

IV. GROWTH INDUCEMENT

Section 15126(g) of the CEQA Guidelines requires EIRs to include a discussion of the ways in which a proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Thus, growth inducement refers to the factors associated with a proposed project which may have the potential to stimulate growth in an area. Generally, growth-inducing factors are those which promote the extension of public services, such as water, sewer and schools, and/or access roads into areas which have been reserved in long-range planning for non-urban land uses until some time in the distant future. Other factors related to growth-inducement include the establishment of new land uses, typically through the general/community plan amendment or rezone process, the development potential of land surrounding the project, and socioeconomic forces.

In a Program EIR for a General Plan or General Plan Update, it is essential that the issue of growth inducement is fully addressed to ensure that the subject area can accommodate the projected growth associated with implementation of the adopted long-range Land Use Plan. In the following analysis, growth is not assumed to be necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.

A. Public Service Infrastructure

The proposed General Plan Update would increase the demand for public services such as police and fire protection; solid waste collection and disposal; natural gas, electric and telephone distribution; water service and availability; sewage treatment; schools, parks and recreational facilities; and health care service. Impacts to these services would largely be countered by an increase in property tax revenues and development fees.

In terms of extending roads into areas designated for non-urban uses, the General Plan Circulation and Scenic Highways Element is designed to accommodate future growth in the region until the year 2015. New roads shall be constructed to serve approved projects only, and shall not extend beyond the subdivision or property lines of newly-constructed urban developments. Furthermore, construction of new roads shall not occur in a "leapfrog" fashion, but rather must tie into existing access.

B. Establishment of New Land Uses

The Imperial County General Plan Update proposes two new land use classifications not included in the previous 1973 General Plan: Special Purpose Facility and Specific Plan Area (SPA). It should be noted, however, that the proposed General Plan Update substantially reduces the total amount of land designated for urban and residential uses, as compared to the 1973 General Plan. Although such uses are also permitted in other land use classifications, they are subject to specific conditions and land use controls. In this way, the proposed General Plan Update can be said to be less growth-inducing than the 1973 General Plan.

The Special Purpose Facility designation applies to lands required for basic governmental services, such as solid and liquid waste facilities, prisons and airports, that have physical or operational characteristics incompatible with most other land uses. This land use classification would not be considered growth-inducing.

Land within the SPA category usually has environmental or unique land use constraints or opportunities. For these reasons, suitable areas proposed for large-scale urban development or other uses within an SPA require more detailed planning than would typically be required by the County Zoning or Subdivision Ordinances. The SPA designation is potentially growth-inducing because it would allow the conversion of predominantly agricultural land to urban uses in accordance with an adopted Specific Plan. Much of the area encompassed by the SPA category, however, was previously designated by the 1973 General Plan for urban, residential or heavy industrial uses. Therefore, the application of special land use and/or design controls within SPAs could potentially reduce the intensity of development that would have been allowed under the 1973 General Plan.

Although growth within an SPA may be regulated to manageable levels through the specific plan process, the potential exists for growth-inducing impacts in areas adjacent to SPAs. This is particularly the case in agricultural areas that are situated between two SPAs. For example, areas that are presently in agricultural production or designated as Agriculture by the General Plan occur between the Bravo Ranch and East Border Crossing SPAs along the International Border, and between the Tamarack Canyon Ranch and Mesquite Lake SPAs south of Brawley. Property values in areas directly adjacent to SPA boundaries are anticipated to increase as development proceeds within each SPA. This, along with the issue of land use incompatibility, would provide incentive for agricultural properties outside the SPAs to convert to similar urban uses. As in a "domino" fashion, adjacent owners would be encouraged to develop their properties until all land between SPAs and/or Urban Areas is eventually "built-out". Such potentially significant growth-inducing impacts could be avoided, however, via implementation of the policies and programs provided in the General Plan Land Use and Agriculture Elements, and mitigation measures in this Program EIR.

C. Development Potential of Surrounding Land

For the most part, implementation of the proposed General Plan Update would not promote the development of land surrounding Imperial County sooner than is planned because a majority of the County's Urban Areas are designated within the central Imperial Valley area, in the vicinity of existing developed land. Much of the land situated along Imperial County's boundaries with San Diego County, Riverside County, and Arizona is characterized by desert or mountainous terrain that generally lacks public services. In addition, these areas are mostly designated as Open Space by the respective general plans due to the rugged topography.

An exception to the above occurs along the International Border, particularly the County's south-central boundary with Mexico. This area contains a high potential for significant growth inducement due to the poorly-regulated and unrestricted development which often occurs within Mexico, particularly adjacent to the U.S./Mexican business ventures called maquiladoras. In

this case, the development potential of Mexican lands adjacent to the Urban Area designations of Imperial County is directly related to socioeconomics (please see discussion below).

D. Socioeconomics

As mentioned above, population growth in Mexico is stimulated by the introduction of new business enterprises on the United States side of the International Border. In recent years, a string of commercial, industrial and manufacturing facilities called maquiladoras have begun appearing along the Border. Straddling both the United States and Mexico, these facilities provide tremendous incentive for people to migrate towards the border towns in which they occur. Mexican citizens are particularly attracted to these businesses, as they offer substantially better wages, and corresponding quality of life standards, than elsewhere in the interior. This can result in a potential for uncontrolled growth in the immediate vicinity. Areas within Imperial County that are particularly susceptible to such growth impacts include Calexico, Winterhaven, and perhaps the proposed Felicity, Bravo Ranch and East Border Crossing SPAs.

E. Growth Accommodation

A project may accommodate planned growth rather than promote unrestricted growth if it implements previously adopted long-range plans which have fully addressed the issue of growth-inducement. The proposed General Plan Update incorporates the following factors which will accommodate growth within Imperial County:

- Substantially less area is designated as residential, urban and industrial uses than was provided by the 1973 General Plan. Much of this acreage has instead been transferred into the "Recreation/Open Space" and "Government/Special Public" categories, providing the County greater land use controls in the generally environmentally-constrained areas outside the central Imperial Valley.
- As compared to the 1973 General Plan, a greater amount of land is designated as SPA allowing local government additional land use controls and more flexibility in urban design.
- No additional public facilities or transportation routes beyond the levels of service anticipated by the General Plan are proposed, nor would any required public services/facilities be extended into areas reserved in long-range planning from future development.
- The ultimate conversion of currently undeveloped land within Imperial County, which is designated for development pursuant to General Plan guidelines, would not stimulate growth in most areas surrounding the County. This is because land uses along the County boundary are not proposed which would be higher in density than adjacent areas outside the County, except along a portion of the International Border.

These growth accommodating factors are associated with specific goals and policies related to public services, traffic circulation, and environmental standards which serve to accommodate growth in a controlled manner.