

Chapter V ALTERNATIVES

P P P

The *CEQA Guidelines* require analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the project's basic objectives and avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. The range of alternatives required in an EIR is governed by a "rule of reason" that requires the EIR to set forth only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice.¹

The Berkeley *Draft General Plan*, as proposed by the City of Berkeley, has been described and analyzed in the previous chapters with an emphasis on potentially significant impacts and recommended mitigation measures to avoid these impacts. The following discussion is intended to inform the public and decision makers of three potentially feasible alternatives to the proposed project which would avoid or lessen some of the significant effects of the project, as well as to respond to issues raised by the public at scoping sessions and community meetings for the EIR and the *Draft General Plan*.

This chapter is divided into two subsections. The first, "Primary CEQA Alternatives" describes three CEQA alternatives. The second section selects the "Environmentally Superior Alternative."

A. Primary CEQA-Alternatives

This section analyzes the following three alternatives:

- \$ The CEQA-required No Project Alternative, which compares conditions under the *Draft General Plan* with the continuation of the existing 1977 *Master Plan*;
- \$ The No Growth Alternative, which would allow no new growth in the City except redevelopment; and

¹ *CEQA Guidelines*, 1998, Section 15126.6.

- § The Increased Development Alternative, which assumes that the allowable floor area ratios (FARs) and building heights would be increased in the Downtown and along the major transit corridors to allow significantly more development, especially housing development.

For each alternative addressed, a brief project description is followed by a discussion of **Mitigating Factors** and **Adverse Effects** for that particular alternative. The emphasis of the analysis is upon the alternative's comparison to the proposed *Draft General Plan* for identified, potentially significant impacts, and whether or not the alternative would reduce, eliminate, or create new significant impacts.

1. No Project Alternative

a. **Principal Characteristics.** The No Project Alternative assumes that the *Draft General Plan* is not adopted and the existing 1977 *Master Plan* would remain as the City's guiding policy document. Development in the City would occur as allowed by the existing *Master Plan*. Land use designations would not change from those that exist today. The City's population would increase consistent with ABAG projections under the 1977 *Master Plan*, resulting in a population of approximately 111,458 by 2020. Regional and local traffic congestion and related air pollution and noise would continue to increase in at least select areas, as noted in the traffic analysis in Chapter IV of this EIR.

This plan-to-plan comparison (*Draft General Plan* to 1977 *Master Plan*) is different from the comparison presented throughout Chapter IV. There, the proposed project is compared to existing conditions as they are today at the time of this analysis. Here, the No Project Alternative examines a future condition that is trended forward from today, on the basis of the earlier (but still operative) *Master Plan*.

b. **Mitigating Factors.** If the 1977 *Master Plan* were to remain in effect, all the area plan policies would not need to be readopted, since they have already been adopted and need no further action. In relation to traffic impacts that were identified as significant and unavoidable, for the Year 2005, two rather than ten street segments would be significantly impacted under the No Project Alternative, and for the Year 2020, 11 rather than 26 street segments would be significantly impacted. Adverse seismic hazards that would be associated with increased density in select areas of Berkeley (and the resulting population and employment increases) would not increase as much. The City would maintain consistency with the regional Clean Air Plan. Other *Draft General Plan* policies that would result in significant impacts that would not occur with ABAG-projected growth for the City—including those related to land use, housing, transportation, community services, infrastructure, urban design and visual quality, natural resources, hydrology and water quality, and noise—would not occur with this

alternative. It is important to note that aside from the traffic impacts and the technical inconsistency of the *Draft General Plan* with ABAG population and employment projections, which were used in the *97 Bay Area Clean Air Plan*, all other potential adverse impacts could be mitigated to less-than-significant levels, a condition that clarifies the relatively small mitigating effect of the No Project Alternative.

c. Adverse Effects. Without implementation of various policies included in the *Draft General Plan*, such as incentives for affordable housing development, fair share housing needs would not be met; the City's housing shortage would continue, and the City would not have an updated Housing Element as required by State law. Additionally, the 1977 *Master Plan* land use classifications do not comply with the current State planning guidelines. Increased transit service would not be facilitated to as great an extent as with the proposed *Draft General Plan*. All other policies in the *Draft General Plan* that represent advances over the 1977 *Master Plan* and that would result in net benefits, such as policies related to improving City response to seismic, fire and other hazards, long-term achievement of regional air quality goals and implementation of land use compatibility guidelines for noise, would not be implemented under this alternative.

2. No Growth Alternative

a. Principal Characteristics. This alternative assumes that the City is completely built out and that no net new development would be allowed. The existing conditions identified in the previous setting sections would be the projected level of development for 2020. Only policies associated with maintaining existing development would be included in the *Draft General Plan*. New construction would be associated with replacement of existing residential units or commercial/industrial space. A reduction in the allowable zoning envelope would be necessary to implement this alternative. This alternative addresses the significant unmitigable impact identified in this EIR: AIR-1, which finds that the City's projected growth would be technically inconsistent with the Clean Air Plan. This alternative would lessen the severity of the other significant unmitigable impact TRN-4 which finds that future growth would significantly impact Berkeley street segments in 2005 and 2020. However, even if growth in Berkeley were held constant, new growth in adjacent communities and the region would trigger significant impacts on most of the same street segments that are part of the Congestion Management Plan Designated Network and the Metropolitan Transportation System, and traffic in Berkeley would continue to worsen. Additionally, noise would continue to worsen because it is linked to increasing traffic congestion. A new fire station also would still be required in the hills. This alternative generally addresses other transportation, community service, infrastructure, geology, hydrology and water quality, and noise impacts related to additional growth in the Downtown, adjacent to the University and along transit-corridors that were identified in this EIR.

b. Mitigating Factors. This alternative would preserve the character of the Downtown, neighborhood and avenue commercial districts. None of the increase in traffic or demand for parking associated with new population and employment in the Downtown, including parking shortages and spillover into adjacent residential neighborhoods, would occur. The City would remain technically consistent with the regional Clean Air Plan. However, as noted above for the No Project Alternative, the scale of these mitigating effects would be relatively small, as all significant adverse impacts of the *Draft General Plan* (except for TRN-4 and AIR-1) could be mitigated to less-than-significant levels.

c. Adverse Factors. With this alternative, the City would not meet its regional fair share housing needs as mandated by the State, and would not increase the supply of affordable housing for Berkeley residents. The current housing shortage for very-low, low- and moderate-income families would likely continue to worsen. Additionally, the provision of a diversity of jobs and housing, and a variety of local goods and services necessary to keep up with a changing regional and global economy would be hindered by a policy context in which underlying market forces were stymied by an absolute cap on development. This alternative would also not allow for increased population density in the Downtown or the transit-oriented development that could result. In this way, this alternative would not support increased transit service and use. The end result could be a reduced potential to ultimately decrease traffic volumes on City streets in part because of a worsening jobs/housing ratio. Additionally, transit-oriented development is intended to encourage less dependence on the automobile, which would help ease the forecast regional increase in traffic of 249 percent by 2020. In addition, long-term achievement of regional air quality goals by promoting transit-oriented development would not occur. Impacts associated with implementation of other policies in the *Draft General Plan*, such as land use, community services, transportation, infrastructure, cultural resources, natural resources, seismic hazards, hydrology and water quality, noise, and hazardous materials impacts, would continue to occur. However, as shown throughout Chapter IV and outlined in Chapter VI, those impacts can all be reduced to less-than-significant levels.

3. Increased Development Alternative

a. Principal Characteristics. This alternative assumes that development, population and employment densities would be increased in the Downtown, adjacent to the University, along mixed use/commercial corridors and in areas well-served by transit. This alternative assumes that the allowable FAR in the Downtown would increase from 6 to 10. Building heights would not be restricted to 87 feet. Allowable heights and FARs in avenue commercial districts would be increased from a maximum of 4.0 to 5.0. This alternative would allow for an increase in residential units and overall employment in the City of Berkeley and an increase in Citywide development density.

b. Mitigating Factors. This alternative would result in a larger number of residential units being constructed in the Downtown and along transit-served corridors in the City of Berkeley. More commercial and office space could also be constructed. The City would be more likely to meet its affordable housing goals under this alternative than under the proposed policies of the *Draft General Plan*. This alternative could allow the levels of population and employment densities in the Downtown and along mixed use/commercial corridors that would allow for increased provision of transit. Additional transit operations could help reduce reliance on the automobile, and increase use of transit, walking, biking and other forms of transportation and, therefore, ease regional traffic and associated air quality problems.

c. Adverse Factors. This alternative could potentially result in shade, wind, and shadow effects on existing development in the Downtown and along commercial corridors. Residential areas adjacent to the Downtown could be potentially impacted with spillover effects such as increased congestion and parking in neighborhoods by workers and shoppers. If increased transit service and use did not occur under this alternative, the gap between parking demand and supply in the Downtown could increase, depending on other policy choices such as parking requirements and provision of public parking facilities. The visual character of the Downtown and commercial corridors could be adversely impacted by additional growth if it is not properly reviewed and regulated. The City would not maintain consistency with the regional Clean Air Plan. Impacts relating to community services, infrastructure, cultural resources, urban design and visual quality, natural resources, hydrology, and water quality might also occur.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the marginal change to the environment of the City of Berkeley with the implementation of an alternative development vision like this one would be very small. The City of Berkeley has been virtually built-out for decades and has experienced development pressures and new construction that have basically in-filled undeveloped parcels, at a relatively small scale, or redeveloped existing sites where historic uses were no longer efficient or created too many adverse impacts to adjacent uses. Even the largest-scale development projects during the period which the 1977 *Master Plan* governed growth in Berkeley (e.g., Bayer in west Berkeley, the Fourth Street commercial area, renovations to multiple public buildings in the civic center, or numerous University of California projects) are smaller individually and collectively than those experienced in dozens of other East Bay communities during the same nearly 25-year period. One needs only to look at Oakland, Emeryville, Walnut Creek, and Fremont, not to mention Silicon Valley communities, to see new development and redevelopment at scales that overwhelm the changes experienced in Berkeley. Even if the market were to markedly respond to the types of incentives provided in this alternative with additional growth, the broad base of development in Berkeley and the physical environment it helps create would remain relatively unchanged.

B. Environmentally-Superior Alternative

CEQA requires the identification of an environmentally-superior alternative which mitigates most if not all of the significant impacts associated with the project. The No Growth Alternative described previously would address the two unmitigable significant impacts identified in this EIR:

Impact TRN-4: Year 2005: Relative to existing conditions, the *Draft General Plan* would produce significant impacts on five Berkeley streets (10 street segments) in the year 2005, including sections of Gilman Street, Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, Ashby Avenue, and Dwight Way (refer to Table IV.D-9). When measured relative to the 2005 Without Plan case, only two of the street segments would be significantly impacted (refer to Table IV.D-10).

Year 2020: Relative to existing conditions, the *Draft General Plan* would produce significant impacts on 11 Berkeley streets (26 street segments) in the year 2020, including sections of Adeline Street, Alcatraz Avenue, Ashby Avenue, Bancroft Way, Cedar Street, Dwight Way, Gilman Street, Martin Luther King, Jr. Way, and Oxford Street (refer to Table IV.D-11). When measured relative to the 2020 Without Plan case, 11 of the street segments would be significantly impacted (refer to Table IV.D-12.) (PS)

and

Impact AIR-3: The *Draft General Plan* would allow employment and population growth that would generate additional air emissions, and that would not be consistent with the population and vehicle miles traveled assumptions in the regional Clean Air Plan. (S)

Mitigation measures have been identified to reduce the future impacts to Berkeley street segments; however, because congestion levels on these roadway segments are in many cases either already near capacity or are also projected to be near capacity under the 1977 *Master Plan* (the No Project Alternative), the effects of these mitigation measures would not necessarily completely eliminate the impacts.

In addition as described previously, even if growth in Berkeley were held constant, new growth in adjacent communities and the region would trigger significant impacts on most of the same street segments that are part of the Congestion Management Plan Designated Network and the Metropolitan Transportation System, and traffic in Berkeley would continue to worsen. Therefore, the No Growth alternative would reduce but not

eliminate the impacts identified in Impact TRN-4. In fact, traffic congestion on City streets could worsen under this alternative in part because of a greater jobs/housing imbalance. Additionally, noise would continue to worsen because it is linked to increasing traffic congestion.

The Clean Air Plan is based on ABAG population and housing projections which were informed by the projections identified in the 1977 *Master Plan* and did not take into consideration the Regional Housing Needs Determination as mandated by the State of California. Therefore, if the *Draft General Plan* were to be consistent with the Clean Air Plan, the City would not meet their State mandated fair share housing requirements, and the Housing Element of the *Draft General Plan* would not meet State approval (a significant unmitigable impact). Furthermore, the *Draft General Plan* is supportive of regional air quality improvement methods, and the type of development envisioned by the *Plan* transit-oriented development would ultimately help achieve regional air quality goals, thus resulting in a regional air quality benefit.

Under the No Growth alternative, there would be no advancements in policies related to improving City response to seismic, fire and other hazards, and implementation of land use compatibility guidelines for noise. For these reasons and those stated above, the *Draft General Plan* is the preferred project.

