

Chapter 1

Our Region, Our Future

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Our Region, Our Future

A vision of healthy and thriving communities



The San Diego Region: A Special Place at A Crossroads

Here's a thought to get us started: we live in a place where people come to vacation, a place where they dream of living and find almost impossible to leave once they make it their home.

What draws people here? Certainly it's the gorgeous weather year-round, a spectacular coastline, big open spaces, first-class family entertainment, a fantastic metropolitan area, a booming biotech industry, and an enticing international border. Those things make us proud to show off our region to out-of-town family and friends. But it's bedrock qualities like our strong economy, healthy neighborhoods, great schools, and top universities that make us grateful to live here.

Still, our region is at a crossroads. The same things that draw people here, to visit or stay, place pressures on our daily lives. Traffic can be challenging.

Neighborhoods can be expensive and out of reach. Pick a summer day, any summer day, and it seems everyone is at the coast. The fact is, our region is growing.



While our population will continue to increase in the coming decades, we will have important choices to make – choices about how to grow, where to grow, and how to get around. We have big decisions to make to sustain the qualities we love most about the San Diego region.

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) is developing a bold new vision for transportation in the region – one that will lead to a more sustainable future. New investments in the regional transportation network will provide people with more travel choices, while protecting the environment, creating healthy communities, and stimulating economic growth for the benefit all San Diegans. In February 2019, the SANDAG Board of Directors approved an action plan that extends the development of a new Regional Plan into late 2021.

San Diego Forward: The 2021 Regional Plan (2021 Regional Plan) will embody 5 Big Moves, transformative initiatives that reimagine how people will travel throughout the region. These 5 Big Moves are:

- Complete Corridors: The backbone of a complete transportation system that leverages technology, pricing, and connectivity to repurpose how both highways and local roads are used.
- Transit Leap: A complete network of high-capacity, high-speed, and high-frequency transit services that incorporates new transit modes and improves existing services.
- Mobility Hubs: Places of connectivity where a variety of travel options converge to deliver a seamless travel experience.
- Flexible Fleets: On-demand, shared, electric vehicles that connect to transit and travel between Mobility Hubs along the network of Complete Corridors.
- Next OS: An integrated platform that will make all of the strategies work together by connecting users, transportation service providers, and infrastructure to orchestrate more efficient movement of people and goods.

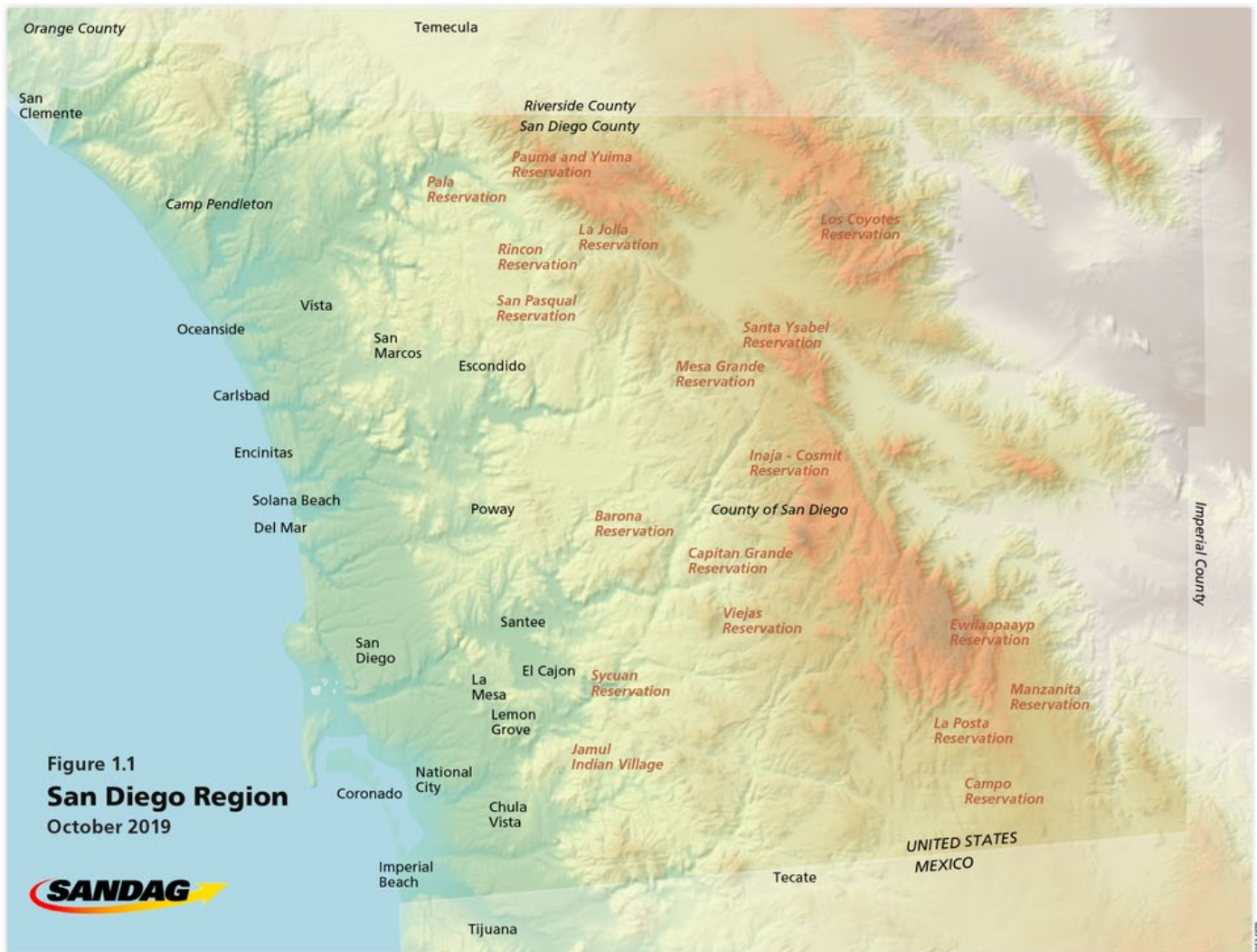
Together, these initiatives will create a fully integrated, world-class transportation system.

SANDAG is working with stakeholders and the larger public to create the 2021 Regional Plan. In the meantime, this document, called San Diego Forward: The 2019 Federal Regional Transportation Plan (2019 Federal RTP) complies with federal requirements for the development of regional transportation plans, achieves an air quality conformity finding from the U.S. Department of Transportation, and preserves funding for the region’s transportation investments. The 2019 Federal RTP builds on San Diego Forward: The 2015 Regional Plan (2015 Regional Plan), with updated project costs and revenues and a new regional growth forecast.

An Opportunity to Shape Our Region

Sustainability. Our 2019 Federal RTP will talk a lot about what that word means, not just the dictionary version, but what it means for *us*.

This 2019 Federal RTP is built on input from people throughout our region, young and old and from neighborhoods big and small. The success of the 2019 Federal RTP will depend on the degree to which our region feels invested in its success – a sense of buy-in and ownership. It is our region, after all. And our future. As we plan for the years ahead, it's important to recognize that we live in a unique place that is interconnected with our neighbors. We are surrounded by tangible boundaries: The Pacific Ocean to the west, the mountains, Anza-Borrego Desert, and Imperial County's agricultural fields to the east, the international border with Mexico to the south, and Camp Pendleton as well as Orange and Riverside counties to the north. San Diego is also unique in that we have neighbors within our boundaries, as 18 tribal nations call the region home (see Figure 1.1). But we don't live in a vacuum, and we must coordinate with our regional and international neighbors.



The 2019 Federal RTP provides a roadmap to grow and evolve, and it prioritizes 30 years of regional transportation projects to create a framework for much of the region's transportation infrastructure.

Before us lie challenges and opportunities to help guide the future growth of our region and build a transportation system that works for everyone, all in ways that protect our environment, support our economy, and maintain our quality of life.

Over the next three decades, nearly \$208 billion will be invested in our region to create, maintain, and improve a balanced transportation network. Our 2019 Federal RTP does two main things to ensure that these tax dollars will be spent for the greatest public good: It provides a roadmap to grow and evolve, and it prioritizes 30 years of regional transportation projects to create a framework for much of the region's transportation infrastructure. The transportation decisions detailed in the 2019 Federal RTP serve an overarching goal: create more transportation choices, which ultimately will lead to healthier communities, healthier people, and a healthier environment.

In addition, the 2019 Federal RTP has been organized to include several important elements, starting out with the Policy Element included in this chapter.

The elements and locations where they can be found in the 2019 Federal RTP are described in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1
2019 Federal Regional Transportation Plan Elements

Element Name	Description	Location
Policy Element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes the transportation issues in the region and federal planning factors; identifies and quantifies regional needs expressed within both short and long-range planning horizons; and maintains internal consistency with the Financial Element and fund estimates. 	Chapters 1, 4 and 5, Appendices C, D, I, Q, and R
Financial Element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarizes costs to operate and maintain the current transportation system. Estimates costs and revenues to implement the projects identified in the Action Plan. Provides an inventory of existing and potential transportation funding sources. Lists candidate projects if funding becomes available. Identifies potential funding shortfalls. Identifies alternative policy directions that affect the funding of projects. 	Chapter 3, Appendices A and E
Action Element	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describes short- and long-term activities and strategies that address an integrated multimodal transportation system. Provides performance-based decision making to support national goals and regional priorities. 	Chapters 2 and 5, Appendices A, D, and E
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complies with the federal Clean Air Act and air quality conformity regulations. 	Appendix B



The Importance of Planning

We all know that planning for the future is a good idea. Over the years, SANDAG has coordinated regional efforts to address many important issues. These include using land more wisely; building an efficient and more accessible transportation system; protecting the environment; improving public health; promoting a strong regional economy; better managing our access to energy; incorporating equity into the planning process; addressing pressing needs on tribal lands; and supporting a vibrant international border.

More recently, planning has focused sharply on how the region can offer people *more transportation choices* – including more options for biking, walking, and public transit. We’ve also focused on what we can do collectively to better reduce greenhouse gas emissions and better adapt to the effects of climate change. We’ve drawn stronger links between how we use land, how we get around, and achieved a better understanding for how our choices for both can improve or harm our health. We’re also working to make sure the region can benefit from emerging technologies that will make transportation more efficient. Finally, we’re ensuring that all groups, including low-income, minority, and senior populations, have the opportunity to be meaningfully involved in developing plans for the future.

As San Diegans, we all share the responsibility for shaping our region’s future. In a region as culturally and economically diverse as ours, crafting a plan for how best to grow and the smartest ways to get around isn’t easy. But it’s vital at a time when the challenges we face are being confronted by Americans across the nation. Among these are an increasing rate of obesity, which drives chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and asthma. Other challenges in our region include a “silver tsunami” of aging citizens who will have significant needs, and a growing and dynamic young population of “millennials” with their own priorities and desires. These two generations have many overlapping interests, including an increasing desire for urban lifestyles and more options for getting around. These are just a few reasons why it’s important to plan for our future – locally, regionally, and across all of our borders.

SANDAG is required by law to update its regional transportation plan every four years, and this document is the latest update. Many aspects of this 2019 Federal RTP build upon the 2015 Regional Plan and address new federal planning requirements. As we’ve worked on this latest update, we’ve also continued to make progress on implementing actions included in the 2015 Regional Plan. Planning for the region’s future is an ongoing enterprise, with work progressing on several fronts continuously as plans are developed, implemented, evaluated, and updated to reflect new realities.

Our RTPs reflect a broad range of public discourse and community engagement. The 2019 Federal RTP incorporates contributions from numerous people, organizations, and groups. Individuals from communities across the San Diego region, community-based organizations, elected officials, environmental groups, developers, business and healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders all helped to shape the 2019 Federal RTP.



Implementing the 2019 Federal RTP will substantially increase the percentage of people and jobs regionwide that are situated near high-frequency transit. In 2016, 32 percent of the region's population lived near high-frequency transit stops. That figure is projected to increase to 55 percent by 2050 with the transit investments and land use changes outlined in the 2019 Federal RTP. Similarly, the percentage of jobs located within half a mile of high-frequency transit will increase to 69 percent in 2050, up from 43 percent in 2016.

Meanwhile, investments in infrastructure for biking and walking, combined with smart growth practices that encourage these types of active transportation, are projected to increase the percentage of people and workplaces near bike routes. These transportation options will result in more people exercising and fewer people choosing to drive alone.

The transportation investments detailed in the RTP, coupled with expected improvements in fuel and vehicle technologies, are expected to help clean the air. On-road pollutants that form smog as well as greenhouse gas emissions, are projected to fall below 2016 levels.

The RTP offers people more transportation options regionwide. But the benefits of having more choices are especially pronounced along the transportation corridors where investments are made. Significant investments, for example, are being made in public transit to and from work.

Implementing the new RTP is projected to double the number of times people board public transit everyday to 722,000 by 2035, compared with 353,000 in 2016. By 2050, that number is projected to increase to 850,000.

- 113 million annual boardings in 2016 (based on actual counts)
- 231 million projected annual boardings in 2035
- 272 million projected annual boardings in 2050

The investments made in our 2019 Federal RTP will provide residents, workers, and visitors with more transportation choices. It will also help to preserve the environment and support regional economic growth.

This plan is guided by regionally selected performance measures and also federal performance measures. A System Performance Report is included in Appendix D which details the measures, the data behind them, the regional targets and efforts underway to meet these targets.

Our Roadmap for San Diego Forward: The 2019 Federal Regional Transportation Plan

The goals of the 2019 Federal RTP are simple but ambitious: to provide innovative mobility choices and planning to support a sustainable and healthy region, a vibrant economy, and an outstanding quality of life for all.

All good plans begin with an overall vision and specific goals. What do we want to accomplish? Where do we want to be when our 2019 Federal RTP is fully realized? The goals of the 2019 Federal RTP are simple but ambitious: to provide innovative mobility choices and planning to support a sustainable and healthy region, a vibrant economy, and an outstanding quality of life for all.



To provide innovative mobility choices and planning to support a sustainable and healthy region, a vibrant economy, and an outstanding quality of life for all.

Easily enough said. But how do we get there? For the 2019 Federal RTP, policy objectives point the way. The policy objectives serve as a roadmap to guide our journey toward achieving our goals and vision.¹ We identified six general categories of policy objectives, and within each one there are two to three specific policy objectives. These key actions are listed in Chapter 5: Ensuring Performance.



Policy Objective Categories

Here are the six general categories of policy objectives, each with its own set of specific objectives:

Habitat and Open Space Preservation

- Focus growth in areas that are already urbanized, allowing the region to set aside and restore more open space in our less developed areas.
- Protect and restore our region’s urban canyons, coastlines, beaches, and water resources.²

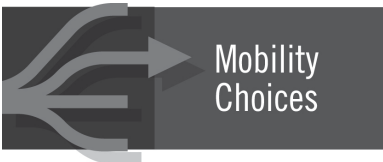
Regional Economic Prosperity

- Invest in transportation projects that provide access for all communities to a variety of jobs with competitive wages.
- Build infrastructure that makes the movement of freight in our community more efficient and environmentally friendly.

Environmental Stewardship

- Make transportation investments that result in cleaner air, environmental protection, conservation, efficiency, and sustainable living.
- Support energy programs that promote sustainability.





Mobility Choices

Mobility Choices

- Provide safe, secure, healthy, affordable, and convenient travel choices between the places where people live, work, and play.
- Take advantage of new technologies to make the transportation system more efficient and accessible.



Partnerships/ Collaboration

Partnerships/Collaboration

- Collaborate with Native American tribes, Mexico, military bases, neighboring counties, infrastructure providers, the private sector, and local communities to design a transportation system that connects to the mega-region and national network, works for everyone, and fosters a high quality of life for all.
- As we plan for our region, recognize the vital economic, environmental, cultural, and community linkages between the San Diego region and Baja California.



Healthy and Complete Communities

Healthy and Complete Communities

- Create great places for everyone to live, work, and play.
- Connect communities through a variety of transportation choices that promote healthy lifestyles, including walking and biking.
- Increase the supply and variety of housing types – affordable for people of all ages and income levels in areas with frequent transit service and with access to a variety of services.

Recognizing the Connections in Our Regional Transportation Plan

The topics addressed in the 2019 Federal RTP – and in other big picture visions for our community’s future – are interrelated. We must make a concerted effort to craft policies and actions that support livable communities and healthy places with a variety of transportation choices. And we must avoid decisions that lead us toward “silos” that fail to recognize the interconnectedness of the many issues that influence this region. To accomplish this, we must understand our region as it is today and how it will change in the future.

We’re in this Together

As the region’s planning agency, SANDAG is uniquely positioned to bring together decision-makers from all areas of the region. The agency serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for our region, joining elected officials from all 18 cities and the County of San Diego as a regional council of governments. One of our primary responsibilities is regional transportation planning. We invest in public transit, highways, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, freight corridors, and technologies to better manage our regional transportation system and the everyday demands on it. We also provide financial incentives and offer grant programs to various jurisdictions and organizations. Through these activities, SANDAG influences policies for how local governments use land, protect the environment, and grow their economies.

SANDAG collaborates with a variety of partners. They include regional economic development corporations; chambers of commerce; environmental groups; water and energy providers; health providers; community-based organizations; labor; law enforcement; partners in Baja California; tribal nations; the military; universities and community colleges; neighboring counties; Caltrans; transit operators; Port of San Diego; San Diego County Airport Authority; the private sector; and other organizations and stakeholders.

Working together, we have developed a shared vision for mid-century. This vision brings together local plans for sustainable growth, and it provides a regional framework that promotes a strong economy, an efficient transportation system, a healthy environment, and thriving communities.

Partners at Our Borders

As we’ve mentioned, it’s critical that we coordinate planning with our neighbors outside and within our geographic boundaries. We live in a binational region that includes San Diego and Imperial counties, and the northern cities of Baja California. About 6.9 million people live today in this binational region, and that number is projected to grow to 8.6 million by 2040.³ It’s a place with diverse landscapes, politics, economies, languages, and cultures. Even so, we are linked socially and economically. People and goods flow across our borders in huge numbers every day.

The San Ysidro Port of Entry is one of the busiest land ports of entry in the world. It's the region's primary gateway for people who drive and walk across the border. Otay Mesa, our region's main commercial port of entry, is the second busiest land port of entry along the nation's southern border for commercial truck crossings and is the busiest commercial crossing on the California-Baja California border.

We also have neighbors within our region who have control over federal land: federally recognized tribes and the military. In the San Diego region, there are 18 independent sovereign tribal nations with jurisdiction over 19 reservations – the most in any county in the United States. Our region also has the largest military presence in the country, with Camp Pendleton, Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, North Island Naval Base, and Naval Base San Diego.

How we grow impacts our neighbors just as our neighbors' growth impacts us. Our collective growth – not only with Baja California but also within our tribal lands, military bases, and areas north and east of us – increases the demand for water, energy, housing, and roadways, and it places pressure on open space. Coordinated intergovernmental planning with our crossborder partners, neighboring counties, military partners, and tribal governments within the San Diego region helps promote collaborative solutions to protect our quality of life.

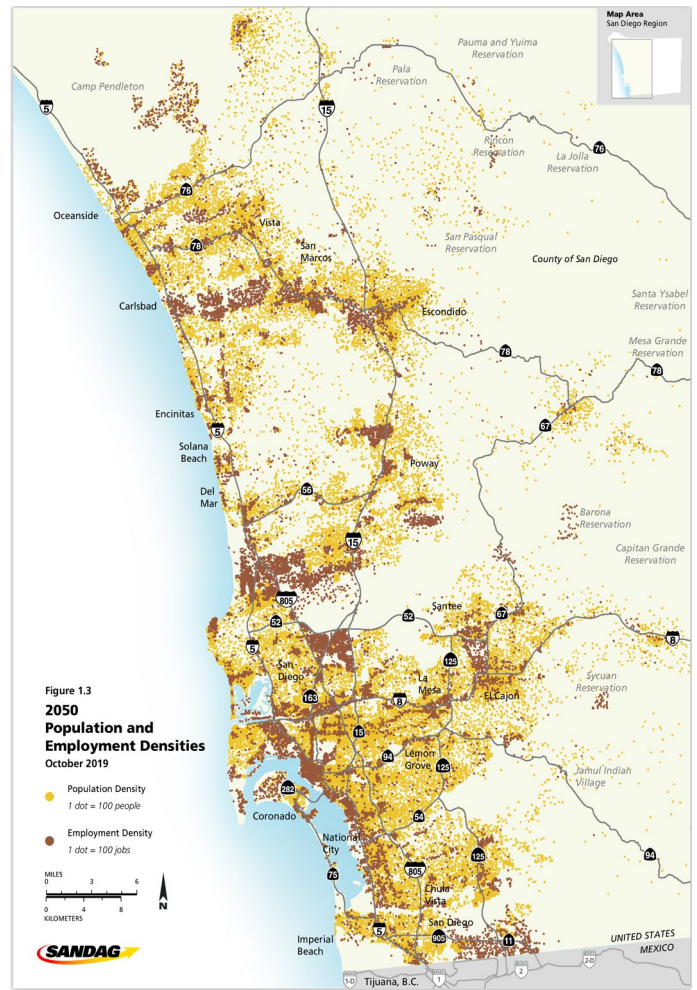
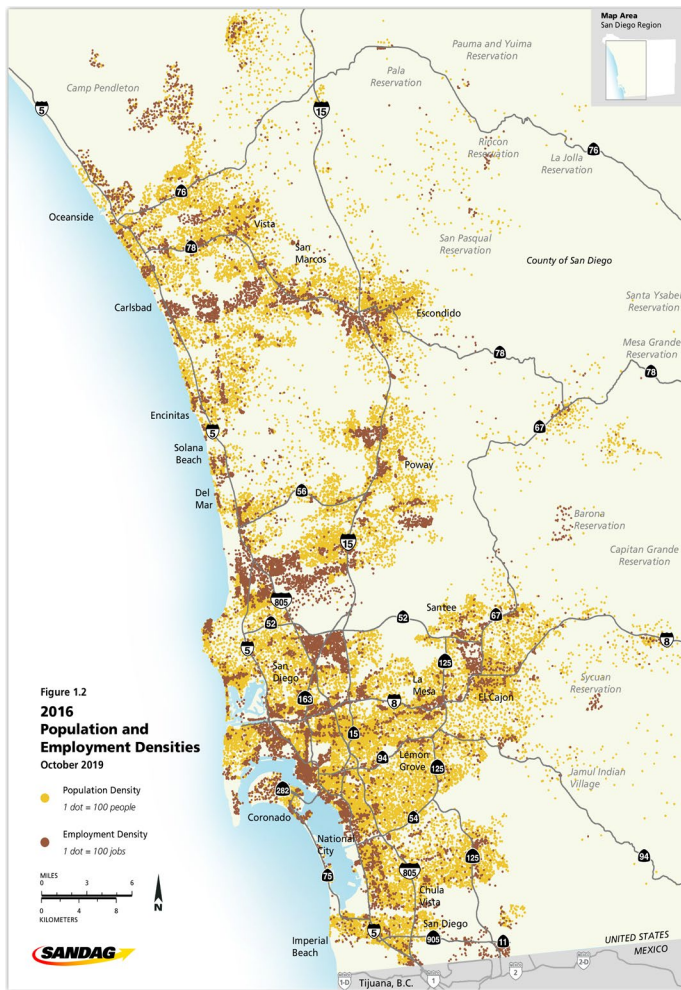
Where and How We'll Grow

Our region is large and diverse, with 18 individual cities, unincorporated land governed by the County of San Diego, the 18 sovereign tribal governments and 19 reservations we've mentioned, three major military bases, an international border with Mexico, and four land ports of entry between San Diego and Baja California. Today, about 3.3 million people live here. Every year that number – and the number of jobs and homes – go up. These increases reflect a growing economy and new opportunities.

Our region isn't just growing; it's growing in new ways. Figures 1.2 and 1.3 show that rather than expanding "out" as we have in the past, the SANDAG Regional Growth Forecast is projecting that we will grow "up," creating more compact communities.

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The Regional Growth Forecast⁴ uses the most recent land use planning assumptions from all 18 cities of the region and San Diego County. These planning assumptions are what SANDAG uses to develop the supporting transportation network, water agencies use for water planning purposes, and utility providers use for long range planning.

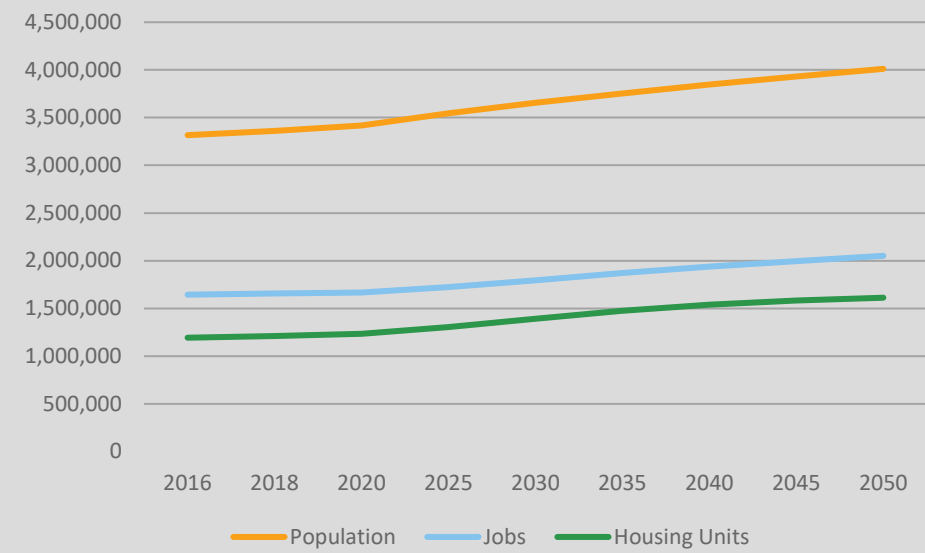
Denser neighborhoods, particularly in the western third of the San Diego region, will offer housing, jobs, and services closer to one another – and importantly, closer to the regional transportation network. While the western areas will grow over time through more compact communities, more land in the eastern two-thirds of the region will be preserved as open space.⁵

Our Population

Now for some hard numbers: By 2050, our region’s population is projected to grow by nearly 700,000 people. This growth will lead to about 408,000 more jobs and nearly 420,000 more apartments, condos, houses, and other types of dwellings. Figure 1.4 provides a summary of population, housing units, and job statistics as well as future trends through 2050.

Figure 1.4 San Diego Region Population, Jobs, and Housing Forecast

August 2019



Source: 2050 Regional Growth Forecast, Series 14, version 17, 2019

San Diego has long been thought of as a region of “transplants” where more than half of residents were born outside of California. But, future growth is expected to be largely homegrown. Although migration rates and fertility rates have been declining, the region’s population is projected to continue increasing due to the momentum of births from the current population and improvements in life expectancy. The percentage of people in the region aged 65 or older is projected to grow significantly in coming decades. By 2050, this demographic is projected to account for 25 percent of the region’s population – up from about 15 percent today. More than ever, our plans for the future must consider all ages and life stages when considering improved services. The accessibility and efficiency of mobility options will continue to be critical for an effective transportation system.

Below are key projections for 2050, some of which we’ve discussed, that are influencing how we plan for the future:

- Most of the region’s population growth will come from growing families that already live here today.
- Our population is aging. More than 25 percent of the population will be at least 65 by 2050. That’s compared with 15 percent today.
- We’ll grow more diverse. Nearly 40 percent of the region’s population will be Hispanic, nearly 12 percent will be Asian, and about 4 percent will be African American.
- More than 77 percent of the growth in housing will be in apartment buildings, condo complexes, and other multifamily dwellings. That’s a dramatic change from the way the future looked back in 2000, when 48 percent of the land planned for housing in our region was earmarked for single-family homes.

- By 2050, nearly half of the region will be preserved as open space and parks, habitat, or farmland^{6,7} – an accomplishment driven significantly by the projected shift to multifamily housing and compact development patterns across the region.

We've discussed already how development is projected to shift toward urban areas and along key transportation corridors. To help you visualize what we mean, here are a few concrete examples from around our region:

- National City's general plan provides opportunities for more than 10,000 additional multifamily homes near the Blue Line Trolley and the planned Trolley line connecting San Ysidro and Carmel Valley via the Interstate 805 corridor.
- San Marcos adopted specific plans for the San Marcos Creek and University districts to create a comprehensive downtown core by adding mixed-use developments near California State University San Marcos and the SPRINTER rail corridor.
- More than half of the regional growth in new housing will occur within the City of San Diego. Downtown San Diego will continue to see growth over the next few decades, and the City has updated community plans in North Park, San Ysidro, Encanto, Old Town, Midway/Pacific Highway, and Grantville that add thousands of housing units around transit stations in these communities. Additionally, the City of San Diego is updating community plans in Mission Valley and Kearny Mesa that will add housing units near transit and jobs.



On the jobs front, the 2019 Federal RTP projects that today's centers of employment will continue to expand:

- The Sorrento Valley employment center, which includes University Towne Centre, around the University of California at San Diego, will remain the largest job center in the region, with nearly 175,000 jobs expected in this area by 2050.
- The Downtown San Diego employment center will add about 35,000 jobs by 2050.
- The Otay Mesa East and Otay Mesa Brown Field employment centers will become much larger, and together support a total of 32,000 jobs by 2050 – up from about 15,000 jobs today.
- The Kearny Mesa employment center will add about 20,000 jobs by 2050, making it almost as large as the Downtown San Diego area.

The Regional Growth Forecast projects that the San Diego region will continue to grow more sustainably. More compact and efficient communities, paired with a greater variety of transportation options and less sprawl, will result in preserved open space and habitat, and a more efficient use of water and energy.

It's All About Choices

When we think about the future, most of us would prefer *more* choices than fewer choices. And, we'd like our range of choices to vary according to the stages of our lives and our personal circumstances.

If we are young adults heading off to college, we may want a dorm room or an affordable apartment with lots of travel options to get to class – including safe routes for walking and biking. If we have young children, we may want a home that's close to their local school, and in a neighborhood that can support walking, riding a scooter, skateboarding, or biking. If we are empty nesters, we may prefer a condo in an urban area so we can get around easily and enjoy an art show, play, or other cultural event. If we're embarking on a blended family experience, we may need a larger home and more alternative ways of getting around. If we're older, we may need assisted living choices with options for traveling to our medical appointments. If we're facing health issues, we may need to build more physical activity into our daily schedules while also having ready access to medical care.

The ways in which our communities are built can make a difference in the kinds of choices available to us. By designing communities that better integrate the connections between how we use land and how we get around (i.e. transportation), we can create more opportunities for developing a wider variety of travel choices beyond the car, including options like the Trolley, SPRINTER, COASTER, buses, biking, and walking. Emerging technologies can help us optimize these choices, by ultimately making it easier and more efficient to choose transportation options beyond driving alone.

The societal benefits of having access to a wider range of travel choices are numerous. We can spend less time in our cars and save gas money. We can reduce air pollution and maximize public health. And we can lower the amount of greenhouse gases that we emit into the atmosphere.

In coming chapters we'll review how our region grew in previous decades, and how new thinking about development, transportation, technology, and sustainability will improve the region's future. We'll outline how more compact development and a greater mix of land uses will create more vibrant communities, while also supporting existing and new transportation projects. We'll also review what it will take to pay for transportation improvements. Then we'll discuss the benefits of charting this course for the future. Finally, we'll review key actions that will propel us forward, and how we'll keep track of our progress to ensure the success of the 2019 Federal RTP.



Endnotes

- ¹ The Public Involvement Plan, which includes a detailed description of the consultation and participation of interested parties, and strategies identified for use in preparing the 2019 Federal RTP, is included in Appendix F: Public Involvement Program.
- ² These objectives are consistent with the Coastal Commission policies articulated in Chapter 3 of the Coast Act <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/fedcd/cach3.pdf>
- ³ 2040 projected population is based on the most recent estimates from SANDAG, California Department of Finance, and Mexico’s National Population Council (CONAPO).
- ⁴ Appendix J: Regional Growth Forecast
- ⁵ Appendix U.10: Management Strategic Plan for Conserved Lands in Western San Diego County
- ⁶ Based on the best practically available scientific information regarding resource areas and farmland in the region.
- ⁷ “Open Space and Parks” include beach-passive (other sandy areas along the coastline with limited parking and access), open space park or preserve, and undevelopable natural area. “Farmland” includes Williamson Act Lands. “Habitat” includes SANDAG conserved lands.