

# Seizing the Opportunity

Using the San Joaquin Valley Sustainable Communities Strategies to advance health, sustainability, and shared prosperity

*Regional Transportation Plans (RTP) and Sustainable Communities Strategies (SCS) can jumpstart the region's economy, save families money, improve public health, reduce air and water pollution and strengthen the agricultural sector. In 2012, over 30 groups sent a letter to the Regional Policy Council describing strategies to create a more healthy, prosperous and equitable region while reducing air pollution and greenhouse gases (GHGs): <http://bit.ly/VbuQSA>.*

**Public Health:** Our transportation investments can provide residents the opportunity to make healthier choices and support cleaner air. Embracing health-oriented planning will allow over 100,000 San Joaquin Valley children with asthma to breathe cleaner air and will begin to reverse epidemic levels of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other chronic illnesses that affect hundreds of thousands of Valley residents.

**Economy:** As demographics shift, meeting the growing demand for walkable communities will help keep homes affordable and attract long-term economic growth. Existing land use growth patterns burden households with costly commutes and tax local governments with expensive infrastructure. Investing in existing communities can put that money to better use, and targeting those investments to communities that historically have been left behind will produce the greatest returns Valleywide.

**Equity and Opportunity:** Efforts to reduce greenhouse gases will best succeed when they serve historically overlooked communities and expand opportunities for everyone. Low-income, especially rural, communities often lack basic features of healthy, sustainable neighborhoods – potable water, sewer systems, safe and affordable homes, adequate public transit, parks, sidewalks, streetlights and essential services. Our planning must address these inequities to meet its full potential.

**Watersheds and Working Lands:** An acre of farmland can add up to \$15,000 to the local economy annually, and the Sierra provides our water. Focusing growth and investment in existing communities can begin to reverse decades of land use and transportation planning decisions that have contributed to poor air quality and allowed for growth at the expense of critical farmland and foothills.



## The benefits of taking action: greater health and prosperity

**Save households and local governments money:** By 2035, a more focused growth pattern could save Valley households \$3,600 per year in driving and utility costs and Valley taxpayers more than \$20 billion in infrastructure costs, according to research funded by the California Strategic Growth Council.

**Improve health via increased physical activity:** The CA Dept. of Public Health found that if residents spent just 22 minutes apiece each day walking or biking, the health benefits would “rank among the most notable public health achievements in the modern era, and reduce the estimated \$34 billion annual cost in California from cardiovascular disease and other chronic conditions such as obesity.”

**Build neighborhoods where people want to live:** In 2012, Kern Council of Governments surveyed 1201 residents and found that two thirds support efforts to expand alternatives to driving alone, such as local bus services and improved sidewalks and bike lanes. A 2012 study prepared for Fresno Council of Governments by The Concord Group found that demand for multi-family development such as townhomes and rental flats, in both urban centers and small communities, exceeds supply 4 to 1.

**Reduce air pollution health impacts:** American Lung Association in California research found reductions in VMT and traffic pollution in the Southern California region could avoid 16,000 asthma attacks and nearly \$16 billion in health and other costs by 2035. Similarly, Calthorpe Associates’ research into the Fresno General Plan found that more focused land use could avoid \$14 million in pollution-related health costs in 2035 alone.

## Strategies for Success

**Complete Communities:** Focus growth and investment to improve existing urban and rural neighborhoods, creating sustainable places to live for people of all incomes

The SCS should direct growth and investment into *existing* urban and rural communities, so that current residents can count on the opportunities that complete communities offer: affordable homes, high quality transportation options, walkable neighborhoods, essential services, and economic and educational opportunities. Regions should help identify funding sources that localities can use to plan, build, and maintain the infrastructure in these communities.

**Transportation:** Provide Valley residents of all incomes with a variety of transportation options—such as rail, bus, and vanpools – and safe and comfortable routes for walking and biking

SCS plans should front-load walking, biking and transit projects that boost healthy transportation opportunities, reduce vehicle pollution and health impacts to residents near roadways, and provide all communities with real transportation options – particularly rural, low-income and other underserved populations such as seniors.

**Housing:** Provide a diversity of housing options for all income levels and consider the jobs/transit/housing fit

For housing, SCSs should include: growth scenarios that examine a variety of housing types affordable to all income levels, a jobs-housing fit measuring the match between housing affordability and wage levels within a defined area, and identification of areas susceptible to gentrification and resident displacement. This will help maximize greenhouse gas reductions by creating opportunities for those most likely to use public transit and alternative transportation to access jobs and services.

**Land Conservation:** Minimize loss and conversion of high-value farm, ranch, and natural resource lands

Undertake a step-by-step process to identify key landscapes and the valuable services they provide and to set goals for their protection and remedies for their loss. Land conservation represents an important tool for achieving SCS goals and brings with it a wealth of co-benefits, from maintaining a viable agricultural infrastructure to increasing recreational opportunities.