

California Senate Bill 375: Linking Regional Plans to State Greenhouse Gas Reduction Goals

Plan Bay Area grew out of “The California Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008” (California Senate Bill 375, Steinberg), which requires each of the state’s 18 metropolitan areas — including the Bay Area — to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and light trucks. Signed by former Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the law requires that the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) promote compact, mixed-use commercial and residential development. To meet the goals of SB 375, Plan Bay Area directs more future development in areas that are or will be walkable and bikable and close to public transit, jobs, schools, shopping, parks, recreation and other amenities. Key elements of SB 375 include the following.

- The law requires that the Bay Area and other California regions develop a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) — a new element of the regional transportation plan (RTP) — to strive to reach the greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction target established for each region by the California Air Resources Board. The Bay Area’s target is a 7 percent per capita reduction by 2020 and a 15 percent per capita reduction by 2035. Plan Bay Area is the region’s first RTP subject to SB 375.
- In the Bay Area, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) is responsible for the land use and housing assumptions for the SCS, which adds three new elements to the RTP: (1) a land use component that identifies how the region could house the region’s entire population over the next 25 years; (2) a discussion of resource and farmland areas; and (3) a demonstration of how the development pattern and the transportation network can work together to reduce GHG emissions.

- Extensive outreach with local government officials is required, as well as a public participation plan that includes a minimum number of workshops in each county as well as three public hearings on the draft SCS prior to adoption of a final plan.
- The law synchronizes the regional housing need allocation (RHNA) process — adopted in the 1980s — with the regional transportation planning process.
- Finally, SB 375 streamlines the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for housing and mixed-use projects that are consistent with the SCS and meet specified criteria, such as proximity to public transportation.

Plan Bay Area is one element of a broader California effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While Plan Bay Area focuses on where the region is expected to grow and what transportation investments will support that growth, Assembly Bill 32 (2006) creates a comprehensive framework to cut greenhouse gases with new, cleaner fuels, more efficient cars and trucks, lower carbon building codes, cleaner power generation, as well as coordinated regional planning. In addition, Caltrans will lead efforts consistent with Senate Bill 391 (2009) to reduce greenhouse gases statewide from the transportation sector, including freight. These strategies are outlined in the California Air Resources Board’s (CARB) 2008 Scoping Plan, which demonstrates there is no single way to reduce greenhouse gases. Every sector must contribute if the state is to achieve its goals today and for tomorrow’s generations.