SB 375 (Steinberg) is California state legislation that became law effective January 1, 2009. It prompts California regions to work together to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from cars and light trucks. This new law would achieve this objective by requiring integration of planning processes for transportation, land-use and housing. The plans emerging from this process will lead to more efficient communities that provide residents with alternatives to using single occupant vehicles. SB 375 requires the California Air Resources Board (ARB) to develop regional reduction targets for automobiles and light trucks GHG emissions. The regions, in turn, are tasked with creating “sustainable communities strategy,” (SCS) which combine transportation and land-use elements in order to achieve the emissions reduction target, if feasible. SB 375 also offers local governments regulatory and other incentives to encourage more compact new development and transportation alternatives.

Background
In order to achieve the greenhouse gas reduction goals set out in California Assembly Bill 32: The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32), SB 375 focuses on reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and urban sprawl. AB 32 was the nation’s first law to limit greenhouse gas emissions and SB 375 was enacted thereafter to more specifically address the transportation and land use components of greenhouse gas emissions. Through the implementation of regional SCS plans by 2020, the goal of SB 375 is to see a significant decrease in greenhouse gas emissions for the environment and an increase in quality of life for residents.

How does SB 375 Relate to SCAG?
SB 375 requires SCAG to direct the development of the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) for the region. Alternatively, if the GHG emissions reduction targets cannot be met through the SCS, an Alternative Planning Strategy (APS) may be developed showing how those targets would be achieved through alternative development patterns, infrastructure, or additional transportation measures or policies. Additionally, unique to the SCAG region, is the option for subregions to create their own SCS or APS.

There are two mutually important facets to the SB 375 legislation: reducing VMT and encouraging more compact, complete, and efficient communities for the future.

What is required in a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)?
The SCS, as defined in SB 375, is a newly required element of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). After receiving regional targets in 2010, SCAG will begin to develop the SCS and create a plan for meeting the emissions reduction targets by 2020 and 2035 respectively.

The new SCS will integrate planning elements of transportation, land use, and housing with greenhouse gas reduction targets. This process will require meaningful collaboration and negotiation with local governments and other stakeholders in the region, to ensure a well-balanced SCS is developed and that all aspects of transportation alternatives have been considered and properly vetted.

Development of the SCS is subject to an extensive public review process. Outreach and public participation will play a major part in the creation of the final SCS document; input and suggestions will be considered.

Next Steps
To date, SCAG has performed outreach and promoted dialogue among member cities and stakeholders, participated in the Regional Targets Advisory Committee process to inform the ARB in the target setting process, consulted with other Metropolitan Planning Organizations on scenario development and other issues, developed five “sketch” scenarios to establish a range of targets and has performed additional analysis leading up to ARB’s target adoption.

Next steps include two rounds of SCS workshops with CTC’s, local jurisdictions, subregions, and other stakeholders as well as workshops with elected officials leading up to presentation of draft SCS/RTP in November 2011.

For more information please visit the SCAG Web site at: www.scag.ca.gov/sb375 or contact Matt Horton at (213) 236-1980 or horton@scag.ca.gov.