

Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) is the lead agency for the preparation and review of the Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). Pursuant to section 15082 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), BCAG is soliciting views from your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. BCAG will accept written comments concerning the scope and content of the EIR from interested persons and organizations concerned with the project.

The Draft EIR will be a Program EIR. Per the CEQA Guidelines, a Program EIR is an EIR that may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project. The purpose of a Program EIR is to allow the lead agency to consider broad policy alternatives and program-wide mitigation measures at an early time when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative impacts.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND SCOPE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Project Title

Program EIR for the Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG) 2016 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP-SCS)

Project Location

The geographical extent of the proposed RTP-SCS includes the area within the limits of Butte County, California, including the incorporated cities of Biggs, Chico, Gridley, Oroville, and Paradise, and all unincorporated areas under the jurisdiction of the County of Butte. The attached figure shows the RTP-SCS plan area.

Project Description

The Butte County Association of Governments (BCAG), as both the federally-designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and the State-designated regional transportation planning agency (RTPA) for Butte County, is required by both federal and State law to prepare a long-range (at least 20-year) transportation planning document known as a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP is an action-oriented document used to achieve a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system. California Government Code §65080 et seq. and Title 23 United States Code (USC) §134 require Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPA) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) to prepare long-range transportation plans to: 1) establish regional goals, 2) identify present and future needs, deficiencies and constraints, 3) analyze potential solutions, 4) estimate available funding, and 5) propose investments. State Statutes require that the RTP serve as the foundation for the short-range transportation planning documents: the Regional and Federal Transportation Improvement Programs (RTIP and FTIP).

BCAG has the responsibility to prepare a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) as part of the RTP, pursuant to the requirements of California Senate Bill 375 as adopted in 2008. The SCS sets forth a forecasted development pattern for the region, which, when integrated with the transportation network and other transportation measures and policies, is intended to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from passenger vehicles and light trucks to achieve the regional GHG reduction targets set by the California Air Resources Board (ARB).

Under both federal and State law, BCAG must update its RTP every four years. The 2016 RTP-SCS is the long-range planning, policy, action, and financial document for the Butte County Region. The RTP-SCS covers a 24-year period from 2016 to 2040 and is an update of the 2012 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) (please note for the 2016 cycle, the plan will be called "Regional Transportation Plan" instead of "Metropolitan Transportation Plan" as it was in 2012). The RTP-SCS identifies the region's transportation needs and issues and sets forth actions, programs, and projects to address those needs and issues. The RTP-SCS adopts policies, sets goals, and identifies financial resources to encourage and promote the safe and efficient management, operation, and development of a regional intermodal transportation system that would serve the mobility needs of goods and people. In addition, as the MPO for Butte County, BCAG is required to prepare a SCS that demonstrates how GHG reduction targets will be met through integrated land use, housing, and transportation planning. Thus the RTP-SCS will address both the transportation component of the RTP, as well as the land use component of the SCS. It should be noted that BCAG does not propose any land use changes, but rather the land use patterns envisioned by the RTP-SCS are based on the General Plan land use and zoning designations of the local agencies (the five incorporated cities and the county). The RTP-SCS would be consistent with the land use and zoning designations in the incorporated and unincorporated areas.

In 2010, the California ARB set GHG reduction targets for the BCAG region from on-road light-duty trucks and passenger vehicles as a 1% increase from 2005 emissions levels by 2020 and a 1% increase from 2005 emissions levels by 2035 (California Air Resources Board). The reduction targets are currently proposed to be updated in 2016. These targets apply to the BCAG region as a whole for all on-road light-duty trucks and passenger vehicles emissions, and not to individual cities or sub-regions.

SB 375 specifically states that local governments retain their autonomy to plan local General Plan policies and land uses. The RTP-SCS rather is intended to provide a regional policy foundation that local governments may build upon, if they so choose. As described above, the RTP-SCS does not propose to change any land use and zoning designations; rather, the land use scenario envisioned by the RTP-SCS is based on and would be consistent with the existing local General Plan policies and land use designations as specified by the local agencies. As such, the RTP-SCS includes and accommodates the quantitative growth projections for the region based on the buildout of the local General Plans. SB 375 also requires that the RTP-SCS's forecasted development pattern for the region be consistent with the eight-year regional housing needs as allocated to member jurisdictions through the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) process under State housing law.

In addition, the RTP-SCS EIR will lay the groundwork for the streamlined review of qualifying development projects within Transit Priority Areas. Qualifying projects that meet statutory criteria and are consistent with the RTP-SCS are eligible for streamlined environmental review pursuant to CEQA.

Issues to Be Addressed in the EIR

The impact categories listed below have been preliminarily identified for analysis in the 2016 RTP-SCS EIR. An Initial Study was prepared for the project and will be available for review at the BCAG office, located at 2580 Sierra Sunrise Terrace, Suite 100, Chico, CA 95928 and on the BCAG website at <http://www.bcag.org/Planning/MTP--SCS/index.html>.

- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality and Health Impacts/Risks
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Historic Resources
- Climate Change/Greenhouse Gases
- Noise
- Transportation and Circulation

In addition, the EIR will address cumulative impacts, growth inducing impacts, and other issues required by CEQA.

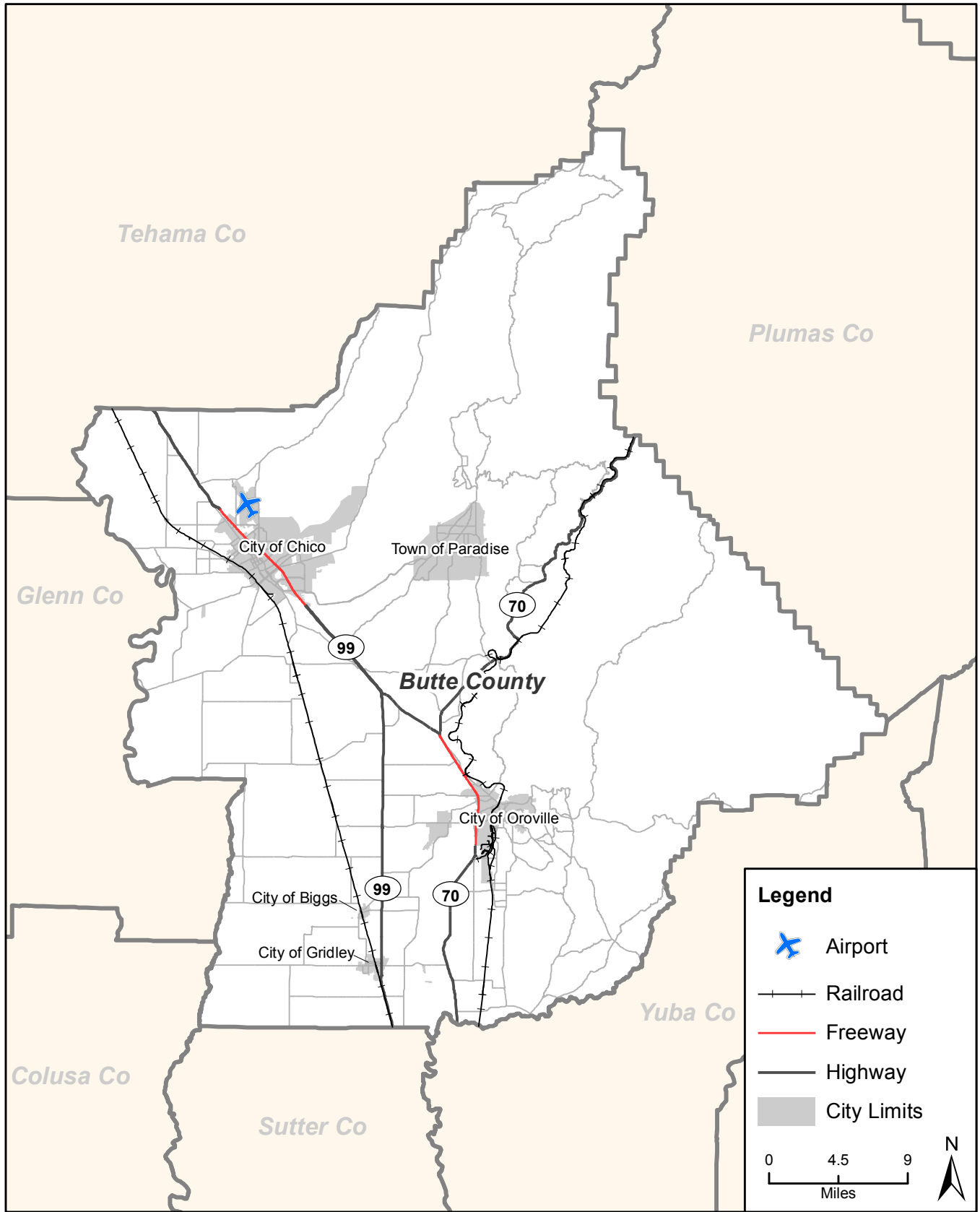
Through the NOP, BCAG is seeking input on further categories of analysis or areas of focus within the specified categories above. Time limits required by State law mandate your response be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

Public Review and Public Scoping Meetings

The 30-day public review and comment period will commence on September 15, 2015 and conclude October 15, 2015 at 5:00 p.m. Public comments may be submitted in writing by 5:00 p.m. on October 15 to Brian Lasagna at the address below.

Contact Person: Brian Lasagna, Senior Planner
 Butte County Association of Governments
 2580 Sierra Sunrise Terrace, Suite 100,
 Chico, CA 95928
 blasagna@bcag.org

BCAG will hold two public information/EIR scoping meetings. The first meeting will be held on **Tuesday September 29, 2015** in the Butte County Association of Governments Conference Room located at 2580 Sierra Sunrise Terrace, Suite 100, Chico, CA 95928, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The second meeting will be held on **Wednesday September 30, 2015** in the Oroville City Hall Conference Room located at 1735 Montgomery Street, Oroville, CA 95965, from 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The purpose of these meetings are to solicit input on the scope and content of the environmental analysis that will be included in the Draft EIR.



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Additional data provided by BCAG, 2015.

RTP-SCS Plan Area

Figure 1