

Sacramento Region: The Evolution of Integrated Transportation Planning

Oral Testimony of:

Mike McKeever, Executive Director
Sacramento Area Council of Governments, Sacramento, California
(v) 916.340.6205; (e) mmckeever@sacog.org

Remarks as Prepared for Presentation to:

U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Hearing on S. 1733, Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act
October 29, 2009

Chairman Boxer and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity.

The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) is a federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization representing 2.3 million people in 22 cities and six counties. We update and adopt a Regional Transportation Plan every four years. Over the past few years, I think we have provided a pretty good test run for the transportation planning approach in this bill. Our main demographics — income, ethnicity, age, education, etcetera — are similar to the nation. We have a multi-centered growth pattern; two of our three largest employment centers are suburban, the third is downtown Sacramento, our state capital. We have a number of rural small towns and a large agricultural economy. We are the intersection of major north-south and east-west truck and rail freight corridors. Our public transit system needs to be better maintained and expanded. And our politics are diverse.

My written testimony details our innovative regional planning work and its many performance benefits. I believe the transportation elements of this bill will help us to reach the goals we have set for ourselves. The bill's approach is straightforward:

- First, the federal government will identify a national target for transportation greenhouse gas emission reductions;
- Second, states and regions will meet certain standards for data, modeling, and scenario analysis, and then they will establish their performance targets; and
- Third, federal agencies will provide guidance, technical assistance and financial incentives to help the states and regions succeed in meeting their targets.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Congresswoman Matsui from Sacramento, who led the effort to include similar provisions in the Waxman-Markey bill. Over the last several years, we have engaged thousands of our citizens, provided them with high quality information, and listened to them. A remarkably broad-based regional consensus emerged - that our land use practices and transportation investment strategies needed to change. Here is what our region decided.

1. Housing Choices: Market research and demographic trends pointed to the same thing: our citizens need a lot more of them — townhomes, rowhouses, small lot single family, condominiums and apartments in addition to our abundance of larger lot single family homes.

2. Transportation Choices: State-of-the-art data and modeling tools documented growing problems with passenger and freight vehicle congestion, air pollution, safety, and skyrocketing infrastructure costs. Armed with this knowledge we concluded that we needed more truly viable alternatives to the car — a much more robust and varied public transit system, more pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and more but different kinds of streets, that are purposely designed to be attractive for all the transportation options, and not just the automobile. We also identified the need for targeted highway capacity improvements for goods movement, including reinvesting in our farm to market routes.

3. Old School Community Design: Modeling and public opinion polling told us we also need to start building neighborhoods and cities the way we used to: purposely putting houses, jobs, schools, shopping and other elements of our daily lives close together, instead of far apart.

Sounds like just simple common sense, doesn't it? It is! And that's why I am so optimistic it can happen. People throughout the country are familiar with many examples of wonderful, successful, older neighborhoods that are built exactly on these principles. And now many new developments are, too: from mixed use projects around the Metro stops in the nation's capital region, to smart growth master planned communities in suburban areas, to revitalizing downtowns in our rural areas. The greenhouse emissions from these types of developments are significantly lower. But many other important things are lower as well. Lower congestion; less time for family members and freight trucks waiting in traffic; total infrastructure costs \$16 billion less in the Sacramento region alone; lower water use; lower building energy use; lower numbers of productive agricultural lands converted to urbanization, lower impact on open space and natural resources, and lower health problems and costs.

Are the regions and states up to this? Of course they are. The regional and state transportation plans include trillions of dollars of infrastructure investments. We have an obligation to taxpayers to spend their money as productively as possible. And how can we possibly do that without basic things like accurate data, good modeling tools, objective analysis of future options, engaged citizens, and a careful regard for plan performance?

Regions representing 90 percent of the population of California have done similar work over the last few years. The California Department of Transportation has been a strong partner in this work. And last year, California adopted a new state law, Senate Bill 375, based on these regional initiatives. Authored by California Senate President Pro Tem Steinberg, and signed by Governor Schwarzenegger, the law links climate change, land use, transportation and housing planning, and provides regulatory relief for housing and mixed use projects that reduce transportation greenhouse gas emissions. The law calls for the California Air Resources Board to establish regional greenhouse gas emission targets for passenger vehicles, but retains local government land use powers and the ultimate discretion of the MPOs over the regional transportation plans. It is based on a healthy partnership between local governments, their regional agencies, and the state.

The federal government has legitimate policy and financial interests in the performance of the state and regional transportation plans. But the states and regions are closest to the ground and best equipped to stay in the lead role to write and implement the plans. I believe that the performance

targets and funding sources in this bill will spur both efficiency-producing cooperation and innovation-creating competition among and between the regions and states. I very much appreciate that this legislative approach uses incentives and partnerships rather than a traditional regulatory approach, such as the current provisions for criteria pollutants embedded in the Clean Air Act.

Finally, of course, we need money to help us succeed. I applaud the increased transportation allowance in this bill, and strongly encourage you to keep it where it is and increase it if at all possible. The funding need in the transit sector is particularly acute and the potential savings are large. In my written testimony I have provided some detail regarding the importance of increased near-term transit investments, and the performance benefits that would be created for our region. The SB 375 Regional Targets Advisory Committee in California that I chaired released our report a month ago, stressing the critical importance of adequate transit funding to achieve significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions.

Thank you for your time, and Chairman Boxer, I want to thank you especially for your leadership and your longstanding support for SACOG's regional planning program.