

October 8, 2026

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**Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for
Lake Skinner Regional Water Transmission System Project
(Proposed Project) (SCH No.: 2022070445)**

South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD) Staff appreciate the opportunity to review the above-mentioned document. The Eastern Municipal Water District (EMWD) (South Coast AQMD Facility ID 90305¹) is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Lead Agency for the Proposed Project. To provide context, South Coast AQMD Staff have provided a brief summary of the project information and prepared the following comments which are organized by topic of concern.

Summary of Proposed Project Information in the Draft PEIR

Based on the Draft PEIR, the Proposed Project consists of the following components:

- 1) A new water service connection (turnout) to transfer treated water deliveries from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California's (Metropolitan) Robert A. Skinner Water Treatment Plant (Skinner WTP) to EMWD;
- 2) A new booster pump station (BPS) adjacent and connected to the turnout, to pump water to EMWD's service area;

To support the water transmission capacity designed for sequential expansion from an initial 40 cubic feet per second (cfs) capacity to a maximum buildout capacity of 140 cfs, the pumping equipment configuration starts with 5 pumps (four 10-cfs duty, one standby) in Phase 1, expanding to 12 pumps total (seven 10-cfs and five 20-cfs) at full buildout with the maximum combined energy usage up to 55,251,072 horsepower(hp)-hours/year.² The pumps would be driven by either natural gas internal combustion engines (ICEs) (800–1,500 hp) or electric motors (600–1,250 hp). Also, emergency power supply includes one to three diesel standby generators (1.0 megawatt (MW) to 3.0 MW each) to ensure continuous operation during grid power outages.

¹ South Coast AQMD FIND, available at: <https://xappprod.aqmd.gov/find/facility/AQMDsearch?facilityID=90305>

² Lake Skinner Regional Water Transmission System Project Draft PEIR. p. 4.4-9.

- 3) A new high-pressure conveyance transmission pipeline network to deliver water from Skinner WTP to EMWD's service area.³

The proposed Project would be located within unincorporated areas of Riverside County, east of the cities of Menifee and Murrieta. The transmission pipelines would extend in an overall northern direction from Skinner WTP approximately 14 miles through the southern Perris Valley area to the community of Winchester. The new BPS and turnout would be sited near the intersection of Auld Road and Leon Road, approximately two miles west of the Skinner WTP.⁴

The nearest sensitive receptor (e.g., residential development) are single-family homes located as close as 70 feet (approx. 21 meters) from potential BPS site footprints.⁵

Construction of the Proposed Project is anticipated to occur in in multiple phases and over a span of 15 years.⁶

South Coast AQMD Comments

Health Risk Assessment (HRA) during Project Construction, Operation, and the Concurrent Construction and Operation Phases

CEQA Guidelines Sections 15126.2 and 15126.4 require a Draft PEIR to include a description of the significant environmental effects of a Proposed Project, significant environmental effects which cannot be avoided, significant irreversible environmental changes, growth-inducing impacts, and mitigation measures proposed to minimize the significant adverse impacts. An impact is considered significant under CEQA if it leads to a "substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in the environment." In addition to the air quality impacts from the criteria air pollutants and greenhouse gases, the adverse air quality health risk impacts associated with increased emissions of toxic air contaminants (TACs) from all sources (including but not limited to expected future permitted stationary and portable sources, mobile sources, and other emission sources) during the operation phases need to be appropriately evaluated using qualitative and/or quantitative approaches to justify whether there will be potentially substantial adverse impacts.

However, the Draft PEIR does not appear to quantify the potential health risk associated with TAC emissions during the Proposed Project construction, operation, and the concurrent construction and operation phases. As a result, the potential cancer risk linked to the Proposed Project is unknown and undisclosed. This omission is concerning because the Proposed Project would include multiple large stationary and emergency engines, including natural gas ICE-driven pumps⁷ and one to three diesel emergency generators, and sensitive receptors may be located as close as approximately 70 feet from the BPS site. Diesel particulate matter (DPM), in particular, is a toxic air contaminant and carcinogen. In addition, the construction is expected to take place over extended time (i.e., 15 years) and in multiple phase each to take approximately 16 months⁸, and the operation of the Proposed Project is expected to occur concurrently.

³ *Ibid.* p. 1-1.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 2-2.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 4.1-22.

⁶ *Ibid.* Table 2-1. p. 2-3.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 4.1-15 to 4.1-19.

⁸ *Ibid.* Table 2-2. p. 2-10.

Therefore, the Lead Agency is recommended to conduct a program-level HRA, which should include evaluating truck emissions (including the truck routes to and from the site, truck loading/unloading, and their proximity to the sensitive receptors) and the impacts from natural gas pumps and diesel-powered stationary and portable sources under the foreseeable probable future conditions. The analysis should consider the applicable project phases and the maximum reasonably foreseeable operational configuration at buildout, as appropriate.

The operational HRA should quantify potential cancer risk and acute and chronic non-cancer health impacts at nearby sensitive receptor locations, including the residences located near the proposed BPS. The analysis should identify the emission sources, emission rates, operating assumptions, stack parameters, and other modeling assumptions used in the assessment and should disclose the resulting health risks to the public and workers, as applicable.

The HRA results should be compared to the South Coast AQMD Air Quality Significance Thresholds for TACs⁹ to determine whether there will be a potentially significant air quality impact. South Coast AQMD's CEQA significance threshold for cancer risk is 10 in one million. The analysis should also disclose the potential health risks for chronic and acute impacts of the Proposed Project's operation on residents living and/or workers working outside the Proposed Project's boundary in the Revised Draft PEIR or Final PEIR.

If the Lead Agency determines that an operational HRA is not necessary, the Final PEIR should provide substantial evidence supporting that determination, including an explanation of why the proposed natural gas ICE pumps, diesel emergency generators, and other foreseeable operational emission sources would not result in potentially significant health risk impacts to nearby sensitive receptors.

South Coast AQMD Air Permits and Role as a Responsible Agency

If implementation of the Proposed Project would require the use of new stationary and portable sources, including but not limited to emergency generators, fire water pumps, boilers, etc., air permits from South Coast AQMD will be required. The Final PEIR should include a discussion about the potentially applicable South Coast AQMD rules that may be applicable to the Proposed Project. Those rules may include, for example, Rule 201 – Permit to Construct,¹⁰ Rule 203 – Permit to Operate,¹¹ Rule 401 – Visible Emissions,¹² Rule 402 – Nuisance,¹³ Rule 403 – Fugitive Dust,¹⁴ Rule 1110.2 – Emissions from Gaseous and Liquid Fueled Engines,¹⁵ Rule 1113 – Architectural Coatings,¹⁶ Regulation XIII – New Source Review,¹⁷ Rule 1401 – New Source Review of Toxic Air Contaminants,¹⁸ Rule 1470 – Requirements for Stationary Diesel-Fueled Internal Combustion

⁹ South Coast AQMD Air Quality Significance Thresholds. <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/ceqa/handbook/south-coast-aqmd-air-quality-significance-thresholds.pdf>

¹⁰ South Coast AQMD, Rule 201 is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-ii/rule-201.pdf>

¹¹ South Coast AQMD, Rule 203 is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-ii/rule-203.pdf>

¹² South Coast AQMD, Rule 401 is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/rule-iv/rule-401.pdf>

¹³ South Coast AQMD, Rule 402 is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/rule-iv/rule-402.pdf>

¹⁴ South Coast AQMD, Rule 403 is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/rule-iv/rule-403>

¹⁵ South Coast AQMD, Rule 1110.2 is available at: https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xi/r1110_2.pdf

¹⁶ South Coast AQMD, Rule 1113 is available at <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xi/r1113.pdf>

¹⁷ South Coast AQMD, Regulation XIII is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/home/rules-compliance/rules/scaqmd-rule-book/regulation-xiii>

¹⁸ South Coast AQMD, Rule 1401 is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xiv/rule-1401.pdf>

and Other Compression Ignition Engines,¹⁹ etc. It is important to note if air permits from South Coast AQMD are required, the role of South Coast AQMD would change from a Commenting Agency to a Responsible Agency under CEQA. In addition, if South Coast AQMD is identified as a Responsible Agency, per CEQA Guidelines Sections 15086, the Lead Agency is required to consult with South Coast AQMD.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15096 sets forth specific procedures for a Responsible Agency, including making a decision on the adequacy of the CEQA document for use as part of the process for conducting a review of the Proposed Project and issuing discretionary approvals. Moreover, it is important to note that if a Responsible Agency determines that a CEQA document is not adequate to rely upon for its discretionary approvals, the Responsible Agency must take further actions listed in CEQA Guideline Section 15096(e), which could have the effect of delaying the implementation of the Proposed Project. In its role as CEQA Responsible Agency, the South Coast AQMD is obligated to ensure that the CEQA document prepared for this Proposed Project contains a sufficient project description and analysis to be relied upon in order to issue any discretionary approvals that may be needed for air permits. South Coast AQMD is concerned that the project description and analysis in its current form in the Draft PEIR is inadequate to be relied upon for this purpose.

For these reasons, the final CEQA document should be revised to include a discussion about any and all new stationary and portable equipment requiring South Coast AQMD air permits, provide the evaluation of their air quality and greenhouse gas impacts, and identify South Coast AQMD as a Responsible Agency for the Proposed Project as this information will be relied upon as the basis for the permit conditions and emission limits for the air permit(s). Please contact South Coast AQMD's Engineering and Permitting Staff at (909) 396-3385 for questions regarding what types of equipment would require air permits. For more general information on permits, please visit South Coast AQMD's webpage at <https://www.aqmd.gov/home/permits>.

Mitigation Measure AQ-1 and South Coast AQMD Permitting Requirements

The proposed MM-AQ-1 in the Draft PEIR would help reduce air quality impacts. However, the Draft PEIR states that, because electric-only pumps (Option 1) may not be feasible due to operational reliability requirements during power outages or emergency conditions²⁰, the Lead Agency may need to rely on natural gas ICE pumps under Option 2. While Option 2 would limit the use of natural gas ICE pumps to the initial 40 cfs capacity and require electric pumps for subsequent expansions (80 cfs and 140 cfs), the Draft PEIR acknowledges that NOx and CO emissions would continue to exceed applicable significance thresholds and that the impact would remain significant and unavoidable.

South Coast AQMD requires permits for equipment that emits air contaminants such as NOx and CO, unless specifically exempt. Equipment subject to permitting requirements must obtain the necessary authorization prior to construction, installation, or operation and comply with applicable emission standards and permit conditions. In particular, South Coast AQMD Rule 1110.2 establishes emission requirements for NOx, CO, and VOCs from stationary and portable engines greater than 50 brake horsepower. The Draft PEIR should therefore clarify whether the proposed natural gas ICE pumps, at their anticipated emission levels, would comply with applicable South

¹⁹ South Coast AQMD, Rule 1470 is available at: <https://www.aqmd.gov/docs/default-source/rule-book/reg-xiv/rule-1470.pdf>

²⁰ Lake Skinner Regional Water Transmission System Project Draft PEIR, pp. 4.1-12 to 4.1-13.

Coast AQMD requirements and be eligible to obtain the necessary permits for construction and operation.

The stated need for natural gas ICE pumps to provide operational reliability during power outages or emergency conditions is understandable. Nevertheless, the Draft PEIR should consider whether feasible approaches are available that could provide the necessary reliability while also minimizing emissions and ensuring compliance with South Coast AQMD permitting requirements. In this regard, the Draft PEIR should distinguish between CEQA significance thresholds and South Coast AQMD regulatory and permitting requirements. The determination that an impact is significant and unavoidable under CEQA does not, by itself, establish that the proposed equipment can be permitted or legally operated.

Accordingly, the Lead Agency should demonstrate that the mitigation approach is not only operationally feasible, but also legally and technically feasible under applicable South Coast AQMD requirements. The Draft PEIR should provide additional information regarding the anticipated NO_x and CO emission rates from the proposed natural gas ICE pumps and identify the applicable South Coast AQMD requirements and permit conditions. In particular, the Draft PEIR should clarify whether the equipment contemplated under Option 2 is expected to comply with applicable emission limits and obtain the required permits, or whether additional emission controls, operating restrictions, or other measures would be necessary.

This clarification is particularly important because, if the proposed equipment cannot meet applicable South Coast AQMD requirements or obtain the necessary permits at the proposed configuration, reliance on natural gas ICE pumps as the backup to the electric-pump option may not be feasible as described. The Draft PEIR should therefore identify and evaluate feasible alternatives or additional controls that could address the project's operational reliability needs while reducing potential air quality impacts and ensuring compliance with applicable South Coast AQMD requirements.

The Lead Agency is recommended to clarify the permitting requirements applicable to the proposed natural gas ICE pumps and demonstrate that the equipment can be permitted and operated in compliance with those requirements. If additional controls or alternative approaches may be necessary to obtain the required permits, the Draft PEIR should identify and evaluate those measures.

Potential Underestimation of Emissions Due to Exclusion of Haul Truck Activity and Construction Worker Trips During Project Construction

The Draft PEIR notes that emissions related to off-site delivery/haul truck activity and construction worker trips are not considered in the evaluation of construction-related localized impacts, as these mobile emissions are spread along area roadways and are not localized.²¹ However, construction-related truck trips and worker vehicle trips would nevertheless generate project-related emissions along the specific roadways and haul routes used to access the project site. Depending on the intensity and considering the anticipated long duration of construction activity (i.e., 16 months for each phase), these emissions could contribute to localized concentrations and exposure for sensitive receptors located adjacent to or near heavily used roadway segments.

²¹ Lake Skinner Regional Water Transmission System Project Appendices to the Draft PEIR, p. 50.

Therefore, the Lead Agency is recommended to clarify the technical and regulatory basis for excluding construction-related haul-truck and worker-trip emissions from the localized impact analysis in the Draft PEIR. In particular, the Final PEIR should explain whether the analysis considered the anticipated number, frequency, and routing of construction truck trips; the duration and intensity of peak construction activity; and the proximity of sensitive receptors to the principal access and haul routes. If the Lead Agency determines that these mobile-source emissions do not have the potential to result in a significant localized impact, the Final PEIR should provide sufficient supporting analysis to substantiate that conclusion.

The Lead Agency is also recommended to consider whether additional evaluation is warranted for roadway segments where construction traffic would be concentrated or where sensitive receptors are located nearby. If appropriate, feasible measures could include requirements to minimize truck and equipment idling, establish designated haul routes that avoid sensitive receptors where feasible, coordinate truck arrivals to reduce queueing and unnecessary circulation, and implement other applicable construction-traffic emission controls.

Conclusion

As set forth in California Public Resources Code Section 21092.5(a) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15088(a-b), the Lead Agency shall evaluate comments from public agencies on the environmental issues and prepare a written response at least 10 days prior to certifying the Final PEIR. As such, please provide South Coast AQMD written responses to all comments contained herein at least 10 days prior to the certification of the Final PEIR. In addition, as provided by CEQA Guidelines Section 15088(c), if the Lead Agency's position is at variance with recommendations provided in this comment letter, detailed reasons supported by substantial evidence in the record to explain why specific comments and suggestions are not accepted must be provided.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. South Coast AQMD Staff are available to work with the Lead Agency to address any air quality questions that may arise from this comment letter. Please contact Zoya Banan, PhD., Air Quality Specialist, at ZBanan@aqmd.gov or me at SWang1@aqmd.gov should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Sam Wang

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RVC260820-06

Control Number