

STREETS BLOG

Air Resources Board Actually Talks About the Importance of Walking, Biking

By Melanie Curry | Dec 19, 2017 |  2



California Air Resources Board chair Mary Nichols addresses the board last week. Image: Air Resources Board (screengrab)

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At its meeting last week on California's climate change goals, the California Air Resources Board discussed a shift in the way it will set climate change goals through regional plans. At the same meeting, the board adopted a plan on how it will achieve new climate change targets set by state law.

And in the midst of the wonky talk, there was some traction for the idea that more focus on and investment in the role of active transportation in meeting climate change and health goals would be a good thing.



The two issues before the board were in some conflict with each other. That is, the scoping plan the board adopted outlines strategies for California to reach its goal of a 25 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2030, as set in current law. But the current plan for the regional goals sets them lower than that, in the 11 to 18 percent range.



The regional targets are called for by S.B. 375, which [aims to align regional transportation plans and local land uses to help reduce driving](#). The regional governments have pushed for lower targets, saying that they are already doing everything within their control to meet the goals they already have.

At last week's meeting, the heads of several of the regional Metropolitan Planning Organizations, or MPOs, expressed support for the target-setting process, and committed themselves to "ambitious" and "achievable" targets.

But health and environmental justice advocates were not buying it. Ana Castro Reynoso of the Environmental Health Coalition pushed the board to require a strict emission reduction target of 25 percent for the San Diego Association of Governments, for example. SANDAG, she said, [has focused its regional planning on developing and expanding freeways](#) and has misled the public about the true effect of those plans. She said that the current target, and even the slightly higher target being discussed at the meeting, would not force SANDAG to make any of the changes needed to get people to shift away from solo driving.

"We need stronger support from the Air Resources Board," she said.

Her testimony was supported by several other speakers, including Phoebe Seaton of the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, who spoke of the importance of urgent and ambitious targets and action, "more ambitious than we are seeing, and have seen." Chloe Ames of Climate Resolve pointed out that without higher targets, the regions continue to plan for and invest in capacity-expanding and sprawl-inducing projects like the [High Desert Corridor in San Bernardino](#), which is a freeway designed not to reduce congestion but to encourage sprawl, she said.

The region's transportation plans "continue to fund capacity-increasing projects instead of giving people real choices" in how they travel, said Bill Magavern of the Coalition of Clean Air.