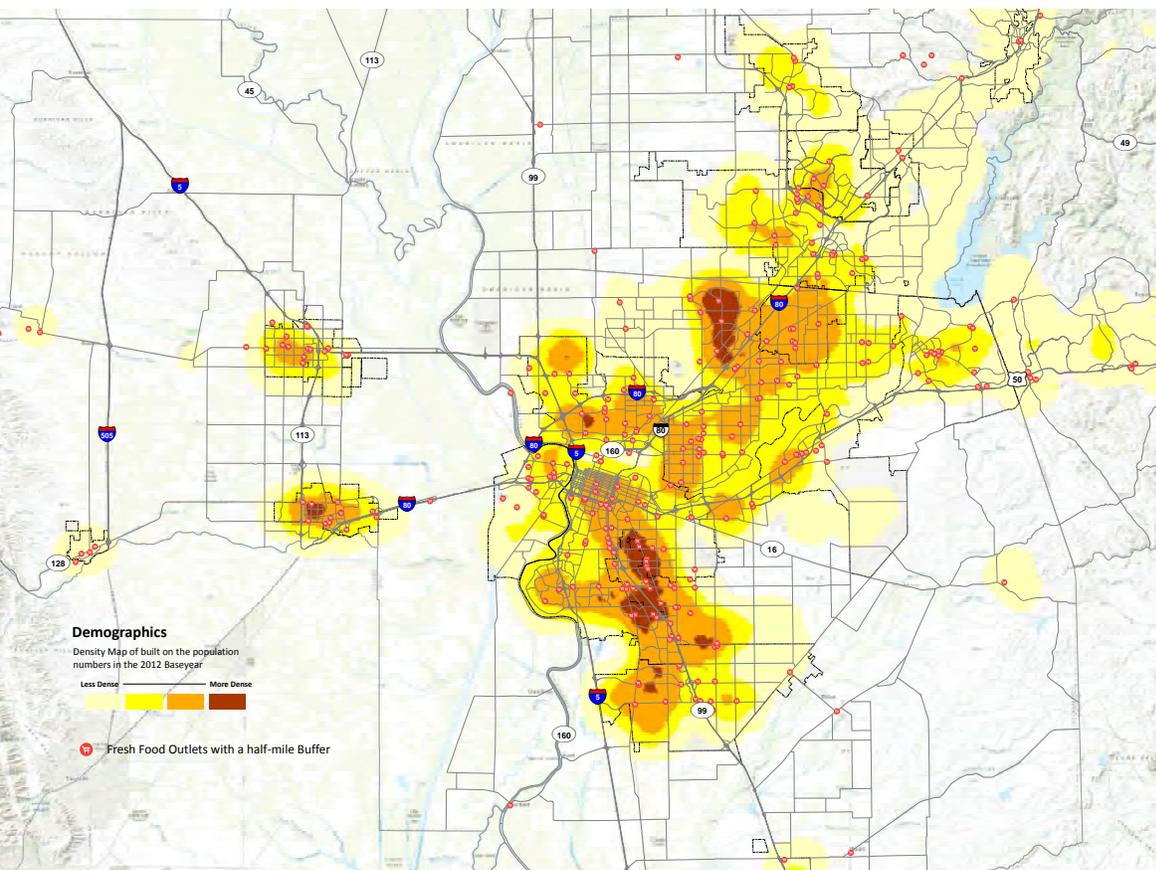


## Project Highlight



# Rural and Urban Approach for Sustainable Communities Strategy and Metropolitan Transit Plan Implementation in the Sacramento Region

The Sacramento Region is comprised of El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties and the 22 cities within those counties (excluding the Tahoe Basin). Sacramento is home to California's capitol and the headquarters of many state government operations, which comprise a significant amount of the region's employment opportunities, alongside education, agriculture, health care and professional services. The region spans a large geographic area, however, and 85 percent remains rural. The Sacramento Area Council



A population density map reveals the largely rural character of the Sacramento Region. Source: SACOG.

of Governments (SACOG) is the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization and is responsible for developing a regional transportation plan every four years.

SACOG has utilized funding from all three rounds of Grant Program to advance its efforts to plan for a sustainable Sacramento Region at the local government level. Emphasis was initially placed on furthering the *Rural-Urban Connections Strategy* which focuses on the rural areas of the region. More recently, SACOG has focused their Sustainable Communities Planning Grant-funded work on technical assistance in implementing the *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* and *Sustainable Communities Strategy* (MTP/SCS).

### The Project

The work funded by the Grant Program is diverse and has resulted in a variety of planning documents and case studies. What is unique about the projects SACOG initiated with Grant Program funding is how they have addressed both urban and rural issues with equal focus and deliberation, recognizing the significance of the rural contributions to the Sacramento Region's future.

The keystone piece of these planning efforts has been the *Rural-Urban Connections Strategy* (RUCS) program that undertook landmark efforts in rural land use and economic development research. RUCS acknowledged that rural economic vitality relies on wise land use decisions, but detailed planning for agriculture is typically unavailable. With this in mind, they executed a series of case studies and extensive stakeholder engagement to support rural economic development decision-making. RUCS studies utilized cutting edge modeling and analysis tools; topics included:

- **Agriculture and Wildlife Habitat:** assessed how cropland can double as wildlife habitat and the economic and environmental trade-offs of land use changes
- **Local Food System Assessment:** examined how Delta farmers can remain viable by tapping into the demand for locally grown food and agritourism activities
- **Food System Multipliers:** analyzed how crop production, particularly of specialty crops, fits into the larger food system (aggregation, processing, distribution) and fuels urban and rural job growth
- **Food Hub Feasibility Analysis:** provided tools to jurisdictions and developers to create "food hubs," agricultural infrastructure (including packing, processing, storage, marketing, and distribution) centers that help locally grown food reach the market.



Source: SACOG Staff

### Locally-Driven Solutions

- Developing an approach to rural land use and economic development strategies that has fundamentally changed the way SACOG plans for the future of the Sacramento Region.
- Providing technical assistance to local governments to enhance their ability to achieve the objectives of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategies, helping to speed the implementation of these important planning efforts.

All of RUCS work aimed to identify strategies that leverage and enhance the value of existing agricultural and open lands. Proactive rural planning provides a means by which stakeholders can forecast and prepare for possible futures and incorporate that with similar planning conducted for urban areas. An integrated planning approach, like the RUCS project, can help decision-makers better understand the tradeoffs in setting planning objectives, while also offering a means by which to link both rural and urban lands to local and regional transportation planning and other infrastructure investments.

In addition to the accomplishments of the RUCS project, SACOG has completed technical assistance work to aid in implementing the MTP/SCS, funded by the Grant Program. SACOG staff worked with participating local governments to identify opportunities for the grant funding to help them implement practices that are consistent with the *Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS)*. For example, SACOG would work with local governments to convene a public discussion, to provide examples of successful efforts in similar places, and to help them develop a strategy for implementation.

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*By entering a new era of planning for both rural and urban communities within the region, SACOG is advancing the practice of regional planning in California.*

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### **Local/Regional Connection**

As a metropolitan planning organization and regional transportation agency, SACOG helps link local governments with planning resources that prepare the region to thrive in the future. Acting as the bridge between the regional and local, SACOG helped prepare rural communities for sustainable economic development strategies in locations such as Yuba and Yolo counties. In more urban locations like Sacramento, Davis, Placerville, Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Isleton,

Rancho Cordova, Colfax and Winters, SACOG helped provide financial and technical resources to develop economically viable infill strategies.

SACOG's efforts to support both rural and urban efforts to advance long-range planning and implementation of the SCS have been appreciated by participating local governments. Furthermore, this balance has helped SACOG to respond to earlier critiques of the regional blueprint process that rested heavily on urban development and growth. By entering a new era of planning for both rural and urban communities within the region, SACOG is helping to advance the practice of regional planning in California.



*In 2008, SACOG engaged a range of local farmers and agricultural enterprises, including Yolo Land & Cattle Co, to host agricultural tours, with the aim of educating government representatives about the production, processing, transportation and regulatory challenges and opportunities. Source: SACOG Staff*



Government representatives learn about opportunities to bolster the region's ag economy on 2008 RUCS' farm tours. Source: SACOG Staff

### Agency Collaboration for Action

As a regional agency, SACOG takes a multi-disciplinary approach to all planning. All departments within SACOG worked collaboratively to achieve successful implementation of the MTP/SCS—including modelers, transportation planners, land use planners, transit planners, and communications departments.

SACOG staff support their local government partners, particularly through technical assistance programs such as the one funded by the Grant Program.

### Effective Community Engagement

The Sacramento Region is host to a diversity of community types, each with their own unique culture of civic engagement. Public involvement objectives and practices varied, depending on each community's individual situation. In some cases, the participating local government made a substantial effort to engage stakeholders in developing a collective vision for a stronger, more viable commercial district through one-on-one engagement and numerous in-person meetings and phone calls. Following these efforts, many groups found that the bonds amongst business and property owners were much stronger, creating momentum towards collective action.

In the case of RUCS project stakeholder engagement, the project emphasized innovative outreach and community engagement, including a number of farm tours in 2008. As one of the foundational initiatives under RUCS, SACOG engaged a range of local farmers and agricultural enterprises to host agricultural tours with the aim of educating

government representatives about the production, processing, transportation and regulatory challenges and opportunities.

Whether the planning effort was associated with RUCS or with a technical assistance program, SACOG staff made an effort to design an engagement program to best met the needs of that particular community in addressing the issues that were most important to them.

### Sustainable Benefits for California

Implementation of the SACOG's RUCS and MTP/SCS will help to advance many of California's sustainability objectives, particularly in the areas of:

- Economic Prosperity
- Equity
- Improved infrastructure systems
- Infill and compact development
- Natural resources and agricultural lands protection and preservation
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions
- Revitalized urban and community centers

#### For More Information

Name: David Shabazian, Rural-Urban Connections Strategy Manager

Agency: Sacramento Area Council of Governments

Telephone: 916-340-6231

Email: dshabazian@sacog.org

Website: [www.sacog.org/rural-urban-connections-strategy](http://www.sacog.org/rural-urban-connections-strategy)