

Sustainable Communities Strategy

Q&A

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**** This document reflects actual questions asked at public workshops, in letters, articles, and phone calls, and region-wide committee meetings. ****

Overview, Benefits, and Goals

<p>What is the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) and what does it do?</p>	<p>The SCS is a long term regional land use plan (2040) designed to prepare the Bay Area for job growth while maintaining our high quality of life. The SCS is required to be adopted by MTC and ABAG in April 2013 by SB 375 (2008; Steinberg). The SCS has been undertaken collaboratively with local governments, identifying areas where cities have chosen appropriate future growth. The SCS is to be updated every four years.</p>
<p>How is Plan Bay Area related to the Sustainable Communities Strategy?</p>	<p>The SCS is part of a larger planning process, called Plan Bay Area, which includes the Bay Area’s regional transportation plan, air quality plans, and open space planning.</p>
<p>What are the goals of the SCS?</p>	<p>SCS is intended to more efficiently utilize the infrastructure of the Bay Area to accommodate the growth of the Bay Area economy. Planning in advance for growth should result in more jobs for the economy, better neighborhoods, improved transportation choices, lesser taxes, and a higher quality of life for residents.</p>
<p>Who is involved in the process of developing the SCS and what are the roles of those involved?</p>	<p>The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) have the primary responsibility of developing the Bay Area’s SCS. Land use, transportation, public health, and infrastructure planning are being coordinated under Plan Bay Area. They are working in collaboration with the State, regional, local agencies, as well as many business and community groups who view themselves as stakeholders in the process. SB 375 requires that the Boards of the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission adopt the SCS/Plan Bay Area by April 2013.</p>
<p>What are the regional agencies in the Bay Area and who are their board members?</p>	<p>The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), www.abag.ca.gov The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), www.mtc.ca.gov Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD/Air District, www.baaqmd.gov Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), www.bcdc.ca.gov Go to the agencies website’s as listed above for full lists of the board and commission members.</p>

<p>What sort of changes can we expect as a result of the SCS? When will changes begin?</p>	<p>Land use and transportation decisions take place slowly over many years. The SCS is looking at 2040 as a planning horizon. If we look back at the Bay Area since 1980, we can see many changes from that time. Over time, cities that agree with the principles of the SCS will begin to plan and zone for land uses that are identified in the plan. It is also important to note that the SCS is updated every four years, so changes in the economy or other factors can be taken into account.</p> <p>The SCS will not have immediate affects on the Bay Area. Over time, cities that agree with the principles of the SCS will begin to plan and zone for land uses that are identified in the plan. The State and regional agencies will encourage incentives and resources to support such efforts. The Bay Area’s transportation plans will also be matched to accommodate the growth plans outlined in the SCS.</p>
<p>What is the process and timeline used in developing the SCS?</p>	<p>The SCS process began in 2009, building upon several local and regional efforts in the prior decade to coordinate land use and transportation planning. One of the early steps in the process was to ask cities to self-identify areas for growth where appropriate, and where that location would be well served by transit or pedestrian travel. The cities and regional agencies then began a process of collaboration, establishing principles for high quality planning and neighborhoods and a system for developing priorities for funding. Once this regional framework for growth was established, ABAG was able to make projections as to how the Bay Area economy might expand in the future, and where jobs and housing might locate.</p>
<p>What is a Preferred Land Use Scenario—plan for whose future?</p>	<p>The Preferred Scenario, titled the Jobs-Housing Connection, identifies where economic growth will likely occur in the region, and where housing to serve such growth might be located. Several alternative scenarios were studied. The Jobs Housing Connection, will be the forecasted preferred scenario of the region when approved by ABAG in May 2012. Additional input will be sought from local governments, special districts, stakeholders and residents before a Plan is finally adopted in April 2013. As we are all aware, there is no one possible future that we can rely upon. That is why the Plan will be amended every four years.</p>

<p>What is the time-frame for updating the SCS land use Scenarios and finalizing the plan?</p>	<p>The regional agencies and local government land use authorities have been discussing various economic and land use scenarios for over 18 months. On March 15, 2012, ABAG will release the Jobs Housing Connection Scenario (the Preferred Scenario) for additional comments. On May 17, ABAG will approve the Jobs Housing Connections Scenario as the preferred scenario to be evaluated in a required program environmental impact report (EIR). Between May 2012 and the end of this year, City Councils and stakeholders will be requesting refinements to the preferred scenario (or the Project per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), leading to final adoption of an SCS by April 2013.</p>
<p>What are the Alternative Scenarios that have been identified and how were they determined?</p>	<p>Following the release of the Initial Vision Scenario in Fall of 2010, ABAG and MTC received comments from local planners, City Councils, and stakeholders. From all these comments, an attempt was made to present five alternatives that drew upon the received comments. Three of the Alternatives were based on ABAG's independent research as to market trends and reasonable planning assumptions. ABAG has taken the comments on the Alternative Scenarios into account in creating the Preferred Scenario – Jobs Housing Connection.</p>
<p>How did you come up with these potential land use scenarios?</p>	<p>All of the scenarios were designed to prepare the Bay Area for future job growth. The Bay Area is a growing region with world class economic assets. Working in collaboration with local government and special districts, the scenarios were developed to meet the region's housing and transportation needs.</p>
<p>How often will the SCS be updated and what is the process for updating the plan when necessary?</p>	<p>The SCS is required by SB 375 to be updated every four years. ABAG will be working with local governments to determine whether land use adjustments are required. Market forces and the capacity of cities to finance infrastructure are two important trends to monitor.</p>
<p>Over what period will the SCS be applied to the region?</p>	<p>The SCS planning horizon is 2040. If projected economic growth in the United States is delayed, Bay Area projections might therefore be deferred until 2040-2050.</p>
<p>How often have planning processes such as the SCS taken place in the Bay Area?</p>	<p>The SCS is the first planning process of this type in the Bay Area. Other regional plans were developed by various entities or regional agencies, but none have nearly the same level of collaboration with local governments and stakeholders as the SCS.</p>

<p>When was the last regional planning process undertaken and what were some of the benefits of the region's last long-term planning strategy?</p>	<p>Regional plans have been undertaken by ABAG throughout the decades. As a result of these plans which included an open space plan, an ocean coastline plan, and the Environmental Management Plan for the Bay Area (a complex work program that combined air and water quality, water supply, and solid waste), several environmental protection agencies were created These included the Coastal Commission, San Francisco Estuary Partnership, and the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority.</p>
<p>What is SB 375 and why was this law created?</p>	<p>SB 375 is a state law requiring regional agencies throughout the State to develop integrated land use and transportation plans. The bill was intended to foster development patterns that reduce the need to drive. The reduced need to drive is measured by reduced greenhouse gas emissions.</p>
<p>Why is the SCS necessary?</p>	<p>The State of California has been growing rapidly over the past five decades. During this time, many transportation and water improvements have been made to accommodate growth. The State financial condition has made additional growth improvements highly problematic, and the Legislature has proposed that each region in the State come up with its own plan.</p>
<p>What will be the benefits of the SCS for families with children?</p>	<p>Producing jobs, reducing traffic congestion, and building high quality neighborhoods is essential for families in the Bay Area. Maintaining the quality of life for the Bay Area for future generations is a primary goal of the SCS.</p>
<p>What will be the benefits of the SCS for the population over 55?</p>	<p>Many residents over 55 are looking for safe and enjoyable neighborhoods where driving is optional for routine trips. If the SCS is successful, many additional neighborhoods of this type will exist in the Bay Area.</p>
<p>What will be the benefits of the SCS for residents under 35?</p>	<p>Many residents under 35 are seeking urban neighborhoods where there are cultural activities and community amenities. The SCS will provide additional choices of the community one wants to live in the Bay Area.</p>
<p>What will be the benefits of the SCS to larger cities employing over 20,000 residents?</p>	<p>Cities with larger employment sectors function better when workers live close to jobs that are accessible to transit. This reduces pressure on highways, downtown congestion, and parking facilities.</p>

<p>What sort of changes should we expect to cities with large employment sectors?</p>	<p>The Bay Area economy has strength in knowledge based industries. There is evidence to suggest that such industries, in addition to locating at employment campuses, are interested in locating in highly functional city centers.</p>
<p>What will be the benefits of SCS for smaller more rural cities and towns?</p>	<p>A key aspect of the SCS is to channel growth and high density employment to urban centers which already have transit and high capacity infrastructure. The SCS has a goal of preserving land for agriculture, recreation, and open space for future generations. Over the time period of the SCS, there may be additional resources to these communities to preserve key land through public acquisition.</p>
<p>What sort of changes should we expect to rural areas?</p>	<p>Rural cities and towns are expected to remain intact with their current quality of life. The Bay Area should be able to grow economically without changing the character of smaller cities and towns.</p>
<p>How are Priority Development Areas (PDA) put together and how do PDAs relate to the scenarios/proposed blueprints for moving forward?</p>	<p>PDAs are specific areas that are nominated 100% by local governments themselves, following consultation with planning staff and City Councils. PDAs were nominated in a slightly different fashion, with only general areas identified as near-term conservation opportunities.</p>
<p>What sort of growth is the region expecting and how was this number of growth determined?</p>	<p>ABAG is forecasting that the Bay Area could add over 1 million jobs, 2 million in population, and approximately 700,000 households to the region by 2040. Regional growth projections were undertaken by expert consultants retained by ABAG. The methodology for forecasts of this type is commonly used throughout the United States for regions performing long term forecasts. ABAG has issued a report on this subject which is posted online at www.abag.ca.gov.</p>

Local Control

Will local governments be forced to make land use decisions that are dictated by regional agencies?	No. Local governments retain full land use authority in their jurisdictions.
What authority do regional agencies have to implement the SCS?	With respect to land use authority, only local governments can implement the SCS. ABAG has no implementing authority, but it does administer grants that act as incentives for local government to plan for future growth.
What is the role of local government in this planning process?	Local government is the originator and implementer of the land use strategy of the SCS. Local planners and City Councils nominated the Priority Development Areas (PDAs) in their cities, and only they can implement land use plans.
What are local governments currently doing in relation to planning how counties, cities, and towns are developed and what could change with adoption of an SCS plan?	One of the advantages of a regional SCS is that cities and counties can see what their neighboring jurisdictions are planning. Once the SCS plan is adopted, local governments will be able to see who is planning to participate in implementing land use plans.
What is the ongoing role of city/county planning directors related to the SCS plan?	City and County planning directors retain their full authority and report to their respective local officials.
Do potential plans that have been identified relate to existing city and county plans?	In most cases, yes. Sometimes cities have not updated their general plans to reflect their PDAs. In other cases, the SCS has assumed different levels of growth for the PDAs over the 30 year planning period than what is reflected in local plans. ABAG discusses these changes with local governments during the planning process.

Community Input

<p>What role do I as a member of the public/community play in the SCS process?</p>	<p>Members of the public provide the maximum impact when working with their local governments on land use plans. Members of the public also provide comments on the SCS documents, and can attend all sessions conducted by ABAG where the SCS is discussed on the public agenda. Additionally, there are various public meetings to discuss the SCS where members of the public are invited. For an updated list of SCS events, go to http://www.onebayarea.org/plan_bay_area/</p>
<p>Who or What will my input affect?</p>	<p>The SCS is influenced by many different stakeholders: cities, counties, community groups, governmental agencies, and business members. It is not possible to trace the influence of any one stakeholder, group, or individual.</p>
<p>How can my input help in plans to strengthen neighborhoods?</p>	<p>Local governments want the participation of residents regarding the planning of neighborhoods.</p>
<p>How can I affect and reduce traffic congestion?</p>	<p>Recurring traffic congestion is caused when too many people are attempting to drive over the same roadways. As more people get on the highways, the speeds of the traffic go down, and the highway becomes even more inefficient. So as an individual, it helps if there are more opportunities and choices for alternative transportation to help reduce trips and the number of cars on the road. The SCS can help reduce traffic by planning neighborhoods where trips and errands can be done locally, and transit is available for work trips.</p>
<p>How will this SCS/planning affect the neighborhood I live in?</p>	<p>Unless you live in a PDA, the SCS should not affect your neighborhood. If you do live in a PDA or plan to live in one, there is a community planning process to discuss how to make sure any changes to the neighborhood result in a high quality place to live.</p>
<p>Why are we meeting with the public to discuss and hear their insights into transportation and land use planning over the next 35 years?</p>	<p>Decisions made today regarding infrastructure investments will affect the region for many years to come. The best plans will take into account many different points of view.</p>

Housing and Land Use

<p>What about housing that is sitting idle, owned by banks/foreclosure?</p>	<p>It is expected that the vacancy rates for housing in the Bay Area will remain high for some years to come. This is a temporary effect of the financial crisis. Over time, these units will be put back on the market for sale and rental. ABAG has assumed a reduced need for new housing over the 30-year time period.</p>
<p>Why don't we make empty homes affordable housing, instead of building more?</p>	<p>It would make sense for existing empty homes to be used for permanently affordable housing. However, there are few programs with the cash to buy these homes for that purpose.</p>
<p>Is this a move to force me to live in high density high rise neighborhoods, and convert single family residential neighborhoods into dense clusters?</p>	<p>The SCS will not require any person to live where they do not choose. We are aware of no plans in any city in the Bay Area to convert a single family neighborhood into dense clusters. The SCS preserves existing single family neighborhoods, while looking at opportunities to improve neighborhoods that already have higher density or vacant parcels.</p>
<p>Are you forcing the regions cities and towns to become urbanized?</p>	<p>No cities or towns are being forced to urbanize.</p>
<p>How is the SCS related to housing mandates and needs that have been designated for cities and towns?</p>	<p>State law requires that the region's housing need be zoned over an eight year period. This allocation is called the Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA). ABAG is required by State law to provide the allocation method. This work is done in collaboration with cities and counties. Some counties prefer to do their own allocations, such as San Mateo, Napa, and Solano. The RHNA must be consistent with the SCS, but there are other objectives to be considered in the RHNA. For more information about the Bay Area RHNA, visit to the ABAG website and the regional housing section at http://www.abag.ca.gov/housing-top.html.</p>
<p>How are housing projections related to state-mandated housing allocations?</p>	<p>The long term housing projections in the SCS (25 years) are not related to the state mandated housing allocations (RHNA). RHNA is allocated over an eight year period (2014-2022).</p>
<p>How will housing allocations be divided amongst counties, cities, and towns?</p>	<p>Housing allocations amongst cities are made pursuant to the adoption of the RHNA methodology by ABAG. Three counties—San Mateo, Napa, and Solano— have chosen to make their own allocations, which is their right. ABAG convenes a Housing Methodology Committee with broad representation before making any recommendations. For more information, visit http://www.abag.ca.gov/housing-top.html.</p>

<p>How were housing allocations determined and why?</p>	<p>In areas where ABAG conducts the allocations, housing allocations were made pursuant to two policies: 1) zoning for housing in PDAs (70% of the region); and zoning in cities without PDAs, based on household formation rates and other factors (30%). For more information, visit http://www.abag.ca.gov/housing-top.html.</p>
<p>What are the housing projections in the Plan Bay Area Initial Vision Scenario document and how were they determined?</p>	<p>The Housing Projections in the Initial Vision Scenario were established by the ABAG model under the assumption that there was an unlimited amount of housing subsidy available to the Bay Area to support affordable housing. The purpose of the Scenario was to demonstrate how high levels of housing might be distributed in the region to meet high levels of job growth and avoid importing workers from the Central Valley. The Initial Vision Scenario does not use reasonable planning assumptions and is not eligible to be adopted as the SCS.</p>
<p>Why can't we stop developing housing to stop the region from growing?</p>	<p>The Bay Area expects to have a level of job growth in order to maintain our economy and quality of life. If the Bay Area inhibits job growth, the jobs will go to another region and this will start a cycle of decline as other regions have experienced when job losses were not replaced with new jobs. Unemployment and fiscal pressures reduce public services and property values decline. The purpose of the SCS is to prevent economic losses from happening here. To support job growth, it is necessary to supply more housing for workers in locations that have a transit choice and are not dependent on highway travel.</p>
<p>What about infrastructure to support these plans?</p>	<p>Infrastructure financing to support infill development is one of the principal challenges of the SCS. With the loss of redevelopment, new methods will be needed to finance reconstruction of the built environment.</p>
<p>How are transportation and land use decisions integrated?</p>	<p>Land use decisions over the long term impact how people travel around the region. To the extent that agencies can better predict long term land changes, the transportation system can be better built to accommodate these trips. Programming future transportation investments requires a high degree of understanding as to how land use will change. Land uses will also change based on how the transportation system is working. High levels of highway congestion will discourage employers from locating on those corridors.</p>

Funding, Economy, Jobs

<p>What is the funding source for Plan Bay Area and how much funding is being allocated for it?</p>	<p>Plan Bay Area utilizes state and federal transportation funds, and may also guide funds available to congestion management agencies, transit districts, local governments and other special districts.</p>
<p>How will the funds be distributed for Plan Bay Area projects?</p>	<p>Plan Bay Area is intended to help guide investment decisions in the future. Funds for Plan Bay Area are distributed regionally and locally, depending on fund source</p>
<p>How are transportation investment dollars related to land use decisions?</p>	<p>Living closer to jobs and essential service results in more walking, cycling or transit trips.</p>
<p>Aren't we in an economy that is suffering?</p>	<p>The United States and Bay Area economy has been negatively impacted by the financial crisis that occurred in late 2007. Millions of jobs were lost nationwide and the threat of a second great depression was a possibility. Plan Bay Area looks ahead to times when the United States recovers and begins producing jobs again. The Bay Area is expected to capture a good share of those jobs, and Plan Bay Area will help prepare for this job growth.</p>
<p>Isn't there a local, state and national budget crisis?</p>	<p>The financial crisis, among other factors, has created a budget crisis for most levels of government. The best means to resolve these problems is through a growing economy. Plan Bay Area should help the Bay Area economy recover and grow, generating additional tax revenues without raising taxes.</p>
<p>What about business needs?</p>	<p>Attention to business needs is critical for the Bay Area economy to be successful. Many businesses find locating and expanding difficult in this region. There are many issues that will need to be addressed in the Bay Area to create a better business environment and increase job production.</p>
<p>How can we talk about growth in this bad economy?</p>	<p>The Bay Area economy will grow more rapidly when the national economy recovers. By preparing the Bay Area for job growth, Plan Bay Area provides a better future for its residents.</p>

<p>Where do these statistics for population growth come from?</p>	<p>Population forecasts are created by various methodologies. ABAG uses a “shift share” method. First, the region’s job potential is calculated as a portion of the national share. Regions grow or shrink based on the economic viability. When jobs are created in the Bay Area, people are induced to stay in the region or come from outside the region to fill these jobs. For more information on forecast methodology, visit www.abag.ca.gov.</p>
<p>Why aren’t we talking about jobs?</p>	<p>The primary purpose of the Bay Area’s SCS is to prepare the region for job growth. For jobs to be developed in the Bay Area housing, transportation, and supporting infrastructure need to be developed.</p>

Misconceptions

<p>ABAG and MTC conspired to eliminate public discussion and open debate.</p>	<p>The land use SCS—Jobs-Housing Connection—is a plan which has been created collaboratively with local governments. Even though the focus was to engage local governments, there have been many meetings on the subject that were open to the public. The last two attempts to hold public workshops on this complicated subject were met with concerns. One of the concerns of some members of the public was that these meetings would be used to justify the plan, not actually seek input. Other people stated concerns that the meetings were designed as propaganda to reach a pre-determined outcome, not allowing for people to question if a plan was required at all. That was not the intended purpose of the meetings, which was to hear the comments of the public regarding various aspects of the plan. Additional public meetings will be held to continue outreach to community embers and give more opportunities to provide input. For a partial list of meetings held to date, please see OneBayArea web site at http://www.onebayarea.org/spotlight_12-11.htm</p>
<p>This public meeting was staged participation from paid employees.</p>	<p>No employees of the agencies were paid any special compensation for attending the meetings. Salaried employees are expected to attend meetings to facilitate them. We are not aware of any employees of the regional agencies who spoke at the meetings as member of the public.</p>

ABAG and MTC violated the Brown Act (open meeting law) by requiring the public to pre-register and declare their political label for these visioning meetings (labels like concerned citizen, small government advocate, social justice advocate, or environmental advocate).

The pre-registration process was created to ensure adequate refreshments and meeting space for break out groups and to track the differing points of view of those who were attending. The pre-registration process may have given a false impression of attempting to control which members of the public could attend. Pre-registration will be optional in future SCS meetings. These types of public meetings are not covered under the Brown Act.

Isn't the SCS and Plan Bay Area related to Agenda 21?

The SCS/Plan Bay Area and the United Nations Agenda 21 have no connection at all. We are aware that there are groups across the United States that are trying to make a case that regional planning for land use and transportation sustainability is part of a United Nations initiative known as Agenda 21. This is known as the "Agenda 21 conspiracy." We have since investigated the United Nations Agenda 21. Agenda 21 refers to the need in the developing world to practice environmental sustainability, such as forestry and natural resources management. There are also discussions regarding the need for rapidly urbanizing cities in the developing world to build public works, such as water and sewer systems, in advance of the growing population. In the United States, there are already many regulations regarding land use and resource management, and no need to reference United Nations documents. There has been no contact between the United Nations and the Bay Area's regional agencies. For more information about United Nations Agenda 21, please see <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=52>

And from the American Planning Association:
http://www.onebayarea.org/pdf/Plan_Bay_Area_FAQ_2-12.pdf

What is the role of the State in all this?

The State legislature has mandated that the regions in California prepare plans that will manage and accommodate the State's growth (SB 375). California has grown very rapidly in the past five decades, and existing infrastructure systems and water supply are severely strained. For California to grow economically, the State believes each region should plan for the future.

Will the land use decisions affect personal property rights?	Plan Bay Area will have no impact on personal property rights. All persons owning property have rights established by law and the Constitution. Property rights are protected and regulated by local government zoning. Local governments can only change zoning after an extensive legal process, where the property owner participates.
Are we talking about eminent domain?	The SCS has no eminent domain authority. Local governments or state agencies can only use eminent domain when property is needed for a public purpose, and then full compensation must be paid to the owner.
Are you taking away my choices for where I live?	No choices are being taken away. The SCS should provide additional choices of neighborhoods in the Bay Area.
Aren't you violating my property rights?	No property rights are being violated or threatened by Plan Bay Area.
Aren't you taking away use of cars?	No.
How is this related to social justice, environmental justice, and equal justice?	<p>Social equity is the formal term, and includes the idea that all persons should have fair and equal access to opportunity. In SCS Plan Bay Area, this includes MTC and ABAG's adopted targets to house all persons at all income levels in the region, achieve greater air quality improvements in impacted areas, and improve the affordability of housing and transportation for lower-income households. MTC and ABAG are analyzing planning scenarios for equity implications at each stage of the SCS Plan's development.</p> <p>Environmental Justice stems from a Presidential Executive Order to promote the fair distribution of benefits and burdens for disadvantaged communities, and promote the inclusion of minority and low-income communities in decision-making. The federal government, which oversees the development of our regional planning efforts, states that: <i>"Each federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies and activities on minority populations and low-income populations."</i> As a recipient of federal funds, MTC is required to incorporate environmental justice principles in all its planning efforts, including the sustainable communities strategy to be incorporated into Plan Bay Area.</p>

Public Workshops were a sham. The workshops were not transparent. You did not answer any questions during the public workshops?

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For more information, contact ABAG at 510/464-7900 and visit ABAG website at www.abag.ca.gov.

For ongoing updates and background materials on SCS Plan Bay Area, visit the website www.onebayarea.org