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Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

Section 1.0 contains a detailed summary table which identifies the project's environmental impacts, proposed mitigation measures, and the level of impact significance after mitigation. This section lists the impacts which are considered significant after all mitigation is applied. The significant impacts are as follows:

Agricultural Resources

The proposed project will result in the conversion of approximately 3,100 acres of prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, and unique farmland to non-agricultural uses which is considered a significant unavoidable adverse impact. Approximately 200 acres of unique farmland and farmland of statewide importance will be dedicated to the City or other appropriate public agency in accordance with the NCCP Agreement. These lands will not be converted to urban uses but will remain as open space. Agricultural operations may continue so long as they are consistent with the NCCP. The project is being proposed under the Protocol Agreement which anticipated the eventual development of areas within the City's sphere of influence, including the project site, and the conversion of those areas from agricultural to non-agricultural uses.

Although the project will result in the conversion of agricultural lands to urban uses, the long-term viability of those lands designated as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance or unique farmland for continued agricultural production uses is questionable due to non-development factors noted above. Therefore, although the conversion of these lands is considered significant, the landowner's and City's ability to sustain economically viable agricultural uses is questionable. Moreover, while the conversion of these agricultural lands is significant in terms of the acreage remaining in the City's sphere, because agricultural operations is not specifically a local issue, the conversion of these acres should also be considered against the regional and statewide context. As discussed in the Environmental Setting section, Orange County represents approximately one quarter of one percent (.25 of 1%) of the prime farmland in the state, less than five one hundredths of one percent (.05 of 1%) of the farmland of statewide importance, and less than six tenths of one percent (.6 of 1%) of the unique farmland. Since 1998, Orange County's percentage of these soil classifications has been reduced even further. When compared to the statewide acreage of Significant Farmland, the conversion of the project Significant Farmland acreage constitutes an extremely small percentage of loss. For example, the percentage of prime farmland in the project

area lost when compared to the acreage of prime farmland in the State is four-one hundredths of one percent (.04 of 1%). Therefore, while the conversion of Significant Farmland within the City's sphere is significant at the local level, the percent reduction resulting from the conversion of these lands when compared to the amount throughout the remainder of the State is not substantial.

Air Quality

Construction activities were shown to possibly cause PM₁₀ significance thresholds to be exceeded even if accelerated dust control measures are implemented. Construction equipment exhaust emissions were shown to be significant for all air pollutants in the first construction phase, and for NOx and PM10 in the second construction phase. Although the mitigation measures listed above will reduce potential construction-related air quality impacts, they remain a temporary Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impact.

The mitigation measures listed above are expected to reduce project-related emissions. However, even after the application of mitigation measures, the proposed project is expected to generate emissions levels in exceedance of AQMD's threshold criteria for CO, ROG, NOx, and PM₁₀ in the SCAB, which is classified as a non-attainment area. As a result, project-related air quality impacts are considered a significant unavoidable adverse impact.

Although the proposed project will result in significant air quality impacts, the project is consistent with Regional Comprehensive Plan and Guide (RCPG) and AQMP projections strategies to reduce the number of trips (i.e., through encouraging HOV usage) and the length of trips (i.e., by reducing regional VMT by reducing home-to-work commute distances). The assumptions regarding land use-based air quality measures is that trips and mode choices are not only a function of the transportation system, but also relate to housing density, relative locations of residential and commercial land uses, and the proximity to regional transportation systems.

Cumulative Transportation/Traffic

While potential impacts to the freeway/tollway mainline segments and ramps have been evaluated, this analysis assumes that implementation of freeway and ramp improvements, except for ramp intersections with arterial streets, will be the responsibility of the existing regional transportation agencies. A number of programs are in place in Orange County to improve and upgrade the regional transportation system. These include the Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA) Corridor program, the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), Caltrans Traffic Operations Strategies (TOPS), and the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Measure M program.

Orange County has supplemented their transportation programs by implementing a county sales tax for transportation improvements through the Measure M program. Funds from this program are available for improvements to regional interchanges and arterial highways. The ramps on the I-5 and I-405 identified as impacted would be eligible for improvement funding through the Measure M program.

It has been assumed in the traffic analysis that the cumulative impact of project traffic along with other regional growth at the identified impacted ramp locations will be mitigated through a combination of the above discussed programs. For example, Caltrans is currently preparing a Project Study Report for the widening of the I-5 southbound off-ramp at Culver Drive to two lanes. However, if these programs are not implemented by the agencies with the responsibility to do so, the project's freeway/tollway ramp impacts would remain significant and unmitigated.