CHAPTER 7: CEQA TOPICS AND FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

This chapter describes those potential environmental effects identified in Chapter 5 that would be considered significant under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Potential cumulative impacts are also described, and the potential for the project to stimulate unplanned growth is considered.

While CEQA requires that a determination of significant impacts be stated in an EIS/EIR, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) does not. Under NEPA, significance is used to determine whether an EIS or some other level of documentation is required, and once a decision to prepare an EIS is made, the magnitude of the impact is evaluated and no further judgment of its significance is required. For this reason, the CEQA significance criteria and the determination of significant impacts have not been included in other sections of this combined NEPA/CEQA EIS/EIR. Instead, those criteria and determinations have been grouped in this chapter, titled "CEQA Findings of Significance."

It should be noted that although the presence of mitigation under CEQA creates a presumption of significant impacts, NEPA anticipates that an EIS will identify means to mitigate the adverse impacts of a project if such measures are not already included in the proposed action or alternatives. For this reason, some mitigation measures described in this document and in this section are wholly appropriate under NEPA, although the impacts they address may not be considered significant under CEQA.

7.1 SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

CEQA requires that an EIR identify the significant environmental effects of the project (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126), but does not provide thresholds for significance. Instead, CEQA Guidelines Section 15064(b) states that "the determination . . . calls for careful judgment on the part of the public agency involved . . . " and that "an ironclad definition of significant effect is not possible because the significance of an activity may vary with the setting." In the current analysis, the City and County of San Francisco and the Joint Powers Board have given careful consideration to the issue of significance. As a result, the significance criteria shown in Table 7.1-1 have been used to evaluate the environmental impact categories indicated.

Table 7.1-1: CEQA Significance Thresholds For Selected Environmental Impact Categories

DEIS/ DEIR Sec. No	IMPACT CATEGORY	EXPLANATION OF CEQA SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLD	SOURCE(S)
5.1.1	Land Use	A significant impact would occur if the project would substantially disrupt or divide the physical arrangement of an established community; or have a substantial adverse impact upon the existing character of the vicinity.	State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G
5.1.2	Wind	The project would have a significant impact if it would cause the City of San Francisco's wind hazard criterion (26 miles per hour) for more than one full hour per year.	San Francisco Planning Code Section 148
5.1.3	Shadow	A project would have a significant effect if it would result in substantial new shadow on public open space under the jurisdiction of the Recreation and Park Commission during the period from one hour after sunrise to one hour before sunset, at any time of the year.	San Francisco Planning Code Section 295
5.2	Residential/ Business Displacement	A significant impact would occur if the project would displace substantial numbers of people requiring the construction of replacement housing elsewhere.	State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G
5.4, 5.5	Community Facilities & Services; Parklands, Schools & Churches	A significant impact would occur if the project would: (a) conflict with established recreational, educational or religious uses; (b) conflict with adopted plans and goals of the community; (c) create additional demand for public service facilities, the expansion of which would result in environmental impact.	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G
5.7	Air Quality	A significant impact would occur if the project would violate any ambient air quality standard (NAAQS or CAAQS), increase the number or frequency of violations, contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation, or expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations.	State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G; US EPA; BAAQMD
5.8	Noise	A significant impact would occur if the project would substantially increase the ambient noise levels for adjoining areas. A noise increase of 10 db is perceived as a doubling of noise, and is generally considered substantial. (See Section 5.8 for a discussion of the FTA Noise Criteria, which determine "impact" and "severe impact" under NEPA).	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G

Table 7.1-1: CEQA Significance Thresholds For Selected Environmental Impact Categories

DEIS/ DEIR Sec. No	IMPACT CATEGORY	EXPLANATION OF CEQA SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLD	SOURCE(S)
5.8	Vibration	A significant impact would occur if the project would create intrusive vibration substantially affecting adjacent land uses. Vibration of 75 VdB is generally considered intrusive for residential land uses. (See Section 5.8 for a discussion of the FTA Vibration Criteria).	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G
5.9	Geology/ Seismicity	A significant impact would occur if the project would expose people or structures to major geologic hazards.	State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G
5.10, 5.11	Water Resources	A significant impact would occur if the project would cause substantial flooding, erosion, or siltation, or would substantially degrade water quality, or would substantially degrade or deplete ground water resources.	State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G
5.14	Cultural & Historic Resources	A project is normally found to have a significant impact on the environment if the project would have a substantial adverse change to an historic resource – either an archaeological site, an historic architectural structure, or an historic district. A "historic resource" is defined as a resource that is listed in or determined eligible for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources; listed in or determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places; one that is included as significant in a locally adopted register such as Article 10 and 11 of the San Francisco Planning Code; or one determined by the lead agency to be historically significant. A resource that is deemed significant due to its identification in a historic resource survey that meets the criteria of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1(g) would be presumed an historic resource unless a preponderance of evidence demonstrates otherwise. A "substantial adverse change" is defined as demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of the resource would be materially impaired (a major change to the defining elements of historic character).	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines (Sec. 15064.5 and 15065(a); Appendix G; CEQA Sec. 21084.1, and City and County of San Francisco Planning Department.

Table 7.1-1: CEQA Significance Thresholds For Selected Environmental Impact Categories

DEIS/ DEIR Sec. No	IMPACT CATEGORY	EXPLANATION OF CEQA SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLD	SOURCE(S)
5.15	Hazardous Waste	A significant impact would occur if the project would create a potential public health hazard involving the use, production, or disposal of materials which pose a hazard to people or animal or plant populations in the area affected. (Quantitative hazardous waste criteria exist for specific materials and constituents.)	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G
5.16	Visual Changes	The project would have a significant effect on the environment if it would have a substantial effect on a scenic vista, substantially degrade or obstruct publicly accessible views; substantially degrade the existing visual character or the quality of the area, or result in a substantial, demonstrable negative aesthetic effect; or generate obtrusive light or glare that would adversely affect views or substantially affect other properties.	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G
5.18	Energy	A significant impact would occur if the project would encourage activities which result in the use of large amounts of fuel, water or energy; or use fuel, water, or energy in a wasteful manner.	State CEQA Guidelines, Appendix G
5.19	Transit Services & Accessibility	A significant impact would occur if a project would cause a substantial project-specific or cumulative increase in transit demand that cannot be accommodated by existing or proposed transit capacity resulting in unacceptable levels of transit service. When considering cumulative development in the area, an adverse impact would also be created if the project contributed substantially to the deterioration of transit service or caused a substantial conflict with transit operations.	San Francisco Planning Department

Table 7.1-1: CEQA Significance Thresholds For Selected Environmental Impact Categories

DEIS/ DEIR Sec. No	IMPACT CATEGORY	EXPLANATION OF CEQA SIGNIFICANCE THRESHOLD	SOURCE(S)
5.19	Traffic Congestion	In San Francisco, the threshold for a significant adverse impact on traffic has been established as the deterioration in the level-of-service (LOS) at a signalized intersection to LOS E or F (i.e., a deterioration from LOS D or better to LOS E or F), or if an intersection at LOS E deteriorates to LOS F. An intersection that is at LOS E or F in the existing condition may be a significant adverse impact depending on the magnitude of the project's contribution to worsening of delay. In addition, a project would have a significant adverse effect if it would cause major traffic hazards, or would contribute considerably to cumulative traffic increases that would cause deterioration in levels of service to unacceptable levels. (See Sections 3.2 for a definition of LOS and a quantification of associated delay.)	San Francisco Planning Department
5.19	Traffic Circulation	A significant impact would occur if the project would substantially change traffic circulation patterns, creating an unusual safety hazard, or eliminating access to surrounding areas.	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines Section 15382.
5.19	Parking Displacement	The displacement of parking spaces is not generally considered a significant physical environmental effect but is a social effect and an inconvenience to those who must seek other parking. The displacement of parking spaces and any resulting parking deficits are also not considered to be a permanent condition as drivers may be induced to seek and find alternative parking facilities and shift to other modes of travel. Therefore, parking shortages are considered to be social effects rather than impacts on the physical environment.	San Francisco Planning Department
5.21	Temporary Construction Period Effects	Construction impacts on traffic, transit, noise, air quality, and the visual environment would generally not be considered significant since construction-related changes are by their nature temporary. A significant impact would occur only if temporary effects substantially affected accessibility to an area for a long period of time, or posed a severe health or safety threat.	Derived from State CEQA Guidelines, Section 15382

Source: Parsons Transportation Group and other sources as noted, September 2001.

Some impact categories lend themselves to scientific or mathematical analysis, and therefore to quantification. For other impact categories that are more qualitative or are entirely dependent on the immediate setting, a hard-and-fast threshold is not generally feasible. In these cases, the definition of significant effects from the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15382) has been applied as the significance criterion: "a substantial adverse change in physical conditions." Where a potential impact category is not relevant to the current project (potential impact on floodplains is a good example), no significance criterion is presented. Also, unlike NEPA, CEQA does not require a discussion of socioeconomic effects, except where they would result in physical changes, and states that social or economic effects shall not be treated as significant effects (see CEQA Guidelines Sections 15064(f) and 15131). For this reason, socioeconomic impact categories are not included in Table 7.1-1.

7.2 UNAVOIDABLE SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECTS UNDER CEQA

7.2.1 *EFFECTS ON HISTORIC RESOURCES*

Construction of a new Transbay Terminal and the Caltrain Downtown Extension would require demolition of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), *or properties that are individually eligible for listing or that are contributors to multi-component properties or districts that are or appear eligible for listing. These properties are described in Section 5.14.* The existing Transbay Terminal and associated bus ramps *and approach structures would be demolished to construct the new Transbay Terminal component of the Project. These demolitions would constitute significant adverse effects under CEQA.*

Under either Caltrain Downtown Extension alternative, the Cut-and-Cover Option would result in the demolition of an additional *13* properties *that are individually eligible or that are contributors to a district that is or appears* eligible for listing in the NRHP. *Also, three buildings that are contributors to the Second and Howard Historic District / New Montgomery – Second Street Conservation District that would not be demolished would be isolated from the remainder of the district; this would constitute a substantial adverse change to the district.*

The Tunneling Option for *the Townsend Street to Folsom Street segment of* either of the Caltrain Downtown Extension alternatives would result in the demolition of ten *fewer* buildings than under the Cut-and-Cover Option, *but three buildings that are either individually eligible or that are contributors to a historic district that is eligible would still be demolished, and three other contributory buildings would still be isolated from the remainder of the district, as described in the preceding paragraph. These effects would constitute a substantial adverse change.* In general, projects that result in the substantial alteration or demolition of a recognized historic resource would be considered to have a significant effect on the environment.

7.2.2 *EFFECTS ON TRAFFIC AND CIRCULATION*

Although the project would result in a reduction in regional vehicle miles traveled (VMT), there would be unavoidable significant traffic impacts at the following seven intersections in the vicinity of the Transbay Terminal. These significant effects would occur under both the 2020 baseline plus the project and the 2020 cumulative conditions plus the project.

- First/Market
- First/Mission
- First/Howard
- Fremont/Howard
- Beale/Howard
- Second/Folsom and
- Second/Bryant

The predicted levels of service (LOS) at these intersections (identified in Table 5.19-4 in Section 5.19) would exceed the San Francisco CEQA thresholds of significance.

7.3 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

CEQA defines cumulative impacts as "two or more individual effects which, when considered together are considerable," and suggests that cumulative impacts may "result from individually minor but collectively significant projects taking place over a period of time" (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15355). CEQA documents are required to include a discussion of potential cumulative effects *when those effects are significant* and the State CEQA Guidelines suggest two possible methods for assessing potential cumulative effects (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15130). The first method is a list-based approach, which considers a list of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects producing related or cumulative impacts. The second method is projections-based, and uses a summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document that is designed to evaluate regional or areawide conditions. The projections-based method is generally used by San Francisco in evaluating projects within its jurisdiction.

While the use of regional projections is one possible method of analyzing cumulative effects under CEQA, it is the required method under NEPA. FTA guidelines require that regional growth projections from the metropolitan planning organization (MTC in this case) be used as input for the assumed future year conditions.

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) countywide travel demand forecasting model (SFCTA Model) was used to develop the travel forecasts for development and growth through the year 2020 in the region, as well as to determine travel demand to and from the South of Market area (area roughly bounded by The Embarcadero, Market Street, South Van Ness Avenue and King Street). This approach results in an impacts assessment for year 2020

conditions that takes into account both the future development expected in the South of Market area, as well as the expected growth in housing and employment for the remainder of San Francisco and the nine-county Bay Area.

The most up-to-date version of the SFCTA Model estimates future traffic and transit travel demand for the entire nine-county Bay Area region based on land use and employment forecasts prepared by the San Francisco Planning Department for the county, plus regional growth estimates developed and adopted by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) in 1998 (Projections '98) for the remainder of the Bay Area region. Travel demand was estimated for three land use scenarios:

- **2020 No Project,** which assumed future development and growth, consistent with the ABAG forecasts for San Francisco and the Bay Area, and incorporates projects that have recently been approved or entitled in the South of Market area.
- **2020 Project,** which included the additional development associated with the Terminal/Extension Project.
- **2020 Cumulative,** which incorporated other plans recently proposed in the South of Market area including the Rincon Hill Rezoning and the South of Market Redevelopment Area Plan, the Mid-Market Redevelopment Area Plan, and the Terminal/Extension Project. As a result, the year 2020 cumulative conditions forecasts used in the analysis exceed the ABAG forecasts for San Francisco for employment by about 2.8 percent, and household population by about 1.4 percent.

7.3.1 REGIONAL CONTEXT

Because this document is based on accepted, regional land use forecasts for 2020, and assumes transportation improvements programmed within the same time frame, effects evaluated with the project include the cumulative effects of development within the region. Thus, additional analysis of potential cumulative effects related to specific development and transportation improvement projects within the region is not necessary. Impact categories for which the project effects presented in Chapter 5 already present cumulative conditions include the following: land use, transportation (including traffic and transit), air quality, and noise.

7.3.2 LOCAL CONTEXT

Potential cumulative effects are not always regional in scope, and the current project was analyzed to determine whether less than significant environmental effects that would be experienced locally could become significant when considered with other reasonably foreseeable future projects in the project area. Reasonably foreseeable future projects are here defined as the projects assumed in the 2020 No-Project Alternative and described in Section 2.1, other plans recently proposed in the local South of Market area including, the Rincon Hill Rezoning and the

South of Market Redevelopment Area Plan, the Mid-Market Redevelopment Area Plan, and the Terminal/Extension Project. As noted above the inclusion of these local plans results in a 2020 cumulative scenario that exceeds the ABAG forecasts for San Francisco for employment by about 2.8 percent, and household population by about 1.4 percent.

To assess the effects of the vehicle-trips generated by the Transbay Terminal/Caltrain Downtown Extension/Redevelopment Project on 2020 Cumulative local traffic conditions, the contribution of the Project (Assuming the Full Build Redevelopment Alternative) to the 2020 Cumulative traffic volumes was determined. Results of the traffic analyses for these land use scenarios are provided in Section 5.19.4

7.3.3 CUMULATIVE VISUAL IMPACTS

The determination of visual effect is by its very nature is subjective. Potential changes to the San Francisco greater downtown cityscape are shown in Figure 5.16-3. This graphic from the Redevelopment Agency's Draft Design for Development Vision shows a possible urban form resulting from proposed changes to the height and bulk in the Transbay Redevelopment Area. The reasonably foreseeable proposed projects within the Rincon Hill area are also shown. In addition to these projects, the Rincon Hill Mixed Use District is currently undergoing environmental review for proposed changes to zoning with increased height allowances and revised bulk requirements that would allow additional tall towers to be developed. This Rincon Hill Mixed Use District development along with Transbay Redevelopment Plan and other development in the area would result in loss of some existing views, both short- and long-range, from such citywide open spaces as Dolores Park, Twin Peaks, and Potrero Hill. From these sites, the downtown core area would appear larger as it would be extended southward toward the Bay Bridge. This would be a distinct visual change from existing conditions with lower-rise structures to an intensive view of urbanization. A similar change to a more intensive urban view would be expected from viewpoints on Treasure Island.

Likewise from the Bay Bridge, there would be a segment of the Bridge where the views both short- and long-range would change with the full implementation of the Transbay and Rincon plans. With implementation of the Transbay cumulatively with the Rincon Mixed Use district, the more urban downtown core would be closer to the Bridge, changing the views from vehicles traveling along the segment of the highway adjacent to Rincon Hill. These changed visual features are commonly accepted in urban areas and would not substantially degrade existing visual quality or obstruct publicly accessible views; however, the types of views would change to a more intensive urban visual character. However, while changing views, the project would not result in a demonstrative cumulative adverse aesthetic effect.

7.4 GROWTH INDUCEMENT

This section considers whether the Caltrain Extension to the Transbay Terminal Site Alternative would encourage development in excess of amounts expected and provided for in the region

and/or San Francisco. Growth inducement would occur if the amount of population or employment growth projected to occur as a result of the project would exceed planned levels. Increased development and growth in an area are dependent on a variety of factors, including employment and other opportunities, availability of developable land, and availability of infrastructure, water, and power resources.

Transportation projects are potentially growth inducing when they extend service to the edge of an urban area, reducing travel times and improving access between employment opportunities and vacant or underdeveloped land to the extent that the travel time savings and enhanced accessibility outweigh other factors affecting locational decisions.

The Transbay Terminal/Caltrain Downtown Extension/Redevelopment Project is being designed to facilitate planned growth on under-utilized properties in the heart of downtown San Francisco. An important goal of the project is to promote a vibrant new mixed-use neighborhood in an urban center, and enhance public transit access in this area. The redevelopment component of the project would provide a mix of residential and commercial development in a pedestrian-oriented neighborhood, which is consistent with the existing urban character of the Transbay Terminal area. The proposed Transbay Terminal would also provide a hub, bringing a large, transit-user population into a confined area, focusing opportunities for economic/joint development on the site, and potentially stimulating economic activity in the general vicinity.

Transit travel times with the Downtown Extension alternatives are projected to decrease by as much as 15 minutes. These time savings, while sufficient to attract additional riders to Caltrain, are not expected to induce unwanted or unplanned growth, both because they are not great enough to offset other locational factors, and because the project would extend an existing rail corridor, within a region that is already developed.

Modest growth is expected in the region by 2020, and San Francisco population is expected to grow approximately 11.7 percent from 723,959 in 1990 to 808,798 by 2020. At the same time, jobs are expected to grow 19.4 percent from about 566,648 in 1990 to about 731,664 in 2020, with some shift in downtown jobs to the South of Market Area. The primary factors causing the magnitude of this growth, such as the regional economy, availability of services, and so on, are independent of the proposed project.

In the context of downtown San Francisco, opportunities created by the Transbay Terminal/Caltrain Downtown Extension/ Redevelopment Project would not be expected to stimulate unplanned growth, but would rather facilitate the distribution of projected growth to available sites, and facilitate development activities consistent with the *San Francisco General Plan*.