

Preliminary Environmental Assessment Memorandum

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March 23, 2007

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From: Jerry Haag, environmental consultant

Subject: Environmental Issues-Northeast Line Light Rail Stations Project

Background

The purpose of this memo is to address the application of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and implementing CEQA Guidelines on the proposed Northeast Line Light Rail Stations Plan.

Location and Context

The project area includes a large number of properties surrounding the three existing light rail stations that are the subject of the plans: the Globe Station, the most westerly of the stations, located at the intersection of Del Paso Boulevard and Globe Avenue; the Arden/Del Paso Station, located within the Arden Way right-of-way between Grove Street and Oxford Street and the easterly station, known as the Royal Oaks Station, located immediately southeast of Arden Way and Royal Oaks Drive.

The project area for this study has been defined to include properties within an approximate one-quarter mile radius of each of the stations.

Land uses surrounding the three stations are highly varied. Properties fronting the arterial roadways through the project area contain a mix of retail commercial and office uses of varying ages and conditions. Properties lying south of the three stations are generally characterized by well-maintained single-family dwellings with at least one City park serving these neighborhoods. Properties north of the three stations are more mixed and include single-family dwellings, some of which need maintenance, and light industrial uses near the railroad tracks. Light industrial areas also exist on the easterly side of the project area near the railroad tracks that form the easterly boundary of the project area.

Project Description

The proposed project includes consideration of a Plan that incorporates a vision for improving and enhancing the design and appearance of properties adjacent to each of the stations, including recommendations for streetscape improvements and the appearance of new and redeveloped land uses. The Plan also includes an analysis of existing public infrastructure and recommendations to support urban design and streetscape recommendations.

The Plan includes recommendations for attracting future land uses within the project area, generally involving more dense residential uses and intensive non-residential uses, consistent with a market analysis for the area, to encourage the reinvigoration of the project area. Although the proposed Plan is considered an advisory policy document; it is anticipated that implementation of the Plan, once approved, will likely include future amendments to the General Plan and zoning ordinance to accommodate more intensive land uses as envisioned in the Plan. The City could also prepare a Specific Plan to guide and regulate future development near the three light rail stations.

The overall vision for the project area includes:

- Using recommended development patterns in and around each light rail station to provide an identity and sense of place.
- Maximizing the Transit Oriented Development (TOD) potential around each station.
- Enhancing and humanizing the public realm in and around each station, which includes public rights-of-way, parks, trails and other public gathering places.
- Building upon the synergy of existing resources.
- Providing for development incentives to achieve the overall vision.

The Plan also includes more specific recommendations to upgrade each of the three light rail stations. These are:

- **Globe Station:** This station should be identified as the gateway to North Sacramento and land uses surrounding the station should be intensified. Del Paso Avenue should be redesigned to include more pedestrian-friendly features, such as special paving at pedestrian street crossings, installation of public area and bulb-outs at key street intersections. Land uses along the Del Paso corridor should be intensified with higher density residential and mixed-use complexes to encourage more pedestrian activity near the Globe Station.
- **Arden/Del Paso Station:** The vision for the center of the three stations includes making this station the anchor of this neighborhood, improving the safety of this station, improving pedestrian connections to Del Paso Boulevard and taking advantage of redevelopment of surrounding properties. Recommended land uses adjacent to the Arden/Del Paso station include office, commercial and mixed uses to the north and a mix of office, commercial and residential south of the station. Arden Way, adjacent to the light rail station between Oxford and Royal Oaks Boulevard, is recommended to be redesigned to include a new local serving travel lane on the south side of the station to serve intensified land uses as well as to provide improved bicycle and pedestrian access.

- **Royal Oaks Station:** The vision for the most easterly of the three stations is to improve the overall appearance and environment surrounding the station, enhance connections to and from the station and provide for a family oriented environment around the station. Land use recommendations adjacent to the station include development of intensified residential, live-work and similar uses north of the station. Larger complexes of mixed uses and residential development are recommended south of the station.

Environmental Issues

This section of the memo discusses the proposed project in light of CEQA mandated environmental topics:

- *Aesthetics:* It is unlikely that approval and implementation of the proposed project would result in any potentially significant impacts with regard to damage to existing scenic resources within the project area or substantial degradation of the existing visual character of the area since the project area is largely developed and the proposed project recommends aesthetic improvements in the form of enhanced streetscapes, additional landscaping and architecturally pleasing development on privately owned properties in the project area.

The proposed Plan does include recommendations for the construction of new buildings that would likely be taller and bulkier than existing buildings in the project area. Depending on the height and location of new buildings, there is a possibility that such buildings could block existing views or create shade/shadow conditions on adjacent properties. A mitigation measure could include design review by the City to include a view analysis and shade/shadow analysis of all new structures over two stories to ensure that significant views from existing buildings would not be blocked and that no significant shade or shadow impacts would result on adjacent properties.

Implementation of the proposed project would likely include new streetlights and exterior lighting on buildings that could impact surrounding low-density residential areas. A mitigation measure is recommended to ensure that all new public and private exterior light fixtures be equipped with cut-off lenses to direct light sources in a downward direction to avoid spill over of light and glare onto adjacent areas.

- *Agricultural Resources:* Since the project area is developed to a significant degree, no significant impacts are anticipated with regard to conversion of prime farmlands to urban uses, disruption to existing agricultural operations or conflicts with Williamson Act land conservation contracts.
- *Air Quality:* One of the objectives of the project is to increase the use of the three light rail stations by providing a more attractive and inviting environment around each of the stations. Land uses around the stations are also recommended to be changed and intensified to encourage greater transit usage. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with the regional clean air plan. However,

there would be an increase in the number of automobile trips associated with future residential and non-residential land uses that could exceed state and federal air emission standards. Additional development in the plan area could also likely contribute to considerable increases in air emissions since the Central Valley is a non-attainment air quality area. Future technical air impact analysis is therefore recommended once a build-out scenario for the Plan area is identified. Future air quality impact analyses should discuss the impacts of diesel fuel emissions on future residents, since a significant number of new residents would be added under the Plan.

Any future air quality analysis to assess impacts of increasing land use intensity within the project area should also discuss the project's contribution to global climate change, although this, by necessity, would need to be a qualitative discussion, since the CEQA Guidelines do not include standards of significance for this topic.

In the absence of a technical air quality analysis as of the writing of this memo and even with adherence to standard air quality mitigation measures, it is likely that project and cumulative air quality impacts would be significant and unavoidable, requiring the Lead Agency to adopt Overriding Considerations when considering future land use changes that would implement the proposed Plan.

- *Biological Resources*: The project would likely not impact individual special-status species, special-status habitats, wetlands, riparian habitats or other biological resources since the project area is nearly fully developed.
- *Cultural Resources*: It is possible that the project area contains structures that are listed on local, state or federal registers of historic places. Prior to demolition of any structures, a records search should be performed by a qualified architectural historian to ensure that the building is not considered a significant historic resource.

There is also a possibility that that construction of public improvements such as street widenings, street reconfigurations, installation of new underground utilities and similar activities could disturb unrecorded buried prehistoric, Native American or other cultural resources. Appropriate wording should be included on all construction documents and specifications to the effect that work should stop within a specified time of any find of such resources. A qualified archeologist should also be consulted to evaluate the find and develop a plan to protect or preserve such finds.

- *Geology and Soils*: It is unlikely that any of the project area is underlain by an active or potentially active faults, so that the risk from actual ground rupture is considered low. The risk from seismic ground shaking is considered high, however, due to the large number of active faults in the Sacramento and Bay areas. Construction of public and private improvements consistent with California Building Codes and other seismic standards would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level.

The risk of landslide is considered low, since the project site is generally flat.

Erosion of graded material from the project area during any future consideration would be considered a potentially significant impact and could be reduced to a less-than-significant level through the preparation and enforcement of erosion control plans.

Portions of the project area may be underlain by soil types that may be considered expansive in nature or that may result in lateral spreading, differential settlement of future improvements or similar soil-related hazards. Individual, project-specific soils analyses should be undertaken to determine the presence or absence of these conditions. Specific recommendations included in each of the reports should be implemented as part of each individual construction project.

- *Hazards and Hazardous Materials:* Based on information provided by SHRA, two possible sources of soil and/or groundwater contamination exist within or adjacent to the project area. There is a suspected plume of contaminated material north of the Globe Station, in the El Monte Triangle. An investigation of this plume is being undertaken by SHRA to characterize this plume, its origin, and possible remediation, if required. A second plume is suspected underneath the 1000 to 1200 block of Del Paso Boulevard. This plume may be the result of underground leaking storage tanks at 1212 Del Paso Boulevard that are in the process of being removed.

In addition to the above two known instances of contamination, future demolition of structures as part of the proposed project could release asbestos, lead based paint and/or other hazardous materials into the atmosphere. Building-specific analyses should be undertaken prior to any demolition and, if such materials are identified, a qualified contractor or other qualified environmental professional should prepare a remediation plan to be undertaken as part of demolition activities.

There is also a potential for uncovering hazardous materials in the soil and/or groundwater due to on-going or previous uses within the project area in addition to the two instances cited above. This could include automobile service stations, auto repair shops, auto dismantlers, dry cleaners and a number of light industrial uses that currently exist or likely existed in the past. It is recommended that Phase I Environmental Site Assessments be prepared for any property proposed to be demolished or significantly redeveloped as part of the project. Based on the results of the Phase I assessment, additional analyses may be required and individual remediation plans may need to be prepared for sites that could require the approval of the City of Sacramento, the Regional Water Quality Control Board, the State Department of Toxic Substance Control and other agencies.

Other than the above, approval and implementation of the proposed Plan would not result in a significant hazard due to the transport, use and/or handling of hazardous materials, would not impact nearby aircraft operations due to the

absence of nearby airports or air strips, would not subject people or improvements to the risk of wildland fire and would not cause blockage of any emergency evacuation plan.

- *Hydrology and Water Quality:* The proposed Plan would likely not significantly change existing surface drainage conditions, since major portions of the project area would remain at their existing topographic elevations. Although portions of the project area currently experience flooding, a part of the proposed project includes upgrades to the City's stormwater drainage system, so that any underserved areas would be provided with adequate drainage.

Project construction to implement the Plan could result in a potential degradation of surface water quality standards. Future development projects would also be required to comply with NDPES runoff standards to ensure that operational characteristics of any future projects built under the Plan would not result in significant surface water pollution issues.

Based on preliminary drainage information prepared as part of the project, none of the project area is located within a FEMA-designation 100-year flood hazard area, which is considered the threshold of significance.

- *Land Use and Planning:* The proposed Plan would not physically disrupt the existing neighborhood surrounding the three light rail stations, but would assist in integrating the surrounding neighborhoods. The Plan may require amendments to the City's General Plan, applicable specific plan(s) and the zoning ordinance to accommodate anticipated increases in land use density or intensity. Given the developed nature of the project area, it is unlikely that a habitat conservation plan has been approved that includes the project area.

One potential land use impact could be disruption of existing businesses along Arden Way or Del Paso Boulevard as a result of construction of streetscape improvements. Recommended measures to reduce this potential impact would be to provide advance notice of major streetscape construction projects that could interfere with customer parking or access to businesses.

- *Mineral Resources:* It is unlikely that mineral resources would be encountered as part of Plan implementation.
- *Noise:* There would be short-term increases in construction noise on adjacent land uses. This could be reduced to a less-than-significant level by requiring major public and private development projects to develop and implement Construction Noise Management Plans to be approved by the City prior to commencement of construction. Such plans should include hours of operation, reasonable limitations on use of construction and possible use of temporary noise shielding.

No other significant noise impacts are anticipated since no major habitable development would be facilitated by the Plan, no airport-related noise would be

generated and construction of streetscape improvements would likely involve normal construction operations.

- *Population and Housing:* The proposed Plan would induce a significant number of residents to move to the project area, since one of the project objectives is clearly to make the project area a more desirable place to live. This influx of new residents would need to be analyzed for implementation purposes. Approval and implementation of the Plan could likely displace a significant number of existing residents and/or businesses depending on specific sites for individual development proposals. Mitigation measures should be included in any future environmental documents associated with the project to require advance notification to current residents and businesses of the need to relocate and preparation of a relocation plan.
- *Public Services:* The project area is currently served by the City of Sacramento Fire and Police Departments. Since the area is already developed, it is likely that approval and implementation of the Plan would not impact the ability of these service providers to continue providing service from existing stations without the need to expand such facilities. Major new developments would need to be reviewed by the Police and Fire Departments to ensure that no additional physical facilities would be required to serve new developments.¹

In terms of possible impacts to local school districts, payment of development impact fees to the respective districts prior to issuance of building permits will provide for full mitigation of any school impacts.²

Overall, impacts to public service providers is anticipated to be less-than-significant.

- *Recreation:* It is likely that a number of small pocket parks and public plazas would be constructed as part of the proposed project. New residential development that may occur in the project area would be required to either provide on-site parks or pay in-lieu fees to the City of Sacramento based on the expected number of residents in each development. Parks and recreation impacts are anticipated to be less-than-significant.
- *Transportation and Traffic:* The project area is served by both arterial roadways (Arden Way and Del Paso Boulevard) as well as a number of collector and local residential streets. Construction of proposed streetscape improvements that would change the number of travel lanes through the project area should be analyzed to determine if there would be significant impacts to the flow of auto traffic during peak hours. More generally, additional technical analysis is needed to determine

¹ CEQA only requires an analysis of physical impacts of a project on the environment. For police and fire services, this means a project would have a significant impact if it were to require the police or fire department to construct a new station or expand an existing station.

² Under SB 50, payment of school impact fees have been determined to constitute mitigation of school impacts for development projects.

how new residential development and higher intensity development patterns would affect circulation.

Of particular importance is the skewed intersection of Arden Way and Del Paso Boulevard that is typically more difficult for motorists to negotiate due to its non-standard design. This particular intersection geometric likely has less capacity than a standard 90-degree intersection and the two arterials feeding into this intersection provide major east-west circulation in this portion of the community. Mitigation measures would need to be identified in a follow-on traffic analysis. Future traffic analyses may indicate that mitigation for this intersection to meet City acceptable Level of Service standards may prove infeasible due to lack of sufficient future right-of-way to widen these roadways and a statement of overriding considerations would need to be adopted when approving future development projects.

The proposed project would improve both pedestrian and bicycle access within the project area so these would not be significant impacts. An analysis should be completed to determine project impacts, if any, to local and regional public transit systems.

Air traffic would not be affected by the proposed project, nor would the proposed project affect any emergency access routes within the project area in the long term.

Related possible impacts would include the potential for short-term blockage Arden Way and Del Paso for construction of streetscape improvements and long term-impacts associated with reconfiguration of travel lanes on these roadways. These could be mitigated through advance coordination with Police and Fire Department staff to ensure that adequate emergency routes are established.

- *Utilities:* The project area is presently urbanized and served by a combination of City of Sacramento and private utility systems. In terms of water service, the City of Sacramento provides water for domestic and fire fighting purposes. The proposed Plan includes construction of new localized water mains, primarily 8-inch and 12-inch diameter pipes, to upgrade water supply and pressure. In terms of wastewater, the City also maintains a sewer collection, treatment and disposal system to support existing development in the project area.

Information prepared as part of the Plan shows that existing sewer facilities are adequate to support the existing type and level of development; however, increased land development that could occur under the Plan would require upgrading an existing 15- to 18-inch diameter line near the Globe and Del Paso Stations to an 18- to 24-inch diameter pipe system. To support anticipated development near the Royal Oaks Drive station, additional sewer pipes are recommended to connect to an existing 72-inch diameter sewer force main near the station. These new pipes would supplement existing pipes within the project area.

Water and sewer upgrades within the project area would likely be provided by a combination of development fees from proposed new development in the project area, supplemented by City capital funding.

Electrical and natural gas service is also currently provided to the project area. If additional or upgraded service is needed in the future to support new development, individual developers will be required to fund such upgrades.

Overall, provision of utilities to serve the proposed project is not anticipated to represent a significant impact.

Recommendation

Completion of the specialized, technical analyses recommended in this memo, including but not limited to air quality, hazardous materials and traffic, will allow the City of Sacramento to determine the appropriate CEQA document, either a mitigated negative declaration or an environmental impact report (EIR), for the proposed project. Based on preliminary information available as of the preparation of this memo, it appears that an EIR will be required.