

Summary of comments and concerns during the General Plan Update Focus Group Session #5

Mobility Strategies II

On Thursday, February 3, the General Plan Update Team held the fifth Focus Group Session designed to allow for public input and participation in the Update process. This was the second session focused on mobility strategies, including roadway, transit, pedestrian and bicycle improvement opportunities. Discussion included a brief synopsis of the January 26th Board Workshop by Mike Penrose, Chief of Engineering for the County Department of Transportation. Once the introductory remarks were made, the focus group was asked to provide input on opportunities to enhance mobility throughout the County.

HOV LANES

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding HOV lanes.

1. *HOV lanes are not working. They have major traffic implications and are not cost effective.*
2. *HOV lanes do work. The first 3 years after establishing an HOV lane, there is little change. After 5 years, they become very effective.*
3. *3+ HOV lanes are acceptable, 2+ are not as beneficial.*
4. *Carpool lanes must be part of the picture, along with transit, for an efficient transportation system.*
5. *HOV and roadway improvements cause more people to drive, effectively subsidizing driving.*
6. *Scenario 3 shows BRT in shared HOV lanes, not dedicated lanes.*

Response: While HOVs alone cannot solve traffic problems, Sacramento County and SACOG believe that they do play a key role in the County's transportation plan. There is an extensive network of HOV lanes throughout Sacramento County that will be maintained and expanded in the years to come. HOV lanes that require two or three passengers both provide benefit to carpoolers, but a higher designation (3 passenger) may be more appropriate when carpool lanes begin to fill up with 2-passenger vehicles. HOV lanes do not necessarily encourage *more* people to commute. They encourage single-occupancy commuters to ride together, effectively reducing automotive traffic and VMTs.

Since there is no concrete definition for BRT, some believe that BRT buses can share an HOV lane with other traffic, while others believe that true BRT requires a dedicated lane solely for BRT traffic. Many of the scenarios in the Mobility Strategies Study show "mixed flow" BRT service that has BRT buses sharing HOV lanes with other automobile

traffic. 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. Once the definitions are more clearly defined, future corridor planning processes will be able to evaluate the merits of different levels of service in a particular corridor.

TRANSIT PLANNING AND IMPROVEMENTS

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding public transportation planning and improvements.

- 1. Was light rail considered in any of the study corridors?*
- 2. Jitneys should be used for travel within corridors.*
- 3. Transitways move more people than just focusing on car throughput.*
- 4. Density is the key to an efficient transportation system.*
- 5. Pricing, travel time and density will change travel behavior, but the transit system must work.*
- 6. Demographics may be the largest transportation driver.*
- 7. A transit-only crossing of the American River should be implemented.*

Response: Light Rail was not considered for these 11 corridors because RT does not show such facilities on their 20-year vision map. However, Bus Rapid Transit, which operates much like Light Rail on wheels, was analyzed because of its cost-effectiveness and ability to operate with less infrastructure requirements. Many of these corridors are identified on RTs 20-year vision map as “Enhanced Bus Corridors” which will most likely offer some level of BRT. Jitneys could also be used to carry passengers along a corridor, providing extensive taxi-like service operating on a fixed route, but not necessarily on a fixed schedule.

The Mobility Strategies Study did find that providing intensive public transit and pedestrian facilities improved “Person Capacity” much more than any other scenario, including expressways that provide the most vehicle throughput. However, efficient operation and expansion of public transportation systems requires a certain level of ridership. One of the most effective ways to increase ridership is to locate residents, retail and places of employment near transit stops, so that people can walk to a transit station, hop on board a bus or a train, and arrive at a station near their destination. Density and intensity of development adjacent to transit stations are key components of a viable public transit system, illustrating the nexus between land use and transportation planning and demonstrating the need for multi-disciplinary planning efforts. Changing travel behavior (i.e.: getting people out of cars) requires that other modes of transportation are efficient, safe and desirable. This is a central goal of the Sacramento County Planning and Transportation Departments.

Any crossing of the American River is very controversial, even for a transit-only or pedestrian-only facility. This remains an option but would require extensive planning and community outreach to create buy-in from stakeholder groups and the public at large.

FREIGHT TRAFFIC

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding increased freight traffic.

- 1. Will the County study or address increasing freight traffic?*
- 2. The railroad companies say that they are maxed-out on their ability to move freight and have no capital to add tracks.*

Response: Freight traffic is definitely increasing across the United States, putting more large trucks on the nation's roadways. The County is looking at different ways to deal with this concern, although no formal study has been initiated. Increasing freight traffic on heavy rail systems may involve adding tracks, since most of the railroads are claiming that they cannot handle a significant increase in traffic with the current facilities. However, such infrastructure investments would need to be made by Federal, State or private entities, limiting the County's role.

MOBILITY STRATEGIES STUDY

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding the Mobility Strategies Study.

- 1. Do the current scenarios in the Mobility Strategies Study represent 1993 General Plan designations?*
- 2. How do you concentrate on improving an entire corridor, rather than piecemeal improvements?*
- 3. Is a tunnel connecting Highways 50 and 80 still being considered?*
- 4. These plans need to address existing communities and their quality of life.*

Response: The "Current" scenarios identified in the Mobility Strategies Study represent improvements that will be initiated unless other plans supersede them. The roadway designations are from the 1993 General Plan. The Mobility Strategies Study offers options for corridor-wide improvements, not just piecemeal efforts. These plans concentrate on holistic changes that would need to be implemented together to maximize the benefits of such improvements. Also, improvements to each corridor must be evaluated not

only on their effects to the corridor, but how the changes affect the County's transportation system at large.

The tunnel connecting Highway 50 and 80, as well as all other options outlined in the Study, may be considered in future planning efforts. The range of possible improvements outlined in the Study are purely options. The Study's intention was not to represent planned improvements, but to look at all possibilities so that they may be considered during the General Plan Update and other planning and implementation efforts. County staff will address quality of life issues through commercial corridor planning efforts with extensive outreach efforts and coordination with community members, various stakeholder groups, and County and regional agencies and organizations.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding the link between land use/transportation and public health.

- 1. Air Quality must be addressed in our transportation improvement plans.*
- 2. Transportation improvements will affect people's health. The link between transportation and public health must be realized.*
- 3. The connection between land use, transportation and health needs to be addressed in the early stages of planning.*

Response: Air quality is a major concern in the Sacramento metropolitan region, and automobiles are a large contributor to the problem. The County views the linkage between land use and transportation as a key in reducing air quality problems. Communities that facilitate walking, biking and transit usage can decrease dependence on the automobile and reduce VMTs and the associated air pollution. Multi-modal transportation systems require denser development, especially around transit stations, and facilities to encourage travel outside of an automobile. Planning department staff is also looking into the link between land use, transportation and physical activity – specifically, how development patterns affect residents' ability and decisions to be more physically active. Language will be included in the updated General Plan as well as future commercial corridor plans regarding the relationship between the built environment and public health.

REDUCING VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding options to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMTs).

1. *The Franchise Tax Board in Rancho Cordova has a person working to coordinate carpools.*
2. *Transportation Management Associations (TMA) should be considered.*
3. *Flex cars or “trading spaces” - moving places of work to be closer to residence - can be used to reduce VMTs.*
4. *Limit garage spaces to reduce VMTs.*
5. *Will oil rising in price and running out eventually change transportation planning?*
6. *Oil price and availability is not the only issue. Many cannot afford to drive or own a car.*
7. *Technology will improve MPG and the existing transportation system will continue to function.*

Response: There are a number of efforts that can reduce VMTs. Such efforts may be initiated by the public sector, the private sector, or a combination of both. Employers can create carpool programs or TMAs to reduce employees driving to work alone in automobiles. Car-sharing programs (flex cars) and relocating employees closer to their residence can also reduce single occupant vehicle traffic. Limiting garage spaces would not necessarily lead to a reduction in car ownership or VMTs and is not a strategy currently being explored by the County.

As oil becomes more scarce and costly, there will be a stronger financial incentive to find other ways to travel. However, Sacramento County is already planning for a more diverse, multi-modal transportation system regardless of current fossil fuel availability or price. While public transportation, carpooling and pedestrian travel do reduce oil consumption; they also have other social and economic benefits, making them desirable alternatives regardless of the state of oil price and availability. A multi-modal transportation system reduces traffic congestion, improves air quality, and enhances mobility for those who do not (or cannot afford) to drive a car. Cars that get more miles to the gallon will help to reduce oil consumption, but will not alleviate traffic concerns or provide mobility to those who don't drive.

BIKES AND PEDESTRIANS

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

1. *Does the County only consider roadways, or bike trails as well.*

2. *Overpasses for bikes and pedestrians are great.*
3. *Pedestrian and bike safety is a huge concern in these corridors.*

Response: The County considers all modes of travel and does not limit planning or implementation efforts to roadway improvements. Sacramento County has adopted the 2010 Sacramento City/County Bikeway Master Plan and is currently composing a Pedestrian Master Plan. These efforts intend to plan for future improvements to facilitate pedestrian and bicycle travel throughout the County, be it on road or trail. The Mobility Strategies Study also looked at corridor-specific improvements to create a safer and more efficient setting for pedestrian and bicycle travel. Due to their nature as high traffic volume roadways, they will never be the most safe or desirable environment for such activities. However, there are a number of steps that can be taken to improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists in these corridors, including construction of sidewalks, bike lanes, street crossings and intelligent transportation system strategies.

REGIONAL PLANNING

Comment: General comments, questions and concerns were raised regarding regional transportation planning.

1. *Will we update our plans based on the actions of other jurisdictions, even if their plans are not desirable?*
2. *How will the County address regional rail?*
3. *Have we addressed airports transportation needs yet?*

Response: The County must consider regional traffic flow when planning for the County's transportation system, including other jurisdiction's plans for future improvements. However, this does not mean that the County plans to compliment or coordinate with planning or implementation efforts deemed undesirable or unnecessary.

Regional Transit is the lead agency over the regional rail concept. Sacramento County Transportation staff will incorporate the concept in to the Circulation Element when the regional rail concept is incorporated in to Regional Transit's master plan.

Airport transportation master plans are being updated in the County such as Sacramento International and McClellan's Comprehensive Land Use Plan on separate efforts. It is the intent to incorporate those efforts in to the General Plan Update.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

- Explore revising the levels of service standards for our roadways. Other jurisdictions in Florida and City of Seattle are studying new approaches to rate roadway services. The new approach calls for rating roadways based upon the provision of alternative modes of travel such as pedestrian walkways and controls, bicycle lanes and transit.
- Parking maximums should be used, not minimums.
- The County should look at the City's efforts regarding parking.
- Setbacks on Watt will have large implications on transit and land use. Specific setbacks on Watt would be studied in an effort separate from the General Plan Update.