



SB 375 MPO Working Group: California MPOs Team Up to Address Climate Change

Quick Information

Organization(s): California Council of Governments (CALCOG), San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), Los Angeles' Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), and San Francisco's Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)

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Website: <http://www.calcog.org/index.aspx?nid=107>

Cooperation Topic(s): Air Quality and Environmental Planning

Cooperation Practice(s): Forums for Communication and Idea Sharing

Cost Information: Each member of the SB 375 MPO Working Group pays dues to fund CALCOG.

Faced with legislative requirements to develop greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions targets and transportation, housing, and land use strategies to achieve GHG reductions, California metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) began meeting regularly to coordinate methods for fulfilling these requirements. The meetings resulted in not only a consistent method for developing the MPOs' emissions targets—almost all of which the California Air Resources Board (ARB) accepted—but also a forum for discussing numerous other statewide initiatives, including California's new Cap-and-Trade Program.

Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration

In 2008, the California State Legislature passed the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act (SB 375), which required each of the State's MPOs to propose regional targets for passenger vehicle GHG emissions reductions to the ARB separately through a formal board action. SB 375 also required MPOs to develop and adopt a "sustainable communities strategy" (SCS) that outlines transportation, housing, and land use plans to achieve their regional targets. Collectively, the MPOs, who recognized the need to develop consistent methods for determining these targets and facilitating this goal, created the SB 375 MPO Working Group.

Collaboration Structure

Originally, the SB 375 MPO Working Group meetings provided a relatively informal way for MPOs to share their strategies for conducting required planning efforts. California's largest urban MPOs— San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), Los Angeles' Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), and San Francisco's Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)—led these efforts along with representatives from the eight Central Valley MPOs and six smaller MPOs. The MPOs took turns hosting the

meetings and planning the agendas, as the agency leaders and staff saw the value of sharing ideas and coordinating on a regular basis. After initial GHG targets were set, the responsibility for planning and organizing shifted to the California Association of Governments (CALCOG), an organization, which encompasses all of the State's MPOs and COGs. The shift to CALCOG was natural, as CALCOG already encompassed and collected dues from the State's MPOs and COGs. The SB 375 MPO Working Group is a technical, non-policy group that focuses on improving government-to-government lines of communication. Each member agency pays dues to fund CALCOG, which the MPOs and COGs have found to be an effective entity for not only facilitating the SB 375 meetings but also communicating their ideas to State government representatives.

Currently, the MPOs' Planning Directors meet quarterly to discuss SB 375 implementation activities and related planning developments, and specific task groups meet at different intervals depending on what is most appropriate for the group. Meetings are held on the same day as meetings about other statewide initiatives, such as the California Transportation Plan (CTP) 2040, in order to increase attendance. The meetings are often held in Sacramento, which makes it easier for key State agencies to attend. The meetings begin with a discussion between the MPOs, after which they are joined by their State partners, including the ARB and Caltrans. By providing a forum for sharing information and lessons learned, the meetings allow the MPOs and State agencies to learn from each other and receive feedback.

CALCOG also hosts bi-monthly meetings for the executives of its membership, which includes all 18 MPO directors. These meetings focus on policy-level decisions and allow the executive directors to set goals for the Planning Director meetings, discuss implementation of State and Federal policies and programs, and identify legislative initiatives to promote. The Planning Directors provide recommendations after discussing the technical aspects of issues identified by the executive directors.

Collaboration Accomplishments

The first and largest accomplishment of the Working Group meetings was to provide a framework that helped the State and the public discuss how high to set the GHG emissions targets for each MPO. The group reached consensus that each target should be both "ambitious" and "achievable," meaning that each agency would have to make an effort to meet its target. Through these first meetings, MPOs staff began to develop a common language and assumptions to measure GHG emissions. For example, MPOs started using

Takeaways

- California MPOs created the SB 375 MPO Working Group to develop consistent methods for determining GHG emission targets.
- The MPOs took turns organizing and hosting the meetings and planning the agendas, because the agency leaders and staff saw the value of sharing ideas and coordinating on a regular basis.
- The SB 375 MPO Working Group proposed GHG emissions targets for each region, almost all of which were adopted by the ARB.
- The meetings increased the MPOs' capacity for measuring emissions and addressing the targets by sharing staff support and expertise, thereby decreasing overall costs.
- SB 375 meetings allow the MPOs to establish consensus and work with State agencies to understand various legislative proposals, which lends the MPOs a stronger voice that carries more weight in the State Legislature's decisions.

consistent assumptions—like the price of fuel—which allowed for the ARB to take a more consistent approach in setting targets across the State. Previously, each MPO had made its own assumptions about such variables. In addition, the MPOs share data and try to coordinate efforts between their staff (when possible) in order to efficiently work toward common goals.

The SB 375 meetings also benefited a number of other statewide initiatives and facilitated integrated planning processes that traverse multiple area, including transportation, public health, land use, housing, water, and energy. While the meetings initially focused on GHG emissions targets and SCS plans, other State agencies, like the Department of Public Health, soon saw the value of participating and began using the forum to receive input from the MPOs. The Strategic Growth Council has also sought MPO feedback to help develop and implement elements of the Cap-and-Trade Program that apply to sustainable communities and transportation. Thus, the SB 375 meetings have allowed the California MPOs to better address the interrelated nature of the GHG emissions targets, SCS plans, CTP 2040, and the new Cap-and-Trade Program.

Collaborating on many related programs not only allows the MPOs to make better informed decisions about various initiatives, but also strengthens their influence on legislative matters. The SB 375 meetings allow the MPOs to establish consensus and work with State agencies to more fully understand various legislative proposals. Together, these processes lend the MPOs a stronger voice that carries more weight in the State Legislature's decisions.

SCAG, MTC, SACOG, and SANDAG are working to coordinate a household survey in an ongoing collaborative effort. In order to sustain this effort, a formal memorandum of agreement was established in 2014. The MPOs aim to build the household survey collectively but maintain data for each of their service areas individually.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Reaching consensus at SB 375 meetings requires more perseverance than the MPOs originally anticipated due in part to the differences among them, particularly between urban and rural areas. However, the MPOs maintain their motivation to collaborate by continuously reaffirming the importance of sharing information and strategies related to their GHG targets, SCS plans, and other statewide initiatives. When developing statewide performance measures in 2013, the MPOs overcame the struggle for consensus by agreeing that certain regions could adopt slightly different measures, recognizing the unique attributes of those regions.

SB 375 coordination has spurred continual reassessment of performance measures and the assumptions associated with these measures. For example, different MPOs may have the same goal of reducing traffic congestion, but each agency may measure congestion based on different regional characteristics. The MPOs work together to develop more comparable performance measures and processes across the State. CALCOG coordinated

with other California MPOs to help develop the [2013 SANDAG Statewide Performance Monitoring Indicators for Transportation Planning report](#), which aimed to universalize statewide performance data based on available datasets.

The SB 375 MPO Coordination Meetings present an impressive example of multi-jurisdictional collaboration to address a pressing challenge—climate change. The global scale of this issue will require coordination at every level, and California’s MPOs provide a model through their efforts to jointly develop and implement strategies to reduce GHG emissions.

Additional Resources

- [CALCOG Website](#)
- [SANDAG Statewide Performance Monitoring Indicators for Transportation Planning Final Report](#)