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Councils of Governments (COGs) and Subregions in Los Angeles County



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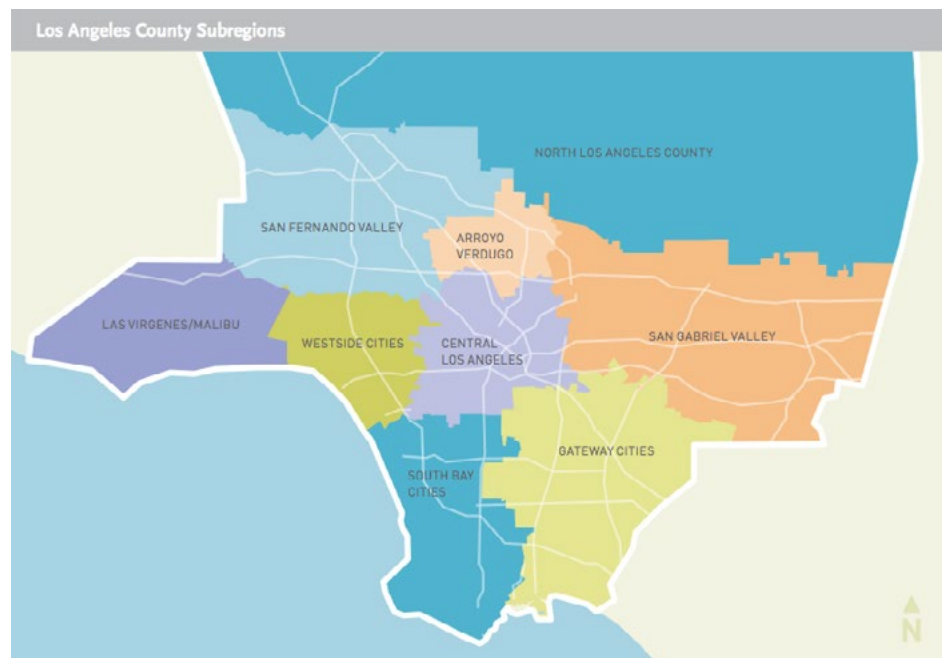
Los Angeles County is a large and diverse region with more than 10 million residents in 89 jurisdictions. Due to its size and complexity, nine geographic subregions have been identified for planning purposes. The subregions vary in form, but all consist of the area's local government representatives (city council members and LA County Board of Supervisors) and share the goal of cooperatively addressing regional priorities and matters of mutual interest.

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- Arroyo Verdugo – 3 cities, population: 339,006
- Central Los Angeles – Central City of Los Angeles, population: 1,698,572
- Gateway Cities – 28 cities, Port of Long Beach, and unincorporated areas, population: 2,004,751
- Las Virgenes/Malibu – 5 cities and unincorporated areas, population: 87,736
- North Los Angeles County – 3 cities and unincorporated areas, population: 588,858
- San Fernando Valley - 2 cities and unincorporated areas, population: 1,409,278
- San Gabriel Valley – 31 cities and unincorporated areas, population: 1,800,205
- South Bay Cities – 16 cities and unincorporated areas, population: 1,319,7974
- Westside Cities – 5 cities and unincorporated areas, population: 587,552

(Source: 2009 Metro Long Range Transportation Plan Technical Document)





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Councils of Governments (COGs) and Subregions in Los Angeles County

What is a Council of Governments?

The terms Council of Governments (COG) and subregion are often used interchangeably. The two are similar in nature; however, a COG operates either under a joint-powers authority or an official memorandum of understanding. Subregions that do not operate as COGs can still participate in policy making permitting they have bylaws.

Many COGs throughout the country were formed in the late 1960s and 1970s due to the emerging emphasis placed on long-term planning at the federal level, particularly in terms of transportation planning. Rather than a city-by-city approach, COGs became the preferred interface. However, COGs are voluntary organizations and are not federally mandated, unlike Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

Members of COGs are usually cities, counties and supervisorial districts. Some COGs also include other members such as water districts and ports. COGs generally form due to shared issues among members. Often this has to do with a transportation link, corridor or watershed running throughout the COG region. Within Southern California, members within COGs share common transportation issues usually stemming from transportation corridors in the form of arterials, freeways or transit. The Southern California COG boundaries were formed by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the region's MPO. The County of Los Angeles is usually represented in each Southern California COG as most COGs have unincorporated areas within their boundaries.

COG boards are usually comprised of elected officials from the member cities and supervisors from representative districts. Board or Executive Committee members have the power to vote and votes are either equal or based on the proportionate population of member cities. Many COGs have an Executive Director and staff as well as an Executive Committee or a Board of Directors. While several COGs in Los Angeles County have paid staff, some are staffed with city representatives. The Central Los Angeles subregion is wholly contained within the City of Los Angeles and supported by city staff.

COGs provide forums for discussion and communication for their members in order to develop consensus, cooperative planning and coordination. COGs have committees such as steering committees, transportation committees and/or working

groups that focus on specific issues or areas. COGs also provide technical assistance for issues that affect the subregion or region. The actual goals and responsibilities of most COGs are determined by the member cities.

COGs represent their associated members in larger planning organizations at the regional, state and federal level. Within Southern California these are the SCAG, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), Air Resources Board and others. COGs often enter into Memorandums of Understanding with these larger agencies to formalize their relationships and goals.

How COGs are funded and staffed

COGs rely on members' dues; each member jurisdiction pays a yearly amount to the COG for administrative and other purposes. Some subregions ask for dues, while others do not. Apart from dues, COGs seek out grants from entities such as SCAG, the state Strategic Growth Council, the Air Resources Board and Metro. COGs will seek out special grants for planning, research purposes and special projects. Some COGs conduct special assessments for strategic planning. Recently, Measure R funds have been designated towards most of the COGs. However, it must be noted that apart from dues there is no other form of sustained funding; COGs must seek out grants, assessments and designated funding.

The primary stakeholders in COGs are their members. COGs function to serve members and their projects revolve around what their member jurisdictions need and want. They also function as a coordinator to meet the mutual needs of cities and unincorporated Los Angeles County communities. COGs cannot demand that their members implement anything; they can only suggest and offer opportunities for regional coordination.

During planning updates, Metro and SCAG will ask COGs to submit transportation lists for both long and short-range plans as well as for current and future funding streams. When developed, the lists stem from the specific needs of cities or combined needs of cities. The members themselves create a consensus around priorities.

COGs and Metro

Metro serves as the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, with authority as the region's transportation planner and coordinator, designer, builder and operator. Through countywide planning, Metro creates the Los Angeles County region's long-term transportation investment plans. COGs are involved with Metro in a variety of ways:

- Directly through Metro Board Members who sit on COG boards and through Metro Board Members who are assigned to the COG region.
- Directly with County Supervisors, particularly deputies, who are assigned to the region.
- Directly with Metro staff who are assigned to the region.
- Each COG has a voting seat on Metro's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).
- Each COG has a voting seat on Metro's Streets and Freeways TAC Sub-Committee.
- Some COG staff sit on other standing committees directly related to the Board such as the ad hoc Sustainability Committee.
- COGs are involved in Metro's long and short-range planning. Metro gives updates to COGs, city managers, mayors, directors and others. Metro reaches out and asks agencies to submit lists of projects. The Metro Board ultimately advocates for these projects and decides which projects get put into the plans.
- Metro has five local service councils which advise on Metro services in these regions: Gateway Cities, San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, South Bay and Westside/Central.
- Setting Regional Allocation Procedures & Regional Subsidies Program.
- Applying for funds from Metro's grant funding opportunities: Call for Projects, Open Streets Program, Transit Oriented Development and others.

Conclusion

COGs are increasingly key players in regional planning processes, particularly regarding implementation of legislation such as AB 32 and SB 375. In Los Angeles County, COGs and subregions have also been awarded funds from local measures, namely Measure R, and are poised to significantly influence and receive funds from future measures. The COGs are assembling project lists that will significantly inform Metro's long-range transportation plan update, already underway. As such, many Los Angeles County COGs are undertaking extensive studies and strategic planning so they can present salient findings at Metro, SCAG and other agencies. They are also undertaking extensive analysis to aid their cities and regions in implementing strategies to meet greenhouse gas reduction targets set by legislation.

Interested stakeholders and community-based organizations can work with COGs directly by attending COG meetings and providing input into their strategies, studies, plans and proposed project lists. Stakeholders can also take the knowledge from these studies and plans to work with individual cities on implementation of regional priorities. Likewise, stakeholders can work with individual cities to inform their participation in COG decisions.

Funding agencies prioritize projects that meet certain criteria and have a compelling case based on solid data and analysis. Projects must show what benefits they will be able to achieve in order to get funded. COGs have a pivotal role in generating and assembling data that supports their subregional priorities, which ultimately inform Metro's investment strategy. Stakeholders that understand these relationships and limitations will more effectively shape investments and policy outcomes in their communities.

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