

1.1 Project Background and Overview

In December 2006, the Cities of Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, and Folsom, and Sacramento and El Dorado Counties (member agencies), collaborated to form the Capital SouthEast Connector Joint Powers Authority (JPA) to facilitate the planning, environmental review, engineering design, and development, and construction of the Capital SouthEast Connector Project (Connector/proposed project). The proposed project is a 35-mile multi-modal transportation facility that will link communities in Sacramento and El Dorado Counties, including Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, Folsom, and El Dorado Hills. The project limits extend from the Interstate 5 (I-5)/Hood Franklin Road interchange in southwest Sacramento County to approximately 35 miles northeastward, terminating at U.S. Highway 50 (US 50) in the community of El Dorado Hills, near Silva Valley Parkway approximately 3 miles east of the Sacramento County/El Dorado County line.

The Connector is envisioned to link residential areas and employment centers in the project corridor, serving both local and regional travel needs and substantially reducing the excessive traffic volumes that currently overburden existing two-lane roadways, which were never intended to serve as major commuter routes.

When completed, the proposed project would be a road of four to six traffic lanes with limited access points that would accommodate a variety of regional transportation needs. The Connector will provide options for a variety of travel modes throughout the project corridor, supporting several of the seven principles of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments' (SACOG's) Blueprint, which is an in-depth analysis of land use and transportation development patterns that addresses vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and air quality emissions in SACOG's six-county, 22-city region (Sacramento Area Council of Governments 2004).

1.2 Project History

Planning for a regional transportation facility, such as the Connector, to serve the project corridor has proceeded for more than two decades. Sacramento County conducted the East Area Transportation Study in 1984, which identified a need for a circumferential "beltway" to accommodate increasing development, population, and transportation demands (Sacramento County 1984). This became the focus of a feasibility study conducted by SACOG in 1985. In 1986, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) prepared a route concept report for two proposed highways in southern Placer County and eastern Sacramento County: State Route (SR) 65 and SR 148. The beltway and the proposed alignments of the highways were located within the corridor between Elk Grove in the south and southern Placer County in the north (Caltrans 1986).

During the late 1980s, SACOG conducted the Metro Study, a study of transportation system improvements for 2010 (Sacramento Area Council of Governments 1989). The study identified the need for a multi-modal corridor starting at I-80 near Roseville in Placer County and connecting to US 50 in eastern Sacramento County and SR 99 and I-5 near Elk Grove in southern Sacramento County.

This study specifically analyzed an SR 65/SR 148 freeway. The recommended alternative included this new roadway, along with other transit and bicycle improvements in the corridor.

In 1988, the voters of Sacramento County passed Measure A, a countywide 0.5% sales tax to be levied over a 20-year period (1989–2009). The proceeds of the tax were specified to be used to fund a comprehensive program of roadway and transit improvements. In 2004, the voters extended the tax an additional 30 years. The ballot text of the Measure A extension, as approved by the voters, identifies the proposed project as the “I-5/SR99/US50 Connector” and specifies that receipt of funding for construction is contingent on the establishment, approval, and adoption of a habitat conservation approach by the local recipient of funds.

In the early 1990s, Caltrans undertook the SouthEast Area Transportation Study (SATS) to identify transportation alternatives for meeting future travel demand in the same general corridor that had been identified in SACOG’s Metro Study. The SATS was intended to be a feasibility study for a broader area that included the corridor, but with a greater emphasis on multi-modal transportation options (Caltrans 1993).

During preparation of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2025 by SACOG in 2002, a project in the corridor area was designated as the “Elk Grove–Rancho Cordova–El Dorado Connector” (Sacramento Area Council of Governments 2002). Immediately following adoption of MTP 2025, SACOG undertook a project planning process—the Elk Grove–Rancho Cordova–El Dorado Connector Study—to generate input from a wide range of stakeholders on project purpose and need for the Connector corridor, and to define a set of conceptually defined project alternatives to be considered in a future environmental review process. As a result of this process, four conceptual alternatives along with a no-project alternative were developed, which generally follow Hood Franklin, Kammerer, Grant Line, and White Rock Roads, and include segments using either Bradshaw Road or Sunrise Boulevard.

As part of the project planning process, SACOG facilitated extensive participation by local government agencies, community residents, and other stakeholders affected by the project. A stakeholder advisory committee and a technical advisory committee met regularly to develop the elements of the project’s objectives and purpose and need, which were presented to a policy advisory committee that included representatives from each of the five member agencies. During this pre–environmental studies phase, these committees continued to meet regularly. Community residents and other members of the public attended these meetings and the six public information sessions. Oral and written comments were received from committee members, local residents, community representatives, and other interested parties. In May 2005, the SACOG Board of Directors approved a final concept plan report (Sacramento Area Council of Governments 2005). Detailed descriptions of the conceptual alternatives developed during the Connector study were outlined in the report, along with initial elements of purpose and need. The project was also included in MTP 2035 (Sacramento Area Council of Governments 2008), and is part of the current planning efforts to update MTP 2035 to include sustainable communities requirements and be in compliance with Senate Bill (SB) 375.

1.3 Purpose of EIR

This environmental impact report (EIR) has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] 15000 et seq.). CEQA requires that state and local government agencies consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have discretionary authority before taking action on those projects (California Public Resources Code [PRC] 21000 et seq.).

The purpose of this EIR is to analyze the environmental impacts of the proposed project, to indicate ways to reduce or avoid potential environmental damage of the proposed project, and to identify alternatives to the proposed project. CEQA requires that each public agency mitigate or avoid the significant environmental effects of projects it approves or implements, whenever feasible.

An EIR is an informational document used in state, regional, and local planning and decision-making processes to meet the requirements of CEQA. It is not the purpose of the EIR to recommend either approval or denial of a project. The draft EIR must disclose environmental effects, including those that cannot be avoided; growth-inducing effects; effects found not to be significant; and significant cumulative impacts of all past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects.

1.3.1 Program EIR

This EIR will serve as a program EIR for the proposed project (i.e., the Capital SouthEast Connector project). Section 15168 of the State CEQA Guidelines defines a “program EIR” as an EIR that may be prepared on “a series of related actions which can be characterized as one large project,” such as phased projects. Use of a program EIR allows a CEQA lead agency (in this case, the JPA) to characterize the overall program of actions as the “project” being approved at the time (in this case, the selection of a maximum 1,000-foot-wide corridor connecting communities between I-5 in Elk Grove and US 50 in El Dorado County). When subsequent activities are proposed, a determination will be made at that time whether additional CEQA documents are necessary if significant impacts occur that were not examined in the program EIR. This concept, referred to as “tiering,” addresses the coverage of general matters in broader EIRs with subsequent negative declarations or site-specific EIRs. These subsequent, project-specific environmental documents will incorporate by reference the general discussions in the previously prepared program EIR, and concentrate solely on the issues specific to the environmental analysis prepared for a project segment. A program EIR can act as the first-tier analysis for subsequent, more detailed project-specific environmental review.

In the case of the proposed project, multiple project-specific sections of the overall Connector corridor will be designed and implemented over time. This program EIR will provide the CEQA lead and responsible agencies with a base reference of facts and analyses that will avoid unnecessary repetition for future project-specific assessments by member agencies on individual project segments, and will allow for a comprehensive approach to the consideration of regional and cumulative impacts.

1.4 Scoping and Public Involvement Plan for Program EIR

1.4.1 Purpose of Scoping

CEQA outlines a scoping process as part of the environmental review of a proposed project. Section 15083 of the State CEQA Guidelines defines early consultation, also called *scoping*, as the opportunity for reviewing agencies and the public to identify the range of actions, alternatives, mitigation measures, and significant impacts to be analyzed in depth in an EIR. The opportunity to provide input on the issues and alternatives to be evaluated during the environmental process is provided to potentially affected federal, state, and local agencies; Indian tribes; and other interested persons or organizations that may be concerned with the environmental effects of the project.

As described below, the scoping process for this EIR involved the distribution of a notice of preparation (NOP) of a draft EIR, holding scoping meetings (for projects of state- or region-wide significance), and requesting comments and input from agencies and individuals on the NOP. As described in Section 1.2, the planning process included participation by a range of stakeholders, including local agencies and the public. In preparation for beginning the environmental phase, the JPA also held additional public workshops in communities in the project area to solicit comments.

1.4.1.1 Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting Announcements

The JPA circulated an NOP for the program EIR to agencies for a 45-day period between February 1, 2010, and March 17, 2010 (Capital SouthEast Connector Joint Powers Authority 2010a). The notice was posted on the project website (<http://connectorjpa.net>) and was made available at the following locations in the project area:

- JPA office, located at 10640 Mather Blvd, Suite 120, Mather, CA95655
- Elk Grove Planning Counter, located at City Hall, 8401 Laguna Palms Way, Elk Grove, CA 95758
- Rancho Cordova Planning Department, located at City Hall, 2729 Prospect Park Drive, Rancho Cordova, CA 95670
- Folsom Planning Counter, located at City Hall, 50 Natoma Street, 2nd Floor, Folsom, CA 95630
- Sacramento County Public Information Counter, located at 827 7th Street, Room 101, Sacramento, CA 95814
- El Dorado County Planning Department, located at 2850 Fairlane Court, Building "C", Placerville, CA 95667

The JPA developed a mailing list to distribute the scoping meeting announcements and the NOP. Interested agencies, individuals, and organizations were included in the list. A copy of the NOP is provided in Appendix A.

1.4.1.2 NOP Scoping Meetings

Combined public information and agency scoping meetings were held during this period to solicit comments and identify issues of concern:

- Tuesday, February 23, 2010, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the El Dorado Hills Library, 7455 Silva Valley Parkway, El Dorado Hills
- Wednesday, February 24, 2010, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at Rancho Cordova City Hall, American River Room, 2729 Prospect Park Drive, Rancho Cordova
- Monday, March 1, 2010, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the Sacramento County Agricultural Extension Auditorium, 4145 Branch Center Road, Sacramento
- Wednesday, March 3, 2010, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at Elk Grove City Hall, Council Chambers, 8400 Laguna Palms Way, Elk Grove
- Monday, March 8, 2010, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the Folsom Community Center, 52 Natoma Street, Folsom

The scoping meetings were held to solicit input from agencies and interested parties on critical issues to be addressed in the program EIR. Announcements of the scoping meetings were distributed with the NOP on February 1, 2010, and published in local newspapers. Additionally, the JPA mailed postcards to more than 2,000 area residents, inviting them to attend the scoping meetings and learn more about the Connector.

The meeting formats were identical at each meeting and included exhibits focused on:

- travel demand and transportation,
- environmental issues and review process,
- public outreach, and
- engineering/design.

At each scoping meeting, the JPA and member agencies staffed each exhibit area to provide overviews and answer questions on various topic areas covered. A separate station was set up for public comments. Comment cards were available for meeting attendees to fill out at the meeting or take home and send by mail, email, or fax to the JPA office by the end of the NOP comment period (March 17, 2010).

1.4.1.3 Scoping Comments and Scoping Report

The NOP included a request that recipients send a written list of issues to the JPA to help further identify environmental issues for the EIR. A copy of the written correspondence received (letters, emails, comment cards) is available at the JPA office in Mather, California. The JPA also prepared a scoping report that summarized the proposed project, scoping process, and issues raised (written and verbal) during the public scoping (Capital SouthEast Connector Joint Powers Authority 2010b). A copy of the scoping report is provided in Appendix A.

1.4.1.4 Future Opportunities for Public Input

Additional opportunities for public review and comment will be provided before concluding the program-level review and approval of the project.

Draft Program EIR Public Meetings

The JPA will conduct informational meetings to present the results of the draft program EIR analysis and solicit comments during review of the public draft program EIR. The meetings are scheduled for the following locations and times:

- Tuesday, April 12, 2011, from 6p.m. to 8 p.m. at William Brooks Elementary School, 3610 Park Drive, El Dorado Hills
- Wednesday, April 13, 2011, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at Rancho Cordova City Hall, American River Room, 2729 Prospect Park Drive, Rancho Cordova
- Thursday, April 14, 2011, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at Elk Grove City Hall, Council Chambers, 8400 Laguna Palms Way, Elk Grove
- Tuesday, April 19, 2011, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the Sacramento County Agricultural Extension Auditorium, 4145 Branch Center Road, Sacramento
- Wednesday, April 20, 2011, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the Folsom Community Center, 52 Natoma Street, Folsom

Questions about the draft program EIR meetings can be directed to the JPA offices at 916/876-9094.

Final Program EIR Public Hearing

The final EIR will include written responses to comments related to relevant environmental issues. The JPA will consider all relevant comments received before making a decision to certify the final program EIR and approve the project during at public hearing.

1.5 Regional Planning Efforts and the Connector

The proposed project would support numerous past and ongoing regional planning efforts, which are described below.

1.5.1 Adopted Plans

The following adopted documents were used as a basis to help develop the initial population projections and traffic volume forecasts for the project through 2035:

- MTP 2035 (Sacramento Area Council of Governments 2008)
- Folsom General Plan (City of Folsom 1993)
- Rancho Cordova General Plan (City of Rancho Cordova 2006a)
- Elk Grove General Plan (City of Elk Grove 2009)
- El Dorado County General Plan (El Dorado County 2004)
- Sacramento County General Plan (Sacramento County 1993)

1.5.2 Plan Updates

In addition, more current information from the draft Sacramento County 2030 General Plan Update (<http://www.msa2.sacounty.net/planning/Pages/GeneralPlanUpdate>), Folsom General Plan update (http://www.folsom.ca.us/depts/community_development/planning/general_plan), Folsom South of U.S. Highway 50 draft Specific Plan (http://www.folsom.ca.us/home_nav/sphere), and SACOG's draft planning scenarios for MTP 2035 were used to better reflect current conditions in the region since adoption of the general plans and MTP 2035 (<http://www.sacog.org/mtp/2035>). Because these plans are currently under revision, information is regularly updated and provided on the agencies' websites.

1.5.3 South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan

The JPA is a partner in the South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan (SSHCP) process that is currently underway to help ensure preservation of natural resources in south Sacramento County. The SSHCP provides a regional approach to balancing development against conservation and protection of habitat, open space, and agricultural lands. The SSHCP will protect 30 species of plants and wildlife including 10 that are listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) or the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). The SSHCP also will protect vernal pool, wetland, and stream habitats that are subject to the federal Clean Water Act (CWA), California's Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, and Streambed Alteration Agreement requirements under Fish and Game Code Sections 1600, et seq.

The HCP will be carried out through an Implementation Agreement among Plan Participants and state and federal resource and regulatory agencies. Plan participants include Sacramento County, City of Elk Grove, City of Galt, City of Rancho Cordova, Sacramento County Water Agency, Sacramento Regional Sanitation District, Sacramento Area Sewer District, and the JPA. The resource and regulatory agencies include USFWS and CDFG as well as the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB).

The Connector is included in the SSHCP as a covered project. The development of the SSHCP allows the JPA to participate in a comprehensive plan to protect wetland and endangered species in a coordinated and predictable manner. As a plan participant, the JPA will optimize its ability to develop region-wide mitigation through the use of local funds allocated for the purpose of open space preservation. The SSHCP is currently under preparation; an administrative draft was prepared in July 2010 (Sacramento County 2010a, <<http://www.southsachcp.com/Documents>>).

1.6 Lead and Responsible Agencies

Although the specific elements of the Connector will be further developed and implemented by the JPA or individual member agencies, the JPA is responsible for selection of the 35-mile-long corridor; therefore, the JPA is the CEQA lead agency for the purpose of conducting this environmental review. Sacramento County, El Dorado County, and the Cities of Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, and Folsom may carry out future development of specific projects that would be a part of the Connector and therefore are responsible agencies under CEQA.

1.6.1 Lead Agency Actions

The JPA will serve as the lead agency under CEQA for the program EIR and will approve a corridor alignment. As part of the decision-making process, the JPA will take the following specific actions:

- certify the final program EIR,
- adopt the findings of fact and statement of overriding considerations,
- adopt the mitigation monitoring and reporting plan, and
- adopt the 35-mile-long corridor alignment.

1.6.2 Responsible Agency Actions

The responsible agencies for the program EIR are the member agencies (Sacramento County, El Dorado County, and the Cities of Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, and Folsom). After the JPA certifies the final program EIR and approves a corridor alignment, each city and county will amend its respective general plan to identify the JPA's selected corridor and adopt policies for its preservation. The cities and counties may establish by ordinance or resolution an *official plan line* that will identify the selected Connector route and preserve it in the face of future land use decisions. The official plan line establishes the city's or county's intent to eventually implement the Corridor and would require the area within the future right-of-way to be reserved for the Connector, limiting the location of new development to the area outside the alignment and requiring the alignment to be shown on new tentative maps.

Because this is a program EIR and project-level approvals are not anticipated at this point, no other permits or approvals (and therefore no other responsible agency actions) are anticipated for the program EIR. After the final program EIR is certified, more-detailed project-level review can proceed along the selected corridor by either the JPA or the member agencies. This program EIR will serve as a first-tier analyses for later project-level alignment decisions by these agencies.

1.7 Terminology

This report establishes thresholds of significance based on State CEQA Guidelines and standard practice, and identifies the following types of impacts:

- A *less-than-significant impact* is considered to cause no substantial adverse change in the environment and requires no mitigation measures.
- A *significant impact* is considered to cause a substantial adverse effect on the environment but can be reduced to a less-than-significant level by implementing mitigation measures.
- A *significant unavoidable impact* is considered to cause a substantial adverse effect on the environment for which feasible mitigation measures are not available to reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level.
- A *beneficial impact* is considered to cause a positive change in the environment.

CEQA requires that each public agency mitigate or avoid, wherever feasible, the significant impacts of any project it approves or implements. This program EIR recommends mitigation measures to reduce impacts of the proposed project. State CEQA Guidelines Section 15370 defines mitigation as:

- avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or part of an action;
- minimizing the impact by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation;
- rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
- reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action; and
- compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or improvements to the environment.

Subsequent environmental documents may incorporate by reference materials from this program EIR, as appropriate, regarding secondary effects, cumulative impacts, broad alternatives, and other factors. Subsequent environmental documents will need to focus solely on site-specific issues that were not already considered in this program EIR.

1.8 Organization of Program EIR

The content and format of this program EIR are designed to meet the requirements of CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines. The report is organized in the following chapters to allow the reader to easily obtain information about the project and its specific issues.

- The “Summary” briefly discusses several aspects of the proposed project and program EIR—the purpose of this program EIR; project objectives; descriptions of the proposed project, optional project component, and alternative; significant unavoidable impacts; the environmentally superior alternative; and other impact conclusions.
- Chapter 1, “Introduction,” provides background information on the proposed project, discusses the purpose of this program EIR in detail, summarizes the scoping and public involvement process, discusses how the project ties into regional planning efforts, lists the CEQA lead and responsible agencies for the project, defines impact conclusions used throughout this EIR, and discusses the organization of this EIR.
- Chapter 2, “Project Description,” discusses the existing roadway system in the project area, project objectives, alternatives screening process, sustainable design elements incorporated into the project, and project construction, costs, and financing.
- Chapters 3–16, are each devoted to the resource or issue areas listed below, respectively. In general, each describes the study area for that resource or issue, the environmental setting before project implementation (existing conditions and regulatory setting), the approach and methods (including significance thresholds) used in the impact analysis, the impacts that would result from the proposed project and optional project components, and mitigation measures that would eliminate or reduce significant impacts.
 - “Aesthetics”
 - “Air Quality”
 - “Biological Resources”
 - “Cultural Resources”
 - “Energy”

- “Geology, Soils, and Paleontological Resources”
- “Hazards and Hazardous Materials”
- “Hydrology and Water Quality”
- “Land Use”
- “Noise”
- “Population and Housing”
- “Public Services and Utilities”
- “Recreation”
- “Traffic and Transportation”
- Chapter 17, “Alternatives and Other CEQA Considerations,” describes the alternatives to the proposed project and the impacts associated with those alternatives, identifies the environmentally superior alternative, and discusses significant and irreversible environmental changes.
- Chapter 18, “Cumulative and Growth-Inducing Impacts,” summarizes the proposed project’s contribution to cumulative impacts, as well as its growth-inducing impacts.
- Chapter 19, “References Cited,” identifies the printed references and personal communications used in preparing this program EIR.
- Chapter 20, “List of Preparers,” identifies the individuals involved in preparing this program EIR and their roles, including the JPA and several consultants.
- Several appendices are included at the end of this report and include the following:
 - Appendix A, “Notice of Preparation, Scoping Report, and Comment Letters”
 - Appendix B, “Technical Information on Operational Emissions Modeling”
 - Appendix C, “Recorded Cultural Resources and Native American Correspondence”
 - Appendix C-1, “Recorded Cultural Resources”
 - Appendix C-2, “Native American Consultation”
 - Appendix D, “Geotechnical Impact Report”
 - Appendix E, “Initial Site Assessment (Draft)”
 - Appendix F, “Floodplain Evaluation Report (Draft)”
 - Appendix G, “Location Hydraulic Study (Draft)”
 - Appendix H, “Alternatives Screening”
 - Appendix I, “Biological Resources in the Project Area”
 - Appendix J, “Analysis of Access Roads between US 50 and the Capital SouthEast Connector Project”