

NEWS

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San Bernardino County a pioneer in responsible growth *New General Plan update includes list of measures to combat global warming*

SAN BERNARDINO – How should fast-growing regions address the fast-growing concern over global warming?

The County of San Bernardino has effectively dealt with the issue by initiating economic development programs that attract good jobs to the region to reduce the number of long-distance commuters. That is also one of the many ways the county's newly adopted General Plan update tackles greenhouse gas emissions.

The General Plan update adopted by the county Board of Supervisors on March 13 is a responsible blueprint for the future. It includes precisely the type of environmental measures that scientists recommend to address greenhouse gas emissions – policies that are designed to conserve energy, encourage transit, and reduce vehicle commutes by developing more jobs closer to where people live.

That's why county leaders say they were taken aback by lawsuits filed earlier this month by Attorney General Jerry Brown and three environmental fund-raising groups, who claim the General Plan ignored global warming and are seeking to throw out the entire plan.

"We incorporated measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the new plan because we wanted to take the lead in protecting our environment," said County Board of Supervisors Chairman Paul Biane.

In the General Plan Update, the county included several measures that scientists agree will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, even though state law does not require counties to do so and no guidelines exist defining how counties can or should address greenhouse gas emissions in general plans.

The landmark legislation recently signed into law, Assembly Bill 32, calls upon the California Air Resources Board to create regulations for counties to follow. The state board, however, has not yet acted, so there are no AB 32 regulations currently in place.

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"The county stands ready to work in partnership with the attorney general and anyone else at the state level on these issues," Chairman Biane said.

Dealing with Growth

As the price of homes has risen in coastal areas, growing numbers of Southern Californians have moved inland to take advantage of San Bernardino County's affordable homes, great climate, educational institutions, and recreational opportunities. This has created freeway congestion as new inland residents commute to their jobs in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

To remedy this, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors has directed its Economic Development Agency to attract the high-wage, high-skill jobs to reduce the number of commuters on local roads. As a result, our region has created 43 percent of all jobs in Southern California since 1990. Thanks in large part to the county's economic development efforts, our job base is growing at a faster rate than nearly all of California. Unemployment in our county is now at its lowest level in 42 years, despite our sharp and massive growth.

According to Inland Empire economist John Husing, the inland metro area is expected to add 260,000 more jobs than Los Angeles County by 2020 and nearly match the combined job gains of Orange, San Diego, Ventura, and Imperial counties.

"San Bernardino County is justly proud of how it has managed growth and instituted innovative environmental protections while experiencing some of the fastest growth in the United States," Chairman Biane said.

By addressing the jobs deficit and taking cars off the road, San Bernardino County is working to alleviate the top source of greenhouse gas emissions in the region. The county's new General Plan reflects this strategy and lays out a series of other policies to encourage smart growth and reduce the greenhouse gases that lead to global warming.

A Responsible and Responsive Plan

"The county's new General Plan meets all the requirements of planning laws and environmental impact laws, and the county has no doubt the General Plan will withstand any legal challenge," said Randy Scott, the county's chief of Advanced Planning and the primary architect of the General Plan update.

Specifically, the County of San Bernardino General Plan Update addresses global warming by:

- Promoting development that mixes homes with businesses to minimize the length and frequency of vehicle trips.
- Directing development toward existing transit corridors.
- Providing for childcare centers, restaurants, banks, and other similar services near employment centers to minimize mid-day vehicle use.
- Providing incentives for alternative-fuel vehicle use and carpooling.

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- Calling for replacing current county vehicles with alternative-fuel vehicles.
- Supporting the development of publicly accessible alternative fuel stations and other infrastructure.
- Encouraging ride sharing, use of public mass transportation, and solar energy.

The complete plan is available for the public to view and download from the county's website, www.sbcounty.gov.

A Strong Record on Fighting Greenhouse Emissions

The County of San Bernardino has traditionally been and continues to be at the forefront of efforts to protect the environment and to adopt the types of policies and programs that reduce greenhouse gas emissions:

- The County of San Bernardino created the state's first regional air quality planning element, which earned the 1991 SCAQMD Clean Air Award, the 1991 CSAC Challenge Award, and the 1993 Southern California Gas Company Partners in Energy Efficiency Award. This resulted in critical policies and procedures that have been integrated into the development review process through the county General Plan and Development Code since the early '90s and reiterated and strengthened in the 2007 General Plan Update and Development Code.
- The county's Economic Development Agency is working with the City of Victorville and Inland Energy Inc. to develop the world's first hybrid power plant, which will generate 563 megawatts using 250 acres of solar thermal collectors in combination with natural gas generators
- The County of San Bernardino Fleet Management Department has been a leader among California counties in converting its fleet of public vehicles to alternative fuels. Also, in 2003, the County of San Bernardino became the first California county to purchase a fleet of hybrid vehicles and incorporate them into the county's vehicle fleet. This is significant because the County of San Bernardino operates and manages the largest vehicle fleet in the county.
- The county Public Works Department recently replaced its stable of gas- and diesel-powered portable highway message boards with solar-powered message boards.
- The county Public Works Department recently purchased five liquid natural gas heavy-duty water trucks, dump trucks, and an asphalt patch truck to replace diesel-powered vehicles. Three additional liquid natural gas heavy-duty trucks are on order, and the department is seeking seven more for the coming fiscal year. Every liquid natural gas heavy-duty vehicle that replaces a diesel model removes 300 pounds of greenhouse gases from the air each year.
- For more than two decades the county Human Resources Department has operated an active and effective Commuter Services Program to encourage, coordinate, and reward carpooling, provide information about public transportation and other alternative to solo commuting. Because the county is by far the largest employer in the Inland Empire with nearly 20,000 employees, these efforts have a very real impact on the quality of our atmosphere.

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The General Plan Update approved by the Board of Supervisors on March 13, 2007 was the result of more than four years of diligent work on the part of professional county staff, environmental attorneys and other experts, community leaders, elected officials, and members of the public.

The county conducted 25 public meetings in every community to ensure the plan reflects the wishes of everyone in San Bernardino County. The county consulted with state and local air agencies, and reviewed the reports from state, federal and international agencies regarding climate change.

Also, Jerry Brown and the environmental fund-raising groups have touted their lawsuits as significant because San Bernardino County is the largest county in the contiguous 48 states. Although this is true, the county's General Plan has jurisdiction over only the unincorporated areas, which account for only 15 percent of the county's population and 15 percent of the county's land mass (75 percent of the county's land mass is owned by the federal government, over which the county has no land use authority). The county also has no authority over the county's 24 cities, where most of the development and population growth occur.

Finally, scientists and policy makers have long accepted the obvious fact that air quality is not a county-by-county or city-by-city issue. Nowhere is this truer than in Southern California, where most of the air pollution in San Bernardino County creeps over from Los Angeles County. That's why the county has virtually zero legal authority over air pollution issues, which are wisely regulated by the state on a regional basis.

"That's why the county would welcome constructive dialogue with the attorney general rather than costly and time-consuming litigation," Chairman Biane said.