

San Diegans Voice Concerns to State Officials About Air Quality, Environmental Justice, and Climate Change - San Diego Free Press

By David Harris / [San Diego 350](#)

SD350 members David Harris, Eddie Junsay, Nicola Peill-Moelter, Roland Bleu, Michael Brackney and others participate in the energy table

What do you get when you bring together 120 environmental activists and residents from environmental justice communities in a room with a dozen state regulators? If you're lucky, dozens of ideas for incentivizing renewable energy, improving public transit, and protecting neighborhoods from toxic industrial fumes.

This is exactly what happened on July 14th when the California Air Resources Board (CARB) sponsored a workshop on climate change at the beautiful new Cesar Chavez campus in Barrio Logan. Local residents, whose voices are rarely heard by policy makers in Sacramento, came out in force to speak out about air pollution from local industry, the need for better transit options, and the impacts of climate change on communities already impacted by poor air quality.

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This workshop, one of [a series of 15 workshops](#) scheduled throughout the State, invited people who have been living with toxic air pollution for decades to participate in the planning process. The forum drew more than one hundred people, 75% of who came from Barrio Logan, National City, Chula Vista, and other communities whose health has been adversely affected by poor air quality. They were joined by many environmental activists, including members of SanDiego350 and the Sierra Club.

Environmental Health Coalition (EHC) hosted the workshop and has organized local Latino neighborhoods around environmental justice issues since 1990. Diane Takvorian, EHC Executive Director, opened the session by pointing out that this was the first time that CARB staff had visited environmental justice neighborhoods to solicit input.

(Photo: Environmental Health Coalition)

“These public workshops are an acknowledgement [by State regulators] that our communities are hit first and worst by the harmful effects of climate change and air pollution,” Takvorian said “It’s critical that residents share their stories at this meeting and that policy makers in Sacramento hear their voices.” Takvorian is currently serving as the environment justice representative to the Air Resources Board, an

appointment made by former State Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins.

City Councilman David Alvarez welcomed everyone and spoke about how he was motivated to address environmental issues growing up in Barrio Logan and the importance of residents working together to improve air quality and to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

Mari Rose Taruc, a Bay Area environmental leader who serves on the CARB Environmental Justice Advisory Committee, presented a draft “Scoping Plan”, the framework which will define the State’s climate change priorities for the next 15 years and beyond.

Initially, AB32 required CARB to develop a Scoping Plan that describes the approach California will take to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) to 1990 levels by 2020. Then, on April 29, 2015, Governor Brown issued [Executive Order B-30-15](#) establishing a mid-term GHG reduction target for Californians to reach 40 percent below 1990 GHG levels by 2030.

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California Air Resources Board (CARB) workshop in Barrio Logan, July 14, 2016

Under the Executive Order, all state agencies with jurisdiction over sources of GHG emissions were directed to implement measures to achieve reductions of GHG emissions to meet the 2030 targets. The mid-term target is critical to help frame the suite of policy measures, regulations, planning efforts, and investments in clean technologies and infrastructure needed to continue driving down emissions.

Three targeted sectors – Transportation, Energy, and Industry – were the focus of breakout sessions at the community meeting in San Diego. Participants gathered around tables to pose problems, ask questions, and suggest solutions. Their comments, captured on flip charts, will be compiled by CARB and made available on its website for public review. Californians can still [submit comments to CARB](#) on the state’s climate plan online.

Members of SanDiego350, one of the leading local organizations advocating for strong climate change policies, presented ideas to strengthen the implementation of AB32. They spoke in favor of more stringent requirements being implemented now so that long-term local and regional plans can be brought into compliance with the long term goal of reducing GHG emissions by 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.

A prime example of this is the 40-year regional transportation plan (RTP) produced by SANDAG (San Diego Association of Governments). This “business as usual” plan prioritizes freeway projects at the expense of public transit, ignoring the fact that transportation contributes nearly half all emissions in San Diego County.

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(Photo: Environmental Health Coalition)

The RTP projects meeting the CARB requirements for 2020 and 2035 with a plan that completely fails to achieve long term emission reductions goals (according to SANDAG’s own projections; see the chart below). Part of the reason is the population factor, because while the 2020 and 2035 requirements are for

per capita reductions, our region's population is projected to grow, leading to projections of nearly negligible reductions *overall*.

On July 8th, SANDAG approved the language for a county-wide ballot measure on the November 2016 ballot that will increase sales tax by half a cent throughout San Diego county to pay for a selection of projects from the 40 year plan, locking in the funding for a plan that fails to achieve climate targets for the coming decades.

In 2012, SANDAG was sued by the Cleveland National Forest Foundation over its failure to take air pollution and climate impacts into account in the Environmental Impact Report which was prepared for the RTP passed that year. ... To date, SANDAG has lost at the Superior and Appeals Courts, and a decision is expected later this year from the CA Supreme Court.

A little background is necessary to understand why SANDAG's ballot initiative is counter productive for our climate future. In 2012, SANDAG was sued by the Cleveland National Forest Foundation over its failure to take air pollution and climate impacts into account in the Environmental Impact Report which was prepared for the RTP passed that year.

California's Attorney General Kamala Harris intervened in the lawsuit, stating that "infrastructure and land use decisions made in the early years of the RTP/SCS may lock in transportation inefficiencies and preclude any realistic possibility of meeting the Executive Order's goal of an 80% reduction in GHG emissions." To date, SANDAG has lost at the Superior and Appeals Courts, and a decision is expected later this year from the CA Supreme Court.

"We are glad that CARB is listening to those who will be most impacted by climate change," stated Joyce Lane, co-chair of 350's Public Policy Team " Now we would like to see CARB exercise its authority to ensure that cities and planning agencies across the state are complying with both short-term and long-term emission reduction goals."

For more information on the CARB Scoping Plan, check out the Environmental Justice Advisory Committee website [here](#).

David Harris is a climate action volunteer with SanDiego350. Over a 15 year span, he was an affordable housing manager and community development analyst for the cities of Oceanside, Encinitas, and Chula Vista. Previously, David worked with nonprofit developers to finance transitional housing for homeless families and to subsidize housing for people with AIDS/HIV. He began his career as a consumer advocate with CalPIRG and the Environmental Health Coalition. A native San Diegan, David has lived in La Mesa for the past 10 years.