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Breakthrough Reached on How and Where California Grows

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By William M. Macfadyen, Noozhawk Publisher

Builders and environmentalists align behind a sweeping regional growth measure involving housing policy, transportation funding and greenhouse gases.

An unlikely coalition of environmentalists, homebuilders and local governments have announced a breakthrough on sweeping legislation that would limit development sprawl, increase the supply of affordable housing and lead to shortened commutes — compromises fueled by the urgency to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The agreement on [SB 375](#) would give local governments financial incentives and land-use leeway to encourage more compact, smart-growth projects that combine infill housing and transportation hubs.



"For California to meet its climate goals, competing stakeholders must come together to solve problems that have remained unsolved for years," said state [Sen. Darrell Steinberg](#), D-Sacramento, who co-authored the bill with [Sen. Denise Ducheny](#), D-San Diego.

"I'm proud that local governments, housing builders, environmental advocates and others all recognize that to reduce greenhouse gases and promote a better way of life, our communities must change the way they grow."

The landmark legislation is intended to help the state's regions comply with [AB 32](#), which [Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed](#) in 2006. That law requires California to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. Because cars and light trucks emit about 30 percent of such gases in California, reducing the time commuters spend in their cars through smart, coordinated transportation and housing planning is essential. SB 375 offers local governments regulatory and other incentives to get involved, primarily through the \$5 billion in transportation money Sacramento allocates each year.

Under the legislation:

- » Regions must make transportation decisions encouraging development that increases affordable housing and reduces commute times, emissions and gasoline consumption.
- » The [California Environmental Quality Act](#), or CEQA, the state's principal environmental protection statute, would be amended so the review process rewards development projects that improve air quality

and energy conservation. In return, environmentalists would have a greater say in how and where projects are located to best reduce greenhouse gas emissions

The agreement came after months of negotiations with cities, counties, homebuilders, environmentalists, affordable-housing advocates, transportation officials, community groups and others. The deal was sealed when traditional adversaries — environmentalists and builders — hammered out their differences.

“This is the first bill in the United States to align housing policy, transportation funding and climate policy,” said Tom Adams, president of the [California League of Conservation Voters](#). “The bill does this by promoting development patterns that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by increasing housing choices, reducing commute distances and reducing congestion.”

“By reducing sprawl, SB 375 will give Californians the choice not to drive so much and help meet our AB 32 greenhouse gas reduction targets,” added Ann Notthoff, California advocacy director of the [Natural Resources Defense Council](#).

The building industry also hailed the agreement.

“SB 375 is a measure that truly serves the public interest — improving the quality of life of all Californians by ensuring a healthy environment, affordable places to live and the mobility necessary to keep the state’s economy strong and prosperous,” said Ray Becker of [DMB Associates](#) and the chairman of the [California Building Industry Association](#).

Meanwhile, the board of directors of the [League of California Cities](#) voted unanimously to support the amended SB 375.

“It is a good moment for local governments and for all parties concerned,” said [Santa Barbara City Councilwoman Iya Falcone](#), a league board member. “This is a good day for the people of California and the new politics of working together.”

The legislation will receive its first test before the [Assembly Appropriations Committee](#). Schwarzenegger has not taken a position on the bill, although he champions reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promotes building more homes within urban cores.

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