



December 17, 2007

Mr. Mike McKeever  
Executive Director  
Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)  
1415 L Street, Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Comments on the Draft 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report

Dear Mr. McKeever,

37-1 Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the SACOG Draft 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). As an organization dedicated to the preservation of the wildlife habitat of the Sandhill Crane, our members are interested in how future transportation plans for the Region will impact existing open space and agricultural preserves, as both of these areas provide habitat for this beautiful native species.

37-2 SACOG, in adopting the principles of smart growth identified in the Blueprint regional planning process, can be very instrumental in preventing the type of sprawl development that threatens Sacramento's remaining open space lands. We recognize the difficulties that are inherent in creating a regional plan that requires the cooperation of so many local government leaders and planning agencies. However, in our review of the Draft MTP, we found there is very little information on how these entities will work with SACOG to achieve the Blueprint smart growth principles. As you are well aware, there have been some significant projects and plans introduced and approved by these governments in the recent past that lead us to believe that urban sprawl is barely being contained. These projects include:

- 37-3 • The South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan (SSHCP) receiving area has been threatened by the City of Elk Grove and their proposed Sphere of Influence

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expansion. An estimated 9,000 acres of this land could be developed into low-density sprawl, in keeping with Elk Grove's extreme lack of interest in creating compact development. These acres are prime farmland that also serves as habitat area for threatened species such as the Swainson's Hawk and Sandhill Crane.

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- The Placer Vineyards low-density suburban development that distinctly defies the Blueprint growth projections, and threatens the preservation of agricultural lands and vernal pool habitat.

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- Sacramento's Greenbriar project is a greenfields development that characterizes leap-frog development, and does not provide adequate mitigation of prime farmland and giant garter snake habitat.

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These are some of the prime examples, and there are many others. What we would like to point out is that the MTP does not seem to provide any reliable method of containing the area's sprawl, and without that containment, we will be less able to encourage people to use alternative transportation. As an example, the densities for development identified in Sacramento County's recent General Plan update are very wide, and there is no indication of how the County will benchmark infill development prior to the development of greenfield properties. We believe that SACOG should be the agency who tracks these development goals, as the transportation network has been made dependent on smart growth in order to achieve reductions in vehicle miles traveled.

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Furthermore, it looks as if the bulk of the spending in the MTP projects is geared toward road and freeway expansion. We would like to encourage SACOG to shift more of the spending in the MTP towards bus rapid transit and pedestrian and bicycle improvements. If our road capacity keeps growing faster than our capacity to move people by other modes, transit will not become a more attractive option for people commuting to work, particularly in downtown Sacramento.

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SOS Cranes' members are also concerned about the plans for a Downtown-Natomas-Airport (DNA) light rail line. This very expensive option, while popular, may not provide well for the transit needs of Natomas residents. We believe that bus rapid transit would be a better option, especially in the short term.

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Another MTP project that concerns our members is the building of new bridges. We feel there should be no new bridges over the American or Sacramento Rivers

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unless they are designed exclusively for transit, emergency vehicles, and pedestrians or bicycles. Similarly, we feel that expansion of arterial roads to six lanes in mixed commercial-residential neighborhoods is unwarranted. Many neighborhoods are up in arms about these expansions, and they have overwhelmingly supported pedestrian-friendly mixed use, transit-oriented development.

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Finally, we found it disappointing that there were no estimates in the body of the MTP draft on how the proposed transportation plans would affect the conservation of open space and agricultural preserves. A complete description of the existing lands and the estimated number of acres that would be impacted by development in each jurisdiction would aid the public in determining what trade-offs are necessary or unnecessary in the expansion of our transportation network.

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SOS Cranes looks forward to hearing from you regarding these comments, and will look forward to working with SACOG in the future to help develop a transportation network that works for, and not against our fine-feathered friend, the Sandhill Crane.

We extend our warmest holiday greetings to you and your staff.

Sincerely,

Mike Savino  
President

Cc: U.S. Representative Doris Matsui  
Senator Darrell Steinberg  
Assembly Member Dave Jones  
Matt Carpenter, Project Manager