

Key Mobility Challenges

Limited Reliable Travel Options Besides Driving: As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, one of the top challenges noted by Connect SoCal survey respondents is having limited reliable travel options other than driving. Despite billions of dollars in investments in our transit and active-transportation infrastructure, gaps in service and reliability remain—and these gaps impact perceptions of available options. As evidenced by responses to other survey questions, many people in the region prefer to drive alone on some trips, like errands, but want different options, such as walking or transit, for other trips that might include going to work or school or visiting friends.

The current lack of travel options besides driving in parts of the region can lead to increased congestion on the regional transportation network, which then leads to time wasted in traffic and increased emissions and pollutants. In other parts of the region, people with access to a transit network have noted concerns about reliability and safety.

Transportation Safety: Safety can refer to both personal security when traveling on transit and safety when on our roadways, either in a vehicle, on a bike or on foot. Traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries are a critical and preventable public health and equity issue in the region. Approximately 1,600 people die, and 140,000 are injured—more than 7,000 of which are serious injuries—on roadways throughout the SCAG region every year.¹⁵ Collisions are happening in every community in the region and to people from all walks of life, including those who drive, walk and bike. Approximately 90 percent of collisions occur in urban areas, with most taking place on local roads, not highways. Regionally, about 65 percent of fatalities and serious injuries occur on less than 1.5 percent of the roadway network. Of particular concern are vulnerable groups such as children, older adults, pedestrians, bicyclists and users of personal mobility devices like e-scooters.

The regional housing crisis has resulted in people without housing seeking shelter in public spaces, particularly at locations with 24-hour transit/rail service. Unhoused persons frequently utilize buses or trains for overnight stays. The situation raises several concerns for both transit/rail agencies and riders. Returning riders are apprehensive about their safety and security as they resume using transit/rail services. Buses or trains occupied by unhoused persons may face lingering cleanliness issues, and there have been reports of threats, assault and crime incidents that deter ridership.¹⁶ From the transit/rail agency's perspective, addressing homelessness on systems poses a complex challenge, particularly amidst many other pressing issues and limited funding. Across the region, transit/rail agencies will need to develop comprehensive strategies that address homelessness on their systems, considering factors such as safety, cleanliness and the welfare of both riders and unhoused persons.

Increasing safety for pedestrians and bicyclists can make transit and active transportation a more appealing travel option, thereby motivating mode shifts away from single occupancy vehicle travel and reducing GHG emissions. However, finding sustainable solutions within the context of limited resources will remain an ongoing challenge.

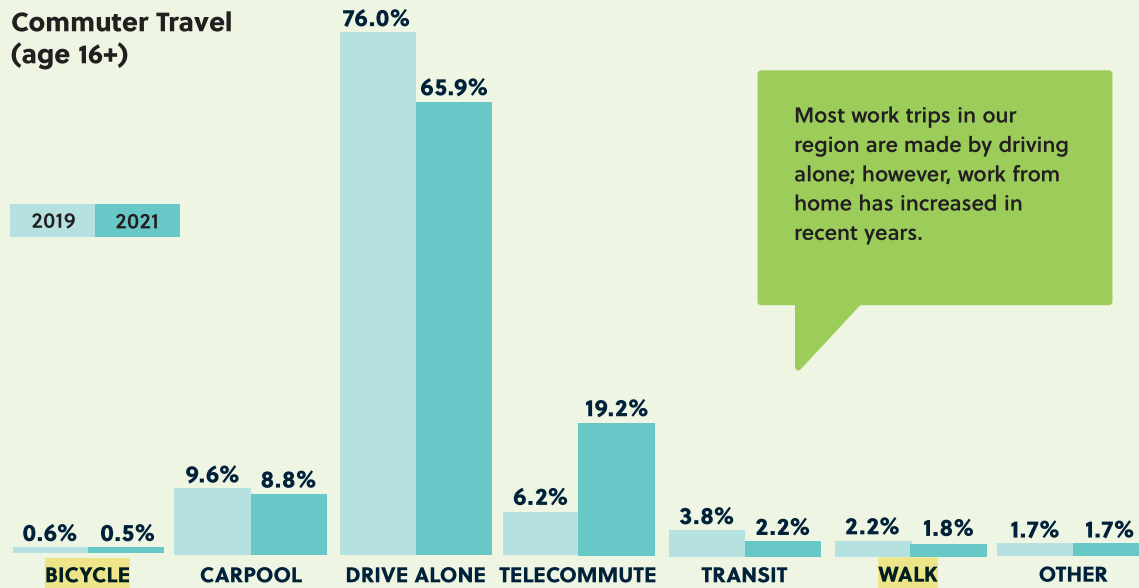
CONNECT SOCIAL 2024: TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

The Way We Move Today

The region’s transportation network is extensive. However, the current lack of convenient travel options in areas of the region apart from driving create traffic congestion and air pollution. Responses to the

COVID-19 pandemic sparked changes in travel behavior and trends, which spotlight what is needed and what is possible for the future of transportation in our region.

Commuter Travel (age 16+)



Most work trips in our region are made by driving alone; however, work from home has increased in recent years.

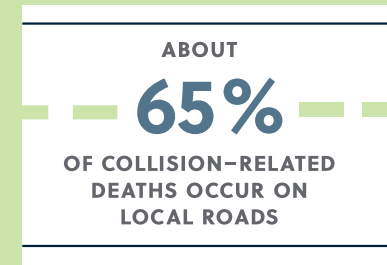
Source: 2021 American Community Survey 1-year Sample, Table B08006

Most Non-Work Trips are Short

While trips to work are longer on average, the short distance of most other trips taken in the region opens up possibilities for other modes like walking, biking or rolling.



Annual Safety Statistics



Traffic-related deaths and injuries are a preventable public health and equity issue in the region.

Source: California Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System (SWITRS) (2021); Fatality Analysis Research System (FARS) 2021

ENVIRONMENT

Overview

What is the health of our people and environment? Despite significant improvements over the last several decades, the SCAG region still has some of the worst air quality in the country. Poor local air quality and the lack of dependable transportation options, active transportation, affordable housing, health care and job opportunities in many SCAG region communities can lead to poor health outcomes. The region is already facing the impacts of climate change, including extreme heat and severe wildfires. Heat-related events occurring from 2010 to 2019 resulted in more than 53,000 emergency room visits, 7,000 hospitalizations, and 600 deaths in California. Indicators show that the number and intensity of extreme-heat health events will worsen drastically throughout the state by midcentury. Extreme heat causes drier landscapes, which then make wildfires and drought more likely and extreme. In 2020, California experienced a record number of dry heat days due to a changing climate and had over 6,000 fires that burned millions of acres, making that year the largest wildfire season recorded in the state's modern history. Economic costs from wildfires include resources involved in fighting the fires, damage to property, health care bills, disrupted business costs, lost tax revenue, and decreased property values—and were estimated to be \$10 billion in 2020.

Natural lands offer important benefits to the region, including capturing carbon emissions and recharging groundwater resources. However, natural lands have decreased by roughly 50,000 acres, or 0.2 percent, between 2012 and 2019. Farmland decreased by 40,000 acres, or 3.5 percent, between 2012 and 2018. While farming practices can contribute to GHG emissions, these are typically far less than emissions in urban environments, and farm and grazing lands can provide co-benefits such as wildlife habitats, flood control and groundwater recharge. Our agricultural sector generates \$12.8 billion (2023 \$US) average annual output each year and employs an average of 53,000 workers.

As the region faces unprecedented challenges, it is important to coordinate regional land use and transportation strategies. It is also essential to address Southern California's growth and sustainability challenges in order to protect the SCAG region's natural resources and reduce future risks from climate change.

Key Environmental Challenges

Climate Change: This challenge includes increased wildfires, flooding, extreme heat, drought, sea-level rise and heavy storms, among other hazards. These impacts influence public health, communities, natural systems and the economy, as well as how we travel if there are disruptions and damages to our transportation system.

Poor Air Quality and Related Health Impacts: Across the SCAG region, transportation and land use decisions are shaping neighborhoods while also influencing the health outcomes of residents. The way a community is designed impacts the likelihood that a person will bike or walk to school, work or local shops; have access to healthy food or parks; and breathe air free of pollutants. Conditions in the places where people are born, live, learn, work and play are known as the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), and they help explain why some health outcomes (e.g., rates of asthma or diabetes) vary widely across the region. To improve health outcomes and reduce these inequities, it is critical to consider public health in integrated land use and transportation planning such as through meeting federal air quality standards. (For more details, see Chapter 5 for SCAG's transportation conformity, the Supplementals section for the South Coast Air Quality Management District's Contingency Measure Plan, and the Goods Movement Technical Report Section 5.2 for goods movement related air quality.)

Loss of Open Space: The urbanization of the region over the past several decades has led to the consumption of hundreds of thousands of acres of natural land and farmland. The diverse natural landscapes of Southern California are an invaluable asset to the millions of people, native plants and animal species that call the SCAG region home.

Key Economic Challenges

Lack of economic opportunity: One of the top economic challenges raised by people throughout the region was the lack of higher-paying jobs within the region. Sometimes this was expressed as a lack of sufficient education and training to access those jobs. As we transition to clean energy technologies, it will be important to support residents in the necessary training to ensure that they have the skills to access opportunities within these related fields.

Population aging: By 2050, the region's median age is projected to increase to 43.8 years—up from 37.7 years in 2019 and 30.5 years in 1990. This will lead to a substantial change in the ratio of working-age individuals (16–64) to seniors (65+). In 1990, there were 6.8 working-age people per senior, and by 2050, there are projected to only be 2.9. This will likely put additional strain on retirement benefits, including Social Security.

Increasing supply-chain complexities: Accommodating the needs of a growing goods movement sector across the supply chain is a challenge. Variables beyond the region's control, such as trade tariffs, the COVID-19 pandemic and other geopolitical tensions can impact how we can efficiently move goods within and through the region. Additionally, national, state and local policies will have an impact on both freight intermodal capacity and industrial development across goods movement industries.

TAKING ACTION

Implementation of Connect SoCal relies primarily on the actions and decisions of other transportation agencies, local jurisdictions and actors in the private sector to operate transit service, install new bike paths, approve new land uses or build new housing. SCAG's role for Plan implementation rests on collaboration with other agencies and stakeholders, policy leadership, our role as an information hub, through research—and, lastly, by providing resources to local agencies or jurisdictions to advance their planning efforts or implementation of Connect SoCal. Implementation Strategies for Connect SoCal 2024 can be found in Chapter 3.

Regional Leadership

SCAG's role in implementing Connect SoCal 2024 is primarily through one of four ways: collaboration, funding administration, research and resources.

Collaboration and policy leadership: Coordinating policies across jurisdictions is crucial to successful Plan implementation. SCAG will collaborate with local governments, transit agencies, non-profits, community organizations and other stakeholders to align land use and transportation planning, streamline regulations and encourage cooperation.