

Research Report – UCD-ITS-RR-13-07

Cultivating Cooperation without Control:
A Study of California's MPO-Driven
Smart Growth Programs

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Gian-Claudia Sciara
Susan Handy

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Gian-Claudia Sciara
Susan Handy

Institute of Transportation Studies
University of California, Davis
One Shields Ave., Davis, CA 95616

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Executive Summary

California’s Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, or SB375 establishes a new framework for the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) that plan and allocate federal funding for regional transportation investments in California. The law places these largely advisory planning bodies in a tricky position. On one hand, MPOs must plan for transportation investments that would support land use and development patterns to reduce automobile reliance and transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions; this plan is called the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS). On the other hand, MPOs themselves have no direct control over land use and development patterns. Because MPOs have no land use authority, SB375 anticipates that they will instead leverage the federal transportation funds at their disposal to incentivize local land use decisions compatible with their SCS (and ultimately SB 375 GHG reduction goals). Thus SB 375 does not ensure that local governments’ zoning and development choices will align with the region’s SCS, but in principle local governments that make SCS-compatible choices stand to benefit more from MPO-directed federal funds than those local governments that do not.

How well will such incentives work to achieve SB375’s desired results, and how will MPOs measure progress and goal achievement? Experts in land use and transportation acknowledge that present efforts to propel California toward smart growth will bear fruit most visibly in the long-term. To answer these questions, we looked to four longstanding MPO-driven programs to encourage smart growth in the state’s four largest metropolitan regions. Through these programs, MPOs in the Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco Bay, and Southern California metro regions have supported local capital and planning projects serving smart growth objectives since even before SB 375 was passed. The programs have typically favored projects that emphasize compact development; transit-, walk- and bike-friendly communities; jobs-housing balance; vibrant downtowns; and mixed-use centers.

Table 1. MPO-Based Smart Growth Programs in California’s Largest Regions

MPO	Smart Growth Program (year of inception)
SACOG	Community Design Program (2005)
SANDAG	Pilot Smart Growth Incentive Program (2005)
MTC	Transportation for Livable Communities Program / One Bay Area Grant Program (1997)
SCAG	Compass/Blueprint Demonstration Grant & Green Incentive Programs (2005)

To learn about MPOs’ experiences using funding awards to prod local government smart growth plans and projects, we analyzed these four programs, studying their formation and institutionalization, the projects they funded, related policies in the wider institutional environment, and any efforts to evaluate the programs’ impacts. To do so, we reviewed the program documents made available through public agencies, including program descriptions in the regional transportation plans, program reports, and memos; data on grant awards; and program application and selection review materials. To complement our document review, we interviewed key staff at each program about each its evolution, operation, funding, project selection, and evaluation. We describe our main findings below.

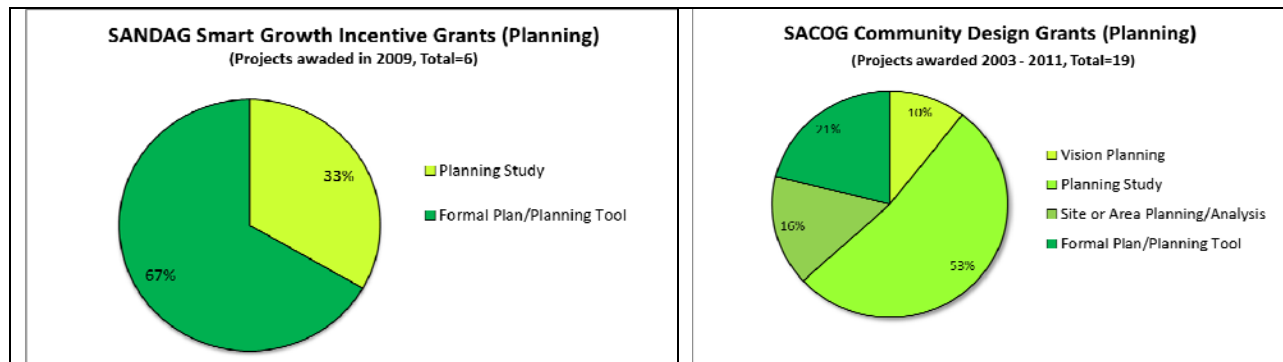
Program Results and Performance

1. Local governments have eagerly applied for funds from MPOs' smart growth programs to support their own projects.

Judging from projects pursued to date and reports of program staff, funds available through MPO' smart growth programs are in demand. If collected in the future, data on grant applications received or application approval rates could help to quantify that demand. It is possible that the grants' popularity reflects a substitution effect, whereby MPO funds are replacing local funds that would otherwise have supported the projects; however, the extreme financial challenges faced by California local governments since the 2008 economic crisis would appear to make this unlikely.

2. Local governments used the grants most commonly to improve conditions for bicycle and pedestrian travel, the areas surrounding transit stations, and streetscapes.

While almost all projects addressed several related issues at once, these were the top three elements of projects awarded through the MPOs' programs. Looking exclusively at planning grants, an encouraging finding is that planning projects largely supported *end stage* planning efforts, such as the production of General Plans, Plan Amendments, Specific Plans, and Site Planning, as opposed to more preliminary studies or vision planning efforts. (For instance, see the figures for the San Diego and Sacramento regions' programs, below.) Across the four MPOs' programs, the average size of capital awards ranged from about \$950,000 to \$1.44 million. Planning grants were smaller, ranging in average from \$37,000 to \$310,000.



3. Smart growth programs have largely favored capital versus planning investment, due to biases built into the programs' underlying funding sources.

The MPOs have used largely federal funding sources— including the Surface Transportation Program and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program – to initiate smart growth grants, and only capital projects are eligible for such funds. Still, cities often need foundational and late stage planning efforts to prepare for smart growth, like consensus visioning or drafting revised General Plans and zoning ordinances. With such efforts ineligible for federally-supported smart growth programs, consideration is needed of how to balance capital and planning needs.

Whereas reliance on restricted federal funds could limit activities to promote smart growth, San Diego's local sales tax-funded smart growth efforts, for example, fund a wider array of projects.

4. Data that would allow us to measure whether smart growth programs are leading to changes in people’s travel behavior are not being collected.

To date, evaluations of MPO-driven smart growth programs have been more oriented toward project audits and anecdotal project benefits. More robust before-and-after project evaluations are needed. Thoughtful measures of performance in SB375 terms could ascertain whether projects undertaken with regional smart growth funds (a) would have been made anyway without the MPO programs; (b) have contributed or are likely to contribute to travel behavior changes and reduced automobile use; and (c) may produce co-benefits such as improved community health or economic growth. Planning-specific performance metrics would also capture the potential longer term impacts of smart-growth oriented planning.

Lessons for Advancing Investment in Smart Growth and SCS Implementation

5. Each MPO used flexible federal transportation funds to start its smart growth grant program. If continued and expanded, such flexible support could foster greater regional efforts to spur compact growth and reduced automobile reliance.

MPOs’ ability to tap flexible federal funds like STP, CMAQ, and TE allowed them to launch these programs. In the San Diego case, the region even moved to institutionalize the program using its own sales tax revenues, approved through the TransNet initiative. Thus, the California MPOs’ smart growth programs show how flexible federal funds can nurture regional innovation. Federal support for flexible regional expenditures on a much larger scale was envisioned in a 2009 transportation reauthorization proposal,¹ but ultimately was not included in the MAP-21 legislation (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century) that ultimately passed. If pursued in the future, a significant expansion of flexible regional funds could extend smart growth principles more significantly into larger scale MPO-led transportation infrastructure investments.

6. Each MPO program evolved over time. Flexibly structured programs are important as MPOs learn how best to encourage local government smart growth activity.

By retaining flexibility in their programs’ structure, the MPOs were able to include new funding sources, expand and revise program eligibility to adjust to local circumstances and opportunities, strengthen project selection, and target specific obstacles to smart growth.

7. When investing in smart growth projects, policymakers must be wary of choices made exclusively to satisfy geopolitical equity.

Geopolitical tensions are inherent in promoting smart growth across a region, as local jurisdictions want to ensure they benefit. Yet, striving for equity among local jurisdictions when awarding program funds may dilute the impacts of available investment. At the same time, concentrated awards that maximize transformative effects of smart growth investments in

¹ U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. (2009). *Surface Transportation Authorization Act of 2009*. Retrieved from http://t4america.org/docs/062209_STAA_fulltext.pdf. (See pgs. 230-231)

specific places can tangibly shape the contours of growth across a region. Areas not selected for smart growth investments may perceive spending patterns as inequitable. Done well, smart growth investments may not make *everyone* happy.

8. Where they exist, MPO board resolutions or policies directing resources to areas targeted for growth can enhance the impact of regional smart growth programs. Such policies could also enhance MPOs' broader efforts to implement their SCSs.

Each of the MPOs whose smart growth programs we examined has some formally articulated policy or strategy to direct growth to specific areas within the respective region (e.g. the Southern California region's "2 percent" strategy, or the San Francisco Bay region's use of Priority Development Areas). Applied to the wider set of funds allocated by the MPO *in addition to* the smart growth grants, such policies could help to leverage those smart growth initiatives and enhance the region's prospects for realizing its SCS.

9. The demise of local redevelopment agencies in California may be an obstacle to realizing smart growth projects needing private sector participation.

While we did not gather empirical evidence about whether smart growth projects have been impacted by the disappearance of redevelopment funding, anecdotal reports say the realization of such projects is now more difficult. Under state law, city and county redevelopment agencies had been able to use property tax increment revenues to finance—commonly along with private developer funds or other governmental resources—capital improvements, land and real estate acquisitions, affordable housing, and planning and marketing (LAO 2011.) Indeed, studies of California redevelopment suggest it was a flexible tool that could improve targeted areas and help realize more affordable housing,² two outcomes likely to be compatible with smart growth efforts in many places.

² Taylor, M. (2011). *The 2011-12 Budget: Should California End Redevelopment Agencies?* Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst's Office.

***Cultivating Cooperation without Control:
A Study of MPO-driven Smart Growth Programs in California***

I. Smart Growth Incentive Programs and their Link to SB375

When it passed the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, known as SB375, the state of California set forth a policy framework for reducing transportation-related greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the state. SB 375 aims to reduce automobile reliance in California and resultant greenhouse gases. It does so by promoting transportation improvements that will help Californians drive less while traveling more by such other modes as transit, cycling, and walking. The law builds on an earlier, bold step in state climate policy, the Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32), which in 2006 committed California to lowering GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. Under SB375, the California Air Resources Board has developed specific GHG reduction goals for the state’s metropolitan areas. For example, the four largest metropolitan areas, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, and the San Francisco Bay Area, have each been asked to reduce GHG emissions 7 or 8 percent below 2005 per capita levels by the year 2020, and to meet more ambitious targets by 2035. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. ARB Approved Regional GHG Emissions Reduction Targets

	Percent change in per capita GHG emissions relative to 2005 levels			
	Sacramento	San Diego	San Francisco	Los Angeles
2020 Target	7%	7%	7%	8%
2035 Target	16%	13%	15%	13%

Under SB375, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) play a central role in regional efforts to meet these GHG reduction targets. These regional planning bodies, composed of local elected officials and representatives of state and local transportation agencies, craft the long range transportation plans and near term capital programs for investing federal transportation dollars in metropolitan areas. SB375 asks each California MPO to create a “Sustainable Communities Strategy” (SCS) document outlining the measures it will take to achieve its GHG target. Traditionally MPOs have not been required to address land use beyond acknowledging regional growth forecasts in their transportation plans. However, now the MPO’s SCS is expected to include infrastructure investment and land use policies that together would reduce the amount of driving Californian’s do and, consequently, that would decrease transportation-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The new law also connects each MPO’s Sustainable Community Strategy to California policy on affordable housing. The State Housing Element Law of 1980 requires that regional councils determine the projected need for housing across people of all income ranges through what is known as the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA). This assessment identifies each jurisdiction’s share of regional housing need, reflecting anticipated population and household growth, so that jurisdictions throughout the region plan accordingly for growth in households across the income spectrum. Under SB375, the SCS developed by an MPO to achieve GHG reduction must also accommodate the RHNA allocation plan. Thus, transportation

investments guided by the SCS would reinforce efforts to make housing available across income groups. Complementary transportation and housing policy could expand opportunities for California residents to live close to work and help to reduce commute distances.

SB 375 is grounded in research suggesting that compact and center-focused land use together with development practices that bring jobs and housing closer together can enable people to make fewer and shorter auto trips while using non-auto modes more frequently. At the same time, the law places responsibility for its implementation with regional planning organizations that, their SCSs notwithstanding, have no authority over the zoning regulations or development decisions that could help to reduce auto use and GHG production. Municipal and county land use ordinances and other policies, and locally funded transportation projects, remain firmly in the purview of local governments. How then are MPOs to deliver SB375’s goals? And what actions might enhance their ability to do so?

For insights into these questions, this paper examines smart growth grant programs that have been initiated by California MPOs well *before* SB375’s passage yet that share some of its aims. Over the last decade and a half, each of the MPOs serving the Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles regions has launched a competitive grant program to encourage local land development and transportation investments in accordance with smart growth principles. (See Table 2.) Through these programs, MPOs have reserved modest amounts of funds to support local governments’ capital and planning projects that align with smart growth objectives. Such projects may emphasize compact development; transit-, walk- and bike-friendly communities; jobs-housing balance; vibrant downtowns; and mixed-use centers.

Table 2. MPO-Based Smart Growth Programs in California’s Largest Regions

MPO	Smart Growth Program
SACOG	Community Design Program (2005)
SANDAG	Pilot Smart Growth Incentive Program (2005)
MTC	Transportation for Livable Communities Program / One Bay Area Grant Program (1997)
SCAG	Compass/Blueprint Demonstration Grant & Green Incentive Programs (2005)

The mechanism these programs rely on to influence local government land use decisions is the same one that SB375 asks MPOs to employ: financial incentives. Under SB375, an MPO should make strategic regional transportation investments, guided by its SCS, to encourage less automobile-reliant land use patterns. The law does not require local governments to reflect the regional SCS their land use policies, but jurisdictions that do so stand better chances in principle of securing federal funds through the MPO’s programming, or capital budgeting, process. Similarly, the MPO-based programs discussed here offer discretionary grants for local governments that would voluntarily undertake the kinds of smart-growth planning or capital improvement projects the MPO identifies as desirable.

With these programs well underway, the experiences that MPOs have collected in their design and implementation should shed light on MPOs’ ability to further incentivize local government land and transportation decisions to promote reduced automobile reliance and

focused growth. Yet, there has been little study of the factors that have helped or hindered program effectiveness, leaving some to wonder whether the “grants that some MPOs have been offering local governments to support plans and projects that implement regional land use provide effective implementation measures” (Rose, 2011, p. 4). Do we know if these programs are helping? Would the same investments have been made without the programs? How should we measure the effectiveness of regional smart growth incentives? Are they making a difference in terms of travel behavior? Are there model MPO initiatives that could be replicated to leverage MPOs’ limited discretion and to enhance prospects for realizing the SCS? What factors limit the realization or expansion of such programs? Should programs be changed, discarded? Should MPO do other things? What supportive actions might increase MPOs ability to deliver SB375 goals?

To answer these questions, we examine the smart growth grant programs in operation at the state’s four largest MPOs, and consider their different regional contexts. (See Table 3). This paper considers the formation and institutionalization of each program, local efforts supported by each program, related policies in place at the MPO or in the wider institutional environment, and prospects for evaluating the impacts of program investments. To conduct our analysis, we reviewed the program documents made available through agency websites, including program descriptions in the regional transportation plans, program reports and memos, data on grant awards, and program application and selection review materials. We also reviewed local and regional policies that seemed to bear directly on the programs’ aims. To complement our document review, we interviewed key staff involved in each of the programs. In semi-structured interviews, we spoke with staff about each program’s evolution, operation, evaluation, funding, and project selection criteria. For each program, we also asked clarifying questions and probed issues specific to each case, as emerged in our document review.

While the programs all share similar aims, they vary in terms of the types of projects they fund, with capital awards not eligible for funding in Los Angeles, limited planning projects funded in Sacramento, and a mixture of capital and planning projects in both San Diego and the San Francisco Bay Area. The MPOs also use different sources of funds to support their smart-growth grants, with federal STP, CMAQ and Transportation Enhancements being most popular and also available to support capital projects. (See Table 4.) And whereas the SCAG, the Los Angeles MPO, relies on federal and state planning funds and supports only planning initiatives, the San Diego MPO enjoys considerably more flexibility to fund both capital and planning work, given its reliance on fairly flexible local sales tax dollars. The capital awards made through all three capital-funding programs are similar in size, reflecting the scale of projects pursued. And while each region has funded its program at a different level, overall the programs typically represent a small share of funding that is programmed by the MPO for its regional transportation improvement program, or TIP. Looking more closely at these programs below helps us to identify important cross-over lessons for SB 375.

Table 3. Characteristics of Case Study Regions

	Sacramento	San Diego	San Francisco	Los Angeles
MPO	Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)	San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)	San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)	Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)
Regional Population (2010)	2,323,112 ³	3,095,313 ⁴	7,375,678 ⁵	18,051,534 ⁶
Regional Size	6,193 sq. mi.	4,230 sq. mi.	7,000 sq. mi.	38,000 sq. mi.
No. of Counties in Region	6	1	9	6
Counties in Region	El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo, Yuba	San Diego	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma	Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura
No. of Cities in Region	22	18	101	191
Size of Regional Transp. Investment Program (TIP)	\$3.3 billion (FY 2010/11 to 2013/14)	\$10.1 billion (FY 2010/11 to FY 2014/15)	\$11.1 billion (FY 2010/11 to 2013/14)	\$31.4 billion (FY 2010/11 – 2015/16)
Measures to Designate Targeted Growth Areas?	Transit Priority Areas; Centers & Corridors	Smart Growth Opportunity Areas	Priority Development Areas	The 2% Strategy

³ California State Department of Finance Population and Housing Estimates (2009) <http://www.sacog.org/demographics/pophsg/>

⁴ 2010 census, reported by SANDAG <http://profilewarehouse.sandag.org/profiles/cen10/reg999cen10.pdf>

⁵ California State Department of Finance Population and Housing Estimates (2009) reported by MTC: http://www.mtc.ca.gov/maps_and_data/datamart/stats/Copop.htm

⁶ http://rtpsc.scag.ca.gov/Documents/2012/final/SR/2012fRTP_GrowthForecast.pdf

Table 4. Summary of California MPOs' Smart Growth Grant Programs

	Sacramento	San Diego	San Francisco	Los Angeles
Program	Community Design Program	Smart Growth Incentive Program Pilot: 2005 Expanded: 2008–2048	Transportation for Livable Communities Program	Compass Blueprint Program
MPO	Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)	San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)	San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)	Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)
Year Started	2005	2005	1997	2005
Began as Pilot?	No.	Yes.	No.	No.
Dedicated funding	No.	Yes. (2008-2048 TransNet sales tax)	No.	No.
Federal Funding Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STP • CMAQ • Transportation Enhancements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation Enhancements (\$17 million) used in 2005 to capitalize the pilot program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • STP • CMAQ • Transportation Enhancements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidated planning grant (CPG) • FHWA Metro. Planning (PL) • FTA Metro. Planning (\$5303) • FHWA State Planning and Research-Partnership Planning Element • FTA State Planning and Research (\$5304)
State Funding Source(s)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation Development Act - State Transit Assistance fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caltrans Blueprint Grants • ARB funds (3 projects)
Local Funding Source(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swaps of federal funds from program for local agency funds, to support planning projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TransNet</i> sales tax funds; est. \$250 million (2008-2048) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swaps of federal funds from program for local agency funds, to support projects not eligible for transportation funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the future, potentially Transportation Development Act dollars from the "Local Transportation Fund."
Eligible Projects				
Planning	(limited)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Avg. Award	\$237,139 (2005-2013)	\$310,000 (2009)	\$36,640 (1998-2003)	\$104,307 (2005-2013)
Capital	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(not eligible)
Avg. Award	\$1,438,739 (2005-2013)	\$944,363 (2009)	\$957,676 (1998 – 2003)	

2. Examining Smart Growth Programs

2.1. Los Angeles: Compass Blueprint Demonstration Program

Program Launch and Institutionalization

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the MPO for the 6-county greater Los Angeles region, launched the Compass Blueprint Demonstration program in 2005. The grant program was designed to encourage innovative planning among SCAG's member counties and cities and to stimulate opportunities for sustainable development at the local level. Projects funded through the program are intended to serve as regional examples of "great planning."

Plans for the Compass Blueprint Demonstration program emerged from the region's earlier comprehensive growth visioning process. SCAG initiated the Southern California Compass process in 2000; regional forecasts suggested an additional 6 million people would live in the SCAG region by 2030, prompting the MPO to consider the transportation and land use challenges involved in accommodating growth while also preserving regional livability. Using Compass to conduct region-wide public surveys, workshops, technical modeling analysis, and expert reviews, SCAG engaged regional stakeholders in assessing future growth scenarios. The resulting Growth Vision Report, adopted by SCAG's board in 2004, articulated the regional commitment to the preferred growth scenario. Infill development would play an important role, with the L.A. Basin absorbing the most growth – both in households and employees – through infill (SCAG, 2004, 45).

While not a binding document, SCAG's Growth Vision Report establishes that land use should help to enhance regional mobility, livability, prosperity and sustainability. Proposed transportation and land use strategies would focus development in urban centers and existing cities; promote infill and mixed use development; encourage mutually supportive transportation investments and land use decisions; provide new housing near existing jobs and new jobs near existing housing; encourage transit-oriented development; and promote travel choices. The vision's basic principles and strategies mesh well with SB375's aim of reducing transportation related GHGs.

In addition to the Growth Vision principles and preferred scenario, SCAG's Compass process also gave birth to the "2% Strategy" for accommodating growth in the region. The strategy would concentrate new and infill development only in key areas that, together, comprise just 2 percent of the region's land area. By targeting metro and city centers, rail transit stops, bus rapid transit corridors, airports, and priority residential infill areas, the strategy aims to accommodate residential and employment growth in existing centers instead of isolated greenfields and to build on the transit and transportation infrastructure already in place.

Program Structure

SCAG initiated the Compass Blueprint Demonstration program to support its Growth Vision and the 2% Strategy. The program offers technical assistance, planning tools, and training to cities, counties, subregions and Councils of Governments (COGs), and County Transportation Commissions (CTCs), as well as non-governmental organizations partnering with a local jurisdiction or public agency. The grants provide assistance to local jurisdictions to:

- Update General Plans to reflect Compass Blueprint principles and integrate land use and transportation planning;
- Develop specific plans, zoning overlays and other planning tools to stimulate desired land use changes within areas targeted for development (2% Strategy Opportunity Areas);
- Complete the economic analysis and community involvement efforts that will ensure that the planned changes are market feasible and responsible to stakeholder concerns; and to
- Visualize potential changes, through innovative graphics and mapping technology to inform the dialogue about growth, development and transportation at the local and regional level.

(SCAG, 2008, p. 7-35)

Grants are not limited to only areas within the 2% Strategy, but projects within those areas would likely perform well under SCAG criteria for scoring candidate projects. The MPO's project selection criteria weigh a project's ability to encourage development near existing infrastructure; to promote infill, redevelopment, and density; and to maximize efficiency in infrastructure use (SCAG 2007). These program criteria favor locally-scaled planning efforts that could promote compact development and transportation alternatives and also reduce VMT.

When it first began the demonstration grant program, SCAG used its own pre-selected roster of consultants to provide planning services to grant recipients. It later abandoned this practice, as allowing local jurisdictions to contract with consultants of their choice provided for smoother project delivery. The MPO also revised its grant selection criteria after some experience with the program (SCAG, 2007); our attempts to document the precise revisions were unsuccessful.

To make the Compass Blueprint planning grants widely available to local governments, the MPO permits only one proposal per city to compete in each funding round. If a single jurisdiction submits multiple funding applications, SCAG first picks the most competitive one and then eliminates that city's other projects from the applicant pool.

To support the demonstration program, SCAG relies on several pots of federal planning funds that may be used for planning efforts but not capital projects. This distinguishes SCAG's program from peer programs that focus on capital projects or a mixture of capital and planning efforts. Other MPOs have used the regional-component of federal Surface Transportation Program (STP),⁷ typically allocated to MPOs directly, to support capital projects to advance

⁷ Unlike other sources of federal or state funds, STP funds can be used for both road and transit projects, including projects on Federal-aid highways, the National Highway System, public bridge projects, transit capital projects, and

smart growth and livability (FHWA, 2010), but SCAG does not have access to these funds. California state law SB 1435, passed in the early 1990s, *sub-allocates* STP (and CMAQ) funds from MPOs directly to county agencies based on regional population shares. In Los Angeles, SCAG suballocates its STP funds to 13 different County Transportation Commissions, placing the funds beyond the MPO’s control.⁸ Each county programs the funds for its own transportation programs.

To expand the Compass Blueprint Program’s substantive reach, SCAG plans to enlarge the program as part of a broader sustainability effort, funded in part by Local Transportation Funds (LTF) SCAG receives under the Transportation Development Act (TDA) of 1971.⁹ The MPO would continue supporting smart-growth oriented planning assistance but would also offer grants for active-transportation projects and green energy projects.

Program Impact

SCAG and its local government partners have completed over 80 Compass Blueprint Demonstration Projects to date and over another 40 projects are underway. Over time, SCAG has increased the total funds made available for demonstration grants, particularly in FY11/12 and FY12/13, perhaps resulting from LTF dollars made available. The average grant size has increased as well, largely reflecting inflation. (See Table 5.)

Table 5.

SCAG Compass Blueprint Demonstration Grants								
	FY 05/06	FY 06/07	FY 07/08	FY 08/09	FY 09/10	FY 10/11	FY 11/12	FY 12/13
Number of Projects	9	12	18	18	25	5	20	26
Total Contract Value	\$150,000	\$671,800	\$1,424,111	\$1,857,492	\$2,940,332	\$582,997	\$3,046,475	\$3,199,635
Avg. Project Value	\$16,667	\$51,677	\$71,206	\$103,194	\$117,613	\$116,599	\$152,324	\$123,063

(SCAG, Compass Blueprint Program Monitoring Statistics, personal communication, 2012)

bus terminals and facilities. Their flexibility and eligibility for capital projects (i.e. construction and construction-related activities) make them a desirable funding source.

⁸ California’s SB 1435 requires suballocation of federal STP funds directly to county transportation commissions, where they exist. There are no statutorily designated CTCs in the Bay Area, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission has instead used its regional STP funds to support smart growth grants.

⁹ The TDA dedicates a portion of the state’s sales tax revenue to the Local Transit Fund in each county for mass transit and other transportation purposes. Funds are distributed among counties based on where the revenues were collected, following a *situs* rule. Only a specified percentage of LTF funds may be used for planning and programming purposes (Caltrans, 2009). Until recently, state law specified that SCAG could spend up to 0.75 percent, but no more than \$1 million, of its annual LTF allocation on planning and programming purposes, even though the 0.75 percent far exceeded the \$1 million cap. Passed in 2009, AB 1403 eliminated the cap, and LTF revenues to SCAG have since more than quadrupled, providing some funds with which to expand the MPO’s sustainability efforts. (See also http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/09-10/bill/asm/ab_1401-1450/ab_1403_cfa_20090502_072841_asm_comm.html)

We sought to understand the substantive components addressed by the Compass Blueprint Demonstration Projects and the level of planning efforts undertaken through grant funded projects. To do so, we reviewed and analyzed the descriptions and supporting documents made available for completed projects on the SCAG website.¹⁰ First, we categorized projects according to the kinds of activities or issues the project sought to address. We found that most demonstration projects had several elements. (See Table 6.) The grants have been used most frequently to identify strategies or recommendations for land use planning and development (41 percent of projects). The program has also supported a significant amount of planning activity for transit stations and station areas (29 percent of projects). Many local governments have also undertaken market feasibility studies of various development proposals and planning for TOD projects with Compass Blueprint support. Public planning charettes and workshops and corridor studies that focus on economic revitalization have been popular as well.

Table 6. Activities/Issues Addressed in Compass Blueprint Projects (Planning)

Project Component	Number of Projects (total=82)	Percent of Projects*
land use / development strategies/recommendations	34	41%
transit station/ station area planning	24	29%
market/ financial feasibility	20	24%
transit oriented development	18	22%
corridor study	16	20%
public workshops / charettes	16	20%
urban design recommendations / strategies / guidelines	14	17%
infill analysis	9	11%
mixed use development	8	10%
downtown revitalization	7	9%
parking study / analysis	6	7%
scenario planning	6	7%
bike/ped improvements	4	5%
freeway cap	4	5%
park	4	5%
streetscape improvements	4	5%
economic development / revitalization	3	4%
governance models	3	4%
funding study	2	2%
transit service study	2	2%
zoning code development – overlay	2	2%

*Because projects may have several components, percentages do not add to 100.

Second, we also sought to establish the extent to which the project might prepare the sponsoring local government to undertake specific development actions or land use changes to advance smart growth principles in the city’s form. Because planning projects themselves do not produce constructed physical improvements, their impacts in terms of SB-375 goals can seem less tangible. Planning projects also vary in terms of whether or how they change a city’s

¹⁰ See <http://www.compassblueprint.org/projects/complete>.

approach to growth or infrastructure investment. For instance, a vision plan could articulate guiding principles or aesthetic models which a city wishes to realize, however the city may or may not following it through. For these reasons, we sought to distinguish between planning efforts that would likely lead to or had already led to zoning code changes or physical developments reflecting smart growth principles from efforts that were more preliminary in nature, such as visioning exercises or initial planning studies.

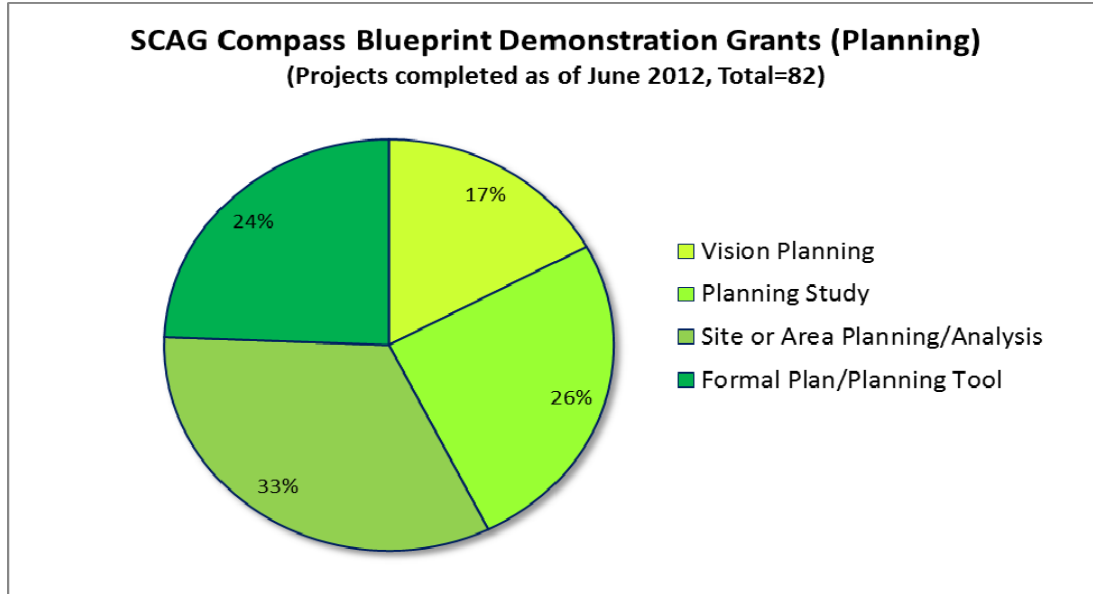
To draw such distinctions, we grouped SCAG’s demonstration projects into four categories. First, we identify projects that sought to develop planning tools with formal status as binding policy documents or implementing regulations under California land use law; these “Formal Plans” included projects updating a general plan or element thereof, developing an area plan, revising zoning codes and ordinances, or developing a specific plan. (See Table 7.) Each of these efforts varies in terms of the amounts of planning detail it prescribes and legal force it carries, but all are fairly mature efforts to shape the development of a city or area within a city. We then distinguished “Site/Area Planning/Analysis” projects, which typically analyzed the market feasibility of developing a specific site or zone. “Planning Studies” examined more generally the potential for change in a certain area or on a specific parcel. Finally, “Vision Planning” projects focused on establishing consensus among stakeholders on ideas and principles to guide a city’s future planning, and are the most exploratory efforts to determine a course of planning action.

Table 7. Planning Tools Grouped as “Formal Plans”

Planning Tool	Description
General Plan	“intended as the supreme document guiding the future physical development of a community – the set of policies from which all decisions flow” (Fulton & Shigley, 104) California’s 1971 consistency law requires that zoning ordinances and subdivision procedures be consistent with the general plan.
Area Plan / Community Plan	a more specific version of the general plan, dealing with a smaller geographic area; has the same force of law as a general plan. (Fulton & Shigley, 107)
Zoning Ordinance	“designed to translate the general plan’s broad policy statements into specific requirements.... [It] divides up all land in the city into zones and specifies the permitted uses and required standards in each zone.” (Fulton & Shigley, 103)
Specific Plan	“an implementation document...designed to implement the general plan (or an area plan) within a certain area” (Fulton & Shigley, 213); typically contains detailed development standards; akin to a zoning ordinance; not part of the general plan.

Roughly one-quarter of Compass Blueprint projects have supported projects we identify as formal, where some evidence of implementation and resulting change might be expected from completed projects (Figure 1). Future analysis could evaluate those projects to establish their precise impacts. For instance, were resulting general plan updates or zoning code revisions adopted? Where zoning codes were approved, have underlying densities changed? Such analyses could suggest the circumstances under which planning efforts are more likely to produce substantive changes in the physical environment. They could also guide efforts to assess the outcomes of other planning investments to further SB375 goals. Further, this same typology could be used to assess whether the planning efforts supported by other MPOs’ smart-growth programs display similar proportions of projects that are more preliminary or mature.

Figure 1.



In 2010, SCAG staff conducted their own evaluation of the program and projects completed to date; their work deserves attention for its efforts to characterize and measure program outcomes. For the evaluation, SCAG staff interviewed local government staff at 35 partner agencies about the projects' results and the process of working with SCAG on the Demonstration Projects. The evaluation presents program's effectiveness in three different ways (Brandenburg, 2012). First, it reports general feedback from grant recipients, noting that "Results were overwhelmingly positive and nearly all respondents were interested in applying for future Compass Blueprint assistance." Second, it assesses project outcomes by distinguishing projects that were on-hold or shelved completely from those still actively in use as policy or planning guidance. About half of the projects reviewed were still active, but just about as many were currently having no impact.

[O]f the 35 partner agencies, 19 reported that the projects were still active, 12 were classified as on hold, and 6 were classified as shelved or permanently in-active. "Active" status is defined as a) adopted by city council, planning commission, or agency board, b) being used as the basis for further plans, c) used as the basis for grant applications, or d) referred to regularly in agency operations. Of the 12 projects defined as "on-hold," nine were due to economic conditions and three due to change in schedule of pending transportation improvement. Of the six projects classified as "in-active," two were shelved due to change in economic conditions and four were studies the city agency no longer wanted to pursue, or that the city was dissatisfied with the consultant's work.
(Brandenburg, 2012)

Finally, the evaluation also sought capture the number of acres, housing units, commercial square footage, and retail square footage affected by funded planning studies and efforts. (See Table 8.) Such metrics are likely to assume growing importance as California regions endeavor to demonstrate their progress toward SB375's goals; however, they are difficult to state

accurately. As the SCAG evaluation notes, “due to the wide variability in types, scales and planning phases of Demonstration Projects, the land use statistics are rough estimates and are not reliable projections of what will be built” (Brandenburg, 2012).

Table 8. Land Use Metrics for Compass Blueprint Projects Completed by August 2009

Land Use Statistics (through 08/09)	
Total # Housing Units Studied (high)	39,821
Total # Housing Units Studied (low)	33,501
Total Combined Cmrd. Sq. ft. Studied	32,553,415
Total Retail Sq. ft. Studied (high)	9,455,836
Total Retail Sq. ft. Studied (low)	8,423,471
Total Office Sq. ft. Studied (high)	15,132,414
Total Office Sq. ft. Studied (low)	14,080,722

Observations

For considering SB375 implementation in light of California MPOs’ existing experiences with encouraging smart-growth oriented land planning, the Compass Blueprint Demonstration Program is especially interesting. Whereas other MPO smart growth programs support both smart-growth planning initiatives and capital projects, Compass Blueprint grants have largely supported direct technical assistance only for planning efforts. Constraints on the funding sources supporting the program prohibit SCAG from awarding dollars for construction or even pre-construction oriented activities. Thus, the SCAG program provides a view of the kinds of planning activities local governments have undertaken in response to such incentives for smart growth. It also provides an opportunity to consider how to evaluate the performance of exclusively planning-oriented projects in light of SB375 aims. The program also provides insight into organizing a MPO-based effort toward SB375 goals in an extremely large region characterized by strong sub-regional entities.

First, federal funds helped to spur local innovation via the Compass Blueprint Demonstration Projects. In particular, SCAG used specific pots of federal planning funds including FHWA and FTA Metropolitan Planning funds (PL and §5303, respectively), as well as Planning and Research funds to support the local demonstration planning grants. Federal funds, albeit different ones, play a key role in enabling smart growth innovation by California’s other large MPOs.

Second, SCAG’s regionally directed investments in local land use planning involve a conundrum. As an MPO, SCAG cannot compel its member local governments to make specific land use decisions. Yet, its planning grants offer one way to nudge local planning to align with SB375 aims and SCAG’s SCS. After all, it is the land use and planning policies of local governments that determine whether, where and how regional growth will be accommodated, making local policies foundational to SCAG efforts to promote smart growth and reduce automobile reliance.

At the same time, it can be difficult to ensure that planning investments are realized, and this tension that arises in SCAG’s administration of the Compass Blueprint grants. To address the inherent uncertainty of planning efforts, SCAG staff has considered asking future project applicants for evidence of the jurisdiction’s commitment to act on and implement policies and

recommendations resulting from a Compass Blueprint funded planning effort. For instance, a supporting letter from an applicant jurisdiction's city council might affirm the council's commitment to zoning code revisions. SCAG staff report contemplating making awards only to projects likely to produce zoning changes, however this was unpopular; many communities wanted to do more preliminary planning studies.

Another conundrum relates to evaluating outcomes of planning investments in terms SB375 goals. How should we assess the contribution of recommended, proposed or approved land use policies to changing people's travel choices? The Compass Blueprint demo program is an important case, as it is an element of SCAG's Sustainable Communities Strategy (2012 RTP/SCS). If SCAG expects the program to help reduce regional vehicle travel and associated GHGs, how will it know if it succeeds? In its own program evaluation, SCAG estimated the acreage, housing units, and commercial and retail square footage potentially affected by its demonstration projects. Yet such metrics are difficult to compile accurately and may be irrelevant if plans do not get built as anticipated. The need for robust performance measures assumes growing importance as California regions endeavor to demonstrate their progress toward SB375's goals, and as new federal transportation legislation. Further, how should we weight the contribution of planning and visioning processes that produce consensus in support of smart growth strategies? Such processes may not directly yield SB 375-compatible zoning changes, but they may increase the likelihood that local governments will pursue such changes in the future.

Finally, as is common with most discretionary allocation processes, SCAG has the choice to concentrate its demonstration grants on specific areas or to distribute them more widely. SCAG's decision to distribute its resources broadly likely helps it to achieve wider political buy-in for the program. On one hand, given the sheer size of the multi-county SCAG region (38,000 square miles, almost 200 separate municipal and county governments, and over 18 million residents), and its tradition of strong county-level transportation commissions, this approach may be effective. Also, the planning projects funded by SCAG's program tend to be less costly and hence more easily spread among more recipients than are capital projects. On the other hand, it could be more productive to concentrate planning assistance in fewer key areas and projects with potential to be highly impactful.

2.2. San Diego Assoc. of Governments (SANDAG): Smart Growth Incentives Program

Program launch and institutionalization

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), which serves as both a regional council of governments and an MPO for the single-county San Diego region, launched its Smart Growth Incentives Program in 2005 to encourage the development of projects integrating smart growth land uses and transportation facilities (SANDAG, 2005). The program had been envisioned earlier in the MPO's 2030 long range transportation plan and SACG's Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP). The RCP established a clear policy commitment to better connecting transportation and land use decisions while also respecting local sovereignty over land planning. It called for applying smart growth principles to local development choices and regional transportation spending decisions, and defined smart growth as

developing the region in a way that creates communities with more housing and transportation choices, better access to jobs, more public spaces, and more open space preservation. Smart growth more closely links jobs and housing, provides more urban public facilities such as parks and police stations, makes our neighborhoods more walkable, and places more jobs and housing near transit. It reduces land consumption in our rural and agricultural areas, and spurs reinvestment in our existing communities.

(SANDAG 2004, p. 2)

To balance local autonomy with a regional approach to land use, the RCP specifically calls for incentive-based strategies to spur smart growth development in key areas. The Smart Growth Incentives Program (SGIP) is one such strategy.

SANDAG started SGIP as a pilot program in 2005 with \$17 million in federal Transportation Enhancements funding, and also recognized the need for more sustained funding. The MPO formalized the initiative in 2008 with dedicated 40-year funding through the county half-cent sales tax program known as TransNet. This tax was first approved by San Diego County residents in 1987 to fund a 20-year program of transportation projects throughout the county, and when residents voted in 2008 to extend the tax another 40 years, a small share of the anticipated revenues were set aside for the Smart Growth Incentive (SGI) program. Of the \$14 billion that the TransNet tax is expected to generate for transport investment through 2048, roughly 2 percent or \$280 million will be available to support the SGI program's local projects. To prepare for the program's next phase, SANDAG convened planning and public works directors from the region to develop the program guidelines and selection criteria for funding.

In the SGI scoring process, projects receive points for being within so-called "smart growth opportunity areas." The Regional Comprehensive Plan of 2004 called for the designation of specific Smart Growth Opportunity Areas to guide "local governments, property owners, and service providers as to where smart growth development should occur from a regional perspective (SANDAG 2004, p. 5). The region has identified 204 locations as target areas for "smart growth," identified in tiers as existing urban, town, and community centers, as well as mixed use corridors served by transit and capable of supporting less automobile-reliant land

development patterns. All else being equal, these Smart Growth Opportunity Areas stand better chances of receiving SGIP grants than do areas not targeted for smart growth.

Resolution 33, adopted in 2006, is a second SANDAG policy that influences its award of SGI funds and also bolsters its efforts to implement SB375. This board resolution requires the MPO, when awarding MPO discretionary funds like those for the SGI program, assign at least 25 percent of available points based on local performance in providing affordable housing.¹¹ The policy will help the San Diego MPO satisfy SB375 in terms of the law's attention to the planning and production of affordable housing (SANDAG 2012a).

Since the SGI program's adoption, an explicit objective has been "to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging travel by means other than private automobile. In particular, the projects should support public transit usage by being located in areas served by transit, and by improving access to transit" (SANDAG 2012b, 33). Recently, SANDAG has proposed adjusting its SGI scoring criteria to reflect recent adoption of the MPO's Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). New criteria will reflect the MPO's design guidelines for smart growth, and its increased emphasis on Transportation Demand Strategies, while also incorporating lessons from its 2009 grant awards.

Program Impact

To date, SANDAG has made only two rounds of SGI grant awards, one under the 2005 pilot program, and the other after the program was funded by TransNet. The first pilot grants funded 16 projects, averaging \$1.4 million each. These were largely micro-scale capital projects that featured pedestrian improvements as a core element for a few-block stretch, a bus stop or transit station, or town square. Place-making improvements were a common focus, and some also provided for the addition of bicycling amenities and lanes. While the projects did aim to better conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users, none addressed large enough an area to make a very big impact, and SANDAG staff have acknowledged that the projects were not of a scale to be transformative.

Next, using TransNet funds in 2009, SANDAG had the flexibility to fund both capital *and* planning projects in its second round of awards. Of the 14 awards made, eight were for capital projects. These tended to be projects costing roughly either one-half a million dollars or several million dollars. (See Table 9.) Pedestrian improvements featured in almost all the projects, with smaller projects treating discrete intersection improvements and bigger projects addressing a limited stretch of corridor or larger subarea or place. Improvements were often focused on transit access, particularly trolley stations and bus stops. The planning grants awarded sought to transform corridors, transit areas or stations, or specific areas, incorporating smart growth and TOD elements, and also to combine land use and mobility planning. Overall,

¹¹ Performance is based on (a) whether a jurisdiction meets or exceeds the region's average proportion of low income households; (b) the jurisdiction's share of the total number of lower-income housing units produced in the region over the most recent five years; (c) the jurisdiction's actual number of lower income housing units as a percentage of its total housing units; and (d) the percent of lower-income households residing in each jurisdiction.

across both rounds of funding, SGI projects most commonly sought to improve bicycle and pedestrian accommodation, the areas around transit stations, and streetscapes. (See Table 10.)

Table 9.

SANDAG Smart Growth Incentive Program Grants					
Project Averages					
	No. of Projects	Grant Amount	Match amount	Total Project Cost	Match as % of project cost
Pilot Grants, 2005	16	\$1,404,250	NA	NA	NA
Capital Grants, 2009*	8	\$944,363	\$809,788	\$1,754,150	37%
Planning Grants, 2009*	6	\$310,000	\$250,667	\$560,667	38%

* Figures for 2009 capital and planning grants, match, and project cost amounts are all drawn from the successful grant applications, not final award contracts. Thus, the figures are estimated.

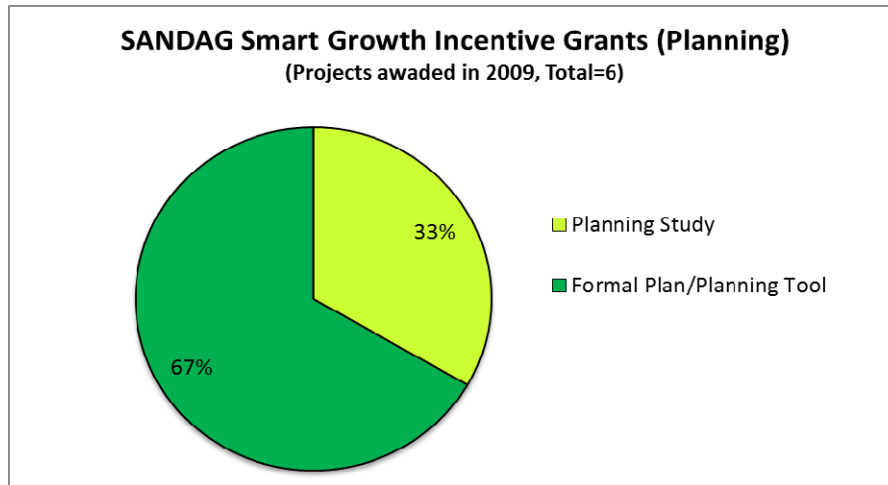
Table 10. Activities/Issues Addressed in 2009 SANDAG Smart Growth Incentive Program Projects (Capital and Planning)

Project Component	Number of Projects (total=14)	Percent of Projects*
Bike/ped improvements	12	86%
Station area	8	57%
Streetscape improvements	4	29%
Land use/development strategies/recommendations	3	21%
Mixed use development	3	21%
Downtown revitalization	2	14%
Urban design recommendations/ strategies/guidelines	2	14%
Economic development/revitalization	1	7%
Transit oriented development	1	7%

*Because projects may have several components, percentages do not add to 100.

Six of the 14 grants made available through the SGI Program in 2009 supported planning efforts. Of those six, four projects were end-stage planning efforts designed to produce master plans, specific mobility and land use strategies, and supporting environmental documents, in other words the kinds of products that would position the sponsoring local government to implement smart growth oriented projects. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2.



To better understand how its grants have impacted travel behavior in the region, SANDAG is beginning to require that applicants for its Smart Growth grants (and its related Active Travel grants) provide for baseline travel data collection in their project scope of work, schedule, and budget. The MPO would provide up to \$5,000 per project for that effort and is also developing a standard methodology for local jurisdictions to follow when collecting baseline data on travel patterns. Once projects are complete, the MPO intends to conduct the after-evaluation itself and to measure results against the earlier baseline, establishing a more empirical approach to evaluation than has been used elsewhere.

Observations

The launch and evolution of SANDAG's SGI program illustrates how federal funding tailored to non-traditional, non-highway investments can kick-start innovation in metropolitan regions and leverage longer term funding for SB375 compatible investment programs. In this case, SANDAG used local sales tax revenues to institutionalize the SGI program, shifting away from federal funds used more commonly in the other programs.

The use of local sales taxes is itself of interest. Local governments have increasingly leaned on local option taxes to support traditional infrastructure investments, particularly in California (Crabbe et al, 2005). This trend has raised concerns, as funding transportation with sales tax revenue breaks the traditional link between user payments for the transportation system and benefits derived from using it. Also, the expenditure plans associated with local option taxes can also be highly politicized, as ballot approval typically hinges on the political appeal of the program of investments the initiative will fund (Wachs, 2003).

Absent other sustainable funding sources, however, funding SB375 compatible transportation and land use investments with region-wide sales tax programs could have advantages. For one, it may be more politically feasible to impose or reserve a portion of general sales tax than it is to raise state gasoline tax funds. Locally generated funds also provide more spending flexibility than do siloed state or federal transportation funds. SGI projects, for

instance, can include “a broad array of transportation- related infrastructure improvement projects that will assist local agencies in better integrating transportation and land use” (SANDAG, 2012, p. 54). Because the local TransNet ordinance determines eligibility, local elected officials may aggressively fund transportation-land use integration projects, if they choose. Sales tax initiatives, typically are approved for one or more decades at a time, could allow an MPO to institutionalize such a program, perhaps providing it greater stability than federal or state funds.

Program administrators have observed that local officials have pressed for greater geopolitical equity in the award of SGI grants, noting that “the SANDAG Board of Directors would like to see a wider distribution of projects and more examples of smart growth in different settings throughout the region.” Additionally, program planners have noted that “desired larger scale, transformative projects have been difficult to achieve” (SANDAG, 2012b, p. 18). Desire for both “transformative projects” and widely distributed projects and varieties of projects may be incompatible. For example, the high number of designated Smart Growth Opportunity Areas sites will help to distribute associated resources widely and accommodate geopolitical demand, but may also dilute the impact of smart growth investments by spreading them too thin.

A final observation concerns the limited frequency with which SANDAG has held competitions for grant awards thus far. With only two funding cycles since 2005, the SGI program is not regularized as an annual occurrence. It is possible that more frequent or annual funding cycles could heighten the impact of such incentive grant programs, as local governments would then continually consider projects to submit for funding awards.

2.3. Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG): Community Design Program

Program Launch and Institutionalization

When adopting its 2025 long range plan, or metropolitan transportation plan (MTP), in 2002, the board of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), the region's MPO, set aside \$500 million for a new, smart-growth grant initiative called the Community Design program. With VMT-reduction as an explicit objective, the program anticipated the transportation planning framework later formalized by SB375.

The intent of the Community Design Program is to use regional transportation funding to promote the construction of land use developments...that lead to fewer vehicles miles traveled and more walking, biking, and transit usage. The program results from the recognition that land use influences travel behavior and can be a powerful tool to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the regional transportation system.

(SACOG, 2006, p. 62)

Today, the program figures in the regional strategy for realizing SB 375 targets, by providing “[s]eed funding to encourage smart-growth development projects complementary to this MTP/SCS that may otherwise not happen” (SACOG, 2012, p. 66).

The Community Design program has its roots in the Sacramento region's well known Blueprint Project planning process, undertaken by SACOG, in the early 2000s. Experiencing significant population growth and development throughout the 1990s, the 6-county SACOG region, which stretches from Yolo County west of Sacramento to the Lake Tahoe Basin to the east, sought to plan for the high levels of growth that were forecasted to continue. The SACOG Board of Directors initiated the Blueprint Project to invite citizens and decision-makers to examine and weigh in on alternative visions for growth for the region. In December 2004, the board unanimously adopted the “Preferred Blueprint Scenario,” a vision to accommodate growth while promoting compact, mixed-use development, and increased transit options, rather than to allow continued low density development.

This regional commitment to smart growth planning principles laid the groundwork for the Community Design Program. Materials describing the program and application requirements make repeated links to the region's Blueprint principles, suggesting the importance of the MPO's visioning process and the state support it received from Caltrans' Blueprint Planning grant program.

To fund the program over the life of the 2025 plan, SACOG reserved funds from the region's share of federal Transportation Enhancement (TE), STP, and CMAQ dollars. The 2030 MTP increased the region's commitment to the program to \$2.2 billion through 2035 (SACOG, 2012, p. 4-2). Reflecting the area's history of subregional organization, the program funds projects in only four (Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba) of the region's six counties, where SACOG serves as both MPO and state designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency. El Dorado and Placer Counties each have an independent RTPA and thus spend their own sub-

allocation of CMAQ and STP funds under SB1435; this relationship is formalized in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between SACOG and the two counties.

Projects funded

Given the program’s underlying federal transportation funding sources and their emphasis on capital projects, SACOG has increasingly stressed the importance of federal-aid eligibility in grant selection. Projects must have a significant transportation element, such as the construction of infrastructure, environmental review, design, or right-of-way purchase.

Initially, the program allowed and funded planning related projects. However, planning activities are generally not allowed with the majority of sources of funds that the program provided. SACOG has sought to accommodate some demand for planning projects, such as corridor revitalization plans or bike-ped master plans. Because it cannot use TE, STP, or CMAQ dollars for such projects, SACOG has arranged funding swaps, exchanging these funds for more flexible local agency funds. SACOG limits awards for such projects a maximum of \$100,000.

In five rounds of funding to date, SACOG has awarded over \$80 million to 50 capital projects and 35 planning-focused projects. (See Table 11). As in the San Diego region, projects have emphasized pedestrian and bicycle improvements, streetscape projects that improve access and aesthetics or enhance place-making for areas like plazas or main-streets, and bus stop and transit station improvements. The program has also supported many projects to support or enhance mixed use development. (See Table 12). Our analysis of the 19 planning projects funded by the Community Design Program suggests that over one-third (37 percent) supported advanced stage planning efforts that could help realize smart growth Figure 3.

Table 11. Community Design Program Awards: Two-Year Program Cycle

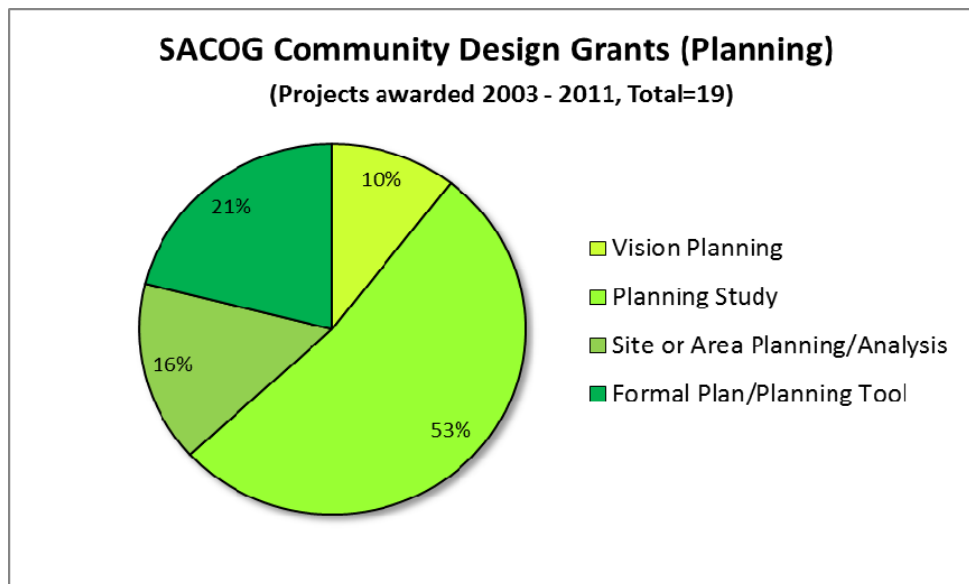
	Round 1 2003-2005	Round 2 2005-2007	Round 3 2007-2009	Round 4 2009-2011	Round 5 2011-2013
Capital Grants					
<i>No. of Projects</i>	10	10	7	13	10
<i>Total Awarded</i>	\$11,605,770	\$7,113,000	\$17,865,000	\$17,018,200	\$18,335,000
<i>Avg. Grant</i>	\$1,160,577	\$711,300	\$2,552,143	\$1,309,092	\$1,833,500
Planning Grants					
<i>No. of Projects</i>	5	14	5	5	6
<i>Total Awarded</i>	\$1,102,860	\$5,597,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$600,000
<i>Avg. Grant</i>	\$220,572	\$399,786	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Total Capital & Planning Awarded	\$12,708,630	\$12,710,000	\$18,365,000	\$17,518,200	\$18,935,000

Table 12. Activities/Issues Addressed in SACOG Community Design Projects (Capital and Planning)

Project Component	Number of Projects (total=61)	Percent of Projects*
Bike/ped improvements	43	70%
Streetscape improvements	31	51%
Station area	30	49%
Mixed use development	14	23%
Transit oriented development	10	16%
Economic development/revitalization	6	10%
Parking	6	10%
Downtown revitalization	5	8%
Lane reconfiguration	4	7%
Public workshops/charettes	4	7%
Infill	3	5%
Corridor Study	2	3%
Funding study	2	3%
Governance models	1	2%
Land use/development strategies/recommendations	1	2%
Urban design recommendations/strategies/guidelines	1	2%
Utilities upgrade	1	2%

*Because projects may have several components, percentages do not add to 100.

Figure 3.



Observations

This look at the Community Design program yields several insights about how best to encourage SB375-compatible land use planning and transportation investments from local governments. First, in this case, the regional growth visioning process helped to establish regional motivation and momentum for the program. The ambitious Blueprint process involved numerous public workshops and meetings with local government staff and officials and resulted in the SACOG board commitment to address smart growth in its federal funding decisions and to support projects that would promote mixed land uses, transportation options, housing choice, compact development, use existing assets, quality design, and natural resource protection (SACOG, 2007). The articulation of this commitment would suggest the region is prepared to meet SB375's requirements and to build consensus among local governments in support of reduced automobile use through more compact and more accessible land use and transportation policy.

Second, similar to projects in San Diego's SGI program, the scale of Community Design projects has tended to be small. It would be useful to study whether, how, and to what extent strategic improvements to limited stretches of corridors, significant intersections, and select streetscape projects can catalyze urban development in targeted places and also alter travel choices of the residents and workers who inhabit them.

Third, constraints on how underlying funding sources may be used shapes how local governments response to the funding incentive. The Community Design program has directed limited funds to planning projects. Yet, program staff report that local jurisdictions see planning support as useful and that interest in planning projects is high. This could indicate that local governments need more fundamental assistance planning for a future with SB 375, helping them to contemplate strategic development and transportation projects. Whether greater planning assistance would lead to better SB375 outcomes locally, and how that might be assessed remain outstanding questions.

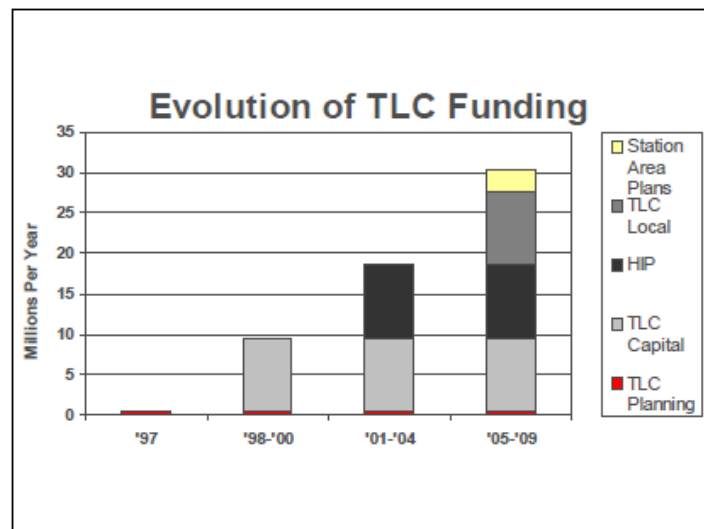
Finally, the Community Design program also reveals some of the sub-regional complexity common in California metropolitan regions, as El Dorado and Placer County do not participate in the program. Whether these two counties have used their CMAQ, STP, and TE apportionments in ways that are consistent with wider region's Community Design program is an important question, although we do not take it up here.

2.4. San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC): Transportation for Livable Communities Program

Program launch and institutionalization

In 1997, the Bay Area’s MPO, the MTC, launched the Transportation for Livable Communities Program (TLC) funding program “to support community-based transportation projects that bring new vibrancy to downtown areas, commercial cores, neighborhoods, and transit corridors, enhancing their amenities and ambiance and making them places where people want to live, work and visit” (MTC, 2011). Although it originated before the law was passed, the TLC program foreshadowed SB 375 in its aims to enhance community livability and to foster the development of infill housing, amenities, and services to establish pedestrian and transit friendly environments. The program has focused on projects involving streetscape or station area improvements, as well as projects enhancing bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access and connectivity.

Figure 4.
MTC Gradually Expands TLC Program with Land Use-focused Components



(Johnson, 2008)

Over the 15-year course of TLC, as MTC gained experience with the program and as the regional conversation about smart growth deepened, MTC has tweaked the program to increasingly encourage projects that impact local land use. In its early years, TLC’s first component was planning grants. Later, MTC expanded the program to include added a second, capital grant component that would foster pedestrian- and transit-oriented physical development, for instance through aesthetic plazas, landscaped streets, and easy access to bus and transit. A third component added in 2000, the Housing Incentives Program (HIP), further encouraged projects that would bear explicitly on local land; HIP would supporting TLC-type transportation improvements *specifically in jurisdictions that constructed housing near transit hubs*, and higher density projects received larger grant awards (MTC, 2000). A fourth TLC component—Station

Area Planning grants added in 2005—aimed specifically to help local governments initiate planning for transit supportive land use and amenities around transit stations. The grants would reinforce the transit extension projects approved through the region’s Resolution 3434 and the companion TOD policy requiring transit extensions to have transit supportive land use plans and policies. More recently, MTC also added a “Local” component to the TLC program, making TLC funds available to county-based transportation commissions to program their own TLC projects.

To fund TLC, MTC has drawn on four different federal and state sources (MTC, 2011):

- Congestion Management & Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) – 65 percent;
- Transportation Enhancements (TE) - 31 percent;
- Surface Transportation Program - 2 percent; and
- State Transit Assistance fund of California’s Transportation Development Act - 2 percent.

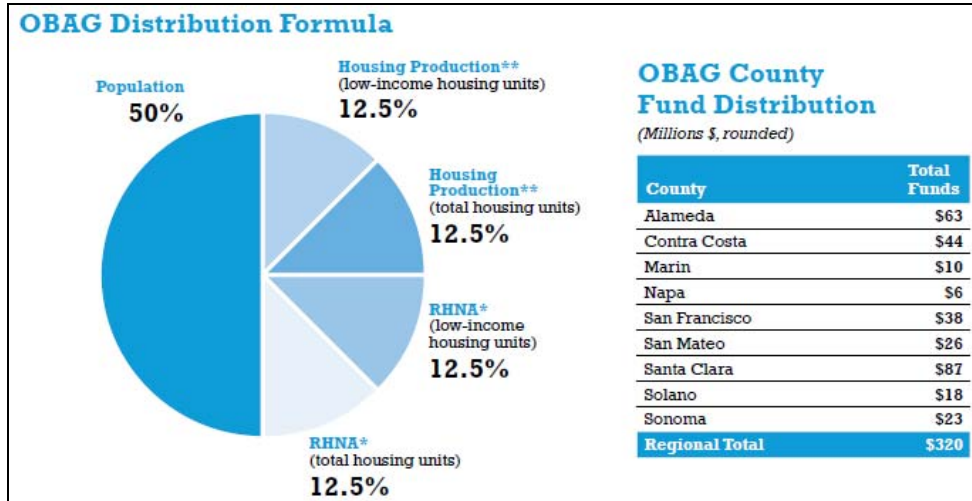
In cases where a proposed TLC project would serve the program’s goals but was ineligible for a federal funding source, MTC has swapped the federal grant award for an equivalent amount of local funds.

In 2012, the MTC began transitioning the TLC program to a dramatically restructured platform, known as the OneBayArea Grant (OBAG) Program. The new OBAG incentive program would more directly encourage compliance with the region’s SCS. Like TLC Local grants, the OBAG program would work like block grant, apportioning total funds to local entities up-front. A jurisdiction’s regional performance in producing lower income housing would factor highly in determining its share of funds, integrating MTC’s federal funding program with SB375. The OBAG structure allows each county congestion management agency or transportation commission to use its funds as it chooses, provided projects fall within MTC-established categories such as:

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements;
- Local Streets and Roads Preservation;
- Transportation for Livable Communities;
- Safe Routes to School/Transit;
- Priority Conservation Area; and
- Planning and Outreach Activities.

While funds have yet to be awarded through this new program, OBAG’s distribution policy weights land use considerations, namely housing production, and population equally in determining a jurisdiction’s share of funds. (See Figure 5.) Consequently, the Bay Area’s more urbanized counties, including Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Cost, and San Francisco, stand to receive greater shares of OBAG funds than more sparsely settled ones.

Figure 5. The OneBayArea Grant (OBAG) Program Funding Apportionment (FY 2012-FY2016)



(MTC 2012)

Projects Funded

From 1997 through 2011, the TLC program awarded roughly \$200 million. Any of the region’s cities, counties or transit agencies could apply for the grants, which have ranged in size roughly from \$100,000 to over \$4 million. According to MTC’s own 2008 evaluation of TLC, typical grants have funded “pedestrian facilities such as enhanced sidewalks, crosswalks, pedestrian scale lighting, and streetscape amenities, as well as bicycle routes and transit access improvements” (MTC, 2008, 5). Further, disadvantaged communities have been the most common beneficiaries of TLC projects. Table 11. provides an overview of TLC grants in the program’s first 10 years.

Table 13.

Transportation for Livable Communities Grants 1998 – 2008		
TLC Component (project type)	Total Funded (millions)	# of Projects
Planning Grants	\$2	65
Capital Grants	\$85	81
Housing Incentives (HIP)	\$27	38
Station Area Planning (FY '05-09)	\$12	NA
Local TLC programs (FY '06-09)	\$35	NA

(MTC, 2008, p. 5)

Our own analysis of TLC funded efforts suggests that projects providing for improved bicycle and pedestrian conditions, streetscapes, and station areas were most common across both across capital and planning grants.

Table 14. Activities/Issues Addressed in MTC TLC Projects (Capital)

Project Component	Number of Projects (total = 104)	Percent of Projects*
Bike/ped improvements	92	89%
Streetscape improvements	71	68%
Station area	66	64%
Downtown revitalization	28	27%
Lane reconfiguration	10	10%
Economic development/revitalization	5	5%
Parking	4	4%
Mixed use development	3	3%
Transit oriented development	3	3%
Utilities upgrade	3	3%
Infill	2	2%
Land use/development strategies/ recommendations	1	1%
Land acquisition/site assembly	1	1%

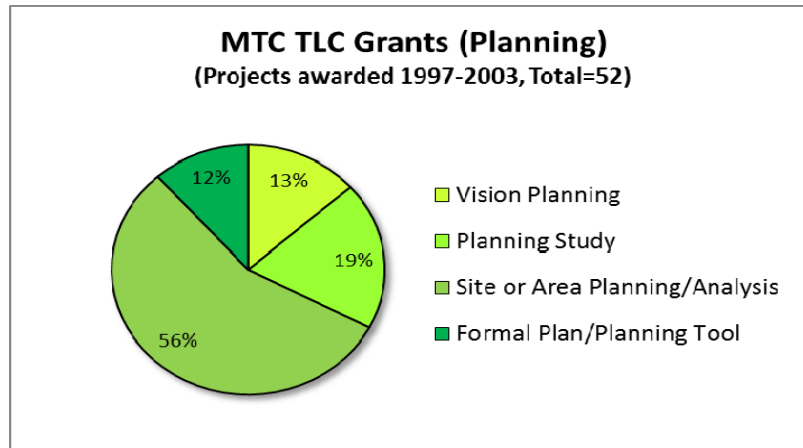
*Because projects may have several components, percentages do not add to 100.

Table 15. Activities/Issues Addressed in MTC TLC Projects (Planning)

Project Component	Number of Projects (total = 60)	Percent of Projects*
Bike/ped improvements	36	60%
Station area	36	60%
Streetscape improvements	19	32%
Land use/development strategies/recommendations	9	15%
Transit oriented development	7	12%
Downtown revitalization	5	8%
Mixed use development	5	8%
Urban design recommendations/strategies/guidelines	5	8%
Lane reconfiguration	3	5%
Public workshops/charettes	3	5%
Circulation Plan	2	3%
Economic development/revitalization	2	3%
Park	2	3%
Zoning Code Development	2	3%
Corridor Study	1	2%
Utilities upgrade	1	2%

*Because projects may have several components, percentages do not add to 100.

Figure 6.*



*MTC funded 60 TLC planning projects in this period. We analyzed 52 projects for which sufficient project information was available.

Recently, MTC made non-transportation infrastructure improvements (such as sewer upgrades needed for new TOD units) eligible for its TLC grants. Such preliminary, non-transportation investments can be important for infill projects that add residential capacity to a neighborhood. The MTC may also award TLC funds for land assembly or site acquisition, or as other incentives for increasing density. And where such non-transportation infrastructure projects require swaps of federally-sourced TLC funds for local funds, MTC has indicated its willingness to do so. The MPO's support for foundational infill infrastructure could prove increasingly important in light of the 2012 elimination of California local redevelopment agencies, a traditional source of financing for infill and revitalization projects.

MTC has gradually increased the maximum size of the awards it makes with successive TLC grant rounds, moving from \$1 million to \$3 million and, most recently, to \$6 million. Program staff says the agency chose to support larger projects with bigger potential impacts and to point resources more emphatically to the program's objectives. While larger grants might make for a lumpier distribution of funds, concentrating resources on high impact projects could be more effective.

Observations

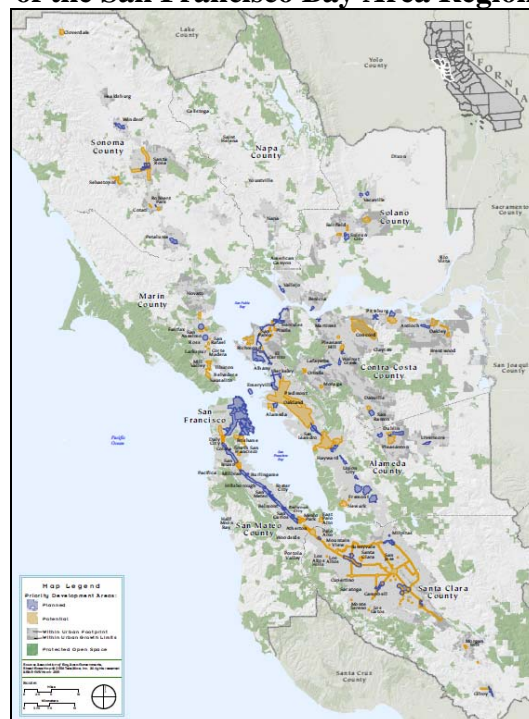
MTC's program benefits from other MPO-based policies that reinforce its smart growth efforts. Widely regarded as one of the more innovative and proactive MPOs in the nation, the MTC enacted these policies well before SB375 entered the policy framework for regional transportation planning in California.

One such policy is MTC's Resolution 3434 Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Policy. It was passed in 2005 to complement the Resolution 3434 Regional Transit Expansion Program, which commits MTC to developing specific new rail extension and service expansion projects, regional express bus, and other enhancements to existing transit corridors. The TOD policy requires that rail extension projects meet corridor-level housing density thresholds to qualify for

regional discretionary funding. For instance, to be eligible for TLC funds and HIP funds, transit extension projects must meet the specified housing development thresholds.

Another supportive policy is MTC's acknowledgement of so-called Priority Development Areas (PDAs). Similar to SCAG's 2 Percent Strategy, PDAs are areas where supportive investments like TLC grants would complement local commitments to develop infill housing and provide walking, cycling, and public amenities. They are typically served by transit. To promote more compact land development in the Bay Area, the MTC worked with three other regional agencies [Association of Bay Area Governments, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission] to designate PDAs.¹² (See Figure 7.) These actors agreed to encourage infill development in locally identified PDAs served by transit in the region. Since the first PDAs were adopted in the late 2000s, a project's location within the PDA has been an important criterion for TLC awards.

Figure 7. Priority Development Areas (Planned and Potential) of the San Francisco Bay Area Region



The PDA designation could prove a valuable criterion for MTC in the award of broader transportation funds in the future. Most planned PDAs fall within existing urban footprints and within the ring of densely populated Bay-adjacent cities, enhancing the prospects for development to occur in established communities. Further, the considerations that have

¹² In adopting designated PDAs, ABAG distinguishes between planned PDAs and potential PDAs and favors planned PDAs for capital funds. A planned PDA will have both an adopted land use plan and a resolution of support from the city council or county board, and in general is deemed more funding-ready, particularly for capital infrastructure funds. Potential PDAs may benefit from planning grants and technical assistance, but not capital infrastructure funds. <http://www.bayareavision.org/initiatives/prioritydevelopmentareas.html>

informed PDA approval align well with SB375 aims. Review of proposed PDA candidates considers many factors that should reasonably convey an area’s potential for land development that would increase the jobs-housing balance, temper automobile reliance, and enhance community livability. (See Table 16.)

Table 16.

Information Used to Assess and Approve Priority Development Areas	
▪ current and future housing units and types	▪ development fees
▪ current and future employment	▪ community /elected support development
▪ current and future allowable densities by land use type	▪ recent residential and commercial development
▪ land area devoted to surface parking	▪ current and future demographic profiles
▪ future parking standards	▪ multi-modal transportation accessibility
▪ general needs for capital infrastructure	▪ current and future public parks and plazas
▪ availability of capital and operating funding sources	▪ funding for parks
▪ status of supportive plans and planning components	▪ collaboration with and planning for public schools
▪ review & approval procedures for development projects	

FOCUS Program. PDA Assessment Survey. *PDA Application Review Process* Retrieved Aug. 15, 2012, from <http://www.bayareavision.org/pdaapplication/pdaapplicationreview.html>

The San Francisco Bay Area’s experience with each of these policies should bolster MTC’s ability to implement its SCS and to meet SB375 GHG goals through less automobile-reliant land development patterns. This experience, together with pressure from smart growth activists and elected officials (Barbour and Deakin, 2012), may help to explain the MTC’s willingness to commit to a more ambitious 2035 GHG reduction target than even the most ambitious 2035 scenario proposed by the California Air Resources Board. This makes it of interest as a model for potential replication elsewhere in the California or other states to further greenhouse gas reductions via transportation and land use compatible investments.

As MTC transitions the TLC program to the new block grant style OneBayArea Grant (OBAG) program, it will be important to study whether or how the resulting portfolio of *locally selected* OBAG projects differs from that which emerged from the MPO’s own project selection process for TLC. The answer to this question could guide future policy choices about how to allocate authority over infrastructure spending decisions intended to promote infill development and reduced automobile reliance.

3. Lessons for SB375

By passing SB 375 in 2008, the state of California began to encourage regions to use strategic transportation investment choices to shape local responses to growth and land development pressures. The law provided a framework for spending transportation dollars where local land use choices would reinforce efforts to concentrate growth in established centers and to reduce automobile reliance.

Yet, long before this state policy emerged, urban regions in the state were already feeling the pressure from outwardly sprawling growth, as greenfield areas were converted to residential and commercial use, commute times lengthened, and congestion on regional road networks

increased. Several regions established their own incentive grant programs to encourage local land use planning and capital projects that would refocus growth on established centers and make cycling, walking, and using public transit more attractive and feasible means of travel. These smart growth incentive programs, begun by San Francisco's MTC, San Diego's SANDAG, Sacramento's SACOG, and Los Angeles' SCAG, have been examined here. Our analysis of these programs suggests several lessons that extend to California's efforts to implement SB 375 in the year ahead.

It's been noted that all of these programs have relied on federal and in some cases state funds to support the smart-growth investments that local governments in their region would pursue. In the case of SANDAG, initial investment of federal enhancements funds helped to leverage a 40-year commitment of local sales tax revenues to support smart growth grants. This pattern suggests that an important question is whether MPOs in California, and perhaps their partners in associations of governments and other regional entities could use other sources of discretionary funds in a similar manner. Can MPOs expand the federal sources they have used in this manner? Or, could more MPOs tap increasingly popular local sales tax revenues to do the same? In other sectors, what federal funds might be similarly marshaled? Could federal housing dollars be targeted to increase housing availability and affordability in areas well served by existing transportation infrastructure and services, and with local street networks friendly to pedestrians and cyclists?

Such questions point to the need not only to spur innovative and SB-375 compatible investment programs but also to sustain them. SB 375 asks MPOs to use the promise of transportation funds as a carrot to nudge local governments to adopt supportive land use policies. Yet many of the main funds that MPOs program are constrained by federal rules, and discretionary funds like Transportation Enhancements to enable bicycle and pedestrian investments face an uncertain future. Although Enhancements funding was ultimately preserved (as part of the Transportation Alternatives Program) in the recently transportation authorization bill MAP-21,¹³ some proposals for the recent federal transportation funding law would have eliminated it. Such debates are likely to be opened again in two years, when the law requires renewal, and it is possible that federal funds used to support California MPOs' smart growth programs would diminish and that competition for those funds would intensify. Could MPOs act more effectively to support SB 375 if they could generate and program their own regional funds?

This review also suggests greater attention to performance measurement is needed when making investments in the name of SB 375. While some MPOs have evaluated their smart growth programs, they have noted inherent difficulties in doing so. Few provisions are made for baseline data collection to assess either travel behavior or urban development impacts of capital projects. Evaluating the impact of funded planning efforts presents other challenges, like how to establish the potential longer term outcomes of preliminary planning studies, or how to assess concrete planning actions like rezoning when private development does not follow during economic downturns. Or, what about planning efforts that get shelved but may have a later life? Planning efforts are undoubtedly a necessary foundation for reshaping communities in the vision of SB-375 and deserve support. However, they are likely to produce visible results mostly in the

¹³ For information on the Transportation Alternatives Program, see <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/map21/tap.cfm>.

long term. Additionally, it could be important but difficult to isolate the effects of small projects, versus cumulative effects of all of them.

Finally, how MPOs have handled the spatial distribution of smart growth grants suggests geopolitical equity as an extremely complex issue that regions will have to broach in implementing SB375. In several programs reviewed here, the MPOs weighted “preferential growth area” designations in project selections as one way to shape the geographic distribution of funds. In a second approach, one MPO also spread grants among its constituent jurisdictions by considering only one application per city per funding round. If money is to be used as the incentive for local government action on SB375, distributing funds evenly among jurisdictions could dilute the impact of available resources. At its core, SB375 should produce regional “winners”: areas targeted for regional growth within MPO plans should benefit from investments. Concentrating investment could mean advancing the economic future of one place over another, spurring growth in places where the transport system would support it but not in places where travel is largely automobile reliant. If individual cities insist on a “fair share” approach to infrastructure investment, SB375’s goals may be hampered. As it restructures its smart growth program, the MTC plans to distribute block grants to counties based on population and housing production. This approach, which blends geopolitical concerns with performance measures, may open the door to more creative distributional solutions able to earn public acceptance of SB 375 land use planning and physical development while also delivering performance.

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