

Building a Regional Voice: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments' Blueprint Initiative

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Abstract

Regional planning, often touted as the answer to sporadic and unsustainable growth, has historically been weak in the Sacramento region and in California as a whole. Local governments control land use decision-making in their boundaries and regional governments have had little power or intent to disrupt that dynamic. However, a recent initiative by the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans), named the California Regional Blueprint Program, attempts to revise this paradigm. Through a multi-jurisdictional visioning process, the program endeavors to reintroduce regional planning in a way that satisfies local officials, stakeholders and the general public. This paper explores the process and progress of Blueprint planning in the Sacramento region. Interviews with regional staff who led the process and stakeholders who participated in it suggest that the Blueprint planning process helped build trust among these individuals, and progress toward a more sustainable development pattern in the future.

Introduction: Collaborating Toward A Regional Vision

The Sacramento region is growing in population and in land area. Poorly planned growth, low density; residential development have replaced farmland and open space. Between 2000 and 2002 alone, urban land acreage increased by over 12,000 acres (Division of Land Resource Protection 2004). This pattern increases the potential for flooding and further degrades air quality. It necessitates car trips, worsening the already severe congestion. It makes walking more difficult and transit more expensive. Researchers project that the population in the Sacramento region will double over the next 40 years, placing further strain on infrastructure systems (Levy and Doche-Boulos 2005). What are planners doing in anticipation of this growth and in the face of these problems?

Regional planning, often touted as the answer to sporadic and unsustainable growth, has historically been weak in the Sacramento region and in California as a whole. Local governments control land use decision-making within their boundaries and regional governments have had little power or intent to disrupt that dynamic. However, the California Regional Blueprint Planning Program, a recent initiative by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), attempts to revise this paradigm. Blueprint planning is a voluntary program that provides seed funding for regional governments to pursue multi-issue regional plans. As Caltrans defines it, the program will “build capacity for regional collaboration and integrated planning that will in turn enable regions to plan to accommodate all their future growth, thereby reducing need for sprawl” (Caltrans n.d., a). Through a multi-jurisdictional visioning process, the program endeavors to reintroduce regional planning in a way that satisfies local officials, stakeholders and the general public. Although several regional agencies throughout the state have explored similar efforts of multi-jurisdictional collaboration in the past, the Blueprint planning program formalized these efforts. The program created a coordinated process and funding stream, in which sixteen regional governments participated in 2006 and 2007 (Caltrans n.d., b).

There is much at stake for this planning process in the Sacramento region. First, the results of Blueprint planning will inform decisions in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan 205 (MTP), to be completed in Winter 2008. The MTP will allocate approximately \$30 billion in capital improvements over the following 23 years. From local officials to developers to neighbors, many people have a genuine interest in how these funds are allocated. Second, the Sacramento region is one of the pioneers of Blueprint planning. Other regional agencies around the state and the country are watching the outcome of this process in order to inform their own initiatives.

This paper explores the process and progress of Blueprint planning in the Sacramento region. It describes the attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders involved in the process, asking the following questions: Who was involved in this Blueprint planning process? How did they become involved? What were their perceptions of the process?

Although it is too early to draw conclusions about the outcome of this ambitious process, it is clear that substantial success has been made in building relationships and improving communication between the local governments and Sacramento’s regional planning body. But there is still a long way to go. There is no formal plan and the guidelines set forth do not describe implementation measures. Considering the fractured nature of local authority, perhaps this outcome is all that can be expected. Now

that the Blueprint has instituted a base level of trust and collaboration amongst decision makers and interested community members, successive regional planning efforts may benefit and prove successful.

Methodology

This paper relies on interviews, observations and published materials. I completed eleven formal interviews with various stakeholders: senior staff at the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) and its partner Valley Vision, local planners from two cities, and representatives from the business, agriculture, environment, affordable housing and utility sectors. While attending one of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) workshops I spoke informally with many other stakeholders and community members. I reviewed reports and promotional materials produced by SACOG, as well as articles in the Sacramento Bee and other local newspapers. This paper also draws from a June 2006 paper by Elisa Barbour and Michael Teitz which studies Blueprint planning initiatives in four regions of California, including the Sacramento region. Additionally, I consulted unpublished works from Jonathan Davidson at the Center for Sustainable Suburban Development (CSSD) at the University of California, Riverside. Although this paper is my individual endeavor, CSSD originally commissioned the topic and research.

There are several limitations to this study. First, I only spoke with a handful of participants, roughly 5,000 individuals who participated in the Blueprint process. I selected interviewees based on recommendations from SACOG and subsequently from other stakeholder interviewees. Second, local governments have had little time to implement Blueprint strategies, so it may be too soon to know what implementation measures will be taken or the success of the Blueprint process in the region. Likewise, it is too early to comment on outcomes of the MTP process, since SACOG has not yet finalized the plan.

The Region in Context

Regional Context: The Role of SACOG

SACOG led and facilitated the Blueprint planning process. SACOG is the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Council of Government (COG) and Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for the Sacramento region. As shown in Figure 1, the Sacramento region is composed of 22 cities in 6 counties: El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento,

Sutter, Yolo and Yuba. Although a group of staff members run the day-to-day operations at SACOG, the leadership at SACOG is made up of local representatives. Specifically, the 32-member Board of Directors is comprised of elected officials from each county and city in the region. These member cities and counties originally created SACOG through a joint powers agreement in order to provide a forum to address problems and issues that have area-wide aspects or implications, such as transportation, air quality, water quality, land use, housing, and employment (SACOG 2003). Facilitating a complex planning process which includes numerous cities, counties, and regional transportation authorities is no small task. This section describes SACOG's purpose and scope of work, as well as how the member governments generally perceive its role.

Figure 1. Sacramento Area Six-County Region



Source: State of California: Office of the Attorney General.

Under the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and its subsequent reauthorizations, SACOG, as the region's MPO, is required to adopt an MTP every three years, with a planning timeline of at least 20 years. SACOG receives federal transportation funds and distributes these funds to cities, counties, and local transportation

authorities, who in turn operate, maintain and improve roads, transit, bike and pedestrian networks and projects. For the 2005–2006 fiscal year, SACOG had a budget of \$15.3 million. About \$9.4 million of this funding comes from the federal government. Local governments contribute \$4.7 million from general sales tax and the gas tax, county transportation and air quality districts, and membership dues. The State of California and in-kind funds represent the remaining revenues sources (SACOG 2005c). These funding sources are not discretionary. Most of the federal dollars must be spent on capital projects and many of the other sources are earmarked for specific programs.

Beyond holding the purse strings for transportation funding, SACOG has an advisory role in land use planning. As the region's COG, SACOG is required to conduct a Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA). SACOG estimates projected housing needs for each city and county in an effort to spread the housing burden across the region and increase the stock of affordable units. However, SACOG's projections are non-binding.

In reality, local planners and other outsiders see SACOG's major function as a data clearinghouse and technical support service. SACOG supplies demographic, land use and transportation data and provides technical assistance to member cities and counties. SACOG's role in the region is broadening, but its core purpose and strength is still as the regional transportation planning body.

Current Profile of the Sacramento Region

This section presents a profile of the six-county Sacramento region; population, employment and transportation behavior statistics help to illuminate the stress that current residents place on the region's infrastructure systems.

Most of the region's two million residents live in single-family detached homes in low density communities (U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Table H30; Fulton et al. 2001). According to SACOG's calculations, nearly two-thirds of residents live in Sacramento County, with the majority living in unincorporated areas (SACOG 2002). Sacramento, as the state capital and regional hub, has historically been the primary job center; suburban cities such as Rancho Cordova and Roseville, however, are increasingly becoming important employment centers.

In 1997, the population density of the Sacramento region (defined as a four-county area in this study) was 5.55 persons per urbanized acre. This figure represents a 3 percent reduction in density from 15 years earlier,

meaning that the rate of urbanized land area growth was greater than the rate of population growth. In comparison, the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles region accommodate more people on less land; they have higher densities of 7.96 and 8.31 persons per acre, respectively (Fulton et al. 2001).

This low-density pattern suggests that infrastructure, such as utilities and transportation, must cover more land area. It requires highways and arterial roads to accommodate many drivers, increasing transportation capital projects and maintenance expenses substantially. Not surprisingly, nearly 90 percent of workers travel to their workplaces by car. Most workers (83 percent) can get to work in less than 40 minutes, generally considered an acceptable commute time. In comparison, commute times in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area are on average longer; about a quarter of the population in each region travels more than 40 minutes to get to work (U.S. Census Bureau 2000, Table P31). Given the population growth anticipated, SACOG estimates that there will be a 53 percent increase in travel by 2027. This change portends increased travel distances, times and traffic, bolstering SACOG's argument that the region must change its development patterns (SACOG 2005a).

Projected Growth Forecasts

SACOG uses population and employment projections to estimate housing and transportation infrastructure needs for the region. These projections affect policy decisions and development patterns and therefore can be controversial. After considering several competing and contradictory population projections, SACOG hired a consultant team of Levy and Doche-Boulos to calculate projections of major demographic characteristics through 2030 and 2050.

The consultants project that the population will double, to nearly 4 million, by 2050. With a doubling in population comes a near doubling

Figure 2. SACOG Approved Demographic Characteristics Projections, 2030 and 2050

	Year			% Change
	2000	2030	2050	2000-2050
Characteristics				
Population	1,948,700	3,232,589	3,952,098	103%
Jobs	920,265	1,445,137	1,800,211	96%

Source: Levy and Doche-Boulos. 2005. "Projections of Employment, Population, Households, and Household Income in the SACOG Region for 2000 – 2050." Adopted by SACOG Board September 15, 2005: 2.

in the projected number of jobs and potentially the number of commute trips. In addition, they project a substantial increase in the 65 and over age group, from 11 percent of the population in 2000 to 21 percent in 2050, suggesting a need for changes in the makeup of the housing stock (from single-family to apartments) and possibly in the mode of travel trips (vehicles vs. transit or walking).

SACOG's leaders capitalized on the shock value of this population doubling and chose a planning horizon of 2050 for its Blueprint planning. As SACOG explained to local officials and other participants, these future residents will require additional housing units, jobs and schools. They will place additional burdens on land, water and energy resources, as well as transportation infrastructure.

Ten-Steps Toward Integrating Transportation & Land Use Planning

Senior staff at SACOG consider land use to be the "biggest driver in transportation planning" (Personal Communication). But, while federal and state regulations mandate regional transportation planning, California law continues to assign primary land use planning and regulation to local governments. In the past, SACOG made attempts to create a coordinated land use and transportation plan at the regional level, but lacked support from local member governments. After several failed attempts and a lawsuit by environmental groups over a lapse in conformity with air quality standards, SACOG's leaders realized it would take a major collaborative effort to come up with a regional plan that truly based the MTP on future land use patterns and that avoided further litigation.

For the most recently adopted MTP, completed in 2002, SACOG created the "Transportation Roundtable," an advisory group commissioned to brainstorm and draft goals for the MTP. The Roundtable consisted of group of 55 "diverse" stakeholders from the private sector, community and interest groups, and public agencies. The Roundtable recommended goals, guiding principles and study alternatives and created a draft MTP for the SACOG Board. Specifically, the Roundtable recommended that the Board allocate as much as one-third of transportation dollars toward smart growth-type projects (SACOG 2006a).

Although SACOG included many of the Roundtable's suggested reforms in the final MTP, the Roundtable itself was somewhat controversial. One interviewee, who was involved in selecting Roundtable members, reported that the SACOG Board of Directors was suspicious of the

Roundtable and its advisory role. Another interviewee concurred, claiming that it was made up of the “same old crowd.” He criticized this process in which stakeholders in Sacramento were making land use and transportation decisions for residents and workers in other counties (Personal Communication). On the other hand, the Roundtable effectively pushed SACOG to pursue land use planning before trying to complete another transportation plan. It was also the first effort in the region to attempt a multi-stakeholder approach that included non-governmental individuals as advisors. These factors set the stage for the Blueprint and led to a ten step process of Blueprint planning—from problem identification through plan adoption.

The Inaugural Blueprint

The original goals of the Blueprint process were basic and broad. SACOG envisioned that the Blueprint could answer questions for the region including: How should we grow? Where should we grow? How should we travel around the region? How will growth affect our environment? (SACOG 2004b) But, this time around, SACOG did not make top-down decisions. Rather, SACOG appears to have learned from its mistakes and is trying to better involve local authorities and other stakeholders in planning for the region. It is achieving this through a series of public workshops with stakeholder participants and continuous coordination between land use and transportation planners and elected officials in member governments.

SACOG does not envision the end result to be a comprehensive regional plan. SACOG does not have the authority or trust from its constituents to complete such a plan. Rather the Blueprint will outline basic future land use patterns and goals; in turn, the MTP will use the Blueprint as a base land use map and overlay transportation improvements on top of it. The MTP will have a budget of approximately \$36 billion for a 28-year planning cycle (SACOG n.d.).

SACOG’s regional planning process follows basic planning theory. The Blueprint and MTP follow parallel processes, one after the other. Both follow the rational planning model: defining a problem, reviewing planning goals, analyzing data, developing alternative scenarios and adopting a plan. The process underway to complete the MTP 2035 is summarized in Figure 3 and detailed in the text below. SACOG facilitates each of the steps, refining the plan according to feedback received from elected officials, local planners and residents and stakeholders who attended the Blueprint and/or MTP workshops.

Strategic Partnership for Public and Stakeholder Outreach

At the outset, SACOG developed an outreach plan and hired on an essential partner, Valley Vision, for its Blueprint initiative. SACOG created a Community Input Plan in order to identify ways to engage the general public, stakeholder groups and local officials to better plan for the region (SACOG 2004a). SACOG organized a technical advisory committee made up of local land use planners, transportation planners and public works employees from across the region. Planners began strategizing around content for a regional land use plan and public outreach campaign. They recognized that local control over land use was sacrosanct, but what SACOG could do was to guide localities toward a coherent plan that could be accepted across the region.

SACOG's strategic partner, Valley Vision, a Sacramento-based non-profit, was integral to the outreach effort. Self-described as a "neutral convener" and "civic glue," Valley Vision partners with other organizations in order to convene people and build frameworks to solve regional problems (Personal Communication). Valley Vision helped SACOG gather stakeholders and plan a set of public workshops to work through possible land use scenarios and indicate preferences for future growth. In this relationship, SACOG served as the content expert and Valley Vision led the outreach. Typically, their names and logos were side by side on all Blueprint literature and credits. As a small independent non-governmental organization with expertise in public outreach, Valley Vision was effective in recruiting participants.

SACOG arranged a secondary partnership with the Sacramento Bee newspaper. The Sacramento Bee announced upcoming workshops, described the planning problem, process, and purpose, and highlighted results from recent workshops. It is not clear how many people came to the workshops because of the newspaper announcements, but it is likely the media helped to spread the word about the planning process and outcomes.

Part 1: Developing a Preferred Land Use Scenario

1. Identifying the Problem: Data Collection and Analysis to Establish the "Base Case"

SACOG planners developed a base case scenario of how growth would unfold in the region without intervention. First, SACOG staff analyzed development approvals for approximately 800 parcels in the region over a four year period to determine how much development was taking place. Then they extended those development trends forward over several

Figure 3. SACOG Planning Process for Land Use and Transportation Planning

	Steps	Description
Blueprint	1. Identifying the Problem: Data Collection & Analysis of Land Use Data to Establish "Base Case"	SACOG staff develop demographic projections (e.g., population, jobs) and a 50-year projection map of development if current trends continue
	2. Blueprint Land Use Workshops	38 neighborhood, city, county and regional level meetings with stakeholders, public, elected officials to develop regional land use guidelines
	3. Communication with Local Elected Officials & City Planners	SACOG meets with 22 city councils and six county boards on an ongoing basis
	4. Regional Electronic Town Hall Meeting	SACOG reconfigures alternative land use scenarios using feedback from steps 2 and 3; participants vote for their preferred Blueprint alternative with auto-feedback clickers
	5. Adopt Preferred Blueprint Scenario	SACOG Board approves land use map and guidelines
Metropolitan Transportation Plan	6. Integrating Transportation Improvements: Modeling and Scenario-Building	SACOG staff develop technical growth models and projections of transportation factors using Blueprint map and input from local planners and officials
	7. MTP Transportation Workshops	City, county and regional level meetings with stakeholders, public, elected officials to develop transportation decisions overlaid on Blueprint land use map
	8. Communication with Local Elected Officials & City Planners	SACOG meets with 22 city councils and six county boards on an ongoing basis and holds summit of elected officials
	9. Regional Electronic Town Hall Meeting	SACOG reconfigures alternative transportation scenarios using feedback from steps 6 and 7; participants vote for their preferred MTP alternative with auto-feedback clickers
	10. Adopt Metropolitan Transportation Plan	SACOG develops 23-year transportation plan based on feedback from above steps

Source: Sacramento Area Council of Governments. "Four Scenarios for the Future" Presentation given April 30, 2004.

decades and used their consultants' demographic projections to estimate housing and infrastructure needs.

The base case map, identified as Scenario A, showed that given the population and housing units projected, current growth patterns could not be sustained. In other words, city and county general plans did not have enough land set aside to accommodate the region's trend in land and resource consumption. This realization resonated with participants, planners, and elected officials. As one interviewee noted about participants at his table: "they realize what's up; they get it. They're saying, 'my commute is getting worse, we're expecting thousands of people. Maybe some of this smart growth stuff isn't that bad!'" (Personal Communication)

2. Blueprint Land Use Workshops

Valley Vision staff used a "connector" model to recruit participants to the workshops. They asked someone that they do know, such as a SACOG board member or a local businessperson, for recommendations and assistance. For example, Valley Vision may ask one known developer to give them the names of ten other developers to contact and asks to use their name as a reference. Most importantly, Valley Vision asks local residents and leaders what type of outreach will work in their community. For example, in one rural community, staff put requests for participants in utility bills. In a more affluent area, Valley Vision used e-mail to contact potential participants.

An estimated 5,000 people participated in 38 public workshops between March 2003 and April 2004. There were 30 workshops which focused on city or neighborhood-level areas, 7 workshops that looked at the county-level plans and one final region-wide workshop. Most of the workshops took place in cities, as opposed to unincorporated areas and nearly half took place in Sacramento County, which contains the majority of the region's population.

All of the meetings followed a similar agenda. When participants walked in the door of the workshop, they were asked to choose an affiliation: real estate development, business, elected office, education, environment, social equity, neighborhood association, or public utilities. Participants were provided name-tags indicating their group affiliation and assigned to a table of eight with one member from each group affiliation. SACOG and Valley Vision intended to allow for a diverse set of viewpoints at each table. Interviewees said that they did not always speak as representatives of their organization or affiliation; rather, personal opinions and emotions often trumped professional interests.

Meetings began with an introductory video and PowerPoint presentation introducing the agenda, process and issues at hand. There were one or two facilitators at each table—typically SACOG staff members or local planners. Facilitators initiated discussions, documented participants' decisions and generally helped move along conversations, by asking questions and suggesting issues for consideration.

At the neighborhood/city level meetings, participants focused on small case study areas within their locality. There was a computer at each table running a software program called Planning for Community, Energy, Environmental and Economic Sustainability (PLACE3S), which contains data on all 75,000 parcels of land in the region. Participants made land use changes on a large map using stickers that corresponded to about 25 different development types (e.g., small lot single family residential, neighborhood retail, park, etc.) and the facilitator input the table's decisions into the program. PLACE3S then gave feedback on these decisions in the form of some 30 outcomes, including air quality, energy consumption, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and economic performance.

At the county-level workshops, participants chose from four land use alternatives with which to start planning their county. Scenario A was the base case scenario that SACOG had developed. The next three Scenarios: B, C and D, emerged out of the local workshops and each represented varying degrees of smart growth planning. In each county workshop, participants use these scenario maps as base maps, then made changes and refinements to land use and density.

For the one regional-level workshop, SACOG staff compiled the outcomes of the city and county-level workshops to create composite regional scenario maps B, C, and D. Figure 4 reports some of the relative differences for each of the scenarios. Each scenario accommodates the same population, jobs and housing units, but differs in its population concentration in Sacramento County and its consumption of greenfields, among other outcomes.

Scenario B called for the greatest growth at the outer edges of the region, Scenario C at the inner ring of Sacramento County, and Scenario D in the center of the region, along transit corridors. Scenario A, the base case, results in an increase in the proportion of single-family large lot homes, the greatest proportion of greenfield development and just 7 percent of trips by walking and biking. Scenario D, on the other hand, shows a 21 percent decrease in the proportion of single-family large lot homes, more even distribution of growth between infill and greenfield development and twice as many trips by walking and biking.

Figure 4. Comparison of Blueprint Alternative Scenarios

		Scenarios			
	Characteristics	A	B	C	D
Density	Primary Location of Development within the Region	Sprawl	Edges	Inner Ring	Center
	Population Growth in Sacramento County	48%	53%	57%	63%
Housing	Change in Percentage of Single-Family Large Lot	+5%	-17%	-18%	-21%
	Change in Percentage of Attached Residential Units	-4%	+4%	+5%	+7%
	Residential Growth Through Greenfield Development	73%	61%	62%	56%
	Additional Urbanized Land (square miles)	661	298	293	244
Transportation Access & Mode Choice	Residential Growth Near Transit	2%	27%	35%	35%
	Job Growth Near Transit	5%	32%	40%	44%
	Percent Trips by Transit	2%	4%	5%	5%
	Percent Trips by Walking/Biking	7%	13%	13%	15%
Growth Accommodated through 2050	Population	1.7 Million			
	Number of Jobs	1 Million			
	Number of Housing Units	840,000			
	Open Space	17,000 acres of new parks			

3. Communication with Local Elected Officials & City Planners

At the end of the series of workshops, SACOG staff met with planners and officials in each city and county and reported back the results of the workshops. They asked for feedback on the results and confirmed that they had projected for the correct number of residents, employees, dwelling units, etc. Planners and elected officials offered their feedback on goals, projects or specific parcels and SACOG adjusted the plans accordingly. One local planner said "SACOG did a tremendous job with every jurisdiction to make sure that everyone was on board . . . pushing the agenda, coming to council and keeping all the elected officials informed." (Personal Communication). SACOG invited all planning directors in the region to monthly meetings at SACOG throughout the Blueprint process. In some communities, planning directors would, in turn, bring materials and mapping ideas back to their staff to discuss ideas or projects.

Figure 5. The Blueprint Principles

Blueprint Principles	Description
Housing choice and diversity	Build an array of housing types (single-family, townhouses, apartments) to accommodate people with different needs (e.g., low-income, seniors, families)
Use of existing assets	Infill development, adaptive reuse of existing buildings, maintenance of existing infrastructure
Compact development	Increase density to improve access to services and jobs, shorten vehicle trip and increase convenience of walking and biking
Natural resource conservation	Create public use open-space in new developments and preserve wildlife and plant habitat, and agricultural land where appropriate. Encourage energy efficient design and water conservation.
Design for quality	Incorporate design details (sidewalks, landscaping, placement of garages) to make the environment more attractive, improve the experience of walking or biking and create a sense of community
Mixed use development	Create local activity centers to improve access to basic needs and services, shorten or reduce trips (e.g., small shopping center within residential neighborhood)
Transportation choices	Design developments that are convenient for people to walk, bike, ride public transportation or carpool

4. Regional Electronic Town Hall Meeting

Next, SACOG organized a summit of elected officials from across the six counties in an effort to reach some consensus around the plan. Approximately 80 out of 144 elected officials attended. They provided immediate feedback on various scenarios using individual keypads to place their votes. For example, 85 percent of the officials present answered “yes” or “yes definitely,” to the question of whether it would be good for the citizens of the region if the region implemented the Blueprint. Using this feedback from member cities and counties, SACOG produced the “Preferred Blueprint Scenario” for 2050: a land use map and a set of Blueprint principles (2005b).

5. Adopt Preferred Blueprint Scenario

SACOG received unanimous approval from the local councils for the Blueprint map and principles; the SACOG Board of Directors adopted this preferred scenario in December 2004. However, the outcome that they approved was just a skeleton and not an actual plan.

As shown in Figure 5, the seven Blueprint principles developed through the workshops are basic smart growth strategies for land use planning. They are ambitious given that the region is currently growing in a much more sprawling and low-density way. The Preferred Blueprint Scenario proposes smaller lot sizes, mixed housing types (condos and apartments, in addition to single-family homes), transit alternatives and pedestrian-friendly neighborhood commercial centers (2005b).

The land use map is intended as a conceptual framework that exemplifies the Blueprint growth principles and a guide for localities in their land use planning. However, the map depicts land use parcel by parcel. A resident can easily zoom in and identify the 2050 land use for her property. It is not surprising that some residents are taking this map very seriously. Several residents have called their local planning department to find out what this change to light industrial land use in their residential neighborhood is all about (Personal Communication)!

Still, there was substantial consensus among participants about the preferred scenario. Participant choices clearly converged toward Scenario C with some elements of Scenario D (slightly higher density and intensity). One SACOG staff member said that at the end of each of the workshops, it became clear that people wanted pedestrian-friendly districts, transit-oriented development (TOD), open space, bike paths and density near major corridors.

Stakeholder Perceptions of the Blueprint Visioning Workshops

There was so much consensus around the final Blueprint Preferred Scenario that it was difficult for several of my interviewees to identify elements of the process and plan to improve upon. While this satisfaction may be a result of the bias of my interview sample, media sources and unanimous approval by the SACOG Board suggest that the process did satisfy most participants. The reason for this widespread approval was two-fold. First, by default, stakeholders were interested in the regional planning process, had a stake in its outcome and were supportive of more sustainable and equitable planning before the process even started. Second, the principles were not controversial and participants generally agreed with them. For example, quality design and housing choices are not controversial ideas for participants to accept. To SACOG's credit, without all of its effort to engage local planners and officials, there may not have been such widespread approval for the Blueprint.

Despite this broad consensus, I was able to tease out many criticisms and suggestions for improvement, from SACOG, local planners and stakeholders. Generally, these criticisms fall into two categories: process and content.

In terms of process, some workshop attendees criticized the demographic make-up of participants. Several stakeholders argued that the "usual suspects" that attend all the community participation processes filled the room. They claimed that participants did not accurately represent the demographics of the region. One suggestion was that SACOG go to under-resourced communities to hold workshops rather than asking participants to come to them. Other stakeholders felt that it was unfair to use grant money to try to increase representation among some groups (specifically underrepresented minority and low-income groups) at the meetings.

In terms of content, some participants criticized the assumptions of the scenarios as well as what was not included in land use discussions. First, some participants lamented that there were only four scenarios from which participants could choose. Scenario A, representing the status quo was easily dismissed. As in Goldilocks' tale, Scenario B was too weak and sprawling and Scenario D too dense, which made Scenario C just right. Moreover, as consensus built in that direction, the momentum was unstoppable. One participant commented: "Because so many people engaged in the workshops, it was difficult not to go with the flow. Momentum built up in support of option C and there ensued a political basis among elected leaders for agreeing with constituents" (Personal Communication).

During the meetings, other participants criticized substantive topics that the Blueprint left out, including infrastructure (aside from transportation) and financing. Others felt that the workshops were too place-based as opposed to people-based. For the City of Elk Grove and El Dorado County, the content of the Blueprint drove them out of the planning process before it had even started. Both agencies were simultaneously pursuing General Plan updates with very different goals—namely plans that prioritized the traditional suburban development pattern. SACOG staff believe that it will be essential to reconcile different plans in the future and is willing to work hard to ensure that all member governments are on board (Personal Communication).

Part 2: Overlaying Transportation Infrastructure Improvements

With the Blueprint Preferred Scenario having been adopted by the SACOG Board and approved by elected officials in the region, SACOG set off to integrate a transportation plan with the land use forecast. Caltrans, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District and each county's transit agency partnered with SACOG and Valley Vision to prepare data, scenarios and develop the workshops. SACOG's intent was to include all decision-making authorities in the planning and facilitation of these workshops. In general, the MTP planning process mimicked the Blueprint initiative in terms of outreach and the structure of the workshops.

6. Integrating Transportation Improvements: Modeling and Scenario-Building

SACOG staff built technical growth models and completed projections of transportation outcomes (e.g., VMT, levels of congestion, etc.) in order to set goals for the planning process. Using results from the Blueprint land use study and information gathered from local planners regarding transportation plans in the pipeline and in development, SACOG developed two sets of maps. The first set of maps depicted existing transportation infrastructure and possible future projects overlaid on top of a 2030 version of the Blueprint land use map. This "distance" set included three maps for each county: transportation projects serving short distance trips (one to three miles), medium distance trips (three to ten miles) and longer trips (more than ten miles). The second set of maps depicted relative levels of congestion on highways, arterials and other major roads, again for each county. These "congestion" maps represented what congestion on roads would look like, if the transportation plans on each of the distance maps were implemented.

7. Transportation Planning Workshops

To refine the transportation scenarios and gain input from stakeholders, SACOG held eighteen MTP workshops between February and August 2006. Participants were charged with deciding how to control traffic congestion and meet clean air goals in the county through various transportation improvement options and while staying within budget.

Participants chose one of the three trip distance maps as a base map on which they would make transportation improvements. The congestion maps helped participants to identify areas that needed improvement as they considered trade-offs for new transit infrastructure and road improvements. At some of the tables, a second facilitator used the PLACE3S software to input participants' decisions about where to build or improve roads, bridges and transit infrastructure. PLACE3S then returned results on outcomes such as road conditions, congestion and VMT.

8. Communication with Local Elected Officials & City Planners

The engagement process with city officials is identical to the process described above for the Blueprint component. SACOG staff members met with city councils and county boards throughout the region to address concerns and gain consensus. In January 2006, SACOG held a workshop for elected officials throughout the region to discuss transportation challenges in their respective jurisdictions.

9. Regional Electronic Town Hall Meeting

A planning feat in and of itself, SACOG held eight meetings around the region on a single evening in November 2006. Out of the MTP workshops and discussions with local planners and officials, SACOG staff refined three planning scenarios to use at these workshops. Participants discussed the pros and cons of the scenarios and how they pertained to specific corridors, identified priorities and ultimately selected their preferred scenario. Over 1,200 people attended this event (SACOG 2006b). As of Spring 2007, SACOG is reviewing the results of the workshops, returning to individual city councils and county boards for approval and drafting the MTP 2035.

10. Adopt MTP Document

SACOG staff expect that the Board will approve the MTP 2035 in Winter 2008. The MTP is considered a “project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); therefore SACOG must also complete an environmental impact report (EIR). Current expectations are that SACOG will continue this cycle of Blueprint land use visioning and regional transportation planning into the future.

Implementation

SACOG has not developed a clear implementation strategy. Instead, three factors are coalescing toward implementation of the Blueprint principles. First, with increasing housing prices in the region and the average age of the population increasing, demand is shifting toward more accessible and affordable units. Second, the market supply has correspondingly shifted to provide these housing types. Although, admittedly, there is still a long way to go to convince residents, developers, and elected officials that this is an appropriate type of development in their communities. Third, SACOG staff are working with local governments to prepare implementation plans, advocate for Blueprint-type projects in front of city councils and provide grant money to assist with financing projects. SACOG staff and local planning agencies expressed hope that on-the-ground development examples made possible through these grant programs will further convince residents that Blueprint types of projects will benefit their localities.

Local Implementation: A Case Study of the City of Roseville

The City of Roseville presents a case study of what local implementation might look like. Roseville adopted a series of implementation strategies in May 2005 that align with the SACOG Blueprint principles.

The City first formed a 20-member Growth Management Visioning Committee (GMVC) made up of business professionals, retirees, long-time residents and new residents to assist in the process of developing a vision for future development (City of Roseville 2005). The GMVC spent seven months reviewing growth management policies and ended up being “supportive of growth, but in a smart way.” (Personal Communication).

The planners took the GMVC’s suggestions, researched best practices in other suburban communities and considered recommendations from

SACOG staff. They compiled these findings into a set of implementation strategies that reads like a menu. They defined each principle within a timeline that articulates when the city is ready to implement each element: currently, in 0 to 5 years, in 6 to 15 years, and in 16 to 30 years (City of Roseville 2005).

For Roseville, the true test of the success of the Blueprint will take time. As one planner said, "We can have all the nice documents and plans, but unless there are examples on the ground, it doesn't help" (Personal Communication). When the planners and city council persons can point to a Blueprint-type project that people enjoy living, working and shopping in, they expect that residents will be more accepting of the development type and developers more willing to build in that form.

For SACOG, getting projects on the ground and encouraging local communities to create their own implementation strategies are the steps towards implementation of the Blueprint. SACOG expects that Roseville's implementation strategies will serve as a model for other cities.

Conclusion

Through the Blueprint and MTP planning processes, SACOG achieved many successes. It created a vision for future development that both appealed to the majority of stakeholders and accomplished its initial goal: accommodating population growth on a smaller footprint. Participants looked at the effects of sprawling suburban development and chose a different strategy for development. SACOG also engaged a wider range of stakeholders than it had in the past. Community members had an opportunity to learn about the challenges facing their communities and about regional planning as a strategy for making them more livable. They also had the chance to share their opinions in a meaningful way. Local planners and officials, particularly those outside of Sacramento County, described improved relationships with SACOG staff. Overall, SACOG built social and political capital that will help it in future planning processes and plan approvals.

However, these planning processes were just the first steps. SACOG started a dialogue and created a vision, but how the region will move from vision to reality is still unclear. The upcoming MTP document should provide some clues by describing how SACOG integrated the land use vision and transportation plans and how they prioritized projects. Moreover, it will have steps defining implementation strategies. SACOG will need to continue to support local governments in implementing the Blueprint principles in their communities. Between the funding stream

from SACOG's grants programs and the unintentional Blueprint brand that developed, there is incentive and momentum to change development patterns.

If the cycle of Blueprint and MTP workshops continues as intended, it will be important for SACOG to measure its progress. Does incorporating land use into transportation planning make for better outcomes in the built environment? Are participants' stated views and decisions ultimately reflected in the final Blueprint and MTP plans? Although SACOG and Valley Vision received widespread approval during this Blueprint planning process, they must address the criticisms that have been made in order to improve the process next time. Given the trust this process developed among stakeholders, the stage is set for continual improvement within this cycle of land use and transportation planning.

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- Regional Planner, Sacramento Area Council of Governments, December 2005.
- Staff Member, Valley Vision, December 2005.
- Planners, City of Roseville, December 2005.
- Planner, City of Citrus Heights, December 2005.
- Professor of Human & Community Development, University California at Davis, March 2006.
- Staff Member, Environmental Council of Sacramento, March 2006.
- Program Manager, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, March 2006.
- Staff Member, Sacramento Housing Alliance, March 2006.
- Staff Member, Metro Chamber, March 2006.

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