



Caltrans Division of Research,  
Innovation and System Information

Research

Notes

Planning, Policy  
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Information

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Project Title:  
UTC - Tracking Land Use Changes that  
Support Sustainable Mobility (NCST)

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## Tracking Land Use Changes that Support Sustainable Mobility

Investigating the conditions that influence local governments and MPOs to take land use and development actions that reflect the regional scenarios to reduce VMT

### WHAT IS THE NEED?

This study is undertaken in the policy context established by the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 (Senate Bill (SB) 375). This law acknowledges that land use planning can lessen automobile reliance, and requires each metropolitan planning organization's (MPO) 4-year regional transportation plan to include a "Sustainable Communities Strategy" (SCS). The SCS is expected to outline infrastructure investment and land use strategies that together would reduce driving by Californians and, thus, reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This study will contribute to the understanding of local and regional performance under SB 375.

As California regions are now developing and approving the second rounds of SCSs under SB 375, the state has turned attention to monitoring regional and local implementation. Are on-the-ground land use patterns and planning actions evolving in a direction that will support the regional SCSs and anticipated GHG reductions? Such assessment is important to Caltrans, as a key partner in MPO planning.



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## WHAT ARE WE DOING?

In this study, the research team will survey local governments and MPOs to investigate the conditions under which regional collaboration occurs on land use and development, particularly in supporting the land use visions of MPOs or comparable regional entities.

First, the research team will develop and pre-test a survey instrument for administration to local governments in California and to a reference group of local governments outside of the state. Thematic areas addressed in the survey may include: 1) level of local government understanding of / local policy alignment with the regional SCS and its land use vision; 2) local data collection & monitoring practices for (a) local land use policy, (b) physical development, and (c) anticipated development; 3) ability and resources for such data collection; 4) key factors shaping local development; and 5) communication and interaction between MPO and local governments on land use matters.

Next, the researchers will administer the survey to local governments, specifically planning directors from California's 540 cities. Then the survey data collected will be cleaned and augmented, and analysis of the survey data will include descriptive statistics capturing survey results and relevant cross tabulations. Finally, the team will produce a report describing what the survey responses reveal about local efforts and capacity to monitor land use, and their practices for communicating and sharing such knowledge with MPOs.

## WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

This research is expected to address the following question: "What circumstances and factors make individual local governments within a metro region more likely to take land use and development actions, such as zoning changes or specific development approvals, that reflect the regional land use scenario to reduce automobile dependence and vehicle miles traveled (VMT)?"

## WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

SB 375 anticipates that local land use will play an important role in making Californians' mobility more sustainable. It asks MPOs to better integrate planning for land use, transportation, and housing, however, MPOs have no land use authority, not even under their SCS. SB 375 fully affirms local control over land use; its success depends on voluntary local government compliance with regional GHG-reducing land use visions articulated in the SCS. Given SB 375's reliance on local governments' own land use decisions, it is essential to understand how land use in California communities is changing.

This project will illuminate the extent to which local governments report understanding the SCS and its land use policy implications, and to which they are taking action to support the SCS. It will also suggest what factors most influence local development choices and how local governments collect and share with MPOs the data that tracks land use and development. The research results will inform efforts by Caltrans, along with other state, regional, and local agencies, to make transportation planning more comprehensive, to develop new performance measures, and to facilitate implementation of regional SCSs.

## WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

To date, the researchers have completed and circulated the draft survey instrument soliciting feedback from Technical Advisory Committee members. They have also initiated outreach to partner organizations such as the Local Government Commission with whom they might partner for survey administration. Next steps are to complete the draft instrument, responding to the feedback given to date, field test it, and develop survey administration plan.