



Principles to Guide the Update of the RTP Guidelines

SB 375 brought a sea-change to the law governing regional planning in California. By integrating the silos of land-use and transportation, and by mandating GHG-reductions as well as adequate housing for the region’s population at all income levels, the law not only stepped up performance-based planning in California, but also engaged many new stakeholders.

As key stakeholders in the SB 375 processes at the regional level, we brought important perspectives to the fore, including expertise on reducing public health disparities, investing in meeting the needs of underserved residents while protecting them from the risk of displacement, protecting natural and agricultural lands, and improving the regional welfare by promoting the “3 Es” of economy, environment, and equity.

We have now participated in one or more cycles of regional planning under SB 375, and it is our judgment that while the law has helped significantly advance sustainable and equitable regional planning across California, its promise remains unachieved in many cases. Among other things:

- The twin crises of **housing unaffordability and displacement**, far from being adequately addressed in regional plans, are being exacerbated in some transit-oriented communities, pushing low-income workers and especially people of color into places on the exurban fringes, far from jobs and transit. We also need to plan ahead to avoid these twin crises where they haven't spread yet, including the Central Valley.
- Investments in **freeway expansion and other VMT-inducing projects** continue to dominate the priority lists at many county Congestion Management Agencies (CMAs),

and are not only “baked into” the RTPs, but sometimes front-loaded, at the expense of **deteriorating service levels and unaffordable fares on our transit systems** and of **active transportation investments**.

- **Sprawl development projects** that are inconsistent with adopted RTPs are moving forward in many regions of the state, threatening our natural and agricultural lands, increasing commutes and transportation-related pollution, and inhibiting the ability of existing communities to provide sustainable transportation choices.
- And purported reductions in VMT and GHG emissions are difficult to credit when in some instances they appear to result more from **manipulation in computer modeling** than from **actual VMT-reducing policies and investments**.

As most of the state’s major regions have completed, or are well on the way to adopting, their second RTP/SCS under SB 375, it is time to take a hard look at these crises, and the policies and practices that undergird them.

To truly realize the promise of SB 375, this very timely update of the RTP Guidelines should emphasize the following principles:

1. A More Inclusive Process: The Guidelines should ensure that the RTP/SCS process is inclusive of all communities in the region, especially residents of vulnerable and rural communities, with meaningful community engagement in the development of goals, priorities and scenarios and in the choice among a meaningful range of alternatives.
2. A Focus on Policies and Investments that Achieve the Twin Mandates of the Law: The Guidelines should provide a clear, strong framework for implementing SB 375, and ensuring that we meet our greenhouse gas and affordable housing mandates. They should, in particular, promote the kinds of transformative land use policies and transportation investments that are necessary to achieve those mandates.
3. Transparency: The Guidelines should ensure that the regional investments and policies that are expected to achieve the mandates of SB 375 are specified clearly and transparently, and are front-loaded in the early years of the plan. Where actions are assumed to be taken by others, the basis for that assumption should be made clear.
4. Social and Racial Justice: The Guidelines should ensure that regional planning fairly and timely meets the needs of low-income and minority communities and populations, while reducing – not worsening – patterns of regional segregation and the risk of displacement. The Guidelines should promote regional coordination in local planning to “affirmatively further fair housing” opportunities.
5. Public Health Co-Benefits: The Guidelines should ensure that regional planning identifies and addresses the direct health impacts (e.g., air pollution, physical activity, pedestrian fatalities) as well indirect health impacts (e.g., social cohesion, access to jobs, household expenses) of land use and transportation decisions, and in particular reduces the health disparities that burden low-income communities and people of color. The Guidelines should cross-reference best practices that promote health and equity as included in the Appendix
6. Natural Resource Conservation: The Guidelines should curtail sprawl development and ensure that the true costs to agriculture, habitat, and ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, groundwater recharge, and flood abatement are accounted for in regional land use planning. MPOs should facilitate regionally-coordinated natural resource inventories and conservation strategies that guide local land use decision making for the betterment of urban, rural, and natural communities alike.

7. Climate Change Adaptation: The Guidelines should consider future climate impacts (i.e. sea level rise, drought, increased flood and wildfire risk) when identifying priority development and conservation areas and in prioritizing infrastructure investments.
8. Holding Local Planning Accountable to Regional Goals: The Guidelines should ensure consistency by holding local government and transportation agencies – including CMAs and sales tax authorities – accountable for the impact of their planning and funding decisions on GHG-reduction and housing production goals, as well as on sprawl, regional segregation and unequal access to opportunity. Regional plans should not incorporate – much less reward – local decisions that are inconsistent with regional goals. Conversely, regional agencies should incentivize local transportation and land-use planning and projects that promote regional goals. State funding should also better align with and support local projects that meet SB 375 goals.
9. Transparency and Accountability in Modeling: Modeling is an exercise in probabilities based on assumptions, and the Guidelines should ensure that both the assumptions and the margin of error are specified transparently. Modeled outcomes on paper should not be accepted as a substitute for investments and policies that are well-tailored to actually achieve SB 375's mandates to reduce GHGs, house the population at all income levels, and achieve social equity. And projected GHG-reduction and housing production during the 4-year life of the RTP/SCS should be specified. Furthermore, modeling projections should incorporate state-of-the-science techniques to include induced travel from sprawl development enabled by highway expansion.
10. Faithful Implementation: The Guidelines should hold regional agencies accountable for implementing the actions in the RTP/SCS, and reporting on the success or shortcomings of those implementation actions annually.

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