Regional Implementation Plan for Smart Growth Development Strategies

Project Summary & Goals

In the Regional Blueprint planning process for the Monterey Bay Area, AMBAG staff and local planning staff identified areas around the region called "Blueprint Priority Areas." These Priority Areas meet certain professionally accepted criteria for moderate to high residential densities and incorporate mixed use along with transit accessibility. The adoption of the Regional Blueprint for the Monterey Bay Area in February 2011 laid the foundation for the development of the Sustainable Communities Strategy for the Monterey Bay Area in that it invoked a thoughtful dialogue at the regional level about infill development and the types of policies that would help to support it.

The next step in moving the region towards smart growth development is to plan more strategically for where housing and development should go in the region and how to support and incentivize that development pattern. In order to begin this planning process AMBAG applied for and was awarded a Caltrans Community Based Transportation Planning Grant. There are three major components of the work conducted by AMBAG through this grant: 1) development of a scenario planning framework for the Sustainable Communities Strategy and a development potential analysis; 2) infill feasibility analysis; and 3) a political feasibility analysis of smart growth development strategies. Additionally, in 2011, AMBAG formed a Regional Advisory Committee which is central to the political feasibility analysis component of this project.

Ultimately, the goal of this project as stated in the scope of work is to help realize the Sustainable Communities Strategy development pattern. In doing so, the region will experience improved mobility and accessibility resulting from transit supportive density levels; a stimulated regional economy resulting from sustainable property development and more efficient movement of people and goods; more efficient utilization of existing transportation infrastructure resulting from an increase in modal choices; increased safety resulting from lively and well designed pedestrian oriented spaces; a diverse public engaged in the long-term sustainable growth of the region; and ultimately, a significant reduction of the region's environmental footprint through lowered VMT and GHG emissions and minimal greenfield development.

1. Base Case Scenario Development & Development Potential Analysis

The Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is now required to include a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) per Senate Bill 375. The SCS is a scenario planning process that helps to measure the effects of changing land use patterns and transportation network characteristics on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Measuring difference between scenarios requires a baseline, or a Base Case Scenario. A Base Case Scenario and future alternative scenarios necessitate a constructive approach to talking about land use across the region. While all jurisdictions have General Plan designations that describe land use, those descriptions vary from one to the next. In order to address this, AMBAG developed a typology matrix using a place based planning approach that would allow staff to conduct a scenario planning process using a cohesive approach to land use patterns. The typology matrix describes various land use typologies based on density/intensity, character of use and transportation characteristics. These typologies were then applied to all of the jurisdictions in a manner that reflected the general plans of the region. This became the land use component of the Base Case Scenario for the region as it is indicative of what would happen if the region did nothing to target a reduction in GHGs. The scenario planning process for the MTP will move forward using this same typology matrix to develop alternative scenarios that will likely meet the regional GHG target reductions and these alternatives will be measured against the Base Case developed through this grant work.

The development of alternative scenarios will also draw on a GIS analysis conducted through this grant that identified parcels with development potential based on improvement value to land value ratio and a built to capacity ratio among other key criteria. This analysis utilized available county level assessor's parcel data, local general plans and zoning data, as well as building footprint and height data recently produced through AMBAG's regional LIDAR initiative. In coordination with local jurisdictions AMBAG will be able to identify areas that are prime for infill development and growth. This data and information will be used in the development of the alternative scenarios for the Sustainable Communities Strategy in that it will help to inform what land use patterns are actually feasible in the region.

2. Financial Feasibility Analysis of Infill

Another major component of this project consists of a financial feasibility analysis for infill typologies. Regional Blueprint coordination efforts in 2009-2010 have allowed AMBAG staff to survey over 700 members of the public as well as over 100 local planning staff on housing and neighborhood preferences. Results from these surveys suggest that a significant percentage of Monterey Bay Area residents think that the region needs more medium-density housing, such as townhouses. This analysis tested the financial feasibility of such housing in market sub-regions and provided recommendations on ways to make infill more attractive to developers such as reducing parking requirements and matching typologies to demographic needs. The results of this component will be used to inform the development of the alternative scenarios for the Sustainable Communities Strategy in that AMBAG will be able to propose land use typologies that are appropriate to each sub-region.

3. Political Feasibility Analysis of Smart Growth Development Strategies

Building on the Blueprint public participation efforts, AMBAG staff convened the Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) to participate in a series of surveys, discussions and interviews to analyze the feasibility of a range of policies that have the potential to most significantly improve the development potential of parcels as identified through this project. Over the course of nine months, over 30 RAC members provided insights into a wide range of stakeholder concerns for over forty strategies including transportation, economic development, and parking policies. Information from these surveys will be utilized to develop resources to assist with implementation of smart growth development strategies. AMBAG staff will continue to work with the RAC and planning directors to translate these policies into strategies that will help to support alternative scenarios for the Sustainable Communities Strategy.