



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **What is Valley Vision Stanislaus?**

Valley Vision Stanislaus is a regional planning effort underway in Stanislaus County to improve the quality of life in our communities by expanding transportation and housing choices. It takes a big-picture look at how we can grow over time in a way that uses resources efficiently, protects existing communities, conserves farmland and open space, and supports our local economy.

The resulting Plan will represent the collective efforts of Stanislaus County and the Cities of Ceres, Hughson, Modesto, Newman, Oakdale, Patterson, Riverbank, Turlock and Waterford. They are working through the Stanislaus Council of Governments (StanCOG), the Metropolitan Planning Organization or MPO responsible for setting transportation policy and priorities for the region and documenting how transportation funds will be spent in the Regional Transportation Plan or RTP. The Plan makes it possible for our region to get Federal and State funding for local transportation projects and programs.

### **Why are we doing this?**

There are laws that require these regional plans, but this is also an opportunity to think about how we want our region to grow and evolve over the next several years in a way that meets our needs and matches our values. Planning in advance of growth can result in better neighborhoods, more housing and transportation choices, and a higher quality of life for residents.

The Federal government requires that Metropolitan Planning Organizations such as StanCOG, develop Regional Transportation Plans which are updated every four years to reflect current population, employment and travel projections as well as changes in local plans and regional transportation priorities.

The Plan allocates anticipated federal, state and local revenue for transportation projects and programs on the local level. No Plan, No money.

### **What is different about this Regional Transportation Plan?**

A new state law, Senate Bill 375, requires planners to also consider how land use and transportation planning can be coordinated to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. That information must be included in the form of a Sustainable Communities Strategy or SCS, as part of all future Regional Transportation Plans. This means planning for housing, jobs and services to be located in a way that helps reduce the amount we travel day-to-day in our cars and trucks.

To comply with the law, we must develop a RTP/SCS that accomplishes three things:

1. Identifies areas to house the region's population growth for at least the next twenty-five years. This includes households at all income levels.
2. Develops a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that meets the needs of the region; and
3. Reduces greenhouse-gas emissions from automobiles and light trucks.

### **How does this relate to the Blueprint Planning Process?**

The Blueprint was a regional planning effort to identify priorities and preferences for long-term growth in the San Joaquin Valley. Our Plan will be distinct from that effort, but may build upon those earlier Blueprint efforts.

### **Who will prepare the Valley Vision plans and when?**

StanCOG will be leading this effort. They will work closely with the County, local cities, transportation agencies and community groups to get input for the development of the Plan. Everyone interested is invited to participate in this process to help shape our community's future. The RTP/SCS is expected to be adopted in October 2013.

### **How can we talk about growth in this economy? What about jobs?**

Our local economy is likely to improve as the national economy recovers. Planning for efficient land use and transportation systems makes the our region more attractive to potential employers and residents, which will support long-term economic growth and prosperity. Housing, transportation, and supporting infrastructure need to be developed for job growth so that businesses can operate successfully and workers can live nearby and get to work easily.

### **What does it mean to coordinate land use and transportation plans?**

Public agencies regularly create and update land use and transportation plans, but these are not always done together or even in coordination. The plans being created under Valley Vision Stanislaus will consider both land use and transportation together, recognizing that land use affects how and where people live, work and travel. If we know what land use changes are likely to occur, we can better plan our transportation systems to meet those needs. Likewise, land uses may change based on how the

transportation system is working. For example, road congestion may discourage employers from locating on those corridors.

### **What is the connection between planning and greenhouse gases?**

Transportation is the largest single source of greenhouse gasses in California. Changing transportation patterns by reducing how much people need to drive can reduce emissions and improve local air quality.

The Valley Vision Stanislaus Plan can help reduce emissions by:

- Encouraging land uses (jobs, stores, schools, and homes) to be located closer together in some communities so people can drive less to meet their day-to-day needs.
- Clustering homes, jobs and other activities near transit, so people have more transportation choices.
- Planning land uses and transportation together, so we can manage traffic congestion and reduce emissions from inefficiencies.

### **Why should we care about greenhouse gas emissions?**

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions into the environment limits the effects of global warming which in turn supports public health and the environment. Plans and policies that lower greenhouse gas emissions from transportation can also lower energy consumption, shorten commute times, save money and reduce the need for driving.

### **How can a regional transportation and land-use plan reduce greenhouse gas emissions?**

Valley Vision Stanislaus can help meet reduction goals by working with local cities, the County and public agencies to plan for more people living near their jobs and other services. Also, by creating better access to transit and making biking and walking easier and safer, residents won't have to drive as much. Greater efficiency in how people travel can mean less driving which translates into fewer greenhouse gas emissions and other health based pollutant emissions from tailpipes into the air.

### **Land use changes very slowly and many places will not change much. How much difference can Valley Vision Stanislaus really make?**

It will likely be several years before changes in the land use pattern make a measurable difference in total emissions from personal cars and trucks. Improvements in technology – including more fuel-efficient cars and trucks –and policy changes will also be needed to reach reduction targets. However, changing land uses is also critical to improving air quality and public health through emission reductions.

Valley Vision Stanislaus is just one effort to help reduce emissions in California. There is a consensus that there isn't just one thing that we should do; we will need to move on

all fronts. Changes in technology will have to be accompanied by changes in how people travel.

**What are the greenhouse-gas reduction targets?**

In September 2010, the California Air Resources Board adopted emissions reduction targets for the entire San Joaquin Valley for the years 2020 and 2035. The targets are a 5 percent reduction in GHG emissions by 2020 and a 10 percent reduction by 2035, compared to 2005 emissions.

**Do these plans take power away from our cities or the County?**

No. SB 375 is explicit that StanCOG does not have the authority to take or over-ride “the land use authority of cities and counties in the region.” There is no requirement that cities and counties change any of their plans.

Your local government has the authority to create plans for how your community will grow or not, what businesses to encourage, and where new housing might go. Each city puts in place its own zoning and policies about development (but whether that development actually occurs depends on the economy and private market). StanCOG will work closely with city and county staff to make sure the plans are consistent with and support local land use plans and community priorities.

**Why would local governments want to conform to Valley Vision Stanislaus Plan?**

Some issues like traffic congestion or air quality often require the cooperation of several communities to address. Regional planning efforts can bring a variety of benefits to our neighborhoods. We can improve the efficiency and quality of life of our communities by working together to provide cleaner air, improved public health, safer streets, and homes closer to transit, jobs, and services.

There will also be CEQA incentives for development at the local level which conform to the Valley Vision Stanislaus Plan.

**Is Valley Vision Stanislaus part of Agenda 21?**

No. Agenda 21 is a United Nations report on policies and settlement patterns, poverty and the environment that was developed in 1992. Neither StanCOG, the County nor any of our cities have any affiliation with or authority regarding any policy goals and recommendations of the United Nations.

**How can I share my ideas and opinions?**

Public participation is essential to the success of Valley Vision Stanislaus, and we hope you will get involved. We are seeking the input of many residents and stakeholders to create a plan that meets our goals and reflects our community values. There are a number of ways you can get involved.

Project Website: [www.ValleyVisionStanislaus.com](http://www.ValleyVisionStanislaus.com)

Here you will find all the latest information about the development of the Valley Vision Stanislaus Plan including:

- Project information and overview and purpose of the Plan;
- Listing of all meetings and workshops;
- Presentations and materials produced for public meetings and workshops;
- Fact sheets regarding the planning process;
- Drafts and materials produced for the Plan, as well as CEQA documents
- Library with all relevant documents

#### Meetings and Workshops

Over the course of the project, we will be hosting a series of public workshops to engage the community regarding the development of the Valley Vision Stanislaus Plan.

Meetings will be held in various locations throughout the County to ensure equal access to all residents. Your attendance is encouraged but if you cannot make a meeting, don't worry. We'll be posting all meeting agendas, materials, and minutes on our website so you can keep track of the process.

#### In the Community and In the News

Look for us at local community meetings and events. We will also be working closely with local news media in the area to get the word out about the planning process and ways people can participate.

#### **Who should I contact with questions?**

You can submit questions or comments via our website at [www.ValleyVisionStanislaus.com](http://www.ValleyVisionStanislaus.com).

Or if you prefer, you can contact our project manager directly:

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