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Project Title:

Tracking Land Use Changes That Support Sustainable Mobility

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Tracking Land Use Changes That Support Sustainable Mobility

Investigating the conditions that influence local governments and MPOs to take land use and development actions that reflect the regional scenarios to reduce VMT

WHAT WAS THE NEED?

This study was undertaken in the policy context established by the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 (Senate Bill (SB) 375). This law acknowledges that land use planning can lessen automobile reliance, and requires each metropolitan planning organization's (MPO) 4-year regional transportation plan to include a "Sustainable Communities Strategy" (SCS). The SCS is expected to outline infrastructure investment and land use strategies that together would reduce driving by Californians and, thus, reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This study contributes to the understanding of local and regional performance under SB 375.

As California regions are now developing and approving the second rounds of SCSs under SB 375, the state has turned attention to monitoring regional and local implementation. Are on-the-ground planning actions and policy evolving in a direction that will support the regional SCSs and anticipated GHG reductions? Such assessment is important to Caltrans, as a key partner in MPO planning.

WHAT WAS OUR GOAL?

This research sought to address the following question: To what extent are cities in California adopting local land use strategies that support the regional land use visions intended to reduce automobile reliance? Further, what circumstances and factors make individual local governments within a metro region more likely to take land use and development actions, such as zoning changes or specific development approvals, that reflect the regional land use scenario to reduce automobile dependence and vehicle miles traveled (VMT)?

WHAT DID WE DO?

This study explored the responses of California cities and counties to SB 375 in order to understand what may make local



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governments more or less likely to collaborate with regionally oriented policies. The report summarizes a survey of California local governments administered in early 2017 and explores two main questions: (1) to what extent are California local governments adopting local land use policy and development decisions that reflect the MPO's regional land use vision; and (2) what factors might make some local governments more likely to cooperate with regional land use visions, and what factors make others less likely to do so?

To complete this project, the research team first developed and pre-tested a survey instrument for administration to local governments in California and to a reference group of local governments outside of the state. Next, the researchers administered the survey to city and county land use planning and community development directors in California. Then the survey data collected was cleaned and augmented, and analysis of the survey data completed, including descriptive statistics capturing survey results. Survey data were then used to build an exploratory model that aims to identify what factors make a city adopt more of the kinds of land use strategies that would support the MPO's regional land use vision. Finally, the team produced a report describing what the survey responses revealed about local efforts and capacity to monitor land use, and their practices for communicating and sharing such knowledge with MPOs.

WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

A key finding is that California cities have not uniformly included land use strategies to promote smart growth in their zoning codes. Indeed, some cities report using all eight strategies that the research team asked about, while others used none. Cities responding to the survey had adopted on average about five of the eight key land use strategies included in the survey. The researchers also learned about factors that appear to increase adoption of smart growth oriented zoning. Local governments that report overall positive awareness

of, engagement in, and satisfaction with the regional planning process tend to adopt more SB 375–favorable land use strategies than other cities. Additionally, the presence of Green Party-registered voters and population size are positively correlated with SB 375–favorable practices as well.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

Given SB 375's reliance on local governments' own land use decisions, it is essential to understand how land use in California communities is changing. SB 375 anticipates that local land use will play an important role in making Californians' mobility more sustainable. It asks MPOs to better integrate planning for land use, transportation, and housing, however, MPOs have no land use authority, not even under their SCS. SB 375 fully affirms local control over land use; its success depends on voluntary local government compliance with regional GHG-reducing land use visions articulated in the SCSs.

This project illuminates the extent to which local governments report understanding the SCS and its land use policy implications, and to which they are taking action to support the SCS. It also reports how local governments collect and share with MPOs various data tracking land use and development. Finally, it begins to explore which factors most influence local development choices. The research results inform efforts by Caltrans, along with other state, regional, and local agencies, to facilitate implementation of regional SCSs, and thereby to make transportation planning more comprehensive, and to identify new ways of measuring local government performance with respect to land use planning under SB 375.

LEARN MORE

The final report can be accessed at <https://ncst.ucdavis.edu/project/tracking-land-use-changes-that-support-sustainable-mobility/>.