CHAPTER 2

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT
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INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the public involvement during the development of the Plan (Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy). Public participation is essential to an effective planning process. The approval of Senate Bill (SB) 375 fundamentally changed the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), and the public outreach component was no exception. The legislation mandated several requirements for the public outreach process in addition to what was already required under federal and state processes. Building upon previous RTP outreach efforts and those of the Regional Blueprint Planning process, the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) attempted to exceed public participation requirements by providing a full suite of opportunities for the public and interested stakeholder groups to be a part of the Plan’s planning process.
Outreach efforts for the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) started well before development of the plan. Efforts were focused through presentations at stakeholder group meetings, listening sessions, regional workshops, online surveys, and presentation to SJCOG standing committees. A newly created RTP/SCS Advisory Committee was a key advisory body for technical and policy considerations for the plan. In keeping with the interconnected transportation and land use connectivity focus that is the foundation of SB 375, the Plan was developed in close coordination with SJCOG’s member agency professional staffs from both the planning and public works departments. The result is a carefully coordinated set of demographic, economic, land use, and transportation investment assumptions that were clearly communicated through the public outreach process.

Guiding the Way — SJCOG Public Participation Plan

The purpose of SJCOG’s Public Participation Plan is to inform and involve citizens in SJCOG’s various programs, projects, and work activities. Among those included in this outreach effort were lower-income households, minorities, persons with disabilities, representatives from community and service organizations, tribal councils, and other public agencies. In May 2011, the SJCOG Policy Board approved the 2011 Public Participation Plan (PPP), a major update from the previous plan. The document includes an appendix outlining the public outreach process specific to SB 375—an important aspect of the first RTP to incorporate an SCS.
The PPP also assists in identifying and addressing environmental justice and social equity issues. Citizen participation objectives include involvement of interested citizens, stakeholders, and representatives of community organizations in agency work through timely workshops on topical issues, fully noticed public hearings, and ongoing broad citizen/organization involvement in the planning and decision processes.

Getting Started

Even as the 2011 RTP was being adopted, the SJCOG was laying the foundation for the Plan, San Joaquin’s first-ever SCS. SB 375 had been signed into law in 2008, and SJCOG’s Regional Blueprint Document had been approved by the SJCOG board in January 2010. While SB 375 provided the legislated impetus in the development of the San Joaquin County SCS, the Blueprint planning process and its extensive outreach plan provided the jump-start to the long-range vision and conceptual framework upon which the SCS would be built. The following list outlines some of the early outreach efforts:

The SJCOG Public Participation Plan

The PPP is Built Upon Five Guiding Principles:

- Public participation is dynamic and requires teamwork at all levels of the organization.
- One size does not fit all—diverse perspectives are critical—with SJCOG’s Citizen Advisory Committee being the standing committee through which various public outreach activities can be initiated.
- Effective public outreach involves relationship building with local governments, stakeholders, and advisory groups.
- Engage the public by making transportation planning relevant, removing barriers to participation, and saying things simply.
- Being open and transparent empowers low-income communities and communities of color to participate in decisions as they are being made.

Five Strategies to Implement the Guiding Principles:

- Early engagement
- Access to all
- Response to written comments
- Keep the public and the SJCOG board members aware of areas of agreement and disagreement
- Notify the public of proposed or final actions
April 2009: The SJCOG hosted a public workshop on Assembly Bill (AB) 32 and SB 375 to help stakeholders, elected officials, and the public understand the laws as they relate to the RTP and the Regional Blueprint.

May 2011: The SJCOG hosted a workshop for the Blueprint Planners Roundtable on the requirements of SB 375 and ongoing Valleywide Blueprint work, deliverables, and studies.

August 2012: The SJCOG hosted a public workshop on SB 375, greenhouse gas emissions targets, and scenario planning.

August 2012: Presentations to Smart Valley Places Community Leadership Groups on public participation opportunities for the 2014 RTP.

Community Voices on Transportation Choices

In addition to these early efforts, the SJCOG launched an extensive civic engagement strategy made up of many elements. A timeline/schedule of the process is shown in Figure 2.1. The intent was to ensure that the Plan was a regional plan with local input. The civic engagements components are described in the following sections.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Public Engagement</th>
<th>Milestones</th>
<th>Policy Board Actions</th>
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<tr>
<td>JULY</td>
<td>Listening Sessions</td>
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<td>Community Workshops</td>
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<td>2/28: RTP/SCS released for public comment</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3/27: RHNA Methodology presented to COG Board</td>
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<td>3/28: 2015 FTIP and Air Quality Conformity public comment period begins</td>
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<td>Community Workshops</td>
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<td>4/28: 2015 FTIP and Air Quality Conformity public comment period ends</td>
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<td>6/26: COG Board adopts RTP/SCS, Certifies EIR, Conformity Determination</td>
<td>SJCOG BOARD</td>
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RTP/SCS Advisory Committee

In mid-2012, the SJCOG began work on establishing the advisory committee that would be instrumental in informing the development of the Plan and SCS. Many of the committee members had also served on either the Blueprint Planners Roundtable or the Blueprint Leadership Group and so were already familiar with SB 375 and its relationship to the RTP. The group represented diverse interests, including local agency planners, transit agencies, environmental groups, low-income housing advocates, real estate development representatives, business interests, economic development, and civic engagement advocacy. The following groups were represented on the committee:

- City of Escalon
- City of Lathrop
- City of Lodi
- City of Manteca
- City of Ripon
- City of Stockton
- City of Tracy
- San Joaquin County
- San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission
- San Joaquin Regional Transit District
- Campaign for Common Ground
- Sierra Club
- League of Women Voters
- Business Council, Inc. of San Joaquin County
- Visionary Homebuilders
- San Joaquin Partnership
- Building Industry Association of the Delta
- San Joaquin Farm Bureau

The committee began meeting in October 2012, meeting a total of 10 times between October 2012 and December 2013. This committee was the main advisory committee for the technical work surrounding scenario development, as well as weighing in on the goals and objectives for the RTP and assisting in the development of performance indicators. The committee meetings were held in the SJCOG board room, was open to the public, and was available by WebEx to participants or members of the public who could not attend in person.

Although not officially represented on the RTP/SCS Advisory Committee, several stakeholder groups were actively engaged with the advisory committee and regularly attended the meetings either by person or on the phone to provide additional input on items under consideration by the committee. Those in regular attendance at the advisory committee meetings included representatives from the San Joaquin Public Health Department, Environmental Justice Program of Catholic Charities (Stockton Diocese), American Lung Association, and ClimatePlan among others. SJCOG staff met with these and other interested stakeholder groups, upon the request of these stakeholder groups, several times during the development of the Plan.
Valley Visions — the Valley-wide Public Outreach Efforts

In 2010, SJCOG joined the other seven San Joaquin Valley Metropolitan Planning Organizations (Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Kern) in a joint grant proposal to the California Strategic Growth Council for Proposition 84 funding. One of the tasks identified in the successful grant proposal was enhancement of the eight COGs’ individual public outreach efforts with a valley-wide campaign. The project scope for this task included templates/written materials for customization, a media campaign to engage residents and publicize outreach efforts (social media, newspapers, radio and/or TV), and to assist with the development of SB 375 required workshops and hearings.

Of particular note here is an informational video on the SCS process provided in three languages—English, Spanish, and Hmong—and the media campaign that was active during the months of August, September, and October 2013.

The videos were made available on YouTube, with links on the SJCOG Valley Visions web page. The links were widely distributed to SJCOG’s outreach mailing lists. The valley-wide media campaign included ad, banner, and audio placement on Pandora; ad tiles on Facebook; Google Adwords; and banner/ad placement on Google Display network. Online newspaper ad placement appeared in the San Joaquin County newspapers in Stockton (Recordnet.com), Lodi (Lodinews.com), and Manteca (Mantecabulletin.com).
We want to hear from you – The Public Listening Sessions

Billed as Part 1 of a two-part series of community meetings, SJCOG staff conducted a series of listening sessions around the county in late July and early August 2013. Six total meetings were held in Ripon, Escalon, Lodi, Tracy, Manteca, and Stockton. Notices for these listening sessions were sent out to over 550 individual e-mail addresses including SJCOG’s outreach databases, members of SJCOG’s standing committees, members of the SJCOG board, and those opting in to receive regular communication from the SJCOG website. Flyers were also posted in advance at the various meeting locations and at various SJCOG meetings during July.

These early sessions were designed to gauge public opinion on the various elements that made up the foundation for the four RTP/SCS scenarios (as shown in Figure 2.2). After a short presentation from SJCOG staff, the sessions were interactive, employing “clicker” technology to gather responses and provide instant feedback to each group for discussion.

Spanish translation services were provided at the Manteca and Stockton locations, and were available upon advance request at the remaining locations.

In addition to the in-person sessions, SJCOG made the presentation and interactive survey available online in both English and Spanish. More than twice the number of respondents participated in the online survey when compared to the in-person sessions. In total, between 169 and 181 responses were received.

Highlights of the session demographics revealed that 48 percent of respondents were familiar with SJCOG and had attended previous meetings, while 19 percent were participating in a meeting for the first time. As expected, Stockton, as the regional population center, had the largest number of participants (approximately 62 percent). Other areas of the county were reasonably well represented. While most age groups appear to be well represented in the data, as a percentage of the total population, the white, non-Hispanic group is somewhat over-represented in the data, at 66 percent of respondents; those commuting outside the county for work were underrepresented in the data, with only a 17 percent overall share. (Please refer to the technical appendix for full demographics).
Listening Session Highlights:

- A multimodal perspective on transportation improvements.
- Strong preference for funding bikeway improvements, but mostly for recreational purposes.
- Roadway widenings and construction of new roads was least favored.
- Preservation of farmland and revitalization of existing downtowns was important to residents.
- The region would be best served by concentrating future growth within existing cities.
- Locating housing and jobs in closer proximity would be the most effective way to reduce congestion.
- Although respondents favored growth in existing cities and co-location of uses, a majority expressed a desire to live in a single-family home.
- The biggest concerns for the overall process were:
  - Lack of funding for projects.
  - How public input would be incorporated into the plan.
  - The manner in which various projects would be prioritized.
Figure 2.2 RTP/SCS Scenario Building Process

Scenario Development Process

Creation of Land Use Scenarios

Envision Tomorrow Tool
SJCOC TDM Model

A
B
C
D

Development Patterns
Housing Options
Growth Location & Intensity
Transportation Investments

Public Workshops & Input

Example of Scenario handout from workshop.

Conceptual Scenarios Descriptions

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<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Less Transit Oriented</th>
<th>More Transit Oriented</th>
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Example of Trade-offs Between Scenarios handout from workshop.

Final Scenario Selection

Public Support
RTP/SCS Advisory Committee
SJCOC Board

Scenario C - Enhanced

- Best achieves the intent of SB375 within the boundaries of local General Plans
- Ambitious and achievable, and meets ARB greenhouse gas targets.
- Expands on a longstanding multi-modal transportation vision.
- Provides for greater opportunities for transit use.
- Aligns with current market and economic studies.
- Ambitious conservation goals with regard to farmland preservation, but with greater alignment with local agency general plans.

The Plan represents a region-specific, balanced multi-modal plan that not only achieves the intent and promise of SB 375, but can be implemented through existing and planned programs and policies.
RTP/SCS Scenario Workshops

In August 2013, SJCOG staff carried the work of the RTP/SCS advisory committee and other stakeholder groups forward in the form of four possible alternative scenarios for the future of San Joaquin County.

The workshops were held in five separate locations in San Joaquin County. Besides the e-mail notifications as described under Listening Sessions, display ads were taken out in local print newspapers in Escalon, Ripon, Tracy, Stockton, Lodi, and Manteca. Additionally, an English/Spanish display ad was placed in Joaquin magazine (a locally produced monthly bilingual magazine for the San Joaquin Valley Latino population), and an online ad was placed with the Latino Times. A Spanish translator was available at all five locations.

Each workshop featured large-scale maps of the general land use pattern and identification of the components of each scenario relative to the four elements: development pattern, growth location, housing options, and transportation options. Residents were invited to look over the large-scale maps and ask any initial questions about the scenarios; staff then gave a short presentation and invited participants to discuss the presentation with other attendees and to build their own scenario relative to the four elements. Next, participants were asked a series of interactive questions about their overall support for various policies inherent in the scenarios. Finally, a series of questions asked San Joaquin County residents to share their opinions on which scenario (or scenario element) best achieved the plan goals and personal preferences, and could be implemented given the economic realities of available revenues and implementing mechanisms.
Besides the in-person workshops, the presentations and survey questions were adapted to an online format and made available in both English and Spanish. There were approximately 85 participants between the in-person and on-line surveys. The results were tabulated as both as a weighted count and according to participant’s first choice.

**Highlights of the results indicated:**

- When asked about scenario preferences for transportation investments given limited revenues, participants favored Scenario C, showing greater interest in enhanced bus, rail, and active transportation options.

- Participants favored Scenarios C and D with regard to the various regional growth concepts. There was an interest in compact development to foster and support non-automobile travel opportunities and to provide additional housing choices to accommodate changing demographics.

The opinions and preferences from both the Listening Sessions and the Scenario Workshops have been incorporated into final RTP scenario assumptions. The input from the public outreach process, the RTP/SCS advisory committee, SJCOG’s other standing committees, and other interested stakeholder groups was communicated to the full SJCOG Board of Directors in September 2013. The SJCOG Board accepted the recommendations as communicated and directed staff to move forward with a land use and transportation scenario consistent with Scenario C, but with some important elements brought in from Scenario D and consistent with recommendations and preferences from the public workshops.

**Mini-Presentations**

In addition to the more formal listening sessions and scenario workshops, SJCOG staff provided a variety of short, educational presentations to various stakeholder groups.
Between the months of January and August 2013, SJCOG staff provided seven presentations, reaching over 200 participants. One presentation, in August 2013, to Comerciantes Unidos, was conducted with concurrent Spanish translation.

Retooling the Outreach Tools: Feedback on the Public Participation Process

Although the outreach activities for the Plan represent the most extensive outreach plan by SJCOG for an SJCOG RTP to date, some stakeholder groups, and in fact, SJCOG standing committee members expressed concern at the low turnout at some of the Listening Sessions and subsequent Scenario Workshops. To address these concerns, SJCOG staff met with various interest groups, consulted the Citizens Advisory Committee, and asked for assistance from the RTP/SCS Advisory Committee in reaching out to its constituents or members during January and February 2014, ahead of the release of the draft plan in late February 2014. The purpose of these additional outreach activities is to provide an overview of the RTP and SCS for those that may not have participated in previous outreach meetings and to provide a link between the long-range transportation plan and its impact in the daily lives of residents. The additional outreach included staff presentations and a toolkit of educational pieces (e.g., video, printed materials, enhanced online presence) for dissemination by both SJCOG and community groups. The presentations (in January and February 2014) included the City of Stockton Climate Action Plan Advisory Committee, Better Breathers Club, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Vietnamese Voluntary Foundation, and Downtown Comeback Club of Stockton. The success of these additional activities will be measured by increased attendance at post-draft Plan release workshops/hearings and/or comments received on the Plan from interested stakeholder groups and the public at large.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the responses, input, comments, and suggestions from the outreach efforts have had a profound influence on the strategies and package of transportation investments identified in the Plan. It directly resulted in a major shift in transportation investments among the different modes of travel. A comparison of the differences in investment strategies are shown in Figures 2.3 and 2.4.
Figure 2.3 2011 RTP Investments by Mode

Figure 2.4 2014 RTP/SCS (The Plan) Investments by Mode

(Figures do not add to 100% due to rounding)