



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is Valley Visions?**

Valley Visions is a series of planning efforts underway throughout the San Joaquin Valley. It takes a big-picture look at how the Central Valley can grow over time in a way that uses resources efficiently, protects existing communities, conserves farmland and open space, and supports the Central Valley economy. Planning in advance for growth can result in better neighborhoods, more housing and transportation choices, and a higher quality of life for residents.

The regional plans consider long-term housing, transportation and land use needs. Each region in California, including the eight counties of the Central Valley, is required to complete a long-term plan under Senate Bill 375 (SB 375). The eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley are coordinating on some aspects of these planning efforts to maximize resources, however each Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is developing a separate plan.

### **Why are we doing this?**

There are laws that require these regional plans, but this is also an opportunity to think about how we want our region to grow and evolve over the next several years in a way that meets our needs and matches our values.

MPOs are agencies that set transportation policy and priorities for a region, outlining how transportation funds will be spent. There are 18 MPOs in California, including 8 in the San Joaquin Valley. Each is required by state and federal laws to develop a long-range plan to guide transportation investment in the region. These Regional Transportation Plans are updated every four years to reflect current population, employment and travel projections as well as changes in local plans and regional transportation priorities.

A new requirement, added by SB 375, asks planners to also consider how land use and transportation planning can be coordinated to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This means planning for housing, jobs and services to be located in a way that helps reduce the amount we travel day-to-day in our cars and trucks.

**What will these plans do?**

SB375 requires that an MPO develop a plan called a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) that accomplishes three things:

1. Identifies areas to house the region's population growth for at least the next twenty-five years. This includes households at all income levels.
2. Develops a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that meets the needs of the region; and
3. Reduces greenhouse-gas emissions from automobiles and light trucks.

**How does this relate to the Blueprint Planning Process?**

The Blueprint was a regional planning effort to identify priorities and preferences for long-term growth in the Valley. These plans and the input gathered during that process will support and guide Valley Visions plans. The resulting plans will be distinct from, but build upon, earlier Blueprint efforts.

**Who will prepare the Valley Vision plans and when?**

It depends on which county you live in. Each of the eight MPOs in the San Joaquin Valley is responsible for preparing these plans, with input from residents and other stakeholders. They will work closely with local cities, transportation agencies and community groups to get input into these plans. Everyone interested is invited to participate in this process to help shape our community's future. Most of the Valley Visions plans will be complete by the end of 2013.

**How can we talk about growth in this economy? What about jobs?**

The San Joaquin Valley's economy is likely to improve as the national economy recovers. Planning for efficient land use and transportation systems makes the region more attractive to potential employers and residents, which will support long-term growth and prosperity. Housing, transportation, and supporting infrastructure need to be developed for job growth so that businesses can operate successfully and workers can live nearby and get to work easily.

**What does it mean to coordinate land use and transportation plans?**

Public agencies regularly create and update land use and transportation plans, but these are not always done together or even in coordination. The plans being created under Valley Visions will consider both land use and transportation together, recognizing that land use affects how and where people live, work and travel. If we know what land use changes are likely to occur, we can better plan our transportation systems to meet those needs. Likewise, land uses may change based on how the transportation system is working. For example, road congestion may discourage employers from locating on those corridors.

**What is the connection between planning and greenhouse gases?**

Transportation is the largest single source of GHG in California. Changing transportation patterns by reducing how much people need to drive can reduce emissions and improve local air quality.

The Valley Visions plans can help reduce emissions by:

- Encouraging land uses (jobs, stores, schools, and homes) to be located closer together in some communities so people can drive less to meet their day-to-day needs.
- Clustering homes, jobs and other activities near transit, so people have more transportation choices.
- Planning land uses and transportation together, so we can manage traffic congestion and reduce emissions from inefficiencies.

### **Why should we care about greenhouse gas emissions?**

Reducing GHG emissions into the environment can improve air quality, support public health and protect the environment. Plans and policies that lower GHG emissions from transportation can also lower energy consumption, shorten commute times, save money and reduce the need for driving.

In addition, there are laws, including SB 375, that require air quality standards and emission reduction goals. SB 375 requires California to reduce GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, and requires land-use/housing plans that reduce emissions from cars and light trucks to help meet these regional targets.

### **How can a regional transportation and land-use plan reduce greenhouse gas emissions?**

Valley Visions can help meet GHG goals by working with local cities, counties and public agencies to plan for more people living near their jobs and other services. Also, by creating better access to transit and making biking and walking easier and safer, residents won't have to drive as much. Less driving means fewer emissions from tailpipes into the air.

### **Land use changes very slowly and many places will not change much. How much difference can Valley Visions really make?**

It will likely be several years before changes in the land use pattern make a measurable difference in total emissions from personal cars and trucks. Improvements in technology – including more fuel-efficient cars and trucks –and policy changes –such as parking pricing -- will also be needed to reach reduction targets. However, changing land uses is also critical to improving air quality and public health through emission reductions.

Valley Visions is just one effort to help reduce GHG emissions in California. There is a consensus that there isn't just one thing that we should do; we will need to move on all

fronts. Changes in technology will have to be accompanied by changes in how people travel.

**What are the greenhouse-gas reduction targets?**

In September 2010, the California Air Resources Board (ARB) adopted GHG reduction targets for the San Joaquin Valley for the years 2020 and 2035. The targets are a 5 percent reduction in GHG emissions by 2020 and a 10 percent reduction by 2035, compared to 2005 emissions.

**Do these plans take power away from cities or counties?**

No. SB 375 is explicit that the MPOs do not have the authority to take or over-ride “the land use authority of cities and counties in the region.” There is no requirement that cities and counties change any of their plans.

Your local government has the authority to create plans for how your community will grow or not, what businesses to encourage, and where new housing might go. Each city puts in place its own zoning and policies about development (but whether that development actually occurs depends on the economy and private market). Your MPO will work closely with city and county staff to make sure the plans are consistent with and support local land use plans and community priorities.

**Why would local governments want to conform to the regional Valley Visions?**

Some issues like traffic congestion or air quality often require the cooperation of several communities to address. Regional planning efforts can bring a variety of benefits to our neighborhoods. We can improve the quality of life of our communities by working together to provide cleaner air, improved public health, safer streets, and homes closer to transit, jobs, and services.

There will also be funding incentives that for localities that conform to the Valley Visions plans. These include investments from the Regional Transportation Plan, and assistance in meeting the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

**Is Valley Visions part of Agenda 21?**

No. Agenda 21 is a United Nations report on policies and settlement patterns, poverty and the environment that was developed in 1992. [Insert MPO mission.] [MPO name] has no affiliation with or authority regarding any policy goals and recommendations of the United Nations.

**How can I share my ideas and opinions?**

Public participation is essential to the success of Valley Visions, and we hope you will get involved. We need the input of many residents and stakeholders to create a plan that meets our goals and reflects our community values.

There are many ways to get involved. A great way to start is by visiting [MPO website] to find out about local efforts and upcoming workshops. [MPOs to add additional information about other opportunities, including advisory committees, questionnaires, etc.]

Decisions made today regarding infrastructure investments will affect the region for many years to come. The best plans will take into account many different points of view, so we hope you'll get involved.

**Who should I contact with questions?**

Fresno Council of Governments

(559) 233-4148

[www.fresnocog.org](http://www.fresnocog.org) or [www.valley-visions.org](http://www.valley-visions.org)

2035 Tulare Street, Suite 201, Fresno CA 93722