

6.0 CEQA Considerations

CEQA requires consideration and discussion of environmental impacts of a proposed project based on changes to the existing physical conditions in the affected area as they exist at the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.2). Although the Tier 1 action is the adoption of a preferred route that will not result in any physical impacts to the environment, the CEQA analysis considers the potential physical impacts associated with future construction. This analysis will overstate the actual impacts likely to occur, because the actual right-of-way of the future transportation facility to be built within the WT Corridor will be smaller than the 150 to 300 m (500 to 1,000 ft) bandwidths of the alternatives. As such, the areas permanently impacted by the project will be one-third to one-half the size of the areas evaluated in this EIS/EIR. More detailed Tier 2 environmental studies will evaluate various alignment locations within the preferred route and identify potentially significant impacts with more certainty.

For each of the topics analyzed in Chapter 4.0, the following discussions evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the proposed CETAP alternatives addressing the questions in the Environmental Checklist contained in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. In addition, discussions are provided regarding the CEQA requirements for analysis of potential growth inducing effects of the proposed project, as well as the Environmentally Superior Alternative.

6.1 Land Use

Would the project:

6.1.1 Physically Divide an Established Community?

The No Build Alternative would not physically divide an established community.

The existing land uses in Alternatives 7a, 7b, 1 and 3 are largely characterized by rural and single family residential uses. While acquisition of entire parcels and portions of parcels will be required, implementation of these alternatives will not divide an established community. Alternative H is located along the I-215 and I-15 corridors. While existing land uses include greater areas of commercial and public facilities, Alternative H would result in the widening of already existing interstate highways and would not introduce new impacts to community disruption or division.

Alternatives 5 a and 5b are located in an area characterized by existing development on either side of Butterfield Stage Road. There are several neighborhoods and other land uses that could be affected by these alternatives. For example, there is a new “Butterfield” development near the Pourroy/Benton Road intersection that would be bisected by Alternatives 5a and 5b, although there are neighborhoods of sufficient size on either side of the road to continue to function independently of each other. There are new neighborhoods being developed along Butterfield Stage Road between Rancho California and SR-79/Constance Road. Individual neighborhoods are generally bound by major streets. Implementation of the 5a and 5b alternatives could intensify existing separations of land uses. The southern portion of Alternative 5a could isolate residents living in homes south of SR-79/Constance Road from commerce and civic services in

Temecula. Similarly, the southern loop of Alternative 5b could separate the Pechanga Entertainment Center south of SR-79/Constance Road from the remaining reservation south of Temecula.

In conclusion, Alternatives 5a and 5b would intensify existing separations of land uses in the study area, however, these alternatives would not divide an existing community and therefore these impacts are considered less than significant.

6.1.2 Conflict with Any Applicable Land Use Plan, Policy, or Regulation of an Agency with Jurisdiction over the Project (Including, but Not Limited to the General Plan, Specific Plan, Local Coastal Program or Zoning Ordinance) Adopted for the Purpose of Avoiding or Mitigating an Environmental Effect?

The WT Build Alternatives would not create a conflict with applicable land use plans because the CETAP corridors are acknowledged in the new Riverside County General Plan. The applicable Area Plan policies support accommodating the CETAP corridor improvements as described in Section 4.1. An amendment to the new Riverside County General Plan will be required to reflect the selected WT Corridor alternative.

The WT Build Alternatives are inconsistent with the General Plan Circulation Elements of the Cities of Temecula and Murrieta since these routes are not shown in the City plans. Following adoption of a preferred alternative, RCTC will request the cities to amend their General Plans to incorporate the adopted route if it traverses either City. This EIS/EIR is intended to provide the supporting CEQA documentation necessary for these General Plan amendments.

The No Build Alternatives are inconsistent with the new County General Plan that supports improved mobility in the study area.

6.1.3 Conflict with Any Applicable Habitat Conservation Plan or Natural Community Conservation Plan.

The Build Alternatives do not conflict with the Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan because the CETAP and MSHCP plans have been planned in conjunction with one another by RCTC and the County of Riverside, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game.

6.2 Farmland

Would the Project:

6.2.1 Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as Shown on the Maps Prepared Pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to Non-Agricultural Use?

As discussed in Section 4.2.2 of this EIS/EIR, the implementation and construction of alternatives within the WT Corridor study area will convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural uses. Every