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SB 375 – Implementation Update

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Let's start with a little background. SB 375 was passed in 2008 to provide an incentive for local jurisdictions and developers to alter the sprawling growth patterns historic in California. The mechanism for accomplishing this is the creation of new GHG elements being inserted into the regional transportation plans.

The new pieces to the puzzle are called Sustainable Communities Strategy, or SCS, and, if necessary, Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) designed to achieve regional GHG reduction targets to be adopted by each of the state's Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). This additional process is viewed as an important component of the Climate Change [Scoping Plan](#) that was adopted in 2008 pursuant to the provisions of the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, commonly known as [AB 32](#). SB 375's overall goal is to reduce GHG emissions through a reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

The process for implementation of SB 375 is a lengthy one, starting with the adoption of the targets themselves later this year.

Development of a region's Sustainable Communities Strategy or Alternative Planning Strategy is likely to take more than a year. The adoption of these strategies for the Southern California region is not projected to occur until 2012 at the earliest.

This process, however, took a major step forward recently with the release of preliminary GHG reduction estimates by the state's MPOs. The estimates were presented at a meeting of the Regional Targets Advisory Committee ([RTAC](#)) on May 25 in Sacramento, hosted by the California Air Resources Board (CARB or Board). These estimates will be used by CARB to ultimately establish regional targets for the reduction of GHGs through land use planning. CARB is required to establish these regional targets by September of this year.

The next step will be for the RTAC to recommend regional GHG emission reduction targets to CARB. The Board will then consider the recommendation and formally seek public input with a series of workshops around the state in July, before adopting the targets this fall. After the reduction targets are adopted by CARB the regional



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MPOs, such as the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), will then be required to develop their SCS and/or APS.

The implications of this process are wide-ranging and could affect transportation, land use, and development patterns in California for many decades to come. SCAG's response to the request for preliminary GHG reduction estimates is telling. SCAG participated in the May 25 meeting in two ways. They presented their findings [individually](#) and as part of a larger [group](#) made up of the major urban areas in California (Bay Area, San Diego, and Sacramento). The GHG reduction potential for the six-county SCAG region was estimated to be between 3 and 12 percent in 2035. This range was consistent with the other three large MPOs—MTC (Bay Area), SANDAG (San Diego), and SACOG (Sacramento). Because actual program-level details were not provided, and should not be expected until much later in the RTP development process, it is impossible to precisely predict how this will all shake out. But SCAG took great efforts to acknowledge the public process they have undertaken with their subregional local governments, as these entities will really be responsible for on-the-ground implementation. Still the conclusions of the recommendations begin to forecast the direction that will be taken to implement SB 375. These conclusions are set out as follows:

Conclusions

Comparison of "most ambitious" scenarios of the four large MPOs suggests:

Each MPO achieves different percentage reductions from 2005 to 2035.

Each MPO is constrained by varying commitments to fund maintenance and operations of existing systems.

Each MPO has tested aggressive pricing measures; however, such measures have significant policy and legal barriers.

Each MPO has tested land use scenarios that lead to more compact development patterns than with existing plans; results vary by region.

Transportation systems investments (transit, highway, bicycle, and pedestrian networks) can lead to significant GHG reductions.

Transportation Demand Management (TDM) and Transportation System Management (TSM) measures may also lead to GHG reductions, and can often be implemented more quickly than capital investments in the transportation system itself.

The best ("ambitious and achievable") GHG reductions will result from:

Further testing of "hybrid" scenarios that combine the most productive individual measures for each region and are tied to fiscally constrained revenue forecasts per federal requirements.

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Continued refinement of growth forecasts to accurately reflect changing economic and demographic conditions.

Evaluation of scenarios in relation to non-GHG performance measures:

Other transportation system performance measures.

Sustainability performance measures incorporating the 3 Es (environmental, economic and social equity factors).

SCAG presented five versions of future growth scenarios for the region. These versions bounded the minimum and maximum GHG reductions available. Descriptively, these were referred to as "achievable" on the low end and "ambitious" on the high end. "Achievable" is viewed as status quo, while "ambitious" would be very difficult to meet. The actual target will be somewhere in between and won't be known until after CARB makes their final statewide determination this fall. The debate between "achievable" and "ambitious" is at the heart of the decision the Board will be making, not only for SCAG but for all 17 other regions as well.

Even though the range of reductions was similar around the state, the methods proposed to achieve those goals were quite different. For the Bay Area, pricing strategies such as bridge tolls and other financial mechanisms (parking surcharges for example) were estimated to have the greatest impact on reducing the number of miles driven. In Sacramento, where outward growth is projected in the future, densification of new housing developments was the key policy. And for the San Diego area, improvements in the operation of their existing transportation systems was highlighted. For the SCAG region, however, a mix of all the above strategies was determined to be necessary, with no single strategy being highlighted as the key to success. The message being that SCAG is too large, too diverse and too unique to have a one size fits all approach. It can be reasoned from their presentations that each of these strategies will be on the table in some form or another next time around.

While some of the strategies, such as the focusing of new development on infill and transit-related sites has been long anticipated, the pricing strategies may well have the greatest impact and have not been widely aired to date. The past has shown us that dramatic increases in the cost of fuel results in small, but measureable, decreases in VMT. But our existing growth patterns currently reflect the existing costs of transportation. If alternative, cheaper transportation is not available to existing commuters, what will the impact of higher transportation costs (fuel, tolls, parking) be on their ability to continue to commute? In the short term this could have a significant impact on the economy.

For additional information on this issue, contact:

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