



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report

Date: December 21, 2016
Case No.: 2016-016100ENV
Project Title: **Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension**
Zoning: Resource Management District and Residential Estates District
Project Sponsor: San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
Yin Lan Zhang – (415) 487-5201
YZhang@sfgwater.org
Lead Agency: San Francisco Planning Department
Staff Contact: Justin Horner – (415) 575-9023
Justin.horner@sfgov.org

1650 Mission St.
Suite 400
San Francisco,
CA 94103-2479

Reception:
415.558.6378

Fax:
415.558.6409

Planning
Information:
415.558.6377

PROJECT SUMMARY

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is proposing the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension Project (Project), a component of the SFPUC's *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan (Plan)*. The *Plan* includes goals, policies, and actions that are designed to guide SFPUC management of resources, infrastructure, facilities, and public access within the agency's roughly 23,000-acre San Francisco Peninsula Watershed lands. In 2001, the Planning Commission certified a Program Environmental Impact Report (Program EIR) analyzing the physical environmental effects of the *Plan's* implementation¹. The SFPUC subsequently approved the *Plan* and implemented the Fifiel/Cahill Ridge Trail. The Project is among the actions identified in the *Plan* and evaluated in the Program EIR. Since certification of the Program EIR, SFPUC has advanced the Project's design, and additional details regarding Project location, construction, and operation are now available. SFPUC is also considering modifications to elements of its public access management program, which would apply to existing and proposed facilities. The Planning Department has determined that the Project, as currently proposed, warrants further consideration under CEQA, and that a Project EIR which tiers off the 2001 Program EIR would be the appropriate type of CEQA document. This Notice of Preparation initiates the CEQA process for the Project EIR.

The Project would involve extending the Bay Area Ridge Trail, modifying access management programs over existing and proposed trail segments, and conveying a permanent easement over an existing trail segment. Trail improvements would include a new multi-use trail segment extending approximately 6 miles south from the southern terminus of the Fifiel/Cahill Ridge Trail (near the State Route 35/92 intersection) to a Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) Phleger Estate trail connection (see **Figure 1**). Trail support facilities under consideration include new vault toilets, drainage facilities, retaining structures, and security mechanisms (such as fences and gates). In addition, SFPUC would construct two new trailhead parking areas: one just south of the State Route 35/92 intersection

¹ The San Francisco Planning Commission certified the *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan – Environmental Impact Report* (File No.: 96.22E; State Clearinghouse No. 98082030) on January 11, 2001. While prepared as a Program EIR, the document examines one element of the *Plan*, the Fifiel-Cahill Ridge Trail Project, at a project level. Other *Plan* elements were evaluated at a program level, including a proposed southern extension of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, denoted Management Action tra2 or Southern Skyline Boulevard Trail. The SFPUC approved the *Plan* pursuant to SFPUC Resolution 02-0265.

(approximately 10 vehicles) and a second larger area (approximately 50 vehicles) to the north of Skylawn Cemetery. SFPUC would also construct a new, approximately 0.5-mile accessible loop trail along the existing Fifield/Cahill Trail and acquire a permanent trail easement (currently held by the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council) in the vicinity of Skylawn Cemetery, north of State Route 92.

The proposed trail segments would be operated in coordination with the Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail, which currently is operated by the SFPUC under a docent-led-only access program three days a week. The SFPUC is considering and will analyze a range of access procedures for the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension (SSBRTE) and the Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail. The range will include unrestricted access for the entire length of the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail) on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed (approximately 16 miles), implementing an annual permit program (seven days a week), and expanding the existing docent program to the entire length of the Ridge Trail on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed. Access procedures could also be implemented consistently along the entire 16 mile alignment or in hybrid combinations north and south of the Highway 92/35 intersection (e.g., the existing docent program could continue on Fifield/Cahill Ridge, with unrestricted access or an annual permit program for the proposed SSBRTE south of the SR 92/35 intersection).

An overview of individual Project components under consideration for the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension and the Skylawn Cemetery Access and Trail Improvements is provided in the following subsections.

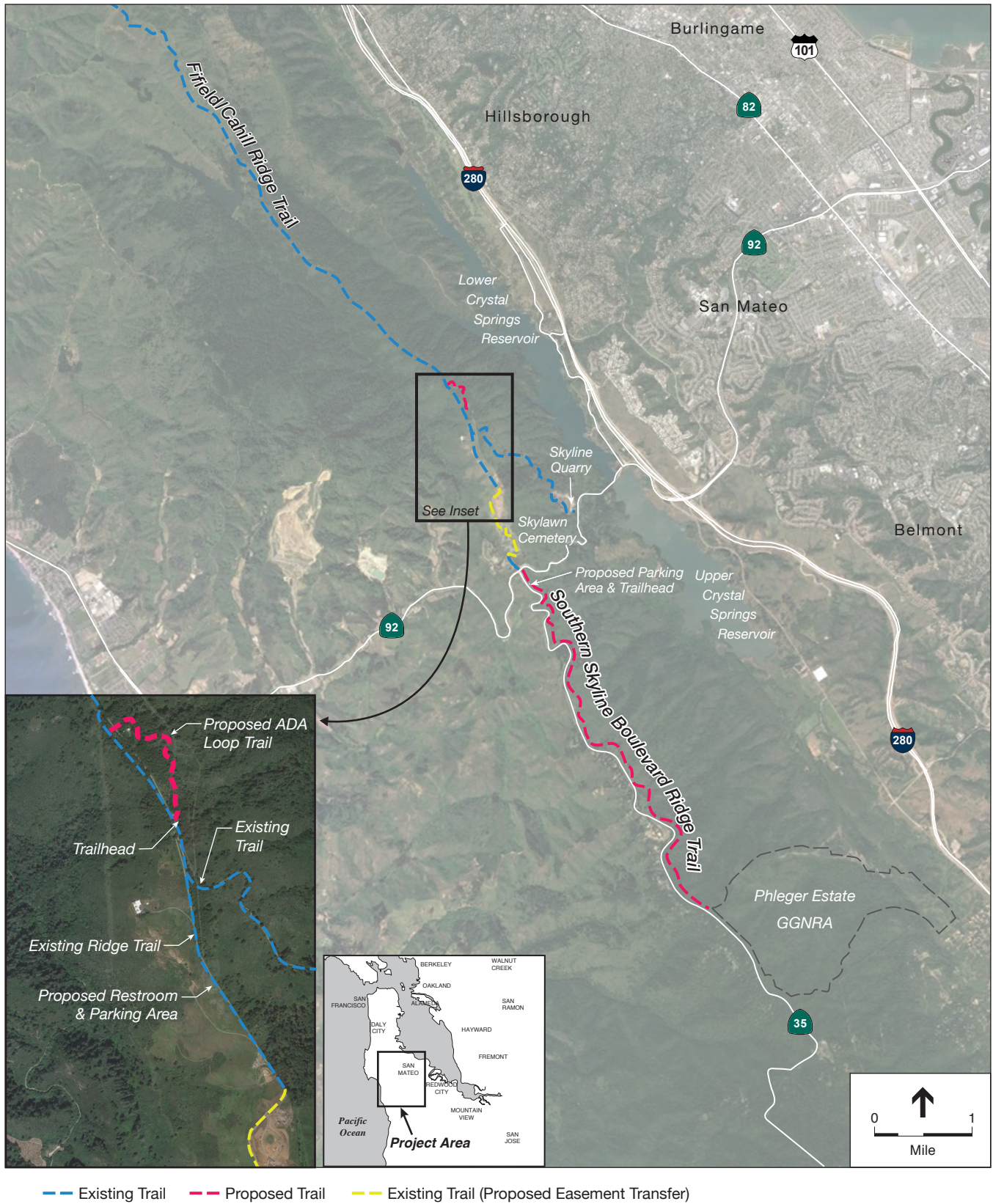
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension

The Project's main component, the Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension (SSBRTE), would be located at the top of the ridge, 1 to 1.75 miles upslope of Upper Crystal Springs Reservoir, extending south and generally following Skyline Boulevard from State Route 92 to the southern boundary of SFPUC property at the Phleger Estate property. The trail would generally be 8 feet in width. Depending upon topography, geology, and vegetation, the trail may be narrower or wider (up to 12 feet in width). The proposed alignment was identified based on the trail design requirement to maintain a maximum 10 percent slope along the length of the trail and follow the existing grades and ground topography to minimize construction impacts where feasible. The proposed alignment was delineated to follow the existing ridgeline. The trail would consist of three main segments, as described below.

Northern Segment (Segment 1)

The approximately 12-foot-wide 1.9-mile northern segment would start near the existing California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) parking area at the intersection of State Route 92 and Upper Skyline Boulevard (State Route 35). The proposed design includes a new trailhead parking lot, information kiosk, and pedestrian gate to access the northern entrance to this section of the SSBRTE. The northern section of the proposed trail would traverse steep slopes with dense vegetation along the top of the ridge. A portion of the trail would follow a currently closed SFPUC roadbed. Potential drainage and slope stability issues along portions of this segment would be addressed with approximately 2,500 linear feet of retaining wall (up to 8 feet in height) and minor features (i.e., rocked regions and/or drainage pipes). The retaining walls are conceptually designed as soldier pile walls with wood or concrete lagging.



SOURCE: ESA+Orion; Google Earth

Southern Skyline Boulevard Ridge Trail Extension

Figure 1
Project Location

Middle Segment (Segment 2)

The 1.7-mile middle segment is proposed to follow the existing fuel break along an area that is primarily a flat bench, surrounded by brush. The topography for this segment has gentle slopes throughout, with a large portion accessible by vehicle through various gates along State Route 35. A pit toilet would be constructed, with a service road from Skyline Boulevard providing access for construction and routine maintenance. There is moderate vegetation along this segment, which includes a vegetated fuel break. The proposed trail could be as wide as 12 feet in this segment.

Southern Segment (Segment 3)

The 2.3-mile southern segment is proposed to pass through a forested area with features similar to the middle segment. The forested area contains a significant number of mature trees, including Douglas fir and coast redwood. The trail width along portions of this segment may be limited by the topography and vegetation. This alignment is the farthest segment from Skyline Boulevard, but access from the roadway would still be feasible at certain locations. A pit toilet would also be constructed in this segment with a service road from Skyline Boulevard for routine maintenance and to provide temporary construction access for the Project. An additional service road from Skyline Boulevard would be constructed in this segment to provide access for construction and routine maintenance and patrol. This segment would end at the southern boundary of SFPUC property, and connect with a trail on the GGNRA Phleger Estate.

Drainage

In addition to surface drainage required for the trail, drainage features along the trail alignment would include water bars, swales, drainage pipes or culverts, and/or weep holes in retaining structures. These features would be designed in accordance with local standards, codes, and practices. Drainage would be designed to control runoff using drain inlets, waterbars, swales, vegetation, or riprap to protect against erosion in the project area.

Parking Lot

An approximately 3,000-square-foot paved parking lot accommodating up to 10 cars would be constructed near the intersection of State Route 92 and State Route 35. It would be designed in coordination with Caltrans, and supplemented by the SFPUC Engineering Management Bureau's design guidelines.

Restroom Facilities

Two pre-fabricated restrooms would be installed along the SSB RTE. Installation of these facilities would require excavation to a depth of approximately 5 feet to accommodate the toilet vault, which would be pumped out routinely. Locations for these restrooms would be finalized during the final geotechnical investigation. All of the excavated materials would be used for fill in nearby trail construction.

Retaining Structures

Retaining structures are proposed at multiple locations along the northern segment and one location along the southern segment to stabilize cut and/or fill slopes and establish a terrace for building trail tread on steep, sloped areas of the trail alignment. The retaining systems under consideration include mechanically stabilized earth walls, soil nail walls, or soldier piles with wood or concrete lagging. The proposed retaining structures would total approximately 0.5 mile in length.

Security Features

During the Project design, the SFPUC would coordinate with SFPUC Emergency Planning and Security to ensure that facility security features are included. These features may include, but are not limited to, fences and gates installed along the alignment. In addition, limited SFPUC vehicular access from Skyline Boulevard to the trail would be provided for maintenance, operations, emergency response, and routine patrol. Fencing materials would include chain-link security fencing, barbed-wire or smooth wire fencing, or split-rail fencing. Fencing types and locations will be determined as the trail design is finalized.

Skylawn Cemetery Access and Trailhead Improvements

Trail Easement

The Ridge Trail Council has acquired a trail easement from Skylawn Cemetery. The easement contains approximately 1 mile of the Ridge Trail alignment through the cemetery from Highway 92 to Cemetery Gate. The SFPUC would accept and record this perpetual easement from the Ridge Trail Council as part of the Project, to facilitate consistent and efficient management of the entire Ridge Trail on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed.

Trail Parking and Entrance

New trailhead improvements are proposed on SFPUC lands in the vicinity of Skylawn Cemetery along the existing service road to support trail users, enhance educational opportunities, and ensure watershed protection. The proposed trailhead improvements include developing a 40,000 square-foot, 50-car parking lot along the western side of the existing service road and repurposing the existing access road north of the parking lot as a trail corridor to provide connectivity to the existing Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail. These improvements involve grading and surfacing approximately one acre of land that is outside of the hydrologic boundary of the watershed. A kiosk and trail signs would direct trail users, and a permanent pit toilet would be installed. Road bar-gates and bollards would limit vehicles to the access road and parking area only. Fencing may be installed as needed around the perimeter of the parking lot and along the SFPUC property line.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliant Trail Loop

A 0.5 mile ADA-compliant trail loop would be built for interpretive opportunities designed for disabled individuals. This trail would begin at the Cemetery Gate kiosk, and wind its way on a very gentle grade in a northeasterly direction through the Douglas fir forest. The tread of the trail would be specially constructed to provide surfaces that allow for easy access with minimal grades, consistent with ADA specifications.

Construction and Schedule

Construction activities would generally include clearing, grubbing, grading, excavation, and compaction, and limited paving or other surfacing, among other activities. Construction activity would generally be limited to within 50 feet of the trail centerline (up to 100-foot-wide construction area), with reduced areas where limited by terrain or vegetation.

Equipment and vehicles may include small bulldozers, excavators, drill rigs, water trucks, concrete trucks, trail machines, pickup trucks, dump trucks, 4x4 utility vehicles and other assorted small equipment, such as compressors, pumps, trailers, compactors, and chippers. Project construction

equipment and materials would be staged in designated locations, within or immediately adjacent to sites proposed for Project components. Substantial site preparation is not anticipated for staging areas.

Construction of the Project is expected to begin in January 2018 and end in December 2018. Earthwork would be limited to the fair-weather season, while other types of construction (e.g., fencing, vegetation cutting, signage installation, etc.) may be performed as conditions allow. It is estimated that construction crew size would vary from 5 to 20 persons.

SFPUC Ridge Trail Operations

Access Management Program

The proposed trail would be operated in coordination with the Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail, which currently is operated by the SFPUC three days a week, under a docent-led access program. The docent program is limited to three trips per day, and includes hiking, running, mountain bikes, and equestrian uses. The SFPUC is considering and will analyze a range of access procedures for the SSB RTE and the Fifield/Cahill Ridge Trail. The range will include unrestricted access for the entire length of the Ridge Trail on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed (approximately 16 miles), implementing a seven-days-a-week annual permit program, and expanding the existing docent program to the entire length of the Ridge Trail on the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed. Access procedures could also be implemented consistently along the entire 16-mile alignment or in hybrid combinations north and south of the Highway 92/35 intersection (e.g., the existing docent program could continue on the Fifield/Cahill Ridge, with unrestricted access or an annual permit program for the proposed SSB RTE south of the Highway 92/35 intersection).

Skyline Quarry Special Use Site

The existing Skyline Quarry trailhead would continue to be available as the staging area for equestrians and other trail users but on a pre-arranged (non-drop-in) basis. It is expected that most equestrians would bring their stock to the trail in trailers. Staging equestrians at Skyline Quarry would potentially reduce conflicts among trail users, and allow for increased staging opportunities for all users of the Ridge Trail. In addition, staging at the Skyline Quarry would facilitate access to both the Lower Crystal Springs Dam Overlook, the east-facing slopes of Cahill Ridge, and vistas to the east that are not available on Cahill Ridge. This staging option would allow the SFPUC to provide additional educational and recreational opportunities.

APPROVALS REQUIRED

The Project could be required to obtain permits and approvals described below for project construction and operation.

Federal

No federal permits or approvals appear to be applicable to the proposed project.

State

The project would be required to obtain an Encroachment Permit from Caltrans for construction-related activity.

Local

- San Francisco Planning Commission certification of the Final EIR and determination of consistency with the San Francisco General Plan.
- SFPUC construction contracts and other project implementation actions.
- San Francisco Board of Supervisors consideration of any appeals of the Planning Commission's certification of the Final EIR and appropriation of project funding.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The Project could result in potentially significant environmental effects. The Planning Department will prepare a Project EIR which tiers off the *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan EIR*, in accordance with CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR § 15168). Tiering will ensure that the Project EIR builds upon all previous work prepared for and incorporated in the *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan EIR*.

The Project EIR will describe site-specific environmental impacts and identify existing *Peninsula Watershed Management Plan* policies, actions, and mitigation, and/or new mitigation measures to address those impacts. Based upon this analysis, the Planning Department will determine whether potentially significant adverse effects would be avoided or mitigated to a less-than-significant level through the application of such policies, actions, or mitigation measures. The Project EIR also will evaluate a No Project Alternative which will assume no change to existing project site conditions and operations, as well as additional project alternatives that could potentially reduce or avoid any significant environmental impacts associated with the Project.

The Project EIR will include a focused, yet detailed, tiered analysis of environmental topics for which a potentially significant impact could result. The Project EIR will also address other topics, albeit in less detail, for which no impact or less-than-significant impacts would be expected. Key environmental topics to be addressed in the Project EIR are described briefly below.

Tribal and Other Cultural Resources

The San Francisco peninsula region is known to have been intensively occupied during prehistoric times. Several archaeological and historical resources have been documented in the vicinity of the SFPUC Peninsula Watershed. Identified resources will be evaluated for their significance according to CEQA, the National Register of Historic Places, and the California Register of Historic Resources. Impacts on these resources will be addressed in the Project EIR. A cultural resources impact could also occur during construction if previously unidentified cultural resources were disturbed.

Natural Resources

The SFPUC Peninsula Watershed has the highest concentration of rare, threatened, and endangered species in the nine-county Bay Area. The watershed possesses important regional habitat for wildlife and fish species, and has been designated as both a fish and a game refuge by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Thirty-eight special-status wildlife species are known to occur on the watershed, or have a high or moderate potential to occur based on distance to nearest documented occurrence and habitat. Sixteen different plant communities (types of plants that tend to occur together) are present in the watershed, including a mosaic of grasslands, scrub and chaparral, hardwood and softwood woodlands and

forests, freshwater marshes, and urban and cultivated areas. Of these plant communities, nine are considered endangered, sensitive, or rare under state and/or county regulations because of their limited distribution either locally or regionally. Wetlands habitat has been identified in the immediate vicinity of Project elements. Sudden oak death, a forest disease caused by the plant pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*, has also been documented in the watershed. The Project EIR will examine potential direct and indirect effects of Project construction and operation on special-status wildlife and plants, sensitive natural communities, including wetlands habitat, and the spread of sudden oak death.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Construction of the Project would require vegetation removal, light grading, and limited areas of excavation which could result in soil erosion during construction. Modifications to existing access management programs would result in new and/or more intensive public use of watershed lands which could result in water quality impacts related to adequacy of sanitation facilities, unauthorized use by domestic animals, increased fire hazard, and increased erosion and sedimentation due to vegetation and soil disturbance. These potential impacts related to hydrology and water quality will be evaluated in the Project EIR.

Fire Management

In the absence of episodic natural fire, and coupled with persistent drought and the large number of trees that have succumbed to sudden oak death, risk of fire hazard is high in the Project area. Construction activities involving use of electrical equipment or combustion engines in the Project area would increase risk of fire hazard. Similarly, the increase in public access and use of the watershed that would result from the Project would also increase risk of wildfire. These potential impacts related to fire management and wildfire risk will be addressed in the Project EIR.

Transportation and Access

Construction activities would generate additional vehicle traffic, including construction vehicles traveling to and from work sites and trucks transporting supplies and equipment. Project construction may require temporary rerouting of traffic lanes on Skyline Boulevard (SR 35) during low-traffic times (e.g., weekends or overnight). Traffic speeds would be reduced during lane closures. Once constructed, the proposed trail extension and facility improvements would be expected to attract new visitors to the Project site. Potential impacts related to traffic and transportation will be evaluated in the Project EIR.

Noise

Part of the Project would be constructed in residential areas where construction noise could disturb residents. Similarly, increased public use of these areas would introduce new sources of noise into these areas. Potential impacts of construction and operational noise will be evaluated in the Project EIR.

Other Environmental Issues

All environmental effects of the Project will be considered in the Project EIR. Additional topics, such as the ones listed below, will be included.

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- Mineral and Energy Resources
- Population and Housing

- Air Quality & Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards/Hazardous Materials
- Land Use and Recreation
- Utilities and Public Service Systems
- Wind and Shadow
- Growth-inducing Impacts
- Cumulative Impacts

FINDING

This project may have a significant effect on the environment and an environmental impact report (EIR) is required. This determination is based upon the criteria of the State CEQA Guidelines, Sections 15060 (Preliminary Review), 15064 (Determining Significant Effect), and 15065 (Mandatory Findings of Significance). The purpose of the EIR is to provide information about potential significant physical environmental effects of the proposed project, to identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and to describe and analyze possible alternatives to the proposed project. Preparation of an NOP or EIR does not indicate a decision by the City to approve or to disapprove the project. However, prior to making any such decision, the decision makers must review and consider the information contained in the EIR.

PUBLIC SCOPING PROCESS

Pursuant to the State of California Public Resources Code Section 21083.9 and California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines Section 15206, a public scoping meeting will be held to receive oral comments concerning the scope of the EIR. The meeting will be held on **January 18th, 2017 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.** at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, 525 Golden Gate Avenue, 2nd floor, O'Shaughnessy Conference Room, San Francisco, CA 94102. To request a language interpreter or to accommodate persons with disabilities at the scoping meeting, please contact the staff contact listed above at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting. Written comments will also be accepted at this meeting and until 5:00 p.m. on February 3, 2017. Written comments should be sent to Lisa Gibson, San Francisco Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94103.

If you work for a responsible state or trustee agency, we need to know the views of your agency regarding the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency may need to use the EIR when considering a permit or other approval for this project. Please include the name of a contact person in your agency.

12/20/16
Date


Lisa Gibson
Acting Environmental Review Officer