



Update to the General Plan Guidelines: Complete Streets and the Circulation Element

December 15, 2010

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

December 2010

I am pleased to announce the publication of the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR), *Update to the General Plan Guidelines: Complete Streets and the Circulation Element*. Assembly Bill 1358 (AB 1358, Chapter 657, Statutes of 2008), the California Complete Streets Act, required OPR to amend the *2003 General Plan Guidelines* to provide guidance to local jurisdictions on how to plan for multimodal transportation networks in general plan circulation elements. This document amends guidance on preparing circulation elements found on pages 55-62 of Chapter 4 of the *2003 General Plan Guidelines*. Local jurisdictions should use this *Update* in conjunction with the *2003 Guidelines* when they are updating their general plan circulation elements.

The OPR staff thanks the many organizations and stakeholders who generously shared their expertise during the development of this *Update*. OPR consulted with various state agencies, regional agencies, local jurisdictions, planning and transportation consultants, health organizations, pedestrian and bicycle advocacy groups, and members of the public. This document is another example of how partnerships and collaboration can support quality communities for all Californians.

Based upon this broad consultation, OPR issued a *Draft Update to the General Plan Guidelines: Complete Streets and the Circulation Element* on October 20, 2010 for 30 days of public review and comment. All comments received on the draft document were carefully considered for incorporation. We hope that you will find this update to be an informative guide and useful tool in the practice of local planning. OPR always welcomes suggestions on ways to improve the *General Plan Guidelines*, and other OPR guidance documents. OPR strives to provide quality planning guidance to city and county decision makers, staff and community residents.

Cathleen Cox,

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SECTION I: PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

PURPOSE

This update to the circulation element section of the *2003 General Plan Guidelines* meets the requirements of Assembly Bill 1358, The California Complete Streets Act. The Act requires the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to amend the *General Plan Guidelines* to assist city and counties in integrating multimodal transportation network policies into the circulation elements of their general plans. Starting January 2011, all cities and counties, upon the next update of their circulation element, must plan for the development of multimodal transportation networks.¹

To support cities and counties in meeting the requirements and objectives of AB 1358, this update provides guidance on general plan circulation element goals, policies, data collection techniques, and implementation measures related to multimodal transportation networks. The goal of this update is to provide information on how a city or county can plan for the development of a well-balanced, connected, safe, and convenient multimodal transportation network. This network should consist of complete streets which are designed and constructed to serve all users of streets, roads, and highways, regardless of their age or ability, or whether they are driving, walking, bicycling, or taking transit.

AB 1358 places the planning, designing, and building of complete streets into the larger planning framework of the general plan by requiring jurisdictions to amend their circulation elements to plan for multimodal transportation networks. These networks should allow for all users to effectively travel by motor vehicle, foot, bicycle, and transit to reach key destinations within their community and the larger region. OPR recommends that local jurisdictions view all transportation projects, new or retrofit, as opportunities to improve safety, access, and mobility for all travelers and recognize pedestrian, bicycle, and transit modes as integral elements of their transportation system. The standard practice should be to construct complete streets while prioritizing project selection and project funding so that jurisdictions accelerate development of a balanced, multimodal transportation network.

Understanding the existing resources, location, and design of a local jurisdiction is imperative to successfully implement a multimodal transportation network. The planning, design, construction, and operation of a multimodal transportation network will be different for each community. Complete streets will look different in rural, suburban, or urban communities. Cities and counties should focus on crafting a network of travel options that are reflective of a community's individual context. A list of selected references with more information on multimodal transportation networks is provided at the end of this document.

¹ Assembly Bill 1358, Chapter 657, Statutes 2008.

BACKGROUND

The California Complete Streets Act (AB 1358)

On September 30, 2008 Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed Assembly Bill 1358, the California Complete Streets Act. The Act states: “In order to fulfill the commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, make the most efficient use of urban land and transportation infrastructure, and improve public health by encouraging physical activity, transportation planners must find innovative ways to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and to shift from short trips in the automobile to biking, walking and use of public transit.”²

The legislation impacts local general plans by adding the following language to Government Code Section 65302(b)(2)(A) and (B):

- (A) Commencing January 1, 2011, upon any substantial revision of the circulation element, the legislative body shall modify the circulation element to plan for a balanced, multimodal transportation network that meets the needs of all users of the streets, roads, and highways for safe and convenient travel in a manner that is suitable to the rural, suburban, or urban context of the general plan.
- (B) For the purposes of this paragraph, “users of streets, roads, and highways” means bicyclists, children, persons with disabilities, motorists, movers of commercial goods, pedestrians, users of public transportation, and seniors.

RELATED FEDERAL AND STATE POLICIES

U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Bicycle and Pedestrian Policy:

The *United States Department of Transportation Policy Statement on Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Accommodations Regulations and Recommendations* supports “fully integrated active transportation networks,” that include accommodations for bicyclists and pedestrians.³ The DOT’s bicyclist and pedestrian accommodation regulations and recommendations are consistent with California’s complete street policies and AB 1358. The DOT encourages all transportation agencies and local governments to adopt similar policies to ensure all users of streets, roads, and highways are taken into consideration when developing new or retrofitting existing transportation systems.

The *United States Department of Transportation Policy Statement on Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation Regulations and Recommendations* can be found at the following website:

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/policy_accom.htm

² Assembly Bill 1358, Chapter 657, Statutes 2008.

³ U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, *United States Department of Transportation Policy Statement on Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation Regulations and Recommendations*, March 2010 http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/policy_accom.htm (accessed July 2010).

California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Complete Streets Policy: The *California Department of Transportation Deputy Directive 64-Revision #1: 'Complete Streets: Integrating the Transportation System'* (DD-64-R1) was released on October 2, 2008. DD-64-R1 directs Caltrans staff to support increased mobility and access for all Californians on Caltrans built and maintained roads.

DD-64-R1 states that Caltrans will:

- “Provide for the needs of travelers of all ages and abilities in all planning, programming, design construction, operations, and maintenance activities and products on the State Highway System;
- View transportation improvements (new and retrofit) as opportunities to improve safety, access, and mobility for all travelers and recognizes bicycle, pedestrian, and transit modes as integral elements of the transportation system;
- Develop integrated multimodal projects in balance with community goals, plans, and values; addressing the safety and mobility needs of bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users in all projects, regardless of funding;
- Facilitate bicycle, pedestrian, and transit travel by creating ‘complete streets’ beginning early in system planning and continuing through project delivery and maintenance and operations; and,
- Collaborate among all (Caltrans) department functional units and stakeholders to develop a network of complete streets.”⁴

DD-64-R1 is limited to Caltrans owned and maintained streets, roads, and highways and focuses on the planning, construction, and maintenance of complete streets and when possible, on the creation of multimodal networks. The goals of DD-64-R1 provide important guidance for the design of streets that make up a local integrated multimodal transportation network.

Caltrans’ *Complete Streets Implementation Action Plan* and other information on Caltrans’ complete street policies can be found at the following website:

http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ocp/complete_streets.html

Safe Routes to School:

In 2005 the United States Congress passed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users Act (SAFETEA-LU). This transportation reauthorization bill included funding for the Federal Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. The objective of the SRTS program is to support the use of safe, active transportation modes (i.e. walking and bicycling) for children to and

⁴ California Department of Transportation, *Deputy Directive 64-R1*, (2008) http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ocp/complete_streets_files/dd_64_r1_signed.pdf (accessed June 2010).

from schools. The availability of active transportation modes can increase children's activity levels and decrease the likelihood of childhood diseases. This is especially important as childhood obesity rates and other illnesses related to inactivity are rapidly increasing both nationally and throughout California.⁵

The SRTS program is administered by the Federal Highway Administration, which distributes program funds to individual State Departments of Transportation. In California, Caltrans distributes the federal grant funding to eligible cities and counties for local SRTS projects. In addition, Caltrans administers its own Safe Routes to School program, known as SR2S, which includes high schools. The federal program opens eligibility only for K-8 schools. Funds for both programs are available on a competitive basis, with each Caltrans District having a fixed amount available for cities and counties.

Federal and State funding criteria vary slightly, but typically funds are allocated for:

- (1) "The planning, design, and construction of infrastructure-related projects within approximately two miles of a primary or middle school (high schools per Caltrans funding) that will improve the ability of students to walk and bicycle to school;
- (2) Non infrastructure-related activities that encourage walking and bicycling to school, including awareness campaigns and outreach to the press and community leaders, traffic education and enforcement, student training; and,
- (3) SRTS program capacity building including training and hiring of state program volunteers, and managers."⁶

Eligible projects can include pedestrian facilities, traffic calming, traffic control devices, bicycle facilities, and public outreach and education.

Schools are an important node to include in the development of a local multimodal transportation network. Local multimodal transportation networks should address the needs of parents and children by providing safe active transportation options to and from schools. Doing so can reduce vehicle trips, reduce congestion, and improve road safety near schools, and increase children's activity rates. While the general plan itself is not eligible for funding, Safe Routes to School programs can help implement part of a connected, safe multimodal transportation network.

Additional information on SRTS and SR2S can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.saferoutesinfo.org>

<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/saferoutes.htm>.

5 California Department of Health Services, *Prevalence of Obesity and Healthy Weight in California Counties, 2001*, June 2004 <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/pubsforms/Pubs/OHIRobesityweightCA2001.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2010).

6 Safe Routes to School, *Safe Routes to School Guide*, <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/guide/index.cfm> (accessed August 2010).

MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS

What are Multimodal Transportation Networks?

Multimodal transportation networks allow for all modes of travel including walking, bicycling, and transit to be used to reach key destinations in a community and region safely and directly. Jurisdictions can use complete streets design to construct networks of safe streets that are accessible to all modes and all users no matter their age or ability. Complete streets are defined below:

The National Complete Streets Coalition defines complete streets as follows:

Complete streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities must be able to safely move along and across a complete street.

Creating complete streets means transportation agencies must change their orientation toward building primarily for cars. Instituting a complete streets policy ensures that transportation agencies routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users.⁷

The American Planning Association describes complete streets as follows:

Complete streets serve everyone – pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and drivers – and they take into account the needs of people with disabilities, older people, and children. The complete streets movement seeks to change the way transportation agencies and communities approach every street project and ensure safety, convenience, and accessibility for all.⁸

Caltrans defines complete streets as follows:

A transportation facility that is planned, designed, operated, and maintained to provide safe mobility for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit vehicles, truckers, and motorists, appropriate to the function and context of the facility. Complete street concepts apply to rural, suburban, and urban areas.⁹

⁷ National Complete Streets Coalition, www.completestreets.org (accessed July 2010).

⁸ Barbara McCann and Suzanne Rynne, *Complete Streets: Best Policy and Implementation Practices*, American Planning Association, Report No. 559:1.

⁹ California Department of Transportation, *Complete Streets Implementation Action Plan*, Feb. 2010 http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/ocp/complete_streets_files/CompleteStreets_IP03-10-10.pdf (accessed July 2010).

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS

Safety

Multimodal transportation networks, using complete streets best practices, can lead to safer travel for all roadway users. Designing streets and travel routes that consider safe travel for all modes can reduce the occurrence and severity of vehicular collisions with pedestrian and bicyclists.¹⁰ Streets and other transportation facility design considerations that accommodate a variety of modes and user abilities can contribute to a safer environment that makes all modes of travel more appealing.

Health

Multimodal transportation networks that allow people to walk or bicycle as a viable transportation option can promote an active lifestyle by encouraging travelers to walk or ride bicycles instead of driving. These active transportation modes increase physical activity rates. Frequent exercise is known to reduce obesity rates and lower the risk of heart disease and diabetes.¹¹ A comprehensive transportation network that allows safe walking and bicycling to multiple destinations, including transit, promotes better health.

Reducing the amount that people drive by increasing the opportunity for walking, bicycling, and transit also reduces vehicle emissions. Emissions from vehicles are a major contributor to poor air quality, which in turn, is a major contributor to health ailments such as asthma. Although poor air quality is not always the cause of asthma, vehicle emissions are a major contributor to asthma related illnesses.¹²

Multimodal transportation networks provide options and increase mobility for people who cannot or do not drive to stay connected to their communities. This is especially important for people with disabilities and for all people as they age. Without alternatives to the automobile, these individuals can easily become socially isolated; unable to access essential resources such as grocery stores, houses of worship, and medical care. Social isolation and a lack of access to essential resources can negatively impact people's physical and mental well-being.

Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emission Reduction

Land use patterns and the existing transportation infrastructure play a direct role in the rate and growth of vehicle miles traveled (VMT); influencing the distance that people travel and the mode of travel they choose. The need to reduce transportation-related GHG emissions was highlighted in the

10 California Department of Transportation, *Complete Streets Implementation Action Plan*.

11 California Department of Public Health, *The Burden of Cardiovascular Disease in California, A Report of the California Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Program*, 2007 <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cvd/Documents/CHDSP-BurdenReport-HighRes.pdf> (accessed June 2010).

12 California Department of Health Services, *The Burden of Asthma in California: A Surveillance Report*, 2007 <http://www.californiabreathing.org/images/stories/publications/asthamburdenreport.pdf> (accessed June 2010).

California Air Resources Board's (CARB) *2008 AB 32 Climate Change Scoping Plan*.¹³ Transportation accounts for 38 percent of California's GHG emissions.¹⁴ Studies show that even with aggressive state and federal vehicle efficiency standards and the use of alternative fuels, meeting the State's GHG reduction goals will require a reduction in how much the average Californian drives.¹⁵ Reducing the number of automobile trips can reduce fuel consumption and GHG emissions.

Economic Development and Cost Savings

Creating multimodal transportation networks can improve economic conditions for both business owners and residents. A network of complete streets can be safer and more appealing to residents and visitors, which can benefit retail and commercial development. Multimodal transportation networks can improve conditions for existing businesses by helping revitalize an area and attracting new economic activity. Integrating the needs of all users can also be cost-effective, by reducing public and private costs. Accommodating all modes reduces the need for larger infrastructure projects, such as additional vehicle parking and road widening, which can be more costly than complete streets retrofits.

REGIONAL PLANNING

Assembly Bill 32 and Senate Bill 375

The Legislature passed Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32), The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.¹⁶ AB 32 requires the State of California to reduce its GHG emissions to 1990 levels no later than 2020. Senate Bill 375 (SB 375) builds on the existing regional transportation planning process undertaken by the state's 18 Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to connect the reduction of GHG emissions from cars and light trucks to regional land use and infrastructure planning.¹⁷ According to the California Air Resources Board (CARB), passenger vehicles are the number one emitter of GHG emissions in California.¹⁸ SB 375 asserts that "Without improved land use and transportation policy, California will not be able to achieve the goals of AB 32."¹⁹

13 California Air Resources Board, *AB 32 Climate Change Scoping Plan*, (2008): <http://www.arb.ca.gov/cc/scopingplan/document/scopingplandocument.htm> (accessed September 2010).

14 California Climate Change Portal, "Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory," 2004 <http://www.climatechange.ca.gov/inventory/index.html> (accessed June 2010).

15 California Air Resources Board, *AB 32 Climate Change Scoping Plan*.

16 Assembly Bill 32, Chapter 488, Statutes 2006.

17 Senate Bill 375, Section 1(c), 2008.

18 California Air Resources Board, *California Greenhouse Gas Inventory for 2000-2008- by Category as Defined in the Scoping Plan*, (May 2010): http://www.arb.ca.gov/cc/inventory/data/tables/ghg_inventory_scopingplan_00-08_2010-05-12.pdf (accessed September 2010).

19 Senate Bill 375, Section 1(c), 2008.

The main objectives of SB 375 are:

- (1) To use the regional transportation planning process to direct funding to transportation projects that reduce GHG emissions by coordinating land use and transportation planning;
- (2) To use the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) streamlining as an incentive to encourage residential development projects which help achieve AB 32 GHG emission reduction goals; and,
- (3) To coordinate the state's requirements for regional housing development and planning with the regional transportation planning process.

Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs)

Each regional transportation planning agency, including federally recognized MPOs and state recognized Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs), is required to prepare and adopt a RTP. The RTP's goal is to achieve a coordinated and balanced regional transportation system. The plan should consider all transportation systems, as well as their users and associated facilities and services including, but not limited to: mass transit, highways, railroads, bicycle, walking, goods movement, maritime, and aviation. The plan is meant to be action-oriented and pragmatic and to consider both short-term and long-term system issues. An RTP establishes the region's priorities for funding transportation infrastructure projects and other transportation programs.

The *2010 Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines* (RTP Guidelines) approved by the California Transportation Commission and prepared by Caltrans, summarizes RTP requirements in both federal and state law. State law directs the RTP to "present clear, concise policy guidance to local and state officials" and to "consider and incorporate, as appropriate, the transportation plans of cities, counties, districts, private organizations, and state and federal agencies"²⁰ A RTP must be consistent with the *RTP Guidelines*.

Although it is not legislatively required, the *RTP Guidelines* suggest that MPOs and RTPAs include local multimodal transportation policies in their plans. The *RTP Guidelines* recommend that regional transportation agencies integrate multimodal transportation network policies into their RTPs, identify the financial resources necessary to accommodate such policies, and consider accelerating programming for projects that retrofit existing roads to provide safe and convenient travel by all users. The guidelines also encourage MPOs and RTPAs to work with jurisdictions and agencies within their region to ensure that general plan circulation elements and local street and road standards include the necessary planning, design, construction, operations, and maintenance procedures, to support all transportation system users.²¹

²⁰ California Government Code §65080(a).

²¹ California Transportation Commission, 2010 *California Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines*, (April 2010): http://www.catc.ca.gov/programs/rtp/2010_RTP_Guidelines.pdf (accessed September 2010).

Federal transportation law emphasizes the need for the coordination of regional and local plans by requiring a RTP to be based on the most recent local planning assumptions including local general plans and other relevant factors. Any decisions about the allocation of transportation funds must be consistent with the RTP.”²²

Sustainable Communities Strategy

SB 375 requires each of the state’s 18 MPOs to include a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) in its RTP. RTPAs are not required to develop a SCS as part of their RTP. SB 375 also directs CARB, in consultation with MPOs, to develop regional GHG emission reduction targets for each MPO. MPO’s must develop a SCS as part of its RTP that explains what feasible land use patterns and transportation system improvements would be necessary to meet CARB targets. An SCS must be adopted whether or not it meets CARB targets; however, if an MPO cannot meet these targets through its SCS, it must develop an alternative plan called an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS). An APS is not required to be part of the RTP and therefore does not impact RTP transportation funding decisions.

The SCS is expected to set forth a growth strategy that integrates land use, regional housing needs allocations, and the region’s transportation infrastructure plan consistent with the goal of meeting CARB’s regional GHG reduction targets. The SCS does not supersede a local general plan, specific plan, or zoning ordinance. SB 375 does not require that a local general plan, specific plan, or zoning ordinance be consistent with an SCS. However, a RTP must be internally consistent, so regional transportation funding and policy decisions need to be consistent with the SCS.

An SCS should perform the following tasks:

- Identify the general location of uses, residential densities, and building intensities within the region;
- Identify areas within the region sufficient to house all economic segments of the regional population, taking into account migration patterns, population growth, etc.;
- Identify areas within the region sufficient to house an eight-year projection of the regional housing need;
- Identify a transportation network to service the transportation needs of the region;
- Gather and consider the best available scientific information regarding the region’s resource areas and farmland;
- When feasible, forecast a development pattern for the region, which when integrated with the transportation network, and other transportation

²² Part 450 of Title 23 of, and Part 93 of Title 40 of, the Code of Federal.

measures and policies, reduces GHG emissions from passenger vehicles to achieve, the CARB GHG emissions reduction targets; and,

- Quantify the GHG emissions reduction projected by the SCS. If the SCS does not achieve the SB 375 targets, the SCS must identify the difference between its projected GHG emissions reduction and the CARB identified target for the region.²³

To see a full description of what is required of an SCS please see G.C §65080(b)(2)(B).

SB 375 requires all regional counties not just MPOs to consider financial incentives for cities and counties that have resource areas or farmland, for the purpose of transportation investments. Such considerations include, but are not limited to:

- The preservation and safety of the city street or county road system;
- Farm-to-market transportation needs; and,
- Interconnectivity transportation needs.

Farm-to-market refers to the transportation facilities needed to provide connections between areas of agricultural production, processing, and storage facilities to agricultural distribution and sales activities.

The bill also requires that MPOs or county transportation agencies address financial assistance for counties to address countywide (transportation) service responsibilities, in counties that contribute towards the greenhouse gas emission reduction targets by implementing policies for growth to occur within their cities.

General plans should identify city and county resource areas and/or farmlands. County general plans may also identify policies targeting growth into the incorporated cities or towns within their limits.²⁴

By updating general plans to include multimodal transportation network policies, cities and counties can support MPOs in developing an RTP and SCS and reaching regional GHG emission reduction targets. Once an SCS is adopted, establishing multimodal transportation network policies in the general plan that are consistent with the RTP and SCS can potentially increase the likelihood of funding for local priority projects through the RTP process. A city or county whose general plan is consistent with the regional SCS may be better situated to use the CEQA exemption and streamlining included in SB 375. The applicability of the SB 375 CEQA exemption is the sole realm of the city and county, MPOs cannot require a city or county to use an exemption or streamlining provisions for any particular site or project.

²³ California Government Code §65080(b)(2)(B); Part 450 of Title 23 of, and Part 93 of Title 40 of, the Code of Federal.

²⁴ California Government Code §65080(4)(C).