

2.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

INTRODUCTION

The following discussion addresses the physical attributes of the project site, and the local and regional areas in the project vicinity. The information provided in this section enables the decision makers and the public to formulate an understanding of the project site and the surrounding area, and provides perspective on potential project impacts. The scope of this section is in accordance with *California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines* section 15125, which provides in part:

- (a) An EIR must include a description of the physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project, as they exist at the time the notice of preparation is published, or if no notice of preparation is published, at the time environmental analysis is commenced, from both a local and regional perspective. This environmental setting will normally constitute the baseline physical conditions by which a Lead Agency determines whether an impact is significant. The description of the environmental setting shall be no longer than is necessary to [gain] an understanding of the significant effects of the proposed project and its alternatives.*
- (c) Knowledge of the regional setting is critical to the assessment of environmental impacts. Special emphasis should be placed on environmental resources that are rare or unique to that region and would be affected by the project. The EIR must demonstrate that the significant environmental impacts of the proposed project were adequately investigated and discussed and it must permit the significant effects of the project to be considered in the full environmental context.*

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Via Princessa East Extension project was published and distributed on September 21, 2009; environmental conditions, as they existed on that date, establish the baseline for purposes of this environmental analysis.

In summary, this section generally describes the physical environment in which the proposed project would be located; additional information, tailored to the existing regulatory setting and the analyses of individual environmental impact categories, is provided in later sections.

REGIONAL SETTING

The location of the Via Princessa East Extension project site relative to the regional and local setting is illustrated in **Figures 3.0-1** and **3.0-2**, respectively (see **Section 3.0, Project Description**). As shown, the project site is located in the City of Santa Clarita approximately 2 miles north of State Route 14 (SR-14) on undeveloped rural land surrounded by residential and commercial land use designations.

Vehicular access to the Santa Clarita Valley is primarily from I-5, which is the major north-south freeway corridor in the area, and SR-14, which runs along the eastern side of the Santa Clarita Valley and then northeasterly to the cities of Lancaster and Palmdale in the Antelope Valley. SR-126 provides a westerly connection to the Santa Clarita Valley. The closest airport to the project site is Whiteman which is located approximately 10.5 miles to the south. The closest major airport is the Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport, located approximately 16 miles southeast of the project site.

A variety of topographic features contribute to the regional setting of the project site. The Santa Clarita Valley (Valley) is generally flat with some gently rolling hills that range in elevation from approximately 1,200 to 1,600 feet. The Valley is bordered on the south by the Santa Susana Mountains, to the east by the San Gabriel Mountains, and to the north and west by the Angeles National Forest. The mountain ranges that surround the Valley can be viewed from great distances and from the other more dominant visual features in the area. For example, Whitaker Peak to the north of the project site has an elevation of 4,148 feet, Oat Mountain to the south is 3,747 feet high, and Mt. Gleason to the east has an elevation of 6,502 feet. Several watercourses, the largest of which is the Santa Clara River, cross the Valley floor. However, the watercourses in the project area usually are dry, maintaining surface water flow only during storms in the winter months. Other prominent topographic features of the Valley are the north-south trending canyons.

The Santa Clarita Valley has a Mediterranean-type climate characterized by warm, dry summers, and mild winters. Most rainfall occurs between November and March, and typically totals approximately 15 to 18 inches annually. Santa Ana winds often sweep through the area in the fall and winter months, bringing periods of warm, dry weather. The Southern California area has been divided into a number of geographical air basins. The Santa Clarita Valley is located within the South Coast Air Basin, which includes all of Orange County and the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties. Due to the topography and climate within the basin, the South Coast Air Basin consistently generates the highest levels of smog in the United States and, therefore, is considered to have the worst air quality in the nation.

The Santa Clarita Valley is divided into two jurisdictional regions: (1) the City of Santa Clarita; and (2) the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. The City of Santa Clarita generally is located in the more central portions of the Santa Clarita Valley, with unincorporated County areas surrounding the City. The project site is located entirely within the limits of the City of Santa Clarita.

LOCAL SETTING

Existing Roadways

Golden Valley Road is a four-lane secondary arterial highway that extends from Newhall Ranch Road in the north to Via Princessa to the south of SR-14.

The eastern portion of Via Princessa is a four-lane roadway between Whites Canyon Road and Rainbow Glen Drive. West of Rainbow Glen Drive, Via Princessa is currently configured as a two-lane roadway and ends just west of Sheldon Avenue. East of Whites Canyon, Via Princessa is configured as a four to six-lane highway.

Surrounding Land Uses

The project site, which is undeveloped and is approximately 1.2 miles in length, is surrounded by developed land uses, which are primarily residential. Residential development is located to the northeast of the project site. Vacant land is located to the north of the project site and storage and testing facilities for National Technical Systems and Golden Valley Road is located to the west of the project site. Golden Valley High School is also located to the south of the project site.

General Plan Land Use Designations

The City's General Plan Land Use Map, designates the project site as BP (Business Park) and UR5 (Urban Residential 5), which allows for a minimum 19 dwelling units per acre, maximum 30 dwelling units per acre.

Site Characteristics

The project site encompasses 16 parcels in the City of Santa Clarita. The project site is currently undeveloped rural land consisting of hilly terrain with extensive native vegetation. There are currently two City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power right-of-way crossings on the site. An aqueduct is located on the west side of the project site and an overhead power line corridor is located on the east side. Several areas near the southwestern portion of the project site contain stored equipment and materials for National Technical Systems (NTS). Two water tanks are located on the east side of the project site near the terminus of Via Princessa. No pits, ponds, underground or above ground tanks (with the exception of the two water tanks) are known to be located on the project site. No toxics or hazardous air emissions facilities are located within 0.25 mile of the project site. Please see **Section 4.6, Human-Made Hazards**, for a complete discussion of potential impacts from hazards and hazardous materials at the project site.

The project site elevation ranges from approximately 1,390 feet above mean sea level (msl) in the southwest portion of the site to approximately 1,830 feet above msl in the northeast portion of the site. The nearest surface water drainage is the Santa Clara River, which is located approximately 1 mile to the northeast. Please see **Section 4.7, Hydrology and Water Quality**, for a complete discussion of potential hydrologic impacts at the project site.

The project area is located within an undeveloped area largely characterized by chaparral/scrub habitat. The proposed project is located within a very high fire hazard zone as designated by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire). As described in the Open Space and Conservation Element, the Saugus area is not generally subject to wetland constraints because it has no wetland habitat. Please see **Section 4.2, Biological Resources**, for a complete discussion of potential impacts to biological resources at the project site.

With respect to air quality, the project site is located within the South Coast Air Basin (SCAB), which includes all of the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Orange, and Riverside Counties. It is also located in the transitional microclimatic zone of the basin between two climatic types (termed valley marginal and high desert), and in Source Receptor Area (SRA) 13, which encompasses the Santa Clarita Valley. The station that monitors the air quality of this SRA, located at 12th Street and Placerita Canyon Road, with registered values above state and federal standards for ozone (O₃) and PM_{2.5} (particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter), and values above the state standard for PM₁₀ (particles less than 10 micrometers in diameter). Concentrations of carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), and sulfates have not been exceeded within the Santa Clarita Valley, and concentrations of two other criteria pollutants—sulfur dioxide and lead—have not been exceeded anywhere within the basin for several years. Please refer to **Section 4.1, Air Quality**, for additional information on ambient air quality on, and in the vicinity of, the project site.

As the proposed project would include earthmoving activities there is the potential for uncovering archeological and paleontological resources. Please see **Section 4.3, Cultural Resources**, for a complete discussion of potential cultural impacts at the project site.

Geologically, the project site lies within the eastern portion of the Ventura Basin within the western Transverse Ranges. The Ventura Basin and Transverse Ranges are characterized by ongoing tectonic activity. In the Ventura Basin, tertiary and quaternary sediments have been folded and faulted along predominant east/west structural trends. The Transverse Ranges are characterized by roughly east/west trending mountains. Please see **Section 4.4, Geology and Soils**, for a complete discussion of potential geological impacts at the project site.

Noise is currently generated by vehicle traffic along Golden Valley Road on the west side of the project site and along Via Princessa on the east side. Noise impacts are addressed in detail in **Section 4.9, Noise**.

The I-5 Freeway is located approximately 4 miles west of the project site and SR-14 is located approximately 2 miles to the south. Site access is currently provided via Golden Valley Road and Via Princessa. Traffic and circulation impacts are addressed in detail in **Section 4.10, Transportation and Circulation**.