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Juliann Allison and Jonathan Davidson

Collaborative Regional Planning in California: Potential Models for Sustainable Governance

Executive Summary

California faces several challenges related to population growth, economic needs, and infrastructure development. There is an increasing movement towards addressing these challenges at the regional level, with problems that are too big for any particular local government, and that require planning and coordination across various government and stakeholder groups. For instance, the state's continuing demographic growth and urbanization intensify the conflicts between regional transportation policies and land use practices at the municipal level.

In this report, we analyze five recent initiatives widely considered to be characteristic of collaborative regional planning as it is practiced in California. We chose cases in new-growth regions such as the counties of Merced and Riverside and in more mature growth regions such as San Diego County and the Sacramento metropolitan area. We find several elements for successful efforts at collaborative planning, including the use of computer graphic technology, innovations in stakeholder outreach, and early recognition of environmental impacts. Thus, while prior efforts are helpful in collaborative regional planning, there are several innovations to help create new precedents for successful planning.

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Introduction

California is the most populous state in the United States and one of the world's largest economies. Despite the state's size and economic importance, many issues related to economic growth and population growth are occurring at the regional level, from "mega regions" such as the Los Angeles metropolitan area to smaller regions such as the Central Coast. California's regions are vulnerable to social, political, environmental, and economic fluctuations that often exceed the problem-solving capacity of traditional governing institutions at the state and local levels.

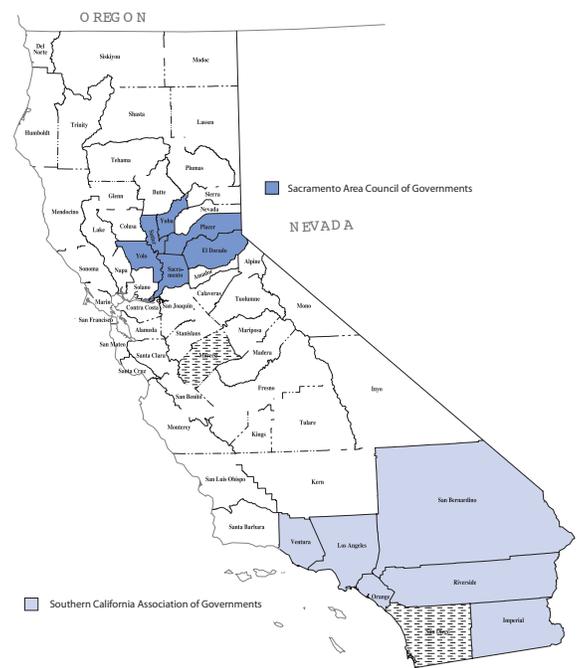
For instance, the state's continuing demographic growth and urbanization intensify the conflicts between regional transportation policies and local government land use practices. Transportation planning is conducted through voluntary councils of government (COGs), which rely on member cooperation and influence to achieve policy consensus. Land use regulation and planning are reserved for local governments. In addition, a wide array of federal, state, and sub-state agencies implement laws to improve air and water quality, and to evaluate environmental impacts from any proposed projects.

Collaborative regional planning represents a promising response to this crisis of governance. This comprehensive and inclusive planning model seeks to achieve the efficient and sustainable placement of land use activities, public infrastructure (i.e., communications and transportation networks) - and housing and other development to accommodate population growth beyond the governance capacities of cities and counties. According to Judith Innes and David Booher, these models include new forms of collaborative dialogue, policy making, and action that fill the gaps left when formal government institutions and practices do not adequately fulfill their responsibilities, or where no particular agency has jurisdiction. "These collaborative processes, engaging public and private sector players representing many interests working on tasks that are about public welfare, have become part of an emerging governance system. This system lacks formal authority, is linked in varying ways to formal government, and engages stakeholders who are typically outsiders to public choices."¹ We find that in California, dialogues among governmental and other stakeholders have led to collaborative new

partnerships, innovative institutional arrangements, and the potential for ongoing, successful comprehensive regional planning.

This article reports on five recent initiatives widely considered to be characteristic of collaborative regional planning as it is practiced in California. Each case represents planning and public policy making that has successfully transcended accepted legal, economic, and substantive boundaries to achieve comprehensive regional - transportation- and land use- planning in a range of rural to urban contexts.

Figure 1: Map of Case Studies in California



The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) adopted a *Land Use Blueprint* that could guide capital area growth toward mid century. Citizen workshops used geographic information systems and "clicker" technology to gain rapid feedback on projected impacts of alternative policies. As the pilot agency for the region's Partnership for Integrated Planning, the **Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG)** prepared its *Regional Transportation Plan*. Under this agreement, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Federal Highway Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 9 staff assisted this

predominantly rural area in data analysis and other technical matters. **The Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP)** emerged from intense negotiations among environmental activists, developers, and other land-use stakeholders in a rapidly urbanizing region. The group’s Consensus Planning Principles brought a *Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan*, a revised process for transportation project acceptance, and clarified policies within the County General Plan. **The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)** adopted a *Compass Blueprint* - a strategic vision that encourages mixed-density development accessible to transportation alternatives. Its neighboring

San Diego County Association of Governments (SANDAG) adopted a *Regional Comprehensive Plan* that could serve as an advisory guide for local government land use decisions.

These programs were the focus of a study conducted by UC Riverside’s Center for Sustainable Suburban Development (CSSD) for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Summarized in Table 1, and detailed individually in the following sections, these case studies are presented within a “rational comprehensive planning framework.”

Table 1: Collaborative Elements in Regional Planning Initiatives

	Functional Planning Areas	Precursors and Instigation	Public Involvement Strategy	Generating and Selecting Alternatives	Plan Implementation
Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)	<i>Land Use (visioning); transportation</i>	<i>Prior initiatives (1989, 1995, 2002) sought transportation-land use linkages</i>	<i>Interactive workshops to establish a Land Use Blueprint for 2050. GIS and voting “clickers” assist process.</i>	<i>“Blueprint” workshops generated alternative scenarios to guide land use and transportation policies toward 2050.</i>	<i>Actions by local governments and developers consistent with Land Use Blueprint.</i>
Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG)	<i>Regional transportation plan integrated environmental and land use planning concerns.</i>	<i>Federal/State Partnership for Integrated Planning selected MCAG as pilot agency.</i>	<i>Planners met directly with stakeholders, - including under-represented interests. GIS and voting “clickers” assisted process</i>	<i>Outreach meetings gained included fiscal element in selecting among alternate scenarios.</i>	<i>Interlocal development fee agreements for regionally-defined projects. Improved relationships with local governments and Caltrans, EPA and FHWA.</i>
Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP)	<i>Habitat protection, transportation, and revised County comprehensive plan.</i>	<i>Environmental, development, and other stakeholders negotiated to break gridlock.</i>	<i>RCIP integrated governmental and stakeholder interests via structured committees.</i>	<i>Transportation projects and habitat protection areas designated through RCIP committees.</i>	<i>Local- state-federal habitat protection plan. Interlocal impact fees for habitat protection and for regional transportation projects.</i>
Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)	<i>Growth visioning; transportation, comprehensive plan.</i>	<i>An internal growth vision subcommittee formed and initiated four visioning principles.</i>	<i>Workshops sought consensus for Compass vision. SCAG Subregions coordinated many events.</i>	<i>“Density chip exercise” highlighted local benefits from mixed-density transit-oriented development.</i>	<i>Consultant services for localities willing to adapt land use policies to Compass objectives.</i>
San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)	<i>Comprehensive regional planning (transportation, land use, housing, regional economy).</i>	<i>Regional growth planning initiatives date to late 1980s. Legislative directive to prepare regional plan.</i>	<i>Stakeholder workshops to develop regional vision and test planning principles.</i>	<i>Planners involved stakeholder and community groups in developing regional guiding principles.</i>	<i>Smart Growth Incentive Program funds local transit-oriented projects; stakeholder and technical working groups are ongoing</i>

Rational comprehensive planning is a widely accepted model used in both the state guidelines for local government planning and Federal Highway Administration primer for metropolitan transportation planning.² The sequential stages of this process begin with analysis of economic and demographic trends. Once goals and objectives are defined, alternative future development scenarios are created before plan adoption and appropriate implementation measures. Throughout the process, progress toward stated goals is monitored and incorporated into the next planning cycle. In order to ensure involvement by all stakeholders, collaborative planning programs include key agencies, organizations, and individuals throughout all phases of the planning process.

The case studies also illustrate the collaborative planning ideal that public policy should be determined cooperatively through active stakeholder involvement.³ Notably, all of the programs discussed in the case studies capitalized on federal and state assistance and existing cooperative arrangements among local governments to integrate transportation and land use planning and environmental protection. Caltrans, in particular, is the primary source for state-level support for integrated regional planning. Its Blueprint Planning program currently provides \$5 million in grants to regional agencies. Caltrans is generally regarded as a supplemental strategy for implementing the \$19.9 billion allocated to transportation in the Governor's Strategic Growth Plan, which references a proposed law to direct investment to "projects that produce the most congestion relief, safety, pollution reduction, and improvement of system operation."⁴ Caltrans also coordinates the Blueprint Learning Network (BLN) in cooperation with the Resources Agency, the California Department of Housing and Community Development, the California Center for Regional Leadership, and the University of California at Davis. Network workshops focus on "on overcoming the challenges and obstacles to effective regional blueprint planning" by, for instance, providing a common planning and analytic framework for land use, transportation, housing, and environmental factors.

We chose our case studies with an eye towards highlighting challenges in new-growth regions such as the counties of Merced and Riverside and in more mature

growth regions such as San Diego County and the Sacramento metropolitan area. We conducted a total of 80 interviews with county managers, consultants, and groups stakeholders representing environmental, development, and social equity interests. On the whole, the evidence from our case studies indicates that regional planners consulted with citizens in setting goals and selecting future scenarios; local, state, and federal agencies cooperated on data collection and analysis.

We conspicuously identify the collaboration associated with each of these regional planning programs as the dynamic synergies that emerge when two or more stakeholders perceive benefits from convening on matters of common policy interest. Of course, these benefits need not be reciprocal. Citizens attending a planning workshop who are asked to select among planning scenarios may benefit simply via the satisfaction that their interests are acknowledged; however, the planner who is conducting that workshop may perceive a benefit only after successfully developing a hybrid scenario that reflects participants' consensus. Collaborative benefits can alternatively be measured by objective outcomes, ranging from a basic agreement to share environmental data, to a complex intergovernmental plan for implementation. Regardless of the specific planning process, and however benefits are measured, we find that program success depends on the participation of officials who are able to convey effectively the benefits of comprehensive planning and cooperative regional governance.

Integrating Land Use Visioning with Transportation Planning in Sacramento

Regional planning by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) combines consensus-based land use visioning with innovative transportation processes. Its "Preferred Blueprint Scenario" envisions development patterns toward the year 2050. It includes a land use map and accompanying principles representing common smart growth strategies.

Precedent for integrating transportation and land use planning in the Sacramento region dates back to at least 1989. At that time, SACOG developed a plan called the Metro Study that proposed three alternatives, including one

for a light rail system with concentrated development around it. In 1995, the agency attempted again to integrate land use as a key component in transportation planning. A 2002 Transportation Roundtable convened 55 diverse stakeholders from the private sector, community and interest groups, and public agencies. According to one interviewee, the Roundtable pushed SACOG to pursue the land use planning component before trying to complete another transportation plan.

The SACOG Blueprint process is the first public involvement process to envision long-term growth in the Sacramento region. Its adoption followed an extensive series of community workshops. These meetings used innovative geographic information system technology and hand-held “clickers” to provide rapid feedback on citizen preferences. The adopted map is intended as a guiding framework for local and regional land use decisions. SACOG and local planners projected that true implementation will be achieved when communities have examples of Blueprint-consistent projects and when their General Plans and land use laws align with smart growth principles. Interviewees noted that major developers now have “infill” development branches seeking properties with potential for higher density and access to existing infrastructure. Local governments have also shown receptiveness to higher density transit-oriented development projects. Observers express optimism that these sequential processes will encourage more integrated planning at the regional level.

All of the programs discussed in our case studies capitalized on federal and state assistance and existing cooperative arrangements among local governments to integrate transportation and land use planning and environmental protection

The Merced Regional Transportation Plan and Partnership for Integrated Planning

The Merced County Association of Governments' (MCAG's) prepared its 2004 Regional

Transportation Plan as a pilot agency for a Federal-State Partnership for Integrated Planning. This agreement among Caltrans, the Federal Highway Administration, and the EPA encourages continuing relationships with local transportation planning agencies. Beyond this interagency collaboration, MCAG staff reached out to stakeholder interests that are often underrepresented in this planning process. At community workshops, citizens were asked to consider estimated costs while selecting a preferred development scenario. Observers credit these MCAG initiatives as significant influences for five cities adopting local impact fees to finance regionally defined transportation projects.

MCAG planners also sought direct public involvement in defining transportation issues and goals. Their initial format was to schedule community brainstorming meetings at city halls. The sparse attendance at these sessions was confirmed by a staff comment, “We arrived with two dozen donuts and went home with two dozen donuts.” What began to set the process apart from previous years was the agency's decision to approach stakeholders directly, instead of trying to convince stakeholders to come to them. When MCAG couldn't get people to come to special meetings in each town or community, planners began contacting existing committees and civic groups. The most prominent examples were two of the county's main ethnic groups, Southeast Asians and Hispanics. As with the other focus groups, MCAG was tenacious in tracking down community members to participate in the planning process.

In Spring 2005, five out of the county's six cities agreed to adopt development impact fees, which fund regional projects serving new growth. Participants and observers attributed these exceptional measures to the connection the agency made with the public during the RTP process. Two key factors were referenced specifically. First, the development and selection of alternative planning scenarios required public participants to consider implementation costs associated with each option. Observers also credited MCAG's initiatives with giving citizens a sense of ownership in the planning process and transportation infrastructure. These processes were facilitated by innovative technology such as GIS and voting “clickers” to increase collaboration among stakeholder participants.

While MCAG has limited implementation authority, agency planners used reason and influence to educate county residents about the connections between transportation infrastructure and quality of life. In turn, citizens exercised local will through municipal enactments for a regional transportation impact fee. However, Merced's experience also illustrates recurrent challenges in California's regional planning processes. The transportation plan's lack of direct authority over land use, housing, environmental regulation, and decisions frustrate more integrated efforts.

The Riverside County Integrated Project: Negotiated Planning and Habitat Protection

The Riverside County Integrated Project (RCIP) emerged from a negotiated agreement among environmental activists, developers, and agricultural and other propertied interests. At its inception in the late 1990s, litigation over protecting habitat for a single species placed severe restrictions on potential development sites. A backlog in transportation planning was compounded by regulatory delays and increasing costs. Environmental advocates recognized that growth from neighboring counties would continue regardless of how Riverside County addressed it.

The RCIP's sustaining three-part structure is a federation of planning and regulatory controls. A Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP) includes over 150 species. The Community and Environmental Transportation Acceptability Process is designed to minimize project delays. County General Plan amendments establish a Certainty System to improve predictability for developers and property owners.

During this negotiation phase, each agency, organization, and individual/citizen stakeholder showed willingness to identify issues and interests. Ultimately, stakeholder representatives reached agreement in principle using the County General Plan as the primary integrating force. Environmental representatives acknowledged that finding viable solutions to habitat concerns before development begins was preferable to after-the-fact challenges. Developers could accept added fees for habitat planning and transportation improvements if they could expect greater certainty in County land use policies.

Similarly, farming interests in Riverside County could find a more predictable time frame when they may choose to sell their land for development purposes. The negotiated balance would reserve areas to protect plant and animal habitats, address community and environmental concerns before proceeding with transportation projects, and clarify land use policies in the County General Plan.

Observers noted a critical threshold was passed when negotiators acknowledged together that development would occur whether or not there was effective planning within the County. A second major shift occurred when discussions toward understanding the primary interests of each stakeholder. Development interests sought greater certainty that land use planning and regulation would be consistent. Added costs may be acceptable if they are predictable and fair. Agricultural and property owners also sought plan certainty. Advocates for transportation infrastructure concluded that environmental issues must be addressed before any project planning takes place. Environmental interests recognized that habitat protection would fare better in a coordinated regulatory and planning system.

RCIP planning and governance differs substantially from the other case studies. There is no physical "Office of RCIP." The County General Plan is a county function. Habitat protection and transportation planning are allocated among local, regional, state, and federal authorities. This complex implementation structure reflects the initial balance of stakeholder interests. The agreement for the conservation plan was signed by the County, fourteen municipalities; three local special districts, Caltrans, the state Department of Parks and Recreation, and Department Of Fish And Game; and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. It identifies approximately 1.26 million acres within an overall area of nearly 2,000 square miles. 843,500 acres are in unincorporated areas and approximately 372,700 acres within municipal authority.⁵ Local governments participate in the transportation impact fee program by adopting a model ordinance providing that fees collected for residential and non-residential projects will be directed to regionally-defined projects. The most striking feature of the RCIP as a collaborative process is that opposing and politically powerful groups came together to negotiate its existence. It

was driven by the need to streamline environmental review for major infrastructure projects. It was advocated and guided by active stakeholders who saw a need to negotiate a realistic response to unprecedented growth.

The SCAG Compass: Charting a Course for a Sustainable Mega-Region

Mobility, livability, prosperity, and sustainability are the guiding principles for the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Compass Blueprint. Compass began as an initiative within its Regional Board's Growth Visioning Subcommittee. The agency conducted surveys, workshops, and regional dialogues before adopting the Southern California Compass Growth Vision and Implementation Program in June 2004. Its primary implementation strategy is to encourage transit-oriented development by using only 2% of remaining compatible land within the region. This cooperative policy could accommodate regional population and economic growth through 2030. SCAG assists local demonstration projects consistent with Compass objectives.

The Compass program balances sustainable ideals with collaborative challenge. SCAG leadership worked intensively with staff to develop the initial guidance framework. Consultants assisted in proposing a sequence of actions to engage citizen involvement. After surveying public views on growth and regional issues, planners conducted workshops that asked participants to map a development pattern that would accommodate growth through 2030. This "chips exercise" offered options ranging from low-density residential zoning to concentrated mixed use categories. As this exercise progressed, nearly all groups traded lower density residential chips for ones that could concentrate development in transit-accessible locations. Later workshops with civic leaders, referred to as the Southland Dialogues, highlighted the role of SCAG subregions and local governments in implementing Compass objectives.

SCAG representatives and city officials noted that a persistent barrier for collaborative planning is fostering a link between its planning principles and local government policies and practice. One city official emphasized that local governments are not bound to the policies and authority of SCAG. Its 14 subregions provide a critical

communication link between the Regional Board and member governments. The challenge is fostering an integrated vision and compelling reasons for localities to adapt to regional sustainable development goals. Toward these ends, SCAG's primary tools are continuing support for demonstration projects and conveying the persistent wisdom of its 2% strategy to provide local benefits consistent with Compass principles.

A Regional Comprehensive Plan for San Diego County Governments

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) adopted a Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) as a long-term vision for county-wide growth and development. Its impressive scope links transportation, land use, housing, environment, and other elements into a coordinated growth vision toward 2030. Acknowledging that primary land use powers are seated in local governments SANDAG's plan proposes a "regional framework for local action."⁶ The agency integrates its "Metropolitan Transportation Plan" as a chapter within the overall regional document. Other elements address land use, housing, social equity, environment, urban form, and border policies.

The RCP acknowledges a central paradox for regional planning initiatives in California. On one hand, it recognizes that if trends continue unabated, there will be more expensive and fewer types of housing, continuing jobs-housing imbalance, less open space, and increased environmental degradation. On the other hand, the RCP also acknowledges that many necessary implementation steps rely on land use decisions by its local government members. The plan responds by proposing a framework that favors compact, mixed-use developments, and housing options for all income levels. Implementation includes creating an integrated and reliable transportation system, promoting collaboration among governments, and incentives to implement planning goals and objectives. A major premise is that improving connections between local and regional land use planning will guide other planning within the region.

(continued on page 10)

Survey of Public Opinion and Involvement

To complement case study research conducted by the UCR Center for Sustainable Suburban Development, the research team worked with the UCR Survey Research Center to field a public opinion survey of residents of Merced County, Riverside County, several counties surrounding Sacramento, and San Diego County.

The survey on citizen evaluations of local problems were designed to provide important contextual information on resident awareness of, and engagement in, local planning projects. First, respondents were asked to place each of 14 problems on a 7-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (not a problem) to 7 (severe problem). The regional average scores for each issue are listed in Table 2: Higher numbers indicate that the issue is a more severe problem.

Table 2. Severity of Infrastructure and Growth Issues

	Merced	Riverside	Sacramento	San Diego
Increased traffic congestion	5.4	6.2	5.9	5.9
Lack of affordable housing	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.7
Cost of new infrastructure	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.4
High property taxes	5	5.3	5.1	5.2
Overcrowded schools	5.3	5.3	5	4.8
Air pollution	5.4	5	4.9	4.7
High crime rates	5.2	4.9	4.8	4.8
Growth of cities & suburbs	4.6	5	5.1	4.9
Loss of farm land	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.3
Water pollution	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.8
Loss of animal habitat	4.2	4.5	4.6	4.5
Loss of open space	4.1	4.5	4.2	4.5
Crowded neighborhoods	4	4.5	4.1	4.2
Inadequate water supply	3.8	3.9	3.8	4.1

Not surprisingly, in all regions investigated, traffic congestion remains a primary concern of California residents. Increased traffic congestion earned an average score of 5.84 among all of respondents. It is also the most severe problem (or tied for this distinction) in each region as well. Increased

traffic congestion is most problematic in Riverside County, where survey respondents rate it 6.23 on average. The second and third biggest problems are the lack of affordable housing and the high cost of building new roads and water lines. While the lack of affordable housing appears to be perceived as a slightly more severe problem, the difference between these two is minimal. The fourth and fifth overall most severe problems we included on our list are high property taxes and overcrowded schools. Overcrowded schools are of particular concern to survey respondents in Merced and Riverside Counties, but perceived as less problematic in the other areas.

In sum, several of the issues collaborative planners in these areas are engaging the public to discuss are on the forefront of residents' minds and perceived to be major problems in each community.

Interest and Participation in Local Land Use and Growth Decisions

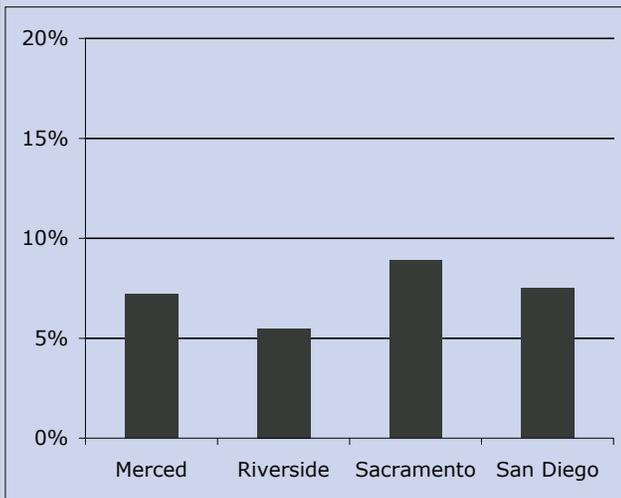
Members of the public are quite interested in local decisions on land use and growth. We asked respondents to indicate both their interest in land use decisions, as well as their personal involvement in these processes. Respondents could indicate that they have a lot of interest, only some, very little or no interest in local growth and land use decisions.

Riverside and Sacramento-area residents are most interested in local growth and land use decisions (in both places, more than 33 percent of respondents said they have "a lot" of interest in these decisions). Merced respondents ranked second (30.1 percent said "a lot"), and San Diego residents indicated the least interest (26.6 percent said "a lot").

However, while indicating that they are interested in local land use decisions, respondents are less likely to be directly involved in these decisions. We asked respondents whether they attend meetings, sign petitions, write letters to officials, or are otherwise personally involved in local land use and growth decisions. Figure 2 reports the proportion of those residents indicating that they are involved "a lot" in such decisions.

There was more self-reported participation in local land use and growth decisions in the Sacramento area than elsewhere, and self-reported involvement is lowest in Riverside, with 5.5 percent of respondents indicating they are involved in these decisions with great frequency.

Figure 2. Percent of Residents Involved “A Lot” in Land Use and Growth Decisions

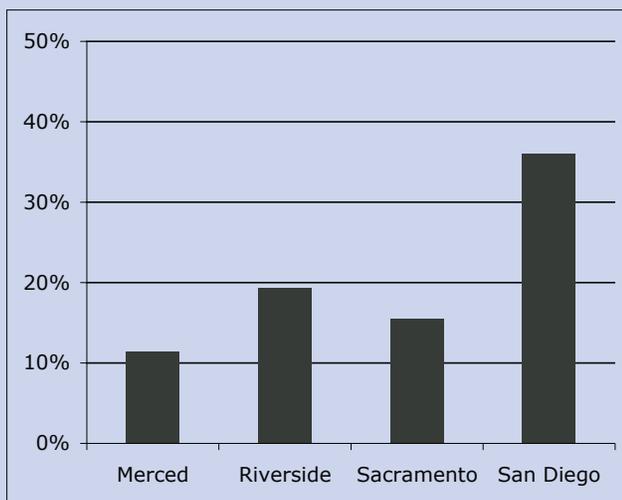


Knowledge and Evaluation of Collaborative Planning Projects

We also investigated whether residents of each of these communities remembered hearing anything about the collaborative planning project CSSD studied for CalTrans. We found only about one-fifth of these respondents remembered hearing something about the collaborative planning effort.

Figure 3 reports the percentage of respondents in each region who had heard of the collaborative planning project in their region. These responses do not represent a high level of public familiarity with these planning documents.

Figure 3. Percent of Residents Familiar with Regional Planning Project



This also demonstrated some regional variation, with Merced (11.4 percent) and Sacramento (15.5 percent) residents indicating less familiarity with their planning projects than respondents in Riverside (19.4 percent) and San Diego (36.0 percent).

However, these numbers represent a soft knowledge of the planning projects. Among those who had heard of the specific planning project, many were not sufficiently familiar with it to evaluate whether they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of it.

Nonetheless, in three of the four regions – Merced, Riverside, and the Sacramento-area – among the small group of respondents recalling the project, the collaborative planning effort had a more favorable than unfavorable reputation. Among our San Diego respondents, the collaborative planning project was remembered less favorably.

These survey results together suggest that while members of the public recognize severe problems in many of the areas regional planners are attempting to address with collaborative plans, the general public is perhaps less engaged than collaborative planning advocates might hope.

However, among the very small number of people who are engaged, collaborative planning may produce satisfying results.

Notes on the Survey

The survey was conducted March 12-April 24, 2007. The results reported here include responses from 961 interviews, representing an overall response rate of 44.2 percent.

Of these, 236 respondents come from the Merced County subsample, a 47.2 percent response rate, with a margin of error of approximately ±6.4 percent; 253 are from the Riverside County (±6.2 margin of error) subsample, with a 46.4 percent response rate; 258 respondents are from counties in the Sacramento region (El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba Counties), a 52.5 percent response rate with a ±6.1 margin of error; and 214 respondents come from the San Diego County subsample (±6.7 margin of error), with a 42.0 percent response rate.

The analyses reported here are based on unweighted data, pooling responses from our main samples and minority over-samples in each area. The survey results are authored by Martin Johnson, Department of Political Science, UC Riverside.

(continued from page 7)

SANDAG built on cooperative precedents over two decades to adopt the Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP). Planners noted strongly that it could build on precedent from the Regional Growth Management Strategy (1988-1992) and a process leading to a 1995 report outlining policies for habitat preservation, transportation, land use, housing, and state/local tax reform. That plan clearly acknowledges that SANDAG may influence, but not direct local land use decisions. It also provides an area-wide vision that includes housing, transportation, the regional economy, and relations across national and county borders. SANDAG has initiated a Smart Growth Incentive Program to support transit-oriented projects consistent with regional plan criteria.

In preparing the RCP, SANDAG planners engaged citizens representing diverse interests and communities. Extensive public involvement that included issue identification and defining a regional vision provided a basis for region-wide support in the implementation stage. Planners organized three rounds of public workshops, directed community outreach to underrepresented interest groups, and ongoing interaction with local government planners, managers, and officials. As with the other initiatives, one may focus on its limitations or see promise in innovative planning, long-term visioning, smart growth incentives, and intergovernmental cooperation.

SANDAG chose a comprehensive planning approach that is openly dependent on local and private will within its region. As such, it invites easy criticism concerning its realistic prospects for implementation. Yet, explicitness also brings attention to how the agency directs its authority and influence toward established goals. Success in implementing the RCP depends on effective working relationships between agency and local governments – primarily on transportation and land use decisions.

Common Insights from Uncommon Case Studies

These case studies provide a number of common elements – detailed below - that may be instructive for integrating transportation, land use, and environmental

planning in other regions. Some are clear: the importance of precedent; acceptance of growth trends; comprehensiveness; and that active stakeholder involvement improves prospects for collaborative implementation. The elements of regional leadership are more elusive; they must convey realistic acceptance of overlying regional issue while deflecting criticism for innovative responses. However, persuasion has its limits. Regional transportation planning cannot yet take precedence over competing local land controls. Finally, despite significant statewide bond issues, funding remains a major limitation.

Starting From Somewhere: The Importance of Precedent

Collaborative planning initiatives benefit from precursor efforts. Observers in San Diego, Sacramento, SCAG, and Merced all referenced the importance of prior regional efforts to current program effectiveness. Specifically, SACOG observers noted that Blueprint benefitted significantly from earlier attempts to link transportation planning with land use. MCAG's prior efforts included coordinated transit planning with local governments, state, and federal agencies to Yosemite Park. The RCIP emerged as a contrast to unguided development, and costly interim planning to protect habitat for a single species. SCAG had promoted "livable cities" and integrated planning before Compass. San Diego adopted a Regional Growth Management Strategy in 1988. SANDAG promoted a Region 2020 vision in the mid-1990s that included habitat preservation, transportation, land use, housing, and state/local tax reform.

Accepting Regional Realities: Growth Trends and Governance Capacity

Acknowledging regional trends and current governance capacity are threshold requisites for effective collaborative planning. This easily overlooked step was integral to progress in the cases we examined. SACOG planners created a Blueprint "base case" scenario by analyzing development approvals over a four-year period (1998-2001) and extending these trends forward to 2050. With convening assistance from Valley Vision, the agency conducted 30 city or neighborhood-level workshops, seven

that focused on county-level plans, and a region-wide workshop to select the preferred Blueprint scenario. The SACOG Board approved this land use vision unanimously. In Riverside County, negotiations to establish the RCIP passed a critical threshold when builders, property owners, agricultural, and environmental advocates acknowledged that growth would occur with or without an integrated response. That acceptance provided leverage for stakeholders to reach consensus on strengthening the County General Plan, a local-state-federal partnership for habitat protection, and local development fees to support environmental and transportation initiatives. SCAG Compass workshops confronted participants with regional realities and trends. For example, the 38,000 square mile SCAG region includes approximately 10,500 square miles of remaining developable land. Area population is expected to grow from over 18 million (nearly ½ of the state’s population) to nearly 25 million by 2030. Workshop organizers challenged stakeholders to “do the math” using GIS maps and chips representing density mixes to consider how future growth could be accommodated within the region.

Regional Leadership: “Don’t Say No!”

Regional leadership for collaborative planning combines realistic understanding with undeterred optimism. Though it is not a formal project finding, this observation does reflect leadership qualities noted in project interviews with key participants. These initiators could accurately recite regional trends. Many referenced the gap between regional transportation planning and local land use authority. They also cited fiscal constraints and environmental compliance issues. Some openly acknowledged the resistance they encountered. Our direct and cross-interviews revealed qualities of persistent persuasion among these program initiators. They would not equate lack of precedent with incapacity. In other words, these regional stewards would not accept “you can’t do that” when in fact they could.

Addressing Environmental Concerns Early and Often

Collaborative regional planning with transportation as a primary element benefits from early contact with

environmental interests and regulatory agencies. Transportation planning was prioritized in each of our cases. All except the Riverside project are formally charged with planning for regional transportation needs. These plans must comply with Federal Clean Air Act emission standards, habitat protection laws, and other regulatory requirements. Noncompliance can halt or seriously delay planned projects. The Partnership for Integrated Planning began as a Federal-State partnership with early and continuing communication as a primary objective. MCAG’s participation enabled regional planners to include environmental and resource constraints in its early planning stages. The RCIP sought to restructure planning for transportation corridors by consulting with communities, and with environmental interests and regulators, before proceeding with project design. Early consultation on environmental compliance may also lead to generating more acceptable project alternatives.

Collaborative planning initiatives benefit from precursor efforts. Observers in San Diego, Sacramento, SCAG, and Merced all referenced the importance of prior regional efforts to current program effectiveness.

Integrating Transportation Planning with Land Use and Other Plans

Collaborative planning extends beyond single function transportation planning to include land use, environment, housing, and other functional areas. Our case studies indicate that plan initiatives connected transportation, land use, environmental, and other planning functions. SACOG’s current transportation plan incorporates future land use choices from its adopted Blueprint vision. The MCAG RTP process brought environmental planning and regulatory concerns into the earliest planning stages. The RCIP linked habitat planning, environmental and community acceptance, and County General Plan amendments. SCAG’s Compass Blueprint seeks sustainable development by coordinating transportation, land use, and open space planning. The SANDAG RCP sets transportation as a co-element with urban form,

housing, natural habitats and resources, economic prosperity, public facilities, social equity, and relationships with bordering counties and Mexico.

“What’s In a Name?”

Labels help define a regional planning initiative. The terms Blueprint, RCIP, Compass, and provide a focus for collaborative planning initiatives. Project interviewees in Sacramento and for SCAG indicated that Blueprint and Compass respectively had become almost synonymous with “smart growth.” In Merced, Measure A (the ½-cent sales tax for transportation) was associated with meeting regional transportation needs. The SANDAG RCP is well recognized. The RCIP is recognized for its enhanced transportation approval process and multi-species habitat planning.

Collaborative regional planning with transportation as a primary element benefits from early contact with environmental interests and regulatory agencies.

Stakeholder Outreach: Business Not As Usual

Active stakeholder involvement in planning decisions can improve the prospects for implementation. In our Merced case study, several observers noted that staff outreach was a key getting 5 of 6 municipalities to adopt transportation impact fees to meet region-wide needs. Planners recognized early in the process that traditional public meeting formats were ineffective. MCAG staff reoriented its public outreach by meeting with representative stakeholder groups and within underrepresented communities. Participants shared positive responses about being consulted on goal-setting and scenario preferences. At SACOG MTP workshops, participants were asked to allocate expected funding among infrastructure alternatives (e.g. light rail, lane expansion, and new roads). Then, each proposal was evaluated with respect to impacts on vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Some

observed that this approach was “too real” because it pointed clearly to funding inadequacies. It also allowed frustration to be directed toward SACOG staff as they conducted these workshops. Whether or not it leads to funding innovations, the debate over funding priorities has altered.

Use of Technology for Collaborative Planning

“New graphic techniques for displaying the results of land use decisions enhance community involvement and integrated planning.”⁷ As stated in this Caltrans description, GIS- based plan exercises inform agency planners and workshop participants by projecting the impacts of decisions in capable form. The SACOG Blueprint process pictured the Sacramento region in 2050 based on a continuation of existing development trends. This “base case” scenario provided a vision that could be altered by adapting land use and transportation policies. These alternative “blueprints” could also be shown as mid-century land use patterns. SCAG Compass workshops followed a similar theme, but confronted participants more directly with allocating land uses that would accommodate long-term growth. Participants had a base map and an initial set of density chips. Many working groups chose to trade their lower density chips (representing single-family larger acreage lots) for higher-density chips that could be allocated to development with major transportation connections (highways or rail). These scenario choices helped participants see graphically how anticipated growth could be effectively limited to 2% of developable land if closely linked to transportation infrastructure. The SACOG MTP workshops allowed participants and planners to see shorter-term impacts on road usage from proposed combinations of projects in the upcoming budget cycle. These map-based scenarios or calculated traffic impacts also allowed participants to see the projected impacts of their choices within minutes or days rather than months or years. On another level, it challenged community participants and government officials to think in different contexts. Instead of, or in addition to, “where’s my traffic light?” discussions focused on larger regional transportation issues. When asked to accommodate growth for the next quarter century, participants saw the impact of their scenario choices on a regional map.

Collaborative Planning Leads to Collaborative Implementation

Collaborative planning that shows respective benefits for regional and local interests improves prospects for innovative implementation measures. Using cooperative influence as a primary tool, these initiatives met remarkable successes in plan implementation. The agreement establishing the RCIP multi-species habitat plan includes the County, fourteen municipalities, and local districts for flood control, parks, and waste management. Caltrans, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Department of Fish and Game are state-level parties to this agreement, as is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Separate inter-local agreements provide financial support for the habitat plan and RCIP transportation element. Local Development Mitigation Fees are directed to the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority for the MSHCP. Proceeds from fourteen local Transportation Uniform Mitigation Fee programs are managed by the Western Riverside Council of Governments. Similarly, MCAG allocates locally administered transportation impact fees toward regionally defined projects. The SCAG Compass program assists local governments members willing to encourage mixed density transit-oriented developments. Public workshops helped demonstrate that reliance on low-density zoning can impede prospects for attracting compatible development projects. This realization has encouraged member governments to adopt more flexible land development codes. It also illustrates how promoting local economic objectives can support the Compass strategy to direct development to 2% of available land within its region. SANDAG offers competitive grants to local transit-oriented development projects under its Smart Growth Incentive Program. Its technical working group meets regularly to exchange information and planning strategies. For SACOG, SCAG and SANDAG, promoting smart growth represents far more than idealized vision. In particular, the SCAG Compass workshops offer realistic development alternatives that promote Compass principles. As development is guided toward SCAG's 2% Opportunity Areas, there are correlated reductions in mobile source emissions. The Compass Demonstration Projects, SANDAG Smart Growth Incentive Program, and SACOG competitive grant program to promote Blueprint principles

offer "on-the-ground" examples for the programs they represent.

Beyond Influence and Carrots: Collaborative Planning Needs More Tools

Regional planning initiatives in California are limited in scale and authority. While these programs are impressive accomplishments, they rely on governmental and other stakeholders to see benefits in cooperation. SACOG can raise the dialogue and influence public and private land use practices. It cannot sanction inconsistent local actions. MCAG's impressive outreach and fiscal influence has not yet persuaded voters to approve a sales tax measure to support transportation improvements. The RCIP is a necessary but limited response to overwhelming growth impacts. The SCAG Compass can point and wait for local governments to select sustainable and self-serving growth policies. The exemplary SANDAG regional comprehensive plan admits at the outset that it relies on municipal cooperation for success. The agency can offer financial incentives for smart growth projects. It cannot condition or withhold funding for inconsistent local actions.

Conclusions

These five collaborative regional planning programs successfully invested state planning funds to combine regional leadership and local acceptance. They integrated transportation planning with land use, environmental, housing, economic, and other substantive planning areas. In combination, they illustrate cooperative data analysis, visioning and scenario planning, innovative finance, and unprecedented regulatory agreements. These programs are also marked by intergovernmental cooperation, active stakeholder involvement, and outreach to underrepresented citizens. For example:

- MCAG's resourceful planning staff adapted their public involvement strategy to meet directly within underrepresented communities and stakeholder interests. Observers referenced this fiscal realism and extensive public involvement as persuasive forces for member governments enacting transportation impact fees for regionally defined projects.

- Diverse stakeholder interests in Riverside County negotiated guiding objectives that formed the bases for the integrated plan.

- Initiatives within SCAG's governing board led to Compass guiding principles and a strategy to guide land development to 2% of remaining sites with the region.

- SACOG's Blueprint process selected a preferred development scenario toward mid-century by convening community-based stakeholder workshops.

- MCAG staff met extensively with focus groups to develop regional transportation goals.

- SANDAG revised its planning vision based on citizen preferences expressed in community meetings.

Planners also sought consensus on goals and future scenarios at their community workshops. For example, Merced regional planners included cost estimates associated with each future development scenario. Observers notably considered this economic tie-in as a contributing influence in local government decisions to adopt transportation impact fee ordinances. Likewise, SACOG convened interactive community workshops to determine its preferred Blueprint scenario.

Our review of collaborative regional planning in California, finally, indicates that program success depends on policy makers and other stakeholders at all levels of government to see benefits in cooperation. In fact, a November 2003 report from the Governor's office argues that state support for achieving goals and policies for sustainable development "...will require collaborative planning at and among all levels of government, with the State taking the lead at times, and acting as a partner at others."⁸ Caltrans can guide regional planning initiatives, and councils of governments (COGs) can raise the dialogue and influence public and private land use practices, for instance, but neither bodies can develop or implement local policy changes and other actions. More specifically, the RCIP is a necessary but limited response to overwhelming growth impacts. Even the exemplary SANDAG RCP admits at the outset that it relies on municipal cooperation for success; the agency can offer financial incentives for smart growth projects, but cannot condition or withhold funding for inconsistent local actions. Yet, in every case,

these collaborative initiatives emerged from individuals' shared visions to proven examples of regional cooperation and collaboration in the interest of planned growth.

List of Acronyms

COG: Council of Governments

EPA: Environmental Protection Agency

MCAG: Merced County Association of Governments

RCIP: Riverside County Integrated Project

RCP: Regional Comprehensive Plan

SCAG: Southern California Association of Governments

SACOG: Sacramento Area Association of Governments

SANDAG: San Diego Association of Governments

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- ² This is reflected in the Governor's Office of Planning and Research General Plan Guidelines and the Federal Highway Administration/Federal Transit Administration Briefing Notebook on the metropolitan planning process (see also Hostovsky 2006, Boyne et al. 2004).
- ³ "The essence of... [collaborative planning] is to delegate responsibility for planning to multistakeholder groups that engage in face-to-face negotiations to reach consensus agreements." (Gunton and Day 2003). See also Innes and Booher (1999) and Susskind and Hoben (2004).
- ⁴ The California Strategic Growth Plan, January 10, 2007, p. 16; Governor's Budget Summary, 2007-2008, pp. 66-71. See also Caltrans, Transportation Planning, Regional and Interagency Planning, California Regional Blueprint Planning Program, <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/orip/orip.htm> (available November 2007) and State of California, Department of Transportation, News Release, State Announces \$5 Million in Blueprint Planning Grants, November 30, 2006.
- ⁵ From the *Implementing Agreement for the Western Riverside County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan/Natural Community Conservation Plan 3* (2003).
- ⁶ San Diego Association of Governments, *Regional Comprehensive Plan for the San Diego Region 1* (2004).
- ⁷ Caltrans, Transportation Planning, Collaborative Planning Branch, http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/orip/Collaborative_Planning.htm (available November 2007).
- ⁸ See Governor's Office of Planning and Research, *Governor's Environmental Goals and Policy Report* (2003).

Notes

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¹ See more generally Innes and Booher (2002).

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