

CHAPTER FIVE - CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Introduction

The *California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines* require that all environmental impact reports contain an analysis of cumulative impacts for the project. An EIR must discuss the "cumulative impacts" of a project when its incremental effect will be cumulatively considerable. Section 15355 defines cumulative impacts as "*two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.*" A cumulative impact "*consists of an impact which is created as a result of the combination of the project evaluated in the EIR together with other projects causing related impacts*" [Section 15130(a)(1)]. The discussions of cumulative impacts "*shall reflect the severity of the impacts and their likelihood of occurrence, but the discussion need not provide as great detail as is provided for the effects attributable to the project alone*" [Section 15130(b)].

The Guidelines provide further direction regarding cumulative impacts analysis. The state that "*Lead agencies should define the geographic scope of the area affected by the cumulative effect and provide a reasonable explanation for the geographic limitation used*" [Section 15130(b)(1)(B)(3)]. The cumulative impact analysis "*shall examine reasonable, feasible options for mitigating or avoiding the project's contribution to any significant cumulative effects*" [Section 15130(b)(3)]. With some projects, "*the only feasible mitigation for cumulative impacts may involve the adoption of ordinances or regulations rather than the imposition of conditions on a project-by-project basis*" [Section 15130(c)].

Section 15130(a)(3) states also that an EIR may determine that a project's contribution to a significant cumulative impact will be rendered less than cumulatively considerable, and thus not significant, if a project is required to implement or fund its fair share of a mitigation measure(s) designed to alleviate the cumulative impact.

As used above, the terms "past, present and probable future project" include approved projects that have not yet been constructed; projects that are currently under construction; projects requiring an agency approval for an application that has been received at the time a Notice of Preparation is released; and projects that have been budgeted, planned, or included as a later phase of a previously approved project.

5.1 Impacts

A brief summary of the results of the cumulative impacts analysis of the project:

Air quality: Salinas is located within the North Central Coast Air Basin, which is comprised of more than 5,100 square miles, and includes Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito Counties. Although air quality in Salinas is generally very good, the North Central Coast Air Basin is considered a non-attainment area due to exceedances of the California Ambient Air Quality Standards (CAAQS) for ozone and inhalable particulate matter (PM₁₀). Exceedances of State ozone standards are largely the result of these pollutants from the Bay Area due to meteorologic conditions.

Because the basin has not violated the State ozone standard more than three times at any monitoring location within the district during calendar year 2000, the district is designated “nonattainment-transitional” designation until it has validated the data. There has been a downward trend in the number of ozone exceedances within the last 13 years. However, the nonattainment-transitional designation is based on one year of ambient pollutant data and does not reflect the variability of meteorological conditions. Because meteorological conditions can lead to variability in air pollutant formation, the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District (MBUAPCD) can remain on the borderline of attainment and non-attainment for several years until there is a sufficient reduction in the generation of ozone precursors to overcome the variability caused by meteorological conditions.

The designation as having a severe air quality problem makes any project-level significant air quality impact a contributor to a cumulative air quality impact. In this instance, NO_x as an ozone precursor, PM₁₀ and possibly PM_{2.5} emissions constitute significant cumulative impacts with associated health impairment potential.