Agenda Item No._____

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CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: July 20, 2010

TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

FROM: Planning Division, Community Development Department

SUBJECT: *Plan Santa Barbara* General Plan Update – Transportation Policies and Draft Environmental Impact Report Analysis

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council hold a work session the on the *Plan Santa Barbara* General Plan Update – Transportation Policies and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) Analysis.

DISCUSSION:

The central transportation issue facing the City is how to accommodate incremental growth while minimizing or avoiding substantial increases in congestion at freeway interchanges and major City roads, such as Upper State Street. The analysis in the DEIR shows that, although better than the No Project Alternative, *Plan Santa Barbara,* as proposed will nearly double the number of significantly impacted intersections in the City (from existing 13 to 21 by 2030). This would fall short of *Plan Santa Barbara's* policy objective to keep traffic congestion below the 2008 baseline study.

The transportation model analysis in the DEIR specifically tailored for the City, shows that future development generates the least amount of increased traffic if located within the Downtown core and along major transit corridors north of U.S Hwy 101. The analysis shows that trip generation rates are lower for land uses located in the Downtown core and City grid street system versus other parts of the City because of the compact mix of land uses, the street design that supports all types of users (i.e.: all types of travel modes), and the accessibility of the Downtown commercial district within this area and from other areas via transit.

The alternatives analysis in the DEIR shows that reducing the net increase of commercial land use and increasing housing within the City's central commercial core and adjacent neighborhoods north of U.S. Hwy 101 can contribute to lowering the level of traffic congestion. Commercial land uses generate more jobs, some level of which need to be filled by people commuting from outside our community. Housing units located within the Downtown core can provide a place for workers to live, offsetting the

need to increase commute trips. Commuter trips contribute the most to traffic congestion because they predominately occur during the morning and afternoon peak hours when many people want to drive at the same time.

The traffic model also shows that the most effective measure to combat traffic congestion is to aggressively support Travel Demand Management (TDM) strategies that include on-street public parking pricing management in the Downtown, as well as other strategies described (i.e.: transit passes, parking cash-out, Safe Routes to Schools, telecommuting). The primary reason why TDM was found to be more effective than land use growth restrictions is because TDM strategies were shown to affect a percentage of both existing as well as future trips, rather than just reducing the incremental amount of trips caused by future development projects.

Because the *Plan Santa Barbara* proposal nearly doubles the number of impacted intersections, the DEIR includes robust TDM and on-street parking pricing as a proposed mitigation measure. This mitigation is estimated to reduce the number of new impacted intersections to 3. The EIR consultants tell us that on-street public parking pricing represents 75% - 85% of the effectiveness of the TDM program. So while the other components of the TDM program are appropriate for consideration, significant reductions in traffic congestion will be primarily achieved through parking pricing.

On-street public parking pricing has been a significant topic of discussion because it is not only an environmental issue; it is also an economic and quality of life decision that must support the economic vitality of the Downtown. Accordingly, Downtown stakeholders should be intimately involved in directing the implementation of such a program.

The past policy and practice of the City has been intolerant toward traffic congestion, however each plan alternative includes some level of increase in traffic congestion over 20 years. Decision makers will need to determine the appropriate balance between the amount and type of land use growth, the location of growth, the level of TDM implementation, and acceptable future congestion levels.

At the work session, Transportation Staff will present an overview of the DEIR findings for discussion purposes. Section 16.0 TRANSPORTATION of the DEIR, starting on page 16-1, presents a thorough background of the transportation issues for decision-maker consideration.

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