



SANDAG'S Controversial Endorsement of 1 Mile SDA

Executive Summary

On January 12th, Allison Wood, a SANDAG Senior Regional Planner, phoned in to support the San Diego Planning Department's proposed Sustainable Development Area's (SDA) 1 mile walking distance from transit, influencing the City's Land Use and Housing Committee's vote. Thereafter, on January 24, SANDAG's Jennifer Williamson appeared at the Community Planners Committee meeting stating that SANDAG had not taken a position on San Diego's SDAs.

On 1/27, Neighbors For a Better San Diego received a letter from SANDAG confirming that they support 1 mile SDAs based on a decision made on an uncertain date through an undefined Intergovernmental Review Process based on alignment with the unspecified goals of the:

- Regional Housing Needs Assessment Plan,
- Sustainable Communities Strategies, and
- Mobility Hub Strategy

The letter also confirmed that this decision was not made by any SANDAG advisory committee or the SANDAG Board. Follow-up questions remain unanswered by SANDAG.

The fact that two different SANDAG employees professed two contradictory agency positions regarding SDAs within a given week suggests that this was not a decision that was carefully considered based on existing policies and research. It is disconcerting at best that an agency with such a significant budget and impact on the lives of San Diegans would operate in such a haphazard, inconsistent and self-contradictory manner. It seems obvious that politics played a bigger role than research and facts in this decision-making process.

Based on a thorough review of SANDAG's published literature, we determined that encouraging development up to one mile away from major transit is inconsistent with both SANDAG's own research on effective transit-oriented development and its historical position. Below we document each piece of evidence contradicting SANDAG's recent support for one mile walking distance to transit as an appropriate measure for reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and increasing transit usage.

SANDAG Research and Historical Positions on Walking Distance to Transit

In SANDAG’s 2021 Regional Plan, ½ mile from transit is a key benchmark:

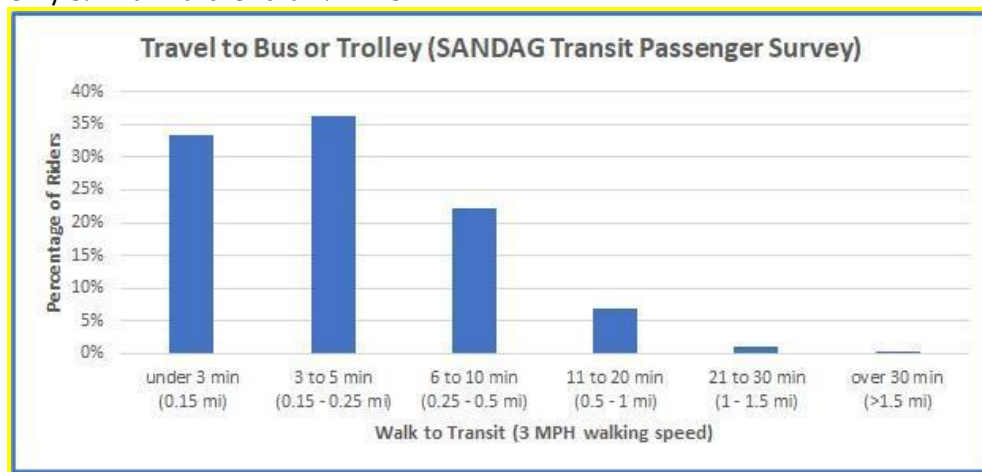
- “Only 12% of low-income residents currently live **within a half-mile of a commuter rail, light rail or Rapid transit stop.**”³⁶
- “2021 Regional Plan performance results show a threefold increase in social equity focused populations (people with low incomes, people of color, and seniors) living **within a half-mile of a commuter rail, light rail, or Rapid transit stop**”³⁶

SANDAG’s 2019 TNC Survey showed that 97% of local transit users walk to transit and 89% walk home, nearly everyone. Only 1-2% “roll” via bike, scooter or skateboard.

- In 2019¹⁹
 - 97% walk to/89% walk from
 - 2% come/89% go via auto
 - 1% roll to /2% roll from via bike, skateboard, etc.
 - 1.5% come /0.8% go via transit/air (long distance mode)

SANDAG’s 2015 Passenger Survey showed that 92% walk 10 minutes - ½ mile or less to transit.

- 70% walk 5 minutes or less to access transit (1/4 mile or less)²⁶
- Only 8% walk further than ½ mile



2015 On-Board Transit Passenger Survey; Results of the 2015 On-Board Transit Passenger Survey for San Diego Region; Prepared for: San Diego Association of Governments pg. 19 https://www.sandag.org/uploads/projectid/projectid_494_21412.pdf

SANDAG’s Smart Growth Incentive Program is intended to “contribute to the reduction in GHG emissions and vehicle miles traveled and improve public health by encouraging travel by means

other than single-occupant vehicle. In particular, proposed projects should support public transit usage by improving access to transit and be located in areas served by transit.”³⁴

- Its scoring rubric is based on projects being **½ mile from a transit stop** and it even differentiates between Rapid and heavy rail versus buses/light rail.
 - “Project **area includes or is within 0.5 miles** of an existing or planned Rapid and/or rail stop (10 points)”³⁴
 - “Project **includes or is within 0.5 miles** of an existing or planned major transit stop (non-Rapid/non-Rail) (5 points)”³⁴

SANDAG’s Housing Acceleration Program (HAP) is intended to fund activities that accelerate housing production “while shifting modes of travel to more sustainable methods to reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gasses.”³⁵ HAP grant criteria also acknowledges the key factor of ½ mile distance to transit.

- “Relationship to Regional Transit” – “Prioritize projects **within ½-mile** of Rapid, passenger rail or major transportation stop”³⁵

SANDAG’s 2015 Designing for Smart Growth scorecard gives extra points for buildings and developments with transit access “within a comfortable **¼-mile walk of a transit corridor, or a transit stop**”²³

SANDAG’s Transit Oriented Districts document recommends a walking “catchment area” that’s “conveniently accessible **within 5-minutes of each transit station by foot**” That’s **¼ mile**.²⁵

SANDAG’s 2017 Mobility Hub Implementation Strategy uses a **5-minute ¼-mile walkshed to transit** to evaluate transit equity because car ownership rates are lower among the impoverished, low-income minorities, and seniors.²⁹

AS FOR the City of SAN DIEGO, in its own 2020 Transportation Study Manual EVERY reference to distance from transit is **½ mile**. It even requires Affordable housing be screened for transit access “defined as transit being located within reasonable walking distance (**1/2 mile**) from the project driveway.”³³

EVEN MTS’s 2018 Designing For Transit manual noted that “Passengers are typically **willing to walk between a quarter mile and a half of a mile from a transit station.**”²⁰

SANDAG’s Support for One Mile SDAs Not Justified Based on Transit Usage Data:

There is essentially universal agreement that few riders will trek beyond ½ mile to take transit, so using SDAs with a 1 mile walkshed to justify building dense and affordable housing **½ to 1 mile AWAY** from transit works against San Diego’s Climate Action goals by increasing auto use and defeating efforts to decrease GHG, and improve air quality. Housing beyond ½ mile will not meet

the state or federal definition of “transit-oriented development.” Further, it is inconsistent with the 5 minute, ¼ mile walkshed prescribed in SANDAG’s Mobility Hubs.

On what basis is SANDAG suddenly in favor of a 1 mile walkshed to transit? How is this political decision justifiable based on transit usage data?

Sources

- 19** 2019 TNC Survey Data_Transit Egress Mode_TAN QA-QC (San Diego)
Peter.Stevens@sandag.org
https://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_4868_32650.pdf
- 20** **Designing for Transit** A Manual for Integrating Public Transportation and Land Development in the San Diego Metropolitan Area Published by San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, Feb 2018 https://www.sdmts.com/sites/default/files/attachments/mts_designingfortransit_2018-02-02web.pdf
- 23** San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), *Designing for Smart Growth/Creating Great Places in the San Diego Region*, Smart Growth Scorecard 2015
- 25** Transit-Oriented Districts A Strategy For The San Diego Region, SANDAG 2015
https://www.sandag.org/uploads/projectid/projectid_500_19413.pdf
- 26** On-Board Transit Passenger Survey: Results of the 2015 On-Board Transit Passenger Survey for San Diego Region; Prepared for SANDAG
https://www.sandag.org/uploads/projectid/projectid_494_21412.pdf
- 29** SANDAG Regional Mobility Hub Implementation Strategy Equity Considerations 12/15/17
<https://www.sandag.org/-/media/SANDAG/Documents/PDF/projects-and-programs/innovative-mobility/mobility-hubs/mobility-hub-planning-resources/mobility-hub-equity-considerations-2017-12-15.pdf>
- 33** The City of San Diego Transportation Study Manual (TSM), September 29, 2020
<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/10-transportation-study-manual.pdf>
- 34** SANDAG Smart Growth Incentive Grant Program Call For Projects – Cycle 5 11/24/2021
- 35** SANDAG Housing Acceleration Program Grant Details 12/2021 <https://www.sandag.org/-/media/SANDAG/Documents/PDF/funding/grant-programs/smart-growth-and-housing/housing-acceleration-grant-program/housing-acceleration-program-grant-details-2021-12-01.pdf>
- 36** SANDAG Regional Plan Chapter 1: A Bold New Vision for the 2021 Regional Plan, 12/1/2021
<https://www.sandag.org/-/media/SANDAG/Documents/PDF/regional-plan/2021-regional-plan/final-2021-regional-plan/2021-regional-plan-chapter-1-2021-12-01.pdf>