

Section 7.1 in Chapter 7.0 of this EIS/EIR addresses the potential for the proposed project to affect growth in western Riverside County.

The analysis concluded that the WT Alternatives 1, 3, 7a and 7b traverse areas designated for low-density development and have planned community centers and/or commercial retail uses within relatively short distances that could be accessed by these potential routes. The corridor alternatives could facilitate access to these land uses and could potentially result in additional pressure to increase development intensity along these routes. However, the corridor alternatives would not, in and of themselves, directly or indirectly cause expansion of growth in the corridor study area beyond that planned in the County General Plan, because should the size and intensity of the planned development areas be incrementally increased, other planned development areas and activity centers could be reduced in intensity, due to the density limits in the Area Plans. The WT alternatives would facilitate or accommodate the growth planned for the study area, and may result in adjustments to the precise location, size, and intensity of the planned activity centers and developments but would not cause substantial new unplanned growth.

6.17 Environmentally Superior Alternative

6.17.1 No Build Alternative (General Plan Build Out)

The No Build Alternative (General Plan Build Out) is the environmentally superior alternative to the proposed project for the following environmental topics: hydrology, noise, biology, wetlands, socioeconomics, environmental justice, land use, cultural resources, visual, light and glare, and impacts to 4(f) resources. The No Build Alternative is environmentally superior in these areas because it would not involve the reservation of right-of-way for the ultimate construction of a major new transportation facility that would incur landform modification and associated environmental impacts.

However, the No Build Alternative would result in greater impacts than the Build Alternatives with regard to air quality, energy consumption, public services, and traffic and circulation. Without the CETAP Corridor, these areas would be impacted in the long term as a result of worsening levels of service on the existing circulation system and the need for improvement of arterial and freeways. As a result, residents, businesses, and emergency personnel would experience a reduction in accessibility and a worsening of the existing quality of life. In addition, the No Build Alternative is inconsistent with the proposed Riverside County General Plan and would not provide the necessary transportation infrastructure to accommodate future economic development in western Riverside County.

For those issues for which the No Build Alternative is the Environmentally Superior Alternative, the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15126.6(e)(2)) stipulate that the EIR shall identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives. Selection of the environmentally superior alternative for the entire length of the Corridor is difficult because of the variety of areas through which the alignments traverse. However, the following discussion summarizes the environmental superiority of the alternatives for those issues for which a difference in impact was discernable.

6.17.2 Build Alternatives

Determining an Environmentally Superior Alternative among the Build Alternatives requires consideration of the various environmental topics addressed in this EIS/EIR. When comparing the environmental effects among alternatives, the relative impact and context of the alternatives must be considered in addition to the absolute quantities of impacts (for example, an alternative that displaces 100 properties within a localized area may have a more severe impact than an alternative that displaces 300 properties spread throughout a 20 mi corridor). This consideration is important given the variable lengths and locations of the WT Corridor alternatives.

Of the Build Alternatives, Alternative 7A is considered the Environmentally Superior Alternative, since it has the least amount of impacts with respect to aquatic and biological resources and is one of the lesser impacting alternatives with respect to cultural resources, socioeconomics (displacements), land use, and Section 4(f) resources.