



January 16, 2018

County of San Diego Planning Commission
5510 Overland Avenue, Suite 310
San Diego, CA 92123
Attn: Lisa Fitzpatrick, Planning Commission Secretary

Subject: County of San Diego Final Draft Climate Action Plan and Final SEIR

Dear Planning Commission:

Climate Action Campaign (CAC) is committed to stopping climate change by helping local governments in the San Diego Region pass and implement successful climate plans with commitments to 100% clean energy by 2035. We envision a future in which all communities have healthy places to live, work, and play.

The Climate Action Campaign (CAC) is disappointed in the County's Final Climate Action Plan (CAP). Despite numerous public comments from organizations and individuals seeking to improve the CAP and strengthen the County's plan to reduce GHG emissions, the Final CAP repeats nearly all of flaws in the previous draft.

CAC has worked extensively with various jurisdictions in the region to draft CAPs and develop policies to reduce GHG emissions. While we support the County CAP's goals and many of its proposed GHG reduction concepts, we are concerned that the CAP's flaws result in a step in the wrong direction.

1. Required mitigation is not sufficiently defined and enforceable

The CAP is required by Mitigation Measure CC-1.2 of the 2011 General Plan Update's (GPU) environmental impact report (EIR) as mitigation for climate change impacts from land uses designated in the General Plan. Therefore, GHG reduction measures in the CAP must be enforceable as mitigation under CEQA.

Responses to comments regarding GHG Reduction Measure T-4.1 indicate the CAP includes "options" for local direct investment. But the CAP does not provide substantial evidence that the local direct investment projects will be able to achieve the projected emissions reductions. Response to comment O10-4 responds to CAC's comments by indicating that CAC did not provide substantial evidence that GHG Reduction Measure T-4.1 would not be effective.

However, it is the lead agency's responsibility to provide substantial evidence demonstrating effectiveness of mitigation.



In addition, the new cost-benefit analysis studies included in Attachment H cannot be used as a determinant to pick and choose which of CAP's GHG reduction measures will be implemented. The GHG reductions provided by the CAP as part of the General Plan's mitigation and must be enforced.

Finally, as we have noted previously, the CAP's per-capita GHG reduction targets will not be as effective as mass emissions reduction targets. The CAP is required mitigation for the 2011 GPU's emissions. Under a per-capita approach, population growth could cause the County to fall short of the state GHG reduction targets that the County committed to meet. The CAP also falls short of meeting the County's share of state targets by proposing to allow overseas offset credits to mitigate for General Plan Amendment projects.

2. The CAP Would Allow Sprawl Development to Increase Regional VMT in Excess of SANDAG's Requirements and Contrary to Smart-Growth Policies

The CAP's responses to comments find the CAP to be consistent with SB 375 and SANDAG's Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) because the CAP does not propose land use changes to the 2011 GPU. This approach indicates that changes to the 2011 GPU would be inconsistent with the SANDAG's SCS.

However, Mitigation Measure GHG-1 permits General Plan Amendments projects to find no significant impacts based only on the purchase of overseas offsets credits. Mitigation Measure GHG-1 does not require any local reduction in VMT or consistency with the SCS. Proposed amendments to the 2011 GPU typically propose sprawl projects in rural areas without adequate access to transit. These General Plan Amendment projects would necessarily add VMT inconsistent with the SCS, but could still comply with the CAP's offset requirements.

For example, Newland Sierra is a proposed General Plan Amendment project located between Escondido and Riverside County, and is expected to come before the Planning Commission later this year. It proposes 82% of its GHG emissions reductions would result from off-site carbon credit purchases. Newland Sierra is located over six miles from the nearest transit station and would add to the County's VMT.

Another General Plan Amendment project, the Project Specific Requests (PSRs), also proposes additional sprawl development located primarily in North County. It is also expected to be considered by the Planning Commission later this year. The PSRs rely on a similar offset proposal allowing GHG mitigation from overseas offset credits that do not reduce the County's VMT.

Under the CAP's Mitigation Measure GHG-1, these General Plan Amendment projects would result in increased VMT that exceeds the VMT projections SANDAG used to prepare its SCS.



As CAC commented on the Draft CAP, we are concerned that 45% of the County's emissions currently come from on-road transportation but just 4.4 % of total reductions will result directly from the built environment and transportation strategies. The responses to comments justify the limited reductions from the transportation sector because the County has limited jurisdiction over transportation emissions. However, the County has land use authority and should ensure that General Plan Amendment projects are located in areas that have direct access to transit, limit VMT, and are consistent with the SCS's VMT reduction projections.

3. Overseas Offset Credits Are Insufficient Mitigation and Fail to Implement State Policies

Since the end of the comment period on the Draft CAP, the Air Resources Board (ARB) has approved its Updated Scoping Plan. For development projects relying on offset credit purchases for GHG mitigation, ARB's Updated Scoping Plan emphasizes the importance of also reducing VMT and including direct investments in the community.

As discussed above, the CAP's Mitigation Measure GHG-1 does not reduce VMT. The General Plan Amendment projects that will rely on it are located in areas that increase VMT. We are concerned that environmental justice aspects of this proposal have not been adequately evaluated. Air pollutants that coincide with on-road transportation GHG emissions will impact local communities, but the mitigation proposed in the CAP would be based on overseas offset credits.

CAP Mitigation Measure GHG-1 also does not provide for direct investment to local communities. There is only one project in the County that currently qualifies for offset credits under Mitigation Measure GHG-1, but those credits are not yet available. Also, any GHG emissions reductions from the direct investment program will be used to mitigate the 2011 GPU's climate change impacts, not the General Plan Amendments' impacts.

Mitigation Measure GHG-1 would be inconsistent with ARB's Updated Scoping Plan, because it allows General Plan Amendment projects to rely on overseas offset credit purchases without reducing VMT or investing in local projects.

4. Recommend Addition of Option 1 - Renewable Energy

We agree with staff's analysis that including a 100% clean energy target would reduce the disproportionate burden currently placed on measure T-4.1 to reduce emissions. As we have noted, a 100% clean energy target would make the County consistent with other cities in the County, including San Diego, Del Mar, Solana Beach, Chula Vista, and likely Encinitas (set to adopt its CAP on 1/17/18). We disagree with the assertion in the SEIR that increasing the renewable energy target from 90% to 100% would necessarily require the additional construction of large-scale renewable energy facilities and thereby create significant environmental impacts.



5. CAP Needs to Address Environmental Justice

In response to CAC's comments urging inclusion of an Environmental Justice section that commits to developing equity metrics and methodology for tracking and reporting on social equity in CAP implementation, the County indicated that it will address the topic more comprehensively in Community Plan Updates and future General Plan Updates. Addressing Environmental Justice in a comprehensive manner in those contexts does not obviate the need to address it specifically in the implementation of the CAP. It needs to be addressed in both places to be successfully implemented and funded. This is a huge gap in the public policy responsibility of the County.

6. Recommend Clear Provisions in the CAP for the Content of Annual Monitoring Reports

We are pleased that the County will conduct annual monitoring reports, perform GHG inventory updates every two years, and prepare CAP updates every five years. We agree that the CAP is a living document and note that the five-year update schedule should not preclude mid-course adjustments if new opportunities arise to further reduce emissions.

In addition, we recommend that the County clarify what will be included in annual monitoring reports and specify that the reporting must address both whether and to what extent CAP actions are being implemented and whether the CAP is meeting its GHG reduction targets.

Conclusion

We recommend revising the CAP to ensure that required mitigation is sufficiently defined and enforceable, the County's authority over land use is used to reduce VMT instead of increasing it, and that the CAP's proposed use of offset credits complies with the Updated Scoping Plan. In addition, we recommend incorporating the 100% renewable energy option, adding an Environmental Justice section with clear metrics, and clarifying the content of annual monitoring reports.

Sincerely,

Sophie Wolfram, Policy Advocate
Climate Action Campaign