California Transportation Plan Assessment (AB 285)
Achieving transportation-related GHG state reduction goals through alignment of the California Transportation Plan and Regional Sustainable Communities Strategies

Presentation of Draft Findings

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Research approach

- SGC contracted with UC -- Berkeley as lead, subawards to UCLA and UC Davis; established subawards, hired students, Human Subjects protocols for the study (to enable interviews) approved (May 2021)
- Reviewed history of transportation planning in California and analyzed state and regional plans, funding, and legal issues (June – August 2021)
- Completed >80 interviews with current and former elected officials, advocates, academic researchers, and staff of state agencies, transit agencies, local jurisdictions, MPOs. (August – October 2021)
- Drafted 5 working papers and a report that combines them plus a summary report (Aug. – Oct. 2021)
- Reviews of the drafts (October – November 2021)
- Final report reflecting comments received will be submitted December 2021
- TODAY: present draft findings from UC work
Finding #1: There is a gap between the climate-friendly state vision for transportation and the reality that investments at the state and regional levels continue to emphasize automobility.

AB 285 calls for:

- a review of transportation plans and programs at the state and metropolitan level, including Sustainable Communities strategies.
- An assessment of how the implementation of the CTP and regional plans “will influence the configuration of the statewide integrated multimodal transportation system.”
- A “review of the potential impacts and opportunities for coordination” of key state funding programs,” to be conducted in consultation with the administering agencies.
- Calls out several programs for special attention:
  - the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program
  - the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program
  - the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program, the Transformative Climate Communities Program
  - the Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant Program.

We found:

- The programs referenced in AB 285 represent ~2% of the state transportation spending
- A large share of state, regional and local transportation expenditures goes to maintaining, rehabilitating, and operating the mature and extensive highway system
- Highway capacity is being added at the state, regional and local levels to address congestion, safety, and goods movement concerns and will likely increase VMT
- Funds for bike, ped projects are oversubscribed
- Transit is an important strategy in the state and regional plans, but has been hit hard by COVID and faces funding shortfalls, maintenance needs
Finding #2: The institutional structure for transportation is decentralized across many agencies and levels of government, requiring a high level of cooperation to reach decisions and fund projects and making changes in direction a complex matter.

Source: California Metropolitan Planning Organization Regional Transportation Plan Review Report, Caltrans, 2015
Finding #3. California’s large number of transportation organizations and the plans they produce add to the complexity as goals expand and new priorities emerge.
Finding #4: While the California Transportation Plan (CTP 2050) addresses many goals and sets an aspirational vision for transportation in CA, it directly shapes only a portion of investment decisions. Many key decisions rest with local and regional authorities.
Finding #5. Many state and local funding programs do not explicitly address key CTP goals, such as combatting climate change and improving equity. This is in part because the projects were conceived before these goals were given heavy emphasis.
Finding #6: MPOs and their RTPs/SCSs have no choice but to bank on ambitious state and local action to achieve their mandated goals, since MPOs do not directly control many of the core components and assumptions of their plans, including local transportation spending and land use.
Finding #6 (cont.) : Most MPOs continue to devote the bulk of their total spending towards auto investments, both capacity expansion and road operations and/or maintenance.
(cont'd finding #6) Expenditures programmed in TIPs are generally less multimodal than expenditures planned in RTP/SCSs.

These results indicate that despite multimodal ambitions in some RTP/SCSs, MPOs tend to frontload auto infrastructure and backload transit when funding projects.
Finding #7: At all levels of government, spending in transportation tends to be additive without revisiting past commitments to projects or programs. Yet without reconsidering these commitments, California will not meet climate goals or other goals in the CTP 2050.

Source: CARB analysis
Finding #8: Existing funding programs have flexibility to adjust spending to meet current policy priorities.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for flexibility</th>
<th>Concerns about flexibility</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Search for alternative ways to achieve ends (alternative modes, new types of services, more effective operations, price signals, .....)</td>
<td>• Too flexible: may not offer clear direction and may not meet all goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prioritize projects that meet policy goals for early action</td>
<td>• Promises made: May lead to changes that some see as upending previously agreed upon commitments, undermining trust</td>
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<td>• Provide matching funds to high priority projects</td>
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Finding #9. The state and MPOs are beginning to establish guidelines and use matching funds and programming authorities to advance projects that help attain California priorities.

Other important steps:

• State and regional agencies work with project sponsors to modify their projects so that they will score well when evaluated against state goals

• Pilot projects to test new strategies -- preferably with independent (3rd party) evaluations
Finding #10: The new federal infrastructure legislation, together with new state funding, opens up opportunities for reimagining transportation in California.

Possibilities will be opened up to use funds strategically:

- Bring in federal funds for high priority projects
- Use additional funds / freed up funds to increase responsiveness to California priorities