

Chapter 4 Environmental Analysis

Sections 4.1 through 4.10 in this chapter contain a discussion of the potential environmental effects from implementation of the OC River Walk Project (project), including the current environmental setting, regulatory setting, method of analysis, thresholds of significance, impacts (including cumulative), and mitigation measures.

Scope of the Environmental Impacts Analysis

In accordance with Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, the potential environmental effects from the project are analyzed in this chapter for the following environmental issue areas. Other environmental issues identified in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines have been scoped out from further analysis, as they were determined to have no impact or a less than significant impact in the Initial Study prepared during the Notice of Preparation process. The Notice of Preparation and the accompanying Initial Study were circulated for public review from March 23, 2023, through April 24, 2023, and are included as Appendix A to this Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Environmental issues found to have no or less than significant impacts are also included in Section 6.4, Effects Found Not to Be Significant.

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources

Format of the Environmental Impact Analysis

The following subsections compose each of the 10 environmental issue area sections in Sections 4.1 through 4.10 of this Draft EIR.

Environmental Setting

This subsection describes the current environmental setting of each environmental issue area. According to Section 15125 of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must include a description of the existing physical environmental conditions in the project vicinity to provide the “baseline conditions” against which project-related impacts are compared. Normally, the baseline conditions are the physical conditions that exist when the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published. The NOP for the project was published on March 23, 2023, and the baseline conditions contained in this Draft EIR are generally taken from this time period. However, the CEQA Guidelines and applicable case law recognize that the date for establishing an environmental baseline cannot always be rigid. Physical environmental conditions may vary over a range of time periods; thus, the use of environmental baselines that differ from the publication date of the NOP is reasonable

and appropriate when conducting the environmental analyses. Some sections rely on a variety of data to establish an applicable baseline. For example, in Sections 4.1, Air Quality; 4.2, Biological Resources; 4.3, Cultural Resources; 4.6, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, 4.9, Transportation; and 4.10, Tribal Cultural Resources, available data was months and sometimes several years old. Therefore, projections regarding how those conditions might have changed were incorporated into the EIR sections and corresponding technical reports.

This subsection also provides a summary of regulations, plans, policies, and laws that are relevant to each environmental issue area at the federal, state, and local levels.

Thresholds of Significance

This subsection identifies the criteria used to determine whether potential environmental effects are significant. The thresholds of significance used in this analysis were primarily based on Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. However, in some cases, thresholds were developed specifically for this analysis or were adapted from standards adopted by other agencies or entities. This subsection defines the type, amount, and/or extent of impact that would be considered a significant, adverse change in the environment. Some thresholds of significance are quantitative, while others are qualitative. The thresholds of significance are intended to assist the reader in understanding how and why this Draft EIR reaches a conclusion that an impact is significant, potentially significant, or less than significant.

Plans, Programs, and Policies

This subsection addresses plans, programs, and policies relevant to the project.

Environmental Impacts

This subsection describes the potential environmental impacts of the project and, based on the thresholds of significance, concludes if the environmental impacts would be significant, potentially significant, or less than significant or if no impact would occur. Each impact criterion is addressed in its own subsection. This format is designed to assist the reader in quickly identifying the subject of each impact analysis and for use in Table ES-2, Summary of Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures, which forms the basis of the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.

The analysis of environmental impacts considers both the construction and operational phases associated with implementation of the project. As required by Section 15126.2(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, direct, indirect, long-term, short-term, on-site, and/or off-site impacts are addressed, as appropriate, for the environmental issue area being analyzed. This Draft EIR uses the following terms to describe the level of significance of impacts identified during the course of the environmental analysis:

- **No Impact:** “No impact” refers to implementation of the proposed project having no impact on environmental conditions.
- **Less than Significant Impact:** “Less than significant” refers to two conditions:

- Impacts resulting from implementation of the project that are not likely to exceed the defined standards of significance.
- Potentially significant impacts before implementation of mitigation measures. If implementation of the specified mitigation measures would reduce the potentially significant impact to a level that does not exceed the defined standards of significance, the impact is considered less than significant.
- **Potentially Significant Impact:** “Potentially significant” refers to impacts resulting from implementation of the project that may exceed defined standards of significance before mitigation is considered.
- **Significant and Unavoidable Impact:** “Significant and unavoidable” refers to impacts resulting from implementation of the project that cannot be eliminated or reduced to below the defined standards of significance or a less than significant level through implementation of feasible mitigation measures.

A “significant effect” is defined by Section 15382 of the CEQA Guidelines as “a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. An economic or social change by itself shall not be considered a significant effect on the environment . . . [but] may be considered in determining whether the physical change is significant.”

Cumulative Impacts

CEQA requires that EIRs discuss cumulative impacts in addition to project impacts. In accordance with CEQA, the discussion of cumulative impacts must reflect the severity of the impacts and the likelihood of their occurrence; however, the discussion need not be as detailed as the discussion of environmental impacts attributable to the project alone. Further, the discussion should be guided by the standards of practicality and reasonableness (CEQA Guidelines, Section 15130[b]). Please refer to Section 3.3 of this Draft EIR for additional information on cumulative impact methodology.

Level of Significance before Mitigation

This subsection identifies the level of significance of project impacts before mitigation measures are implemented.

Mitigation Measures

This subsection identifies mitigation measures for each impact criterion when applicable.

Level of Significance after Mitigation

This subsection identifies the level of significance of project impacts after mitigation measures are implemented.

This page intentionally left blank.