



Innovation Task Force

Item #16-4-3 Information

April 14, 2016

Update on Development of National & Statewide Planning Tools

Issue: SACOG staff are working to improve the scenario planning tools used in the MTP/SCS and other planning studies. Two projects are underway, one project with California MPOs and state agencies. The other project includes regional agencies from across the country.

Discussion: Scenario planning tools are at the core of the inclusive, data-driven planning process that has been critical to our success in the past decade. During the Blueprint Vision study and the first MTP/SCS plan the iPLACE³S tool was used. The transition to the UrbanFootprint tool will enable us to have a larger group of expert users and lower our costs. However, implementation has moved forward at a slower pace than expected.

The development of the UrbanFootprint scenario planning tool has been funded by state agencies and MPOs in California. Although there has been some coordination, the efforts have largely been independent. In addition, the tool is built with open source software, but the benefits of an open source environment have not been realized. A consortium of users is being developed to direct the tool's operation and development efforts. Better coordination among the users will result in improved usage at each agency and improved communication between agencies. The benefits include easier operation, lower costs to develop and implement improved analytics, and lower barriers to entry for new users. The larger the community of users is, the lower the costs and the expertise in fully utilizing the tool will expand.

At the national level, Mike McKeever started discussions with the Mid-America Regional Council (Kansas City) and the Wasatch Front Regional Council (Salt Lake City) on similar issues. These two agencies have had similar experience as SACOG in realizing the benefits of scenario planning tools but at considerable time and expense. If the problems could be overcome not only would we improve our capabilities, but other regions could also effectively conduct scenario planning. A synergy of benefits could be realized with a broader, more robust community of experts across the country. As the discussions continued a few other regional agencies (Boston and Denver among others) joined in. A few other scenario tools similar to UrbanFootprint are used in these agencies, which added some issues on data consistency and interoperability of the analytical metrics to the list.

In order to move forward, some fundamental work was needed to focus the discussions into a plan of action. Funding was received from FHWA, the Transit Center, and the Summit Foundation to organize a consortium, systematically evaluate the scenario tools, and design projects that will address current weaknesses and improve the interoperability among the tools so analytical modules can be shared across them. The primary goal is to create a system that will deliver technology solutions to increase interoperability and consistency among tools, and in so

doing, simultaneously improve their ease and breadth of use while lowering their cost.

Both the state and the national level efforts are underway, and we hope to have tangible results in the coming months. Staff will brief the Board members as these projects advance.

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MM:GRG

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