



# Agenda Report

February 10, 2014

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council  
**FROM:** Planning & Community Development Department  
**SUBJECT: GENERAL PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT PRELIMINARY PROJECT ALTERNATIVES**

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council adopt the Planning Commission's recommendation to direct staff to study within the environmental impact report (EIR) the following alternatives to the General Plan Update:

- A. No Project Alternative,
- B. Central District, South Fair Oaks, Lincoln Ave Alternative,
- C. Efficient Transportation Alternative, and a
- D. Reduced Air Quality and Noise Impact Alternative.

## **ADVISORY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION:**

The Planning Commission and the Transportation Advisory Commission (TAC) recommend that the City Council study the following within the General Plan Update EIR:

- A. No Project Alternative,
- B. Central District, South Fair Oaks, and Lincoln Ave Alternative,
- C. Efficient Transportation Alternative (with subtle differences between the Commissions' recommendations), and a
- D. Reduced Air Quality and Noise Impact Alternative (with subtle differences between the Commissions' recommendations).

The direction within the Planning Commission and Staff recommendation provides less detail for alternatives C and D, from the Transportation Advisory Commission. In regard to the Efficient Transportation Alternative, the TAC recommends modifying development caps in the Central District, South Fair Oaks, and Fair Oaks Orange Grove Specific Plans and reducing development caps elsewhere, if needed; the Planning Commission and Staff considered this direction but do not recommend it. Additionally the TAC

recommends that the Reduced Air Quality and Noise Impact Alternative not downzone multi-family areas and explore mitigation measures beyond air filtration. The Planning Commission and Staff recommendation does not provide this additional direction.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On April 29, 2013, the City Council provided direction to begin preparation of an EIR for the proposed General Plan Update. According to the California Environmental Quality Act, an EIR must include a study of alternatives to the proposed project. In regard to these project alternatives, CEQA states that:

- The alternatives must substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project;
- There must be a reasonable range of alternatives;
- The alternatives must attain most of the basic objectives of the project; and
- The analysis must evaluate the environmental merits of the alternatives.

One of the goals of CEQA is to identify ways to lessen, mitigate, or avoid the significant effect that a project may have on the environment. In line with that purpose, alternatives should lessen significant effects, even if those alternatives would limit, to some degree, the ability to meet every project objective. Alternatives can be eliminated from consideration if they are infeasible, do not meet most of the basic project objectives, or are unable to avoid or lessen significant environmental impacts.

### **PRELIMINARY PROJECT ALTERNATIVES:**

The purpose of developing project alternatives is to lessen or avoid the significant effect that a project may have on the environment. Since a complete analysis of the environmental impacts of the proposed General Plan Update is not yet complete, the General Plan EIRs from other cities and this City's previous General Plan EIRs were reviewed to preliminarily identify what significant effects may result. Based on these sources, potentially significant impacts that deserve consideration when formulating alternatives include:

- Transportation and traffic impacts;
- Air quality impacts;
- Greenhouse gas emissions impacts;
- Noise impacts from vehicular sources; and
- Impacts on public recreation.

In selecting a range of alternatives, the EIR does not need to consider every conceivable alternative. Instead, the document must provide a "reasonable" range of "potentially feasible" alternatives that will foster informed decision-making and public participation. The EIR will need to include a brief rationale as to why the alternatives were selected and if any are rejected, the reason for that decision. Below are the

alternatives staff recommends for inclusion in the EIR. Attachment B compares the development caps of the draft General Plan (the "Project") with the development caps of the recommended EIR project alternatives.

No Project Alternative:

Every EIR is required to include a "no project" alternative. The purpose of this alternative is to allow decision makers to understand the impact of approving or not approving the proposed project. There often is confusion between the no project alternative and existing conditions. For a General Plan EIR, while the bulk of the EIR analysis compares the project (the changes to the General Plan) to existing conditions, the no project alternative compares the project to the build out under the existing General Plan. This alternative would be based on the existing policies, Land Use Diagram, and system of development caps. The existing General Plan did not provide a cap for areas outside of specific plans, which at the time included Lincoln Ave., so staff has provided a forecast of growth for these areas.

Central District, South Fair Oaks, and Lincoln Ave Alternative:

When the City Council gave direction to staff to prepare the EIR, it also included direction to staff on the content of one project alternative. The City Council directed staff to prepare an alternative that reduced the development caps for the Central District, South Fair Oaks, and Lincoln Avenue Specific Plans to the level recommended by the Planning Commission. The reduced development caps will be combined with the Draft Land Use Diagram.

Efficient Transportation Alternative:

On December 9, 2013, the Transportation Advisory Commission (TAC) received a recommendation from staff on four project alternatives for the General Plan Update's environmental impact report (EIR):

- A. No Project Alternative,
- B. Central District, South Fair Oaks, and Lincoln Ave Alternative,
- C. Jobs-Housing Balance Alternative (Options 1 and 2), and a
- D. Reduced Air Quality and Noise Impact Alternative.

After some discussion, the TAC referred the item to the Commission's General Plan Subcommittee.

On December 11, 2013, the Planning Commission received the same staff recommendation as the TAC. The Planning Commission passed a motion to, "Remove the Jobs Housing balance alternative from the list of potential alternatives. Direct staff to return to the Planning Commission on January 22, 2014 with a replacement alternative that incorporates input from the Transportation Advisory Commission (TAC), and is consistent with the views expressed by the Planning Commission during this meeting."

The TAC's General Plan Subcommittee met on December 17, 2013 and staff informed the Subcommittee of the Planning Commission's motion. On January 9, 2014, TAC held a special meeting to make a recommendation to the City Council. The Commission made the following recommendation.

- Concerning the EIR's traffic analysis, the EIR should recognize the direction set by Senate Bill 743 by analyzing vehicle miles travelled (VMT) per capita and not level of service.
- Remove the Jobs-Housing Balance Alternative.
- Develop an "Efficient Transportation Alternative" using VMT per capita as a metric for efficient transportation. Recognizing that existing transit oriented districts (TODs) are different (i.e. the Allen and Sierra Madre Villa Stations are more car-oriented than the other TODs), this alternative will focus density in areas with a higher PAC Score (a metric of walkability) and more access to transit and potential bike routes. This would be accomplished by increasing the residential development caps in the Central District Specific Plan, South Fair Oaks Specific Plan and the Fair Oaks/Orange Grove Specific Plan and if necessary, reduce the development caps and/or density for areas other than those mentioned above. Include with this "Efficient Transportation Alternative" a map overlaid with information on the potential future bike routes, existing transit service frequencies and pedestrian accessibility via PAC score (See Attachment F).
- Lastly, concerning the "Air Quality/Noise" alternative, do not downzone multi-family areas and explore alternative mitigation measures, such as air filtration.

Both the Planning Commission and the TAC were critical of the Jobs-Housing Balance Alternative. Staff developed these Alternatives to respond to suggestions made throughout the General Plan process. However, the Commissions noted the complexity of creating a true jobs-housing balance which matches the needs of the job market with the skills and education of the residents and also noted that Pasadena operates in a regional jobs and housing market. Both Commissions identified that the underlying goal of a jobs-housing balance is to reduce traffic and determined to create an alternative that looked to influence traffic while using a different metric.

On January 22, 2014, the Planning Commission received an update on the TAC's action and a revised recommendation from staff that included the following:

- A. No Project Alternative,
- B. Central District, South Fair Oaks, and Lincoln Ave Alternative,
- C. Efficient Transportation Alternative (as recommended by the TAC), and a
- D. Reduced Air Quality and Noise Impact Alternative.

The Planning Commission made a motion to approve the staff recommendation with a modification to the Efficient Transportation Alternative. The Commission removed

portions of the alternative that provided specific instruction on which specific plans should receive additional capacity. The Commission reduced the direction for this alternative to the following statements:

- Concerning the EIR's traffic analysis, the EIR should recognize the direction set by Senate Bill 743 by analyzing vehicle miles travelled (VMT) per capita and not level of service.
- Develop an "Efficient Transportation Alternative" using VMT per capita as a metric for efficient transportation.

The staff recommended Efficient Transportation Alternative would look at ways of improving the efficiency of the transportation network by reducing VMT per capita. Possible ways of reducing VMT per capita include changing development caps or modifying the densities on the Land Use Diagram. Since the impact of the Draft General Plan on VMT per capita has not yet been analyzed, it is not yet known what changes may need to be made to significantly reduce VMT per capita.

VMT per capita is a transportation metric that is gaining widespread use across the transportation field. Previously most transportation analysis reviewed an intersection's level of service (LOS). However, improving an intersection's LOS often results in mitigation measures that improve vehicular travel, but often have negative impacts on a community's character, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit. The State, with the passage of Senate Bill 743, is moving toward alternatives to LOS, such as VMT per capita. The City's Department of Transportation is also looking at using new metrics beyond LOS that will support the General Plan foundational principle of planning for walking, biking, transit and accessibility.

#### Reduced Air Quality and Noise Impact Alternative:

Air quality and noise impacts are higher adjacent to freeways and increase significantly when freeways are above ground. Studies have demonstrated that air pollution is highly concentrated within a 500-foot distance from freeways and that people sensitive to air pollution (such as children, seniors, and people with asthma) may be negatively affected.

The City's General Plan Noise Element includes a map that demonstrated that the highest noise levels (75 or more dBA) are within approximately 350 feet from the freeway, when the freeway is above ground (see Attachment C). To respond to these potential environmental impacts, this alternative would modify the proposed Land Use Diagram along freeways by:

- Changing the multi-family designations on the draft Land Use Diagram to single-family; and
- Changing the mixed-use designations on the draft Land Use Diagram to a similarly dense and exclusively commercial designation.

See Attachment D for a Land Use Diagram that reflects this change.

**COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:**

In determining EIR project alternatives the City Council is determining means of reducing environmental impacts while balancing the following goals from the City Council's Strategic Plan:

- Maintain fiscal responsibility and stability;
- Improve, maintain, and enhance public facilities and infrastructure;
- Increase conservation and sustainability;
- Improve mobility and accessibility throughout the City of Pasadena; and
- Support and promote the quality of life and the local economy.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:**

The action the City Council is being asked to take will determine the project alternatives in the General Plan Update's Environmental Impact Report. The above action does not require a separate environmental analysis.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There is no fiscal impact as a result of this action and it will not have any indirect or support cost requirements. The City Council has separately approved a contract with The Planning Center / DC&E for environmental services related to the General Plan which covers the cost of preparing and analyzing the project alternatives.

Respectfully submitted,



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Attachments: (5)

- Attachment A – Transportation Advisory Commission's Recommendation and Related Maps
- Attachment B – Alternatives Table
- Attachment C – Noise Contour Map
- Attachment D – Air Quality and Noise Alternative Land Use Diagram
- Attachment E – Draft Land Use Diagram