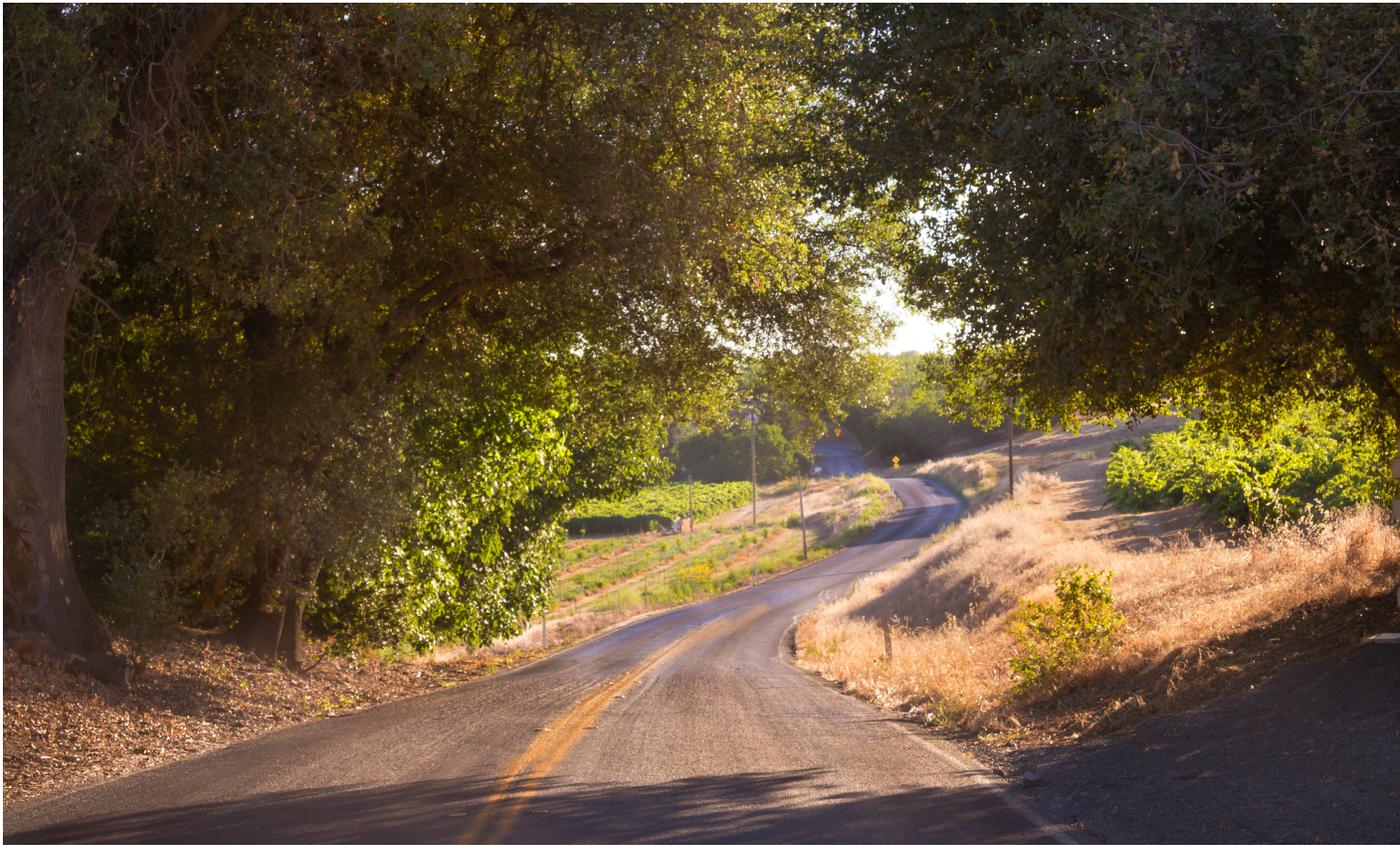


CHAPTER 9

Framework for Moving Forward

Challenges & Opportunities



NINE

We do not know exactly what the future holds. This regional plan focuses on and embraces uncertainty through its innovative strategy evaluation process. The result is a focus on actions that will be effective no matter what the future brings.

While we know the San Joaquin region faces ongoing challenges, we also see that there are future opportunities and strategies to meet these challenges. Here's the overview.

Beyond the Past Successes

Through its role as Regional Transportation Planning Agency for San Joaquin County, the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) will continue providing a forum for regional policy discussions on growth, transportation, environmental management, housing, open space, air quality, fiscal management, and economic development. SJCOG – with its member agencies, regional partners, and community stakeholders – will genuinely consider all sides of every issue through consensus building and collaborations.

The plan's investment strategy is a step toward meeting the air quality, environmental, economic and mobility needs in the San Joaquin region.

SJCOG recognizes these are essential elements to successful implementation of the plan. SJCOG believes the plan investment strategy is a step toward meeting the air quality, environmental, economic and mobility needs in the San Joaquin

region. It will be an effective tool for a comprehensive transportation vision backed by ambitious, achievable, and predicted development.

Some of the project successes from the previous plan include:

- California's first diverging diamond interchange (DDI) project – State Route 120/Union Road in Manteca – was completed. The region is seeking funding for two additional DDI projects.
- Widened 1.5 miles of Thornton Road from Pershing Avenue to Bear Creek to four lanes, including bicycle lanes. The project included improvements to traffic signals, streetlights, curbs, gutters, driveways, and sidewalks.
- Completed the environmental review for the Phase 1A State Route 99/120 Connector project. This project will move to construction in 2023.
- Completed the Navy Drive/BNSF Undercrossing and widening of Navy Drive to four lanes.
- Completed the Church Street Bike and Pedestrian Improvement Project in Lodi. Improvements included resurfacing the roadway, reducing lanes from four to two and installing Class II bike lanes.





Photo Credit: Captivating Photos

Actions Implemented since the adoption of the 2018 RTP/SCS

Strategies implemented or efforts underway during the time since the previous plan was adopted include:

- Completed Phases 1 and 2 of the Climate Adaptation and Resiliency study, which identified risks and vulnerabilities to the transportation system due to climate change and provides specific solutions.
- Established a pilot program that will provide an electric car- and bikesharing service to a community of concern in South Stockton. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) awarded a \$7.4 million grant to SJCOG for this program.
- Completed the Transportation Innovation Planning Study and a Fiber Readiness Plan to prepare San Joaquin County for future advancements in transportation technology. This study identified, funding opportunities and implementation strategies.
- SJCOG started EZHub, a first of its kind cashless ticketing and fare payment system accessible through the Vamos Mobility App, in partnership with Masabi.

- Increased the number of vans and passengers participating in the San Joaquin Vanpool Program during the pandemic. This program is part of dibs, SJCOG's travel demand management program.
- Successfully pivoted the RTP/SCS outreach to virtual webinars and workshops that were open to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional Strategies and Investments Should Funds Become Available

Despite the plan's multibillion-dollar investment strategy, it is important to acknowledge that there will be continuing challenges involved in the delivery of the projects in the plan. As explained throughout the plan, the funding needs far exceed the available funds. The result is a list of unfunded but regionally important projects (Technical Appendix T). These projects are not in the plan for a multitude of other reasons, including undefined scope and implementation schedule. Below is a brief overview of those projects that may be considered upon funding and meeting necessary requirements for Inclusion in the Regional Transportation Plan.

Technological Innovations:

Information is simply not available to ascertain technology readiness, application, or implementation. This includes factors such as quantifying costs to implement or operate, capital investment needs, and impact of technological advancement to those very needs.

Tri-Valley-San Joaquin Valley Rail Authority:

The Tri-Valley-San Joaquin Valley Rail Authority was established by Assembly Bill 758 with a mandate to maximize transit connectivity for commuter travel between Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) rail systems in the Tri-Valley area at the Altamont Pass. On May 12, 2021, the authority board certified a final environmental impact report and approved a preferred project. The authority has started preliminary engineering work and is in the process of seeking funding for project construction.

Valley Rail Expansion and Related Multimodal Stations:

The Valley Rail program includes project development work for connecting ACE and San Joaquins services with High Speed Rail (HSR) at a multi-modal hub station in downtown Merced, but additional capital investments are needed to extend ACE from Ceres to Merced and to connect the San Joaquins to the multi-modal station in Merced. The San Joaquin Regional Rail Authority (SJRRRC) and the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA) are also

working to expand both services north from Sacramento to serve Yuba, Sutter, and Butte counties, to extend ACE to Union City to connect with BART, and to implement additional improvements that will provide enhanced connectivity to HSR Interim Service. At the time of this plan, SJRRRC and SJJPA are actively pursuing grant funding opportunities to address project funding needs for the planned Valley Rail Program to be running by the time HSR Interim Service begins operations in 2030.

Unfunded Operations for Expanded Bus Transit Service:

Bus and rail transit agencies also feel the burn of funding constraints. Operations funding to finance rail and bus transit frequencies or transit line expansions are costly and experience increases due to labor and employment benefit costs. Operations is a category of need where there are highly limited financial resources available to support these activities. Bus operators in the San Joaquin region, like many operators in other regions, continuously weigh their abilities to finance additional bus transit frequency or expansion of transit lines. In some cases, cuts to existing transit service are a hard financial reality.

Unfunded Streets and Roads Maintenance:

Pavement conditions continue to decline due to insufficient funding to properly fix and maintain streets and roads. Even during the plan's public



outreach process, maintenance continues to be a top priority for transportation investments. This backlog exists because agencies must make hard decisions to invest in preventative maintenance on specific streets, while letting some streets simply deteriorate. When streets continue to deteriorate – potholes and pavement cracking – the cost for repairs can be many times more than the cost of preventative maintenance strategies.

The 2020 California Statewide Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment surveyed California’s 58 counties and 482 cities, and captured data from more than 85 percent of the state’s local streets and roads.

According to the 2020 Report, the local system is facing a \$64 billion funding shortfall over the next 10 years to bring pavements into good condition, address deficient bridges, and fix essential components such as storm drains, sidewalks, and signage. It is estimated that \$3.8 billion is needed annually just to maintain local streets and roads in their current condition, but current funding lags by \$1.4 billion per year. Bringing local streets and roads to optimal condition would take an estimated \$7.9 billion annually for the next 10 years.

Unfunded Active Transportation

There are more project needs than there are revenue sources. The public investment in bicycle and pedestrian facilities is essential to not only improve air quality but also to enhance public health. The ongoing challenge is the growing number of unfunded active transportation projects. It is critical to drive investment decisions through performance metrics and determine where best to invest in active transportation. The key would be a focus on filling gaps in bicycle networks.

In addition, it is important to capitalize on an existing strategic advantage – the prevalence of bicycle groups, coalitions, nonprofit active transportation organizations, and public health advocates. Working together to collaborate and consult on the investment decisions will build effective partnerships to get projects from conception to construction.

Through joint discussions about funding the highest priorities and needs, the result will be a walking and cycling system that can be truly viable as a transportation mode in the San Joaquin region.



Photo Credit: Captivating Photos

“Self-Help”

There simply is not enough funding at the federal, state, and local levels to address street maintenance, roadway capital improvements such as new construction projects, interchange improvements and roadway expansions. New construction for congested roadways is simply “shelved” due to the lack of funding to analyze solutions through studies or to begin project development phases such as environmental or design work. Jump-starting these project development efforts becomes risky to agencies when there is no expected construction funding.

Measure K, a half-cent transportation sales tax to pay for transportation improvements in San Joaquin County, has been around since 1990. Even with the infusion of hundreds of millions of dollars through its self-help approach, the local grassroots efforts to address transportation needs cannot do it all. Measure K is already projected to be millions of dollars under earlier financial forecasts and predicted to have a funding shortfall in delivering all the identified transportation improvements. Growing and unfunded transportation needs remain an issue in this self-help county.

Measure K



The Measure K Renewal Ordinance and Expenditure Plan was passed by San Joaquin County voters in 2006 and includes a Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Safe Routes to School Funding Program. The Measure K Expenditure Plan specifies that 60% of the funds will be allocated according to a competitive process. The Expenditure Plan also specifies a minimum of \$65 million in federal transportation funding or Measure K funding will be made available during the life of the Measure K Renewal program for smart growth incentives to local jurisdictions in San Joaquin County. These funds will assist local agencies in better integrating transportation and land use, such as street calming, walkable community projects, transit amenities and alternative modes of transportation. These funds will be available to enhance infill development, neighborhood revitalization and downtown improvements.

In March 2021, the SJCOG Board awarded \$20,445,490 to 14 projects under the 2021 Regional Active Transportation (ATP) combined call for projects. This funding includes \$7,577,000 from the Measure Smart Growth Incentive Program and \$5,721,490 from the Measure K Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Safe Routes to Schools Competitive Program. The San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission was able to secure \$4.5 million for the East Channel Street Streetscape and Connectivity Project, which includes road resurfacing, landscaping, sidewalks, bike paths and ADA-compliant ramps. Other projects funded with Measure K funds include the Greater Downtown Bike and Ped Connectivity Project in Stockton, a class II bikeway to the ACE station in Lathrop, and Safe Routes to Schools projects in Lodi, Ripon, Manteca, and Stockton.

Leo Zuber, San Joaquin Council of Governments Chair and Ripon City Councilmember, knows the importance of investing today in tomorrow's transportation: "Measure K has made a significant difference in the lives of people living and working in San Joaquin County by funding projects that improve transportation safety and the quality of life here. It has made and continues to make a difference in the transportation system — to freeways, streets and roads, public transit networks, and pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly programs — that move people and commerce in and through the San Joaquin region, while reducing congestion and improving air quality. While much has been accomplished, there is still much to be done. I and my SJCOG colleagues are committed to continuing that effort in the coming years."

Commute Patterns Still Show the Draw of Neighboring Counties for Employment.

The number of workers who commute to jobs outside of San Joaquin County has increased dramatically in the past few decades. In the early 1980s there were fewer than 10,000 San Joaquin residents who commuted outside the county for work. By 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were more than 100,000 county residents who commuted outside the county. Most of these residents commuted to jobs in the Bay Area. In early 2020, the state of California issued stay-at-home orders, which resulted in major reduction in commuting. However, as the stay-at-home orders were loosened and more people were vaccinated, the volume of commuter traffic to outside of San Joaquin County have been increasing toward pre-pandemic levels.

The increase in workers who commute to the Bay Area has resulted in growing congestion along I-205 and I-580, particularly near the Altamont Pass. San Joaquin residents commuting from the San Joaquin region account for more than 74 percent of the daily commuters along these roadways.

People are constantly commuting to and from work and school. In the Northern San Joaquin Valley, there are 27,508 inbound commuters coming to the region on a given workday. At the same time, 102,480 outbound commuters leave the region to find work or schooling. Many people have found more affordable housing in San Joaquin County compared to its more densely populated neighbors in Sacramento and the Bay Area but commute to these areas where there are more job opportunities.

This long-term trend of an increasing number of commuters create challenges for the county's transportation infrastructure, but it also creates opportunities to leverage regional advantages and create new employment opportunities. One regional advantage to leverage is the presence of many skilled workers who live in San Joaquin County but work in the Bay Area. These workers potentially could be employed by local businesses, which would relieve some of the pressure on the county's transportation infrastructure.



Air Quality and the San Joaquin Valley

Air quality issues are prevalent due to the geography of the region. The San Joaquin region is in the federally designated San Joaquin Valley Air Basin. The borders of the basin are defined by mountain and foothill ranges to the east and west. The northern border is the county line between San Joaquin and Sacramento counties. The southern border is less defined, but is roughly bounded by the Tehachapi Mountains and, to some extent, the Sierra Nevada range. According to the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, this geography creates a “giant bowl” that makes the valley susceptible to air quality problems. The climate in the valley – long, sunny summer days and cold winter nights – is ideal for growing the valley’s renowned agricultural crops. An undesired effect of this type of environment, however, is that it incubates the components of ozone or smog. In the winter, residential fireplaces contribute to tons of dangerous particulate pollution in the skies.



A Future with More Economic Opportunities and Transportation Mobility

There were promising signs of a strengthening economy before the COVID-19 pandemic. Signs included drops in home foreclosures and new businesses and retail starting to fill vacant

storefronts. Other signs included falling employment rates and rising housing prices. Economic growth in San Joaquin County was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is expected the economy will gradually recover as stay-at-home orders have been loosened and more residents are vaccinated.



Photo Credit: Stockton Metropolitan Airport

The expected growth of the economy after the pandemic will help local jurisdictions with land use authority discover more windows of opportunity to direct future development in urbanized areas and advance the sustainability goals of the plan. In fact, for the plan to successfully meet its goals, it must rely heavily on infrastructure that must be complemented with supportive land use strategies. The target result is long-term economic growth. The plan addresses this issue by investing in a transportation future where multimodal transportation improvements can be pathways for the region to increase local jobs and reduce travel. Living wage jobs and business expansion and retention can be real outcomes of investment decisions.

The plan affords greater mobility through strategies that expand bicycle and pedestrian networks, provide accessibility to transit, and target transportation alternatives to driving alone. Furthermore, maintaining the transportation system and strategic investments in roadway expansion remain an integral piece of the plan’s multipronged investment strategy.

The plan will lead to a more resilient San Joaquin County economy and create a transportation system serving all residents of all incomes.

Conclusion and Next Steps

This is only a snapshot of the many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead as we move forward in creating sustainable communities. The clear policy goals and strategies outlined in the plan, however, provide a plan of action that represents the feedback received from public agencies, community members, businesses, and other stakeholders. The plan also shows that it performs in delivering these strategies. It fits the bill for the region, while addressing climate and other important issues through its integrated land use and transportation planning efforts.

Plan Implementation

Once adopted, the regional plan will move immediately into a robust implementation stage. While a work plan to move the RTP/SCS strategies into action is always part of SJCOG's post adoption work products, with this plan SJCOG is committed to producing a formal RTP/SCS implementation plan document outlining short-term and long-term actions, program and project updates, project delivery assistance strategies, and emerging policy questions requiring further exploration.

Upcoming SB-1 Planning Studies

Social Equity Planning Study: With an expected kick-off in late summer 2022, this study will form an

equity working group and develop a stipend program for non-profit and community-based organization participation. Work products will include recommendations for better incorporating equity considerations into SJCOG's projects, programs, and organizational culture in keeping with current state and federal planning emphasis areas.

Clean Transportation Workforce Development: Building off efforts begun with SJCOG's Stockton Mobility Collective workforce project, this study will develop an ambitious plan to scale the program, integrate it into the larger San Joaquin County workforce ecosystem, explore additional funding opportunities, and find a long-term home for the program. The ultimate goal is to increase the pipeline of local living-wage community jobs and decrease workforce commutes.

Data Sharing, Tools and Analytics Program: SJCOG is proposing to acquire data sets and explore robust tools to aid in project prioritization protocols, evaluate existing program effectiveness, and establish collaborative relationships for local graduate and undergraduate college and university data and business analytics programs. Topics to be explored include: SB743 implementation tools, travel demand model improvements necessary to better evaluate project impact on VMT and greenhouse gas reductions, improvement performance management measurement, further develop economic modeling tools for policy evaluation, and optimize the efficiency of shared mobility services.

