



CLIMATE CHANGE and HOUSING

ISSUE

Legislative and regulatory efforts to combat climate change are a major priority for political leadership both locally and statewide. Governor Newsom has promised to establish California as *the* leader in the fight against climate change. It should be noted that even though California is the fifth largest economy in the world, the state emits less than 1% of global greenhouse gases (GHG). In contrast, California ranks top in the United States for poverty and homelessness – both of which are largely attributable to the housing supply shortage and sky-high housing prices that are nearly 3 times above the national average. Balancing climate change efforts should not negatively impact housing needs.

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to Senate Bill 375 (2008) (SB 375), the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) – locally, SCAG – must update their federally-required, regional transportation plans, known as a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), every four years. The SCS is supposed to depict future regional land uses and all transportation activities, and intelligently inform local and regional decisions about growth in each.

When it enacted SB 375, the Legislature instructed the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to establish “achievable” GHG-reduction targets for each MPO, and take into account foreseeable population growth, the need for economic vitality, and the need to better provide housing for California’s residents. Each MPO must then submit to CARB an SCS that meets its prescribed GHG-reduction target or admit its inability to do so.

CARB also prescribes the basic methodology by which the MPOs must analyze their data to determine whether they can demonstrate compliance with their respective GHG-reduction targets.

At CARB’s direction, MPO’s must show that they can meet their SB 375 GHG-reduction targets primarily through demonstration of projected reductions in per capita vehicles miles traveled (VMT). For example, SCAG’s 2016-2040 RTP (Regional Transportation Plan)/SCS modeled that it could achieve a 16% reduction in per capita GHG emissions by achieving

roughly a 10% reduction in per capita VMT between 2005 and 2035. SCAG is not on track to meet this target.

SOLUTION

Promote and support “All Types of Housing” not just high-density, transit-oriented development (TOD). We are very supportive of TOD, but it alone will not solve our housing emergency.

The kind of exclusively high-density, transit-oriented development patterns that CARB wants to impose have failed to reduce per capita VMT at all in the Bay Area region, which adopted very aggressive growth control and density measures in its two prior SCSs. The Bay Area’s attempts have resulted in an explosion of “mega commuters” – estimated at 170,000 daily workers – who suffer three-hour or four-hour daily commute times to their jobs. Public transit ridership has also fallen, notwithstanding high concentrations of jobs in transit-served locations such as downtown San Francisco. The Bay Area MPO, in the early planning stages of its next SCS, has acknowledged the failure of prior SCSs to producing either adequate or economically attainable housing supplies.

Adding costs and restrictions on certain types of housing will only lower production, make housing less affordable, and increase the poverty rate. It will have the opposite desired effect, as the traditionally more affordable, non-TOD projects are taxed for being farther away from transit. As housing becomes more expensive to produce it becomes less affordable to the middle class, and people will simply choose to move out of state.