

GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION FOR REGIONAL BENEFITS

By Supervisor Linda Parks, January 2009

When government agencies join together in collaborative efforts, great things can get accomplished that would not otherwise be possible. The mutual aid response that occurs throughout the region and state when fire crews amass to battle flames, is testament to the enormous benefits of these collaborations. Sometimes agencies partner and form “Joint Powers Authorities” (JPA’s) that provide combined services to the jurisdictional boundaries of the separate agencies that make up the JPA. An example of this is the Conejo Open Space Conservation Agency which is a JPA of the City of Thousand Oaks and the Conejo Recreation and Park District that oversees the maintenance of open space lands in both jurisdictions.

In other cases agencies form to create commissions, such as the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC) which is made up of a representative from each city council in the county and all five members of the Ventura County Board of Supervisors. There is another body with almost the same composition that doesn’t get much attention, and that is the Ventura Council of Governments, or VCOG. VCOG, like VCTC, has a representative from each city council, but only one representative from the Board of Supervisors. For the last several years, I’ve been the representative from the Board of Supervisors on VCOG, so I get to serve on both boards. Strangely, there is not one city council representative that serves on both VCTC and VCOG. I think this is unfortunate because it has the effect of separating decisions on land use that VCOG oversees, from decisions on transportation that VCTC oversees. For example, VCOG is tasked with deciding where to allocate the number of houses the State requires each county to accommodate. As a result, there isn’t much thought given to coordinating transportation and housing on a regional scale in our county.

Many of the medium and large counties in California have “councils of governments” that are combined with transportation commissions. They not only determine where housing should be allocated, they also provide bus service and bike routes, fund freeway and road improvements and train service. In some cases the combined transportation/COGs also take on air quality and resource conservation roles.

Now a new role for VCOG is emerging with the recently passed State law (SB375) that calls for the drafting of regional plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The plans (called Sustainable Community Strategies) are aimed at reducing the number of vehicle miles we drive, since emissions from transportation are the greatest contributor of man-made greenhouse gas

emissions. Reducing the number of vehicle miles traveled requires efficient land use patterns and transportation systems.

An example of a successful transportation/COG effort towards meeting SB375 requirements is the Community 2050 regional growth strategy underway in San Luis Obispo County. There they have their COG combined with their transportation commission and are looking at not only reducing the number of vehicle miles driven, but also providing for adequate and diverse supplies of housing, reducing the impacts on valuable habitats and farmland, reducing the use of resources, and promoting a prosperous regional economy. Ventura County holds similar goals to San Luis Obispo County, but until we take the plunge and combine VCTC with VCOG we will continue to hamstring our ability to achieve these larger goals.

What prevents such a merger? A couple of years ago I was able to get the merging of these two bodies on the agendas of both VCTC and VCOG, and while the Board of Supervisors and the majority of city representatives were in support, two cities were not. Unfortunately because VCOG bylaws require unanimous approval to change VCOG's composition, the effort was thwarted. It is time to revisit the merger proposal so our county, like others throughout the state, can reap the benefits derived from such a collaborative regional effort.