



# SANDAG's Transportation Plan Could Hinder San Diego's Climate Goals

## One woman's commute to work shows a gap between SANDAG's transportation plan and San Diego's effort to boost use of public transit

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By [Claire Trageser](#)

It takes City Heights resident Eva Luna more than an hour to get to work. She's not commuting from Orange County or riding the train in from Carlsbad — she lives just 2.5 miles from her job as a nanny in Kensington.

Luna doesn't have a car. She can ride the bus for less than a mile down University Avenue or El Cajon Boulevard, but nothing gets her close to work. With all the waiting and transfers, she finds it's faster just to walk.

"Sometimes it's very tiring to have to walk every day," she said, speaking in Spanish.

She has plans for what she'd do with her time if she didn't have to commute two hours every day: She'd learn how to drive and get a car.

If Luna were to switch to commuting by car, she'd be moving the numbers in the city of San Diego's Climate Action Plan in the wrong direction. [The draft plan](#), released by Mayor Kevin Faulconer last year, calls for increasing the number of people who commute by public transit from 10 percent to 25 percent in 20 years.

The plan's other [ambitious transportation goals](#) include increasing the number of people who commute by bike from 1 percent to 18 percent and by foot from 1 percent to 7 percent. It also proposes to cut the number who commute by car from 87 percent to 50 percent.

Those goals apply to people who live within a half mile of existing or planned transit stops, which includes Luna.

But San Diego and other cities in the region don't handle many of the decisions about whether to add bus lines, expand trolley service or widen freeways. Those calls are made by the [San Diego Association of Governments](#), or SANDAG. [Its board](#) is made up of city and county officials who oversee a nearly \$1.2 billion budget of federal, state and local funds.

SANDAG plans out transportation projects for the entire region and decides how to spend sales taxes collected for those projects. In 2015, [it's predicting it'll take in \\$270 million](#) from a half-cent sales tax called TransNet.

Monique López, a policy advocate for the [Environmental Health Coalition](#) based in National City, said there's a major gap between SANDAG's transportation plans and San Diego's Climate Action Plan.

**Greenhouse Gas Reduction Goals in San Diego's Climate Action Plan**

<b>Federal and state:</b>	3,455,107 or 81 percent
<b>SANDAG:</b>	397,681 or 9 percent
<b>City of San Diego:</b>	422,633 or 10 percent
<b>Total:</b>	4,275,421 metric tons CO <sub>2</sub> e

"As the regional transportation plan stands now, it's going to be very difficult for the city of San Diego to achieve its climate action plan goals," López said.

Nicole Capretz, the head of the nonprofit [Climate Action Campaign](#) that's advocating for the city's Climate Action Plan, said San Diego's plan is tied to SANDAG's plan.

"If they don't implement their strategy to hit their greenhouse gas reduction goals, then the city has no chance of hitting their greenhouse gas reduction goals," Capretz said.

By 2020, San Diego's draft Climate Action Plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 4.3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide a year. To reach that goal, it relies on federal, state and regional reductions — including SANDAG's — as well as the city's contributions. In fact, SANDAG's contribution to carbon dioxide reductions is almost as much as the city's contribution.

Last week SANDAG released [a revised version of its regional transportation plan](#). Environmental groups sued over its 2011 plan, saying it spends too much on freeways and roads. While that lawsuit is now at California's Supreme Court, SANDAG is still required to present an updated version every four years.

The environmental impact report on the [new version](#) hasn't yet been released, but López and other environmentalists aren't seeing enough changes.

"There are a few nuances here and there, a few new plans included, a few other plans not included, but it's essentially the same thing because of the way the funding is structured," López said. "It's still weighted towards freeways instead of transit, biking and walking."

"The plan has new language, which is refreshing and good. However, we don't see any change in policy or funding structure, and that's what really counts in terms of transportation planning," Jack Shu, president of the Cleveland National Forest Foundation, [told KPBS Midday Edition](#). His foundation sued over the 2011 plan.

Capretz also said she doesn't think the revised plan has made significant changes, and that spells trouble for the city's climate goals.

"It makes all of us uncomfortable and nervous that we are not on a path to reach the greenhouse gas reduction target," she said.

This revised plan will be [open to public review over the summer](#) and then an updated version will be adopted in the fall.

Charles "Muggs" Stoll, SANDAG's transportation planning director, said the plan directs more than half of its total funding — \$200 billion — to public transit, including extending the trolley line and adding Rapid buses. He said while SANDAG's plan is not focused on helping individual cities with their climate action goals, SANDAG tries to "provide a lot of different options for cities and the county to achieve their plans."

López countered that SANDAG's money has favored roads and freeways in the past, so its new plans should spend even more on public transit, walking and biking to even the scales. And she dismisses Rapid buses, which usually run on highways, as real transit improvements.

"They say, 'We're putting money into transit.' But the way they're doing it is they're expanding freeways left and right, and they're throwing Rapid transit on top of those expanded lanes. Then they're throwing carpool on top of that," López said. "That's problematic because that's not real transit benefits, that's an excuse to add more lanes."

A new Rapid bus won't help Luna. While there are buses to take her east to west, no bus would take her north in the direction she needs to go. The Rapid bus that runs on Interstate 15 doesn't help her travel within the city.

She said she's had to turn down other jobs in the past, including one in Rancho San Diego, because there was no way for her to get there. While she used to ride a bike to work, she said she was almost hit by a car and hurt herself while getting out of the way. The experience shook her, and now she worries her route to work isn't safe for biking.

Stoll said SANDAG may spend more on bus lines, but not until the far end of its 35-year plan.

"As we move out into the later years of the plan, depending on how funding becomes available, we are proposing to provide more transit operations funds to be able to increase the frequency and convenience of existing major bus routes in the region as well," he said.