History Teaches Us That It's Time To Plan For Future Growth NOW: On May 27, 1929, the Regional Plan Association released a monumental plan for New York and the surrounding metropolitan region. The plan argued that for a region whose population would one day reach 20 million inhabitants, strategic investments must be made in "highways, communications, parks and parkways, land uses, bridges and tunnels, housing, airport facilities and other fields."

Only a few months later, financial havoc hit the markets, followed by the Great Depression. At the time many critics observed that this was the worst possible time to be proposing what today would be a couple of hundred billion dollars in new investments for the New York Metropolitan Region. As it turned out, however, it was the best time ever to be making these proposals, because when Franklin Roosevelt began the New Deal and its public works programs, the New York region was one of the few places in the country with plans and preliminary engineering in place for these investments. As a result, most of these projects were completed over the next decade, financed largely by federal public works funding.

Now, in 2008, we find ourselves in similar circumstances, with a federal government looking to create new jobs by identifying infrastructure projects that are "ready to go." These will hopefully not be business-as-usual highway projects that will only increase our current dependence on foreign oil but new projects that will play a role in our transition to a sustainable future.

Fortuitously, the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut metropolitan region has committed itself to perhaps the most ambitious plans for development, preservation and infrastructure since the 1930s. After ignoring mass transit for two generations, the region has identified over $100 billion of new priority transit investments.

When Congress opts to put more money into infrastructure as long-term investment and a way to dig the nation out of this recession, New York City and the region will be ready. Regions in the West need to do the same. In California, the current regional blueprint planning process provides the perfect venue for doing so.

During these previous financial “panics,” our public leaders recognized that bad times are actually a good time to do long-term planning and investing. They put people to work and help prepare a platform for future growth when the economy does recover. Today is no different.

Regions should not be waiting for targets to be established by SB 375, but should be moving ahead today with project proposals that will likely meet the environmental and social goals of SB 375.

President-elect Barack Obama has called for a massive economic recovery bill to generate 2.5 million jobs over his first two years in office. The measure, which could total $500 billion, would bankroll big public works projects to create jobs, provide aid to states to help with Medicaid costs, and provide money toward renewable energy development. Cities and counties need to be ready with new projects that will enhance our economic and environmental goals.

Be Inspired, Join Us In Albuquerque: “Like it or not, we live in interesting times; they are times of danger and uncertainty, but they are also the most creative of any time in the history of mankind” says Ventura County City Manager Rick Cole - a plenary speaker at the 2009 New Partners for Smart Growth Conference.

This is a year for us to be inspired to creativity; and Cole and others at this year’s event will provide an abundance of inspiration to give us the ideas we need to meet the challenges of today.

The program has over 100 cutting-edge sessions and tours of model projects, spanning three full days. Most of the conference sessions have already been approved for AICP accreditation.

Time is running out to get registered for this "not-to-be-missed" event! Register online now, and before the January 9th deadline. Visit www.NewPartners.org to register and get more details on the exciting program!

We also expect both the Hyatt and the DoubleTree Hotels to sell out of rooms at the conference rate of $99. This reduced room rate is only available until December 30th so don’t delay! To receive this rate, call the Hyatt at (800) 233-1234 or the DoubleTree at (800) 584-5058 and indicate you’re attending the New Partners Conference.

SEASON’S GREETINGS FROM THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION!
CA Cities Take Up the Challenge: California has taken center stage in national and international efforts to fight global warming. A new survey of the state’s cities and counties puts the spotlight on the role California’s local governments are playing and finds that there is already considerable local involvement in activities related to climate change. The Public Policy Institute of California analyzed completed surveys from 310 cities and counties, or 58% of all cities and counties in the state, representing 73% of the state’s population. Seventy-five percent of the local governments that responded to the survey indicated some kind of activity underway to address climate change. Because larger cities and counties are more likely to be active in climate change issues, the estimated share of the sample population living in communities with some type of climate change work underway is higher – over 90%.

Many Focus on Emissions Inventories: Under the category of emissions inventories, the most common step is to focus on greenhouse gas emissions in government facilities and operations. Nineteen percent of the communities surveyed have already carried out an in-house emissions survey and 35% plan to or are currently taking this action. Somewhat fewer local governments have taken on the more extensive process of doing a community-wide inventory. Fourteen percent have already carried out a community wide inventory and 28% plan or have already started to do so.

Inventories in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Sacramento region are particularly prevalent, largely because of support granted by outside entities. For instance, within the Bay Area, communities in Sonoma County were involved in a joint countywide assessment assisted by a nonprofit organization. In San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties, city and county governments have been working in partnership with a local business group, Joint Venture Silicon Valley, and in Alameda County the effort is coordinated with the help of the county waste authority.

Some Bay Area communities have received financial support from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District. In the Sacramento area, both the Sacramento Area Council of Governments and the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District have played a leadership role, with funding support coming from the air district.

Local governments typically partner with outside parties to conduct the inventories. ICLEI has been a particularly important partner in the Bay Area (currently working with San Mateo and Santa Clara communities, for instance). Others call on specialized consulting firms.

Half of the communities are preparing climate action plans. Of the 310 communities surveyed, only 7% have both completed an emissions inventory and moved on to establish a reduction target and a plan of policies and programs that will move the community toward meeting the target. A few of their plans have also included examinations of the impacts of climate change and higher temperatures, and looked at how they might be mitigated.

Many more local jurisdictions have climate action plans in progress or intend to create one. Over half of those surveyed are in this category. This planning process is frequently going beyond climate change issues to address broader sustainability goals.

Vast Majority Implementing Policies That Address Greenhouse Gases: Most cities and counties are not waiting to complete a greenhouse gas inventory or develop a climate action plan. They are simply moving ahead to implement emission-reducing changes in their communities. Eighty percent of those surveyed are implementing or planning to implement water efficiency programs and 72% are working on requiring various green building practices. Transit oriented development and smart growth are being implemented or considered by 67% of the responding communities, and 60% are looking to generate energy via renewable sources.

These programs may not bear the greenhouse gas reduction label, however, the end result is the same. For instance, the City of Sacramento has developed a Sustainability Plan, which incorporates targets related to congestion, livability, water conservation, and other areas. San Jose’s Green Vision Plan includes targets related to clean tech job creation, tree planting, and bicycle/pedestrian trails. This approach acknowledges that actions to reduce GHG emissions can have important co-benefits in other specific areas – such as reducing pollution, lowering energy costs, and improving the quality of open space and the urban environment – with the potential for more general benefits to public health, the local economy and quality of life.

To view or download a copy of the PPIC report, go to www.ppic.org and look for Climate Policy at the Local Level: A Survey of California’s Cities and Counties.

Quote of the Month: “My presidency will mark a new chapter in America’s leadership on climate change that will strengthen our security and create millions of new jobs in the process.” — President-Elect Barack Obama at Governor Schwarzenegger’s November 2008 Global Warming Summit.