

## Blueprint Project (Sacramento Area Council of Governments, California)

### *Overview*

#### **Project Overview**

The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) spearheaded an effort to create a Blueprint for growth in the Sacramento Region over the next fifty years. SACOG, which is responsible for the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), recognized the need to link their transportation planning with land use. Creating a vision for future land use in the region would allow SACOG to create and fund a transportation plan that would serve the transportation needs of the region. The development of the Blueprint Project was designed under the acknowledgement that SACOG did not have land use authority over local jurisdictions. Therefore, working with local jurisdictions throughout the process would be vital to having their buy-in and support of the Preferred Scenario that would be the end product of the visioning process.

#### **Screening Process Overview**

The Blueprint Project is based on seven smart growth principles: housing diversity, building on existing assets, mixed-use development, protecting farmland and natural resources, providing transportation choices, and encouraging pedestrian-friendly communities.

Performance measures (e.g. vehicle miles traveled per household, agricultural land converted to urban uses, etc) based on these principles were created in order to analyze and compare the impacts that different growth scenarios would have on the region.

The starting point for the Blueprint process was a “Base Case Study,” which was a projection of how the area would grow if current local government land-use plans and zoning guidelines are followed through to 2050. The next phase of the project was to use a land use projection visualization tool, I-PLACE3S, to develop different growth scenarios that could happen if changes are made to the existing land use plans and zoning ordinances. The different scenarios developed were then compared to one another based on how well they met the smart growth principles. Individual communities evaluated the different growth scenarios through public workshops. Following the visioning process at the community level, regional workshops were held that ultimately led to the creation of the Preferred Blueprint Scenario for the Sacramento Region.

After the selection of the Preferred Blueprint Scenario, SACOG was able to use this plan to develop an MTP that will be able to serve the populations and land uses as envisioned in the Preferred Scenario.

### *Key Aspects of the Screening Process*

#### **Scope**

The Blueprint Project took place prior to the development of the MTP. Completing the land use visioning process before the creation of the transportation plan was necessary to meet the projected needs of the population based on the Preferred Scenario.

The Blueprint Project integrates transportation planning with land use planning. Various factors were evaluated during the creation of the Preferred Scenario that included parks, open space, air quality, economic growth, natural resources, cultural resources, housing, and employment. These factors were used to assess how well different land use scenarios performed according to the smart growth principles.

## **Communications**

### *Agency Involvement*

The Blueprint Project was a multi-agency effort led by the SACOG. SACOG spearheaded the process, but involved local jurisdictions (municipalities and counties), public utilities, government agencies, and interest groups. Individual communities assisted SACOG with the visioning process to create land use scenarios. The local jurisdictions were a vital part of the public workshops that led to the selection of a final preferred scenario for their community. Other government agencies and organizations helped to provide technical support and data. The data provided by these agencies were an essential part of the modeling effort and use of I-PLACE3S. When conflicts arose during the process, SACOG used it as an opportunity to learn more about the issue at hand through further research and analysis. Having more information at hand often helped to diffuse the differences of understanding between participating groups.

### *Public Involvement*

Public involvement was a key component to the Blueprint Project. A series of public workshops was held in each community and area that comprises the Sacramento Region. At these workshops, citizens were invited to participate based on their interests and background to bring together a mix of view points and interests (e.g., business, environmental, developers, elderly). SACOG worked with a public consulting firm, Valley Vision to reach out to the different interest groups. In addition to the invited participants, there were accommodations for citizens who walked-in.

At the meetings, the participants were separated into small groups so that each group had a mix of view points represented. The small groups then worked with a facilitator to develop and discuss different land use scenarios for their community. Using the I-PLACE3S modeling software, the small groups were able to visualize how the different land use scenarios would impact various quality of life indicators. The I-PLACE3S modeling tool allowed for interactive workshops where the attendees could see first-hand how changes they proposed to land-use would impact the various quality of life indicators with the use of extensive maps and graphs. The outcome of the meetings was that each small group voted on a preferred scenario. The results of the small groups were then totaled to determine the overall preference of the community for its preferred scenario.

## **Technology**

The use of I-PLACE3S was a key component to the Blueprint Project that helped demonstrate how changes to land use in one area would impact land use in other areas, as well as impact quality of life issues, such as air quality and open space. I-PLACE3S enables users to apply a variety of zoning or land use designations to potential development areas. These different classifications have different characteristics, such as the number of dwelling units per acre, how many employees commercial areas can handle, and how many parking spaces will be needed. As the users make changes to the zoning, I-PLACE3S shows the users how quality of life indicators, such as traffic congestion, open space, and housing availability will be impacted. The changes are shown to the users through the use of a variety of maps, graphs, and charts.

Additionally, the models can be manipulated and changed in an interactive format at public workshops. This allows the workshop participants to see and realize the impacts of the suggested changes first hand.

### **Metrics and Data**

I-PLACE3S, the visioning tool used in the Blueprint Project, required the use of an extensive level of data from several sources. The categories of data inputs used in the process included land use, zoning, demographics, housing, employment, traffic, natural resources, cultural resources, and air quality. The local jurisdictions each provided land use data that was compiled with other data sources, such as natural resources. The data received from the individual jurisdictions were not in a uniform standard and therefore had to be compiled into a common centerline file. In some instances, the land use plans or environmental features were not available in any sort of digital format, and therefore had to be digitized or created for this project. The data were all “pushed” back to the parcel level, meaning in some instances the data had to be manipulated so that it was compatible with I-PLACE3S.

Based on the smart growth indicators, performance measures were used to compare land use scenarios. Examples of smart growth indicators used included housing type, growth near transit, per capita carbon dioxide and small particulates emissions, agricultural land converted to urban uses, vehicle miles traveled per household, and people living in areas with good mix of jobs and housing. The participants in the public workshops were then able to compare the outcomes of the land use scenarios based on the performance measures through the use of the I-PLACE3S visioning tool.

### ***Lessons Learned***

#### **Success Factors**

Overall, the Blueprint Project has been considered a success as it created a Preferred Scenario, or regional vision, for how the citizens and communities want the Sacramento Region to grow over the next fifty years. Through the use of technology (I-PLACE3S) and extensive public workshops, SACOG was able to build community consensus and support for the regional planning exercise. The Blueprint Project and the Preferred Scenario has been an essential component to SACOG’s subsequent development of the MTP. In the development of the MTP, SACOG has selected transportation improvements projects that will meet the needs of the changes in land use and growth projections that are proposed in the Preferred Scenario.

#### **Key Innovations**

The ability of SACOG to use a modeling and simulation tool at its public workshops during the Blueprint Project helped to make the planning process interactive. The approach of using I-PLACE3S helped the citizens, stakeholders, and participating agencies see the consequences of changes in land use first hand. The use of technology with an in-depth public involvement process helped to create grassroots support and a sustainable level of credibility for the final Preferred Scenario.

Additionally, the Blueprint Project was able to complete a regional land use vision that had the support of the local jurisdictions which it could then take and use in the development of its MTP. Having an established future land use vision for the region will be vital to helping SACOG accomplish its goals of meeting the transportation needs of the region over the next fifty years.

## ***Barriers and Solutions***

### **Institutional**

The Blueprint Project required bringing numerous stakeholders together to create the Preferred Scenario for the Sacramento Region. Implementation of the Preferred Scenario would be hindered if all the stakeholders and agencies did not (or could not) support it. SACOG found that bringing each of these organization and agencies into the process as early on as possible helped to streamline the project and build support for the final product.

Given the fifty year horizon of the Blueprint Project and the Preferred Scenario, SACOG faces a long and arduous task of implementing the Preferred Scenario over the next fifty years. While SACOG currently has the support from local communities and the general public for the Preferred Scenario, maintaining this support and keeping it relevant as the years go on will be vital to its successful implementation. This will most likely require a continued public outreach effort to keep stakeholders aware of the Blueprint Project and the Preferred Scenario.

### **Technical**

The Blueprint Project required an initial investment in compiling the needed data from various sources and streamlining it into a format that would work with PLACE3S, the modeling and visualization software used to create and analyze the land use scenarios. In addition, SACOG also had to work with EcoInteractive which developed PLACE3S to ensure that it had the capabilities needed to make the visualization tool useful at the public workshops. This required an initial investment upfront to obtain the needed level of data and staff to support the technology needs of the Blueprint Project.

Overall, the Blueprint Project is a common sense approach to developing a vision for growth and a transportation plan that build upon each other. Other regions considering using the Blueprint process have the benefit of being able to model their efforts off of what SACOG accomplished and to use the modeling tool, PLACE3S that was developed for this project. However, the regions will still have to bring together all of the data from the local jurisdictions to input into the modeling software. Depending on how the existing data is compiled and managed, this process could be time consuming and costly.

## ***Recommendations***

The Blueprint Project is an ambitious effort that brings together the land use and transportation planning processes of a region. One key factor to the success of the Blueprint Project was having the leadership support for it from SACOG to keep its momentum and funding moving forward. Without the dedication of sufficient staff and resources, the project would not have had the success it has had.

Another key factor to the success of this project was including all of the stakeholders together to create a unified visioning process. This helped individual communities and agencies realize the implications that their decisions had on other communities or resources. And, most importantly, it helped build buy-in and support of the final Preferred Scenario from the individual communities and agencies. This was essential, as SACOG does not have land use regulatory power in the Sacramento Region, therefore putting the ultimate implementation of the Preferred Scenario in the hands of local jurisdictions and agencies was important.

### **Sources**

Personal Communication. Interview between Director of Community Planning and Operations with SACOG; Urban Planner from URS Corp.; and Transportation Industry Manager with ESRI, Inc. to discuss the Blueprint Project. 15 August 2007.

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Personal Communication. Telephone Interview between Joan Sollenberger, Planning Director of Caltrans and Kory Wilmot with URS Corp. to discuss the Blueprint Project. 13 June 2007.

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