

# 2005 San Benito County Regional Transportation Plan Update

## Draft Environmental Impact Report

*Prepared for:*

Council of San Benito County Governments  
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Hollister, California 95023

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March 2005



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**Draft**  
**Environmental Impact Report**  
*for the*  
2005 San Benito County  
Regional Transportation Plan Update

*State Clearinghouse No. 2004091163*

*Prepared for:*  
**Council of San Benito County Governments**  
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*Draft*  
**San Benito County 2005 RTP EIR**

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Notice of Preparation and Responses



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This section summarizes the characteristics of the Project, the environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and residual impacts associated with the Project.

### **PROJECT SYNOPSIS**

#### **Project Applicant**

The Project applicant is the Council of San Benito County Governments (COG).

#### **Project Description**

The 2005 San Benito County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is an update of the region's existing 2001 RTP. The RTP is a State-mandated comprehensive long-range (20-year) regional planning document that is used to guide the development of the Regional and Federal Transportation Improvement Program as well as other transportation planning and programming efforts. The RTP includes several elements, including the following: Assessment of Needs, Action Plan, Financial Plan, and Transportation Goals and Policies. The RTP identifies the region's transportation needs, sets forth an action plan of projects, determines actions and programs to address the needs and issues, and documents the financial resources needed to implement the Plan. The RTP establishes a clear vision of San Benito County's regional transportation goals, policies, objectives, and strategies. The Action Element of the RTP includes all the major transportation projects within the county being considered by various agencies. Such projects may include intersection improvements, highway and roadway widening, bicycle lanes and paths, pedestrian-related projects, transit-oriented projects, and other infrastructure related to transportation activities. The RTP assumes that future growth in the County will occur primarily within Hollister's existing urban area.

The RTP reflects all recent changes in legislative requirements, local land use policies, and resource constraints. The RTP has been developed within the framework of the California Transportation Commission's Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines. The State's RTP Guidelines set forth the purpose of the RTP as follows:

- Provide the foundation for transportation decisions by local, regional and state officials;
- Document the region's mobility needs and issues;
- Identify and attempt to resolve regional issues and provide policy and future transportation mobility needs;
- Set forth an action plan to address transportation issues and needs consistent with regional and state policies;
- Identify transportation improvements in sufficient detail to aid in the development of the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and to be useful in decisions related to development and growth of the region;
- Identify agencies responsible for implementing the action plan;
- Document the region's financial resources needed to meet mobility needs;



- Provide input to the California Transportation Commission in development of its Annual Report to the Legislature.

The RTP must also comply with requirements specified in TEA-21 and other federal regulations. Under TEA-21, the RTP planning process must consider seven factors, all of which were considered during development of the 2005 RTP. Other federal requirements include conformity with the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments and consistency with the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP). Specific requirements of these two programs are described in the Draft 2005 RTP, which is available for review at the COG offices.

The 2005 Regional Transportation Plan Goals include:

1. To support the economic vitality of the region, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
2. To increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
3. To increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and freight.
4. To protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life.
5. To enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
6. To promote efficient system management and operation.
7. To make maintenance of existing transportation a priority.

Upon adoption by COG, the plan will become the basis for future programming decisions regarding local, state, and federal transportation funds. Because the RTP is a long-range planning/programming document, it does not include specific project designs or construction schedules for any of the actions identified in the Action Element. Specific project design efforts and subsequent environmental review would be the subject of future technical study by the lead implementing agency sponsoring the transportation system modification. In this regard, specific projects identified in the RTP may be substantially modified from their initial descriptions in the RTP.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

The proposed project evaluated in Section 4 of this EIR includes all projects from the constrained and unconstrained project lists. Section 6 of this EIR examines three alternatives to the RTP: (1) the "constrained projects" alternative, under which only currently funded improvements would be undertaken; (2) the "modified project" alternative, which would eliminate several specific projects with the potential to result in unavoidable environmental impacts; (3) the "no project" alternative; under which no new regionally significant transportation improvements would be undertaken after 2005.

The No Project alternative would have the fewest environmental impacts because it involves no additional construction activity after 2005. However, it should be noted that the no project alternative would result in continued congestion, and associated air contaminant emissions and land use effects, as well as additional economic and social effects, if no transportation improvements were implemented. Among the other scenarios, the Modified Project scenario



(Alternative 2) would have less overall impact than the Constrained Project scenarios (Alternative 1) in most areas because it involves fewer overall capital improvement projects and would specifically avoid the potential Class I impacts with regard to agricultural resources, exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels, and displacement (land use).

It should be noted that none of the alternative scenarios would address countywide traffic congestion issues to the degree that the RTP would. Consequently, though the project is not identified as environmentally superior overall, it is the superior alternative from the standpoint of addressing countywide traffic issues.

The alternatives analysis is described in further detail in Section 6.0, *Alternatives*.

## **AREAS OF CONCERN**

Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines § 15123, this EIR acknowledges the areas of controversy and issues to be resolved which are known to COG or were raised during the scoping process. Four comment letters from agencies and the public, including the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), were received in response to the NOP. NOP comment letters are included in Appendix A of this EIR.

Primary environmental areas of concern raised by the commenting agencies and the public include:

- ❖ Consistency with air quality plans
- ❖ Exposure of sensitive receptors to odors and/or toxic air contaminants
- ❖ Air contaminant emissions from transportation projects
- ❖ Effects on wildlife habitats and sensitive species
- ❖ Impacts on jurisdictional watercourses
- ❖ Impacts related to biodiversity
- ❖ Hollister traffic congestion impacts related to interregional traffic
- ❖ Conflicts between vehicles and slow moving agricultural equipment

Air quality impacts are described in Section 4.2, *Air Quality*, of this EIR. Impacts related to biological resources and traffic are described in Section 4.0, *Environmental Impact Analysis*, of this EIR.

## **SUMMARY OF IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES**

Table ES-1 identifies potential Project environmental impacts, proposed mitigation measures to be considered by responsible agencies in evaluating specific projects, and potential residual impacts. Specific RTP projects that may contribute to the impacts described below are listed in the Tables at the end of individual EIR impact sections (4.1 through 4.4). Impacts are organized by classes. Class I impacts are defined as significant, unavoidable adverse impacts which require a statement of overriding considerations to be issued pursuant to Section 15093 of the *State CEQA Guidelines* if the Project is approved. Class II impacts are significant adverse impacts that can be feasibly mitigated to less than significant levels and which require findings to be made under Section 15091

of the *State CEQA Guidelines*. Class III are considered less than significant impacts, and Class IV are beneficial impacts.

**Significant and Unavoidable Impacts of the Project**

Section 15126(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires an EIR to “describe any significant impacts, including those which can be mitigated but not reduced to a level of insignificance. Where there are impacts that cannot be alleviated without imposing an alternative design, their implications and the reasons why the project is being proposed, notwithstanding their effect, should be described.”

Section 4 of this EIR provides a description of the potential environmental impacts of the Project and recommends consideration by responsible agencies of mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level, where possible. After implementation of the recommended mitigation measures, most of the potential significant impacts associated with the Project would be reduced to a less-than-significant level. However, potential impacts related to conversion of agricultural lands, exposure of sensitive receptors to high noise levels, and alteration of the county’s character to a more urban or suburban condition, may be considered significant and unavoidable.

**Table ES-1. Summary of Potential Project Environmental Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Residual Impacts**

Impact	Mitigation Measures	Residual Impact
<b>CLASS I IMPACTS</b>		
<b>AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES</b>		
<p><b>Impact AG-1.</b> Some RTP projects could convert agricultural lands to transportation infrastructure and/or parcelize agricultural operations. Although the actual level of impact from individual projects is not known at this time, the overall impact to agriculture is assumed to be Class I, <i>significant and unavoidable</i>.</p>	<p><b>AG-1(a)</b> When new roadway extensions are planned, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the RTP project is located shall assure that project-specific environmental reviews consider alternative alignments that reduce or avoid impacts to agricultural lands.</p> <p><b>AG-1(b)</b> Rural roadway alignments shall follow property lines to the extent feasible, to minimize impacts to the agricultural production value of any specific property. Farmers shall be compensated for the loss of agricultural production at the margins of lost property, based on the amount of land deeded as road right-of-way, as a function of the total amount of production on the property.</p>	<p>Although the above measures would reduce impacts to agriculture to the degree feasible, such impacts cannot be fully mitigated due to the potential conversion of agricultural lands. Impacts from individual projects will need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis; however, because impacts to individual agricultural properties cannot be assumed to be insignificant, agricultural impacts are considered potentially significant and unavoidable.</p>
<p><b>Impact AG-2.</b> Development of some RTP roadway projects could contribute to the alteration of the county's rural (or semi-rural) areas to a somewhat more suburban or urban condition, through</p>	<p><b>AG-2(a)</b> Roadway extensions and widenings shall avoid the removal of existing mature trees to the extent possible. Any trees lost shall be replaced at a minimum 2:1 basis and incorporated into the landscaping design for the roadway. Tree</p>	<p>Implementation of the above mitigation measures would reduce project-specific impacts to the extent feasible. Nevertheless, the incremental alteration of the area's current rural or semi-rural character to</p>



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<p>the addition of lighting, glare, and urban features. This is considered Class I, <i>significant and unavoidable</i> impact.</p>	<p>replacement ratios shall be consistent with Caltrans or the local jurisdictions in which impacts could occur.</p> <p><b>AG-2(b)</b> Roadway lighting shall be minimized and controlled to the extent possible, and shall not exceed the maximum height limits of Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project would occur. In addition, lighting shall be designed so as not to spill over onto adjacent properties.</p> <p><b>AG-2(c)</b> Bus shelters, signage and other ancillary facilities constructed under the RTP shall be designed in accordance with the architectural review requirements of Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project would occur. Bus shelters in rural areas shall incorporate earth tone colors and wood materials complementary of the natural surroundings.</p>	<p>a more urbanized environment is considered a significant and unavoidable (Class I) impact.</p>
<b>NOISE</b>		
<p><b>Impact N-2.</b> Various RTP projects could potentially expose sensitive receptors to noise in excess of normally acceptable levels. Projects that increase use of existing roadways, reuse rail lines, and other transportation facilities, and extend or realign such facilities, could result in substantial increases in noise levels at adjacent receptors. This would be considered a Class I, <i>significant and unavoidable</i> impact.</p>	<p><b>N-2(a)</b> If an RTP project is located adjacent to sensitive uses, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project is located shall ensure that a noise survey is conducted to determine alternate alignments which allow greater distance from, or greater buffering of, noise-sensitive areas. The noise survey shall be sufficient to indicate existing and projected noise levels, to determine the amount of attenuation needed to reduce potential noise impacts to such uses to an exterior noise level of 65 dBA or less. This shall be accomplished during the project's individual environmental review.</p> <p><b>N-2(b)</b> Various sound attenuation techniques shall be considered where new or expanded roadways or reused rail lines are found to expose receptors to noise exceeding normally acceptable levels. The preferred methods for mitigating noise impacts will be the use of appropriate setbacks and sound attenuating building design, including retrofit of existing structures with sound</p>	<p>Implementation of the recommended programmatic measures would reduce potential impacts to a less than significant level. However, it should be noted that the construction of sound attenuation devices may create aesthetic impacts that may be undesirable and may affect the semi-rural character of much of the county. To mitigate this potential secondary impact to the degree feasible, the following measure is recommended:</p> <p><b>N-2(c)</b> Long expanses of walls or fences should be interrupted with offsets and provided with accents to prevent monotony. Landscape pockets and pedestrian access through walls should be provided. Whenever possible, a combination of elements should be used, including solid fences,</p>



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	<p>attenuating building materials where feasible. In instances where use of these techniques is not feasible, the use of sound barriers (earthen berms, sound walls, or some combination of the two) will be considered. Determination of appropriate noise attenuation measures will be assessed on a case-by-case basis during a project's individual environmental review pursuant to the regulations of the applicable agency.</p>	<p>walls, and, landscaped berms. Implementation of soundwalls or other noise barriers along roadway extensions may be physically or economically infeasible in certain locations. Therefore, noise impacts associated with roadway realignments or expansions would remain significant and unavoidable.</p>
<b>CLASS II IMPACTS</b>		
<b>AIR QUALITY</b>		
<p><b>Impact AQ-1.</b> Many of the capital improvement projects included in the RTP would involve construction activity that could generate temporary increases in local air pollution. Because of their temporary nature, such impacts are considered Class II, <i>significant but mitigable</i>.</p>	<p><b>AQ-1(a)</b> Application of CBACT. All construction equipment be properly maintained and tuned according to manufacturer specifications. All off-road and portable diesel powered equipment, including but not limited to bulldozers, graders, cranes, loaders, scrapers, backhoes, generator sets, compressors, and auxiliary power units, shall be fueled exclusively with CARB motor vehicle diesel fuel. At least 20% of the diesel-fueled equipment used for project construction shall be 1996 or newer. The project applicant shall install catalytic soot filters on at least 20% of the pre-1996 diesel-fueled equipment, targeting those projected to generate the greatest emissions. Where catalytic soot filters are determined to be unsuitable, the owner shall install and use an oxidation catalyst. Suitability is to be determined by an independent California Licensed Mechanical Engineer who will submit, for District approval, a Suitability Report identifying and explaining the particular constraints to using the preferred catalytic soot filter.</p> <p><b>AQ-1(b)</b> The following measures shall be implemented to reduce PM<sub>10</sub> emissions during project construction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reduce the amount of the disturbed area where possible.</li> <li>▪ Use water trucks or sprinkler systems in sufficient quantities to prevent airborne dust from leaving the site.</li> </ul>	<p>With the recommended measures, construction-related air quality impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level.</p>



**Table ES-1. Summary of Potential Project Environmental Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Residual Impacts**

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>	<b>Residual Impact</b>
	<p>Water shall be applied as soon as possible whenever wind speeds exceed 15 miles per hour. Reclaimed (nonpotable) water should be used whenever possible.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All dirt-stock-pile areas shall be sprayed daily as needed.</li> <li>▪ Permanent dust control measures shall be identified in the approved project revegetation and landscape plans and implemented as soon as possible following completion of any soil disturbing activities.</li> <li>▪ Exposed ground areas that are planned to be reworked at dates greater than one month after initial grading shall be sown with a fast-germinating native grass seed and watered until vegetation is established.</li> <li>▪ All disturbed soil areas not subject to revegetation shall be stabilized using approved chemical soil binders, jute netting, or other methods approved in advance by the APCD.</li> <li>▪ All roadways, driveways, sidewalks, etc., to be paved shall be completed as soon as possible. In addition, building pads shall be laid as soon as possible after grading unless seeding or soil binders are used.</li> <li>▪ Vehicle speed for all construction vehicles shall not exceed 15 mph on any unpaved surface at the construction site.</li> <li>▪ All trucks hauling dirt, sand, soil or other loose materials shall be covered or shall maintain at least two feet of freeboard (minimum vertical distance between top of load and top of trailer) in accordance with CVC Section 23114.</li> <li>▪ Install wheel washers where vehicles enter and exit unpaved roads onto streets, or wash off trucks and equipment leaving the site.</li> <li>▪ Sweep streets at the end of each day if visible soil material is carried onto adjacent paved roads. Water sweepers with reclaimed water shall be used where feasible.</li> </ul> <p><b>AQ-1(c)</b> If importation, exportation, or stockpiling of fill material is involved, soil</p>	



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<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>	<b>Residual Impact</b>
	<p>stockpiled for more than two days shall be covered, kept moist, or treated with soil binders to prevent dust generation.</p> <p>Trucks transporting material shall be tarped from the point of origin.</p> <p><b>AQ-1(d)</b> The contractor or builder shall designate a person or persons to monitor the dust control program and to order increased watering as necessary to prevent transport of dust off-site. Their duties shall include holiday and weekend periods when work may not be in progress.</p>	
<p><b>Impact AQ-5.</b> Implementation of future transit station projects could result in stationary or semi-stationary emissions sources that expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations and/or odors, such as diesel exhaust. This would be considered a Class II, <i>significant but mitigable</i>, impact.</p>	<p><b>AQ-5(a)</b> The agencies that propose a transit station project that is demonstrated to significantly impact sensitive receptors shall design the project so that impacts are reduced to the extent feasible. This may involve a reduction in the size of the project, relocation of the project, or reconfiguration of project facilities so that stationary sources (e.g., idling vehicles) are not located adjacent to sensitive receptors. If physical changes to an impacting project are not feasible due to physical, economic, technological, or other constraints, the project proponent shall prohibit engine idling for periods greater than one minute.</p>	<p>Impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels with proposed mitigation.</p>
<b>LAND USE and PLAN CONSISTENCY</b>		
<p><b>Impact LU-1.</b> Some RTP projects may create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development. This is considered a Class II, <i>significant but mitigable</i> impact.</p>	<p><b>LU-1(a)</b> Setbacks, fences, or other appropriate means shall be used to separate transportation facilities with the potential to generate land use conflicts from adjacent sensitive land uses. Roadways shall be designed to minimize potential impacts to pedestrians and bicyclists, particularly those living in adjacent residential areas, or attending nearby schools. Adequate striping, signs and signalization shall be installed to slow traffic where appropriate, and to reduce safety and noise impacts. The jurisdiction through which the impacting project traverses would be responsible</p>	<p>Implementation of recommended mitigation measures would be expected to reduce land use conflicts to a less than significant level.</p>



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<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>	<b>Residual Impact</b>
	<p>for implementing this measure, which may in part be based on project-specific noise and safety studies required by the local agency.</p> <p><b>LU-1(b)</b> Street lighting, where necessary, shall be minimized to the extent possible in areas adjacent to sensitive land uses. Street lights shall be shielded, and oriented away from residential development. No street light shall exceed the minimum height requirement as dictated by Caltrans or local ordinance, as applicable.</p>	
<p><b>Impact LU-2.</b> During construction, many RTP projects would result in temporarily lane closures or other access restrictions that would disrupt existing homes, businesses, and pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes. This is considered a Class II, <i>significant but mitigable</i> impact.</p>	<p><b>LU-2(a)</b> For all transportation projects that could result in temporary lane closures or access blockage during construction, a temporary access plan shall be implemented to ensure continued access to affected cyclists, pedestrians, businesses, and homes. Appropriate signs and safe access shall be guaranteed during project construction to ensure that businesses remain open.</p>	<p>Implementation of recommended measures would mitigate impacts relating to temporary disturbance.</p>
<p><b>Impact LU-3.</b> Some RTP projects could permanently displace or disrupt existing homes and businesses. This is considered a Class II, <i>significant but mitigable</i> impact.</p>	<p><b>LU-3(a)</b> Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which an RTP project with the potential to displace residences or businesses (as indicated in Table 4.3-1) is located shall assure that project-specific environmental reviews consider alternative alignments that avoid or minimize impacts to nearby residences and businesses.</p> <p><b>LU-3(b)</b> Where project-specific reviews identify displacement or relocation impacts that are unavoidable, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project is located shall ensure that appropriate local, state, and federal relocation programs are used to assist eligible persons to relocate. In addition, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction shall review and, if necessary, modify the construction schedules to ensure that adequate time is provided to allow affected businesses to find and relocate to other sites.</p>	<p>Implementation of recommended measures would reduce impacts relating to long-term displacement to a less than significant level.</p>



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<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>	<b>Residual Impact</b>
<b>NOISE</b>		
<p><b>Impact N-1.</b> Construction activity associated with road, bike, pedestrian, and transit projects would create temporary noise level increases in discreet locations throughout the county over the life of the RTP. This is considered a Class II, <i>significant but mitigable</i> impact.</p>	<p><b>N-1(a)</b> Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which a particular RTP project is located shall ensure that, where residences or other noise sensitive uses are located adjacent to construction sites, appropriate measures shall be implemented to ensure consistency with noise ordinance requirements relating to construction. Specific techniques may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on construction timing, use of sound blankets on construction equipment, and the use of temporary walls and noise barriers to block and deflect noise.</p> <p><b>N-1(b)</b> If a particular project located adjacent to sensitive receptors requires pile driving, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which this project is located shall require the use of pile drilling techniques instead, where feasible, which would reduce the physical impact and associated noise generation from pile driving. This shall be accomplished through the placement of conditions on the project during its individual environmental review.</p>	<p>With implementation of local noise control requirements and proposed mitigation, impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels.</p>
<b>CLASS III IMPACTS</b>		
<b>AIR QUALITY</b>		
<p><b>Impact AQ-2.</b> Implementation of the 2005 RTP would reduce emissions of ozone precursors as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented by promoting a multi-modal transportation system and thereby reducing reliance on single occupancy vehicle use. The RTP would also implement the AQMP Transportation Control Measures. This is considered a Class III, <i>less than significant</i> effect.</p>	<p><b>AQ-2(a)</b> SCCRTC shall continue to give Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding priority to those projects which reduce regional emissions of ozone precursor gases countywide.</p>	<p>The operational impacts of the RTP on the attainment of state and federal air quality standards can be classified as less than significant (Class III) and beneficial in both the short term and long term.</p>
<p><b>Impact AQ-4.</b> Implementation of RTP projects would not result in localized traffic</p>	<p>No mitigation measures are required.</p>	<p>Impacts would be considered less than significant.</p>



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<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>	<b>Residual Impact</b>
congestion that causes localized carbon monoxide (CO) emission hotspots. This would be considered a Class III, <i>less than significant</i> , impact.		
<b>LAND USE and POLICY CONSISTENCY</b>		
<b>Impact LU-4.</b> The RTP includes policies that guide development under the plan. RTP policies are consistent with other regional and local transportation policies. Impacts would be Class III, <i>less than significant</i> .	No mitigation measures are required.	The project is considered consistent with applicable plans and policies adopted by local agencies within the county
<b>GROWTH INDUCEMENT</b>		
<b>Economic Growth.</b> Implementation of the RTP would create short-term economic growth in the County as a result of construction-related job opportunities. RTP implementation would also generate additional employment opportunities for roadway, vehicle, and landscape maintenance, and transportation facility clean-up. The potential employment increase may subsequently increase the demand for support services and utilities, which could generate secondary employment opportunities. This additional economic growth would likely raise the existing revenue base for San Benito County. Although such growth may incrementally increase economic activity in the county, significant physical effects are not expected to result from economic growth generated by the project.	No mitigation measures are required.	Impacts would be considered less than significant.
<b>Population Growth.</b> Population in the region is	No mitigation measures are required.	Impacts would be considered less than significant.



**Table ES-1. Summary of Potential Project Environmental Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Residual Impacts**

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>	<b>Residual Impact</b>
<p>expected to increase regardless of the 2005 RTP. The 2005 RTP will not directly generate population, since the project does not involve the construction of residential units, however it does have the potential to facilitate growth. The 2005 RTP implements some aspects of the circulation elements of the general plans of local jurisdictions in the region. Many of these projects could serve as traffic mitigation measures for anticipated growth under these local plans. Implementation of the RTP would not entail a substantial change in land use anywhere in the County. Rather, the plan responds to existing and projected transportation needs.</p>		
<p><b>Removal of Obstacles to Growth.</b> As discussed in Section 4.3, <i>Land Use and Plan Consistency</i>, implementation of the RTP may remove impediments to growth in some limited fashion. While the transportation system improvements included in the RTP are expected to respond to growth anticipated in adopted local general plans, they may indirectly increase growth pressure by increasing transportation system capacity. In addition, the road extension projects planned in the less developed areas, may remove obstacles to growth by improving vehicular access. For example, the Flynn Road Extension project north and east of the City of Hollister would extend development into currently underdeveloped</p>	<p>No mitigation measures are required.</p>	<p>Impacts would be considered less than significant.</p>



**Table ES-1. Summary of Potential Project Environmental Impacts, Mitigation Measures, and Residual Impacts**

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Measures</b>	<b>Residual Impact</b>
<p>areas. Development induced as a result of removal of obstacles to growth could result in additional environmental impacts (e.g., additional noise and traffic), and may increase the use of slowly renewable and nonrenewable resources and energy to serve new development. For example, induced development projects could affect regional groundwater supplies. However, the nature and magnitude of such impacts are speculative, and would be largely a function of local agency control, prevailing community attitudes, and future market conditions. The environmental impacts of any additional growth would depend upon the type, location, and magnitude of new development.</p>		

## **PROJECT-SPECIFIC IMPACT SUMMARY**

The following table presents a list of contemplated 2005 RTP projects and the anticipated impacts for each project for each issue area. It should be noted that individualized impacts are not described for the issue area of air quality, since this issue area generally relates to cumulative issues and/or RTP policy guidance rather than individual projects. In addition, several impacts relate to many or all of the contemplated projects, and are therefore not listed in Table ES-2 for individual projects. The impacts that would relate to many or all of the contemplated RTP projects are briefly described in the paragraphs below.

### **Impacts Common to All or Many RTP Projects**

Impact AQ-2: Implementation of the 2005 RTP would reduce emissions of ozone precursors as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented by promoting a multi-modal transportation system and thereby reducing reliance on single occupancy vehicle use. The RTP would also implement the AQMP Transportation Control Measures. *Less than significant impact.*

Impact AQ-3: The RTP is consistent with the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) 2001 Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP). *No impact.*



Impact AQ-4: Implementation of RTP projects would not result in localized traffic congestion that causes localized carbon monoxide (CO) emission hotspots. *Less than significant impact.*

Impact LU-2: During construction, many RTP projects would result in temporarily lane closures or other access restrictions that would disrupt existing homes, businesses, and pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes. *Significant but mitigable impact.*

Impact LU-4: The RTP includes policies that guide development under the plan. RTP policies are consistent with other regional and local transportation policies. *Less than significant impact.*

Impact N-1: Construction activity associated with road, bike, pedestrian, and transit projects would create temporary noise level increases in discreet locations throughout the county over the life of the RTP. *Significant but mitigable impact.*

Table ES-2 Summary of 2005 RTP Project Impacts\*

Project ID*	Project Title	Agricultural Resources	Air Quality	Land Use and Plan Consistency	Noise
<b>Street and Highway System Improvements</b>					
Cal-1	Highway 156, Gap Closure Widening	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1, LU-3	N-1, N-2
Cal-2	Highway 156 Widening (North of Hollister)	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Cal-3	Highway 25 to Santa Clara County Widening	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1, LU-3	N-1, N-2
Cal-4	Highway 25 Bypass	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1, LU-3	N-1, N-2
	Highway 25 Safety and Operational Enhancements	AG-2	AQ-1		N-1
	Highway 156 Safety and Operational Enhancements	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1		N-1
Holl-1	Buena Vista Road Construction	AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Holl-2	Memorial Drive Construction-Meridian to Santa Ana	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Holl-5	Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) Construction	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
SBC-1	Fairview Road Widening	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Holl-7	Highway 25 Widening- Sunnyslope to Sunset		AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Holl-8	Westside Boulevard Extension	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Holl-9	New Traffic Signals				
Countywide-1	Street and Highway Maintenance		AQ-1		N-1
Holl-10	Memorial Drive Construction – North of Santa Ana Road	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1		N-1
SBC-2	Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
SBC-3	Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
SBC-5	Flynn Road Extension and Widening	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Cal-5	Highway 101 Widening, Las Armitas – Monterey County Line to Highway 156	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Cal-6	Highway 101 Widening – Highway 156 to Santa Clara County Line	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Cal-7	Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
SBC-6	Union Road Widening	AG-1, AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Holl-6	Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening-Sunset to Fairview	AG-2	AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2
Holl-4	Sunnyslope Road Construction		AQ-1	LU-1	N-1, N-2

The impact numbers presented in this table correspond to the numbers of the impacts in Section 4 of this EIR. For example, an entry of "1, 2" under "Noise" indicates that the project may result in Impacts N-1 and N-2, as described in Section 4.4, Noise, of this EIR.



Table ES-2 Summary of 2005 RTP Project Impacts\*

Project ID*	Project Title	Agricultural Resources	Air Quality	Land Use and Plan Consistency	Noise
<b>Transit System Improvements</b>					
SBCT-1	Transit Vehicle Replacement				
SBCT-1	Contracted Transit Service Operations, Annual Allocation				
SBCOG-2	Commuter Rail Implementation		AQ-5	LU-1	N-2
<b>Aviation System Improvements</b>					
SBt-1-01	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 24 Holding Apron		AQ-1	LU-1	
SBt-1-06	Hollister Municipal Airport Perimeter Fencing				
SBt-1-08	Hollister Municipal Airport Lighting Beacon Rehabilitation				
SBt-1-09	Hollister Municipal Airport Diagonal Hanger Taxiway		AQ-1	LU-1	
SBt-1-10	Hollister Municipal Airport Exit Taxiway		AQ-1	LU-1	
SBt-1-11	Hollister Municipal Airport Parallel Taxiway		AQ-1	LU-1	
SBt-1-12	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 31 Holding Apron		AQ-1	LU-1	
SBt-1-13	Hollister Municipal Airport California Department of Forestry Apron		AQ-1	LU-1	
SBt-1-14	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 31 Protection Zone Acquisition				
SBt-1-15	Hollister Municipal Airport Instrument Landing System				
SBt-1-16	Hollister Municipal Airport Terminal Apron Joint Replacement				
SBt-1-17	Hollister Municipal Airport Southwest Hangar Taxiway		AQ-1	LU-1	
SBt-1-18	Hollister Municipal Airport Taxiway Lighting				
SBt-1-19	Hollister Municipal Airport Land Acquisition				
SBt-1-20	Hollister Municipal Airport Line of Sight Land Acquisition				
<b>Non-Motorized Transportation</b>					
SBCOG-3	Bikeway Repair and Maintenance				
SBCOG-6	San Juan Highway Bike Lane Construction				
SBCOG-3	Southside Road Bike Lane Construction				
SBCOG-4	San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase I)		AQ-1		N-1
SBCOG-5	San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase II)		AQ-1		N-1
SBCOG-2	Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Implementation				



## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) identifies and describes potential environmental impacts associated with implementation of the 2005 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) proposed by the Council of San Benito County Governments (COG). The project's background, as well as the legal basis for preparing an EIR, are described below.

### 1.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND LEGAL AUTHORITY

Section 21000 of the California Government Code, commonly referred to as the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), requires the evaluation of environmental impacts associated with all planning programs or development projects proposed. This EIR has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the *State CEQA Guidelines*. In accordance with Section 15121(a) of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, the purpose of this EIR is to serve as an informational document that:

*"...will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effects of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project..."*.

As such, this EIR is an informational document for use by COG, other agencies, and the general public in their consideration and evaluation of the environmental consequences of implementing of the RTP.

### 1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The 2005 RTP is an update of the previous RTP, adopted by COG in 2001. As discussed in the 2005 RTP, a number of projects in the 2001 RTP have been completed. Some projects yet to be completed have been incorporated into the 2005 RTP. The 2005 RTP Update considers future demand on the transportation system and sets forth goals, policies, and programs for long- and short-range transportation improvements in the County, as required by state and federal law.

In compliance with the *CEQA Guidelines* (Section 15063), preliminary public agency comments on the project were solicited through distribution of a Notice of Preparation (Appendix A). The Notice of Preparation and comments received in response to the Notice of Preparation determined that the currently proposed RTP could create significant environmental impacts and form the basis of the technical focus of this EIR.

### 1.3 TYPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

This document is a program EIR. Section 15168(a) of the *CEQA Guidelines* states that "a program EIR is an EIR which may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either: (1) geographically; (2) as logical parts in a chain of contemplated actions; (3) in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program; or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally



similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways." As such, this EIR presents a region-wide assessment of the RTP's potential impacts. Though the EIR identifies some of the possible impacts of individual projects, it does not evaluate site-specific impacts of individual projects. The lead agencies for individual projects identified in this program EIR are required to prepare project level CEQA documents.

Section 15151 of the California Environmental Quality Act provides the following standards related to the adequacy of an Environmental Impact Report:

*"An Environmental Impact Report should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information which enables them to make a decision which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among experts. The courts have looked not for perfection; but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure."*

## **1.4 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT CONTENT AND FORMAT**

The analysis of environmental impacts identifies impacts by category: significant and unavoidable (Class I), significant but mitigable (Class II), adverse but less than significant (Class III), and beneficial (Class IV). It proposes mitigation measures, where feasible, for identified significant environmental impacts.

The *CEQA Guidelines* also require the analysis of the cumulative effects of a project in combination with other foreseeable development in the area. Section 15130 of the *CEQA Guidelines* prescribes two methods for analyzing cumulative impacts: (1) use of a list of past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects producing related or cumulative impacts; or (2) use of a summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document. However, this document is a Program EIR that analyzes the effects of cumulative buildout of the 2005 RTP, including the constrained and unconstrained projects. The RTP considers the past, present, and future projects described in method 1 above and proposes a range of specific projects designed to meet current and projected future needs. The project also constitutes the cumulative scenario described in method 2. Therefore, the cumulative effects of all circulation system improvements in the county are included in the analysis of the project's impacts. The analysis of project impacts contained in this "first tier" environmental review document may be used as the basis for the cumulative analysis contained in any subsequent environmental documentation for specific projects included in the 2005 RTP.

This EIR has been organized into eight sections. These include:

- 1.0 Introduction – Provides the Statement of Purpose and a discussion of the project background, type of environmental document, and EIR format and content.



- 2.0 Project Description – Identifies the project applicant, presents and discusses the project objectives, project location and specific project characteristics.
- 3.0 Environmental Setting – Provides a description of the existing physical setting of the project area.
- 4.0 Analysis of Environmental Issues – Describes existing conditions found in the project area and assesses potential environmental impacts that may be generated by implementing the project and cumulative development in San Benito County. These potential project impacts are compared to “thresholds of significance” in order to determine the nature and severity of the direct and indirect impacts. Mitigation measures, intended to reduce adverse, significant impacts to less than significant levels, are proposed where feasible. Impacts that cannot be eliminated or mitigated to less than significant levels are also identified.
- 5.0 Growth-Inducing Impacts – Identifies the spatial, economic, or population growth impacts that may result from implementation of the project.
- 6.0 Alternatives - Presents and assesses the potential environmental impacts of three alternatives analyzed in addition to implementation of the RTP. These additional alternatives are:
- *Alternative 1: Constrained Projects Alternative (implement constrained projects only)*
  - *Alternative 2: Modified Project Alternative (elimination of individual improvements with unavoidable impacts)*
  - *Alternative 3: No Project Alternative (no new transportation system improvements)*
- 7.0 References/Preparers - Lists all published materials, federal, state, and local agencies, community groups, and other organizations and individuals consulted during the preparation of this EIR. It also lists the EIR preparers.

## 1.5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REVIEW PROCESS

The environmental impact review process, as required under CEQA, is outlined below. The steps are presented in sequential order.

1. **Notice of Preparation (NOP) Distributed.** Immediately after deciding that an EIR is required, the lead agency must file a NOP soliciting input on the EIR scope to "responsible," "trustee," and involved federal agencies; to the State Clearinghouse, if one or more state agencies is a responsible or trustee agency; and to parties previously requesting notice in writing (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15082; *Public Resources Code* Section 21092.2). The NOP must be posted in the County Clerk's office for 30 days. A scoping meeting to solicit public input on the issues to be assessed in the EIR is not required, but may be conducted by the lead agency.



2. **Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) Prepared.** The DEIR must contain: a) table of contents or index; b) summary; c) project description; d) environmental setting; e) significant impacts (direct, indirect, cumulative, growth-inducing and unavoidable impacts); f) alternatives; g) mitigation measures; and h) irreversible changes.
3. **Public Notice and Review.** A lead agency must prepare a Public Notice of Availability of an EIR. The Notice must be placed in the County Clerk's office for 30 days (Public Resources Code Section 21092). The lead agency must send a copy of its Notice to anyone requesting it (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15087). Additionally, public notice of DEIR availability must be given through at least one of the following procedures: a) publication in a newspaper of general circulation; b) posting on and off the project site; and c) direct mailing to owners and occupants of contiguous properties. The lead agency must consult with and request comments on the DEIR from responsible and trustee agencies, and adjacent cities and counties (Public Resources Code Sections 21104 and 21253). The minimum public review period for a DEIR is 30 days. When a DEIR is sent to the State Clearinghouse for review, the public review period must be 45 days unless a shorter period is approved by the Clearinghouse (Public Resources Code 21091). Distribution of the DEIR may be required through the State Clearinghouse (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15305).
4. **Notice of Completion.** A lead agency must file a Notice of Completion with the State Clearinghouse as soon as it completes a DEIR.
5. **Final EIR (FEIR).** A FEIR must include: a) the DEIR; b) copies of comments received during public review; c) list of persons and entities commenting; and d) responses to comments.
6. **Certification of FEIR.** The lead agency shall certify: a) the FEIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA; b) the FEIR was presented to the decision-making body of the lead agency; and c) the decision-making body reviewed and considered the information in the FEIR prior to approving a project (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15090).
7. **Lead Agency Project Decision.** A lead agency may: a) disapprove a project because of its significant environmental effects; b) require changes to a project to reduce or avoid significant environmental effects; or c) approve a project despite its significant environmental effects, if the proper findings and statement of overriding considerations are adopted (*CEQA Guidelines* Sections 15042 and 15043).
8. **Findings/Statement of Overriding Considerations.** For each significant impact of the project identified in the EIR, the lead or responsible agency must find, based on substantial evidence, that either: a) the project has been changed to avoid or substantially reduce the magnitude of the impact; b) changes to the project are



within another agency's jurisdiction and such changes have or should be adopted; or c) specific economic, social, or other considerations make the mitigation measures or project alternatives infeasible (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15091). If an agency approves a project with unavoidable significant environmental effects, it must prepare a written Statement of Overriding Considerations that set forth the specific social, economic or other reasons supporting the agency's decision.

9. **Mitigation Monitoring/Reporting Program.** When an agency makes findings on significant effects identified in the EIR, it must adopt a reporting or monitoring program for mitigation measures that were adopted or made conditions of project approval to mitigate significant effects.
10. **Notice of Determination.** An agency must file a Notice of Determination after deciding to approve a project for which an EIR is prepared (*CEQA Guidelines* Section 15094). A local agency must file the Notice with the County Clerk. The Notice must be posted for 30 days and sent to anyone previously requesting notice. Posting of the Notice starts a 30-day statute of limitations on CEQA challenges (Public Resources Code Section 21167[c]).

In accordance with CEQA, a good faith effort has been made during the preparation of this EIR to contact affected agencies, organizations and persons who may have an interest in this project. This included the circulation of a Notice of Preparation (NOP) in compliance with the State CEQA Guidelines § 15082. The NOP was circulated on September 30, 2004. The NOP and comments received from public agencies and interested parties on the NOP are contained in Appendix A.

Representatives from various agencies, including the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), have communicated in writing regarding the project. One member of the public also commented in writing and verbally regarding the project. Comments received from these agencies and member of the public have been addressed in this EIR.

This Draft EIR has been distributed to Responsible Agencies, other affected agencies, and interested parties. The Notice of Availability of the Draft EIR has been distributed as required by CEQA, including publication in the newspaper. The notice of availability commences a minimum 45-day public review period. During the 45-day public review period, the Draft EIR, including appendices, is available for review at the COG offices (3216 Southside Road, Hollister, California, 95023).

Comments may be made on the Draft EIR in writing before the end of the 45-day public comment period. Following the close of the comment period, responses to comments on the Draft EIR will be prepared and published as a separate document. The Final EIR text and technical appendices, together with the Draft EIR comments and written responses to comments will constitute the Final EIR.



Written comments on the Draft EIR should be sent to:

Council of San Benito County Governments  
3216 Southside Road  
Hollister, California 95023  
Contact: Tom Quigley, Executive Director



## 2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The specific characteristics of the Project, including the Project applicant, Project characteristics, and Project objectives, are described below.

### 2.1 PROJECT APPLICANT

Council of San Benito County Governments (COG)  
3216 Southside Road  
Hollister, California 95023

### 2.2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

#### *Legislative Requirements*

COG is responsible for updating the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP is a state-mandated, long-range plan which is intended to provide a vision of regional transportation goals, policies, objectives and strategies, providing a basis for transportation infrastructure and operation/maintenance decisions for both the short and longer (25-year) term.

State and federal laws require regional transportation planning agencies to prepare and adopt an RTP and to adopt RTP updates every three years. The State's RTP Guidelines set forth the purpose of the RTP as follows:

- *Provide an assessment of current modes of transportation and the potential of new travel options within the region;*
- *Predict the future needs for travel and goods movement;*
- *Identify and document specific actions necessary to address the region's mobility and accessibility needs;*
- *Identify guidance and document public policy decisions by local, regional, state and federal officials regarding transportation expenditures and financing;*
- *Identify needed transportation improvements in sufficient detail to serve as a foundation for:*
  - *development of the FTIP, RTIP, and ITIP;*
  - *facilitation of the NEPA/404 integration process;*
  - *identification of project purpose and need;*
  - *development of an estimate of emissions impacts for demonstrating conformity with air quality standards identified in the State Implementation Plan (SIP)*
- *Promote consistency between the California Transportation Plan, the regional transportation plan, and other transportation plans developed by cities, counties, districts, private organizations, tribal governments, and state and federal agencies in responding to statewide and interregional transportation issues and needs;*
- *Provide a forum for 1) participation and cooperation, and 2) facilitating partnerships that reconcile transportation issues which transcend regional boundaries and*
- *Involve the public, federal, state and local agencies, as well as local elected officials, early in the transportation planning process so as to include them in discussions and decisions on the social, economic, air quality and environmental issues related to transportation.*



An RTP must include a long-term (minimum 20-year) horizon that reflects regional needs. Regional issues and problems are to be identified and solutions incorporating all modes of travel are to be developed and evaluated. Finally, the RTP must recommend a comprehensive solution that provides direction for programming decisions that meet identified regional transportation needs.

The RTP must also be consistent with requirements specified in TEA-21 and other federal regulations. Other federal requirements include conformity with the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments and consistency with the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP). The relationship of the RTP to other plans and programs are described in the 2005 RTP.

## **2.3 PROJECT LOCATION**

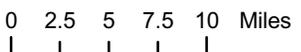
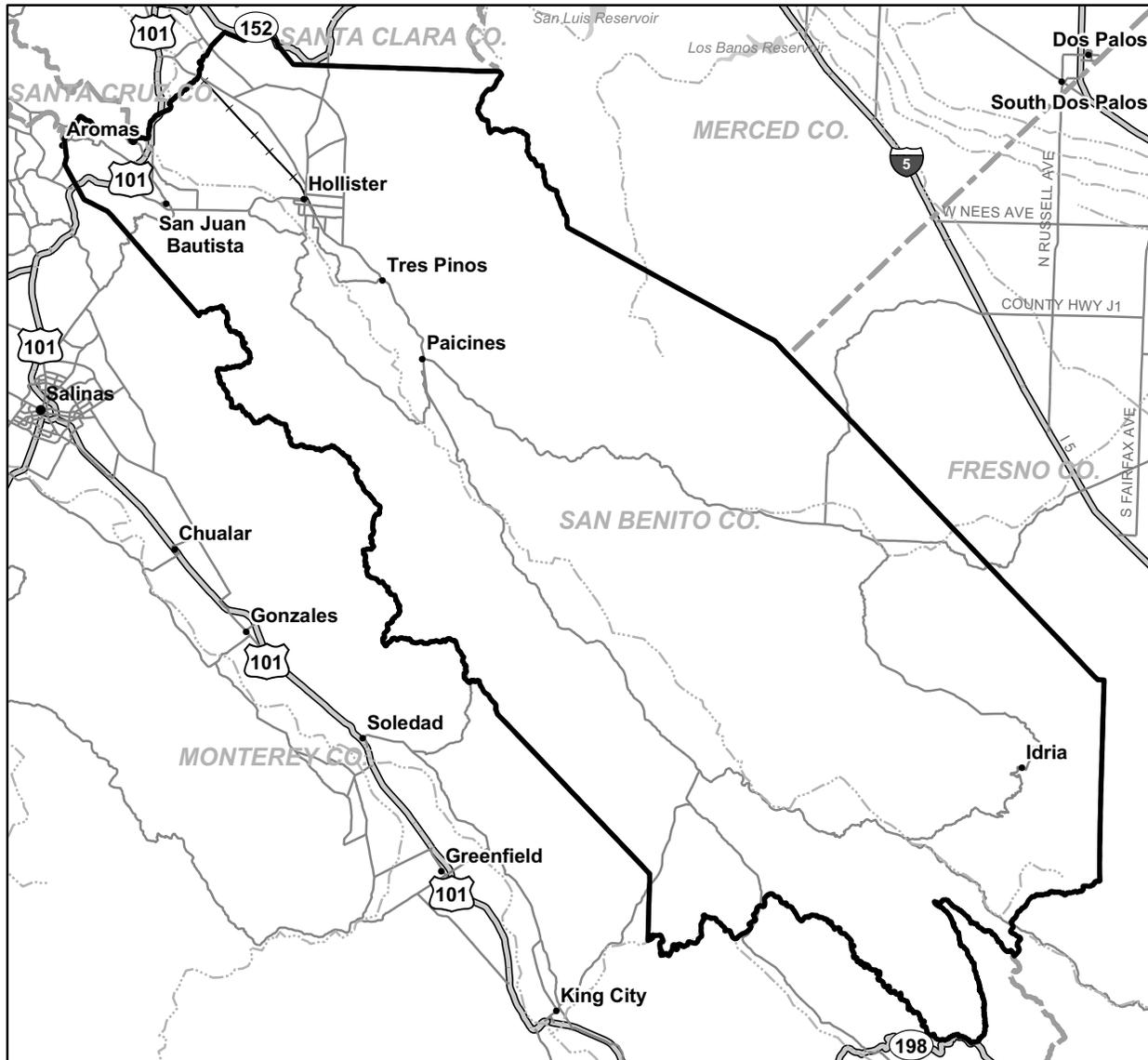
The 2005 RTP addresses transportation needs in San Benito County. Monterey, Santa Clara, Merced, and Fresno Counties surround the county, which is 1,396 square miles and lies between the Gabilan and Diablo Mountain ranges. The County includes the Cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, as well as the unincorporated communities of the County (Figure 2-1). Transportation improvement projects identified in the RTP are located on state highways, regionally significant roads and some local streets, as well as on public lands. For a detailed description of the environmental features of the County, refer to Section 3.0, *Environmental Setting*, of this EIR.

## **2.4 PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS**

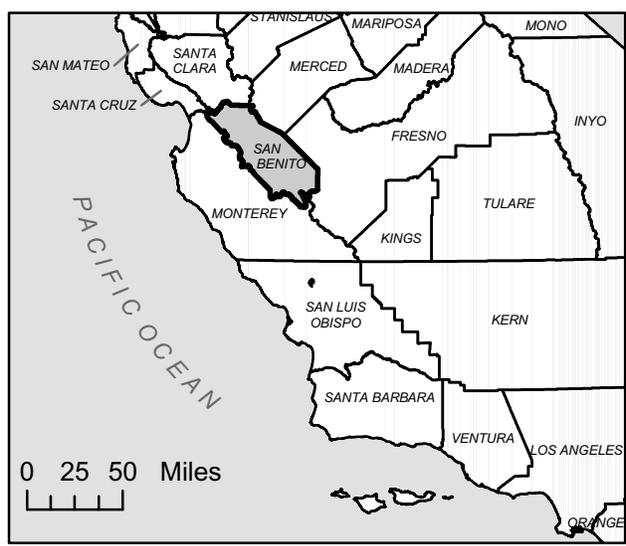
The last update of the RTP was completed in 2001. The primary purpose of the 2005 RTP update is to continue progress in accomplishing the programs and projects contained in the intermodal mix of policies in the adopted 2001 plan. These policies and programs seek to develop a coordinated, integrated and balanced transportation system that meets the current and long-term transportation needs of all the cities, unincorporated communities, socioeconomic classes, businesses and industries in the region. The secondary purpose of the plan is to satisfy federal and state requirements for a regional transportation plan and an ongoing regional planning process.

The RTP is the result of an ongoing, comprehensive and coordinated planning process in the region, involving the Council of Governments, various advisory committees, local jurisdictions, transit agencies, the State of California and the general public. COG evaluated the specific improvements or strategies on a corridor, sub-regional or regional basis in order to be consistent with the plan goals and policies and accomplish RTP objectives. Within each corridor or sub-region of the County the respective strategies, modes and combinations of modes were evaluated as a coherent system.

The RTP consists of two main components: Goals, Objectives and Policies (the Policy Element) and the Investment Program (Action and Financial Elements). The Goals, Objectives and Policies provide a regional vision to guide the development of project lists and funding expenditures. The Investment Program of the RTP, which includes the state-mandated Action and Financial Elements, identifies projects, programs and actions necessary to implement the policy element of the RTP and fill gaps in the regional transportation network, as well as identifies the funds available to the region within the next 20 years and additional funding needs.



 Project Location



Source: US Bureau of the Census TIGER 2000 data.

**Vicinity Map**

**Figure 2-1**



Of the main elements of the RTP, the policies and project lists are the two that include provisions with the potential to create physical changes to the environment. Consequently, these two elements are described in more detail below.

### *RTP Policy Element*

The Policy Element of the RTP conveys the transportation policies of the region. Legislation requires that the objectives be linked to a specific time period for implementation, namely short-range (on the order of 10 years) and long-range (on the order of 20 years). However, most objectives are considered on an ongoing basis and integrated into the continuing activities of the agency as opportunities arise. Each objective is linked (often in many different ways) to needs identified in the RTP as a means of strengthening the linkage between statewide system planning and ultimate project implementation.

The 2005 RTP set of Goals, Objectives, and Policies is primarily a refinement of those currently adopted by the COG Board in 2001. Additions include the areas of intelligent transportation and environmental justice, as well as renewed emphasis on maintaining and enhancing existing infrastructure and community core areas.

The 2005 RTP organizes policies under broad goals instead of grouping them by transportation mode. This system provides a foundation for an integrated set of multimodal goals and policies. Each of the goals, objectives and policies provide direction for the projects included in the 2005 RTP Investment Program. These objectives and policies can be reviewed in the 2005 RTP.

The following general goals have been developed to guide the transportation system decision-making process:

1. To support the economic vitality of the region, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
2. To increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
3. To increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and freight.
4. To protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life.
5. To enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
6. To promote efficient system management and operation.
7. To make maintenance of existing transportation a priority.

To implement each goal, the RTP includes a series of objectives and policies, each keyed to one of the basic goals described above. These are available for review at COG, and are referenced as necessary in the discussion of impacts contained in Section 4.0 of this EIR.

Each of the RTP goals includes proposed Performance Measures to show to what degree, why, and how there has or has not been progress in achieving the goals. The recommended performance measures are unique subsets of the previously adopted objectives and policies. The RTP's Performance Monitoring Program provides a technical basis for the analysis of



programs and projects for consistency with the RTP, improves the ability of the region to distribute increasingly scarce transportation funds efficiently and effectively, provides feedback to policy-makers, and helps to assure the RTP conforms to State and Federal requirements. The Performance Measures are available for review at COG, and are referenced as necessary in the discussion of impacts contained in Section 4.0 of this EIR.

#### *RTP Action Element*

The Action Element of the RTP expresses the goals and objectives contained in the Policy Element in the form of “products” or facilities and services that are intended to serve the public’s transportation needs. The Action Element addresses regional transportation issues and needs for all applicable transportation modes (highways, streets, roads, public transit, railroad, maritime, bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian use, as well as aviation facilities and services) over the next 20 years.

The RTP describes future transportation improvements as short- or long-term. The short-term (constrained) improvements are designed to accommodate growth between 2005 and 2015 that is anticipated in the City of Hollister, City of San Juan Bautista, and County of San Benito General Plans. Guaranteed funding has been identified for the short-term (constrained) projects. The long-term (unconstrained) improvements are designed to accommodate growth in the County between 2015 and 2025, and fall beyond the current planning horizons of local general plans. These projects do not have guaranteed funding.

The major components of the Action Element are derived from the General Plan Land Use, Circulation, and Recreational Elements of COG member agencies, Caltrans’ Route Concept and Improvement Plans for various state highways, COG Corridor Studies and Plans, Transit Plans, airport master plans and ongoing efforts to implement the goals, objectives and policies identified in the RTP Policy Element. Many components of the RTP Action Plan are designed to strengthen existing transportation networks, provide the connection between various transportation systems and promote viable transportation options and community centers.

The Action Element provides the background and context for the programs and projects listed for development over the next 20 years. Programs and projects recommended in the RTP are a combination of short and long-term activities that address regional transportation issues and needs.

Table 2-1 provides a summary of projects included in the 2005 RTP Update that were not included in the 2001 RTP Update, and vice versa. Three projects, the Highway 156 Widening Project (North of Hollister), the Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening – Sunset to Fairview Project, and the commuter rail project on the Hollister Branch Line to Gilroy, were constrained in the 2001 RTP, but are unconstrained in the 2005 RTP due to lack of sufficient state funding. All other projects that were constrained in the 2001 RTP remain constrained in the 2005 RTP. Similarly, all projects that were unconstrained in the 2001 RTP remain unconstrained in the 2005 RTP.

Table 2-2 lists all projects included in the 2005 RTP, grouped by project type. The major transportation mode concepts and regionally substantial projects included in the 2005 RTP are summarized below. The locations of the RTP roadway improvement projects are shown on



Figure 2-2. Figure 2-3 depicts RTP roadway improvement projects in the Hollister area in greater detail.

Street and Highway System Improvements

Street and Highway System Improvement projects included in the RTP are listed in Table 2-2. The primary goal of this program is to implement a comprehensive strategy for the maintenance and improvement of the street and highway system to reduce peak hour traffic. These projects address current and future roadway needs based on existing traffic conditions and projected traffic increases anticipated based on the growth accommodated in the jurisdiction's land use plans. The RTP street and highway system improvement projects include road widenings and extensions, various safety and operational improvements, and road maintenance.

**Table 2-1. Comparison of 2005 RTP Update and 2001 RTP Update Project Lists**

<b>Projects Included in the 2005 RTP Update That Were Not Included in the 2001 RTP Update</b>	<b>Projects Included in the 2001 RTP Update That Are Not Included in the 2005 RTP Update</b>
Highway 25 Safety and Operational Improvements	Meridian Street – Clearview Road to Fairview Road
Highway 156 Safety and Operational Improvements	Bus Stops and Shelters
Contracted Transit Service Operations, Annual Allocation	Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan
San Juan Highway Bike Lane Construction	<i>Hollister Municipal Airport Projects:</i>
Southside Road Bike Lane Construction	Automatic Weather Observation System
<i>Hollister Municipal Airport Projects:</i>	Countywide Comprehensive Land Use Plan
Runway 24 Holding Apron	Runway 24 Protection Zone Acquisition
	Master Plan Update
	Southwest Hangar Access Road

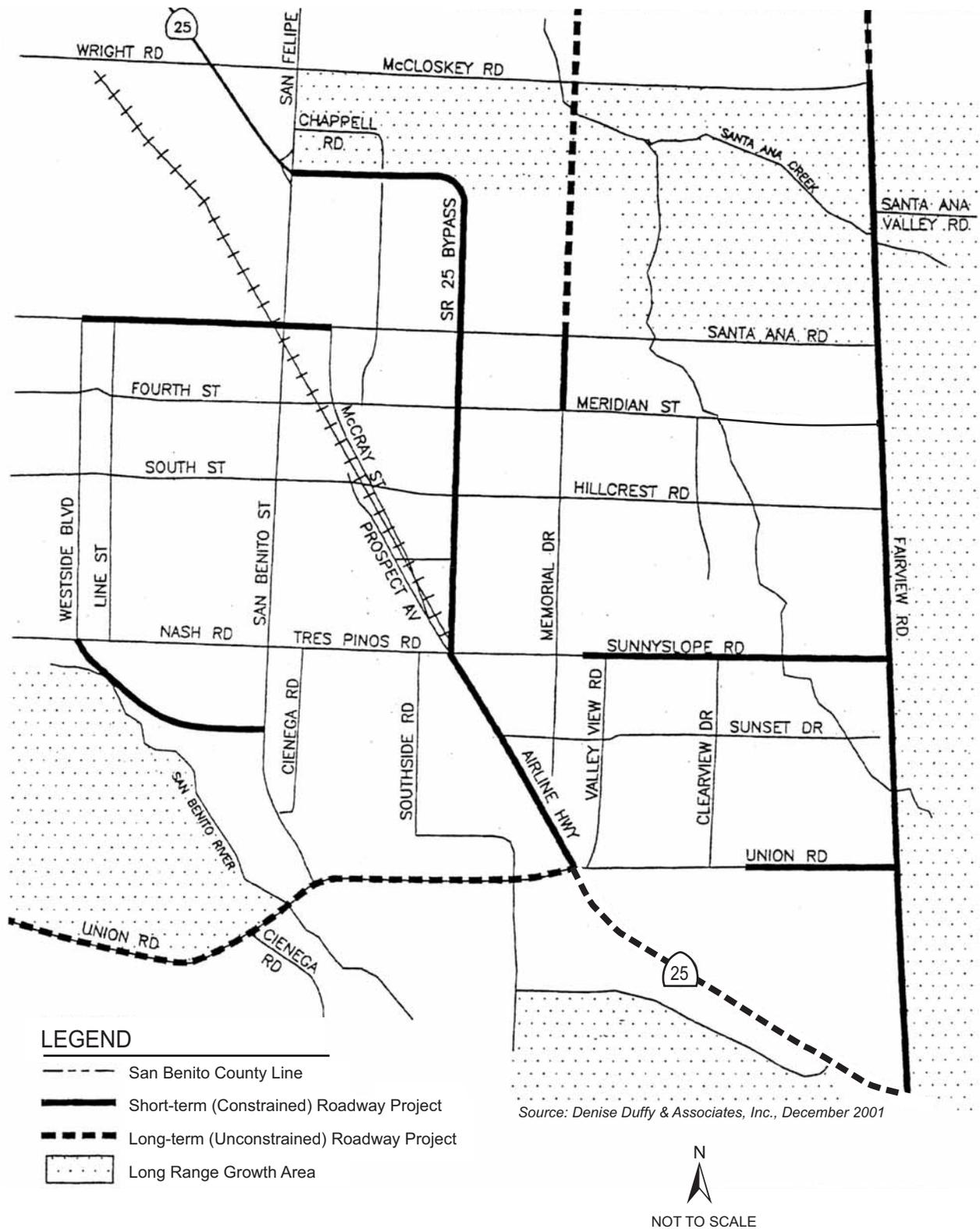
Road widenings would be located along state highways and along local arterials, including the following: Highway 25 (Sunnyslope to Sunset, and north to Santa Clara County), Highway 156 (Gap Closure, Hollister Bypass, and north of Hollister), Fairview Road, Flynn Road, Union Road, and Airline Highway (State Route 25). Road construction and extension projects contemplated in the RTP include: Highway 25 Bypass, Buena Vista Road, Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) extension, Flynn Road extension, Memorial Drive, Sunnyslope Road, and Westside Boulevard extension.

Major street and highway system improvement projects contemplated in the RTP are described in more detail in the paragraphs below:

**Highway 156, Gap Closure Project.** This project would widen Highway 156 to four lanes between San Juan Bautista and Union Road. The objective of this project is to provide a safer route, and more roadway capacity for commuters traveling between the Hollister area and Highway 101. Union Road is a relatively new major arterial route that provides a connection between the developing residential neighborhoods in south Hollister and Highway 156. Highway 156 is a designated inter-regional highway route, and Caltrans has completed several major improvements to the portion of the route within San Benito County. These improvements include construction of a bypass route west of Hollister that allows through traffic to travel







Hollister Area  
 2005 RTP Roadway Improvement Projects

Figure 2-3

between Highway 152 and Highway 101 without going through the City of Hollister. The widening project would further improve the quality of service along approximately 5.6 miles of Highway 156 by improving both inter-regional connectivity, and an important regional commuter route.

**Highway 156 Widening (North of Hollister).** This project would widen a 4-mile long segment of Highway 156 between San Felipe Road and the Santa Clara County line. The objective is to provide a safer route for inter-regional traffic passing through San Benito County on Highway 156. The ultimate plan is to widen all segments of Highway 156, and this project would begin the effort to widen the Highway 156 Hollister Bypass. The widening of Highway 156 is needed due to the combination of a high percentage of heavy vehicles using this route along with inter-regional automobile traffic.

**Highway 25 to Santa Clara County.** Highway 25 is the major highway route between the Hollister area and Santa Clara County. Commuter traffic on this 2-lane rural highway has been increasing steadily over the last ten to 20 years. The level of service has fallen to “E” and several head-on fatal accidents have occurred over the last few years. Residential growth in Hollister and San Benito County is expected to continue, and job growth in Santa Clara County is also expected to continue; therefore, traffic projections for Highway 25 strongly indicate the need for this route to be improved to provide additional roadway capacity. The project would widen approximately 8.6 miles of Highway 25, from San Felipe Road in Hollister northward to the Santa Clara County line. This widening project would be conducted in conjunction with a similar project in Santa Clara County to widen the segment of Highway 25 from the San Benito County line north to Route 101. The interchange between Highway 25 and Route 101 would be improved, and the segment of Route 101 north of the junction with Highway 25 would be improved to a controlled access freeway. Implementation of this complete set of improvements would require a coordinated effort between counties, the City of Gilroy, and Caltrans Districts 4 and 5.

**Highway 25 Bypass.** This new roadway would accommodate increased traffic volumes, to improve traffic operations, and to relieve congestion in downtown Hollister. The project would provide a new 2.7-mile long roadway on a new alignment east of the Hollister central business district. The roadway would generally parallel San Benito Street, and would provide a direct connection between the intersection of Highway 25 and San Felipe Road in north Hollister, and the intersection between Highway 25 and Sunnyslope Road in south Hollister. The new roadway would have four and six lane segments, and six signalized intersections.

**Highway 25 Widening.** This project would widen Highway 25 (Airline Highway) from Sunnyslope Road south to Sunset Road. This 0.4-mile stretch of Highway 25 serves a significant amount of commercial land uses located adjacent to the highway. Traffic projections indicate the roadway will need to provide 6 lanes of capacity through this commercial area. Existing volumes are too high to be adequately served by the existing 4-lane roadway.

**Buena Vista Road Construction.** Buena Vista Road currently exists along a discontinuous alignment in northeast Hollister. There is an opportunity to improve this roadway so that it can serve as a westward extension of Santa Ana Road. Improvement is needed from McCray Street westward to intersect with the planned Westside Boulevard. The objective is to provide a

continuous 2-lane collector street across north Hollister. The improved roadway would substantially improve the accessibility of the neighborhoods in northeast Hollister.

**Memorial Drive Construction.** Memorial Drive is being planned and constructed to serve as a major collector route for the neighborhoods west of the proposed Highway 25 Bypass. This project would construct a segment that is about 0.3 miles in length that runs between Meridian Street and Santa Ana Road. The objective is to provide a direct connection between the residential neighborhoods located adjacent to Memorial Road and Santa Ana Road. Santa Ana Road provides connections east to Fairview Road, and west to San Felipe Road and thence to Highway 25. A subsequent phase of construction would extend Memorial northward into the industrial area located east of the airport off of Fallon Road.

**Sunnyslope Road Construction.** Sunnyslope Road is the major east-west arterial street in southeast Hollister. This roadway provides the primary connection between the residential neighborhoods in southeast Hollister and the commercial areas located near the intersection with Airline Highway, and those located downtown. Sunnyslope Road needs to be a 4-lane roadway, and the project would widen the remaining mile of roadway between El Toro Drive and Fairview Road. This project may be implemented in two phases, El Toro to Highland, and then Highland to Fairview.

**Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) Construction.** Union Road has been planned and constructed to provide a continuous arterial connection through the southern portion of the Hollister area. Union Road currently runs from its intersection with Highway 156 eastward through an intersection with Airline Highway (Highway 25), and into the residential neighborhoods in southeast Hollister. A 0.6-mile extension is needed to complete the connection through to Fairview Road. Union Road has been planned to relieve congestion along Nash Road by providing a more direct path for commuters living in the south Hollister.

**Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening.** The Airline Highway project is needed to relieve traffic congestion along this major north-south corridor caused in large degree by new residential development in South Hollister. The project would widen Airline Highway from two to four lanes.

**Fairview Road Widening.** Fairview Road is the major north-south arterial serving east Hollister. The segment of Fairview Road from McCloskey Road south to Highway 25 serves a rapidly developing residential area, and needs to be widened to 4-lanes in order to improve safety, and to provide increased roadway capacity.

**Westside Boulevard Extension.** Currently Nash Road runs through the middle of San Benito High School creating noise and safety problems. This new street would divert traffic from Nash Road and complete a semi-bypass around Downtown Hollister. Eventually, Nash Road may be closed or restricted to limit disruption to the high school.

**Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial.** The largest growth area in the Hollister Area is projected to be within the area bounded by San Felipe Road, Fallon Road, Fairview Road, and Meridian Street. Growth in this area will require the development of a new minor arterial street to connect Fairview Road with San Felipe Road in the area north of McCloskey

Road. The purpose of the Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Connector is to provide access between Fairview Road and San Felipe Road in the Northeast Hollister Area.

**Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector.** The largest growth area in the Hollister Area is projected to be within the area bounded by San Felipe Road, Fallon Road, Fairview Road, and Meridian Street. Growth in this area will require the development of a new collector street to connect Fairview Road with Memorial Drive in the area south of McCloskey Road. The purpose of the Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Connector is to provide access to arterial streets in the Northeast Hollister Area.

**Flynn Road Extension and Widening.** Long-term growth east and north of the existing Hollister city limits is projected to impact Shore Road as commuters living in the new growth area travel northward to jobs in Santa Clara Valley. The purpose of the extending and widening Flynn Road is to provide an alternative travel path that provides a more direct connection between Fairview Road and Highway 25. This project would accommodate growth in northeast Hollister by increasing road and intersection capacity in this corridor. The project would also affect fewer developed properties than would widening roadways such as McCloskey, Fairview, and Shore.

**Union Road Widening.** Long-term growth east and south of existing Hollister city limits will create impacts on Union Road. Also, automobiles traveling through Hollister to reach regional destinations impact urban streets in Hollister. The purpose of the Union Road Widening Project is to alleviate through-traffic impacts in Hollister and accommodate growth in the Hollister Area by expanding road capacity around Hollister.

**Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening.** Long-term growth in inter-regional traffic is projected to result in increasing traffic volumes on the Highway 156 Hollister Bypass. The increasing traffic volumes include a high percentage of large truck traffic in addition to large numbers of passenger cars and light-duty trucks. The speed differential between the relatively slow moving trucks, and the higher speed passenger vehicles tends to create safety problems along rural 2-lane highways. The purpose of widening the Hollister bypass is to avoid level of service and safety impacts similar to those that have been observed on other segments of State Routes 25 and 156.

### Transit System Improvements

Transit system improvement projects included in the RTP are listed in Table 2-2. The primary goal of the Transit program is to provide reasonable and accessible region-wide public transit services to meet the mobility needs of all residents for access to essential services. The transit system improvement projects identified in the 2005 RTP include implementation of a commuter rail service on the Hollister Branch Line to Gilroy, transit vehicle replacement and an annual allocation for contracted transit service operations.

### Aviation System Improvements

Aviation system improvement projects included in the RTP are listed in Table 2-2. The primary goal of the Aviation program is to promote a safe and efficient air transportation system that serves general aviation and air commerce needs. All of the programmed and planned aviation



system improvements would occur at Hollister Municipal Airport. Specific improvements include implementation of: holding aprons at Runways 24 and 31, and for the California Department of Forestry (CDF), several new taxiways, and land acquisition for line-of-sight safety and for future airport expansion.

### Non-Motorized Transportation (Bicycle and Pedestrian Projects)

The primary goal of the Non-Motorized Transportation program is to provide a comprehensive strategy for a safe and efficient regional bikeway system that promotes bicycling as a means to decrease auto-dependency, air and noise pollution and traffic congestion, and supports sidewalks, pedestrian trails and boardwalks. Providing a safe, convenient and conducive environment for pedestrians promotes walking as a transportation mode in itself and provides connections between other modes. The Action Element incorporates adopted local bike plans of the County and Cities. The non-motorized transportation component of the RTP includes bikeway maintenance and repair, construction of bike lanes along San Juan Highway and Southside Road, provision of the San Benito River Recreational Trail, and Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan implementation.

## **2.5 PROJECT APPROVALS**

The following public agencies would need to review and verify the assumptions inherent in the 2005 RTP before it can be implemented:

- Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG)
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)
- California Transportation Commission (CTC)
- City of Hollister
- City of San Juan Bautista
- County of San Benito
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD)

It should be noted that additional environmental review may have to be conducted by the responsible lead agency prior to implementation of individual projects contained within the RTP. The relationship of this EIR to future environmental review of individual transportation projects is further discussed in Section 1.0, *Introduction*.

## **2.6 LEAD, RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES**

The *CEQA Guidelines* define "lead," "responsible" and "trustee" agencies. The Council of San Benito County Governments is the lead agency for the project because it has the principal responsibility for approving the project.

A "responsible agency" refers to public agencies other than the "lead agency" that have discretionary approval over the project. Because the local agencies identified in Section 2.5



above have approval authority over various individual projects, they are identified as Responsible Agencies. The US Army Corps of Engineers is also a responsible agency as it would have permitting authority over grading activities within the "waters of the United States." This authority is granted under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

A "trustee agency" refers to a state agency having jurisdiction by law over natural resources affected by a project. The California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) has jurisdiction over biological resources, including wetlands that may be impacted by Project development. The CDFG is therefore a trustee agency.



2005 San Benito County  
Regional Transportation Plan Update

Project List



**Table 2-2. 2005 RTP Update Transportation Projects**

Project ID	Project Title	Project Description/Scope	Phasing
<b>Street and Highway System Improvements</b>			
Cal-1	Highway 156, Gap Closure Widening	Widen Highway 156 to four lanes between San Juan Bautista and Union Road.	Constrained
Cal-2	Highway 156 Widening (North of Hollister)	Widen a four-mile segment of Highway 156 between San Felipe Road and the Santa Clara County line.	Constrained
Cal-3	Highway 25 to Santa Clara County Widening	Widen 8.6 miles of Highway 25 to four lanes, from San Felipe Road in Hollister to the Santa Clara County line and upgrade one bridge.	Constrained
Cal-4	Highway 25 Bypass	Construct a new four to six lane arterial between San Felipe Road and Sunnyslope Road.	Constrained
	Highway 25 Safety and Operational Enhancements	Implement safety and operation improvements, such as installing a concrete median barrier along approximately 3.5 miles of the highway, consolidating driveways, and/or limiting access.	Constrained
	Highway 156 Safety and Operational Enhancements	Implement wider shoulders on Highway 156 and intersection improvements at San Juan Road, Lucy Brown Lane, Bixby Lane, and Union/Mitchell Road.	Constrained
Holl-1	Buena Vista Road Construction	Construct a new two-lane road between Westside Boulevard to McCray Street.	Constrained
Holl-2	Memorial Drive Construction-Meridian to Santa Ana	Construct a new four-lane road between Meridian Street and Santa Ana Road.	Constrained
Holl-5	Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) Construction	Construct a 0.6 mile extension of Union Road to Fairview Road.	Constrained
SBC-1	Fairview Road Widening	Widen Fairview Road to four-lane arterial between Highway 25 and McCloskey Road.	Constrained
Holl-7	Highway 25 Widening- Sunnyslope to Sunset	Widen a 0.4-mile stretch of Highway 25 (from Sunnyslope Road to Sunset Road) from four to six lanes.	Constrained
Holl-8	Westside Boulevard Extension	Construct a new two-lane street between Nash Road and San Benito Street.	Constrained
Holl-9	New Traffic Signals	Add traffic signals at up to 17 intersections, as warranted.	Constrained
Countywide-1	Street and Highway Maintenance	Repair and Maintain Existing street and highway facilities.	Constrained
Holl-10	Memorial Drive Construction – North of Santa Ana Road	Extend Memorial Drive as a two-lane road from Santa Ana Road north, to Shelton Drive, Fallon Road, and/or Flynn Road	Unconstrained
SBC-2	Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial	Construct a new four-lane minor arterial from Fairview Road to San Felipe Road (north of McCloskey).	Unconstrained
SBC-3	Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector	Construct a new two-lane collector from Fairview Road to Memorial Drive (south of McCloskey).	Unconstrained
SBC-5	Flynn Road Extension and Widening	Extend and widen Flynn Road to four lanes from Fairview Road to Highway 25.	Unconstrained
Cal-5	Highway 101 Widening, Las Armitas – Monterey County Line to Highway 156	Widen Highway 101 to six-lanes.	Unconstrained
Cal-6	Highway 101 Widening – Highway 156 to Santa Clara County Line	Widen Highway 101 to six-lanes.	Unconstrained
Cal-7	Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening	Widen Highway 156 to a four-lane expressway/freeway.	Unconstrained
SBC-6	Union Road Widening	Widen Union Road to four lanes from Highway 256 to Highway 156	Unconstrained
Holl-6	Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening-Sunset to Fairview	Widen Airline Highway from two to four lanes from Sunset Drive to Fairview Road.	Unconstrained
Holl-4	Sunnyslope Road Construction	Widen Sunnyslope Road to four lanes from El Toro Drive to Fairview Road.	Unconstrained

**Table 2-2. 2005 RTP Update Transportation Projects**

Project ID	Project Title	Project Description/Scope	Phasing
<b>Transit System Improvements</b>			
SBCT-1	Transit Vehicle Replacement	Purchase five 25-passenger vehicles, four 10-passenger vans, and two 14-passenger vans.	Constrained
SBCT-1	Contracted Transit Service Operations, Annual Allocation	Replace old transit vehicles with new transit vehicles as warranted by vehicle age and condition.	Constrained
SBCOG-2	Commuter Rail Implementation	Implement commuter rail service on the Hollister Branch Line to Gilroy.	Unconstrained
<b>Aviation System</b>			
SBT-1-01	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 24 Holding Apron	Provide a holding area adjacent to Runway 24 in which to perform an engine run-up prior to takeoff.	Constrained
SBT-1-06	Hollister Municipal Airport Perimeter Fencing	Install safety fencing to separate ground vehicles and pedestrians from aircraft	Constrained
SBT-1-08	Hollister Municipal Airport Lighting Beacon Rehabilitation	Reconstruct the non-directional lighting beacon to improve aircraft guidance in the airport environs.	Constrained
SBT-1-09	Hollister Municipal Airport Diagonal Hanger Taxiway	Construct a separate taxiway for aircraft taxiing to the hangar area.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-10	Hollister Municipal Airport Exit Taxiway	Construct an exit taxiway on Runway 24.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-11	Hollister Municipal Airport Parallel Taxiway	Construct a parallel taxiways on the terminal side of Runways 24 and 31.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-12	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 31 Holding Apron	Construct a holding area adjacent to Runway 31 in which to perform an engine run-up prior to takeoff.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-13	Hollister Municipal Airport California Department of Forestry Apron	Construct an apron for CDF use adjacent to Runway 31.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-14	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 31 Protection Zone Acquisition	Acquire a runway protection zone for Runway 31 to ensure that long-term airport operations.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-15	Hollister Municipal Airport Instrument Landing System	Construct an Instrument Landing System to upgrade Hollister Municipal Airport's guidance system.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-16	Hollister Municipal Airport Terminal Apron Joint Replacement	Replace the apron joints on the terminal apron.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-17	Hollister Municipal Airport Southwest Hangar Taxiway	Construct taxiway access to the southwest hangar area.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-18	Hollister Municipal Airport Taxiway Lighting	Install medium-intensity taxiway lights to improve aircraft guidance in the airport environs.	Unconstrained
SBT-1-19	Hollister Municipal Airport Land Acquisition	Acquire land for expanded airport facilities (for the construction of additional hangars and miscellaneous airport facilities).	Unconstrained
SBT-1-20	Hollister Municipal Airport Line of Sight Land Acquisition	Acquire land for line of site at the intersection of Runways 24 and 31 to comply with federal regulations.	Unconstrained
<b>Non-Motorized Transportation</b>			
SBCOG-3	Bikeway Repair and Maintenance	Monitor the use of bicycles and make improvements to the bikeway system where needed.	Constrained
SBCOG-6	San Juan Highway Bike Lane Construction	Construct a Class II bike lane, roughly 3 miles, on San Juan Highway from Chittenden Road near State Route 101 to Monterey Street in San Juan Bautista.	Constrained
SBCOG-3	Southside Road Bike Lane Construction	Construct a class II bicycle lane from the City limits to the Pinnacles Community School on Southside Road.	Constrained

**Table 2-2. 2005 RTP Update Transportation Projects**

<b>Project ID</b>	<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Project Description/Scope</b>	<b>Phasing</b>
SBCOG-4	San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase I)	Construct a recreational trail along the San Benito River, from San Juan Bautista to Hollister.	Unconstrained
SBCOG-5	San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase II)	Construct a recreational trail along the San Benito River, from Hollister to Pinnacles National Monument.	Unconstrained
SBCOG-2	Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Implementation	Implementation of projects identified in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.	Unconstrained



## 3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

This section provides a brief description of the current environmental conditions in the RTP project area.

### 3.1 REGIONAL SETTING

San Benito County is a unique rural county bounded by the more urban counties of Monterey County to the west and south, Santa Clara County to the north, and Fresno and Merced Counties to the east. Located in the California Coast Range, its westernmost tip is within ten miles of Monterey Bay, while its easternmost tip is approximately the same distance from the San Joaquin Valley. Physiographically, its most striking features are the Diablo and Gabilan Mountain Ranges and the valleys between them.

The San Benito County region is slightly urbanized, but remains as a generally low density, rural and agricultural area of California that has grown as a bedroom community for the Bay Area throughout the 1990's and continuing to the 2000's. Approximately 97 percent of San Benito County is unincorporated land, with 90 percent being used as farmland, rangelands, forest, and public lands. The County includes the Cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista, as well as the unincorporated communities of the county. The bulk of the county's population resides in the central region near the incorporated cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista. Hollister serves as the major commercial center for the county. The urbanized areas within San Benito County are linked to Highways 25, 156, and 129, which are the primary highway corridors serving the region.

The population in the County increased 1.4% between the years 2003 and 2004. As of the year 2004, 57,100 residents live in San Benito County (California Department of Finance, January 2004). San Juan Bautista experienced the highest growth rate over this period, growing to a population of 1,720, an increase of 6.8%. Economic growth in Santa Clara County created tremendous pressure for residential growth in San Benito County where housing is developed at significantly less cost. As a result, San Benito County's population growth rate has outpaced the state's, and the number of registered vehicles and licensed drivers has grown accordingly. Furthermore, the proportion of employed persons commuting from San Benito County to Santa Clara County each day (and to a lesser extent to Monterey County) has grown. These trends have dramatically increased demands on the regional transportation system. Population growth in San Benito County has been largely confined to the City of Hollister and the surrounding unincorporated area, and as a result the demand for transportation improvements was greatest in the Hollister Area. This growth has resulted in increased peak hour traffic congestion along Highways 156 and 25, especially near Hollister and San Juan Bautista.

### 3.2 MAJOR TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

San Benito County's regional transportation system is composed of capital facilities, including: approximately 911 centerline miles of streets and highways (many including sidewalks), 11.7 miles of heavy rail track (Hollister Branch Line), two airports (Hollister Municipal Airport and Frazier Lake Air Park), and limited bicycle facilities. The regional transportation system also includes operational systems, including: transit and paratransit systems, taxi service, commodity movement, and transportation demand management capabilities.



### 3.2.1 Street and Highway System

**a. State Highways.** The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) maintains five state highways in San Benito County (Routes 25, 101, 129, 146, and 156). With the exception of State Route 101, state highways in San Benito County were originally designed as two-lane rural highways. Many of these facilities in Northern San Benito County have been overwhelmed by increased commuter traffic due to residential growth and commercial growth in the Hollister Area. Past regional transportation plans have focused on State Routes 25 and 156 particularly, seeking to relieve traffic congestion and reduce the number of accidents. State highways are discussed in more detail below, and Figure 2-1 shows a map of San Benito County's state highways.

#### *State Route 25*

State Route 25 traverses the entire length of San Benito County from the southern county boundary at the junction of State Route 198 near King City north through Paicines, Tres Pinos, and Hollister to the northern county boundary near Gilroy, where it connects to State Route 101. In Hollister, State Route 25 occupies Airline Highway, Tres Pinos Road, and San Benito Street. Caltrans classifies this route as a minor arterial, and the route is primarily a rural, two-lane facility, except for a short section (0.3 miles) in Hollister, where it is four lanes. State Route 25 from State Route 198 to State Route 156 is eligible for designation as a State Scenic Route.

State Route 25 is a primary commuter route between Hollister and Gilroy and through Hollister. During peak commute periods, State Route 25 experiences high levels of traffic congestion, and the number of traffic accidents along the corridor are the highest in the county. There is also anecdotal evidence that heavy peak-period traffic volumes are impacting neighboring residential streets. Implementing safety improvements and widening the highway segment is a high priority for San Benito County policy makers.

#### *Highway 101*

State Route 101 passes through the northwestern tip of San Benito County for 7.4 miles and serves primarily interregional traffic. It is the main north/south route in Caltrans District 5 and serves as the backbone of the circulation system for many cities and communities. State Route 101 is considered to be statewide and regionally significant, and Caltrans classifies this route as a principal arterial and includes it as part of the Interregional Route System (IRRS). State Route 101 from the Monterey-San Benito County Line to State Route 156 is eligible for official designation as a State Scenic Route; San Benito County has designated the route as a Scenic Highway.

State Route 101 in San Benito County starts as a four-lane expressway at the Monterey-San Benito County Line and changes to a four-lane freeway 1.6 mile north. The route continues as a four-lane freeway to the Pajaro River Bridge at the San Benito-Santa Clara County Line. Routes 156 and 129 intersect State Route 101 in San Benito County.

State Route 101 is expected to accommodate anticipated growth through the long-term (2020) forecast without major improvements. Transportation officials have identified a route concept for State Route 101 that is a six-lane freeway configuration.



### ***State Route 129***

State Route 129 extends from Santa Cruz County into the northwestern tip of San Benito County connecting to State Route 101 approximately 2.6 miles from the Santa Cruz-San Benito County Line. It provides access between State Route 1 in Santa Cruz County to State Route 101 for truck traffic generated by food processing plants in the Watsonville Area and a sand and gravel quarry in Southeastern Santa Cruz County. The route also serves agricultural production areas and is used by farm equipment and slow-moving trucks carrying farm produce. Finally, State Route 129 provides access to Santa Cruz and Monterey County Beaches. State Route 129 in San Benito County is a two-lane rural road. Caltrans classifies this route as a minor arterial. San Benito County has designated this route as a Scenic Highway.

State Route 129 is expected to accommodate anticipated growth through the long-term (2020) forecast without major improvements. Truck traffic originating from Santa Cruz County on State Route 129 has been impacting San Juan Highway and San Justo Road, both of which are narrow two-lane roads ill-equipped to handle heavy loads and large vehicles. Agricultural-related businesses located on San Juan Highway are generating much of this truck traffic, which is also impacting the local streets of San Juan Bautista as trucks move through the city toward State Route 156. In addition, Anzar High School, which is also located on San Juan Highway, is generating traffic in the area.

The route concept for State Route 129 is a two-lane rural road with passing lanes where appropriate. Substantial increases in population and traffic congestion are anticipated from commercial and residential development in the Watsonville Area.

### ***State Route 146***

State Route 146 in San Benito County is a two-lane rural road used primarily to provide access from Route 25 to the Pinnacles National Monument. Caltrans classifies this route as a minor arterial. State Route 146 is eligible for official designation as a State Scenic Route; San Benito County has designated the route as a Scenic Highway.

State Route 146 is expected to accommodate anticipated growth through the long-term (2020) forecast without major improvements. The route concept for State Route 146 is to maintain the corridor as a two-lane rural road.

### ***State Route 156***

State Route 156 traverses Northern San Benito County from State Route 101 west of San Juan Bautista through San Juan Bautista and Hollister to San Benito-Santa Clara County Line where it connects with State Route 152. In Hollister, State Route 156 Bypass, skirts north of the city limits, while Business Route 156 passes through Downtown Hollister.

The corridor serves interregional traffic, including substantial amounts of truck traffic during the week and recreational traffic between the Central Valley and the Monterey Bay Area on the weekend.

Caltrans classifies State Route 156 as a rural minor arterial and includes it as part of the Interregional Route System. It is also designated as a Federal Aid Primary Route and is part of

the Freeway and Expressway System, although a large portion of the route is conventional highway. State Route 156 is eligible for designation as a State Scenic Route.

State Route 156 is a four-lane expressway from State Route 101 to San Juan Bautista, where it narrows into a conventional two-lane rural highway. In the Hollister Area, State Route 156 becomes a two-lane expressway as it bypasses Hollister and maintains that configuration to the San Benito-Santa Clara County Line. Business Route 156 is a two lane rural highway from State Route 156 (bypass) to north of Hollister, where it becomes a four-lane expressway from San Felipe Road to State Route 156 (end of bypass).

State Route 156 is a major corridor for commuters traveling to Monterey and Santa Clara Counties. While portions of the facility have been upgraded to handle increased demand, the segment between San Juan Bautista and Hollister remains a two-lane facility with significant truck and farm equipment traffic. Widening this highway segment is a high priority for San Benito County policy makers. The route concept for State Route 156 is a four-lane expressway from State Route 101 to Union Road west of Hollister and a two-lane expressway from Union Road to the San Benito-Santa Clara County Line. Caltrans is currently in the process of finalizing plans to widen State Route 156 from San Juan Bautista (The Alameda) to Union Road, and SBCOG recently (spring 2000) requested a modified design standard for the facility to limit the amount of prime farmland that would be taken as part of the project.

**b. County Roads and City Streets.** San Benito County's road network includes numerous county roads and city streets. Local jurisdictions classify these facilities according to their function into one of five categories – arterials, collectors, local, local business street, or private roads.

*Arterials.*

The arterial street and road system primarily provides for vehicular movement through or between regions. Within urbanized areas, these facilities provide access to major activity areas and accommodate pedestrian and bicycle use. Arterial streets and roads usually have relatively high traffic volumes and travel speeds, which limits pedestrian and bicycle access. Arterial streets have limited parking opportunities or parking is prohibited altogether.

*Collectors.*

The collector street and road system primarily provides for vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle movement between sub-areas within residential, commercial, and industrial neighborhoods. Collector streets and roads usually have moderate traffic volumes and travel speeds, consistent with a moderate level of pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. Collector streets have limited on-street parking opportunities.

*Local.*

The local street and road system primarily provides for vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle movement within residential, commercial, and industrial neighborhoods. Local streets and roads usually have low traffic volumes and travel speeds, consistent with a moderate to high level of pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. Local streets have ample on-street parking opportunities.



### *Local Business Street.*

Main streets primarily provide for vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle access in and around downtown commercial areas. Main streets usually have moderate to high traffic volumes and low travel speeds, consistent with the highest level of pedestrian and bicycle accessibility. Main streets have ample on-street parking opportunities, including diagonal parking stalls, for commercial use.

### *Private Roads.*

Private roads provide access from public roads to properties otherwise unconnected to the public road system. Private roads are also found in multi-family or condominium development projects. Usually, local jurisdictions require new private roads to meet the same standards as public roads, but in many cases older facilities do not meet minimum public standards. Private roads usually have low traffic volumes and travel speeds, but pedestrian facilities are often missing.

San Benito County's road network has been overwhelmed with increased traffic in the last decade. Traffic congestion on rural roads in northern San Benito County has created long delays at rural intersections, and within Hollister many local and collector streets are being used for through travel. In Downtown Hollister, pedestrian accessibility is low due to wide streets, high speeds, and lack of crosswalks, and parking along San Benito Street in Downtown Hollister is limited to parallel parking stalls. Figure 2-\* shows a map of major streets in Hollister and San Juan Bautista.

## **3.2.2 Transit Services**

Transit providers in San Benito County include County Express Transit System, specialized transit (elderly and disabled), public school bus operators, and Hollister Taxi. Each of these is discussed below. Commuter rail service is not currently provided in or through the County.

**a. County Express Transit System.** Public transportation within San Benito County is supplied by the County Express transit system. County Express was initiated in March of 1975 and was operated, maintained, and administered by the City of Hollister until October 1987. The City of Hollister subcontracted transit operations to a private operator in 1987 and in 1990 it transferred the responsibility for transit system administration to SBCOG. The transit system is now monitored by SBCOG, with the agency providing funding on the basis of services provided to Hollister, San Juan Bautista, and the unincorporated area. In 2000, County Express Transit System's fleet included 16 vehicles: five 28-passenger buses, one 32-passenger bus, two 16-passenger vans, and eight 12-passenger vans. All vehicles are ADA compliant and equipped with wheelchair lifts. The five larger buses operate on Compressed Natural Gas; six of the smaller vehicles operate on unleaded gas, two on propane, and the 32-passenger bus on diesel fuel. County Express Transit Systems employs 1 operations supervisor, 2 radio dispatch operators, and 13 part-time and 3 full-time drivers. County Express Transit System provides fixed route, Dial-a-Ride, and inter-county service. County Express Transit System operates three fixed-route bus lines in Hollister Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. County Express Transit System provides Dial-a-Ride service to Northern San Benito County, including Hollister, San Juan Bautista, and Tres Pinos, Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on weekends from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. County Express Transit System's inter-county service

includes: service to Gilroy's Caltrain Station, service to Gavilan Junior College, and service to Gilroy's Greyhound Station.

**b. Specialized Transportation.** In San Benito County, County Express Transit System, Jovenes de Antano, and the American Cancer Society provide specialized transportation services for the transit-dependent population (the elderly and disabled population). As mentioned above, County Express Transit System provides Dial-a-Ride service to ADA-eligible persons, and this service is limited to Northern San Benito County. Under contract with COG, Jovenes de Antano has provided service for the Senior Nutrition and Out-of-County Medical programs since 1990. Jovenes de Antano's fleet includes: one 15-passenger van, one 13-passenger van, and one 12-passenger van with a wheelchair lift. Jovenes de Antano also provides transportation for doctor appointments, recreational activities, and essential shopping trips. The American Cancer Society provides transportation for cancer-related appointments using volunteers and private vehicles.

### 3.2.3 Aviation Services

Aviation serves several purposes in San Benito County. The agricultural producers, fire fighters, and emergency medical services all depend on the use of aircraft. Private aircraft users also use San Benito County's aviation facilities for commercial and recreational uses.

San Benito County has one public airport (Hollister Municipal Airport), one private airport (Frazier Lake Airpark), and several landing strips scattered throughout the county. Also, Hazel Hawkins Hospital maintains a heliport at its Hollister facility. Regional airport services are provided by San Jose International Airport and Monterey Peninsula Airport.

**a. Hollister Municipal Airport.** The Hollister Municipal Airport is located approximately two miles north of Hollister adjacent to State Route 156 and is owned and operated by the City of Hollister. The facility is a general aviation airport and is included in the National Airport Systems Plan. In its operational role, it is classed as General Utility and accommodates all current aviation aircraft except certain business jets.

**b. Frazier Lake Airpark.** Frazier Lake Airpark is located approximately six miles northwest of Hollister on Frazier Lake Road and is owned privately. The airport is open for public use and has 100 members.

### 3.2.4 Non-Motorized Transportation

Another important aspect of San Benito County's transportation system is non-motorized travel, including pedestrian and bicyclist activities.

**a. Pedestrian Activities.** Walking and the sidewalks, streets, and trails upon which people walk are fundamental to the functioning of San Benito County neighborhoods. Hollister and San Juan Bautista are filled with tree-lined streets, wide sidewalks, and neighborhoods built on a pedestrian scale. In many cases, these streets are well preserved and function as they were originally designed to function. In other cases, these historic streets have been overwhelmed by automobile activity related to the San Juan Bautista State Historic Park.

**b. Bicyclist Activity.** Another important form of non-motorized transportation in San Benito County is bicycle travel. In many cases, bicycles can be accommodated on well-designed streets without the need for separate bike lanes. As many of the major city streets in Hollister and San Juan Bautista become impacted by heavy traffic, street designers must place increased emphasis on accommodating bicycle travel. This can be accomplished by adding Class III bicycle lanes on existing streets and by providing alternative routes dedicated to bicycle and pedestrian use (Class I facilities).

At present, there are limited facilities for bicyclists in San Benito County. Most bicycling is done on roadway shoulders, which are not striped for bike lanes. In the mid-1970s, two Class I bicycle facilities were constructed in the Hollister Area, and these facilities were extended in the 1990s. One of these is adjacent to Prospect Avenue/ Airline Highway between Hawkins Street and Sunset Drive. The second is adjacent to State Route 25 from Tres Pinos School to Sunnyslope Road.

### 3.2.5 Commodity Movement

Commodities in San Benito County are transported in and out of San Benito County by truck and rail, with the large majority of goods being moved by truck.

**a. Trucking.** San Benito County experiences a higher than average amount of truck traffic, and this activity, while largely confined to state highways, impacts local streets and rural roads not designed to handle large, heavy trucks. Trucking activity around and through San Juan Bautista is a particular problem, with Hollister experiencing the same problem to a lesser degree. Commodity exports from San Benito County are primarily agricultural products and quarry materials, and transport of these products and materials generate a significant amount of truck traffic on local and state highways. Imports into San Benito County include nearly everything that is sold in stores.

**b. Railroad.** The sole rail line in San Benito County is the 12-mile-long Hollister Branch Line running from Hollister to Carnadero in Santa Clara County. The facility is owned by the Union Pacific Railroad, which transports approximately 10,000 gross tons of goods on the rail line each year. In decades past, substantial amounts of commodities were transported via rail on the Hollister Branch Line. With the advent of the state highway and the competitive shipping rates offered by truckers, though, rail has become a less viable form of commodity transport.

### 3.2.6 Transportation Demand and System Management

COG provides ridesharing services and park-and-ride lot facilities to help manage the growth in demand for highway capacity. In addition, Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol are working with regional agencies to implement intelligent transportation systems to help manage the efficiency of the existing highway system. These programs and facilities are discussed below.

**a. Ridesharing.** SBCOG has provided ridesharing services to San Benito County residents since 1987, and the program focuses on commuter who travel to Santa Clara and Monterey Counties for work. The goal of the ridesharing program is to help residents of San Benito County achieve an acceptable level of mobility and improve air quality by encouraging

shared vehicle use and the use of other modes of transportation as alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle.

The San Benito County Ridesharing Program database contained 93 persons in June 2000. In addition, San Benito County Ridesharing Program operates one 14-passenger vanpool that operates daily to Santa Clara County.

**b. Park-and-Ride Lots.** San Benito County currently has two park-and-ride lots with 19 parking spaces serving area commuters. One location is at the intersection of State Route 101 and State Route 156 near Searle Road. The other location is in Hollister at the intersection of Hillcrest and Memorial Drives. Both of these lots have bicycle locker accommodations.

**c. Intelligent Transportation Systems.** Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) involve the use of advanced computer, electronic, and communication technologies to increase the safety and efficiency of the highway transportation system.

## 4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS

**Introduction.** This section contains a discussion of the possible environmental effects of the RTP project for the specific issue areas that were identified through the Initial Study process as having the potential to experience significant impacts.

“Significant effect” is defined by the *State CEQA Guidelines* §15382 as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment, but may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant.”

The assessment of each issue area begins with an italicized introduction that summarizes the environmental effects considered for that issue area. This is followed by the setting and impact analysis. Within the impact analysis, the first subsection identifies the methodologies used and the “significance thresholds”, which are those criteria adopted by COG, other agencies, universally recognized, or developed specifically for this analysis to determine whether potential effects are significant. The next subsection describes each impact of the project, mitigation measures for significant impacts, and the level of significance after mitigation. Each effect under consideration for an issue area is separately listed in bold text, with the discussion of the effect and its significance following. Each bolded impact listing also contains a statement of the significance determination for the environmental impact as follows:

*Class I. Significant and Unavoidable: An impact that cannot be reduced to below the threshold level given reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires a Statement of Overriding Considerations to be issued if the project is approved per §15093 of the State CEQA Guidelines.*

*Class II. Significant but Mitigable: An impact that can be reduced to below the threshold level given reasonably available and feasible mitigation measures. Such an impact requires findings to be made under §15091 of the State CEQA Guidelines.*

*Class III. Not Significant: An impact that may be adverse, but does not exceed the threshold levels and does not require mitigation measures. However, mitigation measures that could further lessen the environmental effect may be suggested if readily available and easily achievable.*

*Class IV. Beneficial: An effect that would reduce existing environmental problems or hazards.*

Following each environmental effect discussion is a listing of recommended mitigation measures (if required) and the residual effects or level of significance remaining after the implementation of the measures. In those cases where the mitigation measure for an impact could have a significant environmental impact in another issue area, this impact is discussed as a residual effect. The impact analysis concludes with a listing of specific RTP projects that could contribute to one or more the general impacts described.

The State *CEQA Guidelines* also require the analysis of the cumulative effects of a project in combination with other foreseeable development in the area. Section 15130 of the State *CEQA*



*Guidelines* prescribes two methods for analyzing cumulative impacts: (1) use of a list of past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects producing related or cumulative impacts; or (2) use of a summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document. However, this document is a Program EIR that analyzes the effects of cumulative buildout of the 2005 RTP. The RTP considers the past, present, and future projects described in method 1 above and proposes a range of specific projects designed to meet current and projected future needs. The project also constitutes the cumulative scenario described in method 2. Therefore, the cumulative effects of all circulation system improvements in the county are included in the analysis of the project's impacts. The analysis of project impacts contained in this "first tier" environmental review document will form the basis for the cumulative analysis contained in any subsequent environmental documentation for specific projects proposed under the 2005 RTP.

**Effects Found Not to Be Significant.** Pursuant to Section 15128 of the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR "shall contain a statement briefly indicating the reasons that various possible significant effects of a project were determined not to be significant and were therefore not discussed in detail in the EIR." The project would not cause or otherwise result in significant environmental effects in the resource areas discussed below. As indicated in the State CEQA Guidelines, no further environmental review of these issues is necessary for the reasons summarized in the following discussion.

### Aesthetics

- ❖ *Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista? Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within or visible from a state scenic highway? Would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?*

Although Highways 156 and 25 are not designated as State scenic highways, they are eligible for listing as such. Several roadways in the county provide scenic views of natural and pastoral landscapes. Although not formally designated as scenic highways, nearly all state highways in the county can be characterized as traversing scenic areas, whether in urban centers or crossing rural landscapes. Construction of the RTP improvements along scenic corridors could create visual impacts. These would include:

- Blockage of views by construction equipment and staging areas
- Disruption of views by temporary signage
- Exposure of slopes and removal of vegetation

However, these impacts would be short-term and temporary and would be considered less than significant.

With regard to long-term aesthetic impacts, implementation of the 2005 RTP would generally result in modification to existing transportation facilities within existing highway or roadway rights-of-way. For these types of projects, aesthetic impacts are generally considered adverse but less than significant because they represent further intensification of an existing manmade setting rather than



outright loss of a pristine, natural setting. None of the projects contemplated in the RTP would damage scenic resources such as historic buildings or rock outcroppings. Several ornamental trees and vegetation could be removed to facilitate implementation of proposed improvements. However, most transportation improvements would be landscaped. Landscaping is anticipated to soften the views of the site by creating additional greenery. Caltrans or the local jurisdiction or lead agency of a particular RTP project will ensure that a project in a scenic view corridor will have the minimum possible impact, consistent with project goals, upon foliage, existing landscape architecture and natural scenic views through the placement of conditions on the project by the lead agency during the project specific environmental review and by ensuring that specific design considerations are enacted at each stage of design by the lead agency, Caltrans or local jurisdictions and COG personnel. Less than significant long-term visual impacts would result.

Refer to Section 4.1, *Agricultural Resources*, for a discussion of RTP impacts related to the alteration of rural character in the county.

- ❖ *Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?*

Some RTP highway and roadway projects may include street lighting, and would result in increased daytime glare due to vehicle use and metal materials. In addition, aviation projects such as implementation of a non-directional lighting beacon, would result in increase nighttime lighting levels. These impacts are generally considered adverse but less than significant because they represent further intensification of an existing manmade setting rather than outright loss of a pristine, natural setting. Caltrans or the local jurisdiction or lead agency of a particular RTP project will ensure that transportation and/or aviation improvement projects would not result in overspill of night lighting through the placement of conditions on the project by the lead agency during the project specific environmental review and by ensuring that specific design considerations are enacted at each stage of design by the lead agency, Caltrans or local jurisdictions and COG personnel. Less than significant impacts would result.

### Air Quality

- ❖ *Would the project create objectionable odors affecting a substantial number of people?:*

RTP projects that involve roadway expansions or realignments could result in the transfer of vehicle emissions and/or could result in emissions sources being located closer to receptors. None of the contemplated RTP projects would be expected to result in localized traffic concentrations that could produce substantial odor emissions or affect a substantial number of people when compared to existing conditions. Implementation of the 2005 RTP would reduce vehicle emissions as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented. In addition, the RTP projects would not result in stationary sources of odors. Therefore, less than significant impacts related to odor would result.



### Biological Resources

- ❖ *Would the project adversely impact, either directly or through habitat modifications, any endangered, rare, or threatened species, as listed in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (§670.2 or 670.5) or in Title 50, Code of Federal Regulations (§17.11 or 17.12)?*

*Would the project have a substantial adverse impact, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

*Would the project have a substantial adverse impact on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or US Fish and Wildlife Service?*

*Would the project adversely impact federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) either individually or in combination with the known or probable impacts of other activities through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?*

*Would the project interfere substantially with the movement of any resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of wildlife nursery sites?*

*Would the project conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?*

There are eleven wildlife species that may be located in the County that are considered by the State of California or the Federal government to be either threatened or endangered. An additional 26 species having habitat located within the County are candidate species to be included on federal lists of rare, threatened or endangered or species recognized by the State of California to be "Species of Special Concern". The blunt-nosed leopard lizard, California condor, San Joaquin kit fox, Giant Kangaroo Rat, San Joaquin Antelope Squirrel, Southern Bald Eagle, and Western Yellow Billed Cuckoo, and giant garter snake are all listed as endangered, threatened or rare forms of wildlife by the State of California Natural Diversity Data Base. Most of these species are found in the southeastern areas of the County.

Several sensitive animal species inhabit the Panoche, Tumey Hills and Ciervo Hills areas. This habitat has become increasingly rare due to urbanization and farming in the San Joaquin Valley area. From 80 to 98% of the habitat has been lost for the Blunt nosed leopard lizard, the San Joaquin Antelope Squirrel, the Giant Kangaroo Rat and the San Joaquin kit fox. The Giant Kangaroo Rat is considered to be a good indicator of the health of the remnant San Joaquin Valley endangered species habitats. The rat's abandoned burrows furnish habitat for the Blunt-nosed leopard lizard and the San Joaquin Antelope squirrels are found

in the rat's colonies. The rat is part of the diet for the endangered San Joaquin kit fox where they coexist (BLM 1992).

Several plant species of special concern have been found in the Vallecitos Valley area – the Forked-fiddleneck, Hollisteria and Jared's Peppergrass.

The San Benito Mountain area is noteworthy for the endangered San Benito Evening Primrose and because it is one of the only places where the Jeffery Pine, incense cedar, and Coulter Pine all coexist. This 1,500-acre area has been designated as a natural area by the United States Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management.

San Benito County also has populations of game species, such as deer, wild pig, quail, chukar, partridge, and cottontail rabbit. Tule elk and prong-horned antelope have been introduced in southern San Benito County at the Laguna Ranch Hunt Club.

*Valley Grassland Community.* Grasslands are usually found at low elevations and confined to flat lands or gently rolling hillsides that have a deep layer of clay bearing soil. The use of such land for urbanization, agriculture, and grazing has greatly altered the community's composition and distribution. The remaining natural fields and meadows provide the habitat for many birds which feed not only on the seeds of the grasses and the flowers, but also on the numerous field rodents and reptiles. The predominant vegetation in this community is annual grasses, herbs such as filaree, fiddleneck, popcorn flower, and lupines, and shrub species including saltbush, Mexican tea, golden bush, buckwheat, California sage, and California juniper. Of special importance within the Grassland Community are the grasslands near Tres Pinos and Panoche. These areas have been identified by the California Department of Fish and Game as having an unusually high value as a wildlife resource. In particular, the San Joaquin kit fox ranges within these areas and is considered to be endangered. Valley and Foothill Grasslands also provide habitat for the San Joaquin Antelope Squirrel, and the endangered Giant Kangaroo Rat.

*Riparian Community.* The presence of water provides a favorable habitat for a variety of trees, shrubs, and grasses, as well as a habitat for the largest number of animal species of any vegetative community in the County. Major riparian habitats include the Pajaro and San Benito Rivers. These two rivers also support cold water fish, as do Arroyo Dos Picachos and Laguna Creek.

*Chaparral Community.* The slopes and ridges of the foothills and mountainous regions of San Benito County exemplify the Chaparral Community. A large portion of southern San Benito County is made up of the Chaparral Community, consisting of deep-rooted shrubs, which are able to survive in dry, sunny locations. These provide habitat for an extremely wide variety of animal life, ranging from the common quail to the endangered kit fox. Common species in this plant community include the following: chamise, manzanita, buckbrush, red berry, coffee berry, choke cherry, toyon, silk-tassel bush, mountain mahogany, California buckeye, interior live oak, and scrub oak.



*Oak Woodland Community.* The Oak Woodland Community is characteristic of sheltered valleys and northfacing sides of canyons and is found predominantly in the western and southern regions of San Benito County. It forms a shelter for a wide variety of plant and animal species with the shade it produces keeping the temperature lower than in the surrounding grasslands and chaparral. This community has the highest rainfall and the lowest average temperature of any wildlife habitat in San Benito County. Plants commonly found in this habitat include coast live oak, valley oak, poison oak, buckeye, laurel, madrone, ceanothus and manzanita. The oak woodland provides nesting areas for a wide variety of birds and shelter for a large number of animal species, including opossum, raccoon, skunk, blacktail deer and bobcat.

*Conifer Forest.* The Conifer Forest Community, which is localized on San Benito Mountain, is unique because it contains the only known coexistence of the Coulter pine, Jeffery pine, and incense cedar in the world. There is also a Coulter-jeffery pine hybrid.

*Wetlands.* These areas include freshwater sloughs, swamps, vernal pools, wet meadows, wet pastures, springs and seeps, portions of lakes, ponds, rivers and streams, and all other areas which are periodically or permanently covered by shallow water, or dominated by hydrophytic vegetation, or in which the soils are predominantly hydric in nature (Department of Fish and Game, Environmental Services Division, Department of Fish and Game Recommended Wetland Definition, Mitigation Strategies, and Habitat Value Assessment Methodology, June 24, 1987). Notable lakes and reservoirs in the County are San Felipe Lake (Soap Lake), Tequisquita Slough, Anzar Lake, and San Justo, Paicines and Hernandez Reservoirs.

Construction activity associated with some transportation projects may temporarily disturb wetland or riparian habitats and/or other biological resources. However, compliance with existing regulations pertaining to construction activities would be expected to reduce this impact to a level considered less than significant.

Many of the capital improvement projects envisioned in the RTP involve expansion of existing facilities in urbanized or already developed areas, and/or within existing right-of-way, rather than extension of infrastructure into undeveloped portions of the county. Therefore, most contemplated improvements would not be expected to adversely affect important biological habitats.

Several projects would involve construction, or widening of bridges over rivers and creeks. Other projects would involve the development of bicycle and/or pedestrian paths along riparian corridors, such as the San Benito River Recreational Trail. Construction of these facilities could have both direct impacts due to disturbance of riparian flora and fauna and indirect impacts due to increased erosion and sedimentation, which would adversely affect downstream water quality. However, it should be noted that contemplated trail facilities

would divert existing informal use of sensitive habitat areas, which would be considered a beneficial impact.

Contemplated RTP projects involve the extension or widening of existing roadways in rural, agricultural areas of the county (e.g., Highway 156 widening, etc.). Though agricultural lands are not typically inhabited by large numbers of rare, threatened, or endangered species, they can include such resources as wetland elements and oak trees, that could be disturbed by construction activity. Such disturbance would also have the potential to adversely affect species that inhabit these types of areas, including various amphibians, songbirds, fish, and raptors. Projects in rural and agricultural areas would generally need site-specific review to definitively determine the extent of impacts and types of mitigation necessary.

A number of regulatory mechanisms are in place to address construction-related impacts to wetlands. Disturbance within any water of the U.S. would require a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which would place certain requirements for avoidance or replacement of lost wetland habitat. When a project would alter the natural flow or bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake, a Section 1601 streambed alteration agreement would need to be obtained from the CDFG. Like the 404 permit, this agreement would be expected to include measures that alleviate impacts to riparian habitats. Preparation and implementation of the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPPs) required under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act would alleviate potential indirect impacts relating to increased erosion, sedimentation, and runoff.

None of the RTP capital improvements would be expected to significantly affect conifer forest, oak woodland or chaparral habitats. However, construction activity in some areas would also have the potential to adversely affect individual trees, including oak trees and/or conifers. Construction around trees or areas of impact may require a tree protection and replacement plan. The plan may include, but would not be limited to, setbacks from trees and protective fencing, restrictions regarding grading and paving near trees, direction regarding pruning and digging within root zone of trees, and requirements for replacement and maintenance of trees.

For all projects with potential construction-related impacts, the lead agency will investigate the applicability of various federal, state, and local permit requirements and obtain all required permits prior to construction. In accordance with agency requirements, in the event that wetland or other jurisdictional habitat loss is not avoidable, mitigation should be in-kind and on-site with no net destruction of habitat value. Additional mitigation beyond compliance with the requirements of existing regulations pertaining to biological resources is not required.

- ❖ *Would the project conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Conservation Community Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?*



San Benito County is in the process of preparing a County-wide Habitat Conservation Plan. RTP roadway widening, extension, or realignment projects would occur within areas that may be subject to the county-wide HCP. These projects could potentially affect the species and habitat protected under an HCP. However, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which an RTP project with potentially significant conflicts with an HCP is located will assure that project-specific environmental reviews consider specific mitigation measures and/or alternative alignments that avoid or minimize conflicts with applicable HCPs and the protected species and habitats thereof.

### **Cultural Resources**

- ❖ *Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource which is either listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the California Register of Historic Resources, or a local register of historic resources?*

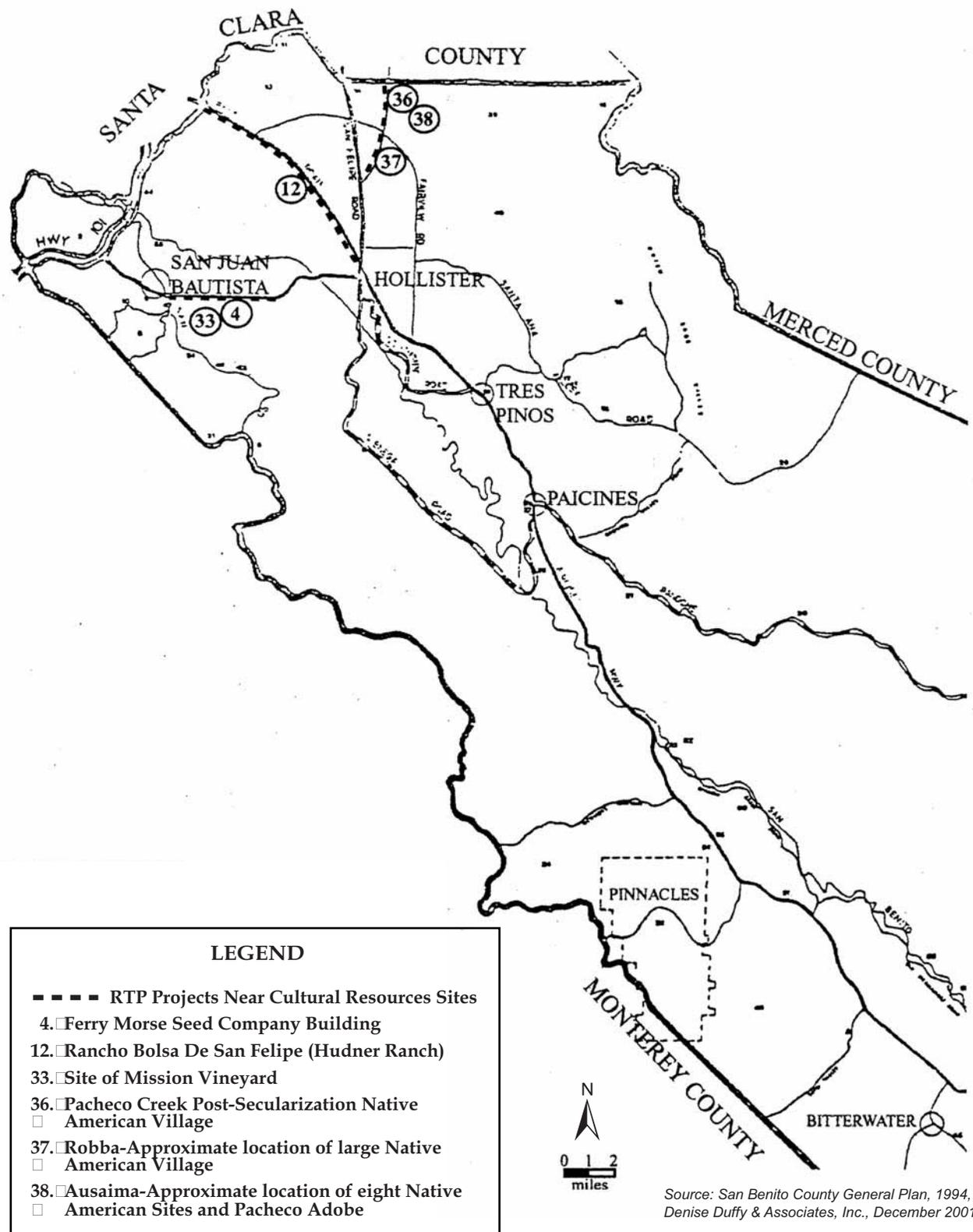
Tables 4-1 and 4-2 present the Historic Landmarks and National Register of Historic Places database listings for San Benito County as of the year 2004 (OHP, 2004). Figure 4-1 depicts known historic and cultural resources sites near planned RTP Roadway Improvement Projects.

Development of the RTP improvement projects could result in the following potentially significant impacts to cultural resources:

- *Damage, destruction, or removal of unrecorded archaeological/historical resources, or*
- *Damage, destruction, or removal of known significant archaeological/historical resources.*

With regard to known significant historic resources, the location and nature of the RTP improvements were evaluated relative to the location of identified historic properties, as listed in Tables 4-1 and 4-2. It has been determined that none of the RTP capital improvement projects would affect any California Historical Landmarks, sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places or other points of historical interest. In each case, the RTP improvements are either well away from a project location, or the improvement would likely avoid the resource.

The nature of potential impacts to cultural resources cannot be fully evaluated at this point since the specific "Area of Potential Effect" for each improvement project has not yet been defined. However, the potential for impacts to known resources is considered low.



**RTP Roadway Improvement Projects  
 Near Historic and Cultural Resource Sites**

Figure 4-1

**Table 4-1 California Historical Landmarks within San Benito County**

Location	Landmark Number	Description	Potential for Impacts
San Juan Bautista	179	<b>Castro House</b> - This building is located in San Juan Bautista State Historic Park at 2 <sup>nd</sup> and Washington Streets.	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	180	<b>Plaza Hotel</b> - This building is located in San Juan Bautista State Historic Park at 2 <sup>nd</sup> and Mariposa Streets.	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	181	<b>Fremont Peak</b> – Located at Fremont Peak State Park, 11 miles south of Highway 156 via San Juan Canyon Road.	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	195	<b>Mission San Juan Bautista and Plaza</b> – Founded June 24, 1790, the mission was destroyed by the earthquakes of 1800 and 1906, and was repeatedly restored. The plaza on its south, surrounded by old adobes, has witnessed many historic scenes. Located at 2 <sup>nd</sup> and Mariposa Streets.	Will be avoided
County	324	<b>New Idria Mine</b> – Site located on San Carlos Peak, from Paicines, 30 miles east on Panoche Road to New Idria Road, then 21 miles south to mine.	Will be avoided

Source: California Office of Historic Preservation, 2004.

**Table 4-2 National Register of Historical Places Listings for San Benito County**

Location	Date Listed	Description	Potential for Impacts
County	1978	Chalone Creek Archaeological Sites; Address Restricted	Will be avoided
Hollister	1992	Downtown Hollister Historic District; Roughly bounded by Fourth, East, South, and Monterey Streets	Will be avoided
Hollister	1993	Joel and Rena Hawkins House; 801 South Street	Will be avoided
Hollister	1992	Hollister Carnegie Library; 375 Fifth Street	Will be avoided
Hollister	1997	Roy D. McCallum House; 1401 San Benito Street	Will be avoided
Hollister	1993	Monterey Street Historic District; Monterey Street and Intersecting Streets Between 5 <sup>th</sup> and B Streets	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	1970	Anza House; 3 <sup>rd</sup> and Franklin Streets	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	1970	Jose Castro House; South Side of Plaza	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	1984	Marentis House; 45 Monterey Street	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	1969	San Juan Bautista Plaza Historic District; Buildings Surrounding Plaza at Washington, Mariposa, and 2 <sup>nd</sup> Streets	Will be avoided
San Juan Bautista	1982	Benjamin Wilcox House; 315 The Alameda	Will be avoided

Source: California Office of Historic Preservation, 2004.

- ❖ *Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a unique archaeological resources (i.e., an artifact, object, or site about which it can be clearly demonstrated that, without merely adding to the current body of knowledge, there is a high probability that it contains information needed to answer important scientific research questions, has a special and particular quality such as being the oldest or best available example of its type, or is directly associated with a scientifically recognized important prehistoric or historic event or person)?*

Because the RTP is programmatic in nature, it is not possible to assess all potential archaeological impacts associated with the numerous specific RTP projects. However, it is known that the archaeological districts located in the county that are listed on the National Register would not be affected by any of the RTP capital improvements. Construction may affect unknown archaeological resources. Thus, the RTP's impacts to unknown archaeological resources are considered potentially significant.



The nature of potential impacts to cultural resources cannot be fully evaluated at this point since the specific “Area of Potential Effect” for each improvement project has not yet been defined. However, the potential for impacts to known resources is considered low. Certain projects would result in development in areas where previous ground disturbance has not recently occurred. If development in such areas uncovers cultural resources, the procedures set forth in the Guidelines for Implementation of California Environmental Quality Act (Title 14, Sections 15000 et. seq. of the California Code of Regulations) shall be followed for identification, documentation and preservation of the resource. These procedures are as follows:

1. A qualified archaeologist shall monitor all earth moving activities within native soil. In the event that archaeological and historic artifacts are encountered during project construction, all work in the vicinity of the find will be halted until such time as the find is evaluated by a qualified archaeologist and appropriate mitigation (if necessary) is implemented.

In the event of the accidental discovery or recognition of any human remains in any location other than a dedicated cemetery, the following steps will be taken:

- A. There shall be no further excavation or disturbance of the site or any nearby area reasonably suspected to overlie adjacent human remains until:
  - 1) The coroner of the county in which the remains are discovered must be contacted to determine that no investigation of the cause of death is required, and
  - 2) If the coroner determines the remains to be Native American:
    - a. The coroner shall contact the Native American Heritage Commission within 24 hours.
    - b. The Native American Heritage Commission shall identify the person or persons it believes to be most likely descended from the deceased Native American.
    - c. The most likely descendent may make recommendations to the landowner or the person responsible for the excavation work, for means of treating or disposing of, with appropriate dignity, the human remains and any associated grave goods as provided in Public resources Code Section 5097.98, or
- B. Where the following conditions occur, the landowner or his authorized representatives shall rebury the Native American human remains and associated grave goods with appropriate



dignity on the property in a location nor subject to further subsurface disturbance.

- 1) The Native American Heritage Commission is unable to identify a most likely descendent or the most likely descendent failed to make a recommendation within 24 hours after being notified by the commission.
- 2) The descendent identified fails to make a recommendation; or
- 3) The landowner or his authorized representative rejects the recommendation of the descendent, and the mediation by the Native American Heritage Commission fails to provide measures acceptable to the landowner.

❖ *Would the project disturb or destroy a unique paleontological resource or site?*

Vertebrate fossils are significant paleontological resources that are afforded protection by federal, state and local environmental laws and guidelines. The potential for destruction or degradation by construction impacts to nonrenewable paleontological resources is considered to be significant under CEQA. According to the Standard Guidelines for the Assessment and Mitigation of Adverse Impacts to Nonrenewable Paleontologic Resources, sedimentary rock units may be described as having (a) high (or known) potential for containing significant nonrenewable paleontological resources, (b) low potential for containing nonrenewable paleontological resources, or (c) undetermined potential. Undiscovered paleontological resources could potentially be encountered during future construction activities of identified RTP projects. Certain projects would result in development in areas where previous ground disturbance has not recently occurred. If development in such areas uncovers paleontological resources, a qualified paleontologist would be contacted to salvage such resources. Less than significant impacts would result.

❖ *Would the project disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries?*

Since no known cemetery uses are located on or adjacent to any of the contemplated RTP project sites, the project is not anticipated to result in impacts to human remains. Refer to the above discussion for a list of measures required in the event that human remains are discovered.

### Geology and Soils

- ❖ *Would the project expose people or structures to potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving: Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault; strong seismic ground shaking; seismic-related ground failure, including*



*liquefaction; inundation by seiche, tsunami, or mudflow; landslides; and/or flooding, including flooding as a result of the failure of a levee or dam?*

*Is the project located on strata or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project, and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?*

*Is the project located on expansive soil creating substantial risks to life or property?*

*Groundshaking.* The County is bordered by the Diablo Range to the east and the Gabilan Range to the west. The two urban centers, San Juan Bautista and Hollister, are located on the nearly flat valley floor between these ranges, in the northern portion of the County. The valley floor is underlain by geologically young, unconsolidated stream deposits. The floor gives way to low foothills and predominantly slopes to the west and east. These older deposits have been locally modified by renewed surface erosion. The higher and steeper mountain areas of the two mountain ranges are underlain by a variety of semiconsolidated to consolidated bedrock materials.

San Benito County, like most of California, is in a highly active seismic area. Communities in California are particularly vulnerable to earthquakes because of the very active San Andreas Fault system, which is capable of generating large, destructive earthquakes. The San Andreas Fault has been mapped from the northern portion of the County, a short distance east of Aromas diagonally through the entire length of the County, passing immediately east of San Juan Bautista and emerging at the southern border of the County, approximately 3.5 miles west of Priest Valley.

The Hayward/Calaveras Fault passes through Santa Clara County and enters San Benito County at San Felipe Lake, terminating at a point just south of Hollister. Numerous other faults, both named and unnamed, have been mapped within the County. Some of these faults are active; others have had no movement observed on them during recorded history.

Variations of groundshaking intensity will occur from place to place, due to local variations in the geologic and soils conditions. This is especially true for areas such as Hollister and San Juan Bautista, where the earth materials vary in thickness, consolidation, grain size, sorting and water saturation.

In a broad sense, the severity of ground shaking appears to be related to the firmness of the ground. Areas underlain by thick, saturated, unconsolidated sediments, such as those found in the Hollister and San Juan Valleys, will experience greater shaking motion than areas underlain by firm bedrock. In other words, ground shaking will have a lesser affect on buildings and persons in areas of hard granite than it will on buildings and persons located on thick beds of sand or other unconsolidated sediments.

Bridge-type structures are most susceptible to earthquake groundshaking and fault rupture; however, roadways may also be damaged by either phenomenon.



During individual project review, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which a particular RTP bridge or roadway project is located will ensure that the structure or road is designed and constructed to the latest geotechnical standards. In most cases, this will necessitate site specific geologic and soils engineering investigations to exceed the code for high groundshaking zones. Such facilities will be located outside fault rupture zones.

*Seismic-Related Ground Failure.* Various processes and phenomena are grouped within the general classification of ground failure. These include landsliding, liquefaction, lateral spreading, lurch cracking, differential settlement, and bedrock shattering. All of these involve a displacement of the ground surface due to a loss of strength or failure of underlying materials during ground shaking. Landslides and liquefaction are the two most likely forms of ground failure to occur in San Benito County. Ground displacement along the Calaveras or San Andreas Fault is taking place daily. This form of movement, called "creep", is not usually damaging to structures on a catastrophic basis. Over long periods of time however, damage to foundations, roads, sidewalks, and utilities may occur.

In more urbanized areas of Hollister and San Juan Bautista water levels vary from 80 to over 200 feet. Areas of perched water could bring water levels much closer to the surface and increase the potential for liquefaction. Some local areas in San Benito County, where ground water is near the surface, are vulnerable to this problem. In such areas, during a large earthquake, building foundations may sink or tilt several feet into the underlying soil. Differential ground subsidence may occur or slope failure may take place along unsupported slopes, such as creek banks or road cuts.

Some risk of lateral spreading and lurch cracking exists along the banks of the San Benito River and many of the tributaries to the river.

Vertical and horizontal displacement has occurred along both the San Andreas and Calaveras Faults. It is reasonable to assume that displacement will occur along these faults in the future.

Fault creep, that is the slow but steady movement along a fault zone, has deformed numerous streets, curbs, gutters, and homes in the community of Hollister. Creep along the San Andreas Fault is visible in the San Juan-Hollister Road area just east of The Alameda in San Juan Bautista. Continuous repairs are required both on state and county roads as a result of this slow, but damaging, movement.

Construction and operation of some roadways and bikeways included in the 2005 RTP could be prone to slope stability, soil and liquefaction hazards. Bridges are less susceptible to such hazards. These hazards could be exacerbated through grading associated with transportation projects, and construction of such projects on unconsolidated fill. Potential impacts related to soil stability and collapsible/compressible soils for the majority of the projects are unlikely, as such geologic conditions are not prevalent in the county.

*Landsliding.* Urban development can affect landslide potential by increasing slope angles, removing downslope supporting earth materials, adding weight upslope of fill or construction, and the addition of water by gardening, septic tank effluent, or the directing of surface drainage into unstable areas. The NRCS Soils Survey of San Benito County indicates that landslide areas cover about 7,730 acres or 0.9 percent of the County. The area northeast of San Juan Bautista, known as the Sargent Anticline (a portion of Flint Hills) is an excellent example of an unstable area which contains landslides resulting from both earthquake generated forces, man-made forces, and the addition of rain water. A second large unstable area is west of the San Benito River and Thomas Road in the Cienega Del Gabilan Rancho. The Swanson Bluff an area southwest of the Tres Pinos Creek and Panoche Road (near Elkhorn Ranch) are two other notable landslide areas.

Roadway projects in mountainous areas or along steeply sloped streambanks are subject to landslide, particularly adjacent to areas of unstabilized cut or fill. Landslides, including rockfalls, can damage the facility itself, or cars and bicycles using the facilities. Lives could also be at risk. Landslides can cause temporary road closures to allow clean up and repair, if necessary. Such closures would necessitate detours, which in turn may cause temporary congestion on detour routes.

If a particular RTP road widening, road extension, or bridge project involves cut slopes over 20 feet in height or is located in areas of bedded or jointed bedrock, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project is located would ensure that specific slope stabilization studies are conducted during individual review of RTP projects. Possible stabilization methods include buttresses and retaining walls. Impacts would be less than significant.

*Seiche and Dam Failure.* If a large earthquake generated landslide should enter the Hernandez, San Justo Reservoir, or any of a number of privately owned reservoirs, a wave could be generated that could damage shoreline development and possibly overtop the dam. Factors to be considered in a site-by-site evaluation should include the length of time that the reservoir is full or nearly full, the depth of the water, and the configuration of the water surface, as well as the downstream topography.

Although the chance of the complete failure of the Hernandez Reservoir is remote, it does exist. Little damage is likely to occur due to the remote location of the dam. However, proposals for development in the area would include an analysis of the potential for inundation damage. Therefore, the RTP would not expose people to significant dam failure hazards.

In the seiche analysis for the San Justo Dam, it was concluded to be unlikely that a seismic induced wave would overtop the dam face. Therefore, the RTP would not expose people to significant seiche hazards.

- ❖ *Would the project result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?*



Erosion is a normal, ongoing process that should be considered in land use planning. Major problems can be avoided if the process is understood. The erosion potential throughout the valley floors of San Benito County is low. Moderate potential exists on lower slopes at the sides of valleys, while the mountainous areas on either side are highly erodible. Stream bank erosion may occur during periods of high water. During floods, waterborne sediment may be deposited on valley floors, principally within the flood plain.

The soils located on terraces, alluvial fans and flood plains generally have little or no erosion problems. Gullying and erosion does occur on some of the more sloping soils within these areas. The low, slight, and moderate categories represent approximately 28% of the County. Approximately two percent of the County is ranked by the NRCS as having moderate erosion potential and nine percent as having moderate to severe erosion potential. These soils, which are made up of the San Benito-Gazos-Linne Association and the Shendan-Cienega-Auberry Association, are located along the westerly boundary of the County and extend from the north all the way to the southerly extremities through the center.

Approximately 61% of the County is considered to have severe to very severe erosion hazards. The potential for severe erosion is concentrated along the easterly boundary of the County, with smaller areas west of Hernandez Valley in the Clear Creek area and around Red Mountain. Some extensive areas for significant soil erosion are present west, south, and north of San Juan Bautista and all of the Aromas area.

Structures and facilities constructed on these soils, as well as users of the facilities, could be exposed to hazards related to erosion. If a particular RTP roadway project involving deep foundations or underground areas is located in an area of moderate or high erosion potential, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project is located will ensure that a grading and erosion control plan that minimizes erosion and sedimentation shall be prepared and implemented by the project proponent, prior to issuance of Grading Permits. Such plans would include erosion reduction measures such as retention basins, drainage diversion structures, spot grading, silt fencing/coordinated sediment trapping, straw bales, and sand bags during grading and construction activities, revegetation of graded areas subsequent to grading activities, installation of topsoil stabilizers, or other methods. Impacts would be less than significant.

- ❖ *Would the project result in the loss of an unique geologic feature?*

Generally, unique geological features are located at high elevations and in rugged conditions that preclude transportation facilities. No RTP projects would affect any designated unique geologic feature. The majority of RTP projects are located along within existing roadway right-of-ways, where no such features are known to occur. Therefore, no impacts related to such features would result.

- ❖ *Would the project have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?*



The projects included in the RTP would not generate wastewater and would not involve the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems. Should such systems be proposed, the applicant for the individual RTP project would be required to evaluate on-site soil capability in accordance with the requirements of the applicable regulatory jurisdiction. Less than significant impacts would result.

### Hazards and Hazardous Materials

- ❖ *Would the project create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?*

Although individual RTP projects may result in improvements to existing hazardous materials routes, no RTP project would involve the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials. Construction of RTP facilities would most likely involve the use of solvents, biocides and fuels that can be considered hazardous if not used, stored, or disposed of properly. However, all transport and use of hazardous materials would be subject to myriad federal, state, and local regulations. Potential impacts are considered adverse but less than significant if standard operating procedures are followed at a construction site.

- ❖ *Would the project create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?:*

The RTP does not include projects that would involve reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials. Although RTP projects may involve improvements to access along designated hazardous materials routes, RTP projects would not involve the use of hazardous materials during project operations. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?*

Although several RTP projects would be located within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile of a school, no such projects would involve hazardous emissions, or handling of hazardous materials during project operations. As described above, construction of RTP facilities would most likely involve the use of solvents, biocides and fuels that can be considered hazardous if not used, stored, or disposed of properly. However, all transport and use of hazardous materials would be subject to myriad federal, state, and local regulations. Potential impacts are considered adverse but less than significant if standard operating procedures are followed at a construction site.

- ❖ *Would the project be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?*

RTP projects could traverse areas of soil, groundwater, or other contamination included on a list of hazardous materials sites. Several RTP projects would be located in urbanized areas characterized by commercial and industrial uses that may have historically released contaminants that affect off-site properties or right-of-way. In addition, several RTP projects traverse agricultural areas, the soils of which could contain residual quantities of presently-banned agricultural chemicals. Additionally, soils in areas within or adjacent to the right-of-way of heavily traveled highways and roadways could contain hazardous quantities of accumulated aerially deposited lead from vehicle exhaust. The local jurisdiction in which an RTP project is located would be required to comply with applicable local, state, and federal requirements regarding site assessment, soils and groundwater evaluation, and remediation in areas where soil or groundwater contamination is known or suspected to occur. Site assessments that result in the need for soil excavation would be required to include: an assessment of air impacts and health impacts associated with excavation activities; identification of any applicable local standards that may be exceeded by the excavation activities, including dust levels and noise; transportation impacts from the removal or remedial activities; and risk of upset practices should an accident occur at the site. Compliance with these requirements would ensure less than significant impacts.

- ❖ *For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, or within the vicinity of a private airstrip, would the project result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the project area?*

Some RTP projects would be located within two miles of Hollister Municipal Airport or Frazier Lake Air Park. However, these projects would maintain a low vertical profile and would not be expected to result in a safety hazard.

RTP aviation projects would improve operations and safety in the planning area of Hollister Municipal Airport. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?*

The RTP contemplates several projects that would improve roadway access and safety. This would be considered a beneficial impact related to emergency response.

- ❖ *Would the project expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands?*

RTP roadway extension, widening, and realignment projects could traverse areas of high fire hazard. However, these projects would not involve occupied structures that could expose people or structures to fire hazards. In addition, such projects would create firebreaks, which would be considered a beneficial impact.

## Hydrology and Water Quality

- ❖ *Would the project violate Regional Water Quality Control Board water quality standards or waste discharge requirements?*

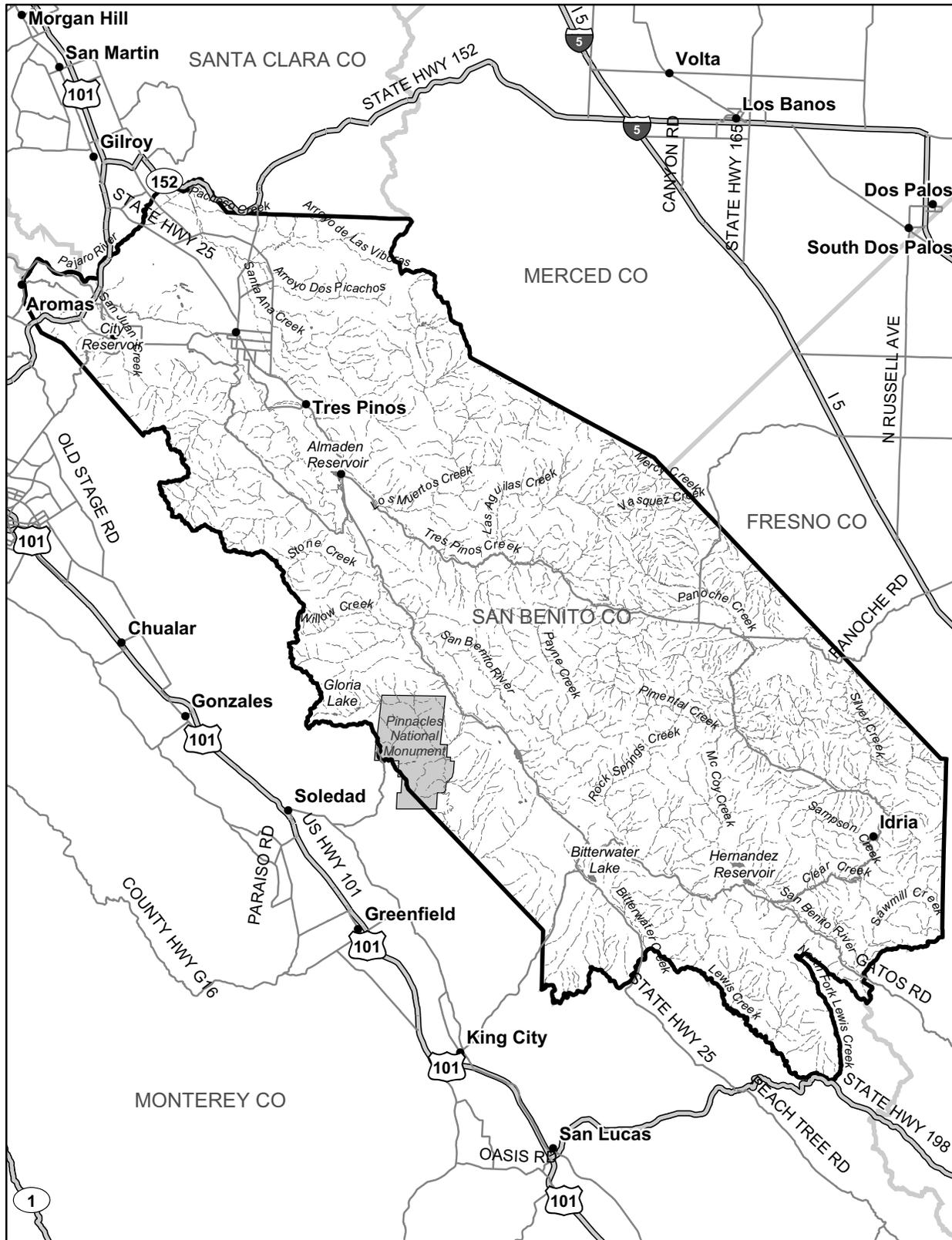
The RTP involves transportation improvements that would not be expected to result in waste discharges that could violate RWQCB standards. The project would intensify the amount of development on the improvement sites, but would not create any land uses that would be expected to discharge contaminants in excess of RWQCB requirements. As such, less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project substantially deplete groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that there would be a net deficit in aquifer volume or a lowering of the local groundwater table level (i.e., the production rate of pre-existing nearby wells would drop to a level which would not support existing land uses or planned uses for which permits have been granted)?*

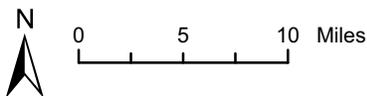
Surface water resources in the county are depicted on Figure 4-2. Major groundwater basins in the county are depicted on Figure 4-3. Implementation of the RTP projects would result in both short-term and long-term impacts to the county's water supply. During grading activities, water would be needed to suppress fugitive dust generated by construction equipment. Most of the RTP roadway improvements involve modification of existing facilities. As such, a substantial increase in landscaped areas is not anticipated for these projects. Nevertheless, irrigation of landscaping associated with the RTP projects would require water, and therefore contribute to long-term adverse impacts to water supply. Major RTP projects, particularly the roadway extensions, could also affect groundwater supplies by incrementally reducing groundwater recharge potential. This reduction in groundwater recharge could occur because the impermeable surfaces associated with the RTP improvements would increase surface water runoff at the expense of natural infiltration. All of the contemplated RTP projects that would involve landscaping and/or would increase the amount of impervious surfaces are located in areas underlain by the North County Basins. As stated in the San Benito County Water District (prepared by Gus Yates, Consulting Hydrologist), "Annual Groundwater Report for Water Year 2002", December 16, 2002, none of the North County Basins are in a state of overdraft. Groundwater levels have recovered over the past 15 years to the point that high water levels cause some potential stream recharge to be rejected and groundwater now discharges into the lower ends of several creeks in the basin. The relatively small storage changes associated with near-normal climatic conditions during 1999-2002 are also good evidence that the basin is not in a long-term state of overdraft.

An estimate of future basin-wide water demands and supplies were provided in the "Evaluation of Project Alternatives to Implement Groundwater Management Plan in San Benito County" (Kennedy/Jenks Consultants, June 2002). According to this report, a combination of local groundwater and imported water supply would be used to meet County water demand through the year 2020.



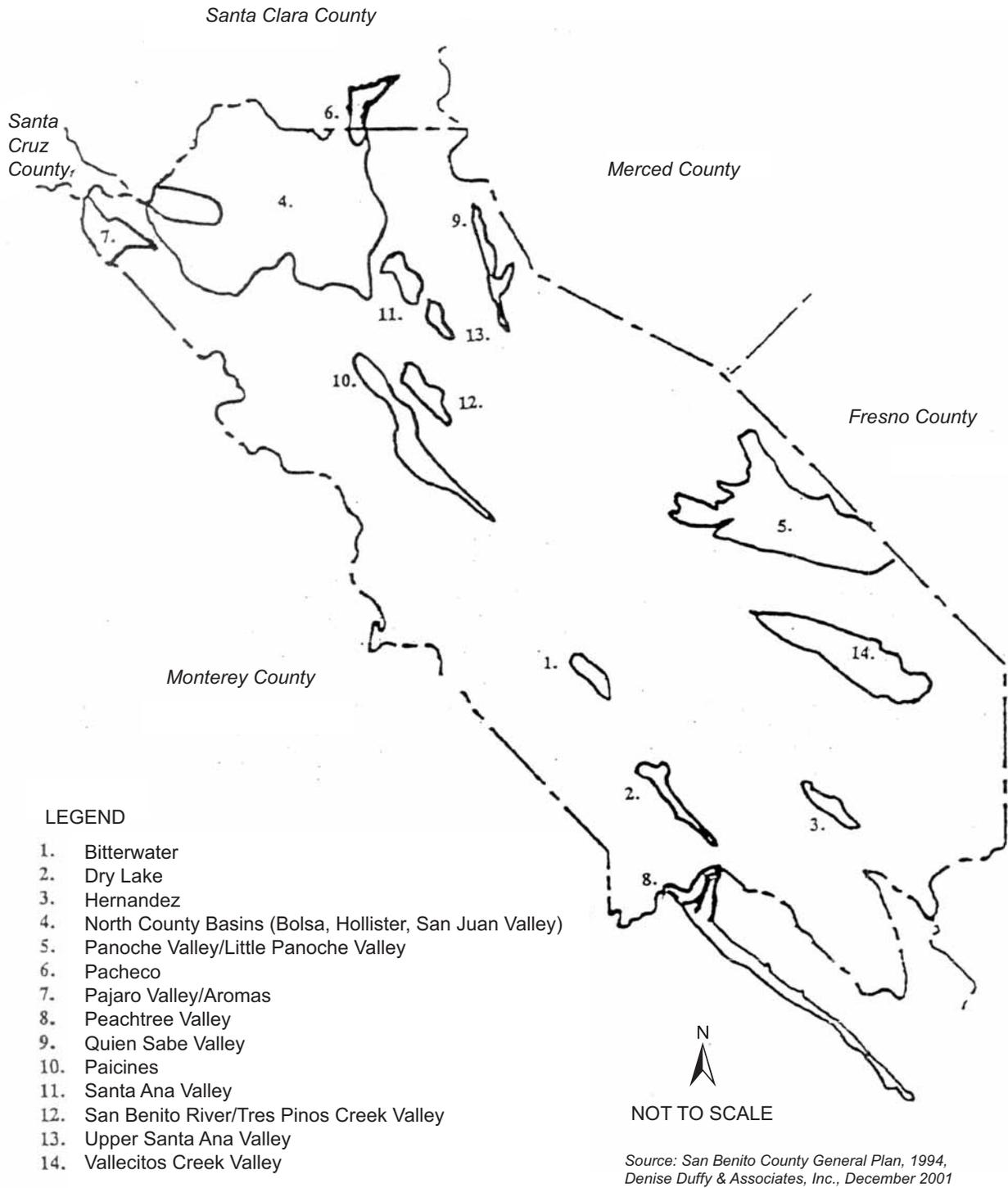


Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census TIGER 2000 data.



## San Benito County Surface Water Resources

Figure 4-2



**Approximate Location of San Benito County  
 Groundwater Basins (4 Square Miles or Greater)**

**Figure 4-3**

Given the surplus supply of the groundwater basins, the reduction in groundwater recharge is considered to be less than significant.

- ❖ *Would the project substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, in a manner which would result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site? Would the project substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, or substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner that would result in flooding on- or off-site?*

Several RTP projects would require alterations of the existing drainage patterns of the respective project sites. However, RTP roadway projects or other projects that involve substantial grading (i.e., more than one acre of ground disturbance) would be required to develop a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) prior to the initiation of grading and implement the SWPPP for all construction activity on the project site. No RTP projects, including bridge projects would substantially alter the course of a stream or river.

Pollutants and chemicals associated with urban activities would run off new roadways (and other new transportation facilities such as parking lots, airport runways, and train stations), flowing into nearby bodies of water. These pollutants would include, but are not limited to: heavy metals from auto emissions, oil, grease, debris, and air pollution residues. Such contaminated urban runoff remains largely untreated, thus resulting in the incremental long-term degradation of water quality. It should be noted that water contamination from urban runoff is an infrequent event and primarily occurs during and immediately following precipitation. During individual project review, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which an RTP road widening or roadway extension project is located shall ensure that the improvement directs runoff into subsurface percolation basins and traps which would allow for the removal of urban pollutants, fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals. Therefore, the RTP projects would not result in substantial erosion, siltation, or flooding on- or off-site. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems to control?*

The minor amounts of runoff generated by the project contemplated in the RTP would be accommodated in existing drainage facilities or proposed extensions of drainage facilities. During individual project review, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which a particular RTP project is located will ensure that adequate drainage infrastructure is in place to accommodate runoff from the project, prior to issuance of grading permits. If adequate drainage infrastructure is not available, the project proponent would pay utility mitigation fees or otherwise provide improvements to the drainage facilities of the jurisdiction in which the project is located such that drainage facilities affected by the project in question maintain an acceptable level of service. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project place housing within a 100-year floodplain, as mapped on a federal Flood Hazard Boundary or Flood Insurance Rate Map or other flood hazard delineation map?*

The flood-ways in San Benito County are restricted almost entirely to areas immediately adjacent to either side of river and creek channels. In the northernmost portion of the County, the Pajaro River has the potential of inundating much larger areas, but most of the flood waters are expected to be contained within the Tequisquita Slough. The proposed project does not include any residential land uses, and therefore would not place housing within a floodplain. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project place within a 100-year floodplain structures which would impede or redirect flood flows?*

RTP road and bikeway projects in low-lying areas may be subject to flood hazard. The effects of flooding could include temporary inundation of a facility that impedes its use, or causes long-term damage to the facility. Flooding may also cause immediate damage to roadways, bikeways, and bridges, particularly during high velocity flood events that wash away or erode facilities. This would typically occur adjacent to rising rivers or streams. Unpaved bikeways are particularly vulnerable, although any facility within the flood zone of a stream would be subject to impacts. Indirect impacts of flooding include threats to lives or property, including cars or bicycles parked adjacent to flooded facilities. Lives can be threatened if motorists or cyclists venture onto flooded or flood-damaged facilities. If a particular RTP roadway, bikeway or bridge project is located in an area with high flooding potential, then during individual project review, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project is located will coordinate with FEMA to ensure that the facility is elevated at least one foot above the 100 year flood zone elevation, that feasible bank stabilization and erosion control measures are implemented along creek crossings, or that other measures acceptable to FEMA are implemented. Less than significant impacts would result.

### **Land Use and Planning**

- ❖ *Would the project physically divide an established community?*

The RTP includes several projects that would widen and/or extend roadways. These road widenings and extensions would cross primarily undeveloped agricultural and /or open space areas. Most RTP road widenings and extensions would only affect narrow strips of agricultural land along existing right-of-way, and would therefore not physically divide an established community. Road realignment and extension RTP projects would result in new or realigned roadways that could traverse residential areas. However, these roadway projects would represent logical extensions or expansions of existing roadways, and would increase access to community facilities. In addition, aviation projects at Hollister Municipal Airport include land acquisition for line-of-sight safety and future airport expansion. However, future airport improvements have not been



identified at this time. Agricultural lands acquired for aviation projects would remain in their existing agricultural use until future development projects were constructed, which would require additional environmental review. Therefore, the RTP would not result in projects that would present access barriers or physically divide an established community. Less than significant impacts would result. RTP project impacts that relate to displacement and/or disruption of existing residences and businesses are described in Impacts LU-2 and LU-3, in Section 4.3 of this EIR.

### **Mineral Resources**

- ❖ *Would the project result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state, or a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?*

Substantial aggregate resources in the northern portion of the County have been classified and mapped through the authority of the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMRA). Among the principal economic minerals within the County are the sand and gravel deposits of the San Benito River and the San Andreas fault. These deposits are presently being mined in a number of locations. In addition, extensive deposits of limestone are located in the Gabilan Range in a several square mile area extending from Fremont Peak. Asbestos, granite, gypsum, Mercury, and other minerals are also actively mined in the County.

RTP projects would generally occur within existing right-of-way and would therefore not affect known mineral resources. RTP roadway extension, road widening, and other transportation projects would not traverse areas that contain known mineral resources. No impacts would result.

### **Public Services**

- ❖ *Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services: fire protection, police protection, schools, parks, or other public facilities?*

The RTP would not involve any residential construction or other projects that would generate population and associated demand for additional fire protection, police protection, school, park, or other public services and facilities. Improved circulation that may occur as a result of the RTP may remove existing obstacles to growth. An increase in development may also require a corresponding increase in parks, schools, and other public facilities. However, it should be emphasized that the impact would be primarily because of land development, rather than the use of the roads themselves. The potential impacts of the RTP related to growth-inducement are described in Section 5.0 of this EIR. The RTP is intended in part to help facilitate emergency response by upgrading the existing



transportation network. Many roadways would be upgraded and, in some cases, extended under the plan. Such facilities could improve the ability for local public protection agencies to respond to emergencies. As such, the RTP would have a beneficial impact to the county and region.

The RTP provides a basis for transportation infrastructure and operation/maintenance decisions for both the short and longer (25-year) term. The RTP contains policies that ensure that adequate support is provided to maintain and operate the existing transportation system and that assign a high funding priority to maintenance of the existing street system. Several RTP projects involve the widening and extension of existing roadways, and the construction of new bike routes throughout the county. However, new roadways or bikeways would not represent a substantial increase over the current inventory of roads. The addition of new roadway segments, bridges, and bikeways would not be expected to significantly alter existing maintenance procedures. Less than significant impacts would result.

### **Recreation**

- ❖ *Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?*

The RTP does not include residential development projects that would increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreation facilities. RTP transportation projects would improve access to parks, which could indirectly increase park use. However, this affect is anticipated to be minor and would not result in the substantial physical deterioration of park facilities to occur or be significantly accelerated. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?:*

The RTP does not include projects that would construct or expand recreational facilities. However, the RTP includes projects that would provide a recreational trail along the San Benito River. The environmental effects of these projects are described throughout this EIR. However, as described above, the RTP does not include residential development projects that would increase demand for recreational facilities. Less than significant impacts would result.

### **Transportation/Traffic**

- ❖ *Would the project cause an increase in traffic which is substantial in relation to the existing traffic load and capacity of the street system (i.e., result in a substantial increase in either the number of vehicle trips, the volume to capacity ratio on roads, or congestion at intersections)?*



*Would the project exceed, either individually or cumulatively, a level of service standard established by the county congestion management agency for designated roads or highways?*

RTP roadway, transit, bicycle/pedestrian, and TDM projects would address potential traffic congestion on existing roadways, and would implement regional circulation improvement projects contemplated in the General Plans of local jurisdictions. The RTP focuses on transportation projects of regional significance, including state highways and major arterials, transit services provided by the existing carriers, and consistency with other regional plans. The implementation of these projects is intended to improve the regional transportation network, and in many cases, to mitigate existing deficiencies in the mobility characteristics and capacity of the transportation system. A combination of roadway modifications, transit projects, bikeways, and other transportation improvement projects is intended to achieve the goal of a multi-modal transportation system. By its nature, the implementation of these projects would result in beneficial impacts with respect to relieving future traffic congestion and addressing the transportation needs identified by the County and the cities within the county.

The General Plans of the County and the cities within the county identify projects to improve the roadway system of the respective jurisdictions. It should be noted that several of these identified improvement projects have already been implemented or have been deleted by the municipalities due to planning, financial, physical, or other constraints. The regional roadway projects contemplated in the General Plans have been included in the 2005 RTP, completed, or abandoned by the individual jurisdictions due to planning, financial, physical, or other constraints. In addition, implementation of the projects contemplated in the 2005 RTP would improve traffic congestion and levels of service of roadways within these jurisdictions. Therefore, implementation of the 2005 RTP would result in less than significant impacts related to traffic volumes and levels of service.

RTP projects that increase roadway capacity could redistribute vehicle travel from other travel modes, times or routes. However, this effect would not be expected to increase traffic congestion beyond pre-project conditions. The transportation and academic literature define "induced vehicle miles traveled (VMT)" as vehicle activity resulting from new trip generation as a response to new highway capacity; i.e., an individual will make more vehicle trips after highway capacity is expanded. This concept assumes a latent demand for highway capacity that is not accommodated by existing highways (i.e., individuals that would otherwise utilize highways instead travel at non-peak commute times, on other routes, or on other modes, such as public transit). Traffic related to new growth (increase in jobs, housing, or population) is not considered induced travel activity, since associated increases in vehicle trips are not generated as a result of freeway capacity expansion. Trips generated as a result of socioeconomic growth can be adequately addressed through current travel demand modeling and air quality modeling. These impacts are addressed in the travel forecasts of the RTP and the general plans of the County and the cities within the county.



Time-of-day and route diversion do not typically result in a net increase in vehicle activity when viewed from a regional perspective. Rather, such diversions would concentrate trips on expanded highways and at peak commute times, in turn relieving traffic congestion on alternate routes and at alternate times. However, diversion from other modes would be expected to increase vehicle activity, as commuters take advantage of the increased highway capacity by switching from public transportation or other commute alternatives to individual vehicles. Diversion from other modes would also be expected to increase vehicle trips on local roads. However, it is assumed that if the diversion from other modes would result in a magnitude of trips that created congestion of roadways, trips would be diverted back to alternative modes, times, and routes. In addition, the RTP includes several projects that promote the use of transportation alternatives to single-occupancy vehicles. Because roadway improvements do not in themselves generate new trips, on balance, implementation of the RTP would increase transit ridership and the utilization of other commute alternatives, and would accordingly reduce the number of daily vehicle trips within the county. Therefore, the RTP would result in less than significant impacts related to induced VMT.

- ❖ *Would the project result in a change in air traffic patterns, including either an increase in traffic levels or a change in location that results in substantial safety risks?*

The 2005 RTP includes aviation projects that are internal to Hollister Municipal Airport (e.g., new taxiways and holding aprons), but these projects would not increase air traffic levels, or change the location of air patterns. Therefore, the RTP would not result in substantial safety risks due to changes in air traffic patterns. No impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project substantially increase hazards due to a design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?*

The RTP contemplates several projects that would improve roadway access and safety. This would be considered a beneficial impact related to design feature hazards. Although the RTP includes projects that would traverse rural areas, the RTP would involve no projects that encourage incompatible uses, such as farm equipment and higher speed vehicles. For example, road widening projects in rural areas would result in fewer conflicts between farm equipment and higher speed vehicles because additional lane(s) would be provided.

- ❖ *Would the project result in inadequate emergency access?*

The RTP contemplates several projects that would improve roadway access and safety. This would be considered a beneficial impact related to emergency access.

- ❖ *Would the project result in inadequate parking capacity?*

The RTP does not include projects that would involve the provision of off-street parking. Some RTP projects (e.g., road widenings and other improvements)



could temporarily impair access to parking, but this effect would be short-term and temporary. Replacement parking would be provided following construction of improvements. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project conflict with adopted policies supporting alternative transportation (e.g., bus turnouts, bicycle racks)?*

Implementation of the RTP would result in beneficial impacts related to alternative transportation, since the RTP includes several projects that encourage the use of alternative transportation.

### Utilities and Service Systems

- ❖ *Would the project exceed wastewater treatment requirements of the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board?*

The projects identified in the RTP would not generate wastewater and would not involve the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems. No impacts would result.

- ❖ *Would the project require or result in the construction of new water or wastewater treatment facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects?*

*Are sufficient water supplies available to serve the project from existing entitlements and resources, or are new or expanded entitlements needed?*

*Has the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project determined that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?*

Most RTP projects would not generate water or wastewater demand, although some RTP projects that involve landscaping could increase water use, and water would be used during construction for dust suppression. Refer to the discussion of *Hydrology and Water Quality*, above. Less than significant impacts would result.

- ❖ *Require or result in the construction of new storm water drainage facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects?*

Some RTP roadway improvement, extension, widening, and realignment projects would involve the construction of new storm water drainage facilities or expansion of existing facilities. Impacts associated with the construction of these facilities are described throughout this EIR. No additional impacts are anticipated.

- ❖ *Is the project served by a landfill with sufficient permitted capacity to accommodate the project's solid waste disposal needs, and, does the project comply with federal, state, and local statutes and regulations related to solid waste?*

The RTP involves projects that may result in minor waste generation during project construction. However, it is anticipated that regional landfills would maintain adequate capacity to accommodate the relatively minor amounts of waste generated. The RTP projects would not be expected to generate substantial solid waste during project operations. Less than significant impacts would result.



## 4.1 AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES

### 4.1.1 Setting

**a. Regional Agricultural Resources.** The San Benito River Valley supports some of the most productive farmland in the State. Agriculture makes a substantial contribution to the County economy and accounts for an overwhelming amount of the privately-owned land in the County. Farming is the main source of income in San Benito County. The principal crops are fruits and nuts, vegetables and other row crops, and small grains. The raising of livestock, namely beef cattle and sheep, is also important. Lack of water is the main factor limiting production in this County. Where water is available, irrigated fields are often intensively farmed. Ponds and reservoirs are used for watering livestock on range and pasture.

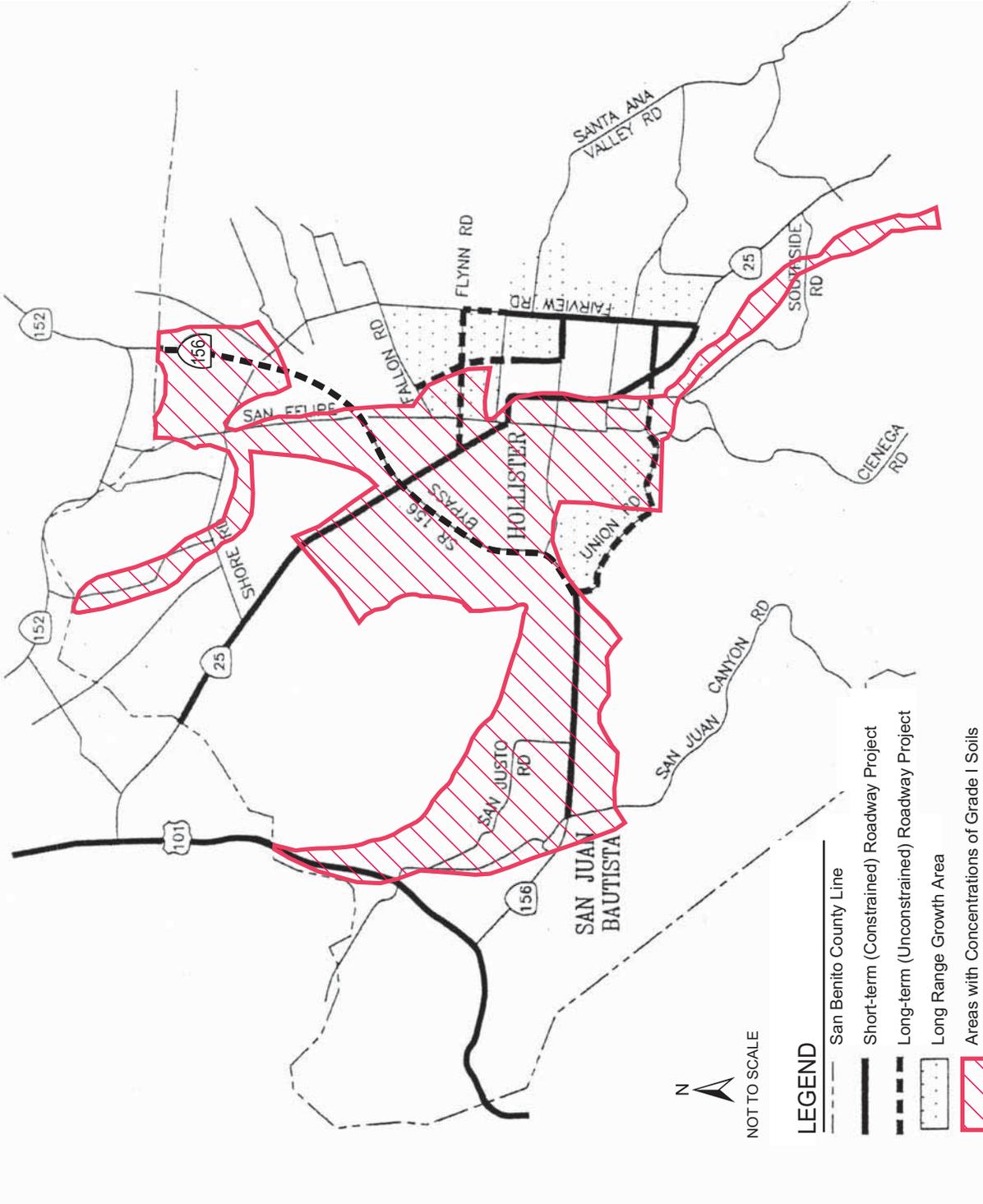
The top five crops, by value in San Benito County in the year 2001 included: lettuce (\$48.4 million), nursery stock (\$25.2 million), winegrapes (\$15.9 million), bell peppers (\$14.5 million), and cattle and calves (\$14.4 million) (San Benito County Farm Bureau, [www.cbf.com/counties/co-35.htm](http://www.cbf.com/counties/co-35.htm), 2004). According to the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, a net total of 717 acres of farmland in the County was lost between the years 1998 and 2000. Approximately 2,626 total acres of Important Farmland (i.e., Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide or Local Importance, and Local Farmland) was lost, while approximately 1,909 acres of grazing land was gained over this time period (CA Dept. of Conservation, [www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/FMMP/pubs/1998\\_2000/conversion\\_tables/sbtcon00.xls](http://www.consrv.ca.gov/dlrp/FMMP/pubs/1998_2000/conversion_tables/sbtcon00.xls)). Refer to Figure 4.1-1 for a depiction of areas with concentrations of Grade I soils near RTP roadway improvement projects.

The more productive agricultural soils within San Benito County, found on terraces, alluvial fans and flood plains, include most of the farmland within the County. These lands occupy approximately 15% of the total land area. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has identified five major soil associations in this group. Of the five associations, the Sorrento-Yolo-Mocho Association and the Clear Lake-Pacheco-Willows Association are the most productive and intensively cultivated soils in the County. These two associations alone make up approximately nine percent of the total land area of the County. The Edenvale-Conejo Association and the Panoche-Los Banos-Panhill Association represent an additional four percent of the land area and are potentially highly productive soils. However, according to the NRCS, the lack of irrigation water limits the use of these soils and is available only in parts of the associations. The remaining association, the Rincon-Antioch-Cropley Association, is used for fruits, nuts, row, and field crops. Erosion is a problem on these soils in areas where it is more sloping, and in some places the irrigation water is of poor quality due to the high boron content. This soil association represents approximately 2.6% of the land area.

Portions of the Clearlake-Pacheco-Willows and the Rincon-Antioch-Cropley associations near Fairview Road (north and northeast of Hollister) have shallow root zones (less than 20 inches) making them suitable for row crops and hay, but not for any crops requiring deep soils.

Approximately three-fourths of the productive agricultural land is located north of Tres Pinos to the County line and from Hollister west to Highway 101, in the San Juan Valley. The remainder of these soils are located in Bear, Topo, Paicines, and Bitterwater Valleys and in the area of San Benito.





**North San Benito County  
 RTP Roadway Improvement Projects  
 Near Areas with Concentrations of Grade I Soils**

Source: Denise Duffy & Associates, Inc., December 2001;  
 San Benito County Environmental Resources and Constraints  
 Inventory, July 1, 1994.

**b. Regulatory Setting.** Preservation of agricultural, recreational and open space lands through agricultural preserve contracts between the County and property owners is a technique encouraged by the State for implementing the general plan. Agricultural preserve contracts are executed through procedures enabled by the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act. A contract may be entered into for property with agricultural, recreational and open space uses in return for decreased property taxes. The County Agricultural Preserve Rules of Procedure require certain minimum parcel sizes and land use restrictions applicable to agricultural preserve lands under their respective contracts. The project site is not currently under Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) contract. To be eligible for Williamson Act designation, a minimum 100 acres of non-prime land is typically required and that land must be used to produce an agricultural commodity that is plant or animal and is produced in California for commercial purposes.

Williamson Act Land encompasses 582,079 acres of public and private lands in the County. About 76% of the Williamson Act land is in private ownership and makes up approximately 62% of the County.

There are three categories of Williamson Act lands: Open Space, Other Prime and Urban Prime. The Open Space category comprises the vast majority of LCA lands (90.5%). This land is predominantly suitable for grazing and dry farming and is the least productive of the three categories. Nearly 2.5% of the Open Space land is in non-renewal status.

The Other Prime category comprises 7.5% of the Williamson Act contract lands and consists of agricultural lands that are considered to be prime for grazing and the production of field, grain, fruit, nut, and row crops. Nearly six percent of the Other Prime land are in non-renewal status.

Urban Prime lands comprise the smallest portion of Williamson Act lands (1.5%) and are all located in the North County Area. These lands are among the most productive LCA lands in the County and are primarily suitable for the production of row, fruit, and nut crops.

#### 4.1.2 Impact Analysis

**a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds.** The conversion of prime agricultural land to non-agricultural use or impairing the productivity of prime agricultural land is considered a significant unavoidable impact. The conversion of Capability Class I and II prime soils to urban uses constitutes such an impact. Pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines, a project would have a significant impact if the project would:

- *Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland) to nonagricultural use;*
- *Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract; and/or*
- *Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could individually or cumulatively result in loss of Farmland, to non-agricultural use.*

**b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.** This section describes generalized impacts associated with the projects anticipated under the RTP. Table 4.1-1 in Section 4.1.2.c. summarizes the specific projects that could result in the impacts discussed in this section.



**Impact AG-1** Some RTP projects could convert agricultural lands to transportation infrastructure and/or parcelize agricultural operations. Although the actual level of impact from individual projects is not known at this time, the overall impact to agriculture is assumed to be Class I, *significant and unavoidable*.

The extension and widening of roadways and implementation of bike trails and/or pedestrian paths under the RTP could encroach onto areas supporting agricultural production. Most projects would only affect narrow strips of agricultural land along existing right-of-way. Nevertheless, such projects could result in the incremental loss of production at these locations, which include areas in the unincorporated portions of the county and the rural areas of the cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista. Both irrigated agriculture and grazing could be affected by such projects. Direct impacts could occur by displacing agricultural production, while indirect impacts (such as trespassing and vandalism) could occur on adjacent agricultural lands following project implementation.

In addition, aviation projects at Hollister Municipal Airport include acquisition of agricultural lands for line-of-sight safety and future airport expansion. However, future airport improvements have not been identified at this time. Agricultural lands acquired for aviation projects would remain in their existing agricultural use until future development projects were constructed, which would require additional environmental review.

Much of the county is underlain by prime agricultural soils, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland as identified by the State Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) and State Soil Geographic (STATSGO) Database (refer to Figure 4.2-1). A number of RTP roadway widenings and extensions throughout the county could encroach on prime agricultural soils, or soils that could support high quality agricultural production. Some of these projects could bisect existing contiguous agricultural operations, such as large scale irrigation or spraying, and potentially preclude continued agricultural use in these areas.

Mitigation Measures. The implementation of the following RTP goals and policies would reduce project impacts related to conversion of agricultural lands:

**Goal 4** To protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 4.1* Shall develop a street and highway system that promotes compact urban development and preserves prime agricultural land.

**Goal 10** New transportation facilities shall be planned to promote compact urban development, prevent urban sprawl, and prevent conversion of prime farmland. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 10.2* Shall locate and design new transportation facilities to minimize the conversion of prime agricultural land outside existing urban/rural boundaries.

No mitigation measures are available to mitigate the loss of agricultural lands, short of eliminating or realigning roadways that would traverse areas containing prime soils. However, the following measures would incrementally reduce impacts to agricultural lands and existing agricultural production:

- AG-1(a)** When new roadway extensions are planned, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the RTP project is located shall assure that project-specific environmental reviews consider alternative alignments that reduce or avoid impacts to agricultural lands.
  
- AG-1(b)** Rural roadway alignments shall follow property lines to the extent feasible, to minimize impacts to the agricultural production value of any specific property. Farmers shall be compensated for the loss of agricultural production at the margins of lost property, based on the amount of land deeded as road right-of-way, as a function of the total amount of production on the property.

Mitigation measure LU-1 (a), described in connection with Impact LU-1 in Section 4.3, *Land Use and Planning*, which calls for appropriate setbacks and fencing, would also minimize trespassing and vandalism impacts.

Significance After Mitigation. Although the above measures would reduce impacts to agriculture to the degree feasible, such impacts cannot be fully mitigated due to the potential conversion of agricultural lands. Impacts from individual projects will need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis; however, because impacts to individual agricultural properties cannot be assumed to be insignificant, agricultural impacts are considered potentially significant and unavoidable.

**Impact AG-2 Development of some RTP roadway projects could contribute to the alteration of the county's rural (or semi-rural) areas to a somewhat more suburban or urban condition, through the addition of lighting, glare, and urban features. This is considered Class I, significant and unavoidable impact.**

Some of the RTP roadway extensions and realignments, bridges and interchanges would introduce visual features that would alter the existing rural character of the area in which they would occur. Road extensions and realignments contemplated in the RTP include Highway 25 Bypass, Buena Vista Road, Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) extension, Flynn Road extension, Memorial Drive, Sunnyslope Road, and Westside Boulevard extension. In addition, road widenings would change the character of a number of rural country roads to that of a more suburbanized community by increasing pavement and potentially removing roadside native plant species, including oak trees. Ancillary facilities constructed along new or existing roads (such as lighting and signs) would further contribute to the trend toward greater visual suburbanization.

The visual effect of roadway projects would be greatest in the more rural areas of the county. Projects with particularly high potential to alter the rural character of the county include the widenings of portions of Highway 156 and Highway 25, and several arterial widenings,



including Fairview Road, Flynn Road, Union Road, and Airline Highway (State Route 25). A complete listing of projects that could alter the existing rural character is included in Table 4.1-1 at the end of this section.

The overall visual effect of such projects, whether or not they are in designated scenic areas, would contribute to an incremental transformation in visual character from rural to more urban or suburban. This is considered a significant impact.

As described in Section 4.0 of this EIR, the State *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15145 notes that “If, after thorough investigation, a Lead Agency finds that a particular impact is too speculative for evaluation, the agency should note its conclusion and terminate discussion of the impact.” An evaluation of the site-specific impacts of many of these types of projects for which sites have not been defined would be speculative, as neither the existing nor the post-project conditions of the sites can be assessed. Nevertheless, these projects will be required to undergo environmental review pursuant to CEQA when site plans are defined, prior to project implementation.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measures are recommended to reduce project impacts related to alteration of rural character:

- AG-2(a)** Roadway extensions and widenings shall avoid the removal of existing mature trees to the extent possible. Any trees lost shall be replaced at a minimum 2:1 basis and incorporated into the landscaping design for the roadway. Tree replacement ratios shall be consistent with Caltrans or the local jurisdictions in which impacts could occur.
  
- AG-2(b)** Roadway lighting shall be minimized and controlled to the extent possible, and shall not exceed the maximum height limits of Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project would occur. In addition, lighting shall be designed so as not to spill over onto adjacent properties.
  
- AG-2(c)** Bus shelters, signage and other ancillary facilities constructed under the RTP shall be designed in accordance with the architectural review requirements of Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project would occur. Bus shelters in rural areas shall incorporate earth tone colors and wood materials complementary of the natural surroundings.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of the above mitigation measures would reduce project-specific impacts to the extent feasible. Nevertheless, the incremental alteration of the area's current rural or semi-rural character to a more urbanized environment is considered a significant and unavoidable (Class I) impact.

**c. Specific RTP Projects That May Result in Impacts.** Table 4.1-1 identifies those projects that may create impacts as discussed in Section 4.1.2.b above. The individual projects listed could create significant agricultural resources impacts but would not necessarily do so. Additional specific analysis will need to be conducted as the individual projects are implemented in order to determine the actual magnitude of impact. Mitigation measures discussed above could apply to these specific projects.



It should be noted that many projects would contribute to Impact AG-2, which is a potentially significant unavoidable impact to the rural character of the region. Although impacts associated with many of these projects would be relatively minor, and not necessarily significant on an individual basis, the cumulative impact resulting from loss of vegetation, additional paving, and impairment of scenic views would be significant and unavoidable.

**Table 4.1-1 RTP Projects That May Result in Agricultural Resources Impacts**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>
Cal-1	Caltrans	Highway 156, Gap Closure Widening	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Cal-3	Caltrans	Highway 25 to Santa Clara County Widening	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Cal-4	Caltrans	Highway 25 Bypass	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
	Caltrans	Highway 156 Safety and Operational Enhancements	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Holl-1	City of Hollister	Buena Vista Road Construction	AG-2	Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Holl-2	City of Hollister	Memorial Drive Construction-Meridian to Santa Ana	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Holl-5	City of Hollister	Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) Construction	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
SBC-1	County of San Benito	Fairview Road Widening	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Holl-8	City of Hollister	Westside Boulevard Extension	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Holl-10	City of Hollister	Memorial Drive Construction – North of Santa Ana Road	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
SBC-2	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
SBC-3	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
SBC-5	County of San Benito	Flynn Road Extension and Widening	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.



**Table 4.1-1 RTP Projects That May Result in Agricultural Resources Impacts**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>
Cal-5	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening, Las Aromitas – Monterey County Line to Highway 156	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Cal-6	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening – Highway 156 to Santa Clara County Line	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Cal-7	Caltrans	Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
SBC-6	County of San Benito	Union Road Widening	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Cal-2	Caltrans	Highway 156 Widening (North of Hollister)	AG-1, AG-2	Possible removal of agricultural lands and/or impacts on adjacent agricultural uses. Possible loss of rural scenic character.
Holl-6	City of Hollister	Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening-Sunset to Fairview	AG-2	Possible loss of rural scenic character.



## 4.2 AIR QUALITY

### 4.2.1 Setting

**a. Meteorology.** Air quality is affected by the rate and location of pollutant emissions and by climatic conditions that influence the movement and dispersion of pollutants. Atmospheric conditions such as wind speed, wind direction, and air temperature gradients, along with local and regional topography, provide the links between air pollutant emissions and air quality.

The project site is located within the North Central Coast Air Basin (NCCAB). The NCCAB is comprised of Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties. The basin lies along the central coast of California and covers an area of 5,159 square miles.

The semi-permanent high pressure cell in the eastern Pacific is the basic controlling factor in the climate of the air basin. In the summer, the high pressure cell is dominant and causes persistent west and northwest winds over the entire California coast. Air descends in the Pacific High pressure cell and forms a stable temperature inversion of hot air over a cool coastal layer of air. The onshore air currents pass over cool ocean waters to bring fog and relatively cool air into the coastal valleys. The warmer air aloft acts as a lid to inhibit vertical air movement.

The generally northwest-southeast orientation of mountainous ridges tends to restrict and channel the summer onshore air currents. Surface heating in the interior portion of the Salinas and San Benito Valleys creates a weak low pressure that intensifies the onshore airflow during the afternoon and evening.

In the fall, the surface winds become weak, and the marine layer grows shallow, dissipating altogether on some days. The airflow is occasionally reversed in a weak offshore movement, and the relatively stationary air mass is held in place by the Pacific High pressure cell, which allows pollutants to build up over a period of a few days. It is most often during this season that the north or east winds develop to transport pollutants from either the San Francisco Bay area or the Central Valley into the NCCAB.

During the winter, the Pacific High pressure cell migrates southward and has less influence on the air basin. Air quality flows in a southeasterly direction out of the Salinas and San Benito Valleys, especially during night and morning hours. Northwest winds nevertheless remain dominant in winter, but easterly flow is more frequent. The general absence of deep, persistent inversions and the occasional storm systems usually result in good air quality for the basin as a whole in winter and early spring.

Hollister, at the northern end of the San Benito Valley, experiences west winds nearly one-third of the time. The prevailing air flow during the summer months probably originates in the Monterey Bay area and enters the northern end of the San Benito Valley via the air gap through the Gabilan Range occupied by the Pajaro River. In addition, a northwesterly airflow frequently transports pollutants into the San Benito Valley from the Santa Clara Valley.

**b. Air Pollution Regulation.** The federal and state governments have been empowered by the federal and state Clean Air Acts to regulate the emission of airborne pollutants and have



established ambient air quality standards for the protection of public health. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the federal agency designated to administer air quality regulation, while the California Air Resources Board (CARB) is the state equivalent in California. Local control in air quality management is provided by the CARB through county-level or regional Air Pollution Control Districts (APCDs). The CARB establishes air quality standards and is responsible for control of mobile emission sources, while the local APCDs are responsible for enforcing standards and regulating stationary sources. The CARB has established 14 air basins statewide. The project site is located in the North Central Coast Air Basin and is within the jurisdiction of the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD).

Federal and state standards have been established for ozone, carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), particulates less than 10 microns in diameter (PM<sub>10</sub>), and lead. California has also set standards for sulfates, hydrogen sulfide, vinyl chloride, and visibility reducing particles. The U.S. EPA adopted stricter air quality standards for ozone and PM<sub>10</sub>. The existing safety standard for ozone, last revised in 1979, were previously set at concentration levels of 0.12 parts per million (ppm) for a 1-hour period. PM<sub>10</sub> threshold levels, established in 1987, are 150 micrograms per cubic meter for a 24-hour period. The EPA has replaced the 1-hour ozone standard with a new 8-hour averaging time and lowered the concentration level from 0.12 to 0.8 ppm. The EPA has also revised the PM<sub>10</sub> standard and changed the method for calculating PM<sub>10</sub> concentrations. The PM<sub>10</sub> standard has been split into two subclasses: a fine fraction (less than or equal to 2.5 microns in diameter) and a coarse fraction (greater than 2.5 microns but less than 10 microns in diameter). The annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard has been set at 15 micrograms per cubic meter spatially averaged across an area. The new 24-hour PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard is based on the 3-year average of the 98th percentile of the 24-hour concentrations measured at a monitoring station.

**c. Current Ambient Air Quality.** The APCD is required to monitor air pollutant levels to assure that the air quality standards are met, and if they are not met, to also develop strategies to meet the standards. Depending on whether or not the standards are met or exceeded, the air basin is classified as being in "attainment" or as "nonattainment." San Benito County is in attainment for all standards except the state ozone and PM<sub>10</sub> standards.

Table 4.2-1 summarizes the annual air quality data for the local airshed. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) maintains over 60 air quality monitoring stations throughout California. The MBUAPCD operates several air quality monitoring stations within the Basin with one station located within the City of Hollister, at Fairview Road. The data collected at this station is considered to be representative of the baseline air quality experienced in the county. It should be noted that San Benito County ambient air quality monitoring data is not available for carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, or hydrogen sulfide.

**Table 4.2-1 Ambient Air Quality Data**

<b>Pollutant</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
Ozone			
Worst Hour, ppm	0.095	0.102	0.091
Number of days of State exceedances (>0.09 ppm)	1	4	0
Number of days of Federal exceedances (>0.12 ppm)	0	0	0
Particulate Matter <10 microns			
Worst 24 Hours, $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$	42.0	59.0	36.0
Number of samples of State exceedances <sup>1</sup> (>50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	0	1	0
Number of samples of Federal exceedances <sup>1</sup> (>150 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	0	0	0
Annual Geometric Mean (State standard = 30 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	15	18.5	16.7
Annual Arithmetic Mean (Federal standard = 50 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ )	17.6	17.9	16.4

ppm: Parts Per Million

$\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  = micrograms per cubic meter

Note: No data available for carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, or hydrogen sulfide

<sup>1</sup> PM<sub>10</sub> exceedances are derived from the number of samples exceeded, not days.

Source: ARB, Annual Air Quality Data Summaries, 2001-2003.

As illustrated by the above data depicted in Table 4.2-1, the primary pollutants of concern in the project area are ozone and particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub>). The County is in nonattainment regarding the state standard for these pollutants. The major sources for PM<sub>10</sub> are fugitive road dust, windblown dust, farming operations, waste burning, construction, mobile sources, and industrial processes. PM<sub>10</sub> levels in the area are primarily due to farming operations, grading, and motor vehicle emissions. The State PM<sub>10</sub> standard were exceeded on one day during the year 2001, on four days during the year 2002, and was not exceeded in the year 2003. In addition, Federal annual arithmetic mean for PM<sub>10</sub> was not exceeded and the State annual geometric mean was exceeded only once during the years 2001-2003.

Ozone is a secondary pollutant that is not produced directly by a source, but rather it is formed by a reaction between nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>x</sub>) and volatile organic compounds (VOC) in the presence of sunlight. Reductions in ozone concentrations are dependent on reducing the amount of these precursors. The major sources of ozone precursor emissions in the Air Basin are motor vehicles, which accounts for approximately 32 percent of VOC, and 41 percent of NO<sub>x</sub> emissions. The federal ozone standard was not exceeded between the years 2000-2002, inclusive. However, the state one-hour ozone standard was exceeded one time during the year 2001 and four times during the year 2002, but was not exceeded during the year 2003. The California Clean Air Act specifies that areas, such as the County, in non-attainment for ozone must reduce emissions of ozone precursors by at least 5% per year until the standards are achieved. The 2001 AQMP contains measures to achieve these reductions.

## 4.2.2 Impact Analysis

**a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds.** According to the MBUAPCD's CEQA Air Quality Guidelines (Revised June 2004), implementation of the project would create a significant impact if the project would:

- Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan



- *Violate any air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation*
- *Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is nonattainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard (including releasing emissions which exceed quantitative thresholds for ozone precursors)*
- *Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations*
- *Create objectionable odors affecting a substantial number of people*

In addition, the MBUAPCD maintains quantitative thresholds of significance. According to the MBUAPCD (June 2004), a project will have a significant air quality effect on the environment if the project would:

- *emit 82 lbs/day of PM<sub>10</sub> at the project site or result in an AAQS PM<sub>10</sub> exceedance at existing receptors during construction;*
- *emit 137 lbs/day of VOC or NO<sub>x</sub> (from stationary sources and motor vehicle trips);*
- *degrade the Level of Service (LOS) at an intersection/road segment from D or better to E or F, or increase the volume to capacity (V/C) ratio at an intersection/road segment at LOS E or F by 0.05 or more; or increase the delay at an intersection at LOS E or F by 10 seconds or more, or decrease reserve capacity at an unsignalized intersection at LOS E or F by 50 or more*
- *emit 550 lbs/day of CO (from stationary sources);*
- *emit 150 lbs/day of SO<sub>x</sub> (from stationary sources);*
- *cause a violation of any other State or national AAQS;*
- *be inconsistent with the AQMP; or*
- *have any other significant adverse impacts (e.g., create objectionable odors, alter air movement, moisture, temperature, or climate).*

A project is deemed to be of statewide, regional, or areawide significance if it would interfere with the attainment or maintenance of State or national Ambient Air Quality Standards (AAQS).

The Project's long-term impacts to air quality will be considered significant if the project results in mobile source emissions that exceed existing levels. In this case, the key pollutants of concern are ozone precursors (NO<sub>x</sub> and VOC) and fine particulate matter.

#### **b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.**

**Impact AQ-1 Many of the capital improvement projects included in the RTP would involve construction activity that could generate temporary increases in local air pollution. Because of their temporary nature, such impacts are considered Class II, significant but mitigable.**

Given the scope of the infrastructure improvements identified in the 2005 RTP, a discussion of potential short-term impacts is warranted. There are three basic sources of short-term emissions that would be generated by implementation of the RTP. These sources include: operation of the construction vehicles, (i.e., scrapers, loaders, dump trucks); the creation of fugitive dust during clearing and grading; and the use of asphalt or other oil based substances during the final construction phases. The quantity of daily emissions, particularly ROG and



NO<sub>x</sub> emissions, generated by construction equipment utilized to build RTP improvements would depend on the number of vehicles used and the hours of operation. The significance of fugitive dust (PM<sub>10</sub>) emissions would depend upon the following factors: the aerial extent of disturbed soils, the length of disturbance time; whether or not existing structures are demolished, whether or not excavation is involved; and whether or not transport of excavated materials offsite is necessary. The level of hydrocarbon emissions generated by oil-based substances such as asphalt are dependent upon the type and amount of asphalt utilized.

Intersection improvements such as signalization and restriping are not expected to generate significant short-term impacts. However, the remainder of the RTP construction projects involves grading and paving, or the construction of permanent facilities. Although individual improvements may not generate significant short-term emissions, it is highly likely that several improvements would be under construction simultaneously in the county, and would generate cumulative construction emissions that could impact air quality. Therefore, short-term impacts generated by implementation of the RTP are considered potentially significant although no established threshold is available to gauge the severity of the impact.

Mitigation Measures. Because all construction projects can produce nuisance dust emissions, dust mitigation measures are required for all construction activities. The following mitigation measures are recommended to minimize emissions and to reduce the amount of dust that drifts onto adjacent properties. These measures would apply to both tract grading and development of individual lots.

**AQ-1(a)** Application of CBACT. All construction equipment be properly maintained and tuned according to manufacturer specifications. All off-road and portable diesel powered equipment, including but not limited to bulldozers, graders, cranes, loaders, scrapers, backhoes, generator sets, compressors, and auxiliary power units, shall be fueled exclusively with CARB motor vehicle diesel fuel. At least 20% of the diesel-fueled equipment used for project construction shall be 1996 or newer. The project applicant shall install catalytic soot filters on at least 20% of the pre-1996 diesel-fueled equipment, targeting those projected to generate the greatest emissions. Where catalytic soot filters are determined to be unsuitable, the owner shall install and use an oxidation catalyst. Suitability is to be determined by an independent California Licensed Mechanical Engineer who will submit, for District approval, a Suitability Report identifying and explaining the particular constraints to using the preferred catalytic soot filter.

**AQ-1(b)** The following measures shall be implemented to reduce PM<sub>10</sub> emissions during project construction:

- Reduce the amount of the disturbed area where possible.
- Use water trucks or sprinkler systems in sufficient quantities to prevent airborne dust from leaving the site. Water shall be applied as soon as possible whenever wind speeds exceed 15 miles per hour. Reclaimed (nonpotable) water should be used whenever possible.



- All dirt-stock-pile areas shall be sprayed daily as needed.
- Permanent dust control measures shall be identified in the approved project revegetation and landscape plans and implemented as soon as possible following completion of any soil disturbing activities.
- Exposed ground areas that are planned to be reworked at dates greater than one month after initial grading shall be sown with a fast-germinating native grass seed and watered until vegetation is established.
- All disturbed soil areas not subject to revegetation shall be stabilized using approved chemical soil binders, jute netting, or other methods approved in advance by the APCD.
- All roadways, driveways, sidewalks, etc., to be paved shall be completed as soon as possible. In addition, building pads shall be laid as soon as possible after grading unless seeding or soil binders are used.
- Vehicle speed for all construction vehicles shall not exceed 15 mph on any unpaved surface at the construction site.
- All trucks hauling dirt, sand, soil or other loose materials shall be covered or shall maintain at least two feet of freeboard (minimum vertical distance between top of load and top of trailer) in accordance with CVC Section 23114.
- Install wheel washers where vehicles enter and exit unpaved roads onto streets, or wash off trucks and equipment leaving the site.
- Sweep streets at the end of each day if visible soil material is carried onto adjacent paved roads. Water sweepers with reclaimed water shall be used where feasible.

**AQ-1(c)** If importation, exportation, or stockpiling of fill material is involved, soil stockpiled for more than two days shall be covered, kept moist, or treated with soil binders to prevent dust generation. Trucks transporting material shall be tarped from the point of origin.

**AQ-1(d)** The contractor or builder shall designate a person or persons to monitor the dust control program and to order increased watering as necessary to prevent transport of dust off-site. Their duties shall include holiday and weekend periods when work may not be in progress.

Significance After Mitigation. With the recommended measures, construction-related air quality impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level.

**Impact AQ-2 Implementation of the 2005 RTP would reduce emissions of ozone precursors as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented by promoting a multi-modal transportation system and thereby reducing reliance on single occupancy vehicle use. The RTP would also implement the AQMP Transportation Control Measures. This is considered a Class III, less than significant effect.**



San Benito County is currently designated as a federal “air-quality attainment maintenance area” and State “non-attainment area” for ozone. A central purpose and goal of the RTP is to reduce regional air emissions, primarily by promoting a multi-modal transportation system, thus reducing reliance on the single occupancy vehicle. The RTP envisions a range of projects, including transit facilities, increased bus usage, bikeways, and pedestrian facilities, that collectively support the multi-modal concept, and increase the mobility of the citizens of the county. In a qualitative sense, these projects will contribute to the achievement of a reduction of air pollutant emissions.

A quantitative analysis of emissions that could result from implementation of the RTP is not feasible due to the varying time frames and other uncertainties regarding implementation of individual RTP projects. A qualitative analysis of the regional effects on air quality from implementation of the RTP follows.

*Air Quality Effects of Projects Included in the RTP.* The list of transportation projects of the 2005 RTP includes widening of existing roadways, construction of new roadways, and construction of new transit and bicycle facilities. Of all the contemplated RTP projects, the roadway projects are considered to be the greatest source of long-term emissions because ozone precursors are generated primarily by on-road vehicles. Creating a multimodal transportation system and integrating land uses which facilitate walking, bicycling and transit use, can greatly lessen the need for auto-related facilities with a range of other transportation options that do not require as much conversion of land to roadways, parking lots and other paved structures.

The AQMP includes nine Transportation Control Measures (TCM) that are intended to reduce air emissions. Each TCM is evaluated below in terms of the various RTP projects intended to implement them.

1. Improved Public Transit Service (New Service and Operations/Increased Ridership)

This TCM includes increased capacity on existing routes, new routes proposed by public transit operators, and increased ridership on existing routes.

2005 RTP projects that implement this TCM:

- Transit Vehicle Replacement
- Contracted Transit Service Operations, Annual Allocation

2. Area-wide Transportation Demand Management (Expanded Outreach)

Area wide Transportation Demand Management (TDM) includes expanded rideshare programs, bicycle education programs, expanded Transportation Management Association (TMA) activity, video conferencing and vanpooling programs. Current rideshare programs in San Benito County provide assistance to voluntary employer trip reduction programs and TMAs; and promote carpooling, vanpooling, transit use, bicycling, and walking to the general public. The secondary function of rideshare programs, the promotion of other alternatives to single occupancy vehicles, serves to support and enhance other TCMs.

The 2005 RTP includes several transit and non-motorized transportation projects that would implement this TCM.



### 3. Signal Synchronization

Projects in this TCM include traffic signals synchronized at two or more intersections. Signal synchronization is included as a TCM because it improves traffic flow, reducing stop and go traffic and its associated pollution emissions.

The 2005 RTP does not include projects that specifically implement this TCM. However, signalization provided for individual roadway improvement projects are typically synchronized.

### 4. New and Improved Bicycle Facilities

This TCM includes projects in San Benito County that improve bicycle facilities. Projects include Class I, II, and III bicycle paths, bicycle storage such as lockers and racks, and other facilities to encourage bicycling as a transportation mode.

2005 RTP projects that implement this TCM:

- Bikeway Repair and Maintenance
- San Juan Highway Bike Lane Construction
- Southside Road Bike Lane Construction
- San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase I)
- San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase II)
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Implementation

### 5. Alternative Fuels

The alternative fuels TCM covers the conversion of gasoline-powered vehicles to alternative fuels, replacement of gasoline-powered vehicles with new alternative fuel vehicles, increasing the infrastructure needed to successfully operate alternative fuel fleets, and new applications of electric powered vehicles. By far the most common alternative fuel in use in the region is Compressed Natural Gas (CNG).

The 2005 RTP does not include projects that specifically implement this TCM.

### 6. Park and Ride Lots

Park and ride lots provide a supporting role to transit, bicycling, and ridesharing TCMs. The projects listed in this analysis are examples of cost effective trip reducing projects that support other TCMs.

The 2005 RTP does not include projects that specifically implement this TCM.

### 7. Livable Communities

“Livable communities” is a TCM with nonquantifiable air quality benefits. Livable communities is a term borrowed from the U. S. Department of Transportation’s Livable Community Initiative. A broad definition of livable communities would include policies and projects that reduce auto dependency by promoting pedestrian, transit, and bicycle scaled



development. AMBAG adopted five policies in June 1995 as part of the *Livable Community Initiative for the Monterey Bay Region*. The five policies are:

- Promote mixed, complementary land uses;
- Promote transit-supportive density and zoning for new development where scheduled transit service exists and transit funds are available to support that density and zoning in the future;
- Provide pedestrian/bike circulation and access;
- Provide transit access; and
- Promote pedestrian friendly design.

These policies complement the recommended mitigation measures in MBUAPCD's *CEQA Air Quality Guidelines*. Three examples of MBUAPCD's recommended mitigation measures include: orient building entrances towards transit facilities, provide bicycle paths within major subdivisions that link to an external network, and provide preferential parking spaces for carpools. These measures are designed to reduce air quality impacts of new development. The livable communities this TCM supports and enhances include other TCMs such as improved public transit, area wide Transportation Demand Management, and improved bicycle facilities.

2005 RTP projects that implement this TCM:

- Transit Vehicle Replacement
- Contracted Transit Service Operations, Annual Allocation
- Bikeway Repair and Maintenance
- San Juan Highway Bike Lane Construction
- Southside Road Bike Lane Construction
- San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase I)
- San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase II)
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Implementation

## 8. Selected Intelligent Transportation Systems

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) is a TCM with nonquantifiable air quality benefits. The California Alliance for Advanced Transportation Systems defines ITS as "advanced sensor, computer, electronics, and communications technologies, applied in an integrated manner to the transportation system through consensus management strategies by regional agencies, to increase safety and mobility." This TCM does not apply to capacity increasing projects.

Different components of ITS include: 1) Advanced Traveler Information Systems (ATIS) which provides travelers with current "real-time" information to make informed travel choices; 2) Advanced Traffic Management/Emergency Management Systems (ATMS/EMS) which facilitates freeway and surface arterial operations to manage travel corridors and emergency situations; 3) Advanced Public Transportation Systems (APTS) which improves mobility for transit riders and transit operations for system managers; 4) Commercial Vehicle Operations (CVO) which enhances commercial goods delivery through improved management capabilities, communications and vehicle operations; 5) Electronic Payment (EP) which allows for electronic payment of transportation services; and 6) Advanced Vehicle Control and Safety Systems (AVCS) which automates vehicle safety and control for safe and improved travel.



ITS is included as a TCM in the Monterey Bay region, in part, for the following reasons: 1 ) it improves traffic flow, reducing stop and go traffic and its associated pollution emissions (through services like Freeway Service Patrol); 2) it decreases the incidence of crashes and resultant stop and go traffic (through projects like Changeable Message Signs, Highway Advisory Radio and Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies); 3) it includes transit related enhancements (through things like SMART Cards and demand responsive services); and 4) it promotes integrated traveler information to make informed traveling choices (through things like information kiosks).

The 2005 RTP does not include projects that specifically implement this TCM.

### 9. Traffic Calming

Traffic calming is defined by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) as “the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior and improve conditions for non-motorized street users. Traffic Calming is a TCM with both nonquantifiable benefits and with some aspects of the TCMS subsumed into the Improved Public Transit and Area wide Transportation Demand Management TCMs. Many of its techniques and principles can be included in the Livable Communities TCMS. Studies have shown traffic calming reduces air pollution emissions by 10 to 50 percent. Projects that reduce vehicle stops and starts provide the greatest air quality benefits.

Traffic calming includes: 1) reducing the speed limit; 2) changing the road design to force traffic to travel at a slower, more even pace; 3) changing the psychological feel of the street; 4) increasing incentives to use public transit; 5) discouraging use of private motor vehicles; 6) optimizing the number of people using each car; 7) encouraging people to organize their own travel more efficiently; 8) optimizing choices for travel; 9) improved equity for non-motorized travel; and 10) creating strong, viable, compact local communities. Examples of specific traffic calming measures include: roundabouts, traffic circles, irregular or textured surfaces, median barriers, lane narrowing, reduced corner radii, street closure and limited street access, raised intersections, gateway treatments, and speed humps.

The 2005 RTP does not include projects that specifically implement this TCM.

Mitigation Measures. The following RTP goal and policy would reduce project impacts related to air quality, as follows:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Goal 4     | To protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life. San Benito County jurisdictions: |
| Policy 4.3 | Shall operate transportation facilities in a way that provides a high level of air quality and energy efficiency.                  |

Although impacts are likely to be less than significant, to further reduce long term air quality impacts, the following measures, are recommended:



**AQ-2(a)** SCCRTC shall continue to give Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding priority to those projects which reduce regional emissions of ozone precursor gases countywide.

Significance After Mitigation. The operational impacts of the RTP on the attainment of state and federal air quality standards can be classified as less than significant (Class III) and beneficial in both the short term and long term.

**Impact AQ-3 The RTP is consistent with the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) 2004 Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP). No impacts related to RTP consistency with the AQMP would result.**

According to the MBUAPCD, the RTP's consistency with the AQMP should be determined by comparing the emissions from the transportation projects with the emissions budget in the AQMP. If the AQMP growth assumptions are likely to be exceeded as a result of the RTP improvements, then the RTP cannot be found consistent with the AQMP. Since the source of the 2005 RTP's growth assumptions is the same as the AQMP (i.e., the 1997 AMBAG Regional Population Forecast), the two documents are consistent. The projects in the RTP are incorporated into the 2005 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and are modeled in the Association of Monterey Bay Area Government (AMBAG) regional travel demand model to determine conformity with the federal emission budgets. The 2004 AMBAG Population, Housing Unit and Employment Forecasts are incorporated into both the regional travel demand model and the 2004 AQMP. Since the RTP would conform with the MTP, the RTP would be consistent with the 2004 AQMP.

Several of the RTP roadway improvement projects provide improved access to areas with existing or anticipated congestion. These extensions would cross primarily undeveloped agricultural and /or open space areas. However, these projects may be needed due to a lack of sufficient roadway capacity or are proposed in local Circulation Elements as necessary to reduce future congestion anticipated as local General Plans are built out. Therefore, it can be argued that these extensions mitigate the potential adverse impacts associated with planned growth on the existing system by providing additional capacity, improving system efficiency and reducing forecast congestion levels.

The growth assumptions in the RTP are consistent with those used in the AQMP. In addition, the RTP includes roadway and intersection improvements that reduce existing and future congestion, thereby reducing emissions. Also, the RTP includes projects that promote the implementation of a majority of the AQMP TCMs. Therefore, the 2005 RTP is considered to be consistent with the AQMP.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. The RTP is considered consistent with the AQMP.

**Impact AQ-4 Implementation of RTP projects would not result in localized traffic congestion that causes localized carbon monoxide (CO) emission**



**hotspots. This would be considered a Class III, less than significant, impact.**

Carbon monoxide (CO) is considered to have a significant air quality impact if the additional CO from a project creates a “hot spot” where the California one-hour standard of 20 parts per million carbon monoxide is exceeded. This typically occurs at severely congested intersections. According to the APCD, if a project, together with existing traffic and that anticipated from foreseeable future development would not result in traffic congestion worse than a level of service (LOS) D, after intersection improvements are implemented, then CO modeling is normally not required.

Implementation of the projects contemplated in the 2005 RTP would improve traffic congestion and levels of service of roadways within the jurisdictions in the county. Implementation of RTP projects would not result in significant localized traffic congestion that exceeds APCD thresholds for CO emissions.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be considered less than significant.

**Impact AQ-5 Implementation of future transit station projects could result in stationary or semi-stationary emissions sources that expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations and/or odors, such as diesel exhaust. This would be considered a Class II, significant but mitigable, impact.**

RTP Project SBCOG-2, *Commuter Rail Implementation*, could result in stationary or semi-stationary emissions sources, such as idling trains and other vehicles. These projects may result in vehicle emissions, including diesel exhaust emissions, that could affect adjacent sensitive receptors. Overall, the RTP projects would be expected to improve traffic flow in the county. Implementation of the 2001 RTP would reduce vehicle emissions as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented. Nevertheless, projects that result in stationary or semi-stationary emissions sources could expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations and/or odors, which would be considered a potentially significant impact unless mitigation is incorporated.

It should be noted that RTP roadway and aviation projects would not result in significant emissions from stationary or semi-stationary source that could affect sensitive receptors.

As described in Section 4.0 of this EIR, the State *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15145 notes that “If, after thorough investigation, a Lead Agency finds that a particular impact is too speculative for evaluation, the agency should note its conclusion and terminate discussion of the impact.” An evaluation of the site-specific impacts of many of these types of projects for which sites have not been defined (including several station projects) would be speculative, as neither the existing nor the post-project conditions of the sites can be assessed. Nevertheless, these projects will be required to undergo environmental review pursuant to CEQA when site plans are defined, prior to project implementation.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measures are required for projects that are demonstrated to significantly impact sensitive receptors.

**AQ-5(a)** The agencies that propose a transit station project that is demonstrated to significantly impact sensitive receptors shall design the project so that impacts are reduced to the extent feasible. This may involve a reduction in the size of the project, relocation of the project, or reconfiguration of project facilities so that stationary sources (e.g., idling vehicles) are not located adjacent to sensitive receptors. If physical changes to an impacting project are not feasible due to physical, economic, technological, or other constraints, the project proponent shall prohibit engine idling for periods greater than one minute.

Significance After Mitigation. Impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels with proposed mitigation.

**c. Specific RTP Projects That May Result in Impacts.** Table 4.2-2 identifies those projects that may create impacts as discussed in Section 4.2.2.b above. The individual projects listed could create significant air quality impacts but would not necessarily do so. Additional specific analysis will need to be conducted as the individual projects are designed and implemented in order to determine the actual magnitude of impact. Mitigation measures discussed above could apply to these specific projects.

**Table 4.2-2 RTP Projects That May Result in Air Quality Impacts**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>
Many	All local jurisdictions	Construction of RTP projects throughout the County	AQ-1	Projects could result in short-term construction emissions that could generate temporary increases in local air pollution
Many	All local jurisdictions	All RTP projects that improve transportation efficiency	AQ-2	RTP projects would reduce emissions of ozone precursors as compared to what would occur if no transportation projects were implemented
Many	All local jurisdictions	All RTP projects	AQ-3	The RTP is consistent with the MBUAPCD Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP).
SBCOG-2	SBCOG	Commuter Rail Implementation	AQ-5	This project could result in stationary sources of odors or air contaminants that affect sensitive receptors.





## 4.3 LAND USE AND PLAN CONSISTENCY

### 4.3.1 Setting

a. **Land Use Patterns.** The project site is located in San Benito County, which occupies approximately 1,389 square miles of both urban and rural land uses. San Benito County is bordered on the north by Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, on the east by Merced and Fresno counties, and on the south and west by Monterey County. Almost 60% of the County's land area is currently in agricultural use. Refer to Section 4.1, *Agricultural Resources*, for a discussion of agricultural land use in the County.

About 77% of San Benito County is currently in some form of public or private open space. The majority of the open space lands are in private ownership as Williamson Act contract land. Recreational and tourist-oriented areas in the County include Pinnacles National Monument, Fremont Peak State Park, San Juan Bautista Mission, and Bolado Park.

San Benito County contains two incorporated cities: Hollister and San Juan Bautista. Urban concentrations of commercial, residential, and industrial development in the county are located in these two cities. Much of the commercial uses (e.g., restaurants, hotels, small retail shops) in these cities serve tourists. Within the City of Hollister, commercial uses line the main thoroughfares, including San Felipe Road/San Benito Street, Fourth Street, and Tres Pinos Road. Existing residential uses are clustered around the downtown core, and extend outward as the community has grown. New residential development has been concentrated in the south and eastern portion of Hollister. The majority of industrial uses, including food processing and light manufacturing, are located in or near Hollister, mostly along San Felipe Road north of McCloskey. The Hollister Municipal Airport lies just north of the City, east of San Felipe Road.

b. **Regulatory Setting.** Land use issues are regulated by the General Plans and zoning ordinances of the County and the incorporated cities of Hollister and San Juan Bautista. The RTP includes a list of regional capital improvements that have been anticipated by each local jurisdiction.

### 4.3.2 Impact Analysis

a. **Methodology and Significance Thresholds.**

1. **Land Use Impacts.** The project would result in a significant land use impact if it would physically divide an established community, conflict with applicable land use plans, policies or regulations, a habitat conservation plan, or natural communities conservation plan. Land use impacts were assessed based upon the level of physical impact anticipated in the various issues that can affect compatibility (air quality, noise aesthetics). These thresholds are augmented by those contained in Sections 4.2 and 4.4 (*Air Quality* and *Noise*, respectively) which are issues that relate directly to land use compatibility.

2. **Growth-Inducing Impacts.** Please refer to Section 5.0 of this EIR, *Growth-Inducing Impacts*, for a discussion of potential growth-inducing impacts related to the RTP.



**b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.** This section describes generalized impacts associated with the projects listed in the RTP. Table 4.3-1 in Section 4.3.2.c. lists the specific projects that could result in the impacts discussed below.

**Impact LU-1** Some RTP projects may create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development. This is considered a Class II, *significant but mitigable* impact.

The RTP includes roadway projects that could result in physical land use impacts with existing development. Such impacts could include an increase in noise, lighting conflicts with neighboring uses, or a degradation of public safety or air quality. Projects with the potential to create these kinds of impacts include construction of new facilities in proximity to sensitive uses, and road extensions and widenings.

Land use conflicts associated with RTP improvements are considered potentially significant. Such impacts would be most common in urban and suburban areas, particularly in areas where roadway widenings or construction are envisioned. Impacts would be most pronounced in residential areas, or in areas with schools, parks, or other land uses with large numbers of children or elderly people, who are most sensitive to noise impacts. Please note that additional impacts related to noise are described in Section 4.4, *Noise*, of this EIR. Land use conflict impacts related to agricultural uses are described in Section 4.1, *Agricultural Resources*, of this EIR.

Mitigation Measures. The following RTP goals and policies would reduce project impacts related to land use compatibility.

**Goal 9** To design, construct, and maintain the integrity of streets and highways to serve their designated purpose and be compatible with the land use to which they are adjacent. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 9.1* Shall construct (or cause to be constructed if private), roads, highways, and selected urban arterial streets for regional or interregional travel. Such facilities shall be designed to the minimum standard of the local jurisdiction within which they are located. Such standards shall emphasize safe and efficient *automobile, motorcycle, truck, and transit* operation. Where appropriate, the jurisdiction shall accommodate the safe movement of agricultural equipment on the facility.

*Policy 9.2* Shall construct (or cause to be constructed if private), urban collector and local streets primarily for intra-city travel. Shall accommodate vehicular travel but shall emphasize safe and efficient *pedestrian and bicycle* travel.

*Policy 9.3* Shall construct (or cause to be constructed, if private), streets in downtown areas primarily to serve business activity. Shall include wide sidewalks and encourage diagonal parking where feasible to

increase the number of parking spaces close to businesses and to facilitate the calming of traffic on major downtown streets.

**Goal 11** To promote the development of "livable" streets in urbanized areas that accommodates multiple modes of transportation. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 11.1* Shall include bike lanes on arterial and collector streets where feasible, and sidewalks on all streets in developed areas. They should also require street trees designed to form canopies over streets and green strips between sidewalks and streets in new development.

*Policy 11.2* Shall protect urban streets from through traffic by constructing bypass routes around Hollister.

*Policy 11.3* Shall designate appropriate routes for large trucks and establish ordinances that prohibit large trucks from traveling on non-designated streets.

*Policy 11.4* Shall adopt alternative street standards, consistent with standards for fire protection that accommodate traffic-calming measures for existing urban streets. Where appropriate, jurisdictions should install traffic-calming devices to protect local residential streets from speeding traffic.

In addition, the following mitigation measures are recommended to reduce land use compatibility impacts.

**LU-1(a)** Setbacks, fences, or other appropriate means shall be used to separate transportation facilities with the potential to generate land use conflicts from adjacent sensitive land uses. Roadways shall be designed to minimize potential impacts to pedestrians and bicyclists, particularly those living in adjacent residential areas, or attending nearby schools. Adequate striping, signs and signalization shall be installed to slow traffic where appropriate, and to reduce safety and noise impacts. The jurisdiction through which the impacting project traverses would be responsible for implementing this measure, which may in part be based on project-specific noise and safety studies required by the local agency.

**LU-1(b)** Street lighting, where necessary, shall be minimized to the extent possible in areas adjacent to sensitive land uses. Street lights shall be shielded, and oriented away from residential development. No street light shall exceed the minimum height requirement as dictated by Caltrans or local ordinance, as applicable.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of recommended mitigation measures would be expected to reduce land use conflicts to a less than significant level.



**Impact LU-2** During construction, many RTP projects would result in temporarily lane closures or other access restrictions that would disrupt existing homes, businesses, and pedestrian, bicycle, and transit routes. This is considered a Class II, *significant but mitigable* impact.

During construction on both new and existing roadways, homes and businesses may be temporarily disrupted through temporary road or lane closures, or blockage of access to parking. Bicycle and pedestrian access could also be disrupted. Temporary disruption of bicyclists, pedestrians, homes and/or businesses would be considered a potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures. The following mitigation measure is required.

**LU-2(a)** For all transportation projects that could result in temporary lane closures or access blockage during construction, a temporary access plan shall be implemented to ensure continued access to affected cyclists, pedestrians, businesses, and homes. Appropriate signs and safe access shall be guaranteed during project construction to ensure that businesses remain open.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of recommended measures would mitigate impacts relating to temporary disturbance.

**Impact LU-3** Some RTP projects could permanently displace or disrupt existing homes and businesses. This is considered a Class II, *significant but mitigable* impact.

Projects that involve the widening or extension of roadways may result in permanent displacement of residents or businesses. Displacement impacts would occur most commonly in urban areas, where roadways would expand into previously-developed areas. Such impacts could also occur in rural areas, where roadways would encroach on existing farmland. Access and disruption impacts associated with construction would occur to varying degrees with all construction projects, but would be most acute in urban areas with high volumes of traffic and businesses that depend upon ease of vehicular access. The precise amount of land, number of residences, and businesses potentially subject to acquisition cannot be determined at this time, since the design of proposed facilities has not been completed. This analysis presents a reasonable worst-case assessment of such impacts. Permanent displacement of homes and/or businesses would be considered a potentially significant impact.

Mitigation Measures. The following measures are recommended to mitigate potential impacts relating to temporary disturbance to and permanent displacement of residences and businesses.

**LU-3(a)** Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which an RTP project with the potential to displace residences or businesses (as indicated in Table 4.3-1) is located shall assure that project-specific environmental reviews consider alternative alignments that avoid or minimize impacts to nearby residences and businesses.



- LU-3(b)** Where project-specific reviews identify displacement or relocation impacts that are unavoidable, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project is located shall ensure that appropriate local, state, and federal relocation programs are used to assist eligible persons to relocate. In addition, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction shall review and, if necessary, modify the construction schedules to ensure that adequate time is provided to allow affected businesses to find and relocate to other sites.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of recommended measures would reduce impacts relating to long-term displacement to a less than significant level.

**Impact LU-4 The RTP includes policies that guide development under the plan. RTP policies are consistent with other regional and local transportation policies. Impacts would be Class III, less than significant.**

A basic premise of the RTP Policy Element is that it be consistent with the intent of the General Plans and local coastal plans of the county and cities within the county, recognizing the interdependence of local and regional transportation and land use planning. The Policy Element of the RTP describes the goals and policies that guide facility development under the RTP.

The general goals of the RTP are as follows:

1. To support the economic vitality of the region, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.
2. To increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.
3. To increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and freight.
4. To protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life.
5. To enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.
6. To promote efficient system management and operation.
7. To make maintenance of existing transportation a priority.

#### City of Hollister General Plan

The Hollister General Plan was updated in 1995 and establishes a planning horizon through the year 2010. The General Plan sets forth transportation goals and policies, including the following:

- Provide a safe and efficient transportation system, which maintains an orderly pattern of development consistent with economic, social, and environmental needs.
- Maintain a level of service (LOS) C on roadways and at intersections.
- Protect aviation-related activities from incompatible uses.
- Improve the transportation system in accordance with planned economic growth consistent with the General Plan.



- Coordinate with state and local jurisdictions in transportation system planning and development.

#### City of San Juan Bautista General Plan

The City of San Juan Bautista adopted a new General Plan in 1998. The San Juan Bautista General Plan establishes goals and policies through the year 2015. The General Plan's Transportation Element acknowledges the good operating conditions of the City's current transportation system, while identifying several roadway improvements for the year 2015. The major goals and policies of the General Plan are as follows:

- Provide and maintain a road network that allows for convenient, safe, uncongested travel.
- Ensure an adequate supply of parking.
- Minimize adverse traffic impacts on adjacent uses and neighborhoods.
- Establish a safe network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
- Provide alternative modes of transportation.
- Coordinate local transportation plans with local agencies.

#### County of San Benito General Plan

The County of San Benito General Plan consists of several elements adopted between 1980 and 1995. The General Plan establishes policies governing development of property in the County in areas planned for urban services. The Transportation Element was adopted in 1992 and contains a Transportation element Map that identifies existing and planned transportation facilities in the County, and establishes transportation goals and policies. The major goals and policies of the General Plan are as follows:

- Develop a safe, efficient Countywide transportation system that provides a variety of modes of travel.
- Prepare a County Transportation Master Plan.
- Maintain a level of service C on County roads and intersections.
- Promote alternative modes of transportation, including public transit.
- Protect airport facilities from incompatible uses.

#### RTP Consistency

In general, RTP policies encourage a multi-modal transportation network. Emphasis is placed on non-motorized vehicles, in part to reduce traffic congestion and air quality impacts associated with automobile use. RTP policies would minimize environmental impacts and conserve energy to the extent possible, insofar as they preferentially encourage non-motorized transportation. This approach is consistent with local transportation goals and policies of all the general plans in the county, which are similarly framed. The RTP includes the majority of roadway improvements identified in Hollister's General Plan and Map. The RTP identifies improvements to regional facilities, such as Highway 156, as called for in the San Juan Bautista General Plan, although local City improvements listed in the San Juan Bautista General Plan are not included. Proposed facility improvements are also consistent with those identified in the County's General Plan.



RTP policies are also consistent with the Air Pollution Control District (APCD) Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP), which promotes similar policies emphasizing alternative fuels and alternative transportation modes. RTP policies also emphasize coordination and consistency with applicable land use plans. Based on this analysis, the RTP is found to be consistent with both regional and local transportation goals.

Mitigation Measures. No mitigation measures are required.

Significance After Mitigation. The project is considered consistent with applicable plans and policies adopted by local agencies within the county.

Note that growth inducing impacts of the RTP are described in Section 5.0 of this EIR.

**c. Specific RTP Projects That May Result in Impacts.** Table 4.3-1 identifies those projects that may create impacts as discussed in Section 4.3.2.b. The individual projects listed could create significant land use impacts but would not necessarily do so. Additional specific analysis will need to be conducted as the individual projects are implemented in order to determine the actual magnitude of impact. Mitigation measures discussed above would apply to these specific projects.

**Table 4.3-1 RTP Projects That May Result in Land Use and Plan Consistency Impacts**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>
Many	All	Construction of Road Improvements throughout the county	LU-2	Could temporarily disrupt adjacent homes and/or businesses as a result of lane closures and/or other access restrictions
Cal-1	Caltrans	Highway 156, Gap Closure Widening	LU-1, LU-3	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development. Possible displacement of existing uses and/or effects on neighboring sensitive land uses.
Cal-3	Caltrans	Highway 25 to Santa Clara County Widening	LU-1, LU-3	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development. Possible displacement of existing uses and/or effects on neighboring sensitive land uses.
Cal-4	Caltrans	Highway 25 Bypass	LU-1, LU-3	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development. Possible displacement of existing uses and/or effects on neighboring sensitive land uses.
Holl-1	City of Hollister	Buena Vista Road Construction	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Holl-2	City of Hollister	Memorial Drive Construction-Meridian to Santa Ana	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Holl-5	City of Hollister	Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) Construction	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBC-1	County of San Benito	Fairview Road Widening	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Holl-7	City of Hollister	Highway 25 Widening-Sunnyslope to Sunset	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.



**Table 4.3-1 RTP Projects That May Result in Land Use and Plan Consistency Impacts**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>
Holl-8	City of Hollister	Westside Boulevard Extension	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBC-2	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBC-3	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBC-5	County of San Benito	Flynn Road Extension and Widening	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Cal-5	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening, Las Aromitas – Monterey County Line to Highway 156	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Cal-6	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening – Highway 156 to Santa Clara County Line	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Cal-7	Caltrans	Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBC-6	County of San Benito	Union Road Widening	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Cal-2	Caltrans	Highway 156 Widening (North of Hollister)	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Holl-6	City of Hollister	Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening-Sunset to Fairview	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
Holl-4	City of Hollister	Sunnyslope Road Construction	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBCOG-2	SBCOG	Commuter Rail Implementation	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBt-1-01	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 24 Holding Apron	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBt-1-09	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Diagonal Hanger Taxiway	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBt-1-10	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Exit Taxiway	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBt-1-11	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Parallel Taxiway	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBt-1-12	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 31 Holding Apron	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBt-1-13	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport California Department of Forestry Apron	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.
SBt-1-17	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Southwest Hangar Taxiway	LU-1	Could create land use conflicts with existing sensitive land uses and/or residential development.



## 4.4 NOISE

### 4.4.1 Setting

**a. Overview of Sound Measurement.** Sound is technically described in terms of the loudness (amplitude) of the sound and frequency (pitch) of the sound. The standard unit of measurement of the loudness of sound is the Decibel (dB). Since the human ear is not equally sensitive to sound at all frequencies, a special frequency-dependent rating scale has been devised to relate noise to human sensitivity. The A-weighted decibel scale (dBA) performs this compensation by discriminating against frequencies in a manner approximating the sensitivity of the human ear.

Decibels are based on the logarithmic scale. The logarithmic scale compresses the wide range in sound pressure levels to a more usable range of numbers in a manner similar to the Richter scale used to measure earthquakes. In terms of human response to noise, a sound 10 dBA higher than another is judged to be twice as loud; and 20 dBA higher four times as loud; and so forth. Everyday sounds normally range from 30 dB (very quiet) to 100 dB (very loud). In general, a 3 dB change in community noise levels is noticeable, while 1-2 dB changes are generally not perceived. Noise levels typically attenuate at a rate of 6 dBA per doubling of distance from point sources such as industrial machinery. Noise from lightly traveled roads typically attenuates at a rate of about 4.5 dBA per doubling of distance. Noise from heavily traveled roads typically attenuates at about 3 dBA per doubling of distance.

In addition to the actual instantaneous measurement of sound levels, the duration of sound is important since sounds that occur over a long period of time are more likely to be an annoyance or cause direct physical damage or environmental stress. Several rating scales have been developed to account for the known effects of noise on people. Based on these effects, the observation has been made that the potential for noise to impact people is dependent on the total acoustical energy content of the noise. A number of noise scales have been developed to account for this factor. These scales include the Equivalent Noise Level (LEQ), the Day Night Noise Level (LDN) and the Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL).

LEQ is the sound level corresponding to a steady-state sound level containing the same total energy as a time-varying signal over a given sample period. LEQ is the “energy” average noise level during the time period of the sample. LEQ can be measured for any time period, but is typically measured for 15 minutes, 1 hour, or 24 hours.

LDN is a 24-hour, time-weighted average noise level. Time-weighted refers to the fact that noise which occurs during certain sensitive time periods is penalized for occurring at these times. In the LDN scale, those events that take place during the night (10 p.m. to 7 a.m.) are penalized by 10 dB. This penalty was selected to attempt to account for increased human sensitivity to noise during the quieter period of day, where sleep is the most probable activity.

CNEL is similar to the LDN scale except that it includes an additional 5 dBA penalty for events that occur during the evening (7 p.m. to 10 p.m.) time period. Thus, both the Ldn and CNEL noise measures represent a 24-hour average of A-weighted noise levels with Ldn providing a nighttime adjustment and CNEL providing both an evening and nighttime adjustment.



Intermittent or occasional noise such as that associated with stationary noise sources is not of sufficient volume to exceed community noise standards that are based on a time averaged scale such as the LDN scale. To account for intermittent noise, the Percent Noise Level (L%) scale is used. The Percent Noise Level is the level exceeded a percentage of the time during the measurement period. Noise Ordinances are typically specified in terms of the percent noise levels. Ordinances are designed to protect people from noise sources such as music, machinery and vehicular traffic on private property.

The actual time period in which noise occurs is also important since noise that occurs at night tends to be more disturbing than that which occurs during the daytime. To evaluate community noise on a 24-hour basis, the day-night average sound level was developed (Ldn). Ldn is the time average of all A-weighted levels for a 24-hour period with a 10 dB upward adjustment added to those noise levels occurring between 10:00 PM and 7:00 AM to account for the general increased sensitivity of people to nighttime noise levels. The Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) is identical to the Ldn with one exception. The CNEL adds 5 dB to evening noise levels (7:00 PM to 10:00 PM).

Noise has been defined as unwanted sound and it is known to have several adverse effects on people. From these known effects of noise, criteria have been established to help protect the public health and safety and prevent disruption of certain human activities. These criteria are based on such known impacts of noise on people as hearing loss, speech interference, sleep interference, physiological responses and annoyance.

**b. Land Use Compatibility.** The State Office of Noise Control has established guidelines to provide the community with a noise environment deemed to be generally acceptable. Table 4.4-1 depicts ranges of noise exposure levels considered compatible with various types of land uses. Where a land use is denoted as "normally acceptable" for the given Ldn noise environment, the highest noise level in that range should be considered the maximum desirable for conventional construction that does not incorporate any special acoustic treatment. The acceptability of noise environments classified as "conditionally acceptable" or "normally unacceptable" will depend on the anticipated amount of time that will normally be spent outside the structure and the acoustic treatment to be incorporated in structural design.

With regard to noise-sensitive residential uses, the recommended exterior noise limits are 60 dBA CNEL for single family residences and 65 dBA CNEL for multi-family residences. Community noise exposure levels over 70 dB are normally not acceptable for residential, school, library, hospitals and other noise sensitive uses. The recommended maximum interior noise level is 45 dBA CNEL, which could normally be achieved using standard construction techniques if exterior noise levels are within the levels described above.

The County of San Benito has adopted noise policies in its Noise Element. The County of San Benito Noise Criteria and Standards were developed based on federal noise guidance, from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

**Table 4.4-1. San Benito County Land Use Compatibility for Community Noise Environments**

Land Use Category	Community Noise Exposure Ldn or CNEL, dB					
	55	60	65	70	75	80
Residential – Low Density Single Family, Duplex, Mobile Home						
Residential – Multi-Family						
Transient Lodging – Motels, Hotels						
Schools, Libraries, Churches, Hospitals, Nursing Homes						
Auditoriums, Concert Halls, Amphitheaters						
Sports Arena, Outdoor Spectator Sports						
Playgrounds, Neighborhood Parks						
Golf Courses, Riding Stables, Water Recreation, Cemeteries						
Office Buildings, Business Commercial and Professional						
Industrial, Manufacturing, Utilities, Agriculture						
<b>Clearly Acceptable</b> The Noise exposure is such that the activities associated with the land use may be carried out with essentially no interference from aircraft noise. (Residential areas: both indoor and outdoor noise environments are pleasant.)						
<b>Normally Acceptable</b> The Noise exposure is great enough to be of some concern, but common building construction will make the indoor environment acceptable, even for sleeping quarters.						
<b>Normally Unacceptable</b> The noise exposure is significantly more severe so that unusual and costly building construction is necessary to insure adequate performance of activities. (Residential areas: barriers must be erected between the site and prominent noise sources to make the outdoor environment tolerable.)						
<b>Clearly Unacceptable</b> The noise exposure is so severe that construction costs to make the indoor environment acceptable for performance of activities would be prohibitive. (Residential areas: the outdoor environment would be intolerable for normal residential use.)						

Source: San Benito County General Plan Noise Element, 1984

The EPA document, “Information on Levels of environmental Noise Requisite to Protect Public Health and Welfare With An Adequate Margin of Safety” (March 1974) described 55 LDN as the requisite level for areas with outdoor uses, including residences and recreational areas. The EPA “level document” does not constitute a standard, specification or regulation, but identifies safe levels of environmental noise exposure without consideration for economic cost for achieving these levels.

The County Zoning Ordinance (Section 44.3) establishes day and night exterior noise limits for noise compatibility. The noise level standard (one hour average) for residences is 50 dBA Leq during the day and 40 dBA Leq during the night. The noise level standard for commercial uses is 65 dBA Leq during the day and 55 dBA Leq during the night. To reduce construction impacts, construction is required to be limited to weekdays and Saturdays between the hours of 7:00 A.M. and 7:00 P.M. The County General Plan Noise Element establishes noise standards of 65 dBA Ldn exterior and 45 dBA Ldn interior for residences, 70 dBA Ldn exterior for motels/hotels, 70 dBA Ldn for golf courses, and 75 dBA Ldn for commercial uses. The City of Hollister General Plan establishes a noise standard of 60 dBA Ldn for residential uses.



For highway transportation projects with FHWA involvement, the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1970 and the associated implementing regulations (23 CFR 772) govern the analysis and abatement of traffic noise impacts. The regulations require that potential noise impacts in areas of frequent human use be identified during the planning and design of a highway project. The regulations contain Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC) that are used to determine when a noise impact would occur. The NAC differ depending on the type of land use under analysis. For example, the NAC for residences (67 dBA) is lower than the NAC for commercial areas (72 dBA). The following table lists the noise abatement criteria.

**Table 4.4-2. FHWA Noise Abatement Criteria**

Activity Category	NAC, Hourly A-Weighted Noise Level, dBA $L_{eq}(h)$	Description of Activities
A	57 Exterior	Lands on which serenity and quiet are of extraordinary significance and serve an important public need and where the preservation of those qualities is essential if the area is to continue to serve its intended purpose
B	67 Exterior	Picnic areas, recreation areas, playgrounds, active sport areas, parks, residences, motels, hotels, schools, churches, libraries, and hospitals.
C	72 Exterior	Developed lands, properties, or activities not included in Categories A or B above
D	--	Undeveloped lands.
E	52 Interior	Residence, motels, hotels, public meeting rooms, schools, churches, libraries, hospitals, and auditoriums

Both Caltrans and the FHWA utilize the Code of Federal Regulations (23 CFR 772) Procedures for Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise. Adverse noise impacts are determined to occur when the Noise Abatement Criteria (NAC) for any particular land use category is approached (i.e.: within 1 dB) or exceeded. The categories of greatest importance to this project are Category “B” (67 dBA  $L_{eq}1H$ ) for exterior residential and school uses and Category “E” (52 dBA  $L_{eq}1H$ ) for interior school and residential uses. Note that the two categories for exterior and interior use are essentially the same given that typical noise attenuation from outdoor to indoor is 15-20 dB with the windows and doors closed. In addition, a project will generally have a significant effect if it will increase the ambient noise level at the outdoor living areas of noise sensitive uses by 12 DBA or more. In accordance with the Department’s *Traffic Noise Analysis Protocol for New Highway Construction and Reconstruction Projects, October 1998*, a noise impact occurs when the future noise level with the project results in a substantial increase in noise level (defined as a 12 dBA or more increase) or when the future noise level with the project approaches or exceeds the NAC. Approaching the NAC is defined as coming within 1 dBA of the NAC.

**c. Noise Sources.** Ambient noise levels in San Benito County vary widely depending upon proximity to noise generators, such as major roads, airports, and rail lines. The major noise sources in the county are described below.

Motor Vehicle Traffic. Motor vehicles are the primary source of noise in most of San Benito County. This can be attributed to the network of major, primary, and secondary arterials located throughout the county, as well as the large number of vehicle trips that occur each day. County roadway noise levels are highest along the portions of Highway 156 and Highway 25



that traverse urban areas. Noise levels at 50 feet from the centerline of these roadways during peak travel periods can reach up to 70 dBA Leq.

Aircraft and Railroad Operation. Aircraft flyovers in the county are limited to flights to and from Hollister Municipal Airport and Frazier Lake Air Park, and occasional California Department of Forestry (CDF) aircraft, as well as sporadic commercial overflights.

The 12-mile-long Union Pacific Railroad Line traverses the county from Hollister north to Santa Clara County. This line transports approximately 10,000 gross tons of goods each year. Noise from this source is characterized by the passage of trains at wide time intervals but with individual trains emitting a high sound level. Noise levels adjacent to active rail lines reach 65 dBA Ldn to approximately 100 feet of the tracks, and 60 dBA Ldn to approximately 200 feet of the tracks.

#### 4.4.2 Impact Analysis

**a. Methodology and Significance Thresholds.** The analysis of noise impacts considers the effects of both temporary construction-related noise and long-term noise associated with transportation system improvements. Temporary construction noise was estimated based upon levels presented in the USEPA document *Noise from Construction Equipment and Operations, Building Equipment, and Home Appliances (1971)*. Long-term traffic-related noise was estimated using a modification of the Federal Highway Noise Prediction Model.

Long-term noise level increases are considered a result of the RTP only if RTP implementation involves an improvement project that introduces a new noise source or moves an existing noise source closer to a sensitive receptor (extension of a road through a residential area, for example). Increases in traffic on existing roads on which no improvements are planned are not considered impacts of the RTP, but rather are a result of general increases in traffic.

The significance of potential impacts on noise is based on the CEQA Initial Study Checklist. For the purposes of this analysis, implementation of the RTP of an individual project included in the RTP would result in a significant impact if it would result in:

- *Exposure of persons to or generation of noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies;*
- *Exposure of persons to or generation of excessive ground-borne vibration or ground-borne noise levels;*
- *A substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project; or*
- *A substantial temporary or periodic increase in ambient noise levels in the project vicinity above levels existing without the project.*

**b. Project Impacts and Mitigation Measures.** This section describes generalized impacts associated with the projects anticipated in the RTP. Table 4.4-3 in Section 4.4.2.c lists the specific projects that could result in the impacts discussed in this section.

**Impact N-1 Construction activity associated with road, bike, pedestrian, and transit projects would create temporary noise level increases in discreet locations throughout the county over the life of the RTP. This is considered a Class II, *significant but mitigable* impact.**

The operation of heavy equipment during the construction of roadway infrastructure would result in temporary increases in noise in the immediate vicinity of individual construction sites. Average noise levels associated with the use of heavy equipment at construction sites can range from about 78 to 88 dBA at 50 feet from the source, depending upon the types of equipment in operation at any given time and the phase of construction. The highest noise levels generally occur during excavation and foundation development, which involve the use of such equipment as backhoes, bulldozers, shovels, and front end loaders. In addition, the use of pile drivers and other heavy construction equipment could result in the generation of excessive groundborne vibration and/or noise levels.

Noise levels from point sources such as construction sites typically attenuate at a rate of about 6 dBA per doubling of distance. Based on this, average construction noise levels at a distance of 400 feet would be typically 60 to 66 dBA. Therefore, only areas within 400 to 600 feet of construction sites would be expected to be exposed to unacceptable noise levels. Impacts would be temporary, but potentially significant.

Mitigation Measures.

- N-1(a)** Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which a particular RTP project is located shall ensure that, where residences or other noise sensitive uses are located adjacent to construction sites, appropriate measures shall be implemented to ensure consistency with noise ordinance requirements relating to construction. Specific techniques may include, but are not limited to, restrictions on construction timing, use of sound blankets on construction equipment, and the use of temporary walls and noise barriers to block and deflect noise.
- N-1(b)** If a particular project located adjacent to sensitive receptors requires pile driving, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which this project is located shall require the use of pile drilling techniques instead, where feasible, which would reduce the physical impact and associated noise generation from pile driving. This shall be accomplished through the placement of conditions on the project during its individual environmental review.

Significance After Mitigation. With implementation of local noise control requirements and proposed mitigation, impacts would be reduced to less than significant levels.

**Impact N-2 Various RTP projects could potentially expose sensitive receptors to noise in excess of normally acceptable levels. Projects that increase use of existing roadways, rail lines, and other transportation facilities, and extend or realign such facilities, could result in substantial increases in noise levels at adjacent receptors. This would be considered a Class I, *significant and unavoidable* impact.**



*Roadways.* The RTP includes many roadway modification projects, a number of which involve widening of existing facilities for the purpose of increasing their capacity. Such projects would not in themselves introduce new traffic, but rather are intended to relieve current or projected future traffic congestion or poor safety conditions. However, in some cases, widening projects would accommodate increased traffic speed and volumes. Although many of the planned widening projects are in rural areas where sensitive noise receptors would not be affected, several would move traffic closer to noise-sensitive land uses.

Widening projects with the potential to create significant noise impacts include Highway 25 (Sunnyslope to Sunset, and north to Santa Clara County), Highway 156 (Gap Closure, Hollister Bypass, and north of Hollister), Fairview Road, Flynn Road, Union Road, Airline Highway (State Route 25). Specific widening projects with the potential to create significant noise impacts are listed in Table 4.4-3 in Section 4.4.2.c.

Various improvements for Highways 156 and 25, would increase the capacity of the freeways, thereby accommodating increased traffic levels. Noise levels would be expected to exceed 65 dBA CNEL along freeway segments and are expected to increase in all locations as traffic levels increase. However, noise level increases would be expected to be substantially less than 3 dBA at all locations. Consequently, although noise will potentially exceed 65 dBA within several hundred feet of the freeway, the change in noise associated with increased traffic would not be audible to most listeners. In addition, topography, buildings, walls, and other barriers would provide attenuation of highway noise. Many areas along the freeway corridor are at least partially shielded from traffic noise by one or more of these factors.

The RTP contemplates roadway extensions and realignments in certain areas. These include the Highway 25 Bypass, Buena Vista Road, Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) extension, Flynn Road extension, Memorial Drive, Sunnyslope Road, and Westside Boulevard extension. New or extended roadways would introduce traffic into areas currently not experiencing roadway noise.

*Transit Operations.* Rail projects (i.e., reuse of existing rail lines for commuter rail transit) would result in substantial periodic noise levels experienced at adjacent receptors. The rail improvement in the RTP is designed to reuse the Hollister Branch Line rail corridor for commuter rail service between Hollister and Gilroy. This project would result in increases in the frequency of rail service in the county. Rail station locations have not yet been identified. Implementation of rail stations would result in additional localized traffic that would produce vehicle noise. In addition, operation of the commuter rail service would incrementally increase noise levels in the vicinity of rail lines. Implementation of these rail projects would result in minimal increases in ambient noise levels when averaged over a 24-hour period, but would produce substantial periodic noise levels. This would be considered a potentially significant impact.

Projects that would increase the number of buses or other transit vehicles used by transit providers, or that would alter or expand existing transit routes would result in increased bus trips and/or trip lengths. This would increase noise on county roadways. However, the reduction in traffic noise that would occur as the result of the associated reduction in vehicle trips would more than offset this noise increase. Therefore, transit projects would result in an

overall noise reduction when compared to existing conditions, which would be considered a beneficial impact.

*Airport.* Although an increase in aircraft operations at Hollister Municipal Airport is not part of the RTP, improvements at the airport would support increased operations. Therefore, airport projects would be indirectly responsible for incrementally increasing ambient noise levels near airports. Planned improvements with the potential to accommodate additional air traffic or modify noise patterns in the area include construction of new taxiways and holding aprons. Existing and planned noise-sensitive uses could potentially fall within the 60 and 65 dBA CNEL noise contours for the airport; however, despite the increased traffic anticipated for the facility, overall noise levels are expected to decline due to the introduction of newer, quieter aircraft. Because an increase in noise levels is not anticipated, no significant impacts due to aircraft operations would occur.

Mitigation Measures. The following RTP goals and policies would reduce project noise impacts on adjacent receptors.

**Goal 9** To design, construct, and maintain the integrity of streets and highways to serve their designated purpose and be compatible with the land use to which they are adjacent. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 9.1* Shall construct (or cause to be constructed if private), roads, highways, and selected urban arterial streets for regional or interregional travel. Such facilities shall be designed to the minimum standard of the local jurisdiction within which they are located. Such standards shall emphasize safe and efficient *automobile, motorcycle, truck, and transit* operation. Where appropriate, the jurisdiction shall accommodate the safe movement of agricultural equipment on the facility.

*Policy 9.2* Shall construct (or cause to be constructed if private), urban collector and local streets primarily for intra-city travel. Shall accommodate vehicular travel but shall emphasize safe and efficient *pedestrian and bicycle* travel.

*Policy 9.3* Shall construct (or cause to be constructed, if private), streets in downtown areas primarily to serve business activity. Shall include wide sidewalks and encourage diagonal parking where feasible to increase the number of parking spaces close to businesses and to facilitate the calming of traffic on major downtown streets.

**Goal 11** To promote the development of "livable" streets in urbanized areas that accommodates multiple modes of transportation. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 11.1* Shall include bike lanes on arterial and collector streets where feasible, and sidewalks on all streets in developed areas. They should also require street trees designed to form canopies over



streets and green strips between sidewalks and streets in new development.

*Policy 11.2* Shall protect urban streets from through traffic by constructing bypass routes around Hollister.

*Policy 11.3* Shall designate appropriate routes for large trucks and establish ordinances that prohibit large trucks from traveling on non-designated streets.

*Policy 11.4* Shall adopt alternative street standards, consistent with standards for fire protection that accommodate traffic-calming measures for existing urban streets. Where appropriate, jurisdictions should install traffic-calming devices to protect local residential streets from speeding traffic.

In addition, the following mitigation measures are recommended to reduce potential long-term noise impacts:

**N-2(a)** If an RTP project is located adjacent to sensitive uses, Caltrans or the local jurisdiction in which the project is located shall ensure that a noise survey is conducted to determine alternate alignments which allow greater distance from, or greater buffering of, noise-sensitive areas. The noise survey shall be sufficient to indicate existing and projected noise levels, to determine the amount of attenuation needed to reduce potential noise impacts to such uses to an exterior noise level of 65 dBA or less. This shall be accomplished during the project's individual environmental review.

**N-2(b)** Various sound attenuation techniques shall be considered where new or expanded roadways or the reused rail lines are found to expose receptors to noise exceeding normally acceptable levels. The preferred methods for mitigating noise impacts will be the use of appropriate setbacks and sound attenuating building design, including retrofit of existing structures with sound attenuating building materials where feasible. In instances where use of these techniques is not feasible, the use of sound barriers (earthen berms, sound walls, or some combination of the two) will be considered. Determination of appropriate noise attenuation measures will be assessed on a case-by-case basis during a project's individual environmental review pursuant to the regulations of the applicable agency.

Significance After Mitigation. Implementation of the recommended programmatic measures would reduce potential impacts to a less than significant level. However, it should be noted that the construction of sound attenuation devices may create aesthetic impacts that may be undesirable and may affect the semi-rural character of much of the county. To mitigate this potential secondary impact to the degree feasible, the following measure is recommended:



**N-2(c)** Long expanses of walls or fences should be interrupted with offsets and provided with accents to prevent monotony. Landscape pockets and pedestrian access through walls should be provided. Whenever possible, a combination of elements should be used, including solid fences, walls, and, landscaped berms.

Implementation of soundwalls or other noise barriers along roadway extensions may be physically or economically infeasible in certain locations. Therefore, noise impacts associated with roadway realignments or expansions would remain significant and unavoidable.

**c. Specific RTP Projects That May Result in Impacts.** Table 4.4-3 identifies those projects that may create impacts as discussed in Section 4.4.2.b. The individual projects listed could create significant noise impacts but would not necessarily do so. Additional specific analysis will need to be conducted as the individual projects are implemented in order to determine the actual magnitude of impact. Mitigation measures discussed above would apply to these specific projects.

**Table 4.4-3 RTP Projects That May Result in Noise Impacts**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>
Many	All	Construction of Road and Bikeway Improvements Throughout the County	N-1	Possible noise impacts for projects within 1,600 feet of sensitive receptors
Cal-1	Caltrans	Highway 156, Gap Closure Widening	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Cal-3	Caltrans	Highway 25 to Santa Clara County Widening	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Cal-4	Caltrans	Highway 25 Bypass	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
Holl-1	City of Hollister	Buena Vista Road Construction	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
Holl-2	City of Hollister	Memorial Drive Construction-Meridian to Santa Ana	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
Holl-5	City of Hollister	Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) Construction	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
SBC-1	County of San Benito	Fairview Road Widening	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Holl-7	City of Hollister	Highway 25 Widening- Sunnyslope to Sunset	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Holl-8	City of Hollister	Westside Boulevard Extension	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
SBC-2	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
SBC-3	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents



**Table 4.4-3 RTP Projects That May Result in Noise Impacts**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Description of Impact</b>
SBC-5	County of San Benito	Flynn Road Extension and Widening	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
Cal-5	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening, Las Aromitas – Monterey County Line to Highway 156	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Cal-6	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening – Highway 156 to Santa Clara County Line	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Cal-7	Caltrans	Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
SBC-6	County of San Benito	Union Road Widening	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Cal-2	Caltrans	Highway 156 Widening (North of Hollister)	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Holl-6	City of Hollister	Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening-Sunset to Fairview	N-2	Possible impacts due to increased/redistributed traffic and speed
Holl-4	City of Hollister	Sunnyslope Road Construction	N-2	Introduction of roadway segment could result in increased noise to nearby residents
SBCOG-2	SBCOG	Commuter Rail Implementation	N-2	Introduction of additional rail trips and/or future rail stations could result in increased noise to nearby residents and other sensitive receptors





## 5.0 GROWTH INDUCING IMPACTS

Section 15126(g) of the *State CEQA Guidelines* requires a discussion of a project's potential to foster economic or population growth, including ways in which a project could remove an obstacle to growth. Based on the CEQA Guidelines, growth inducement is any growth that exceeds planned growth of an area and results in new development that would not have taken place without implementation of the project. The project's potential to induce growth is discussed in this section.

Growth does not necessarily create significant physical changes to the environment. However, depending upon the type, magnitude, and location of growth, it can result in significant adverse environmental effects. The project's growth inducing potential is therefore considered significant if it could result in unavoidable significant effects in one or more environmental issue areas.

### 5.1 ECONOMIC GROWTH

Implementation of the RTP would create short-term economic growth in the County as a result of construction-related job opportunities. RTP implementation would also generate additional employment opportunities for roadway, vehicle, and landscape maintenance, and transportation facility clean-up. The potential employment increase may subsequently increase the demand for support services and utilities, which could generate secondary employment opportunities. This additional economic growth would likely raise the existing revenue base for San Benito County. Although such growth may incrementally increase economic activity in the county, significant physical effects are not expected to result from economic growth generated by the project.

### 5.2 POPULATION GROWTH

About 68% (38,720) of the county's population of 57,100 lives within incorporated cities (California Department of Finance, January 2004). Substantial County population concentrations are located in the Cities of Hollister (37,000) and San Juan Bautista (1,720). Between 2003 and 2004 the population of San Benito County increased approximately 1.4 percent, from 56,300 to 57,100. According to the California Department of Finance, San Benito County's population is projected to reach 73,547 by the year 2020, which would represent an increase of approximately 29% over the current population).

About 28,230 people are currently employed in San Benito County, while about 2,570 unemployed workers (8.3% of the workforce) also reside in the county (EDD, ("Labor Force Data for Sub-County Areas", August 11, 2004). About half of the jobs in the county are located in or around the City of Hollister.

Population in the region is expected to increase regardless of the 2005 RTP. The 2005 RTP will not directly generate population, since the project does not involve the construction of residential units, however it does have the potential to facilitate growth.

The 2005 RTP implements some aspects of the circulation elements of the general plans of local jurisdictions in the region. Many of these projects could serve as traffic mitigation measures for anticipated growth under these local plans. Implementation of the RTP would not entail a



substantial change in land use anywhere in the County. Rather, the plan responds to existing and projected transportation needs.

### 5.3 REMOVAL OF OBSTACLES TO GROWTH

As discussed in Section 4.3, *Land Use and Plan Consistency*, implementation of the RTP may remove impediments to growth in some limited fashion. While the transportation system improvements included in the RTP are expected to respond to growth anticipated in adopted local general plans, they may indirectly increase growth pressure by increasing transportation system capacity. In addition, the road extension projects planned in the less developed areas, may remove obstacles to growth by improving vehicular access. For example, the Flynn Road Extension project north and east of the City of Hollister would extend development into currently underdeveloped areas. Development induced as a result of removal of obstacles to growth could result in additional environmental impacts (e.g., additional noise and traffic), and may increase the use of slowly renewable and nonrenewable resources and energy to serve new development. For example, induced development projects could affect regional groundwater supplies. However, the nature and magnitude of such impacts are speculative, and would be largely a function of local agency control, prevailing community attitudes, and future market conditions. The environmental impacts of any additional growth would depend upon the type, location, and magnitude of new development.

Policy Evaluation to Assess the RTP's Growth-Inducement Potential. The potential for a long-term plan (such as an RTP) to be growth-inducing is a function of three factors: 1) the type of growth the plan envisions; 2) policy direction that regulates the rate at which this growth could occur; and 3) funding availability. The RTP provides a mechanism to implement the circulation projects described in local general plans and capital improvement programs. In that sense, an RTP is not growth-inducing. However, an RTP may contain policy direction that could influence the timing of these projects, generally through establishing funding priorities. If, for example, priority is given to projects that would increase roadway capacities or extend the existing roadway network, these improved roads (generally major arterials or freeways) would allow land development envisioned under the local general plans to occur at a faster rate. This could be considered growth-inducing.

The following discussion evaluates RTP policies to assess the plan's potential to be growth-inducing.

In general, the goals, objectives and policies of the 2005 RTP support a multi-modal transportation concept, emphasizing the importance of alternative forms of transportation, including bicycles, transit, and pedestrian activity. Most crucially, the RTP contains the following goals, objectives and policies that link transportation planning and regional land use patterns.

The following goals and policies encourage compact urban development to preserve environmental resources, and therefore serve to deter physical growth:

**Goal 4** To protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve quality of life. San Benito County jurisdictions:



*Policy 4.1* Shall develop a street and highway system that promotes compact urban development and preserves prime agricultural land.

*Policy 4.2* Shall design transportation improvements to conserve protected habitats and species.

*Policy 4.3* Shall operate transportation facilities in a way that provides a high level of air quality and energy efficiency.

*Policy 4.4* Shall design urban streets and public transit systems to protect residential and business districts from degradation due to large traffic volumes and or speeding vehicles.

**Goal 10** New transportation facilities shall be planned to promote compact urban development, prevent urban sprawl, and prevent conversion of prime farmland. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 10.1* Shall provide transportation incentives to developers of compact, infill development in existing urbanized areas to minimize the premature construction of new streets and highways.

*Policy 10.2* Shall locate and design new transportation facilities to minimize the conversion of prime agricultural land outside existing urban/rural boundaries.

The following goal and policies encourage transit oriented development and the use of public transportation to conserve energy. This would reduce the potential for future growth as a result of transportation improvements.

**Goal 14** To promote transit-oriented development and encourage the use of public transportation to reduce energy consumption and congestion. San Benito County jurisdictions:

*Policy 14.1* Shall give priority to development projects that construct residential and commercial projects in proximity to existing and planned rail and bus transit stations. Jurisdictions shall review these projects and possibly require the provision of transit facilities in conjunction with and financed by the developer.

*Policy 14.2* Shall encourage automobile and bicycle parking facilities at major rail and bus transit stations.



## 6.0 ALTERNATIVES

As required by Section 15126(d) of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, this EIR examines a range of reasonable alternatives to the project that could feasibly achieve similar objectives. Since the primary objective of the RTP is to guide short- and long-range transportation improvements countywide, a discussion of alternative sites is not appropriate. Instead, the analysis of alternatives focuses on the inclusion or exclusion of groups of projects envisioned under the RTP. Three alternatives to the implementation of the entire RTP were evaluated, as follows:

- *Alternative 1: Constrained Projects Alternative (implement constrained projects only)*
- *Alternative 2: Modified Project Alternative (elimination of individual improvements with unavoidable impacts)*
- *Alternative 3: No Project Alternative (no new transportation system improvements)*

Each alternative is described in detail in the following discussion.

### 6.1 ALTERNATIVE 1: Constrained Projects Alternative

#### 6.1.1 Description

This alternative assumes that only the projects planned “within projected funds” (constrained projects) identified in the 2005 RTP are implemented. These projects are shown in Table 2-1 in Section 2.0, *Project Description*. This list includes all those projects that currently have funding as well as those projects for which funding is likely to be available by 2025. None of the projects needing new funding (new state, federal, or regional funding sources; new taxes, for example) would be constructed.

The projects included in this scenario have the highest funding priorities, because COG has determined they are the most immediately important projects to help achieve the regional transportation goals identified in the RTP update. Other factors considered by COG in developing this list of constrained projects include the identification of likely funding sources, project feasibility, and environmental considerations. 2005 RTP projects excluded from this alternative are described in Table 6-1.

#### 6.1.2 Impact Analysis

**a. Agricultural Resources.** This alternative envisions fewer road widenings and extensions and land acquisitions than the proposed RTP update described in Section 2.0 of this EIR. Because fewer roadways would be constructed, impacts to agriculture and agricultural land would be less than under the proposed RTP Update. Nevertheless, while agricultural impacts overall would be of a lesser magnitude than for the proposed RTP Update, they would still be considered significant and unavoidable due to the potential for impacts to agriculture.

**Table 6-1. 2005 RTP Projects Eliminated Under the Constrained Projects Alternative**

<b>Project #</b>	<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Project Description</b>
Holl-10	City of Hollister	Memorial Drive Construction
SBC-2	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial
SBC-3	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector
SBC-5	County of San Benito	Flynn Road Extension and Widening
Cal-5	Caltrans	Highway 101, Las Armitas
Cal-6	Caltrans	Highway 101
Cal-7	Caltrans	Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening
SBC-6	County of San Benito	Union Road Widening
Holl-6	City of Hollister	Airline Highway (State Route 25) Widening-Sunset to Fairview
Holl-4	City of Hollister	Sunnyslope Road Construction
SBt-1-09	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Diagonal Hanger Taxiway
SBt-1-10	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Exit Taxiway
SBt-1-11	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Parallel Taxiway
SBt-1-12	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 31 Holding Apron
SBt-1-13	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport California Department of Forestry Apron
SBt-1-14	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Runway 31 Protection Zone Acquisition
SBt-1-15	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Instrument Landing System
SBt-1-16	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Terminal Apron Joint Replacement
SBt-1-17	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Southwest Hangar Taxiway
SBt-1-18	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Taxiway Lighting
SBt-1-19	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Land Acquisition
SBt-1-20	Hollister Municipal Airport	Hollister Municipal Airport Line of Sight Land Acquisition
SBCOG-2	Council of San Benito County Governments	Commuter Rail Implementation
SBCOG-4	Council of San Benito County Governments	San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase I)
SBCOG-5	Council of San Benito County Governments	San Benito River Recreational Trail (Phase II)
SBCOG-2	Council of San Benito County Governments	Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Implementation

**b. Air Quality.** Implementation of this alternative would result in reduced short-term air quality impacts because less construction activity would occur. However, because certain congestion problems would not be alleviated under this alternative, long-term air quality impacts could be greater than under the proposed RTP Update. In addition, this alternative involves fewer alternative transportation projects (e.g., bike and pedestrian projects) than contemplated in the 2005 RTP, and therefore may result in comparatively higher single-occupancy vehicle use and associated air emissions. Overall, impacts would be greater than with the proposed RTP Update.

**c. Land Use/Plan Consistency.** This alternative envisions fewer road widenings and extensions than the proposed RTP update described in Section 2.0 of this EIR. Consequently, the number of anticipated land use conflicts would likely be fewer.

This alternative also avoids development of road improvements to Highway 156, Memorial Drive, Flynn Road, Union Road, Airline Highway, and Sunnyslope Road, which could have resulted in land use compatibility impacts related to adjacent agricultural and urban uses. This alternative would not implement certain transportation improvements identified in County and City General Plans and accounted for in the MBUAPCD's Air Quality Management Plan. Therefore, this alternative would result in less consistency with plans than the proposed RTP



Update. Overall, impacts related to land use and plan consistency would be both better and worse than for the proposed RTP Update.

**d. Noise.** Implementation of this alternative would likely result in noise impacts that are both better and worse than those expected under the proposed RTP Update. The reduction in overall construction activity would reduce temporary noise impacts throughout the county. Although the number of road widenings would be substantially reduced as compared to the proposed RTP Update, the increase in traffic volumes resulting from regional growth would still be expected to occur. Nevertheless, the resultant reduction in vehicle speeds associated with increased traffic congestion that would occur under this alternative would incrementally reduce traffic-related noise impacts when compared to the proposed RTP Update. However, as described above, this alternative involves fewer alternative transportation projects (e.g., bike and pedestrian projects) than contemplated in the 2005 RTP, and therefore may result in comparatively higher vehicle use and associated noise emissions.

## 6.2 ALTERNATIVE 2: Modified Project Alternative

### 6.2.1 Description

This alternative assumes that the RTP is implemented, but that certain projects with the potential to create Class I (significant and unavoidable) impacts are eliminated, particularly with regard to agricultural resources. This alternative would also eliminate projects that are potentially infeasible without substantial displacement of existing land development. Specific projects that would be eliminated under this alternative are described in Table 6-2, which also illustrates how their elimination would reduce potential impacts.

**Table 6-2. RTP Projects Eliminated Under the Modified Project Alternative**

Project	Jurisdiction	Project Description	Impact Reduction
Cal-1	Caltrans	Highway 156, Gap Closure Widening	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land, exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels, and potential displacement of homes and/or businesses.
Cal-3	Caltrans	Highway 25 to Santa Clara County Widening	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land, exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels, and potential displacement of homes and/or businesses.
Cal-4	Caltrans	Highway 25 Bypass	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land, exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels, and potential displacement of homes and/or businesses.
Holl-2	City of Hollister	Memorial Drive Construction-Meridian to Santa Ana	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
Holl-5	City of Hollister	Union Road (formerly Crestview Drive) Construction	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
SBC-1	County of San Benito	Fairview Road Widening	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
Holl-8	City of Hollister	Westside Boulevard Extension	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.



**Table 6-2. RTP Projects Eliminated Under the Modified Project Alternative**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Project Description</b>	<b>Impact Reduction</b>
Holl-10	City of Hollister	Memorial Drive Construction – North of Santa Ana Road	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land.
SBC-2	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/San Felipe Road East-West Arterial	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land.
SBC-3	County of San Benito	Fairview Road/Memorial Drive East-West Collector	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land.
SBC-5	County of San Benito	Flynn Road Extension and Widening	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
Cal-5	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening, Las Aromitas – Monterey County Line to Highway 156	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
Cal-6	Caltrans	Highway 101 Widening – Highway 156 to Santa Clara County Line	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
Cal-7	Caltrans	Highway 156, Hollister Bypass Widening	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
SBC-6	County of San Benito	Union Road Widening	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
Cal-2	Caltrans	Highway 156 Widening (North of Hollister)	Eliminates potential impacts to agricultural land and impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.
SBCOG-2	Council of San Benito County Governments	Commuter Rail Implementation	Eliminates potential impacts related to exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels.

## 6.2.2 Impact Analysis

**a. Benefits of the Modified Project Alternative.** This scenario would remove various RTP projects that involve either potential conversion of agricultural land, potential exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels, or potential land use/displacement issues. Some projects would potentially have more than one of these impacts, as noted in the table. Although many of the agricultural areas that would be affected under the RTP consist of grazing and nonprime farmlands, the project's impacts to agricultural resources (Impact AG-1) are considered potentially significant and unavoidable. Under this alternative, these potential impacts could be reduced to less than significant levels. In addition to the reduced land use impacts described above, removal of these projects would also incrementally reduce potential impacts relating to aesthetics, biological resources, cultural resources, noise, and water resources, as compared to what would be expected under the proposed RTP Update. However, it should be noted that the remaining projects would still contribute to an unavoidable loss of rural scenic character in the region.

**b. Adverse Impacts.** Elimination of the projects listed in Table 6-2 would result in increased traffic impacts when compared to the project, since many are necessary to reduce existing and projected traffic congestion and fill gaps in the existing transportation network. Certain congestion problems would not be alleviated under this alternative. As a result, long-term air quality impacts could be greater than under the project due to higher emissions from relatively slower traffic speeds and higher vehicle concentrations. This alternative would not



implement certain transportation improvements identified in County and City General Plans and accounted for in the MBUAPCD's Air Quality Management Plan. Therefore, this alternative would result in less consistency with plans than the proposed RTP Update.

**c. Impacts Similar to the Project.** Geohazard and facility maintenance impacts would not be substantially different than those expected with the proposed RTP Update.

## **6.3 ALTERNATIVE 3: No New Development (No Project Alternative)**

### **6.3.1 Description**

This alternative assumes that no capital improvement projects are funded, implemented or constructed after 2005. Consequently, no change to the countywide transportation system would occur after this year. This scenario addresses the CEQA required analysis of a No Project Alternative.

### **6.3.2 Impact Analysis**

This alternative would have none of the environmental impacts of the RTP, either adverse or beneficial. Consequently, the potentially unavoidable adverse impacts of the RTP in the area of agricultural resources and land use (displacement) would not occur. On the other hand, the project's beneficial impacts related to traffic and air quality would not occur either. Traffic levels of service would continue to decline throughout the county as traffic levels rise without improvements to the countywide transportation system. Though the lack of additional road capacity may ultimately restrict land development and associated increases in air pollutant emissions in the county, the increased traffic congestion that would likely occur under this alternative would likely increase engine idling and associated air pollutant concentrations to some degree.

This alternative would not fulfill COG's general goals and objectives related to a multi-modal transportation system, as outlined in either the existing 2001 RTP or the 2005 RTP Update. For this reason, this alternative would also result in substantial inconsistencies with general plan goals and objectives of the various jurisdictions in the county. In effect, this scenario would make it difficult for any of these jurisdictions to fully implement the Circulation Elements of their general plans.

## **6.4 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE**

This section compares the impacts of the three alternatives under consideration to those of the project. Table 6-3 shows whether each alternative is environmentally inferior to, or similar to, or inferior to the project for each of the issue areas studied in this EIR.

The No Project Alternative could be considered environmentally superior overall, as it would entail the fewest new roadway projects. Consequently, it would have the fewest impacts with regard to issues most dependent on the overall magnitude of development. No other scenario would be considered superior for more issues.



**Table 6-3. Impact Comparison Summary to Proposed Project**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Constrained Projects Alternative (Alternative 1)</b>	<b>Modified Project Alternative (Alternative 2)</b>	<b>No New Development (Alternative 3)</b>
Agricultural Resources	+	+	+
Air Quality	-	-	+/-
Land Use/Plan Consistency	+/-	+/-	+
Noise	+/-	+	+
<b>Overall</b>	0	+1	+3

+ Superior to the project

- Inferior to the project

+/- Both better and worse than the project

CEQA also requires a discussion of the environmentally superior alternative scenario other than “No Project.” The Modified Project scenario (Alternative 2) would have less overall impact than the Constrained Project scenarios (Alternative 1) in most areas because it involves fewer overall capital improvement projects and would specifically avoid the potential Class I impacts with regard to agricultural resources, exposure of sensitive receptors to severe noise levels, and displacement (land use). A determination as to which of these is superior depends upon the relative importance one places upon the various issue areas.

It should be noted that none of the alternative scenarios would address countywide traffic congestion issues to the degree that the RTP would. Consequently, though the project is not identified as environmentally superior overall, it is the superior alternative from the standpoint of addressing countywide traffic issues.

## 7.0 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE CHANGES

The environmental effects of the proposed project are discussed in Section 4.0 of this EIR and are summarized in the executive summary. Section 15126.2(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires a discussion of “significant irreversible environmental changes which would be caused by the proposed project should it be implemented. Uses of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project may be irreversible since a large commitment of such resources makes removal or nonuse thereafter unlikely. Primary impacts and, particularly, secondary impacts (such as a highway improvement which provides access to a previously inaccessible area) generally commit future generations to similar uses. Also irreversible damage can result from environmental accidents associated with the project. Irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified.”

Construction and use of the projects included in the RTP would irreversibly commit construction materials and non-renewable energy resources to the purposes of the projects. These energy resource demands would be used for construction, transportation of people and goods, as well as lighting and other associated energy needs. Non-renewable and slowly renewable resources used by RTP projects would include, but are not limited to, lumber and other forest products; sand and gravel; asphalt; petrochemical construction materials; steel; copper; lead and other metals; water; etc. A marginal increase in the commitment of facility maintenance services would also be required. Primary project impacts related to consumption of non-renewable and slowly renewable resources are considered to be less than significant because the project would not use unusual amounts of energy or construction materials.

RTP roadway, bikeway, pedestrian, and transit projects would generally occur within existing right-of-way. However, some roadway expansions, realignments and/or extensions would result in the conversion of agricultural lands, and could induce development as a result of removal of obstacles to growth. This could result in secondary environmental impacts (e.g., additional noise and traffic), and may increase the use of nonrenewable resources and energy to serve new development. However, as described in Section 5.0, *Growth Inducing Impacts*, the nature and magnitude of such impacts are speculative, and would be largely a function of local agency control, prevailing community attitudes, and future market conditions. The environmental impacts of any additional growth would depend upon the type, location, and magnitude of new development.

RTP roadway widenings and extensions could generate additional noise that would result in significant and unavoidable noise impacts (refer to Section 4.4, *Noise*). RTP roadway widenings, extensions, and other transportation improvements could convert agricultural lands to transportation infrastructure and/or parcelize agricultural operations and/or could contribute to the alteration of the county's rural (or semi-rural) areas to a somewhat more suburban or urban condition, which would be considered significant and unavoidable impacts related to agricultural resources.



## 8.0 REFERENCES AND PREPARERS

### 8.1 REFERENCES

#### 8.1.1 Bibliography

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## **8.2 LIST OF PREPARERS**

This EIR was prepared by Rincon Consultants, Inc. under contract to the Council of San Benito County Governments. Mr. Tom Quigley served as project manager for COG. Persons involved in data gathering analysis, project management, and quality control include:

### **Rincon Consultants, Inc.**

Stephen Svete, AICP, Principal-in-Charge  
John Rickenbach, AICP, Project Director  
Richard Daulton, Project Manager  
Walter Hamann, CEG, Senior Geologist  
Joanne Dramko, Graphic Designer  
Kathy Babcock, Graphic Designer





## **Appendix**

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*Notice of Preparation and Responses*



**Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report  
for the  
San Benito County 2005 Regional Transportation Plan Update  
San Benito County, California**

**Lead Agency:**

Council of San Benito County Governments  
3216 Southside Road  
Hollister, California 95023

**Consulting Firm:**

Rincon Consultants, Inc.  
1530 Monterey Street, Suite D  
San Luis Obispo, California 93401

*Contact:*

Mary Dinkuhn  
Transportation Planner

*Contact:*

John Rickenbach  
Planning Operations Manager

**Summary:** The Council of San Benito County Governments (COG) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2005 Update to the San Benito County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). We request your agency's input as to the scope and content of environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. The EIR is intended to serve as an informational document to inform decision-makers and the general public of the environmental consequences of the proposed action.

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, your response to this notice must be sent at the earliest possible date but *not later than 30 days from receipt of this notice*. Please send your response to the Council of San Benito County Governments at the address shown above. You should indicate the appropriate contact person at your agency for any return correspondence.

**Project Title:** San Benito County 2005 Regional Transportation Plan Update

**Project Location:** The RTP Action Element contemplates several major transportation projects throughout San Benito County.

**Project Description:** The 2005 San Benito County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is an update of the region's existing 2001 RTP. The RTP is a state-mandated, long-range plan which is intended to provide a vision of regional transportation goals, policies, objectives and strategies, providing a basis for transportation infrastructure and operation/maintenance decisions for both the short and longer (25-year) term. The RTP identifies the region's transportation needs, sets forth an action plan of projects, determines actions and programs to address the needs and issues, and documents the financial resources needed to implement the Plan. The RTP establishes a clear vision of San Benito County's regional transportation goals, policies, objectives, and strategies. The Action Element of the RTP includes all the major transportation projects within the county being considered by various agencies. Such projects may include intersection improvements, highway and roadway widening, bicycle lanes and paths, pedestrian-related projects, transit-oriented projects, and other infrastructure related to transportation activities.

**Potential Environmental Effects:** Key issues that the EIR will address include agricultural resources, air quality, land use and plan consistency, and noise.

**Scoping Meeting:** The public is encouraged to attend the upcoming scoping meeting for this project, the purpose of which will be to:

- ◆ Discuss the environmental documentation process;
- ◆ Present key characteristics of the proposed project;
- ◆ Take public input about the scope of environmental issues to be analyzed in the EIR; and
- ◆ Discuss the timing for public input into the EIR process.

The scoping meeting will be held:

**Tuesday, October 12, 2004**  
**7:00 PM**  
**City of Hollister City Hall**  
**375 Fifth Street, Hollister, California**

We hope you can attend this meeting, and encourage written comments. If you cannot attend this meeting, you will still have the opportunity to voice your concerns about the project at a future public hearing. If you have any questions regarding this project or the upcoming scoping meeting, please contact Mary Dinkuhn at the Council of San Benito County Governments (831/637-7665), or John Rickenbach at Rincon Consultants (805/547-0900).

**Prepared By:**

**RINCON CONSULTANTS, INC.**

John Rickenbach  
Planning Operations Manager  
805/547-0900

---

Signature

Date



## MONTEREY BAY

Unified Air Pollution Control District  
serving Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz counties

AIR POLLUTION CONTROL OFFICER  
Douglas Quetin

24580 Silver Cloud Court • Monterey, California 93940 • 831/647-9411 • FAX 831/647-8501

OCT 18 2004

October 13, 2004

Mary Dinkuhn  
County of San Benito County Governments  
3216 Southside Road  
Hollister, CA 95023

SUBJECT: NOP OF EIR FOR SAN BENITO COUNTY 2005 RTP UPDATE

Dear Ms.

Staff has reviewed the referenced document and has the following recommendations for the scope of work for the air quality analysis:

1. Consistency determinations with the AQMP are used by the District to determine a project's impact on regional air quality. If a federal action is involved, a general conformity finding should be made, as well. AMBAG should be contacted for these determinations.
2. If the project might expose sensitive receptors in adjacent land uses to air quality problems such as odors or toxic air contaminants (e.g., diesel exhaust), the DEIR should include a qualitative assessment of these impacts.
3. Mitigation measures should be identified for any significant impacts on air quality. The EIR should quantify the emission reduction effectiveness of each measure, identify agencies responsible for implementation and monitoring, and conclude whether mitigation measures would reduce impacts below significance levels.
4. Since the project may not be specific enough to determine project level impacts, the DEIR should recommend the following be undertaken for subsequent projects:
  - Project construction PM<sub>10</sub> emissions should be quantified. If emissions would exceed 82 lb/day, the project would have a significant impact on air quality. However, PM<sub>10</sub> modeling could be undertaken to verify or dispute this finding per the District's CEQA Air Quality Guidelines. Additionally, diesel risk assessments may be needed at the project level to determine exposure of sensitive receptors to diesel exhaust.
  - VOC and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions should be quantified for those construction activities not accommodate in the AQMP. Staff should be consulted regarding potential construction equipment to be used on the project.

DISTRICT  
BOARD  
MEMBERS

CHAIR:  
Jack Earlich  
Del Rey Oaks

VICE CHAIR:  
Bob Cruz  
San Benito  
County

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Arturo Medina  
San Juan  
Bautista

John Myers  
King City

Ellen Pife  
Santa Cruz  
County

- If project or cumulative traffic would cause LOS to decline from D or better to E or F, dispersion modeling should be undertaken to determine if carbon monoxide concentrations would violate ambient air quality standards at sensitive receptor locations.

The District's CEQA Air Quality Guidelines can be used to help prepare the air quality analysis. The Guidelines are available at the District's website - [www.mbuapcd.org](http://www.mbuapcd.org). Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Janet Brennan  
Supervising Planner  
Planning and Air Monitoring Division

State of California - The Resources Agency

ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, Governor

## DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

<http://www.dfg.ca.gov>  
POST OFFICE BOX 47  
YOUNTVILLE, CALIFORNIA 94599  
(707) 844-6500

November 17, 2004

NOV 19 2004

Ms. Mary Dinukhin  
Transportation Planner  
Council of San Benito Governments  
3216 Southside Road  
Hollister, CA 95023  
Via fax (831) 636-4160

Dear Ms. Dinukhin:

San Benito County  
Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update  
Notice of Preparation (NOP)  
Environmental Impact Report  
SCH# 2004091163

Department of Fish and Game (DFG) personnel have reviewed the document for the subject project. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit comments at a date later than what had been requested.

We note that several key categories of "Project Issues Discussed in Document" appear to be missing for a project of this scope. At a minimum, the general expansion of the transportation infrastructure that is the basis of the RTP will require the alteration of wildlife habitats. Impacts to wetland and riparian zones, as well as water quality, may also occur. These basic categories of potential impact must be included in the EIR to provide resource agencies the opportunity to comment.

The assessments of the flora and fauna within and adjacent to the project areas, with particular emphasis upon identifying endangered, threatened, and locally unique species and sensitive habitats, are deficient in some respects. The assessments should follow DFG's Guidelines for Assessing the Effects of Proposed Projects on Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Plants and Natural Communities (revised May 8, 2000). The Guidelines are available at [www.dfg.ca.gov/whdab/pdfs/guideplt.pdf](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/whdab/pdfs/guideplt.pdf).

A discussion of impacts to wider ranging species should include the loss of breeding and foraging habitat over the entire planning area, habitat fragmentation, and cumulative impacts.

*Conserving California's Wildlife Since 1870*



Ms. Mary Dinukhin  
November 17, 2004  
Page 2

The cumulative effect of all developments in the area should be considered, particularly from the perspective of fragmentation of habitat and blocking of movement corridors.

We recommend mitigation for all habitats, including grasslands. Grasslands and scrub are often developed without mitigation, leading to an unaddressed cumulative loss of wildlife habitat. We recommend impacts be mitigated by avoidance, minimization of impacts, and acquisition and preservation as open space of at least an equal area and quality as that lost. Calculation of suitable mitigation ratios should include a more thorough evaluation of impact on San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*). This can be achieved through the use of the Kit Fox Habitat Evaluation Form (enclosed), which is currently used by DFG and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service staffs to determine mitigation ratios for lands removed from available habitat. Please provide an Evaluation Form, completed by a qualified wildlife biologist, to DFG prior to finalizing your first Draft EIR to obtain our recommendation on suitable mitigation.

Individual activities within the RTP that will divert or obstruct the natural flow, or change the bed, channel, or bank (which may include associated riparian resources) of a river or stream, or use material from a streambed, may require a Streambed Alteration Agreement (SAA), pursuant to Section 1600 et seq. of the Fish and Game Code, with the applicant. Issuance of SAAs is subject to CEQA. DFG, as a responsible agency under CEQA, will consider the Environmental Impact Report for the project. The EIR should fully identify the potential impacts to the stream or riparian resources and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring and reporting commitments for completion of the agreement. To obtain information about the SAA notification process, please access our website at [www.dfg.ca.gov/1600](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/1600); or to request a notification package, contact the Streambed Alteration Program at (707) 944-5520.

Please be advised that a California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Permit must be obtained if the project has the potential to result in take of species of plants or animals listed under CESA, either during construction or over the life of the project. Issuance of a CESA Permit is subject to CEQA documentation; therefore, the CEQA document must specify impacts, mitigation measures, and a mitigation monitoring and reporting program. If the project will impact CESA listed species, early consultation

Ms. Mary Dinukhin  
November 17, 2004  
Page 3

is encouraged, as significant modification to the project and mitigation measures may be required in order to obtain a CESA Permit.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Serge Glushkoff, Environmental Scientist, at (707) 944-5597, or by email at [SGlushkoff@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:SGlushkoff@dfg.ca.gov); or Scott Wilson, Habitat Conservation Supervisor, at (707) 944-5584.

Sincerely,



Robert W. Floerke  
Regional Manager  
Central Coast Region

Enclosure  
cc: State Clearinghouse

# Kit Fox Habitat Evaluation Form Cover Sheet

Project Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant Name \_\_\_\_\_ App. Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ App. Phone # \_\_\_\_\_ App. Email \_\_\_\_\_

Project Location\* and DFG 1600 Notification Number \_\_\_\_\_

\*Include project vicinity map and project boundary on copy of U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute map (size may be reduced)

U.S.G.S. Quad Map Name \_\_\_\_\_

Lat/Long or UTM coordinates \_\_\_\_\_

Project Description: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Project Size: _____ Acres	Amount of Kit Fox Habitat Effected: _____ Acres
---------------------------	---

Quantity of WHR Habitat Types Impacted (i.e. - 2 acres annual grassland, 3 acres blue oak woodland)

WHR type \_\_\_\_\_ Acres      WHR type \_\_\_\_\_ Acres

WHR type \_\_\_\_\_ Acres      WHR type \_\_\_\_\_ Acres

WHR type \_\_\_\_\_ Acres      WHR type \_\_\_\_\_ Acres

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

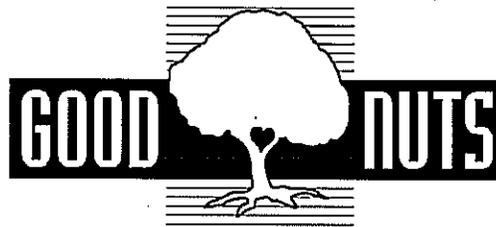
Form Completed By: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

*Revised 6/01*

\_\_\_\_\_

P.O. Box 237  
12331 Airline Hwy  
Paicines, CA 95043



(831) 628-3218  
FAX (831)628-3011  
1 - 888 WALNUTS

## FACSIMILE

TO: Richard Daulton  
Company: Rincon Consultants, Inc.  
From: Greg  
Date: 11/11/2004 Time: 4:24:28 PM Fax Number 18055470901 Total Pages Including This Page 2

**Subject:**

Mary and Richard:

Attached are comments related to the regional transportation plan.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to provide comments.

Greg Swett

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

50 HIGUERA STREET  
SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA 93401-5415  
PHONE (805) 549-3101  
FAX (805) 549-3329  
TDD (805) 549-3259  
<http://www.dot.gov/dist05>



*Flex your power!  
Be energy efficient!*

November 2, 2004

NOP for the San Benito Co.  
RTP Update  
SCH# 2004091163

Mary Dinkuhn, Associate Transportation Planner  
Council of San Benito County Governments  
3216 Southside Road  
Hollister, CA 95023

Dear Ms. Dinkuhn:

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION (NOP) FOR THE SAN BENITO COUNTY 2005  
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN (RTP) UPDATE - SCH# 2004091163**

The California Department of Transportation (Department) District 5 has reviewed the NOP for the San Benito County 2005 Regional Transportation Plan Update Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

District 5 Staff requests that the Council of San Benito County Governments (COG) discuss the following issues:

The EIR should address socio-economic consideration specific to transportation needs for traditionally under-responded stakeholders and ensure that transportation proposals do not disproportionately impact minority, disabled or other groups protected under Title VI (Civil Rights). The EIR should document the efforts made to reach out to these groups as part of the planning process.

The COG may also consider as part of the EIR, opportunities for early environmental planning that could help facilitate delivery of the projects in the future. Identification of important habitat types and resources at a regional scale along with the potential for delivering conservation planning strategies that can help address the cumulative impacts of the transportation network.

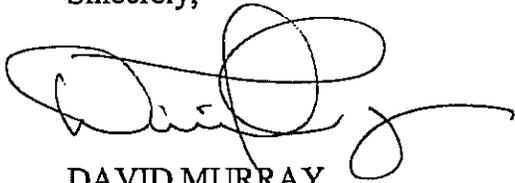
We suggest that the COG review the publication on "Biodiversity and Roads – Strategies and Issues for Improving Conservation and Transportation in California" (see attachment) as well as the Merced County Association of Governments "Partnership for Integrated Planning" (PIP) at the following website: <http://www.mcag.cog.ca.us/pip/>.

Ms. Mary Dinkuhn  
November 2, 2004  
Page 2

Please provide District 5 with a copy of the San Benito RTP Update/DEIR when it becomes available.

If you have any questions, please contact Mark McCumsey of my staff at (805) 549-3963.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Murray", with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

DAVID MURRAY  
Branch Chief  
Regional Planning / Development Review

Matching California's Conservation Opportunities and Transportation Needs

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*A Partnership between Caltrans and The Nature Conservancy, California Chapter*

# **Biodiversity and Roads**

Final Report Packet

Prepared by

GreenInfo Network



with Terrell Watt Planning Consultants

*July, 2003*

## Contents

- A. Final Report: Biodiversity and Roads – Strategies and Issues for Improving Conservation and Transportation Planning in California
- B. Map Sets
- C. Memo: Biodiversity and Roads – A Review of Impacts and Planning Initiatives
- D. Memo: Transportation Planning in California – A Framework for Conservation Strategy

*Supported through a grant from the Oracle Corporation*

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# SUMMARY

This report presents findings and conclusions from an assessment of issues and strategies for improving conservation and transportation planning processes in California. It was prepared for The Nature Conservancy, California office, in partnership with Caltrans. The key findings of each of the report's sections are as follows:

## Biodiversity and Roads – An Overview

- **BIODIVERSITY:** Biodiversity is the variation of life in all its forms, including diversity of ecosystems, species and gene pools – and it is a critical indicator of the planet's overall health.
- **IMPACTS:** While urbanization generally has very extensive effects on biodiversity, roads have their own significant impacts, particularly in rural and exurban areas and in sensitive habitats. Key impacts from roads are: the death of wildlife, habitat loss and fragmentation, degradation of habitat due to noise, air, water, soil pollution from road construction and maintenance and vehicle use, and the spread of exotic species.
- **TRENDS:** Large future increases in population and the associated demand for transportation are pushing growth into undeveloped and rural areas and creating increasing risk to remaining intact ecosystems throughout California.

## Transportation Planning in California

- **OVERALL:** California's transportation planning system is complex and decentralized, with projects emerging from many different jurisdictional levels
- **KEY ELEMENTS:** Major planning elements are: Statewide transportation plans (CTP, RTPs); programming and budgeting documents (RTIPs, etc.); State and Federal Funding Programs (STIP, FTIP, etc.); environmental review for plans and projects (CEQA/NEPA, ESA, etc.), and local general plans/circulation elements.
- **BIODIVERSITY PLANNING:** Consideration of biodiversity in these planning processes often comes late and many projects' cumulative impacts are not well understood
- **CONCLUSIONS:** The best planning tools for improving the consideration of biodiversity in transportation planning are: MPO Regional Transportation Plans, "program" EIRs and circulation elements of city and county general plans. Habitat Conservation Plans are also good opportunities, as are efforts to create interagency agreements, particularly at the state level. Underlying these approaches, however, is the strong need for state policies to guide conservation priorities.

## Biodiversity and Roads – A Framework for Analysis and Policy

- **ROAD ECOLOGY:** This new field of conservation science has great promise for better understanding the complex relationships between roads and biodiversity, and for fostering productive, multi-agency collaborations to address road impacts on biodiversity.
- **IMPACTS:** The major types of impacts of roads on biodiversity are those affecting vegetation and plant communities, wildlife, aquatic systems, landscape processes and configuration.
- **SCALE:** Understanding the relationship between the scale of plans and projects and their impacts on biodiversity is essential in crafting effective policy and program strategies.

- **LESSONS FROM OTHER STATES:** Few states have extensive planning processes for incorporating biodiversity into road planning. Among those that do, Florida has the most promising approach, using formal designation of priority greenways to guide an early information gathering and sharing process that helps avoid project-level conflicts and gains better consideration of regional mitigation strategies.
- **STATE PRIORITIES:** Having state (and through it, regional) priorities clearly defined is a critical element in successful planning for roads in relation to biodiversity needs.

### **Integrating Road Planning and Conservation in California**

- **APPROACH:** To assess the actual extent of potential road/biodiversity impacts, this project used a summary of all major planned road projects in California and assessed their relationship to areas of high biotic value.
- **GIS ANALYSIS:** The Caltrans CTIS database of transportation projects and TNC's portfolio sites were linked to show which sites were affected by which projects, and what ecological factors were key to those potential project impacts. Looking more closely at a single region, other ecological data was applied to this analysis to further illustrate issues and options in using this information to inform collaborative approaches to planning.
- **CONCLUSIONS:**
  - **Usefulness of GIS tools:** Combining relatively simple and available data with careful GIS analysis and display provides a highly useful tool that has not heretofore been applied to transportation and biodiversity issues in California.
  - **The tools help TNC answer:** What type of and how many road projects are planned for which portfolio areas?; What species or communities might be affected?
  - **The tools help Caltrans answer:** Where are there biodiversity hotspots?; What species or communities are present?; Where are there potential mitigation sites for biodiversity impacts?
- **ROADLESSNESS:** Data on the density of roads in California enables effective evaluation of other habitat data, but is underused. Protecting areas with few roads is key to conservation of animal species, particularly animals that move long distances.

### **Conclusions**

- **STRATEGY:** The best overall approach to improving conservation consideration in transportation planning is to:
  - **Identify** planned transportation projects likely to have significant environmental affects
  - **Integrate** TNC portfolio conservation areas and other biological data with the transportation planning framework
  - **Coordinate** transportation and conservation expertise to develop an early warning system
  - **Avoid** road routes that affect areas with high biological value
  - **Mitigate** effects of projects using the best available sites – for a single project or collectively for a series of road projects
- **ROAD ECOLOGY:** Because the impacts of roads on biodiversity are not fully understood, investments in advancing the emerging science of road ecology should be encouraged. These investments could help in project level designs and mitigations, as well as broader scale approaches.

- **COLLABORATION:** A closer working relationship between regional leaders of both conservation and transportation agencies (Caltrans and TNC) is a very useful step, given the regional nature of how many road projects are developed. Key coordination areas are -- information/data sharing, review of specific projects or other opportunities, and ongoing communication between Caltrans district and TNC ecoregion managers.
- **REGIONAL MITIGATION:** Policy or planning tools that enable mitigation within an entire region may frequently offer excellent opportunities, compared to traditional project-by-project mitigations.
- **POLICY/PLANNING TOOLS:** Tools that appear to offer the most significant opportunities for avoidance or regional mitigation are: Regional Transportation Plans (by MPOs), circulation elements of county general plans. Habitat Conservation Plans are useful analytical frameworks for these broader policy approaches. Interagency agreements, particularly the 1991 Memorandum of Agreement for interagency work on roads and the environment and the recent Tri-Agency Partnership, may also offer useful opportunities.
- **STATE PRIORITIES:** Official goals and priorities for conservation are fundamentally important to the long term success of integrating conservation and road planning.
- **TNC PORTFOLIOS:** In the absence of statewide priorities for biodiversity, the TNC portfolio sites offer an excellent framework for assessing road impacts and alternatives.
- **GIS TOOL:** Using CTIS, TNC portfolios and other information in a GIS application can greatly aid in the general assessment of biodiversity issues arising from potential, planned or programmed road projects.

### Next Steps

- **INFORMATION:** Both Caltrans and TNC should implement information sharing to better connect District managers with Ecoregional managers, outlining for each the options and opportunities of such collaboration followed by introductory connections (in-person or phone meetings). All Caltrans and TNC managers should have a printed and digital version of the jurisdiction map produced for this project.
- **EDUCATION:** TNC should use the information in this project to inform its key managers and other staff of the context and opportunities for improving the integration of road planning into TNC's ongoing programs.
- **OPPORTUNITIES:** Caltrans and TNC should continue looking for opportunities that allow the two organizations to develop their collaborations, around both advance planning (impact avoidance) and project mitigation.
- **PILOT PROJECT:** The most productive next step for the TNC/Caltrans collaboration is a pilot project to develop a full implementation of the cooperation strategy outlined above, most likely focusing on Caltrans District 5 (Central Coast)

**GREGORY G. SWETT**  
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November 11, 2004

Council of San Benito County Governments  
3216 Southside Road  
Hollister, CA 95023

Ms. Dinkuhn:

Reference: San Benito County 2005 Regional Transportation Plan Update

The regional transportation plan and related environmental report fail to include data from the VTA's Southern Gateway Study which is publicly available. This lack of inclusion results in the following problems:

1. Excessive long term increase in traffic through San Juan and the San Juan Valley primarily related to interregional traffic from Pacheco Pass to 101 south.
2. Traffic impacts on Highway 25, Fairview Road, Shore Road, and Frazier Lake Road from interregional traffic from Pacheco Pass going north that is coming from 152.
3. Ignores financial constraints and costs associated with building 3 major highways—25, 152, and 156.

Options for Fairview Road widening do not take into consideration existing driveways and right-of-way constraints. What is the intent of Fairview Road—move local traffic or provide a route for northbound traffic leaving the county?

Clearly lacking in this plan is the overall traffic objectives which can be summarized as follows:

1. Local traffic within Hollister.
2. Local traffic within the county which is primarily agriculturally related that requires access to fields and can involve slow moving vehicles. This mix of vehicles with interregional traffic is a deadly mix and frustrating to both constituents.
3. Traffic originating in Hollister with destinations to the north.
4. Interregional traffic traversing the county east-west (156) and northern destination (152) traffic utilizing San Benito County as an alternate route.

The sources of traffic also create questions on public transportation as an effective alternative. With 101 at its maximum size, Coyote Valley constraints will affect San Benito County traffic. Using a 25 year horizon, rail clearly has a place in future planning.

Thank you,

Gregory Swett  
San Benito County Farm Bureau Transportation Chair

Welcome! Please Sign In...

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