



**METROPOLITAN  
TRANSPORTATION  
COMMISSION**

Joseph P. Bort MetroCenter  
101 Eighth Street  
Oakland, CA 94607-4700  
TEL 510.817.5700  
TDD/TTY 510.817.5769  
FAX 510.817.5848  
E-MAIL [info@mtc.ca.gov](mailto:info@mtc.ca.gov)  
WEB [www.mtc.ca.gov](http://www.mtc.ca.gov)

## *Memorandum*

TO: Planning Committee

DATE: July 3, 2008

FR: Deputy Executive Director, Policy

W. I.

RE: Transportation 2035: Project and Alternatives To Be Evaluated in EIR

### **Background**

MTC is the lead agency for the preparation of a program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Transportation 2035 Plan. This environmental assessment of the proposed Transportation 2035 Plan fulfills the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and is designed to inform decision-makers, responsible and trustee agencies, and the general public of a proposed action and the range of potential environmental impacts of that action.

The EIR recommends a set of measures to mitigate any significant adverse regional impacts identified in the analysis of the proposed Transportation 2035 Plan. Furthermore, CEQA requires EIRs to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed Project (i.e., Transportation 2035 Plan) that could feasibly attain most of the basic project objectives and would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant environmental impacts. This EIR will also evaluate four alternatives to the Project: the No Project alternative as required by CEQA plus three other alternatives.

Public comments on the scope of the environmental analysis and EIR alternatives were solicited through the Notice of Preparation (NOP) issued on February 19, 2008 for a 30-day review period and at public scoping meetings held on March 10 and March 13, 2008. In addition, a government-to-government consultation meeting between the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, MTC and Caltrans was held on March 21, 2008.

### **Project and Alternatives To Be Evaluated in Transportation 2035 EIR**

This memo presents the definitions of the proposed Project and alternatives that would be evaluated in the Transportation 2035 EIR. These alternatives need to be considered in the following context:

- Transportation 2035 is a financially constrained plan as required by state and federal planning regulations. It includes transportation projects and programs that would be funded through existing and future revenues that are projected to be reasonably available to the region over the 25-year horizon of the plan. A total of \$223 billion in revenues is available for the financially constrained Transportation 2035 Plan. This financially constrained plan will be evaluated for transportation-air quality conformity pursuant to the Federal Clean Air Act requirements. Moreover, the Transportation 2035 Plan includes an unconstrained financial element that identifies a set of illustrative transportation projects and programs that would be moved into the financially constrained element if additional resources beyond those identified in the financial plan were to become available.
- Napa and Santa Clara counties are considering placing transportation sales tax measures on the November 2008 ballot for voter approval, and SMART is expected to place a district tax measure to fund the proposed 70-mile passenger railroad/bicycle-pedestrian path project also for the November 2008 ballot. For the EIR analysis, projects funded by these measures will be included in the Project definition.

- In response to the NOP, MTC received a few comment letters addressing alternatives definitions, as follows:
  - *TRANSDEF* (3/20/08): Recommends that alternatives be defined solely as different lists of investments. Suggests that pricing alternatives and “other” alternatives be run as sub-alternatives on each of the alternatives. Recommends evaluating an emissions-reduction alternative comprised of transportation network designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; the TRANSDEF Smart Growth Alternative from the Transportation 2030 EIR would be revised to serve this purpose.
  - *Greenbelt Alliance* (3/20/08): Suggests studying an alternative that includes significantly more focused growth.
  - *TALC* (3/20/08): Suggests applying pricing as a sub-alternative to the other alternatives.
- MTC has previously examined the TRANSDEF Smart Growth Alternative as part of the Transportation 2030 EIR, and more recently, MTC tested the impacts of aggressive pricing and land use strategies as part of the vision scenario analysis for Transportation 2035. Re-evaluating the proposed TRANSDEF alternative will not produce markedly different results compared to the prior T2030 analyses, and therefore will not provide the Commission with new or meaningful information for use in its decision-making. Also, more importantly, the Transportation 2030 EIR raised concerns about the feasibility of the underlying assumptions for the TRANSDEF Smart Growth Alternative, including the deletion of over 200 committed, fully funded projects from the network definition and the addition of new transit services without operating funds. Staff is, however, recommending the inclusion of separate aggressive land use and pricing scenarios in the alternative analysis as described below.

Staff recommends the following project and alternatives to be evaluated in the Transportation 2035 EIR (see **Attachment A** to Resolution 3869 for more details):

- **Project:** Transportation 2035 Financially Constrained element, including all Resolution 3434 projects, and projects contemplated in revenue measures considered for the November 2008 ballot.
- **Alternative 1: No Project:** The No Project is limited to a set of transportation projects and programs that are in advanced planning stages and slated to go forward since they have full funding commitments.
- **Alternative 2: Financially Constrained Plan with Heavy Maintenance Emphasis:** The set of transportation projects and programs included would be funded through revenues projected to be reasonably available over the next 25-year horizon of Transportation 2035. Unlike the proposed Project, this alternative places its investment emphasis almost entirely to system maintenance.
- **Alternative 3: Financially Constrained Plan with Heavy Maintenance Emphasis + Pricing Strategies:** This alternative reflects the same project definition as Alternative 2 plus examines the level of impact that additional user-based pricing strategies beyond the Regional HOT Network could have on the performance of the infrastructure investments.
- **Alternative 4: Financially Constrained Plan with Heavy Maintenance Emphasis + Land Use Strategies:** This alternative reflects the same project definition as Alternative 2 plus evaluates the level of impact that an alternative land use forecast that goes beyond Projections 2007 could have on the performance of the infrastructure investment.

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends that this Committee approve and refer MTC Resolution 3869 to Commission for final approval. MTC Resolution 3869 approves the definitions of the proposed Project and alternatives to be evaluated in the Transportation 2035 EIR.

TM: AN

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## **Attachment A**

### **Project and Alternatives in Transportation 2035 EIR**

As required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Guidelines §15126.6), an environmental impact report (EIR) shall describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project. The alternatives would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives. While the EIR does not need to consider every conceivable alternative to the project, it must consider a range of feasible alternatives that will foster informed decision-making and public participation. The EIR does not need to consider alternatives that are infeasible.

#### **Project and Alternatives**

Below is a description of the proposed Project and Alternatives to be evaluated in the Transportation 2035 EIR:

#### **Project: Transportation 2035**

The Transportation 2035 Plan represents a strategic investment plan to improve system performance, accessibility and mobility for Bay Area travelers over the next 25 years. As required by state and federal planning regulations, the Transportation 2035 Plan is financially constrained in that it includes a set of transportation projects and programs that would be funded through existing and future revenues projected to be reasonably available to the region over the 25-year horizon of the plan. A total of \$223 billion in revenues, including net High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) Network revenues (\$6.1 billion) and Anticipated/Unspecified revenues (\$12.9 billion), is available for the financially constrained Transportation 2035 Plan. Moreover, the Transportation 2035 Plan also includes an unconstrained financial element that identifies a set of illustrative transportation projects and programs that would be shifted into the financially constrained element if additional resources beyond those identified in the financial plan were to become available. Both elements combined, along with supporting goals, performance objectives and policy strategies, constitute the strategic Transportation 2035 vision. The latest socio-economic forecasts adopted by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) – *Projections 2007* – serve as the underlying demographic and land use assumptions for the EIR analysis.

#### **Alternative 1: No Project**

The No Project Alternative, required by CEQA, addresses the effect of not implementing the Transportation 2035 Plan. This includes a set of transportation projects and programs that are in advanced planning stages and slated to go forward since they have full funding commitments. These projects are: (1) identified in the federally required Fiscal Year 2009 Transportation Improvement Program, a four-year funding program of Bay Area projects and programs, (2) not yet in the TIP but are fully funded sales tax projects authorized by voters in seven Bay Area counties, including San Francisco, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Alameda, Contra Costa, Sonoma and Marin counties, and (3) not yet in the TIP but fully funded through other committed funds as defined by statute or MTC policy. ABAG's *Projections 2007* serves as the underlying demographic and land use assumptions for the EIR analysis.

#### **Alternative 2: Financially Constrained Plan with Heavy Maintenance Emphasis**

This alternative represents only the set of transportation projects and programs that would be funded through revenues projected to be reasonably available over the next 25-year horizon of Transportation 2035. Unlike the proposed Project, this alternative places its investment emphasis almost entirely to system maintenance. That is, most of the \$32 billion in uncommitted discretionary revenues available is shifted toward maintenance of the existing system, thereby limiting the amount of discretionary revenues available for system efficiency and expansion. As such, some system efficiency and expansion projects identified in the proposed Project would drop out of this alternative. This alternative assumes no pricing

strategy beyond the Regional HOT Network that is included in the financially constrained plan, and uses ABAG's Projections 2007 as the underlying demographic and land use assumptions for the EIR analysis.

**Alternative 3: Financially Constrained Plan with Heavy Maintenance Emphasis + Pricing Strategies**

This alternative reflects the same project definition as Alternative 2 **plus** examines the level of impact that additional user-based pricing strategies beyond the Regional HOT Network could have on the performance of the infrastructure investments. The pricing strategies are intended to induce changes in travel behavior by increasing the cost of driving. They include: (a) carbon tax or tax on vehicle miles driven that would essential double auto operating costs, (b) congestion fee for using congested freeways during peak periods, and (c) increased parking charges for all trips. The cumulative effect of these pricing strategies is a substantial increase in transportation cost. This alternative uses ABAG's Projections 2007 as the underlying demographic and land use assumptions for the EIR analysis.

**Alternative 4: Financially Constrained Plan with Heavy Maintenance Emphasis + Land Use Strategies**

This alternative reflects the same project definition as Alternative 2 **plus** evaluates the level of impact that an alternative land use forecast that goes beyond the Projections 2007 could have on the performance of the infrastructure investment. ABAG staff produced this alternative land use forecast with the objective of balancing jobs and housing and targeting growth in existing communities and near transit. This alternative land use forecast is a policy forecast, as opposed to a purely market-driven outcome. Compared to Projections 2007, this forecast reflects considerable shifts in regional growth to existing employment and housing centers, areas projected to have either household or employment growth, and areas with existing and/or planned transit. It also assumes fewer in-commuters from neighboring regions by accommodating 37,000 more households within the Bay Area. This alternative assumes no pricing strategy beyond the Regional HOT Network that is included in the financially constrained plan.