I. Background and Goals

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) exist in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000 to promote intergovernmental and stakeholder-driven consensus-building for regional transportation investments. The policies, plans, and programs that MPOs adopt determine where and how transportation investments will be made, influencing growth and development in the regions they serve for decades to come. With the passage of the Safe-Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) in 2005, Congress expanded the scope of transportation planning to require its coordination with land use and economic development, encouraging broader support of smart growth and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). Now, MPOs across the nation are seeking meaningful ways to incorporate smart growth and TOD in their work.

The goal of the “Mainstreaming TOD” roundtable was to provide an opportunity for planners to engage in informal discussion and ask questions of representatives from MPOs who are leading the nation in promoting smart growth and TOD in their regional transportation planning processes. Nearly 50 people attended the 90-minute session. Charles Goodman of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) served as presenter and facilitator, and the three roundtable panelists included:

- Greg Chew, Senior Planner, Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG)
- Christine Eary, Associate Planner, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)
- Mark Butala, Manager of Comprehensive Planning, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)

The following report summarizes information shared by panelists and discussed with participants.
II. Key Findings

The 90-minute roundtable discussion identified numerous opportunities for MPOs to mainstream smart growth principles and promote TOD in their regional transportation planning work, including:

Policy Formation and Decision-making
- Adopt TOD supportive goals, objectives, policies, and performance measures in the long-range transportation plan;
- Use smart growth criteria for prioritizing project implementation in the long-range plan and regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP); and
- Develop demographic projections and growth forecasts in-house, based on local data assumptions and context, for use in transportation plans, programs, and policies.

Resource Allocation for Planning and Implementation
- Conduct technical studies that highlight specific regional opportunities for smart growth and TOD;
- Include funding for TOD joint-developments in the TIP; and
- Create a grant program to fund local smart growth plans in the Unified Planning Work program (UPWP).

Education and Technical Assistance
- Offer technical assistance and support for local member jurisdictions on smart growth and TOD planning and financing;
- Take advantage of Board members’ expertise from their other role as local elected officials overseeing land use control; and
- Provide leadership to foster regional awareness and dialogue on smart growth issues and TOD.

III. Summary of Discussions

Panelists responded to three questions and engaged participants in discussion through question and answer. The three questions were:

1. What is the driving force for promoting TOD and smart growth in your organization?
2. How do local governments and community advocates benefit from your agency’s efforts to support TOD and smart growth region-wide?
3. Are there any lessons learned you can share with participants from your organization’s experience promoting TOD and smart growth in your region?

1. What is the Driving Force for Promoting TOD and Smart Growth in Your Organization?

Sacramento (SACOG) – The driving force for incorporating TOD and smart growth principles in the Sacramento region’s transportation planning processes was the need to address the region’s rapid population growth. A demographic study in the early 2000s predicted that the region’s population would more than double by mid-century, rising from 1.8 million to 3.8 million people. Demographers at the state level predicted the population rise would happen much quicker, by 2030. At then-current rates of land consumption, 661 square miles of undeveloped land would be needed to accommodate such growth, and regional traffic congestion would rise by an estimated 54 percent. The SACOG Board (including representatives from 6 counties and 22 cities) decided that the best way to address these issues was to go to the public and ask for help in updating the long-range transportation plan. An extensive community visioning and public outreach process followed that became known as the Sacramento Blueprint. After gaining input from over 5,000 community members, elected officials, and business leaders, the SACOG Board adopted a preferred scenario for its long-range transportation plan that promotes compact, mixed-use development and more transit choices as an alternative to low density development. The
Sacramento Blueprint process made the case for mainstreaming TOD principles in SACOG’s long-range transportation plan by securing public buy-in through extensive outreach and began the culture shift – both within the agency and in the broader public discourse – that was needed to sustain it’s commitment to uphold them.

**San Diego (SANDAG)** – In San Diego, the impetus to address TOD and smart growth principles came via state mandate. In 2003, an Act of the California State Legislature (Senate Bill 1703) consolidated SANDAG’s transportation planning responsibilities with the transit planning, programming, project development, and construction responsibilities of San Diego County’s two transit providers. Consolidation re-formulated SANDAG as a super-agency that now serves as a "one-stop shop" for regional planning, decision-making, and project implementation county-wide. In the consolidation legislation, the state charged SANDAG with developing a Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) to design strategies for better linking transportation with inter-related issues such as land use and urban form, housing, public facilities, environmental protection, economic development, and energy, and to encourage more sustainable, equitable development region-wide. The consolidation legislation also required that SANDAG develop performance monitoring measures to track progress annually on implementing the goals of the RCP and long-range transportation plan. An emphasis on performance measurement combined with the state’s recent push to address climate change and carbon emissions favors the incorporation of smart growth and TOD-supportive policies in both the RCP and the long-range transportation plan.

**Southern California (SCAG)** – Air quality was the key issue motivating smart growth and TOD in southern California. Analysis showed that unless dramatic steps were taken to curb car emissions, SCAG would not be able to meet air quality conformity requirements and could lose millions of dollars in Federal funding. A number of officials on the SCAG Board formed a sub-committee to explore the link between transportation and land-use and identify ways to reduce emissions by integrating transportation and land-use more effectively. The sub-committee also conducted research to see what other MPO regions around the country were doing to strengthen the transportation-land use connection. SCAG then hired a leading urban design and architecture firm specializing in smart growth and TOD to help articulate specific smart growth and TOD opportunities in SCAG’s update to the long-range plan. Local municipalities retain full control of land use decision-making, but SCAG is now using transportation funding as a “carrot” to provide an incentive for TOD-supportive land uses among its 194 member jurisdictions by targeting investments in TOD-supportive areas.

**Participant Discussion**

Although Federal legislation encourages coordination between transportation and land use, there is no Federal mandate for MPOs to address smart growth in regional transportation planning. Building knowledge and support for smart growth and TOD principles among local elected officials is an essential pre-condition for ideas to be championed or adopted by the MPO Board.

As in Southern California, an air quality conformity crisis peaked local elected officials’ interest in smart growth and TOD in the Atlanta, Georgia region. In response, the Atlanta Regional Commission (Atlanta MPO) created a “Livable Centers Initiative” (LCI) to build support for smart growth principles from the ground up. Local municipalities may apply to the program for funding to create local smart growth transportation plans. ARC then targets transportation infrastructure and project funding to support implementation. The hope is that knowledge and expertise generated through the LCI program at the local level will lead to increased leadership and vision on issues of smart growth and TOD at the regional level as well through demonstrating the success of TOD projects.

Participants and panelists agreed that creating a planning grant program with Federal funds is a key opportunity for MPOs to support smart growth and mainstream TOD planning in their regions. MPOs can fund these initiatives in their annual UPWP using Federal Planning (PL) funds. Examples of notable MPO grant programs mentioned during the discussion included:

- **Livable Centers Initiative**, ARC
- **Smart Growth Incentive Program**, SANDAG
• Transportation for Livable Communities, Metropolitan Transportation Commission (the San Francisco Bay Area MPO)

2. How do local governments and community advocates benefit from your agency’s efforts to support TOD and smart growth region-wide?

Sacramento (SACOG) – The Sacramento Blueprint process built a strong foundation of political and community support for the compact, mixed-use growth scenario adopted in the region’s long-range transportation plan. As a result, SACOG dedicated 500 million dollars of the funds it programs for smart growth construction and 250 million dollars for smart growth planning, bike/pedestrian activities, public involvement, and support services.

San Diego (SANDAG) – SANDAG promotes smart growth and TOD to its member jurisdictions through funding and technical assistance. Staff created a “Smart Growth Toolbox” on SANDAG’s website with planning and financing tools, including a set of “smart growth design guidelines” that municipalities can use to inform the design of transit stations, multimodal streets, civic buildings, parks, and parking facilities. Beginning in 2009, SANDAG will award two percent of its annual TransNet funding (San Diego County’s half-cent sales tax dedicated to transportation) to local governments to promote smart growth planning and TOD-supportive infrastructure investments through its Smart Growth Incentive Program. In fiscal year 2009, the Smart Growth Incentive Program will offer 5 million dollars in competitive grants to SANDAG’s member jurisdictions.

Southern California (SCAG) – SCAG runs a technical assistance program for member jurisdictions that includes a “Toolbox Tuesdays” series, during which staff offer training in the most popular topics and skills their local planners request. SCAG also retains about 50 consultants on contract to assist member governments in developing proposals for SCAG funds.

3. Are there any lessons learned you can share with participants from your organization’s experience promoting TOD and smart growth in your region?

Sacramento (SACOG) – Our philosophy is that offering more and better information and choices leads to improved decision-making. SACOG never tried to convince people they should support smart growth. Instead, our strategy was to show forecasts of what would happen in the region without it, have our staff use cutting edge information technology and modeling to develop compelling choices, and then ask elected officials and members of the public to tell us how to respond. The result is a smart-growth plan that has wide political and community support without our staff having had to persuade anyone of the value of “smart growth.”

San Diego (SANDAG) – Building relationships with and consensus among member jurisdictions in support of smart growth and TOD policies is the most important step to mainstreaming smart growth and TOD issues in regional transportation planning.

Southern California (SCAG) – Education and Board engagement is critical to promoting TOD and smart growth in any region. MPOs will have a much greater impact if their Board members become champions than if smart growth and TOD policies are driven primarily by staff recommendation.

IV. Key Contacts

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