

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

# Sacramento Regional Transit Master Plan

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# 1 Introduction

## Introduction

- 1.1 Sacramento Regional Transit (RT) is the largest transit authority in the Sacramento region. The last long term plan for RT was a Transit Master Plan (TMP) developed in 1993. Since then, the region has experienced significant growth in population and employment and regional forecasts prepared by the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) predict that this growth will continue well into the future. There is therefore a need for a fresh view on RT's long term plans to ensure that it can continue to support the economic growth and mobility needs of the region.

## Background and Context

### 1993 Transit Master Plan

- 1.2 The 1993 TMP highlighted that the growing shift away from a single downtown core towards a polycentric region with dispersed centers and continued low density residential suburban sprawl was making efficient transit delivery increasingly difficult. Distances between home and destinations - jobs, shopping, schools and hospitals - were continuing to increase leading to longer journeys and increased congestion across the region.
- 1.3 Increases in trip lengths, journey times and congestion were not only having an adverse impact on Sacramento residents' quality of life, they were also beginning to have a real and measurable impact on the region's air quality.
- 1.4 The 1993 TMP set a course for RT that included large scale investments in its light rail and bus networks and since its adoption, RT has more than doubled the length of its light rail network to over 37 miles. However, despite this major investment, RT's services

are only able to capture 1% of the total travel market in the region.

- 1.5 As sprawl has continued and jobs and homes have continued to spread over a wider area, it has become even more difficult for Regional Transit to provide a substantial or fully effective transit service.

### A New Way to Grow

- 1.6 Planning work undertaken by SACOG has forecast that the regional population will grow to 3.5 million by 2050 (87% increase) with an increased number of households (115% increase) and jobs (100% increase). At the same time the composition of the population will change with a growing number of elderly residents and people living on their own.
- 1.7 For the past 50 years or more, the Sacramento region has grown as a result of cheap gas prices and a land use pattern designed for an automobile-dependent lifestyle. Residents have become accustomed to using their cars for virtually every trip and parking in most places is abundant and cheap adding a further incentive to drive.
- 1.8 However, over the past few years there has been a growing recognition that the Sacramento region needs to steer a different course. SACOG has developed an alternative land use vision called the *Preferred Blueprint Scenario* that is based on the principles of 'smart growth'. This approach consumes less land because of policies based on higher density, and often mixed use development with an emphasis on livable neighborhoods and local communities where walking and cycling, as well as greater transit use, are encouraged as alternatives to using the car for every trip.
- 1.9 The Blueprint is a 50-year plan, highlighting that change will occur incrementally, not immediately. Its delivery is also dependent on a consensus between many stakeholders:

the local jurisdictions to adopt smart growth guidelines in their general plans; land owners and the development community to realize a benefit in smart growth projects; and the public to shift to a different lifestyle, moving away from low density suburban development to well designed communities that have a mix of land uses and better transportation choices. The Blueprint encourages communities that create a more vibrant and interesting place to live and work.

- 1.10 While such a comprehensive shift in the way the Sacramento region is planned may have seemed ambitious when the Blueprint was adopted in 2004; since then there has been a major shift in circumstances, all of which highlight the need for a new approach for transit provision in the Sacramento region.

#### ***The Role for Transit***

- 1.11 The 2008 spike in gas prices and the 2009 recession have highlighted that economic conditions can have a considerable impact on where people choose to live and work and how they travel, with increased levels of transit ridership recorded in 2008. Gas prices are likely to increase in the long term and congestion will only get worse with population growth; therefore, the public will be more open to finding quicker, more affordable ways to travel.
- 1.12 Sacramento Regional Transit's services already provide a vital service in the Sacramento region. Now, however, there is a need for a comprehensive step change in the quality, coverage and frequency of transit, making it a real transportation choice that is clean, convenient, reliable, efficient and affordable. The way transit is provided will need to adapt to changes in population and employment by connecting employment centers throughout the region to the populations that access them. The Vision set out in this TransitAction Plan will

make transit a convenient lifestyle choice in the Sacramento region.

#### **Structure of the TransitAction Document**

- 1.13 This Transit Master Plan (RT's TransitAction Plan) consists of ten sections. Following this Introduction, Section 2 examines *The New Transit Challenge* in more detail, looking at global, national, regional and local changes that influence the content and direction of the Plan.
- 1.14 This is followed in Section 3 by a brief summary of our starting point, looking at Regional Transit's current organization, infrastructure and operating performance, along with already planned major projects.
- 1.15 With our benchmark established, Section 4 then starts to address the *Transit Vision* for the 25-30-year TransitAction Plan. This section takes a comprehensive look at the components of successful transit, drawing on a review of experiences from elsewhere in California, the US and Europe. It concludes by presenting the TransitAction Plan Vision Statement and supporting objectives, and also highlights the need for an integrated approach encompassing 'smart growth' land use and complementary transportation demand management measures.
- 1.16 Section 5 then provides details of a range of TransitAction Plan scenarios that have been developed to examine the impacts and benefits of different combinations of transit investments. These were used to provide the material for a comprehensive outreach program undertaken as part of the development of the TransitAction Plan. The results of this analysis have been used to shape the development of the final TransitAction Plan.
- 1.17 The details of the outreach program are presented in Section 6, *The People's Plan*. The combined findings of the technical

scenario testing and the outreach have then been used to frame Section 7 which contains details of the proposed capital program in the TransitAction Plan for Regional Transit covering 2009-2035.

- 1.18 Section 8 sets out details off the increased transit frequencies and operating hours that form a part of the Plan. Updated *Service Planning Guidelines* to be used by Regional Transit to measure transit performance and ensure that services are working to achieve the TransitAction Plan Vision are also presented. In addition, detailed *Transit-oriented Development Guidelines* will be added to help guide future development with regard to mix of uses, design, and intensity, that ensure transit effectiveness.
- 1.19 The concluding Sections of the TransitAction Plan then turn to how the Plan will be achieved. The ‘pragmatic’ aspects of the TransitAction Plan are addressed in Section 9, *Finding the Funding*, which describes the need to identify sources of funding to pay for the Plan. Finally, Section 10 sets out a phased delivery plan for the content of the TransitAction Plan.
- 1.20 The TransitAction document will be supported by an ADA/Paratransit Plan and an updated Short Range Transit Plan.