

## *Putting the Pieces Together*

### *A Status Update and Overview for the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) of the San Joaquin Valley*



*June 15, 2012*

There are a lot questions about the three-letter acronym “SCS” that has us all wondering what is it and what does it mean for the San Joaquin Valley. Hopefully this “layman” summary will answer some of those questions. In short, a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) is a plan for integrating transportation, land-use and housing policies for achieving lower greenhouse gas emissions per person. That’s the short version, the longer and detailed explanation is provided below.

#### ***Legislative Background: Where did the “SCS” Come From?***

SCS is derived from the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, also known as Senate Bill 375 (SB 375), a State of California law-targeting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from “mobile” pollution sources, specifically passenger vehicles.

Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, come from the burning of fossil fuels (i.e. the petroleum based gasoline in automobiles) and contribute to the greenhouse effect, or a rise in average surface temperature, as well as air pollution. Passenger vehicles are the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions statewide and account for 30 percent of the total emissions.

Senate Bill 375 was a follow up bill to Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32), the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006. AB 32 set goals for the reduction of statewide greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, representing a 25 percent reduction statewide. [The California Air Resources Board \(CARB or ARB\)](#) is charged with establishing greenhouse gas emission “targets” for regions within the state including the San Joaquin Valley. The targets were adopted by ARB in September 2010.

#### ***What are the Components of a “SCS”?***

A Sustainable Communities Strategy is a plan for demonstrating land-use and transportation measures that will be used to meet the region’s greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, if feasible. The main components of a SCS are as follows:

1. Identify the general location of uses, residential densities, and building intensities within the region;
2. Identify areas within the region sufficient to house all the population of the region, including all economic segments of the population, over the course of the planning period of the regional transportation plan (RTP);
3. Identify areas within the region sufficient to house an eight-year projection of the regional housing needs for the region;
4. Identify a transportation network to service the transportation needs of the region;
5. Gather and consider the best practically available scientific information regarding resource areas and farmland in the region;

6. Consider the state’s housing goals; the provision of safe and decent housing for all segments of the population, particularly for low to moderate income households;
7. Set forth a forecasted development pattern for the region, which, when integrated with the transportation network and other transportation measures and policies, will reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles consistent with the target reductions developed by ARB;
8. And, allow the regional transportation plan to comply with federal laws inclusive of the Clean Air Act.

***Who Creates and Manages the SCS?***

By law (SB 375), the Sustainable Communities Strategy needs to be part of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) developed by Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) - also known as Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPA) or sometimes “COGs”. As a result, each Valley MPO is developing their own SCS.

The Regional Transportation Plan is a federal and state mandated long range (usually 20-year) transportation plan that includes an assessment of all transportation systems, identifies current and future deficiencies and needs, identifies all major projects and funding, and demonstrates how the plan, if implemented, will conform to certain air quality standards. The approved RTP is submitted to the [Federal Highway Administration](#), the [California Transportation Commission](#) and [Caltrans](#), and allows for MPOs to continue receiving federal and state transportation funding, which supports local and regional transportation projects.

Each San Joaquin Valley MPO develops a RTP and it is updated every four years. Right now, all Valley MPOs are working on updating their RTPs so that the SCS portion of the RTP is completed and accepted by the California Air Resources Board by December 2013 (KCAG has a 2014 deadline).

***If the Goal is to Reduce GHG Emissions, what are the “Targets”?***

As mentioned, the SCS needs to demonstrate how our future growth will be consistent with a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to the established “targets”. The reduction target is the percent decrease in per capita greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from passenger vehicles.

In September 2010, the California Air Resources Board, in coordination with the Valley MPOs, established “placeholder” targets for the San Joaquin Valley for years 2020 and 2035. The targets are a 5 percent reduction in GHG emissions by 2020 and a 10 percent reduction by 2035 with 2005 as the base year.

**San Joaquin Valley Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)**

There are eight MPOs in the eight county San Joaquin Valley, which runs from Stockton (San Joaquin County) in the north to Bakersfield (Kern County) in the south.

[San Joaquin Council of Governments \(SJ COG\)](#)

[Stanislaus Council of Governments \(StanCOG\)](#)

[Merced Association of Governments \(MCAG\)](#)

[Madera County Transportation Commission \(MCTC\)](#)

[Fresno Council of Governments \(Fresno COG\)](#)

[Kings County Association of Governments \(KCAG\)](#)

[Tulare County Association of Government \(TCAG\)](#)

[Kern Council of Governments \(Kern COG\)](#)

The SJV MPOs work together on many Valleywide initiatives including the SCS process. There is a formal Directors Committee whereas the eight MPO Executive Directors meet monthly to discuss transportation and other issues relevant to the Valley.

In 2006, the SJV Regional Policy Council was formed to further integrate the role of MPOs in the regional planning process. For more information about the SJV Regional Policy Council: [www.sjvcogs.org](http://www.sjvcogs.org)



The targets for the Valley were “placeholder” percentages pending the development of improved data, modeling, and target setting scenarios. At that time, the MPOs were not ready to accept the targets “as is” because they lacked certain information that would help determine if the proposed targets were realistic or not.

Since that time, the Valley MPOs have been working on developing the modeling infrastructure and other resources that will enable them to go back to the California Air Resources Board in November 2012 to propose “provisional” targets that would be used to complete the SCS by the December 2013 deadline. Once the SCS are accepted by the Air Resources Board, then ARB will take a separate action in early 2014 to update and finalize the GHG targets statewide. If a MPO cannot meet the targets through their respective SCS, then an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) needs to be developed that demonstrates how targets could be achieved.

### ***What are some of the Efforts Going on in the San Joaquin Valley to Complete the SCS Process?***

The Valley MPOs have a strong history of collaboration through such efforts as the Valleywide Blueprint, the formation of the Regional Policy Council, and several other regional efforts. SB 375 provides the eight MPOs the option to work together in the development of multi-county goals, policies and sustainable community strategies (SCS); however, it does not define which approach the eight MPOs should utilize if they choose to implement any of the options to work together. The decision of how the MPOs will work together is the choice of each MPO.

As a result, the Valley MPOs are working both collectively and independently on their respective SCS. Modeling and public outreach are SCS components where the MPOs are sharing resources, however, each MPO is developing a separate SCS.

Development of the SCS is an “unfunded mandate” that requires extensive resources to complete. In order to fund these activities, the Valley MPOs applied for and secured \$2.5 million in grant funding over three years from the [California Strategic Growth Council’s](#) Proposition 84 Planning Grant Program to support its SCS efforts. The [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#) has also been supportive of the Valleywide SCS effort and is working with the Valley MPOs in various capacities.

### ***When Important Growth and Development Discussions take place during the SCS Process, will Members of the Public be Invited to Participate?***

Everyone needs to be part of this planning process. The general public, non profits, elected officials, private sector and special interest groups should be engaged in all portions of the SCS process, particularly the SCS scenario development portion where land use and transportation policy recommendations will be formulated. The MPOs need this public participation in order to ensure that all sectors of population and interest groups understand and guide the Valley’s future growth policy recommendations.

A major component of the RTP and SCS planning process is public outreach and participation across all income levels. RTP laws and guidelines require MPOs to be sensitive to how all residents, particularly low-income communities and communities of color, may be impacted by possible transportation and land use changes identified in the RTP and SCS process, and that these populations receive equal benefits, on an equally timely basis, as other populations.

### ***“Modeling” was Mentioned as Being Critical to the SCS Process, What Does it Mean?***

In order to determine where growth may or may not occur, at what intensity, its relationship to existing and planned transportation systems, and its implications for reducing GHG emissions, there needs to be a sophisticated land use, transportation and GHG computer modeling system in place. The Valley MPOs are collectively working together on this effort.

In a nutshell, “Envision Tomorrow” is a land use scenario-planning tool that will incorporate every Valley city and county general plan, along with their respective planned land uses. With the anticipated land uses from the general plans, the transportation Model Improvement Program (MIP Model) will estimate vehicle trips (i.e. every home or office will generate “x” number of vehicle trips). Then, those vehicle trips are to be plugged into the California Air Resources Board model called “EMFAC” to determine the amount of GHG emission reductions.

The growth scenarios from the SCS process can then be revised and modified to arrive at the required amounts of GHG emission reductions. These adjustments to model input and output results will require various growth alternatives to be developed, again exemplifying the critical need for public input and participation in the process.

### ***How does the “Blueprint” fit into the SCS Process?***

The Blueprint process was a Caltrans funded planning effort conducted for the region and within each MPO to develop consensus for shared “smart growth” principals as well as identifying preferred density levels for future growth in our region. The Blueprint in many ways was a precursor to the growth alternative scenarios to be developed in the SCS process. The extensive public outreach conducted for the Blueprint and the resulting shared principals will support and guide the SCS process.



### ***Does the “SCS” require Cities and Counties to Change their General Plans?***

Because local land use agencies (i.e. cities and counties) have land use authority, there is no requirement in the SB 375 legislation for cities and counties to change or amend their general plans to be consistent with the SCS. Cities and Counties will be involved in the SCS planning process and will obviously be encouraged to recognize the land use and transportation policies developed in the SCS. Federal and State transportation funds go through the MPOs to the jurisdictions, so there certainly is an implication for collaboration and working together.

One incentive offered to cities and counties is CEQA streamlining for development projects that are consistent with the SCS.

### ***What are the Next Steps to Completing the Valley’s SCSs?***

As mentioned earlier, a complicating factor in the Valley’s SCS process is the existence of eight MPOs doing eight SCSs for one region. Other regions, such as the San Francisco Bay Area have one MPO, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, which represents multiple counties. So in the Bay Area as well as the Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Diego regions, just one SCS is to be completed with one set of targets.

It is unclear whether the Valley MPOs must meet the GHG reduction targets individually or collectively. CARB will be looking to the MPOs for their recommendation, and this topic has been an ongoing point of discussion since the “placeholder” targets were set in September 2010. This, in part, is related to the whole regional discussion for the Valley. What is to gain and what is to lose by working together?

In terms of the SCS, a shared regional GHS target would allow for larger metropolitan areas in the San Joaquin Valley (Fresno, Bakersfield, Stockton) to show intensified development patterns resulting in less vehicle miles travelled and less GHG emissions. The rural agricultural communities, throughout the region, would be less impacted by SB 375 in this scenario because emission reductions would be attained in the metro areas.

On the other hand, without a regional sharing of surplus and deficit GHG emissions, each county will be responsible for meeting the target individually which, for example, could be problematic for rural communities in some counties, particularly those counties without a larger metropolitan area. The Valley MPOs continue to discuss this topic and will need to address it with CARB in November 2012.

Another complicating factor is the pending Federal transportation bill to replace SAFETEA-LU (the \$244 billion transportation funding act of 2005) that may contain a provision to redefine how MPO status is determined. As a result, half of the Valley MPOs could be severely impacted, or eliminated, which will hamper their ability to carry out important planning processes such as the SCS process.

At this time, each Valley MPO is working on updating their Regional Transportation Plan and is beginning to work on their respective Sustainable Communities Strategy. The Modeling efforts will assist in determining the appropriate GHG targets to be considered by CARB at their November 2012 Board Meeting. After that time, with provisional targets in place, the MPOs will get into the “nuts and bolts” of the process by conducting all the necessary data collection, policy analysis and growth scenario development. Most of the Valley MPOs are on track to have their SCSs completed by December 2013.

Some MPOs like Kern COG have already started the public outreach process. Other MPOs have formed steering committees to help guide these important next 18 months. In June 2012, the eight MPOs selected a consultant group to assist in the public outreach and education component.

**For additional information at the MPO level regarding what is happening in your county, please contact the following key policy staff:**

San Joaquin Council of Governments	Tanisha Taylor, 209.235.0586, <a href="mailto:taylor@sjcog.org">taylor@sjcog.org</a>
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Madera County Transportation Commission	Derek Winning, 559.675.0721 ext 17, <a href="mailto:Derek@maderactc.org">Derek@maderactc.org</a>
Fresno Council of Governments	Barbara Steck, 559.233.4148 ext 202, <a href="mailto:bjsteck@fresno.gov">bjsteck@fresno.gov</a>
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**The other “Big Four” California MPOs – SCS Status**

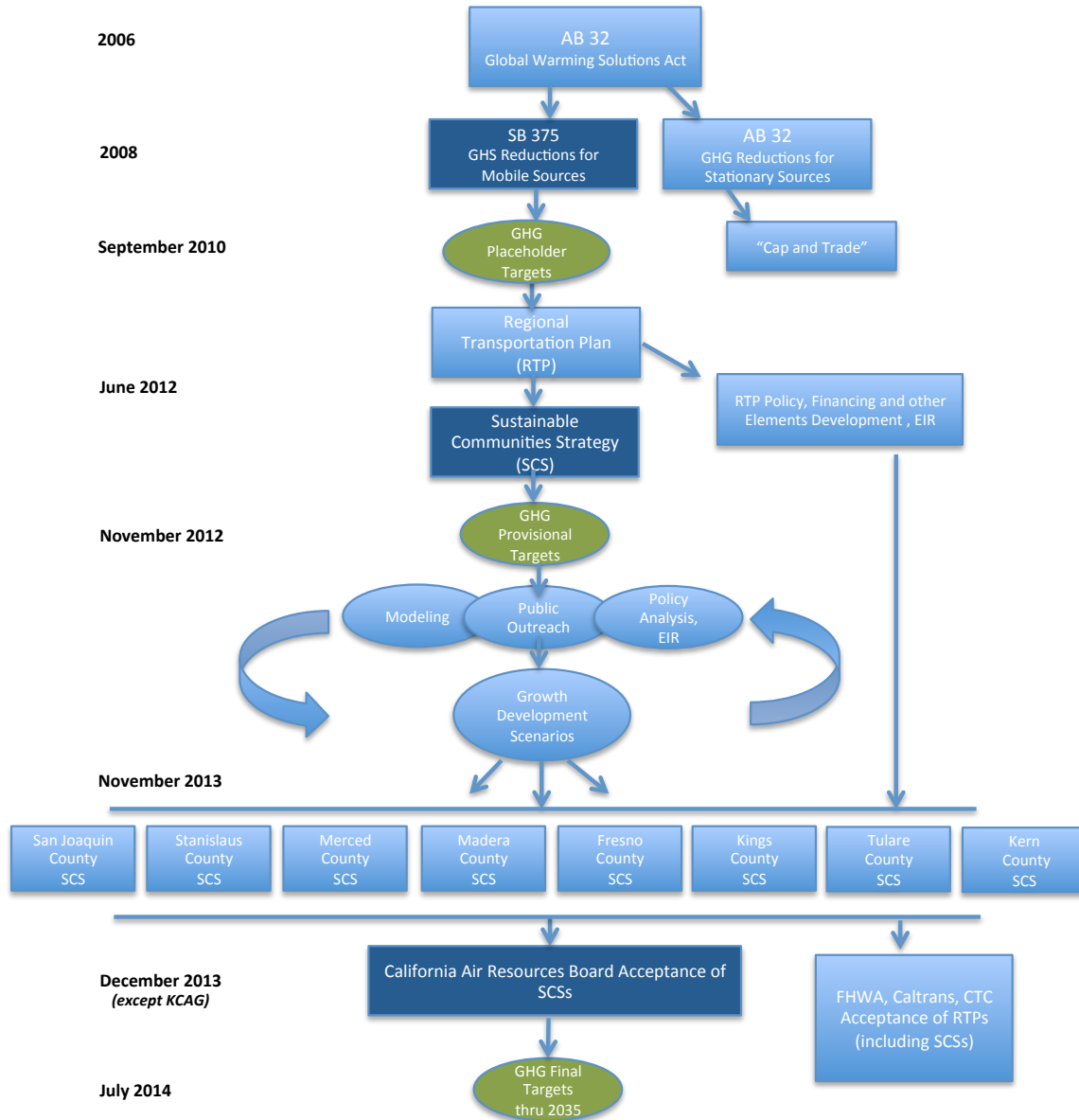
The [San Diego Association of Governments \(SANDAG\)](#) was the first MPO in California to complete their SCS in October of 2011. It faced some legal challenges in terms of its growth scenario that emphasized more compact development and greater transit use in later years versus at the front end of the planning period. There was also concern over the lack of outreach to lower income segments of the population.

The [Sacramento Area Council of Governments \(SACOG\)](#) completed their SCS in April 2012.

The [Southern California Association of Governments \(SCAG\)](#) also completed their SCS in April 2012.

The San Francisco Bay Area [Metropolitan Transportation Commission \(MTC\)](#) SCS process is still under development.

## Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) Process for the San Joaquin Valley



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