

# Section 3

## Environmental Analysis

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

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#### Organization of this Section

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This section of the EIR provides an overview of the environmental analysis chapter, which includes Sections 3.2 through 3.18. Each Section presents an analysis of environmental factors that may be affected by the proposed project in the Santa Clara-Alum Rock Corridor. For each issue, the following information is presented:

- Existing Conditions—describes existing baseline conditions, including the environmental context and regulatory background.
- Impact Assessment—identifies standards of significance and evaluates how the proposed project would affect the baseline conditions.
- Mitigation Measures—identifies ways to reduce, eliminate or avoid impacts that are considered significant.

#### Scope of this Environmental Impact Report

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The purpose of this EIR is to fully disclose the environmental consequences of building and operating the proposed project in advance of any decisions to commit substantial financial or other resources toward its implementation. This EIR has been prepared pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA). The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is the lead agency under CEQA.

On November 1, 2007, a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for an EIR was filed with the State Clearinghouse, consistent with Section 15082 of the CEQA Guidelines (a copy of the NOP is included in Appendix A of this document).

CEQA requires the identification and evaluation of the resources potentially affected by a project. CEQA requires that all State and local government agencies consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have discretionary authority, and requires that a determination of significant impacts be identified in an EIR and mitigation measures identified and implemented where feasible. Further CEQA considerations are discussed in Section 4, Other CEQA Considerations, of this document.

VTA has determined that the environmental resource areas listed below will be analyzed in this EIR. The environmental analysis incorporated herein identifies the environmental consequence of the proposed alternatives on these resource areas, as well as the mitigation measures proposed to address any significant impacts. Each topic listed below is numbered using an alpha-numerical system that

identifies the environmental issue. For example, *VQ-1* denotes the first impact discussion in the Visual Quality Section. The numerical codes used to identify the environmental issues discussed in this section are as follows:

- TR — Transportation
- AQ — Air Quality
- BIO — Biological Resources
- CS — Community Services (Public Services)
- CR — Cultural Resources
- EMF — Electromagnetic Fields
- EN — Energy
- GEO — Soils, Geology, and Seismicity
- HAZ — Hazardous Materials
- HYDRO — Hydrology and Water Quality
- LU — Land Use
- NOI — Noise and Vibration
- SS — Safety and Security
- PH — Population and Housing
- VQ — Visual Quality
- CI — Construction Impacts

Mitigation measures are numbered to correspond to the impacts they address; e.g., Mitigation Measure VQ-3.1 refers to the first mitigation measure for Impact 3 in the Visual Quality subsection.

## **Determination of Significance under CEQA**

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### **Standards of Significance**

The *Standards of Significance* discussion in each section of this chapter describes the criteria by which an adverse effect (impact) is declared and therefore in need of mitigation (i.e., an action to avoid, minimize, or compensate for the effect). These criteria are largely based on standards used by VTA and professional practice. Where appropriate, criteria are based on State or federal standards (e.g., air quality significance criteria or thresholds are based on the State and federal ambient air quality standards, noise significant thresholds are based on criteria defined by FTA). Also, where appropriate, criteria are based on the State CEQA Guidelines that are used by VTA, which generally describe circumstances under which impacts considered significant.

### **Types of Impacts**

Under CEQA, the following types of impacts are identified:

**No Impact (NI):** A finding of *no impact* is made when the analysis concludes that the proposed project would not affect the resource or issue area in any way.

**Less Than Significant (LTS):** An impact is considered *less than significant* if the analysis concludes that the impact of the proposed project would not exceed established or defined thresholds.

**Significant (S):** An impact is considered *significant* or *potentially significant* (not clear whether a significant impact would occur) if the analysis concludes that the proposed project could have a substantial adverse impact on the resource or issue area by exceeding an established or defined threshold. For example, air pollutant emissions that exceed federal ambient air quality standards or elimination of a rare or endangered species would be a significant adverse impact. In cases in which an impact is *potentially significant*, the analysis conservatively assesses reasonably foreseeable potential impacts, but the discussion acknowledges that there is uncertainty regarding the extent of the impact. Mitigation can be implemented to reduce a significant or potentially significant impact to a less-than-significant level, such that no substantial adverse change in the environment is expected to result.

**Significant and Unavoidable (SU):** An impact is considered *significant and unavoidable* if the analysis concludes that the effects of the proposed project exceeds established or defined thresholds that could have a substantial adverse effect on the resource or issue area, and no mitigation is available to reduce the impact to a less-than-significant level.

**Beneficial (B):** *Beneficial* effects include impacts that enhance or improve an existing environmental condition.