



Item #16-6-5 Information

Land Use & Natural Resources Committee

May 26, 2016

Projects of Regional Significance: MPO Definition Peer Review

Issue: Should SACOG implement a prioritization methodology for reviewing CEQA documents for projects of regional significance?

Recommendation: None. This item is for information only. Based on input from the Committee related to the preliminary research, staff may return with a recommendation at a later date.

Discussion: SACOG comments on development projects for a variety of reasons, including agency policy, joint powers authority, and sanction by State law, as follows:

- Since the first annual Overall Work Program (OWP) in 2005 following adoption of the Blueprint, SACOG has had a Board-adopted policy that provides for staff analysis and comment on development projects in regards to determining consistency with the Blueprint and MTP/SCS when requested by a member agency. In 2013, the Board reaffirmed by resolution its support for SACOG's role in commenting on land use projects and other Blueprint implementation activities as described in the annually-adopted OWP.
- The Memorandum of Understanding for the Joint Powers Agreement between SACOG's member agencies empowers SACOG staff to make recommendations in area-wide plans and advocate for implementation of area-wide plans.
- Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), SACOG is responsible for reviewing local plans and projects of regional significance for consistency with adopted regional plans. Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are authorized to determine if a proposed project is of regional significance, including but not limited to projects with the potential to generate significant amounts of traffic or affect attainment or maintenance of state or national air quality standards.

This staff report relates only to the third item, CEQA review. As such, SACOG has the authority to determine whether a project or plan should be reviewed for regional significance. SACOG's intergovernmental review process is conducted as local agencies release a Notice of Availability for a project's Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Currently, once SACOG is notified about the release of an EIR, our agency reviews and formally comments through the public review process on projects that stand out to staff as particularly essential to meeting regional goals, as well any projects requesting review. This review activity is infrequent and reported monthly in the CEO's Report included in the monthly Board Meeting Packet. However, the question has been raised as to whether SACOG could do more to support projects that are important to the region. Many of our peer MPOs utilize a methodology that includes clear thresholds for prioritizing which projects will undergo intergovernmental review. While SACOG would not need to be limited by a threshold (e.g., broader existing policy), a better-defined prioritization method could better position SACOG to monitor and review projects of regional significance in the future, now that regional development has been accelerating since the recession.

To identify the prioritization methods that have already been implemented, SACOG conducted a peer review of 14 MPOs comparable in regional size. We found that four of the identified peer MPOs utilize some type of methodology to define projects of regional significance: Atlanta Regional Commission, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, Maricopa Association of Governments (Phoenix), and Southern California Association of Governments. These MPOs all use quantitative metrics based on project size or trips, though the methodologies vary by threshold and in detail.

SACOG will incorporate input from the Committee and further analyze these findings to determine whether the agency should pursue developing a proposed prioritization methodology. As part of this process, we will also engage our two Regional Transportation Planning Agencies, the El Dorado Transportation Commission and the

Placer County Transportation Planning Agency, and the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District to solicit feedback on the peer review research and proposed approach.

Approved by:

Mike McKeever
Chief Executive Officer

MM:AH:ts
Attachment

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Attachment A

MPO Projects of Regional Significance Definition Peer Review

- *Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC):*
 - Prioritizes “developments of regional impact” as defined by the Georgia Planning Act – “A development project that is likely to generate impacts beyond the host local government’s jurisdiction”.
 - Provides expedited review for the following projects: Livable Centers Initiative (agency grant program for corridor development), TOD, and Limited Trip Generation (no more than 1,000 Gross Daily Trips) projects.
 - Thresholds (See Table 1: Atlanta Regional Commission Developments of Regional Impact Thresholds)
- *Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP):*
 - Prioritizes “developments of regional importance”, which are defined as “development proposals that have the possibility of introducing widespread regional impacts to the daily activities of significant numbers of people or to the natural environment. Of particular concern are characteristics of proposals that may have impacts beyond the jurisdiction of the permitting agency (e.g. municipal zoning, county stormwater, state transportation departments)”.
 - Thresholds:

At least one of following quantitative thresholds must be exceeded in order for CMAP to proceed with a DRI review:

 - The project is estimated to generate or divert greater than 50,000 auto vehicle trips (or truck equivalent) per day on the region’s highway system.
 - The project is estimated to add a net discharge of greater than 5 million gallons effluent per day.
 - The project adds greater than 500 acres of impervious paved surfaces and rooftops. Projects within 100 yards of critical streams and natural areas as identified in the accompanying map may proceed with a DRI review by applying the above thresholds reduced by 50%.
- *Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), Phoenix: Developments of Regional Significance*
 - Prioritizes “developments of regional significance”, which include:
 - General plans and amendments, special study areas, specific plans, Planned Area Development or Planned Unit Development documents, or other major development plans and
 - Land use sizes that would result in 20,000 average daily trips, the equivalent of one lane’s capacity in a single direction on a freeway (e.g., 800 units or 640 acres of housing).

- *Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG):*
 - Prioritizes “projects of regional significance” using the definition below pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act and through notification by the Statewide Clearinghouse.
 - Thresholds:
14 California Code of Regulations, Chapter 3, Article 13: 15206 (b) The Lead Agency shall determine that a proposed project is of statewide, regional, or areawide significance if the project meets any of the following criteria:
 - (1) A proposed local general plan, element, or amendment thereof for which an EIR was prepared.
 - (2) A project has the potential for causing significant effects on the environment extending beyond the city or county in which the project would be located. Projects subject to this subdivision include:
 - (A) A proposed residential development of more than 500 dwelling units.
 - (B) A proposed shopping center or business establishment employing more than 1,000 persons or encompassing more than 500,000 square feet of floor space.
 - (C) A proposed commercial office building employing more than 1,000 persons or encompassing more than 250,000 square feet of floor space.
 - (D) A proposed hotel/motel development of more than 500 rooms.
 - (E) A proposed industrial, manufacturing, or processing plant, or industrial park planned to house more than 1,000 persons, occupying more than 40 acres of land, or encompassing more than 650,000 square feet of floor area.
 - (3) A project which would result in the cancellation of an open space contract made pursuant to the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 (Williamson Act) for any parcel of 100 or more acres.
 - (4) A project for which an EIR and not a Negative Declaration was prepared which would be located in and would substantially impact the following areas of critical environmental sensitivity:
 - (D) An area within 1/4 mile of a wild and scenic river as defined by Section 5093.5 of the Public Resources Code.
 - (E) The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, as defined in Water Code Section 12220.
 - (5) A project which would substantially affect sensitive wildlife habitats including but not limited to riparian lands, wetlands, bays, estuaries, marshes, and habitats for endangered, rare and threatened species as defined by Section 15380 of this Chapter.
 - (6) A project which would interfere with attainment of regional water quality standards as stated in the approved areawide waste treatment management plan.
 - (7) A project which would provide housing, jobs, or occupancy for 500 or more people within 10 miles of a nuclear power plant.

Peer-Reviewed MPOS without an Identified Prioritization Methodology:

- Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO)
- Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)
- East-West Gateway Council of Governments (EWGCOG), St. Louis
- Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC)
- Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC)
- Metropolitan Council, Twin Cities: Metropolitan Significance Review
- Mid-America Regional Council (MARC), Kansas City
- Pima Association of Governments (PAG), Tucson
- Portland Metro
- Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC), Salt Lake City