



Connect SoCal 2024 Subcommittee Draft White Paper

NEXT GENERATION INFRASTRUCTURE

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INTRODUCTION

SCAG is currently developing Connect SoCal 2024. Three special Regional Council subcommittees have been created around Next Generation Infrastructure, Resilience and Conservation, and Racial Equity and Regional Planning. The Resilience and Conservation Subcommittee and Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee each met four times between September 2022 and January 2023 and the Next Generation Infrastructure Subcommittee met five times between September 2022 and February 2023, to identify recommendations that will inform how these emerging issues are addressed in Connect SoCal 2024.

The goal of the Next Generation Infrastructure Subcommittee was to build on Connect SoCal 2020 and provide guidance on the priorities and strategies for Connect SoCal 2024, reflecting the rapidly evolving developments across the region specific to the future of mobility and associated implications for public policy. The need for a more comprehensive understanding of these developments and consensus building on key regional strategies and policies is even more evident today in preparation for Connect SoCal 2024 as we continue to grapple with the pandemic, a more challenging economic environment, and shifting state and federal priorities with increasing uncertainties across the planning horizon.

The Next Generation Infrastructure Subcommittee convened five times between September 2022 and February 2023. To facilitate greater policy discussion of key areas anticipated to be critical for the development of Connect SoCal 2024, the Next Generation Infrastructure Subcommittee discussed and responded to the following policy questions:

- How has travel changed with COVID and what will this mean for long-range transportation planning?
- (How) should our objectives for highway investment evolve?
- How do we ensure transit recovery?
- (How) should we better align the way we pay for and fund transportation with equity and resiliency goals?

SUBCOMMITTEE FOUNDATIONS

SCAG prepares a long-range Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) every four years, which provides a vision for integrating land use and transportation for increased mobility and more sustainable growth. SCAG's next RTP/SCS, Connect SoCal 2024, will incorporate important updates of fundamental data, enhanced strategies and investments based on, and intended to strengthen, the plan adopted by the SCAG Regional Council in 2020. The pillars of Connect SoCal 2020 are anticipated to continue into Connect SoCal 2024, including a focus on maintaining and better managing the transportation network we have for moving people and goods, while expanding mobility choices by locating housing, jobs, and transit closer together and increasing investment in transit and complete streets.

The adoption of Connect SoCal 2020 illustrated the complexity of long-range planning with rapidly evolving developments across the region ranging from broader sustainability and air quality issues to the future of mobility and associated implications for public policy. The need for more comprehensive understanding of these developments and consensus building on key regional strategies and policies is even more evident today in preparation for Connect SoCal 2024 as we continue to grapple with the pandemic, a more challenging economic environment, and increasing uncertainties across the planning horizon. The emerging landscape will be complex, likely exacerbating many of our existing core challenges.

Over the course of the next fiscal year, SCAG staff will be seeking direction from our policy makers, through the relevant Policy Committees, on the priorities and strategies for Connect SoCal 2024 to better align investments across the region.

SUBCOMMITTEE: DISCUSSION & KEY FINDINGS

On September 21, 2022, the first meeting of the Subcommittee focused on how travel behavior is evolving. The meeting explored telecommuting/hybrid work, including implications of on job centers and future commute patterns. Despite higher levels of telecommuting/hybrid work, travel volumes have rebounded from pandemic lows. The meeting also explored the contribution of non-commute travel to increasing traffic and investment strategy alignment with the non-commute geospatial patterns and modal choices. Professor Giovanni Circella, the Director of the 3 Revolutions Future Mobility Program at the University of California, Davis and Professor Brian Taylor, the Director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles provided presentations exploring emerging trends and engaged Subcommittee members with implications for investment strategies.

The second Subcommittee meeting was held on October 19, 2022, and focused on evolving objectives for highway investment. A panel discussion comprised the bulk of the meeting. The panelists were:

- Fran Inman, Senior Vice President, Majestic Realty
- Benito Pérez, Policy Director, Transportation for America
- Jeanie Ward-Waller, Deputy Director, Planning & Modal Programs, Caltrans
- Raymond Wolfe, Executive Director, San Bernardino County Transportation Authority

The panelists explored how highway investment policies have evolved in recent years, including shifting away from highway capacity investments. The discussion also explored the implications of changing highway objectives for goods movement and the supply chain. The panelist addressed how we might reimagine use of our public rights-of-way, including for Complete Streets, safety improvements, and curb space management.

On November 16, 2022, the third Subcommittee meeting focused on how the region can work together to ensure transit recovery. A panel discussion comprised the bulk of the meeting. The panelists were:

- Rolando Cruz, Chief Transportation Officer, City of Culver City, Culver CityBus
- Roderick Diaz, Director of Planning and Development, Metrolink
- Krista Glotzbach, Partnerships Lead, Via
- Lauren McCarthy, Director and Strategic Lead, Shared-Use Mobility Center

The panelists explored how transit has changed in recent years and in light of the pandemic, and the ways in which public and private organizations can work together to motivate increased transit ridership.

The final Subcommittee meeting was held on January 18, 2023. Seleta Reynolds, Chief Innovation Officer at the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, addressed universal basic mobility and Professor Michael Manville, UCLA Department of Urban Planning Vice Chair, highlighted his research on how we should better align the way we pay for, fund, and manage our transportation system with equity and resiliency goals.

Each of the Subcommittee meetings included facilitated discussions led by the Subcommittee Chair. The Subcommittee presentations and subsequent discussions highlighted the following key findings:

- Increases in telework are changing the dynamics of travel both in time and in location.
- Post-pandemic, the region is experiencing more short trips throughout the day, especially across the afternoon period.
- Transportation system preservation remains a universal priority, and with greater needs associated with transition to zero emissions vehicles.
- The deployment of new technology should focus on people and addressing larger shared goals (e.g., advancing equitable access).
- Expanding highway capacity may be warranted but should be aligned with efforts to mitigate potential increases in vehicle miles traveled, especially single-occupant vehicle travel.
- Transportation solutions should involve increasing choices beyond driving, including connecting communities with pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and prioritizing transit to make it competitive with driving.
- Center solutions on people and their evolving travel needs, for example supporting more local short trips versus long commutes.
- Focus on understanding and meeting the needs of existing transit riders because this will also help attract new riders.
- Leverage technology and data to better understand people's needs, communicate information and invite feedback, attract riders that might otherwise never consider transit, and facilitate unified planning and payment for multimodal trips.
- Public agencies should partner across agencies and sectors to develop projects and in doing so, minimize risk, build trust, and recognize/leverage unique strengths that each party brings.
- Cities should encourage the shift of the mobility paradigm by enhancing and supporting services across all modes including transit, micromobility, and automobiles.
- Public agencies need to engage and assert a role in management of the transportation digital realm.
- Re-envision the transportation system more like a utility.
- Rethink the role of the automobile in our daily lives, but in a sophisticated manner that goes beyond just focusing on the need to reduce vehicle miles traveled.
- Place greater importance on valuing accessibility.
- Recognize that we can achieve many environmental goals with modest changes in travel behavior.
- Plan and manage the transportation system like an investor.
- Road pricing can be revenue source, mechanism to improve driving and system performance, and tool for addressing equity concerns.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, feedback from members of the Subcommittee can be grouped into four broad recommendations. These recommendations will inform the Connect SoCal Policy Development Framework and on-going policy discussions related to Connect SoCal 2024, and will be taken to the Regional Council for further deliberation:

- **Maintain a people-centric transportation investment strategy:** Ensure that deployment of new technologies support people’s needs and address larger shared goals like advancing equitable access and reducing traffic fatalities and series injuries. Prioritize use of our public rights-of-way for all roadway users, especially focusing on the needs of non-single occupant vehicle users.
- **Continue to invest in system preservation and efficiency investments:** Fix-it-first remains a key strategy for Connect SoCal, especially recognizing greater needs associated with the transition to zero emission vehicles and ensuring system resilience. Within this context, operational improvements and targeted strategic highway capacity expansion are warranted when coupled with complementary efforts to offset any potential increases in vehicle miles traveled and especially single-occupant vehicle travel.
- **Expand and enhance mobility choices:** Focus on understanding and meeting the needs of existing transit riders, which will also attract new riders. Increase choices beyond driving by enhancing and supporting services across all modes of travel including transit, active transportation, micromobility, and automobiles. Reconsider the role of the automobile in our daily lives and how mobility options can increase reliable accessibility.
- **Re-envision how we plan, fund, and manage the transportation system:** Plan and manage the transportation system more like an investor, including asserting a role in the management of the transportation digital realm. Appropriately pricing the transportation system ensures that the system functions for all users (even during peak demand periods), generates reliable revenue, and established resources for addressing equity concerns.

NEXT STEPS

These recommendations are intended to inform the on-going development of the Connect SoCal Policy Development Framework to provide direction for addressing emerging and cross-cutting issues in Connect SoCal 2024. They will be considered by the Joint Policy Committee alongside recommendations from the Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee and the Resilience and Conservation Subcommittee in March. The scope of the Subcommittee discussions also illuminated opportunities for broader recommendations to inform SCAG’s work both in Connect SoCal implementation and other program areas. To realize these recommendations, potential actions to support integration into Connect SoCal 2024 and its implementation are summarized below:

- Incorporate and analyze data from surveys, other location-based services data as available to incorporate emerging travel patterns and behaviors.
- Evaluate options to assess transit priority treatments and on-demand shared mobility services, including directly within regional models.
- Explore mitigation strategies to combine with efforts to build out the express lane system and improve the flow of goods.

- Conduct research and engagement with disadvantaged communities and communities of color to better understand and plan for mobility needs.
- Conduct research, engagement, and pilot projects for advancing funding strategies that transition the region to a user fee-based system that better reflects the true costs of transportation and ensures an equitable distribution of costs and benefits.

MAIN OFFICE

900 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 1700
Los Angeles, CA 90017
Tel: (213) 236-1800
scag.ca.gov

REGIONAL OFFICES

IMPERIAL COUNTY

1503 North Imperial Ave., Ste. 104
El Centro, CA 92243
Tel: (213) 236-1967

ORANGE COUNTY

OCTA Building
600 South Main St., Ste. 741
Orange, CA 92868
Tel: (213) 236-1997

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

3403 10th St., Ste. 805
Riverside, CA 92501
Tel: (951) 784-1513

SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

Santa Fe Depot
1170 West 3rd St., Ste. 140
San Bernardino, CA 92418
Tel: (213) 236-1925

VENTURA COUNTY

4001 Mission Oaks Blvd., Ste. L
Camarillo, CA 93012
Tel: (213) 236-1960

