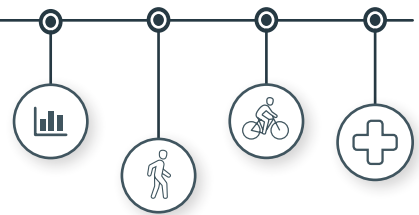




CASE STUDY: SACRAMENTO, CA

Promoting health and economic prosperity through data-driven decision-making



THE BOTTOM LINE

The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), seeking the economic benefits of healthier residents and using a lens of improved economic performance, adopted several health- and social equity-related performance measures into its project selection process. This resulted in funding for more projects from SACOG’s Regional/Local Program to make it safer and more convenient to walk or bicycle.

THE CONTEXT

Nestled in the Sacramento Valley 85 miles northeast of San Francisco, California's capital city region stretches from some of the nation's most productive farmland in the Central Valley to the majestic peaks of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Approximately 2.4 million people call the six-county Sacramento metro area home, with about half a million in the city itself. Residents enjoy a high quality of life at a low cost, compared to the Bay Area, assets that have helped boost the region's population by nearly 20 percent in the last decade.

Concerned about the negative aspects of poorly planned growth, SACOG worked with residents and stakeholders over the course of two years to develop the long-range plan known as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS) 2035, adopted in 2012. This plan included SACOG's newly adopted performance measures (related to health, the economy, and more), which were developed concurrently with the MTP/SCS and are explored in greater detail in this case study.

THE PROBLEM

With growing demand for limited transportation funding, SACOG's Board of Directors wanted a more quantitative approach to project selection. They wanted to introduce objective project selection criteria that improved transparency and responded to the perception that the process could be influenced by local political pressure.



Bicyclists use an overpass across I-80 in Sacramento, a vital link that connects hundreds of miles of bike trails throughout the county and region.

WHAT THEY DID

To create the system for evaluating transportation projects for funding, SACOG first established seven policy priorities (called performance outcomes) for their transportation projects:

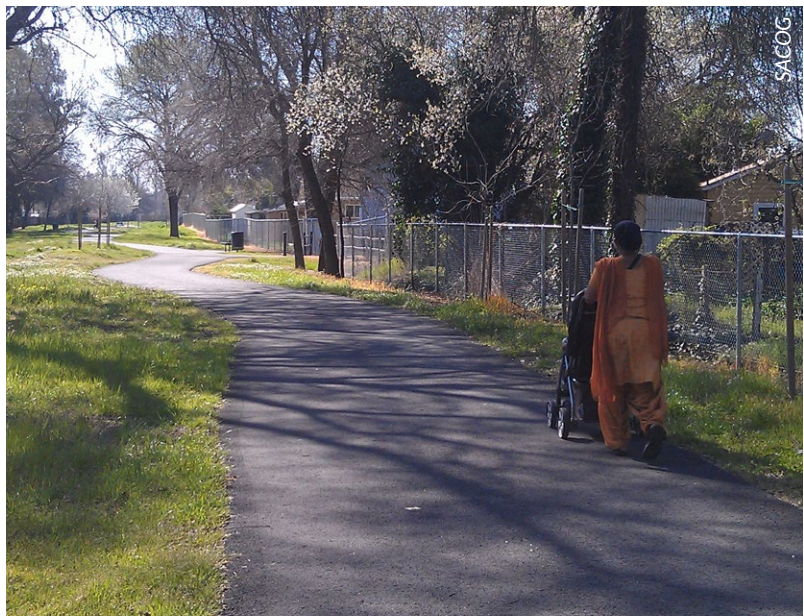
1. Regional **reduction in vehicle miles traveled (VMT)**
2. Regional **reduction in congested VMT**
3. Increase in **transit ridership and/or active transportation**
4. Long-term **economic benefit**
5. Improvement in **goods movement**
6. Improvement in **safety and security**
7. State of **good repair** benefits

SACOG then required local jurisdictions to demonstrate how a proposed transportation project would help the region make progress towards those policy priorities. Specifically,

if applying for funding from SACOG's largest funding program, the Regional/Local Program, the applicant had to show how the project would advance at least three of these seven performance outcomes (the list at left).

SACOG then created 20 prime performance measures to specifically evaluate how a proposed project would help the region make progress towards the seven performance outcomes, selecting the transportation projects that would best achieve progress.

Many of these 20 performance measures have an economic dimension. Many have also been used to demonstrate a proposed project's impact on public health and health disparities. For example, one of SACOG's seven policy priorities is to increase transit ridership and/or rates of active transportation. To this end, SACOG established a few measures to directly assess a proposed project's impact on bicycling/walking mode share. One measure



People performing a walking audit, left, and a woman walking along the Live Oak Community Trail, which was selected for funding in 2016.

was used to evaluate how a proposed project would change bike and walk mode share in Environmental Justice areas, or how it would influence the number of transit, walk, or bike trips per capita.

Environmental Justice areas are those with disproportionately higher rates of low-income residents, people of color, households spending more than 50 percent of income on housing costs and single-parent households, among several other key characteristics.¹

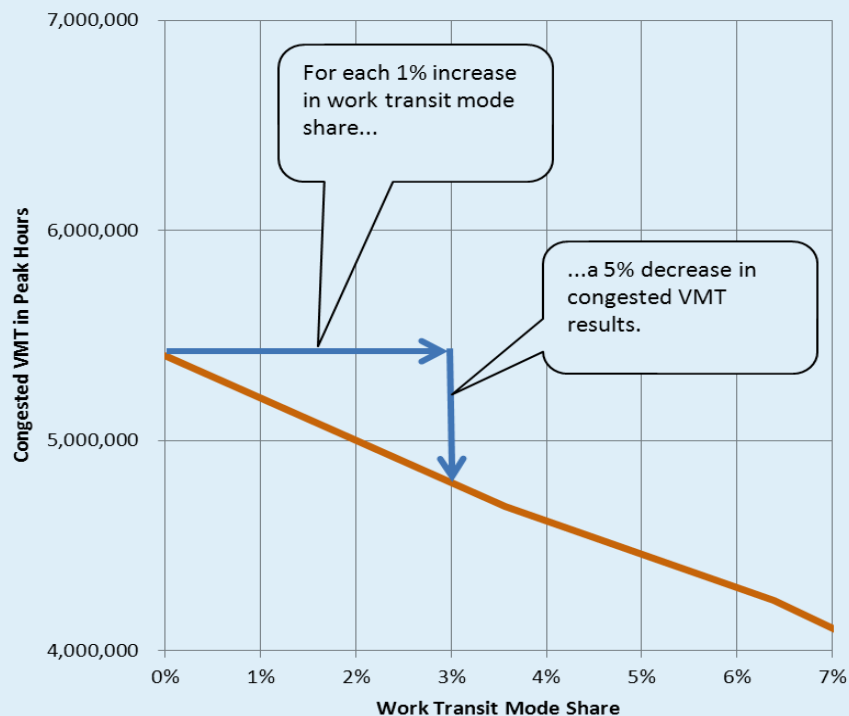
Other opportunity indicators included access to jobs and higher education for low-income residents and people of color and the availability of affordable housing.

HOW THEY DID IT

To develop these 20 performance measures, SACOG led an 18-month collaborative process with its board members, planning staff, partners from various organizations, and the public. Consulting with a wide range of people and groups required SACOG to learn how to effectively communicate the complicated concept of transportation performance measures in terms more easily understood by the public and decision-makers. Creating simple, clear graphics helped SACOG effectively illustrate how performance measures could link to policy priorities.

For example, the graphic below shows how an increase in transit mode share may lead to a reduction in congested VMT during peak travel hours.

Sacramento Region: Transit Mode Share & Congested Travel



Source: SACOG

KEY PARTNERS

SACOG led a collaborative process to develop its performance measures, involving SACOG’s Board of Directors, which includes county supervisors and city council members from throughout the six-county region; planning staff; representatives from active transportation groups and local agencies that provide social services or transportation for senior citizens, people with disabilities, and low-income residents.

SACOG’s Board of Directors adopted the performance outcomes (the 7 policy goals) and 20 performance measures for use in its 2012 MTP/SCS.

“Sacramento County understands the importance of data and how it advises decision-making. The County works closely with SACOG as part of this data-driven process because we firmly believe it will help inform decisions that will strengthen our local economy, improve public health outcomes, promote social equity and protect the environment in Sacramento County and the region overall. This valued relationship with SACOG results in a process that reflects increased transparency and a greater understanding of what makes for successful projects that will help us meet our ambitious goals and better serve our community.”

– Judy Robinson, Sustainability Manager, Sacramento County



○ BARRIERS ALONG THE WAY

A common challenge that regional agencies such as SACOG grapple with is that MPO data and analysis tools are typically focused on the transportation system level rather than the *project* level. For example, bicycle and pedestrian counts and information on site-specific conditions are often limited and make it challenging to accurately forecast how much an individual project creates a performance benefit at the regional scale. Despite this challenge, SACOG continues to make progress at collecting data and tools to discern project-specific impacts.

During the most recent funding round, some local jurisdictions worried that project-level data limitations would make it difficult to prepare competitive applications. SACOG addressed these concerns by making regional data and maps easy to access and use, while also matching local agencies to external data sources.

SACOG also offered up-front technical assistance, including pre-submittal review letters. These letters notified applicants of project eligibility and offered suggestions for appropriate performance outcomes to address, along with strategies for using the data sources to make the performance case for a project.

Once the applications were submitted, a broader group of SACOG staff and external partners reviewed and scored the projects. The top performing projects were selected and then advanced to SACOG's policy board for consideration and approval.

“Sacramento Regional Transit has been pleased to work with SACOG to identify and adopt smart performance measures that can help improve connections to the region’s public transportation system. Almost every transit trip begins with a walk or a bike ride and we’re glad to see this new data-driven approach result in projects that make walking and biking a safer and more convenient option for a greater number of people. That helps us increase ridership and deliver an even better product to the public.”

–Henry Li, CEO/GM, Sacramento Regional Transit

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

The process had an immediate impact on investment decisions. SACOG estimated that prior to using the performance-based framework, only 25-30 percent of funded projects included elements to help facilitate walking or biking. In the latest round of Regional/Local Program funding, this number increased to 45-50 percent of projects.

The process was not without a few skeptics. To overcome uncertainty, a broad range of interest groups and local elected officials actively participated in the development of the performance measures, which had a positive impact on the transition to performance-based project selection. When key decision-makers saw how the use of the performance measures increased transparency in the selection of projects for funding, they supported continued efforts to further strengthen performance measurement and data-driven decision-making.

In addition to elevating projects more suited to the region's needs in SACOG's Regional/Local Program, staff believe they are positioned well to be competitive for two new performance-based programs from the state of California. These state programs encourage (1) active transportation projects and (2) transportation and affordable housing projects that demonstrate greenhouse gas emission reductions. Early results from the new active transportation program show that SACOG was more competitive for funding by using the performance-based methodology. These two state programs are also helping MPOs across the state of California see greater alignment in the use and adoption of performance measures. This will make benchmarking easier across MPOs as comparisons are made in how transportation projects meet performance measures throughout the state. The two programs may also lead to efficiencies in measuring and monitoring the impacts of transportation projects.



A group of children use crosswalks and sidewalks that were installed near a new community center and playground in Citrus Heights.

LESSONS LEARNED

SACOG offers the following advice to other MPOs:

1 Select a limited number of measures.

Measure what matters most to avoid wasting financial resources or losing focus on what is most important to an MPO policy board. In order to develop a limited set of performance measures, make sure a clear strategic direction exists before starting.

2 Lead with messages that resonate with decision-makers.

SACOG successfully adopted and used performance measures that led to increases in bicycle and pedestrian projects by focusing on the economic benefits of transportation projects that would score well, not just health and social equity benefits.

3 Do not rely on numbers alone.

SACOG strives to be as data-driven as possible, but recognizes that some policy outcomes cannot easily be measured by data using purely quantitative methods. Some policy goals or objectives are difficult to analyze quantitatively because of limited data or the lack of consensus on evaluation methodologies. Examples include policies related to community placemaking and environmental justice.

4 Integrate measures with state and federal policy frameworks.

SACOG's set of key policy measures are largely reflective of policy outcomes first emphasized in the 2012 federal transportation law, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), and the state's transportation policy plan. But SACOG also encourages other MPOs to go beyond the limited set of performance measures stipulated in current federal legislation and adopt a broader framework of metrics including public health, social equity, environmental protection and other important issues. Transportation for America's Planning for a Healthier Future report suggests health, equity and environmental performance measures that MPOs may use and provides an overview of how others have used them.²

CONCLUSION

With the support of its board and other local stakeholders, SACOG successfully adopted several health- and social equity-related performance measures for its project selection process. This resulted in more than 45 percent of selected projects including components that will improve public health by making it safer and more convenient to walk or bicycle in the

region. By involving board members and other local elected officials in the development of the performance measures, SACOG is actively supporting continued efforts to further strengthen performance measurement and data-driven decision-making throughout the Sacramento region.

A cyclist navigates a portion of the Dry Creek trail in Roseville, CA



“In a region that suffers from significant air quality problems, it’s critical that we find ways to make walking, biking and using transit safer and more convenient. Doing so will help improve not only our air quality, but also bring numerous other public health and economic benefits. This new data-driven process will help us make progress on accomplishing all of these goals, and SACOG did an outstanding job of reaching out to stakeholders during their development.”

–Teri Duarte, MPH, Land Use and Health Planner, Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District and former Executive Director, WALKSacramento

NOTES

1. See definition of Environmental Justice areas in Appendix C-5 of SACOG's 2016 MTP/SCS, "Environmental Justice and Title VI Analysis Methodology" at http://www.sacog.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/appendix_c-5_environmental_justice_and_title_vi_analysis_methodology.pdf.
2. T4America's Planning for a Healthier Future report is available at <http://t4america.org/2016/06/22/introducing-planning-for-a-healthier-future/>

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WHO WE ARE



Transportation for America is an alliance of elected, business and civic leaders from communities across the country, united to ensure that states and the federal government step up to invest in smart, homegrown, locally-driven transportation solutions. These are the investments that hold the key to our future economic prosperity. www.t4america.org