Southern California Association of Governments
Remote Participation Only
April 29, 2021

		EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S APPROVAL
To:	Emerging Technologies Committee (ETC)	
From:	Thomas Bellino, Senior Regional Planner (213) 236-1830, bellino@scag.ca.gov	*Kome Ajise*
Subject:	SCAG Tools Underway - Regional Data Platform, SoCal Greenprint, Local Information Services Team	

RECOMMENDED ACTION:
Information Only – No Action Required

STRATEGIC PLAN:
This item supports the following Strategic Plan Goal 2: Advance Southern California's policy interests and planning priorities through regional, statewide, and national engagement and advocacy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
With the adoption of SCAG's Future Communities Initiative in 2018, efforts have been underway to improve local jurisdictions' access to current, historical, local, and regional datasets that can reduce the costs of planning and increase the efficiency of public service – as roughly two-thirds of local jurisdictions do not have the in-house staff or GIS resources to analyze and process data. Along these lines, SCAG has initiated the Regional Data Platform (RDP) and SoCal Greenprint projects to foster local adoption of interactive, automated, and state-of-the-art information tools and technologies as a value-added service to enhance member agencies' planning and operations. This presentation will provide an overview of each project's progress to date, outreach findings with key stakeholders to develop these tools, as well as engagements with jurisdictions to advertise and provide trainings on current resources stemming from these projects through SCAG's Local Information Services Team (LIST).

BACKGROUND:
"Big Data" and the rapid proliferation of new technologies are poised to transform and disrupt traditional policy making and planning within our local communities and across the Southern California region as a whole. Through improvements in data collection, analysis, and technology applications, governments have the opportunity to be more efficient, innovative, and transparent. To ensure that public agencies and communities in Southern California not only keep up with the pace of innovation, but lead the nation, SCAG's Regional Council adopted the Future Communities

Framework that included a set of policy recommendations and a short-term work plan that provides technology resources and technical know-how to local jurisdictions, including easy to use data tools.

With more than two thirds of jurisdictions reporting having less than optimal staff resources and technology to analyze and process data, SCAG's work in this regard helps jurisdictions provide more efficient and timely services to their residents. By collecting data related to transportation, energy use, or park use, city services can be tailored to the needs of local residents in ways that reduce the cost of services and allow scarce resources to go further. For example, through the use of shared data platforms, agency workers always know where to go to find the most up-to-date data for their analysis. This reduces duplication of datasets, errors in analysis based on outdated data, and fewer hours spent searching for datasets.

In implementing the Regional Council's direction, SCAG has been working to develop interactive mapping tools that can help local planners and other stakeholders better integrate data into decision-making, both in support of local general planning and long-range transportation and sustainable communities planning.

Regional Data Platform
The Regional Data Platform (RDP) will provide a system of online tools for SCAG and local jurisdictions to access data necessary for local general plan development and decision making by monitoring transportation, land development trends, housing and economic growth, and sustainability conditions. Further, the RDP will standardize regionally significant datasets, provide opportunities for local partners to update their data in real-time, and draw insights from local trends. It will be an online tool for SCAG and local jurisdictions to access data necessary for day-to-day business needs, as well as long range planning initiatives. The platform will also feature a data-driven collaboration hub for local jurisdictions to engage with stakeholders for individual projects, such as local and regional land use planning, active transportation planning, greenhouse gas reduction strategies and development impact assessments. Moving beyond just technology, this platform will help government engage with data in a simpler way, allowing the interpretation of information into actionable insights and knowledge, and provide a digital venue for local agencies to engage with their residents using data as a medium.

As a first step in developing the Regional Data Platform, SCAG has been engaging with local jurisdictions across the region to roll-out free GIS software licenses that help to fill information gaps in the immediate. These off-the-shelf licenses allow jurisdictions to access thousands of curated datasets from local, state, and federal partner agencies through interactive tools, including ArcGIS Online, ArcGIS Pro, ArcGIS Urban, and Community Analyst. Importantly, these licenses can be utilized independently from the Regional Data Platform while the integrated system is under development. To take full advantage of these resources, local jurisdictions are encouraged to

contact SCAG. More information on the vision and process for developing the platform can be found on the project website at https://arcg.is/0u8mLD2.

To ensure that the Regional Data Platform is tailored to suit local needs, the SCAG and Esri project team interviewed 10 member agencies (8 cities and 2 counties) that represent a balanced cross-section of the SCAG region in terms of GIS proficiency and technology usage in planning. This outreach helped the project team to understand current planning workflows and challenges experienced by local government staff, as well as identify key technology features and datasets needed to improve the General Plan update process. Common challenges amongst these jurisdictions were that a lack of self-service data applications often results in organizational inefficiencies, compiling and refining data is time consuming and inefficient from a resource perspective, and that a lack of visualization tools results in less-constructive community feedback, amongst other concerns. Jurisdictions also shared opportunities and ideas for SCAG to improve local planning, which include developing a centralized data and information repository for long range planning, enhancing SCAG's local profiles to be interactive and educational, and providing standardized and streamlined processes for repeatable tasks.

Based on this feedback, the project team prioritized launch of a housing element tool called the Housing Element Parcel Tool (HELPR) (https://maps.scag.ca.gov/helpr), as the first in a suite of resources to be provided through the Regional Data Platform. HELPR is a web-mapping tool for local jurisdictions and other stakeholders to understand local land use and site opportunities for aligning housing planning with the state Department of Housing and Community Development's (HCD) 6th cycle housing element requirements.

The tool is based on updated, curated versions of parcel-level land use data, environmentally sensitive areas with data informed by the SoCal Greenprint project, and other datasets that have been available through SCAG's open data portal. HELPR also allows for downloads of tabular and spatial data for external use. Additionally, the tool provides the opportunity to view regional policy objectives in SCAG's 2020 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (Connect SoCal), which may help align local planning with regional goals during housing element updates. Upon the development of additional data and receiving feedback, a second release of HELPR is underway and scheduled for a Spring 2021 release.

SoCal Greenprint

SCAG is also in the process of developing an innovative online regional mapping tool known as the SoCal Greenprint. This will be a strategic conservation mapping tool that highlights the benefits of natural lands, waters, and agricultural lands, including access to parks and trails, habitat protection and connectivity, clean water, clean air, food production, and increased resilience to climate change. The SoCal Greenprint will support planners, conservation practitioners, developers, infrastructure agencies, and other stakeholders in integrating the protection of natural and

agricultural resources into land use and infrastructure plans and avoid potential litigation by identifying and assessing environmental issues early in the planning process.

SCAG has contracted with The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a leading international conservation organization with experience creating Greenprints in California, in 2019 to lead this process with input from a diverse group of stakeholders in the fields of planning, conservation, community organization, developers and more. The project's first year entailed extensive, targeted outreach to stakeholders to gain insight on the tool's key users, uses, main themes, and the best datasets to include. While the SoCal Greenprint will be freely available to anyone, key users have been defined as infrastructure agencies, conservation practitioners, community-based organizations, developers and planners.

To ensure that the SoCal Greenprint will be designed based on the needs of key users, SCAG and TNC have assembled a Steering Committee to guide the development of the tool. Steering Committee members are responsible for making decisions on the strategies to achieve outcomes and are focused on identifying and meeting Greenprint user needs. They attend monthly meetings with SCAG, TNC, and GreenInfo Network (GIN) to provide feedback on the Greenprint, and assist with outreach and identifying key contacts. Steering Committee participants include representatives from Audubon California, East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, Friends of Harbors Beaches and Parks, Nature for All, Tataviam Land Conservancy, and UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability, among others.

TNC and SCAG have also assembled a Strategic Advisory Committee and a Science and Methods Advisory Committee that include experts and external stakeholders from the building industry, local governments, infrastructure and natural resource agencies, conservation organizations, community organizations, landowners, parks and open space districts, scientists, and academia. The intention for the Committees is to reflect the diversity of people, landscapes, and experiences within the SCAG region to help the tool be meaningful for key users. The role of committee participants is to contribute actively in committee meetings and provide feedback to SCAG and the TNC team at key inflection points throughout the data gathering, development, and refinement process. This includes:

- Connecting with regional stakeholders who should be engaged or might provide additional expertise
- Providing input on themes and data outputs, and identifying sources of data
- Providing feedback on data communication and interpretation
- Supporting developing case studies, and participating in beta testing of the Greenprint tool

Further, an important element of the project entails interviews with key stakeholders, including members of the building and development community. Rapid Assessments have also been

conducted with various organizations to identify their priorities and walk individual stakeholders through potential data outputs for inclusion in the Greenprint. These sessions have been held with representatives of the Building Industry Association of Southern California (BIASC), Los Angeles County Planning Department, Riverside Corona Resource Conservation District, Sierra Club, Clean Power Alliance, and San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) thus far. Additional invitations for Rapid Assessment sessions were extended to local jurisdictions, county transportation commissions, subregions, community based organizations, and local conservancies.

With stakeholder input from these collective engagements, six final themes were developed to organize the data: agriculture and working lands, habitat and biodiversity, built environment, climate vulnerabilities and resilience, and water. Environmental justice, equity, and inclusion will be interwoven into all themes.

As discussed previously, synergies have also been established between work on the SoCal Greenprint and SCAG's housing efforts. The Nature Conservancy provided guidance on how to process and incorporate data in Connect SoCal's conservation layers and provided a prioritized list of environmental data that was incorporated into SCAG's Housing Element Parcel (HELPR) tool (https://maps.scag.ca.gov/helpr). This data is useful for planners in identifying areas to prioritize and accommodate future housing growth, which can help jurisdictions avoid potential environmental harms and issues in housing planning. While stakeholder outreach and data vetting continue, this upcoming year will focus on developing and testing the tool and gearing up for a launch campaign. The SoCal Greenprint is on schedule for completion in late 2021; additional information on the project is available online at https://scag.ca.gov/greenprint.

Local Information Services Team (LIST)
To support local jurisdictions in accessing SCAG's data tools, SCAG has established a team of planning staff, called the Local Information Services Team (LIST), to deliver personalized technical assistance to local jurisdictions, and provide local staff an opportunity to offer feedback on how SCAG can improve our products to facilitate better collaboration, both regionally and locally. By working closely with local jurisdictions, the LIST team also gains a strong understanding of local information needs to help inform the development of future information products and tools. The LIST will serve as a conduit to provide continuing data-oriented engagements with jurisdictions as our region moves through the four-year regional transportation plan and sustainable communities strategies (RTP/SCS) planning process.

In recent months, the LIST team has been engaging with local jurisdictions through one-on-one sessions to inform and train local staff on current resources available through the Regional Data Platform (RDP) and SoCal Greenprint projects – primarily the Housing Element Parcel Tool (HELPR), as well as software licenses from Esri's suite of resources made available through the Regional Data Platform. Starting in February 2021, the LIST team held individual two-hour training sessions with

nearly 50 jurisdictions. To request a training session, local staff can reach out to SCAG at list@scag.ca.gov.

FISCAL IMPACT:

These projects are funded in SCAG's Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Overall Work Program under 290-4862.01, 280-4832.01, 280-4832.02, and 280-4832.03.

ATTACHMENT(S):

1. PowerPoint Presentation: Update on SCAG Tools Underway