CHAPTER 4

REGIONAL PLANNING AND POLICY FRAMEWORK
A Preferred Approach for our Regional Growth

The Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) establishes a new approach to planning in the San Diego region. This approach is based upon:

- A planning framework that parallels the framework used by cities and counties in preparing their general plans, and thereby strengthens the relationship between local and regional plans and programs; and
- A policy framework that focuses on connecting local and regional transportation and land use plans, and creation of incentives that promote “smart growth” planning and implementation throughout the region.

The RCP goes further than ever before to foster collaboration between government jurisdictions at the local and regional level. It ensures that local governments maintain local land use control, yet it calls for local land use plans to be considered for their regional impacts. It creates a new framework for inter-agency coordination including increasing subregional collaboration (e.g. adjacent cities working together to plan a shared roadway).

Importantly, it ties transportation funding to smart growth planning in our urban, suburban, and rural communities. The Regional Planning and Policy Framework outlines how SANDAG intends to better link transportation and land use planning and create other incentives to achieve the RCP’s smart growth objectives.

EXISTING REGIONAL PLANS AND PROGRAMS

Over the years, SANDAG and other governmental agencies have adopted a number of regional plans and programs. These plans and programs address a wide range of issues such as housing, economic development, transportation, air and water quality, habitat conservation, water supply, waste management, population growth, and growth management.

Each of these existing regional plans and programs is interrelated in terms of its planning goals, growth assumptions, policy approach, and performance monitoring approach; however, to date, there has been no overall framework for coordinating these plans, or for monitoring their overall effectiveness in meeting regional quality of life goals.

EXISTING LOCAL PLANS AND PROGRAMS

In addition to regional plans and programs, the County of San Diego and the region’s eighteen cities each have an adopted general plan, made up of a number of mandatory and optional elements, including Land Use, Circulation (Transportation), Housing, Public Facilities, Environmental Management (Open Space, Conservation, Safety, Scenic

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Highways), and Economic Development. State law specifically provides local jurisdictions with the authority to make land use decisions in accordance with their general plans.

Some of these general plans also serve as the basis for “Local Coastal Programs,” pursuant to the State Coastal Act, for jurisdictions located within the state’s Coastal Zone. Regarding habitat preservation, many local jurisdictions have prepared and adopted “Habitat Conservation Subarea Plans,” which implement the regional habitat conservation plans. Finally, many local service providers, such as the County of San Diego, local cities, school districts, water districts, sanitation districts, and the like, have developed facility and service master plans that provide guidance in the development and operation of services for those entities.

Currently no overall framework exists for coordinating these plans with each other, or with related regional plans and programs. The Regional Comprehensive Plan provides a new planning framework for the San Diego region – one which pulls together the various local and regional plans from throughout the region, in a structure much like that of local general plans, and establishes a coordinated regional planning document that serves as an organizing framework and guidance document for the myriad existing plans in the region.

GROWTH PROJECTIONS

The need for a comprehensive regional planning and policy framework is made evident not only by incompatibilities between existing local and regional planning documents and land uses, but also by the fact that current plans, if left unchanged, will not accommodate projected population growth and housing needs.

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**Future Outcomes If Local Plans Are Left Unchanged**

- Reduced open space. Current plans would consume far more land than a smart growth development pattern, which would emphasize more redevelopment and infill.

- More expensive housing and fewer types of housing choices. In general, most existing development consists of single family homes. On average, current densities in the cities and urbanized unincorporated areas are relatively low, and planned densities on currently-vacant land are even lower. This pattern limits our ability to address our projected housing needs, pushes up housing costs, and can result in more persons sharing the same household due to high home prices and rents.

- Imbalance between housing and jobs. Jobs are a key driver of population growth. Current local general plans allow for more growth in jobs than housing. Additionally, local plans largely separate residential areas from job centers.

- Environmental degradation. An imbalance between jobs and housing leads to more and longer commutes, increased energy consumption, and more smog. It also impacts development patterns within our watersheds which increases urban runoff, and in turn, affects the quality of both our drinking water and our water bodies, such as lakes, streams, bays, and the ocean.
The region is expected to grow by one million people, 314,000 new homes, and 439,000 new jobs between 2000 and 2030. Current projections show that unless we increase housing capacities in our more urbanized, incorporated jurisdictions beyond what is called for in existing plans and policies, more of our future population growth will be forced into the more rural, unincorporated areas of our region. That, in turn, will lead to continued loss of agricultural land, open space, and natural habitat. Additionally, more housing (approximately 90,000 housing units) will be “exported” out of the San Diego region – primarily to Riverside County and northern Baja California, causing higher housing prices and increasing traffic problems.

Also, because each general plan is specific to a single jurisdiction, land uses may conflict between cities and may be completely disconnected from the regional transportation network. For example, one city could zone an area for housing, while another has set aside land right next door for manufacturing or industrial uses; or significant housing densities could be planned in rural areas with two-lane roads and little to no access to transit services.

SANDAG has twice studied alternative future land use scenarios, using computer models to compare the future outcomes to what is likely to happen under current general plans.

The first analysis was done in 1998 in preparation of the 2020 Cities/County Growth Forecast. It compared the existing plans to three progressively more ambitious smart growth land use alternatives. One of the most dramatic differences was in land consumption. As seen in Figure 4.2, the current plans have the potential to consume up to three times as much land as the smart growth alternatives. That translates roughly into twice the land area of the City of San Diego, or from another perspective, the equivalent land area of 15 Oceansides or 68 National Cities.

In addition to the decreased land consumption, the smart growth alternatives were found to provide many transportation-related improvements in comparison to current plans. Table 4.1 below summarizes how the alternatives proposed above would result in reduced traffic impacts.

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**FIGURE 4.2—ALTERNATIVE FUTURE LAND USE SCENARIOS: FUTURE LAND CONSUMPTION IN ACRES UNDER EXISTING PLANS VS. THREE SMART GROWTH ALTERNATIVES**

![Figure 4.2: Alternative Future Land Use Scenarios](image)

**TABLE 4.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use Scenarios</th>
<th>Current Plans</th>
<th>Alt. 1</th>
<th>Alt. 2</th>
<th>Alt. 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acres Consumed</td>
<td>202,500</td>
<td>342,700</td>
<td>219,300</td>
<td>200,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. 2020 Cities/County Forecast Land Use Alternatives (1998): Alternative 1: Assumed increasing residential and employment densities around a 1,000-foot radius of existing and planned transit stops. Alternative 2: Same as Alternative 1, plus all future residential development throughout the jurisdictions at the top ends of their density ranges. Alternative 3: Same as Alternative 2, but included caps on future development in the unincorporated areas based on the county of San Diego’s GP 2020 plan update population targets at that time.
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TABLE 4.1—PERCENT REDUCTION OF TRAFFIC IMPACTS COMPARED TO CURRENT PLANS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRANSPORTATION CATEGORY</th>
<th>ALT 1</th>
<th>ALT 2</th>
<th>ALT 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miles of Congestion on Arterials</td>
<td>-71%</td>
<td>-71%</td>
<td>-69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miles of Congestion on Freeways</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td>-18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Miles Traveled</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle Hours Traveled</td>
<td>-21%</td>
<td>-22%</td>
<td>-22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Trip Length in Time</td>
<td>-20%</td>
<td>-22%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Trip Length in Distance</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>-12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Costs of Travel and Fuel</td>
<td>-19%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
<td>-19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Air Pollutants</td>
<td>-11%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
<td>-11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 2020 Cities/County Forecast Land Use Alternatives Report, November 1998

All together, about 30 land use and transportation measures were examined, including those shown in Table 4.1. In nearly every case, smart growth proved beneficial and regional mobility was improved. By reducing land consumption, the impacts on the environment, particularly in existing rural areas, were greatly reduced. The one significant area in which smart growth assumptions did not yield positive results was in relation to increased localized traffic area impacts in areas of significant intensification. However, localized traffic impacts can often be reduced with the implementation of improved transit service, and parking and design treatments (described in the Urban Form and Transportation chapters).

In 2002 a similar analysis was performed in preparation of the 2030 Preliminary Forecast and the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan. Again, the future impacts of a smart growth land use alternative were tested against the current plans. One difference from the 1998 study was that this time, the jurisdictions provided guidance by identifying specific areas where they felt smart growth could be most feasibly implemented. As a result, fewer smart growth sites were used in the 2002 analysis than in 1998, and the quantitative benefits of the outcome measures were reduced proportionally.

The lesson from both studies is clear: a little smart growth helps improve our quality of life a little, and a lot of smart growth helps more. That’s why the preferred planning concept for the RCP focuses on the connection between transportation and smart growth land uses.

THE PREFERRED PLANNING CONCEPT

Connecting our Transportation and Land Use Plans

The RCP contains policy objectives and actions aimed at improving transportation and land use coordination. It also identifies potential smart growth opportunity areas where transportation and other infrastructure resources should be directed.

Policy Objectives and Actions to Improve Transportation/Land Use Coordination
The RCP sets forth policy objectives and actions in seven major areas to improve transportation and land use coordination:

1. Implement the adopted Regional Transportation Plan “2030 Mobility Network”\(^2\) in an efficient and cost-effective manner;
2. Enhance transportation systems by improving connectivity between interrelated modes of transportation;
3. Provide adequate funding to meet both the capital, and operational and maintenance needs of our transportation systems;
4. Facilitate coordination through subregional planning among jurisdictions where proposed regional transportation and commuter transit service corridors cross jurisdictional boundaries;
5. Consider regional and local mobility objectives in planning and approving new land uses;
6. Design development to reduce auto dependency and improve the walking environment through safe and pleasant streetscapes; and
7. Align the timing of related transportation and land use development.

For each of these seven areas, policy objectives and actions have been included in the individual chapters of the RCP.

Smart Growth Opportunity Areas

A key recommendation of the RCP is to identify smart growth opportunity areas, and to direct transportation facility improvements and other infrastructure resources toward those areas where compact, higher density, mixed use, pedestrian-oriented development exists now, is currently planned, or has the potential for future incorporation into local land use plans.

The Urban Form chapter includes a matrix that identifies the characteristics of existing and potential smart growth opportunity areas for seven distinct categories, ranging from the metropolitan center to town centers to rural villages. The matrix will serve as a guide in developing a concept map that shows actual smart growth opportunity areas throughout the region. The concept map will be used as the foundation for showing eligible locations for smart growth incentive funds.

The regional transit network included in MOBILITY 2030 was used as a starting point in identifying the characteristics of smart growth opportunity areas because, from a mobility standpoint, it makes sense to couple higher land use intensities with regional transportation investments, particularly those related to transit stations and services. The Urban Form chapter discusses the smart growth opportunity areas and the framework for smart growth incentives in more detail.

Using Transportation and Land Use Plans to Guide Other Plans

\(^2\) The “2030 Mobility Network” is the regional highway, transit, and arterial network in the MOBILITY 2030 Regional Transportation Plan, which completes the missing links in the freeway system and provides a system of connected and free-flowing managed/high occupancy vehicle lanes integrated with new or improved high-quality transit services.
The designation of specific smart growth opportunity areas in the RCP will provide guidance to local governments, property owners, and service providers as to where smart growth development should occur from a regional perspective, and will focus attention on these areas as local jurisdictions update their general plans and redevelopment plans, and service providers update their facility master plans. By coordinating our planning in this manner, we will ensure that public and private investment in local and regional infrastructure is implemented in an efficient and sustainable manner (see the IRIS and Implementation chapters for more detail).

IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

A major focus of the implementation program of the RCP is to strengthen the connection between local and regional land use and transportation plans through collaboration and incentives. The RCP is not based upon a “top down” approach of consistency and conformity. Instead, it is a collaborative planning approach that builds up from the local level into a regional framework, relying on incentives to achieve the goals and actions recommended in the chapters.

Specific actions related to transportation/land use coordination are described briefly below, and in more detail in upcoming chapters.

Transportation Project Evaluation and Prioritization

MOBILITY 2030, the Regional Transportation Plan, is the adopted long-range transportation planning document. It is used as the basis for funding decisions made through the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), the five-year capital improvement program for transportation projects that is updated by SANDAG every two years. The currently adopted RTIP covers the period from fiscal years 2003 to 2007, and reflects the region’s priorities for short-range transportation system improvements.

In the most recent update of the RTIP, projects were evaluated on the basis of four complex sets of criteria, designed primarily to meet transportation objectives. Prior to the 2006 RTIP update, SANDAG will work with its member agencies and other stakeholders to revise its transportation project evaluation criteria into a simpler set of criteria that will better reflect both the transportation and land use policy objectives of the RCP, and strengthen the relationship between

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3 Due to the state budget crisis in 2004 and the lack of a new multi-year federal transportation reauthorization bill, no new funding was available in the 2004 RTIP cycle (covering fiscal years 2005 to 2009). The transportation evaluation criteria would be revised prior to the 2006 RTIP funding cycle (covering fiscal years 2007 to 2011), when new transportation funding is anticipated.
local smart growth opportunity areas and regional funding for transportation improvements, particularly those related to transit (see the Transportation chapter for more detail).

Smart Growth Incentives

Successful implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Plan will require incentives for smart growth development that meets the goals and policies of the RCP. As discussed in the Urban Form chapter, there are a number of different approaches to providing such incentives. At the broadest level, because the RCP calls for SANDAG to coordinate its transportation investments with local land use decisions, all transportation funds that SANDAG programs can, to some extent, provide incentives for smart growth development. Decisions regarding priorities for future regional transit, arterial, and highway corridor projects should be based, in part, on how well local communities have planned for smart growth land uses that facilitate a wide set of transportation choices that, in turn, increase mobility.

Additionally, as local jurisdictions implement smart growth projects, there is growing recognition that investments in infrastructure other than regional transportation facilities is needed. While funding for smart growth is available from a number of sources, including state agencies, federal agencies, and private foundations, MOBILITY 2030 includes a $25 million, five-year, pilot incentive program to encourage land use decisions that support smart growth principles. This program, further discussed in the Urban Form chapter, will be used specifically to fund planning and infrastructure that supports smart growth development projects.

The RCP also recognizes that local jurisdictions can also play a significant role with regard to the provision of incentives. Local jurisdictions can promote development in smart growth opportunity areas by offering incentives such as priorities for infrastructure improvements, fee reductions, priority processing of development plans, and others, thereby maximizing local and regional investments in key areas. The Urban Form chapter describes potential funding sources for smart growth incentives and outlines overall principles for developing criteria for applying the incentives.

As additional funding becomes available, smart growth incentive programs should be expanded to help meet the planning and infrastructure needs of smart growth opportunity areas.

Subregional Planning and Implementation Programs

While the initial steps outlined above will help improve coordination of local and regional plans, many of the coordination issues cross jurisdictions, and require further refinements to planning concepts contained in MOBILITY 2030 and the RCP. For example, many of the proposed regional and commuter transit service corridors cross jurisdictional boundaries. The exact alignment of future corridors and station locations need to be refined in order to make the systems work most effectively from both a transportation and land use perspective.

In order to address these issues more effectively in the future, greater emphasis will be placed on the preparation of subregional transportation and land use studies and implementation programs. These studies will focus on particular subregional areas where transportation and land use issues cross jurisdictional boundaries and where subregional evaluation and planning strategies could lead
to more effective solutions (Figure 4.4). In some cases, these subregional studies will not only include areas within the jurisdiction of the county and its cities, but neighboring counties and Baja California, Mexico, that must be considered to develop workable solutions. Compacts among the participants in subregional planning programs may be developed to provide a structure for their implementation.

**FIGURE 4.4—SUBREGIONAL LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

Other strategies for implementing the preferred concept of the RCP are detailed in the Implementation chapter, including guidelines for strengthening the local/regional connection, improvement of analytical tools and traffic forecasting modeling capabilities, and performance monitoring programs.

**CONCLUSION**

By focusing the Regional Comprehensive Plan on the coordination of transportation and land use plans at the local and regional levels, the region will be able to address many of its pressing problems: traffic congestion, housing affordability, protection of sensitive habitats, and strengthening our economy, while ensuring equity in planning and development.

In addition, by pursuing the preferred planning concept outlined in this chapter, which calls for using regional transportation funding as an incentive for local agencies and other service providers to make land use decisions and infrastructure investments that support smart growth, local jurisdictions and regional service providers can efficiently plan for the expansion of their facilities and services and accommodate growth in a more cost-effective and sustainable manner.

The following chapters address each of the major elements of planning for our region: transportation, urban form, housing, healthy environment, economic prosperity, public facilities, and borders issues. Each chapter begins with a vision of our region in 2030 in relation to that topic, and includes a description of existing conditions, existing plans and programs, an analysis of key issues, and recommended goals, policy objectives, and actions. Taken together, these chapters, along with the Integrated Regional Infrastructure Strategy (IRIS), form the core of the Regional Comprehensive Plan.