

# Aligning Metropolitan Transportation Planning and Investments with California's Climate and Equity Goals

March 3, 2025



# Agenda

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# Introductions

# The UCLA ITS Research Team



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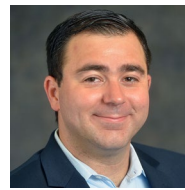
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# Overview of Issue, Study

Determine whether and to what extent Metropolitan Planning Organizations incorporate California's climate and equity goals into their transportation project evaluations and project selections

# Our research process

- In consultation with CARB staff, we identified a sample of seven California Metropolitan Planning Organizations to study
  - Selected all four large and a sample of three smaller MPOs
  - For the smaller MPOs, we emphasized those that had recently updated their Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

# MPOs studied

## The Big 4 MPOs

1. Metropolitan Transportation Commission (San Francisco Bay Area MTC)
2. Sacramento Council of Governments (SACOG)
3. San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG)
4. Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)

## Three Smaller MPOs

1. Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (6/22 RTP)
2. Fresno Council of Governments (FCOG) - large and growing, with TCC and HSR investment (7/22 RTP)
3. San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) - within sphere of influence of larger region (MTC) (8/22 RTP)



# Our research process

Review of MPO Legal and Research  
Literature

Review of MPO Documents

Interviews with MPO Staff,  
Boards, and Advocates

# Our research process

Review of MPO Legal and Research Literature

Review of MPO Documents

Interviews with MPO Staff, Boards, and Advocates

- Creations of the state and federal governments
- Where locally-elected government representation meets state and federal mandates

# Our research process

## Review of MPO Legal and Research Literature

- Creations of the state and federal governments
- Where locally-elected government representation meets state and federal mandates

## Review of MPO Documents

- Review of publicly-documented planning, public participation, and project evaluation work for the 7 studied MPOs
- Focused on (1) where in the process projects are evaluated and (2) whether and to what extent climate and equity goals were considered

## Interviews with MPO Staff, Boards, and Advocates

# Our research process

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## Interviews with MPO Staff, Boards, and Advocates

- We spoke with 32 people (MPO staff, MPO board members, climate/equity stakeholders) to learn what happens behind the scenes at these 7 MPOs in the planning, project evaluation, and programming processes

# Key Findings

- All seven MPOs integrate climate and equity into planning, but the extent varies greatly, especially across funding programs
- Project evaluation methods range from comprehensive to rudimentary, and from transparent to poorly documented
- Emissions/VMT evaluations are more robust than equity assessments, likely due to regulatory requirements
- Some MPOs are notably improving community engagement and conducting plan-level equity assessments

# Project Assessment in the RTP

- **Focus on the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)**
  - Rigorous climate and equity vetting *during the RTP process* is crucial, as FTIP inclusion is often procedural after RTP approval
  - Stronger assessment methodologies are very likely linked to better climate and equity outcomes
  - MPOs could better utilize already collected performance monitoring data

# Project Assessment in the RTP

- **Focus on the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)**
  - Rigorous climate and equity vetting *during the RTP process* is crucial, as FTIP inclusion is often procedural after RTP approval
  - Stronger assessment methodologies are very likely linked to better climate and equity outcomes
  - MPOs could better utilize performance monitoring data
- **Encourage MPOs to invest in improved project-based assessment**
  - Scoring rubrics are common for project evaluation, especially where data/resources are limited
  - Most MPOs use rubrics with transparent criteria/weights
  - MPOs that invested in project-based assessments in their Overall Work Programs had more robust and informative project-level assessments

# The Limits of Project Scoring

- **There are many limitations to current project scoring practices**
  - Objective criteria often include traffic volumes or funding availability
  - Some criteria, like accessibility improvements, are often assessed subjectively by MPO staff or stakeholders; scoring processes also vary in clarity and consistency
  - Current rubrics often mix objective and subjective assessments, some of which may be made by groups with goals not aligned with current MPO priorities
  - Scoring may also fail to capture long-term and cumulative effects, and are less useful when decision-makers disagree on key tradeoffs



# Putting Metropolitan Planning and Programming in Context

# CA MPO Planning & Programming

California MPOs produce two key documents:

- **RTP/SCS (20+ years):** Long-range plan, including the SB 375-mandated Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) to reduce GHG emissions. Some counties/regions also have RTPs incorporated into the MPO's plan.
- **FTIP (4-5 years):** Nearer-term plan listing funded projects. Local CTCs/RTPAs may also have short-range plans consolidated into the FTIP.

# Federal, State, and MPO Roles in Regional Transportation Planning

- **USDOT:** Distributes federal transportation funds to states, who sub-allocate to MPOs. Requires RTPs and FTIPs to distribute funds.
- **States:** Receive federal funds and allocate to MPOs/local governments. Provide additional state funding.
- **CARB:** Regulatory agency that sets GHG emission reduction targets for each region. Reviews SCS/APS for target achievement. SCS focuses on coordinated land use/housing/transportation, but doesn't regulate local land use.
- **MPOs:** Planning agencies that develop RTP/SCS (long-range plan (20+ years horizon), and FTIP (4-year project list). RTP/SCS must be fiscally constrained, meet air quality requirements, and address GHG reduction targets. FTIP implements RTP/SCS, listing funded projects.

# The Complexities of MPO Planning

- **Expanding Demands:** MPOs face numerous requirements, including regional needs, air quality, performance measurement, public involvement, fiscal constraints, GHG reduction, sustainable development, equity, and more.
- **Key Products:** The long-range RTP and nearer-term FTIP reflect how well MPOs address these demands.
- **Diverse Organizations:** MPOs vary significantly in size, capacity, governance, and regional context, leading to different priorities and planning processes. Smaller MPOs may struggle with equity analysis, while larger ones have more resources.
- **Evolving Context:** Changing demographics and priorities require MPOs to adapt their approaches, especially regarding equity in areas with housing needs, gentrification, and ex-urban poverty.

# Project Selection and Prioritization

- **Multi-Dimensional Criteria:** Project selection criteria have expanded beyond roadway performance to include multi-modal considerations, health, and equity. However, funding silos complicate cross-modal planning.
- **Best Practices:** Aligning criteria with long-term goals and emphasizing user impacts are recommended, but flexibility is crucial due to varying agency conditions.
- **Political Dimensions:** MPO decision-making is inherently political, with local interests often in conflict with regional benefits.
- **Technical Shortcomings:** Equity assessments often lack rigor and consistency due to methodological issues and lack of standardized guidance. Existing analyses may not fully capture the needs of marginalized communities.
- **MPO Experiences:** California MPOs (except the Bay Area) have tended to favor auto infrastructure, with FTIP funding being less multimodal than RTP plans. Local option sales tax projects can conflict with SB 375 goals, although recent trends show some improvement.

# MPO Transportation Planning, Programming, and Project Evaluation in California

# We Collected and Reviewed Public Documents

- **Overall Work Program:** A federally-required work plan and budget narrative. We looked for evidence of projects, staff assignments, and budgeted resources related to project selection work.
- **Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategies:** We looked for evidence on how equity and climate considerations were presented in terms of both goals and links to performance measures.
- **Public Participation Plans:** We looked for equity considerations in the timeline and procedures for engaging members of the public about the RTP/SCS and FTIP
- **Federal Transportation Improvement Program:** A list of funding for specified projects.
- **MPO Meeting Agendas, Reports, Presentations and Minutes:** We reviewed these to determine project information was presented to MPO board and committee members, and to what extent climate and equity considerations were included in the reports or minutes
- **Environmental review documents:** We reviewed comments on Draft EIRs to identify projects that raised climate or equity concerns.

# Project Selection: Summary

|   | MTC | SACOG | SANDAG | SCAG | FCOG | SJCOG | AMBAG |
|---|-----|-------|--------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Scenario planning used                                | ✓   | ✓     | ✗      | (✓)  | ✓    | ✓     | ✗     |
| RTP (MTP)/SCS consistency checked                     | ✓   | ✓     | ✓      | ✗    | ✓    | ✗     | ✓     |
| Individual projects assessed                          | ✓   | ✗     | ✗      | ✗    | ✓    | ✗     | ?     |
| Project's sensitivity to future conditions considered | ✓   | ✗     | ✗      | (✓)  | ✓    | (✓)   | ?     |



# Project Selection: MTC

## MTC has the most comprehensive, transparent RTP/SCS process among MPOs reviewed

🏆 MTC goes beyond standard practice (see next slide)


|  |   |
|--|---|
| Scenario planning used                               | ✅ Yes (to identify preferred land use scenario) |
| Evaluate project for consistency with MTP/SCS        | ✅ Yes   |
| Assesses individual transportation projects          | ✅ Yes   |
| Considers project's sensitivity to future conditions | ✅ Yes   |

# Project Selection: MTC


| Standard Practice 😊   | MTC 🏆  |
|---|--|
| Compliant RTP/SCS programming process                                 | Comprehensive and transparent RTP/SCS programming process, with publicly-inviting “Guide to the TIP”   |
| Single-forecast predict-and-act planning approach in drafting RTP/SCS | Scenario planning that assesses project performance against different possible futures (Horizon Initiative), including <i>unfavorable</i> transportation, development, climate scenarios |
| Scoring used to select projects                                       | Results are shared with project sponsors who can modify projects in response   |
| Equity process is separate/parallel                                   | MTC’s Equity Platform directly informs the Horizon Initiative, the RTP/SCS, and the TIP  |

# Project Selection: SACOG

## SACOG evaluates factors that are not typically part of MPO project scoring rubrics

 *New project assessment tool combines individual RTPA TIPs and evaluates VMT/capita, multimodal, economic prosperity, freight movement, socioeconomic equity*

Scenario planning used

 Yes (to identify preferred land use scenario)

Evaluate project for consistency with MTP/SCS

 Yes

Assesses individual transportation projects

 No


Considers project's sensitivity to future conditions

 No

# Project Selection: SANDAG

## SANDAG does not use scenario planning

 SANDAG instead considers project readiness, connectivity, revenues, and other criteria

 Regional Social Equity Planning Framework calls for prioritizing projects that advance equitable and safe transportation

Scenario planning used

 No

Evaluate project for consistency with MTP/SCS

 Yes (and programs)

Assesses individual transportation projects

 No

Considers project's sensitivity to future conditions

 No

# Project Selection: SCAG

## SCAG uses limited scenario planning

🏆 SCAG is home to more people than all but four states (CA, FL, NY, TX)

📝 Given its size and diversity, SCAG delegates most transportation project selection to its six CTCs, each of which prepares its own Countywide Transportation Plan

Scenario planning

☑ Partially: scenario model compares project and no-project alternatives

Evaluate project for consistency with MTP/SCS, program evaluations

✗ No




Assesses individual transportation projects

✗ No

Considers project's sensitivity to future conditions


☑ Partially: uses three conditions (base year, baseline, plan)

# Project Selection and Monitoring: SCAG





- SCAG has formal agreements with each of the six CTCs regarding transportation programming
  - CTCs responsible for transportation programming and short-range planning
  - CTCs develop six FTIPs based on SCAG guidelines (prepared in consultation with funders, stakeholders)
- In 2020 SCAG delegated CMAQ and STBG project selection authority to CTCs
  -  CTCs conduct project performance assessments in advance of submitting them for the FTIP
  -  FHWA has directed SCAG to review Caltrans' updated CMAQ and STBG administrative policies and incorporate any changes necessary to comply with federal regulations
  -  This may change future project selection processes, which will include federally required performance measures in, and perhaps a competitive selection process for, project selection
- SCAG uses additional performance measures for ongoing regional system monitoring efforts

# Project Selection: FCOG

## FCOG uses a novel scenario planning approach


 FCOG considers multiple performance indicators related to: public health, clean air, access to destinations, access to jobs, services in disadvantaged communities, protecting agricultural land, bike/walk friendliness, roadway quality, climate change, VMT, and achievability





 FCOG maintains a list of contingency projects

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Scenario planning  |  Yes  |
| Evaluate project for consistency with MTP/SCS, program evaluations |  Yes (separate EJ & Equity Analysis also conducted) |
| Assesses individual transportation projects                        |  Yes (projects ranked)                              |
| Considers project's sensitivity to future conditions               |  Yes  |

# Project Selection: SJCOG

## SJCOG focuses on strategies

 SJCOG's scenario planning exercise involves testing strategies against future scenarios; MPO engages multiple CBOs as part of their planning process

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Scenario planning   |  Yes (four strategy groups with three future scenarios) |
| Evaluate projects for consistency with MTP/SCS, program evaluations |  No   |
| Assesses individual transportation projects                         |  No, but strategies assessed                            |
| Considers project's sensitivity to future conditions                |  Partially: strategies, not projects considered         |



# Project Selection: AMBAG

## AMBAG differs from other MPOs studied


 *Three constituent RTPAs produce their own FTIPs that combine into one MTIP; selection processes split across decision-makers*

 *AMBAG assess the location of project expenditures as an equity metric (though it doesn't distinguish between types of spending or possible disparate impacts, e.g., highway improvements)*

Scenario planning

 No

Evaluate projects for consistency with MTP/SCS, program evaluations

 Yes (and SB 375 requirements)

Assesses individual transportation projects

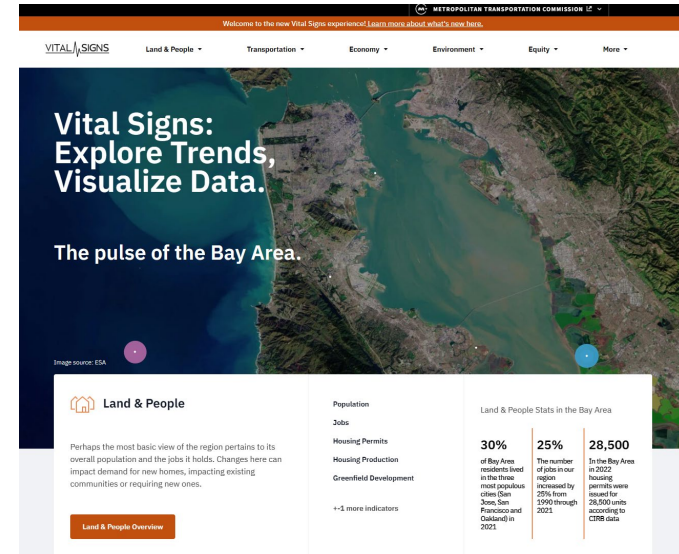
 Unclear: process is opaque

Considers project's sensitivity to future conditions

 Unclear: process is opaque

# Project Performance Evaluation: MTC



- MTC dedicates substantial funding for performance assessment through its **Vital Signs** initiative (started in 2015)
  - An interactive online portal addresses transportation, land and people, the economy, the environment, and social equity
- MTC uses a **life-cycle benefit-cost assessment** tool
  - Allows comparison of widely varied projects
  - Includes initial cost of capital; operations, maintenance, rehabilitation, and/or replacement costs, plus residual value
  - Includes quality of life, health, economic, and environmental benefits not included in Caltrans' Cal B/C tool
  - Transparent in how travel time reliability is valued, unlike many other MPO scoring rubrics



# Project Performance Assessment: SACOG

- SACOG uses advanced, transparent data and methods to evaluate project outcomes
  - 👍 Useful when decision-makers disagree about values or priorities
  - 🤖 But could be too much information for staff, stakeholders, and decision-makers to fully grasp
  - 😐 Unclear how SACOG incorporates project assessments into project list development
  - 🙋♂ No published assessment results for stakeholders, decision-makers to see before RTP/SCS project selection
- SACOG is the only one of the four large MPOs that includes constituent RTPAs, which produce their own RTPs
- Integrating individual RTPs into SACOG's RTP/SCS limits the MPO's authority over project selection processes

# Project Selection and Monitoring: SANDAG

- SANDAG performs a Social Equity Analysis of specific projects in the TIP
  -  Reviews the location of project expenditures within CalEnviroScreen Disadvantaged Communities
  -  Asks project sponsors whether they performed a Title VI analysis and whether the project benefits low-income households, people with disabilities, and those with limited English proficiency

# Project Selection and Monitoring: SANDAG (cont.)

- SANDAG's incorporation of climate and equity considerations into its planning and project selection has both strengths and weaknesses vis-a-vis other big MPOs
  - 👍 A promising Social Equity Framework includes contracting with community-based organizations (CBOs) to engage in the RTP/SCS process
  - 👎 No formal equity evaluation of individual projects (but its Social Equity Framework identifies the need for future project-level social equity analyses)
  - 👍 Like most other MPOs, SANDAG has regional performance indicators and produces regular monitoring reports
  - 👎 Reports not systematically incorporated into transportation project assessments

# The Role of Climate and Equity in CA Regional Planning: Insights from Stakeholders in MPO Processes

Determine whether and to what extent Metropolitan Planning Organizations incorporate California's climate and equity goals into their transportation project evaluations and project selections

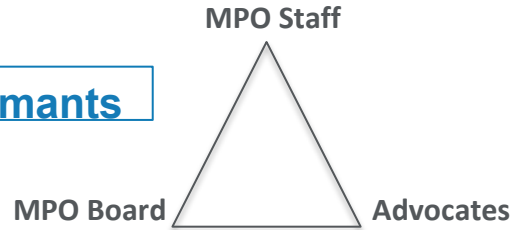
# Our Methods





# Our Methods

## Interview Key Informants



### 18 California Metropolitan Planning Agencies (MPO)

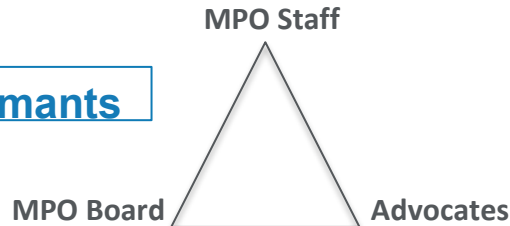
|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| AMBAG               | Association of Monterey Bay Governments                                      |
| Butte CAG           | Butte County Association of Governments                                      |
| Fresno COG          | Council of Fresno County Governments   |
| Kings CAG           | Kings County Association of Governments                                      |
| Kern COG            | Kern Council of Governments  |
| Merced CAG          | Merced County Association of Governments                                     |
| Madera CTC          | Madera County Transportation Commission                                      |
| MTC/ABAG            | Metropolitan Transportation Commission & Association of Bay Area Governments |
| SACOG               | Sacramento Area Council of Governments                                       |
| SANDAG              | San Diego Association of Governments   |
| San Joaquin COG     | San Joaquin Council of Governments   |
| San Luis Obispo COG | San Luis Obispo Council of Governments                                       |
| Santa Barbara CAG   | Santa Barbara County Association of Governments                              |
| Shasta RTA          | Shasta Regional Transportation Agency  |
| SCAG                | Southern California Association of Governments                               |
| Stanislaus COG      | Stanislaus Council of Governments  |
| Tulare CAG          | Tulare County Association of Governments                                     |
| Tahoe MPO           | Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization                                     |



# Our Methods

|                            | Number of participants | Data Collection Activity (#) | Hours |
|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| <b>MPO Staff</b>           | 13                     | Interviews (7)               | 8.3   |
| <b>MPO Board Members</b>   | 11                     | Focus Groups (3)             | 4.3   |
| <b>Community Advocates</b> | 8                      | Focus Groups (2)             | 2.9   |
| <b>Total</b>               | 32                     | 12                           | 15.5  |

## Interview Key Informants



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|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| AMBAG               | Association of Monterey Bay Governments                                      |
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| Kings CAG           | Kings County Association of Governments                                      |
| Kern COG            | Kern Council of Governments  |
| Merced CAG          | Merced County Association of Governments                                     |
| Madera CTC          | Madera County Transportation Commission                                      |
| MTC/ABAG            | Metropolitan Transportation Commission & Association of Bay Area Governments |
| SACOG               | Sacramento Area Council of Governments                                       |
| SANDAG              | San Diego Association of Governments   |
| San Joaquin COG     | San Joaquin Council of Governments   |
| San Luis Obispo COG | San Luis Obispo Council of Governments                                       |
| Santa Barbara CAG   | Santa Barbara County Association of Governments                              |
| Shasta RTA          | Shasta Regional Transportation Agency  |
| SCAG                | Southern California Association of Governments                               |
| Stanislaus COG      | Stanislaus Council of Governments  |
| Tulare CAG          | Tulare County Association of Governments                                     |
| Tahoe MPO           | Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization                                     |



# Insights from MPO Staff, Board, and Advocate Perspectives on Project Selection

## 1. Participant Perspectives on the SB 375 Goal Post

**Climate Objectives are Understood more Consistently than Equity Objectives**

**Participant Engagement with Equity Varies**

**Equity Efforts Require Engagement**

**Equity is Understood as Context-Dependent and Achieved through Community Processes**

# Insights from MPO Staff, Board, and Advocate Perspectives on Project Selection

## 1. The SB 375 Goal Post: Climate & Equity

**Climate Objectives are Understood more Consistently than Equity Objectives**

**Participant Engagement with Equity Varies**

**Equity is Understood as Context-Dependent and Achieved through Community Processes**

**Equity Efforts Require Engagement**

## 2. Structural Challenges in the MPO Environment

**MPO Board Representation and Voting**

**Regional-Local Tensions**

**Limits to MPO Authority**

# 1a. Defining the SB 375 Goal Post: Climate

|                       | Climate Objectives  |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>State Guidance</b> | <i>Making our carbon footprint smaller... [with] a more multimodal system, embracing smarter land use, and utilizing... ZE vehicles.</i><br>– CalSTA Core Four Priorities |

# 1a. Defining the SB 375 Goal Post: Climate

|                              | Climate Objectives  |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>State Guidance</b>        | <p><i>Making our carbon footprint smaller... [with] a more multimodal system, embracing smarter land use, and utilizing... ZE vehicles.</i></p> <p>– <b>CalSTA Core Four Priorities</b></p>   |
| <b>Participant Reactions</b> | <p><i>"[The Big 4] have a 19% reduction by 2035... but CARB calls for 25% by 2030, 8 years from now... I include the rural areas... just because you're rural, doesn't mean you're off the hook... (to the other FG participants) what's your plan to reduce VMT in your jurisdiction by 3% this year? ... And your answers could be the same as mine, which is we don't even measure it... can't even meet our obligation for today..."</i></p> <p>– <b>MPO Board Member</b></p> <p><i>We included those as growth geographies for equity... more in line with AFFH and RHNA than... CARB's GHG goals... We're trying to... advance multiple goals, not just... climate</i></p> <p>– <b>MPO Senior Staff</b></p> <p><i>[When] the state commissions any study, they focus on these 2 goals... We keep telling them: "These are not the only goals." For [us], ...economic development has at least equal weight, if not more...</i></p> <p>– <b>MPO Senior Staff</b></p> |

# 1b. Defining the SB 375 Goal Post: Equity

|                       | Equity Objectives  |
|-----------------------|--|
| <b>State Guidance</b> | <i>Create an equitable and accessible transportation network and to provide equitable opportunities for all people.</i><br>– CalSTA Core Four Priorities |

# 1b. Defining the SB 375 Goal Post: Equity

|                              | Equity Objectives   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>State Guidance</b>        | <p><i>Create an equitable and accessible transportation network and to provide equitable opportunities for all people.</i></p> <p>– CalSTA Core Four Priorities</p>   |
| <b>Participant Reactions</b> | <p><i>Our communities were built on a more traditional Gold Rush approach, especially in rural California... None of our communities were built on redlining policies.... [W]hen you channel funding through an urban equity lens, it doesn't translate to our county...</i></p> <p>– MPO Board Member</p> <p><i>Conservatives have equity issues, too... They call it economic opportunity</i></p> <p>– MPO Board Member</p> <p><i>[I]t's very obvious that climate is the priority. And equity is not.... And they certainly aren't thinking about the intersections of those two things...</i></p> <p>– Community Advocate</p> <p><i>[Embedded] in all of our psyches [as advocates] is...that nexus of equity and climate... If you prioritize poor people and how they move around... that's how you get around it without expending a lot of resources and money... I think that piece is lost... in the larger messaging</i></p> <p>– Community Advocate</p> |



# Defining & Achieving Equity through Community Processes

*When we have focus groups, we just don't get a lot of people.... [F]or folks that can be entertained endlessly on their tablet... a process that might take multiple years, [is] just not as exciting...*

**– MPO Board Member**

# Defining & Achieving Equity through Community Processes

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**– MPO Board Member**

*What are their values, loyalties, and losses? We can't look [at MPOs] as a whole institution, we need to look at the individual people that make it up, and how do we create change with those folks?*

**– Community Advocate**

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*The disadvantage[d] or the equity groups that you're trying to affect... [Y]ou've got to really encourage them to be at these meetings... hear what they have to say,.. meet some of that demand. They've got to feel like they're part of the process, and we don't do a very good job [in CA].*

**– MPO Board Member**

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*The disadvantage[d] or the equity groups that you're trying to affect... [Y]ou've got to really encourage them to be at these meetings... hear what they have to say,.. meet some of that demand. They've got to feel like they're part of the process, and we don't do a very good job [in CA].*

**– MPO Board Member**

*The MPO staff committed to do community outreach but then didn't actually do the community outreach before the decision was made...*

**– MPO Board Member**

## 2. Recognition of Structural Challenges for MPOs

| Themes                                     | Anecdotal Evidence  |
|--|---|
| <b>MPO Board Representation and Voting</b> | <p><i>The...mainly...suburban supervisors, broadly speaking, aren't term-limited and have a bunch of staff.... And so, the suburban supervisors end up accumulating most of the power at [the MPO].... It's difficult for [city councilmembers] to...stay and acquire...institutional knowledge and...spend the time to...become regional leaders</i></p> <p>– MPO Board Member</p> <p><i>[Maybe] the most dominant issue is how these [MPO] boards allow the smaller, more suburban jurisdictions to punch above their weight...in terms of the power. You know, I haven't really gotten to the bottom of why the [largest city in the region] is pretty AWOL on the MPO.</i></p> <p>– Community Advocate</p> <p><i>There's a power struggle, and many areas that have a high population don't get any more of a vote per se...than a population—a community—that has a much smaller population. Yet, they have equal voices in our process.</i></p> <p>– MPO Board Member</p> |

## 2. Recognition of Structural Challenges for MPOs

| Themes                         | Anecdotal Evidence   |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Regional-Local Tensions</b> | <p><i>[How] they decide projects...feels sometimes like...whatever the local cities said they wanted to do... It doesn't always feel like the MPO is really trying to set an agenda... just sort of like assembling a bunch of visions and rolling it up into one document</i></p> <p>– <b>Community Advocate</b></p> <p><i>That's the hardest part to get across with...new members of the MPO... we're not here for your city; we're here for the region, planning for the region.</i></p> <p>– <b>MPO Board Member</b></p>  |
| <b>Limits to MPO Authority</b> | <p><i>[T]he counties themselves are working with their local jurisdictions in developing many of those [project] concepts. Many of those concepts are a part of sales tax initiatives.... The lion's share of them probably are... we don't necessarily have the opportunity to really...screen and push [them] out....</i></p> <p>– <b>MPO Senior Staff</b></p> <p><i>Everybody gets excited about...[RHNA]. I don't myself because all of it is a planning exercise. You designate where homes can be built... [Cities] don't have to build anything... can't get a developer to build anything anyway; the true cost [is] prohibitive</i></p> <p>– <b>MPO Board Member</b>, said in response to the question, “Anything else preventing you from advancing equity and climate goals to the degree they could be?”</p> |

# Implications

- MPOs are central to the SB 375 project
- Well-known MPO limitations impede GHG and equity progress
- Remedies deserve attention
  - Reforms to MPO governing structures (AB 805 in San Diego)
    - State supports that help MPOs pursue regional objectives over local impulses
- MPOs' understanding of climate objectives is relatively uniform
  - Even so, less urbanized, less wealthy regions have different priorities
- MPOs approaches to equity are necessarily diverse
  - Board, staff, and advocates want context-driven understandings and approaches
  - Delineating region-specific equity goals may help to avoid misunderstandings

# Conclusions and Recommendations



# General Recommendations

- MPO project selection processes are complicated and difficult to understand. Meaningful engagement in MPO processes requires high levels of process knowledge and time. Paying and educating Community-Based Organizations is an emerging best practice for community engagement.

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- Accessible, Educational documents like MTC's Guide to the TIP are essential to meaningful engaging the public.
- Monitor the development of the Caltrans System Investment Strategy, specifically the project-level population-weighted accessibility assessment tools.

# For the California Air Resources Board

## SCS Guidelines Update

- Does CARB have authority to recommend that MPOs to use project evaluation methods as part of “policy analysis” for “transportation strategies” in SB 375 oversight?
- If not, consider a requirement for a reporting narrative on the connection between project selection processes and the MPO’s performance monitoring and targets

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## SB 1000 Implementation

- Explore project-level impact assessments that include accessibility changes, as a best practice for projects in EJ or “Disadvantaged Communities”

# For the California Transportation Commission

## Project Data

- Create data standards so that certain project-level performance information (like VMT impact, homes/land taken) can be shared among governmental agencies and provide for an input standard for internal and external developers of project-level assessment methodologies
- Create reporting or publishing requirements for project-level characteristics and performance information.

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## RTP Guidelines

- Create guidance for MPOs using scenario planning approaches to assess climate and equity outcomes across varied futures.
- Create a dedicated forum (e.g. daylong workshop) through which community advocates across the state can engage with CTC staff on revisions to the RTP guidelines.

# For the Legislature

## SHC § 182

California may need to update Streets and Highways Codes §§ 182.6 and 182.7 based on FHWA Federal Certification Reports that found the requirements set forth in these sections contradicted federal codes and regulations. In doing so, the legislature should consider:

1. Require public reporting of project-level data in a standardized format (CTC Recommendation #1).
2. Require some projects to be assessed in advance of their inclusion in an RTP or TIP project list (MPO Recommendation #3).



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## Future SB 375 Revisions

In future amendments to SB 375 or the California Environmental Quality Act, consider allowing environmental assessments that utilize scenario planning or forecasting of multiple futures to meet the statutory requirements for Environmental Impact Reports.

## Participant Compensation

The public sector should be able to compensate people for participating in engagement processes or advisory committees.

# For Metropolitan Planning Organizations

## Project-level performance assessments

- Develop internal capacity for project performance assessments in Overall Work Programs
- Develop an implementation strategy for project performance assessments, perhaps starting with largest projects
- After some phased implementation, MPOs should assess all projects in each RTP cycle, including those carried-over from previous RTPs

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## Scenario planning

- Develop a technical capacity and organizational culture permissive of scenario planning
- Work with CALCOG or across multiple MPOs to share knowledge about the integration of scenario planning into California RTPs/SCSs, including how to engage board members and stakeholders on the range of possible futures

# For Future Research

## Project Assessment and Selection

- Consider the effectiveness of qualitative project screening on consistency with MPO goals and objectives.
  - *Counterpoint:* goals and objectives are so broad that all projects can be deemed consistent
- Create a methodology to assess project benefits and impacts, particularly on direct and indirect determinants of climate and equity outcomes.
  - *Prerequisite:* Project data standard

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## Equity & Engagement

- Systematically describe the practice of defining equity in California.
  - While there are no universal definitions, an inventory of existing definitions will help inform and guide meaningful planning for equity and participation.
- More research is needed on how MPO structure and composition affects regional planning and policy outcomes.
- Housing scarcity and insecurity across the state affects transportation systems, climate, and equity.
  - Staff, board members, and community representatives repeatedly noted this point

# Questions? Comments?



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# Thank You

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