SBCAG
santa barbara county association of governments

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STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: San Luis Obispo Council of Governments Regional Plan

MEETING DATE: September 21, 2006 **AGENDA ITEM:** 10

STAFF CONTACT: Michael Powers, Steve Devencenzi, SLOCOG

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive presentation from SLOCOG staff on development of regional blueprint plan for SLOCOG and discuss coordination opportunities with the communities of Guadalupe, Santa Maria, unincorporated Santa Maria Valley, and, SBCAG.

DISCUSSION:

SBCAG's neighboring COG to the North, San Luis Obispo Council of Governments is involved in a regional planning effort. Based on the connections between southern SLO County and northern Santa Barbara County, SLOCOG wishes to update your board on their progress they have made in preparing the regional plan and discuss coordination opportunities with SBCAG, the cities of Santa Maria and Guadalupe, and the County of Santa Barbara.

A summary of the SLOCOG Community 2050 planning effort is attached and a SLOCOG staff member will brief the board on the current status at the meeting on the 21st.

COMMITTEE REVIEW: None

Community 2050 Update
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments, San Luis Obispo, California

Overview

SLOCOG received a Blueprint Planning Grant from the state in fiscal year 2005-06 to undertake a scenario planning process. This process, called Community 2050, centered on having the community envision the region's future. SLOCOG started with its municipalities' 20-year plans, and then asked how people wanted the region to develop from there over the next couple of decades. SLOCOG is currently between Phases II and IVA in Figure 3. Based on the preferred 2050 vision, some changes may be made to the 20-year plans.

SLOCOG endeavors to help align agencies in the region with a shared, public vision through the scenario planning process. To succeed in this process, SLOCOG divided the county into four subregions based on each area's own distinct markets (for example, jobs and housing) and characteristics; this allowed smaller areas within the county to be heard. The four areas are the North Coast, Central Area, North County, and South County.

SLOCOG set up stakeholder involvement committees with locally elected officials and other interested parties in each of the four subregions of the county to solicit their input and to get their buy-in early on. SLOCOG strives to have an array of locally elected officials on board as early as possible to engender a feeling of ownership of the process. They also stress that the regional vision being created provides a framework that communities can choose to evaluate and implement in their plans, or not.

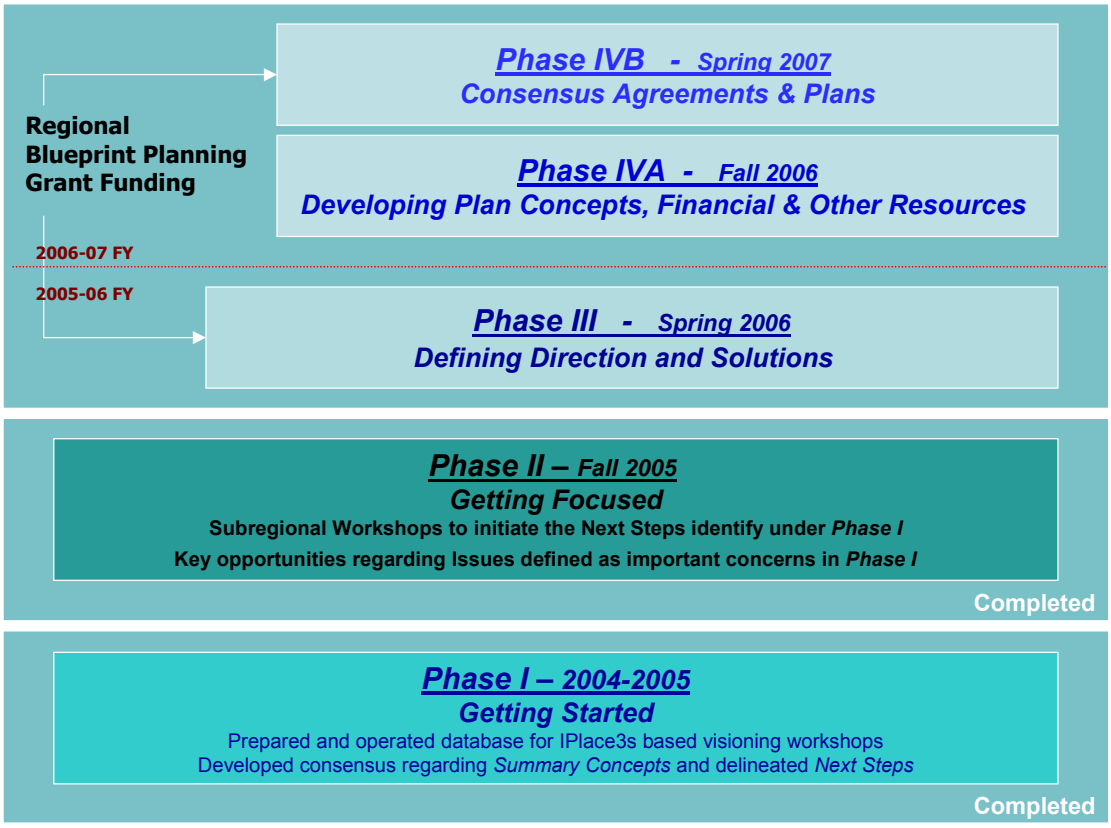

Figure 1: The Phases of SLOCOG's scenario planning process

SLOCOG held a series of workshops in each of the areas in the county as part of their 2050 visioning process. The general public was invited, and elected officials and planning commissioners also attended. At the workshops, members of the community and stakeholders got together to review existing maps and brainstorm ideas for new development. The main purpose of the workshops was to build awareness and consensus. SLOCOG created "Development Type" menus in their model, described more below, that enabled participants to create alternative scenarios (Development Type indicators are listed in Box 1). The scenarios are compared on the fly to assist in developing new ideas. Interactive polling was used to ask participants what summary concepts and scenarios they most preferred. Existing land use served as a baseline scenario to compare proposed land use changes and to evaluate development impacts.

Box 1: Indicators in the iPlace3s Model

- Jobs per Capita
- Total Acres with Employment
- Dwelling Units and Jobs by Sector
- Employment Totals
- Employees per Acre
- Employees per Dwelling Unit
- Dwelling Units per Employees
- Floor Area Ratio Density
- Dwelling Unit Totals
- Dwelling Units per Acre
- Total Acres with Dwelling Units
- Residents per Acre
- Physical Displacement
- Potential Jobs & Housing Units Through Redevelopment
- Jobs Housing Match
- Tenure of Housing Stock
- Total VMT per Household and percent Change in VMT from Base
- Annual Health Related Costs and Percent Change in Annual Vehicle Emissions
- Overall Pedestrian Friendliness
- Pedestrian Environmental Quality
- Annual BTUs and Percent Change in Annual BTUs
- Miles of Bikeways per Capita
- Transit Stop/Line Dwelling Unit Densities
- Transit Stop/Line Employment Densities
- Overall Transit Friendliness
- Transit Friendliness by Stops
- Rail Boardings
- Percent Change in Rail Boardings
- Parks/Open Space per 1,000 People
- Water Consumption

In working with stakeholders and the public, SLOCOG found real-time analysis of the scenarios to be an important tool in demonstrating how infrastructure decisions shape the community. Having real-time results also helped SLOCOG build trust and bolster public buy-in, as the process was open and transparent to the participants. At the public workshops, participants were first seated at tables within a meeting room, then given chips to place on a map of the county in areas where they thought population and jobs should be located between the years 2030-2050. Participants were given the choice of several chip sets, from low-density (business as usual) growth up to high-density growth. As participants sketched out future land use scenarios, forecasters at each table entered information into a computer. Through a program called iPlace3s, which was connected to the region's traffic model, the computer yielded immediate feedback to emphasize the relationship between land use choices and traffic conditions.

Figure 4 shows how SLOCOG used technology to inform workshop participants of the transportation impacts of their development choices. Generating feedback took only 15 minutes. When people saw the impact of continuing low-density growth on their community and the surrounding environment, many participants traded their lower-density chips in for higher density chip sets, and new information was entered into iPlace3s.

Technical assistance for the project was provided by nearby California Polytechnic University. Working with the local university enables SLOCOG and local units of government to take advantage of a broad

knowledge base and a pool of student labor. California Polytechnic University houses GIS data and makes it available for use by all.

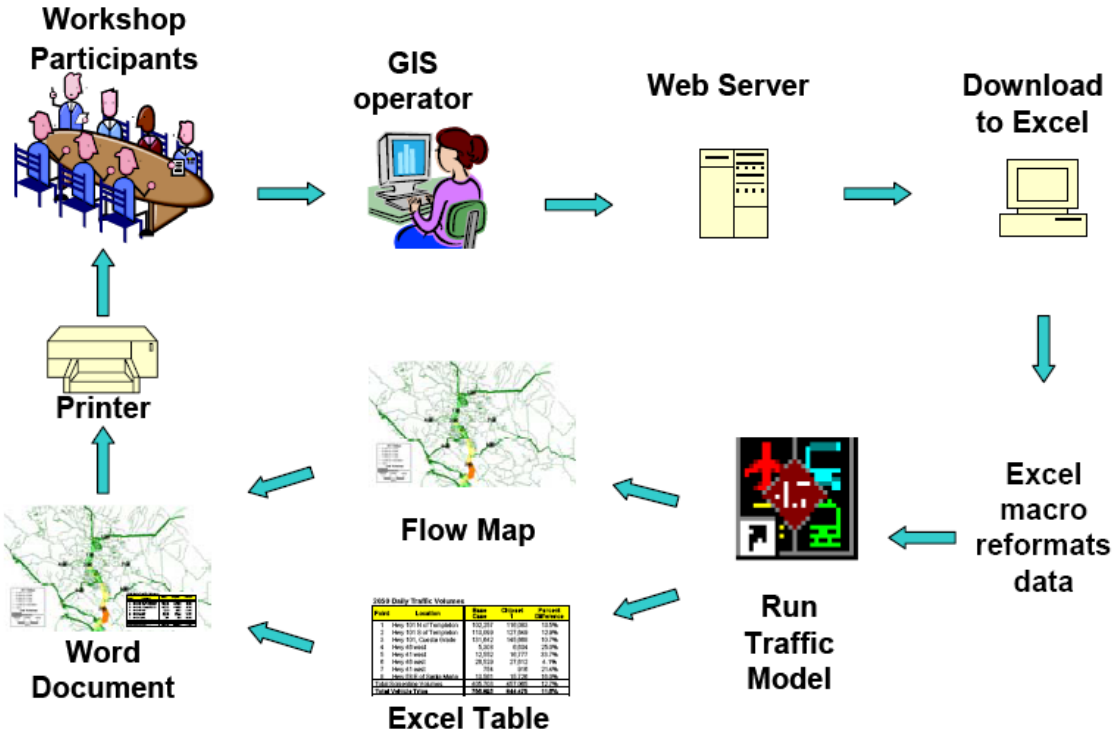

Figure 2: Real-Time Modeling of Transportation Impacts

The program SLOCOG used to translate the participants choices into regional impacts – iPlace3s – is a parcel-level web-based scenario planning tool that is the successor of iPlace3s. iPlace3s is a desktop scenario planning tool that has been used by the Sacramento, San Francisco, and San Diego regions. In the next phase, SLOCOG will begin using UPlan, a tool developed by the University of California at Davis in partnership with CalTrans. UPlan models where land use changes will occur in response to the transportation infrastructure.

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The Community 2050 program will utilize the *UPlan* model this fall to evaluate and design a "Base Case" and will be followed after the first of the year with visioning workshops utilizing the *Place3s* model. The subregional basis of the program is particularly designed to focus this on the partnership opportunities that exist within the distinct housing markets, economic centers, and environmental subregional of the County. The program has been, and will continue to be, highly integrated with the County of San Luis Obispo's Land use Element update which is focused on issues at the rural-urban interface and the intensification of land uses within urban areas that can provide a more efficient land use pattern that (a) supports improved mobility and reduced dependency on single-occupant vehicle trips, (b) supports the development of friendly, cohesive and integrated pedestrian facilities, (c) accommodates an adequate supply of housing for all incomes, (c) reduces impacts on valuable habitat, productive farmland, and air quality, (d) increases resource use efficiency, and (e) results in safe and vibrant neighborhoods.

As noted last spring the *Community 2050* program will evaluate interrelationships between existing interregional partnerships such as those addressing:

- *Economic Development* – The Economic Vitality Corporation (EVC) and County Economic Advisory Committee are being included in these efforts in working jointly toward a *Countywide Economic Plan* as envisioned in 1993. This is being "driven" by the high cost of housing in the region and the need to work more effectively to address housing issues.

- *Housing* – The primary issue identified in the fall workshops has been housing. The Homebuilders Association, Housing Trust Fund, and Housing Authority have been participating in the program and will be assisting with presenting key housing issues and potential solutions to some of the vexing issues that underlie this problem area.

- *Transportation Infrastructure* – As the Regional Transportation Planning Agency SLOCOG will review the Regional Transportation Plan and will review and update funding priorities and performance measures as a part of the ongoing program.

- *Environmental Planning* - Community separators, protecting agriculture and open space have been identified as major concerns – a number of base resources and several studies and programs are underway or in place. This program will map these areas and include them in the evaluation and planning process.

UPlan

The UPlan component will use the existing General Plans and look at the constraints and opportunities or attractors that will influence development location and timing. As previously noted the Technical Advisory Group recognizes that local land use authority is the cornerstone of local agencies powers and the program must be designed and executed to develop a consensus Regional Vision that provides a constructive framework for the establishment of common principles and/or visions; action policies, statements, guidelines and programs that are adopted as part of local planning standards and/or ordinances; commitment to work toward goals & financing strategies; compacts, memorandums of understanding (MOU), and/or memorandums of agreement (MOA); and specific plans, general plan or other plan updates.

UPlan was developed to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to improve regional transportation planning capabilities. The Information Center for the Environment (ICE) at the University of California, Davis (UC Davis), was contracted to assist with the development of this GIS-based decision support tool. It is an urban growth model developed to evaluate the land development impacts of transportation projects.

UPlan develops growth scenarios by overlaying GIS data layers to predict land use allocation and patterns in the most attractive and least environmentally damaging areas. The model allows the user to test the effects of land use and transportation policies and analyze environmental impacts. The user sets certain features based on assumptions regarding attractions and discouragements to growth; some of these assumptions are standard modeling principles. The user also sets features to buffer or mask protected areas so the model does not allocate growth there. For instance, a user would buffer a resource such as a wetland, or mask a current urban area that is already built out, so the model would not allocate growth in those areas.

UPlan was "tested" in Merced County with an application that took a broad look at the projected footprint of growth in that county. Data layers were compiled from many sources, including resource agencies that were invited to contribute data layers and provide rankings of resources to help the Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) know the agencies' priorities. This information was represented in the settings applied in UPlan and reflected in the scenarios that resulted. The outreach to resource agencies for input on data and rankings was a new way to bring

resource agencies into the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) development process. MCAG analyzed the different scenarios generated by the model. Potential effects, including cumulative impacts, were then compared to a status quo or no-change alternative of the RTP. The results were presented in the RTP's EIR.

Cumulative Impacts Analysis

The holistic look at the effects of transportation and land use decisions provided by UPlan makes it particularly well suited for cumulative impacts analysis. It allows cumulative impacts to be explored in a way that is not typically available without the use of GIS modeling, largely because of its extensive use of data. UPlan or a similar GIS-based tool is invaluable for plan-level cumulative impacts analysis for many reasons including:

- its broad, regional approach to representing data;
- its ability to overlay many kinds of data at a regional level; and,
- its increasing practicality in terms of cost and access.

An interagency group called the Cumulative Impacts Advisory Panel (Panel) was convened in Merced to address agencies' mutual concerns about cumulative impacts analysis for transportation projects. Panel members were drawn from the agencies that most commonly prepare or comment on cumulative impact analyses. The intent of the cumulative impacts analysis component was to conduct a series of workshops or group meetings to:

- Discuss cumulative impacts terminology, roles and responsibilities
- Address traditional problems in cumulative impacts analysis and mitigation
- Develop an approach for conducting cumulative impacts analysis in the EIR for the RTP, based on Panel members' collaborative input, and applicable to a plan level analysis

The use of UPlan and early collaboration with participating agencies allows data needs to be identified and met in a more comprehensive and coordinated manner. The desired results are best achieved in a small group setting, using a conversational and interactive format using a series of facilitated meetings among a small group of staff from key local, federal, and state agencies involved with cumulative impacts analysis. The scope of cumulative impacts analysis is properly regional. It allows for modification of alternatives if significant cumulative impacts are identified and project-level analysis can refer back to and build upon regional plan analysis.

Asking resource and regulatory agencies for input to regional impact analysis, rather than asking them to respond to project-level documents, is a paradigm shift. No statutory or regulatory process otherwise brings federal resource and regulatory agencies together with state agencies and an MPO to coordinate on environmental issues. The MCAG effort was unprecedented with respect to its focus on arriving at an approach to analyzing cumulative impacts at a regional, plan level. Environmental and project delivery staff with agencies and organizations are accustomed to project-level cumulative impacts analysis. With UPlan the cumulative impacts analysis can be approached in a very different way.

SLOCOG and local partners will evaluate the potential for the use of UPlan in conducting future cumulative impact analysis.

Next Steps

Following the meetings this Fall staff from the County, LAFCO, and APCD staff as well as the Countywide Planning Directors Group will be looking at the specific results and needs of each subregion. The Elected Officials Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the

supervisorial districts, cities, community service districts or areas within the subregion and community advisory groups will be invited to participate and will be consulted regarding the format and subject matter for the next series.