On April 13, 2007, Attorney General Jerry Brown initiated a suit against the County of San Bernardino on the grounds that the County’s general plan violates AB 32 and CEQA, respectively, failing to consider ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and evaluate the general plan’s impacts on global warming.

Barely 4 months later, both parties signed a settlement agreement. It commits the county to amending its general plan within 30 months to include a greenhouse gas reduction policy.

The settlement states that the county will create an inventory of all “known or reasonably discoverable sources of greenhouse gases” in the county. They will determine their 1990 emission levels and make projections for 2020. They will then create a target for emissions reduction by 2020 from discretionary land use decisions.

Asked how the county will go about calculating past and future emission levels (figures that are necessary for illustrating compliance with AB 32), Director Rock replied that this question is currently under discussion.

While in the 07/08 budget, passed this month, the legislature mandated that the Governor’s Office of Planning create CEQA guidelines addressing greenhouse gas emissions, this work isn’t scheduled for completion until 2010. Thus the County is on its own when it comes to completing this task.

According to Rock, the figures will likely come from the regional air quality control district, however county officials are also discussing methodologies with the Governor’s Climate Action Team, the CA Air Resources Board, ICLEI and the CA Climate Action Registry.

According to the settlement agreement, San Bernardino County has until 2010 to develop a set of measures that will allow them to meet their 2020 target for greenhouse gas reduction. According to the office of LGC Boardmember and San Bernardino County Supervisor Josie Gonzales, the County had already started working on a greenhouse gas reduction plan, prior to the lawsuit.

The County voted this month on their package of measures including a measure that will waive building permit fees for existing homeowners who want to install solar panels, tankless water heaters, wind generators, and energy-efficient heating and cooling systems. The County expects to issue permits for about 136 such devices this year.

Also included in their greenhouse gas reduction package is a measure requiring all new county government buildings and major renovations to comply with the standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED standards focusing on water savings, energy efficiency, building materials and indoor air quality.

Further, a voluntary green builder program will be initiated that provides incentives to developers. Under this proposal, the county will adopt the Building Industry Association’s Green Builder model, in which homes must exceed state energy-efficiency standards by 15 percent, use at least 20,000 gallons less water each year, and use wood products primarily from sustainable forests.

In return, developers who participate will get their plans fast tracked for review, receive guaranteed timelines for city approvals, and jump to the head of the line on field inspections.

The County has established a web site that provides information on the county’s environmental programs. It can be found at www.greencountysb.com.

The Attorney General has suggested some additional greenhouse gas reduction measures appropriate for inclusion in a general plan. Among them are 1) building high-density developments that reduce vehicle trips by incorporating public transit; 2) limiting parking, 3) imposing a transportation impact fee on new development that would fund public transit service, and 4) developing regional multi-modal transportation centers.

Complimenting San Bernardino officials on the forward-thinking settlement agreement, Brown observed, “This landmark agreement establishes one of the first greenhouse gas reduction plans in California. It is a model that I encourage other cities and counties to adopt.”

San Bernardino County officials are understandably proud. According to Board Vice Chairman, Supervisor Gary Ovitt, “San Bernardino County will lead the way in the implementation of strategies and steps to enhance our future and serve as a model for others.”
Portland Successfully Tackles Greenhouse Gases, Builds Local Economy: It has been said that by signing the Kyoto Treaty, nations will risk losing billions of dollars from their economies. The City of Portland, Oregon has proven this to be a mistaken assumption.

In 1993, Portland became the first U.S. city to adopt a local global warming action plan. By 2006, per-capita carbon dioxide emissions had dropped by 12.5 percent and, notably, employment was up by 14 percent.

The city has its own office of sustainable development, which is responsible for collecting solid waste; providing leadership; contributing solutions on energy conservation; promoting use of renewable energy resources, including solar and wind power; encouraging waste reduction, recycling, sustainable construction practices; handling electric utility rate and water conservation issues; and helping implement the city’s local action plan on global warming.

But a great deal of their success is due to Portland’s early recognition that transportation and land use are connected. The city has depended largely on transit as a transportation option and has been encouraging transit oriented development throughout the region. In metro Portland, 30 percent of all jobs are within three miles of the central business district and fewer than 20 percent are more than 10 miles from the CBD. This land use pattern makes commuting to work via transit very convenient. The City has experienced a 75% growth in transit use in the county since 1990.

Compared to other U.S. metropolitan areas, Portland area residents drive about 20 percent fewer miles every day — about 4 miles less than average — and have the second lowest rate of transportation spending costs of the 28 largest metro areas in the U.S.

Four miles may not seem like much, but the overall impact on greenhouse gas emissions and the economy is highly significant. Portlanders burn 400,000 fewer gallons annually than those from other metropolitan areas with a population of 2 million. This translates into a total reduction of 1.4 million tons of greenhouse gases emitted per year.

Reducing auto use also keeps more money in the local economy. Again, the result is surprisingly significant. Portlanders spend $1.1 billion less per year on their cars than the average. Because this money gets re-spent in other sectors of the economy, it is stimulating local businesses and job development.

To browse the surprisingly broad array of programs and services offered by the City of Portland’s Office of Sustainable Development, visit www.portlandonline.com/osd/.

Keep Your Kids Safe — Install Traffic Circles: Federal and state funds available to California cities and counties for Safe Routes to School total $98 million this year. One highly effective use of these funds is to invest them in traffic circles. Seattle has reported a 77 percent to 91 percent reduction in traffic accidents after installing a citywide traffic-calming program that included 700 new residential traffic circles. More information on traffic calming measures is available from the LGC at www.lgc.org.

Redevelopment Project Cuts Crime: In the 1990s, the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego suffered from poverty, crime, and urban blight, lacking educational and recreational facilities for its residents. In 1994, the City initiated an effort to address this problem, one which time has proven to be quite successful.

Ten years later, the neighborhood now has a new police substation, an elementary school, a library, a community service center, a performance annex, a continuing education center, and a retail center, as well as recreational facilities and townhouses. Not only do residents have places to shop, play, learn and live, violent crime has dropped by about 40%.

Safe Routes to School Funding Available: Now is the time to apply for Safe Routes to Schools funds. Caltrans has released a call for projects for $52 million available to California cities and counties. Projects funded by the program will improve the safety of students who walk or bike to school and will encourage more students to do so. The application submittal deadline is Friday, November 16, 2007. Another $46 million is expected to be available through Caltrans with an anticipated call for projects next month. After that, it will be about two years before the next call for projects for either program so be sure to apply now! For more information on the state funding, go to www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/saferoutes/sr2s.htm.

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