

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines in order to disclose the potential environmental consequences of implementing the Project. As required under CEQA, the PEIR evaluates and describes potentially significant environmental impacts, identifies mitigation measures to avoid or reduce the significance of potential impacts, and evaluates the comparative effects of potentially feasible alternatives to the proposed project.

As required under CEQA, the PEIR evaluates and describes potentially significant environmental impacts, identifies mitigation measures to avoid or reduce the magnitude of potential impacts, and evaluates the comparative effects of potentially feasible alternatives to the proposed projects.

1.1 Project Requiring Environmental Analysis

The Project would facilitate the future expansion of high-speed broadband internet network, referred to herein as the Santa Barbara County Last-Mile Broadband Program (Broadband Program or Project), throughout the County of Santa Barbara (County). The Project would facilitate implementation of future broadband infrastructure installations in various communities across the County that are currently underserved or unserved by high-speed broadband internet services. These broadband facility installations could include both underground and aerial fiberoptic cable as part of proposed “last-mile” broadband facilities, which are intended to reach end users in these affected communities. These last-mile facilities would provide connections to end users in communities across the County and connect from the State of California’s “middle-mile” broadband network (Statewide Middle Mile Network) currently being implemented by the California Department of Technology (CDT).

The Project details are further described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, of this Draft PEIR.

1.2 Purpose and Intended Uses of this PEIR

CEQA requires that before a decision can be made to approve a project that would pose potential adverse physical effects, a PEIR must be prepared that fully describes the environmental effects of the project. The PEIR is a public information document that identifies and evaluates potential environmental impacts of a project, recommends mitigation measures to lessen or eliminate significant adverse impacts, and examines feasible alternatives to the project. The information contained in the PEIR must be reviewed and considered by the lead agency (i.e., County, incorporated Cities, or other local agencies) and by any responsible agencies (as defined in CEQA) prior to a decision to approve, disapprove, or modify the proposed projects.

1.3 Scope of this Draft PEIR

This Draft PEIR includes an evaluation of the following eight environmental issues as well as other CEQA-mandated issues (e.g., cumulative impacts, growth-inducing impacts, significance unavoidable impacts, alternatives):

- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions/Global Climate Change
- Noise and Vibration
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems (Telecommunication Facilities)

Under the CEQA statutes and the State CEQA Guidelines, a lead agency may limit an EIR’s discussion of environmental effects when such effects are not considered potentially significant (PRC Section 21002.1[e]; State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15128, 15143). An Initial Study was prepared for the Project in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15063 in order to assist in determining the scope of issues to be addressed in the Draft PEIR. Information used during the preparation of the Initial Study and Draft PEIR scoping process to determine which impacts would be potentially significant was derived from review of the Project; review of applicable planning documents and CEQA documentation; feedback from public and agency consultation; and comments received on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) (see Appendix A of this Draft PEIR).

The NOP and Initial Study were distributed on May 30, 2024, to responsible and trustee agencies and potentially interested members of the public. The purpose of the NOP was to provide notification that an EIR for the Project was being prepared and to solicit input on the scope and content of the environmental document. As a result of the review of existing information and the scoping process, it was determined that each of the issue areas listed above should be evaluated in this Draft PEIR. Further information on the NOP and scoping process is provided below in Section 1.4, “Public Review Process.”

1.4 Public Review Process

As noted above, an NOP, which included an Initial Study, was distributed on May 30, 2024, to responsible agencies, trustee agencies, interested parties and organizations, and private organizations and individuals that could have interest in the Project. The Initial Study and NOP were available at the Santa Barbara County offices at 260 North San Antonio Road, Suite B, Santa Barbara, California 93110 and online at <https://www.sbcag.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Broadband-Program-EIR-Initial-Study.pdf>.

The purpose of the NOP was to provide notification that a PEIR for the Santa Barbara County Last-Mile Broadband Program was being prepared and to solicit input on the scope and content of the document. The NOP and responses to the NOP are included in Appendix A of this Draft PEIR.

This Draft PEIR is being circulated for public review and comment for a minimum of 45 days. During this period, comments from the general public as well as organizations and agencies on environmental issues may be submitted to the Lead Agency. Written comments on the Draft PEIR should be mailed or emailed to:

Fred Luna, SBCAG
260 North San Antonio Road, Suite B
Santa Barbara, California 93111
Info@sbcag.org

Upon completion of the public review and comment period, a Final PEIR will be prepared that will include both written and oral comments on the Draft PEIR received during the public review period, responses to those comments, and any revisions to the Draft PEIR made in response to public comments. The Draft PEIR and responses to comments volume will comprise the Final PEIR for the project.

Before adopting the Santa Barbara County Last-Mile Broadband Program, the lead agency, is required to certify that the PEIR has been completed in compliance with CEQA, that the decision-making body reviewed.

1.5 PEIR Organization

This Draft PEIR document is organized as follows:

Executive Summary – This section summarizes the Project and the conclusions of the Draft PEIR. A summary table is included and organized to allow the reader to easily identify potentially significant effects, proposed mitigation measures, and any residual environmental impacts after implementation of mitigation measures. A summary of the alternatives to the Project and the environmentally superior alternatives are also provided. The Summary also describes areas of controversy regarding the Project that are known to SBCAG as of publication of this PEIR.

Chapter 1, Introduction – This chapter describes the purpose and organization of the PEIR.

Chapter 2, Project Description – This chapter describes the Project. The description includes, with text and graphics, the location and boundaries of the Project, statement of objectives, and a description of the Project's components and characteristics.

Chapter 3, Environmental Setting– This chapter discusses the environmental setting and approach to the environmental analysis.

Chapter 4, Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures – For each environmental issue, this chapter discusses the environmental and regulatory setting, the methodology used, the detailed analysis of potential impacts (including direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts), and, if necessary, a discussion of potentially feasible mitigation measures.

Chapter 5, Project Alternatives – This chapter describes potentially feasible alternatives to the Project that may avoid or substantially reduce one or more significant impacts while attaining most of the basic objectives of the Project and evaluates the comparative environmental effects of the alternatives.

Chapter 6, Other CEQA Considerations – This chapter discusses several issues required to be included in an EIR, including effects not found to be significant, significant and unavoidable impacts, significant irreversible environmental changes, and the potential for the Project to induce growth.

Chapter 7, References – This chapter lists all citations used throughout the Draft PEIR.

Chapter 8, List of Preparers and Persons Consulted – This chapter identifies the agency staff and consultants who prepared the PEIR, and agencies or individuals consulted during preparation of the PEIR.

Appendices – The appendices include environmental scoping information and technical reports and data used in the preparation of the Draft PEIR.

1.6 Standard Terminology Used in the PEIR

This PEIR uses the following standard terminology:

- “No impact” means no change from existing conditions (no mitigation is needed).
- “Less-than-significant impact” means no substantial adverse change in the physical environment (no mitigation is needed).
- “Potentially significant impact” means an impact that might cause a substantial adverse change in the environment (mitigation is recommended because potentially significant impacts are treated as significant).
- “Significant impact” means an impact that would cause a substantial adverse change in the physical environment (mitigation is recommended).
- “Significant and unavoidable impact” means an impact that would cause a substantial adverse change in the physical environment and that cannot be avoided, even with the implementation of all feasible mitigation.