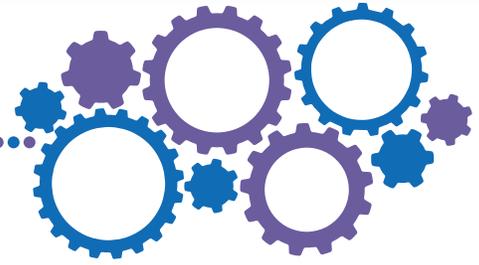


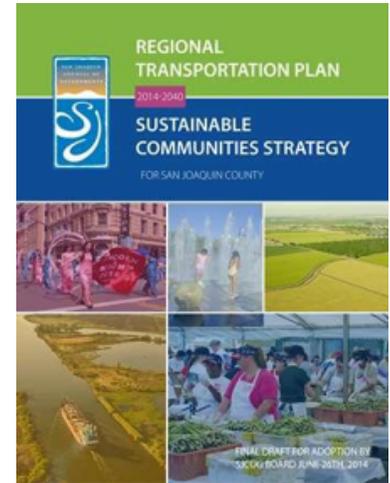
# San Joaquin County Integrates Health in Regional Planning



## OVERVIEW

In San Joaquin County, a community organization led a collective effort to engage the broad community in integrating health issues into important policies that impact infrastructure funding for the region. Through the Sustainable Communities Coalition (Coalition) facilitated by Catholic Charities' Environmental Justice Program (Catholic Charities/EJ), San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS), and other partners joined together to successfully influence the San Joaquin regional planning process, strengthening intent and language to help achieve the following:

- Incorporation of measurable goals to improve public health, increase active transportation, and ensure social equity in the adopted San Joaquin Council of Government's 2014 Regional Transportation Plan Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS)
- Support of allocation of \$115 million dollars in new sidewalks, streetlights, landscaping and traffic calming; and 822 more miles of bike lanes in the RTP/SCS
- Inclusion of strategies to reduce auto trips and auto pollutants, as well as increase diversity of housing, access to transit and to reduce the amount households spend on transportation in the RTP/SCS
- Strengthening of the public participation plan and enhancing the engagement of diverse community groups to provide unified input to the RTP/SCS



## GOALS

Catholic Charities/EJ, PHS and other partners identified a need to engage the broader community in San Joaquin County to collectively advocate for healthy community policies in the 2014 RTP/SCS. Per the new SCS requirement, San Joaquin's RTP had to address the following goals:

1. Sustain the environment through greenhouse gas reductions,
2. Aid economic recovery through improved mobility,
3. Improve public health through encouraging active transportation,
4. Support neighborhoods through promotion of infill and redevelopment, and
5. Preserve agricultural heritage by protecting prime farmland.

## CHALLENGES

While the SCS provided a unique opportunity to engage the broad community and integrate health issues into important policies that impact infrastructure funding, several challenges emerged:

- Identifying health-related policies that fit the needs of diverse community groups with different priorities and goals;
- Limited technical knowledge around how an RTP/SCS is developed, such as how modeling works and what data planners use in decision-making;
- Limited resources for many of the smaller nonprofits to participate in a multi-year planning activity; and
- Opposition to some proposed strategies from entrenched interests with financial resources to participate in the process, with established champions and recognized special interest expertise.

**“The RTP/SCS was the catalyst that brought Public Health Services into contact with non-traditional community partners that we knew and respected but had never had the opportunity to work with before in such a long-term and purposeful way.”**

*- Barb Alberson, Sr. Deputy Director, Policy & Planning, SJ County Public Health Services*

## STRATEGIES

The Coalition was organized and facilitated by Catholic Charities/EJ to engage the community in the first San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) Regional Transportation Plan that included the new Senate Bill 375 Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) requirement. Participants were from the fields of agriculture, public health and equity, environmental justice and environmental quality, as well as planning, nonprofit housing and for-profit infill development.

Catholic Charities/EJ, through funding from the statewide network, ClimatePlan, served as the coordinator for the Coalition, and as the single point of contact with SJCOG. Micro-grants were awarded to small nonprofits to allow them to actively participate in the process. Catholic Charities/EJ worked with the Coalition to identify common goals and objectives, and to create a cohesive message and talking points that all the Coalition members could support. A broad range of groups were asked to join the Coalition, including business interests that could speak to the concerns of decision makers. For example, the Coalition's affordable housing infill developers were able to counter concerns that there was no market for infill housing. The funding also allowed the Coalition to hire technical experts to understand the RTP/SCS process and determine how to best frame policies to support its objectives. The final recommendations included policies that supported greater investment in active transportation (i.e. safe and walkable, mixed used/ income communities, always with an emphasis on investing in existing neighborhoods).

The Coalition used data and other successful examples to show the validity of proposed objectives and refute assertions that its proposed policies would have a negative impact on the community. These examples were used by SJCOG staff to support recommendations to the Board. The Coalition was consistent not only in its message but in attending meetings, submitting comment letters, and responding to concerns about its proposals.

While the 2014 RTP/SCS did not include all of the Coalition's recommendations, they helped move the needle and created a solid foundation for progress in future plans. The COG Board agreed to create an Implementation Working Group (IWG) to ensure that COG funding decisions reflected the recommendations set forth in the RTP/SCS. The Board invited both Catholic Charities/EJ and PHS to serve as members on the IWG to help monitor implementation of these policies.

After the 2014 RTP/SCS was completed, the Coalition turned its sights to the Amendments to the Stockton General Plan. It expanded membership to include additional organizations interested in equity, education, and violence prevention. The Coalition was then renamed the Healthy Neighborhood Collaborative (HNC) to better highlight the intersection between health equity and planning, transportation and land use activities. In addition to informing changes to Stockton's General Plan, the HNC remains involved in implementing the policies and recommendations in the 2014 RTP/SCS, and preparing for the next planning cycle to launch the 2018 RTP/SCS.

The success of this project was largely based on the ability of the community groups to meld perspectives and speak with one consistent voice throughout the process. They were able to identify shared goals by committing to the concept that healthy community policies would help them reach their own organizational objectives. The Coalition also helped reach out to the community and encourage residents to voice their opinions on what was being proposed. Their input was invaluable in crafting the final recommendations.

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

HNC's members serving on the Implementation Working Group are actively involved in RTP/SCS implementation. For example, they reviewed Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 Active Transportation Program proposals, and ensured that HNC's suggestions for community engagement were included in the SJCOG's public participation plan for the 2018 RTP/SCS.

As described above, HNC also continues to focus on integrating public health into other plans and projects including the Amendments to the Stockton General Plan. The collaborative is already participating in discussions about the scope of the SJCOG's 2018 RTP/SCS, and in identifying how to address the challenges of funding collective action and sustained engagement in multi-year planning processes.

**“The County public health department is hands down our biggest ally and has supported the coalition by educating decision makers about the impact of their decisions and lending credibility to the idea that planning impacts the health of the community.”**

*- Katelyn Roedner Sutter, San Joaquin Regional Director & Environmental Justice Program Manager, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Stockton*

## **TO LEARN MORE CONTACT:**

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