

Initial Study/Negative Declaration

Sierra County Transportation Commission
2025 Regional Transportation Plan
Sierra County, California



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Prepared by:
Green DOT Transportation Solutions



Introduction

Project Title

Sierra County 2025 Regional Transportation Plan

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Project Sponsor's Name and Address

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Project Location and Setting

The Regional Transportation Plan update encompasses the entire County of Sierra, including its one incorporated City, Loyalton and all unincorporated areas. Sierra County is located in Northern California, nestled in the heart of the northern Sierra Nevada Mountain range. Encompassing approximately 958 square miles, the county is characterized by a complex geography of steep mountain slopes, densely forested hills, alpine meadows, and the expansive Sierra Valley, the largest alpine valley in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. More than two-thirds of Sierra County's land area (about 68%, per U.S. Forest Service [USFS], 2023) is publicly owned and managed by federal agencies, primarily the Tahoe National Forest and the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. This predominance of public lands influences transportation planning, as significant roadway mileage traverses remote areas maintained to serve both local communities and recreational visitors. Topographic challenges define the county's transportation environment. Elevations range roughly from 1,800 feet in the Sierra Valley near Loyalton to over 8,800 feet at the county's higher peaks. Snow accumulation, rockslides, and variable geological conditions require careful roadway design and consistent maintenance. Travel corridors, primarily aligned along river valleys and plateaus, reflect historical settlement patterns and remain critical for connecting sparsely distributed communities.

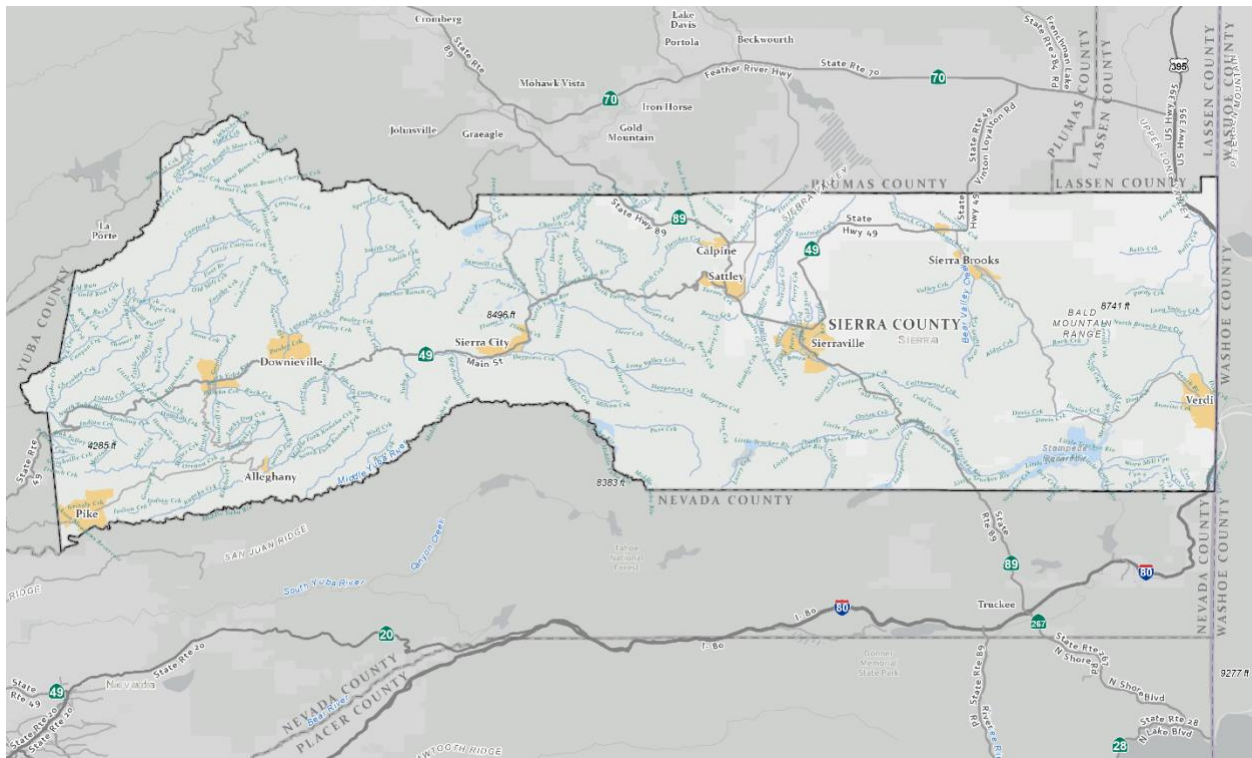


Figure 1: Location Map

General Plan and Zoning

There are a variety of General Plan Land Use designations throughout the entire County, which includes the entire Project area. The proposed Project was designed to be consistent with the General Plan of Sierra County. The Circulation Element from the County's General Plan was used as a reference during the development of the Sierra County 2025 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The proposed Project is consistent with the General Plan and does not include any proposed changes to the County's General Plan.

Project Description

The Sierra County Transportation Commission (SCTC) serves as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Sierra County, ensuring the alignment of local, state, and federal transportation objectives. The SCTC's mission includes facilitating sustainable, safe, and equitable transportation solutions that enhance mobility for all residents and visitors. As a predominantly rural county with dispersed population centers like Loyalton, Downieville, Alleghany, Pike, Verdi, Sierra City, Calpine, and Sierraville, SCTC addresses unique challenges, including limited transit access, aging infrastructure, and diverse stakeholder interests. The Sierra County Transportation Commission (SCTC) is the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for Sierra County, responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of transportation planning within the region. As a rural county nestled in the northern Sierra Nevada, Sierra County's transportation network serves diverse needs, including local travel, tourism, and emergency services. SCTC's mission is to ensure a transportation system that is safe, efficient, and accessible to all residents while preserving the county's natural environment.

Federal law (Title 23 CFR 450.300, Subpart B) and California Government Code Section 65080 mandate RTPAs to prepare long-range transportation plans to guide transportation investments over a minimum 20-year horizon. The 2025 Sierra County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) serves as a roadmap for addressing current transportation challenges and preparing for future needs. By updating the RTP every four to five years, Sierra County remains eligible for critical state and federal funding programs. The RTPA is required by California law to adopt and submit an updated Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) and to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) every five years. The last update to the Sierra County RTP was adopted in 2020. The planning horizon for the 2025 Sierra County RTP is 2045, with transportation improvements in the RTP identified as short-term (0-10 years) and long term (11-20 years).

The 2025 Regional Transportation Plan is considered a “Project” under CEQA, and this Initial Study is focused on the Plan as a long-term planning effort. Projects identified within the Plan will be individually evaluated under CEQA at the project level when the project is being delivered. The RTP update must be consistent with the Caltrans 2024 Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines for Regional Transportation Planning Agencies, which requires inclusion of program-level outcome-based performance measures and close ties to the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) and the Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP).

The overall focus of the 2025 RTP is directed at developing a coordinated and balanced multimodal regional transportation system that is financially constrained to the revenues anticipated over the life of the plan. The RTP is a result of coordination between County, Caltrans, local communities, governmental resource agencies, commercial interests, and residents. Balance is achieved by considering investments and improvements for moving people and goods across all modes including roads, transit, bicycle, pedestrian, trucking, and aviation.

The 2025 RTP builds on the foundation of the 2020 plan, incorporating updated data and addressing new priorities, such as climate resilience, equity, and emerging technologies. It considers all modes of transportation, including roadways, public transit, active transportation, freight, aviation, and emergency routes. Developed through collaboration with Caltrans, Tribal governments, community stakeholders, and the public, the RTP aligns with state and federal goals while addressing Sierra County’s unique rural context.

Purpose of the Plan

As defined by the 2024 RTP Guidelines, the purpose of the Regional Transportation Plan is to accomplish the following objectives:

- Provide an assessment of the current modes of transportation and the potential for new travel options within the region;
- Project and estimate the future needs for travel and goods movement;
- Identify and document specific actions necessary to address regional mobility and accessibility needs;

- Identify guidance and document public policy decisions by local, regional, state and federal officials regarding transportation expenditures and financing;
- Identify needed transportation improvements, in sufficient detail, to serve as a foundation for the: (a) Development of the Federal State Transportation Improvement Program (FSTIP, which includes the STIP), (b) Facilitation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/404 integration process and (c) Identification of project purpose and need;
- Employ performance measures that demonstrate the effectiveness of the system of transportation improvement projects in meeting the intended goals;
- Promote consistency between the RTP and the California Transportation Plan 2050, as well as other plans developed by cities, counties, districts, California Tribal Governments, and State and federal agencies that respond to statewide and interregional transportation issues and needs;
- Provide a forum for: (1) participation and cooperation and (2) facilitation of partnerships that reconcile transportation issues which transcend regional boundaries;
- Involve community-based organizations as part of the public, federal, State and local agencies, California Tribal Governments, as well as local elected officials, early in the transportation planning process so as to include them in discussions and decisions on the social, economic, air quality and environmental issues related to transportation;
- Support economic vitality by enabling competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency;
- Increase the safety of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase the security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users;
- Increase accessibility and mobility of people and freight;
- Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between (regional) transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns;
- Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight;
- Promote efficient system management and operation;
- Emphasize the preservation of the existing transportation system;
- Improve the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system and reduce or mitigate

stormwater impacts of surface transportation; and

- Enhance travel and tourism.

The development of the RTP should also correspond to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This ensures that all people have equal access to the transportation planning process and that all people, regardless of their race, sexual orientation, or income level will be included in the decision-making process.

Project Purpose and Need

The 2024 RTP guidelines require that an RTP “provide a clearly defined justification for its transportation projects and programs.” This requirement is known as the Project Purpose and Need Statement. Caltrans’ Deputy Directive No. DD 83 describes a project’s “Need” as an identified transportation deficiency or problem, and its “Purpose” as the set of objectives that will be met to address the transportation deficiency. In the Sierra County 2025 RTP, each project by mode included in the Action Element includes a qualitative assessment of purpose and need indicating a project’s contribution to system preservation, safety, multimodal improvements, and regional and local mobility. These broader benefits capture the desired outcome of projects during the RTP period and intend to enhance and protect the overall livability for the people in Sierra County.

All projects listed in the Action Element of the RTP fall into one of the following designations. It should be noted that projects within each grouping are for the most part in random order. Consequently, SCTC, County, and/or Caltrans may change the priority ranking or project scope during the RTP approval process.

- Short-Range: RTP improvements represent short-range projects that are fully fundable from anticipated revenue sources, referred to as “constrained”, and will normally be programmed during the first ten (0-10) years of the RTP.
- Long-Range: RTP improvements represent long-range projects that are included on the unconstrained or “unfunded” list of projects in the RTP and are planned for programming in the 11–20-year time frame (by the RTP horizon year, 2045).

The RTP does not directly provide for the implementation of transportation projects and/or facilities. Rather, it identifies necessary improvements to provide the best possible transportation and circulation system to meet the mobility and accessibility needs of the entire county.

Due to the regional nature of the RTP, the analysis in this Initial Study focuses on those impacts that are anticipated to be potentially significant on a regional system-wide level. As individual projects near implementation, it will be necessary to undertake project-specific environmental assessments before each project is approved and implemented. Such future environmental review will be required in accordance with CEQA and, if federally funded, NEPA. Adoption of this Initial Study/Negative Declaration and approval of the RTP does not authorize Sierra County or Caltrans to undertake construction of specific improvement projects identified in the RTP

without further environmental review and consideration.

The following definitions are used in the Regional Transportation Plan:

System Preservation – This category of improvement indicates a project that serves to maintain the integrity of the existing system so that access and mobility are not hindered for travelers. Improvements may include bridge repairs, airport runway repairs, and upgrades to signs and traffic control devices and striping. Rehabilitation projects are those that do not include an entire reconstruction of the roadway, but they often include overlay and/or chip seal work that are also be considered a safety improvement. Other forms of required maintenance include culvert repair and bridge rehabilitation. Most road projects identified in the RTP indicate either “rehabilitation” or “reconstruction” to maintain system preservation.

Safety Projects – Safety projects are meant to maintain or enhance efficiency of the roadway system while reducing the number of collisions, decreasing potential conflicts between various modes of transportation, and preventing injury or fatalities for all transportation system users. Examples of safety improvements include roadway and intersection realignments to improve sight-distance, pavement or runway resurfacing to provide for a smooth travel surface, signage to clarify traffic and aviation operations, congestion relief, obstacle removal so that traffic flows are not hindered, and improvements to pedestrian and bicycle facilities to promote safe travel to desired destinations. In addition, bridge repairs and reinforcement improve safety and efficiency. The desired outcome of safety projects is to reduce the number of collisions on the transportation system, and reduce fatalities, injuries, and damage to property and resources.

Multi-modal Enhancement – Multi-modal projects include improvements for alternative modes of transportation to single-occupancy vehicles including biking, walking and transit. By creating and improving facilities for people walking, biking, and taking transit, multi-modal projects are designed to enhance safety for all road users, improve connectivity and mobility, and encourage mode-shift away from single-occupancy vehicles. Examples of multi-modal projects include separated and protected bike lanes, secure bike parking, shared bike routes, sidewalks, enhanced crosswalks, transit amenities, street furnishings, wayfinding and signage.

Regional Goals

The comprehensive goals, objectives, and policies that have been developed for this RTP meet the needs of the region and are consistent with the County’s regional vision and priorities for action, which set the framework for carrying out the roles and responsibilities of the SCTC and assist them in their decision-making process for transportation investment. These objectives are intended to guide the development of a transportation system that is balanced, multi-modal, and will maintain and improve the quality of life in Sierra County.

Sierra County Regional Goals:

Goal 1: Maintain a safe, efficient, roadway system.

Goal 2: Encourage a safe and convenient non-motorized transportation system.

Goal 3: Support an effective and accessible public transportation system.

Goal 4: Promote aviation facilities.

Goal 5: Encourage improvement to rail services.

Goal 6: Ensure sensitivity to the environment in all transportation decisions.

Goal 7: Include state climate change strategies in transportation investment decisions.

Goal 8: Ensure that Tribal residents within the Sierra region have safe, effective, functional transportation systems, including streets, roads pedestrian and bicycle facilities and transit.

Other Public Agencies Whose Approval Is Required (e.g., Permits, etc.)

Sierra County is the Lead Agency for the proposed Project (2025 Regional Transportation Plan) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Section 15050. No permits are required to approve the proposed Project. Future permit approvals will vary on a project-level basis for projects included in the Action Element of the RTP and may include, but are not necessarily limited to coordination with: Cities of Williams and Sierra, Native American Tribes, Caltrans, CA Department of Fish and Wildlife, Regional Water Quality Control Board, Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Land Management, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Highway Administration, Federal Aviation Administration, and the California Transportation Commission.

Pursuant to PUC 21080.3.1 and AB 52, SCTC consulted with Native American Tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated with Sierra County. SCTC requested a consultation list of tribes located within Sierra County from the Native American Heritage Commission. SCTC sent letters to each tribe requesting input on regional transportation needs as well to begin formal consultation. Tribes were also personally invited to the public hearing on the RTP and provided with a copy of the Draft RTP. To date, no tribes have responded.

Environmental Factors Potentially Affected

None of the environmental factors listed below would be potentially affected by this Project, as described on the following pages.

Aesthetics	Agriculture Resources	Air Quality
Biological Resources	Cultural Resources	Geology/Soils
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Hazards & Hazardous Materials	Hydrology/Water Quality
Land Use/Planning	Mineral Resources	Noise
Population/Housing	Public Services	Recreation
Transportation/Traffic	Utilities/Service Systems	Tribal Cultural Resources
Wildfire	Mandatory Findings of Significance	

Determination

On the basis of this initial evaluation:

x	I find that the proposed Project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
	I find that although the proposed Project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the Project have been made by or agreed to by the Project proponent. A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
	I find that the proposed Project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
	I find that the proposed Project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
	I find that although the proposed Project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed Project, nothing further is required.

Bryan Davey, Director of Transportation

Date

Evaluation of Environmental Impacts

In each area of potential impact listed in this section, there are one or more questions which assess the degree of potential environmental effect. A response is provided to each question using one of the four impact evaluation criteria described below. A discussion of the response is also included.

- ***Potentially Significant Impact*** - This response is appropriate when there is substantial evidence that an effect might be significant and for which no mitigation has been incorporated. If there are one or more "Potentially Significant Impact" entries, upon completion of the Initial Study, an EIR is required.
- ***Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated*** - This response applies when the incorporation of mitigation measures has reduced an effect from "Potentially Significant Impact" to a "Less Than Significant Impact". The Lead Agency must describe the mitigation measures and briefly explain how they reduce the effect to a less than significant level.
- ***Less than Significant Impact*** - A less than significant impact is one which is deemed to have little or no adverse effect on the environment. Mitigation measures are, therefore, not necessary, although they may be recommended to further reduce a minor impact.
- ***No Impact*** - These issues were either identified as having no impact on the environment, or they are not relevant to the Project.

Environmental Checklist

This section of the Initial Study incorporates the most current Appendix "G" Environmental Checklist Form, contained in the CEQA Guidelines. Impact questions and responses are included in both tabular and narrative formats for each of the 17 environmental topic areas.

I. AESTHETICS – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?			X	
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?			X	
c) Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?			X	
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?			X	

DISCUSSION

Sierra County is renowned for its scenic vistas – from the forested canyons of the Sierra Nevada to the open expanse of Sierra Valley – and even features a designated State Scenic Highway. A 41-mile segment of State Route 49 through the county (from the Yuba County line to Yuba Summit) is part of the Yuba-Donner Scenic Byway, offering travelers dramatic river canyon views and picturesque historic towns along the route. The 2025 RTP does not propose any new highways or large structures that would degrade scenic vistas or damage the visual quality of the landscape. Projects in the plan consist mainly of maintenance (e.g. roadway repaving, bridge repairs) and minor improvements along existing roads, so they will not introduce new sources of light/glare or obstruct important views. The character of scenic resources, such as natural landforms, historic roadside features, and dark night skies, will remain unchanged.

The RTP 2025 would not directly alter the visual character of Sierra County as it does not authorize any specific construction projects. The plan focuses primarily on maintenance and improvements to existing transportation facilities rather than new major infrastructure that could impact scenic vistas or resources. Any future project arising from the RTP that might affect visual resources would be subject to project-specific environmental review, local design review, and compliance with applicable general plan policies protecting scenic resources. The RTP policies themselves encourage context-sensitive design that respects local visual character. The plan does not include new lighting sources that would create light pollution and does not

authorize construction that would damage scenic resources along state scenic highways. Therefore, aesthetic impacts are less than significant.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a-d): Less than Significant. The RTP as a “Project” does not propose any construction of new roadways that would affect any of these natural resources and aesthetic views. Roadway projects included in the RTP consist primarily of roadway maintenance and safety improvements. Improvements also occur on State Highways and on local roadways, which would not significantly alter the aesthetics of an area or lead to indirect population growth as a result of access improvements into areas that are currently undeveloped. Additionally, the Project includes roadway and multimodal transportation priorities that will be pursued over the lifetime of the RTP. The projects identified within the RTP will not cause any major aesthetic changes to the Project area. Additionally, each project within the RTP will go through a specific project-level CEQA evaluation at the project level. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

II. AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?				X
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?				X
c) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non- agricultural use?				X

DISCUSSION

Sierra County contains agricultural lands (primarily in Sierra Valley's ranches and pastures) and vast forested areas. The RTP has no provisions that would convert farmland or forest land to other uses, nor does it encourage growth that would encroach on these resources. In fact, the plan supports agriculture by improving goods movement and maintaining farm-to-market routes. There are no new roadway alignments or capacity-expansion projects proposed that would require new right-of-way through agricultural fields or timberlands – all identified projects occur on existing transportation corridors. Likewise, the plan does not propose zoning or land use changes affecting Williamson Act farmlands or forest zoning. By focusing on rehabilitation of existing roads and bridges, the RTP avoids any significant impacts on prime agricultural soils or forest resources. Therefore, there will be no impact as the RTP will not conflict with agricultural land preservation or forestry management; it neither removes lands from production nor enables development on such lands.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a): No Impact. Implementation of the RTP entails implementation of project-level improvements as funding permits over the 20-year lifetime of the Plan. The proposed Project would not convert any agricultural lands and would therefore have no significant impact on Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland or Farmland of Statewide importance. Therefore, there is no impact, and no mitigation is required.

Response b): No Impact. The RTP does not challenge any zoning or land use regulations as designated in the General Plan. The proposed Project would not result in conflicts with any Williamson Act contracts, nor would it result in the cancellation of any Williamson Act contracts. There will be no impact on the Williamson Act contract, therefore no mitigation is required.

Response c): No Impact. See responses a) and b) above. The Regional Transportation Plan will have no impact on agricultural resources in Sierra County.

III. AIR QUALITY – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?			X	
b) Violate any air quality standard or contribute substantially to an existing or projected air quality violation?			X	
c) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the Project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard (including releasing emissions which exceed quantitative thresholds for ozone precursors)?			X	
d) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?			X	
e) Create objectionable odors affecting a substantial number of people?			X	

DISCUSSION

Sierra County is part of the Mountain Counties Air Basin, under the jurisdiction of the Northern Sierra Air Quality Management District (NSAQMD). The county's air quality is generally very good due to low population density, minimal industry, extensive undeveloped lands, and infrequent traffic congestion. The only pollutant for which the area is in non-attainment is particulate matter (PM₁₀) under California standards (not federal standards), largely due to wood stove smoke, open burning, and dust from unpaved roads – not from vehicular traffic. The 2025 RTP will not conflict with or obstruct any air quality plans; rather, it aligns with efforts to maintain clean air. The plan does not add vehicle capacity or generate new traffic, so it will not create a cumulatively considerable increase in criteria pollutants. Construction of individual projects (like road resurfacing or bridge work) may cause temporary, localized emissions (dust or equipment exhaust), but these minor effects will be short-term and subject to standard controls (e.g. dust suppression per NSAQMD rules). The plan's emphasis on transit and active transportation could have a long-term beneficial effect by reducing vehicle emissions. There are no elements that would expose sensitive receptors (e.g. schools, hospitals) to substantial pollutant concentrations, and no significant odor-producing activities. Therefore, the RTP poses a *less than Significant Impact*. The RTP itself will not worsen air quality and in some respects supports air quality improvement (through reduced congestion and encouragement of clean transportation modes).

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-e): Less Than Significant. Many projects outlined within the RTP aim to reduce vehicular trips and promote alternative modes of transportation. However, some projects may have short term effects on air quality, sensitive receptors, or create odors during construction.

These individual projects identified in the RTP will be subject to project-level environmental review prior to approval and construction.

In 2006, the California State Legislature adopted Assembly Bill (AB) 32 known as the California Global Warming Solutions Act (Section 38560.5 of the Health and Safety Code). The bill, and subsequent legislation (SB 375) establishes a cap on statewide greenhouse gas emissions and sets forth the regulatory framework to achieve the corresponding reduction in statewide emissions levels.

In January 2007, the Legislature asked the CTC to review the RTP guidelines to incorporate climate change emission reduction measures. The request emphasized that RTPs should utilize models that accurately measure the benefits of land use strategies aimed at reducing vehicle trips and/or trip length. The CTC staff established an RTP guidelines working group to assist in the development of “best practices” for inclusion in the RTP Guidelines. The 2024 RTP Guidelines provide several recommendations for consideration by rural RTPAs to address greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions. The following State and federal strategies have specific application to Sierra County:

- Alignment with performance measurements and asset management.
- Alignment with goals and policies for the State’s Climate Action Plan for Transportation Investments (CAPTI).
- Alignment with Planning Practice Examples in Appendix F.
- **Federal: Title 23 CFR Part 450.324(b)** requires short and long-range strategies for an integrated multimodal transportation system. **State: GC Section 65080(a)** requires that the RTP shall be directed at achieving a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system.
- **Federal: Title 23 CFR Part 450.324(b)** requires short and long-range strategies for an integrated multimodal transportation system. 23 CFR 450.325(f)(8) is an added requirement for the RTP pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 135 to include consideration of the role that intercity buses play in reducing congestion, pollution, and energy consumption. **State: GC Section 65080(a)** the RTP shall be directed at achieving a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system.
- **Federal: Title 23 CFR Part 450.324(b)** requires short and long-range strategies for an integrated multimodal transportation system to facilitate the safe and efficient movement of people and goods. Title 23 CFR Part 450.324(f)(1) states that the RTP shall include the projected transportation demand of persons and goods in the metropolitan planning area over the period of the plan, and Title 23 CFR Part 450.324(f)(3) states that the RTP shall include operational and management strategies to improve the performance of existing transportation facilities to relieve vehicular congestion and maximize the safety and mobility of people and goods. **State: GC Section 65080(a)** requires that the RTP shall be directed at achieving a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system.
- **Federal: Title 23 U.S.C. Section 134 and Title 23 CFR Part 450.324(f)(5)** requires strategies for improving the regional transportation system and reducing congestion.
- **Federal: Title 23 CFR Part 450.206(a)(3)** states the planning process will address the

security of the transportation system for the public. Title 23 CFR Part 450.216(c) states that the CTP shall reference, summarize, or contain any applicable emergency relief and disaster preparedness plans, strategies and policies that support homeland security and safeguard the personal security of all motorized and non-motorized users. RTPAs shall also comply.

- **Federal: 23 CFR 450.324(f)(7)** The RTP may consider projects and strategies that address areas or corridors where current or projected deficiencies threatens the efficient functioning of key elements of the metropolitan area's transportation system.
- **State: Public Resources Code, Section 21000, et seq.** Rural RTPAs have a unique set of challenges compared to urbanized areas to reduce regional transportation related GHG emissions. Lower land use densities, limited transit options, and higher VMT per household contribute to the challenges to reduce these emissions. More efficient vehicles and low-carbon fuels present the highest payoff for rural counties to reduce transportation related carbon dioxide emissions. Nonetheless Final 2024 Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines for RTPAs 120 rural RTPAs should strive to incorporate strategies to reduce their GHG emissions during their planning process. RTPAs that are not located within a boundary of an MPO are not subject to the provisions of SB 375, or the resultant requirements to address regional GHG targets in their RTPs. This includes the requirement to prepare a SCS to meet a regional GHG emissions reduction target. It is suggested that in preparing the environmental document for their RTP, RTPAs ensure that any GHG emissions during either construction or, as a result of the project, be addressed and mitigated, as appropriate.
- **Federal: 23 CFR 450.306; 23 CFR 450.324(f)(3) & (4); 23 CFR 450.340(e) & (f)** It is important to note that failure to consider any factor specified in the Performance- Based Approach, 23 CFR 450.306 (d), shall not be reviewable by any court under Title 23 U.S.C., 49 U.S.C. Chapter 53, Subchapter II of Title 5 U.S.C. Chapter 5, or Title 5 U.S.C. Chapter 7 in any matter affecting an RTP, TIP, a project or strategy, or the certification of a metropolitan transportation planning process. The FHWA maintains a Performance Based Planning and Programming Guidebook to help identify potential packages of strategies to achieve performance-based objectives, as well as the data and tools used to determine which strategies may be most effective, available at: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/performance_based_planning/pbpp_guidebook/page06.cfm

The transportation planning literature recognizes three interrelated components that contribute to transportation emissions reductions. Those components include changes in vehicle technology (cleaner burning engines), alternative fuel sources, and vehicle use. The first two components are typically the responsibility of industry and national governmental interests. RTPAs and local governments can affect vehicle use by promoting transportation alternatives to the automobile, and by managing the demand for transportation. These efforts typically involve goals and policies and/or projects and programs focused on getting people out of their cars and into non-auto modes of travel (mode shifting).

RTPAs that are not located within the boundaries of a Metropolitan Planning Organization, which includes SCTC, are not subject to the provisions of SB 375 which require addressing regional GHG

targets in the RTP and preparation of a Sustainable Communities Strategy. Future improvements to the transit system and a commitment to a future rideshare program could provide residents another alternative to driving a car.

The following RTP goals are established for Sierra County to increase safety while reducing dependence on the automobile and to promote mode shifting to other forms of transportation.

- Goal 1: Maintain a safe, efficient, roadway system.
- Goal 2: Encourage a safe and convenient non-motorized transportation system.
- Goal 3: Support an effective and accessible public transportation system.
- Goal 6: Ensure sensitivity to the environment in all transportation decisions.
- Goal 7: Include state climate change strategies in transportation investment decisions.
- Goal 8: Ensure that Tribal residents within the Sierra region have safe, effective, functional transportation systems, including streets, roads pedestrian and bicycle facilities and transit.

The effectiveness of efforts by the RTPA to provide transportation alternatives and to implement Transportation Demand Model (TDM) and Transportation System Management (TSM) policies and strategies can be measured in terms of reductions in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) or the expected growth in VMT. VMT reductions correlate directly with reductions in GHG emissions.

The Sierra County 2025 RTP recognizes that non-auto mobility options, including walking, biking and transit, require coordinated land use decisions and improved infrastructure. The goals and policies in the RTP are consistent with the County's proposed General Plan revisions to provide a balanced multi-modal transportation system that includes non-auto choices for access and mobility. The County is committed to implementing these types of policies and strategies that reduce reliance on the automobile and contribute to the reduction of GHG emissions. Although the RTP mentions projects that will enhance the countywide transportation system, the proposed improvements would not influence VMT or population levels, nor would it significantly alter current air quality levels. As such, the proposed Project would result in less than significant impacts to air quality, and no mitigation is required.

IV. BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?			X	
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or US Fish and Wildlife Service?			X	
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?			X	
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?			X	
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?			X	
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?			X	

DISCUSSION

The diverse ecosystems of Sierra County range from riverine habitats along the Yuba River to upland conifer forests that support a variety of wildlife. The RTP has been crafted with policies to minimize environmental impacts on biological resources from transportation investments. Since the RTP is programmatic and does not directly authorize construction, no physical habitat disturbance occurs just by adopting the plan. Future projects will undergo site-specific environmental analysis to avoid or mitigate impacts to sensitive species or habitats. At this stage, the RTP's listed projects (mostly pavement rehab and one bridge replacement) are expected to

have no effect. The plan does not entail significant vegetation removal, wetland fill, or disruption of migratory wildlife corridors. It will not conflict with local resource protection ordinances or any adopted conservation plans. Therefore, the RTP poses a *less than significant impact* because the adoption of the RTP itself has no direct adverse impact on biological resources, and proposed transportation improvements will be designed and scheduled to avoid sensitive habitats, resulting in no significant impact on species or natural communities.

The RTP 2025 does not directly approve any construction in sensitive habitats or changes in land use. No specific project in this plan will be built absent further review and approval, which will include biological surveys, permitting, and mitigation as required by law. As such, adopting the plan will not disturb any special-status species, protected wetlands, or other sensitive biological resources at this stage.

The plan is consistent with Sierra County's general plan policies for habitat and open space protection, and it does not propose new development in conservation areas. Future projects that arise from the RTP (such as road rehabilitation or shoulder widening) typically occur in existing public right-of-way or previously disturbed areas, minimizing the potential to affect undisturbed habitat.

If any project has the potential to affect biological resources (for example, a bridge replacement near a creek or a new bike path), that project will undergo a project-level CEQA/NEPA analysis and obtain any necessary permits (e.g., Army Corps, California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife) to avoid or mitigate impacts to wildlife or wetlands. At the program level, the RTP causes no change to biological resources, and it would not conflict with any local, state, or federal conservation plans.

The Initial Study found that the RTP "would not threaten biological resources", and no mitigation is required.

State Wildlife Action Plan

The goals identified in the Policy Element (Chapter 3) of the RTP consider stressors identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan. The State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) identifies separate conservational provinces broken into subzones called ecoregions by the SWAP. The SWAP identifies sensitive species, habitat stressors, and suggested conservation goals and actions for each of the ecoregions in California.

The California State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) was not developed on a county-by-county basis. However, this consultation with SWAP is mandatory and still provides relevant information. California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB).

A review was performed of county-wide species using the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). The information in the species list includes known occurrences and historical occurrences of species listed as threatened, endangered or otherwise protected under policies or ordinances at the local or regional level as

required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA, §15380). Because the RTP does not propose to expand the capacity of the existing transportation network and includes mostly reconstruction and rehabilitation projects, it is not anticipated to impact threatened or endangered species.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a-f): Less than Significant. The proposed Project does not propose the construction of any new roadways. Rehabilitation efforts make up most projects identified in the RTP, which would not disturb any new ground as they would occur on existing roadways. Any project identified in the RTP would go through project-specific environmental review to ensure that no sensitive areas or species would be harmed. The maintenance and rehabilitation projects in Sierra County would not have an adverse effect on any candidate species identified in the SWAP, nor would it have any adverse effect on any riparian habitat, sensitive natural community or protected wetland identified in the County. The Plan would not interfere with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with any wildlife corridors. The RTP would not conflict with any local protections, nor would it conflict with any conservation plans. Therefore, the current RTP as a plan would not impact biological resources, wetland resources, or conflict with any habitat conservation plan or local ordinance protecting natural and biological resources. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

V. CULTURAL RESOURCES – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource as defined in §15064.5?			X	
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to §15064.5?			X	
c) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?			X	
d) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of formal cemeteries?			X	

DISCUSSION

Sierra County has a rich historical heritage dating back to the Gold Rush era, with many historic structures, sites, and districts. State Route 49 itself passes through "several picturesque gold rush towns" in the county, underscoring the presence of cultural resources along transportation corridors. The RTP, however, does not propose any project that would demolish or alter historic buildings, archaeological sites, or other cultural resources. Projects are largely limited to repairing or upgrading existing infrastructure (e.g. fixing bridges, repaving roads) within current rights-of-way, which greatly reduces the likelihood of disturbing unknown archaeological deposits. Should any ground-disturbing work uncover potential cultural artifacts or human remains in the future, standard procedures under CEQA and state law (e.g. immediate halting of work and consultation with a qualified archaeologist and Native American representatives) will ensure proper handling – but at the plan level, no impacts are anticipated. Therefore, there is *the impact is less than significant* because The RTP will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of any historical or archaeological resource. It is consistent with the county's goal of preserving its cultural heritage while maintaining infrastructure.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a-d): Less than Significant. The proposed Project does not entitle, propose, or otherwise require the construction of new roadways. The proposed Project includes a variety of roadway improvement projects, which consist primarily of roadway rehabilitation efforts and roadway safety improvements. The proposed Project identifies roadway and multimodal transportation improvement funding priorities that will be implemented over the next 20 years. Nearly all of the roadway projects identified in the RTP consist of rehabilitation efforts, which would occur within the roadbeds of the existing roadways and would not have the potential to impact any known or previously undiscovered cultural resources. Individual projects identified in the RTP would be subject to project-level environmental review prior to approval and

construction of the improvements. This future project-level environmental review of individual projects would identify the potential for impacts to any cultural, historical, paleontological or archaeological resources including human remains or cultural artifacts. A project level environmental review is required under CEQA for each project identified in the Regional Transportation Plan and will be evaluated at that time for cultural resources. This Plan as a Project has a less than significant impact on the environment and no mitigation is required.

VI. GEOLOGY AND SOILS – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Expose people or structures to potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury, or death involving:			X	
i) Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42.			X	
ii) Strong seismic ground shaking?			X	
iii) Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?			X	
iv) Landslides?			X	
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?			X	
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the Project, and potentially result in on- or off- site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction or collapse?			X	
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1-B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial risks to life or property?			X	
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative waste water disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of waste water?			X	

DISCUSSION

Sierra County's terrain is mountainous, and like much of California, it is subject to geologic hazards such as earthquakes, landslides, and erosion. The RTP itself, as a planning document, does not directly expose people or structures to geologic risks – it does not approve any new habitable structures or significant alterations to landforms. Future roadway and bridge projects identified in the plan will be engineered in compliance with the California Building Code seismic design standards to ensure safety during earthquakes (e.g. bridges will be retrofitted or designed to withstand ground shaking). These projects will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for site-specific geotechnical conditions. Slope stabilization, proper drainage, and erosion control

measures will be incorporated into designs to prevent landslides or excessive soil loss during construction. The RTP does not propose development on unstable soils or expansive clays that could create substantial risks; improvements generally occur on established roadbeds that have long been in place. There are also no septic systems or unique paleontological resources involved with the transportation projects in the plan. Therefore, the impact is *less than significant because* the plan itself causes no direct geologic or soil impacts, and future projects implemented under the RTP will include standard geotechnical assessments and construction measures to reduce any geology/soil-related hazards to a less-than-significant level.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-e): Less than Significant. Seismicity is directly related to the distribution of fault systems within a region. Depending on activity patterns, faults and fault-related geologic features may be classified as active, potentially active, or inactive. The entire State of California is considered seismically active and is susceptible to seismic ground shaking, however, the most highly active fault zones are along coastal areas.

Fault Rupture. Ruptures to the fault line can occur due to earthquakes or fault creeps. The Alquist-Priolo Fault Zoning Act requires active earthquake fault zones to be mapped, and it provides special development considerations within these zones. While Sierra County could be affected by distant earthquakes, there are no Alquist-Priolo Fault zones within the region.

Seismic Ground Shaking. Some possibility of seismic ground shaking in California is expected. Due to this expectation, California requires special design considerations for all structural improvements in accordance with the seismic design provisions in the California Building Code. These seismic design provisions require enhanced structural integrity based on several risk parameters. Any future roadway improvements implemented as a result of adoption of the RTP would be subject to detailed engineering review at each project-specific level to ensure that the structural integrity is consistent with state requirements. As such, implementation of the proposed RTP as a Project would result in a less than significant impact from seismic ground shaking.

Liquefaction. Liquefaction typically requires a significant sudden decrease of shearing resistance in cohesionless soils and a sudden increase in water pressure, which is typically associated with an earthquake of high magnitude. The potential for liquefaction is highest when groundwater levels are high, and loose, fine, sandy soils occur at depths of less than 50 feet. Most areas of Sierra County are at a low risk of hazards from liquefaction. Any future roadway improvements implemented as a result of adoption of the RTP would be subject to detailed engineering requirements to ensure structural integrity consistent with the requirements of state law. As such, implementation of the proposed Project would result in a less than significant impact from liquefaction.

Landslides. Landslides include rockfalls, deep slope failure, and shallow slope failure. Factors such as the geological conditions, drainage, slope, vegetation, and others directly affect the potential for landslides. A common trigger for landslides results from the construction of new roadways. Most roadway projects identified in the RTP consist of maintenance or repair of existing facilities, and no new roadways are proposed in the 2025 RTP. Furthermore, any future

roadway improvements implemented as a result of adoption of the RTP would be subject to detailed project-level review. Therefore, the potential for landslides is considered less than significant.

Lateral Spreading. Lateral spreading typically results when ground shaking moves soil toward an area where the soil integrity is weak or unsupported, and it typically occurs on the surface of a slope, although it does not occur strictly on steep slopes. Oftentimes, lateral spreading is directly associated with areas of liquefaction. However, any future roadway improvements implemented as a result of adoption of the RTP would be subject to detailed project-level review. Therefore, the potential of impact from lateral spreading is considered less than significant.

Erosion. Erosion naturally occurs on the surface of the earth as surface materials (i.e. rock, soil, debris, etc.) is loosened, dissolved, or worn away, and transported from one place to another by gravity. Two common types of soil erosion include wind erosion and water erosion. The steepness of a slope is an important factor that affects soil erosion. Erosion potential in soils is influenced primarily by loose soil texture and steep slopes. Loose soils can be eroded by water or wind forces, whereas soils with high clay content are generally susceptible only to water erosion. The potential for erosion generally increases as a result of human activity, primarily through the development of facilities and impervious surfaces and the removal of vegetative cover. There are no new roadways proposed in the RTP, and any projects implemented from the RTP will go through project-level review and analysis. Therefore, the potential for erosion is considered less than significant.

Expansive Soils. There are no expansive soils in Sierra County that have a moderate to high swelling capacity, and most of the area does not have any expansive soils. Expansive soils are those that shrink or swell with the change in moisture content. The volume of change is influenced by the quantity of moisture, by the kind and amount of clay in the soil, and by the original porosity of the soil. Shrinking and swelling can damage roads and structures unless special engineering design is incorporated into the project plans. There are no new roadways proposed in the RTP, and any projects implemented from the RTP will go through project-level review and analysis. Therefore, the potential for new expansive soil issues is considered less than significant.

Septic Tanks. Implementation of the RTP would not result in the use or expansion of any septic systems. Implementation of the proposed Project would have a less than significant impact on this environmental topic, and no mitigation is required.

VII. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?			X	
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?			X	

DISCUSSION

The RTP includes goals, policies, and strategies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Sierra County. These goals and policies largely consist of methods to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), which is the main source of GHG emissions for transportation. RTP projects such as roadway and bridge repairs are necessary to maintain a safe regional transportation system and to prevent deterioration of roadways and bridges which may require costlier repairs in the future. These projects will not result in greater traffic volumes along State Highways or County roads as they are simply maintaining the current system.

The RTP includes bicycle and pedestrian projects, and transit projects aimed at enabling travelers to utilize alternative modes of transportation. By expanding alternative forms of transportation and not including capacity-enhancing projects, Sierra County is in line with statewide climate change goals.

The RTP is aligned with state GHG reduction targets (AB 32, SB 32) and includes strategies to cut emissions. Because the plan does not add significant roadway capacity or induce new traffic, it will not generate a substantial increase in GHG emissions. On the contrary, by improving traffic flow on existing roads and investing in transit and non-motorized travel, the plan could slightly reduce per capita vehicle emissions over time. The RTP is also consistent with California's Climate Change Scoping Plan and does not conflict with any policies aimed at reducing GHGs – it in fact supports them. Therefore the impact is *less than significant because* implementation of the RTP would not hinder GHG reduction efforts; any emissions associated with the plan are minimal and incremental, and the plan's policies contribute to long-term climate benefits by facilitating cleaner transportation options.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a) and b): Less than Significant. The RTP includes numerous goals related to the increase in multi-modal transportation options, which reduce dependence on the automobile, and may subsequently result in decreases in total VMT throughout the County. The RTP is consistent with all County General Plan updates and County land use guidelines and will encourage infill development and strategic planning to assist in VMT reduction and shorter travel distances.

VIII. HAZARDS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?				X
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the release of hazardous materials into the environment?				X
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?				X
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?				X
e) For a Project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the Project result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the Project area?			X	
f) For a Project within the vicinity of a private airstrip, would the Project result in a safety hazard for people residing or working in the Project area?			X	
g) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?				X
h) Expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving wildland fires, including where wildlands are adjacent to urbanized areas or where residences are intermixed with wildlands?			X	

DISCUSSION

The RTP would not create significant hazards to the public through transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials, as it is a planning document that does not directly authorize any activities involving hazardous substances. The plan does not interfere with emergency response plans or evacuation routes; in fact, many RTP projects aim to improve emergency access and evacuation capabilities through road improvements and maintenance. Sierra County does contain some sites

with known contamination, but the RTP does not propose disturbance at these locations. For future projects, standard practices for site assessment and remediation would be implemented if contaminated soils are encountered during construction. The RTP does not locate incompatible land uses near airports or airstrips, nor does it place sensitive receptors in areas with elevated wildfire risks. Any roadway improvements would be designed to meet applicable safety standards, including those for transport of hazardous materials. Therefore, impacts related to hazards and hazardous materials are *less than significant*.

The RTP does not involve the routine use or transport of significant quantities of hazardous materials. Transportation improvement projects (road and bridge work) will require common hazardous substances like fuels, oils, and asphalt during construction, but these will be handled in accordance with standard regulations to prevent spills or accidents. There are no new land uses introduced by the plan that would create a significant hazard to the public – for example, no industrial facilities or hazmat storage sites are proposed. The plan also avoids placing any new infrastructure in areas where it could release existing contamination; any projects that might occur on or near known hazardous material sites will undergo appropriate environmental site assessments before construction. In terms of community safety, the RTP is expected to benefit emergency response and evacuation. By maintaining and upgrading key roads, the plan improves reliability of evacuation routes in the event of wildfires or other disasters. The plan will not create significant public health hazards; it conforms to all hazardous materials regulations and improves the transportation system's safety and emergency readiness (with no impairments to emergency response plans), therefore the impact is *less than significant*.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-c): No Impact. The RTP does not propose any new roadways to be constructed, and any potential use of hazardous substances used through construction equipment would be properly assessed and mitigated before any projects are constructed. No hazardous materials will be transported or used within a one quarter mile radius of any schools. Furthermore, any specific project from the RTP would be evaluated for these conditions at a specific project-level basis before construction. Implementation of the proposed Project would have a less than significant impact on this environmental topic and no mitigation is required.

Responses d): Less than Significant. There are two locations in Sierra County that are registered with the Department of Toxic Substances Control and included on the Cortese List. However, any specific project from the RTP would be evaluated on a specific project-level basis. Implementation of the proposed Project would have no impact on this environmental topic and no mitigation is required.

Response e-f): Less than Significant. The Action Element of the RTP includes a list of proposed improvement projects related to aviation facilities in the County. The proposed aviation facility improvements consist primarily of rehabilitation and maintenance efforts. All improvements to aviation facilities within the County identified in the RTP are consistent with the applicable airport land use plans (ALUPs) and would not result in changes to the aviation and flight patterns surrounding County aviation facilities. Furthermore, any specific project from the RTP would be evaluated on a specific project-level basis. Implementation of the proposed Project would have

a less than significant impact on this environmental topic and no mitigation is required.

Response g): Less than Significant. The proposed Project would not impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. The improvements identified in the RTP would improve the transportation network in Sierra County, which would serve to improve emergency response times countywide. Construction activities associated with projects identified within the RTP may result in temporary lane closures that may temporarily impede emergency access to certain areas within the County during construction. However, each improvement project, when undertaken, will include measures to allow safe passage whenever possible. Any specific project from the RTP would be evaluated on a specific project-level basis. Implementation of the proposed Project would have a less than significant impact on this environmental topic and no mitigation is required.

Response h): Less than Significant. Wildfires are a major hazard in the State of California and in Sierra County. Wildfires burn natural vegetation on developed and undeveloped lands and include timber, brush, woodland, and grass fires. While low intensity wildfires have an important role in the ecosystem, modern wildfires are exacerbated due to fire suppression, extreme drought and climate change. These higher intensity fires put human health and safety, structures (e.g., homes, schools, businesses, etc.), air quality, recreation areas, water quality, wildlife habitat and ecosystem health, and forest resources at risk. Most populated areas in Sierra County are in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI). This leaves communities at a higher level of risk as they are more exposed to wildland fires.

The proposed Project consists primarily of projects that will improve and rehabilitate roadways throughout the County. Roadway rehabilitation is necessary for improving emergency response and evacuation efficiency. There are no new homes, businesses or habitable structures proposed as part of the RTP. Therefore, implementation of the proposed Project would not result in increased risks associated with wildfires. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

IX. HYDROLOGY AND WATER QUALITY – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements?			X	
b) Substantially deplete groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that there would be a net deficit in aquifer volume or a lowering of the local groundwater table level (e.g., the production rate of pre-existing nearby wells would drop to a level which would not support existing land uses or planned uses for which permits have been granted)?			X	
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, in a manner which would result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site?			X	
d) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river, or substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or off-site?			X	
e) Create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff?			X	
f) Otherwise substantially degrade water quality?			X	
g) Place housing within a 100-year flood hazard area as mapped on a federal Flood Hazard Boundary or Flood Insurance Rate Map or other flood hazard delineation map?			X	
h) Place within a 100-year flood hazard area structures which would impede or redirect flood flows?			X	
i) Expose people or structures to a significant risk of loss, injury or death involving flooding, including flooding as a result of the failure of a levee or dam?			X	
j) Inundation by seiche, tsunami, or mudflow?			X	

DISCUSSION

The RTP update will not directly involve any discharges or alterations to waterways, groundwater, or drainage patterns. It is a planning document with no ground-disturbing activities authorized. Consequently, the project cannot violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, nor will it deplete groundwater or interfere with groundwater recharge.

There are no construction activities under this plan that could cause erosion, sediment runoff, or flooding. Any future transportation project (like road improvements) that could affect hydrology or water quality will be subject to stormwater best management practices and permitting (e.g., compliance with the Construction General Permit for stormwater) at the time of its development.

The RTP itself has no impact on floodplains or drainage, as it does not propose placing structures in flood hazard areas. It also does not affect any dam or levee, nor does it introduce new impervious surfaces that would increase storm runoff. In short, adoption of the RTP will not change current hydrologic conditions. The Initial Study concluded that any potential impacts on hydrology and water quality are less than significant, with no mitigation required.

Transportation projects have the potential to affect waterways through runoff and physical modifications, but the RTP itself does not directly authorize any activity that could impact water resources. The plan's projects, when implemented, will incorporate best management practices to protect water quality. During construction of road or bridge improvements, contractors will follow stormwater pollution prevention plans (SWPPPs) as required by the State Water Resources Control Board, ensuring that sediment, oils, or other pollutants do not enter streams or rivers. Sierra County's major waterways (e.g. the North Yuba River, Downie River, and others) are valued resources, and the RTP avoids any new stream crossings or extensive channel modifications. In fact, replacing an aging bridge as outlined in the plan will likely improve hydrologic conditions by removing old in-stream supports and reducing erosion at that crossing. The RTP does not involve adding large areas of impervious surface; repaving and maintenance will not significantly change drainage patterns or stormwater volumes. There is no impact to groundwater recharge or extraction since the plan does not include groundwater usage. Therefore the impact is *less than significant* because implementation of the RTP is not expected to violate any water quality standards or significantly alter hydrology. With standard construction safeguards, the projects will avoid water contamination and respect natural drainage systems.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a-j): Less than Significant. Implementation of the proposed Project would indirectly result in the improvement and rehabilitation of roadways and transportation infrastructure throughout Sierra County. The Project would not result in the development or construction of housing or other habitable structures that would be at risk from flooding events and no new roadways would be developed. There are a small number of projects identified within the RTP that may increase the area of impervious surfaces within the County. Such improvements consist primarily of repaving or roadway widening to address safety and operational concerns. The RTP would not substantially alter existing drainage, nor would it contribute to runoff water. The RTP would not degrade the water quality, nor would it place housing within a 100-year flood hazard area. As such, the Project would not result in an increased demand for ground or surface

water resources and would have no impact on these environmental resources.

There is the potential for water quality impacts to occur during construction activities associated with the various projects identified in the RTP. Each project is subject to further project-level environmental review prior to approval and construction. During subsequent environmental review, potential project-specific construction impacts to water quality would be identified, and mitigation measures, in the form of Best Management Practices would be identified and implemented to ensure that impacts to water quality are reduced or avoided. Impacts to the hydrology and water quality are considered less than significant and no mitigation is required.

X. LAND USE AND PLANNING – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Physically divide an established community?				X
b) Conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation of an agency with jurisdiction over the Project (including, but not limited to the general plan, specific plan, local coastal program, or zoning ordinance) adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?				X
c) Conflict with any applicable habitat conservation plan or natural community conservation plan?				X

DISCUSSION

The RTP was developed in coordination with local general plans and would not conflict with established land use plans, policies, or regulations. It supports existing community plans rather than introducing incompatible uses or creating physical divisions within established communities. The transportation improvements identified in the RTP are intended to serve planned growth consistent with adopted general plans, not to induce unplanned growth. As a regional transportation plan, the document inherently promotes connectivity rather than division of communities. The RTP is also consistent with regional air quality plans, habitat conservation plans, and other resource management documents. It does not authorize changes in land use or zoning, which remain under the jurisdiction of local agencies. Therefore, land use and planning impacts are less than significant.

The RTP is consistent with adopted land use plans and policies in Sierra County. It is fundamentally a transportation policy document and does not propose any changes in land use designations or growth patterns. Instead, it supports the Sierra County General Plan's goals by improving transportation facilities that serve existing communities and planned land uses. The plan focuses on maintaining connectivity for the county's small towns without facilitating sprawl or development into rural undeveloped areas. Because the RTP does not involve constructing new roads into untouched areas, it avoids dividing established communities or conflicting with conservation land uses. All projects are within or adjacent to existing transportation rights-of-way and have been coordinated with local and regional plans. Therefore, there is *no impact* because the RTP will not induce unplanned growth or land use incompatibility; it complements current land use plans and helps implement them by providing necessary transportation improvements in appropriate locations.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-c): No Impact. Implementation of the proposed Project would result in improvements to the County's transportation network, and there are no proposed changes to land uses or land use designations in the RTP. The RTP is consistent with the County General Plan, and no housing would be affected, nor would any new roadways be constructed. Furthermore, any projects implemented as a result of the RTP would go through a more detailed project-level analysis. Implementation of the RTP would not conflict with a habitat conservation plan. There are no impacts to land use associated with the proposed Project and no mitigation is required.

XI. MINERAL RESOURCES – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant	No Impact
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?				X
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?				X

DISCUSSION

Sierra County has a history of mineral extraction (notably gold mining during the 19th and early 20th centuries), and remnants of this heritage remain (e.g. old mining equipment and sites scattered in the forest). However, modern significant mineral resource zones (such as active mining operations or known aggregate deposits) are limited. The RTP does not encroach on any designated mineral resource areas identified by the State or county. Since the plan mainly rehabilitates existing transportation infrastructure, it will not result in the loss of availability of any known mineral resources. Therefore, there is *no impact* because the RTP will not restrict the availability of mineral resources; it neither uses large quantities of mineral materials beyond normal construction needs nor blocks access to known mineral-rich sites. Transportation improvements under the plan are compatible with the continued availability of local mineral resources.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a-b): No Impact. There are no active mines that would be affected by the RTP. The proposed Project would not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource or mineral resource recovery site. Implementation of the proposed Project would have a less than significant impact, therefore no mitigation is required.

XII. NOISE – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Exposure of persons to or generation of noise levels in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?			X	
b) Exposure of persons to or generation of excessive ground-borne vibration or ground-borne noise levels?			X	
c) A substantial permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the Project vicinity above levels existing without the Project?			X	
d) A substantial temporary or periodic increase in ambient noise levels in the Project vicinity above levels existing without the Project?			X	
e) For a Project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the Project expose people residing or working in the Project area to excessive noise levels?			X	
f) For a Project within the vicinity of a private airstrip, would the Project expose people residing or working in the Project area to excessive noise levels?			X	

DISCUSSION

The ambient noise environment in Sierra County is generally quiet and rural, with occasional vehicle noise along highways and natural sounds dominating away from roads. Implementation of the RTP is not expected to create significant long-term noise increases. Since no new high-volume roadways or lane expansions are proposed, traffic noise levels on local highways should remain similar to existing. Some short-term noise will inevitably occur during construction of projects like repaving or bridge work – heavy equipment, paving machinery, and trucks can produce substantial noise and vibration. These construction noise impacts will be temporary and are typically exempt from strict noise standards provided they occur in daytime hours and use proper mufflers on equipment. Additionally, given the sparse population, few sensitive receptors (homes, schools) are near enough to planned project sites to experience significant disturbance. Thus, the project will not expose people to noise levels exceeding standards, nor result in a substantial permanent increase in ambient noise. The Initial Study finds the noise impact to be less than significant, with no mitigation measures needed. Therefore, the impact is *less than significant* because the RTP does not introduce new permanent noise sources; any construction-related noise will be short-lived and managed to minimize disturbance, resulting in no significant noise impact on residents or wildlife.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-f): Less than Significant. Implementation of the proposed Project consists primarily of improvements to the existing transportation network in Sierra County. There are no new roadways proposed that would introduce new vehicle trips into areas not currently exposed to mobile noise sources from the existing transportation network. The improvements identified in the RTP would not directly result in increased vehicle trips on the County roadway network and would therefore not result in increased noise levels from vehicles travelling on existing roadways and transportation facilities in the County. Any noise disturbances to people or animals due to construction activities would be temporary, and subsequent environmental review of project-specific impacts would be required prior to approval and implementation of future improvements to ensure that sensitive species are not disturbed. This review would propose temporary mitigations to sensitive receptors and assign mitigation measures as needed to reduce noise impacts. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

XIII. POPULATION AND HOUSING – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Induce substantial population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?			X	
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?			X	
c) Displace substantial numbers of people, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?			X	

DISCUSSION

Sierra County is a very sparsely populated region and has slow or stagnant population growth. The RTP is a policy plan for transportation and does not include any components that would directly induce population growth or demand for new housing. It does not propose new housing construction, nor does it open access to large undeveloped areas in a way that would encourage new subdivisions. All improvements are meant to serve existing communities and expected travel needs based on the General Plan's growth projections (which are modest). There will be no displacement of people or housing caused by the RTP's projects – since projects occur within existing road footprints, no homes or businesses will be removed or relocated. Consequently, the plan will not necessitate construction of replacement housing elsewhere. Therefore, the impact is *less than significant* because the RTP will have no effect on population distribution or housing availability; it is tailored to accommodate and safely serve the county's current and planned population, not to generate new growth.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-c): Less than Significant. The Sierra County region is not undergoing any major development or construction that would significantly alter the population. The proposed Project consists primarily of the rehabilitation of the existing transportation network in Sierra County. There are no new roadways proposed that would extend vehicular access into areas of the County that are not currently accessible by area roadways. The Project would not result in the direct or indirect inducement of population growth. The RTP includes projects that would occur primarily within the right-of-way of the existing transportation network and would not displace any persons or housing units. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

XIV. PUBLIC SERVICES – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:			X	
Fire protection?			X	
Police protection?			X	
Schools?			X	
Parks?			X	
Other public facilities?			X	

DISCUSSION

The RTP itself does not create new development that would increase the population or significantly change service demands. Therefore, it will not result in the need for new or expanded public services such as schools, police, fire, or parks beyond what is already planned. The plan does not include building any new government facilities or altering any public service infrastructure. Sierra County's communities have existing public service arrangements (fire protection largely volunteer-based, a single school district, etc.), and the RTP has no negative impact on their operation. If anything, by enhancing evacuation routes and overall connectivity, the plan supports public safety services, especially important in a county prone to wildfires and winter storms. There is no adverse impact on public services – no increased demand that would require new fire stations, police facilities, schools, or hospital capacity.

Adoption of the RTP would not result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities for fire protection, police protection, schools, parks, or other public facilities. The plan does not directly cause population growth that would increase demand for these services. Rather, it accommodates anticipated growth that has already been planned for in local plans. Many transportation improvements identified in the RTP would improve access to public facilities and enhance emergency response times through better roadway conditions and reduced congestion. The Plan does not propose the construction of new schools, parks, or other public facilities that could have environmental impacts. Therefore, impacts to public services are less than significant.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTION

Response a): Less than Significant. The proposed Project (adoption of the RTP) consists

primarily of the rehabilitation and improvement of the existing transportation network in Sierra County. The projects included in the RTP would not construct any new roadways into areas not already accessible and would not have an impact on population change. As such, the RTP would not create a demand for increased public services, including police protection, fire protection, schools, parks and other public. Furthermore, every project included in the RTP will be analyzed at a project-specific level to verify this. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

XV. RECREATION– WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the Project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the			X	
b) Does the Project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which			X	

DISCUSSION

Outdoor recreation is a major facet of Sierra County's identity (with abundant opportunities for fishing, hiking, camping, etc.), but the RTP does not directly create or remove recreational facilities. It does not induce population growth that would lead to overuse of existing recreational areas. No parkland will be converted or negatively affected by the transportation projects. The plan does not involve constructing recreational facilities itself, so there's no impact such as increased noise or environmental effects on parks. The RTP will not adversely impact the quality or availability of recreational opportunities.

The RTP would not increase the use of existing parks or recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration would occur. It does not propose construction of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment. The plan does include some bicycle and pedestrian improvements that may enhance access to recreational areas, but these would generally have beneficial rather than adverse impacts. By improving transportation access to parks and open spaces, the RTP supports recreational opportunities without creating significant adverse impacts. Any specific bicycle or pedestrian pathway projects identified in the RTP would undergo separate environmental review when proposed for implementation. Therefore, recreational impacts are less than significant.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-b): Less than Significant. The proposed Project (adoption of the RTP) consists primarily of the rehabilitation and improvement of the existing transportation network in Sierra County. The projects included in the RTP would not construct any new roadways into areas not already accessible and would not have an impact on population change. Furthermore, every project included in the RTP will be analyzed at a project-specific level to verify this. As such, the demand for increased recreational facilities would not increase as a result of implementation of the proposed Project. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

XVI. TRANSPORTATION/TRAFFIC – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Conflict with an applicable plan, ordinance or policy establishing measures of effectiveness for the performance of the circulation system, taking into account all modes of transportation including mass transit and non-motorized travel and relevant components of the circulation system, including but not limited to intersections, streets, highways and freeways, pedestrian and bicycle paths, and mass transit?			X	
b) Conflict with an applicable congestion management program, including, but not limited to level of service standards and travel demand measures, or other standards established by the county congestion management agency for designated roads or highways?			X	
c) Result in a change in air traffic patterns, including either an increase in traffic levels or a change in location that results in substantial safety risks?			X	
d) Substantially increase hazards due to a design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?			X	
e) Result in inadequate emergency access?			X	
f) Conflict with adopted policies, plans, or programs regarding public transit, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities, or otherwise decrease the performance or safety of such facilities?			X	

DISCUSSION

Evaluating transportation impacts under CEQA now focuses on vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and consistency with plans (pursuant to CEQA Guidelines and SB 743). The RTP is, by definition, the long-range plan for regional transportation – it is consistent with statewide and regional policies aimed at improving transportation efficiency and reducing per-capita VMT. Adopting the plan will not directly cause any physical change in traffic conditions; rather, it guides future projects that, collectively, aim to improve traffic safety and operations on existing roads and enhance alternatives to driving (public transit, bicycling, walking). Because the RTP does not include any immediate development or roadway expansion that would induce new travel, it will not increase traffic congestion or VMT in the short term. Many RTP strategies (e.g., transit improvements, complete streets projects) are expected to help reduce VMT over time. The plan does not

propose new road alignments through undeveloped areas, so it does not create new roadway hazards or barriers. It also does not conflict with any the Circulation Element of the General Plan – it was developed in coordination with the County and cities and is consistent with their land use plans. Any site-specific traffic impacts of a particular future project (e.g., a new intersection or road widening) will be studied when that project is designed, but at the program level no significant transportation impact occurs from adopting the RTP.

The RTP's very purpose is to benefit the transportation network – enhancing safety, reducing maintenance backlogs, and improving multimodal mobility. Under CEQA, transportation impacts are now evaluated largely in terms of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) rather than congestion. The 2025 RTP is not expected to significantly increase VMT; it does not add major new road capacity that could induce longer commutes or sprawling development. The plan is consistent with state objectives to reduce per capita VMT and promotes alternatives to driving (public transit, walking, biking) which can help minimize VMT growth. It does not conflict with any applicable transportation plans; rather, it is the guiding transportation plan for the region and aligns with state and regional transportation policies (including safety, Complete Streets, and VMT reduction strategies). By prioritizing road maintenance, the RTP will improve roadway conditions and potentially reduce accident rates (e.g. fixing potholes, improving signage on rural roads). There are no changes proposed that would create hazardous geometric design features – designs will follow Caltrans and county standards to ensure safe travel. Nor will the plan interfere with emergency access. Therefore, the impact is *less than significant* because the RTP has positive transportation effects and no adverse CEQA transportation impacts. It does not cause a substantial increase in traffic or travel hazards; instead it facilitates a safer, more efficient transportation system consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3 objectives (vehicle travel reductions).

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-b): Less than Significant. The Project is the preparation of the Regional Transportation Plan, which is a plan developed to guide transportation investments for all modes of transportation through goals, policies and proposed projects. It establishes vehicle miles traveled (VMT) standards established by the Sierra County Transportation Commission for the County's roads and highways. It also includes policies regarding public transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities and airports. As such, there is no conflict as the RTP is the guiding transportation plan for the region. The RTP is also consistent with the circulation element of the General Plans and would not result in conflicts or inconsistencies with that plan. Therefore, there is no impact, and no mitigation is required. Implementation of the proposed RTP would result in improvements and rehabilitation to the existing transportation and roadway network in Sierra County. Implementation of the proposed Project would not result in population growth within Sierra County and would not directly result in increases of VMT. The proposed Project would improve traffic flows and operations throughout the County and would not result in VMT that exceeds applicable standards or thresholds. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

Responses c-f): Less than Significant. As described throughout this Initial Study, implementation of the proposed Project would assist in the improvement of the County's transportation network

across all modes of transit and transportation. The improvements proposed to aviation facilities in the County would not result in an increase in flights or a change in flight patterns. There are policies and programs included in the RTP that would improve public access to transit systems and alternative modes of transportation, such as bicycle use, and the RTP does not conflict with any existing plans to improve active transportation or transit. The various roadway improvements identified in the RTP would assist in the delivery of emergency services by improving the local and regional roadway network and reducing existing design and safety hazards. The RTP and the projects included within were developed after careful review of the General Plan of the County. The RTP is consistent with the circulation element of the General Plan and would not result in conflicts or inconsistencies with the above referenced plan. This is considered a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

XVII. TRIBAL CULTURAL RESOURCES – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource, defined in public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:				
a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of the Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k), or			X	
b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American Tribe.			X	

DISCUSSION

Sierra County lies within the ancestral territories of Native American groups, principally the Nisenan (Southern Maidu) and Washoe peoples, who historically inhabited and utilized the land. Under AB 52 (tribal cultural resources consultation requirements), the SCTC notified local tribes during the RTP's preparation. No specific tribal cultural resources have been identified that would be affected by the plan's adoption. The RTP does not approve any ground disturbance at this stage; therefore, it has no direct impact on tribal cultural resources. Nonetheless, the County will continue to consult with tribes as individual projects move forward, to ensure any potential resources (such as sacred sites or traditional cultural properties) are protected. Given that most projects are on existing roads, the likelihood of disturbing previously undisturbed areas of tribal significance is low. Standard inadvertent discovery protocols will be in place during project construction (if cultural materials or human remains of Native American origin are found, work will stop and appropriate tribal representatives will be engaged). Therefore, the impact is *less than significant because* the RTP, by itself, does not impact tribal cultural resources. Future project-specific coordination with Native American tribes will provide protection for any tribal resources, and no significant impacts are anticipated.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Response a-b): Less than Significant. CEQA requires lead agencies to determine if a proposed Project would have a significant effect on tribal cultural resources. The CEQA Guidelines define tribal cultural resources as: (1) a site, feature, place, cultural landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American Tribe that is listed or eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources, or on a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code Section 5020.1(k); or (2) a resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant according to the historical register criteria in Public Resources Code Section 5024.1(c), and considering the significance of the resource to a California Native American Tribe. The County provides notices of projects under AB52 to the designated contact of, or a tribal representative of, traditionally and culturally affiliated California Native American tribes that have requested notice.

The proposed Project does not entitle, propose, or otherwise require the construction of new roadways. The proposed Project includes a variety of roadway improvement projects, which consist primarily of roadway rehabilitation efforts and roadway safety improvements. The proposed Project identifies roadway and multimodal transportation improvement funding priorities that will be implemented over the next 20 years. Nearly all of the roadway projects identified in the RTP consist of rehabilitation efforts, which would occur within the roadbeds of the existing roadways and would not have the potential to impact any known or previously undiscovered cultural resources. Individual projects identified in the RTP that may include the widening of a roadway or any other projects that would require excavation at previously undisturbed sites would be subject to project-level environmental review prior to approval and construction of the improvements. This future project-level environmental review of individual projects would identify the potential for impacts to any cultural resources. This is a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

XVIII. UTILITIES AND SERVICE SYSTEMS – WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Exceed wastewater treatment requirements of the applicable Regional Water Quality Control Board?			X	
b) Require or result in the construction of new water or wastewater treatment facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects?			X	
c) Require or result in the construction of new storm water drainage facilities or expansion of existing facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental effects?			X	
d) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the Project from existing entitlements and resources, or are new or expanded entitlements needed?			X	
e) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the Project that it has adequate capacity to serve the Projects Projected demand in addition to the providers existing commitments?			X	
f) Be served by a landfill with sufficient permitted capacity to accommodate the Projects solid waste disposal needs?			X	
g) Comply with federal, state, and local statutes and regulations related to solid waste?			X	

DISCUSSION

The RTP does not include development that would require new water supply, wastewater treatment, or substantial utility services. Transportation projects like road and bridge improvements have minimal utilities demand and they do not generate wastewater or solid waste in operation. The plan will not cause any increase in long-term water usage or affect water treatment facilities. Construction debris from projects (old asphalt, etc.) will be disposed of properly in existing licensed facilities, but the volume is not enough to significantly impact landfill capacity. There are also no aspects of the plan that involve new energy supply infrastructure beyond possibly installing some electrical hookups for EV chargers or transit facilities, which is easily supported by the local grid. The RTP does not lead to population growth that would strain utilities. The plan will not result in the need for new or expanded utilities or service systems. All projects can be served by existing infrastructure (for example, any street lighting or signals installed will tie into current power systems, and maintenance of roads does not require new utility lines). There is no adverse effect on water supply, wastewater facilities, stormwater

systems, or solid waste management.

The RTP would not require or result in the construction of new water, wastewater treatment, stormwater drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities with significant environmental effects. As a transportation plan, it does not directly increase water demand, generate wastewater, or substantially increase solid waste generation. Transportation projects may include some drainage improvements within existing rights-of-way, but these would be designed to meet current standards for water quality and would not cause significant environmental effects. The RTP does not propose development that would exceed wastewater treatment capacity or water supplies. While some construction waste may be generated by future transportation projects, these would be subject to state and local requirements for recycling and diversion from landfills. Therefore, impacts to utilities and service systems are less than significant.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-g): Less than Significant. The Project consists of various roadway and transportation network improvement projects throughout the County. No new roadways are proposed, RTP projects mostly consist of rehabilitation efforts. However, as described throughout this Initial Study, projects identified in the RTP would be subject to project-level environmental review to determine what mitigation measures are appropriate. Future projects under this review may result in proposed mitigation measures to avoid or lessen potential impacts to drainages such as culverts or swales adjacent to roadway and other improvement projects. Projects are anticipated to generate spoils to some degree. However, Best Management Practices (BMP's) are followed for proper spoil storage and disposal, which often occurs at county maintenance yards. The projects constructed as a result of the RTP will all be subject to project-level review; however, it is not anticipated that these projects will exceed wastewater treatment sites or landfills, nor would they require additional water supplies for the purposes of the Project. As any from the RTP will go through this project-level review, this is considered a less than significant impact and no mitigation is required.

XIX. WILDFIRE – IF LOCATED IN OR NEAR STATE RESPONSIBILITY AREAS OR LANDS CLASSIFIED AS VERY HIGH FIRE HAZARD SEVERITY ZONES, WOULD THE PROJECT:

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?			X	
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose Project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?			X	
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?			X	
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including down slope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?			X	

DISCUSSION

Wildfire risk is a constant concern in the Sierra Nevada region. Large portions of Sierra County are classified as High or Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones under state criteria (over 120,000 acres in the Very High category) Fire Hazard Severity Zones in State Responsibility Area - Sierra County, owing to the county's forested landscapes and rugged terrain. The RTP, however, does not exacerbate wildfire risks; it includes no activities such as housing development in fire-prone wildlands or infrastructure that would directly increase ignition sources. On the contrary, maintaining and improving roads can aid in wildfire management by providing reliable evacuation routes and access for firefighting equipment. For example, clearing overgrown vegetation along existing road shoulders as part of routine maintenance can reduce fuel near travel routes. The plan does not propose overhead utility lines or other facilities that could spark fires. During construction of projects, contractors will implement fire safety measures (especially during hot, dry conditions) in accordance with Cal Fire guidelines to avoid ignitions (e.g. no welding or grinding without proper precautions on Red Flag warning days). No aspect of the RTP would impair an adopted emergency response or evacuation plan – in fact, it strengthens such plans by addressing key roadway improvements for safe evacuations. The projects will not expose people or structures to new wildfire hazards; they generally improve resilience (e.g. a new bridge can provide a more dependable escape route if the old one was load-limited). Therefore, the impact is *less than significant* because the RTP itself poses no wildfire impact. It neither increases wildfire risk nor worsens the potential consequences of wildfire; instead, it contributes to community safety in wildfire scenarios by ensuring the transportation network remains robust and accessible.

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-d): Less than Significant. The Project consists of various roadway and transportation network improvement projects throughout the County. No new roadways are proposed, RTP projects mostly consist of rehabilitation efforts. However, as described throughout this Initial Study, projects identified in the RTP would be subject to project-level environmental review to determine what mitigation measures are appropriate. Future projects under this review may result in proposed mitigation measures to avoid or lessen potential impacts. The Project would not result in land use changes that would affect an emergency response or emergency evacuation plan. The Project would not require installation of infrastructure that would exacerbate fire risk. The Project would not impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan.

The Project would not interfere with any of the plans or reports mentioned in the discussion above because it would not prohibit subsequent plans from being established or prevent the goals and objectives of existing plans from being carried out. The Project would not require rerouting of traffic or road closures that would impair emergency response services. Therefore, the Project, would not significantly impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. The Project would not result in exacerbated wildfire risk that would expose occupants to pollutant concentrations. Furthermore, the Project would not result in increased slopes or other conditions which would exacerbate wildfire risk. Therefore, the Project would have no impact related to exposing people or structures to flooding, landslides, or risks associated with post-fire instability.

XX. MANDATORY FINDINGS OF SIGNIFICANCE

	Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant with Mitigation	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Does the Project have the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?			X	
b) Does the Project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a Project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past Projects, the effects of other current Projects, and the effects of probable future Projects)?			X	
c) Does the Project have environmental effects which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?			X	

RESPONSES TO CHECKLIST QUESTIONS

Responses a-c): Less than Significant. When considered with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, the RTP would not result in cumulatively considerable environmental impacts. The plan is designed to be consistent with local general plans, regional air quality plans, and other planning documents that have already considered cumulative conditions. Many of the projects in the RTP (such as road maintenance, safety improvements, and multimodal enhancements) would have minimal impacts individually and would not combine to create significant cumulative effects. The plan is inherently cumulative in nature, as it considers the transportation system as a whole rather than as isolated projects. By promoting efficient transportation, transit use, and non-motorized travel, the RTP could help reduce cumulative impacts related to air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, and energy consumption compared to a no-project scenario.

The RTP is a policy plan with no direct physical changes; it includes protections for environmental resources and avoids impacts to habitats and cultural sites. As discussed, it is not expected to degrade natural or historic resources in any significant way. Cumulative impacts are not foreseen because the RTP's projects are mostly maintenance-oriented and have minimal environmental footprints. Regionally, the plan is consistent with others and does not contribute to any cumulatively significant trends. No substantial adverse effects on humans have been identified. The plan does not expose people to hazards, pollution, or other environmental harm; conversely,

it aims to improve public safety and public health. There are no elements of the RTP that would significantly affect community noise levels, air quality, or water quality in a way that harms residents. The analysis of all topics found impacts to be none or less-than-significant, indicating that people in Sierra County will not be adversely affected by the plan's implementation. Notably, the RTP will not induce unplanned growth or result in significant cumulative impacts; it is fundamentally a policy document that by itself does not alter the physical environment.

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