Our Region. Our Future.

Creating Sustainable Communities in the San Diego Region
Growing Smarter
The San Diego region’s vision of its own future has been evolving for decades, changing from an emphasis on accommodating new growth in an orderly fashion to a focus on shaping that growth to create a more sustainable community.

That change in vision evolved from the work of the region’s city and county governments, acting both on their own and collectively through the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG).

As SANDAG today works on drawing up the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan—which will look 40 years ahead, and for the first time will suggest ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through a Sustainable Communities Strategy—their future is one that will depend on growing smarter.

Shaping Communities
Growing smarter means guiding the development of our land use and transportation in ways that encourage the creation of special places where people can live, work, and play—and then connecting those places with a robust transit system. Rather than continuing to expand into the shrinking open space to the east of our urban core, this new view calls for making room for our growing population in transportation corridors within the urban core and creating vibrant centers where people have a variety of transportation choices.

It is a vision of the future that the region’s local governments have been working toward for decades. The San Diego area has changed from a post-war boomtown looking to grow, to a bustling metropolis straining to make room for migration from the rest of the country, to a region that is now seeking to strike the delicate balance between accommodating growth and preserving its extraordinary quality of life.

A New Era for Planning
Along with the rest of California and the nation, San Diego County entered the modern era of urban and environmental planning in the late 1960s and early 1970s. New federal and state environmental laws passed in response to concerns about the impacts of growth on natural systems mandated careful review of the potential effects of new development. At the same time, cities and counties began to draw up detailed general plans to address these issues and other community concerns such as traffic congestion.

By the 1990s, federal and state environmental laws promoted a more comprehensive approach. Local jurisdictions responded by banding together and creating regional plans for preserving open space, protecting water resources, and improving air quality.

Now, as concerns grow about greenhouse gases and their potential effects on the environment, another era of planning has taken hold, integrating economic growth and housing availability efforts with land use, transportation, and environmental planning to create a single “sustainable community planning” approach.

Our Evolving Future
Each step through that process, our region’s vision for its own future has evolved, changing from one that pictured steady expansion to the east, to one that placed a greater value on protecting open space, to one that now focuses on a compact urban core where more people live but use fewer resources.

Snapshots in Time
On the following pages you will see three snapshots in time—how our region saw its future in 1986, again in 2000, and how we see it today. These snapshots track the history of our evolving views, point out key milestones along the way, and explain how the entire region working together can create a sustainable vision for the future and then make that vision a reality.
Responding to Growth

The region’s efforts to create a more sustainable future have their roots in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when sweeping federal and state environmental protection laws created a foundation on which local cities and counties could begin to build.

Concerns were rising over the environmental effects of rapid population growth and intense development. The urban area of San Diego County was quickly expanding to the north and east, as suburban tracts of single-family homes sprouted up to meet demand. From 1970 to 1990, the population of San Diego County grew from about 1.4 million to 2.5 million residents – reflecting a statewide trend, where the population shot up from 20 million to 30 million people.

Acting under new laws like the California Environmental Quality Act (which required local governments to consider the environmental impact of development projects) and the State Planning Act (which required them to adopt comprehensive general plans), the cities and the county began to look more closely at growth within their jurisdictions. They set out to consciously shape how their communities would develop over long periods of time. The first wave of those plans called for continued suburban development to the east to accommodate projected population growth.

While cities and the county worked to meet the housing and employment needs of an expanding population, concerns grew that rapid suburban development could affect water and air quality, consume the region’s remaining open space, and create intolerable traffic congestion with solo commuters traveling back and forth from bedroom communities to job centers.

In the late 1980s, the region’s voters responded by creating a regional growth management board to help plan for the future (SANDAG was selected to fill this role) and by approving the local TransNet half-cent sales tax to fund highway, transit, and local road improvements.

In 1990, 670,289 acres (of the 2.7 million total in the county) was parks and open space.

**Major Milestones Toward Sustainability in the San Diego Region**

- **1966** – Local governments create regional Comprehensive Planning Organization (CPO)
- **1970s** – County and cities adopt first comprehensive general plans
- **1970s** – County and cities begin producing environmental impact reports
- **1986** – SANDAG produces first Comprehensive Transportation Plan
- **1988** – San Diego Trolley goes into service
- **1988** – Vote approved TransNet half-cent sales tax for transportation goes into effect
- **1988** – Cities designate SANDAG (formerly CPO) as Regional Planning and Growth Management Board

**Projected Mix of New Housing from 1986 to 2010**

- **Single Family** 64%
- **Multi-Family** 36%

**Projected Total Regional Housing Mix in 2010**

- **Single Family** 66%
- **Multi-Family** 34%

**Population Per Acre**

- **Least than 0.1**
- **0.1 - 0.5**
- **0.5 - 1.0**
- **1.0 - 2.5**
- **More than 2.5**

**Expanding Eastward**

The brown areas on this map are already built out or slated for urban development by 2010.

**Land Available**

The areas in white are open land available for rural development.

**Vision of 2010**

- **Parks & Open Space**
- **Farmland and Open Space**
- **Urban**

**In 1986, plans called for just 36 percent of new housing built over the coming 24 years to be multi-family units – the rest of the new housing would be single-family homes that are relatively difficult to serve with transit. Forecasts indicated that in the year 2010 only about one-third of the total units in the region would be multi-family.**
Preserving the Environment

The 1990s ushered in an increasing level of sophistication for local and regional planners working to accommodate growth, while at the same time protect the San Diego region’s environment and quality of life.

The cities looked 20 years ahead, updating their general plans to show how their communities would appear in future decades. Developers were encouraged to build new projects under the guidance of large-scale master plans. These plans called for new neighborhoods to be built around community centers, with land set aside for parks, transportation corridors, schools, open space, and other important amenities.

Meanwhile, environmental regulations that previously had been applied only on a project-by-project basis were put into broader use. Acting individually and collectively, local jurisdictions began making regional-scale environmental decisions, creating plans for habitat conservation, watershed management, and regional air quality.

One of the largest of these was the Multiple Species Conservation Program (MSCP). Adopted in 1997, the MSCP spans 11 cities and unincorporated areas of central and southwest San Diego County. It targets more than 173,000 acres for preservation. Work also began on similar plans to preserve 20,000 acres within the cities of North County and another 300,000 acres in the unincorporated area.

By the year 2000, a SANDAG growth forecast projecting how the region would look in 2030 (compiled by combining demographic predictions with local general plans), showed urban expansion toward the east slowing down. The region’s new vision for the future started to show more permanent open space and a more compact urban core.

In 2000, 904,614 acres (of the 2.7 million total in the county) was parks and open space. Several major projects were completed, including the Otay Ranch project, which called for increasing density in exchange for preserving open land.

In 2030, plans called for a little more than half of new housing built over the coming 30 years to be multi-family units, up significantly from previous forecasts — meaning a larger percentage of housing would be more compact and potentially accessible to transit. As a result, forecasts indicated that by the year 2030 about 40 percent of the total units in the region would be multi-family.
Growing Smarter: 2001 – Today

An Integrated Approach

Since the year 2000, the principles that guide our vision for the future have deepened and matured. Jurisdictions have begun to integrate local and regional plans for accommodating our growing population, preserving open space, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions into a holistic approach referred to as “smart growth.”

In its simplest form, the smart growth concept calls for creating and preserving special places – places where people live, work, and play in the same place – increasing mixed land uses and housing types, while also improving walkability and reducing the need for cars. Then these places are connected with a vastly improved transit system.

The result is a more sustainable future – a future where there are more people, but they consume fewer resources. Current forecasts predict that although another 1.2 million people will live in the county by 2050, they will live in urban centers and communities along the region’s major transportation corridors. Development will be very limited in the rural portion of the county. The region will preserve the open space that forms a buffer between the urban areas and the backcountry.

This vision emerges by combining the current general plans of all the cities and the county into documents like the Regional Comprehensive Plan and the Regional Transportation Plan, both created through SANDAG.

Understanding the need to grow in a more sustainable way, our local government leaders have embraced the concepts of smart growth and used them to guide their visions for the future.

In 2008, 1,071,721 acres (of the 2.7 million total in the county) was parks and open space. (of the 2.7 million total in the county) was parks and open space.

Sustainability in the San Diego Region

Major Milestones Toward Sustainability in the San Diego Region

2000s – Several cities adopt general plan updates

2000 – Local governments and wildlife agencies approve North County Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Program

2004 – SANDAG adopts FY20 Regional Comprehensive Plan

2004 – Voters extend Transient旅馆 tax (for 40 years)

2004 – $80 million Transit Environmental Mitigation Program established

2005 – Trolley extended through Mission Valley to SeaWorld;恭喜“Trolley Centennial”

2006 – The 16 cities and county work with SANDAG to prepare an integrated, first regional Smart Growth Concept Map

2008 – SPRINTER light rail goes into service

A Vision for 2050

Sustainable Community Planning

The region’s current growth forecast – depicted on this map – looks out to the year 2050. Its vision of the future shows no further significant expansion to the east even though the region is expected to add another 1.2 million residents.

Unique Communities Active, mixed-use community centers will be connected by regional transit like the SPRINTER rail line. (Open oval)

Compact Urban Core

A more compact urban core will develop along transportation corridors such as I-5 from downtown San Diego to South Bay. (Closed oval)

Vision of 2050

Population Per Acre

Projected Mix of New Housing from Today to 2050

Projected Total Regional Housing Mix in 2050

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<th>Single-Family</th>
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Population Per Acre

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<th>Land Use</th>
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<tr>
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<td>38.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>All Other Land</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
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Regional Collaboration

It takes collaboration between the 18 cities, the County of San Diego, SANDAG, and many other agencies to create a comprehensive vision for our future. That process is underway now. In early 2010, SANDAG published its latest growth forecast for the region – the 12th in a series of forecasts dating back to the 1970s that have predicted the future with remarkable success. The 2050 Growth Forecast was generated using a combination of economic and demographic projections, existing land use plans and policies, and potential land use plan changes that may occur in the region.

The forecast represents a consensus among demographers, planners, and policy makers regarding how and where future growth is likely to occur. The graphs on the opposite page illustrate some interesting data points from the forecast, including expected changes in demographics and housing capacity.

2050 Regional Transportation Plan

The predictions in the growth forecast are being used to help create the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), a comprehensive blueprint for how the region’s transportation system will evolve in the future. This version of the RTP – which is updated every four years – will be adopted in 2011.

Like the growth forecast, this latest edition of the RTP will be different. It will look farther into the future than ever before, and it also will look at an important new factor. For the first time ever, the RTP will include a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), a new element required under State Senate Bill 375.

The purpose of the SCS is to create a scenario for the growth of the region and its transportation system that will lead to per capita reductions in greenhouse gas emissions using targets set by the California Air Resources Board.

Planning for Sustainability

The Sustainable Communities Strategy in the 2050 RTP will help the region take the next step on its journey toward a more sustainable future. The SCS will describe how a comprehensive plan integrating smart growth land use patterns, enhanced transit, transportation demand management strategies, and many other improvements can shape more sustainable communities.

Working together, local and regional governments, stakeholder groups, and the public will create a new, increasingly sustainable future for the San Diego region.

Get Involved in the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan

SANDAG invites you to get involved in shaping our region’s future.

Where will we all live in the decades to come? What will be the best way for us to get around? How do we preserve our open spaces? And how do we address these issues in a way that helps us reduce greenhouse gas emissions while strengthening our economy?

Learn about the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan being developed.

SANDAG.org/2050RTP
facebook.com/SANDAGregion

Join our e-mail list at 2050rtp@SANDAG.org
Tell us what you think at 1 (877) 277-5736

Housing Near Transit Will Increase

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Housing Capacity (Number of Additional Housing Units)

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