



Transportation Committee

November 25, 2009

Rural-Urban Connections Strategy Project Update

Issue: The working papers and working group process for the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS) Transportation Working Group topic have been completed and staff is beginning to summarize the finding in preparation for a workshop with the SACOG Board in January.

Recommendation: None; this item is for information only.

Discussion: Over the last year, SACOG staff and RUCS consultants have been writing working papers and engaging stakeholders in workshops for the transportation, land use, and local market topics of the RUCS project. Working papers on current conditions and innovations to address challenges and promote opportunities were drafted by the RUCS team and posted to the RUCS wiki for review by stakeholders. Workshops also offered stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback via exercises designed around the issues addressed in the papers. While the majority of the workshops focused on one topic, the last two workshops covered multiple topics and included exercises designed to facilitate discussions about how topics are linked.

The transportation working group's overarching focus has been exploring how transportation infrastructure and data can support and sustain the rural economy. To this end, SACOG staff researched rural transportation issues, wrote briefing papers, and held workshops to identify promising innovations. Staff is currently working on implementation. Short-term implementation work will revolve around three themes identified through the RUCS project: the need for additional funding, the need for additional data, and the need for better coordination of transportation strategies

Going forward, staff will be using the working papers and workshop feedback to craft white papers for committee and board review. Those papers will be presented to the board in a workshop that is tentatively planned for January. Staff will be seeking guidance from the committee and board on areas within each topic where staff should concentrate efforts to craft implementation strategies. Coupled with technical work, those strategies will be part of a "toolkit" that can assist with local economic viability and environmental sustainability efforts.

Approved by:

Mike McKeever
Executive Director

MM:RM:gg

Key Staff: Matt Carpenter, Director of Transportation Planning, (916) 340-6276
Robert McCrary, Senior Planner, (916) 340-6228
David Shabazian, Senior Planner, (916) 340-6231
Christine Scherman, Junior Planner, (916) 340-6262

RUCS Transportation: Project Overview

Introduction

The Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS) is a multi-faceted planning effort that looks at the region's growth and sustainability objectives from a rural perspective. Work on the RUCS project has been divided among several working groups, each focusing on unique challenges and opportunities in the region's rural areas. The transportation working group's overarching focus has been exploring how transportation infrastructure and data can support and sustain the rural economy. Within this broad focus, early stakeholder feedback revealed three key themes for RUCS transportation:

- the need for additional funding for rural transportation infrastructure,
- the need for more and better data, especially with regard to GIS and mapping resources, and
- the need for better coordination of transportation strategies beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

Existing Conditions

Transportation planning is often thought of in an urban context with an emphasis on connecting the bustling urban metropolis and its residents to employment, recreation, and housing. However, transportation planning is equally important in rural areas, where transportation needs range from constructing safe and effective wildlife crossings to maintaining the infrastructure to transport millions of dollars worth of agricultural product.

In the SACOG region, what typifies "rural" in one county may not translate in the other five counties. Depending on the location, rural areas could include agricultural lands, recreation areas, habitat and protected lands, low-density development, or a combination of these and other uses, all of which require different transportation investments.

For example, the SACOG region produces over 3.4 million tons of agricultural product a year, most of which is trucked over rural roads to processing and packing points beyond the six-county region. This type of rural land use requires different infrastructure investments than an area populated with agri-tourism sites. The latter may require wayfinding signs and congestion management, while the former requires regular road maintenance and safety improvements.

Even in robust economic climates, rural localities have a difficult time securing resources to maintain and improve the disproportionate share of roadway miles in their care. Though rural areas in the SACOG region account for just 10 percent of the population, they contain 48 percent of the region's road miles (8,258 miles). Similarly, a disproportionate number of fatal collisions occur on rural roadways. In 2006, over two thirds of the SACOG region's 259 fatalities occurred in rural areas. Unfortunately, many funding programs are population-based, leaving rural areas with few options for financing roadway safety and maintenance projects.

Project Work

Because of the diversity of rural landscapes in the region, staff consulted with SACOG advisory committees to narrow the focus of RUCS to the most pervasive issues. In addition to the three key themes mentioned above, brainstorm sessions with the Transit Coordinating Committee (TCC) and Regional Planning Partnership (RPP) yielded five transportation topic areas for study in the RUCS project. The five topic areas are **rural travel behavior, rural mobility, rural goods movement, rural safety and security, and rural systems maintenance.**

DRAFT

Briefing Book

These five topic areas guided research that culminated in the preparation of a RUCS Transportation Briefing Book. The Briefing Book examines each of the five topic areas in a separate topic paper and also explores more specific issues in a series of case studies. Examples of case studies include non-emergency medical transportation, disaster preparedness, and school accessibility.

Workshops

Stakeholder workshops are a critical component of the RUCS project. Staff conducted one transportation workshop and one joint workshop which included land use and transportation themes. Workshop participants provided invaluable feedback and guided the direction of subsequent RUCS transportation efforts. Below are descriptions of the two workshops.

Workshop 1: December 11, 2008—California Farm Bureau Federation

Workshop Exercise: Armed with a map of the region, linear and symbolic stickers, highlighters, and a list of possible improvements, workshop participants were assigned to a specific county and asked to identify roads or areas in need of rehabilitation/reconstruction, safety improvements, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, urban road standards, and special designation as a goods movement route.

Needs identified:

- safety improvements and safety data (to help target the highest priority areas),
- bicycle and pedestrian improvements,
- context sensitive wildlife crossings,
- the separation of commuter traffic from goods movement and local traffic, and
- the preservation of the character of rural roads.

Based on workshop feedback, staff developed a list of innovations that could satisfy rural transportation needs. The list was sent out to stakeholders in survey form, and staff used the survey results to narrow the list of innovations to those that could best alleviate the funding, information, and coordination challenges of rural transportation planning. These innovations were brought to the second workshop.

Workshop 2: August 27, 2009—Sierra 2 Community Center

In this joint land use-transportation workshop, participants were divided into one of four land use “themes” and asked to complete three exercises. The themes were small farm/agritourism, commodity agriculture, large lot residential with agriculture, and recreation/open space.

Workshop Exercises: In the first and second exercises, participants were given a list of land use and transportation innovations and asked to identify which innovations would be most effective in preserving, protecting, or supporting the landscape of their rural theme. In the third exercise, workshop participants used their expertise to make additions to a map of goods movement routes originally identified by December workshop participants and refined through interviews with other RUCS stakeholders.

Key Findings:

- Non-traditional infrastructure innovations (signage, passing lanes, ITS solutions) were popular, especially among the small farm/agri-tourism groups.
- Education and information brokering crossed all land use themes as an important innovation.
- Data are still critical: processing center locations and volume processed, origin and destination of shipped product, rural employment, and traffic volumes on rural roads.

DRAFT

RUCS Implementation

Implementation of the RUCS project will be an on-going process as rural transportation planning continues to evolve in response to new land use patterns, economic pressures, and infrastructure needs. Therefore, SACOG has both short-term and long-term implementation strategies. Short-term strategies will focus on the three major themes identified earlier: the need for additional funding, the need for additional data, and the need for better coordination of transportation strategies. Long-term strategies will be shaped by the SACOG Board of Directors with assistance from other stakeholders.

Rural Transportation Funding Guide:

Getting a transportation related project funded is a complex, often confusing, process. To move a project towards construction, project proponents and policy makers must shape comprehensive funding packages based on a puzzling array of programs and funds.

- SACOG created a rural funding handbook to guide grant applicants through the process of identifying, applying for, and receiving funding. The SACOG guide focuses on programs that are geared towards or allow applicants from rural areas.
- The funding handbook provides basic information about each funding program, such as the program description, eligibility requirements, funding level, deadlines, and potential SACOG assistance. The programs have also been compiled into a matrix that allows for easy reference.
- The funding guide is available online at <http://www.sacog.org/rucs/working-group-documents.cfm>. Local agencies are encouraged to contact SACOG for data analysis assistance, general grant application assistance, and other technical assistance.

County Safety Summaries and Technical Assistance

Roadway safety has been a recurring theme throughout the RUCS project. A disproportionate number of fatal collisions occur in rural areas, but without good local data it is hard to identify priority roads for safety improvements.

- SACOG created a County Safety Summary for each county in the region. Summaries are designed to give an overview of roadway safety conditions in our region's rural areas.
- SACOG geocoded five years (2002-2006) of collisions data into a Geographic Information System (GIS). Interested parties should contact SACOG for more information.
- SACOG is offering technical assistance to agencies who apply for safety grant funds. It is SACOG's hope that offering this assistance will bolster our region's applications and capture the most possible funding for roadway safety improvements.

Goods Movement Network

The SACOG region produces around \$1.2 billion worth of agricultural product a year that needs to be transported quickly from farms to processors to distributors and finally to retailers and consumers. Understanding which roads trucks currently utilize and focusing improvements on specific goods movement corridors can help attract heavy truck traffic away from roads needed for the movement of agricultural equipment and farm workers, creating a safer and more efficient transportation network.

- Within the six-county region, an estimated 90 percent of freight tonnage is carried by truck, 3 percent by rail, and less than .5 percent by ship and air.
- A region that has adequate goods movement infrastructure and is strategically located from a trade perspective can profit considerably from its ability to receive, sort, and deliver goods and services quickly, cheaply, and effectively.

DRAFT

- Staff worked with county farm bureaus, farmers, and city and county transportation planners to identify important goods movement corridors throughout the region. The goods movement network can be viewed online at <http://www.sacog.org/regionalfunding/fall2009/>.

Agricultural Worker Transportation Study:

SACOG is developing a Business Plan to deliver vanpool services to the region's agricultural workers. The Business Plan will implement a program funded with a \$2 million grant from the State of California.

- Over 34,000 farm workers live in the Sacramento region. A 2003 report, the *Agricultural Worker Transportation Needs Assessment Report*, revealed that 72 percent of California agricultural workers did not have reliable transportation.
- Draft survey results for the four-county SACOG region identify a large market that is interested in the proposed program, making it feasible.
- A successful pilot project in the San Joaquin Valley, started in 2002 by the Kings County Area Public Transportation Agency, now runs 80 (off season) to 140 (peak) agricultural worker vanpools; new programs have started in at least five other regions.

Future Opportunities for Rural Transportation

In the future, SACOG hopes to work with its partner agencies on collaborative projects that advance the principles identified in the RUCS project. Through joint sponsorship of grant applications, SACOG hopes to provide technical assistance for a wide variety of transportation projects that will help sustain and support the rural economy. Below are some possible areas for future study.

- Non-Traditional Rural Transit: As the population continues to age, non-emergency medical transit will increase in importance. Transit to agri-tourism and recreation destinations is another area worthy of study, especially as congestion continues to worsen on transitioning rural roads.
- Habitat Crossings: Roads and highways create a barrier effect for wildlife movement resulting in habitat fragmentation and habitat loss, the two leading causes of species decline. Caltrans is embarking on a statewide assessment of habitat and wildlife connectivity called the California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project. The project will identify critical wildlife corridors and connectivity areas so wildlife needs can be evaluated earlier in state and regional planning processes.
- Emergency Preparedness and Response: The Sacramento region faces a number of potential emergency situations in the form of forest fires, flooding, and earthquakes. SACOG is working with partner agencies to implement an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) project called the Sacramento Transportation Area Network (STARNET) system. Transit operators and emergency responders will be able to use STARNET to exchange information and coordinate operations in the Sacramento region during emergency situations.
- Regional Bike Network: There are currently almost 2,000 miles of bicycle routes in the region, 44 percent of which exist outside of urbanized boundaries in small urban or rural areas. However, fragmentation of the bike network makes intercity and intercounty travel quite challenging. One effort to increase connectivity is the creation of the Regional Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trails Master Plan (the Plan). Complementing the Plan is the SACOG Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Program. This funding program provides funding for capital and non-capital (up to 10% of program funds) projects. Visit <http://www.sacog.org/bikeinfo/bikeped.cfm> for more information.