Establishing Green Means Go “Green Zones”

**What is Green Means Go:** Green Means Go is a multi-year pilot program to lower greenhouse gas emissions in the six county Sacramento region using three strategies: accelerating infill development, reducing vehicle trips, and promoting clean mobility options, in targeted areas, called Green Zones. Although the Green Means Go program includes all three strategies, the first, accelerate infill development, is a critical foundation for the other two strategies. The MTP/SCS assumes that over the next two decades, the region will attract roughly 168,000 new homes and 228,000 new jobs to infill areas in cities, suburbs, and towns across the region. This is about 64 percent of new housing and 84 percent of the new jobs expected in the region by 2040. Accommodating future housing and employment alongside existing jobs and services and leveraging the transportation system already in place in existing communities is not only an efficient use of existing infrastructure and space but is critical for achieving air and climate goals. Prioritizing and incentivizing infill development is one of the most important actions government agencies can take to reduce the amount and distance that people need to drive, manage congestion, foster economic development, and reduce tailpipe emissions that affect air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. The Green Means Go effort is intended to help pay for infrastructure upgrades to catalyze infill development envisioned in local land use plans. Establishing the Green Zones is an important first step to develop the Green Means Go program.

**What is a Green Zone:** For Green Means Go, local jurisdictions will nominate Green Zones, which are areas where they will promote infill, reduce regulatory and economic barriers to infill, and support new transportation options. For Green Means Go to be most effective, the Green Zones need to be places where significant new growth is planned so that the efforts to accelerate infill, accelerate travel choice, and accelerate vehicle electrification all have potential to be complimentary strategies. Green Zones will be the areas that are eligible for any future Green Means Go funding for projects should we receive state funding leading up to the next MTP/SCS update. However, understanding that funding and priorities can change over time, SACOG will allow amendments to the Green Zones on an as needed basis following discussions with local agency staff and at the discretion of the Executive Director. Staff will update the Land Use and Natural Resources Committee if and when meaningful changes to designated Green Zones are proposed. Meaningful changes include designation of new areas, removal of areas, or significant changes to the boundaries of existing areas. Staff will also explore changes to the eligible areas and requirements as the Green Means Go project moves forward.

Should SACOG receive stimulus funding for Green Means Go that needs to be allocated prior to establishing Green Zones later this year, staff will work with local agencies and the Board of Directors to ensure this funding can be distributed in a manner that is consistent with the goals of the Green Means Go program as quickly as possible.

In addition to serving as focused areas for Green Means Go investments, Green Zones may also be cited by local agencies as Priority Development Areas (PDAs) which will qualify projects in these areas to receive extra points in the state’s Infill Infrastructure Grant.

**Eligible Areas:** There are two primary requirements for nominated Green Zones: (1) Green Zones must be within infill areas, defined by the 2020 MTP/SCS Community Type map as Center and Corridor Communities or Established Communities (which can be found in the MTP/SCS Chapter 3, page 19) and (2) Green Zones must be planned for growth or being considered for increased growth through current local planning work, such as specific plans or general plan updates and supported by local policies and actions that support...
increased development or redevelopment in the area. Examples of these policies and actions include: a specific plan, higher density zoning, public investment, nexus studies to facilitate fee reductions, economic development studies or plans, willingness to implement fee reductions and/or process streamlining for the area upon receiving funding for infrastructure improvements. Because these are areas where significant new growth is planned, or being planned, equity should be a priority. As areas grow and transform, gentrification and displacement can happen. Where applicable, outreach with communities of color, proactive anti-displacement policies, and mitigation strategies should be considered in Green Zones.

Listed below are several additional factors that should be considered when evaluating which areas to nominate as Green Zones. An online mapping database of this information will be provided to assist local agencies when identifying Green Zones. There are no limitations on how many areas a jurisdiction can nominate. There are no size requirements. If the above criteria are met, a jurisdiction can determine whether to nominate multiple Green Zones or a single larger geography that includes many communities. Prioritizing specific communities or corridors is strongly encouraged to better target future investments where they can have the greatest impact.

Additional MTP/SCS factors to consider when evaluating which areas to nominate as Green Zones:

- located within an average or lower than average vehicle miles traveled today, or in 2040, as shown in the 2020 MTP/SCS
- access to transit and/or other transportation choices
- helping jobs/housing balance
- located in an Environmental Justice or disadvantaged community
- access to high opportunity areas
- access to jobs, education, services, transit

Recognizing that rural communities in unincorporated counties face different challenges and are often intentionally not planned for significant new growth, this framework will need flexibility to accommodate Green Zones in these rural communities. Growing in location-efficient infill areas, particularly in areas that already include a mix of uses and transportation options that foster lower VMT is a critical path to achieving regional greenhouse reduction targets. Inversely, avoiding significant growth in rural areas where land uses and transportation options necessitate relatively higher vehicle miles traveled is helpful in avoiding future greenhouse gas emissions and also an important component of the Sustainable Communities Strategy. Therefore, exceptions to the above requirements may be considered to identify appropriate Green Zones in rural counties. Unincorporated counties with these rural communities should work with SACOG through the application process to identify alternative factors that can inform the designation of Green Zones in rural communities. While Green Zones in these areas are not typically good candidates for Green Means Go investments that aim to accelerate infill, there may be other future opportunities for these Green Zones.

Eligible Applicants: Because Green Zones must be planned for growth and supported by local policies, cities and counties are the primary applicants. However, partnerships are strongly encouraged. Particularly, water agencies, sewer and sanitation districts, transit agencies, air districts, and utility providers all have a role to play in future project implementation in Green Zones. Cities and counties should work with these partners during the nomination process. These partnerships will be critical to understanding the project needs and required implementation steps if the region receives funding for Green Zones.

How to Apply: Local agencies will submit Green Zone applications to SACOG using a simple online form. The application process will be collaborative and iterative: local jurisdictions are encouraged to collaborate internally and externally as extensively as needed to identify and prioritize infill areas. SACOG staff are
available for questions and collaboration prior to applying as well. SACOG will review applications as they are received and work with local agencies to finalize the Green Zones on a rolling basis over a couple of months this fall. Once final Green Zones are accepted, local agencies must adopt their Green Zone(s) by action of their city council or board of supervisors. The SACOG Board will then consider adopting all the Green Zones at its December meeting.

Attachment B provides the high-level calendar for establishing Green Zones this year.