

# EQUINOX CENTER

October 14, 2010

The Hon. Pam Slater-Price, Chair  
San Diego County Board of Supervisors  
1600 Pacific Coast Highway, Room 335  
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Chairwoman Slater-Price

**The Equinox Center is a non-profit policy and research center based in Encinitas and dedicated to providing balanced, objective information to decision makers in San Diego County about how to balance regional growth with our finite natural resources.** We are writing to you today to provide data and research that we hope will be valuable in your decision making process on the County General Plan Update.

## **Summary of Equinox Center Position on County General Plan Update:**

In the County General Plan Update, the Board of Supervisors has a tremendous leadership opportunity to step out to create a bold and sustainable vision for San Diego County. **Data from Equinox Center's 2010 Regional Quality of Life Dashboard reveals that our region is excelling in some measures but others need attention. Among those where we need to do better: water, transportation and energy/climate change. Please see the attached dashboard for more data and analysis on these issues.**

We believe the County General Plan Update (GPU) should put the County on the path towards more sustainable development by:

- **ensuring the bulk of the growth in the unincorporated area occurs in locations where there is access to sufficient water supply**
- **planning growth to minimize vehicle miles traveled in the region, thereby reducing air quality problems and helping us achieve climate goals;**
- **focusing development in livable, village-like communities where residents have easy access to jobs, schools and other services;**

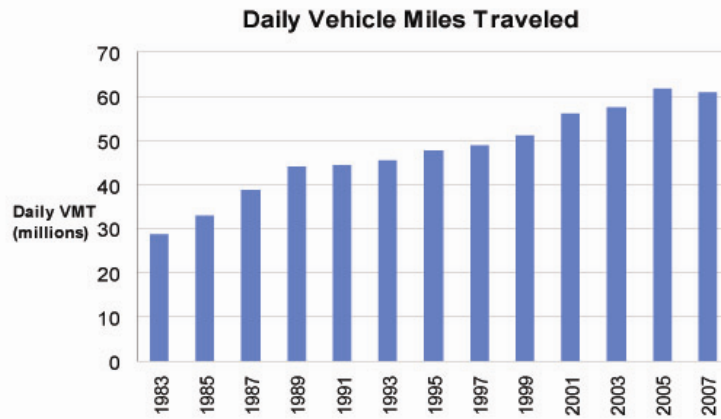
In addition to providing leadership for the region, choosing the General Plan Update map that best incorporates the principles of sustainable development can save the County dollars. **A recent National Association of Counties (NACo) survey highlighting county sustainability efforts in 2010 stated that the most important benefit counties are realizing from sustainability efforts is cost savings.**

**I. Water-** Equinox Center's in-depth research on water supply in this region has uncovered some important facts:

- San Diego County has a **very limited local groundwater supply**, and what is available is at risk of being contaminated or of being over allocated. Recently the City of San Diego sued the Sweetwater Authority over its plans to draw more water from the aquifer that serves them both. As the risk of longer and more frequent drought increases with climate change, this type of conflict over groundwater will become more challenging for all regions of the county.
- **60% of all water use in the region is for residential use, and 55% of that is used for landscaping.** Compact development requires less water, so the choices we make when it comes to planning and developing residential areas are critical to using our water resources wisely. Recent studies have shown that employing more compact development patterns could save California 19 million acre-feet of water -- enough water to fill the Hetch Hetchy reservoir more than 50 times by the year 2050.

Given these facts, we urge the Board of Supervisors to provide pivotal leadership in moving San Diego towards a **more secure water future**. We encourage you to choose the **General Plan Update option and map that minimizes the impact on groundwater resources and encourages smarter growth in areas that already have access to water**.

**II. Transportation and Air Quality**-On the topic of transportation, we urge you to consider a plan that **minimizes or reduces vehicle miles traveled in the region**. Our data shows that in aggregate, the amount of miles we travel every day in San Diego County has almost doubled since 1990. As a result, San Diego is one of the most congested areas in the country...in fact each of us spends an average of **52 extra hours/year in traffic delays**.

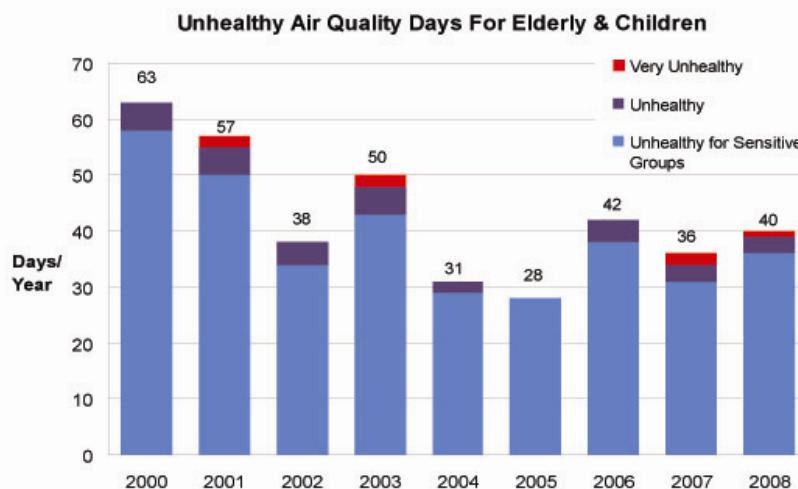


Source: Equinox Center, 2009; Texas Transportation Institute Urban Mobility Report, 2009

Much of this increase is due to a sprawling development pattern where people live far from their jobs, schools or other services. This pattern hits each of us in the pocket book--it is estimated that traffic **delays cost us about \$1,000/person/year**, and has an economic cost to the region as a whole. **75% of businesses in the region say that traffic congestion is a significant obstacle to doing business** in the region.

In addition to the impacts of congestion on economic development and on personal time available to spend with family and friends, we hope you will consider the **air quality impacts** of your development choices. Though San Diego has made some gains in air quality in the last decade, **we are still in non-attainment for particulate matter, and according to 2008 EPA data, air quality in the county was considered unhealthy on 40 days for elderly and children, our most vulnerable populations**.

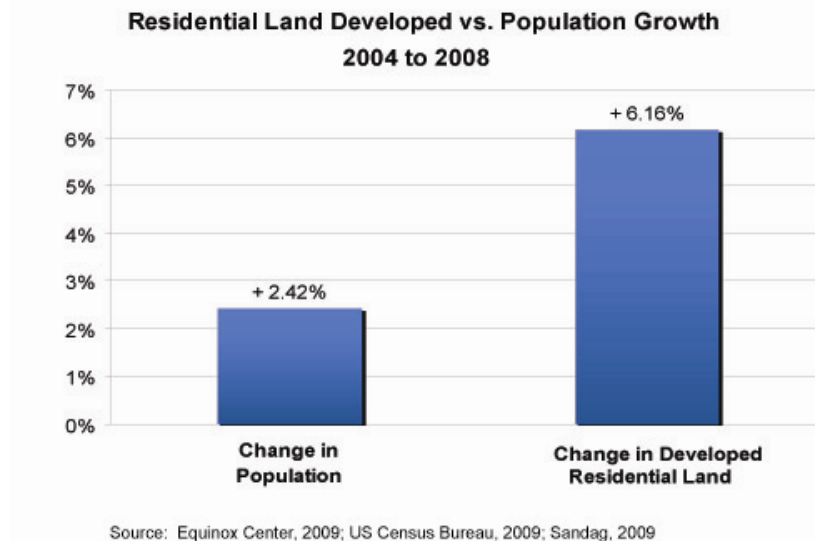
More time and vehicles on the road also mean more greenhouse gas emissions. According to the most recent greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory of the county conducted by the Energy Policy Initiative Center at USD, **46% of all GHG emissions in the county are from on-road transportation**. **To reduce the number of days our air is considered unhealthy, and to achieve our climate goals, we must plan and act now to reduce miles traveled in the region**.



Source: Equinox Center, 2009; EPA, 2009

**III-Land Use and Intelligent Growth**-Finally, as a region, we need to consider the impact of our growth on using up our precious land and wildlife habitat. As I am sure you know, **the County of San Diego is home to more kinds of native animals and plants than any other county in the continental United States, and leads the nation in the number of indigenous species at risk.** We are proud of the fact that so much of the County's habitat is protected in the back country, and we do not want to jeopardize the gains made by approving incompatible development in those areas.

Unfortunately, our research shows that in recent years, **the amount of land developed or zoned for residential uses in the County has significantly outpaced the region's population growth.**



**We believe these trends can be reversed if we plan wisely.** We urge you to consider the benefits of choosing a framework that will set up smart growth patterns that will help us address the water, energy, transportation, air quality, climate and other challenges that we will face in the next decades. Our research into smart growth options lead us to the following conclusions:

- Studies show that **compact development results in fewer miles driven, reducing fuel consumption and transportation emissions.**
- **Compact growth can save governments money,** reducing infrastructure costs by anywhere from 12-70%, compared to scattered growth.
- Smart growth **encourages healthy habits such as walking and biking,** an important factor considering San Diego's high obesity and chronic disease rates.
- **Denser development helps conserve energy and water** by reducing leakages and waste from transmission and transport. 9% of energy is lost in transmission so the farther a building is from an energy source, the more energy is wasted.

In summary, we commend the Supervisors for embarking on this journey to update the County's General Plan which will affect land use patterns in the region for decades to come. **The San Diego region has a remarkable quality of life and as our population grows we need to make choices that maintain or enhance it. We ask you to consider the common good of all the region's residents and businesses, and to help make San Diego County a model when it comes to integrated, intelligent planning for the future.**

We have attached our 2010 Quality of Life Dashboard, which will soon be updated with new figures. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Ann Tartre, Program Director  
Equinox Center

CC:  
Supervisors  
Clerk of the Board  
Department of Planning and Land Use  
Interested Parties