



## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Draft EIR**

On January 23, 2012 the City of San Diego released the Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Plaza de Panama Project. The release of the Draft EIR is an important milestone in the project approval process. The public will have the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft EIR during a 45-day public comment period. Public comments and responses are included in the Final EIR, which will be forwarded to decision makers – including the City Council – for consideration.

**Q. *What is the purpose of this Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR)?***

A. The purpose of the Draft EIR is to analyze potential environmental impacts, and the proposed mitigation for those identified impacts, of the Plaza de Panama project and a range of alternatives. The EIR provides the City Council with accurate technical data about the project and alternatives to help it decide which project, if any, is most appropriate for Balboa Park.

**Q. *What issues does the draft EIR evaluate?***

A. It evaluates the projects' impacts on:

- Land use
- Historical resources
- Visual effects and neighborhood character
- Transportation/circulation and parking
- Air quality
- Biological resources
- Energy conservation
- Geological conditions
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Health and safety/hazardous materials
- Hydrology
- Noise
- Paleontological resources
- Public services and facilities
- Public utilities
- Water quality

**Q. *Who is responsible for the EIR?***

A: The City of San Diego issues the Draft EIR, and the review process is managed by the City's Development Services Department.

**Q. *Does the Draft EIR consider any alternatives to the project?***

A: Yes, the Draft EIR provides a thorough analysis of 13 project alternatives. The scope of the alternatives analysis is believed to be unprecedented in an EIR in the City of San Diego and far exceeds the requirements set forth in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The list of project alternatives for consideration was largely developed through public input. The City's Development Services Department assessed all alternatives suggested and determined the final list of 13 alternatives that received full environmental analysis.

**Q: *How are the impacts and benefits of the project and alternatives assessed?***

A: Environmental impacts of the proposed project and alternatives are assessed against existing conditions. In addition, impacts of alternatives are also compared to impacts of the proposed project. The EIR also includes a list of project objectives to be achieved, and the project and alternatives are assessed against these objectives to determine how well each are met.

**Q. What does the EIR say about the Plaza de Panama project proposed by the Plaza de Panama Committee?**

- A. The Plaza de Panama project meets all project objectives as follows:
- The project, by removing vehicular traffic from the core of Balboa Park and returning those areas to pedestrian plazas and gardens, restores the historical and visual fabric of the Plaza de Panama, Plaza de California, the El Prado, the Mall (Esplanade), and Pan American Road.
  - The project maintains public/proximate vehicle access to Balboa Park from both east and west by keeping Cabrillo Bridge open to personal vehicles.
  - The project resolves 14 of 20 areas of conflict where pedestrians now must cross or share roadways.
  - The project provides Balboa Park with a net gain of 273 parking spaces by replacing the asphalt parking lot south of the Spreckels Organ Pavilion with a three-story underground parking structure.
  - The project reclaims 6.3 acres of parkland through its reclamation of areas now used for parking lots and roadways and by creating a new park on top of the parking structure.
  - The project could be completed by January 2015, in time for the 2015 centennial celebration.

The Draft EIR identifies three negative impacts that cannot be mitigated, all of which result from the Centennial Bridge which allows traffic to bypass the plazas in the core of the park:

- Because the Centennial Bridge would alter the spatial relationships of the Cabrillo Bridge and California Quadrangle (which are a part of the Balboa Park National Landmark Historic District), it would result in an impact to a historical resource.
- Because the Centennial Bridge has an impact to a historical resource, it is inconsistent with the preservation goals of the Balboa Park Master Plan and Central Mesa Precise Plan, resulting in a land use impact.
- Because the Centennial Bridge would introduce an element of modern architecture into an historical setting, it would result in a visual impact. Replication of historical design is not permissible in accordance with Secretary of Interior Rehabilitation Standards.

The EIR also concludes that there will be temporary noise impacts during construction that cannot be mitigated, but these impacts will cease when construction is complete.

**Q. What does the draft EIR say about the Plaza de Panama project's effect on noise?**

- A. The Draft EIR says the project will not result in an increase in noise levels at noise sensitive locations within Balboa Park. It will actually reduce noise in the Plaza de Panama, Plaza de California, El Prado and the Mall (Esplanade), as well as on the north side of Alcazar Garden. The project will result in a very slight increase in noise levels on the south side of Alcazar Garden. This increase would not be perceptible to the human ear. The project and all of the alternatives (except No Project) would have temporary construction noise impacts.

**Q: What does the draft EIR say about project alternatives that were analyzed?**

- A: The proposed project and the 13 alternatives analyzed all fall into one of the following three categories:
- Close the Cabrillo Bridge to vehicular traffic
  - Allow traffic to continue driving through the park, but eliminate parking from the Plaza de Panama
  - Build the Centennial Bridge/Road to route traffic away from heart of the park

Each of these categories includes variations on the provision and location of additional parking and the amount of park space reclaimed. Information about specific impacts and benefits can be found in the Draft EIR, but some general impacts apply to each of the categories:

- Alternatives that close the Cabrillo Bridge to vehicles avoid the impacts of the Centennial Bridge/Road, but result in significant unmitigated traffic impacts outside of the park. They reclaim the plazas in the heart of the park, but fail to meet the objective of maintaining proximate public access from both sides of the park.
- Alternatives that allow traffic to continue through the heart of the park avoid the impacts of the Centennial Bridge, but some result in significant unmitigated traffic impacts in the Plaza de Panama, and some result in unmitigated traffic impacts external to the park. They maintain access from both sides of the park, but fail to meet the objective of removing vehicles from the heart of the park.
- Alternatives that include the Centennial Bridge have no significant unmitigable traffic impacts, inside or outside the park, but have the impacts of the Centennial Bridge. They meet the primary objectives of removing cars from the heart of the park and maintaining proximate public access from both sides of the park.
- All alternatives (except the No Project Alternative) have temporary noise impacts that will result from construction.

**Q. Why is the EIR still in draft form?**

A. An EIR is not complete until the public has had the opportunity to review its findings and comment on them. The release of Draft begins a 45-day period for public review and comment. The Final EIR will contain public comments submitted to the City and responses to these comments.

**Q. What happens to this EIR once it is in its final form?**

A. Once the Final EIR is released, it will move forward to the City Council for certification.

**Q. Is certification of the EIR the same as project approval?**

A. No. They are distinct and separate actions. However, the Council must consider the EIR analysis when approving any project or alternative. Using that analysis, it can take steps to mitigate potential negative impacts that could result from a project. In the case where negative impacts cannot be mitigated, the City Council can still decide that a project should go forward despite those impacts. To do this, the City Council will adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations, which outlines the reasons that unmitigated negative impacts are outweighed by the project's benefits to the city. Information on both the impacts and the benefits may be found in the EIR.

**Q: Where can I review a copy of the draft EIR?**

A: The draft EIR is available on the City of San Diego website (<http://clerkdoc.sannet.gov/Website/publicnotice/pubnotceqa.html>). Links to the Draft EIR are also provided on the Plaza de Panama Project website in the "Info & Documents" section ([www.plazadepanama.org](http://www.plazadepanama.org)). Copies of the document are also available for review at the Downtown Central Library (820 E St., San Diego, CA 92101-6416) and the North Park Branch Library (3795 31st St., San Diego, CA 92104-3720) or may be purchased at the City's Development Services Department.

**Q: How can I submit comments on the draft EIR?**

A: The draft EIR is available for public review and comment for a 45-day period. The deadline for submitting comments is 5:00 pm on March 8, 2012. Comments may be submitted in writing to the City of San Diego via U.S. Mail and e-mail to:

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