

**POLICY IN MOTION**  
**TRANSPORTATION PLANNING IN CALIFORNIA AFTER AB 32**

**LAUREN MICHELE**

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Policy in motion: transportation planning in California after AB 32 /Lauren Michele.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-1463633967

ISBN-10: 1463633963

1. Urban transportation—Environmental aspects—United States. 2. Urbanization—Environmental aspects—United States. 3. City planning—United States. 4. Climatic changes—United States. 5. Sustainable development—United States. I. Title.

2011910720

Published in the United States by Policy in Motion, Sacramento, CA.

[www.policyinmotion.com](http://www.policyinmotion.com)

## ABOUT LAUREN MICHELE



**“I have observed Lauren handle complex and challenging situations with energy, intelligence, empathy and professionalism.”**

-Jerry Walters,  
*Chief Technical Officer; Fehr & Peers*

**“Lauren is a sharp analyst who has a good command of the big policy picture and a nuanced understanding of key technical and political issues.”**

-Steve Winkelman,  
*Director of Transportation & Adaptation Programs; Center for Clean Air Policy*

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In a time where transportation policy efforts are pointing toward economic, environmental and equitable stewardship, Lauren Michele – Principal and Founder of Policy in Motion – supports planning practitioners, policy makers and public participants in understanding how sustainability policy impacts community values. Her combined knowledge as a practicing transportation planning consultant and sustainable policy analyst has given her a foundation to build a business on connecting federal and state funding/legislative priorities with local and regional implementation of projects/programs. Lauren Michele crafts and implements transportation projects and regulatory frameworks which work toward complete community sustainability and people-oriented development – facilitating access to affordable living near quality jobs, food, schools and health services.

A graduate of the UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies and researcher with the University’s Urban Land Use and Transportation Center, Ms. Michele’s background extends from in-classroom teaching of undergraduate courses in Transportation Policy to experiential learning while living and researching multi-modal transportation planning in Europe.

The lotus flower was chosen as the symbol for Policy in Motion to represent optimism for a sustainable future through transportation policy and the idea that even – just as a lotus – economically, equitably or environmentally distressed communities can surface from muddy waters to create thriving, healthy and beautiful places to live. Each petal represents key community values often under consideration during the transportation planning and policy development process.

**TO THOSE SERVING  
A GREATER PURPOSE**



In dwelling, live close to the ground.

In thinking, keep to the simple.

In conflict, be fair and generous.

In governing, don't try to control.

In work, do what you enjoy.

In family life, be completely present.

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*Tao Te Ching, Chapter 8*

*6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.*

*Translation by Stephen Mitchell*

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## GROWING CALIFORNIA

The integration of transportation, land use, and greenhouse gas (GHG) planning is becoming more urgent and more apparent. It is motivated by a desire to protect the environment, improve livability, spur economic growth, and promote energy security. Such integrated planning can provide a basis for more informed decision making.

The question is how. Local and national governments around the world are struggling with this challenge, enacting new legislation and regulations. The good news is that actions to create more sustainable communities, enhance energy security, and reduce climate change are often the same. That is, actions to reduce oil use and greenhouse gas emissions are often the same actions one would take to improve livability and reduce infrastructure costs.

The case of California is particularly interesting. In recent years, it has adopted a number of laws and regulations that link climate change, livability, and other sustainability goals – providing a legal and planning framework for taking action. The result is an enhanced level of collaboration between local, regional, and state governments.

The key law was the 2006 *Global Warming Solutions Act* (AB 32), requiring greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced to 1990 levels by 2020. Because transportation accounts for almost 40 percent of GHG emissions in California, sustainable transportation issues rose to the forefront. California was faced with the challenge of not only accelerating its leadership in vehicle technology and fuels, but also tackling travel behavior in a state where auto-centric cities and lifestyles were pioneered. AB 32 highlighted the need to strengthen the transportation planning process in addressing travel behavior and the link between land use and travel.

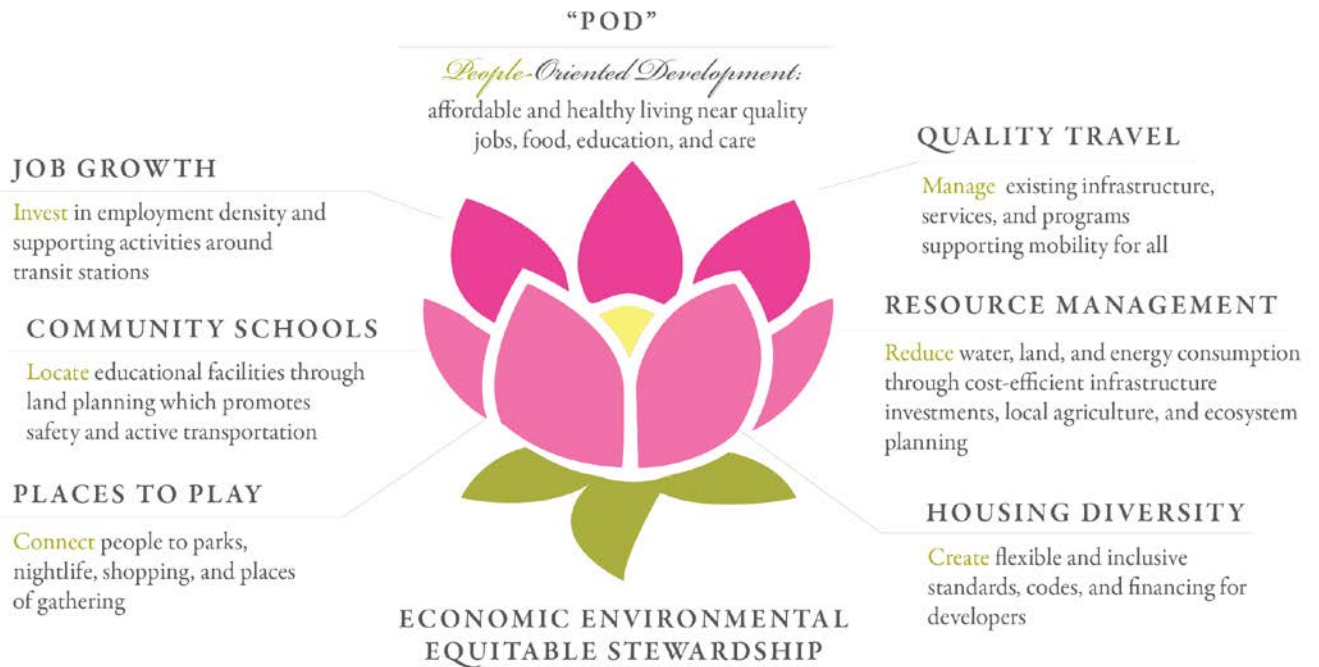
Subsequent laws after AB 32 directly targeted transportation and land use planning, calling for a more integrated planning process and creating a foundation for stronger and more flexible regulatory frameworks and financial incentives.

This book examines California's transportation planning initiatives since AB 32, with a nuanced eye toward the State's unique rules, laws, politics, and institutions. Lauren Michele provides insights and lessons for policymakers and planners—in California and elsewhere—as they strive to create more sustainable communities and transportation systems.

**Daniel Sperling, Ph.D**  
Sacramento, California  
August 2011

*-Director; Institute of Transportation Studies, UC Davis*  
*-Author; Two Billion Cars: Driving Toward Sustainability*  
*-Board Member; California Air Resources Board*

## HOW CAN TRANSPORTATION POLICY GROW BEAUTIFUL COMMUNITIES?



### “MY LIFE IS MY MESSAGE”

~ Gandhi ~

I noticed after writing my book there was one case story I hadn't told yet. Mine. While I was hesitant to share my personal story in a technical handbook for policy makers on overcoming barriers to sustainability planning in California, I realized that the most impactful messages to share with the world are the ones that reflect our own experiences and way of living. I offer this case story as an example of why community is so imperative for human happiness in hopes that it elevates the importance of why government must become more agile in its approach to regulations and new institutional frameworks, which foster the growth of beautiful

communities based on economic, environmental, and equitable stewardship.

**I live in a POD** – or “people-oriented development” within a greater region on the rise of blossoming sustainable communities – you could also say I live in California’s capital community of midtown, Sacramento. I define POD as: *affordable and healthy living near quality jobs, food, education, and care*. POD is not about ending an era of car domination, it’s about fostering more “heart-oriented activities” in communities.

I have lived in the downtown/midtown area of Sacramento for five years without owning a vehicle purely for lifestyle convenience and cost savings – which AAA estimates to be approximately \$9,600 per year (at \$2.26 per gallon and free parking) and the United States Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reports an average of \$4,582 in annual operational and maintenance expenses alone. Even if I was gifted a car and unlimited free parking, I’ve saved well over \$20,000 during my lifetime in Sacramento – minus my \$800 electric scooter and roughly \$1,000 in regional train tickets. That’s a lot of money to spend on something which we on average use for about an hour a day. **This is called affordable living.**

So what could one do with nearly five grand of spare cash a year and an extra hour of “free time” each day? Exercise regularly? Increase quality time with family? Take tropical vacations? Create a daily spiritual practice? Invite your friends over for a nutritious meal? Read to your kids? Read to your neighbor’s kids? Walk the dog? Volunteer at a food bank? Garden? What makes YOU happy? **These are called heart-oriented activities.**

I am a 15 minute tree-shaded bike ride from the policy heartbeat of the Golden State where I spend most of my working hours, and my nephew will be able to enjoy the same bicycling convenience to midtown’s internship-based high school where he will have the opportunity for hands-on learning around his interests

in business and public policy due to our urban community mentors, leaders, and resources which support the public charter school. Further, his school – the Met – exemplifies investing in POD, as it is under renovation to become the City of Sacramento’s first LEED certified school supported by a mission for sustainable learning. **This is called access to jobs and education.**

I am blessed with gracious landlords of a beautifully remodeled two story townhome with a 100 square foot patio which I have converted into a zen-urban oasis complete with an infrared sauna and vegetable garden. On the weekends, I can enjoy a leisurely ride or stroll to the farmer’s market, outdoor concerts, state museums, “Second Saturday” art/music events, and other heart-oriented activities. Because I feel so connected to my community, I actively volunteer with youth mentorship programs and organizations focused on providing nutritional and emotional support services to the greater Sacramento region. **This is called healthy living.**



In seven minutes I can walk to the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op to purchase fresh, organic produce from our local farms and all the ingredients I need for my gluten-free vegan

cupcakes. While en route to my local store, I pass by an independent coffeehouse with WiFi; a friend's pool; Sacramento's only "urban winery" complete with a cellar and tasting room for award winning local wines; two yoga studios of varying styles; my dentist, chiropractor, and acupuncturist; a Sacramento Regional Transit Light Rail Station; and a neighborhood park where I snapped a photo with Governor Jerry Brown. Just a few more walking minutes down the road I have access to some of the best western medicine facilities and doctors in California – something I developed immense gratitude for when my sister was hospitalized for two months after a major accident last year. **This is called access to food and care.**

You don't have to live in the heart of an urban region to be a POD either. There are PODs in rural communities and suburbs across the country. I was born in Maui, Hawaii and grew up in Sonoma County, CA – where rural economies based on agriculture and tourism thrive. Despite Sonoma County's highest auto ownership rate in the Bay Area during my childhood, I was able to continue my quality of life in high school after being diagnosed with epilepsy because I lived in the POD of downtown Santa Rosa. Imagine the feeling of devastation to be told at the age of 18 – months from graduating high school and leaving for college life, that you can no longer drive a vehicle. After the shock of losing my license in the middle of my senior year of high school, I began bicycling out of necessity to school, extracurricular activities, and my internship with the City of Santa Rosa's Engineering Department. I soon was racing my classmates to first period when I discovered bike parking on campus was significantly easier than circling the campus parking lot in search of a space.

After several months of medical stability, I was finally allowed to drive again under my doctor's care. I remember the day I was given my license back: I hopped on my bicycle to head downtown for a music lesson and could care less. POD gave me

insulation from a major exogenous shock – a protection similar to if gas prices were to suddenly double. Being in a POD allowed me to continue life without major disruption, and I’m certain if I didn’t have a life accessible by bicycle during those months I would have suffered compounding depression from both a medical condition diagnosis and the loss of my social life and independence. Two years ago I was told I couldn’t ride a bicycle anymore due to a severe nerve pinch in my back – my most beloved and only source of transportation. This time my midtown Sacramento POD protected me from the hardship because I lived on a bus route that enabled me to get downtown for work and train travel to other regions, and was surrounded by a carpool community of friends and colleagues. Such health circumstances and the happiness from interdependent living are on the minds of baby boomers like my mother, and are exactly the reasons why we have a moral responsibility to grow PODs in existing communities across California.

I truly believe that fostering the growth of PODs everywhere – urban and rural places – will result in more prosperous and happier communities. Every neighborhood needs to be a POD, and every neighbor needs to be a seed, which means our focus as policy makers and leaders must be on investing in existing assets and our existing residents. Government will need more than reformed zoning codes and traffic standards in order to create PODs. While regulatory changes are critical, policy makers need to recreate a new planning process which engages residents as caretakers of their community neighbors and resources. This means a process where “NIMBY” philosophy is not fostered as the case in our current planning model. PODs cannot thrive without neighborhood caretakers. When people understand the higher quality of living POD creates, the desire for unsustainable plans and projects naturally dissipates. For example, when you have a desire to support your community farmers, entrepreneurs, establishments,

and ecosystems, you begin to realize that big box retail and auto-centric streets disconnect communities which are meant to thrive in an interdependent manner. Instead, self-serving NIMBY attitudes are replaced with “YIOBY” (YES in OUR Backyard) for places of heart-oriented gathering and low impact living for all community members.

People-oriented development is a concept that goes beyond traditional planning concepts of promoting high density development near transit stations; rather, POD focuses on what makes people happy and how to offer existing neighborhoods job growth, community schools, places of gathering, quality travel, resource management, and housing diversity. In a state that drives 800 million miles a day and spends ten percent of household income on cars, planning for PODs today will blossom beautiful communities tomorrow, where people have more opportunities to engage in simple living and heart-oriented activities rather than being bound to material goods that are necessities in POD absence.

While California’s rigid governmental structures are continually repairing our current paradigm of transportation and land use planning, what is needed is a complete rebuild of the paradigm. The State must become more nimble to local implementation issues if we are to successfully create people-oriented development. Even in my POD, infill developers face difficulties with project implementation due to not only macro-level regulatory barriers, but political uncertainty and conflicting policy objectives at the local level. Further, residents motivated by fear rather than serving the greater community good are acting as a special interest group whose lobbying efforts should be equal to and not dominant over groups representing the community at large. This requires more responsibility and leadership among local elected officials to care for each other’s constituents as they would their own.

Greed, hatred, and ignorance cause controversy and appear camouflaged in the planning process as large homebuilding

profit drive, fear of “disrupting” existing neighborhoods, and lack of understanding the benefits that POD investments can have. The planning process will change when we change. Overconsumption and excess driving are typically identified as sustainability challenges in themselves; however, they are actually a symptom of disconnected communities. When we are connected to others and tied to our neighbors with heart-oriented activities, we carpool, bike, walk, drive, and ride closer to home because that is where our hearts are. Our culture must become more service-oriented and less self-motivated if we are to be community caretakers.

But society moves when leadership points in a better direction. **Leaders are caretakers** – this means not dominating people’s behavior directly, but rather guiding them toward their fullest potential to serve each other in interdependent communities. Policy makers at all levels of government should act humbly and craft exemplary policy with simple approaches, patient attitudes, and compassionate results. When we offer respect to others it empowers them to lead. Let’s create a new paradigm in planning where government’s role is to understand and address the market challenges of development patterns, update regulations to reflect new ideas, and integrate full sustainability analysis into the decision making process so that community residents are given an opportunity to better connect to their neighbors and neighborhood. POD is about recognizing that political controversy in the planning and project approval process is rooted in a lack of interdependent thinking, and that sustainable living must be grounded in “community caretaking consciousness” in order to uproot social, environmental, and economic inequities.

In a state where energy, air, water, and fire are heavily regulated, local land use decisions are farthest from that. California’s unique democracy and global economy is unparalleled to any other union. The State is setting new policy directions for sustainable living, but outdated regulatory frameworks and

conflicting agency missions are prohibiting the coordination of funding structures, research priorities, decision making, and project review. New laws for integrated transportation and land use in a post-AB 32 era must be aligned with supporting paradigm shifts if California is to move forward in a truly unified vision.

**Lauren Michele, M.S.**  
Sacramento, California  
August 2011

*-lifelong student & practitioner of conscious living*



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Problem Statement

“Even if vehicle fuel efficiency were to reach 55 mpg by 2030, we would still see only modest decreases in transportation carbon dioxide emissions without a decrease in vehicle miles traveled.” This quote from United States Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in his July 14, 2009 testimony to Congress illustrates the growing role that the transportation sector has in meeting climate change objectives through not just vehicle and fuel technologies, but also through addressing travel behavior policies that reduce vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) growth and improve network management on our transport systems.

In California, the transportation sector accounts for approximately 38 percent of the total GHG inventory in the state – nine percent higher than the US transport share of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), likely due to California's leadership in energy efficiency building codes and the high percent of electricity generation from natural gas (4). Of the transportation sector's GHG contribution in California, 65 percent of emissions come from light duty trucks/cars and on-road freight (4). While state and federal action has been taken to set new requirements for vehicle efficiency and fuels, tackling travel behavior continues to be largely political due to the nature of how daily travel affects people's lifestyles. Even though transportation is the largest contributing sector to California's GHG inventory, the fact that transportation is 38 percent of the State's GHG problem will not likely result in the sector being

38 percent of the solution when cost-effectiveness of reduction strategies are taken into account. Further, California has attempted to garner all cost-effective energy savings from newly constructed buildings since 1978 (26), but has achieved no more than stabilization in per capita electricity consumption (25). This fact sheds light on the importance of achieving truly ambitious GHG reduction targets from the transportation sector – and that this cannot be done in absence of reducing VMT growth and managing our roadway and transit networks.

This book addresses the travel behavior portion of California's transportation GHG contribution in five chapters:

#### The Four Circles of GHG Reduction Strategies from Travel Behavior

- *categorizes the existing literature on GHG reduction ranges from land use and transportation strategies into four major themes covering VMT growth reduction and improved network management*

#### Planning Theory and Frameworks in California

- *analyzes the theory and practice of the State's land use/transportation planning structure, environmental review process, and funding allocation framework*
- *examines local, regional, state, and federal roles in the implementation of key climate change and sustainable transportation laws*

#### Implementing SACOG Blueprint & Metropolitan Transportation Plan

- *applies SACOG's new planning methods used in their Regional Growth Vision Plan (Blueprint) and their Regional Transportation Plan (Metropolitan Transportation Plan) to existing state frameworks to reveal what aspects of state government need policy reform in order to successfully implement Senate Bill 375's "Sustainable Communities Strategies"*

- *compares SACOG to other regions throughout the state*

#### New Policy Frameworks for California

- *details California statute and agency recommendations based on analysis of how SACOG was able to perform under existing state frameworks*
- *analyzes the concept of “decoupling” VMT growth from traditional transportation revenue sources by incentivizing local and regional governments to reduce VMT growth and improve network management under a new regional program funded by cap-and-trade auction revenues*

#### Creating a Federal Framework for Integrated Planning

- *provides recommended statute language and agency action to support GHG reduction from travel behavior changes*