

Notice of Preparation

Date: March 14, 2025

To: Reference List of Recipients

From: **Patricia Taylor, Executive Director**
Madera County Transportation Commission - Lead Agency
2001 Howard Road, Suite 201
Madera, CA 93637, (559) 675-0721, patricia@maderactc.org

Subject: Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting for a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Madera County Transportation Commission (MCTC) 2026 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)

The Madera County Transportation Commission (MCTC) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the 2026 RTP/SCS. MCTC is requesting input regarding the scope and content of the environmental information, which is germane to your agency’s statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. The public is also encouraged to provide input. The project title, location, environmental review requirements, agency background and overview, project description, and probable environmental issues to be addressed in the PEIR are attached. An Initial Study is not attached and is not required pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15060(d).

Your response is requested at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice or by **Monday, April 14, 2025**. Please respond to Ms. Patricia Taylor, Executive Director, by email (preferred) or at the physical address below. Please identify the name, phone number, and email address of a contact person at your agency.

By E-Mail:
patricia@maderactc.org

By Mail:
2001 Howard Road, Suite 201
Madera, CA 93637

The project is of regional significance; therefore, in addition to the written comments you may provide, your verbal comments regarding the preparation of the PEIR are also requested. A virtual scoping meeting will be held on **Thursday, March 20, 2025**, beginning at 9:00 AM via the Zoom platform. Please register in advance for this meeting using the following link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/879m4FJoTn2HpyzQ3aFO5w>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. Agency and/or public input can be provided in writing before or after the Scoping Meeting until April 14, 2025. MCTC looks forward to receiving your comments regarding this important project for our region.

Attachment

Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting
Program Environmental Impact Report
Project Overview and Scope of Environmental Analysis
MCTC 2026 Regional Transportation Plan and
Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)
March 14, 2025

Project Title

Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Madera County Transportation Commission (MCTC) 2026 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

Location

Within the corporate limits of Madera County, California, including the two (2) incorporated cities (Chowchilla and Madera) and all unincorporated areas under the jurisdiction of the County of Madera . Located in the central section of the San Joaquin Valley in Central California, Madera County encompasses 2,153 square miles of land. Merced and Mariposa counties bound the county to the north, Mono County to the east, and Fresno County to the south and west. The 2024 population in Madera County was 160,788, according to the California State Department of Finance (DOF). Encompassing 2,153 square miles, the County is situated near the State's geographic center along State Route (SR) 99, approximately 160 miles south of San Francisco. The County has an altitude near Madera of 200 feet above sea level to 12,989 feet above sea level in the Sierra Nevada.

CEQA Requirements

The RTP/SCS PEIR will be prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State CEQA Guidelines. CEQA requires public agencies, such as MCTC, to consider the potential environmental impacts of the proposed 2026 RTP/SCS. The objectives of CEQA are to:

- ✓ Disclose to the MCTC Board and the public the potential environmental impacts of the proposed RTP/SCS
- ✓ Propose feasible alternatives or mitigation measures that avoid, eliminate, or reduce project-related environmental effects and disclose if there are unavoidable impacts
- ✓ Describe the analytical process which leads to MCTC’s decision on the project
- ✓ Promote interagency coordination
- ✓ Provide a mechanism for increasing public participation in the planning process

The environmental document will be prepared as a “Programmatic” or “Program” EIR (PEIR), which is a type of first-tier document as defined in CEQA Guidelines Sections 15152 (Tiering) and 15168 (Program EIR). A Program EIR is prepared for an agency program or series of actions that can be characterized as one large project.

Typically, such a project involves actions that are closely related geographically and are logical parts of a chain of contemplated events, rules, regulations, or plans that govern the conduct of a continuing program with generally similar environmental effects and mitigation measures. The RTP/SCS would be such a project.

It is noted that additional environmental analysis by local jurisdictions or other agencies of individual projects contained in the 2026 RTP/SCS may be required. The tiering concept is a multi-level approach to streamlining subsequent environmental reviews. This first-tier RTP/SCS PEIR will analyze general matters (i.e., broad policies, the planned regional multi-modal transportation system, related impacts, and program-wide mitigation measures). Subsequent tiers prepared by local jurisdictions or other agencies (later EIRs and Negative Declarations) will include an analysis of narrower, subsequent projects by “incorporating by reference” the general discussions from the broader first-tier RTP/SCS PEIR. Second-tier environmental reviews will focus on the impacts of individual improvement projects that implement the RTP/SCS, related programs, and/or policy(ies).

Regional Planning Background and Overview

MCTC is a voluntary association of local governments created in 1973 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement composed of elected officials of Madera County and its two (2) incorporated cities. In addition, MCTC is the designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) and the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which qualifies it for Federal transportation funding as identified in Title 23 U.S.C. Section 134 and Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450.300. MPOs are federally designated while the State designated RTPAs are described under California Government Code Section 29532 et seq.

As part of the regional transportation planning process, MCTC studies potential transportation improvements, forecasts future conditions and needs, and pools its member agencies' planning resources and expertise to facilitate the development of a shared strategic vision for transportation and development in the region. These responsibilities enable MCTC to fulfill federal and State planning requirements and maintain the eligibility of the Madera region for federal and State funding for transportation planning and improvements.

According to the 2024 California Regional Transportation Planning Guidelines, prepared by the California Transportation Commission (CTC), MCTC is required to adopt and submit an updated RTP to the CTC and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) every four (4) years.

The 2026 RTP is a planning document to be developed by MCTC in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Caltrans, and other stakeholders, including transportation system users. Following the passage of *Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32) – The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006*, which specifies that by the year 2020, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within the State must be at 1990 levels, *Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) – The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008* was signed into law as the framework for achieving greenhouse gas emissions reductions from land use and transportation planning.

SB 375 includes four (4) primary findings related to the RTP/SCS development process:

- ✓ That the California Air Resource Board (ARB) develop regional GHG emission reduction targets for cars and light trucks for each of the 18 MPOs in California, including MCTC
- ✓ During this next RTP update, MCTC must prepare an SCS that specifies how the GHG emissions reduction target set by ARB will be achieved. If the target cannot be met through the SCS, then an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) shall be prepared by MCTC
- ✓ Streamlines CEQA requires specific residential and mixed-use developments that are consistent with the Madera County SCS or APS (as determined by ARB) to achieve the regional GHG emissions reduction target
- ✓ It requires that MCTC conduct the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) process consistently with the RTP/SCS process and that the RHNA allocations be consistent with the development pattern in the SCS. The last RHNA planning cycle was during the 2022 RTP/SCS planning cycle. The RTP must be updated every four years, and the RHNA Plan every eight years. Therefore, every other RTP coincides with the RHNA planning process

Project Description

The project, as defined pursuant to the Public Resources Code, Section 21065, is the preparation of the 2026 RTP/SCS. MCTC is in the process of preparing the RTP/SCS as required by Section 65080 et seq., of Chapter 2.5 of the California Government Code, federal guidelines pursuant to new requirements established in the federal surface transportation reauthorization, including the “Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act of 2021 or the “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) 2021-2026,” the “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) 2016-2020,” the “Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Acts – 2012-2014,” Transportation Conformity for the Air Quality Attainment Plan per 40 CFR Part 51 and 40 CFR Part 93, and requirements outlined in *Assembly Bill 32*, *The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006*, and *Senate Bill 375 The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008*. Finally, the CTC has prepared guidelines (most recently adopted by the CTC in 2024) to assist in preparing the RTP/SCS.

The last comprehensive EIR on the RTP/SCS was completed in August 2022 and addressed transportation improvement projects, programs, and funding sources.

The 2026 RTP/SCS will address all transportation modes, including motor vehicles, transit (commuter and local), rail (commuter and interregional), goods movement (rail freight and trucking), bicycle and pedestrian facilities, aviation systems, and transportation systems management (TSM) programs and projects considering the horizon year of 2049. In addition, the 2026 RTP/SCS will:

- ✓ Identify the region’s transportation goals, objectives, and policies
- ✓ Include the SCS, which demonstrates how the region will meet its GHG reduction targets (currently being discussed by the California Air Resources Board and the eight (8) San Joaquin Valley Regional Transportation Planning Agencies) through integrated land use and housing and transportation planning. *Once adopted by MCTC, the SCS becomes an integral part of the RTP*
- ✓ Set forth an action plan of projects and programs to address the needs consistent with goals such as those listed below from the 2022 RTP/SCS:

- **Improve Quality of Life** - MCTC’s plans, programs, and policies will work to improve the quality of life in the Madera County region by integrating transportation systems that promote access to affordable housing, education resources, jobs, and recreational facilities.
- **Raise Economic Prosperity** - MCTC’s plans, programs, and policies will facilitate enhanced economic viability of the region by increasing access to education and new job opportunities. A more educated population combined with a low cost of living can attract new investment in the Madera region.
- **Cultural Diversity** - MCTC’s plans, programs, and policies will respect the region’s wide variety of cultures and subcultures (each having unique needs and perspectives) by facilitating a range of transportation modes and housing choices designed to benefit the County’s diverse population.
- **Promote Public Health and a Cleaner Environment** - MCTC’s plans, programs, and policies will give preference to new development and economic prosperity in ways that ensure the health of its citizens, maintain and enhance the surrounding environment (cultural and socioeconomic resources), and those ways that enhance the region’s financial stability over time.

Specifically, the RTP/SCS will include the following sections, which may be reorganized or modified:

Potential Chapters:

Chapter 1 Introduction – Introduces the setting and purpose of the RTP/SCS, the key guiding regulations, previous regional milestones, and preview of the plan contents.

Chapter 2 Policy Element – a comprehensive listing of goals, objectives, and strategies that identifies the necessary steps to implement the RTP/SCS.

Chapter 3 Sustainable Communities Strategy – A detailing of the collaborative process behind the creation of a planning scenario able to achieve the goals of SB 375 for the Madera region.

Chapter 4 Action Element – Describes the regional assumption, transportation system and how needs are addressed across various modes.

Chapter 5 Financial Element – Outlines the projected revenues for the region and expenditures to implement the RTP/CS.

Chapter 6 Environmental Justice - Summarizes key findings from the Environmental Justice and Equity Analysis for the Madera region.

Appendices – A collection of documents providing supporting information for the contents of the plan.

Potential Appendices:

- A. Appendices Appendix A – RTP Checklist
- B. Appendix B – Project Listing
- C. Appendix C - Public Participation Plan
- D. Appendix D – RTP/SCS Outreach Summary Report
- E. Appendix E - Madera County Project Prioritization Study
- F. Appendix F – Madera County Travel Demand Model 2019 Update Report
- G. Appendix G – Transportation Performance Measures
- H. Appendix H - State Route 99 Business Plan
- I. Appendix I - State Route 41/Avenue 9 Sustainable Corridor Study
- J. Appendix J – Madera County Short-Range Transit Development Plan
- K. Appendix K - Madera County Active Transportation Plan and Complete Streets Guide
- L. Appendix L - SR 233/Robertson Boulevard Corridor Planning Study and Downtown Master Plan
- M. Appendix M - La Vina Mobility Study
- N. Appendix N – Environmental Justice and Equity Report
- O. Appendix O – Valleywide Chapter
- P. Appendix P – San Joaquin Valley Interregional Goods Movement Plan
- Q. Appendix Q - Madera County RHNA Determination
- R. Appendix R - Resolution FTIP RTP
- S. Appendix S - Public Notice
- T. Appendix T - Response To Comments

Preliminary 2026 RTP Project Alternatives and SCS Alternative Scenarios

The following project alternatives were addressed in the 2022 RTP/SCS PEIR and will likely be revised during development of the 2026 RTP/SCS considering local agency and public outreach and input:

- ✓ **No Project**
- ✓ **Scenario 1 Continued Trends** - Assumes growth and housing development like what we see existing in our region today. Maintains a road-centric investment strategy with gradual increases towards multi-modal strategies.
- ✓ **Scenario 2 Moderate Shift** – Moderately increases densities of housing and development in urbanized areas with slight increases to densities in the remainder of the county. Conservative shift in investment towards zero-emission vehicle infrastructure, public transit, shared ride options, micromobility, and non-motorized transportation strategies.
- ✓ **Scenario 3 Conservation and Mobility** – Prioritized development in infill and redevelopment zones, assumes more compact lot sizes in core urban areas, moderate increases to densities in urban areas and slight increases to densities in the remainder of the county, outside of urban cores. Accelerates investment shift towards zero-emission vehicle infrastructure, public transit, shared ride options, micromobility, and non-motorized transportation strategies.

CEQA Streamlining (SB 375 and SB 226)

SB 375 and SB 226 provide “exemptions” for certain types of projects from CEQA review, or projects may qualify for streamlined review if they conform to the regional SCS or the APS (if applicable). Projects qualify for streamlined CEQA review even if they conflict with local plans following the adoption of the SCS.

Environmental Issues to be Addressed in the PEIR

The programs and projects to be included in the 2026 RTP/SCS will be analyzed through the development of the PEIR. This will allow MCTC to analyze the regional or general impacts of the programs and projects. A more detailed or project-level environmental assessment (if required) of the various projects included in the RTP/SCS will be conducted by the various responsible agencies, including Caltrans, Madera County, and the cities within the Madera region before the projects are approved for construction and implementation.

Potential environmental impacts that could result from the Project include project impacts to:

- ✓ Aesthetics
- ✓ Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- ✓ Air Quality
- ✓ Biological Resources
- ✓ Climate Change
- ✓ Cultural Resources & Tribal Cultural Resources
- ✓ Energy and Energy Conservation
- ✓ Geology/Soils/Mineral Resources
- ✓ Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- ✓ Hydrology and Water Quality
- ✓ Land Use, Planning, and Recreation
- ✓ Noise and Vibration
- ✓ Population, Housing, and Employment
- ✓ Public Utilities, Other Utilities, and Services Systems
- ✓ Social and Economic Effects
- ✓ Transportation/Traffic in accordance with SB 743
- ✓ Wildfire
- ✓ Alternatives (noted above), Cumulative Effects, Growth Inducing Impacts, and Other Issues required by CEQA
- ✓ Mandatory Findings of Significance

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March 14, 2025

Date: March 14, 2025

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