

# 5 CHAPTER 5 IMPACT OVERVIEW

## 5.1 SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE IMPACTS

As required by Section 15126.2(b) of the *CEQA Guidelines*, this section identifies project impacts that could not be eliminated or reduced to a less-than-significant level with the incorporation of mitigation measures identified in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

The potential impacts associated with the Proposed Project are described in detail in **Chapter 3**. Out of the 12 impact categories discussed in that Chapter, the following significant and unavoidable impacts would occur as a result of the Proposed Project:

- Operational increases in Greenhouse Gas emissions in 2030 (**Impact 3.3.9**)
- Loss of Airport Creek wildlife movement corridor for large mammals (**Impact 3.4.14**)
- Short-term construction noise impacts (**Impact 3.10.1**)
- U.S. 101 freeway operation for 2030 (**Impact 3.12.9**)

Mitigation measures have been identified to reduce these impacts. However, even with the implementation of these mitigation measures, these impacts would be considered significant and unavoidable.

## 5.2 SIGNIFICANT IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

CEQA requires that significant irreversible environmental changes caused by a proposed project be addressed in an EIR.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the EIR must consider whether “uses of non-renewable resources during the construction and operational phases of the project may be irreversible since a large commitment of such resources makes removal or non-use thereafter unlikely” or whether land use changes would permanently restrict any future development. Nonrenewable resources, in this context, refer to the physical features of the natural environment, such as land, air, and waterways. A discussion of such changes is described below.

### 5.2.1 Use of Non-Renewable Resources

The Proposed Project would require the use of fuels and energy from construction vehicles to perform all the activities associated with the project elements. The increase in use of local fuels associated with the transportation and construction demand would have an irreversible effect on air quality within the Regional Study Area.

### 5.2.2 Conversion of Agricultural Land Uses

Construction of the Proposed Project would convert approximately 14 acres of prime farmland, 17 acres of farmland of statewide importance, 31 acres of farmland of local importance to non-agricultural uses within existing Airport property. This farmland would not be available for any type of future cultivation due to the short-term and long-term project elements that would directly

<sup>1</sup> CEQA Guidelines, Section 15126.2(c) [14 Cal. Code Regs. § 15126.2(c)].

or indirectly affect these areas. Acquisition of Williamson Act Farmlands outside the existing Airport boundary would require the County to cancel the existing Williamson Act contracts through a process called the *Williamson Act Program – Easement Exchanges*. While these farmlands would not be available to private owners for farming operations in the future, an agricultural conservation easement would dedicate other land to preserve every acre of agricultural resources within Sonoma County. The majority of this farmland is currently owned by the Airport and not used for agricultural purposes. Thus, while the conversion is irreversible, any impact associated with the conversion is minimal.

### **5.2.3 Use of Utility Services**

The Proposed Project would require the use of additional utility services such as water and electricity to meet increased demand at the Airport. The commitment of these services would be long-term and irreversible, but their use is not expected to result in significant long-term shortfalls in the availability of these resources. No new generation facilities would be required. Energy consumed by the project is not likely to contribute to intermittent statewide energy shortfalls.

## **5.3 GROWTH INDUCING IMPACTS**

This section discusses the ways in which the Proposed Project could foster economic or population growth. Growth-inducing impacts are caused by those characteristics of a project that tend to foster or encourage population and/or economic growth. Inducements to growth include the generation of construction and permanent employment opportunities in the support sector of the economy. A project could also induce growth by lowering or removing barriers to growth or by creating an amenity that attracts new population or economic activity.

In accordance with Section 15126.2(d) of the *CEQA Guidelines*, an EIR must:

“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. Included in this are projects which would remove obstacles to population growth ... Increases in the population may tax existing community service facilities, requiring construction of new facilities that could cause significant environmental effects. Also discuss the characteristics of some projects which may encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment, either individually or cumulatively. It must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.”

Two issues must be considered when assessing the growth-inducing impacts of a project:

- Elimination of obstacles to population growth: The extent to which additional infrastructure capacity or a change in regulatory structure would allow additional development in the City; and
- Promotion of economic growth: The extent to which the proposed project can cause increased activity in the local or regional economy. Economic impacts can include direct effects, such as the direction and strategies implemented within the project area, and indirect or secondary impacts, such as increased commercial activity needed to serve the additional population projected from the project..

### **5.3.1 Elimination of Obstacles to Population Growth**

The elimination of either physical or regulatory obstacles to population growth is considered to be a growth-inducing impact. A physical obstacle to population growth typically involves the lack of public service infrastructure. The extension of public service infrastructure, including roadways, water mains, and sewer lines, into areas not currently provided with these services is expected to support new development. Similarly, the elimination of or change to a regulatory obstacle, including existing growth and development policies, can result in new population growth.

The Proposed Project neither extends public service infrastructure into new areas nor eliminates or changes a regulatory obstacle that can result in new population growth. Current County and local land use plans and policies are the guiding force on whether future business and residential growth can be accommodated by the existing infrastructure facilities and services within the Regional Study Area. Development at the Airport is not directly related to future development and growth potential within the Regional Study Area. Instead, Airport development is designed to accommodate the forecasted demand for airline passengers up until the year 2030 (see **Appendix E** for forecasts). This forecast is based on a variety of air traffic demand factors described in the *Sonoma County Airport Master Plan* (June 2011 Draft). The Forecasts show that Airport enplanements will grow from 92,659 in 2010 to 275,101 (Low Growth: Regional Dominant scenario) by the year 2030.<sup>2</sup>

Based on the CEQA Guidelines, the Proposed Project would not induce economic or population growth, or cause the construction of additional housing in the surrounding environment. Much of the land surrounding the Airport is designated for urban or agricultural uses with limited infrastructure due to the proximity of the Airport operations. Even with additional air traffic forecasted by 2030, the Airport only expects an increase of 40 employees. This slight increase in growth would not significantly affect the demand for goods and services within the local environment or within the Regional Study Area. Moreover, the Proposed Project is consistent with the land use and growth management policies in the Sonoma County General Plan. Thus, there is no anticipated adverse impact to growth resulting from the Proposed Project since it consistent with County and local use plans and policies.

### **5.3.2 Growth Inducement Effects**

Growth inducement may constitute an adverse impact if the growth is not consistent with the land use and growth management policies for the affected area. The Sonoma County General Plan, and land use and growth management plans and policies of cities within the County, guide development patterns and provide for orderly development supported by adequate public services. A project that would induce “disorderly” growth in conflict with local land use plans could indirectly cause additional adverse environmental impacts to other public services.

While the increase in air passengers under the Proposed Project could result in additional economic growth in the Regional Study Area, it would be a minor increase that would already be accounted for in existing land use plans for Sonoma County and the Town of Windsor. Since the Proposed Project is responding to accommodation of forecasted growth based on the Airport Master Plan, there would be no indirect effect of growth within the Regional Study Area. In addition, the potential economic growth of airport and passenger oriented businesses within the Airport Study Area alone is not a stimulus to new development. The Sonoma County General

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<sup>2</sup> Sonoma County, *Sonoma County Airport Master Plan*, June 2011.

Plans already anticipates the amount of growth and development that is planned and build out of the Proposed Project is not expected to encourage any development or growth in addition to, or in conflict with, the adopted General Plan.

## **5.4 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

According to Section 15130 of the *CEQA Guidelines*, an EIR shall discuss the cumulative impacts of a project. A cumulative impact consists of an impact that is created as a result of the combination of the project evaluated in the EIR together with other projects causing related impacts.

There are a variety of existing and reasonably foreseeable projects within the Regional Study Area. For the short-term (prior to 2015), the following public-sector projects have been identified by Sonoma County, the Sonoma County Transportation Agency (SCTA), the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), and the Town of Windsor:

- Improve Airport Boulevard interchange with U.S. Highway 101;
- Improve Airport Boulevard / Skylane Road intersection;
- Improve Brickway Boulevard Bridge and the River Road / Laughlin Road (Brickway) intersection;
- Install solar panel farm on Airport property;
- Construct energy plant on property east of the Airport owned by SCWA; and
- Improvements to U.S. Highway 101.

The short-term projects on or adjacent to the Airport (i.e., the solar panel farm and the energy plant) have been reviewed by the FAA and are considered to be compatible with Airport operations.

In addition, Sonoma County and the Town of Windsor have identified a variety of private-sector projects within the Regional Study Area that are anticipated to be completed from 2011 to 2016. These projects include the following:

- 79 residential lots in the Town of Windsor
- 606 residential units in the Town of Windsor
- 16 industrial lots in the Town of Windsor
- Medical building in the Town of Windsor
- 12 commercial live / work units in the Town of Windsor
- 3 office buildings in the Town of Windsor
- Wine storage warehouse in the Town of Windsor
- Four office / industrial buildings in unincorporated Sonoma County
- Winery in unincorporated Sonoma County

### *Cumulative Impacts*

The cumulative impacts associated with the Proposed Project were largely discussed in **Chapter 3**. The Proposed Project would contribute to increases in construction-related and operation-related air pollutant emissions in the Regional Study Area. As discussed in **Section 3.3**, these increases would not violate any air quality emission standard. The Proposed

Project also would contribute to an increase in GHG emissions. As described in **Section 3.3**, this increase in GHG emissions is considered to be a significant impact.

As described in **Section 3.4**, implementation of the Proposed Project would result in both temporary and permanent impact to seasonal wetlands, riparian habitat, woodlands, and grasslands that support, or may support, special status species, and impacts to wildlife corridor movement. The implementation of the proposed solar panel farm on portions of the Airport could result in additional impacts to special status species. Any impacts associated with the development of the solar panel farm would be required to implement mitigation measures in compliance with the Santa Rosa Plain Conservation Strategy. Similarly, any other development within the Regional Study Area that would affect biological resources would be required to mitigate for impacts.

The Proposed Project would contribute to cumulative noise impacts as a result of construction, and for operations, in areas to the north of the Airport. As described in **Section 3.10**, these areas are depicted in **Figures 3.10-14** and **3.10-15**. Mitigation measures have been identified to reduce this cumulative impact to a less-than-significant level (see **Mitigation Measure 3.10.5**).

Implementation of the short-term elements of the Proposed Project would not result in any changes to the transportation infrastructure in the Airport vicinity. As described in **Section 3.12**, the Proposed Project would contribute to increases in traffic volumes in the Airport vicinity. In addition, the analysis contained in Section 3.12 addresses the traffic-related cumulative impacts and the contribution of the Proposed Project to those impacts.

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