Where Could SB 375 Take Us?
The Land Use - Transport - Climate Connection
Michael Woo, Los Angeles City Planning Commissioner
The land use - transportation - climate connection
California’s leadership role on climate policy (AB 32, SB 375)
A Change in Direction from the Top

• “I think people are a lot more open now to thinking regionally, in terms of how we plan our transportation infrastructure. The days where we're just building sprawl forever, those days are over... I think that Republicans, Democrats, everybody recognizes that that's not a smart way to design communities.” -- President Barack Obama in Fort Myers, Florida, February 10, 2009.
Air Resources Board: Calling for “ambitious yet achievable targets” for reducing GHG emissions relating to land use and transport

- Transport sector is largest single source of GHG emissions (40% statewide average)
- CARB set target of 5 MMT GHG reduction (out of 169 MMT total) from local gov’t/land use
- Regional Targets Advisory Committee appointed to advise CARB on factors to be considered in setting GHG emission reduction targets for each region
“Sustainable Communities Strategy” (SCS)

• Regional (or subregional) planning tool set forth by SB 375
• Purpose: to show how land use, transport to be coordinated to achieve GHG emission reduction goal
• SCS to be incorporated into Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)
Opportunity for local government

- CEQA “relief” for housing and mixed-use “transit priority projects”
- Incentive to promote or accelerate compact development, auto alternatives, TODs, walkable neighborhoods, mixed use projects, etc., already in the works
- Voluntary, not mandatory, for city and county governments
Challenges of implementation

- Feasibility test: “Feasible means capable of being accomplished in a reasonable period of time, taking into account economic, environmental, legal, social, and technological factors.”
- No state funds provided to local governments for SB 375 implementation
- Barriers to innovation during economic downturn and public sector retrenchment
The challenge of the Southern California region
Planning in the City of Los Angeles

- Legacy of a weak department beset by a politicized process
- City Planning Dept. now in resurgence
- County voter approval of 1/2-cent sales tax increase for transit expansion
- More TODs, but unfinished business with transportation demand management (TDM)
Housing affordability in the City of Los Angeles

• Median home price tripled, from $174,000 in 1997 to $525,000 in 2007
• Avg. monthly rent for 2BR apt almost doubled, from $870 to $1650
• Meanwhile, median family income grew only 18%, from $47,800 ($3987/mon.) to $56,500 ($4708/mon.)
“The leaking pipe”

- Anachronistic off-street parking requirements
- Weak (or non-existent) TDM policies
- Inadequate coordination between land use and transportation decisions
- Lack of clear direction from top leadership on priority of reducing VMT (unnecessary car use)
Lowest regional average commute times in “balanced”, affluent communities such as Thousand Oaks, Burbank, Glendale, Pasadena,
Worst average commute times in L.A. County reported by residents of Lancaster, Palmdale, and areas west of downtown L.A.

- Car drivers have average commute of 28 minutes
- Bus riders average commute is 46 minutes
Is Southern California ready for smart growth?

- Compactness, not sprawl
- Mix land uses; put housing and jobs closer together
- Diverse housing choices
- Transportation choices beyond the single-passenger car
- Walkable neighborhoods
- Emphasize in-fill, not greenfield, development (minimize new infrastructure investment)
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, critical environmental areas
Winds of change in Southern California?

- 36% of full-time workers in San Bernardino County willing to accept 5% less income to work closer to home
- 29% willing to accept 10% less pay to work closer to home
New strategy to concentrate new density near transit stations and corridors, sparing existing low-density neighborhoods.
Six unanswered questions

1. What can be done to build awareness and support from stakeholders and the general public?
2. How will regional and subregional authorities persuade local governments to participate?
3. How can transit operators live up to rising expectations when the state is cutting transit funding?
4. Will the economic downturn make “bad projects” irresistible?
5. What can be done about interregional trips?
6. What can low-density, primarily residential communities without transit infrastructure do to participate in the SB 375 effort?
Pursuing an “ambitious yet achievable” GHG emission reduction target in Southern California

- Local governments will retain primary land use decision-making role (Can more experienced local gov’ts share lessons with less experienced?)
- Need to coordinate land use and transportation stakeholders
- Key challenge: How to link climate policy to economic recovery, social justice, and local aspirations?
- ClimatePlan advocacy for sustainable communities in So. Calif.

[www.climateplanca.org](http://www.climateplanca.org)