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# California Government Screening Maps: An Investigation into Geographic Prioritization in Support of State Climate and Planning Goals



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## Issue

The state of California has put forth multiple climate and planning objectives that underscore the importance of coordinating housing and transportation planning to improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and build sustainable communities. Several state agencies are individually responsible for developing policies, administering programs, and distributing funding to guide housing and/or transportation planning decisions. To carry out policymaking, programming, and funding responsibilities in ways that advance planning, climate, and equity objectives, these agencies require the use of tools to identify and screen locations that present the most opportunity, vulnerability, or need for targeted investment. As such, state maps have become key decision-making tools.

This research examines the extent to which California's main government screening maps — CalEnviroScreen 3.0, Healthy Places Index, Opportunity Area, and Low-Income Priority Populations Maps — are used by different state agencies to direct housing and transportation resources to meet state objectives. To the extent that these maps represent climate and planning goals, the researcher examines housing production relative to the geographic prioritizations presented in each map as well as transportation characteristics of transit proximity and level of vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

## Research Findings

- There is no correlation between geographic prioritization and housing production. That is, housing has not been produced in areas that have been geographically prioritized in any of the maps.
- There is a positive relationship between housing production, transit proximity and low VMT areas, which can support coordinated land use and transportation policies that help meet state climate and planning objectives. However, none of the maps include indicators related to these transportation characteristics that could intentionally direct resources toward those areas.
- There is conflict between the maps' conceptual bases which may lead to investments by different state agencies that are inconsistent with each other and with the state's climate and planning objectives. The CalEnviroScreen 3.0, Healthy Places Index, and Low-Income Priority Populations Maps prioritize areas experiencing environmental burden, poor health outcomes, and those that are low income. These areas often contradict those identified by the Opportunity Area Map, which prioritizes areas with high opportunity for improved life outcomes but tend to be in suburbs where alternatives to driving are fewer. Housing and transportation investments made using these maps

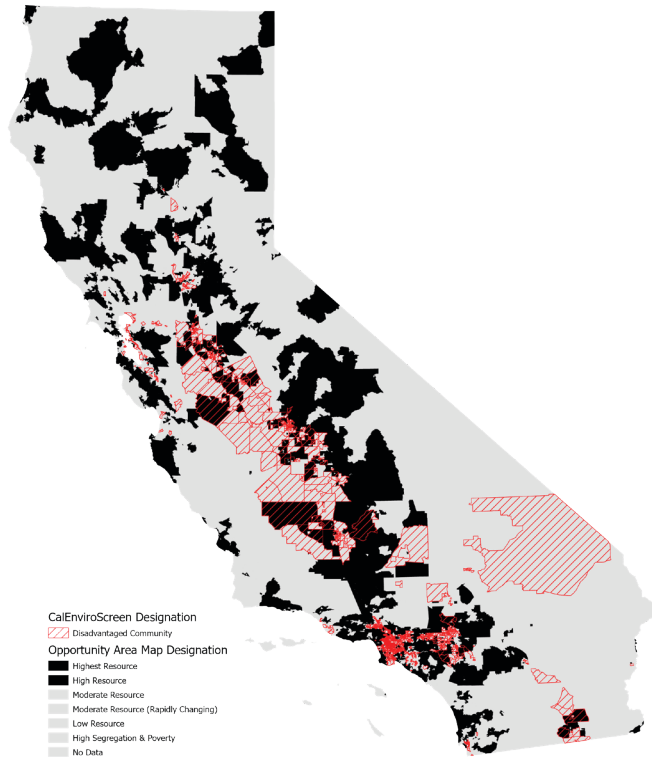


Figure 1. Comparison of census tracts prioritized in the CalEnviroScreen 3.0 and Opportunity Area Maps. While both maps are used to direct state housing resources, they only agree on priority for 135 census tracts.

may be at odds with each other, and potentially move California in the opposite direction of its climate and planning goals.

## Study Approach

To analyze the role of the maps in supporting climate and planning goals through coordinated housing and transportation, the researcher carried out qualitative, quantitative, and spatial analyses. The researcher identified nine maps through a web-based search for state maps used to administer housing and transportation funding programs. Four maps – CalEnviroScreen 3.0, Healthy Places Index, Opportunity Area, and Low-Income Priority Populations Maps – were selected for the study because they are used to direct state housing and transportation resources, and are based on indices which designate rankings or prioritizations by census tract. Change in

housing production was observed using census tract-level housing unit data from the American Community Survey for the periods 2010-14 and 2015-19. Transit proximity was defined as being within a half-mile of existing and planned major transit stops or existing and planned high-quality transit corridors or stops. Low VMT was defined as where home-based VMT per person is less than regional average VMT per person. The researcher reviewed map technical documents to compare conceptual basis, purpose, priority, uses, and indicators of each map; conducted statistical analysis to determine relationships between housing production and geographic prioritization in each map; and conducted spatial analysis to compare the overlap of geographic prioritization, housing, transit proximity, and VMT.

## Conclusions

Coordinating housing and transportation planning to improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and build sustainable communities is critical to advancing the state's climate and planning objectives. California's current mapping tools represent differing conceptual goals and lack key indicators needed to ensure that the way communities are planned, funded, and built align with desired outcomes. Continued coordination between the California Air Resources Board, California Transportation Commission, and Department of Housing and Community Development is needed to advance the state's efforts in these areas. Future meetings of these agencies may consider discussing specific topics, such as:

- Consolidation of housing programs and/or application of a single mapping tool that advances consistent and complementary principles for geographic prioritization.
- The state's priorities for housing location: high opportunity areas vs. disadvantaged communities.
- State decisions around transportation investments and whether these support the long-term climate and planning goals.



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