numbers of people and/or housing units)
- Public Services (e.g., cause a need for new or physically altered physical facilities to maintain acceptable service ratios for fire, police, schools, and other public services, the construction of which could cause impacts)
- Recreation (e.g., result in an increase in the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks resulting in a need for new parks, the construction of which could cause impacts)
- Transportation (e.g., conflict with applicable plans or standards for roadway effective performance metrics or conflict with a congestion management plan designed to achieve effective traffic flow)
- Tribal Cultural Resources (e.g., cause substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource)
- Utilities and Service Systems (e.g., require the construction of facilities, the construction of which would cause significant impacts)

- Wildfire (e.g., expose people to wildfire risk)

These and other examples of CEQA thresholds are aimed at protecting the local environment in which projects occur and demonstrating to the public that it is being protected. At the regional scale of the Plan and in this 2024 PEIR, it is difficult to identify with specificity any of these impacts. Nonetheless, each impact category is analyzed in light of Plan components to determine the potential for significance.

## 1.3 BASELINE FOR DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE AND THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE

The 2024 PEIR must identify significant impacts that would be expected to result from implementation of the Plan. Significant impacts are defined as a “substantial or potentially substantial, adverse change in the environment” (Public Resources Code Section 21068). Significant impacts must be determined by applying explicit significance criteria, and the examination should normally be limited to changes in the existing physical conditions from comparing the future Plan conditions to the existing environmental setting (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2(a)). The existing setting is described in detail in each resource section of Chapter 3, *Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures*, of this document, and represents the most recent, reliable, and representative data to describe current regional conditions at the time of publication of the NOP for the 2024 PEIR, October 17, 2022. In most instances, the most recent reliable data was for 2019, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic and associated effects on vehicle miles traveled, individual activity patterns and travel behavior, goods movement, work-at-home practices, and other related changes to regional-scale activities. For population, land use, and modeling analyses (air quality, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, and transportation), base year information is collected every four years as part of the Plan. The base year for the Plan is 2019. It should be noted that for some topic areas (such as agriculture and forestry resources, hydrology and water quality, and utilities and service systems) resources, facilities, or conditions were not notably affected by pandemic-related societal changes or relevant trends have emerged or continued since 2019 conditions. Where appropriate and identified throughout this 2024 PEIR, the environmental and regulatory settings of various resource areas have used more recent data to better characterize baseline conditions. Or, conversely, where data were unavailable for 2019 or a more recent year, the most recent data were used (typically 2022). See the *Methodology* section for each resource area in Chapter 3 of this document for an additional discussion of data used to characterize environmental and regulatory settings for each resource topic. See further discussion of the 2024 PEIR baseline in Section 3.0, *Introduction to the Analysis*.

CEQA gives the lead agency the responsibility to determine whether an adverse environmental effect identified in an EIR should be classified as “significant” or “less than significant” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15064(b)). Under Section 15064(b), “the significance of an activity may vary with the setting” and, as a result, an inflexible definition of what constitutes a significant effect is not always possible. The lead agency has discretion to set its own significance criteria, which requires the lead agency to make a policy judgment about how to distinguish impacts which are adverse, but significant, from impacts which are adverse, but not significant (*Eureka Citizens for Responsible Gov’t v. City of Eureka* (2007) 147 Cal.App.4th 357). A lead agency may select a standard of significance based on its judgment about an appropriate standard of significance (*Sierra Club v. City of Orange* (2008) 163 Cal.App.4th 523, 541). The standards of significance used in an EIR may also rely upon policies adopted and implemented by the lead agency (*Mira Mar Mobile Community v. City of Oceanside* (2004) 119 Cal.App.4th 477). The criteria for determining significance are included in each resource section in Chapter 3 of this 2024 PEIR.

## 1.4 CONSIDERATION OF REGIONAL POPULATION GROWTH AND PATTERN OF GROWTH

It is important to emphasize that population growth and urbanization in the SCAG region will increase substantially by 2050, with or without implementation of the Plan.

The analysis assumes all the changes in land use and transportation within the region between 2019 and 2050 are attributed to the Plan known at the time of preparing this PEIR. This is because at the regional scale, it is difficult to parse out the effects of the Plan as compared to effects that would occur without the Plan (although evaluation of the No Project Alternative is provided in Chapter 4, *Alternatives*). Moreover, because locations, densities, implementation timing, and other site-unique factors related to development are not specified in the Plan, SCAG cannot quantify the specific impacts. Uncertainties from a number of external factors (including energy and water efficiency requirements, air emission standards, etc.) may also affect the analyses. SCAG therefore programmatically analyzes regional impacts and provides a selection of mitigation measures to address impacts based on reasonable assumptions regarding transportation projects and growth and conservative assumptions regarding parameters that affect impacts.

As required by CEQA, Chapter 3 of this document provides a direct comparison for each resource category between the expected future conditions with the Plan and the baseline conditions. Chapter 4, *Alternatives*, includes an analysis of alternate growth distribution patterns (continuation of existing development patterns in the No Project Alternative and a denser land use pattern under the Intensified Land Use Alternative).

## 1.5 PLAN ALTERNATIVES

When considering whether or not the range of alternatives to be evaluated in an EIR is adequate, several principles apply. The “discussion of alternatives need not be exhaustive,” and the requirement to discuss alternatives is “subject to a construction of reasonableness” (*Residents Ad Hoc Stadium Committee v. Board of Trustees* [1979] 89 Cal.App.3d 274, 286). “An EIR need not consider every conceivable alternative to a project” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(a)).

Under CEQA, perfection is not the standard governing a lead agency's proposed range of project alternatives. Rather, in preparing an EIR, a lead agency must make an objective, good faith effort to provide information permitting a reasonable choice of alternatives that would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project, while avoiding or substantially lessening the project's significant adverse environmental impacts (*California Oak Foundation v. Regents of University of California* [2010] 188 Cal.App.4th 227, 275–276).

CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(d) requires an EIR to include sufficient information about each alternative in order to allow meaningful evaluation, analysis, and comparison with the proposed project. They suggest the use of a matrix displaying each alternative's significant environmental effects to summarize the comparison (see Chapter 4, *Alternatives*). When a large-scale program contains multiple, interrelated objectives, an alternative that does not meet all of those objectives may be excluded from detailed analysis (see *In re Bay-Delta Programmatic Environmental Impact Report Coordinated Proceedings* [2008] 43 Cal. 4th 1143, 1162–1168). An EIR must discuss alternatives to a project in its entirety but is not required to discuss alternatives to each particular component of a project (see *California Oak Foundation v. Regents of University of California* [2010] 188 Cal.App.4th 227, 276–277). CEQA does not require an EIR to consider multiple variations on the alternatives analyzed. “What is required is the production of information sufficient to permit a reasonable choice of alternatives so far as environmental

aspects are concerned" (*Village Laguna of Laguna Beach, Inc. v. 21 Board of Supervisors of Orange County* [1982] 134 Cal.App.3d 1022).

This 2024 PEIR provides two "book-end" alternatives to capture the range of potential environmental impacts associated with the selected alternatives to the Plan and a framework for understanding the greatest potential impacts when compared to the Plan. The Plan and each alternative maintain a constant total for population, households, and jobs for the region in 2050. The year 2050 growth projections for each alternative differ only in the distribution of growth.

The comparative analysis of the expected future conditions with the Plan and if no Plan were adopted (the No Project Alternative) is discussed in Chapter 4, *Alternatives*, of this 2024 PEIR. Specifically, Chapter 4 describes and analyzes the following two selected alternatives:

- **No Project Alternative.** The No Project Alternative is required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(e)(2) and assumes that the Plan would not be approved. It assumes what would occur if the Plan were not approved. For purposes of this document, it is the continued implementation of goals and policies in the region of the adopted 2020 RTP/SCS. The No Project Alternative includes only those transportation projects that are in the first year of the previously conforming FTIP (i.e., the 2023 FTIP; FY2022/2023). The growth included in the No Project Alternative has the same regional and county totals for population, housing, and employment as those in the Plan developed as part of SCAG's county and regional growth forecast process in consultation with the Demographic Panel of Experts, and subsequently reviewed by local jurisdictions.
- **Intensified Land Use Alternative.** The Intensified Land Use Alternative is based on the Plan's transportation network and strategies. The land use pattern builds on the land use strategies as described in Connect SoCal 2024. Specifically, it increases densities and intensifies land use patterns of the Plan, especially around PDAs to maximize transit opportunities. The growth pattern associated with this alternative optimizes urban areas and suburban town centers, transit-oriented developments (TODs), HQTCS, livable corridors, and neighborhood mobility areas. It also includes a greater progressive job-housing distribution optimized for TODs and infill in PDAs. The growth included in the Intensified Land Use Alternative has the same regional and county totals for population, housing, and employment as those in the Plan developed as part of SCAG's county and regional growth forecast process in consultation with the Demographic Panel of Experts, and subsequently reviewed by local jurisdictions.

## 1.6 MITIGATION MEASURES

CEQA requires that SCAG identify all feasible mitigation measures in the 2024 PEIR that would avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of the project. CEQA, however, does not require a lead agency to undertake identified mitigation measures, even if those measures are necessary to address a project's significant environmental effects, if the agency finds that the measures "are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and have been, or can and should be, adopted by that other agency" *City of Marina v. Bd. of Trustees of the Calif. State Univ.* (2006) 39 Cal.App.4th 341, 366; see also *Smart Rail v. Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority* (2013) 57 Cal.App.4th 439. Under these circumstances, the lead agency may find that the measures "can and should" be implemented by the other agency or agencies said to have exclusive responsibility/jurisdiction over the measures (*City of Marina*, 39 Cal.App.4th at 366). As the CEQA Guidelines explain, the "finding in subsection (a)(2) shall not be made if the agency making the finding has concurrent jurisdiction with another agency to deal with identified feasible mitigation measures or alternatives."

Furthermore, SB 375 specifically provides that nothing in an SCS supersedes the land use authority of local jurisdictions, and that local jurisdictions are not required to change their land use policies and regulations, including their general plans, to be consistent with the SCS or an alternative planning strategy. Moreover, local jurisdictions have plenary authority to regulate land use through their police powers granted by California Constitution Article XI, Section 7, and under several statutes, including the local planning law, the zoning law, and the Subdivision Map Act. As such, SCAG has no concurrent land use authority or jurisdiction to implement mitigation related to land use plans and projects that implement the Plan. With respect to the transportation projects included in the Plan, these projects are to be implemented by Caltrans, county transportation commissions, local transit agencies, and local governments (i.e., cities and counties), and not SCAG. SCAG also has no authority or jurisdiction to require these agencies to implement project-specific mitigation measures.

CEQA case law also held that deferral of the specifics of mitigation is permissible where the lead agency commits itself to mitigation and, in the mitigation measure, either describes performance standards to be met in future mitigation or provides a menu of alternative mitigation measures to be selected from in the future (*California Native Plant Society v. City of Rancho Cordova* [2009] 172 Cal.App.4th 603 [the details of exactly how the required mitigation and its performance standards will be achieved can be deferred pending completion of a future study]; *Endangered Habitats League Inc. v. County of Orange* [2005] 131 Cal.App.4th 777, 793 [deferred mitigation acceptable when performance standards are included]; *Riverwatch v. County of San Diego* (1999) 76 Cal.App.4th 1428, 1448–1450 [a deferred approach may be appropriate where it is not reasonably practical or feasible to provide a more complete analysis before approval and the EIR otherwise provides adequate information of the project’s impacts]; *Sacramento Old City Assn. v. City Council of Sacramento*, supra, 229 Cal.App.3d at 1028–1029 [deferral of agency’s selection among several alternatives based on performance criteria was appropriate]).<sup>2</sup> CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.4(a)(1)(B) provides:

*“Formulation of mitigation should not be deferred until some future time. The specific details of a mitigation measure, however, may be developed after project approval when it is impractical or infeasible to include those details during the project’s environmental review provided that the agency (1) commits itself to the mitigation, (2) adopts specific performance standards the mitigation will achieve, and (3) identifies the type(s) of potential action(s) that can feasibly achieve that performance standard and that will be considered, analyzed, and potentially incorporated in the mitigation measure”*

Moreover, with respect to greenhouse gas emissions in the case of adoption of a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emission (i.e., the RTP/SCS):

*“mitigation may include the identification of specific measures that may be implemented on a project-by-project basis. Mitigation may also include the incorporation of specific measures or policies found in an adopted ordinance or regulation that reduces the cumulative effect of emissions.”*

Mitigation measures should reflect the level of detail appropriate to the EIR being prepared. (See, e.g., *Koster v. County of San Joaquin* (1996) 47 Cal.App.4th 29; provides that a first-tier EIR may contain generalized mitigation

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<sup>2</sup> Note that in litigation challenging SANDAG’s adoption of its 2050 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy, the California Court of Appeal found that “[a]n EIR may not defer the formulation of mitigation measures to a future time, but mitigation measures may specify performance standards which would mitigate the project’s significant effects and may be accomplished in more than one specified way.” *Cleveland National Forest Foundation v. San Diego Assn. of Governments* (2014) 231 Cal. App. 4th 1056, 1089 (partially reversed on other grounds by *Cleveland National Forest Foundation v. San Diego Assn. of Governments* (2017) 3 Cal.5th 497).

criteria). In this case, the 2024 PEIR addresses a large-scale region with a variety of projects spread over more than 20 years. As such, this 2024 PEIR identifies program-wide mitigation measures for implementation by SCAG.

In addition, the 2024 PEIR identifies project-level mitigation measures for lead agencies to consider which they “can and should” adopt, as applicable and feasible, in subsequent project-specific design, CEQA review, and decision-making processes. (See CEQA Guidelines Section 15091(a)(2)). Lead agencies may also identify other comparable measures capable of reducing impacts below the specified threshold. It is ultimately up to the lead agency to determine the appropriateness of the mitigation measure based on project-specific circumstances. As appropriate and authorized by the CEQA Guidelines and case law, the program-wide mitigation measures included in this 2024 PEIR are less detailed than those that would be part of a project EIR, and the selection of detailed mitigation measures is properly deferred to future project-specific CEQA reviews. For the purposes of this PEIR, it is assumed that each lead agency for specific projects would have the ability to impose and enforce these measures (i.e., that the measures will be implemented). However, given the size and diversity of conditions and projects in the region, it is reasonably foreseeable that for some projects’ impacts would remain significant and unavoidable even after implementation of all feasible mitigation measures.

For projects proposing to streamline environmental review under SB 375 or for projects otherwise tiering off this 2024 PEIR, the project-level mitigation measures described in this 2024 PEIR (or comparable measures) can and should be considered and implemented by lead agencies (and project sponsors) during the subsequent, project- or site-specific environmental reviews for transportation and development projects as applicable and feasible. However, SCAG cannot and does not require lead agencies to adopt mitigation, and it is ultimately the responsibility of the lead agency to determine and adopt project-specific mitigation as appropriate and feasible for each project.

The SCAG level and project-level mitigation measures referenced in this 2024 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.<sup>3</sup> See further discussion of Plan Features that May Reduce Impacts, Compliance with Laws and Regulations and Mitigation Measures in Section 3.0, *Introduction to the Analysis*.

## 1.7 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FOR THE PLAN

The Plan was developed with input from the public in accordance with the adopted 2022 Public Participation Plan. SCAG recognizes the need for early engagement during the development of Connect SoCal 2024. For members of the public, SCAG hosted 20 in-person and seven virtual workshops on the Plan in spring of 2023 (SCAG, 2022b). SCAG developed specific outreach goals this cycle to move the region toward equity and resilience, promote a planning vision that recognizes the region as a whole, and provides context to educate the public about the challenges SCAG faces and the strategies to overcome them. To help further inform local, state and federal

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<sup>3</sup> Note that compliance with existing regulations, such as the Uniform Building Code and California Building Code, is not considered mitigation because compliance is already required regardless of whether an impact is found to be significant or not by the CEQA analysis. However, such regulations do reduce environmental impacts and are identified in the Regulatory Framework and discussed in impact analyses where appropriate, to provide additional information on the how potential impacts are reduced. In some cases, regulatory compliance may be sufficient to reduce impacts to a level of less than significance, however, given the size and scale of the region and diversity of projects many impacts are conservatively identified as significant and mitigation measures are identified to provide options for lead agencies such that impacts may be reduced to a level of less than significant level where feasible or reduced to the maximum extent feasible where impacts have the potential to be significant.

agencies, and other interested parties about the elements of the Draft Plan, SCAG posted announcements and videos on its website, blog sites, and its social media platforms; prepared digital ads in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese; placed billboard and transit shelter ads; ran Radio ads; and placed ads in 10 print newspaper outlets for Black audiences and in-language preferred speakers of Spanish, Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese. In addition, the ongoing engagement with stakeholders through SCAG’s working group and technical advisory committees, were incorporated in the development of the Plan.

The Draft Plan was authorized for release by the Regional Council for a public comment and review period commencing November 2, 2023 and concluding January 12, 2024. SCAG engages in additional public participation activities during the public review and comment period on the Draft Plan. Public hearings on the Draft Connect SoCal 2024 are held during the public review and comment period. The hearings are held both in-person and virtually via Zoom and are noticed in numerous newspapers throughout the region. The notice are published in English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese languages. The Draft Connect SoCal 2024 are posted on the SCAG website and virtually distributed to libraries throughout the region, and physically distributed to libraries upon request.

During public review and comment period for the Draft Plan, SCAG holds public workshops related to the Plan. Although the informational workshops are tailored to public officials and agency representatives, they are open to the public, and time are allowed for public comment. SCAG conducts additional outreach activities, as appropriate, to the business community, ethnic groups, Native American tribes, and other stakeholders during the public review period, as needed.

With the release of the Draft Plan, SCAG makes available the interactive Plan website that provides for easy navigation through the various sections of the Plan and allows visitors to submit comments through the online form. In addition to the online forum, SCAG accepts public input through mailings and at public workshops.

Plan comments related to the PEIR received during the public review period of the Draft Plan are considered and addressed in SCAG’s response to comments and included in the Final PEIR document.

## 1.8 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION FOR THE 2024 PEIR

### 1.8.1 NOTICE OF PREPARATION AND DETERMINATION OF SCOPE OF 2024 PEIR

Pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080.4 and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15082 and 15375, the NOP for the Plan was released on October 17, 2022, and circulated for a 30-day comment period ending November 16, 2022. SCAG hosted two virtual scoping meetings on November 9, 2022, at 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., and on November 10, 2022, at 10:00 am to 12:00 pm.

The NOP was filed with the State Clearinghouse on October 17, 2022; posted with the County Clerks for the six counties in the SCAG region; and distributed to various federal, state, regional and local government agencies,

and other interested agencies, organizations, and individuals. The NOP was made available on SCAG’s website at <https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/nop-draft-peir-connect-social-2024.pdf?1666036242>.

A summary of the NOP was translated to English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese languages and published in twelve newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, and additional newspapers that address the large geographic reach and diverse population within the SCAG region:

- Desert Sun
- Imperial Valley Press
- La Opinion
- Los Angeles Sentinel
- Los Angeles Times
- Nguoi Viet
- The Press Enterprise
- San Bernardino County Sun
- The Korea Times
- The Orange County Register
- Ventura County Star
- World Journal (Chinese Daily News)

The NOP was circulated primarily using electronic mail to over 4,000 interested parties, including representatives of Native American tribes. The NOP was mailed directly to 137 interested parties, including federal, state, regional and local agencies, organizations and major libraries in the region using the U.S. Postal Service certified mail service. The NOP was also posted at the following locations:

**SCAG Main Office**

900 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1700  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

**SCAG San Bernardino County Regional Office**

1170 West 3rd Street, Suite 140  
San Bernardino, CA 92410

**SCAG Riverside County Regional Office**

3403 10th Street, Suite 805  
Riverside, CA 92501

**SCAG Orange County Regional Office**

600 South Main Street, Suite 741  
Orange, CA 92868

**SCAG Imperial County Regional Office**

1503 N. Imperial Avenue, Suite 104  
El Centro, CA 92243

**SCAG Ventura County Regional Office**

4001 Mission Oaks Boulevard, Suite L  
Camarillo, CA 93012

The NOP provided notification of the two public scoping meetings for interested parties to receive information on the Plan and the related CEQA process as well as providing an opportunity for providing comments both by mail and electronically and at the public scoping meetings.

SCAG received 16 comment letters (including two comment letters received after close of the public comment period) in response to the NOP and seven verbal comments at the public NOP scoping meetings. A breakdown of NOP commenters is listed in **Table 1-1, Summary of NOP Commenters**, below.

Both PEIR and Plan topics were raised by the commenters on the NOP. SCAG received 50 individual comments related to the PEIR and 30 individual comments on the Plan. A breakdown of the NOP comments by PEIR and Plan topic areas is presented below in **Table 1-2, Summary of NOP Comments by Topic Areas**. The NOP and comments received on the NOP are included in **Appendix A** to this 2024 PEIR.



TABLE 1-1 Summary of NOP Commenters

COMMENTERS	NUMBER
Sovereign Nation	1
State Agency	4
Regional Agency	2
Local Agency (SCAG Member Jurisdiction)	4
Other Interested Organization and Individuals	12

TABLE 1-2 Summary of NOP Comments by Topic Areas\*

	TOPIC AREAS	NUMBER
PEIR	Project Description	7
	Air Quality	2
	Biological Resources	1
	Cultural Resources	2
	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	4
	Hydrology and Water Quality	1
	Population and Housing	3
	Recreation	3
	Transportation	4
	Tribal Cultural Resources	2
	Utilities and Service Systems	2
	Wildfire	1
	Mitigation Measures	7
	Alternatives	5
	PEIR Development Process	4
	Findings of Fact/Statement of Overriding Considerations	1
	Plan (Connect SoCal 2024)	Plan Requirements
Plan Development Process		3
Plan Goals and Performance Measures		4
Transportation Planning		5
Transportation Conformity		2
Forecasted Regional Development Pattern		8
Climate and Resilience		4
Data	2	

Table Notes:

\* Table 1-2 does not include comments from the California Coastal Commission in the breakdown because their comments, which were submitted to SCAG on November 16, 2022, were dated February 21, 2019, in response to the NOP of Connect SoCal 2020 (2020 RTP/SCS) PEIR (State Clearinghouse No.: 2019011061).

The scope and content of the 2024 PEIR were developed with consideration of the comments received in response to the NOP. Appendix A of the 2024 PEIR includes a copy of the NOP and written comments received in responses to the NOP.

## 1.8.2 TRIBAL CONSULTATION

On October 13, 2022, PEIR staff requested a list from the California Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) of California Native American tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area of the Plan. SCAG staff initiated the tribal consultation process on October 27, 2022, by sending Tribal Consultation Initiation letters to all of SCAG’s tribal contacts within the 15 days of the release of the NOP, as required by Assembly Bill 52 (AB 52; Gatto). Additional letters were sent on December 14, 2022, and December 20, 2022, upon receipt of the tribal contacts list from the NAHC. In total, staff contacted 64 tribal contacts and 54 tribes in the SCAG region. The AB 52 tribal consultation concluded on January 20, 2023, with no requests for consultation. See Section 3.18, *Tribal Cultural Resources*, and Appendix G, of this PEIR for additional details.

## 1.8.3 ADDITIONAL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

To further advance outreach efforts for this 2024 PEIR, SCAG staff leverages its existing Technical Advisory Committees, Working Groups, and Policy Committees. These forums assist SCAG staff in facilitating stakeholder engagement in the development and implementation of plans and policies, including the 2024 PEIR. Members and attendees include elected officials and other representatives from the business/development sector; the environmental sector; local jurisdictions; resource agencies; and the public.

In addition, SCAG PEIR staff conducts targeted outreach to key stakeholders by topics specific to the PEIR. For example, PEIR staff reached out to representatives of all five air districts in the SCAG region to discuss the preliminary approach to 2024 PEIR’s air quality and GHG sections. Two one-and-one meetings were coordinated with CEQA staff from the South Coast Air Quality Management District and Ventura County Air Pollution Control District through this effort, as detailed in Table 1-3. When appropriate, staff has also coordinated meetings with public agencies and other interested stakeholders to hold specific PEIR related discussions, upon request. The content for targeted outreach was tailored to the specific interests of the stakeholders.

Public participation and stakeholder outreach efforts for the 2024 PEIR are presented in **Table 1-3, 2024 PEIR Public Participation and Stakeholder Outreach**, below.

TABLE 1-3 2024 PEIR Public Participation and Stakeholder Outreach<sup>a</sup>

DATE	FORUM	STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATIVES	TOPICS COVERED
March 3, 2022	Energy and Environment Committee	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR 101
September 1, 2022	Energy and Environment Committee	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	CEQA Initiation for the Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR
October 6, 2022	Energy and Environment Committee	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	Request to Release Connect SoCal 2024 PEIR Notice of Preparation
October 10, 2022	Global & Land Use Economic Counsel	Business; General Public	Release of the NOP

DATE	FORUM	STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATIVES	TOPICS COVERED
October 31, 2022	Aviation Technical Advisory Committee	Aviation and Airports	Status Update on the 2024 PEIR Aviation Technical Report
November 9, 2022	2024 Draft PEIR NOP Scoping Meeting #1	Business; Environmental; Public Agencies; General Public	Connect SoCal 2024 Project and 2024 PEIR Overview
November 10, 2022	2024 Draft PEIR NOP Scoping Meeting #2	Business; Environmental; Public Agencies; General Public	Connect SoCal 2024 Project and 2024 PEIR Overview
January 4, 2023	Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority / Riverside County Transportation Commission	Public Agencies	Conservation
February 2, 2023	Energy and Environment Committee	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	2024 PEIR Status Update on NOP Comments
February 16, 2023	Joint Sustainable and Resilient Communities/ Natural and Farm Lands Conservation	Environmental; General Public	2024 PEIR Overview & Status Update, Recap on NOP Comments, and Preliminary Approach to Biological Resources Impact Analysis
March 8, 2023	South Coast Air Quality Management District	Air Districts	2024 PEIR Overview, Preliminary Technical Methodology for Air Quality and GHG Impacts Analyses
March 13, 2023	City of Riverside	Public Agencies	Transportation Impacts Analysis
March 14, 2023	Ventura County Air Pollution Control District	Air Districts	2024 PEIR Overview, Preliminary Technical Methodology for Air Quality and GHG Impacts Analyses
March 16, 2023	Technical Working Group	Business; Environmental; Public Agencies; General Public	2024 PEIR Status Update and Major Components
April 3, 2023	Global & Land Use Economic Counsel	Business; General Public	2024 PEIR Status Update
April 6, 2023	Energy and Environment Committee	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	Status Update on Additional Stakeholder Outreach and Highlights of Preliminary Approaches to Major Components
April 27, 2023	Ventura County Air Pollution Control District	Air Districts	2024 PEIR Overview, Preliminary Technical Methodology for Air Quality and GHG Impacts Analyses
May 24, 2023	South Coast Air Quality Management District	Air Districts	2024 PEIR Overview and Equity
June 23, 2023	South Coast Air Quality Management District	Air Districts	2024 PEIR Overview and Equity
July 6, 2023	Energy and Environment Committee	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	Status Update on Additional Stakeholder Outreach and Preliminary Outline of Draft Contents

DATE	FORUM	STAKEHOLDER REPRESENTATIVES	TOPICS COVERED
July 18, 2023	Technical Working Group	Business; Environmental; Public Agencies; General Public	Preliminary Outline of Draft Contents
August 24, 2023	Joint Sustainable and Resilient Communities / Natural and Farm Lands Conservation Working Groups (Joint Meeting)	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	Status Update on Major Outreach, Approaches to Major Components and Outline of Draft Contents
September 7, 2023	Joint Regional Council and Policy Committee <sup>b</sup>	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	CEQA Requirements and 2024 PEIR Status Update
September 21, 2023	Technical Working Group	Business; Environmental; Public Agencies; General Public	Status Update on Development, Major Components and Outline of Contents of the 2024 Draft PEIR
November 2, 2023	Energy and Environment Committee	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	Recommendation that Regional Council Approve Release of Connect SoCal 2024 Draft PEIR for public review and comment
November 2, 2023	Regional Council	Elected Officials, Interested Stakeholders, General Public	Consideration to Approve Release of Connect SoCal 2024 Draft PEIR for public review and comment

Table notes:

- a. Updated in November 2023.
- b. The 2024 PEIR was highlighted and included in the staff report and presentation to the Joint Meeting of SCAG Regional Council and Policy Committees on September 7, 2023.

## 1.8.4 PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR THE 2024 DRAFT PEIR

Pursuant to SCAG Regional Council’s authorization, the 2024 Draft PEIR was released for a 65-day public comment and review period beginning November 9, 2023 and ending January 12, 2024. The 2024 Draft PEIR document was published on SCAG’s website at <https://scag.ca.gov/peir>.

The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the 2024 Draft PEIR, which includes a link to the 2024 Draft PEIR document, was filed with the State Clearinghouse on November 9, 2023; posted with the County Clerks for the six counties in the SCAG region; and distributed to various federal, state, regional and local government agencies, and other interested agencies, organizations, and individuals.

A summary of the NOA was translated to English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese languages and published in 13 newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times, and additional newspapers that address the large geographic reach and diverse population within the SCAG region:

- Antelope Valley Press
- Desert Sun
- Imperial Valley Press
- The Press Enterprise
- San Bernardino County Sun
- The Korea Times

- La Opinion
- Los Angeles Sentinel
- Los Angeles Times
- Nguoi Viet
- The Orange County Register
- Ventura County Star
- World Journal (Chinese Daily News)

The NOA and 2024 Draft PEIR were circulated primarily using electronic mail to over 4,000 interested parties, including representatives of Native American tribes. The NOA was mailed directly to over 200 interested parties, including federal, state, regional and local agencies, organizations, tribal contacts, and major libraries in the region using the U.S. Postal Service certified mail service. Major libraries also received translated copies of the NOA summary in four languages for posting.

Hard copies of the NOA and 2024 Draft PEIR are also available at the following locations:

**SCAG Main Office**

900 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1700  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

**SCAG San Bernardino County Regional Office**

1170 West 3rd Street, Suite 140  
San Bernardino, CA 92410

**SCAG Riverside County Regional Office**

3403 10th Street, Suite 805  
Riverside, CA 92501

**SCAG Orange County Regional Office**

600 South Main Street, Suite 741  
Orange, CA 92868

**SCAG Imperial County Regional Office**

1503 N. Imperial Avenue, Suite 104  
El Centro, CA 92243

**SCAG Ventura County Regional Office**

4001 Mission Oaks Boulevard, Suite L  
Camarillo, CA 93012

Written comments on this 2024 Draft PEIR will be accepted no later than 5:00 p.m. (Pacific Standard Time) on January 12, 2024. This is a separate but parallel public comment period from the one for the Draft Plan, which ends on the same date.

To submit comments on this 2024 Draft PEIR, please write your comments to Ms. Karen Calderon via email (preferred method) at [ConnectSoCalPEIR@scag.ca.gov](mailto:ConnectSoCalPEIR@scag.ca.gov) or by standard mail to the following address:

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

Written CEQA comments provided by interested parties on the 2024 Draft PEIR are evaluated, responded to, and incorporated into Chapter 9, *Response to Comments*, in the Final PEIR. The 2024 Final PEIR will be provided to the SCAG Regional Council for consideration for certification as part of the decision-making process prior to consideration and action undertaken by the Regional Council for Connect SoCal 2024.

## 1.9 STREAMLINING ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

CEQA has provisions and tools that streamline the environmental review process for qualifying projects. CEQA streamlining provisions are often narrow and may include exceptions. Although SCAG has no land use authority

and does not implement nor approve land use development, Connect SoCal 2024 (specifically the SCS portion) provides pathways to streamline CEQA review for land use development that qualify as Transit Priority Projects (TPPs) or Residential/Mixed-Use Projects (as defined in SB 375). Specifically, SB 375 allows for streamlined review and analysis through an expedited Sustainable Communities Environmental Assessment (SCEA) for TPPs that are consistent with the SCS; and a complete CEQA exemption for TPPs that are consistent with the SCS and meet a specific list of other requirements. Furthermore, SB 743 and SB 226 provide additional CEQA streamlining provisions for certain projects (e.g., projects in transit priority areas and infill development projects). Infill and transit-oriented development projects at the local levels, in particular, can proceed faster through the entitlement and environmental processes by relying on regional project CEQA approvals. Having a certified RTP/SCS PEIR allows for “tiering” for subsequent, individual projects.

SCAG has developed resources that provide background and a summary of the different types of streamlining available and how eligibility is determined for housing development that may be useful for other types of land use development. These resources may be used at their discretion by agencies and other entities serving as CEQA lead agencies for individual projects. These resources do not alter these agencies’ discretions in decision-making, independent judgment and analysis, and preparing environmental documents for their projects or governmental actions subject to CEQA requirements. These resources are for general information only and provided in the following:

- [What is CEQA Streamlining?](#)
- [Senate Bill 375: CEQA Streamlining](#)
- [CEQA Streamlining Options for Non-Exempt Housing Projects Covered by an Existing EIR: Project Eligibility Review Matrix](#)
- [CEQA Streamlining For Infill Projects and Projects Consistent With Community Plan and Zoning](#)
- [CEQA Categorical Exemptions](#)
- [CEQA Exemptions for Housing Projects: Project Eligibility Review Matrix](#)
- [Transit Priority Project and Transit-Oriented Project CEQA Exemptions](#)
- [CEQA Article 12.5 - Exemptions For Agricultural Affordable and Infill Housing](#)
- [Legislative Summary of AB 2345 - Density Bonus Law](#)
- [Density Bonus Law: What are Incentives, Concessions, and Waivers?](#)
- [Senate Bill 9: Ministerial Approval of Duplexes and Urban Lot Splits](#)
- [Senate Bill 10: Local Rezoning for “Missing Middle” Housing Production](#)
- [Senate Bill 35: Affordable Housing Streamlined Approval](#)
- [Senate Bill 330 and Senate Bill 8: Summary of Housing Crisis Act of 2019](#)

For additional details on development streamlining including information presented at the virtual workshops, please visit: <https://scag.ca.gov/streamlining>.

## 1.10 ORGANIZATION OF THE 2024 PEIR

This document is organized into seven chapters, plus an Executive Summary.

- **Executive Summary.** The Executive Summary contains an introduction, project summary, and a summary of the expected environmental impacts resulting from implementation of the Plan and the measures recommended to mitigate those impacts. The summary also includes a comparison of the expected environmental effects of each alternative to the Plan, as well as the areas of controversy, including issues raised by agencies and the public. Additionally, the Executive Summary includes issues to be resolved, including the choice among alternatives, and whether or how to mitigate the significant effects.
- **Chapter 1, Introduction.** This chapter provides an overall introduction to the 2024 PEIR, the CEQA process, and organization of the 2024 PEIR. It describes the SCAG region and authority, purpose and scope of the 2024 PEIR; the characterization of baseline conditions; a discussion of regional population growth and pattern of growth; a brief summary of the Plan, alternatives, and mitigation measures; summary of the environmental review and public outreach process for the Plan and 2024 PEIR; provisions for CEQA for streamlining opportunities; and an overview of the contents of the 2024 PEIR.
- **Chapter 2, Project Description.** Consistent with the provision of CEQA Guidelines Section 15124, this chapter provides relevant background information; summarizes changes that have occurred since adoption of Connect SoCal 2020; provides the location and boundaries of the Plan and general setting information; contains a general description of the technical, economic, and environmental characteristics of the Plan including identifying the Plan's goals and subgoals (project objectives); includes a statement briefly describing the intended uses of the 2024 PEIR; and provides lists of necessary permits and approvals and review and consultation requirements. Although federal environmental review is not required, a discussion of purpose and need for the Plan is also included along with the CEQA-required project objectives.
- **Chapter 3, Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation Measures.** This chapter identifies the environmental setting for the Plan and provides a programmatic analysis of a regional plan. The following resource categories are analyzed in this chapter: 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; and Wildfire. For each of these resource categories, the analysis addresses: Regulatory Framework (including recent case law), Existing Conditions, Methodology, Thresholds of Significance, Impact Analysis, Mitigation Measures, Level of Significance after Mitigation, and Cumulative Impacts. As allowed by CEQA, the determination of impacts is based on a comparison of the future Plan conditions to the existing conditions (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126(a)). This chapter includes maps that geographically depict spatial and quantitative data.
- **Chapter 4, Alternatives.** This chapter describes a reasonable range of alternatives to the 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. It includes a comparison of environmental impacts for the Plan to those for the No Project Alternative and the Intensified Land Use Alternative. The Alternatives are evaluated and compared to the Plan for the resource categories evaluated in Chapter 3.

- **Chapter 5, *Other CEQA Considerations*.** This chapter identifies the significant unavoidable environmental effects, significant irreversible environmental effects, growth inducing impacts, and irreversible damage from environmental accidents of the Plan.
- **Chapter 6, *List of Preparers*.** This chapter lists the contributors to the preparation of this 2024 PEIR.
- **Chapter 7, *Glossary*.** This chapter includes the acronyms used in the document.
- **Appendices.** The 2024 PEIR appendices include:
  - Appendix A, *Notice of Preparation, Public Scoping Materials, and Comments Received*
  - Appendix B, *Air Quality and Health Risk Assessment*
  - Appendix C, *Biological Resources*
  - Appendix D, *Cultural Resources*
  - Appendix E, *Hydrology and Water Quality*
  - Appendix F, *Aviation Noise Technical Report*
  - Appendix G, *Assembly Bill 52 Consultation Summary Report*



## 1.11 SOURCES

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