

REGIONAL PLANNING: WHAT, WHO, WHY, WHERE AND HOW

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A regional approach is essential to manage urban growth.

WHAT is Regional Planning?

“Regional” planning is planning that **occurs beyond the boundaries of local governments** (cities and counties). Sometimes referred to as cross-jurisdictional or multi-jurisdictional planning, regional planning addresses issues that transcend the local level, such as transportation, smart growth, “fair share” provision of affordable housing, watershed planning, regional agricultural planning, air quality, and water quality and provision.

WHO does Regional Planning?

Regional planning can happen in a number of different ways. In most cases

local jurisdictions come together to form regional planning bodies. Some are advisory only, and others have true regulatory powers. Councils of government (COGs), which have a regional planning function and are present in many areas across the state, are an example of the former. Air quality management districts are an example of the latter. Some regional bodies, such as the Bay Area’s Metropolitan Transportation Commission, allocate federal funds in their regions, and in this way exercise considerable power.

Other regional agencies represent ad-hoc efforts by two or more local governments to provide a service or solve a problem.

“**Joint powers authorities**” can be set up to run a commuter rail line, manage



open space, provide insurance, or meet many other common needs. A final type of regional planning agency is set up by state or federal governments to perform a defined task. Examples include park districts, air quality districts, and water quality districts.

Regional bodies tend to have appointed boards, often consisting of elected officials from the cities and counties in which the regional bodies are located. Some regional bodies are made up of only government agencies, while others may include businesses, community-based organizations, or other groups.

WHY do Regional Planning?

Many current problems can only be dealt with at a regional scale. City and county **boundaries are somewhat arbitrary**. Air and water move across landscapes, so managing pollution or supply requires a regional approach. A regional approach is essential to manage urban growth, and may be needed to plan for park systems or habitat conservation for a wide-range of species. Large-scale transportation systems must be planned at a regional scale. Multi-jurisdictional



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planning can help agencies **prepare for disasters** such as earthquakes, fires, or floods. Regional agencies can even help address inequities in tax base between local cities and towns, pooling sales tax revenue and

then redistributing it on the basis of population, as in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area.

Local governments often resist regional approaches, or ignore voluntary regional plans that are created by councils-of-governments or other agencies. This has been a major problem historically. But such resistance can be overcome in a number of ways. Identifying common interests and building relationships between local leaders can help build political will. **State or federal funding can be used to motivate regionalism.** Also, regional agencies can acquire statutory authority from higher levels of government in order to perform their mission.

WHERE does Regional Planning Happen, and at What Scale?

The term "region" has no set definition. Regional planning **can involve only a part of a county** and the cities that lie within it, as in the *One Valley One Vision* plan for the Santa Clarita Valley in Los Angeles, **or it can cross state lines**, as in the *Tahoe Regional Planning Agency*.

In California, regional planning efforts have arisen in areas experiencing rapid growth, such as Southern California, or the San Joaquin Valley, or in areas with a specific, unifying interest in economic development, or in protection of a natural feature (Lake Tahoe).

HOW are Cross-Jurisdictional Planning (CJP) Relationships Established and What Types of Agreements are Formed?

CJP agreement models can be a joint powers agreement, a memorandum of understanding, executive order, agency initiative, negotiated charter, or statutory or other legislative authority.

The **joint powers agreement is the most common form.** This is usually a contract between a city, a county and/or a special district in which the city or county agrees to perform services, cooperate with, or lend its powers to the special district or other government entity. The **joint powers agreement creates a separate legal entity**, a joint powers authority, that can apply for funding in its own name. The authority is a more effective applicant than either party individually because it can provide, with certainty, partnering, matching funds and collaborative approaches, which are elements generally encouraged by funding agencies. **A Memorandum of Understanding, which would not create a separate entity**, would not have these benefits.

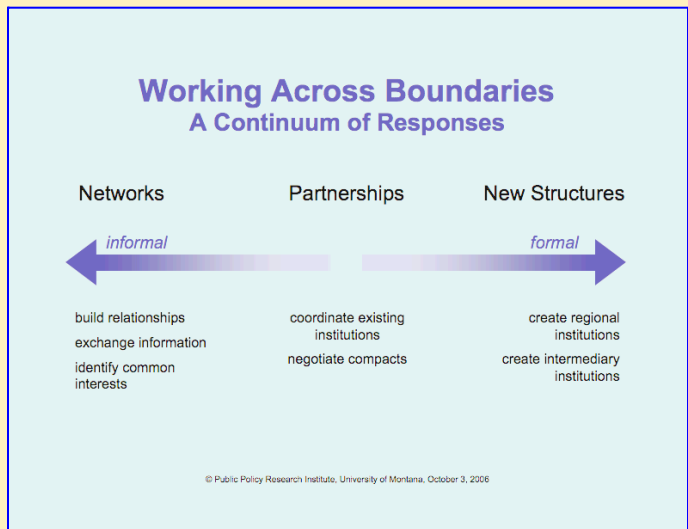
Whether regional planning bodies have authority, and who supersedes who, is a function of the terms of the agreements they reach, and whether these have legal standing.

WHO is doing Regional Planning, Where, Why, and How?

Some examples of cross-jurisdictional planning that appear to be working well

“Identifying common interests and building relationships between local leaders can help build political will” and pave the way for regional planning.

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in California are the *San Diego Association of Governments (SanDAG)*, *Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)*, the *Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC)*, and the *Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities (BAASC)*.

SanDAG

The San Diego Association of Governments, **consisting of eighteen cities and the county government**, serve as the forum for regional decision-making. SANDAG builds consensus, makes strategic plans, obtains and allocates resources, plans, engineers, and builds public transportation, and provides information on a broad range of topics pertinent to the region's quality of life.

SANDAG's **Public Involvement Program** is designed to inform and involve the region's residents in the decision-making process on issues such as growth, transportation, environmental management, housing, open space, air quality, energy, fiscal management, economic development, and public safety.

SanDAG created the **Regional Comprehensive Plan**, adopted in July 2004. It provides a blueprint for managing the region's growth, while preserving natural resources and limiting urban sprawl. The **Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP) serves as the long-term planning framework** for the San Diego region. It provides a broad context in which local and regional decisions can be made that move the region toward a sustainable future – a future with more choices and opportunities for all residents of the region.

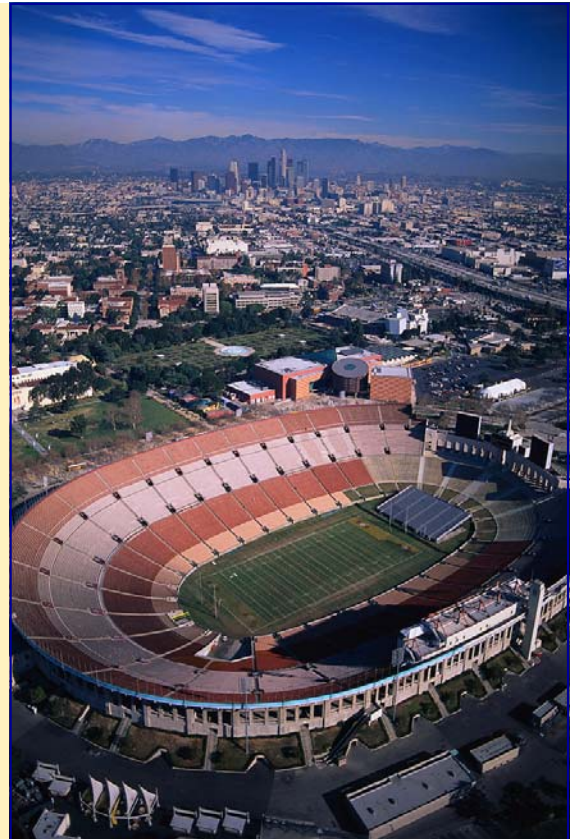
The RCP better integrates the region's local land use and transportation decisions, and focuses attention on where and how they will grow. This provides a vital alternative to where the area could end up if they continue with business as usual. **The RCP contains an incentive-based approach** to encourage and channel growth into existing and future urban areas and smart growth communities.

SCAG

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) **develops long-range regional plans and strategies** that provide for efficient movement of people, goods and information; enhance economic growth and international trade; and improve the environment and quality of life. SCAG also provides quality information services and analysis for the region, and **uses an inclusive decision-making process** that resolves conflicts and encourages trust. SCAG creates an educational and work environment that cultivates creativity, initiative, and opportunity both within the agency and the region.

SCAG's Air Quality Planning Program coordinates with various air quality and transportation stakeholders in Southern California to ensure compliance with the federal and state air quality

requirements, including the Transportation Conformity Rule and other applicable federal, state, and air district laws and regulations. As the Federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the six-county Southern California region, SCAG is required by law to ensure that transportation activities "conform" to, and are supportive of, the goals of regional and state air



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quality plans to attain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). In addition, SCAG is a co-producer, with the South Coast Air Quality Management District (AQMD), of the transportation strategy and transportation control measure sections of the Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) for the Basin.



Regional Council for Rural Counties (RCRC)

The Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC) and its affiliates work hand-in-hand with member counties in areas of State and Federal advocacy, program development and outreach.

Improving the ability of rural California county government to provide services, reducing the

burden of state and federal mandates and promoting a "rural" understanding among urban focused policy makers are the foundation of RCRC's mission.

Rural Counties' Environmental Services Joint Powers Authority (ESJPA) was formed in response to new and costly state and federal mandates regulating local solid waste management programs.

Composed of 22 member counties, ESJPA advocates on behalf of rural counties and provides ongoing assistance to counties in their efforts to comply with state and federal environmental standards. ESJPA's Board includes county Supervisors and technical staff who provide the direction and expertise needed in this critical area.

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BAASC

The Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities **is a coalition** of business, environmental, social equity and government leaders who forge collaborative solutions **to improve the quality of life** in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.

This group is concerned about barriers to their collective prosperity, such as the cost of housing, traffic congestion and unsustainable use of natural resources. To advance regional sustainability, one of BAASC's main functions is to **facilitate dialog to identify shared goals** and develop joint action strategies for the area.



Resource

A map of Councils of Government is below. A complete listing with contact information is online: <http://www.calpin.ca.gov/directory/cog.asp>



Written by the UCANR Land Use Work Group.
<http://ucanr.org/landusefactsheets>