

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

---

## 1.1 DISASTER BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

This Draft Environmental Assessment/Environmental Impact Report (hereafter referred to as Draft EA/EIR) has been prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and its implementing guidelines, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA. The County of Los Angeles Chief Administrative Office (CAO) is the Lead Agency under CEQA. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the lead agency under NEPA.

The Northridge Earthquake occurred on January 17, 1994 at 4:31 AM, causing damage that spanned a 2,192 square mile area in the counties of Los Angeles, Ventura and Orange, California. The epicenter was located one mile south of Northridge at a depth of 11 miles. The estimated magnitude of the Northridge Earthquake was 6.7. The earthquake resulted in 72 deaths and 11,846 injuries that required hospital treatment. Damage costs were estimated at \$25 billion due to the damage of approximately 114,000 residential and commercial structures. In addition, there were costs from associated reduction in productivity and business loss. As a result, on January 17, 1994, President Clinton declared a major disaster for Los Angeles, Ventura and Orange Counties under the authority of the Robert T. Stafford Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 USC §5121.

The County of Los Angeles proposes to repair the County Hall of Justice in response to severe damage caused by the January 17, 1994 Northridge earthquake. The building is located at 211 West Temple Street in downtown Los Angeles, County of Los Angeles, California. Following the earthquake, the Hall of Justice was deemed to be unsafe for occupancy and was vacated. The building experienced extensive damage to the exterior cladding, as well as damage to the interior walls in the courtroom and jail areas. The ornamental architectural decoration on the ceilings, floors, walls, lobbies, and corridors was moderately damaged. Damage was sustained to the interior concrete encased steel columns, perimeter concrete walls, and un-reinforced masonry walls at the light wells in the building. The majority of the earthquake damage occurred to the hollow clay tile interior partition walls and hollow clay tiles furring located at the exterior walls. Between the fourth and eighth floors, approximately 85 percent of the furring areas around the windows show cracking and 75 percent of the partition walls adjacent to columns are cracked.

At the time of the earthquake, the single County occupant of the building the Sheriff's Department was in the process of vacating portions of the building as part of its move into new headquarters in Monterey Park. Use of the building by the Sheriff's Department at the time of the earthquake included office and storage space.

The Hall of Justice Renovation and Reuse Project EA/EIR is an informational document for decision-makers and for the public's use in reviewing potentially significant environmental impacts of the proposed project. The document also evaluates alternatives and mitigation measures that may minimize, avoid, or eliminate those impacts. As such, this EA/EIR includes a full discussion of the project description and the existing environmental setting, significant impacts, mitigation measures with the level of significance after mitigation, and project alternatives.

## 1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The President's Council on Environmental Quality has developed regulations for implementing NEPA. These federal regulations, set forth in Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1508, require an evaluation of alternatives, and a discussion of the potential environmental impacts of a proposed Federal action, as part of the EA process. The FEMA regulations, which establish FEMA's process for implementing NEPA, are set forth in 44 CFR Subpart 10. This EA/EIR was prepared in accordance with FEMA's regulations, as required under NEPA. As part of this NEPA review, the requirements of other environmental laws and executive orders are addressed.

The January 17, 1994, Northridge earthquake severely damaged the Hall of Justice building. As a result, the County asked FEMA to provide assistance, under the authority of Section 406 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act of 1988 (Stafford Act), to restore the damaged facilities to its pre-disaster design and function. The Stafford Act also provides discretionary authority to fund measures to reduce future damages to eligible facilities. The primary purpose of the project is to rehabilitate the Hall of Justice by seismically retrofitting the earthquake damaged building and refurbishing the building interior for office use, while preserving and restoring the selected historic features. Through the repair of the building, the County would be able to reopen the facility for governmental office uses including the County Sheriff's Department, District Attorney, Department of Parks and Recreation, and other County agencies.