



Moving People Quickly and Sustainably to Work, School and Play

Winter 2009

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Interview: Aaron Contorer, Board Member



Aaron Contorer

Q. Tell us about what you're involved in locally.

A. I work for Everyone Counts, a San Diego-based company that provides secure voting by Internet and phone. I'm also involved in several nonprofit projects, including Social Venture Partners, Equinox Center, and my family's Contorer Foundation. All of my projects focus on developing a more sustainable way of prosperity.

Q. Why did you get involved with Move SD?

A. I hope to spend the rest of my life in San Diego, and I want it to keep being a wonderful place to live and work. It's become a big metro area, and all the experts agree that's not going to reverse – in fact our county's population will keep growing. Over half of that is local families having kids.

If we are going to keep a great quality of life, we can't cram another million cars in here. Everyone will spend their days in traffic and breathing smog, and that will ruin our environment and our economic competitiveness. Every great metro area in the world needs a better way for people to get around, and that means rapid transit. I think everyone involved in Move SD wants to bring people together and find really effective solutions to our region's rapid transit needs.

Q. What are your hopes for Move SD?

A. We're the only nonprofit dedicated to bringing better transit solutions to the San Diego Region. That's a big responsibility and we need to live up to it.

We are the umbrella group that everyone interested in transit can count on – employers, community groups, environmentalists, property owners, frequent riders, families of riders, really all the interested parties. San Diego County needs

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Interview: Elyse Lowe, Executive Director

Q. What are your hopes for Move SD?

A. I'm truly inspired by President Obama and his significant policy agenda for change and calling on people to be the change they want to see. I am also inspired by the leaders in San Diego who are not afraid to tackle large civic issues.

Q. Have you been taking transit, and what's it like out there?

A. I take transit regularly, but I also still drive my car. I wish I could take transit everywhere but San Diego lacks this type of transit infrastructure. I live a mile from a trolley station so I often take the trolley downtown. I have been interviewing people when I'm riding.

Q. What do they think?

A. They love transit but they'd like to see it expanded. They want to have transit be faster because it takes too long to get around town. They're upset that the bus routes have been cutback so much.

Q. The State is proposing more large cuts to transit. What do you see coming down the pipe?

A. More major route cuts - big problems for transit-dependents and smart growth. The system has already taken more than a \$100 million in cuts. We will continue to have smart growth planning dependant on effective public transit- yet our transit is becoming less effective as routes and frequencies are reduced. The end result will be more congestion in our urban core.

Q. You attended the SANDAG board retreat. Was transit discussed?

A. Absolutely. The head of SANDAG, Gary Gallegos reported that additional significant state cuts were coming. At the same time, we're planning for more transit - and there is bit of a transit revolution in that additional funding coming in the economic stimulus - with unanimous support in the House of Representatives.

Funding for capital projects is more available, but then can we afford to run the services? That's the hard part. Gallegos doesn't support using one-time capital funds to pay for operations. He suggested they need to ask the voters if they're willing to pay for transit operations.



Elyse Lowe

Q. What was the SANDAG's Board responses to this?

A. They all agreed that sound financial management requires not using one-time capital dollars to fund operations, but at the same time, they mostly all saw the value in expanding the regional transit system. There were a lot of good comments that supported transit.

Q. Was there any news at the SANDAG retreat?

A. In the transportation breakout session the SANDAG DC lobbyist reported that the mid-coast light-rail project is unlikely to be funded in its current form by the FTA. The project just doesn't serve enough people and get them to regional employment centers.

Q. What's the alternative?

A. We've met with SANDAG project staff and presented a FAST Plan BRT alternative. We don't know if they are going to incorporate it or not, but we know it would significantly increase ridership and serve major job centers that the LRT alternative did not.

Q. What was the "take home message" from the SANDAG retreat

A. The state of the economy - if California can't get a budget together - we will be at risk of wasting \$300 million just simply by stopping projects that are already underway, then starting them again. This would impact 39,000 jobs statewide. Half of

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MoveSD News

New Board members join MoveSD

Former City Council President and new Port Commissioner **Scott Peters** has joined the MoveSD Board, along with **Rafael Muilenburg**, a partner at Sheppard Mullin in the Real Estate, Land Use and Environmental Practice Group. Raf is co-chair of the firm’s Global Climate Change practice group and a member of the firm’s Hispanic/Latino Business Practice Group. Scott is also an environmental attorney in private practice, and a staunch supporter of the San Diego Active Transportation 2010 Campaign.

Join MoveSD on Facebook

MoveSD is now a group on Facebook with more than 120 members. Search for “Move San Diego” and add us as a friend, join our FB group for regular updates or add the Move San Diego Cause page to your profile. Become an active part supporting convenient, on-time, healthy, sustainable transportation throughout the San Diego region.

FAST Presentation online

We have created an online version of our presentation on the strategic importance of transit, why performance-based planning is critical to smart growth and Move SD’s proposal for how to apply FAST-planning principles in the San Diego region. To view the plan, visit MoveSanDiego.org and click on the “Programs” link, the click “FAST Plan concept” in the second paragraph.

SB375 requires Sustainable Community Strategy

MoveSD members gave public testimony at the SANDAG Board meeting’s first presentation about SB375, perhaps the state’s most important land-use law in more than 30 years. SB375 requires metropolitan regions to create a “Sustainable Community Strategy” in their Regional Transportation Plans. SB375 is one of several “implementing bills” related to AB32 the California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006.

Endorse FAST Principles online

Move San Diego would like to ask for your personal endorsement of the basic principles of FAST planning:

- Apply global best practices to transportation planning
- Apply market research findings to transit planning
- Design transit projects to increase network connectivity, provide trip times competitive with the car, and provide a satisfying customer experience

Transportation is California’s largest source of carbon dioxide emissions and SB375 sets incentives seeking to concentrate growth in urban areas close to public transit in an effort to reduce Californians’ use of cars and lower their greenhouse gas emissions. SANDAG staff informed the Board that they would be asked to make “big changes” for the future RTP.

The Board also heard a presentation by the Energy Policy Initiatives Center, University of San Diego School of Law, on their first-ever report that provides a detailed accounting of greenhouse gas emissions for San Diego County and identifies 21 strategies for the region to reduce its emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. Of the top results-producing strategies, only one is under the control of regional planners - and that is taking steps to reduce our vehicle-miles traveled.

Visit MoveSanDiego.org and click on the “Programs” link in the upper-left corner; the endorsement section is at the end of the page.

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Interview: Aaron Contorer, Move San Diego Board Member

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an impartial, honest group to provide leadership, to help the government understand the region's transportation needs, and to hold leaders accountable for delivering on those needs. We can

do that in a constructive yet demanding way, so that everyone wins.

Interview: Elyse Lowe, Executive Director

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California's construction industry is dependent on roads, bridges and highways right now.

I am proud of the elected officials who were at the retreat. They all took the time during the retreat to call the state elected officials and ask that they put away partisan politics and get a budget passed for the sake of the people, and to keep California from wasting hundreds of millions of tax payer dollars. I think their collective voice was very important for Sacramento to hear.

Q. Is there any good news on the horizon?

A. Great change is possible during times of great chaos. MoveSD is the only San Diego group that is working for change in transportation and smart growth. Our system is broken and needs to be reformed. This is a key strategic economic and environmental issue where businesses and environmentalists agree. By working together, we can achieve the changes needed. MoveSD wants to take all pieces of the puzzle to make sure the funds are used in the best way to provide efficient, cost effective transit.

MoveSD News – SB375

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Comments by MoveSD included: "We understand that SANDAG is considering a goal of a 10% reduction in vehicle miles traveled.

"Whether this is the right goal or not – and we think it is too small – even that goal will require rethinking transit plans to match existing density and trip patterns in order to have an impact on both traffic and reductions in vehicle miles traveled. As cited earlier, the recent study released by the San Diego Foundation and using SANDAG data, shows that the existing RTP is planning for an almost 40% increase in CO2 emissions. Whatever the goal, transit that is designed well enough to have significant numbers of San Diego changed from driving for key commutes is critical to economic and environmental sustainability and prosperity."

Coping with the Gas Prices: Temporary Fix or Lifestyle Change?

Move SD Board member and 2009 Board Chair **Marcela Escobar-Eck** moderated, and founder **Carolyn Chase**, participated in this panel hosted by local non-profit C3. The questions addressed by the panel included: Is the public transportation system up to the task of meeting commuter demand? What role will the private sector serve to fill the gaps in the public transportation sector? and Will high gas prices and global climate change result in a structural shift in personal behavior and land use patterns to reduce vehicle miles traveled?

Also on the panel were **Jack Dale**, Councilmember, City of Santee and Chair of the SANDAG Transportation Committee; **Paul Jablonski**, CEO, Metropolitan Transit System and **Duane Eskeria**, V.P. of Veolia Transportation, one the private contractors that runs several of the MTS routes.