

1. The New General Plan for Riverside County

The new General Plan and anticipated future growth over the long term are the subjects of the General Plan Program EIR (County of Riverside Transportation and Land Management Agency, 2002). The General Plan is meant to express the community's goals with respect to the man-made and natural environments, and to set forth the policies and implementation measures needed to achieve those goals for the welfare of those who live, work, and do business in Riverside County.

2. Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan

A Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) is being created for the western portion of Riverside County. An ongoing Coachella Valley Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan effort is also under way as part of the comprehensive planning for Riverside County. The western Riverside County MSHCP will address the potential impacts of urban growth, natural habitat loss, and plant and animal species endangerment. It will provide habitat conservation, species protection and management, and program costs. It will provide certainty to the County, cities, landowners, and developers so that planned growth can proceed in an orderly manner while protecting listed and declining species and habitats. A separate EIR and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are being prepared by the County of Riverside Transportation and Land Management Agency and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the western Riverside County MSHCP.

3. Community Environmental and Transportation Acceptability Program

The Community Environmental and Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP) has identified two new intracounty transportation corridors (one north-south and one east-west) to meet the future transportation needs of western Riverside County. The CETAP transportation program contemplates a multimodal transportation facility within each corridor study area. The MSHCP is expected to address the cumulative and growth facilitating effects of the CETAP corridors on endangered species, and to facilitate requisite environmental clearances for such corridors.

The route location decisions for the CETAP corridors will both support and guide land use planning in western Riverside County. Due to the fast pace of development in Riverside County, opportunities are being lost to preserve land for regional transportation facilities. The timely preservation of right-of-way will help ensure that needed transportation infrastructure will be in place in the future to support the economy of Riverside County and provide access to jobs, schools, shopping, and other daily activities. The decision of where to locate the transportation corridors also informs government agencies, landowners, and residents so that timely land use policy decisions can be made and appropriate development standards can be implemented.

1.4 Growth Projections

The HCLE Corridor is located in an area with a population base of nearly 300,000 (source: Western Riverside Council of Governments and SCAG). Most of the corridor is located within unincorporated Riverside County. The remainder falls within the

incorporated areas of Corona, Lake Elsinore, Canyon Lake, Hemet, San Jacinto, Perris, Moreno Valley, and Riverside. Combined, the cities account for a population of over 300,000 and for over 170,000 jobs. Development also has been occurring rapidly within the unincorporated portions of the corridor.

Table 1.A shows the year 2000 and projected 2025 population and employment for cities within the study area and for the unincorporated areas of Riverside County, as provided by the cities to the Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG). The table shows the growth for cities as a whole, not just the portion of the cities located within the immediate study area. The growth projection shows increases in population in the range of eight percent to almost 400 percent, and increases associated with the HCLE Corridor in employment in the range of 32 percent to over 400 percent. The greatest percentage increase associated with the HCLE Corridor is in the cities of Lake Elsinore, Perris, and San Jacinto. The corridor also serves a substantial part of western Riverside County's unincorporated area, where population and employment are expected to nearly double between now and 2025.

1.5 Project Need

The rapid land use conversion from vacant and agricultural to developed subdivisions and commercial properties has outpaced improvements to the transportation infrastructure in western Riverside County. In western Riverside County overall, the population is expected to increase by over one million persons between 2000 and 2025, a more than 70 percent increase. Although currently funded transportation improvements will address some of the current and projected increased future demand, additional transportation improvements are needed to provide for the efficient mobility of goods and people over the long-term planning horizon to 2025 and beyond.

Without transportation improvements beyond those currently planned in western Riverside County, there will be inadequate access to the regional transportation system, increased local and regional traffic congestion, and inadequate mobility on existing facilities, including regional highways and local arterials within the study area in the future. There is a lack of an efficient east-west connection to address the projected movement of people and goods 25 years from now within the interior of western Riverside County.

1.5.1 Problem of Limitations in East-West Access to Current and Future Employment Locations

Transportation infrastructure improvements are necessary within the HCLE Corridor to address the projected job growth in western Riverside County, and to improve access to future employment centers. Traffic patterns on the major east-west transportation