

TransNet Today: Executive Summary

This report makes the following findings:

- (1) SANDAG's Draft 2015 Regional Plan is inadequately designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote health, equity, and economic development.
- (2) SANDAG must shift priorities toward transit and active transportation to maintain the region's ability to compete for federal and state transportation funds.
- (3) SANDAG has the flexibility to advance a number of transit and active transportation projects in the Regional Plan without needing to amend TransNet.

As SANDAG makes its plans to invest in the future of San Diego's transportation system, it faces the same challenges that other regions throughout the state and the country are grappling with including maintaining rapidly aging infrastructure, serving the changing needs and preferences of residents, and addressing sustainability, health, the economy, and equity.

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) process is the forum for laying out the vision for the transportation future of San Diego. SANDAG continues to make commendable progress in its Draft 2015 Regional Plan (titled "San Diego Forward: the Regional Plan") which updates both its Regional Comprehensive Plan, and its Regional Transportation Plan. The Draft 2015 Regional Plan contains a greater commitment to projects that will address climate change and economic development by increasing investment in transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and smart-growth communities. However, the overall investments proposed in the 2015 Draft Regional Plan do not adequately advance long-term changes that are required by California's climate laws, and necessary to substantially contribute to equitable regional prosperity.

Despite the reality of limited funding, SANDAG has the resources and flexibility to ensure the 2015 Regional Plan establishes a more innovative long-term investment strategy. SANDAG has access to significant federal and state sources that can be used for nearly any project. Additionally, it can tap into a growing number of competitive funding programs that reward innovation and sustainability.

The most important perceived limiting factor that stands in the way of a transformational Regional Plan is TransNet, San Diego's half-cent sales tax dedicated to transportation. Due to the large amount of funding it generates, and additional policies SANDAG has passed that commit flexible federal and state resources towards projects in TransNet, the measure has a tremendous influence over the Regional Plan.

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SANDAG has the ability to implement and adapt TransNet without amending its text, and in fact has done both in order to prioritize individual and groups of projects. The willingness to take advantage of this flexibility is critical for ensuring TransNet doesn't become a 40-year weight that limits the ability to craft a long-term visionary investment strategy – the Regional Plan – that responds to the region's evolving needs.

By placing a greater priority on long-term greenhouse gas (GHG) reductions to align with state goals and regional equity, SANDAG can ensure the region will attract maximum federal and state revenues and drive economic growth and overall sustainability.

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The critical variable is that SANDAG must redefine its vision for San Diego's transportation system to align with California's increasingly ambitious GHG reduction goals, and set regional goals for improving health, equity, and the economy. This is a fundamental reorientation of the Regional Plan to become progressively more outcome and goal-oriented. In other words TransNet – along with federal and state resources – should be treated as innovative tools to construct a visionary Regional Plan rather than as limiting factors.