



# Notice of Preparation

**Date:** May 13, 2025

**To:** Reference List of Recipients

**From:** Paul Herman, Deputy Director  
 Fresno Council of Governments–Lead Agency  
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**Subject:** Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting for a Program Environmental Impact Report for the Fresno Council of Governments 2026 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy

Notice is hereby given that the Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) will serve as the lead agency and will prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) addressing potential environmental impacts associated with the 2026 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS). The PEIR will examine potential project impacts consistent with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (*State CEQA Guidelines*) Section 15082. The Fresno COG has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to provide information regarding the proposed project and areas of potential environmental effects proposed to be analyzed in the PEIR.

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 *State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15060(d).

The 30-day comment period runs from May 13, 2025 through June 12, 2025. Comments on the NOP are due no later than 5 p.m. on June 12, 2025. Please send your response to Paul Herman, Deputy Director, at the email (preferred) address or office address shown below. Please identify your (or your organization’s) name, phone number, and email address as part of your comment.

By Email	By Mail
<a href="mailto:pherman@fresnocog.org">pherman@fresnocog.org</a>	2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201 Fresno, CA 93721

The project is of regional significance; therefore, in addition to your written comments provided, your verbal comments regarding preparation of the PEIR are also accepted. A hybrid scoping meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 28, 2025 beginning at 4:00 p.m. in person at the Fresno COG Offices at 2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201, Fresno, CA 93721 in the Sequoia Room and via the Zoom platform at <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88202269828?pwd=azYiZZUcAg1T4KhQDENPuR9Q8HZn0L.1>

Fresno COG looks forward to receiving your comments regarding this important project for our region.

## Project Title

Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Fresno Council of Governments 2026 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

## Location

Fresno COG is one of 38 regional planning agencies within California. Fresno COG works in partnership with its member agencies to plan the future transportation system, taking into consideration future growth estimates, potential development, and land use patterns outlined in each of the adopted or draft general plans prepared by these agencies. The Fresno COG planning area is approximately 6,000 square miles near the geographic center of California, approximately 220 miles north of Los Angeles, and includes the corporate limits of Fresno County, California, including the 15 incorporated cities (Clovis, Coalinga, Firebaugh, Fowler, Fresno, Huron, Kerman, Kingsburg, Mendota, Orange Cove, Parlier, Reedley, San Joaquin, Sanger, and Selma) and all unincorporated areas under the jurisdiction of the county (refer to Figure 1, which shows the area to be addressed by the PEIR and the RTP/SCS).

## Existing Conditions

According to the United States Census Bureau, Fresno County is the second largest county in California's San Joaquin Valley region.<sup>1</sup> Based on the most recent estimates from the State Department of Finance (DOF), the estimated population in January 2024 was 1,017,950,<sup>2</sup> placing Fresno County as the 10th most populous county of the 58 counties in California. The City of Fresno is the fifth largest city in the State, with a current (2024) population of 546,971. The region's population is projected to grow to 1,119,535 by 2045.<sup>3</sup> The existing intermodal transportation network consists of a large network of Interstate and State routes, county roads, airports, and rail lines (refer to Figure 2). Key highway travel routes include Interstate 5 (southeast to northwest in the western portion of the county) and State Route 99 (southeast to northwest through Fresno) provide vital statewide transportation of people and goods. State Routes 33, 41, 168, and 180 provide additional intermodal access and provide opportunities to recreational areas in the county. Fresno County also maintains more than 3,400 miles of paved and unpaved roads.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, as one of the largest farm commodity producers in the world, Fresno County has a strong "farm-to-market" travel demand affecting local roads and the State highways system. Freight movement occurs throughout the county, as farm agricultural and other commodities are brought to market and onto interregional routes. Amtrak serves Fresno and it is experiencing increasing ridership.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Census Bureau. 2020. Fresno County, California. Website: [https://data.census.gov/profile/Fresno\\_County,\\_California?g=050XX00US06019](https://data.census.gov/profile/Fresno_County,_California?g=050XX00US06019) (accessed April 2025).

<sup>2</sup> State of California Department of Finance. 2024a. *Population and Housing Estimates for Cities, Counties, and the State — January 1, 2023 and 2024*. Website: <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/estimates-e1/> (accessed April 2025).

<sup>3</sup> State of California Department of Finance. 2024b. *County Population Projections (2020-2070)*. Website: <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/projections/> (accessed April 2025).

<sup>4</sup> County of Fresno. 2025. Road and Maintenance and Operations Division. <https://www.fresnocountyca.gov/Departments/Public-Works-and-Planning/divisions-of-public-works-and-planning/road-maintenance-and-operations-division> (accessed May 2025)





FIGURE 2

LSA



SOURCE: 2022 Regional Transportation Plan: Sustainable Communities Strategy 2022

I:\2025219(G)\Transportation\_Network a (5/12/2025)

LEGEND

- Airports
- Class 1 Trails
- Rail
- Freeways
- Expressways
- Super Arterials
- Arterials
- Collectors

Fresno Council of Governments 2026 Regional Transportation Plan  
and the Sustainable Communities Strategy Project  
Intermodal Transportation Network

Fresno-Yosemite International Airport provides a hub airport to its service areas of six counties and is one of nine public airports in the Fresno COG planning area. Fresno County has a Regional Active Transportation Plan (approved by the Fresno COG May 30, 2024), which involves expansion and connectivity of shared use paths, separated bikeways, bike lanes, bike routes, yield roadways, and bicycle parking throughout the county and its 15 cities.<sup>5</sup>

## CEQA Requirements

The RTP/SCS PEIR will be prepared in accordance with CEQA and the *State CEQA Guidelines*. CEQA requires public agencies, such as the Fresno COG, to consider the potential environmental impacts of the proposed 2026 RTP/SCS. The objectives of CEQA are to:

- Disclose to the Fresno COG 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.
- Describe the analytical process that leads to Fresno COG’s decision on the project.
- Promote interagency coordination.
- Provide a mechanism for increasing public participation in the planning process.

Pursuant to *State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15168, the EIR will be prepared as a PEIR. This PEIR is intended to serve as the first tier of environmental review, providing a foundation for future, site-specific projects that may be implemented under the RTP/SCS. *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15168 describes a PEIR as an EIR that may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related (1) by geography; (2) by local parts in the chain of contemplated actions; (3) in connection with issuance of rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria; or (4) as individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects. The proposed PEIR to the RTP/SCS will be connected by criterion 1 for all subsequent projects and, for some subsequent projects, may meet all or portions of criteria 2, 3, and 4.

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 include an analysis of general matters (i.e., broad policies, the planned regional multi-modal transportation system and 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

Fresno COG is a voluntary association of local governments and is one of California’s 38 regional transportation planning agencies (RTPAs). Fresno COG was created in 1967 through a Joint Powers Agreement composed of the Fresno County and the 15 incorporated cities. In addition, Fresno COG is a

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<sup>5</sup> Fresno Council of Governments. 2024. *Final Fresno County Regional Active Transportation Plan*. <https://www.fresnocog.org/project/active-transportation/> (accessed May 2025)

federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which qualifies it for federal transportation funding as identified in Title 23 United States Code Section 134 and Title 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 450.300. MPOs are federally designated, whereas the State-designated RTPAs are described under California Government Code Section 29532 et seq. Fresno COG is both an MPO and an RTPA.

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

According to the 2024 California Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines, prepared by the California Transportation Commission (CTC), Fresno COG is required to adopt an updated RTP every 4 years. The 2026 RTP is a planning document to be developed by Fresno COG in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and other stakeholders, including transportation system users. Senate Bill (SB) 375 requires:

- That the California Air Resource Board (CARB) develop regional GHG emission reduction targets for cars and light trucks for each of the 18 MPOs in California, including Fresno COG.
- That Fresno COG prepare an SCS that specifies how the GHG emission reduction target set by CARB will be achieved. If the target cannot be met through the SCS, then an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) shall be prepared by Fresno COG.
- That CEQA requirements streamline for specific residential and mixed-use developments that are consistent with the SCS or APS (as determined by CARB) to achieve the regional GHG emission reduction targets.

## Project Description

The project, as defined pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21065, is the preparation of the 2026 RTP/SCS. Fresno COG 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 “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century”, the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Acts, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Transportation Conformity for the Air Quality Attainment Plan per 40 CFR Part 51 and Part 93, and requirements set forth in Assembly Bill 32, The California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, and SB 375, The Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008. Finally, the CTC has prepared guidelines (most recently adopted by the CTC on January 26, 2024) to assist in the preparation of the RTP/SCS.

The last comprehensive EIR on the RTP/SCS was completed in July 2022. The 2026 RTP/SCS will address all transportation modes, including motor vehicles, transit, rail, goods movement (rail freight and trucking), bicycle and pedestrian facilities, aviation systems, and transportation systems management programs and projects with the horizon year of 2049. In addition, the 2026 RTP/SCS will:

- Identify the region’s transportation goals and policies
- Include the SCS, which demonstrates how the region will meet its GHG reduction targets through integrated land use, and housing and transportation planning. Once adopted by Fresno COG, the SCS becomes an integral part of the RTP.
- Set forth an action plan of projects and programs to address the needs consistent with the Policy Element, such as:
  - Allocating growth along transportation corridors in support of high-capacity transit systems.
  - Facilitating the development of mixed land use districts, which promote living, working, shopping, and recreation accessible by foot or bicycle, and that are served by centrally located transit routes (the Tower District in Fresno, Clovis’ Old Town, and many of the County’s small cities serve as examples built more than 40 years ago).
  - Maintaining and improving the regional street system, connecting local jurisdictions within Fresno County, and connecting Fresno County to adjacent counties.
  - Enhancing and maintaining the existing transit systems and the frequency of current services.
  - Developing connecting bikeway systems and facilitating and encouraging their use.
  - Improving connectivity between highways, streets and roads, transit and rail, transit and air travel, cycling and transit, etc.
  - Reservation of future “park and ride” opportunities.
  - An organized public education effort.
  - Appropriate financing, including both operations and capital investment.
- Integrate results reflected in the Congestion Management Program.
- Document the financial resources needed to implement the plan.
- Reflect the results of the Transportation Conformity Analysis.
- Highlight the 2026 RTP/SCS EIR process and results.
- Detail the RTP/SCS public outreach process.
- Include the Environmental Justice analysis process.

Specifically, the RTP/SCS will include the following recommended and required sections:

- Executive Summary: Provides a regional perspective and identifies challenges and objectives.
- Regional environmental issues.
- Policy Element: Identifies legislative, planning, financial, and institutional issues and requirements, as well as areas of regional consensus.
- Action Element: Describes programs and actions to implement the RTP, including the SCS, and assigns implementation responsibilities.
- Financial Element: Identifies current and anticipated revenue sources and financing techniques to fund planned investments described in the Action Element.
- Sustainable Communities Strategy: A forecasted development pattern integrated with the transportation network, measures and policies, resulting in reduced GHG emissions.

## Preliminary 2026 RTP Project Alternatives and SCS Alternative Scenarios

The following 2026 RTP/SCS project alternatives may be addressed in the PEIR:

- No Build Alternative
- Five Additional Alternatives

## CEQA Streamlining (Senate Bill 375 and Senate Bill 226)

SB 375 and SB 226 provide “exemptions” for certain types of projects from CEQA review. 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 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 development of the PEIR. This will allow Fresno COG 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, the County of Fresno, and the cities within the Fresno 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
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire
- Mandatory Findings of Significance

## EIR PROCESS

Following the close of the NOP comment period, a Draft PEIR will be prepared that will consider all NOP comments. In accordance with *State CEQA Guidelines* Section 15105(a), the Draft EIR will be released for public review and comment for a required 45-day review period. Following the closure of the 45-day public review period, the Fresno COG will prepare a Final EIR, which will include responses to all substantive comments received on the Draft EIR. The Final EIR will be considered by the Transportation Technical Committee/Policy Advisory Committee and Policy Board in making the decision to certify the EIR and approve or deny the project.

Notice of Preparation – Fresno COG 2026 RTP/SCS PEIR  
May 13, 2025

### SCOPING MEETING INVITE

A hybrid scoping meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 28, 2025 beginning at 4:00 p.m. in person in the Sequoia Room at the Fresno COG Offices at 2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201, Fresno, CA 93721 and remotely via Zoom conferencing, which may be accessed using the instructions below:

Step 1) In an internet browser, go to <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88202269828?pwd=azYiZZUcAg1T4KhQDENPuR9Q8HZn0L.1>

Step 2) On a phone, call 1-669-444-9171 (US) or 1-669-900-6833 (San Jose), then enter the webinar identification 88202269828#.

This is an informational meeting, and no decision will be made on the project. Both Fresno COG staff and the EIR Consultant will be present to review the plans and answer questions related to the project. We encourage your participation throughout the review process. You may submit comments by attending the meeting, emailing the Deputy Director, or mailing them to the Fresno COG address at 2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201, Fresno, CA 93721 prior to the close of the NOP comment period listed above.

Date: 5/13/25

Signature:   
Paul Hermán, Deputy Director