

SECTION 6: OTHER CEQA CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 - Growth Inducing Impacts

Section 15126.2(d) of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR evaluate the growth inducing impacts of a proposed action:

Discuss the way in which a proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Included in this are projects that would remove obstacles to population growth (a major expansion of a wastewater treatment plant might, for example, allow for more construction in service areas). Increases in the population may tax existing community service facilities, requiring construction of new facilities that could cause significant environmental effects. Also, discuss the characteristic of some projects, which may encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment, either individually or cumulatively. It must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.

There are two types of growth inducing impacts, direct and indirect. To assess the potential for growth inducing impacts, the project characteristics that may encourage and facilitate activities that may individually or cumulatively affect the environment must be evaluated.

Growth-inducing impacts can occur when the development of a project imposes new burdens on a community by directly inducing population growth, or by leading to the construction of additional developments in the same area of the proposed project. Also included in this category are projects that would remove physical obstacles to population growth (such as a new road into an undeveloped area or a wastewater treatment plant with excess capacity that could allow additional new development in the service area). Construction of these types of infrastructure projects cannot be considered isolated from the development they facilitate and serve. Projects that physically remove obstacles to growth or projects that indirectly induce growth are those that may provide a catalyst for future unrelated development in the area (such as a new residential community that requires additional commercial uses to support residents).

Based on the information provided in CEQA Section 15126.2(d) quoted above, two specific issues must be addressed when determining the growth-inducing impacts of a project:

Elimination of Obstacles to Population Growth: The extent to which additional infrastructure capacity (such as extension of roads, sewer, water infrastructure etc.) or change in regulatory structure (such as a change in policies) will allow additional development; and

Economic Growth: The extent to which a proposed project could result in increased activity in the local economy or the regional economy.

Each of the growth-inducing impacts above are discussed in more detail below.

6.1.1 - Elimination of Obstacles to Population Growth

Eliminating physical or regulatory obstacles to growth can result in a growth-inducing impact because those obstacles are removed. An example of a physical obstacle to growth is the need for public service infrastructure (such as roadways, water mains, sewer lines etc.). Extending public service infrastructure into an area that lacks infrastructure would induce population growth because the infrastructure needed to serve the area would be available, and therefore, the area would then have the capacity to allow population growth. Also, the addition, deletion or alteration of a regulatory obstacle (such as a growth or development policy) could result in new growth because the regulatory obstacle would be altered such that new growth would subsequently not be hindered.

The Fresno General Plan Update policies provide for the expansion of transportation and utility infrastructure to accommodate new growth within the Planning Area in accordance with the General Plan Update. This new growth would accommodate approximately 970,000 people at buildout that is projected to be in the year 2056. The General Plan Update includes Policy LU-1-f, which states that the City's current Sphere of Influence boundary shall be maintained without expansion, except for uses associated with the future High Speed Rail (HSR) maintenance yard. This policy is intended to direct growth primarily to locations within the Planning Area. The HSR maintenance yard is not part of the General Plan Update, and at this time, the specific location of the maintenance yard has not been determined by the HSR Authority. Various alternative locations extend from Merced to Bakersfield. If the area directly south of the Planning Area is selected for the future HSR maintenance yard, the City of Fresno would be required to approve a General Plan amendment and a zone change as well as obtain an approval of an annexation by the Fresno Local Area Formation Commission.

In addition to population growth, the City would experience an increase in employment. As discussed in Section 5.12 of this Master EIR, there are approximately 9,993 employees who resided in the Planning Area in 2010 who left the Planning Area for employment. In 2010, the resident employees to jobs ratio was 0.95. In the buildout year of 2056, approximately 7,363 employees are projected to reside in the Planning Area and leave the Planning Area for employment. In 2056, the resident employees to jobs ratio would be 0.98, which is closer to a balanced ratio of 1.0 employee who resides in the Planning Area to a job within the Planning Area. Therefore, growth in accordance with the General Plan and Development Code Update would provide a beneficial effect on the resident employees to jobs ratio compared to the 2010 ratio. A greater balanced resident employee to jobs ratio would support the conclusion that the proposed General Plan land uses would not induce growth outside of the Planning Area to accommodate residents or employment within the Planning Area.

6.1.2 - Promotion of Economic Growth

The promotion of economic growth is the extent to which a proposed project could cause increased activity in the local or regional economy. A “multiplier effect” is an economic phrase, which pertains to the interrelationships between various sectors of the economy. The multiplier effect is a quantitative description and can be described as how an increase in some economic activity starts a chain reaction that generates more activity than the original increase. During the development of the proposed General Plan Update, the City planned for residential development to accommodate the Fresno Council of Government’s population projections and extend the projections to accommodate future residential development planned within the Planning Area. To account for the planned residential growth within the Planning Area, the City identified a variety of non-residential designated areas to support the future residents. The non-residential areas are designated for commercial, employment uses such as office and industrial, mixed use, public facilities, and open space. These non-residential uses are intended to accommodate the economic growth anticipated to occur through buildout of the General Plan Update in 2056. Therefore, the implementation of the project would not result in further economic development beyond the development anticipated from buildout of the General Plan.

6.2 - Significant Irreversible Changes

As mandated by the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must address any significant irreversible environmental change that would result from project implementation. According to Section 15126.2(c) of the CEQA Guidelines, such a change would occur if one of the following scenarios is involved:

- The project would involve a large commitment of nonrenewable resources;
- Irreversible damage can result from environmental accidents associated with the project; and
- The proposed consumption of resources is not justified (e.g., the project would result in the wasteful use of energy).

The environmental effects of the proposed project are thoroughly discussed in Section 5, Environmental Impact Analysis, of this Master EIR and summarized in the Executive Summary. Implementation of the project would require the long-term commitment of natural resources and land, as discussed below.

Approval and implementation of actions related to future development in accordance with the General Plan and Development Code Update would result in an irretrievable commitment of nonrenewable resources such as energy and construction materials. As discussed in Section 5.16, Energy, of this Master EIR, the General Plan Update includes an objective and policies to reduce the consumption of non-renewable energy resources by adhering to the California Energy Code, establishing standards and regulations to achieve energy conservation targets, and providing incentives and financing programs to reduce energy use.

The consumption of nonrenewable or slowly renewable resources would result from the implementation of future projects developed in accordance with the General Plan and Development

Code Update. These resources include, but are not limited to, lumber and other forest products, sand and gravel, asphalt and concrete, steel, copper, lead, water, electricity, natural gas, and oil.

6.3 - Significant and Unavoidable Impacts

The environmental effects of the proposed project, along with recommended mitigation measures, are discussed in detail in Section 5, Environmental Impact Analysis, of this Master EIR and summarized in the Executive Summary. The following environmental issues were determined to be less than significant, or can be reduced to less than significant with the incorporation of mitigation measures:

- Biological Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Energy

Section 15126.2(b) of the CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR describe any significant impacts, including those that can be mitigated but not reduced to less than significant levels, as a result of implementation of the project. The following environmental issues were determined to result in potential significant and unavoidable impacts.

- Aesthetics – visual character and illumination of the dark sky.
- Agricultural Resources – loss of farmland and removal of Williamson Act Contract land.
- Air Quality – criteria pollutant emissions and toxic air contaminants pollutant concentrations.
- Cultural Resources – potential removal of historic resources.
- Greenhouse Gases – increase in greenhouse gas emissions beyond the year 2020.
- Noise – exceed noise standards and substantial permanent increases in noise levels.
- Transportation and Traffic – potentially exceed thresholds of levels of service on roadways under the jurisdictions of the County of Fresno, City of Clovis, and Caltrans.
- Utility and Service Systems – construction of water, wastewater, and drainage facilities that could cause substantial impacts associated with loss of agriculture and increases in air emissions.