

Chapter 1
Building a Sustainable System

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainability Communities Strategy for 2035 (MTP/SCS) is an important evolutionary milestone along the path of inclusive, equitable, integrated transportation and land use, performance-based planning that SACOG began about a decade ago. As the Sacramento region's first MTP/SCS adopted under Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) and the second plan to link a regional growth pattern and smart land use principles to the transportation system, this plan has many unique features:

- an absolute reduction in the amount of heavy congestion typical residents will experience in their daily lives;
- significant increases in the productivity of the transit system, with more riders and a higher percentage of total costs coming from user fares;
- greater levels of investment in a truly multi-modal transportation system, including complete streets, bicycle and pedestrian facilities;
- better integration of future land use patterns, transportation investments, and air quality impacts, including higher levels of development near current and future transit corridors and California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) incentives for residential and residential mixed-use projects that produce transportation and air quality benefits;
- the first phase of implementing the findings from the ongoing Rural-Urban Connections Strategy;

- providing the foundation for the next Regional Housing Needs Plan; and
- reductions in per capita passenger vehicle greenhouse gas emissions that exceed the minimum targets established for the SACOG region by the California Air Resources Board.

This plan is also the first prepared during a major, sustained national recession that has in many ways challenged California and the Sacramento region even more than the balance of the country. State budget cuts and the collapse of the residential construction sector have severely hurt two of the strongest sectors of the region's economy. This plan reflects these economic realities in a number of ways, including lower forecasted growth rates and transportation revenues than the prior plan, even more attention to land use patterns that optimize transportation performance, and dedicating scarce revenues only to those transportation investments that produce the highest performance benefits. In these ways, the plan seeks to turn the short-term challenge into a more solid foundation for long-term success for the region.

A brief summary of the major planning initiatives over the last decade that have provided the foundation for this plan follows.

2002 MTP

The first major step towards this MTP/SCS was the SACOG board's adoption of the 2002 MTP, also known as the MTP for 2025. In spite of input from a broad-based, 55-person Transportation Roundtable and preparation and analysis of plan scenarios that represented a wide spectrum of transportation priorities—from investing nearly all funds in facilities to serve automobile trips to investing nearly all funds in facilities to serve everything but automobile trips—the MTP adopted by the board forecast per capita congestion increasing by 60 percent over 25 years and worsening air quality. Nothing the planners, engineers, residents and other stakeholders tried by just varying the types of investments in the supply of transportation facilities successfully addressed the congestion and air quality challenges. As the board adopted that MTP, it was not entirely satisfied, and simultaneously committed the organization to an extensive regional transportation-land use study to determine whether integrating demand-side planning (i.e., the way the region was growing) with the traditional supply-side planning of transportation investments might deliver better results than supply-side planning alone.

Blueprint Growth Strategy

After a thorough analysis and community discussions about the trade-offs of growing through 2050 according to a business-as-usual pattern versus three alternative scenarios informed by residents, this two-year scenario planning process resulted in the SACOG board's unanimous adoption of the Blueprint in December 2004. In many ways, the Blueprint fundamentally changed the region's future.

The Blueprint planning process was based on two basic strategies: 1) develop the best scientific, objective information available about the cause-and-effect relationships between land use patterns, travel behavior, and external effects such as air quality; and 2) actively engage a broad base of residents and stakeholders with this information and seek their opinions on how they wanted their neighborhoods, communities, and region to grow. This collaborative effort to look at the future of the region brought together policy makers with residents, community groups, and private business to consider the broadest view of the future needs of the region and needs for the transportation system. SACOG quickly developed local, statewide, and national recognition for its best-in-class data and analysis and public engagement techniques.

Much of the analysis and public discussion during the Blueprint process focused on what type of housing stock the future residents of the region would prefer. A demographic forecast produced the startling finding that two-thirds of the region's growth through 2050 would be in households headed by people 55 years and older. A housing preference survey of current residents concluded that two-thirds of the current people 55 and older in the region preferred housing options

that were scarce in the region at the time—attached for-sale or rental, and small-lot single family detached housing. The Blueprint also focused on the impacts of integrating rather than segregating different kinds of land uses (i.e., locating housing near job centers, schools, shopping and recreation). Dozens of interactive public workshops with over 5,000 people identified high levels of support for mixed-use development patterns that contained significant amounts of more compact housing patterns. A random sample public attitude survey confirmed these preferences.

As part of this process, SACOG built several project modeling and analysis tools, and assembled the first parcel-level Geographic Information System (GIS) database for the region. The resulting analysis demonstrated clearly that these new land use patterns, when paired with supportive transportation investments, would significantly reduce the length of automobile trips, increase transit, walk, and bike trips, substantially reduce the conversion of agricultural, natural resource and open space lands to urban development, and result in fewer air emissions than the historical growth pattern. Out of this information-based, inclusive public process, a clear consensus among residents throughout the region and the SACOG board emerged to fundamentally change the way the region grew in the future.

In 2004, the SACOG board adopted a Blueprint map with areas for future housing and employment growth through 2050, as well as future lands needed for growth after 2050, and seven Blueprint principles:

- provide a variety of transportation choices;
- offer housing choices and opportunities;
- use existing assets;
- take advantage of compact development;
- preserve open space, farmland, and natural beauty, through

natural resources conservation;

- encourage distinctive, attractive communities with quality design; and
- mix land uses.

The Blueprint is a voluntary growth strategy that the Sacramento region's 28 local jurisdictions are actively encouraged to use as they make local land use decisions. At the same time the board adopted the Blueprint, a confluence of market changes driven by demographics and land prices, combined with rapidly changing local government land use policies to voluntarily implement Blueprint-consistent growth, created significant changes in the housing market, with significant increases in the number of attached for-sale and rental products as well as small-lot single family products. There were many other indicators that the market and public policy actions very rapidly began to embrace many of the Blueprint principles, including a major increase in housing planned in and around the three largest employment centers in the region and a number of local government initiatives to improve agricultural and natural resources protection in the rural areas.

For more information about the Blueprint, see Appendix E-1—Blueprint Special Report.

2008 MTP

The Blueprint provided the land use foundation for the next MTP, the MTP for 2035 (2008 MTP), adopted by the SACOG board in Spring 2008 after a two-year planning process that matched the commitment to high-quality information and extensive public engagement used during development of the Blueprint. Based on extensive input, SACOG developed multiple transportation scenarios to test which investments would perform best with a Blueprint-based future land use pattern. SACOG also implemented a more advanced travel demand forecasting tool, SACSIM (an activity-based model that operates at the individual parcel level) to assist the decision making, and added a simpler travel demand model to the land use tool for interactive use in public meetings. The 2008 MTP invested a far greater share of transportation resources in alternative modes and trip reduction than any previous MTP. The balanced transportation investment portfolio also provided for high-occupancy vehicle lanes (i.e., carpool/express bus) on freeways, bridges that shorten distances for motorists and bicyclists, and complete streets that safely accommodate vehicles, transit, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

The performance of this MTP was much better than the prior plan. Per capita heavy congestion was still projected to increase through 2035, but at a much slower rate, 19 percent instead of 60 percent. The percentage of trips using alternative modes to the automobile increased substantially, the average automobile trip length decreased, and per capita air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions were less than projected by the prior plan.

State Implementation Plan (SIP)

SACOG updated the State Implementation Plan for air quality at the same time as the 2008 MTP. This provided opportunities for much closer collaboration between the five air quality management districts in the Sacramento region in the development of the MTP. Leadership by the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District led the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to allow SACOG to use an MTP based on the Blueprint land use pattern as the basis for establishing that the MTP met federal Clean Air Act requirements. Several Transportation Control Measures were adopted with the MTP that committed SACOG to future actions to reduce air emissions from the transportation system, including development of a Rural-Urban Connections Strategy and analysis and policy development for parking policy and congestion pricing policies, among others.

Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS)

Soon after adoption of the 2008 MTP, SACOG launched the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS). RUCS is designed to help implement the Blueprint through finding methods to help ensure the economic vitality of rural areas of the region, including sustainable transportation and land use, agriculture, natural resources and other uses for the rural landscape. SACOG staff began RUCS by developing detailed, parcel-specific data on the cropping patterns on the farms in the region, as well as planning and economic analytical tools to help understand the economics of farming and how infrastructure, land use and market factors affect the ability of farmers to profitably get their goods to market. SACOG has focused both on the substantial part of the region's farm economy that produces food for the nation and world, as well as increasing the share of the region's collective consumption that is grown within the region. While the project is ongoing, its initial findings are reflected in this MTP/SCS through transportation investments and policies and land use patterns that support the rural economy.

For more information about RUCS, see Appendix E-2—Rural-Urban Connections Strategy.

Senate Bill 375 (SB 375)

Six months after the 2008 MTP was adopted, a major state law was passed, SB 375 (Chapter 728, Statutes of 2008). This law was significantly influenced by the Blueprint and other smart growth scenario planning initiatives in San Diego, the Bay Area, and Los Angeles. The law integrates regional land use, housing, transportation, and climate change planning. It requires the California Air Resources Board (ARB) to set performance targets for passenger vehicle emissions in each of 18 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in the state for 2020 and 2035, requires an MTP to include a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) that integrates the land use and transportation components, and amends CEQA to provide incentives for residential and residential mixed use projects that help to implement an MTP/SCS that meets the ARB targets.

SB 375 focuses on planning processes and incentives rather than a traditional regulatory approach. MPOs are not required to meet the greenhouse gas emission targets established by ARB, but if they conclude it is not feasible to do so, they must prepare an Alternative Planning Scenario to demonstrate what further land use and/or transportation actions would be required to meet the targets. The one new mandate in the law is that the Regional Housing Needs Allocation, a required function of the regions under separate state law, must be consistent with the adopted SCS.

The process for preparing this MTP/SCS has been significantly influenced by the new state law. The largest impacts include:

- elevation of greenhouse gas emissions as a performance metric that influences the plan;
- explicit integration of the 2020 and 2035 land use patterns in the plan with their impacts

on Regional Housing Needs Allocations and transportation investments;

- preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under CEQA that thoroughly analyzes land use impacts from the MTP as well as transportation impacts;
- explicit and thorough documentation of the land use component of the plan so that local governments can effectively determine which housing and residential mixed-use projects are consistent with the SCS and therefore qualify for CEQA relief from further analysis of regional transportation, passenger vehicle greenhouse gas emissions, and growth-inducing impacts;
- a subsequent environmental review for selected Transit Priority Areas as case studies for the region in using CEQA streamlining benefits under SB 375.
- thorough analysis and consideration of agricultural and natural resource impacts; and
- coordination of the planning processes between the four largest metropolitan areas as they all strive to meet the requirements of preparing the first regional transportation plan/SCS under the new law.

One of the primary goals of SB 375 is to enhance California's ability to reach its Assembly Bill 32 (Chapter 488 of the Statutes of 2006; hereafter AB 32) goals and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles. ARB has developed greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for passenger vehicles under SB 375. The MTP/SCS, as provided for in SB 375, is designed to provide an incentive-based approach, which provides for CEQA incentives whereby, among other things, the CEQA analysis of greenhouse gas emissions for passenger vehicles can be avoided if a project is consistent with the MTP/SCS map. The SCS recognizes and

protects local land use authority and does not preclude a local jurisdiction from planning and approving growth that is different in terms of total units or geographic extent. Moreover, the SCS does not establish a threshold of significance under CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.7 or a legal presumption that a project inconsistent with the SCS does not meet greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets or AB 32 goals. In short, the SCS is a tool to address greenhouse gas compliance and it provides incentives for development projects that are consistent with the SCS. While SB 375 requires significant changes to this and future plans, the law also acknowledges local land use authority and the region's obligation to write an MTP that is consistent with federal law, including requirements that the plan be based on realistic forecasts of future revenues and land use patterns, even if doing so means the ARB targets cannot be met. Although SB 375 imposes new criteria, the fundamental transportation, land use and air quality integration that SACOG has engaged in for the past several plans comprise the core of the plan.

Related State and Federal Planning Initiatives

California Strategic Growth Council

Another state law, SB 732 (Chapter 729, Statutes of 2008), passed at the same time as SB 375, establishes an interagency Strategic Growth Council charged with aligning state policies and actions to promote sustainability and administering \$90 million in planning grants for regional and local governments from Proposition 84 (2006). The Strategic Growth Council has provided funds to SACOG to assist with further upgrades to its analytical and modeling capabilities and a project to support the agriculture industry and rural communities as part of RUCS implementation.

Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities

This MTP has also been assisted by a new federal initiative announced in 2009. The Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) is between the federal Department of Transportation, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Environmental Protection Agency. The PSC is promoting the type of inclusive, integrated regional planning that SACOG has committed to over the last decade. The initiative strives to align sometimes competing objectives of multiple federal agencies to promote sustainability within regions. SACOG received a \$1.5 million grant from the PSC, primarily to assist with activating the CEQA regulatory reform benefits in SB 375 for Transit Priority Projects.

Senate Bill 391 and the California Interregional Blueprint (CIB)

Similar to requirements for regional transportation plans under SB 375, SB 391 (Liu 2009) requires the State's long-range transportation plan to meet California's climate change goals under Assembly Bill (AB) 32. In response to these statutes, Caltrans is preparing a state-level transportation blueprint to articulate the State's vision for an integrated, multi-modal interregional transportation system that complements regional transportation plans and land use visions. The CIB will integrate the State's long-range modal plans and Caltrans-sponsored programs with the latest technology and tools to enhance the state's ability to plan for and manage the transportation system.

Conclusion

This MTP/SCS is another important milestone in SACOG's commitment to inclusive, integrated, performance-based transportation and land use planning. This update is the first that is titled an MTP/SCS. This labeling is purposeful. SACOG views the SCS not as a separate and distinct element of the plan, but rather integral to the entire document, influencing the land use patterns which form the foundation for transportation investments, the subsequent Regional Housing Needs Plan, and compliance with federal air quality and state greenhouse gas emissions requirements; identification and consideration of the impacts of the plan on environmental justice areas, natural resources and agricultural lands; and the action element that determines how the plan will be funded and implemented. All of these features further improve the quality of this plan update compared to prior updates, and are a further evolution along a path of implementing the Blueprint growth vision for the region that the SACOG Board of Directors established nearly a decade ago.