

Mary Nichols

Keynote Address

Southern California Association of Governments

Regional Workshop on SB 375

Ontario Convention Center

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Note: Actual speech may have varied from this script

Today is nothing short of an historic opportunity to shape the growth in Southern California as a **region**. It's the kickoff to the creation of a new regional plan, a blueprint spawned from an ambitious new law that says, in essence, "No more sprawl!"

SB 375 says that if you pave paradise, reconsider the parking lot. Imagine not having to park or drive because walking to the grocery store is more convenient, and safer. Or because you're within blocks of a station or stop that takes you to work by rail or bus. Or – better yet – because your commute is less than 30 minutes by bike or foot. That's certainly one way cities and residents alike can fight the battle of the bulge.

But before you say I'm dreaming the impossible dream here in the land of sprawl, consider how far you've come in a matter of years and months – not decades – to make that dream come true.

Look no farther than the here and now. Consider the Ontario Convention Center. We're right next to Ontario International Airport. How convenient. How convenient for the thousands of annual visitors – who, most anywhere else – must catch a ride or rent a car to get to their convention because it's way downtown.

Impossible in Southern California? Land of bedroom communities and 90-minute commutes to and from work? Tell that to Greg Devereaux, Ontario's city manager. He's on the panel coming up next. Greg, I'm told, is a guiding light for all the Inland Empire on making the job-housing imbalance a priority on the municipal fix-it list. He's leading the call for consolidating workplaces near centers of population. And not just because SB 375 says so.

You say so. You know by now about the many scientific studies linking traffic exhaust to the shortened lives of the elderly and shortened breath of the young. You need only look around the chambers of local government on a Tuesday night to remind you of traffic's toll on participatory democracy. Your fellow residents are just too darn tired to endure an evening public hearing, let alone read the newspaper accounts.

And you know the Earth's atmosphere is warming – or at least think you had better prepare for longer hot spells and wilder wildfires in case all those scientists are right! And if California – with its big corner on the auto market and technological know-how – doesn't lead the way on mitigation and adaptation, who will? Congress?

The California Legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger once again paved the way with enactment of SB 375. But unlike the other two global warming programs – standards for vehicle performance and low-carbon fuels – this third one – the land-use leg of the AB32 stool – will not be implemented by the Air Resources Board. This time, the ball's in the hands of local government and the regional councils of transportation planning. And I'm looking at the biggest players right here in this room.

We've all heard the statistic that 40 percent of the state's emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases come from transportation. And you all know that the largest portion of that is generated in Southern California.

But the SCAG region also is a proven leader in transportation planning, modeling. And that leadership is alive and well with SB375. Within three months of its enactment, your Gateway Communities sub-region began crafting its portion of the Sustainable Communities Strategy for southeastern Los Angeles County. Other cities such as Irvine have been managing growth as though SB 375 was on the books years ago.

Still other communities can point to models of urban infill to serve as models for us all. There is, for example Pasadena's revival of its downtown center that incorporated the green elements of

mixed-used development and proximity to public transit. There's an apartment complex that literally straddle the Metro rail line.

And I would be remiss not to thank those on the Regional Targets Advisory Committee who worked several months to develop recommendations for ARB as we go about setting regional greenhouse gas reduction targets. The committee did a very thorough job of looking at many, many factors that we'll need to consider.

ARB staff is especially keen on your recommendation that a uniform statewide target be expressed as a per capita percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. And, by the way, tomorrow the Air Resources Board will hear those recommendations.

I'm sure many of you or wondering what precisely ARB's role will be in making sure those targets in greenhouse gas reductions are met. Or, rather, to what extent with ARB be in the hair of regional and local government?

First, there's no mandate to change local land use policy, and no sanctions for not conforming to the Sustainable Communities Strategy. The process is driven by incentives such as CEQA streamlining and even exemption. And the ARB has a successful record of hands-off regulation in the auto and oil industries that leaves it to the experts – the industry engineers and accountants – to figure out how to cost-effectively meet the performance standards we set for engines and fuels.

We also know that smartly designed incentives work, as with the Carl Moyer program that subsidizes the replacement of old and dirty diesel-powered trucks, buses and off-road equipment. Caltrans already jumpstarted the SB 375 collaborative planning process by funding region "blueprints" for sustainable growth, designed from the bottom-up, starting at the neighborhood level.

We know it's hard to plan for a more prosperous and livable community when it seems you're doing all you can do to keep the present conditions from falling apart – what with unemployment at 14 percent here in the Inland Empire.

But SB 375 isn't just about helping the environment. It's also about reducing our dependence on foreign oil, and saving California taxpayers billions of dollars in avoided infrastructure and personal transportation costs.

With SB 375, California gains a competitive advantage over other states for receiving federal stimulus funds and transportation dollars. Also, the state is providing \$12 million from Proposition 84 funds to help the Metropolitan Planning Organizations upgrade their transportation models to better project greenhouse gas reductions. SCAG already has been awarded \$1.5 million of that money.

Making SB 375 work is not an impossible task. And I believe that implementing the law will make for healthier, more livable and prosperous communities – all the while doing our part for the planet in reducing climate-warming gases.

I want to thank SCAG for bringing all of us together to begin the collaboration. I have great faith that the Southern California region can meet the challenge, and ARB would like to be a partner in helping you.

I thank all of you for coming to this workshop and hope that the day is productive.