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Opportunities and Barriers for Implementing Sustainable Communities in California: Findings from the Sustainable Communities Task Force

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Opportunities and Barriers for Implementing Sustainable Communities in California

Findings from the Sustainable Communities Task Force

November 2026

Prepared for: California State Transportation Agency

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Summary

This memorandum summarizes the findings from convenings, semi-structured interviews, and surveys conducted with the 37 members of CalSTA's Sustainable Communities Task Force. The Task Force comprised of representatives from state and regional agencies, local governments, industry groups, housing and environmental advocates, and community-based organizations. This memorandum documents the diverse range of viewpoints about implementing California's climate, housing, equity, and transportation objectives.

The Task Force members primarily discussed opportunities for governance and institutional reforms that would accelerate implementation of a sustainable transportation and land use agenda. They emphasized the need for clarity, objectivity, urgency, transparency, and accountability in the many planning and policy processes in which transportation and land use decisions are made. While progress may be incremental and slow in some performance areas and communities around the state, Task Force members expressed optimism about the potential for progress by pairing clear, outcome-oriented goals with consistent, durable resources that match the scale of desired outcomes. These resources included funding, as well as the expertise of existing institutions across California's state and regional governments.

Section 1 discusses how Task Force members defined the concept of a "sustainable community" and how it could be measured across California's diverse regions. Existing policy frameworks rely on vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as primary performance measures. Task Force members affirmed that reducing driving and GHG emissions remains critical to meeting state climate goals, and emphasized the need for a more expansive, holistic definition.

Section 2 details the Task Force members' perspectives on opportunities, priorities, institutional alignment, and funding structures necessary to accelerate sustainable land use and transportation agendas. Rather than calling for novel technological solutions, members highlighted fundamental governance reforms in several key arenas:

- Goal and Funding Alignment: Members highlighted needs and opportunities for state leadership in aligning agency mandates, establishing objective performance measures, clarifying institutional roles, and strengthening the coordinating role of state agencies. Members expressed a need for durable funding at the scale necessary for the desired change in performance outcomes.
- Transit Access: Members universally recognized convenient, high-quality transit access as a crucial component of creating a multimodal transportation system. Achieving these systems would require a vision, partnership, and fiscal commitment from the state, as well as institutional reforms.
- Active Transportation at Network Scale: Members saw large potential to make transformative investments in active transportation infrastructure across diverse local contexts throughout the state, and nearly all supported increased and sustained funding for community-scale walking and biking networks.
- The Role of MPOs: Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) occupy a unique position between state policy and local implementation, and members generally expressed support for clarifying and strengthening their role and the authority of their Sustainable Communities Strategies in transportation planning and project delivery.

- Leveraging Existing State Resources: Members debated expanding Caltrans' role to act as a statewide entity – capable of delivering complex transit, rail, active transportation, and wildlife crossing projects – and leveraging its project delivery and engineering capacity to accelerate implementation of multimodal projects in smaller local agencies.
- Land Use and Infill Housing: Members highlighted the clarity and enforceability of state housing targets compared to transportation goals. They discussed identifying priority growth areas and funding foundational infrastructure (e.g., utilities, water, power) to catalyze infill housing development near transit.

Section 3 presents the range of viewpoints about various pricing mechanisms: as a tool for managing travel demand, generating sustainable transportation revenue, and attaining regional GHG reduction targets. Task Force members overwhelmingly viewed pricing as a necessary component of sustainable transportation policy, while acknowledging substantial political and implementation hurdles. Members emphasized that implementing pricing schemes would require decisive and courageous leadership from the state legislature and agencies to establish statutory frameworks.

Section 4 summarizes member perspectives regarding future investments in the state highway system within a fiscally constrained environment. Members generally agreed that California's primary policy focus should shift from general capacity expansion to solutions-oriented investments for system maintenance, operational management, and safety. Nearly all members recommended stronger priority of maintenance and repair ("fix-it-first") across local roads, state highways, and transit systems. Members emphasized the need to formally integrate annual climate adaptation, extreme weather resilience, and disaster repair costs into transportation finance planning.

Section 5 addresses a theme identified across all Task Force engagements: the need for standardized, transparent, and publicly accessible data that track how transportation funds are spent. Members emphasized significant data gaps about how state, regional, and local agencies are investing in the transportation system and what outcomes those investments have achieved.

Purpose and Scope of the Memorandum

CalSTA announced the launch of the Sustainable Communities Task Force (SCTF) in August 2025, as an initiative comprised of a "cross-sector coalition tasked with catalyzing the implementation of California's climate, housing, equity and transportation goals." As a component of this initiative, CalSTA requested assistance from a research team at the Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Davis (ITS-Davis) to support the establishment, facilitation, documentation, presentation, and analysis of topics identified and discussed by members of the Task Force.

As CalSTA announced in a press release launching the Task Force, membership included "leaders from state and regional agencies, local governments, transit providers, community-based organizations, housing and environmental advocates, academic institutions and rural and underserved community voices." CalSTA selected and recruited the 37 Task Force members, who were publicly announced in a press release when the effort was launched.

ITS-Davis was also tasked with producing a memo to synthesize the findings and recommendations of the Sustainable Communities Task Force. The purpose of this memo is to summarize and synthesize the range of viewpoints presented by the members of the Task Force, including the topics and issues that are considered important components of "sustainable communities," viewpoints on and experiences with the institutional and political barriers to implementing sustainable communities, the institutional and political opportunities for implementing sustainable communities, and the members' range of policy positions and preferences. Its scope is a description, summary, and synthesis of the findings and policy positions as voiced by the members of the Task Force throughout the year-long, mixed-method engagement process.

Where this memo contains normative statements about what "should" or "needs" to be done by planners, decisionmakers, and specific governmental actors or institutions, those statements are describing the viewpoints communicated by the members of the Task Force. The purpose of this memo is to communicate those viewpoints and policy preferences; it is not to make policy recommendations. This memo contains the thoughts and viewpoints of the members, as interpreted and articulated by the ITS-Davis research team, but they are not necessarily the policy preferences of the authors nor of ITS-Davis.

Methodology

CalSTA and the ITS-Davis team engaged the Sustainable Communities Task Force members through convenings, individual interviews, and asynchronous surveys over the fall of 2025 and the first three quarters of 2026. CalSTA hosted five hybrid-format convenings that took place in the Sacramento region, which members attended in-person or remotely. The first convening was in September 2025 and was an introductory session. The topics of the following three convenings focused on (1) agenda-setting for the Task Force itself, (2) active transportation, and (3) housing and infill development. The fifth convening took place in August 2026, in which the ITS-Davis team presented the primary findings from the Task Force process, facilitated a discussion among the Task Force members, and CalSTA concluded the Task Force.

In the spring of 2026 the ITS-Davis team pivoted the engagement method from large-group convenings to individual interviews. The ITS-Davis team conducted individual, semi-structured

interviews with nearly every member and ex-officio of the Task Force (one member was unavailable) to discuss topics in more depth, with more candor, and confidentially. Members were sent the notes and transcripts from their interview and offered the opportunity to provide feedback, additions, and revisions on their viewpoints. Except where otherwise noted, all material in this memorandum comes from these interviews.

We also provided asynchronous opportunities for engagement. We sought perspectives and policy preferences through a series of three online surveys administered throughout the Task Force process. We administered the first survey in September 2025, before the first convening of the Task Force, to ask members about their general perspectives toward transportation and land use problems and policies. We administered the second survey in October 2025 to ask members about setting an agenda for the Task Force, in response to input received at the first convening. We administered the third survey in August 2026; this final survey queried members for their agreement with primary findings that emerged from the interviews and that we had presented to them at the final convening. The charts in this memorandum are drawn from those survey data.

The members of the Task Force did not take any sort of vote on ideas nor policy recommendations, so none of the viewpoints communicated here represent a consensus. Similarly, no statements represent a statement of the Task Force as a whole; rather, they illustrate the range of viewpoints and explore nuance. The survey results are the best indicator of the number of Task Force members who agreed or disagreed with a given policy perspective.

More details about the Task Force and methodology are in the appendices of this memo. Appendix A lists the Task Force members and ex-officio members. Appendix B contains the questions asked in the semi-structured interviews with each member. Appendices C, D, and E provide the text of the three surveys administered to the members.

Organization of this Memo

This memo is organized by broad policy topic. Within each topic we describe specific themes that Task Force members emphasized and broad themes that emerged from “saturation” – when many individuals referenced a similar topic. It aims to describe the range and nuance of viewpoints about each theme, including both majority and minority viewpoints, and how members’ viewpoints aligned and diverged.

1 Defining Sustainable Communities

In existing laws and regulations – namely SB 375 and SB 743 – the primary metrics for "sustainable communities" are vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gases (GHG) from transportation. At the initial meeting of the Task Force, and throughout the interviews and surveys, members discussed and debated the definition of sustainable communities. The purpose and scope of this Task Force was not to adjudicate if VMT should be used as a performance measure in policy. Rather, it was to discuss pathways to implement the state's sustainable communities goals, which include per capita reductions in VMT assumed in the California Air Resources Board's Scoping Plan. Members nonetheless expressed a wide range of viewpoints on VMT reduction as a basis for policy.

When surveyed at the beginning of the Task Force, nearly all members (96%) agreed that GHG emissions are an important problem that transportation policy should address. Most (83%) agreed that reducing driving is a key part of meeting state climate goals. Members had expressed a wide range of viewpoints about policies that include VMT as a performance measure, ranging from "it's critical" to "it's a failure." Overall, VMT was broadly understood among members to be "a reasonable proxy" for transportation emissions and other outcomes such as air quality, safety, land use patterns, auto dependence, and quality of life.

Members also emphasized that the characteristics and goals of "sustainable communities" should incorporate a broader range of performance measures than reductions in VMT and transportation-based GHGs. Members called for a "more holistic approach to how we measure progress" toward implementation of sustainable communities, not necessarily because reducing VMT is too challenging but because there are positive outcomes for sustainable communities that are independent of changes to VMT, at least in the short term. Members gave examples of these outcomes, such as building out a community-wide network of walking and bicycling facilities, and free transit programs for youth: "When we talk about protected bicycle facilities, safer intersections, and complete streets, the strongest argument is often not greenhouse gas or VMT reduction – it's preventing injuries and saving lives," one member said. Put another way by another member, the benefits of a protected bicycle network that allows a child to safely bike to school are important for realizing sustainable communities, even if that child would've ridden their bike anyway. They reduced no VMT, but they made it to school that day and built a stock of multimodal travel experience. One member summarized it this way: the state needs "a set of shared metrics for what a sustainable community actually is, including VMT reduction but going beyond that." Members suggested that a more expansive tack to defining "sustainable communities" would better include all types of regions and communities in the state – from small rural towns to vast suburban areas to the state's largest cities. In some of those areas, meaningful VMT reduction would be slow or small, members thought: Communities have been built around private automobiles over the course of the past century, and changes to that built form would be at the margins and slow. That didn't mean, however, that members thought that smaller or rural communities should be left out of state policies aimed at sustainable communities and mitigating climate change. Nor did it mean, members thought, that small or rural communities could not make transformative progress toward sustainable communities by other measures. Members frequently mentioned, in a survey and in interviews, measures such as multimodal accessibility, safety, housing affordability, walkability, preservation and access to open space, and access to economic opportunities.

2 Opportunities to Accelerate a Sustainable Transportation and Land Use Agenda

Each member was asked to describe their "blue sky" vision to accelerate implementation of a sustainable transportation and land use agenda. The overwhelming majority of Task Force members described fundamental reforms to governance and institutions, rather than proposing disruptive programs or technologies. The specific examples varied by individual, but the viewpoints expressed by the members of the Task Force were broadly a call for a set of clear goals and priorities tied to funding at the scale necessary for change, combined with clarity of roles, objective measures of successful implementation, accountability, and a sense of urgency. A majority of members specifically mentioned reforms to accelerate, expand, and improve the quality of transit access and community-scale active transportation networks.

2.1 Clear, Consistent Goals and Funding at the Scale Necessary for Change

The SCTF members noted that there is no shortage of goals and performance measures in the arena of transportation and land use. Caltrans, for example, has very clear goals for pavement maintenance that drive its work and how it prioritizes and spends SHOPP funding. Federal transportation policy required MPOs to create specific performance measures in their RTPs. Housing targets are particularly salient at multiple levels of government. In general, members agreed that the state's goals for climate mitigation, housing production, transportation, equity, conservation, climate adaptation, and other components of its sustainable communities vision are all worthwhile.

Their issue, however, was that the goals of state, regional, and local government often aggregate with no clear priority among them, no nuance with how they fit together or contradict, little direction for resolving conflicts between them, and have little or no dedicated funding tied to their implementation. An opportunity to hasten implementation, members said, is to develop a clear framework for navigating these myriad goals. The Task Force members voiced a need for the many state agencies and departments to work collaboratively to identify the goals that are written into the multitude of laws, set priorities, create objective and measurable performance measures, assign agencies and institutional actors with durable roles and accountability for working toward those measures, and to align funding commensurate with the scale of change that is sought. One member characterized this as the need for the state to "get its house in order" with regard to priorities, funding, and regulation between its many agencies and departments, and how they interact with local and regional governments. This work would let the state be a stronger and more reliable partner for local and regional agencies as they deliver the projects that implement sustainable communities.

Objective, outcome-oriented performance measures were a key component of this governance system recommended by Task Force members. Members emphasized performance metrics that can be objectively measured and have benefits in a variety of community types and contexts. Members were particularly supportive of performance measures that could have synergistic effects – walkability, multimodal safety, and economic development were frequent examples of outcomes that could amplify each other. Several members posed rhetorical questions to highlight a gap in performance-based governance: What are the state's goals for walkability? What are the

state's goals for transit, apart from farebox recovery? What are the state's measurable goals that would implement its aim of "increasing equity" that can be objectively assessed? Ambiguous measures make implementation harder to assess and accountability more challenging: "Ambiguity around what is 'consistent' with an SCS makes it very hard to form objective judgements. What is 'consistency' with a 900-page document?"

These goals and the related performance measures can and should exist in concert with each other, several emphasized, and pointed to the housing policy arena as an example:

> *"There's a North Star in housing that's 'more housing faster,' so all policy and implementation and policy is interpreted through that. They don't set aside safety and building codes to build more housing faster; they look at how they can also speed up the building code approval process. There can be multiple goals and standards."*

There was significant debate and widely divergent viewpoints about if and how to update goals and navigate changes to policy priorities. Many goals or priorities in transportation were set decades ago; for example, SB1 and its embedded goals are relatively young at 10 years old, SB 375 was written in a different era of technology and vehicle electrification, and sales tax measures have spending plans perhaps written decades ago. Caltrans also has goals for the highway network; for example, its asset management plan sets performance targets for a "good" state of repair of the state highway system. Some viewed these goals as mandates that cannot legally or ethically be broken. Others viewed goals as something that can be expected to always change, but that changing goals should not affect projects that have already received significant public funds. Some viewed it as the duty of transportation professionals and policymakers to update goals and projects to reflect current information, conditions, and priorities. "It's not fair to say that there aren't goals, but they're not aligned with our current paradigm," a Task Force member said.

Clarity of roles was also repeatedly emphasized. There is no one state, regional, or local agency that is responsible for implementing sustainable communities policy. Implementation is divided (or "fragmented," as it was commonly described) between various state agencies and departments – Caltrans, the Transportation Commission, the Air Resources Board, the Department of Housing and Community Development, et cetera – and across various levels of government. Some Task Force members pointed to the lack of clear roles – paired with the lack of clear goals and objective measures to implement toward – as the "fundamental" or "systemic" problem that is hindering implementation of the state's sustainable communities agenda. When asked for blue-sky ideas about how they would amend the governance system around sustainable communities, one said that their "magic wand would be to give everyone a clear lane." Another compared the governance system in more detail:

> *"What we've set up is a system in which setting a goal is the goal, without any of the implementation ability underneath it. Frankly, in this area, there's been no clear agency whose job it is to implement it. We've set goals on agricultural GHG emissions, but CDFA is an agency with the expertise to do something about that, so they do something about it, and those numbers are actually quite good. We set goals on energy efficiency and CEC does that because they have expertise."*

Several members noted the opportunity for the Strategic Growth Council – the state's cabinet level agency that was established to coordinate the activities of state agencies around land use,

transportation, housing, climate change, air quality, economic development, land conservation, et cetera – to be developed into a stronger institution at the center of implementing the state's sustainable communities policies. SGC could have stronger authority around clarifying and coordinating the state's actions and their impacts on land use, transportation, natural resource conservation, and economic development, many noted. It could be the central institution for collaborative policy conversations about shared performance measures, statewide land use and growth patterns, and statewide infrastructure development, they said. Members suggested that SGC could be empowered with evaluation authority to track progress toward these shared performance measures, and report on sustainable community outcomes from regional and state actions. (One member said that the state should "make the agencies evaluate against the metrics, along with the MPOs. The agencies should be held accountable, too.)

SGC already has many of the institutional elements needed to play this role, members said: it's secretary level, the Council is made up secretaries from the key agencies, it has staff, it has public meeting authority. But it would need certain reforms, a member noted, such as greater independence, so as not to be a political arm of the Governor's Office. One member explained: "There needs to be stronger coordination with the needs of the state transportation system, and we have to be careful about where state resources go, and we also need to be thinking about the cascading impacts of these various policy areas on natural resources, on housing, on other land uses. This is where a Strategic Growth Council should come in." Another member suggested: "I would organize things around the SGC. Not as a regulatory agency, but as a public agency for transparency, accountability, and communicating the shared set of performance measures that are not all oppositional."

2.1.1 Funding

A majority of the Task Force members included new, dedicated funding aimed at implementing clear and measurable goals in their blue-sky vision of sustainable community governance. This common theme was summarized by one member as: "funding is how implementation happens."

Many pointed to the state funding programs for active transportation, affordable housing, and transit capital as the most significant examples of implementation of the state's sustainable communities agenda. The Active Transportation Program, specifically, was repeatedly mentioned as a largely successful model for implementing state, regional, and local sustainable communities goals with two exceptions: there is not enough available funding, and some component of the funds should be consistently distributed to municipalities, by formula or an equivalently durable mechanism, rather than competitive grants. Consistent state funding for active transportation would let local and regional agencies envision, plan, and implement transformative community-scale active transportation networks, rather than spend their limited resources on grant applications with uncertain success.

Nearly everyone pointed to the three iterations of the Regional Early Action Planning grants ("LEAP," "REAP," and "REAP 2.0") as the standout example of funding tied to sustainable communities goals and plans, and as a model for what should be an ongoing and formula-based funding program. REAP and REAP 2.0 funding was of a meaningful enough scale to increase MPOs' institutional capacity. It was also flexible funding that was tied specifically to implementing plans that are aimed at sustainable communities and were written to fit the MPOs' regional context. Essentially, it aligned multiple levels of government to implement plans that hit state housing,

transportation, and climate goals: “It created the opportunity to shape funding in a way that supported local agencies in implementing the regional plan.”

A frequently recommended pathway toward implementation was through new funding sources. New funding sources could create new, clear mandates for implementation toward current goals – e.g., climate mitigation, reconnecting communities – that are unencumbered by the strings and limitations in existing legislation. Many emphasized that existing funding – especially the state’s non-discretionary funds – is legally challenging to realign with other goals. Some also stated that new funding resources would be required to meet all needs in transportation. Several members, though, thought the state needed to better track and publish data about how existing transportation funding is spent, the outcomes created by those investments, and funding needs. Many recognized that new funding was an “easy” answer – in theory, “everyone loves new funding” but in practice, enacting new funding mechanisms is increasingly difficult. One member discussed the fact that creating new funding mechanisms – through legislation or a voter-approved bond – being seen as the “easier” route demonstrated just how challenging it would be to realign existing funding sources.

Another equally recommended pathway was to align existing transportation funding with sustainable communities goals. For example, CalSTA’s Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI) has made progress on aligning the state’s discretionary funds, progress generally described by members as a success. While there are well-recognized legal limitations to realigning certain state and federal funds, members gave examples where funding prioritization follows norms rather than rules or legislation, and saw opportunities in these cases to leverage existing funds to implement new legislation that further sustainable transportation priorities. SB 960, the law that requires Caltrans to incorporate complete streets targets and facilities in its Asset Management Plan and projects funded by the SHOPP, was described as an enormous opportunity to use existing funds to concurrently meet multiple goals, including safety, active transportation, and pavement condition.

2.2 World-Class Transit Access

High-quality, highly convenient, and person-centric transit access was repeatedly identified as an area of particular opportunity and challenge in implementing sustainable communities across all community types. Members emphasized the importance of transit for the mobility and access benefits it provides, as well as the crucial role it plays in equitably realizing multimodal outcomes and a lower-VMT future. Members also emphasized that with California’s geography and , it could and should have integrated networks of local, regional, and state transit on par with the best transit systems in the world.

The Task Force members gave a wide range of examples of transit that they considered successful and could be implemented in other appropriate contexts. Members said that microtransit in the Central Valley and West Sacramento have shown positive outcomes for ridership and cost effectiveness. New bus service, bus rapid transit, and transit pass programs in LA, the Bay Area, San Diego, Fresno, and Tulare have had “high impact” in their respective communities. Several members described high-speed rail networks in other countries, in many cases “elegantly” integrated with local transit systems, and considered the implementation of high-speed rail as a key component of a multimodal California. Not every solution would work everywhere, everyone noted, but all have an important role in their respective contexts.

Nearly all members of the Task Force in some way called on the state to "step up" on prioritizing and funding transit. They identified a need for durable and protected state funding to implement clear, consistent performance goals for transit. "The state needs to figure out how they can become a better partner on transit policy and funding, and shoring up its vision for transit is the foundation of all this work," one member said.

State transit funding needs to extend beyond transit capital to include funding operations. "Long-term transit funding remains one of the most important implementation challenges" for achieving sustainable communities goals. In their ideal future, several members noted that they would put robust transit systems in every community that the state prioritized and funded, and that "seamlessly and elegantly" connected with regional- and state-level transit systems.

> *"We need funding that is right sized to the state's ambition for transit. Everyone puts their hopes and dreams on transit. Labor put their dreams of apprenticeships and jobs on transit. Environmentalists see it as the sustainability and zero-emission program. Equity advocates see it as a mobility justice program. Mobility advocates see it as mobility provision… Transit cannot fight against recissions every year."*

Beyond funding, members emphasized opportunities for streamlining of the regulatory, institutional, legal, financial, and construction landscape to allow transit projects to be delivered faster and more consistently. Local control – the effective "veto power of local jurisdictions over transit projects" – was cited as a fundamental barrier to delivering public transit projects that implement sustainable communities. The sometimes-adversarial relationship between state agencies and local jurisdictions over permitting transit projects was another. Members discussed challenges with receiving encroachment permits from Caltrans and coastal development permits from the Coastal Commission despite support from municipalities, regional agencies, other state agencies, and the federal government. One member said that the state agencies have demonstrated "no sense of urgency or alignment with state goals when transit projects are going through the delivery process."

Members suggested opportunities for institutional reform that would streamline delivery of transit projects. Many of the opportunities involved "cleaning up" the interface between local transit agencies and the state: foster collaboration between the multitude of state agencies that interface with local transit agencies. Several members offered the idea of a "one-stop shop" at the state level to expedite the delivery of projects that align with the state's priorities. The state-level partners would provide a clearinghouse, or an ombudsperson, that helps local agencies shepherd projects through the delivery process and navigate new obstacles and various agencies. This partner-ombudsperson model largely exists at Caltrans for roadway projects, many noted. Another said that to prioritize transformative public transit projects, like rail throughout the state, state political leadership should organize its many state agencies – Caltrans, CalSTA, Natural Resources, CARB, the Coastal Commission, et cetera – to "be a 'Yes' government to this issue." "You have to get your entire government behind it," one person said. Another said that with respect to delivering transit projects, "we're standing in our own way." Another member emphasized that there are indeed models for this kind of reform elsewhere; that it is not a false hope: "People do this in other countries. This isn't pie in the sky."

Task Force members also suggested institutional reforms for transit that they knew were controversial ("third rails," as they called them). Several members discussed that increased and

durable state funding for transit should be tied to clear performance outcomes for transit agencies, and that there needed to be a single state agency that is responsible for their oversight. Many members said that the Transportation Development Act (TDA) should be reformed to create a streamlined state funding mechanism for local transit operations that would be tied to those performance outcomes and oversight. Several members said that there are too many transit operators and there should be consolidation of local transit agencies. "Having dozens of transit operators in a single region can create inefficiency and confusion for the public; fewer agencies involved in the business of transportation may be more efficient and effective," one member said.

2.3 Community-Scale Active Transportation Investment

Safe, protected active transportation networks were the other modal investment that was repeatedly identified by the Task Force members as an area of significant opportunity to implement sustainable communities. This type of investment met many of the sustainable communities goals as broadly defined by the Task Force in its early convening – safety, multimodal accessibility, equity, economic development, et cetera – and was an opportunity in all parts of the state. Representatives from rural communities discussed expansive trail networks as an example of successful implementation of sustainable communities, similar to representatives discussing protected bike lane networks in downtown San Francisco and Sacramento.

A sustainable source of funding was one of the main opportunities identified to catalyze the build-out of transformative active transportation networks. What people described was essentially state formula funding to support community-scale networks of protected facilities for walking and biking. Nearly everyone praised the state Active Transportation Program but also noted that its competitive programming is demanding of applicants and creates boom-and-bust cycles. Further, its popularity has made it chronically oversubscribed and spread thin. "When you create an incentive for the right things they become overwhelmingly popular." Reliable funding would allow local jurisdictions and regions to plan for a more ambitious active transportation networks and to implement those plans.

Task Force members noted that a transformative deployment of network-scale active transportation facilities – like what Austin and Minneapolis have implemented – would require more than consistent annual funding. Catalyzing that scale of change would require "waterfall" investment, state leadership and funding, and local and regional buy-in. A few members suggested this kind of ambitious, community-led program that would rapidly fund and build plans for community-scale, protected walking and biking networks. A program like this should include a diverse cohort of cities from different contexts across the state: California-based examples of bold ideas and successful implementation would be powerful not just within the participating communities, but also for broader implementation throughout the state. Examples are powerful, and the state – in partnership with local agencies and regions – fostering a "race-to-the-top" for active transportation would be an impactful demonstration of implementation, members suggested.

> *Places that are excellent for riding bikes have made transformative investments in the infrastructure and not a piecemeal approach… If the state wants to get serious about an active transportation network, then there needs to be a massive investment at the state level to see transformative change.*

2.4 Institutional Resources and Opportunities

We asked Task Force members about opportunities to catalyze implementation of sustainable transportation and land use agendas that go beyond the creation of new funding programs. Members discussed opportunities to leverage the existing capacity and resources of various institutions and use their comparative advantages to streamline or accelerate delivery of sustainable transportation and land use agendas.

2.4.1 Clarifying and Strengthening the Role of MPOs and SCSs

MPOs and other regional agencies were frequently mentioned for their comparative advantage and untapped institutional potential. These comments came from a diverse range of Task Force members, not just MPO representatives. MPOs "occupy a unique position" between state and local governments and are not very well-understood by officials at either level. ("Locals think that MPOs are one more layer of bureaucracy, and the state often thinks MPOs are puppets for the locals," said one member.) Members emphasized that MPOs are close enough to the local level to understand local implementation challenges, while also operating at the scale at which travel and commute patterns take place, transportation networks function, housing markets operate, economic development plays out, environmental plans are created, et cetera. From that vantage point, several saw MPOs as being most valuable when they can help align state goals, aspirations, and resources with local needs and implementation realities.

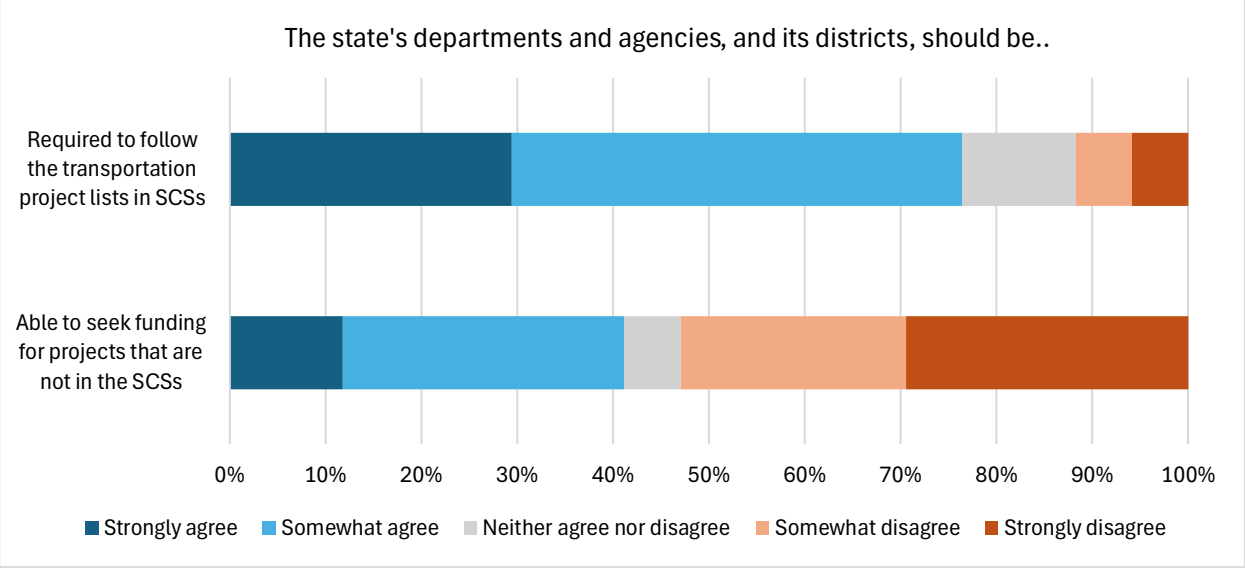
> *"We already do regional planning. We just do not give regional planning enough authority to shape the investments that ultimately determine whether those plans succeed."*

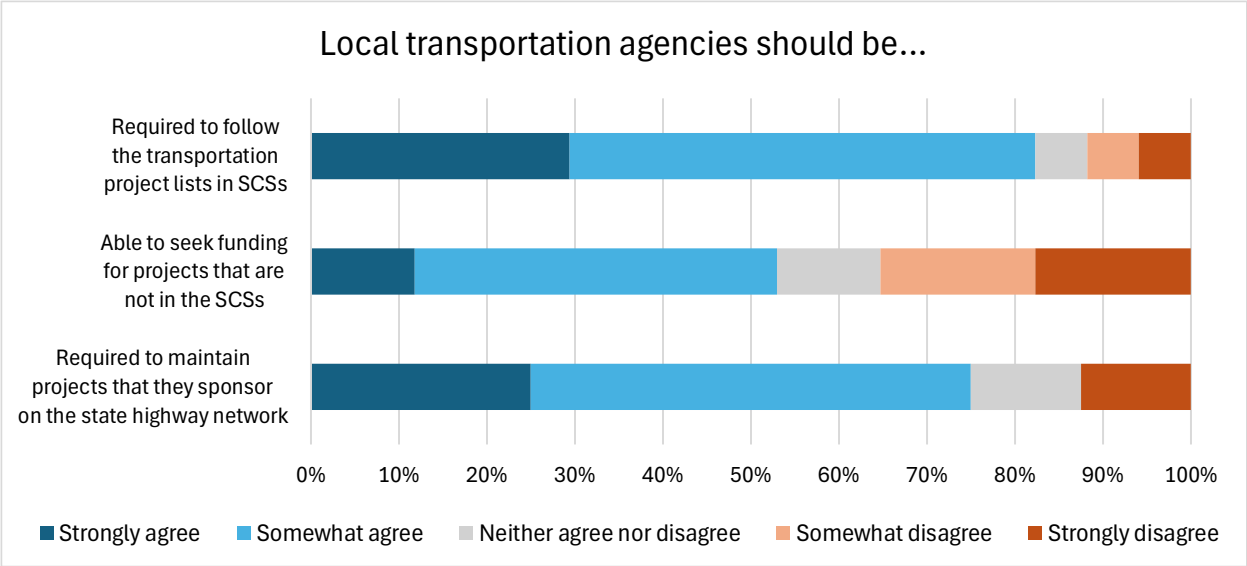
Several members discussed the potential for MPOs to play a larger role in implementation and, specifically, project delivery. This model exists at one MPO (SANDAG), which delivers active transportation, highway, and transit projects funded through the San Diego County's half-cent sales tax. State legislation authorized SANDAG as the consolidated agency it is and gave it responsibility to plan, design, build, and fund transit capital projects, while transit agencies maintained operation authority. This model offers a unique role for the MPO to play a role in both planning and implementing components of its RTP/SCS. One thought that "MPOs could be more effective institutions if they had greater project delivery capacity" because it would consolidate into one agency the authorities of planning and implementing the regional Sustainable Communities Strategy per SB 375. These authorities are currently fragmented: MPOs draft and adopt the regional SCS plans while Caltrans and local transportation agencies generally implement the projects in those plans. With greater project delivery authority MPOs would ostensibly be able to prioritize the delivery of projects that implement the SCS – specifically the projects that would help achieve lower VMT and GHG reduction targets – rather than relying on other agencies to implement the regional plan. Another member would focus institutional reforms on expanding MPOs' planning and implementation resources beyond passenger transportation – e.g., resources for conservation planning, freight planning, and technical assistance.

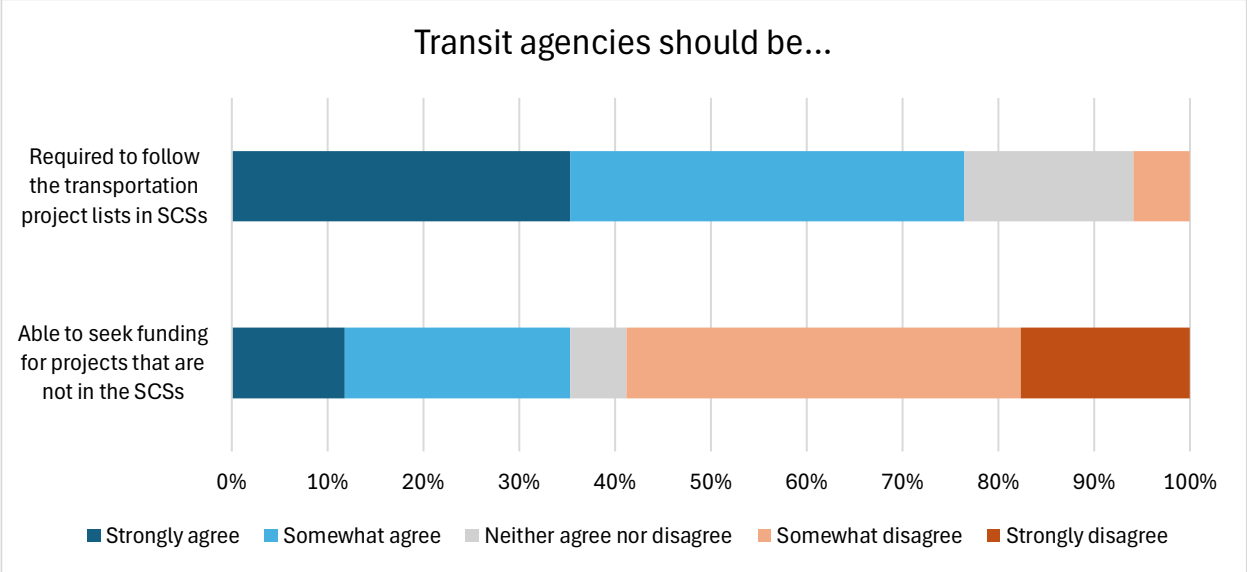
Broadly, members explicitly or implicitly discussed how the heterogeneity of individual MPOs – in their membership sizes, organizational structures, authorities, types of funding, etc. – makes for variation in their role and influence. This variation might contribute to the misunderstanding of the role and value of MPOs. Further, a few members thought that this variation makes it challenging to create overarching policy (e.g., state legislation or guidelines) that would strengthen the role and authorities of MPOs in the implementation of sustainable community goals. One member

suggested that “if the aim is transformational change, a consistent structure for MPOs and their authorities could be helpful.”

Task Force members offered a specific policy recommendation about the authority of the regional plan in transportation governance. Several Task Force members suggested – and the majority of Task Force members (75 – 80%) agreed when asked about it in a survey – that following the transportation project list in the RTP/SCS should be required for state agencies and departments, their districts, and local transportation agencies. Requiring state, local, and transit agencies to follow the project list in the RTP/SCS would help solve a paradox of transportation authority, they said, in which the actions of various state and local agencies can conflict with implementation of the RTP/SCS. Specifically, the state’s Air Resources Board sets GHG targets for the Sustainable Communities Strategies. MPOs then author those SCSs, but the state’s Department of Transportation is not required to follow those plans, members said, and can undermine progress toward SCS implementation by sponsoring highway projects that are inconsistent with the transportation project lists, which are foundational to RTP/SCSs. The viewpoints were similar for local transportation agencies and transit agencies. See the charts below.







In interviews and at in-person convenings, several task force members discussed the requirement of RTP/SCSs to be fiscally constrained, and the lack of a similar requirement for Caltrans' statewide transportation plans. Members discussed the revenue forecasts, with one opining that they are overly optimistic and that the process used projected transportation revenues in the RTP/SCS lacks rigor. Each MPO uses different methods to project revenues, for example, and many of the MPOs project revenues being generated by VMT fees, which have yet to be enacted and currently lack political support. Several members agreed that the results of this are RTP/SCSs that are "disconnected from reality," and many of the policies, projects, and programs that RTP/SCSs rely on to meet GHG targets ultimately going unimplemented due to lack of funding. A member noted that there is a process of oversight for the GHG budgets for each region and how MPOs forecast GHGs from passenger transportation; there is not the same oversight for the MPOs' revenue forecasts and fiscal constraint analysis. There is opportunity for "meaningful enforcement" of the requirement that RTP/SCSs be fiscally constrained, they said, which could create RTP/SCSs with more "realistic delivery plans."

A few other Task Force members discussed the fact that Caltrans and Caltrans districts draft plans with no fiscal constraint requirement. One member mentioned the California Transportation Plan, which is statutorily required to be fiscally unconstrained. It "sets forth a grand vision," but without a fiscal plan, it gives no indication about how to implement it. Another member mentioned the lack of fiscal constraint for plans create by Caltrans districts, which puts them at odds or in conflict with RTP/SCSs. Caltrans does not "have any fiscal constraint on what it does," one member noted, "and then the regions have to figure out how to balance it all." That is: MPOs have to "balance" the highway projects and strategies in Caltrans district plans with revenue projections for their RTP/SCSs, GHG targets per SB 375, air quality requirements per the Clean Air Act, et cetera. Several Task Force members thus recommended that Caltrans and Caltrans districts be required to align their actions with the MPOs' RTP/SCSs.

2.4.2 A Broader Role for Caltrans

Members noted that Caltrans, responsible for highway engineering and construction, among other things, was one example of a state-level institution that could be leveraged to design, engineer, and construct the litany of transportation projects that would implement a multimodal and infill-oriented future. Caltrans can build projects with any "color" of money – it's not limited to spending state funds or even transportation funds – and commonly works on other agencies' projects through cooperative agreements. For example, Caltrans recently used its technical expertise and project management structure to help deliver the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing that spans Highway 101 at Liberty Canyon, which received funding from a variety of public and philanthropic sources. That model could be applied more broadly, some Task Force members suggested, where Caltrans could help deliver and therefore expedite implementation of active transportation projects, transit capital projects, wildlife crossings, and other projects in regional and local plans. One Task Force member suggested that "Caltrans could function more like a statewide public works department." Another member put a finer point on the nuances of this approach:

> *"Caltrans excels at building. Its process is not necessarily fast, but they are a well-oiled machine with very predictable timelines for delivering projects. We could task Caltrans with delivering different kinds of projects – rail, transit, wildlife crossings, water infrastructure, utility infrastructure, maybe even high-speed rail. Those are all projects that need to be engineered, and we have at the state a giant engineering agency that you could put to task with whatever projects we need to build. It's a way to speed up other kinds of projects; put them in the same pipeline that we have for highways."*

Some members of the Task Force recognized that the state's "comparative advantage" in project delivery could be especially useful for delivering transit capital projects. Delivering large transportation infrastructure projects requires significant institutional expertise, which Caltrans has and some transit agencies lack. A Task Force member offered: "Rather than expecting every transit agency to independently develop world-class project delivery capabilities, the state could play a much larger role in delivering major capital projects while allowing metropolitan agencies to focus on planning, prioritization, and funding." Such a division of responsibilities "better reflects where different institutions already have strengths," they said.

Other task force members did not share this preference of Caltrans taking on a broader role in project delivery. They acknowledged that Caltrans has engineering resources, project delivery capacity, and institutional might to create momentum in the implementation of multimodal

transportation projects, for which local agencies would not have capacity. Some also acknowledged that reorienting Caltrans to deliver multimodal projects could expand its range of view – and therefore perhaps expand its priorities – beyond the state highway system that it owns, operates, and maintains. But one member said that increasing Caltrans' role in building transit projects and local projects, while perhaps "intuitive," is "a bit reductive:" On one hand, there would be value in Caltrans' institutional knowledge; on the other, they noted that Caltrans is "not known as a paragon of efficiency," and that its projects have cost overruns and time delays. Some members instead suggested that this enhanced project delivery role – to implement multimodal projects for various agencies that lack delivery capacity – would better fit at MPOs or at county-level transportation agencies that already have strong delivery capacity.

Generally, many Task Force members noted that smaller agencies very often lack delivery capacity for larger projects or projects with state funding, such as from SB1 and the Active Transportation Program, which hinders implementation of projects that are important for achieving sustainable transportation goals. While there was broad agreement about the opportunity for institutional reform to catalyze implementation of these projects – by delegating delivery authority to agencies with the resources to efficiently deliver multimodal transportation projects – viewpoints diverged about which agencies should receive that authority.

2.5 Land Use and Infill Housing

The Task Force members were not explicitly asked about land use and housing in the interviews so generally provided less in-depth discussion of their viewpoints about land use and housing policy than they did about transportation policy topics. Members, however, were explicit in their views about housing affordability being a foundation of sustainable communities and climate mitigation. Themes that emerged around land use and housing were broadly about policy reform, priority areas for growth, and infrastructure to facilitate infill development.

Several members discussed that policy conversations around housing tended to be more straightforward (oftentimes "so much better") than transportation policy conversations because housing policy has clear and objective outcomes, despite housing policy and development being a complex system. The state has clear and objective goals for housing production, gives direction to regional and local governments, and has made its policy enforceable by law, members noted. It also implements housing policy and plans with urgency, which had changed the culture and sense of accountability within housing policy, multiple members noted. Transportation policy, on the other, has not enacted plans or policy with the same sense of urgency around climate change, equity, or accessibility, several members said. This change hasn't come without its challenges, a member noted: "People are very uncomfortable with the new faster pace of planning and implementation based on the pace we're used to from the past parts of our careers." But reform is possible; another member discussed the relatively rapid change in the governance and culture of housing policy:

> *"Change is doable… Incentives and carrots also used to be the culture around housing. There was a lot of technical assistance. Housing elements sat on the shelf. There were no enforcement bodies. The Attorney General's Office wasn't focused on this. There's a viable argument that if that's where housing was, and how far we've come in just about four years, then it's possible to see change in the transportation arena also."*

A concern that many Task Force members expressed was with guiding the state's push for more housing into areas that implement sustainable communities goals. That is, the state's housing production goals and the impact on housing affordability was well-understood by members. But with the lenses of transportation, climate change, equity, evacuation, conservation, and adaptation, members suggested that the state needed to clarify areas for that new housing construction. "All of the state's policy and funding should be incentivizing housing in the right places," a member said. Where the "right places" – or priority growth areas – are around the state for new housing development was not clear to many Task Force members, because of the many and sometimes contradictory state laws that govern land use planning and development. Several members suggested a statewide mapping exercise and authority to evaluate the various laws and performance measures (e.g., RHNA, low-VMT areas, wildfire and flood risk, Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, existing zoning, wildlife corridors) to have an evidence-based conversation about the state's strategic plan for where to grow. Several members suggested that this authority would naturally fit at the Strategic Growth Council or the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation.

Many members discussed the infrastructure needs that essentially prevent infill housing development. Upgrading utilities that serve infill housing – e.g., electricity, water lines, sewers, sewer treatment – can be cost prohibitive, members emphasized. Some of these costs used to be covered by Redevelopment funds, which members simultaneously thought needed to be recreated in some way and would be impossible to recreate. Many members noted that zoning reform and preemption is one element of enabling infill development that has received much of the recent policy attention, but that actual construction requires a broader set of resources, and that local and regional governments need financial assistance from the state to catalyze that construction. "If California wants more housing near transit, it should help communities create the conditions that make that housing possible," a Task Force member recommended.

Members noted, however, that state investment in this foundational infrastructure ("the boring stuff that no one sees," as one described it) could have excellent returns if the state changed its approach and timing. State funding often arrives toward the end of a project's lifespan in the form of competitive grants, a member noted, when planning is nearly complete and local and private sponsors have invested significant resources. If the project doesn't win state funding, it may get shelved and those resources wasted. If the state were to provide investment for foundational infrastructure at the early stages of infill development, a member suggested, it could incentivize other investors from the private sector and other levels of government.

Several members discussed the opportunity to strengthen the role of MPOs as a facilitator of resources and funding to catalyze infill housing and development. Members from around the state pointed to Green Means Go in the SACOG region as a successful example of a regionally coordinated program that had significantly increased infill development and amplified the interest of its local governments in development in low-VMT areas. SACOG debuted Green Means Go in its 2020 MTP/SCS and funds it entirely with public and private grant funds, including SACOG's entire allocation of REAP 2.0 funds from the state in 2021. SCAG has increased its land use staff and planning capacity since SB 375 and significantly increased its staff of housing planners to deliver projects funded with REAP 2.0 funds. Many members were generally supportive of this concept of a coordinated regional approach to facilitating funding and delivering infrastructure for transportation, housing, and infill development. They were particularly supportive of this approach

because of the greenhouse gas target in MPOs' RTP/SCSs, and when paired with state funding for infrastructure and land use planning capacity.

A few members also discussed a potential role for Caltrans, if it were to take on a broader role of a state public works department, to improve coordination between transportation and other infrastructure systems and ultimately improve fiscal efficiency. Sewer, water, broadband, and utilities often share the same right of way as roadway networks. Members referred to instances where newly repaved streets were dug up to upgrade underground utilities, because those upgrades were not coordinated. "A more integrated public works approach [at Caltrans] could create opportunities to coordinate those investments and avoid repeatedly disrupting the same communities," said a Task Force member, and can create opportunities to accelerate upgrades to underground utilities necessary to support infill housing growth.

3 Pricing Schemes

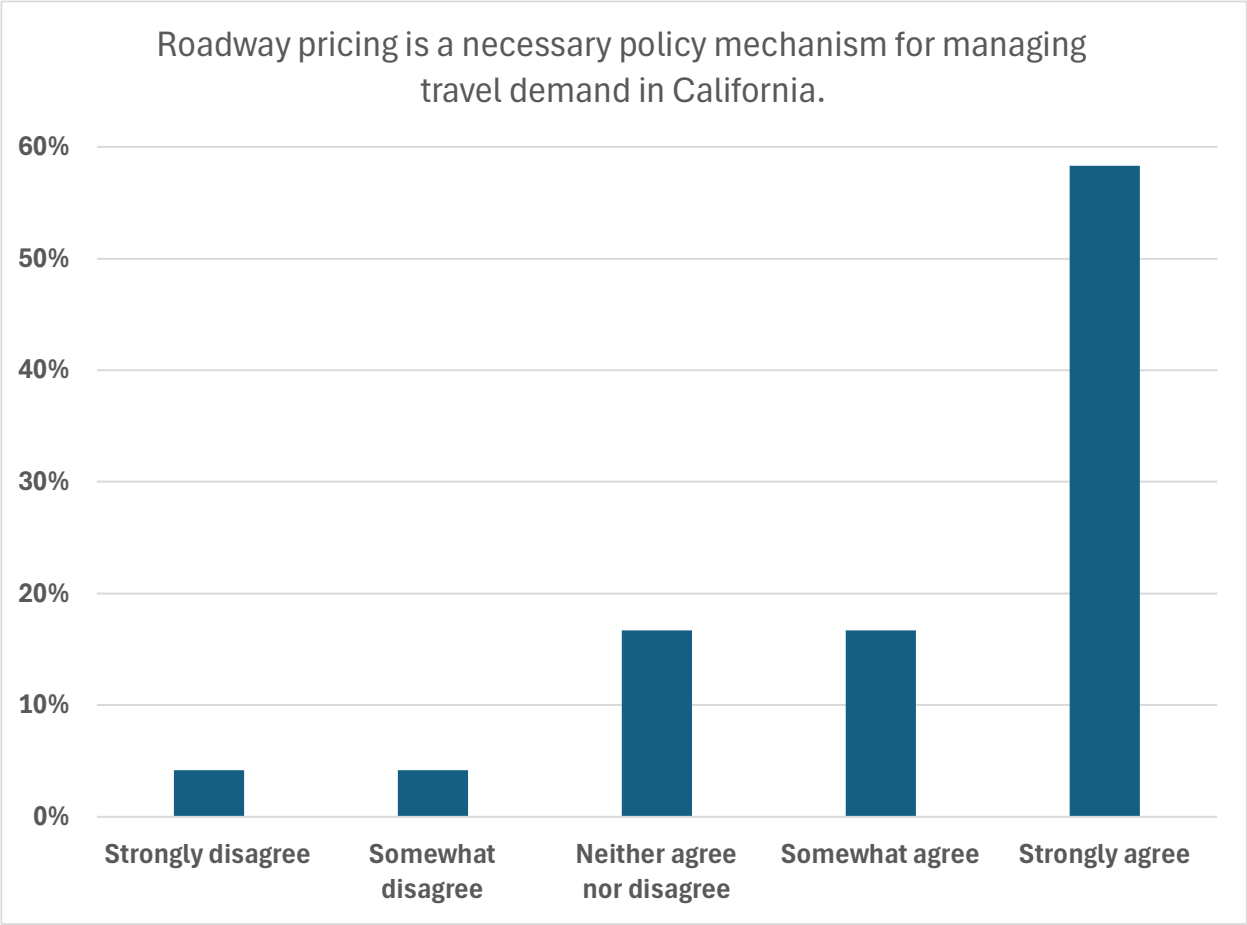
3.1 Pricing is Necessary and Challenging

The majority of Task Force members expressed the opinion that pricing is a necessary component of sustainable transportation policy but recognized that implementing pricing strategies is an immense challenge. Members generally recognized that "pricing" is not a single policy; rather, pricing comes in many forms that each serves a different purpose, are appropriate in different regional or geographic contexts, have different implementation challenges, and require leadership at different levels of government. But among nearly all members of the task force, a pricing scheme of some form was described as necessary to meeting regional GHG targets, strategically managing vehicle travel demand, durably managing operations on the highway system, managing freight and logistics, or creating a sustainable revenue source for transportation funding. As one summarized:

> *"Pricing is a necessary and effective tool to manage auto demand, improve mobility for people, provide reliable transit on the highway system, and create revenue to pay for infrastructure where there is a direct nexus between the fee paid and the benefit received. Pricing is sustainable transportation."*

Pricing was explicitly discussed as an essential strategy within the Regional Transportation Plans/Sustainable Communities Strategies throughout the state. Some pricing strategy or combination thereof – VMT fees, highway tolling, cordon pricing, bridge tolls, parking pricing, auto operating costs (the catch-all driving cost variable in travel demand forecasting models) – was necessary for SCSs to meet the relevant GHG target and actual implementation of pricing strategies would be necessary to realize those GHG reductions in reality. "Pricing is very influential in reducing VMT – models show it and we see it empirically," a Task Force member said.

We asked SCTF members about roadway pricing in the final survey of Task Force, distributed in August 2026. We asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with roadway pricing being necessary policy mechanism to manage travel demand. We also asked them which level of government should take the lead in implementing pricing strategies, and to characterize the barriers to implementation of pricing. Responses from the SCTF are illustrated in the charts below.



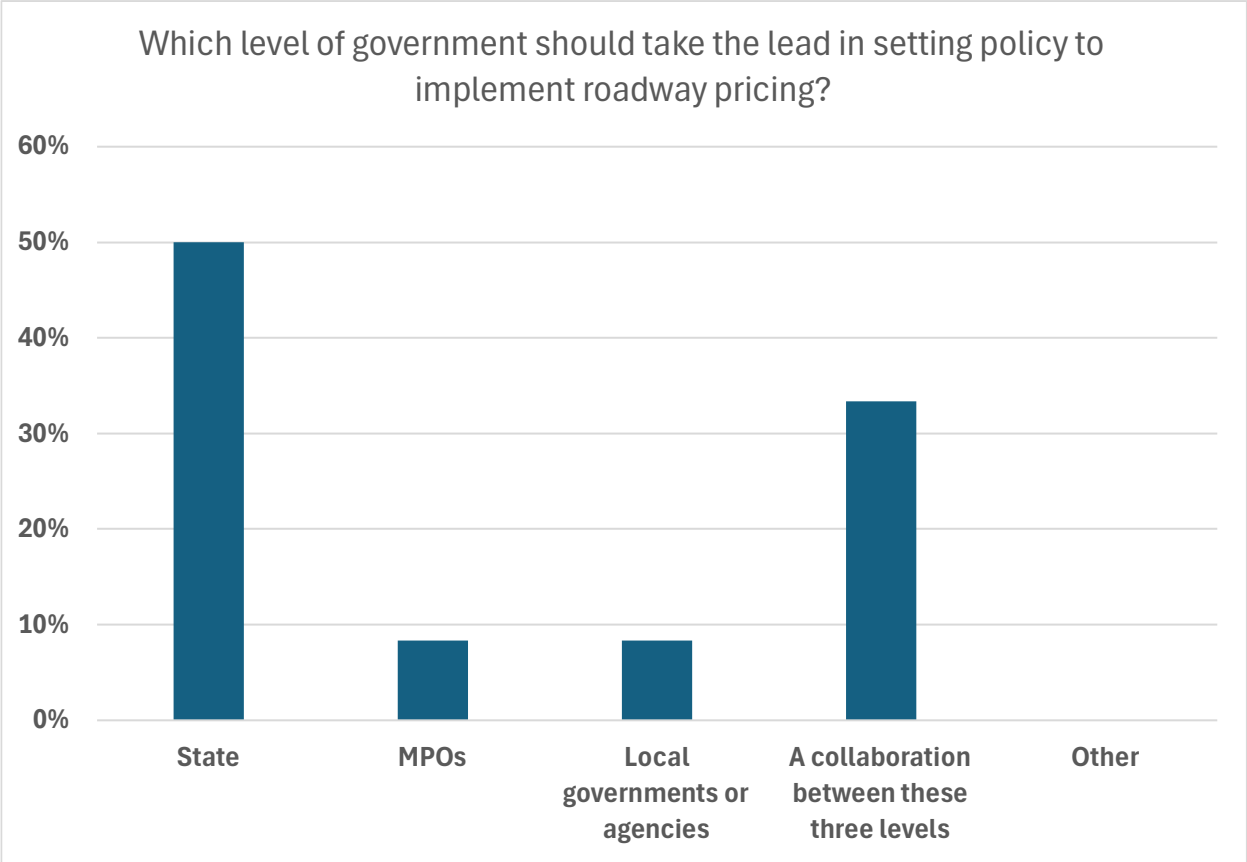
Nearly all Task Force members emphasized the need for the state legislature and state agencies to take a "courageous" leadership role to aide implementation pricing schemes. Members were very aware of the political and professional risk involved with this role, from their own experience or from seeing others' experiences with implementing pricing strategies in their jurisdiction. Various pricing strategies have been studied for decades and proposed in RTP/SCSs throughout the state and, in many regions, meeting the GHG target for the RTP/SCS depends on pricing. But the Task Force members emphasized – with varying degrees of frustration – that California's state agencies and legislature must take action on a statewide pricing policy or framework. Members recognized that Caltrans and the legislature drafting a statewide pricing policy would be difficult and carry political risk, but one opined that they were "abdicating" their responsibility by not adopting pricing policy that would allow MPOs to implement the pricing strategies in their RTP/SCSs. "Regions can't lead – the state has to lead this," another member stated.

The Task Force members were clear, however, that they did not mean that the state should act unilaterally around pricing. Many preferred that a partnership between levels of government, where the state-level leads a statewide policy effort that authorizes a framework for regions and local governments to implement and build upon in tune with their local and regional contexts. Leadership and the nature of collaboration should take a different form and have different leaders depending on the type of pricing strategy. For example, a road-user charge was seen by nearly all to require state leadership and governance to create the policy framework and actual fee-collecting mechanism, even if the mechanism would be used by MPOs or local governments to implement

additional road-user charges at the regional or local level. (Task Force members often used "road-user charge" and "VMT fee" interchangeably as a per-mile rate paid by drivers.) There could be similar, multi-level policy frameworks for highway tolling: a state-level road user charge and a regionally- or locally adopted toll for certain highway segments. Congestion pricing would require state authorization and leadership, as well as a large role for the regional or local government that chooses to implement it. Parking pricing and low-emission zones were something members generally thought should be led by local agencies because of their expertise in local conditions and land use, though these efforts would benefit from state and regional support.

A minority of Task Force members considered pricing something that should be led by local or regional governments. Some referenced existing state law (AB 194, 2015) that allows local governments to build toll lanes on the state highway network, and a member thought the roles and authorities created by that legislation have worked well and should be honored. For political, governance, and practical reasons – e.g., transportation finance operates at a state level, while regional travel sheds and therefore toll lane networks or VMT fees are larger in scale than a single local government – the rest of the Task Force did not share this viewpoint and policy preference.

See the chart below for the distribution of viewpoints about which level of government should take the lead to implement pricing policy.



Some members raised concerns about the impacts of pricing on the equity of transportation outcomes, arguing that pricing schemes should be introduced carefully and with recognition that it will create new monetary costs for drivers. But Task Force members were generally confident that

the equity impacts of pricing strategies could and should be alleviated through their design and with programs that mitigate impacts to low-income drivers. Some referenced the programs that exist for household electricity: electricity use is priced, sometimes in schemes equivalent to congestion pricing (i.e., time-of-use rates), and low-income households can enroll in programs to ensure electricity access. "There are significant equity considerations to work out in the mechanics of a pricing strategy, but I'm confident we can figure those out," said one member. Another emphasized that the state, regions, and cities in California have "an amazing opportunity to roll out equity-oriented pricing schemes."

A few Task Force members differed from the majority in their viewpoints on roadway pricing. Some initially disagreed about pricing being an appropriate strategy – or being an appropriate strategy in their region – but discussed some form of pricing that they had studied, implemented, or advocated for. For example, one strongly disagreed that pricing should be used to manage travel demand and then specified that pricing should only be used as a revenue mechanism. One disagreed with the majority about the necessity of highway or bridge tolling but saw the potential need for VMT fees as a revenue mechanism. Much of this disagreement was about local or regional application of a particular form of pricing (e.g., congestion pricing not being an appropriate solution in areas with low traffic volumes), or about the ability of a local or regional entity to implement a particular form of pricing (e.g., the inability for MPOs to implement a road-user charge), rather than broader disagreement with the use of pricing as a policy strategy. Just one member was "not a fan" of roadway pricing generally and did not see pricing as an appropriate solution to the problems in their region, as a revenue mechanism or otherwise. Fiscal shortfalls in transportation, they thought, should be solved by good governance and budget decisions, and by restoring historical funding that had been incrementally siphoned away from transportation, rather than by generating new transportation revenues via road user charges.

Peeling apart the conversations about the different types of pricing strategies led to fruitful discussion of opportunities and obstacles and revealed distinct policy preferences among the members of the SCTF. We discuss each pricing strategy in turn below.

3.2 Road-User Charges

Road-user charges (RUCs, or VMT fees) were viewed by nearly the entire Task Force as a necessary transportation finance mechanism and seen by many as the pricing strategy that the state should prioritize. A road-user charge could be applied to the entire geography of the state, and a statewide strategy could be added to by MPOs and municipalities to meet local needs. This type of pricing strategy was urgently needed, many said. One summarized:

> *"All [pricing] options should be on the table, but the state needs to secure a supplemental or replacement mechanism for the gas tax to respond to declining revenues from increased fuel efficiency and ZEVs before it takes on [toll] pricing. [Other] pricing can build on RUC systems for the maintenance of the system."*

Many explained that regional VMT fees could build on the pricing infrastructure of a state road-user charge, based on the local or regional need. Similar to how locally adopted sales taxes are additional to the state sales tax (and frequently adopted for transportation funding), locally- or regionally adopted VMT fees could augment the state RUC to meet any number of policy goals. This

would allow regions to manage VMT and move away from transportation sales taxes measures with the same policy mechanism. An SCTF member described how this would work:

> *"We would assume the state would set up the actual mechanism for collecting revenues from a VMT fee system, and then regions could tag on top. If the state's VMT fee is revenue neutral, which is what they say they're going to do, then regional or local ballot initiatives – or whatever the process is – would tick up the VMT fee for the region or the county… We do need the state support to develop the broader framework and have not seen the political leadership to do that."*

Task Force members had a wider range of viewpoints about the mechanics of implementing a statewide road-user charge. Some were adamant that a RUC should exclusively be a one-for-one replacement for the gas tax, in parity with what individuals and businesses currently pay, and not an additional fee on top of gas taxes.

Others were adamant that replacing the gas tax was one of the largest opportunities the state will have to affect transportation policy and enact reforms. Many said that re-creating the existing funding system – e.g., replacing the gas tax with a RUC that is predetermined to be revenue neutral – would miss the rare opportunity of using the new revenue scheme to reevaluate and improve California's transportation finance structure free of historical claims and legislatively-mandated distribution formulae. The RUC "is such an opportunity, so maybe we shouldn't decide upfront that it will be revenue neutral," one member said.

Several mentioned the opportunity of a VMT-based pricing and revenue mechanism to manage travel demand and operations, as well as outcomes for equity, the environment, and fiscal sustainability. "The state should set up system that allows for experimentation across pricing strategies at the regional level," one Task Force member recommended. Another recommended that a state RUC, even if revenue-neutral, should create the pricing infrastructure for a RUC that can be used as a broader policy mechanism: "If a road-user charge is pursued as a gas tax replacement, then the resulting state policy should also provide local governments with a clear framework for implementing local or regional VMT-based fees to manage demand." Another member suggested that transportation look to other, similar policy arenas to manage its network:

> *"VMT fees could vary by time of day, by congestion, et cetera. We must think of transportation corridors and road capacity as a utility and price accordingly."*

Many members discussed other opportunities that could be created by setting up the infrastructure of a statewide road user charge. Behind zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) and creating a mile-based revenue mechanism for their drivers, the most frequently mentioned opportunity was tolling freight trucks. Truck tolls, e.g., a surcharge on the RUC for trucks, could address the greater road damage and maintenance issues that trucks create. This kind of road-user charge scheme – one commensurate with damages created – could be implemented for other modes and for other local or regional needs:

> *"There has to be a pricing scheme in the state, everywhere. In the Central Valley they're exploring truck lanes that have a specific truck surcharge, because trucks are tearing up the roads and create a large maintenance burden. That pricing scheme might be unique to the Central Valley; other cities or regions could have other pricing schemes."*

One member argued for a road-user charge because they see it as the more-appropriate policy mechanism to manage and reduce VMT than requiring VMT forecasts and mitigation for land and housing developments. “Tacking a fee onto someone's driving behavior is very politically charged… but the best way to do VMT [reduction policy] is to follow the vehicle.” VMT reduction policy tied to new land and housing development is a roundabout, unfair, and perverse mechanism for addressing the impacts of VMT, they said, because of its effect on the cost of housing development and variation of individuals’ travel behavior that is independent of neighborhood characteristics (e.g., one works from home while their neighbor is a traveling salesperson).

3.3 Lane Tolling

Lane tolling was one of the most frequently discussed forms of roadway pricing and described as a crucial mechanism for managing travel demand and highway operations. Part of its frequency of discussion was because of how highway tolling relates to highway expansion projects in the state. That is, members said that the addition of tolled lanes to the highway network has generally been feasible by tolling the new lanes, rather than by tolling existing lanes. Another key reason was because lane tolling was often discussed as the incremental step toward ultimately pricing the entire highway network; that incremental step is, in fact, being implemented in many parts of the state.

Task Force members offered many reasons why lane tolling furthers the state’s sustainable transportation agenda. Pricing creates “durable capacity in the highway system,” one described, because the operations management provided by pricing has a lifespan as long as the pricing strategy, whereas new highway capacity improves operations only until vehicle traffic reaches pre-project levels. Tolling could ostensibly reduce the need to construct and maintain additional highway capacity while indefinitely generating the short-run mobility benefits of more capacity.

Toll lanes are a visible form of roadway pricing in many parts of California and elsewhere in the country and are relied on by many of the RTP/SCSs around the state. They provide a physically and politically incremental pricing strategy, where most pricing projects add one or two toll lanes to highway corridors. Task Force members stressed that incrementalism is important for demonstrating to the public and to policymakers the opportunities and benefits created by pricing (the “value proposition” of priced lanes, as one person put it).

Task Force members discussed that, politically and publicly, the most feasible route to implementing a pricing strategy on the highway network is by converting high-occupancy vehicle lanes to high-occupancy toll lanes, or by implementing tolling on new highway lanes. Building new highway capacity to implement tolling, however, contravenes the state’s goals to reduce VMT, as evidence shows that new highway capacity will generally induce VMT even when tolled to optimize operations. The “next frontier” of highway tolling, as one member put it, is thus to add tolling to existing highway capacity. Nearly all members discussed the challenge of tolling existing lanes from political and public standpoints, but that some areas in the state’s larger metro regions may likely “ready” for tolling on existing lanes because of their exposure to existing express lanes and awareness of their value. Some regions forecast that all highway lanes would need to be tolled to meet the 2035 GHG targets per SB 375, several members mentioned, which implies that the incremental implementation of tolling would soon need to apply to existing highway lanes.

Task Force members expressed uncertainty about the state's position on toll lanes. The Department of Transportation and its districts give mixed messages, via ambiguous policies or the types of highway projects they promote. A Task Force member posed the question: "The state could have clearer policies. Do they support express lanes or not? I don't know."

3.4 Congestion Pricing

Congestion pricing was discussed as a mechanism with enormous potential for managing demand and traffic in the central business districts of the state's largest cities. "One of the biggest tools for GHG reduction is congestion pricing," a Task Force member said.

The most often referenced candidate for congestion pricing was San Franscisco, with its clear boundaries and multitude of transportation options in the dense Financial District. Parts of Los Angeles – downtown and the West Side – were also offered as candidates, as were any part of large metropolitan areas where roadway demand consistently exceeds available capacity. Task Force members were clear that congestion pricing was only appropriate in areas that have baseline levels of congestion. That is, it wouldn't be appropriate in many of the state's rural areas that do not have high enough traffic volumes, polycentric regions with dispersed employment centers, or in downtown cores with high vacancy rates.

The largest metropolitan areas in the state – the Bay Area and Los Angeles – have repeatedly studied congestion pricing. The concept and details of congestion pricing, including its potential equity impacts, were well-studied and well-understood by the Task Force members. Transit access and multimodal options have increased in the areas being studied for congestion pricing, which members said was an imperative to pair with congestion pricing. The implementation of congestion pricing in New York City somewhat accelerated the conversation and acceptance around congestion pricing in California, members thought – seeing the implementation of congestion pricing happen in the US offered a powerful example of its potential and its host of positive outcomes.

While congestion pricing is implemented in a localized geography, and requires partnership with those local and regional entities, SCTF members emphasized that implementing congestion pricing would require authorization and leadership at the state level: "Look at the way it's set up in New York. That's a relationship between the state and federal government."

3.5 Parking Pricing

Parking pricing was less discussed in general but was mentioned by members from large and small communities across state – urban, suburban, and rural alike. As a policy mechanism, parking pricing was described as "probably underutilized," "strategic," and "one hundred percent necessary" by various members of the Task Force. Members talked about the potential for its implementation in large cities in urban cores and small cities in rural parts of the state.

A few Task Force members emphasized that parking pricing is a key policy mechanism to implement sustainable transportation, housing, and fiscal plans. Parking pricing was a policy mechanism that created the most significant reductions in regional GHG in some Sustainable Communities Strategies, and therefore a necessary policy to meet the regional GHG targets per SB 375. At the same time, parking pricing within local jurisdictions is currently unenforceable by

MPOs: “We had to add parking pricing to meet the VMT/GHG target, but we can’t force local jurisdictions to price their parking.” One of the state’s smaller MPO provided planning funds to one of its member cities to study parking management, including parking pricing, in the downtown. The city ultimately priced public parking in the area and leveraged the new parking strategy to implement successful AHSC-funded projects.

Most considered parking pricing as a strategy that should be planned and implemented by local governments. Some, however, saw potential benefits of state and regional support of parking pricing schemes.

3.6 Pricing as Part of a Multimodal Policy Conversation

There was a high level of agreement that the policy conversation surrounding pricing needs to be a multimodal policy conversation. Expanding the conversation to the idea of a convenient, attractive multimodal system for which pricing creates benefits will be crucial for gaining public and political support, and for sustaining positive transportation outcomes.

> *“Any new road pricing should be coupled with more money for transit operations. If you price the road system to manage travel demand you have to provide good options and alternatives for people, and many communities don’t have that today.”*

Interviewees noted that the most successful examples of pricing, in terms of both traffic operations and public support, was when pricing strategies were paired with investments that provide drivers other travel options. For example, in the case of Interstate 66 in Virginia, the state DOT started running high-frequency, well-marketed express bus service months before the all-lane tolls went live. If people rode transit, they didn’t have to pay the toll. New York City clearly has a robust transit and active transportation options, and their speed and reliability increased after congestion pricing went into effect. SCTF members emphasized that these are important implementation lessons for California:

> *“One of the reasons congestion pricing continues to struggle politically is that people experience it as a cost before they experience it as a benefit. If all you do is introduce a toll, people understandably get upset. But if you introduce meaningful alternatives first, the conversation changes.”*

3.7 Barriers to Implementing Pricing

Nearly every member of the SCTF emphasized that politics – most often specified as a communication problem, an educational gap, and/or a lack of political leadership – as the primary obstacle to implementing pricing. Public opposition is a related barrier, particularly as it relates to communication, education, and the role of the public as an electorate with the power to vote out political leaders. Many alluded to a stalemate or holding pattern with implementation of roadway pricing. Pricing has been studied by California’s state, regional, and local governments for decades, it’s in regional transportation plans, and a RUC was even piloted, but the potential for political blowback – based on experienced or anticipation – has stymied further implementation.

> *“There is a tendency for every level of government to wait for someone else to take the risk. The state wants the regions to ask for it. The regions want the state to authorize it.*

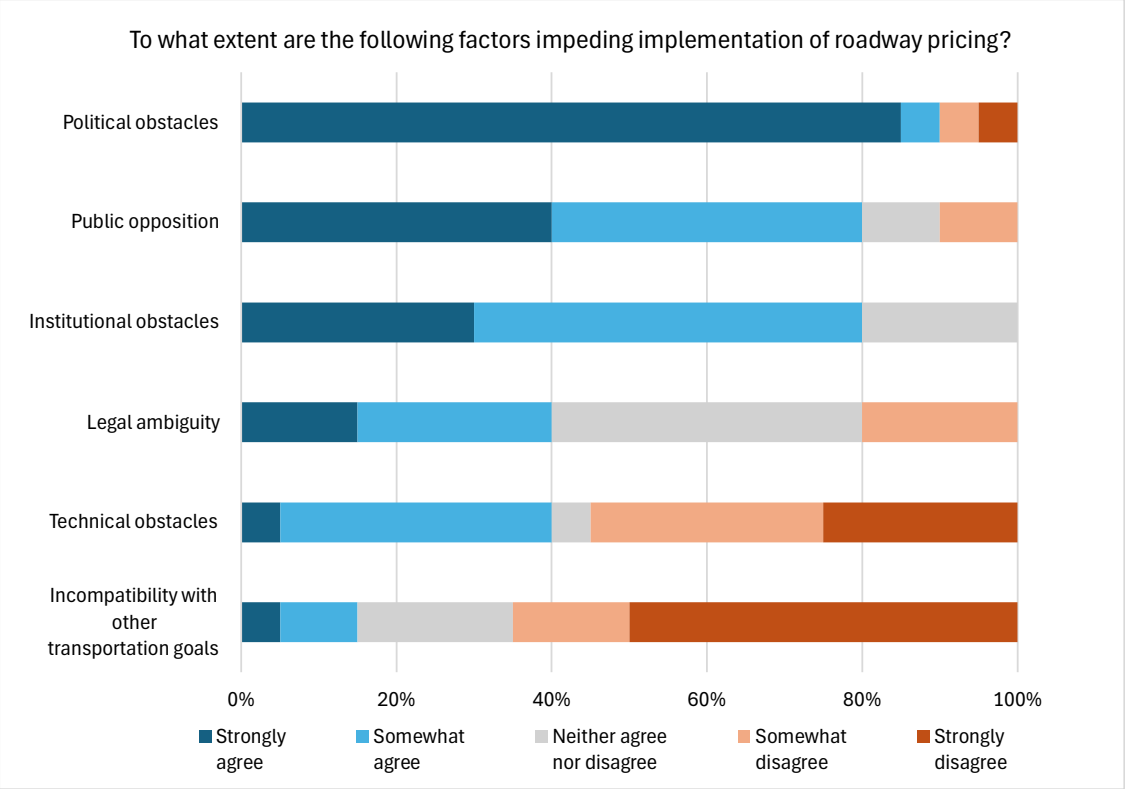
Local governments want regional cover. Everyone is waiting for someone else to go first. That is one reason progress has been slow."

Many discussed legal barriers to roadway pricing, often referencing federal law, though viewpoints about the legal framework and ambiguity around pricing strategies varied widely. Specifically, the federal government has policy about the addition of tolls to existing highway lanes, and Task Force members differed in their interpretation of those rules. Some stated that those policies are effectively a barrier to converting general purpose lanes to tolled lanes. Other pointed to cases where lane conversions have occurred. These concerns about legal ambiguity are for "political expediency" or "political cover," several said. Recent examples have shown that pricing existing highway capacity is a challenging and politically fraught proposal in California, and several discussed how using a restrictive interpretation of federal law offers a convenient shield.

The survey of the Task Force showed that most members did not see legal ambiguity as the impediment to implementing pricing. A majority (85%) strongly agreed that political obstacles were impeding the implementation of roadway pricing and, relatedly, a majority either agreed (40%) or strongly agreed (40%) that public opposition was an impediment. A similar percentage of members agreed (50%) or strongly agreed (30%) that institutional obstacles were an impediment.

Two members wrote in additional factors that they "strongly agreed" were impeding the implementation of roadway pricing. Those write-in responses were: "Erosion of state partnership with regional agencies who implement pricing projects" and "Being an overall bad idea."

See the chart below.



4 The Future of Highway Investments

Interviewees were asked how highway investments should fit into the state's vision for implementing sustainable communities. Every member of the Task Force agreed that the state highway system will need significant investments to maintain and operate, and most viewed future highway investments through a solutions-oriented lens. Nearly all agreed that California's highway system is mostly built out, and additions of capacity will be quite marginal compared to earlier eras in the 1990s and 2000s. At this point, nearly all viewed the greatest priority to be maintaining and managing the capacity that exists today given constrained fiscal resources.

4.1 Highway Investments to Solve Problems

A solutions-oriented approach to managing the existing highway system would require creative and complex highway projects that increase efficiency and address transportation needs, several members explained. Diagnostics of problems should be robust, and solutions should be evidence-based and context-specific. This approach may include targeted expansion of the highway system, members said, but it should include stringent criteria for building new general-purpose capacity. This approach should evaluate problems, solutions, and proposed projects in their context; members generally opposed blanket policies – de facto and de jure – of building new highway capacity but also of prohibiting the building thereof. Specifically, several members said that "one size doesn't fit all" in reference to new highway capacity. Several said that highway capacity has historically been a "one size fits all" solution to problems on the state highway system – congestion, freight operations, safety, air quality, et cetera – regardless of context or evidence. Other members said a statewide policy prohibiting new highway capacity would also be a "one size fits all" solution. Members generally did not support either of these approaches.

The managed truck-only lanes proposed for State Route 99 were cited by several Task Force members as a successful example of a solution-oriented approach to investing in the highway system. The high volume of freight vehicles (around 30%) could travel in the third, truck-only lane, which could reduce weaving and therefore improve safety and operations. It could potentially be tolled in the future, becoming a tolled truck lane to offset road damage costs or incentivize ZEV technologies. Pricing strategies similarly allow for creative opportunities to manage the existing network capacity.

> *"We need to think outside the box and try to solve the problem that's in front of us, with the real solution to that problem. That may still look like widening in some places, but it has to be justified, and it has to be a real solution to a real problem."*

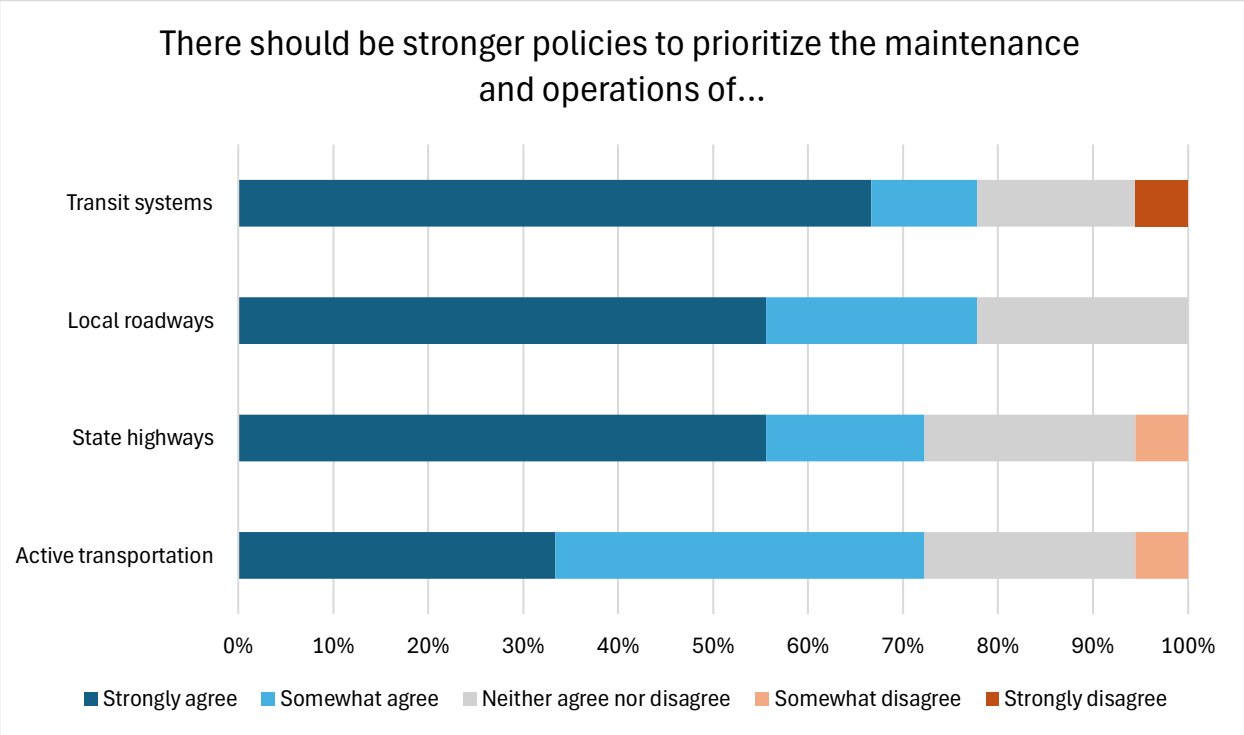
This solution-oriented approach was seen to meet both fiscal constraint and sustainable communities objectives. Gas tax revenues are declining, construction of new capacity is increasingly expensive, any operations improvement is short-lived in most of the state (not "durable," as one put it), and the driving induced by new capacity contravenes the identified climate need of reducing VMT. "If we had a financial plan to live within our means in the road and highway network, we wouldn't be expanding a lot of these roads and highways," one Task Force member said. No members said there would be no more expansion of the highway system.

Many members supported a state fix-it-first policy with "actual teeth." Many cited voters' preferences for maintenance and repair of roadways, and many cited the need to be "actually

fiscally constrained" for the purposes of good governance and realistic transportation plans. Some suggested that a fix-it-first prioritization was already in law, because of SB1's emphasis on maintenance and rehabilitation; others pointed out that much of the SB1 funding has been used for projects that create new capacity. One member offered a counterpoint that a fix-it-first investment strategy creates geographic inequities for regions that have built fewer roads and highways – "fix-it-first only makes sense in places where they built it first."

Many on the Task Force noted that the maintenance needs of the transportation system – highway and otherwise – are seeing unprecedented impacts from climate change and extreme weather events. These events and the commensurate impacts on the network have become annual expenses, some noted – not one-off events – and are already straining the state's transportation maintenance budget. To set realistic targets and prioritize funding, the state would need to account for the "new reality" that requires significant funding for disaster management, including preparing for long-term climate change impacts (hardening, raising, etc.), climate events, and repairing or rebuilding after events. This viewpoint relates to certain comments about redirecting existing transportation funds, as some were redirected away from GHG-reducing transportation uses to climate disaster response. Planning for the fiscal burdens of disasters would ideally avoid the ad hoc siphoning of funds away from transportation funds, members said.

The survey of Task Force members asked about their policy preferences around prioritizing maintenance and operations. This question was broken down by mode – if local roadways, state highways, transit systems, and active transportation should have stronger fix-it-first policies. The majority strongly agreed for transit, local roads, and state highways.



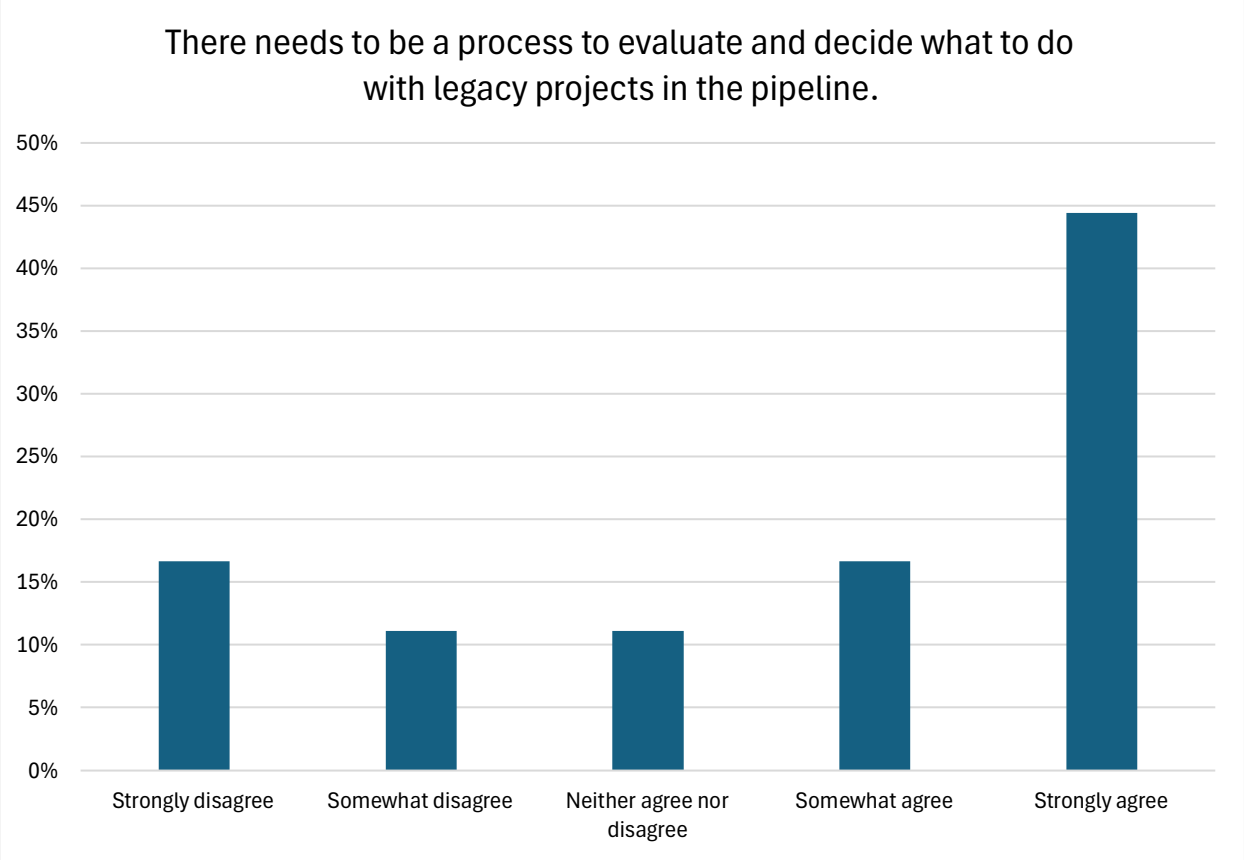
A few on the Task Force suggested that the extent of the road and highway network should be assessed and could be decreased, that within the conversation of fix-it-first and the cost burden of maintaining the existing roadway assets, there is a "need for broader re-evaluation of [highway]

assets that we do have." One suggested evaluating all projects that add to maintenance needs – for example, new lane miles, wider shoulders – because "it's not realistic that we'll ever have the money to fund all the projects in the pipeline." Another suggested, for example, that state-owned roadways that see only limited and seasonal vehicle traffic, because they close for snow in the winter and mostly carry drivers who recreationally choose the scenic route, could be candidates to relinquish or turn to gravel paving. This type of conversation is common in transit planning, another noted, where "cutting routes or frequency isn't uncommon," and could be borrowed for fiscally constrained roadway planning.

4.2 Legacy Capital Projects

Adjacent to the discussion of highway investments was a pointed discussion about the capital projects that have been in the pipeline for decades, often referred to as "legacy projects." This discussion related to both highway and transit projects, and raised the question about how to approach capital projects that were launched in an era with different goals, fiscal resources, or information and are still in the project pipeline. In some cases, these projects have received political support, and significant sums of public money and resources. One member summarized the question that transportation agencies needed to directly face: "Are we going to walk away? Or do we say the project is grandfathered in? At some point, we need to make a decision, either way."

Most Task Force members agree or strongly agree that there needs to be a process to decide what to do legacy projects. See the chart below.



Viewpoints about legacy projects were both varied and strong. One member argued: “It’s important to revisit megaprojects in light of current needs of the state.” But another noted the downside of this approach: “By this logic, a megaproject may never come to fruition because election cycles will change those making policy goals before any megaproject can be completed.” A third argued for a balance: “We should not discount the need for legacy projects, but neither should we ignore changes since those projects were identified as a need and the realities of today.”

Some recommended handling legacy projects analytically: “Apply a basic cost/benefit and life cycle analysis, internalizing as many of the known externalities as possible.” But another said analysis was already conducted: “Many legacy projects are ‘reevaluated’ as they are prepared and considered for funding through existing funding programs and their respective guidelines.” A third questioned the accuracy of the evaluations performed for projects when they apply for funding, noting that project sponsors have incentive to provide optimistic forecasts of the project outcomes and have little oversight in how they conduct analyses.

Members offered various viewpoints about creating a new process to evaluate legacy projects. One was: “The government is already empowered to do this.” Another was: “offer [project sponsors] a combination of technical assistance to design alternative solutions to the identified problems, and then consider giving them the ability to 'cut the line' at CTC for SCS-aligned projects that are a better fit. Show that the state still wants to invest in these communities.”

4.3 Clarity in Governance of the Highway System

A Task Force member noted that the discussion of legacy projects begged the question, “Who has say in whose pipeline?” This governance question was a running theme evident in many discussions about pricing projects and highway projects. Another noted that many transportation policy conversations are often about the need to manage travel demand and reduce VMT, but that Caltrans, CTC, and CalSTA yield on individual highway projects that are forecasted to increase VMT. They identified ambiguity in the management of the highway system: “If the state doesn’t want to expand state highways, the state has that authority.” Another Task Force member noted that Caltrans’ rules differ from its norms: “Caltrans has the authority to say no, but politically that can be hard.” The culture of Caltrans is to “be a really good partner” to the local and regional agencies that sponsor projects on the state highway system: “they’re not going to say no to their partners.” This culture is amplified in the relationships between Caltrans districts, which operate with a significant level of autonomy, and local and regional agencies, especially local agencies with transportation sales tax measures, members noted.

5 A Need for Transparent Data in Transportation

A cross-cutting and consistent theme throughout the interviews, surveys, and convenings of the Task Force was a need for better data and data transparency about how the state, regions, and municipalities are investing in the transportation system and what outcomes these investments achieve. Many members discussed this explicitly, calling for standardized data that show funding and building trends over time, patterns across the state, and project-level funding sources and details. The lack of these data was also implicit throughout the interviews and surveys, as members drew on differing sources of evidence or thought that various datasets were not comprehensive.

Members acknowledged recent legislation that has aimed to address the lack of data, specifically SB 695 and its requirement of Caltrans to report on lane miles added to the state highway system and in the project pipeline. While a helpful starting point, many members said data still lack the detail necessary to answer basic policy questions about transportation investments and the transportation system. Improvements would standardize the reporting from Caltrans, MPOs, and local agencies and make searchable project-level databases and spatial datasets (i.e., geocoded maps) that summarize project details, costs, timelines, and funding sources. “There are still gaps in what data the state is organizing and reporting publicly that make it challenging for any public stakeholders – and likely even people within the agency itself – to actually have a full picture of how the state is spending transportation dollars,” a member said.

Standardized, transparent, and trustworthy data are a necessary starting point for good governance and for productive policy conversations, members suggested. There is opportunity for much greater transparency and clarity about which transportation projects are completed, for what estimated and ultimate cost, and what their outcomes, many members said, and that this information and transparency are core components of performance-based policy and accountability to taxpayers. A member compared the difference in transparency and performance standards between transportation and housing policy arenas: “Housing is under so much more scrutiny compared to transportation; people would never stand for this lack of transparency in housing policy or with their own homes, and they shouldn’t have to stand for it as taxpayers either.” Further, policy conversations devolve into ideological debates without a shared set of evidence, which members disliked. Essentially, members recognized that they would debate how funds *should* be spent on various transportation investments, but that those actual dollar values should not be the subject of policy debate, as they currently are.

6 Appendices

Appendix A: Task Force Members

Zak Accuardi, NRDC

Will Barrett, American Lung Association

Sabrina Bradbury, CalCOG

James Corless, SACOG

Hana Creger, The Greenlining Institute

Dan Dunmoyer, California Building Industry Association

Lee Ann Eager, California Transportation Commission

Lisa Engel, California State Assembly

Kate Gordon, California Forward

Aaron Hake, Riverside County Transportation Commission

Alison Hughes, California State Senate

Sarah Jepson, SCAG

Aaron Kurz, California State Assembly

Julie Lo, Housing California

Matt Maloney, MTC

Antoinette Meier, SANDAG

Mark Neuburger, CSAC

Liz O'Donoghue, The Nature Conservancy

Colin Parent, Circulate San Diego

Michael Pimentel, California Transit Association

Susana Reyes, LA Metro

Susan Shaheen, CARB

Ted Smalley, Tulare County Association of Governments

Sujata Srivastava, SPUR

Sean Tiedgen, Shasta Regional Transportation Agency

Maura Twomey, AMBAG

Kiana Valentine, Transportation California

Jeanie Ward-Waller, ClimatePlan

Melissa White, California State Senate

Eric Will, Rural County Representatives of California

Ex Officio Members

Chanell Fletcher, CARB

Marlon Flournoy, Caltrans

Sean Kennedy, SGC

Sasha Kergan, California Housing & Homelessness Agency

Megan Kirkeby, HCD

Natalie Kuffel, LCI

Laura Pennebaker, CTC

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Can you share an example of an action you've been involved with that has catalyzed implementation of sustainable communities?

2. If you were to create a system – of institutions, policies, plans, programs, regulation, strategies, et cetera – spanning all levels of government to rapidly implement a sustainable transportation and land use agenda, how would you set it up?

3. How does roadway pricing fit into your vision as a policy lever to manage VMT?
    - What are the institutional opportunities and challenges to implementing pricing?
    - What are the political opportunities and challenges to pricing?

4. Next, focusing on how highway projects fit into your system. What do you see as the future of investments in the highway system?
    - What are the institutional opportunities to implementing that kind of investment in the highway system? The challenges?
    - The political opportunities and challenges?

5. Is there anything else you'd like to share about implementing the state goals to reduce VMT and GHG?

Appendix C: Survey 1

This survey was administered in August 2025, and results were presented at the first convening of the Sustainable Communities Task Force on September 10, 2025.

Q1.

Welcome to the Sustainable Communities Task Force! This survey is for discussion purposes in our first meeting. All responses will be anonymous and only presented in aggregate.

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following ideas and statements. We're asking for your opinion; there are no right or wrong answers.

Survey 1: Questions and Summary of Responses (n = 24)

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Some-what disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Some-what agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Regions should have a long-range plan about where they are going.	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%	71%
Regional plans should address core issues like where we should build housing, locate jobs and schools, create places for recreation, and how people can get around.	0%	0%	0%	4%	8%	38%	50%
Travel modes and distances, as well as land use patterns, contribute to climate impacts.	0%	4%	0%	0%	8%	21%	67%
Reducing driving is a key part of meeting state climate goals.	0%	4%	8%	4%	8%	33%	42%
We need more funding to implement the transportation system we need.	0%	4%	4%	4%	21%	21%	46%
We can implement the transportation system we need with the funding we have; we just need to spend our current funding differently.	8%	25%	21%	0%	21%	13%	13%
MPOs need more direct funding to implement their regional plans.	4%	8%	4%	21%	13%	25%	25%
Local governments are making land use decisions based on the vision in the RTP/SCSs.	13%	17%	17%	13%	33%	8%	0%
Local government and agencies are making transportation decisions based on the vision in the RTP/SCSs.	4%	17%	13%	21%	29%	13%	4%
State departments and agencies are making decisions based on the visions in the RTP/SCSs.	17%	17%	25%	21%	21%	0%	0%

Survey 1: Questions and Summary of Responses (n = 24) – continued

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Some-what disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Some-what agree	Agree	Strongly agree
My region needs more road infrastructure to support our economy.	17%	21%	8%	13%	4%	21%	17%
My region needs more transit infrastructure to support our economy.	0%	0%	0%	4%	8%	38%	50%
We can support our mobility needs by better managing our roads, and not increasing roadway capacity.	8%	13%	8%	8%	13%	21%	29%
There are cases in which additional highway capacity is needed.	8%	4%	8%	4%	25%	13%	38%
Regions and local governments should have flexibility in what state goals apply to them.	21%	13%	29%	4%	13%	13%	8%
Regions and local governments should have flexibility in how to meet state goals by selecting the policies and strategies that work best in their jurisdiction.	4%	0%	21%	0%	13%	29%	33%

Survey 1: Questions and Summary of Responses (n = 24) – continued

Question	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Some-what disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Some-what agree	Agree	Strongly agree
The following are important problems that transportation policy and agencies should address:							
Traffic congestion	4%	0%	4%	8%	21%	25%	38%
Greenhouse gas emissions	0%	0%	4%	0%	8%	25%	63%
Jobs & job creation	0%	13%	8%	13%	21%	17%	29%
Lack of transportation options	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	38%	63%
Air pollution	0%	0%	0%	0%	17%	29%	54%
Drive time & reliability	0%	4%	0%	17%	21%	21%	38%
Auto dependence	0%	0%	0%	0%	21%	25%	54%
Safety	0%	8%	4%	8%	29%	13%	38%
Biking & walking access	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	29%	71%
Freight & goods movement	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	46%	42%
Other (n = 8)*	0%	0%	0%	4%	13%	33%	50%

*Written-in responses for “Other”:

- Equity and economic inclusion
- Equity
- Cost of living
- Avoid and minimize impacts on habitat, waters and resources
- Stopping highway expansion
- Potential conflicts between transportation policies, versus housing, air quality, or other state priorities
- Land use related to economic development (type and location of industry)
- Inequitable access and burden

Appendix D: Survey 2

This survey was administered in October 2025, and results were presented at the second convening of the Sustainable Communities Task Force on October 29, 2025.

Q1.

This task force has been put together to focus on implementing strategies to deliver on the promise of sustainable, thriving communities.

In the September meeting, we heard a desire to start this task force with discussion of problem statements – definitions, importance, urgency, successes, barriers – related to sustainable communities and achieving outcomes.

This questionnaire is intended to capture your insights and expertise about defining sustainable communities, outcomes you're trying to accomplish in your work, and procedural and institutional problems you encounter in the implementation thereof.

Your insights will help us prepare for our in-person discussion at the October 29 meeting.

Q2. What are the necessary characteristics of a as you would define it?

- Responses: Five text entry boxes

Q3. Which of these characteristics that you listed do you see as the most *urgent* to focus on?

(You can choose up to three. If you didn't respond to the previous question, this list will be blank – tap the back arrow to fill it out.)

- Responses carried forward from Q2: A maximum of three responses enabled.

Q4. Please elaborate on why these are the most important characteristics and outcomes to aim for in achieving sustainable communities. Share as much as you'd like.

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q5. What are the tools (that currently exist) that are most helpful in your work toward implementing these outcomes, or components, of sustainable communities? Are they procedural? Institutional? Legal? Systemic? Technological?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q6. What are the most challenging barriers that hinder your work toward implementing these outcomes or components? Are they procedural? Institutional? Legal? Systemic? Technological?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q7. The state has set a goal to reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT) to at least 25% of 2019 levels by 2030, and 30% by 2045. Throughout other policy and legislation, VMT reduction is

used as a strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation and as a measure of "sustainable communities" more broadly. (Source: 2022 Scoping Plan)

How do you think VMT, as an outcome, should fit into the outcomes or solutions for sustainable communities? To what degree is VMT an important and/or urgent outcome to tackle in achieving sustainable communities? Why?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q8. What kind of organization do you represent on the Sustainable Communities Task Force? (Optional)

- Responses (one selection): Local government agency or commission; Advocacy organization; State agency, department, board; Industry organization; Non-governmental organization; Regional government agency; Legislature; Other / Self Define: (text entry)

Appendix E: Final Survey

This survey was administered in August 2026 immediately after the final convening on August 3, 2026. The questions were informed by the discussion among Task Force members at the convening.

Q1.

Thank you for an engaged discussion at the Sustainable Communities Task Force convening on Monday. The slide deck presented is available to view for your review and reference as you provide any feedback.

This survey is intended as a follow-up to the in-person discussion at the August 3 meeting, to capture your level of agreement with the themes and policy positions discussed. These survey responses are to efficiently take stock and memorialize your viewpoints, and may be summarized in aggregate in the memo written by ITS-Davis.

Survey responses will be confidential and would only be presented in aggregate.

Feel free to email Amy Lee (aelee@ucdavis.edu) with further comments or to schedule time to discuss topics in more detail.

Q2.1 The Task Force had an in-depth discussion about roadway pricing. This set of questions asks about your level of agreement with topics discussed, your policy recommendations, and offers space for comment.

Q2.2 Roadway pricing is a necessary policy mechanism for managing travel demand in California.

- Multiple choice response: Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree

Q2.3 Which level of government should take the lead in setting policy to implement roadway pricing?

- Multiple choice response: State; MPOs; Local governments or agencies; A collaboration between these three levels; Other, please specify: (text entry)

Q2.4 Pricing comes in many forms: VMT fees, lane tolling, congestion pricing, cordon pricing, parking pricing, truck tolling, et cetera.

What pricing mechanism should be prioritized, and which level of government should take the lead on them?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q2.5 To what extent are the following factors impeding implementation of roadway pricing?

- Response: Matrix

- Options/Statements: Legal ambiguity; Political obstacles; Institutional obstacles; Public opposition; Incompatibility with other transportation goals; Other, please specify (text entry)
- Scale points: Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree

Q2.6 Feel free to elaborate on your responses about pricing, and provide any policy recommendations.

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q3.1 The Task Force also had lengthy discussion about fiscal matters and transportation funding. This set of questions asks about your policy recommendations, and offers space for comment.

Q3.2 The Secretary and Task Force discussed using existing transportation monies more efficiently, as well as the challenges, opportunities, and needs surrounding new funding sources and redirecting existing funding sources.

What is impeding prior efforts to redirect state discretionary funding toward sustainable infrastructure projects?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q3.3 What other funding sources should be spent differently, redirected, or further evaluated for redirection? For what purpose for those funds be redirected?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q3.4 We had a robust discussion at the Task Force about the lack of funding for maintenance of active transportation facilities and transit operations, and how state funding should include maintenance and operations in addition to funding for capital projects.

(E.g., an electric bus sitting in the yard for lack of operating budget; limited active transportation projects because of no funds to maintain new facilities.)

Please share any additional recommendations about investment priorities for transit systems, active transportation facilities, and other sustainable transportation infrastructure.

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q3.5 What should be the investment priorities for state highways and interstates? For local roadways?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q3.6 There should be stronger policies to prioritize the maintenance and operations of…

- Response: Matrix

- Options/Statements: Transit systems; Local roadways; State highways; Active transportation; Other, please specify (text entry)
- Scale points: Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree

Q3.7 How should fiscal constraint and maintenance needs (ongoing maintenance, disaster-related repair, etc.) influence the funding policy for the state highway system? For local roadways?

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q4.1 We discussed the governance structure of transportation planning, institutions, and project implementation. One component of the discussion was about the Regional Transportation Plans / Sustainable Communities Strategies and their potential role in setting priorities for transportation projects and funding.

Q4.2 The state's departments and agencies, and its districts, should be...

- Response: Matrix
- Options/Statements: ***Required to follow*** the transportation project list in SCSs; Able to seek funding for projects that are ***not*** in the SCS
- Scale points: Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree

Q4.3 Local transportation agencies should be...

- Response: Matrix
- Options/Statements: ***Required to follow*** the transportation project list in SCSs; Able to seek funding for projects that are ***not*** in the SCS; ***Required to maintain*** projects that they sponsor on the state highway network
- Scale points: Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree

Q4.4 Transit agencies should be...

- Response: Matrix
- Options/Statements: ***Required to follow*** the transportation project list in SCSs; Able to seek funding for projects that are ***not*** in the SCS
- Scale points: Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree

Q4.5 Feel free to elaborate on your responses above and provide any policy recommendations.

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q5.1 The last topic of discussion was about legacy projects and "megaprojects" that may not fit with current fiscal realities or sustainable communities goals.

Q5.2 There needs to be a process to evaluate and decide what to do with legacy projects in the pipeline.

- Multiple choice response: Strongly disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Strongly agree

Q5.3 Please provide any policy recommendations for handling legacy projects.

- Response: Open-ended text entry

Q6.1 Is there anything else you'd like to add?

- Response: Open-ended text entry