

E. Other Environmental Topic Areas

1. Topics Covered in Initial Study

The Initial Study examined the impacts associated with the proposed project, which would provide recreational passenger rail service between the communities of Capitola, Aptos and Seaside. The analysis conducted for the Initial Study determined that the proposed project would not have the potential to result in a significant impact for a number of environmental topic areas, as discussed below.

Aesthetics

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to aesthetics. The location of the rail line is along a highly scenic corridor with dramatic views of coastal and forest scenery; however, the proposed project would utilize an existing rail line currently used for freight service. The project would involve the construction of six flat concrete platforms at various locations along the six miles of the proposed project. The platforms would not adversely impact scenic resources or degrade the existing visual character of the area because they would be consistent with existing land uses (railroad right-of-way) and would be designed with input from local communities. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated. The SCCRTC considered two options for simulating the potential aesthetic impacts of the project. The SCCRTC considered having a demonstration rail car brought to the site and run along the tracks to show residents what the sound and emissions rates would be like. The cost associated with this idea, the availability of an appropriate vehicle, and the lack of access by Union Pacific were prohibitive factors and this demonstration was not conducted at this time, however may be an option in the future. The SCCRTC also considered preparing computer-generated visual simulations to depict how a proposed recreational train would appear along the corridor. The SCCRTC felt that the cost to produce these simulations would also be prohibitive given the budget available for the environmental review, and the SCCRTC believed they could reach a conclusion about aesthetic impacts without the benefit of such simulations.

Agricultural Resources

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to agricultural resources. Significant agricultural resources exist in Santa Cruz County; however, the proposed project would utilize an existing rail line and railroad right-of-way and would not impact agricultural resources. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Biological Resources

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to biological resources. No direct or indirect impacts to species of concern or sensitive habitats would be anticipated. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Cultural Resources

The Initial Study did not identify any known cultural or historic resources that could be affected by the project. However, the initial study did include mitigation to require that an on site archaeological monitor

be present during ground disturbing activities to ensure that any resources encountered during construction are properly identified and recorded. This mitigation measure is included in Table I.1 of this EIR “Summary of Impacts and Mitigation Measures”.

Geology and Soils

The Initial Study did not identify potentially significant impacts related to geology. Further, the rail line that would be utilized for the proposed project has undergone major renovations and upgrades in the past six years making it sounder in the event of a geologic event. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Hydrology and Water Quality

The Initial Study did not identify potentially significant impacts related to water quality. The proposed project would not violate any water quality standards, deplete groundwater supplies, substantially alter drainage patterns, contribute to runoff or be located in a flood zone. The project would result in a minor increase in impervious surfaces (six new platforms, 8 to 10’ wide by 150’ long, and associated sidewalks), however, no significant impacts would be anticipated as the platform area would not generate sufficient runoff to substantially alter drainage patterns.

Land Use and Planning

The Initial Study did not identify potentially significant impacts related to land use and planning. As previously mentioned, the proposed project would utilize an existing rail line. The extent of new development would be limited to six new platforms in the railroad right-of-way. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Mineral Resources

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to mineral resources and the Santa Cruz County and City of Capitola General Plans do not identify any mineral resources along the existing rail line. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Population and Housing

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to population and housing. The proposed project would not induce population growth either directly or indirectly, nor would it displace people or housing. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Public Services

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to public services. Although the six proposed stations and vehicle siding/storage areas could require extra security, they would be located near public roads and parks, which are routinely patrolled by city police/county sheriffs. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Recreation

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to recreation. The proposed project would not be anticipated to lead to the increased use of existing neighborhood and regional parks but would allow local residents and tourists to access existing recreational resources by mass transportation rather than individual automobiles. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

Utilities

The Initial Study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to utilities and service systems. The utility needs for the proposed project would be limited to electricity for lighting and signs. Stations would not be equipped with restrooms or other facilities that would require water or wastewater disposal services, as these facilities would be provided on the trains. The passenger rail operator would be responsible for the proper disposal of wastewater from the facilities. Therefore, no significant impacts would be anticipated.

2. Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes that Would be Involved in the Proposed Project Should it be Implemented

The implementation of the proposed project would result in the fuel consumption required by the train service. However, this may be offset by the reduction in automobile traffic by visitors who opt to utilize the recreational rail service. In addition, the construction of the station/platforms would involve loss of open land; however, all areas are within the existing railroad right-of-way and are consistent with rail uses.

3. Growth Inducing Impacts

The proposed project would provide an alternative mode of transportation for tourists and local residents. The project would not serve employment centers and therefore would not be a draw to commuters. As a result, the project would not be anticipated to result in growth inducing effects.

4. Cumulative Impacts

A cumulative impact consists of an impact that is created as a result of the combination of the project together with other projects causing related impacts. In the evaluation of cumulative impacts, CEQA requires that the discussion be guided by the standards of practicality and reasonableness, and should focus on those cumulative impacts to which other projects contribute. In general cumulative impacts are identified using a list of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, or using projections for growth contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document.

For the purposes of this analysis, the discussion of potential cumulative traffic impacts utilizes projections for growth from both the City of Capitola and County of Santa Cruz to determine the future impact of the project in relation to other planned development.

a. Cumulative Traffic Impacts

For traffic impacts, the area of spatial boundary is considered to be the at grade railroad crossings of all public and private roadways. The cumulative condition represents the forecasted traffic volumes for the year 2020. While the train would operate for up to 40 to 50 years, population and traffic predictions over that extended period of time are speculative at best. Regional Traffic model do not extend to the 40 to 50 time horizon; most forecasting tools extend to a 20 year time horizon.

In order to determine traffic volumes in the year 2020, growth factors were applied from both the Aptos Village Traffic Study¹ and the Capitola Village Plan to arrive at the cumulative volumes and to remain consistent with these studies. At the intersection of Monterey and Park Avenues, the Capitola Village Plan annual growth factor of 0.56% or 9.6% over the 17-year period between the existing 2003 counts and the 2020 horizon was applied. At all of the other intersections, the Aptos Village Traffic Study annual growth factor of 1.125% or 19.125% over the 17-year period was applied since these intersections lie within the project area or in the vicinity of that study. Traffic generated by the Aptos Village project was added at the intersection of Trout Gulch Road and Soquel Drive and at the intersection of Aptos Creek Road and Soquel Drive.

Table III.E.1 presents the forecasted 2020 levels of service and delay both with and without the recreational train crossing at these intersections. As shown in the table, under cumulative conditions several intersection movements would operate at unacceptable conditions and the proposed recreational rail project would add to that cumulative impact, even though it would contribute only 1.2 seconds per minute of additional delay during the peak hour period.

Proposed signalization at three of the study intersections is included as part of the Aptos Village Development Plan. This planned signalization would improve intersection operations to LOS B at Aptos Creek Road and Soquel Drive, Trout Gulch Road and Soquel Drive, and State Park Drive and Sea Ridge Road. These planned improvements are included in Table 4 to represent the future condition with mitigation. The impact to the intersection of Monterey and Park Avenues would remain significant.

Although the project would contribute only 1.2 seconds per minute of peak hour delay, this incremental contribution is considered cumulatively considerable since the project would contribute to a level of service that is unacceptable pursuant to the City of Capitola's General Plan.

Impact: Under the cumulative conditions with and without the project, the intersection of Monterey and Park Avenues would operate at LOS D, which is below the City of Capitola's Level of Service standard. The project would contribute 1.2 seconds per minute of peak hour delay which is considered a cumulatively considerable impact.

¹ The Aptos Village Plan includes two alternative scenarios for the development of neighborhood commercial and residential uses on a 6.62 acre parcel north of the existing Aptos station. One alternative envisions 64,900 sf of neighborhood commercial development with eight multi-family units. A second alternative envisions 45,000 sf neighborhood commercial with 50 multi-family units. The first alternative would generate approximately 20% more peak hour trips than the second alternative so it was used for the study of the recreational rail project to be conservative in our analysis.

Table III.E.1 – Cumulative Intersection Level of Service With and Without Train Delay

Intersection	Control	Direction	Cumulative PM Peak Hour Conditions		Cumulative PM Peak Hour Conditions + Average Hourly Train Delay		
			LOS	Delay (sec)	LOS	Delay (sec)	
Monterey Avenue & Park Avenue	4-Way Stop	All	D	32.8	D	34.0	
		NB-thru/left	B	12.8	B	14.0	
		NB-right	F	51.0	F	52.2	
		EB	B	10.9	B	12.1	
		SB-right	A	0	A	0	
		SB-thru/left	C	18.5	C	19.7	
		WB	D	26.5	D	27.7	
State Park Drive & Hillcrest Drive	Unsignalized	EB-left/right	C	18.7	C	19.9	
		NB-thru/left	a	a	A	1.2	
		SB-thru/right	a	a	A	1.2	
State Park Drive & Hwy 1 SB ramps	Signalized	All	B	18.2	B	19.4	
State Park Drive & Sea Ridge	Unsignalized	All	E	39.6	E	40.8	
		EB-left	F	54.2	F	54.2	
		EB-right	B	13.0	B	14.2	
Future Condition ^b	Signalized	All	B	10.4	B	11.6	
Trout Gulch Road & Soquel Drive	4-Way Stop	All	D	28.7	D	29.9	
		NB	B	11.8	B	13.0	
		EB-left	E	43.8	E	45.0	
		EB-thru/right	D	33.0	D	33.0	
		SB-thru/left	B	14.9	C	16.1	
		SB-right	C	19.8	C	21.0	
Future Condition ^b	Unsignalized	WB-left	B	14.8	B	14.8	
		WB-thru	B	14.5	B	14.5	
		WB-right	B	13.9	C	15.1	
		Signalized	All	B	14.7	B	15.9
		Aptos Creek Road & Soquel Drive	Unsignalized	SB	F	120.0+	F
	Future Condition ^b	Signalized	All	B	18.5	B	19.7

^a Not calculated because traffic does not have to stop.

^b Future Condition represents the improvements proposed as part of the Aptos Village Traffic Study to mitigate impacts.

b. Other Cumulative Impacts

For all topic areas listed below a list of planned developments within a one-half mile area was compiled from both the City of Capitola and County of Santa Cruz. That list includes a 36-65 unit residential development along Park Avenue, and a list of transportation enhancement projects included in the 2001 Regional Transportation Plan.

The spatial boundary for the study of a project's cumulative impacts varies depending on the resource of concern. Impacts related to geology and archeological resources are generally site specific, while air and noise impacts can travel greater distances. Most site specific impacts have too limited a geographical area of influence to compound, or interrelated with, impacts caused by other projects, with the result that the project's impacts do not worsen or exacerbate the impacts of those other projects. Under CEQA, a lead agency need not address such impacts in detail, as the project will not contribute to any cumulative impacts with respect to such impact categories. (See CEQA Guidelines, §§ 15130, subd. (a) (“[w]here a lead agency is examining a project with an incremental effect that is not ‘cumulatively considerable,’ a lead agency need not consider that effect significant, but shall briefly describe its basis for concluding that the incremental effect is not cumulatively considerable”); *id.*, subd. (a)(1) (“[a]n EIR should not discuss impacts which do not result in part from the project evaluated in the EIR”); *Association of Irrigated Residents v. County of Madera* (2003) 107 Cal.App.4th 1383, 1401-1404 (court upholds cumulative impact analysis against attack, explaining that, for several impact categories, the project's impacts were isolated from other impacts caused by other projects).)

The spatial boundary for the study of impacts related to aesthetics, agriculture, biology, cultural resources, geology and soils, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, recreation, and utilities, is confined to the rail line itself and the wider right-of-way surrounding the rail line. The nature of the recreational rail project is such that impacts to these resources would not extend beyond the boundaries of the immediate project area.

The initial study did not identify any potentially significant impacts related to the project in the areas listed above. Because these impacts are very localized and do not compound or exacerbate the impacts of other projects, the project cannot cause any incremental contribution to any larger significant cumulative impacts caused by the project and other projects taken together. For this reason, the project, in and of itself, cannot cause any “cumulatively considerable” incremental impacts with respect to these other projects. This conclusion applies equally to both the Original Project and the Business Plan Project Alternative.

Noise

Regarding cumulative noise impacts, the spatial boundary is considered to be the extent to which train noise and related crossing bells can be heard in the project vicinity. The project would result in potentially significant impacts to homes within 100 feet of a crossing or within 700 feet of a train horn sounding. Existing roadway noise is the primary additional sound generator in the project vicinity. Existing roadway noise was taken into account in all measurements, and no new roadways are planned that would contribute additional sound to receptors along this corridor. Projected growth in the area, as identified by the growth factor used in the Aptos Village traffic study and Capitola Village Plan would not appreciably increase the sound generated along existing roadways since speed limits would remain unchanged and

speed is the primary factor in determining traffic noise. The project would have potentially significant noise impacts within 100 feet of at-grade crossings and within 700 feet of train horn soundings as described in Chapter III.C. These project impacts would be the sole contributor to the cumulative increase in noise in the project area. With mitigation, notably the establishment of a quiet zone and the replacement of windows facing the grade crossing for homes within 100 feet, the potential noise impacts of either the Original Project or the Business Plan Project Alternative would be reduced to a less than significant level. As the development of the surrounding area would not contribute appreciably to the cumulative increase in sound along the project corridor, no cumulative noise impact is identified. If the SCCRTC is unsuccessful in establishing a quiet zone along the project corridor, then any of the build alternatives would generate a cumulatively considerable increase in noise.

Hazardous Materials

Regarding hazardous materials impacts, the spatial boundary is considered to be the railroad right-of-way. The proposed recreational rail service would not introduce any new hazardous materials into the environment, and will not therefore contribute any additional incremental impact on top of the existing conditions. The Preliminary Site Assessment did not identify any historic activities in the six-mile project corridor that could have obviously contributed to hazardous materials spills. The Phase II sampling of the 32-mile corridor will identify any existing contamination above actionable levels and, consistent with applicable regulatory criteria, SCCRTC will remediate any soil contamination identified in the Phase II investigation in order to protect public health and ensure the avoidance of any adverse effects from the operation of the Project. The project would not therefore contribute to a significant cumulative impact caused by other projects

Air Quality

Regarding cumulative air quality impacts, the spatial boundary is considered to be the regional air basin. The projected growth as defined by Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) is included in the modeling for the Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) used to guide and regulate the attainment status of regional air basins. The proposed project is listed in the 2004 AQMP as a project in the draft *FY 2004/05 through FY 2006/07 MTIP* that is appropriate to the livable communities Transportation Control Measure of the AQMP. Since the project is included with an AQMP Transportation Control Measure it would be consistent with the AQMP, and would not therefore contribute to a cumulative impact in the Monterey Bay air basin

The 32-mile rail corridor and the planned development of a bicycle and pedestrian trail

If and when it is established, the planned bicycle and pedestrian pathway running parallel to the railway is not anticipated to result in any significant cumulative impacts associated with operation of the proposed Recreational Rail Project. The presence of bicyclists and pedestrians near the track would not contribute to any environmental impacts that in combination with the proposed recreational rail service would result in a cumulative increase in any impacts identified in this EIR.

Construction of the trail would include activities that could generate dust and noise during the construction period; however, the timing of such activities would not overlap with construction activities for the planned recreational rail service platforms and would not therefore result in a cumulatively

considerable increase in dust or noise. Further, SCCRTC, as with the project, would comply with all standard relevant dust control measures recommended by MUAPCD.

If the SCCRTC were to extend the proposed recreational rail service along the entire 32-mile segment, the impacts associated with the operation of the extended service would be similar to the project impacts described in this EIR, although any impacts of such an extension would not overlap with those occurring within the six-mile corridor or the wider spatial areas defined for traffic or noise impacts. As discussed above, the project is included in the regional Air Quality Management Plan and is therefore considered to be consistent with this plan and is accounted for in the analysis of the Monterey Bay air basin and its status of attainment relative to criteria pollutants. The cumulative impact of an extension to the recreational rail service would also be accounted for in that plan.

c. Mitigation Measures

Mitigation Measure E-1: Mitigation of the cumulative impact to the Monterey and Park Avenue intersection can be achieved in either of the following two ways:

(1) The capacity of the northbound right-turn lane from Monterey to Park Avenue can be improved by providing an additional eastbound lane on Park Avenue so that the northbound right-turns have a separate lane to turn into, essentially providing for a free right turn. This would require eastbound traffic to merge into a single lane further east of the intersection.

Under this scenario, SCCRTC would grant rights to accommodate the right turn lane and merge area along Park Avenue. The grant of rights would most likely be in the form of an access easement across a certain area within the ROW. The exact amount of land would be determined once conceptual designs for the turn lane are complete. Depending upon the design of and access to the rail platform at this location and any other uses or plans the SCCRTC has for the ROW in this area, the proposed widening of Park Avenue may or may not be feasible.

(2) If widening along Park Avenue is found to be infeasible, the City of Capitola may determine that there are valid constraints to improving this intersection. Under this scenario, and pursuant to existing City of Capitola policies, LOS D may be considered acceptable, but would require changes to the City Council resolution.

The implementation of either of the mitigations measures outlined above would improve the intersection Level of Service to acceptable levels under the cumulative condition.

Because SCCRTC cannot be certain, however, whether either mitigation measure can be successfully implemented, this cumulatively considerable impact will conservatively be characterized as “potentially significant and unavoidable.” Success of the first measure is not assured because, until SCCRTC completes design and engineering work on the project, it will not be certain that land will be available for an additional eastbound lane on Park Avenue. If the first measure does not work, success of the second measure will depend on the willingness of the Capitola City Council to amend the Capitola General Plan. Since SCCRTC has no control over any such decision, it must, at least for purposes of this Revised Draft EIR, acknowledge the prospect that the impact may not be mitigated, and thus may turn out to be significant and unavoidable.