

# **The New Collaborative Region: Suburbs and Cities Working on the Future**

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## **Panel Presentation:**

### **Transportation, Land Use and Regional Collaboration:**

#### **California Experiences**

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I am going to tell you the Sacramento Blueprint story, but I am going to set this up with a little bit of history of where it came from based on my personal experience, because it relates to several other people that are in the room today.

And I'm going to tee off of some of the comments that David Bragdon made from Portland Metro, because most of my career was in Portland.

I have been in California for about five years. I lived through the creation of the First Regional Plan and the Home Rule Charter for the regional government that expanded the legislative powers, gave them the strong powers he talked about.

I had my fingerprints on more of that than I hardly ever admit south of the border and certainly whatever I admit when I'm within my own region. But when I was in Portland and they were developing their First Regional Plan -- John Fregonese was the planning director at the regional government -- what I observed going on was not only the unique governing structure, which had an important role, but the regional government had another service that David didn't mention, which is a very high-quality sophisticated data resource center.

And they started providing data and maps and analysis that the three counties and the -- whatever it is -- 24 cities in the region just simply couldn't get on their own. They didn't have the wherewithal to do it. And I watched in the 1990s as the cities and counties went more and more to the regional government for information and data, and started to think of their world beyond their jurisdictional boundary and understand that there's a whole region there that's connected by the watershed, the airshed, the transportation system.

And that information was a critical component of the local governments buying into the regional planning program.

When the Portland Regional Plan was adopted, my firm and other firms in Portland started getting a lot of client interest around the country, saying, "Well, we like that. We'd like one of those." And the inevitable question was, "Well, yeah, but you are not going to get a regional government that has a lone elected leader and has regulatory power at the regional scale." So really is this transportable?

And I always believed that it was because I thought that the good quality information and just strong technical planning was really instrumental in what happened in Portland. And it wasn't all about the strong regulatory authority that the regional government had, right on the heels of Portland.

So I came out of Portland with that big, "Ah-ha. Information is very powerful. It can lead people to change their minds."

And then immediately after Portland was Robert Grow's project in Envision Utah where I think they really pioneered some citizen involvement techniques.

And the third piece of my history coming into Sacramento was that we were working on the development of software which allowed you to twin the information sophistication in Portland with the citizen involvement sophistication in Envision Utah and put it together so you'd have high technology live in public meetings. So you could take all of that GIS work out of the back room and put it on the table live in public meetings and teach people to be in an interactive format; informed, sophisticated citizen planners. And that work was done largely in the San Diego region with SANDAG and the City of San Diego.

So these three pieces, the Portland information, the Envision Utah citizen involvement, and the San Diego development of places tool were what we brought to the table to start off the Blueprint Project in Sacramento.

Six counties, 22 cities, about 2.2 million people in the region. There is a classic blue - - in blue/red terms -- blue in the middle and red on the periphery kind of a region. And when the Blueprint Project started, there was a civil war going on because a powerful young Democratic legislator had tried to rearrange the way sales tax revenues were distributed and send them more into the inner city and away from the suburbs. Back when I was still a consultant, they were talking about disbanding the government. And that was the meeting where I later was supposed to introduce regional land use plans. I am not making this up. There's no exaggeration here.

We had a lot of trouble convincing the red areas of the region that this wasn't yet another plot to put them out of business and send money to the inner areas. We had a lot of trouble convincing the environmentalists and the citizens that anything approaching real planning could ever happen in the Sacramento region or probably throughout the State of California for that matter. So it took us a while to get this thing launched.

The good news -- to jump to sort of the punch line -- is that over a three-year period, this became a truly transformative, happening event in the Sacramento region. They went from civil war to a document that was unanimously adopted by a board that had been expanded to 31 city and county elected officials by then, and now which the region is very, very proud of. And most of the members on my board are competing against themselves to see who can implement it the best and the fastest.

We succeeded in staging a conversation about how best to manage growth. It did not degenerate -- and that's a purposely value-laden word on my part -- into a, "Should we grow or should we not grow?" We managed to talk about how best to grow. We talked a lot about demographic information, and who was actually going to

be here in the future, and what the grain of our region and the state and the country, the developed world implied for future housing and transportation. We didn't accept the smart growth principles, which, of course, we cleverly renamed Blueprint Principles by the end of the project. We didn't accept them a priori as inherently good, but we said, you know, "There's enough work around the country on these that we are going to put them out there and test them very explicitly and let the citizens of the region tell us whether they like them or not, and if they like them, sort of in what flavors."

We did lots and lots and lots of workshops. Nearly all of them were with the computer technology on the table so that people could do what-iffing, whether it was at the neighborhood scale or county scale or -- totally mind-bogglingly to me -- at the regional scale. This stuff has gotten so powerful and sophisticated, you can model a whole region live in a public meeting and change your mind about what you want and see what the impacts are.

This was sort of the culminating event at the end of the process where we were having people vote with clickers on what they liked about it. We followed Robert's lead and advice and didn't label them the "Smart Growth" and the "Dumb Growth" alternatives, but named them "A," "B," "C," and "D," so we were just totally neutral.

From there, we went into a first -- in our region -- of its kind Elected Official Summit where we had a preferred alternative by that point. We hired the Worthland Worldwide firm to do some polling for us and come to town and talk to us about values. They were extremely persuasive with all of my board, particularly the red state board members, the red county, red city, red suburban area board members.

The Worthland firm really connected with them. You can't hire them anymore. They are out of business. They sold out about six months ago.

Here was the map that got everybody's attention in the region. Early in the project, we put a document on the table that basically "The Sacramento Bee" editorialized. "This is the Road to Ruin" was the title in the lead editorial the day after this was unveiled. And everybody hated that map for their own reasons and all the travel congestion and the air quality problems that came with it. That's the very simple version of the map that was adopted as the preferred alternative. The dark red areas show new growth areas. The very light blue areas show areas of reinvestment.

So if you go back, you've got the same amount of population compressed into a much smaller footprint.

Thematically what happens over the five decades is the core of the region expands. And people become neighbors and sort of family members who are not used to thinking of each other as neighbors and family members. The City of Roseville becomes part of the urban core of the region. And so people with this mapping work, it really is transformative. They start looking at this information and their view of what their community and their world is really starts to change. And then in our region you happen to have sort of a series of nodes; satellites around the area.

Housing was issue number one. We got huge mileage out of educating ourselves about what the housing needs were, about the need not to recreate the mistakes of other metropolitan areas in this state and elsewhere of not building enough housing for the job growth, about the homogeneity in the housing market and that the

median large-lot single-family that just got built over and over and over again in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s was not going to meet the needs of future residents.

We looked at the matrix of how much land we could take out of the path of urbanization and still support the same amount of growth; how much farmland we might be able to save. Of course, the punch line for a regional transportation planning agency is, what does all this do to the transportation system? The mustard here is very heavily congested areas. And the red are areas that are completely broken, a parking lot. And we don't completely solve the problem. We are not selling snake oil. But we have figured out a way, through changing the land use pattern, to give ourselves a much greater chance of making a functional transportation system in the future. We've still got one red area -- getting across the American River at sunrise -- that we are going to have to work on.

Some more of the matrix. A little more than 10 percent of the total trip shift out of cars into some other mode -- transit, walking, or biking. The vehicle miles traveled per household go way down; they go down even from current conditions, which those of you that are familiar with travel modeling know that's not easy to accomplish. That's a sign of a very serious land use plan if you are actually driving the existing VMT down.

The amount of time you have to devote to travel, we also found that, of course, the time is what really connects with people's values.

And the amount of tailpipe emissions goes down. Some of that, over 50 years, gets solved with new technology. But some of the greenhouse gas issues in particular do not. At least we are not projecting that they do. And so land use and less VMT and less emissions has some real benefits there.

Now, germane to the title of this conference, which deals with suburban growth, I thought I knew at the outset from doing enough of this modeling around the country that in the particular Sacramento region, the name of the game was going to be, could we convince anybody that new style suburban greenfield development was a good idea? The infill and the reinvestment, I knew, were going to be a no-brainer. People were going to respond positively to that. We might have an argument of how much of that was really economically feasible and how fast it could come in, but we demonstrated that you can't solve all of the growth challenge in Sacramento by just five-story mixed-use buildings and light rail stations in mid-town Sacramento. We had to find a different way to grow in the greenfields. A little more than half of the housing and a little less than half of the job growth are going to be in a greenfield setting.

Placer County is in some ways ground zero for this discussion in our region. It is by no means the only place, but southwest Placer County, which is unincorporated largely and for years has been labeled as sprawl in the region, turns out -- if growth is in the right volume and done in the right way -- to be a very excellent place for some of the greenfield growth in the Sacramento region to go.

So through this technical work, we sort of changed the debate or are continuing to change the debate. This is by no means a finished story about what sprawl is. And we are working hard with the cities of Roseville, Rocklin, Lincoln in Placer County on how to manage this forecasted growth in southwest Placer so that it is sustainable, so that it has this diversity of housing choices.

And here's just an example of what I'm talking about. Look at the VMT for household average in southwest Placer in the Blueprint Land Use Plan.

Twenty-four vehicle miles traveled per household per day. It's less than the regional average for all, including reinvestment and infill. It's less than the regional average for greenfield growth. That's a real sweet spot from a transportation/air quality standpoint if we can figure out how to do it.

And so to go back to sort of the political theme here. It's very difficult for a Democrat to get elected to dogcatcher in Placer County. It's as red as you can imagine. And the very conservative elected officials responded to these issues of housing choice and transportation choice and infrastructure cost savings that I didn't show you, and reduction in water demand. They got it on their own terms. And they have become champions. Many, not all, but clearly a majority of them have become champions.

And the development community got it. Not immediately, but about halfway through the project, they figured out that good growth was a whole lot better than no growth, and that some of these higher density products and mixed-use products would actually look better on a pro forma than the really good pro formas they had been cashing in on for decades, that it could possibly get even better.

There was a large development that had been in the works for a decade or more in that unincorporated area called Placer Vineyards. And, of course, all the developers of that project said, "Well, we'll do it your way the next time. We've been waiting for 10 years to cash in on this, and we are just going to go with our own plan." And we said, "Well, we will compete with you for the votes on the County Board of Supervisors and see who wins."

So we planted a flag in the ground and said, you know, "It's their decision. It's not ours. But we are going to be arguing with you about that." And we eventually, with some very key leadership on the Placer County Board from some very conservative elected officials, split the owners' group in the Placer Vineyards and got the votes within the owners' group to start the shift towards a Blueprint style plan.

Now, this is a story that hasn't landed yet. They are in the CEQA process. We are negotiating with the environmental community to try to get them not to litigate over transportation and air quality impacts if they go with the higher density Blueprint Plan. But these are the sorts of things -- this is where the rubber hits the road, where you take these nice pretty regional vision maps and start to turn them into, "Okay. Is something really going to be different a few decades out because we all went through this, or did we just do a nice mapping exercise and go home?" And you end up with a few nice example projects, but you never ever really mainstream it. We are really trying hard to get this thing mainstreamed.

So what we are in the middle of doing right now -- I am almost done -- is we have this 2050 Blueprint Growth Strategy. We are now starting to update our Metropolitan Transportation Plan, and so we have to do a new version of that blueprint map that matches the time horizon of the federal requirements, which in our case on this cycle is 2030. So we are working on that map. And we are just starting an MTP process, and we will design a transportation system to match and serve the 2030 version of the Blueprint Land Use Pattern.

So this is where it all starts to come together and we truly start to integrate the land use planning and the transportation plan. We are at the startup. We had our Second Elected Official Summit 10 days ago. And the elected officials are used to getting together. They are starting to like each other. They have a good time now. And they are in the same room instead of arguing about how quickly they can disband the cog and whether it's viable.

We are souping up the places software so we can do travel modeling live in these public meetings, not just land use scenario building. And we are going to do 16 of these workshops. They will be at a county scale. There will be a transportation game with stickers that they play that sort of mimicked off of a Blueprint Land Use game for developing scenarios, emphasis, looking at priorities of regional scale transportation versus sub-regional versus more localized transportation. The Blueprint Land Use Strategy, of course, is trying to move the region towards those local trips and away from those long-distance trips.

We will be looking at transit in a different way than we have in the past. Ted Gains is his name, a Placer County supervisor, who was my board chair until a couple of weeks ago, has just got the bit in his mouth. He and I went to Portland a couple of months ago and rode the streetcar and looked at all the development there. And he came back and went back to the Placer Vineyards developers and said, "I want one more thing. I want a streetcar." And they almost threw us out of room, but they didn't.

So now we are figuring out what the starter line is and where the right-of-way is going to be dedicated. We haven't yet figured out how to pay for it, but we're stealing some of the clever ideas from Portland with their parking fees and whatnot.

So this is on its way. It is definitely gaining momentum. So we are going to be looking at streetcars and more neighborhood shuttle transit instead of just the long-distance sort of transit issues that have been the focus in the past.

I want to close with just a couple of comments tagging off of Doug Henton's remarks, because I thought he gave a really excellent overview of where this state is right now. And this is in play as we speak.

The state, I think, is obvious to most people. Clearly, the critical mass of elected officials has decided we've got to start reinvesting in infrastructure. And I think one of the questions is, is this new learning that has happened in the last five years or so -- largely through the regional governments and these visioning projects about how to grow differently -- going to have any influence on whether we start to raise more money through infrastructure bonds and how that money is spent.

We, of course, in a region that is really proud of our regional growth, would very much like the state if it adds money into the infrastructure for transportation, flood control, housing, other types of infrastructure, to use these regional growth strategies as a template to decide how to spend that money. Because we know the state is going to get a much bigger bang for its buck if it does it in that way.

So that's in play right now. Legislative hearings started last week. Many of you know this better than I. And it will be very interesting to see if two, three, four, five months from now it looks like this regional visioning movement that started in

Portland and went to Utah and sort of swept the country and is happening all around California is going to be a key critical template for how we start to solve our problems.