



# ANNUAL REPORT

2007-2008



**Kern Council  
of Governments**

*Better Planning, Better Transportation*



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McFarland	Ken Rosson
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Kern County	Michael J. Rubio
Caltrans	Sharri Ehlert
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## KERN COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

**K**ern Council of Governments is a state-designated regional transportation planning agency and federally recognized metropolitan planning organization comprising elected officials and selected representatives from Kern County and the cities of Arvin, Bakersfield, California City, Delano, McFarland, Maricopa, Ridgecrest, Shafter, Taft, Tehachapi and Wasco through a joint powers agreement.

Kern COG sets transportation priorities, selects projects and distributes state and federal monies to its members to maintain, repair and support operations of local roadways, public

transportation and other transportation systems, and works with Caltrans to plan, select and construct major highway projects.

Kern COG also offers its members various services such as computer modeling and support, data gathering and population projections, as well as assistance applying for federal and state funds. The following is a summary, by section, of the agency's major activities during fiscal year 2007-2008. ■

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



*You talked. We listened.* In 2007-08, Kern COG did a lot of listening: to the public, professional planners, Native American organizations, business and economic interests, environmental groups, educators and elected leaders to name a few.

Listening was a major theme throughout our public participation efforts, which ranged from the usual community fairs and festivals we attend to much more broad-based efforts like the Kern Regional Blueprint.

The public's opinions are very important to Kern COG's planning process. We are continually working to identify new ways of engaging the public to tell us what they want their communities to look like and what types of transportation investments will support those communities.

Last year we listened to more than 850 people who took time out of their busy schedules to help envision a better future for their communities as part of the Kern Regional Blueprint program. The Blueprint process is designed to help regions plan for future growth and quality-of-life through integrating transportation, housing, land use, economic development and environmental protection considerations.

We traveled to 16 communities throughout Kern talking to 700 folks just like you who wanted to see a better quality of life in the years to come, or to preserve those characteristics of their neighborhoods that they cherish most. During those meetings, we sought your advice on a set of principles to guide future development: principles such as conserving natural resources; having a greater variety of housing choices; and using existing infrastructure before building more.

From those principles, we were able to develop a series of development scenarios, each of which has different levels of housing and population density. We wanted to know how much density you were comfortable with – and you told us. As it turns out, 19 people per acre suits you just fine, an idea that was confirmed by more than 150 elected and community leaders who validated a “moderate density” scenario at our Regional Blueprint Summit last June in Bakersfield.

Many more of you told us the same thing, but in a different way, through our 2008 community survey. We surveyed

about 1,200 people throughout Kern County on quality-of-life issues such as air quality, crime rates, and of course transportation and growth. The results of that survey can be found on our website at [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org), as can most of our Blueprint meeting summaries from each community. This was Kern COG's second survey in two years and will help establish a baseline of public sentiment against which future surveys can measure.

Meanwhile, staff was also listening to several roundtables representing Native American groups, business interests, non-profit organizations, professional planners and architects, environmentalists, high-school students and others who wanted to ensure their voices were heard in the Blueprint process as well. In addition, and on behalf of the entire San Joaquin Valley, Kern COG applied for and received a \$250,000 grant to conduct specific outreach efforts to more than 30 California tribes throughout the Valley.

On a separate front, we heard from science teachers and other educators about our just-completed video project “The Road to Discovery: Cleaner Air.” This project challenges middle-schoolers who are working on a Science Fair project to learn more about Kern County's air pollution problems and how to best solve them. Because middle-school students have yet to establish a habit of driving, the storyline encourages them to just keep doing what they've always done: walk, ride a bike, take a bus or carpool. A companion video, aimed at a slightly older audience, encourages students to consider careers in air quality-related fields such as mechanics, forestry and agricultural science.

Lastly, Kern COG staff answered hundreds of questions about specific transportation projects like the Westside Parkway in Bakersfield or Highway 46 on Kern's west side during several community festivals and fairs, such as Desert Tortoise Days in California City, Arvin's Wildflower Festival, downtown street fairs in Bakersfield, and especially the Great Kern County Fair. Many of these projects will continue well into 2008-09 because we've discovered that you tend to learn a lot more by listening then by talking. So, we will look forward to hearing from you again this year. Together, we will achieve some remarkable things.

*Thanks for communicating.* ■



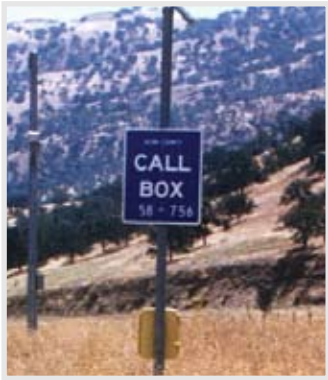
*Ron Brummett  
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## CALL BOXES



Kern COG spent more than \$1 million to upgrade its call box network in 2007-08, converting the roadside devices from analog to digital technology, and installing TTY keyboards for the hearing impaired.

Kern COG acts as the Kern Motorist Aid Authority (KMAA), which operates roadside call boxes for drivers who require assistance after a vehicle breakdown or other, non-emergency situation.

KMAA maintains 574 call boxes on highways and freeways throughout

the county, at a range of one mile apart in urban areas and no more than two miles in rural regions.

The phones are directly connected to California Highway Patrol dispatch centers. Any motorist requiring assistance can be connected to a dispatcher who can radio a patrol car or tow truck for help.

Since they were first installed in 1992, annual calls on the network continue to decline, largely due to the proliferation of cellular phones.

In 2007, KMAA participated in a community survey to determine whether motorists still wanted the call boxes in lieu of other motorist aid services, such as a freeway tow truck patrol; changeable message signs; or additional law enforcement patrols. The public strongly indicated its desire to maintain the call box network.

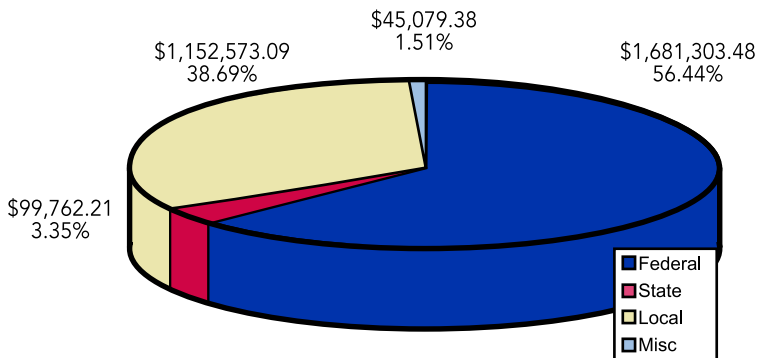
Based on that information, KMAA Board members committed to spend \$1.3 million for technology upgrades and Americans with Disabilities Act compliance. This upgrade will provide a roadside communication system through 2020.

In 2004-05, the Kern Motorist Aid Authority was dismissed as a defendant in a lawsuit that sought call box upgrades on behalf of the deaf and hearing impaired. Kern was excluded because it already had plans to upgrade the network.

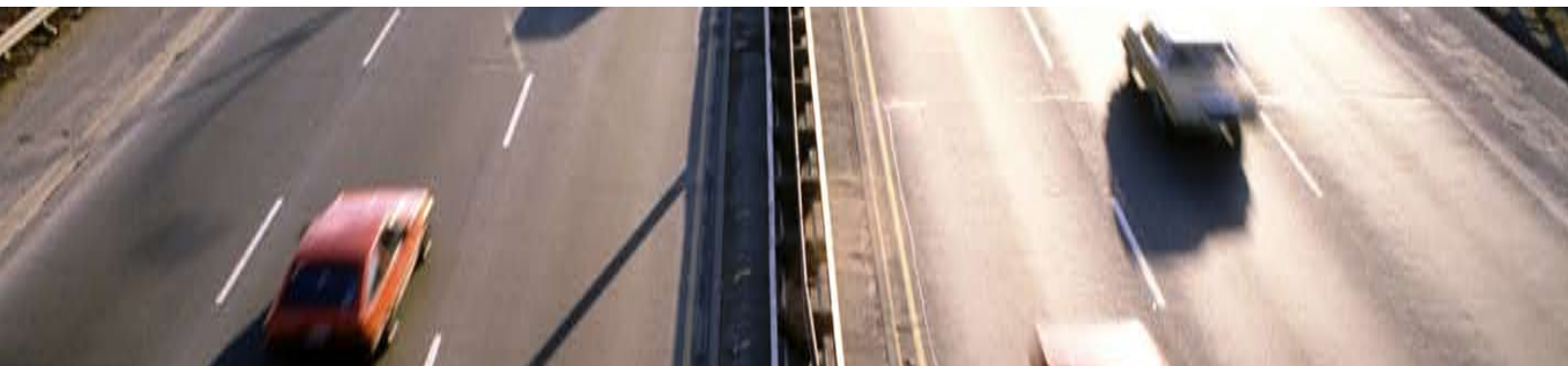
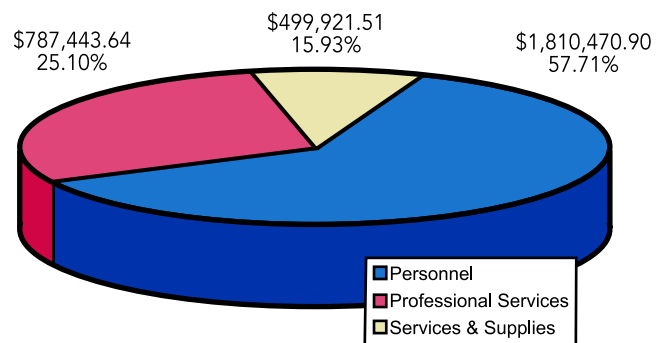
The call box system is funded through a \$1 fee on all registered vehicles in Kern County. Anticipating the upgrades, staff has set aside more than \$1.175 million in capital reserves. ■

## 2007-2008 KERN COG BUDGET

### REVENUE



### EXPENDITURES



## KERN REGIONAL BLUEPRINT



A participant at the Blueprint Summit asks a question about the visioning process.

More than 700 participants in 16 communities turned out for the second phase of Kern COG's Regional Blueprint process during the fall and winter 2007-08 to help develop a new vision for their communities' growth over the next 50 years.

The Blueprint process is designed to help regions plan for future growth and quality-of-life through integrating transportation, housing, land use, economic development and environmental protection considerations.

The Blueprint's second phase combined results of visioning meetings held during 2006-07 and asked participants to rank growth principles and select a preferred growth scenario for their communities. Additional meetings were held with the American Surveyors & Civil Engineers, the Department of Public Health and the Kern High School District.

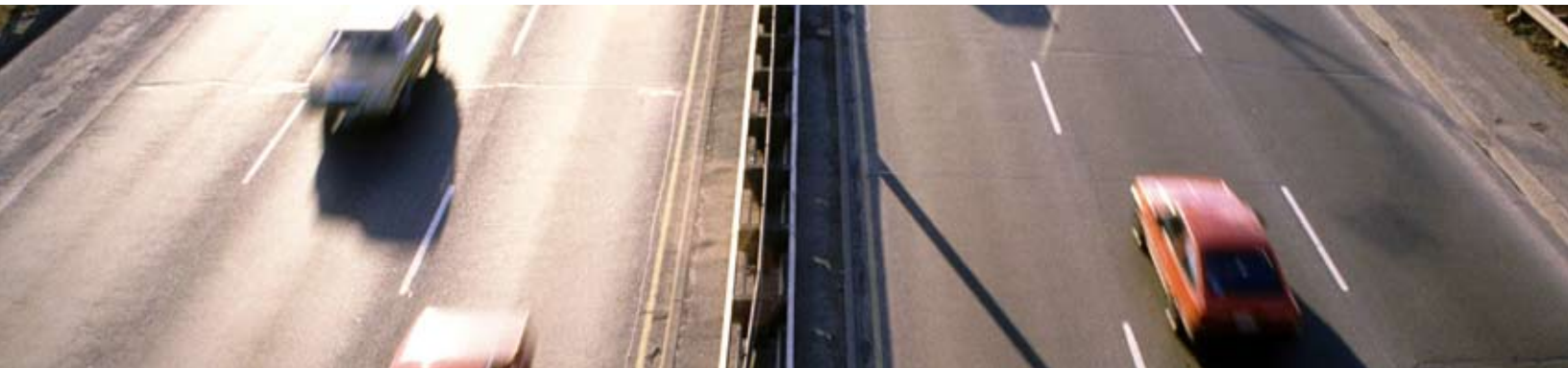
Phase 2 results were presented to citizens from throughout Kern County at the Kern Regional Blueprint Summit on June 26, 2008.

Mayors and city councilmembers from nine of the 11 cities and three county supervisors were among the 158 participants at the summit, representing business, industry, education, environmental and social equity interests; nonprofit organizations; local government; and the general public.

Using electronic polling technology, summit participants were able to provide input on the growth principles community members discussed during both of the Blueprint's outreach phases. They rallied around a set of nine growth principles to help guide future development:

- ◆ *Conserve energy and natural resources;*
- ◆ *Provide adequate and equitable services;*
- ◆ *Enhance economic vitality;*
- ◆ *Provide a variety of housing choices;*
- ◆ *Use and improve existing assets;*
- ◆ *Provide a variety of transportation choices;*
- ◆ *Use compact development where appropriate;*
- ◆ *Conserve undeveloped land and spaces; and*
- ◆ *Increase civic and public engagement.*

A full report on the Kern Regional Blueprint Summit will be available on Kern COG's website, [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org). ■





## AIR QUALITY VIDEOS

In June 2008, Kern COG completed two separate video productions aimed at generating interest among middle and high school students about improving Kern County's poor air quality.

An advisory committee with expertise in California's Science Content Standards, local sixth-grade science curriculum, local air quality issues, and communications helped craft both the storylines and the scripts.

Both movies will be distributed on DVD to middle schools, high schools, and local libraries in late 2008 to coincide with the annual Kern County Science Fair competition. Middle school teachers may use the video in segments to reinforce their Earth Science curriculum lessons. Kern COG will provide teachers with a resource guide and student work sheets along with the DVD.

Teachers will use the videos to encourage students to consider air quality-related science experiments for the competition. Kern COG will offer certificates to students who complete a qualified experiment. The agency will also award medals at the county level. More information will be available through the Kern COG website, [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org).

The first video, "The Road to Discovery – Cleaner Air," follows the exploits of students Sandy and Connor who are seeking extra credit in their science class by producing a movie about the reasons Kern County's air quality is some of the worst in the nation. Over the course of the 30-minute production,

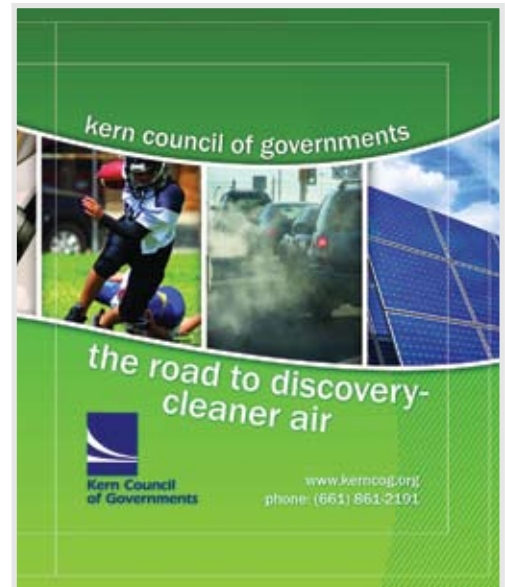
the two students learn that several factors contribute to the region's high pollution levels, including topography, weather and human activity.

The movie was filmed at several locations throughout Kern County, including the Mojave Air and Space Port, the Kern River in Hart Park, an automotive repair facility, a local television studio, and a Shafter almond orchard. It includes science fair hints, designed to get students thinking about how they can conduct air quality-related experiments for school credit.

The second video is a career guide aimed at high schoolers who may be considering an air-quality related job field, including agriculture, transportation planning, automotive technology and meteorology. The video profiles eight people whose careers involve some aspect of air pollution, including tips about necessary education and how to go about getting job experience.

Together, the movies allow Kern COG to add its voice to the chorus of organizations and agencies working to build awareness about air pollution, its causes and potential solutions. Funding for the \$80,000 project came from the federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality program.

"Junior high students haven't yet acquired the behavior of driving themselves to every appointment or activity," said Kern COG Executive Director Ron Brummett. "That is the whole point of this project – to catch them before those behaviors are entrenched and say 'Look, you're already doing the right thing by taking the bus, riding your bike or skateboarding.'" ■



## PROJECT DELIVERY



**K**ern COG provided more than \$130 million for project delivery during 2007-08 through the 2007 Federal Transportation Improvement Program.

About \$87 million was set aside for regional and state highway projects, with another \$43 million going to other local transportation projects. Countywide, there were more than 100 projects programmed during 2007-08.

In 2005, Kern COG's Board directed \$23.8 million in federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funding between 2007 and 2010 for 79 projects, including surfacing unpaved shoulders and streets; traffic signalization improvements; natural gas fueling stations; and transit vehicles. The CMAQ allocation included funding for 11 school districts to replace pre-1988 diesel buses with compressed natural gas buses, about 21 in all. The funding will provide the first compressed natural gas vehicles in many school district fleets.

Kern COG Board members also approved \$26.8 million in federal Regional Surface Transportation Program funds for 2006-2010. This funding category includes roadway rehabilitation and reconstruction projects throughout the county.

Regional projects that started construction in the 2007-08 year include work at State Route 178 and Fairfax Road in Bakersfield. When completed there will be a grade separated interchange and widening of the highway to four lanes on either side of the interchange.

A widening project at Seventh Standard road and State Route 99 also began construction in 2007-08. When completed, the project will include a new overpass and new freeway on-ramps.

Projects begun in 2006-07 are summarized in a report that can be found on Kern COG's website at [http://kern-cog.org/pdf/ftip/Annual\\_Listing\\_2007.pdf](http://kern-cog.org/pdf/ftip/Annual_Listing_2007.pdf). This report provides detail on which projects have moved forward towards construction. ■



## NON-MOTORIZED PROJECTS DURING 2007-2008



More than \$751,000 was awarded to eight bicycle and pedestrian-related projects from the Transportation Development Act-Article 3 (Article 3) program for fiscal year 2007-2008.

The Article 3 program is funded through sales taxes. Eligible projects include bicycle and pedestrian safety programs and infrastructure.

In 2007-08, funding continued for the Valley Boulevard Bike Path in Tehachapi. Kern COG provided \$170,172 last year, with an additional \$170,172 to be awarded in 2008-09. Construction should begin in spring 2009 with completion within three months.

Bakersfield officials were awarded \$263,000 to build the bicycle element of the Millcreek Plan, an innovative proposal to develop the canal corridor in central Bakersfield. Also included in this project is an extension of the Class II bicycle lanes along 21st Street from Chester Avenue east to Union Avenue.

The city of Arvin will use an Article 3 allocation of \$170,384 to help pay for the construction of the Sycamore Street Bike Lanes project. This project will install Class II bicycle lanes along Sycamore from Comanche Drive to Derby Street. The Article 3 allocation adds to a previous Transportation Enhancement Activities award of \$213,000.

The County of Kern will be the lead on construction of pedestrian improvements on Belle Terrace Avenue from Stine to Real Road. The \$81,000 project will be completed in 2008. The pedestrian facilities around Beardsley School will benefit from \$206,000 in Article 3 funding to construct sidewalk on Roberts Lane, Sanford Drive and Teakwood Drive. Currently, students walk in the street to get to school.

The county of Kern and the incorporated cities are eligible to apply for Article 3 funding. A call for projects is issued in May of each year, with an application deadline in mid-July. Funding is awarded in September. ■





## ARVIN TRANSPORTATION DEVELOPMENT PLAN



In January 2008, Kern COG hired consultants to prepare a transportation development plan for the City of Arvin.

The Arvin study, completed in May 2008, recommended that the city modify its transit services from a demand-responsive style to a fixed-route service. The new fixed-route service, if implemented, will travel along the city's periphery running every 30 minutes.

Given Arvin's size, the fixed-route service should provide "walkable" access to all parts of the city while providing a complementary paratransit system

to meet the transportation needs of disabled citizens. The study also recommended extending both the service day and the service week on a three-month trial basis.

As costs of maintaining and fueling automobiles rise, transit services throughout Kern County will want to increase service levels. Kern COG's transportation development plan process assists its member agencies in responding to rising demand for public transit. ■

## CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES TRANSIT PLAN



A Kern COG transit study designed to find strategies that meet the public transportation needs of elderly, low-income, and disabled populations produced several recommendations, including better communication between transportation agencies and social service providers.

The Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan also suggested a better integration of transportation and land use planning; information and marketing programs; better cost-effectiveness of transportation expenditures; and pursuit of new funding sources. The plan was adopted by Kern COG's Board in October 2007.

The plan was developed through a public participation process that included representatives of public, private and non-profit transportation service providers, and was designed to support transit projects that result from senior, low income and disabled funding programs.

Primarily, the study sought to provide an opportunity for a diverse range of stakeholders with a common interest in human services transportation to brainstorm better delivery of transportation services to these targeted populations. ■



## AERIAL IMAGERY

In 2007-08, Kern COG coordinated with more than 30 governmental agencies to purchase 9,000 square miles of new color aerial imagery covering all of Kern County.

Kern COG built upon a partnership with its member agencies in 2000 to purchase the new countywide photography, which was flown by airplane in July 2008. The imagery has about 17 percent better resolution overall, with selected urban areas about 59 percent better resolution, than the most recent 2006 imagery.

Raster or digital aerial imagery is delivered on DVDs or portable hard drives and may come with software that allows the user to zoom, pan and print the areas of interest.

Kern COG uses the imagery in numerous ways, including:

- ▶ Environmental documents for future road projects;
- ▶ Identifying population and employment data locations for the regional transportation model;
- ▶ Verifying the location and number of lanes of the transportation network in the transportation model;
- ▶ Draping imagery of 3-D terrain models to provide perspective views of future road projects;
- ▶ Save staff time required to make site visits;
- ▶ Verify paved vs. dirt road status;
- ▶ Provide visual confirmation of newly completed projects
- ▶ Provide visual representation of technical information. ■

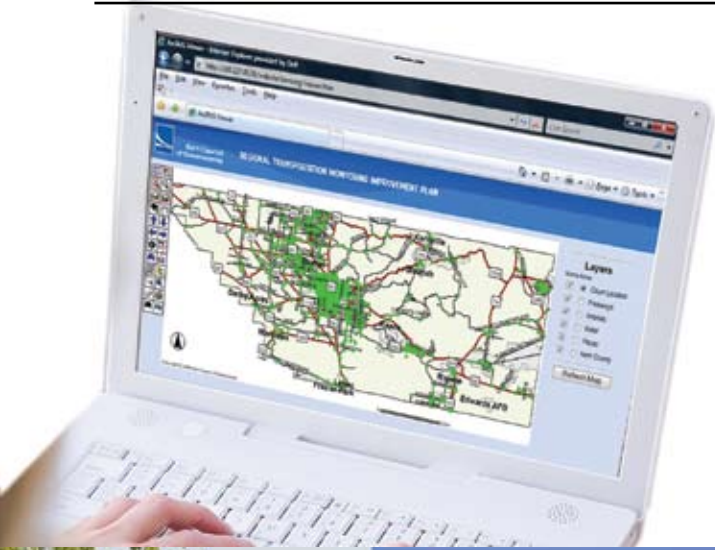


## TRAFFIC COUNTS

A new, interactive map on [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org) allows users to click on roads throughout Kern County to see traffic counts for specific segments.

Kern COG has collected 2,058 traffic counts since 2006 that it has added to a database of 8,639 historical counts. The new web-page gives users the ability to retrieve various traffic data, including daily, hourly, peak hour percentage counts along with directional splits. Some of the locations measure the number of trucks passing through.

Traffic counts are vital in validating Kern COG's computerized regional transportation model, which is used to measure the effectiveness of transportation spending plans in reducing congestion and improving air quality. Kern COG has spent about \$80,000 a year over the last three years for the traffic count program. ■



## LAND USE MODELING



As part of its Regional Blueprint process, Kern COG in 2007-08 employed a UC Davis-developed computer model to help map potential land-use scenarios.

Kern COG is using a combination of computer-based Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tools to show potential development patterns, creating a quick and easy visual reference for how a community could grow over the next several decades.

The primary tool, UPlan, is land use modeling software designed to generate future growth models through population data, existing general plans and other factors that could either attract or discourage development.

For the Blueprint modeling, the Kern region has been divided into eight subareas:

metro Bakersfield; western Kern; north central Kern; Frazier Park; Tehachapi; southeast Kern; Lake Isabella; and the Indian Wells Valley. UPlan projects the effects of future growth in designated areas such as farmland, grazing land, public lands, habitat, military flight corridors, and others for each of the subareas.

Modeling creates a visual representation of where, and to what extent, growth will occur. The models can also compute acreage consumed, or preserved, by each scenario. Different scenarios can be modeled to reflect the visions and values that community residents expressed in the Blueprint workshops.

In February 2007, officials with Kern's 11 incorporated cities and the county accepted Kern COG's baseline model, which represents current growth patterns. Three

other scenario models representing different levels of population density were completed in September 2007. These models were used for series of meetings in which participants were asked to choose a preferred growth scenario.

Kern COG is using the preferred scenario to develop alternative options for growth and transportation systems. Kern COG's successful modeling and workshop procedures are being used by many of the other COGs in the San Joaquin Valley for their own Blueprint projects.

Kern COG has begun to integrate the Uplan land use model with its existing transportation models to provide transportation-related measures and models that can be used to evaluate different land use scenarios. ■

## KERN DATA MANAGEMENT



Kern Council of Governments is the state-designated Census Data Center for Kern County, distributing social and economic data to other government agencies, private businesses and the general public. During 2007-2008 staff answered nearly 1,600 requests for information.

Staff uses a variety of data sources to garner demographic information, including the Bureau of Labor Statistics, California State Department of Finance, Employment Development Department and the U.S. Census. Kern COG uses the demographic data in producing population forecasts, which are the basis for transportation planning.

In addition, staff typically answers more than 1,000 requests for information each year

from simple community or neighborhood population counts to multilayered questions involving deeper analysis. Examples have included determining the population of existing and proposed library branches; projecting revenue from proposed sales tax increases to help pay for transportation funding; and helping schools and universities predict future enrollment by researching the birth rates in school areas.

Kern COG also serves as the federally designated Home Mortgage Disclosure Repository for the region. In this capacity, the agency maintains records of mortgage customers' social characteristics to ensure lenders don't refuse loans or "redline" entire neighborhoods because of racial or income

considerations.

Much of the agency's information resources are available through [www.kerncog.org](http://www.kerncog.org), including links to other information sources. ■





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