

Chapter III

Project Description

A. DESCRIPTION

1. Background

This master environmental impact report (Master EIR) examines the *City of Modesto Urban Area General Plan (UAGP)*, as amended, and updates the 2008 Master EIR accordingly. The Master EIR examines potential impacts at the UAGP level of detail. It will apply to individual development projects that are considered under the UAGP in the future, but it does not specifically analyze any individual subsequent development project(s).

The “project” analyzed in this updated Master EIR consists of amendments to the UAGP, primarily within the Land Use and Transportation elements – although nearly every chapter or section of the document was edited in one way or another. The UAGP was last comprehensively updated in 1995, when the UAGP and a Master EIR were initially adopted as cohesive planning and environmental documentation set. Since 1995, more than 20 UAGP amendments have been adopted, along with a corresponding update to the Master EIR for each, as needed. The current UAGP Amendment (proposed project) responds to changes in federal, state, and local policies that have occurred since the UAGP was last amended – and the Master EIR certified – by the Modesto City Council on October 14, 2008. The horizon timeframe of the amended UAGP would be 2040.

The proposed project includes amendments to the land use and transportation diagrams. Associated policies and other guidance within the UAGP text would also be amended. Other noteworthy project-specific details include: a new traffic model for the Modesto–Stanislaus County region was prepared and applied to the proposed project for the purpose of traffic analyses; and, the UAGP Housing Element update process occurs separately (Modesto’s Housing Element was most recently certified by the State of California in 2016).

The UAGP amendment is intended to extend the useful life of the UAGP until a comprehensive update would be completed. According to state law, the Master EIR must be updated in conjunction with a general plan amendment or update. The Master EIR update is also consistent with provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act that require periodic review and update of Master EIRs.

2. Project Location

Modesto is located in Stanislaus County, in the northern San Joaquin Valley, approximately 95 miles east of San Francisco and 80 miles south of Sacramento (see Figure III-1, “Project Vicinity”). The City of Ceres is located immediately south of the Modesto city limits, the City of Riverbank is located immediately northeast, and the unincorporated town of Salida is located northwest.

The Modesto city limits include an area of approximately 37 square miles, and the entire General Plan area (“planning area”) encompasses approximately 67 square miles or 42,900 acres. The planning area is generally bounded by the Stanislaus River on the north, Whitmore Avenue on the south, Morse Road, Toomes Road, and Hammett Road on the west and North Santa Fe Avenue and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad on the east. The City’s planning area encompasses Salida. The planning area generally consists of the lands that already are, and those that could become, urbanized within the 2040 General Plan timeframe.

3. Modesto Urban Area General Plan

The UAGP is Modesto’s long-term, comprehensive guide for development. Its 40,600-acre planning area reaches beyond the current city limits and sphere of influence. Modesto’s Growth Strategy establishes three geographic areas within the plan: (1) the Downtown Area; (2) the Baseline Developed Area, generally consisting of lands within the 2014 Modesto city limits, plus the unincorporated Beard Industrial Tract located south of SR132 / Yosemite Blvd., and minus the Village One and Tivoli specific plan areas; and, (3) the Planned Urbanizing Area, consisting of areas outside of the 2014 city limits (plus Village One and Tivoli) and within the planning area boundary.

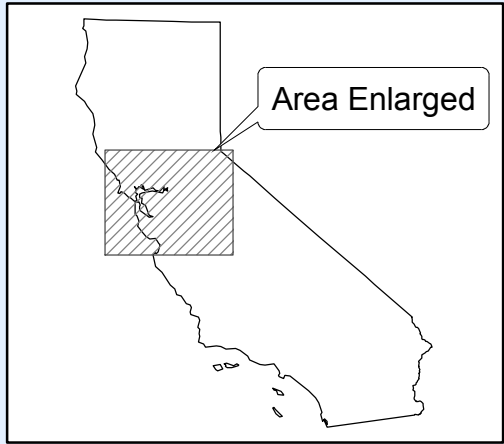
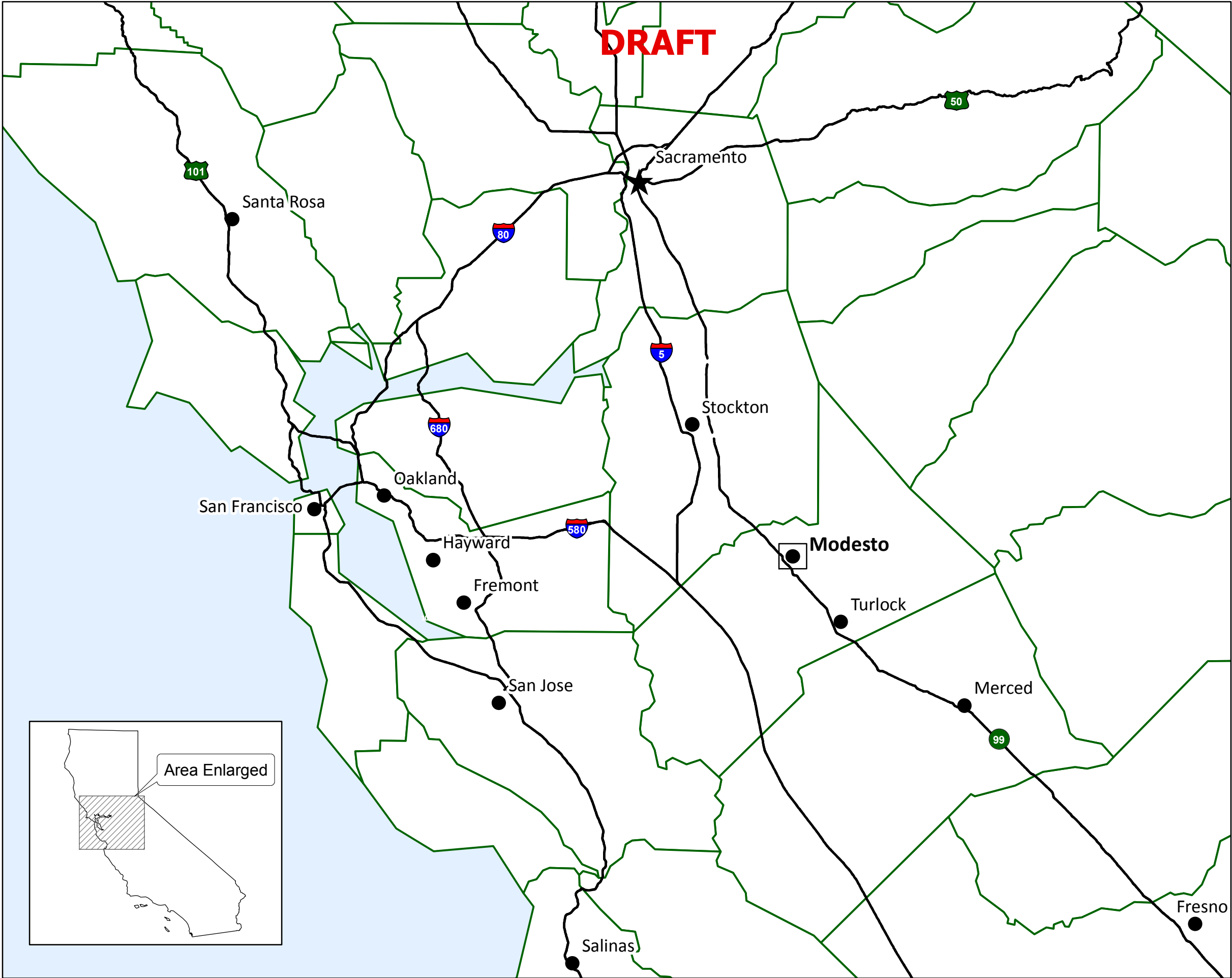
The UAGP is a comprehensive set of goals, policies and exhibits that establish the direction, scale / magnitude and priorities associated with Modesto’s growth and development. The UAGP is amended from time to time, as internal and external factors result in a need to update it. Examples of internal factors include changing priorities and recognition of new opportunities; external factors include new state laws and changing physical conditions – both development-related and environmental. In addition, the simple passage of time also results in a need to update the UAGP, as the document includes a “horizon date” or timeframe for which it is meant to be applicable.

4. Proposed Amendments to the General Plan

The proposed project is an amendment of the UAGP intended to modernize it, extend its useful life and to update it with regard to new laws enacted since the last significant amendment that was adopted in October 2008. The planning horizon timeframe is 2040.

Updates to the UAGP included in this amendment fall into three major categories: (1) a revised Land Use Element, including a revised land use diagram and policies to guide new development within existing neighborhoods, development to create new neighborhoods, and development of infill sites; (2) a revised Circulation Element, including mode-specific transportation diagrams, major transportation corridor policies, complete streets policies, and location-specific policies to differentiate among the existing developed City, new growth areas and Downtown / infill development opportunities; and, (3) revision to text and policies throughout the other portions UAGP for purposes of internal consistency and to meet applicable requirements of state law. The following lists reflect the proposed edits and amendments to the UAGP within these categories.

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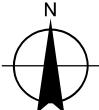
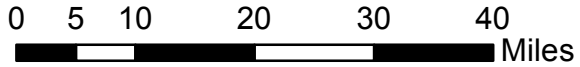
GENERAL PLAN PROGRAM

Figure III-1

PROJECT VICINITY

LEGEND

- Cities
- Highways
- Counties



a. Land Use Element

The proposed project contemplates revisions to the UAGP Land Use Diagram. New and revised land use policies are proposed, in order to allow the UAGP to better reflect the City’s long-term vision for growth and development, and to comply with applicable state laws.

- **Land Use Classifications** – Two new General Plan land use designations are reflected in the proposed project, and one land use designation would be eliminated. The new “Business-Commercial-Residential” land use designation would provide opportunity for employment-intensive development in close proximity to housing and services, and the new “Downtown” designation would help define Modesto’s vision of its City center.

As a result of California law dissolving Redevelopment Agencies, the Redevelopment Planning District land use designation would be eliminated and replaced with the most appropriate alternative designation, on a site- / area- specific basis, including the new Downtown land use designation. Certain other designations would be applied with refined boundaries that better correlate with existing development and/or zoning.

b. Circulation Element

The UAGP amendment includes proposed revisions to transportation facility designations, and new/revised policies to provide direction for anticipated issues and to comply with applicable state law.

- **Complete Streets (AB1358)** – Proposed goals and policies would provide guidance toward providing the full range of transportation mode choice options for the traveling public: pedestrian & disabled, bicycle, auto, and transit.
- **Constrained Streets** – For certain streets that are constrained from further widening due to existing development, right-of-way exactions may be limited to those necessary to close a gap in vehicle travel lane(s), bicycle facility, and/or curb-gutter-sidewalk.
- **Reduce VMT** – New goal and policy language regarding gridded street networks, increased intersection density, and non-motorized access is intended to reduce per-capita vehicle miles travelled over time.
- **Corridor Studies** – New policy is proposed that calls for study of certain major transportation corridors for purposes of planning for both transportation and land use related improvements, in the context of future urban design vision.
- **Strategies** – Travel mode-specific strategies are proposed for pedestrian, bicycle, transit, rail and streets. Each strategy includes a goal that is supported by policies.
- **Road system changes**—In addition to traffic policy revisions, the following are known needed changes to the road network.
 - **North County Corridor** – The future North County Corridor is proposed consistent with the most current design alternatives, east of McHenry Avenue / SR108, generally parallel to Claribel Avenue. As a result, the designation for Claribel Avenue would be changed from Expressway to Minor Arterial.

- ❑ **Principal Arterials** – McHenry Avenue / SR108 (south of Granger Avenue), Yosemite Boulevard / SR132 (between “D” Street and El Vista Avenue), El Vista Avenue (between Scenic Drive and Yosemite Boulevard) and Crows Landing Road (south of 7th Street to the plan area boundary), would be changed from Principal Arterial to Minor Arterial due to ROW constraints.
- ❑ **Downtown Collectors** – Downtown streets generally within the borders of Needham Street, Burney Street, Sierra Drive and Washington Street would be re-designated to Downtown Collector streets.
- ❑ **Freeways and Expressways** – Revised locations and designations for freeways, expressways and interchanges are proposed as shown on Exhibit V-2 of the UAGP.
- ❑ **Bicycle Circulation** – A revised bicycle circulation plan is shown on Exhibit V-3 of the UAGP. An enhanced bicycle transportation network would address the need to provide increased opportunities for non-motorized transportation, and would also help the City meet the requirements of State law relative to complete streets.

c. Other Amendments

The proposed UAGP Amendment would also incorporate changes beyond those associated with land use and circulation as described above. Recently-adopted state legislation (e.g. SB5, SB244) requires certain changes to the UAGP. Similarly, to the extent that the City’s utility master plans have been updated since the prior UAGP amendment was adopted, the proposed project would contain current, relevant and accurate information. Therefore, nearly all Chapters and Sections of the UAGP would be affected by the proposed project.

d. Potential Project Alternatives

The following alternatives are described in more detail in Chapter VIII, *Alternatives Analysis*, of this Master EIR.

Alternative 1. No-Project Alternative

The No-Project alternative assumes that the 1995 UAGP, as amended, would continue to be the City’s general plan. None of the individual amendments (policies, exhibits, etc.) proposed within the UAGP amendment (proposed Project) documentation would be made.

Alternative 2. Increased Density Along Mixed-Use Corridors, at Major Intersections / Nodes

Under this alternative, the UAGP land use diagram would reflect intensified “nodes” of mixed-use transit-oriented development at major intersections (arterial-arterial or higher). Revisions to land use designations along major transportation corridors, to accommodate mixed-use development at higher intensities would also occur.

Alternative 3. Reduced Density Alternative

Under Alternative 3, development in the Downtown area would feature reduced density / intensity as compared to the proposed project. Residential densities and non-residential intensities (e.g. floor-area-ratio) would be reduced across the entire general plan area, and the proposed “BCR” land use designation would not be proposed.

B. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The State CEQA Guidelines require that the project description include a statement of the objectives sought by the project (CEQA Guidelines Section 15124.b). In addition to disclosing the project's intent, the objectives help the lead agency select a reasonable range of project alternatives to be evaluated in the EIR. The objectives may also aid the City in preparing findings or a statement of overriding considerations, if necessary (CEQA Guidelines Section 15124.b).

The overarching goals of the proposed project are to: revise the land use element, including the land use diagram, to provide enhanced economic development opportunities as new development occurs; revise the circulation element to provide a mode-balanced and cost-effective transportation system; update policies to reflect applicable state laws and regulations; and, update the General Plan Master EIR to allow subsequent projects to benefit from streamlined review based on its environmental analysis. Project objectives are as follows:

- Comply with new State and Federal laws;
- Increase acreage for Business Park and related revenue-generating and jobs-producing land use types within the Sphere-of-Influence to promote economic development;
- Provide improved transportation alternatives, including transit, bicycle & pedestrian facilities;
- Facilitate an improved mix of land uses to reduce vehicle miles traveled by locating residential land uses close to employment, retail and services;
- Promote infill development;
- Provide framework for intensified development in Modesto's downtown area;
- Align Modesto's land use and transportation goals and policies;
- Establish a realistic set of assumptions for infrastructure needs and funding;
- Facilitate complete, safe and walkable neighborhoods;
- Provide for a variety of transportation options;
- Promote equitable, affordable housing;
- Support existing neighborhoods / communities; and,
- Maintain the 1995 General Plan and Sphere-of-Influence boundaries (for purposes of defining the proposed project to be analyzed under CEQA).