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Coastal Commission Releases Guidance to Protect Infrastructure That Serves Shoreline Communities

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Public Review Draft:

https://documents.coastal.ca.gov/assets/slr/SLR%20Guidance_Critical%20Infrastructure_8.16.21_FINAL_FullPDF.pdf

SAN FRANCISCO _ In an ongoing effort to help California prepare for sea level rise, the Coastal Commission has released a guidance report to enable communities to plan and protect the critical transportation, water infrastructure and other utilities that serve shoreline and inland communities.

“The California Coastal Commission has long been an ally when it comes to climate change, and now, as our state’s \$44 billion ocean-based economy faces the increasing threat of sea level rise, they have given coastal communities a life raft,” said Senate President pro Tempore Toni G. Atkins (D-San Diego). “This comprehensive guidebook will provide instruction and support to communities as they navigate through the preparations and adaptations necessary to protect families, businesses, and one of California’s most precious resources.”

The report, “Critical Infrastructure at Risk: Sea Level Rise Planning Guidance for California’s Coastal Zone,” was released Monday for public review and will provide local governments and other stakeholders with planning information as they make challenging adaptation decisions. Much of the state’s existing infrastructure is aging and was not designed to withstand sea level rise and other climate change impacts to shoreline areas.

California’s coastal infrastructure supports the nearly 70 percent of residents who live along the coast and allows millions of visitors to access the state’s coastline. Transportation networks carry visitors and residents to and from the coast, and goods and services to and from inland areas. Water systems provide clean water for communities, agriculture, and industry, carry wastewater, and direct stormwater.

“We must take action now to plan for resilient and inclusive coastal communities,” said Commission Vice Chair Donne Brownsey. “One study in the guidance found that 4.6 feet of sea level rise would threaten or damage hundreds of miles of highways and railways, and thousands of miles of road. The scientific data and the economic consequences are profound and undeniable.”

The Commission’s guidance presents five key considerations and makes a series of recommendations. Strategies include floodproofing, elevating or relocating existing infrastructure and siting new infrastructure in safer areas. Many of the approaches could broadly apply to other types of infrastructure such as power plants, gas pipelines and other shoreline facilities.

The document details the expected impacts of sea level rise on infrastructure, describes the regulatory framework, explains how the Commission staff works with other agency partners on sea level rise policies, provides model policies that local governments can use to update their own planning documents and gives direction on how to develop projects to help ensure resilience and protect resources. It also recommends considering the equitable distribution of burden and benefits to underserved communities at

all stages of adaptation planning because these communities are already more vulnerable to the impacts of sea level rise and often lack access to the decision-making process.

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