4.9 TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

This section documents the traffic and transportation-related impacts associated with the proposed Stories of the Rancho Project Master Plan. A *Traffic Impact Analysis* (Rick Engineering 2012) was prepared for the project, and is included as Appendix D. The report was reviewed and approved by County Public Works. The report is incorporated by reference into the discussion and analysis below.

4.9.1 Existing Conditions

4.9.1.1 Road Network

The project site is accessed from South Oakglen Avenue, a two-lane local street, which dead-ends past the southern end of the project site. The local circulation system serving the project site includes US 101 (four-lane freeway), West Tefft Street (two- to four-lane arterial), Mary Avenue (two-lane collector), and Thompson Avenue (two-lane arterial). Class II bike lanes are located on West Tefft Street between Las Flores Drive and Carillo Street. South County Area Transit currently provides limited service to Nipomo; transit stops are located on North Thompson Avenue, Branch Street and West Tefft Street (near Carillo Street, approximately 1.2 miles from the project site) and at Nipomo High School. The traffic study included an analysis of conditions along these roadways and intersections, including the US 101/West Tefft Street interchange.

4.9.1.2 Trip Generation

Existing use of the project site generates the following average daily trips (ADT):

- 26 trips due to employees and visitors on weekdays;
- eight trips due to employees and visitors on weekends; and,
- 280 trips due to special events on weekends.

4.9.1.3 Level of Service

The County has established the level of service (LOS) C threshold as the lower limit for acceptable operations on rural facilities, and an LOS D threshold for urban facilities. The California Department of Transportation's (Caltrans's) thresholds range between LOS C and D on state highway facilities. The South County Traffic Model identifies LOS C as the lower limit for acceptable operations on the local street system.

Based on the traffic analysis, the existing level of service (outside of peak hours) for roadways serving the project is LOS A for all roadways except Mary Avenue north of West Tefft Street, which is operating at LOS C. Under existing conditions during the PM peak hour, West Tefft Street ranges from LOS B to C (Las Flores Drive to Thompson Avenue). Caltrans data indicates that daily traffic volumes on US 101 in the project vicinity are within the LOS B/C range. Average delays at intersections studied along West Tefft Street (including Mary Avenue, US 101 north and southbound ramps, Oakglen Avenue, and Thompson Avenue) are within acceptable levels (LOS C or better). The South County Traffic Model indicates that vehicle delays at the US 101/West Tefft Street southbound ramps are within the LOS D range during the AM peak hour and LOS E range during the PM peak hour.

4.9.1.4 Unsafe Conditions

Based on traffic accident records for South Oakglen Avenue, four reported accidents occurred between January 2005 and December 2010, which does not indicate a significant accident rate in this location.

4.9.1.5 Air Traffic

The project site is not located within 2 miles of an airstrip or airport. The Santa Maria Public Airport is located approximately 8 miles south of the project, and the Oceano County Airport is located approximately 10 miles northwest of the project site.

4.9.2 Regulatory Setting

Transportation system requirements for the unincorporated areas of the county are subject to the policies and plans of the County. The County outlines policies and standards regarding use of public roads in the *South County Inland Area Plan* and *South County Traffic Model Update (Final Report).* The County is responsible for the review and approval of proposed projects and traffic study reports. All new developments are required to meet the parking space and access improvement standards specified by the County.

Caltrans has jurisdiction over all state-maintained facilities, including US 101. Caltrans strives to maintain operations at the LOS C/D threshold on all of its facilities but acknowledges that numerous roadway segments under its control in urban areas will operate at LOS D or worse. Any modifications to facilities within Caltrans right-of-way must be approved by the state.

4.9.3 Thresholds of Significance

The significance of potential transportation and circulation impacts are based on thresholds identified by the County, in accordance with Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. Transportation impacts are considered significant if the proposed project would:

a. Increase vehicle trips to local or areawide circulation system;

b. Reduce existing “Levels of Service” on public roadways (refer to LOS standards below);

c. Create unsafe conditions on public roadways (e.g., limited access, design features, sight distance, slow vehicles);

d. Fail to provide for adequate emergency access;

e. Conflict with an established measure of effectiveness for the performance of the circulation system considering all modes of transportation (e.g., LOS, mass transit, etc.);

f. Conflict with an applicable congestion management program;

g. Conflict with adopted policies, plans, or programs regarding public transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities, or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of such facilities; or,

h. Result in a change in air traffic patterns that may result in substantial safety risks.

4.9.3.1 "Level of Service" Thresholds

The County has established the LOS C threshold for acceptable operations on rural facilities maintained by the County. Caltrans strives to maintain a target level of service at the transition between LOS C/D on state-operated facilities.

Transportation impacts at signalized intersections are considered significant when:

- The addition of project traffic causes the intersection's level of service to degrade from LOS C or better to LOS D, E, or F.
- Project traffic is added to an intersection currently operating at LOS D, E, or F.

Transportation impacts at unsignalized intersections are considered significant when:

- The addition of project traffic to an unsignalized intersection degrades the level of service to an unacceptable level and satisfies the peak-hour signal warrant from the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
- The project's access to a major street causes a potentially unsafe situation or requires a new traffic signal.

Evaluation of arterial roadway segments reflects planning-level conditions along a street, whereas analysis of the intersections reflects detailed conditions of the arterial. Typically, poor operating conditions on an arterial are due to constraints at the intersections, and can be mitigated at the intersection. Therefore, if an arterial roadway segment analysis shows poor operating conditions, but individual intersections operate within acceptable standards, the mitigation measures defer to the intersection.

For US 101 ramps, US 101 mainline segments, or any County roadway segment already operating at LOS D, E, or F without the project, the addition of any project traffic to that location is considered a significant impact.

4.9.3.2 Alternative Transportation

An impact to pedestrians and bicyclists would be considered significant if implementation of the proposed project would conflict with existing or planned bicycle facilities or would generate pedestrian and bicycle demand without providing adequate and appropriate facilities for safe non-motorized mobility. Impacts to transit would be considered significant if the proposed project would conflict with existing or planned transit facilities or will generate potential transit trips and would not provide adequate facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists to access transit routes and stops.

4.9.4 Impact Assessment and Methodology

Impacts were assessed by comparing roadway operations with the addition of project-generated traffic to those under existing conditions and applying the appropriate criteria from thresholds of significance described above. Potential impacts to bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities and services were also identified by comparing project conditions to existing conditions.

4.9.5 Project Specific Impacts and Mitigation Measures

4.9.5.1 Land Use Ordinance Amendment

The proposed amendment would not result in a land use designation change, intensification of land use, or remove a barrier to growth. The proposed amendment includes an update to language regarding the Southland Street interchange (§22.112.080.G.1). The language is clarified to delete the reference to this interchange project because it is no longer proposed by the County Public Works and Caltrans, and replaces it with a requirement for emergency access. This change meets the intent of the original measure by providing emergency access to and from the project site, and would not result in a significant transportation or safety related impact.

In order to ensure that future projects, such as the proposed Master Plan and CUP, address project-specific transportation and circulation impacts, a planning area standard is recommended that requires the project applicant to present measures to reduce impacts to roads and intersections in the area, such as adjustments to peak hour trip generation, payment of road fees, and street improvements based on consultation with the County Department of Public Works (refer to Chapter 4, Environmental Impacts Analysis, Exhibit A).

4.9.5.2 Conditional Use Permit

<u>Increase Vehicle Trips to Local or Areawide Circulation System</u>

Weekly activities at the project site would generate approximately 130 ADT, including nine trips during the AM peak hour and 11 trips during the PM peak hour. The highest number of weekend day trips would occur between May and September due to special events (up to 298 ADT), assuming multiple events are held on the same day. This is an unlikely situation, but was assessed in the traffic study to determine a reasonable “worst case scenario”. An average weekend day would also generate 28 ADT from daily visitors and employees. The maximum daily attendance for a large event would generate approximately 600 ADT (assuming an average of 2.5 persons per vehicle at a 1,500 person event), which would occur only once per year.

Compared to existing conditions, the project would generate approximately 104 additional daily trips during an average weekday, which includes an additional 38 daily visitor trips and 66 additional special event trips. On the weekends, the project would generate approximately 38 additional daily trips, including 20 additional daily visitor trips and 18 additional special event trips. This would result in approximately eight additional trips during an average weekday AM and PM peak hour, and nine peak trips on the average weekend day. The project’s effect on LOS is assessed below (refer to TC Impact 2 discussion).

Based on consultation with County Public Works, the applicant is required to implement standard off-site road improvements, including widening South Oakglen Avenue along the property frontage, improving the driveway to meet County Standards, and restricting parking on South Oakglen Avenue (County Public Works 2011). While the project would increase vehicle trips to the local and areawide circulation system, these improvements would minimize impacts associated with transportation along those routes.

TC Impact 1 **Operation of the project would generate additional daily and special event trips, resulting in a less than significant, long-term impact to South Oakglen Avenue.**

TC/mm-1 *Upon application for construction permits for development of the 30-acre site, the applicant shall submit a street plan and profile to widen South Oakglen Avenue to complete the project site of an A-1 rural street section fronting the property. All proposed driveways shall be constructed in accordance with County Standard B-1 series drawings.*

Residual Impacts

Operation of the project would increase the amount of trips on South Oakglen Avenue, which would result in a *less than significant impact (Class III)*. Compliance with County road improvement standards would further mitigate this effect.

Reduce Existing "Levels of Service" on Public Roadways

The traffic analysis prepared for the project considered the project's effect on the environment, including "background conditions." Background conditions are different from existing conditions in that they include projects that have been approved by the County, and are anticipated to be constructed and contribute to traffic trips and LOS within the study area. The traffic analysis assumed completion of the Willow Road Interchange project, which was constructed in early 2013, and is currently part of the baseline conditions. Based on the results of the background roadway segment analysis, all roadways would operate at LOS A except for Mary Avenue north of West Tefft Street (LOS E) and Mary Avenue south of West Tefft Street (LOS B). Improvements to Mary Avenue were conditioned as part of the Landdev LLC project, which would improve LOS to an acceptable level. During the PM peak hour, taking into account completion of the Willow Road Interchange project, the traffic analysis found that all intersections would operate at acceptable LOS except the US 101/West Tefft Street southbound ramps (LOS D).

Under "Background Plus Project" conditions, all roadways would operate at LOS A except for: Mary Avenue north of West Tefft Street (LOS E) and Mary Avenue south of West Tefft Street (LOS B), due to other projects in the area (i.e., Landdev LLC). As noted above, the Landdev project includes mitigation that would improve LOS. The project would not reduce LOS on any roadway within the study area (Rick Engineering 2012).

During the PM peak hour, taking into account completion of the Willow Road Interchange project, all intersections would operate at acceptable LOS except the US 101/West Tefft Street southbound ramps (LOS D). A majority of project-related trips during the PM peak hour include visitor's center guests and employees/volunteers. The proposed project would contribute to the LOS D designation during the PM peak hour, resulting in a potentially significant impact.

TC Impact 2 **Operation of the project, including generation of additional daily and special event trips, would contribute to LOS D conditions at the US 101/West Tefft Street southbound ramp intersection, resulting in a potentially significant impact.**

TC/mm-2 *Prior to issuance of building permits, to mitigate for impacts to the US 101 / West Tefft Street interchange during the PM peak hour, the applicant shall:*

a. Prepare a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Program subject to the review and approval of the County Department of Public Works that adjusts:

1. *Visitor Center hours outside of the weekday AM peak hours (7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.) and PM peak hours (4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.); and,*

2. *New employee/volunteer hours to avoid outbound trips between 4:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.*

or,

b. *In the event the project would generate new peak hour trips, the applicant shall consult with the County Department of Public Works, and submit the South County Area 1 Road Fee in the amount prevailing at the time of payment.*

Residual Impacts

Implementation of the project would not cause a reduction in LOS on any affected roadway or intersection; however, the additional trips would contribute to a deteriorating condition. Identified mitigation would reduce the potential for peak hour trips, and address the project's contribution to traffic on the US 101/West Tefft Street interchange. Based on incorporation of mitigation measures identified above, residual impacts would be *less than significant with mitigation (Class II).*

Create Unsafe Conditions

The traffic safety analysis included a review of stopping sight distance at the proposed access driveway and South Oakglen Avenue. Stopping sight distance was recorded at 475 feet for southbound vehicles traveling towards the driveway, which is adequate at a speed of 50 mph. There is a relatively unobstructed line of sight looking south from the driveway toward Southland Street; therefore, stopping sight distance for northbound vehicles approaching the project driveway will be sufficient. The traffic analysis determined that a left turn lane is not warranted on South Oakglen Avenue, and project traffic will not significantly impact safety along South Oakglen Avenue (Rick Engineering 2012). Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant (Class III).*

Emergency Access

An approximately 0.6-mile, 18-foot-wide, gated, all-weather emergency access drive is proposed to extend from South Oakglen Avenue to Swallow Lane and on to South Thompson Road, and would include an 89-foot-long, 10-foot-wide flatcar bridge over Nipomo Creek. The intent of the road is to allow for emergency egress only in the event South Oakglen Avenue is not accessible. Based on review by CAL FIRE (2011, 2012), the project includes adequate emergency access. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant (Class III)*.

Conflict with Performance of Circulation System

Analysis of the project's effect on LOS is presented above, and potential impacts were identified as *less than significant with mitigation (Class II)*. The project would include property frontage improvements to South Oakglen Avenue, and an emergency access road. The project would be consistent with and would not preclude strategies identified in local and regional transportation studies and plans including the South County Area Plan Circulation Element (County of San Luis Obispo 2006, Draft 2013), South County Circulation Study (County of San Luis Obispo 2006, 2012 Draft Update), *U.S. Route 101 Corridor System Management Plan* (Caltrans 2012),

or Regional Transportation Plan-Preliminary Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP-PSCS) (San Luis Obispo Council of Governments 2010).

Conflict with Applicable Congestion Management Program

Analysis of the project's effect on LOS is presented above, and potential impacts were identified as *less than significant with mitigation (Class II)*.

Conflict with Adopted Alternative Transportation Policies, Plans, or Programs

As noted above, the project is consistent with adopted transportation and circulation plans, which include alternative transportation policies and strategies. Implementation of the project includes the use of buses and shuttles to transport visitors to the site and associated educational and special events. The site could also be accessed by pedestrians and bicyclists via access roads and trails. Overall, the project is consistent with alternative transportation policies. Therefore, impacts would be *less than significant (Class III).*

Change in Air Traffic Patterns

The project site is separated from the nearest airport by approximately 8 miles (Oceano) and is, therefore, not expected to affect air traffic patterns or result in air traffic-related safety risks. Impacts would be *less than significant (Class III).*

4.9.6 Cumulative Impacts

The cumulative conditions scenario includes background conditions and projects currently under consideration by the County. Under this scenario, all roadways would operate at LOS A except for Mary Avenue north of West Tefft Street (LOS E) and Mary Avenue south of West Tefft Street (LOS B). However, improvements to Mary Avenue were conditioned as part of the Landdev LLC project, which would improve LOS to an acceptable level.

During the PM peak hour, taking into consideration the recent completion of the Willow Road Interchange project, all intersections would operate at acceptable LOS except the US 101/West Tefft Street southbound ramps (LOS D). The proposed project would contribute to the LOS D designation during the PM peak hour under cumulative conditions, although the contribution would be minor (approximately eight PM peak hour trips). Identified project-specific mitigation includes implementation of a TDM program, which would reduce peak hour trips and payment to the South County Area 1 Road fee (if PM peak hour trips are generated) (refer to TC/mm-2). Therefore, potential cumulative impacts would be *less than significant (Class III)*.

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