

October 11, 2016

Subject: Urban Growth and Conservation

Reporting Period: August – October, 2016

Staff Lead: Emily Tibbott, Senior Program Advisor, Environmental Science and Policy

Recommended Action:

For information only – no action required.

Background:

Along the High Speed Rail corridor, 24 station areas are envisioned, some in major population centers and others in more rural contexts, particularly the Central Valley. These stations will have significant impacts on their surrounding communities as well as implications for how these communities grow. Each station area has or will receive a grant from the High Speed Rail Authority to assist with elements such as station siting, design, retail development, housing, and other land use considerations, with a principal focus on the area within a half-mile radius of the station. Stations are expected to bring economic opportunity and vitality, facilitate multi-modal transportation options, and encourage transit-oriented and compact development. While planning effectively for downtown development is critical to high speed rail success, an explicit focus on protection of the open space and agricultural lands values that in many cases provide the backdrop for these communities is equally important.

The Urban Growth and Conservation (UGC) Program, a new venture of the Strategic Growth Council, aims to help high speed rail station area geographies plan sustainably for the growth anticipated with the advent of the train. The Program goal is to assist station area communities in rural settings to protect urban open space values, as well as implement mechanisms for more efficient growth such that adjacent farm and ranch lands are protected; initial focus will be on the station area cities of Gilroy and Palmdale. In Gilroy, staff will work in tandem with the Office of Planning and Research, which has recently launched the Best Practices Pilot Program (BP3), aiming to bring resources and technical guidance to jurisdictions interested to pilot best practices for strengthening community resiliency to climate change.

Update:

During the last two months, SGC and OPR staff, in conjunction with senior staff from the High Speed Rail Authority, have conducted two meetings with City of Gilroy planning staff to identify the current state-of-play with station area and related planning efforts underway in the City, as well as important contextual elements, to arrive at areas for possible State support and collaboration. Additionally, SGC and HSRA staff have held meetings with local and regional conservation entities to get a picture of conservation priorities in the Santa Clara and Coyote valleys. With regard to Palmdale, SGC and HSRA staff held an initial meeting with City of Palmdale planning staff in late September, again to understand the state-of-play with station area planning and related efforts; we are in the process of determining next steps there.

Both Gilroy and Palmdale fall in Bechtel Foundation-funded pilot areas: Santa Clara Valley and Antelope Valley, respectively. SGC staff sits on the Advisory Committee for both pilots, and is exploring ways in which the efforts to sustainably balance development and conservation in Gilroy and Palmdale can be supported through the Bechtel pilot programs.

Key Outcomes and Timing¹

- Climate-smart practices supported in Gilroy's and Palmdale's high speed rail station area plans and general plan updates
 - Gilroy station area plan and general plan update underway; best practices for both adopted by June 2017
 - Palmdale station area plan underway and general plan update process begins mid-2017; best practices adopted for both by Dec 2017
- Public funds awarded to one or both cities in support of efficient growth
 - AHSC and/or SALC funding awarded in at least one city (July 2017)
 - Additional GGRF program(s) funding leverage AHSC and/or SALC funding in at least one city (Dec 2017))
- Additional State-funded capacity placed in at least one city, liaising with SGC and OPR staff (March 2017)
- Biological and/or agricultural values data made available to each city and adopted to guide future infrastructure mitigation investments (June 2017)

¹ Outcomes and timing are preliminary and subject to change following upcoming conversations with each city.