

INTRODUCTION

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This section provides the reader with important information regarding (1) the project background, (2) the purpose of this Environmental Impact Report (EIR), (3) standards for assessing EIR adequacy, (4) the format and content of this EIR, (5) processing requirements for this EIR, and (6) other EIRs and documents incorporated by reference in this document. An EIR is an informational document used to inform agencies and the public of potentially significant environmental effects of a proposed project, identify possible ways to minimize or mitigate the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to a proposed project.

The public agency that is principally responsible for carrying out or approving a project is designated as the "lead agency." Because the Via Princessa East Extension project would be located within the jurisdiction of the City, the City will act as the lead agency. This project requires that the EIR be prepared in accordance with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq., and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 15000 et seq. (*State CEQA Guidelines*).

PROJECT SUMMARY

The proposed project involves the construction of a new roadway segment between Golden Valley Road and the existing roadway terminus near Sheldon Avenue. The Via Princessa East Extension would be one of the primary east-west arterials through the City of Santa Clarita. The proposed roadway would be approximately 1.2 miles in length and is designated as a Major Arterial Highway per the City of Santa Clarita's Master Plan of Arterial Highways. The proposed roadway would consist of a six-lane facility with a 14-foot raised landscaped median, a 10-foot sidewalk/parkway on each side, and a 12-foot two-lane bike path along the south side. The vehicle lanes adjacent to the median would be 12 feet wide, the middle lanes would be 11 feet wide, and the right lanes would be 12 feet wide. The typical right-of-way width would be 116 feet.

The portion of Via Princessa between Sheldon Avenue and Rainbow Glen Drive that is currently constructed as a half section would be completed by constructing the south side of the roadway. In this section, the roadway would be constructed to a typical right-of-way width of 104 feet, consistent with the original design for this section. The total project area, including remedial grading acreage is 25.2 acres.

PROJECT ENTITLEMENTS

In order to allow for the proposed development to occur, MC# 09-108 would require an Oak Tree Permit and a Hillside Review Permit. The oak tree permit would be required to determine the oak tree impacts at the time of project development. The Hillside Review Permit would permit the grading necessary to construct the roadway. These entitlements will be obtained at such time as roadway funding is available or concurrent with a development project. Because it is not known at this time when the project would be funded or built and permits expire after two years, it was determined to be more cost effective to wait until such time as construction of the roadway is imminent to secure permits for the project. In the case of oak trees, those oaks on the project site that are not currently of ordinance size may be large enough to qualify at a later date.

Preliminary environmental review of the proposed project was conducted by the City of Santa Clarita, Community Development Department. An initial study was prepared as part of this review and City staff determined that preparation of an EIR is required. The initial study determined that the following issues should be addressed in this EIR: air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, global climate change, human-made hazards, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, noise, transportation and circulation, and visual resources. On September 21, 2009, a Notice of Preparation (NOP) was circulated for a 30-day review period, pursuant to the requirements of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, in order to solicit input from interested public agencies regarding the content of the EIR. A scoping hearing to provide an overview of the project and the environmental process was conducted on October 29, 2009. The scoping hearing provided the general public an opportunity to provide comment as to what issues should be addressed in the EIR.

PURPOSE OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Subsequent to the passage of CEQA in 1970, a process was established that would (1) inform governmental decision makers and the public about the potential, significant ways environmental effects of proposed activities; (2) identify ways that environmental damage can be avoided or significantly reduced; (3) prevent significant, avoidable damage to the environment by requiring changes in projects through the use of alternatives or mitigation measures when the governmental agency finds the changes to be feasible; and (4) disclose to the public the reasons why a governmental agency approved the project in the manner the agency chose if significant environmental effects are involved.¹ This information is the basis of any EIR.

¹ State of California, *CEQA Guidelines*, Section 15002(a) of the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Chapter 3.

EIR ADEQUACY

The principal use of an EIR is to provide input and information for comprehensive planning analysis. The staff reports prepared by City staff synthesize the pertinent environmental and planning information associated with the project for presentation to the City of Santa Clarita Planning Commission and City Council. Given the important role of the EIR in this planning and decision-making process, it is imperative that the information presented in the EIR be factual, adequate, and complete. The standards for adequacy of an EIR, defined in Section 15151 of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, are as follows:

An EIR 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 the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

This EIR has been prepared by the City of Santa Clarita in accordance with the *State CEQA Guidelines* and City guidelines for the implementation of CEQA.

TYPE OF EIR AND LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

CEQA provides a lead agency with the flexibility to prepare different types of EIRs, and to employ different procedural means to focus environmental analysis on the issues appropriate for decision at each level of environmental review.² CEQA provides that the “degree of specificity required in an EIR will correspond to the degree of specificity involved in the underlying activity which is described in the EIR.” (*State CEQA Guidelines*, Section 15146).

Per *State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15161, a “Project EIR” is:

The most common type of EIR examines the environmental impacts of a specific development project. This type of EIR should focus primarily on the changes in the environment that would result from the development project. The EIR shall examine all phases of the project including planning, construction and operation.

This EIR can be classified as a project EIR. Site-specific studies regarding air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology, hazards, hydrology, noise, and traffic have been conducted for the proposed project. Therefore, there is enough information contained in this EIR to support adequate environmental documentation.

² California Pub. Resources Code, Section 21093(a).

DRAFT EIR FORMAT AND CONTENT

Preliminary environmental review of the Via Princessa East Extension project was conducted by the City's Community Development Department. In the Notice of Preparation (NOP), the City determined that the proposed project may have potentially significant effects on several environmental factors, including: land use and planning; geological problems; water/hydrology; stormwater management and recycling; air quality; transportation/circulation; biological resources; noise; hazards; visual resources; and cultural resources.

The NOP was circulated for a 30-day review period from September 21, 2009, to October 21, 2009, pursuant to the requirements of the *State CEQA Guidelines*, in order to solicit input from responsible and interested public agencies and the community regarding the content of the EIR. In addition, to facilitate local participation, the City held a scoping meeting on the project and solicited suggestions from the public and other agencies on the scope and content of this Draft EIR. The meeting took place at the Century Room at the Santa Clarita City Hall, 23920 Valencia Boulevard, Santa Clarita, California, on October 29, 2009.

In response to the NOPs and scoping meeting, comment letters and other input were received from interested agencies, organizations and others, copies of which are presented in **Appendix 1.0** to this EIR.

Based on the results of the City's NOPs and scoping efforts, the following topics are evaluated in this EIR:

1. Air Quality
2. Biological Resources
3. Cultural Resources
4. Geology and Soils
5. Greenhouse Gas Emissions
6. Human-Made Hazards
7. Hydrology
8. Land Use
9. Noise
10. Transportation and Circulation
11. Visual Resources

This Draft EIR is organized into the following sections:

1. **Introduction.** This section provides an introduction and overview describing the purpose and scope of topics addressed in this EIR and the environmental review process.
2. **Section 1.0, Executive Summary.** This section summarizes environmental consequences that would result from the proposed project, provides a summary table that denotes anticipated significant environmental impacts, describes identified mitigation measures, and indicates the level of significance of impacts before and after mitigation.

3. **Section 2.0, Environmental Setting.** This section discusses the existing environmental setting of the proposed project.
4. **Section 3.0, Project Description.** Contains a detailed description of the proposed project.
5. **Section 4.0, Environmental Impact Analysis.** This section addresses the environmental setting in which the project is proposed. This section also analyzes and identifies the existing conditions, project and cumulative impacts, mitigation measures, and unavoidable significant impacts of the proposed project for the environmental impact categories identified above.
6. **Section 5.0, Cumulative Analysis Methodology.** This section describes the cumulative analysis methodology.
7. **Section 6.0, Alternatives.** This section describes, identifies, and analyzes project alternatives.
8. **Section 7.0, Effects Not Found Significant.** This section provides a brief description of the environmental effects that were found not to be significant.
9. **Section 8.0, Growth Inducement.** This section identifies the project's growth-inducing impacts.
10. **Section 9.0, Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes.** Describes the significant irreversible environmental changes associated with the proposed project and, therefore, not evaluated in further detail.
11. **Section 10.0, Unavoidable Significant Impacts.** This section provides a discussion of the project's significant and unavoidable impacts.
12. **Section 11.0, References.** This section contains a list of the documents cited in this EIR.
13. **Section 12.0, List of Preparers and Persons Consulted.** This section provides a list of EIR preparers, and a list of the organizations and persons consulted in preparing this EIR.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS FOR THE DRAFT EIR

The review process for the Draft EIR will include the procedural steps described below:

Public Notice/Public Review. The City of Santa Clarita Department of Community Development directed and supervised preparation of this Draft EIR, which will be circulated for a 45-day public review period as mandated by CEQA.

A copy of the Draft EIR and all adopted City ordinances and documents is on file at the City of Santa Clarita Department of Community Development. All comments concerning the adequacy of the Draft EIR must be addressed to:

City of Santa Clarita
23920 Valencia Boulevard, Suite 302
Santa Clarita, California 91355
Attention: Harry Corder, Engineering Department
and James Chow, Community Development Department
(Via Princessa East Extension EIR)

Public hearing(s) will be held before the City of Santa Clarita City Council regarding the proposed project and the adequacy of the Draft EIR, at which time public comments will also be heard.

Responses to Comments/Final EIR. Following the 45-day public comment period and public hearing(s) on the Draft EIR, the Final EIR for the proposed project will be prepared in order to respond to the comments received on the Draft EIR. As required by CEQA, the Public Works Department/Community Development Department will distribute responses to comments submitted by public agencies to those agencies for review 10 days prior to consideration of the Final EIR.

Certification of the EIR/Project Consideration. At the conclusion of the EIR public hearing process, the City Council will vote on certification of the EIR and will decide on what action to take with respect to the project.