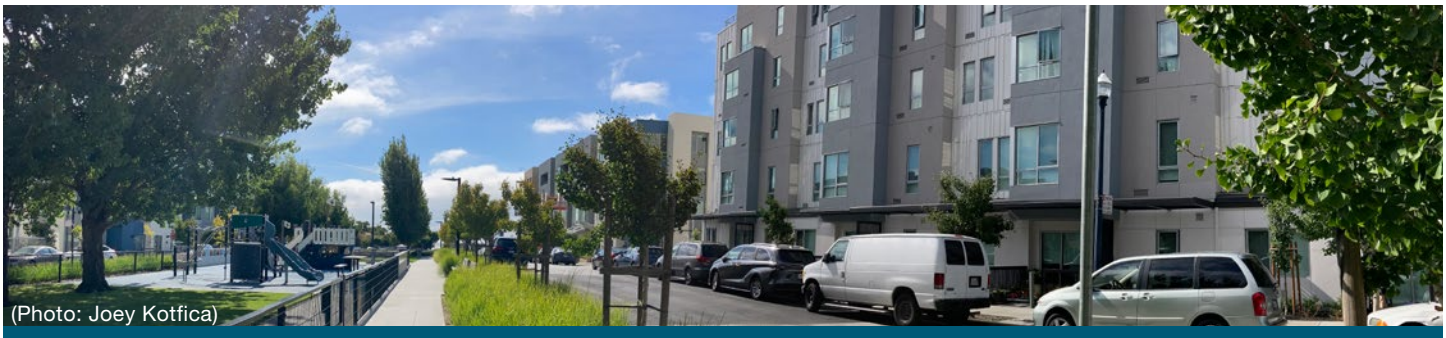
Modernizing Sustainable Communities Strategies: From Planning to Action

Delivering meaningful progress on California's climate, transportation and housing goals

(Photos, left to right: Karl Nielsen; Caltrans, Dist. 4; Karl Nielsen. All rights reserved.)

Since 2008, Senate Bill (SB) 375 (Steinberg) has required each of California's 18 metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to develop a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles, including by planning for adequate housing near jobs and transit. SB 375 has served California well, but it is time to shift the emphasis from planning to implementation to accelerate progress toward California's climate, transportation and housing goals.

Senator Cabaldon (D- Napa) is spearheading this effort with SB 1087. MTC-ABAG is co-sponsoring the bill with our "Big 4" MPO partners: Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG).



(Photo: Joey Kotfica)

The Legislature should provide new flexible, formula-based funding to the Bay Area and other regions to support implementation of Sustainable Communities Strategies. Like the innovative and effective Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) program, funds should be available for a wide range of activities to advance the strategies in each region's plan – from providing technical assistance to local governments developing their cycle 7 housing elements to funding projects and programs that accelerate affordable infill housing and increase low-carbon transportation options.

SB 1087 Modernization Goals

MTC and ABAG boards adopt Plan Bay Area, a $1.4 trillion long-range transportation and land use plan. The Plan prioritizes affordable housing, pedestrian safety and enhanced transit options, among other goals.

(Photo, top to bottom: Karl Nielsen; Noah Berger; Joey Kotfica)

1 Focus on Implementation to Accelerate Progress

The State invests billions of dollars each year in transportation and housing projects that impact California's ability to meet its climate goals. These funding decisions should align more closely with Sustainable Communities Strategies (SCSs). New, dedicated resources should be provided to MPOs to foster innovation and region-specific approaches. Additionally, streamlining SCS development will allow California metro areas to focus their energy away from technical planning exercises to delivering projects and programs that achieve state and regional goals and improve quality of life for their residents.

2 Reflect a Balanced Set of Goals

The modernized SCS should reflect state and regional goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing affordability, improving mobility and making travel safer, among others. This requires the Air Resources Board to consider multiple objectives when establishing GHG targets. Also important is ensuring regions maintain flexibility in implementation to manage trade-offs and balance priorities unique to each region while still advancing the state's climate goals.

3 Earn Trust and Drive Action

The modernized SCS should serve as a trusted roadmap for real investments and decisions. It must be understandable, engaging and grounded in reality. Today, key state modeling assumptions fail to reflect actual conditions, which makes the plan and its impact disconnected from the real world. By reflecting technological changes and other developments impacting vehicular emissions – such as California's transition to cleaner vehicles – the SCS can be a more credible, transparent planning tool and foundation for more informed policy decisions.

ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS
METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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