

# Introduction and Need for a New Plan

## Introduction

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With 2.1 million people in our region and another one million projected by 2035, moving within and between communities is becoming an increasingly difficult challenge. Adding 525,000 new homes and 535,000 new jobs to our region, one might expect increased traffic congestion, dirtier air and longer commute and travel times.

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan for 2035 links land use and transportation planning, with \$42 billion (\$72 billion in expenditure year dollars) in transportation investments in the six-county Sacramento region over the next 28 years. With strategic investments in our current transportation system, we can curb the growth in traffic congestion each household experiences. We can create opportunities for residents of the region to spend less time in their cars and protect our air quality while improving the quality of life.

In 2002, the most recent major MTP update was completed. The plan had notable successes, including the creation of regional funding programs supporting air quality, community design, transportation demand management and bicycling and walking. However, despite our best efforts at dedicating more than \$22 billion (\$37 billion in year of expenditure dollars) for improvements through 2025, research shows traffic congestion levels per household would still increase by some 58 percent over today's levels. Our jobs-housing were not balanced around the region, with three primary job centers in downtown Sacramento, Rancho Cordova and Roseville supporting low density suburban housing across several hundred square miles in our six-county region.

Aware of the need for change, in 2002 the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) undertook the Blueprint visioning project, working collaboratively with civic partner Valley Vision and 5,000 residents, community leaders and elected officials to study future land-use patterns and their potential effects on the region's transportation, air quality, housing, open space and other resources.

Through a series of community workshops, "citizen planners" discovered how we can reduce our air pollution emissions, reduce traffic congestion and reduce our projected land consumption from urban development. Workshop participants told SACOG how they envisioned the future of their communities; SACOG staff examined these ideas using computer models, which showed that implementing smart growth principles would shorten commute times, reduce traffic congestion, lessen dependence on automobiles, provide for a range of housing choices affordable to the workforce and more aligned with the needs of an aging population.

The Preferred Blueprint Scenario unanimously adopted by the SACOG Board of Directors in December 2004, calls for development based on seven smart growth principles: providing a variety of transportation choices; offering housing choices and opportunities; taking advantage of compact development; using existing assets; mixed land uses; preserving open space, farmland and natural beauty through natural resources conservation; and encouraging distinctive, attractive communities with quality design.

By linking land use and transportation planning, and bringing jobs, housing and retail closer together, computer traffic modeling revealed that strategic transportation investments can

significantly improve our travel by increasing transit, walk and bike trips, shortening our remaining car trips and reducing the time we spend in heavy traffic congestion.

Public opinion surveys continue to show that residents value their communities highly. In 2004, residents of the region indicated they liked living in the region because of its variety and availability of services and activities, slower pace of life, small-town feeling, and sense of community and belonging. In 2007, when asked what they liked about living in the region, respondents again indicated appreciation for access to retail, services and entertainment and the outdoors, as well as a small-town feel. Given these values, it is not surprising that growing congestion and lack of accessibility is a big concern.

Drawing on community interests and the SACOG Board's support, this is the first Metropolitan Transportation Plan to be significantly influenced by Blueprint growth principles. The Blueprint is a voluntary strategy that relies on the individual actions of local governments for successful implementation. The land use pattern that forms the foundation for the MTP2035 is based on the policy directions cities and counties are pursuing with the land use patterns and the estimated performance of the market. The market performance is influenced by state and federal regulations as well as local policies and codes.

The land use pattern for the MTP2035 is much more closely aligned with Blueprint growth principles than was the land use pattern for the prior MTP. This is because many of SACOG's members have chosen to actively implement the voluntary growth strategy, and the market is also headed in a direction that in many ways is consistent with these principles. This is especially true for the increasing variety of available housing products, more compact development, and increased infill and redevelopment.

With the assumption that the land use base in this plan will be implemented, the MTP2035 invests a far greater share of transportation resources to alternative modes and trip reduction than any previous MTP. This balance of transportation investments will best serve a more compact land use pattern with the effect of shortening trips and improving air quality. In addition to investing directly in these travel modes and in transportation demand management programs such as rideshare and employer programs, the MTP2035 also provides for carpool/express bus lanes on freeways, bridges that shorten distances for bicyclists, and "complete streets" that safely accommodate vehicles, transit, bicyclists and pedestrians.

The MTP2035 outlines the region's transportation needs, sets principles and policies, and proposes specific strategies. It is a program of related actions designed to coordinate and manage future transportation improvements among the various jurisdictions and agencies operating within the region. The MTP covers a wide range of transportation issues, including how the land use pattern affects travel behavior, development of multiple modes of transportation, rush-hour congestion, special needs of people with limited mobility, goods movement, long-distance travel between the SACOG region and other areas, and the environmental impacts related to travel. The MTP2035 is designed to guide future transportation investment decisions in a balanced manner, sufficient to make needed improvements in all modes of surface transportation, within the limits of resources.

## Need for a New Plan

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**The six-county Sacramento region has changed dramatically in many ways since 1975, and we can expect equally dramatic changes looking forward to 2035. Back in the mid-1970s, the region's population had reached about 1.1 million.** The only major job center was found in downtown Sacramento. The regional transportation system, focused on radial access between suburbs and downtown Sacramento, consisted of freeways designed in the 1960s with twenty years of spare capacity. By the mid-1970s, the region had decided not to expand the freeway system further, and instead built two new radial light rail lines, completed by the mid-1980s. Surrounding communities of that time--Elk Grove, Davis, Woodland, Yuba City, Marysville, Roseville, and Folsom--enjoyed easy access to and from Sacramento, even on two-lane roads. Daily traffic congestion was essentially non-existent.

## GROWTH AND ITS LOCATION

Today, the region has evolved in ways unforeseen even ten years ago and—in spite of a recent slowdown—is expected to continue to grow at a high rate through 2035. Two-worker households have become the norm, with extensive commuting from one community to another. Current low-density suburban land-use patterns mean people travel overwhelmingly by automobile: 82 percent of trips are drive-alone, 10 percent of trips go by auto with two or more occupants, 5 percent are bicycle or walk trips, and 3 percent of trips are by transit.

Projections show that on top of the existing 1 million jobs and 800,000 housing units in 2005, the region is expected to add 535,000 new jobs and 525,000 new housing units between 2005 and 2035. Since the new jobs and housing are expected to be located around the region, we need a new plan to assess the region's commute demands.

Due to the region's commitments to a different future land use pattern that follows smart growth principles, most of the new growth projected in the region is well-balanced between jobs and housing in community areas—aside from three major new housing areas. Where the growth increment tilts either way it tends to lead toward better jobs/housing balance from 2005 conditions.

By 2035, the percentage of housing without jobs in the same community declines by 30 percent, and new significant housing areas are closer to the region's main job centers in downtown Sacramento, Rancho Cordova and Roseville. As a consequence, the average commute can be shorter, commuters will spend less time in traffic, and the rapid growth of peak period congestion in effect since 1995 will slacken.

## A NEW TRANSPORTATION VISION

Sacramento needs a creative new transportation vision to match changing land development patterns, emerging commute patterns, and the overall growth in travel. Greater congestion, more compact development, an aging population, clean air goals, and energy conservation all point to a need to improve and expand transit service. The Sacramento region, with ideal climate and terrain, could see more travel by bicycling and walking, now discouraged in some communities by heavy local auto traffic and discontinuous access. With more than a million empty seats in autos, but fewer than 10,000 empty seats in buses every morning and afternoon, carpools clearly have a place in the picture. Regardless, a large increase in the amount of travel by 2035 means that, even if transit use

could be increased tenfold and bicycle/walk trips tripled, the region still would face a large increase in travel by auto. At least in some places the road system must be expanded too, and if planned comprehensively, road expansions can improve bicycle and bus circulation.

Since 1970, our population has increased 110 percent and our vehicle miles traveled have increased 190 percent, while space on our roads has only increased 30 percent. This Plan takes these realities into account, along with an estimate of what the region can afford, and offers a balanced vision for transportation in the region's future.

In that context, SACOG through this Plan gives primary priority to transit expansion, with the objective of an effective transit system that both serves those who rely on transit and attracts riders who also have the choice to drive. The Plan proposes to invest the maximum feasible share of the region's flexible capital funding into transit expansion, commensurate with funding to operate and need for road capacity for transit to run on. This investment approximately triples the amount of transit available in 2035 compared to today; there are no funds available to operate more service beyond that level, and a modest amount of flexible funds must be invested in road improvements so that transit can move effectively through areas of congested traffic.

Some factors that must be considered in this vision are:

- **Clean Air:** Total smog emissions from motor vehicles are now half what they were in 1980, because technology has reduced auto emissions by 98 percent comparing 1980 models to 2007 models. Still, ever-higher standards for clean air combined with the growth in travel mean that reduction in motor-vehicle emissions must continue.
- **Demographic Changes:** By 2035, the number of residents in the SACOG region age 55 and over is expected to grow dramatically. According to California Department of Finance projections, the number of people age 55 or older will increase by approximately 580,000 a 153 percent increase between 2000 and 2035. As the population ages, older drivers will seek out other forms of transportation, as driving may not be a feasible option.
- **Gas Prices:** Adjusted for inflation, Gasoline prices have increased to the highest level since 1980, while the region's population has increased by about 55 percent and the total miles of driving has increased by 120 percent. Recent gas prices of \$3/gallon and higher start to affect people with lower incomes and cut into driving and quality of life. At the same time, many people do not have good alternative options to driving.
- **Better Transit:** Lack of road building and the resulting congestion have not encouraged many people to take transit instead of driving, even at the extreme congestion levels seen in big cities like Los Angeles. Instead, drivers move onto neighborhood streets, seeking to avoid heavy traffic. A 1999 Sacramento Regional Transit survey showed that half of those who commute on transit, and three-quarters of those who ride transit for other reasons, do not have access to an auto. Furthermore, those percentages rose through the 1990s, so transit to date has increasingly served those who do not have the choice to drive, despite a focus on luring drivers out of their autos.
- **Neighborhood Quality of Life:** Too many drivers cut through parallel neighborhood streets to avoid traffic jams on major arterials, and too often drive at arterial speeds. These streets become less safe and less pleasant as a place for community interaction, especially in areas with discontinuous sidewalks and no bike lanes. When areas are chopped up by cul-de-sacs and gated and walled communities, those who would walk or bicycle must go the

long way around, and fewer children can walk to school. This environment encourages people to drive all the time.

- **Goods Movement:** The amount of freight shipped by truck has tripled since 1980. Trucks often serve as rolling warehouses feeding just-in-time manufacturing and stores with computerized inventories. Rail transportation is not efficient or profitable for trips that are less than 700-1,000 miles, and suburban factories are often not located on rail lines. The region's location at the crossroads of Northern California's major interstate and state routes means that there are large volumes of through trucks to accommodate in addition to trucks making local deliveries, but even so, about 85 percent of trucks moving around and through the Sacramento region to load or unload locally or never leave the region.
- **Climate Change:** Although a discussion of global warming (also referred to herein as "climate change" or "global climate change") impacts is not currently required by the CEQA statutes or Guidelines, it is the view of the State Legislature (as expressed in its adoption of AB 32, The California Climate Solutions Act of 2006) and the Governor (through the issuance of Executive Order #S-3-05) that global warming poses significant adverse effects to the environment of California and the entire world, and that mitigation measures are needed to limit these impacts. A more in-depth discussion is provided in Chapter 9 of the EIR.
- **Oil Consumption:** The consumption of nonrenewable energy (primarily gasoline and diesel fuel) associated with construction activities and the operation of passenger, public transit, and commercial vehicles results in GHG emissions that ultimately result in global climate change. Alternative fuels such as natural gas, ethanol, and electricity (unless derived from solar, wind, nuclear, or other energy sources that do not produce carbon emissions) also result in GHG emissions and contribute to global climate change. An overview of global climate change, the anticipated impacts of climate change to California, and the climate change impacts of the MTP 2035 are provided in Chapter 9 of the EIR.
- **Public Health and Safety:** The federal and state governments each establish ambient air quality standards for several criteria pollutants. Most of the standards have been set to protect public health. There is a considerable body of data linking adverse health effects with traffic generated pollutants. Further discussion on how air quality affects public health is provided in Chapter 6 of the EIR.

Several programs and studies (Safe Routes to Schools/Transit, Community Design and Complete Streets) will help increase public safety and walking and biking. These modes benefit public health by providing good exercise, are energy efficient, and are viable alternatives to driving alone. Further discussion on these topics can be found in Chapter 18 of the EIR. Chapter 5 of the MTP contains numerous policy strategies designed to promote and increase public health and safety. Appendix C7 highlights the specific policies and strategies from Chapter 5 that pertain directly to public health and safety.

Residents of the Sacramento region have given input on how they want to move within and among communities in the years and decades ahead. The public indicated in community workshops, regional TALL Order workshops, and public opinion research that they wanted a balance of investments with priorities for smarter land use, increased transit, better connections with transit, freeway enhancements and bicycle paths throughout the region. They also ranked road maintenance as a high priority.

Projects identified throughout the MTP development process were run through travel performance modeling software, and the resulting project list meet the criteria of being regional priorities and higher performance. With these projects in place, we can expect to reduce vehicle miles traveled per household and hold congestion per household to a 10 percent increase. In the previous MTP, adopted in 2002, vehicle miles traveled were expected to increase, along with a 58 percent increase in traffic congestion. This plan is also significant, because it is the first to link transportation planning and the Blueprint Preferred Growth Scenario, bringing jobs, housing and services closer together.