

## **Council of governments solicits sustainability survey**

By Jonathan Partridge

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The Stanislaus County Council of Governments is working on a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but first it wants to gather thoughts from local residents.

The agency's newly released Sustainable Communities Strategy Vision Survey allows folks to share their own priorities about transportation and land use, as StanCOG prepares to create a state-mandated regional strategy to improve local air quality.

Jaylen French, an associate planner for StanCOG and project manager for its Sustainable Communities Vision and regional transportation plan, said he had received more than 100 responses. He hoped to have 300 by the April 15 deadline.

"We are trying to work with the public to come up with a vision for this plan," French said.

The survey, which can be found online at [www.stancog.org/survey.pdf](http://www.stancog.org/survey.pdf), asks respondents to prioritize land-use and transportation issues they are concerned about, including commute times, traffic congestion and conservation. It also asks people their opinions about regional growth and transportation.

Information from the survey will be used for the Sustainable Communities Vision, a transportation and land-use planning document that StanCOG must complete by late 2013, in accordance with the Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008. That law requires regional transportation planning agencies, such as StanCOG, to come up with strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by linking land use and transportation. It is part of a larger statewide effort, outlined in a 2006 state law, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

The planning document must identify residential densities and building intensities, determine housing needs for the next eight years and find places that could house people for the next 20 years or more. It also must gather and consider information about resource areas and farmland.

In addition, the strategy must identify a network to serve the region's transportation needs and lay out how the area could be developed to help reduce greenhouse emissions from cars and trucks.

While some regional transportation planning agencies in the state are close to completing their plans, StanCOG is just beginning work on its strategy based on the state's mandatory timeline.

No part of the plan will be mandatory, though individual cities and the county might gain certain benefits by incorporating elements into their general plans, French said. He speculated that the state might eventually make transportation funding contingent upon adhering to Sustainable Communities Vision principles, but there is no plan to do so at this time, he said.

While the state provided no funding to help agencies create the documents, French said they already create regional transportation plans on a regular basis.

He anticipated having some type of outreach effort about once every three months to solicit people's input for the plan, whether through a survey or through a workshop. French said survey results would not necessarily affect the outcome of the regional strategy, but they might if a great number of respondents shared priorities.

So far, he said he was impressed with the geographic spread of the responses he received, including several parts of the county.

StanCOG representatives can offer presentations about the strategy for speakers bureaus or community groups if there is any interest, French said.

## **Latino concern for environment grows**

By Rebecca Plevin

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FRESNO -- When he began organizing farmworker communities around environmental justice issues in the early 1990s, Lupe Martínez said Latinos -- himself included -- did not identify with the environmental movement.

"To me, it was either hugging the owls, or hugging the trees," said Martínez, who today is the assistant director of the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment in Delano.

Since then, he has seen a huge shift in Latino support for environmental issues. Today, he said, the environment has become a very personal issue for Latinos across the state.

"It's about our children," Martínez said. "Who doesn't want to have clean air for their kids, especially if you have two or three kids who have asthma?"

Martínez's observations are supported by an annual Public Policy Institute of California survey, which has consistently found that Latinos and other communities of color in the state have high levels of concern about air quality and the environment.

The 2011 survey found that Latinos and African Americans are more likely than whites or Asians to consider air pollution a big problem in their region. Latinos and African Americans are least likely to say they are very satisfied with their air quality.

"I think there has been a belief that only people who don't have other things to worry about can worry about these types of issues," said Sonja Petek, survey project manager at the policy institute. "But we have such high percentages of people believing air pollution is posing a risk, and they or their families are suffering."

"These aren't just extraneous problems," she said. Survey respondents, "care about the risks that these problems may pose to their families. It is a very real issue."

Latinos also sense a disparity in environmental conditions, according to the survey. Latinos are most likely to say that air pollution is a more serious threat in lower-income regions, while a majority of whites do not believe that air quality is worse in low-income areas.

"We know that a lot of the state's Latinos and African American population are in urban centers or near agricultural areas," Petek said. "Those areas do have worse air quality, and I think that is reflected in some of these perceptions."

Government officials and scholars have also noticed the shift in the Latino community's involvement in environmental issues.

Jared Blumenfeld, regional director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, noted the ground-level change during a February visit to the Tulare County community of Seville, where residents can not drink their tap water.

"The environmental movement nationally is male and white, and here it is female and Latina," he said. "It is just nice to see a completely different face of environmentalism."

"This EPA cares about talking to that new face of the environmental movement, so the San Joaquín Valley represents an amazing opportunity to have a dialogue with people that are directly affected."

Jonathan London, director of the Center for Regional Change at the University of California, Davis, has observed a change in the environmental justice movement at the activist level. He

noted that Latino environmental activists -- including Martínez -- have transitioned from fighting local struggles, to taking on issues at a statewide, national, and even global level.

"Environmental justice in California is scaling up from local to global," London said. The environmental issues that activists and community residents are tackling are changing, too, he said.

Today, environmental justice goes beyond fighting against a polluting facility in a community. It also encompasses equal access to basic amenities -- like sidewalks, street lights, sewers, and parks -- and planning for more sustainable communities.

"It is a shift from only oppositional, and only to saying 'no,' to saying 'yes' about really basic human needs, and economic needs, and health," London said.

Martínez, of the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment, also attributes the Latino community's strong support of environmental issues to a new sense of political empowerment.

"When it hits home and it is very personal, you're looking for ways to figure out why and what to do," he said. "I think that we are understanding that we can make changes ourselves."

## **County's fitness lags overall**

### **S.J. residents not living as healthily as counterparts in state, report shows**

By [Joe Goldeen](#), Record Staff Writer  
Stockton Record Wed., April 04, 2012

With the national release Tuesday of the County Health Rankings, San Joaquin County shows very slight improvement over the previous year in health outcomes and the factors that contribute to a person's life span and quality of his or her health.

Measured against the 56 largest counties in California for the 2012 report, San Joaquin ranked 37th in health outcomes (compared with 38th in 2011) and 50th in health factors (compared with 52nd in 2011), still placing it in the bottom third among the unhealthiest counties in California.

Kern, Fresno and San Bernardino were among other large California counties that fared poorly in the annual ranking compiled by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute in conjunction with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Marin, Placer and Santa Clara were among the counties that consistently ranked highest. The full, interactive and easy-to-follow report is available online at [CountyHealthRankings.org](http://CountyHealthRankings.org).

Outcomes were based on a national mortality benchmark for premature death and morbidity levels measuring self-reported health status, number of days a person was affected by poor health, and low birthweight for newborn babies.

Factors that affect people's health were broken down into four categories:

- » Behavior: smoking, obesity, physical inactivity, excessive drinking, motor vehicle crash death rate, sexually transmitted infections, teen birth rate.
- » Clinical care: uninsured, primary care physicians, preventable hospital stays, diabetic screening, mammography screening.
- » Social and economic: high school graduation, some college, unemployment, children in poverty, inadequate social support, children in single-parent households, violent crime rate.

» Physical environment: air pollution, access to recreational facilities, limited access to healthy foods, fast-food restaurants.

The last factor - fast-food restaurants - is a new measure for 2012. In San Joaquin County, 55 percent of all restaurants fall into this category, more than double the national benchmark of 25 percent and above California's actual 49 percent.

Graphs illustrating premature death trends over 10 years are new as well. It shows San Joaquin County's trend measurably higher than both the state and nation for the entire decade.

Michelle Larkin of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation described the rankings as "a health check-up for the counties comparing them against national benchmarks, where they need to improve and where they are doing well."

By compiling the rankings all in one place, they illustrate that there are big differences in health and the factors that influence health both within individual states and across the nation.

Dr. Karen Furst, San Joaquin County's health officer, who had not yet reviewed the new rankings report Tuesday, said such a national report is somewhat limited in using only data sources available for every county in the nation.

"Sometimes we have access to newer data at the local and state level. It's still a good snapshot. This is another good source of information and is good for community groups that want to know what is happening in order to apply for grants or design health-related programs," Furst said.

The national rankings are based on the latest publicly available data for each county and are accessible tools that every county can use to measure where its residents stand on multiple factors that influence health compared to other counties in their state.