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## Regional planning efforts begin to come to life

Mike McCarthy Staff Writer

A planner looking at the numbers would be deeply worried: The six-county Sacramento area is expected to have risen in population by 928,089 between the years 2000 and 2025, according to the Sacramento Area Council of Governments.

That's a 49 percent population increase. Moreover, SACOG estimates the newcomers will need 368,602 new houses and apartments -- three times the existing housing units in the city of Sacramento and 7.7 times the existing housing in Roseville and Rocklin combined. This flood of newcomers, along with their homes and automobiles, is coming to a region that is already complaining loudly about freeway congestion, smog and the development of open space.

What would really worry the planner is that SACOG, which takes in Sacramento, Placer, El Dorado, Yolo, Sutter and Yuba counties, is the only regional planning effort to handle growth. And SACOG plans only transportation, not the pattern of development nor any other infrastructure.

"Unless we have a coordinated planning for the 1 million people due here in the next 20 years, I don't think this region can digest something on that scale," said Bob Waste, a professor of public policy at California State University Sacramento.

Yet there are stirrings of a regional planning effort. SACOG, whose board is composed of elected officials, along with a number of regional leaders and organizations are trying to come up with plans before it is too late.

'Blueprint for the Future': Perhaps the strongest candidate for a regional planning push is the Blueprint for the Future program that is being formed by a half-dozen or so local proponents of regional growth, including Sacramento County Supervisor Roger Dickinson.

Dickinson, who is a SACOG board member, says the blueprint idea stems from a similar effort in Salt Lake City. "They took a look at what their region would look like in 20 or 30 years," he said. "For the first time, there is an opportunity for all stakeholders to develop a sense of the region. We've never done that."

The blueprint idea has not been officially created. But those active in regional growth came up with the

term to unify their own effort. If the idea has a home base, he added, it is SACOG. The agency has undertaken the most ambitious regional planning study the region has yet seen, and has hired a nationally known regional planning expert, Mike McKeever of Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, a prominent planning consultancy.

McKeever is using a \$500,000 state grant to study how land use and transportation can better mesh. McKeever's study will look at the mechanics of growth -- the way the parts interact to create a healthy community. An old pro at regional planning, in 1992 he helped officials in Portland, Ore., transform the existing Metropolitan Service District into a strong regional planning agency.

His study can produce needed information for the blueprint, he said.

For instance, it will look at the value of putting job centers and housing near one another and near transit -- a measure often touted as a way to reduce commuting and its side effects.

The study will examine how infill development compares to sprawl development, with special emphasis on the potential of larger, "underutilized" infill tracts. Also examined will be whether types of housing being produced really match the current homebuyer and renter. The great majority of buyers and renters, he noted, are not families with children, but singles and others who may not want the big house in the suburbs. "We'll develop a menu of ideas to be presented to local government and their constituents," McKeever said.

The whole effort, of course, depends on political acceptance of McKeever's findings and the Blueprint for the Future concept by officials in SACOG's six-county region. To ease the way toward consensus, SACOG's board in May appointed a committee of municipal land-use planners to monitor and advise his study.

Other efforts: The study is one of three significant signs of progress in regional planning, said CSUS professor Waste.

Another sign of progress in regional planning is the chance that Assemblyman Darrell Steinberg's ever-changing AB 680 will be approved. "McKeever's the real deal, as is Steinberg," Waste said.

AB 680, in its current form, would make municipalities share some sales tax revenue on a per-capita basis to eliminate the competition among cities and counties for retailers. Such competition, Steinberg says, encourages disjointed planning decisions, increased traffic and smog, less open space and a lack of affordable housing.

AB 680 is making slow progress through the Legislature and is slated to go to the crucial Senate Local Government committee next week, said Gary Davis, Steinberg's senior legislative assistant.

The third sign of progress in regional planning is the successful adoption of open-space policies in Yolo and Placer counties, Waste said.

McKeever also sees good signs. So far, Blueprint for the Future has enlisted some support from other regional planning efforts in the area, including Valley Vision, the Transportation and Air Quality Collaborative and the Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, among others.

"I don't see a separate organization emerging," he said. "There could be some kind of management structure -- anything from an informal management committee to a nonprofit entity with the purpose of

carrying out the Blueprint project."

Not everyone is optimistic about the regional planning effort. "There's a lot of talk about changing the land-use paradigm," said David Mogavero, president of the Environmental Council of Sacramento. "But no one is actually doing anything about it. Everyone says it's time to stop sprawl. But when sprawl applications show up, the people who oppose sprawl don't step forward and say 'enough is enough.' That's the most effective long-range planning we can do."



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