

EQUINOX CENTER

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT STRONG ECONOMY VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

July 7, 2011

Hon. Jerome Stocks, Chairman
Board of Directors
San Diego Association of Governments
401 "B" Street, Suite 700
San Diego, CA 92101

Re: Comment and Recommendations, 2050 RTP

Chairman Stocks, Members of the Board and Staff:

Equinox Center is an independent, non-partisan non-profit research and policy center based in Encinitas. We are dedicated to providing objective information to decision makers in San Diego County about how to balance regional growth with finite natural resources. We are writing today to provide data, research and comments to SANDAG that we hope will be valuable in your decision making process on the 2050 Regional Transportation Plan. All of our research and communications work is done with three core outcomes in mind: healthy environment, strong economy and vibrant communities for the San Diego region. We applaud SANDAG's adoption of policy objectives very similar to these for the 2050 RTP.

Equinox believes the 2050 RTP is an opportunity for SANDAG to distinguish San Diego, the nation's 8th largest city, by planning for a world class transportation system that serves as a model for cities of the future. Such a system would be cost effective, time effective, and increase the security of our region and the country by reducing our dependence on imported foreign oil. It would also have the added benefits of improving air quality over time, mitigating climate change, and encouraging a prosperous economy by allowing for the efficient movement of goods to, from and through our region. In addition, it would help to create jobs in the construction and transportation sectors—well paying jobs that cannot be outsourced or exported.

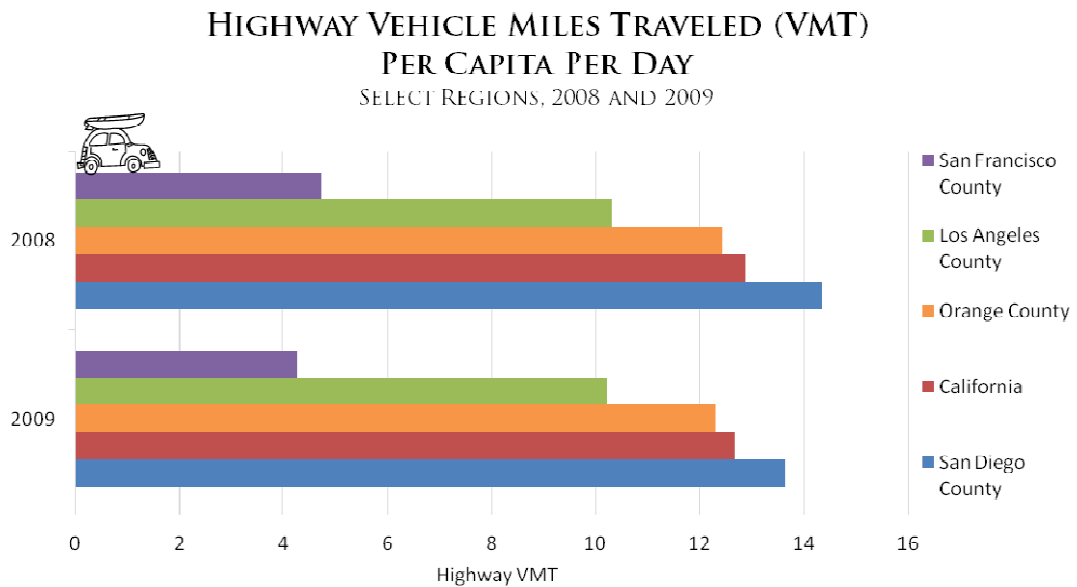
We commend SANDAG for some of the components in the 2050 RTP that help move us in these directions. For example, more dedicated funding to active transportation in a region where our climate is so hospitable to such a transportation choice is a marked improvement over previous plans.

Transportation issues have a significant impact on the quality of life of every resident and visitor to our region, and to our business community. From traffic congestion, to air quality, to fuel costs, the importance of getting this \$196 billion, 40- year plan right is critical to our future. Based on our research and study of best practices from across the country, we recommend the board consider modifying the draft RTP 2050 so that it:

- 1) Sets ambitious but attainable goals for reducing per capita and overall VMT in the region
- 2) Sets ambitious but attainable goals to reduce traffic delays, not just slow the growth of delays
- 3) Improves our region's air quality over time
- 4) Sets ambitious but attainable goals to reduce Single Occupancy Vehicle trips and to increase transit ridership region-wide.

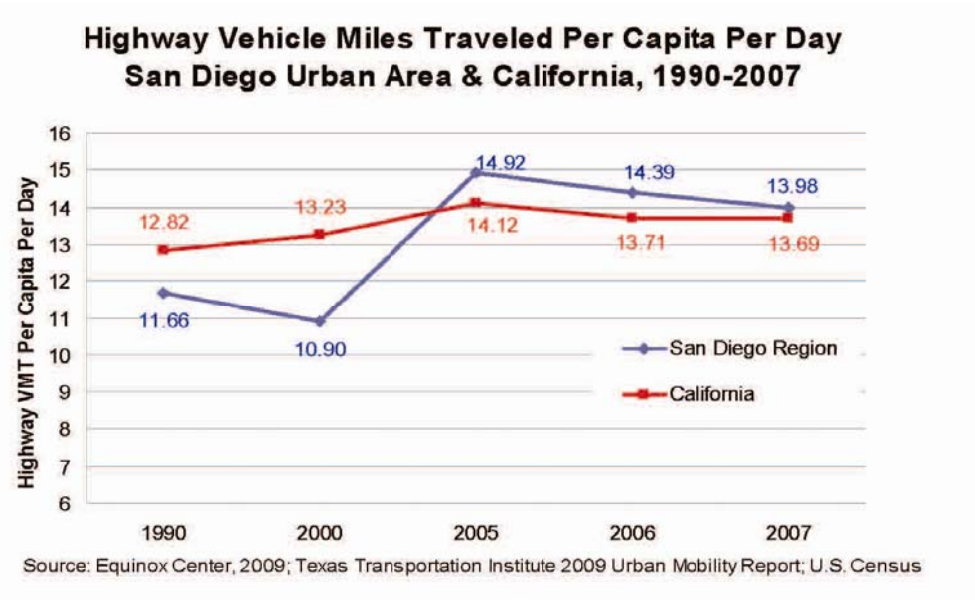
1) VMT

The San Diego regional VMT for highways alone is higher than Los Angeles, San Francisco, Orange County and the California average.



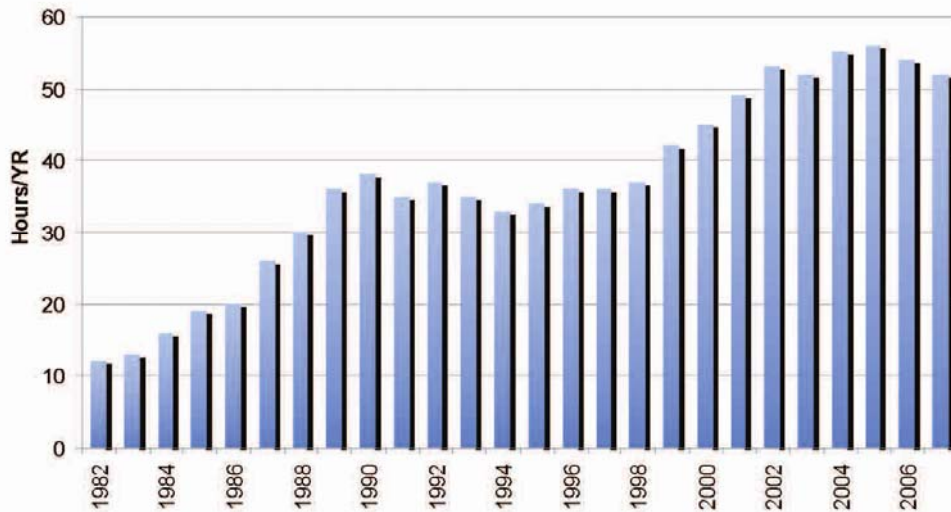
Source: Equinox Center, 2010; California Department of Transportation, 2008, 2009

Equinox data also demonstrates that as VMT has doubled in the past two decades, so has time spent in traffic delays, from 26 hours per person in 1987 to 52 hours per year per person in 2007.



Source: Equinox Center, 2009; Texas Transportation Institute 2009 Urban Mobility Report; U.S. Census

Hours Per Year Spent in Traffic Delays, Per Traveler San Diego Urban Area, 1982-2007



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

Despite VMT in the region having decreased slightly in the past few years due to the recession, we are concerned that as the economy recovers, a “business as usual” mentality and planning that anticipates only a very small per capita VMT reduction over the next 40 years will degrade our quality of life, and make the region less competitive with other areas who have invested more heavily in transportation alternatives. At a minimum, the San Diego region could strive to reduce highway VMT to the California average, and consider going beyond this.

2) Traffic Delays

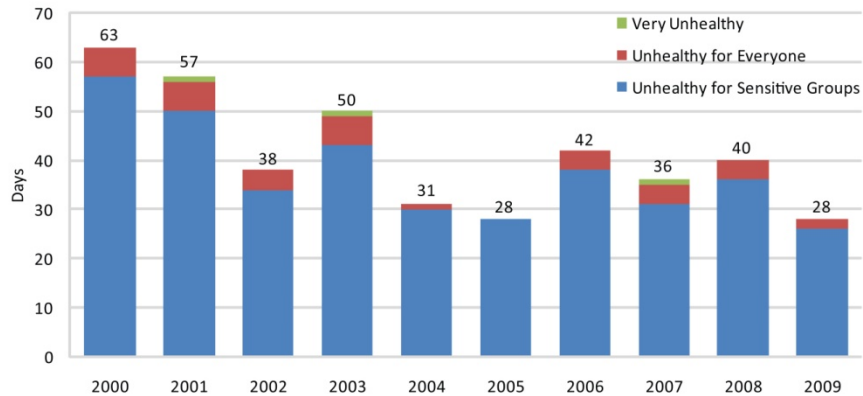
Equinox believes our region would benefit from identifying other regions against which San Diego competes for businesses, workers and movement of goods, and setting targets to reduce traffic delays that help us to out-compete these regions. Businesses in San Diego County have indicated that traffic congestion is one of the top three obstacles they face in the region.

3) Air Quality

Air quality has been improving in the San Diego region over the past decade, as evidenced partly by EPA data showing the number of days considered unhealthy for the region’s children and seniors (see chart on next page).

NUMBER OF UNHEALTHY AIR QUALITY DAYS FOR OLDER ADULTS & CHILDREN

SAN DIEGO, 2000-2009



Source: Equinox Center, 2010; U.S. EPA, 2010

While continued fuel efficiency of vehicles and alternative fuels will likely help to move this trend in the right direction, there is evidence that these positive developments could be offset by population growth and by not having a strong enough focus on reducing VMT. Indeed, SANDAG’s EIR for the RTP 2050 indicates that there are unavoidable and immitigable air quality impacts on the region because of the draft plan. Given that the region is still in non-attainment for several pollutants, and given the cost of asthma and other air quality related diseases to our region, we believe it is critical that the RTP include policy options that allow the region to continue improve our air quality, not worsen it. It is much less expensive to prevent or avoid air quality problems than it is to treat the consequences at a later date.

Equinox also requests that SANDAG document in the 2050 exactly how the GHG reductions anticipated will occur (i.e., link each strategy or policy with a specific amount of reduction) so that progress toward the goal can be better monitored over time.

4) Transit Ridership

Every year, Equinox publishes the San Diego Regional Quality of Life Dashboard, which uses credible data sources to measure the region’s progress on key indicators. We prefer to use data that allows us to compare how San Diego is doing against other regions, and so that we can develop benchmarks and targets based not only on how we are doing against ourselves, but also how we fare against other regions.

For transit ridership we have used the American Community Survey’s commute to work data, which shows that about 76% of commuters chose to drive to work alone and only 3% chose public transit. These numbers differ from the ones that appear in table 2.2 of the draft 2050 RTP. It would be helpful to understand why.

Also, we recommend that in addition to setting transit ridership goals by corridor, SANDAG consider setting a regional goal, and benchmarks for specific timeframes (10 years, for example), so that we know if progress is being made toward the longer term goal and can change strategies if necessary.

We understand that much of the funding SANDAG is counting on to support the implementation of the 2050 RTP is currently considered constrained and lacks flexibility. We have two recommendations regarding this challenge. One is that our region considers joining forces with Los Angeles and others who are advocating for more flexibility in federal and state funding so that Los Angeles can implement its visionary “30-10” project, building 30 years of public transit in

just 10 years. We should not wait until San Diego's traffic and transportation issues are as bad as Los Angeles' to see new solutions. The time to act is now.

In addition, where SANDAG does have discretionary flexible funding, Equinox recommends prioritizing strategic transit investments earlier in the life of the 2050 RTP. If this is done, it may reduce the need for other large, expensive capital investments which are not guaranteed to reduce traffic delays, and could possibly contribute to worsened air quality, and threaten our ability to meet the region's climate goals.

Our vision for San Diego is great. We believe San Diego is positioned to be a world leader in sustainability; to demonstrate that economic prosperity and environmental quality and vibrant communities are not at odds but rather are vitally linked. We need great plans for the region if our region is to achieve this world-class status. We stand ready to assist SANDAG's board and staff to help realize this vision for our region.

I have attached a copy Equinox's most recent Quality of Life Dashboard, and a list of our board of directors.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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