

Promoting Healthy Land Use and Transportation Plans: A Framework for Sustainable Community Strategies

The State of California has a long and successful history of reducing outdoor air pollution by educating the public about air quality problems, creating strong policies to clean up dirty vehicles like trucks and construction equipment, and enforcing regulations like vehicle idling restrictions. The State also has a long history of fighting climate change. Recently passed State legislation -- SB 375 -- provides an opportunity to prevent pollution from happening in the first place.

The legislation requires each region in California to develop a *Sustainable Community Strategy* (SCS) that aligns regional transportation plans and housing development. The goal of the SCS is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), primarily through a reduction in *vehicle miles traveled* (VMT). By incorporating land use strategies that reduce the amount people need to drive, SCSs have the potential to not only reduce greenhouse gasses, but also other harmful air pollution that is directly linked to asthma.

Public health advocates want to ensure that each SCS incorporates and promotes public health policies and sound investments that serve everyone, with special emphasis on low income communities and communities of color. In addition to reducing VMTs, each SCS should support health co-benefits (such as improved air quality through the reduction of criteria pollutants), and incorporate health and safety indicators as part of its performance measures.

Policymakers will be focused on reducing greenhouse gasses and vehicle miles traveled, as well as promoting sound public transit investments at the county level. As they do so, public health considerations and investments that serve low income communities should be prioritized.

At a minimum, each SCS should:

- Limit urban sprawl;
- Prioritize funding the maintenance of current roadways over funding further highway expansion;
- Ensure that there are dedicated funds for alternative forms of transit that are equitable and accessible to all, particularly to low income communities; and
- Reduce the need to drive and encourage people to use those alternative forms of transit by making driving more expensive.

There are many examples of strategies that accomplish these goals, including:

- Establishing an EcoPass fund. An EcoPass is a free bus pass for high school and middle school students. This fund would support free bus passes for high school students from communities who most depend on public transit. It also promotes the transit system, increases usability, reduces driving and reduces GHG.
- Plan and implement alternative forms of mobility that increase walk-ability and bike-ability to encourage physical activity. For example:
 - Increase funding and support for Safe Routes to Schools programs.
 - Increase funding and support for bike routes to work, grocery stores, churches, and parks.
- Increase neighborhood access to open space and recreational areas (i.e. lakes, city parks, etc.). The goal is to give elderly, the young and those without cars access by foot to health-supporting services in their neighborhoods.

Health and Equity should drive the development of the Sustainable Community Strategies

Each SCS should be designed first and foremost with health and equity in mind. The public health community recommends that each SCS:

- Address the following specific health and safety performance measures:
 - Reduce premature deaths from exposure to particulate emissions; Reduce premature deaths from exposure to fine particulates (PM2.5) by 10%; Reduce coarse particulate emissions (PM10) by 30%
 - Reduce by 50% the number of injuries and fatalities from all collisions (including bike and pedestrian)
 - Increase the average daily time walking or biking per person as a transportation method by 60% (for an average of 15 minutes per person per day)
- Include nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), diesel particulate matter and black carbon as air quality indicators. NO₂ has been identified as a key traffic pollutant associated with pediatric asthma. Diesel particulate matter and black carbon are both pollutants associated with asthma and green house gas emissions and truck traffic. The truck traffic is of particulate interest due to its importance in land use planning around freight and transport freeways, ports, and service and distribution centers.
- Incorporate equity measures to ensure all communities benefit from the SCS. All proposed SCS scenarios should be evaluated in terms of their impact on different races and ethnicities, income levels, housing costs, local and minority owned businesses, etc., with the goal of crafting a SCS that is most beneficial for those most in need. For example:
 - How does a SCS reduce emissions by the greatest amount for those communities most burdened by air pollution?
 - How does a SCS provide the best fit for low-income households and entry-level jobs?