



## SUSTAINABLE SAN DIEGO

### ***NEWS RELEASE***

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## **Residents, Activists Gather, Reject SANDAG Transportation Plan**

### *Coalition Says Plan a Missed Opportunity*

(SAN DIEGO, October 17) – A coalition of community groups and residents gathered today at the Boulevard Transit Plaza in City Heights to say that the region’s long-range transportation plan slated for adoption at the end of this month falls short.

Representatives from Sustainable San Diego, a collaborative of numerous organizations working in everything from transportation to housing, health and environmental policy were joined by local residents seeking better access to transit and the economic and environmental benefits that come with it. The group says the Regional Transportation Plan and accompanying Sustainable Communities Strategy set for adoption by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) on October 28<sup>th</sup>, is essentially more of the same policies which place street and road improvements ahead of investment in transit.

“Someone once said the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result” said Steve Padilla, Consultant / Director of Sustainable San Diego and a former Mayor of Chula Vista and SANDAG Board member. “The San Diego region’s air quality is in danger of being downgraded in its ability to meet Federal air quality improvement goals, and the statewide goals set forth in SANDAG’s plan are just barely met by the year 2035. Despite this, SANDAG wants to adopt a plan which still focuses on road capacity and improvements as the first priority, while investments in transit are put off years and even decades. We need a plan that creates a better chance for reductions in Greenhouse gases to actually be achieved, and provides more transportation alternatives for our residents.”

City Heights resident Maria Cortez has been waiting for investments in the long-planned CenterLine bus rapid transit to provide new options to connect to center city and downtown. “I’ve been a resident here for forty years. They have been talking and talking and still we’re waiting” said Cortez. “We need transit options to connect us to job opportunities and reduce emissions. It’s been excuse after excuse after excuse.”

Susan Tinsky is Chair of Sustainable San Diego and Executive Director of the San Diego Housing Federation. “It’s time we invested in our people and not more cars.” Tinsky said. She expressed frustration that SANDAG’S focus remains on investments with limited long term benefit in tough economic times. “Now more than ever, when people and governments are tightening their belts, we need to make the smart investments that will pay the long term dividends. We should put transit which links housing to jobs first, not increase the ability for more people to drive more cars, while delaying transit. This is not the time for business as usual.”

Steering Committee

San Diego Housing  
Federation

MOVE San Diego

WALK San Diego

Community Health  
Improvement Partners

Environmental Health  
Coalition

Justice Overcoming  
Boundaries

Center on Policy  
Initiatives

Local Initiative Support  
Corporation (lisc)

Jacobs Center for  
Neighborhood  
Initiatives

Southeastern Economic  
Development Corp

Global Action Resource  
Center (The Global ARC)

New School of  
Architecture and design

American Society of  
Landscape Architects  
(San Diego Chapter)

City Heights Community  
Development Corporation

Elyse Lowe is Executive Director of MOVE San Diego and Sustainable San Diego Vice Chair. “The number of people projected to use transit increases slightly but only during peak hours during the life of the plan. But overall the ridership remains virtually the same, and the amount of miles people in our region will drive in vehicles will actually increase” Lowe said, “The goal should be to prioritize transit and build more options for people and goods to get around our region. Our economic future depends on it.”

Georgette Gomez, Associate Director at Environmental Health Coalition emphasized that part of the region’s planning must better address impacts to public health, particularly in communities already overburdened with poor air quality, few housing options, lack of effective transportation options and higher rates of chronic diseases. “At the end of the day, these impacts disproportionately affect poor neighborhoods and communities of color. The plan on the table doesn’t adequately address these needs as the recent letter from the Attorney General stressed.”

On September 21, the California Attorney General issued a strong criticism of the draft Sustainable Communities Strategy, stating that the planning agency had missed the mark and failed to adequately address on going impacts to communities in the region already over-burdened with poor air quality and lack of access. “SANDAG missed an opportunity to take the approach that prioritizing access to transit, linking jobs and housing and addressing inequities is the best possible reinvestment in our neighborhoods” Gomez said.

When pressed with the fact often cited by SANDAG that most of the transportation planning funding and established priorities are not able to be easily changed due to the TransNet ordinance and half cent sales tax adopted by voters countywide in 2004, Padilla responded “They have the ability to make certain amendments based upon changed circumstances by a two-thirds vote of the board. They need to muster the political will to do so, and if they can’t, then we as a region need to find the political will to reexamine our priorities maybe even by revisiting the ordinance. Our region’s health and economic future can’t wait.”

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### **BACKGROUND:**

On October 28, 2011 the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDGAG) is slated to adopt the Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy for the period 2012 to 2050. The transportation plan spells out how the region’s transportation networks and systems will be planned and implemented during that time, based upon assumptions about population growth and land use patterns in local jurisdictions.

SANDAG has been required under state law (SB 375) to include a Sustainable Communities Strategy as part of the transportation plan which illustrates how specific required reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will be achieved through the year 2035 based upon better linkages between land use and transportation planning.

The San Diego region is forecast to gain at least another 1.38 million in population between 2011 and 2050. Today, nearly one-third of San Diego County households do not earn enough to live self-sufficiently; children’s asthma rates and rates of chronic disease in our predominantly poor and minority communities can be more than three times the county average; average highway miles driven per day in our region are higher than San Francisco, Orange and even components of Los Angeles counties.

According to the Draft Regional Transportation Plan slated for adoption, the required reductions in Greenhouse gas emissions will barely be achieved, and the bulk of transit investments are put off years and decades, while road capacity and improvements remain the primary focus of the plan. Also according to the plan, overall transit ridership in the San Diego region will remain fairly constant over the full life of the plan, with improvements only seen during peak traffic hours, and the amount of vehicle miles traveled per capita actually increase.

SANDAG received nearly 4,000 public comments on the draft plan many calling on the agency to re-evaluate transit priorities and create a more transit and active transportation oriented plan.

*Sustainable San Diego is a collaboration of numerous organizations dedicated to the support of policies and practices which enhance regional sustainability. SSD believes regional sustainability is achieved when our region's human activities are carried out in a way which can permanently endure, sustain a healthy environment, and maintain the presence of opportunity, justice and equity.*

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