



January 9, 2011

Sacramento Area Council of Governments  
Board of Directors and staff  
1415 L Street, Suite 300  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Draft Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy 2035 Update

Dear SACOG Board of Directors and staff:

WALKSacramento is pleased to comment on the October 27, 2011 draft Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy 2035 Update. The more we read and delve into the draft MTP and its appendices, the more we appreciate the breadth and depth of the work of SACOG's dedicated staff.

We commend SACOG for its intention to increase the level of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure in the region with its commitment to fund \$2.8 billion in new bicycle and pedestrian projects or 7.9% of MTP investments. As well, the draft MTP anticipates Complete Street features will be as much as 16% of its investments in Road Capital & Operations Projects. This would bring the region's overall percentage of regional investment in pedestrian and bicycle improvements over the next 23 years to as high as 11.3% of total funds. Truly SACOG is leading the nation.

We offer several recommendations for strengthening the MTP's provision for Complete Streets to support increased walking and bicycling in this letter and in our attached comments and recommendations on the specific provisions of the MTP and its key appendices.

We have participated in the collaborative work of Climate Plan and Human Impact Partnership helping to craft their recommendations related to walking, bicycling and health. We support the thorough review and recommendations of both of these efforts.

WALKSacramento began its existence as part of the Lung Association of Sacramento Immigrant Trails' involvement in the 1997 MTP planning process. At that time walking was largely ignored by transportation planners both at the local and regional level. We believed then that the provision of safety for pedestrians would go a long way toward addressing some of the region's transportation needs.

We are pleased that what was true in 1997 is no longer true. SACOG and the region's cities and counties recognize the needs of pedestrians and bicyclists – and the needs of a diverse population of young and old, able bodied and disabled. However, while the policies are there, particularly in our most urban areas, there are still many, many

roadways that are unsafe for both pedestrians and bicyclists. This hinders our freedom to get to nearby destinations on foot and bicycle; it limits our ability to take transit; it limits our ability to reduce VMT by substituting walking and bicycling trips for vehicle trips; and it handicaps our ability to support our health by incorporating physical activity into our daily lives.

Now more than ever it is critical to plan and implement transportation projects that support walking and bicycling – for all ages. To strengthen the MTP’s provision for walking and bicycling we recommend the following:

## **1. Set Timetable for Achieving Complete Streets**

SACOG’s draft MTP lacks an overall goal of completing the system for walking and bicycling. We urge that the MTP include such a goal of Complete Streets by 2024.

The MTP does not compare funding for bicycles and pedestrians with what is *needed* to achieve a complete system including a continuous bicycle / pedestrian network. The plan does not achieve Complete Streets throughout the region even within the life of the plan (25 years).

A complete system for bicycles and pedestrians would allow a significantly greater proportion of the population to utilize “active transportation” to obtain physical activity on a daily basis for both utilitarian and recreational trips. From a public health perspective, this is critical, because the most common causes of chronic illness and death today are related to widespread physical inactivity. The high cost of health care today is due in part to the increasing numbers of people requiring medical treatment for conditions that could be alleviated with regular exercise.

Replacement of shorter trips (less than three miles) with walking and bicycling would also reduce emissions of air pollutants, especially given that the shorter vehicle trips are the most polluting, mile per mile. The Sacramento Valley air basin is one of the most top ten polluted in the nation, causing elevated rates of asthma and other conditions related to high concentrations of ozone and particulate matter. Vehicles are the primary source (about 70%) of these air pollutants.

*Why 12 years?* Twelve years is three more MTP cycles. During the first plan cycle, SACOG’s cities and counties could develop or update their bicycle and pedestrian master plans. The next two cycles would provide for plan implementation. By spending money now for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure (frontloading) we can achieve higher levels of walking and bicycling, we will all be healthier, and the air will be cleaner.

We realize that SACOG and the region’s cities and counties are at the end of a deliberative process and that a major shift in focus may not be possible with this MTP. That said, we do believe it is possible to make changes that will assure that we move at a reasonable and accelerated pace to achieve Complete Streets – Safe Routes For All on our major roadways. We think this can be accomplished by adopting the concept of a “Plan for a Plan” – a plan to create a plan to achieve Complete Streets. We urge that SACOG’s include its intention to do this work as part of this MTP and its work-plan for the

next four years so that the next MTP will include the implementation strategies to achieve the Complete Streets in the Region.

## **2. Establish a 20% target for all non-commute walk and bike trips.**

Of all trips in the region, most (80%) are for reasons other than the commute to work and most of those are relatively short distances. The plan estimates that with the current project list, by 2035, 12.1% of all non-commute trips will be by walking or bicycling. This is a very modest 14% increase from the current (2008) 10.6% share by walking and bicycling. This compares with the draft MTP's estimate of a transit mode share increase from .8% to 1.8% or a more than 125% increase. (The transit commute mode share increase is estimated at 193%.) A stretch goal for walking and bicycling should be included with this plan as well.

We recommend a "stretch" target of 20% of all non-commute trips by walking and bicycling, including walking and bicycle to transit. We believe this target could be achievable through incorporating provision for walking and bicycling into SACOG's funding policies and funding programs.

We offer additional suggestions for accomplishing this in our comments on the MTP's specific provisions (Attachment 1).

## **3. Integrate Complete Streets into road maintenance and rehabilitation projects**

We appreciate the extensive work SACOG staff has accomplished "doing more with less" in these difficult economic times. Integrating consideration for Complete Streets into road maintenance and rehabilitation projects is another way to achieve "more with less". Many pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements such as improved street markings can be incorporated with minimal funds into ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation.

Adding bike-lane markings on streets as a part of rehabilitation is one example. Many streets have overly wide lanes which if narrowed can provide room for bike-lanes.

Another important example is providing marked crosswalks at both signalized and non-signalized intersections. Many marked crosswalks were removed in the 1970's and 1980's particularly at un-signalized intersections as a result of limited research that led to the conclusion that marked crosswalks give pedestrians a false sense of security. New research has provided much sounder basis for how to mark uncontrolled intersections to provide the pedestrian greater safety and the driver greater knowledge of the presence of pedestrians. Using this new research, traffic engineers can assess their intersections to determine the most effective treatments for providing pedestrian accessibility and safety. If done in advance of road rehabilitation, these striping treatments can be incorporated into the rehabilitation work with minimal additional cost.

SACOG working with its member jurisdictions can develop a template for "best practices" road rehabilitation programs that build in time for evaluating, planning and engineering for changes to the roadway markings – bike-lane, pedestrian crossing markings, and even lane narrowing to achieve Complete Streets. This is a very cost-effective way to increase the miles of Complete Streets.

#### **4. Incorporate specific pedestrian and bicycle projects in the MTP's transportation project list.**

The MTP's Project List is largely vehicle and transit related. That gives the impression to many that projects that serve pedestrian and bicycle modes are not included. While it is noted in the plan that a significant portion of SACOG's funds will be spent on pedestrian and bicycle projects, it is a separate funding process.

We recommend that each jurisdiction identify its high priority bicycle-pedestrian projects just as it does for its other projects as part of the project identification stage. This will allow the community to know what the jurisdiction's priorities for pedestrian and bicycle improvements are in the context of its other transportation priorities.

In hindsight we realize that one of the most critical steps in the MTP's development is the determination of what projects will be included in the final plan. We urge that this step be made more explicit in the outreach process so that citizens can make their project recommendations along with their scenario recommendations.

Additionally, the MTP project list is large and difficult to review. It would be helpful if it were divided into county subsets with information included to identify which projects will add to Complete Streets.

#### **5. Set performance measures for pedestrian and bicycle safety and health outcomes associated with transportation-related physical activity.**

The plan has no performance measures or targets for pedestrian or bicycle safety. Safety for walkers and bicyclists is critical and should be integrated into all aspects of the MTP including performance measures for funding. Consider utilizing the safety metrics in the *SB375 Health and Equity Metrics* developed by Human Impact Partners ([www.humanimpact.org](http://www.humanimpact.org))

Potential health outcome performance measures could include:

- Increase the average daily time walking or biking per person for transportation by 60% (for an average of 15 minutes per person per day). Note that this includes time walking to transit (not noted in other transportation statistics).
- Improvements in population health status that could be made with the adoption of a complete system for walking and bicycling.

#### **6. Incorporate the promotion of walking and bicycling into the greenhouse gas reduction strategies**

The transportation sector is the biggest contributor overall to GHG emissions, yet the plan does not incorporate strategies to increase to replace car trips with walking and bicycling for the short trips. A significant increase in walking and bicycling trips may enable the achievement of a further reduction in total GHG emissions.

We appreciate working with SACOG, its staff and elected leaders, on this latest MTP and new Sustainable Communities Strategy. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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