

# Sprawl bill has perfect timing

## State incentives would tie in to Blueprint planning for growth in the Valley.

By **Russell Clemings** / The Fresno Bee

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Efforts to control sprawl in the San Joaquin Valley could get a boost from a bill now awaiting Gov. Schwarzenegger's signature.

Senate Bill 375 would set up incentives for regions throughout the state to draw up broad new visions for future development patterns.

That's something that local leaders have been trying to do for the past two years in the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint process.

Neither the Blueprint nor the Senate bill would be binding on the local government agencies that make most land-use decisions.

But if it becomes law, the bill would steer billions in state-controlled transportation funds toward projects that support those broad visions -- and away from those that don't.

"There isn't going to be a prohibition on development that doesn't follow it, but there will be carrots," said Rusty Selix, executive director of California Association of Councils of Governments.

Valley leaders are preparing to reconvene their Blueprint steering committee later this month as the process enters its final stage, in which visions from the eight Valley counties are supposed to be melded into a unified plan.

Fresno County's plan, approved in May, calls for doubling the number of homes on each acre of future development and concentrating "nodes" of heavy development along highways and transit routes, with open space in between.

The Senate bill isn't as specific as that. But it calls for the state Air Resource Board to set targets for cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, and for regional transportation planning agencies to come up with strategies for meeting those targets. Denser development and shorter commutes are likely to play a big part in that.

The timing couldn't be better, local leaders say.

"The beauty for us in the Valley is that we're right in the middle of our Blueprint planning," said Barbara Steck, deputy director of the Council of Fresno County Governments, which oversees the county's Blueprint process.

The Senate bill's fate remains uncertain. The governor has threatened not to sign any bills until the Legislature approves a new state budget, now more than two months overdue.

Regardless, the Blueprint process moves forward this fall.

A team at the University of California at Davis has spent the summer melding the eight county visions.

Early next year the unified vision will undergo review by citizens and policymakers in each county. The final product is supposed to guide the region's development through the middle of this century.

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