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POSITION

Regional Transportation Planning

The San Antonio Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA San Antonio) supports coordinated and comprehensive regional transportation planning based on “smart growth” principles. Smart growth favors long-term regional sustainability over short-term-only vision. Effective, balanced regional transportation planning would preserve urban centers, reduce congestion and sprawl, promote managed growth, enhance neighborhood identity, utilize existing infrastructure, reduce energy consumption and produce a more sustainable economy. Managing growth through a combination of transit-oriented development and incentive zoning programs would help concentrate development in areas of pre-existing infrastructure, saving local governments money and protecting the environment.

Action Sought

AIA San Antonio supports the recently instituted City/County Transportation Task Force, which is part of the Mayor’s Sustainability Initiative. We encourage San Antonio and Bexar County to coordinate with neighboring political jurisdictions to develop a regional transportation and smart growth plan containing viable, multimodal regional transportation systems and compact, walkable development alternatives, including:

- A region-wide transit system incorporating multiple modes of transportation, such as trolleys, buses, bus rapid transit, light rail, and commuter rail.
- Incentive zoning, including bonus density programs, form-based codes and tax credits to encourage transit-oriented mixed-use development.
- A network of regional bicycle and walking trails for recreation and commuting.
- Incentives for businesses to provide free or discounted transit passes for employees to encourage transit use.
- Incentives for businesses to establish staggered work schedules and work-from-home programs for employees to reduce the traffic on local streets and highways.
- Free transit passes for all government employees to show governments’ commitment to public transit.
- HOV lanes and other dedicated corridors on existing roadways to encourage ride-sharing.
- An intense public awareness program showing the benefits of mass transit and smart growth.

Explanation and Justification

The growth of San Antonio over the years has been at a very low density in segregated land uses toward the north and northwest, much of it over the sensitive Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone. The current form of growth is car-based and is not supportive of effective mass transit technologies. A reversal of this trend of suburban sprawl is necessary to maintain San Antonio’s quality of life and global competitiveness. Studies have shown that the economic health of a metropolitan area is adversely affected by suburbanization, congestion and transportation problems. This is a growing concern for the citizens and the larger business community of San Antonio.

As stated in the AIA’s “10 Principles for Livable Communities” (http://www.aia.org/liv_principles), “Giving people the option of walking, biking and using public transit in addition to driving...reduces traffic congestion, protects the environment and encourages physical activity.” Applying the AIA’s 10 Principles for Livable Communities to San Antonio would create a more economically and environmentally sustainable city. Since density of the built urban form is critical to support mass transit, a successful transportation system is intricately connected to a region’s land use and zoning policies. AIA San Antonio believes that mixed-use neighborhoods will best support public transportation systems and be able to provide affordable housing by reducing transportation costs. Compact development also protects open space and the environment by reducing sprawl and such environmental problems as surface water run-off /flooding and carbon dioxide emissions. Focused development would create “urban villages” where people live, work, play and travel using multiple forms of transportation.

Transportation issues are inextricably linked to planning issues. Therefore, a successful and sustainable transportation vision must necessarily include a comprehensive and compatible urban form vision of the entire San Antonio metropolitan area.