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## SCAG Gives Southern California Poor Marks in Key Areas

- Region has made progress, Snoble says, but still falls short on relieving traffic congestion

By JIMMY STROUP

(Dec. 7, 2007) The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) released their annual "State of the Region" report for this year and gave Southern California less than favorable grades in key areas. Transportation received a "D-" rating for the year.

According to a report by City News Service, the low air quality, low income rates, and traffic problems that could cost more than \$500 billion over the next 30 years to correct prompted SCAG to give the region a "D" overall.

The transportation score was low, though the report acknowledged that gains had been made in public transit areas and increased carpooling. The grade prompted Metro CEO Roger Snoble to release a statement to explain why the region would receive such a poor rating.

"[The] report shows that while progress has been made in our efforts to improve mobility throughout the region, we still fall short on what is needed to relieve traffic congestion," he said. "This is primarily because there is just not enough money for transportation purposes."

"Clearly we know what works and how to solve much of the problem. The key ingredient we're missing is funding," he continued. "We know that public transit works, Metro Rapid Lines work, Metro Rail works, carpool lanes on freeways work, so the real issue is having the dollars to do the things that will ease congestion and improve our mobility."

"If we are to keep this region moving, we must secure additional transportation funding, change drivers' behavior and increase the use of public transit or face the nightmare of constant gridlock on our streets and highways," Snoble said.

## Possible solutions

SCAG's report made a budget crunch a clear problem to overcome, arguing that current budgets and plans include a \$132 billion shortfall for the region's transportation future. The report suggested measures like a future gas tax increase of 10 percent or the use of toll roads in the future to compensate for the difference.

Metro is currently looking into toll possibilities in the region and recently announced a plan to explore making HOV lanes on the 10, 210 and 110 freeways into "High Occupancy Toll" (HOT) lanes.

The lanes would create a graduated pay scale allowing all drivers access to what would be pay-per-use lanes. Single drivers would pay a premium

rate, cars with two occupants would pay a lesser rate, and cars with three would pay even less. Rates would also vary depending on levels of congestion and time-of-day.

Buses and vanpools would be exempted from paying to use the HOT lanes – hopefully enticing people to make more use of those forms of transportation. The idea is part of a “congestion pricing” strategy that’s aimed at reducing congestion region-wide and could create an opportunity for Metro to grab some additional federal funding.

The SCAG report also gave regional employment a “B,” air quality and housing “Ds,” and education a “D-.” Last year’s regional rating was a “D+.” The transportation rating increased for this year from an “F” last year to a “D-” in this year’s report.

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