

## SB375 Supports Walkable, Sustainable Development

In 2008 California Legislature passed SB375—which was supported by environmentalists, homebuilders, and cities and counties...and sustainable development.

**Sustainable Development:** This law will limit the state's CO-2 emissions by curbing suburban sprawl and increasing transit-based development through various incentives. If a community plans walkable, mixed-use, transit-oriented growth that reduces automobile use and greenhouse gas emissions, for example, it gets moved to the front of the line for state and federal transportation funds. If a proposed building is located near a transit line, it will have an easier environmental review process.

**Limiting Transportation in Sustainable Development:** Why is SB375 important? Transportation—primarily automobiles—generates one-third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Green buildings, no matter how high performance, cannot reduce greenhouse gas emissions on their own.

Sprawl is a major culprit. In suburban San Bernardino County, California, for example, households make an average of 10 car trips a day, because their homes, workplaces, schools, stores, and friends are miles apart from each other, and transit options are limited. A household in Chicago itself or in one of the nearby rail-connected walkable suburbs generates just 2.5 tons of CO-2 annually—only 22% of the amount attributed to the exurban household.

**Impact of cars on suburban development isn't sustainable:** Because of sprawl, the number of cars is growing faster than the number of people in the U.S. Between 1980 and 2000, 1.2 vehicles were added to the roads for every 1 person increase in the population. Between 1980 and 2000, the total number of vehicular miles driven grew by 80%, more than three times faster than the 24% U.S. population increase in those years. Today, Americans are driving over 365 billion miles annually and producing 154 million metric tons of carbon dioxide just going to the store.

Some skeptics insist that SB375's goal of walkable transit-oriented development is not a realistic solution to global climate change, because most Americans want the typical suburban lifestyle. The 85 million Baby Boomers who are Empty Nesters, or will soon be, are often downsizing and moving to more densely developed urban areas where they can walk to restaurants, stores, theaters, and museums. Meanwhile, Gen Xers (50 million strong) and Generation Y (76 million . . . and just entering the workforce) don't want to live in their parents' suburban neighborhoods. They want more vibrant mixed-use districts, more walkable lifestyles, and more human connections. They want to live close to friends, family, and work. U.S. household size has shrunk from 3.27 in 1950 to 2.03 in 2000. Only one-third of U.S. households have children today. A 2006 Virginia Tech study found that 38% of today's U.S. homebuyers prefer attached housing versus 25% of Americans who want a detached single-family house on a large lot.

**Demographic shift toward sustainable development:** This significant demographic shift is driving market demand away from bedroom communities towards compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development.

Over the past five years, condominium prices, office rents, and retail sales in “new suburban Main Streets” like Reston Town Center in northern Virginia and Southlake Town Center near Fort Worth, Texas have out-performed comparable properties in nearby sprawling suburbs. Finally, today’s economy uncertainty and high gasoline prices have caused many Americans to examine the entire cost of car ownership. . . for a steadily depreciating asset. If an individual or a couple that lives in a transit-served community sells one car, they can invest that money in education, better housing, or a retirement fund.

Americans have also found that rising gasoline prices are not only taking a financial toll on commuters, they are also lowering residential property values in farflung exurbs more than in communities closer to the urban core. Some skeptics insist that SB375 won’t work, because available land for new growth can only be found at the outermost edges of U.S. metropolitan areas, making sprawl inevitable. Wrong.

**Urban land banks make space for dense sustainable development:** Every U.S. suburb and city has “land banks” hiding in plain sight, including vacant lots, moribund office parks and factories, and outdated shopping centers surrounded by surface parking lots. Check out [www.deadmalls.com](http://www.deadmalls.com).

The U.S. Green Building Council, for example, has launched the pilot version of its new LEED for Neighborhood Development program that provides the first national standard for neighborhood design that includes compact mixed-use development, walkability, and proximity to transit. Developments that meet these standards will reduce the number of their residents’ and businesses’ automobile trips and therefore their CO-2 emissions.

### **SB375 is a new model for sustainable urban development**

SB375 is a vital new model for U.S. communities and states that must accommodate growth and also reduce their energy use and CO-2 emissions. California’s SB375 is not only a much-needed model for the U.S., it is a milestone of worldwide importance. SB375 provides a realistic incentives-based development model for fast-growing Asian and Latin American nations that have adopted our increasingly obsolete and environmentally detrimental suburban sprawl growth patterns to accommodate their rapidly growing populations.

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