

## Summary of comments and concerns during the General Plan Update Focus Group Session #3

### *Mobility Strategies*

On Thursday, November 4, the General Plan Update Team held the third of four Focus Group Sessions designed to allow for public input and participation in the Update process. This session was focused on mobility strategies, including roadway, transit, pedestrian and bicycle improvement opportunities. Discussion included a brief synopsis of the “Mobility Strategies Study” by Mike Penrose, Chief of Engineering for the County Department of Transportation, as well as an overview of the link between mobility, land use and health by Teri Duarte of the Department of Health and Human Services. Once the introductory remarks were made, the focus group was asked to provide input on opportunities to enhance mobility throughout the County.

#### **ROADWAY IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

**Comment:** General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding improvements to County roadways.

- 1. The proposed N. Watt couplet may be of some concern to residents in the surrounding area.*
- 2. Is the County looking at upgrading/downgrading any roadways? If so, how do we capture residents' concerns regarding these changes?*
- 3. Permanently reduce potential capacity of Gold Country Boulevard and Coloma (between Sunrise and Gold Country) from 4 to 2 lanes. Keep the single lane striping for safe walking and biking, and to discourage an increase in traffic.*
- 4. If Eagles Nest Road is upgraded from 2 to 4 lanes, it will negatively affect residents and farming interests.*
- 5. Downgrading certain roadways, such as Watt, may have a beneficial affect on nearby residents and the local community, but may not be in the best interest of the region.*
- 6. Are reversible lanes (such as those on the Golden Gate bridge) a possibility?*
- 7. Is the County working with Caltrans on HOV's?*

**Response:** The couplet on North Watt is not a proposed project, but rather one of *many* possible roadway and transit improvements included in the Mobility Strategies Study. The Department of Transportation has scheduled another workshop at the Board of Supervisors on January 26, 2005 to discuss the ideas outlined in the Study in greater detail. The County may consider upgrading or downgrading specific roadway capacities in the future, but those decisions will be based on factors that have not yet been addressed, including: changes to the General Plan land use map, possible expansion of the Urban Policy Area, zoning modifications, and other future roadway and transit projects. If existing or future roadways are affected by such decisions, they may be considered for re-designation to compensate for increases/decreases in traffic counts and changes to traffic patterns. Since many major roadways and corridors serve both local communities and regional traffic, discussion of any proposed changes must take into account

impacts on both the community and the regional traffic pattern. Residents are encouraged to express their comments and concerns to the Board of Supervisors during open session and to County staff at future General Plan Update focus group meetings. All comments and concerns expressed in these venues are made part of the public record and are taken into account by the Board and County staff when making decisions. Reversible lanes require extreme directional traffic (traffic moving one way) during peak times to be effective. Most of the transportation corridors located in County communities have a balance of traffic moving both ways, making reversible lanes impractical. The County has not yet consulted with Caltrans on future High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, but has planned on doing so in the near future.

## **TRANSIT IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

**Comment:** General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding improvements to public transit service in the County.

1. *Can transportation options, such as local shuttle buses, help to move people across busy streets?*
2. *Do you need high densities along entire corridors to support transit?*
3. *How will the General Plan Update reduce conflicts between zoning and General Plan policy LU-14?*
4. *What comes first – higher densities to support transit, or transit to support higher densities?*
5. *The definition of Bus Rapid Transit needs to be clarified.*

**Response:** There are many methods of moving people safely across busy streets, including one or a combination of the following: well-defined crosswalks at intersections served by stoplights, pedestrian medians and refuge islands, curb-extensions, traffic-calming measures, overcrossings, etc. While community shuttle buses are also a possibility, they are expensive to operate and may not adequately discourage unsafe pedestrian crossing. The County advocates developing compact mixed use developments around transit stops to increase ridership and support public transit, but entire corridors need not be built densely to support transit. General Plan policy LU-14 required all development within ½ mile of a transportation corridor to meet certain increased density requirements. Since this was not always feasible, the Board of Supervisors often waived the requirement. Policy LU-14 is being addressed by the General Plan update process to better serve its original purpose of locating higher-density development in a fashion that will support public transit. Often times, a transit station must be present to encourage dense development around it, but federal funding for transit frequently requires that a certain density already exists around a proposed transit stop before money is granted to build such facilities. Comprehensive planning efforts involving representatives of multiple professional disciplines is necessary to overcome this catch-22. The Sacramento Regional Transit District is currently refining the definition of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), Express Bus Service and related terms through a series of workshops.

## LAND USE/TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND HEALTH

**Comment:** There were comments and concerns regarding the link between land use/transportation and public health.

1. *People living in higher density neighborhoods may be under higher stress due to their living conditions, causing more weight problems.*
2. *Planning and building pathways in conventionally designed neighborhoods can help to improve connectivity.*
3. *Land use and transportation plans need to be integrated with the air quality attainment plan.*

**Response:** Some recent studies have shown that suburban residents have a higher instance of overweight than urban residents, possibly due to lack of walking and physical activity. Staff is not aware of any study that points to residents of higher-density neighborhoods being under greater stress, thus leading weight problems. Although both situations are possibilities, neither has been conclusively proven. The County does advocate for building communities with greater connectivity, a mix of uses, and destinations within walking/biking distance to encourage more pedestrian activity and less vehicle miles traveled. There are a variety of ways to provide connectivity, including a network of interconnected streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, pedestrian paths, etc. Although neighborhoods may be retrofitted with some of these amenities after they are built, planning for these facilities before construction can have a far greater impact on overall connectivity. The County views the linkage between land use and transportation as a key in reducing air quality problems experienced throughout the region. Communities that facilitate walking, biking and transit usage can decrease dependence on the automobile and reduce the associated air pollution. The County will continue to integrate land use and transportation planning to achieve the goals of the air quality attainment plan.

## COMMUNITY AMENITIES AND IDENTITY

**Comment:** Comments and concerns were expressed regarding community amenities and identity, or “sense of place.”

1. *We need to preserve a “sense of place” in existing communities.*
2. *Some places have no “sense of place” or historic structures that give it an identity, only potential for development; we need to plan before development takes place in these areas.*
3. *Gold River is built out and has many amenities, but they need to be preserved.*
4. *Planning for community amenities is necessary, but funding is needed to build them. Developers are usually asked to foot the bill.*

**Response:** Creating or preserving a “sense of place” and/or community identity within existing communities is a key theme of the General Plan Update. The County is committed to maintaining or revitalizing existing urbanized areas and assuring that they are viable, distinct communities. The Plan will also encourage planning efforts and community involvement to establish a sense of place where it has not

existed in the past. Community or Specific Plans, as well as proposed design review authority, can be used to guide new development to ensure that it contributes positively to community identity and integrates well into the existing neighborhood. The County recognizes that protecting existing amenities is just as important as providing new facilities and services, a principle that will be illustrated in the updated Plan. No public agency can provide every amenity desired by each community due to budget and authority restrictions. Developers are responsible for providing certain amenities, but their inclusion of others is optional.

## **OTHER ISSUES**

**Comment:** Other issues were raised regarding the General Plan Update.

- 1. North Highlands has a lot of open land that is ready for development; how do we start planning for land use and transit opportunities?*
- 2. How does the Blueprint tie in with the General Plan Update? The Blueprint process may not express some communities' desires.*
- 3. Are special planning areas needed to adjust zoning along commercial corridors?*
- 4. Paths in cul-de-sacs are a crime-prevention concern.*
- 5. Sound walls contribute to fewer eyes on the street and are a crime-prevention concern.*

**Response:** There are many planning studies and tools that can be utilized to plan for development or redevelopment in North Highlands (and other communities), as well as associated mobility improvements. The County's Transportation, Planning and Economic Development departments have all conducted studies to highlight land use and transportation possibilities within existing communities, and to spur future planning efforts in these areas. County staff is currently exploring a range of possibilities and will seek further direction from the Board regarding priority areas where planning efforts should begin. The County's General Plan and SACOG's Blueprint project share many of the same values, but the General Plan's main focus is on the County, while Blueprint is a much broader regional approach to land use and transportation planning. Although many of Blueprint's ideals already exist in (or may be incorporated into) the General Plan, the County is ultimately responsible for the unincorporated areas, and will work directly with them to make sure their needs are met.

Certain paths and sound wall designs can cause concern because they offer concealment and deter "eyes on the street" that reduce unwanted behavior. Good community design can orient paths so that they are open and visible, making them safe and pleasant places to walk even at night. Although they are necessary to mitigate noise impacts in certain neighborhoods, sound walls almost always segregate the adjacent street from residential areas, often leading to deserted streetscapes. However, they can be designed with openings to provide for greater connectivity and to make the affected street more exposed to the community.