

CALIFORNIA PLANNER



American Planning Association
California Chapter

Making Great Communities Happen

Newsletter of the American Planning Association California Chapter



This article is the first part of a three part series on implementation of SB 375

Regional Blueprints - SB 375

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Individual boarding the COASTER train at the Oceanside Center in the City of Oceanside. The COASTER route links North San Diego County and the City of San Diego via stations in Oceanside, Carlsbad, Encinitas, Solana Beach, Sorrento Valley, Old Town San Diego, and Santa Fe Depot.

Brief History of Regional Planning in California

Since the 1970s, California's eighteen metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) have quietly maintained responsibility for essential transportation and demographic forecasting for over 80% of the state's population, its five major ports, and seven international airports. Their sphere of influence covers all urbanized areas of the state. Valued for submitting long range plans to the federal government as a condition for securing federal transportation funding, MPOs have had limited statutory authority for enforcing such plans. With the passage of California's watershed Climate Change law (Assembly Bill 32) signed by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2006 and companion legislation heralded as the "Anti-Sprawl Bill" passed in 2008 (Senate Bill 375), MPOs find themselves taking on the front lines along with cities and counties in the fight against Climate Change. The benefits of cooperative land use and transportation planning hold massive potential to contribute to overall reductions in greenhouse gas emissions – whether regional agencies and state planners can deliver remains to be seen.

State and Federal law requires eighteen federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to adopt and submit an updated Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) every four or five years. The purpose of the RTP is to establish goals; identify present and future needs, deficiencies and constraints; analyze potential solutions; estimate available funding; and propose investments. RTP requirements have expanded over the years to include changes in travel behavior, road safety, employment trends, availability of affordable housing, land use patterns, input on community values and most recently, greenhouse gas (ghg) emissions. RTPs are a collaborative way for regional agencies to coordinate with local government on transportation investment, air quality, and land use. Many state agencies (the California Department of Transportation, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research and the California Air Resource Board, the California Energy Commission and others) are active players in the long

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range planning, but ultimate decision making authority on the RTP rests with the boards of the MPOs and RTPAs.

California's population increase in the 1990s¹, primarily due to expanded suburban development, brought further light to numerous growth related impacts such as long commutes and roadway congestion, rapid consumption of prime agricultural land, and a rise in ghg emissions. The debate over how to handle growth at that time raised issues and discussion of more sustainable plans for growth. Initially discussion was split between "pro-growth" and "anti-growth" approaches, but ultimately "regional planning" or "growth management" emerged as a middle ground strategy to bring pro and anti growth viewpoints together as it combined conservation of prime agricultural and open space with flexibility in accommodating population growth.² The MPO practice of multi-agency, inter-jurisdictional consensus-building evolved through a process known as "scenario planning" whereby geographic information system (GIS) data and growth allocation build-out are used to create scenarios that help the public and policymakers better understand the trade-offs among different policy decisions was seen as a approach to address these conditions. Successful "scenario planning" efforts are built around new graphic techniques for displaying the results of land use decisions and community involvement to ensure that plans for new development meets the vision of local residents. Since 2002 the roles MPO's have changed to reflect this approach as shown in the following table.



A passenger boarding the COASTER train at the Oceanside Transit Center in the city of Oceanside. The COASTER is a train that links North San Diego County and the City of San Diego.

Traditional Role of MPOs/COGs (1970s – 2002)	Current Role of MPOs/COGs (2002 – future)
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) formed to complete RTPs (1960s)	Green House Gas (ghg) Modeling
Councils of Government COGs formed as voluntary associations (1970s)	Linking Sustainable Communities Strategies (SCS) with Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA)
COG assigned to complete RHNA and serve as inter-face between state and local governments (1980)	Support planning systems higher density development and better links between transit and growth
Demographic forecasts	Decision Making Processes
Regional growth management (2005)	Regional Blueprint Planning and Sustainability Planning (economy, environment, energy, and social equity)

Blueprint Planning in California

Since 2005 the California Regional Blueprint Planning Program (administered by the California Department of Transportation) has provided \$20 million in planning grants to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs).³ Increasing the scope of work and the level of responsibility for regional agencies to build collaborative processes throughout their jurisdictions has been part of the state's effort to address environmental and land use challenges regionally. **Regional Blueprints** are inter-jurisdictional planning processes that strive to integrate land use and infrastructure planning while addressing economic development, environmental protection and social equity. In 2005, 14 MPOs were involved in creating Regional Blueprints. Today, of the 58 counties in the State of California, 50 are now developing **Regional Blueprints**. And while Cities and Counties are not required to participate in Regional Blueprints, the influence of regional collaborative planning is

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Built in 2003, a contemporary attached residential high-rise in San Diego, overlooking Balboa Park.

shifting the way many jurisdictions operate. Identifying development plans that are “blueprint consistent” is a helpful consideration as local planning departments assess the viability of particular projects.

The imperative to meet air quality mandates and address mounting congestion with scarce resources prompted regional agencies to look at land use as a lever for promoting more efficient development patterns that include denser “infill” development near transit, protection of essential green spaces, and recognition of affordable housing demands.

Michael Teitz and Elisa Barbour, *PPIC Occasional Paper* 2006, pp. iii – xi.

Regional blueprint planning remains a voluntary planning approach that local government needs to implement. Locating a funding source for local implementation remains an unknown variable in public policy discussions about the future of the movement.

AB 32 committed California to GHG emissions reductions to 1990 levels by the year 2020, but it did not specifically identify how the state would achieve the goal. SB 97 provided CEQA analysis of GHG impacts. **Regional Blueprints** ascended to the forefront of policymakers’ agenda in 2007 as legislators, State Agencies, the California Building Industry Association, and environmental groups like Natural Resources Defense Council grappled with the role regional planners could play in addressing GHG emissions reduction. Perpetuated by the rising incidence of forest fires, a decrease in water supply, and the continual strain on infrastructure systems – **Regional Blueprints** presented a “third way” for both environmentalists and builders to imagine the future.

Furthering this movement of coordinated planning efforts designed to address regional impacts, SB 375 authored by Darryl Steinberg in 2008 has a fundamental premise to address GHG emissions by curbing the transportation sector through effective planning. The law requires the state’s Air Resources Board to determine the level of emissions produced by cars and light trucks in each of the California’s eighteen MPO regions. Emission reduction goals for 2020 and 2035 would be assigned to each region. Local government would then devise strategies for housing development, road building and other land uses to shorten travel distances, reduce driving and meet the new targets.⁴ **Regional Blueprints** are at the core of SB 375’s Sustainable Communities Strategies which address five key questions: How should we grow? Where should we grow? How should we make public investments in growth and quality of life? How should we travel around the region? How will growth affect our environment and the economy?

Regional Blueprints are not aimed to usurp local planning, but are a voluntary process that supports a regional perspective and that consider market signals at a larger scale – often taking into consideration variables and impacts that are not obvious at the local level. For example, big box retail development accumulates at county lines as an unintended consequence of Proposition 13 and local zoning codes, but does not support regional transportation or the goals

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of the region. **Regional Blueprints** provide a framework for connecting land use, transportation, and climate change, and encouraging communities to grow in a more sustainable way that benefits the entire region and helps to inform mandatory local planning processes. The regional perspective is surfacing as a functional response to the mounting pressures facing the state and MPOs and RTPAs are being charged with developing tools to rise to meet these challenges.

Following are two examples this new framework.

New Approaches to Comprehensive Regional Planning in California - Two Case Studies

San Diego

San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) adopted its Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) in 2004 and has been working on implementing the following key planning processes:

- Smart Growth Concept Map. The Smart Growth Concept Map identifies nearly 200 existing, planned, and potential smart growth locations throughout the region, with at least one in each jurisdiction. The locations are associated with seven smart growth “place types” identified in the RCP, reflecting the notion that smart growth is not a “one-size-fits-all” endeavor. About 40% of the sites already have local comprehensive plans and zoning designations consistent with RCP policies; the other 60% are being considered by local governments for changes as plans are updated. The Smart Growth Concept Map will serve as a foundation for developing the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS).

1. *Transnet* Smart Growth Incentive Program (SGIP). The SGIP is a competitive grant program that will generate a dedicated \$280 million over the next 40 years (funded through the *TransNet* half-cent sales tax) for planning and capital improvement projects. In 2005, the SGIP awarded \$19 million to 14 local projects, including streetscape revitalization, pedestrian improvements, transit access enhancements, and nonmotorized transportation infrastructure.
2. Border Planning and Tribal Coordination. The Otay Mesa-Mesa de Otay Binational Corridor Strategic Plan is a binational endeavor to integrate cross-border planning initiatives, including specific collaboration strategies for mutual smart growth housing, habitat, economic prosperity, and transportation opportunities.

For more information on SANDAG’s cutting edge regional planning activities see www.sandag.org.

What is a Regional Blueprint Plan?

A Regional Blueprint Plan is essentially a long-term vision and plan for a region’s preferred land use pattern that emerges from and reflects the values and priorities of that region’s residents. It is voluntary and developed by active participation of local and regional governments, stakeholders, businesses and residents in a collaborative process that integrates land use planning with transportation, housing, air quality, public health, and environmental and resource conservation planning.

The process of developing the plan begins with determining what the region will look like in the future based on current trends and projected growth. This allows citizens to see the impacts of planning decisions and current growth trends on the things that they value in their region - such as open space, air quality, commute times, and much more. With this “status quo” scenario as a baseline, the effort then focuses on finding common ground in the values and priorities of residents - what it is they value in their region, what they want to protect or improve, and what they want their community to look like in 30 or more years.

Planners then take this input and work with Global Information System (GIS) mapping and modeling tools to create alternative scenarios for the region - what it might look like if growth is managed in different ways. The participants in the blueprint process then provide feedback on the choices and consequences represented in the scenarios, and select a preferred land use scenario. Once the regional government adopts the preferred scenario, it is then up to the local governments to implement the blueprint plan in their land use decision-making.

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Sacramento

The Sacramento region launched the state's first Blueprint effort in California back in 2002 and is leading the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for 2035. Underpinned by Blueprint principles, the MTP was developed through numerous public workshops with local government and elected officials and adopted in 2008. While the MTP for 2035 was being developed, SACOG coordinated its Regional Housing Needs Plan update with the MTP projections. Scenarios were developed with parcel-level data and analysis to ensure that the growth concepts were as realistic as possible. Scenario maps illustrate the general amount of land required to accommodate projected growth. Transportation projects were added to each scenario and the Preferred Scenario was approved by the Board of Directors in 2004. The SACOG Blueprint project operated five essential planning principles, including: housing options, compact development, transportation choices, mixed land uses, conservation of natural resources, using existing assets, and quality design. SACOG offers a variety of workshops geared at engaging local planning departments to create communities that embody the blueprint vision.

Five years after the Blueprint adoption, several local governments in the region are coming to the conclusion to start general plan updates that explore integration of the Blueprint into their land use plans and policies. A number of specific plans in-process or adopted reflect the principles of the Blueprint Preferred Scenario and some plans have begun building. The Blueprint envisioned a shift in densities from the predominantly low-density single family housing stock, to a denser, more diverse housing mix including more small-lot (medium-density) single family and attached housing opportunities. The shift from past plans is starting to occur: whereas the region was building 80% large lot and 20% small lot and attached in the late 1990s, new homes built in the three years after Blueprint adoption were mixed 59% large lot and 41% small lot and attached. And in 2007 alone, 33% of all housing units for sale or under construction in the region were large lot and 67% were small lot or attached.



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Downtowns across the Sacramento region were identified in the Blueprint Preferred Scenario as opportunities for infill and reinvestment and these areas have started to see an increase in infill and redevelopment planning and building. Several cities and counties have also targeted their strategic transportation corridors, identified in both the Blueprint and the MTP for 2035, for an infusion of housing to complement the MTP's transportation investments. SACOG's implementation program aims to support member jurisdictions in their local implementation of the Blueprint principles by providing technical services, including data and modeling capabilities, educational opportunities on Blueprint topics, and financial assistance and incentives. These include:

- a suite of civic engagement tools (educational videos, an on-line smart growth photo library, a 3-D Visualization tool, and local-modeled corridor redevelopment visual simulations),
- form-based codes workbook that provides guidance on developed a form-based code for a range of communities,
- Community Design Grant Program that awards grants to public or public-private smart growth projects,
- suite of land use and transportation modeling tools including training and technical assistance.



¹ The population growth of 32.7 million people between 1990 and 2000 represents the largest census-to-census increase in American history. US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, 2001.

² Teitz, Barbour, 2006. Blueprint Planning in California Forcing Consensus in Metropolitan Growth and Development, Public Policy Institute of California.

³ The California Regional Blueprint Program is administered by the Department of Transportation in coordination with the Governor's Office of Planning and Research and the California Department of Housing and Community Development. The funding for the program is provided by the Federal Government.

⁴ New York Times Editorial, 2008. Cut the Sprawl, Cut the Warming.

President's Message

By Kurt Christiansen, AICP, President

Welcome to our first all digital Cal Planner!



Entering the fall season means it is time for the annual California Chapter State conference. This year we will be traveling to the Lake Tahoe region of our State. This year's conference will be hosted by the Sacramento Valley Section in Squaw Creek, California. The conference promises to great experience in one of the most beautiful regions of our state. We do not have many opportunities to visit the more rural and rustic areas for our annual conference and this might be the last chance we have to hold a conference in a more natural setting. I hope you get the opportunity to participate in this unique experience. Sacramento Valley Section has worked hard over the last 18 months to plan and execute the conference. They have put together a conference filled with great speakers and exciting session.

The end of 2009 marks the end of the first reporting cycle for the AICP Certification Maintenance program. On December 31st, AICP members will need to have fulfilled their first 32 credit hours. Some of our non-AICP members might think that we have been more interested in our AICP members because of our many references to the Certification Maintenance (CM) program and the additional programs that we have developed. Let me be the first to say that all of our programs are open to any California Chapter member. If you are interested in attending a CM approved training program, sign up. Every Chapter member is entitled to participate in any and all of our Chapter and Section programs. We promote the programs as CM eligible so that our AICP members know that they can claim the credits to meet their CM requirements. So if you are interested in a title in our lending library, sign-up for it, it is free to all Chapter members.

This time of year is also election season for the State Board and the California Planning Foundation. The state nominating committee, headed by Past President Vince Bertoni, is looking for candidates to fill the offices of Vice President of Administration, Vice President of Public Information, and President-Elect. Anyone interested in running for a State Board position should contact Vince Bertoni at vince.bertoni@lacity.org. For those of you that are less ambitious, the Section Boards are also looking for individuals to serve on a local section level. All of the State Board members started out serving in a Section Leadership position. I encourage you to participate in a leadership position on a local or state level.

This digital *Cal Planner* is a big step for the Chapter. Many of our Sections have already made the transition to an electronic format. We were set to make the transition early this year, but the State Board wanted to make sure that the roll-out of the electronic *Cal Planner* was smooth. The last two issues of the *Cal Planner* has been sent to you through the mail, as well as sent to you electronically. This marks the first all electronic *Cal Planner*. I would like to thank Lance Schulte, Vice President for Public Information, Dorina Blythe of GranDesigns and Sadna Samaranyake of InSiteLogic, for all of their hard work over the past 8 months. Over the course of the next year we will be enhancing the electronic *Cal Planner*, so stay tuned.

APA California Board Nominations

The Nominating Committee for Elected Chapter officers is now accepting nominations for the following Board Officers:

- President-Elect
- Vice President for Administration
- Vice President for Public Information

The President-Elect serves for one year starting on January 1, 2010, then serves as President for two years, and Immediate Past President for one year for a total of four years of service. The Vice President for Administration and the Vice President for Public Information serve for a two year term beginning January 1, 2010. For a description of the duties of each of the officers, please refer to the By-Laws in the "About Us" section on the APA CA website at www.calapa.org.

The Nominating Committee will recommend two candidates for each Chapter office and is seeking candidates that possess leadership capabilities and have demonstrated an interest in APA CA. In addition, the Committee will strive to provide a combination of candidates representing the diversity of the organization.

Anyone who is interested in submitting their name as a candidate is encouraged to submit a resume with work and professional organization experience to Vince Bertoni, AICP, at vince.bertoni@lacity.org. All resumes must be received no later than Friday, September 18, 2009.



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Benefits of Visual Simulation

By Eddie Font, Principal of VisionScape Imagery



Resort - Private Developer

In the environmental planning and entitlement arena, the question of how to craft a strong, objective EIR that will enable all interested parties to fully understand the visual impact of a proposed development is often a source of much discussion. More and more, planning consultants, municipalities and other government agencies are looking for highly accurate visualization tools, specifically Visual Simulations, to communicate the aesthetic impacts of their proposed projects and for inclusion within environmental documents and presentations. Some municipalities now require that visual simulations be submitted with most planning applications.

When visual simulations are not required however, unambiguous “Before and After” analyses of visual impacts play an invaluable role in strengthening EIRs and streamlining the planning and entitlement process. As Randy Bynder, Director of Community Development for the City of Rancho Mirage suggests, “I highly recommend the use of Visual Simulations by our applicants to complete the submittal requirements in order to provide the public and decision makers with effective and reliable visual impact analyses of new projects within the context of existing development.”

What are Visual Simulations?

Visual simulations are incredibly accurate, photo-realistic images that simulate a proposed development’s visual image from particular viewpoints. A visual simulation should consist of both existing and proposed views to show how a project would appear following construction.

Accurate visual simulations bring added credibility to projects and are useful throughout all stages of development, from early design concepts to final project approval and can:

- Communicate and document the visual impacts of a project from multiple viewpoints
- Facilitate design modification in the early stages of project design
- Objectively bring parties together to accurately and visually understand a project.
- Potentially reduce costs associated with unnecessary project delays that may result from unwarranted concerns of a project’s potential visual impact.