

2.2 Growth

2.2.1 Regulatory Setting

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, which established the steps necessary to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, require evaluation of the potential environmental effects of all proposed federal activities and programs. This provision includes a requirement to examine indirect effects, which may occur in areas beyond the immediate influence of a proposed action and at some time in the future. The CEQ regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1508.8) refer to these consequences as indirect impacts. Indirect impacts may include changes in land use, economic vitality, and population density, which are all elements of growth.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) also requires the analysis of a project's potential to induce growth. The CEQA guidelines (Section 15126.2[d]) require that environmental documents "...discuss the ways in which the proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment..."

2.2.2 Affected Environment

Existing and General Plan land uses in the Cities of Lake Forest, Irvine, Tustin, and Santa Ana along the project segment of Interstate 5 (I-5), as well as projected growth rates for the various jurisdictions are discussed in Section 2.1, Land Use, and in Chapter 1, Section 1.2.2.3, Social Demands and Economic Development.

This growth impact analysis follows the First Cut screening guidelines provided in the California Department of Transportation's (Caltrans) *Guidance for Preparers of Growth-Related, Indirect Impact Analyses* (May 2006) which provides a first-cut screening approach to growth impact analysis that identifies the need for and the extent of growth-related impact analysis based on the responses to various questions related to a project's change in accessibility, its potential to influence growth, and the potential for project-related growth to impact resources of concern.

2.2.3 Environmental Consequences

2.2.3.1 Temporary Impacts

Build Alternative (Alternative 2A and Alternative 2B [Preferred Alternative])¹

Any potential growth-related impacts of the Build Alternative would be permanent. There would be no temporary growth-inducing impacts under either Alternative 2A or Alternative 2B with or without Design Option 3.

No Build Alternative (Alternative 1)

No improvements to I-5 within the project limits would be implemented under the No Build Alternative. Therefore, the No Build Alternative would not result in temporary growth-inducing impacts.

2.2.3.2 Permanent Impacts

Build Alternative (Alternative 2A and Alternative 2B [Preferred Alternative])

The assessment of the potential growth-related impacts of the Build Alternative was conducted using the first-cut screening analysis approach, including assessment of whether further analysis would be necessary based on consideration of the following four questions.

How, if at all, does the proposed project potentially change accessibility?

The Build Alternative proposes improvements to an existing freeway facility, and do not alter the access to or from the facility. The Study Area is located in a highly urbanized area, and the proposed improvements do not provide a new transportation facility or new access points to previously inaccessible areas. The Build Alternative would help to alleviate existing and forecasted traffic congestion in the Study Area, resulting in improved operations on I-5 and on nearby arterials. Additionally, the Build Alternative would help to accommodate projected future (2050) traffic volumes in the Study Area consistent with adopted local land use and transportation plans (as discussed in Section 2.1, Land Use, and in Chapter 1, Section 1.2.2.3, Social Demands and Economic Development). Therefore, the project does not have the potential to change accessibility.

How, if at all, do the project type, project location, and growth pressure potentially influence growth?

¹ Alternative 2B without Design Option 3 has been selected as the Preferred Alternative.

Growth in the Cities of Lake Forest, Irvine, Tustin, and Santa Ana is expected to occur with or without the Build Alternative, and the Build Alternative would accommodate approved and planned growth in the Study Area (see Table 2.20.1 for a list of reasonably foreseeable projects within the Study Area) because they would add capacity to a heavily traveled segment of I-5 and thereby help to alleviate existing and forecasted congestion in the Study Area. Pressure for growth is a result of a combination of factors, including economic, market, and land use demands and conditions. The Study Area cities are projected to experience population growth rates ranging from 44.1 percent (for the City of Irvine) to 4.2 percent for the City of Santa Ana between 2012 and 2040 as projected by the Southern California Association of Governments' (SCAG) 2016–2040 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) Final Growth Forecasts.¹

The improvements made to alleviate congestion and enhance the capacity of the existing I-5 facility could make growth in the Study Area more attractive. However, as shown in Table 2.20.1, a substantial number of development projects were proposed and approved prior to the initiation of the planning studies for the proposed project, which indicates that development in the Study Area cities is not dependent on the completion of this freeway improvement project. Additionally, the I-5 corridor runs through a heavily urbanized and built-out area, wherein there is not a substantial amount of land available for new development. The project is in conformance with the growth-related objectives and policies of the General Plans of the Cities of Irvine, Tustin, Lake Forest, and Santa Ana, and the County of Orange. The overarching goals identified in these General Plans call for the provision of adequate transportation facilities, a reduction in traffic congestion, and interagency coordination to achieve a reduction in regional traffic congestion. The Build Alternative does not propose a land use that is inconsistent with these goals or other related policies. Moreover, the fact that the project is called for in the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP), for which each local jurisdiction provides input, suggests that growth policies would effectively manage any growth created by the Build Alternative. The project is unlikely to lead to the intensification of development densities or schedules for development, and no development is predicated on the project being built.

Table 2.20.1 provides a status of developments proximate to the Study Area. These

¹ Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). Website: http://www.scag.ca.gov/Documents/2016_2040RTPSCS_FinalGrowth_ForecastbyJurisdiction.pdf (accessed May 9, 2017).

developments would presumably exist under their current schedules either with or without the proposed project.

The Build Alternative is unlikely to alter the historic and projected growth patterns within the affected jurisdictions and the County of Orange and do not encourage growth on undeveloped and unplanned land. The proposed transportation improvements of this project accommodate existing traffic in the area. Therefore, the Build Alternative would accommodate existing and planned growth, but not influence growth beyond what is currently planned.

Is project-related growth reasonably foreseeable as defined in NEPA?

Under NEPA, indirect impacts need only be evaluated if they are reasonably foreseeable, rather than remote and speculative. As discussed above, the Build Alternative would not influence growth beyond those projects currently planned for the area (Table 2.20.1) and would not influence the rate, type, or amount of growth that would otherwise occur. Therefore, no reasonably foreseeable project-related growth would occur under the Build Alternative.

If there is project-related growth, how, if at all, will that impact resources of concern?

As indicated above, because the Build Alternative would not influence the rate, type, or amount of growth that would otherwise occur, the reasonably foreseeable growth anticipated to occur in the Study Area is not project-related.

Because the Build Alternative would not result in growth-inducing impacts, no analysis of those potential impacts beyond what is contained above in the first-cut screening analysis is necessary.

No Build Alternative (Alternative 1)

No improvements to I-5 would occur under the No Build Alternative. Therefore, the No Build Alternative would not result in any permanent growth-related impacts.

2.2.4 Avoidance, Minimization, and/or Mitigation Measures

As the Build Alternative would not result in any temporary or permanent growth-related impacts, no avoidance, minimization, or mitigation measures are required.