
III. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

A. OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The environmental setting of the Project vicinity is generally described below. More detailed characterization of the baseline environmental setting is provided in the beginning of each individual environmental topic analyzed in Section IV., Environmental Impact Analysis, of this Draft EIR.

TOPOGRAPHY, HYDROLOGY, AND SEISMICITY

The Project site is essentially level, however, the adjacent slope of the Harbor Freeway (I-110) rises adjacent to the Project's western boundary. With this minor exception, there are no steep slopes or hillsides in the vicinity. The largely urbanized site is served by an existing network of storm drains that collect surface runoff which is channeled into Ballona Creek and, ultimately, Santa Monica Bay at Playa Del Rey. The Project site is located within an area that has historically been utilized for oil extraction activity, though there are no current oil extraction activities occurring in proximity to the Project site.

The entire Southern California region is seismically active. All parts of the Los Angeles Basin are subject to ground shaking of varying intensities from earthquakes on nearby and more distant faults. The Project site vicinity has been identified as subject to moderate to high levels of ground shaking from expected seismic events. It is not, however, within any special Earthquake Study Zones as identified by the California Department of Conservation, Division of Mines and Geology or an area identified by the City of Los Angeles as being at substantial risk of liquefaction, landslides, or other seismic hazards. The nearest Earthquake Study Zone is the Newport/Inglewood Fault Zone, which is approximately 10 miles south of the Project. The Elysian Park-Wilshire Thrust Fault Zone is believed to underlie the entire Central City Area. Although the potential effects of seismic activity are an engineering and design consideration in the area, development in the site vicinity poses no unusual seismic risk beyond that which exists throughout the region. Additional information on localized geologic and seismic conditions in the Project vicinity can be found in Section IV. E. of the Draft EIR.

ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS

Meteorological conditions within the Los Angeles Basin are characterized by warm summers, mild winters, infrequent rainfall, moderate afternoon breezes, and generally fair weather.

The Los Angeles metropolitan area, located within the South Coast Air Basin experiences air pollution levels that frequently exceed various state and national standards, although this condition has seen improvement over the past decades. Daily wind patterns greatly influence air quality in the basin by transporting air pollutant emissions generated in the heavily developed portions of the greater Los Angeles area into easterly parts of the South Coast Air Basin, east of downtown Los Angeles. Notwithstanding these pollution levels, air quality conditions within the South Coast Air Basin have improved substantially over the last decade. Additional information on air quality conditions can be found in Section IV. E. of the Draft EIR.

NOISE

Existing ambient noise levels in the site vicinity are largely related to traffic on area freeways, arterials, and local streets. Average daily noise levels along major roadways in the area, including the Harbor Freeway, Santa Monica Freeway, Olympic Boulevard, and Figueroa Street, are over 70 decibels (dBA). Noise levels drop significantly as distance from major roadways increases. For example, the Olympic Properties development area, located immediately north of STAPLES Center and the Convention Center between Olympic Boulevard and 11th Street, has existing noise levels in the 60 dBA range. There are no sensitive noise receptors (residences, schools, hospitals) identified within the Project site. Most uses adjacent to the Project site are commercial and light industrial, which generally are not considered noise sensitive. An apartment building is, however, located adjacent to the north end of the Olympic North Properties, along the north side of Olympic Boulevard. There is a multi-family residential building located at the northeast corner of Flower Street and Olympic Boulevard and an apartment hotel located at the southwest corner of Flower Street and Pico Boulevard. The 10th Street Elementary School, located west of the Harbor Freeway, approximately 1,300 feet northwest of the Project site on the northwest corner of Valencia Street and Olympic Boulevard, is considered a sensitive receptor. The Downtown Holiday Inn hotel is located between the Figueroa Central and Figueroa North Properties, at the southeast corner of Figueroa Street and Olympic Boulevard. However, this hotel is not considered a sensitive receptor because of the transient nature of hotel guests. No other noise sensitive uses are directly adjacent to the Project site. Noise in the vicinity of the STAPLES Center, the Los Angeles Convention and Exhibition Center, and the adjacent Harbor Freeway occasionally exceeds the normally acceptable levels for residential uses (generally defined to be 65 dBA CNEL or below), however, it is not uncommon for ambient noise levels in large metropolitan areas to exceed this average. Additional information on local noise conditions can be found in Section IV. H. of the Draft EIR.

LAND USE

The Project vicinity is characterized by a mixture of commercial, light industrial, major entertainment (STAPLES Center and the Los Angeles Convention and Exhibition Center), and

some multi-family residential uses. The quality of structures in the area varies widely, ranging from new buildings (primarily STAPLES Center and the Convention Center) and older viable structures to older deteriorated structures. Residential and commercial uses are located side-by-side in some adjacent locations. The Figueroa Properties development areas, located east of STAPLES Center and the Convention Center between 11th and 12th Streets, are occupied by a warehouse and minor mechanical buildings that are related to STAPLES Center activities. The balance of the Project site is used for surface parking associated with STAPLES Center events.

The *Central City Community Plan* designates the Project site for Regional Commercial development, except along the eastern edge of the block frontages facing Flower Street. These areas are designated for High Density Residential development. Areas to the north of the Project site are generally designated for Regional Commercial uses, while areas to the east of the Project site are designated for High Density Residential development. Additional detail on existing land uses can be found in Section IV.A. of the Draft EIR.

AESTHETICS

The Project site consists of an irregular, inverted L-shaped group of surface parking parcels located north and east of STAPLES Center and the Convention Center and northeast of the interchange of the Harbor and Santa Monica Freeways. STAPLES Center, the Harbor Freeway, and the Convention Center complex are all located to the west and south of the Project site. The architectural design and large scale of STAPLES Center and the Convention Center complex mark them as localized architectural and visual landmarks that contrast with the commercial and residential character of the surrounding properties. The high rise downtown office towers are visually prominent to the north and east.

The Project site exhibits little topographic relief and there are no substantial slopes or hillsides in the area. Existing landscaping on the site is limited to minimal ornamental landscaping. Landscaping in the general area in and around the Project site is sparse and generally limited to street trees. The most extensively landscaped area in the Project site vicinity is found in Gilbert Lindsay Plaza, which serves as an entry point and gathering area for STAPLES Center and the Convention Center. Several vacant, unpaved areas around the Project site remain undeveloped. Additional information on aesthetic conditions in the Project vicinity can be found in Section IV.B. of the Draft EIR.

POPULATION, HOUSING AND EMPLOYMENT

As reported by the 1990 U.S. Census, the population of the Central City Community Plan Area (22,374 persons) represents approximately 0.6 percent of the total population of the City of

Los Angeles (3,518,315 persons). SCAG forecasts the population of Central City to increase by 8,551 (to 30,926) by the Year 2010. A total of 8,112 dwelling units were recorded for the Central City Area in the 1990 Census. The SCAG forecast for the Central City Area indicates a projected increase to 10,122 dwelling units by the Year 2010. A population of approximately 5,300 persons and approximately 2,000 households were reported for the South Park area for 1990.

Downtown Los Angeles is a major employment center that provided a projected 206,500 jobs in 2000 among many employment sectors. Office and professional employment, which constitutes the majority of downtown employment, is concentrated in office buildings located within the financial district located on the east side of the Harbor Freeway to the north of the Project site. Downtown Los Angeles is also a major center for local, county, state, and federal government employment in the Civic Center located northeast of the Project site. Much of the garment, toy, and small electronics industries in Los Angeles are concentrated in the eastern downtown area, as well as the Los Angeles flower, produce, and jewelry markets. Medical related employment is associated with the California Medical Center. The downtown hotels, STAPLES Center, and the Los Angeles Convention and Exhibition Center also provide a range of employment opportunities. Additional information regarding population, housing and employment can be found in Section IV.C. of the Draft EIR.

TRANSPORTATION/CIRCULATION

Regional access to the Project site and vicinity is provided by the Harbor Freeway and the Santa Monica Freeway. The Project site is also served by a network of local streets. Major north-south running surface streets in the site vicinity include Figueroa Street and Flower Street. Major east-west running surface streets in the area include Olympic Boulevard, Pico Boulevard, and Venice Boulevard. Traffic levels throughout the area are typical for a densely developed and highly urbanized area. The most heavily traveled surface streets in the area are Olympic Boulevard and Figueroa Street. Through traffic is primarily limited to these and other major surface streets.

The Metro Blue Line Pico Station, located near the eastern edge of the site at the intersection of Flower Street and Pico Boulevard, provides passenger rail service directly to STAPLES Center, and the Los Angeles Convention and Exhibition Center. The Blue Line, which runs between downtown Los Angeles and Downtown Long Beach, provides access to much of the Los Angeles region through connections to both the Red Line and the Green Line, as well as numerous bus lines. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) operates 38 bus routes within one mile of the Project site. Additional transportation service is provided by the DASH bus system, which shuttles passengers between other parts of the Central Business District, Chinatown and areas west of the Harbor Freeway, and six taxi companies. Additional information regarding transportation and circulation in the Project vicinity can be found in Sections IV.F.1., IV.F.2., and IV.F.3. of the Draft EIR.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Current activities within the Project site include surface parking and temporary commercial uses associated with STAPLES Center or the Convention Center activities. Phase I and II Environmental Site Assessments (ESAs) conducted for the Project site have discovered environmental concerns associated with past site activities that have required further investigation and site remedial action. To date, closures have been granted for all but three properties on the Project site. These three sites are currently being remediated, and closures are anticipated by fall 2001. Additional information regarding the presence of hazardous materials on or near the Project site can be found in Section IV.G. of the Draft EIR.

PUBLIC SERVICES

The Project vicinity is served by the Los Angeles Fire Department, the Los Angeles Police Department, the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, the Los Angeles Community College District, the Los Angeles Public Library, and the Los Angeles Unified School District. Public police and fire services in the area are generally considered adequate. In addition, the downtown area, like much of the City of Los Angeles, there is a recognized shortage of recreational space, as determined by the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. Additional information regarding locally provided public services can be found in Section IV.I. of the Draft EIR.

UTILITIES

The Project site is in a highly urbanized area with extensively developed infrastructure systems. Utility providers in the area include:

- Sewer service - City of Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation
- Water service - City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Solid waste disposal - City of Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation and private disposal services
- Electric power - City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Natural gas - Southern California Gas Company (Sempra Energy)

Additional information regarding local utility services can be found in Section IV.J. of the Draft EIR.

ARCHITECTURAL/HISTORIC RESOURCES

The land uses within the Project site currently consist of parking. Land uses surrounding the Project site consist of predominantly commercial uses, with some multi-family residential uses bordering the Olympic Properties. These properties exhibit a consistency of scale and appearance which has remained substantially unchanged since the 1960s. No building within close proximity of the Olympic Properties is listed, or eligible for listing, in local, State or federal listings. Many of the existing building facades are dominated by large openings designed to allow for automobile access and expansive display windows, though none appear to be eligible for designation as local landmarks.

The Variety Arts Center of Los Angeles, located immediately northwest of the Figueroa North Properties, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and in the California Register. Two other nearby buildings, the Hotel Figueroa, located northwest of the Figueroa North Properties, and the Petroleum Building, located south of the Figueroa North Properties, are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, but are not currently listed. Additional information regarding local architectural and historic resources can be found in Section IV.L. of the Draft EIR.

III. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

B. CUMULATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that the analysis of potential Project impacts include cumulative impacts. CEQA defines cumulative impacts as “two or more individual effects which, when considered together are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.”⁵ This analysis of cumulative impacts need not be as in-depth as what is performed relative to the proposed Project, but instead is to “be guided by the standards of practicality and reasonableness.”⁶

Cumulative impacts are anticipated impacts of the project along with reasonably foreseeable growth. Reasonably foreseeable growth may be based on either:⁷

- A list of past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects producing related or cumulative impacts; or
- A summary of projections contained in an adopted general plan or related planning document designed to evaluate regional or area-wide conditions.

The Proposed Project is expected to be implemented between 2001 and 2008, as discussed in Section II.B., Project Characteristics. Accordingly, this Draft EIR considers the effects of other proposed development projects within that time frame. While it would be speculative and impossible to identify all projects that could conceivably be built over the next eight years, this analysis has utilized a listing of related projects that have been considered in recent traffic analyses for other proposed developments in the CBD, as well as consultation with the Lead Agency and the CRA, to provide an indicator for the approximate levels of development that might reasonably occur within that time horizon. (See Appendix G, L.A. Sports and Entertainment District EIR Traffic Study.) Table 4 on pages 83 through 85 contains a summary listing of the related projects that might substantially affect intersections in the vicinity of the Project site which have been evaluated in this Draft EIR. These projects are generally located within an area bounded by the Hollywood Freeway (U.S. 101) on the north, San Pedro Street on the east, the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10) on the south, and Hoover Street on the west. The 2008 related project locations are shown in Figure 14 on page 86.

⁵ *State CEQA Guidelines, 14 California Code of Regulations, § 15355, et seq.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, § 15355.

⁷ *Ibid.*, § 15130(b)(1).

Table 4

RELATED PROJECTS (2008)

Map Code	Project/Location	Land Use	Size
1	Shopping Center 1700-1764 W. 6 th Street	retail	76,000 sq.ft.
2	Medici Apartments 722 and 725 Bixel Street	residential retail	658 units total sq.ft. = 50,000
3	Accessory Center Main/11th/Olympic/Los Angeles	retail storage	50,000 sq.ft. 7,900 sq.ft.
4	Mixed-Use 11 th between Hope & Flower	residential retail	200 apartments 20,000 sq.ft.
5	Office Building 850 S. Vermont Avenue	office	44,000 sq.ft.
6	Mixed-Use 3240 Wilshire Boulevard	retail/bowling/restaurant	108,890 sq.ft.
7	Mixed-Use 2959-2973 Wilshire Boulevard	residential retail	142 units total sq.ft. = 27,000
8	Metropolis (Phase 1) SW corner of Francisco and 8 th	office retail	567,000 sq.ft. 5,000 sq.ft.
9	Ambassador Entertainment/Retail Center 3400 Wilshire Boulevard	retail theater	693,000 sq.ft. 110,000 sq.ft.
10	L.A. Convention Center Expansion ^a Venice/11 th /Cherry/Figueroa	convention center	280,000 sq.ft. (250,000 sq.ft.)
11	Toy Center Reuse Flower and 11 th (Replaces existing 30,000 sq.ft. office and 36,000 sq.ft. warehouse uses)	retail restaurant office	4,050 sq.ft. 17,000 sq.ft. 36,000 sq.ft.
12	Old Bank District 4 th and Spring	residential	237 units (lofts)
13	Eldorado Hotel 4 th and Spring	hotel	125 rooms
14	Holiday Inn Expansion Flower and 11 th	hotel	210,000 sq.ft.
15	Disney Hall SW corner of Grand and 1 st	theater office ballroom retail	2,835 seats 22,424 sq.ft. 25,000 sq.ft. 17,172 sq.ft.
16	Our Lady of the Angels Grand Avenue (between Temple and US-101)	cathedral office/rectory	3,000 seats 50,000 sq.ft.
17	Mixed Use NE corner of Olympic and Albany	retail warehouse office child care	60,000 sq.ft. 40,000 sq.ft. 10,000 sq.ft. 5,000 sq.ft.

Table 4 (Continued)

RELATED PROJECTS (2008)

Map Code	Project/Location	Land Use	Size
18	Mixed-Use 615 Olympic Boulevard	residential	66 apartments
19	Flower/Pico Parking Center SW corner of Pico and Flower	parking retail	631 spaces 40,000 sq.ft.
20	Metropolis (Phases 2-5) Between 8 th , Georgia, and 9 th	office retail amphitheater hotel	1,092,000 sq.ft. 218,000 sq.ft. 600 seats 700 rooms
21	Retail NE corner of Main and 9 th	retail	151,000 sq.ft.
22	Auto Store 1561 W. Washington Boulevard	retail	14,150 sq.ft.
23	Restaurant 674 S. Vermont Avenue	restaurant/bar	15,640 sq.ft.
24	Restaurant 3000 Wilshire Boulevard	restaurant/pool hall	8,000 sq.ft.
25	Los Angeles Center Phase 1A N side of 6 th Street between Bixel and I-110	office retail	880,000 sq.ft. 10,000 sq.ft.
26	Garment Building 1015 S. Wall	Replacement of Garment Building	44,919 sq.ft.
27	Retail Clothing Outlet 727-735 E. 12 th Street	Retail Clothing Outlet (Conversion from warehouse to retail clothing outlet)	15,840 sq.ft.
28	Office Project Pico/Figueroa/Flower	retail office	20,000 sq.ft. 225,000 sq.ft.

^a The 1986 FEIR for the Convention Center included discussion of expansion of the Convention Center to provide up to one million square feet of exhibit and meeting space at the Convention Center, which is the national standard for major urban convention centers. This future expansion would require utilization of land areas outside the existing Convention Center, possibly a portion of the Olympic West development area. The Convention Center has a long-term concept to expand by an additional 400,000 to 600,000 square feet of exhibit and support space; however, no formal proposal has yet been developed.

Source: Los Angeles Convention and Exhibition Center and PCR Services Corporation, December 2000.

The analysis of 2008 cumulative development is not intended to identify specific impacts associated with this exact list of related projects. Instead, the list presented in Table 4 on pages 84 through 85 is intended to represent the approximate levels of development that might occur, based on recent development history in downtown Los Angeles. In certain cases where projects may have been proposed earlier (e.g., a draft EIR prepared, an environmental assessment form completed and filed, etc.), but where these applications may no longer be active, it is reasonable to assume that a project of similar magnitude could be developed on the same site during this projected time frame,

Figure 14 Related Projects

although additional environmental assessment may be required on a project-by-project basis. In addition, the analysis of 2008 cumulative development also assumes the continuation of a one percent (1%) average annual growth factor throughout the region. The total projected development to 2008 was then applied to the analysis of all environmental issues, as appropriate.