

7. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

7.1 INTRODUCTION

7.1.1 Purpose and Scope

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) include a discussion of reasonable project alternatives that would “feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project, but would avoid or substantially lessen any significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives” (CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6). This chapter identifies potential alternatives to the proposed project and evaluates them, as required by CEQA.

Key provisions of the CEQA Guidelines on alternatives (Section 15126.6[a] through [f]) are summarized below to explain the foundation and legal requirements for the alternatives analysis in the EIR.

- “The discussion of alternatives shall focus on alternatives to the project or its location which are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the project, even if these alternatives would impede to some degree the attainment of the project objectives, or would be more costly” (15126.6[b]).
- “The specific alternative of ‘no project’ shall also be evaluated along with its impact” (15126.6[e][1]).
- “The no project analysis shall discuss the existing conditions at the time the Notice of Preparation (NOP) is published, and at the time the environmental analysis is commenced, as well as what would reasonably be expected to occur in the foreseeable future if the project were not approved, based on current plans and consistent with available infrastructure and community services. If the environmentally superior alternative is the ‘no project’ alternative, the EIR shall also identify an environmentally superior alternative among the other alternatives” (15126.6[e][2]).
- “The range of alternatives required in an EIR is governed by a ‘rule of reason’ that requires the EIR to set forth only those alternatives necessary to permit a reasoned choice. The alternatives shall be limited to ones that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project” (15126.6[f]).
- “Among the factors that may be taken into account when addressing the feasibility of alternatives are site suitability, economic viability, availability of infrastructure, general plan consistency, other plans or regulatory limitations, jurisdictional boundaries, and whether the proponent can reasonably acquire, control or otherwise have access to the alternative site (or the site is already owned by the proponent)” (15126.6[f][1]).
- “For alternative locations, “only locations that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project need be considered for inclusion in the EIR” (15126.6[f][2][A]).
- “An EIR need not consider an alternative whose effect cannot be reasonably ascertained and whose implementation is remote and speculative” (15126.6[f][3]).



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For each development alternative, this analysis:

- Describes the alternative,
- Analyzes the impact of the alternative as compared to the proposed project,
- Identifies the impacts of the project that would be avoided or lessened by the alternative,
- Assesses whether the alternative would meet most of the basic project objectives,
- Evaluates the comparative merits of the alternative and the project.

Per the CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(d), additional significant effects of the alternatives are discussed in less detail than the significant effects of the project as proposed.

7.1.2 Project Objectives

As described in Section 3.2, the following objectives have been established for the proposed project and will aid decision makers in their review of the project, the project alternatives, and associated environmental impacts:

Vision 2035

- While maintaining our small town atmosphere, the Town of Yucca Valley is a unique, desirable place to live, the economic hub of the Morongo Basin, and a sought after place to visit.
- As a destination, visitors are drawn to our desert environment, arts and culture, recreation, history, night skies, active open space, and shopping and hospitality opportunities.
- Our range of community services and facilities, efficient infrastructure, safe and established neighborhoods, unique character, and diversity define our community and quality of life.
- Our commitment to balanced growth, environmental stewardship, fiscal sustainability, active citizen participation, and property rights are the cornerstones of our community.

Objectives

- Provide a comprehensive update to the Town's General Plan that establishes goals, policies, and implementation actions related to land use, circulation, housing, conservation and open space, safety, and noise
- Designate the distribution, location, and extent of land uses including residential, commercial, mixed use, industrial, open space, and public facilities
- Maintain balanced, sustainable growth, and the desert character and environment, while expanding the Town's position as the economic hub of the Morongo Basin
- Implement a series of distinct mixed use activity nodes along SR-62 to promote and encourage sustainable development, while creating a sense of place along the corridor
- Provide flexibility in Special Policy Areas to respond to unique goals and provide development opportunities in changing market conditions
- Maintain the community's safe and established residential neighborhoods

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- Encourage a range of residential product types on vacant infill sites to meet local housing needs
- Improve the community's jobs-housing balance and fiscal sustainability by planning for a diversified employment base provided by a variety of commercial, industrial, and mixed use land uses
- Provide appropriate community services and efficient infrastructure (roads, sewer, and water) to meet local needs
- Ensure new development covers its proportionate share of infrastructure improvement costs
- Adopt and implement a circulation network based on mobility demands and land use patterns, with a variety of mobility options to reduce vehicle miles traveled and minimize greenhouse gas emissions
- Encourage infill development along SR-62 and on vacant sites in developed areas to conserve the Town's hillsides and wildlife corridors to the greatest extent practical
- Seek opportunities to build upon recreation tourism afforded by the Town's natural features and proximity to the Joshua Tree National Park
- Prepare for and mitigate exposure to natural, human made, and noise related hazards

7.2 SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

The following significant and unavoidable impacts are identified in Chapter 5, *Environmental Analysis*, of this Draft EIR:



Air Quality

- **Impact 5.2-1.** Buildout of the General Plan Update would generate more growth than the current General Plan; therefore, the project would be inconsistent with the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District's (MDAQMD) Air Quality Management Plans (AQMP). Mitigation measures incorporated into future development projects and adherence to the General Plan Update policies and implementation actions for operation and construction phases described in Impacts 5.2-2 and 5.2-3 would reduce criteria air pollutant emissions associated with buildout of the General Plan Update. Goals and policies in the General Plan Update would facilitate continued Town participation/cooperation with MDAQMD and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to achieve regional air quality improvement goals, promotion of energy conservation design and development techniques, encouragement of alternative transportation modes, and implementation of transportation demand management strategies. However, no mitigation measures are available that would reduce impacts associated with inconsistency with the AQMP due to the magnitude of growth and associated emissions that would be generated by the buildout of the Town in accordance with the General Plan Update.
- **Impact 5.2-2.** Construction activities associated with the buildout of the General Plan Update would generate criteria air pollutant emissions that would exceed MDAQMD's regional significance thresholds and would contribute to the ozone and particulate matter nonattainment designations of the Mojave Desert Air Basin (MDAB). Goals and policies in the General Plan Update would reduce air pollutant emissions. However, due to the magnitude of emissions generated by future construction activities associated with the buildout of the General Plan Update, no mitigation measures are available that would reduce impacts below MDAQMD's thresholds.

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- **Impact 5.2-3.** Buildout of the proposed Land Use Plan would generate additional vehicle trips and area sources of criteria air pollutant emissions that exceed MDAQMD's regional significance thresholds and would contribute to the ozone and particulate matter nonattainment designations of the MDAB. Goals and policies in the General Plan Update would reduce air pollutant emissions. However, due to the magnitude of emissions generated by the buildout of residential, office, commercial, industrial, and warehousing land uses in the Town, no mitigation measures are available that would reduce impacts below MDAQMD's thresholds.
- **Impact 5.2-4.** Buildout of the Yucca Valley General Plan could result in new sources of criteria air pollutant emissions near existing or planned sensitive receptors. Goals and policies are included in the General Plan Update that would reduce concentrations of emissions generated by new development. Localized emissions of criteria air pollutants could exceed the MDAQMD regional significance thresholds because of the scale of development activity associated with theoretical buildout of the General Plan Update. For this broad-based General Plan Update, it is not possible to determine whether the scale and phasing of individual projects would result in the exceedance of MDAQMD's localized emissions thresholds. Therefore, in accordance with the MDAQMD methodology, impacts would be significant.

Biological Resources

- **Impact 5.3-2.** Growth accommodated through long-term buildout of the Town of Yucca General Plan would result in significant loss of habitat. CEQA and FESA regulate the loss of habitat as it pertains to special status plant and animal species. Coordination with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife would ensure that, on a project-by-project basis, habitat is replaced or conserved in accordance with the agency-determined ratios if it is determined, through consultation, that special status plant and animal species occur or are likely to occur onsite. Implementation of mitigation measures would also mitigate impacts for each individual project site. However, to this date, no regional Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Communities Conservation Plan has been prepared for the Morongo Basin that mitigates the cumulative loss of habitat as a result of future development. Consequently, though impacts from loss of habitat would be mitigated on a case-by-case basis for each individual development through consultation with the relevant federal and state agencies, they would remain significant.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- **Impact 5.6-1.** Buildout of the Town of Yucca Valley to the maximum level allowed by the land use designations of the General Plan Update land use plan would generate a substantial increase in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions over existing conditions. Goals and policies are included in the General Plan Update that would reduce GHG emissions. Compliance with the goals in the San Bernardino Association of Government's (SANBAG) proposed Regional GHG Reduction Plan (identified as Mitigation Measure 6-1) and policies and implementation measures of the General Plan Update would ensure that long-term GHG emissions from buildout of the General Plan Update are reduced to the extent feasible. However, due to the magnitude of emissions generated by the buildout of residential, office, commercial, industrial, and warehousing land uses in the Town, and the fact that no statewide long-term strategy to reduce emissions beyond year 2020 are available that would reduce impacts below MDAQMD's thresholds at buildout of the General Plan.

Noise

- **Impact 5.10-1.** Traffic generated by buildout of the General Plan would substantially increase traffic noise along major traffic corridors in the Town and could expose existing and planned residents to substantial noise levels. To reduce potential noise impacts to new sensitive land uses, Noise Element Policy N 1 would

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require noise-reducing, site design, and building construction features in residential and mixed-use projects in areas where outdoor average daily noise levels exceed of 65 dBA CNEL. However, no feasible mitigation measures are available that would prevent impacts to existing homes fronting the major transportation corridors. Though new uses can be designed for the expected noise exposure, there would be no feasible mitigation measures to reduce potential noise impacts to existing noise-sensitive uses.

Transportation and Traffic

- **Impact 5.14-2.** The proposed intersection improvements required to meet the San Bernardino County Congestion Management Plan (CMP) acceptable level of service (LOS) standards may be difficult to achieve due to right-of-way acquisitions at the intersection of SR-62 and SR-247. This intersection would operate with more than 45 seconds of delay in the PM peak hour, which is inconsistent with the CMP guidance for that facility.

7.3 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED DURING THE SCOPING/PROJECT PLANNING PROCESS

The following is a discussion of the land use alternatives considered during the scoping and planning process and the reasons why they were not selected for detailed analysis in this Draft EIR.

7.3.1 Alternative Development Areas

CEQA requires that the discussion of alternatives focus on alternatives to the project or its location that are capable of avoiding or substantially lessening any significant effects of the project. The key question and first step in the analysis is whether any of the significant effects of the project would be avoided or substantially lessened by putting the project in another location. Only locations that would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project need be considered for inclusion in the EIR (Guidelines Sec. 15126[5][B][1]). The proposed project is the General Plan Update for the Town of Yucca Valley. The project is necessarily limited to the Town of Yucca Valley, since the Town does not have the authority to impose policies outside its boundaries. Therefore, no alternative development areas were considered.



7.3.2 SR-62 Realignment

A significant and unavoidable traffic impact would occur on SR-62 with full buildout of the proposed General Plan. One alternative considered for reducing traffic impacts on SR-62 was realignment of SR-62 between Santa Fe Trail and Kickapoo Trail in the west-central part of the Town. The realigned SR-62 would extend westward from Santa Fe Trail along the current alignment of Yucca Trail for about 0.5 mile, then curve southward to rejoin the existing SR-62 alignment. The roadway currently designated SR-62 would remain in place as a four-lane divided highway serving the existing commercial and civic corridor along that roadway. CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6(f)(1) requires that alternatives to a project be feasible. An alternative for which implementation is out of the control of the project applicant is not considered feasible. SR-62 is a Caltrans facility. Realignment of SR-62 would be under the control of Caltrans, not the Town of Yucca Valley. Therefore, realignment of SR-62 is not a feasible alternative to the proposed General Plan.

7.4 ALTERNATIVES SELECTED FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

Based on the criteria listed above, the following three alternatives have been determined to represent a reasonable range of alternatives that have the potential to feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project but may avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. These alternatives are analyzed in detail in the following sections.

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- No Project/Current General Plan Alternative
- Clustered Development Alternative
- Reduced Intensity Alternative

An EIR must identify an “environmentally superior” alternative, and where the No Project Alternative is identified as environmentally superior, the EIR is then required to identify as environmentally superior an alternative from among the others evaluated. Each alternative's environmental impacts are compared to the proposed project and determined to be environmentally superior, neutral, or inferior. However, only those impacts found significant and unavoidable are used in making the final determination of whether an alternative is environmentally superior or inferior to the proposed project. Only the impacts involving air quality, biological resources, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, noise, and traffic were found to be significant and unavoidable. Section 7.7 identifies the Environmentally Superior Alternative.

The Preferred Land Use Alternative (proposed General Plan and Development Code Update) is analyzed in detail in Chapter 5 of this DEIR.

Alternatives Comparison

The following statistical analysis provides a summary of general socioeconomic buildout projections determined by the four land use alternatives, including the proposed project. It is important to note that these are not growth projections. That is, they do not anticipate what is likely to occur by a certain time horizon, but rather provide a buildout scenario that would only occur if all the areas of the City were to develop to the probable capacities yielded by the land use alternatives. The following statistics were developed as a tool to better understand the differences between the alternatives. Table 7-1 identifies City-wide information regarding dwelling units, population, and employment projections, and also provides the jobs-to-housing ratio for each of the alternatives.

Table 7-1
Buildout Statistical Summary

| | Proposed Project | No Project/ Current General Plan Alternative | Clustered Development Alternative | Reduced Intensity Alternative |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| Dwelling Units | 27,229 | 24,401 | 27,229 | 20,422 |
| Population | 64,565 | 62,223 | 64,565 | 48,424 |
| Employment | 34,926 | 27,370 | 34,926 | 15,722,777 |
| Jobs-to-Housing Ratio | 1.28 | 1.12 | 1.28 | 26,195 |

7.5 NO PROJECT / CURRENT GENERAL PLAN ALTERNATIVE

In the No Project/ Current General Plan Alternative, the General Plan Update would not be implemented by the Town. The current 1995 General Plan, including land use designations in the Land Use Element shown in Figure 3-3, *Existing Land Use*, would remain in effect. Buildout statistics for the proposed General Plan and the current 1995 General Plan are compared in Table 7-2.

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Table 7-2
No Project / Current General Plan Buildout Summary Compared to
Proposed General Plan

| Category | Proposed Project | No Project/ Current General Plan Alternative | Change | Percent Change |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------|-----------------------|
| Dwelling Units | 27,229 | 24,401 | -2,828 | -10.4% |
| Population | 64,565 | 62,223 | -2,342 | -3.6% |
| Nonresidential (SQFT) | 20,963,702 | 17,633,100 | -3,330,602 | -15.9% |
| Employment | 34,926 | 27,370 | -7,556 | -21.6% |
| Jobs-to-Housing Ratio | 1.28 | 1.12 | -0.16 | -12.5% |

Overall, land use designations between the current general plan and the proposed general plan are similar. However, the proposed land use plan would allow for more intense commercial, residential, and civic uses, and higher-density residential land uses concentrated near SR-62. The proposed land use plan would generally decrease land use density to the north and to the south with distance from SR-62. The following changes were made to the land use designations in the current land use plan under the proposed project:

- Large areas of the Town would be designated Hillside Residential
- Four specific plan areas are designated—three abutting SR-62 and the fourth straddling SR-247 near the northern end of the Town.
- Some additional area south of SR-62 in the western part of the Town would be converted to designated Medium Density Residential designation from Rural Living designation.



Under the No Project/Current General Plan Alternative, these changes would not occur.

7.5.1 Aesthetics

In this alternative, nearly the entire Town would be developed, as would occur with the proposed General Plan Update. Aesthetics impacts would be neutral between these two scenarios.

7.5.2 Air Quality

This alternative would reduce long-term emissions from stationary and mobile sources and short-term emissions from construction activities associated with new development.

This alternative would result in a 10.4 percent decrease in residential units and a 15.9 percent decrease in nonresidential building square footage citywide. This would result in a substantial reduction in average daily trips (ADT) and mobile-source emissions. Furthermore, stationary-source emissions would be reduced because there would be fewer residential and nonresidential developments under the No Project/ Current General Plan Alternative compared to the proposed project. Additionally, a reduction in developments would reduce short-term emissions related to project construction activities. Although this alternative would reduce both long- and short-term pollutant emissions, it would not eliminate significant short- and long-term criteria pollutant contributions of volatile organic compounds (VOC), NO_x, CO, SO₂, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5}; would not be consistent with the air quality management plan, since criteria pollutants thresholds would be exceeded; and would cumulatively contribute to the MDAB nonattainment designations for O₃, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5}. Implementation of the proposed project was found to have

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significant and unavoidable impacts to short- and long-term air quality. In comparison to the proposed project, this alternative would substantially reduce but not eliminate short- and long-term air quality impacts.

7.5.3 Biological Resources

In this alternative, nearly the entire Town would be developed, as would occur with the proposed General Plan Update. The overall distribution of land use intensities and types is similar between the current and proposed General Plans; therefore, this alternative would not reduce impacts to habitat suitable for sensitive species. Impacts of this alternative would be neutral to those of the proposed project.

7.5.4 Cultural Resources

Impacts of this alternative to cultural resources would be similar to those of the proposed General Plan Update, since each would designate nearly the entire Town for development.

7.5.5 Geology and Soils

This alternative would have similar impacts to geology and soils as the proposed General Plan Update. The proposed General Plan includes an updated Geologic Hazards Map, but in both scenarios, each project would be required to have a geotechnical investigation done of its project site, and each project would be required to comply with California Building Code regulations in effect at the time the project was approved by the Town.

7.5.6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The No Project/ Current General Plan Alternative would potentially reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) compared to the proposed project, resulting in a reduction of GHG emissions from mobile sources. Additionally, because the alternative would provide less capacity for residential dwelling units and total square footage of nonresidential developments, GHG emissions from project-related construction activities would also be potentially reduced. Although this alternative would reduce VMT, it would lose the potential benefits derived from more mixed-use and higher intensity developments. These types of developments could reduce per-capita VMT by as much as 30 percent by reducing the distance between employment, services and amenities, and residences, in addition to supporting higher utilization of alternative modes of transportation (ULI 2008). Impacts from this alternative would still be significant and unavoidable, since additional statewide measures would be necessary to reduce GHG emissions to meet the long-term GHG reduction goals under Executive Order S-03-05, which identified a goal to reduce GHG emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

7.5.7 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

In both this alternative and the proposed General Plan Update, land uses throughout the Town would be required to comply with existing state, federal, and county regulations governing use, storage, transport, and disposal of hazardous materials and hazardous wastes. Structures built in fire hazard severity zones would be required to comply with building standards in California Building Code Chapters 7 and 7A, and California Fire Code Chapter 49. Developments and redevelopments in both scenarios would be required to comply with safety review areas, aviation easements, and deed notice areas in the Yucca Valley Airport Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Therefore, hazards and hazardous materials impacts would be similar for these two scenarios.

7.5.8 Hydrology and Water Quality

Because the current General Plan and proposed General Plan Update would each designate nearly the entire Town for development, each would require full buildout of the Master Plan of Drainage adopted in 1999. Each scenario would have similar flood hazard impacts, and each would require that developments within flood zones comply with

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Federal Emergency Management Agency flood insurance requirements and Town Municipal Code requirements for structures in special flood hazard areas. The proposed General Plan would have slightly reduced water quality impacts, since it would require that developments comply with the Small MS4 Permit issued by the State Water Resources Control Board that will take effect July 1, 2013. Overall, hydrology and flood hazard impacts would be neutral between the two scenarios, and water quality impacts would be slightly greater for this alternative.

7.5.9 Land Use and Planning

California Government Code Sections 65300 et seq. requires that cities and counties prepare and adopt general plans. This alternative would leave the current General Plan (adopted in 1995) in place rather than updating it. Neither this alternative nor the proposed project would divide an established community. Development and redevelopment in both scenarios would be required to comply with land use controls set forth in the Yucca Valley Airport Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Land use impacts would be neutral for the two scenarios.

7.5.10 Noise

In this alternative, noise would be reduced slightly compared to what would be generated by buildout of the proposed General Plan Update, because development intensity would be reduced by 10 percent for dwelling units and about 16 percent for nonresidential square footage. Buildout of the proposed General Plan would cause significant and unavoidable traffic noise impacts. Although this alternative would reduce somewhat the number of vehicle trips to and from the Town, many of the vehicle trips on the two highways in Town, SR-62 and SR-247, are regional trips; thus, the proportional reduction in traffic noise due to this alternative would be less than the proportional reductions in residents and workers. Traffic noise impacts of this alternative would remain significant and unavoidable.

7.5.11 Population and Housing

Population and housing impacts of this alternative would be slightly reduced respecting population growth, since forecast population at buildout of the current General Plan is 3.6 percent lower than for the General Plan Update. However, impacts on the jobs-housing balance would be greater for this alternative, because jobs-housing balance at buildout of the current General Plan would be 1.12, more housing rich, than the jobs-housing balance at buildout of the General Plan Update at 1.28. Overall, population and housing impacts would be neutral between the two scenarios.

7.5.12 Public Services

Public services impacts would be slightly less for this alternative, since population would be reduced by 3.6 percent at buildout of the current General Plan compared to the General Plan Update, and employment would be reduced by 21.6 percent.

7.5.13 Recreation

Recreation impacts would be slightly reduced by this alternative, since the population at buildout for this alternative would be 3.6 percent less than for the proposed General Plan Update.

7.5.14 Transportation and Traffic

The LOS for the intersection of SR-62 at SR-247 in 2035 conditions under the proposed General Plan Update is D, with an average delay per vehicle of 51.7 seconds. The SANBAG threshold for acceptable LOS at a CMP intersection is LOS D with average delay of 45 seconds per vehicle—6.7 seconds, or 15 percent, less than that forecast for the General Plan Update. The reduction in development intensity for the current General Plan compared to the General Plan



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Update is 10.4 percent for residential development and 15.9 percent for nonresidential development. Since the number of residents in the Town is forecast to be nearly twice the number of employees at buildout of the General Plan Update (64,565 compared to 34,926), LOS at intersections in the Town are likely to be affected more by residential land uses than by nonresidential land uses. Because the reduction in residential land uses in this alternative, 10.4 percent, is well below the difference in LOS needed to reach acceptable LOS at SR 62/SR 247, 15 percent, it is estimated that traffic conditions at SR 62/SR 247 would remain unacceptable in this alternative.

7.5.15 Utilities and Service Systems

This alternative would have slightly reduced utility and service system impacts compared to the proposed General Plan Update due to the reduced population and employment at buildout of this scenario. Development and operation of the Wastewater Treatment and Water Reclamation System and full buildout of the Master Plan of Drainage would be required in both scenarios.

7.5.16 Conclusion

Impacts of this alternative would be neutral to those of the proposed project for aesthetics, biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, land use and planning, population and housing, and transportation and traffic. Impacts of this alternative would be slightly reduced compared to those of the proposed project for hydrology and water quality, noise, public services, recreation, and utilities and service systems. This alternative would reduce air quality impacts compared to those of the proposed project; however, such impacts would remain significant and unavoidable in this alternative. This alternative could reduce greenhouse gas emissions impacts; however, such impacts would also remain significant and unavoidable. This alternative would not reduce any significant and unavoidable impacts of the proposed project to less than significant.

This alternative would not provide a comprehensive update to the Town's General Plan consistent with California Government Code Sections 65300 et seq. This alternative would not revise the Town's General Plan pursuant to various state requirements for General Plans, for instance, AB 1358, the Complete Streets Act of 2008.

7.6 CLUSTERED DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

The Clustered Development Alternative is proposed to reduce significant and irreversible impacts to biological resources from the cumulative loss of sensitive habitat. In this alternative, development would be concentrated in the central parts of the Town, along SR-62, to minimize or avoid development in Wildlife Corridor Evaluation Areas (WCEAs) and in Open Space Resource Areas (OSRAs), as shown on Figure 5.3-2, *Biological Resources*. Increased intensity would occur in commercial, mixed-use, medium-high-density residential, medium-density residential, and low-density residential designations near SR-62 and SR-247. Total permitted development intensity in the Town in this alternative would be the same as the proposed project.

7.6.1 Aesthetics

Aesthetics impacts would be reduced slightly by this alternative. Development intensity would be reduced within WCEAs and OSRAs, leaving more of those areas natural desert habitat. Development intensity would be increased in parts of the Town near SR-62 and SR-247.

7.6.2 Air Quality

Overall development would be the same as the proposed project under this alternative. Therefore, VMT is estimated to be the same for this Alternative as the proposed project. However, the Clustered Development Alternative is anticipated to increase the potential for mixed-use and higher intensity development along the SR-62 and SR-247 corridors. Mixed-use and higher intensity developments could reduce per-capita VMT by as much as 30 percent by

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reducing the distance between employment, services and amenities, and residences, in addition to supporting higher utilization of alternative modes of transportation (ULI 2008). This alternative would reduce construction emissions because ground-disturbing activities would be concentrated along the suburban corridors, and less development would occur in the greenfield areas. In comparison to the proposed Land Use Plan, this alternative would slightly reduce but not eliminate short- and long-term air quality impacts. Impacts from this alternative would still be significant and unavoidable.

7.6.3 Biological Resources

Biological resources impacts would be reduced under this alternative by clustering development in the urban areas near SR-62 and SR-247 and limiting growth in undeveloped portions of the City, including development that could occur within the WCEAs and OSRAs. Consequently, this alternative would significantly reduce biological resources impacts from cumulative loss of habitat within the region.

7.6.4 Cultural Resources

Impacts to cultural resources would be reduced in this alternative, since some development would be clustered near SR-62 and SR-247 rather than being dispersed within WCEAs and OSRAs.

7.6.5 Geology and Soils

Geology and soils impacts would be reduced in this alternative. Many of the areas in the Town susceptible to earthquake-induced slope instability are on slopes in OSRAs in the Sawtooth Mountains and Little San Bernardino Mountains. This alternative would transfer some development from those areas to near SR-62 and SR-247.

7.6.6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Overall development would be the same as the proposed project under this alternative. Therefore, VMT is estimated to be the same for this Alternative as the proposed project. However, the Clustered Development Alternative is anticipated to increase the potential for mixed-use and higher intensity development along the SR-62 and SR-247 corridors. Mixed-use and higher intensity developments could reduce per-capita VMT by as much as 30 percent by reducing the distance between employment, services and amenities, and residences, in addition to supporting higher utilization of alternative modes of transportation (ULI 2008). Impacts from this alternative would still be significant and unavoidable, since additional statewide measures would be necessary to reduce GHG emissions to meet the long-term GHG reduction goals under Executive Order S-03-05, which identified a goal to reduce GHG emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. Therefore, GHG impacts would remain significant and unavoidable under this alternative.

7.6.7 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

This alternative would concentrate more development near SR-62, and thus near existing hazardous materials sites in the Town—almost all of which are close to SR-62—compared to the proposed General Plan Update. However, compliance with existing regulations would reduce hazards from existing hazardous materials sites to less than significant. The western three-fifths of the SR-62 corridor in Town—and part of the SR-247 corridor—are in or near Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZ). This alternative would shift some development away from VHFHSZs and High Fire Hazard Severity Zones in the western and southern parts of the Town toward SR-62 and SR-247. However, since parts of the areas where some development would be transferred to are also in VHFHSZs, this alternative would have neutral fire hazard impacts relative to the proposed project. Overall, hazards and hazardous materials impacts would be neutral between the two scenarios.



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7.6.8 Hydrology and Water Quality

The majority of 100-year and 500-year flood zones in the Town are relatively close to SR-62. Thus, this alternative would increase the number of structures in flood zones that would be subject to requirements for flood zones—FEMA flood insurance and building standards in Municipal Code Chapter 8.04. The Master Plan of Drainage would need to be completely built out in this alternative, as with the proposed project. Water quality impacts of this alternative would be neutral to those of the proposed project, since total development intensity would be the same in both scenarios.

7.6.9 Land Use and Relevant Planning

The proposed concentration of some of the permitted development intensity in the Town near SR-62 and SR-247 would not conflict with any plan, policy, or regulation intended to avoid or mitigate an environmental effect. This alternative would not divide an established community. Compared to the proposed General Plan, this alternative would further the goals of Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) by concentrating development in urbanized areas of the Town to limit impacts to habitat. The proposed reduction of development intensity in OSRAs and WCEAs in this alternative would also accord better with the two regional conservation plans under preparation, the West Mojave Plan (WMP) and the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP), than would the proposed General Plan. This alternative would have a slightly favorable impact on land use and planning compared to the proposed General Plan.

7.6.10 Noise

This alternative would reduce noise impacts in outlying parts of the Town and increase traffic noise, construction noise, and construction vibration in the central parts of the Town. Noise and vibration impacts would remain significant and unavoidable in this alternative.

7.6.11 Population and Housing

In this alternative, the total number of residential units and residents at General Plan buildout would be the same as for the proposed General Plan. This alternative would not change the land use designations of any existing residential areas to nonresidential land use designations, and thus would not displace housing or residents. Population and housing impacts of this alternative would be neutral to those of the proposed General Plan.

7.6.12 Public Services

Overall, demands for public services would be the same for this alternative as for the proposed General Plan, since buildout populations would be the same in both scenarios. However, because development would be somewhat more concentrated in the central parts of the Town in this alternative, the number of additional required fire stations—facilities that must be sited to provide coverage to areas with people and structures—could be reduced in this alternative.

7.6.13 Recreation

Demands for new and expanded recreational facilities, and maintenance and repair of existing facilities, would be the same in this alternative as for the proposed General Plan, since buildout population would be the same in both scenarios. The distribution of new recreation facilities at General Plan buildout in this alternative would be expected to reflect the distribution of population, concentrated somewhat toward the center of Town.

7. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

7.6.14 Transportation and Traffic

Total trip generation would be the same for this alternative as for the proposed General Plan, since buildout population would be the same in both scenarios. However, development would be somewhat concentrated near the SR-62 and SR-247 corridors in this alternative compared to the General Plan. Thus, vehicle trips in this alternative would be somewhat more concentrated on roadways and intersections that already carry large traffic volumes, and this alternative would worsen impacts to the intersection of SR-62 and SR-247, which would be significant for the proposed project. However, some small fraction of total trips might be practicable via walking or bicycling in this alternative that would not be in the proposed General Plan, because some development would be more dispersed in the latter scenario. This alternative would create somewhat less demand for new and expanded roadways, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and public transit services in the outlying parts of the Town and commensurately increased demands for those facilities and services in the central parts of the Town. Overall, transportation and traffic impacts would be slightly increased in this alternative.

7.6.15 Utilities and Service Systems

Total demands for water, wastewater treatment, storm drainage, electricity, and natural gas would be the same in this alternative as for the proposed General Plan, since buildout population would be the same in the two scenarios. However, because development would be somewhat concentrated in the central parts of the Town in this scenario, the total lengths of water, sewer, and natural gas mains, and electric distribution lines that would be needed in this scenario would be somewhat reduced. Overall, utilities and service systems impacts would be neutral between the two scenarios.

7.6.16 Conclusion

This alternative would reduce impacts of the proposed General Plan to aesthetics, cultural resources, land use and planning, and geology and soils. Impacts of this alternative to hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, population and housing, public services, recreation, and utilities and service systems would be neutral to those of the proposed General Plan. This alternative would reduce air quality, biological resources, and GHG emissions compared to those of the proposed project; however, each of these impacts would remain significant and unavoidable in this alternative. This alternative would decrease noise impacts in rural areas of the Town and increase impacts in urbanized areas of the Town; and therefore, noise impacts under this alternative would remain significant. In addition, this alternative would increase the traffic impacts by reallocating growth along the SR-62 and SR-247 corridors and exacerbating traffic conditions at affected intersections.

This alternative would achieve all of the objectives of the proposed General Plan; however, at General Plan buildout, the development pattern in the Town would be slightly more urbanized and slightly more concentrated in the central parts of the Town, compared to the proposed General Plan, in which much of the Town would be built out with very low density single-family residential development (rural residential, rural living, and hillside residential designations).

7.7 REDUCED INTENSITY ALTERNATIVE

The Reduced Intensity Alternative is proposed to reduce significant and unavoidable impacts to air quality, biological resources, transportation and traffic, noise, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In this alternative, residential and nonresidential development potential at General Plan buildout is reduced by 25 percent compared to the proposed project (see Table 7-3). Note that the buildout population of this alternative (48,424 people) would be less than that of the current General Plan (62,223 people). The distribution of land use designations would be the same in this alternative as in the proposed project (i.e., 98.5 percent of the Town would be designated for some type of developed land use at General Plan buildout in this alternative).



7. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

Table 7-3
Reduced Intensity Alternative Buildout Summary Compared to Proposed General Plan and Current 1995 General Plan

| Category | Proposed Project | Reduced Intensity Alternative | Change | Percent Change |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Dwelling Units | 27,229 | 20,422 | -6,807 | 25.0% |
| Population | 64,565 | 48,424 | -16,141 | 25.0% |
| Nonresidential (SQFT) | 20,963,702 | 15,722,777 | -5,240,925 | 25.0% |
| Employment | 34,926 | 26,195 | -8,731 | 25.0% |
| Jobs-to-Housing Ratio | 1.28 | 1.28 | 0 | 0% |

7.7.1 Aesthetics

Aesthetics impacts would be the same in this alternative as for the proposed project. Density would be reduced Town-wide by 25 percent in this alternative, but most of the Town would be developed with low-density detached single-family houses in both scenarios.

7.7.2 Air Quality

This alternative would reduce long-term emissions from stationary and mobile sources and short-term emissions from construction activities associated with new development.

This alternative would result in a 25 percent decrease in residential units and nonresidential building square footage citywide. This would result in a substantial reduction in ADT and mobile-source emissions. Furthermore, stationary-source emissions would be reduced because there would be fewer residential and nonresidential developments under the Reduced Intensity Alternative compared to the proposed project. Additionally, a reduction in developments would reduce short-term emissions related to project construction activities. Although this alternative would reduce both long- and short-term pollutant emissions, it would not eliminate significant short- and long-term criteria pollutant contributions of VOCs, NO_x, CO, SO₂, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5}; would not be consistent with the air quality management plan, since criteria pollutants thresholds would be exceeded; and would cumulatively contribute to the MDAB nonattainment designations for O₃, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5}. Implementation of the proposed project was found to have significant and unavoidable impacts to short- and long-term air quality. In comparison to the proposed project, this alternative would substantially reduce but not eliminate short- and long-term air quality impacts.

7.7.3 Biological Impacts

This alternative would reduce permitted development intensity by 25 percent uniformly throughout the Town; 98.5 percent of the Town would be designated for some type of developed land use at General Plan buildout in this alternative. Thus, structures and other improvements such as driveways would be spaced slightly farther apart in this alternative compared to the proposed General Plan. While this alternative would leave somewhat more land vacant than would the proposed General Plan, vacant land in this alternative would be fragmented between numerous development, and would not be left in larger patches, as would occur with the Clustered Development Alternative. Therefore, biological resources impacts of this alternative would be similar to those of the proposed project.

7.7.4 Cultural Resources

This alternative would reduce the total development footprint in the Town at general plan buildout slightly compared to the proposed General Plan; however, this alternative would designate almost the whole Town for

7. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

developed land uses. Thus, this alternative would slightly reduce the total land area that would be disturbed by construction. Cultural resources impacts would be slightly reduced in this alternative compared to the proposed General Plan.

7.7.5 Geology and Soils

This alternative would reduce the numbers of residents, visitors, and structures that would be subject to geological hazards in the Town. However, the distribution of permitted land uses in this alternative would be the same as for the proposed General Plan; thus, the same proportions of people and structures would be exposed to hazards such as earthquake-induced slope instability in this alternative. Overall, geology and soils impacts would be slightly reduced in this alternative.

7.7.6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Reduced Intensity Alternative would potentially reduce VMT compared to the proposed project, resulting in a reduction of GHG emissions from mobile sources. Additionally, because the alternative would provide less capacity for residential dwelling units and total square footage of nonresidential developments, GHG emissions from project-related construction activities would also be potentially reduced. Although this alternative would reduce VMT, it would lose the potential benefits derived from more mixed-use and higher intensity developments. These types of developments could reduce per-capita VMT by as much as 30 percent by reducing the distance between employment, services and amenities, and residences, in addition to supporting higher utilization of alternative modes of transportation (ULI 2008). Impacts from this alternative would still be significant and unavoidable, since additional statewide measures would be necessary to reduce GHG emissions to meet the long-term GHG reduction goals under Executive Order S-03-05, which identified a goal to reduce GHG emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

7.7.7 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

In this alternative, fewer people would be exposed to hazards in the Town, including existing hazardous materials sites and high- and very high fire hazard severity zones. The proportional distributions of people and structures in this alternative would be the same as in the proposed General Plan; thus, similar proportions of people would be exposed to hazards that only affect parts of the Town, such as fire hazard severity zones. Overall, hazards and hazardous materials impacts would be slightly reduced by this alternative.

7.7.8 Hydrology and Water Quality

This alternative would reduce the numbers of people and structures that would be exposed to hazards such as flood hazards and would reduce generation of contaminants that could affect stormwater and groundwater. The proportional distributions of people and structures in and outside of flood zones in this alternative would be the same as for the proposed General Plan. The Master Plan of Drainage would need to be completely built out in this alternative, as it would in the proposed General Plan. Overall, hydrology and water quality impacts would be slightly reduced in this alternative.

7.7.9 Land Use and Relevant Planning

This alternative would lower permitted density in the Town by 25 percent, but buildout of this alternative would develop almost the whole Town. Thus, this alternative would lead to more dispersed, lower-density development than would the proposed General Plan. Therefore, this alternative would conflict somewhat with existing and proposed policies favoring more concentrated development, such as SB 375, the WMP, and the DRECP. Land use and planning impacts would be somewhat greater for this alternative than for the proposed General Plan.



7. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

7.7.10 Noise

This alternative would reduce traffic noise due to the reductions in both residents and employment in this alternative. However, much of the traffic on the two highways in the Town, SR-62 and SR-247, is regional traffic; thus, the reduction in traffic noise by this alternative would be less than the 25 percent reduction in residents and employment. This alternative would reduce construction noise and construction vibration in the Town. However, construction noise and vibration impacts would remain significant and unavoidable.

7.7.11 Population and Housing

Buildout of this alternative, like the proposed General Plan, would exceed SCAG population projections for Yucca Valley. However, the latest year for which such projections are available is 2035; General Plan buildout would occur many decades after 2035 in either of these scenarios. Population and housing impacts would be reduced in this alternative due to the lower buildout population.

7.7.12 Public Services

Public services impacts would be reduced in this alternative due to the 25 percent reduction in population at General Plan buildout.

7.7.13 Recreation

Recreation impacts would be reduced in this alternative due to the 25 percent reduction in population at General Plan buildout.

7.7.14 Transportation and Traffic

Transportation and traffic impacts would be reduced by this alternative, since General Plan buildout population would be reduced 25 percent compared to the proposed General Plan. Traffic at the intersection of SR-62 and SR-247 includes regional traffic that is not generated by land uses within the Town of Yucca Valley. Consequently, although this alternative would reduce traffic volumes by approximately 25 percent, the decrease in traffic volume at this intersection would be less than 25 percent because of pass-through traffic. Average delay per vehicle at an intersection does not decrease proportionally to traffic volume. Traffic impacts at the intersection of SR-62 and SR-247 may remain significant. Therefore, this alternative would reduce but may not eliminate the significant traffic impacts of the project.

7.7.15 Utilities and Service Systems

This alternative would reduce utilities and service systems impacts compared to the proposed General Plan due to the 25 percent decrease in buildout population. The Master Plan of Drainage would need to be completely built out in this alternative, as it would in the proposed General Plan.

7.7.16 Conclusion

This alternative would slightly reduce impacts to cultural resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation and traffic, and utilities and service systems, compared to those of the proposed General Plan. Impacts to aesthetics and biological resources would be similar between the two scenarios. Impacts to land use and planning would be increased by this alternative. This alternative would reduce impacts to air quality and greenhouse gas emissions compared to those of the proposed project; however, these two impacts would remain significant and unavoidable in this alternative.

7. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

This alternative would meet most of the objectives for the General Plan, but would meet some of the objectives to a lesser degree than the proposed General Plan would. Two objectives promote conservation of the Town's hillsides, wildlife corridors, and desert character and environment. This alternative and the proposed General Plan would each designate almost the entire Town for development; however, in this alternative, development would be at lower density as well as dispersed over almost the whole Town.

7.8 ENVIRONMENTALLY SUPERIOR ALTERNATIVE

CEQA requires a lead agency to identify the "environmentally superior alternative" and, in cases where the "No Project" Alternative is environmentally superior to the proposed project, the environmentally superior development alternative must be identified. One alternative has been identified as "environmentally superior" to the proposed project:

- Reduced Intensity Alternative

The Reduced Intensity Alternative has been identified as the environmentally superior alternative because it meets the majority of the project objectives and would lessen impacts to 12 resources. However, this alternative would increase impacts to one resource, Land Use and Planning. Table 7-5 shows a comparison of the impacts of the project alternatives compared to the proposed project.



7. Alternatives to the Proposed Project

Table 7-4
Alternatives: Impacts Comparison

| Resource | Proposed Project: Impact | Alternative: Impact Relative to Proposed Project | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | | No Project/ Current General Plan | Clustered Development | Reduced Intensity Alternative |
| Aesthetics | LTS | = | < | = |
| Air Quality | S/U | < | < | < |
| Biological Resources | S/U | = | < | = |
| Cultural Resources | LTSM | = | < | < |
| Geology and Soils | LTSM | = | < | < |
| Greenhouse Gas Emissions | S/U | < | < | < |
| Hazards and Hazardous Materials | LTS= | = | = | < |
| Hydrology and Water Quality | LTSM | < | = | < |
| Land Use and Planning | LTS | > | < | > |
| Noise | S/U | = | < (rural areas), > (urbanized areas) | < |
| Population and Housing | LTS | = | = | < |
| Public Services | LTS | < | = | < |
| Recreation | LTS | < | = | < |
| Transportation and Traffic | S/U | = | > | < |
| Utilities and Service Systems | LTS | < | = | < |

Symbols:

Impacts of alternative compared to those of proposed General Plan

= similar

< reduced

< reduced from significant to less than significant

> Increased

> Increased from less than significant to significant