

# Tulare County Regional Blueprint



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May 2009

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# face the facts: **WE HAVE TO ACT!**



## Table of Contents

### Section 1: Background

- Chapter 1 **Introduction: Tulare County's Regional Blueprint**
- Chapter 2 **Tulare County: A Brief History**
- Chapter 3 **Choosing Our Future**

### Section 2: Tulare County Blueprint Policies

- Chapter 4 **Tulare County Vision**
- Chapter 5 **Local Goals and Objectives**
- Chapter 6 **Preferred Growth Scenario**
- Chapter 7 **Next Steps**

## Chapter 1 Introduction: The Tulare County Regional Blueprint

The Tulare County Association of Governments (TCAG) has been an active participant in the development of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint. The San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint Planning Process is a chance to plan for the future of transportation and land use in the San Joaquin Valley to the Year 2050. The San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint will provide a proactive plan to help guide us down a cooperative path as a region and addresses regional issues such as land use and transportation that can't be adequately addressed on a county-by-county basis



While the issues addressed in San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint are large in scale and very regional, the key to Blueprints are the local jurisdictions who will implement Blueprint Principles. TCAG and its member agencies felt that it was important to prepare a **Tulare County Regional Blueprint** that clarified Tulare County's role in the Blueprint process. The **Tulare County Regional Blueprint** is a stand-alone policy document that is consistent with the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint. This document represents Tulare County's local vision and goals as a participant in the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint process.

We look forward to working with you on creating and implementing the policies in the **Tulare County Regional Blueprint**. We hope that the **Tulare Country Regional Blueprint** and the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint make our region competitive statewide in future funding that is tied to regional planning. We also look forward to seeing the principles found in this document put into practice by our local land use authorities.

## Chapter 2 Tulare County: A Brief History

Tulare County, California is one of the largest counties in the great and fertile San Joaquin Valley.

Geographically it is situated about midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles, the two principal cities of the Pacific Slope.

The county, with vast mountain masses covering nearly half of its area on the eastern side and the balance of its expanse a level and remarkably fertile plain, originally extended from Mariposa County, on the north, to the Los Angeles

County line, on the south, and from the summit of the Coast Range Mountains, on the west, to the summit of the Sierra Nevadas on the east.



Created in 1852 at the same time Siskiyou and Sierra counties were designated, the large area was maintained until 1856, when Fresno County was created from territory taken from Tulare, Mariposa and Merced counties. In 1861 part of the eastern territory was cut off and joined with parts of Fresno, Mariposa and Calaveras in forming Mono County. Kern County, cut from the southern part of Tulare, was originated as Buena Vista County in 1855, but was not officially termed Kern until 1866. All that portion of Tulare lying east



of the Sierras, with a portion of Mono, was set apart for Coso County in 1864, the name being changed to Inyo County in 1866. In 1872 the southern boundaries of Tulare and Inyo were changed by placing them on the sixth standard parallel south of Mount Diablo, thus drawing a direct line across the state, which still forms the northern boundary of San Luis Obispo, Kern and San Bernardino counties. In 1874 the Fresno-Tulare line was re-formed,

placing the boundary along township and section lines rather than along the mountain ridges as theretofore. In 1875-76 another slight change in the Fresno-Tulare line was made, returning to Fresno five square townships, this boundary continuing to the present time. In 1893 Kings County was created from the western part of Tulare.



Within the confines of Tulare County are now 4,863 square miles, or 3,158,400 acres. Were the state of Connecticut lifted bodily from the Atlantic Seaboard and transported westward, it could be set down in California, but it would not quite succeed in covering Tulare County.

The county has an interesting historical aura which dates back to 1770. The first Americans to visit the valley came after 1800. The settling of the country about Visalia, the creation of the county, the struggles of the early settlers, the wars with the Indians, and the growth and development of the country present an interesting story which can be found in a number of the published histories for the county.

## Chapter 3 Choosing Our Future

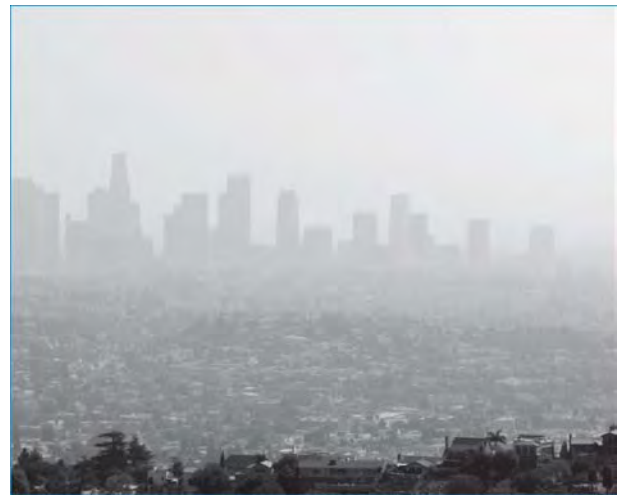
Tulare County is facing a number of challenges – from traffic and air pollution to the effects of a growing population – that we must live with every day. Starting now, it is critical that we have a plan to improve and maintain our quality of life. We do not have to continue down a road that isn't making our communities healthy and productive. We have a small window of opportunity to turn things in a positive direction. If we start now, we can work together to apply solutions to the big problems that impact everyone's quality of life every day.



### Key Challenges

#### Why it's important to act now

- Negative Trends – San Joaquin Valley
  - 74% of the 115,000 acres of land urbanized in the Valley from 1990-2004 was agricultural land
  - 70%+ of all urban development occurred on prime, unique, or farmland of statewide importance in the five Valley counties
  - According to the Public Policy Institute of California, 55% of South Valley residents report they or a family member have asthma
  - According to the Institute for Economic and Environmental Studies, \$3 billion/year is spent on health problems caused by air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley
  - 118% increase in traffic delays in Fresno and Kern counties from 1999-2002
  - 16.3% average Valley unemployment rate (April 2009) is higher than the state average (10.5%) and among the highest in the U.S.
- Negative Trends – Tulare County
  - Loss of high-quality agricultural land
  - Health problems due to poor air quality
  - Increased traffic congestion



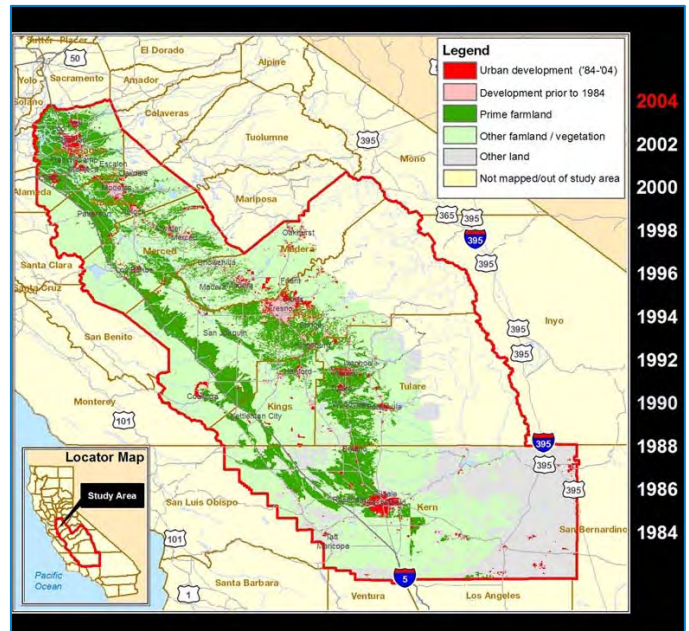
### Population growth

The San Joaquin Valley faces major challenges. One concerns how to handle future growth. Population in the Valley is expected to nearly triple by 2050, from 3.6 million to 9.4 million people, the equivalent of adding 11 new towns the size of Fresno to the area. Tulare County is expected to grow to over 1,00,000 residents by 2050, well over doubling its current population.

This population growth will place increasing pressure on our Tulare County’s unique and fragile environment along with our transportation system.

### Development on agricultural land

Productive agricultural land is a finite and irreplaceable natural resource. Along with the agricultural products that Tulare County’s agricultural land provides, it also supplies products that have substantial cultural and ecological importance. These values can be both immediate and long-term. The immediate values are social heritage, scenic views, open space and community character. The long-term environmental benefits include wildlife habitat, clean air and water, flood control, ground-water recharge and carbon sequestration.



### Traffic congestion

Traffic congestion, a condition of traffic delay, occurs when the number of vehicles using a roadway exceeds the design capacity. Rapid growth in urban areas contributes to traffic congestion as the area grows faster than the overall capacity of the transportation system. The resulting slow-downs negatively impact the residents and the businesses through impacts on air quality, quality of life and business activities. Road-building attempts to ease congestion have only been temporarily effective. Transportation costs, for the average American, outweigh health care, education and food cost.



### If We Don't Act...Negative Trends Continue to 2050

Without some drastic changes, we should expect these negative trends to continue or become worse in Tulare County.

## If We DO Act...A Positive Outlook for 2050

In using our Blueprint planning process in Tulare County, we have learned that our community does not want to continue on its current path of development, but wants to see our future growth preserve our precious environmental and agricultural lands, focus development in urban centers and connect these centers with transportation corridors that provide more mobility.

Through workshops and live-interactive surveys, the residents, business leaders and elected officials of Tulare County worked together to envision a future that is overwhelmingly different from where we are today. A future where Tulare County is recognized as a world-class place to live, learn, work and play. A future where people with diverse backgrounds and talents come together to enhance a global economy that rivals the greatest cities in the world. A future where the natural beauty and other amenities that are unique to our region are enjoyed by all. A future where we consume less land, preserve more precious environmental resources, create more distinctive places to live and provide more travel choices.

### THE FACTS: *Positive Outlook*

**73%** of us love where we live<sup>10</sup>

**50%** lower housing costs than the Bay Area<sup>11</sup>

**25** nearby national and state parks, forests, and wildlife refuges

**150 YEARS** of proud agricultural heritage<sup>2</sup>

**6 OF THE TOP 10** agricultural counties in CA are in the San Joaquin Valley<sup>3</sup>

**\$15.8 BILLION** or half of the state's total agricultural production comes from the San Joaquin Valley<sup>4</sup>

*For sources of facts and figures, visit [www.valleyblueprint.org](http://www.valleyblueprint.org)*



## Chapter 4 Tulare County Vision

The Vision Statement was accepted by the TCAG Board in July 2007. The Vision Statement provides a general overview of the goals and ideals driving the Blueprint process. While creating the vision, TCAG held a series of public meetings aimed at trying to capture a comprehensive vision statement that represented Tulare County. Meetings were held many community/town councils, service clubs, residents, and the Board of Supervisor during this phase of the blueprint process. The accepted vision statement shown below represents the result of that public outreach.



### Accepted Vision Statement

To preserve and enhance the Tulare County region's unique features- its vibrant and culturally-diverse communities, its rivers, farmland, mountains, recreational opportunities, natural areas, and national parks. To promote sustainability through a well trained and educated workforce, and a healthy and diverse economy. To ensure that the urban and rural areas of the County are thriving and residents can enjoy a well-planned, well-designed, and maintained land use structure and transportation system that offers a variety of housing choices, mixed uses, and numerous ways to get from place to place.



## Chapter 5 Local Goals and Objectives

### Background

The Tulare County Blueprint Goals and Objectives were accepted by the TCAG board on August 27, 2007. TCAG worked in conjunction with planning staff from member agencies to formulate the Goals and Objectives. The vision outlined in the Blueprint Vision Statement helped shaped the direction of the Goals and Objectives. Ideally, the Goals and Objectives give policy suggestions that would help reach the aspirations outlined in the Vision Statement.

The Goals and Objectives were purposely developed in a way that would give the cities and the county the opportunity to be flexible in their attempts to implement the Goals and Objectives. It is likely that the cities and county will use different methods to achieve many of the goals found within this document, and TCAG wants to ensure that they are able to do so. As the local Blueprint process progresses, these Goals and Objectives may be changed to better fit the vision of member agencies.

## Air Quality

### **Air Quality Vision: Clean air for our residents and our economy.**

GOAL: Improve quality of life by allowing Tulare County residents to enjoy clean air.

*Objectives:*

1. Implement small, incremental, project-level improvements in air quality that will add to substantial improvements in air quality.
2. Promote adoption of clean, renewable energy technologies to ensure a reliable supply, enhance the region's economy, and improve air quality.
3. Place compatible land uses in close proximity to each other and design them to provide for a high quality environment where residents can walk or bicycle for many of their trips and reduce the distance they drive to work.
4. Improve transportation mobility, goods movement, and public transportation.
5. Educate the public to have a better understanding of air quality issues and their solutions.

GOAL: Achieve United States Environmental Protection Agency standards for 8-hour ozone and PM<sub>2.5</sub> by the current attainment date, or earlier if practicable.

GOAL: Expand awareness of the need to reduce greenhouse gases and incorporate the latest scientific information into planning efforts. (Fresno COG)



## Transportation

### **Transportation Vision: Residents will have the opportunity to utilize multiple types of efficient transportation.**

GOAL: Provide a flexible, efficient, sustainable, and well-integrated multi-modal transportation system for the movement of people and goods that enhances the physical, economic, and social environment.

*Objectives:*

1. Improve mobility through more efficient land use patterns that will reduce single-occupant trip generation and support use of alternative modes.
2. Implement the Regional Transportation Plan in an efficient and cost-effective manner.
3. Give priority to serving regional roadway and transit investments in smart growth opportunity areas while recognizing the need for transportation improvements elsewhere in the region.
4. Develop a network of fast, convenient, high-quality transit services that are competitive with the cost and time to drive alone during peak periods.
5. Improve communication and coordination regarding transportation issues with tribal governments.

GOAL: Establish connected, multi-purpose trail and bikeway systems that facilitate walking and biking as a viable mode of transportation and recreation.

*Objectives:*

1. Improve, enhance, and expand the region's bicycle and pedestrian system and improve the connectivity of different transportation modes where it will result in better overall mobility.

GOAL: Provide a system of regional roads that efficiently and effectively transports goods and people within Tulare County and facilitates transportation throughout larger regions in the state.

*Objectives:*

1. Implement the Route 99 Corridor Master Plan in Tulare County.
2. Improve safety and capacity of vital east-west corridors.

3. Implement Intelligent Transportation System technologies to assist the region in achieving mobility goals.

GOAL: Improve goods movement within the region to increase economic vitality, meet the growing needs of freight and passenger services, and improve traffic safety, air quality, and overall mobility.

*Objectives:*

1. Ensure that the high-speed rail system, if implemented, supports Tulare County in achieving its economic, environmental, land use, and mobility goals.
2. Coordinate with regional transportation systems across county borders to ensure an efficient flow of people and goods along key trade and interregional commuting corridors.

### Land Use/Urban Form

**Land Use Patterns/Urban Form Vision: Creating sustainable communities that promote a positive image.**

GOAL: Create land use patterns that are connected, sustainable, and efficient that positively contribute to the quality of life for Tulare County residents.

*Objectives:*

1. Direct future population and job growth closer to existing and planned job centers and public facilities to preserve open space and important agricultural resources and to make more efficient use of existing urban infrastructure.
2. Integrate the development of land use and transportation, recognizing their dependence.
3. Increase coordination among local General Plans to support and promote regional consensus on future land use that identifies appropriate areas for growth and development, contributes to the conservation of important agricultural and natural resources, facilitates improvements in transportation, air quality, and energy, and advances the sustainability of the region.
4. Define regional infrastructure and develop a process for monitoring the performance and adequacy of regional infrastructure and determining future needs.
5. Minimize the proliferation of ranchette development on important farmland.

6. Protect agricultural areas, waterways, open space, high-value habitat, and other natural systems.

GOAL: Create safe, healthy, walkable, and vibrant communities that are designed to be accessible to people of all abilities and protect public health and safety.

*Objectives:*

1. Facilitate redevelopment and infill development and place high priority on public facility investments that support compact, mixed-use, accessible, walkable neighborhoods that are conveniently located next to transit.
2. Develop collaborative partnerships with irrigation districts, rail companies, and other agencies, to utilize canals, waterways, abandoned right of ways, and other lands as biking and pedestrian trails.

GOAL: Facilitate land use patterns that positively contribute to the economic environment in Tulare County.

*Objectives:*

1. Establish a four-year public university in Tulare County.
2. Promote the region as a business and tourism destination and focus on growth of target industries with comparative advantages.
3. Foster a dynamic business climate, including training resources and other small business support programs, to encourage and support entrepreneurs.



GOAL: Provide an adequate, cost-efficient, and reliable quality water supply to sustain a high quality of life and a world-class agricultural sector while protecting and enhancing the environment.

*Objectives:*

1. Strengthen levees in the region to safeguard water quality and quantity and to provide flood control.
2. Develop and/or implement programs and projects that promote water conservation, augment surface water and groundwater banking storage, provide adequate emergency storage and carryover needs, and add treatment capacity to satisfy treated water needs.

3. Participate in Integrated Regional Water Management Planning that addresses all components of the hydrologic cycle for all Tulare County watersheds.

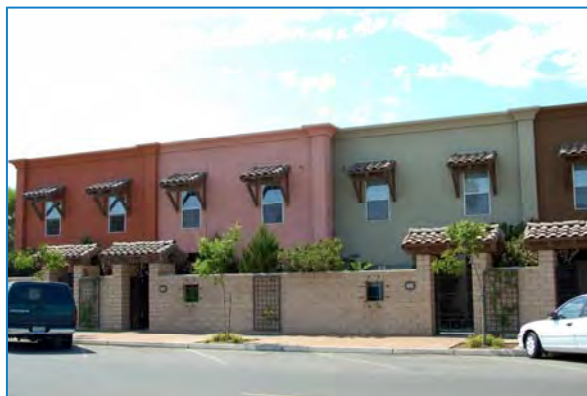
## Housing

**Housing Vision: A variety of housing options available to all income, age, and cultural groups.**

**GOAL:** Provide a variety of affordable and quality housing choices throughout the region for people of all income levels and abilities.

### *Objectives:*

1. Promulgate and promote adoption of community design guidelines that will ensure strong neighborhoods, increase efficiency by promoting green building practices, integrate housing with jobs and schools, improve mobility and health by promoting walking and biking, improve air quality by reducing trip generation, and increase infrastructure cost-effectiveness through efficient land use.
2. Increase the overall average density of new development.
3. Ensure safe and healthy communities that provide a variety of housing types with increased opportunities for home ownership.
4. Provide incentives for local jurisdictions to meet their housing needs.
5. Provide an adequate supply of housing for our region's workforce and adequate sites to accommodate business expansion and retention to minimize interregional and long distance commuting.
6. Conserve and rehabilitate the existing housing stock, while minimizing the displacement of lower income and minority residents as redevelopment and revitalization occurs.



## Agriculture

### **Agriculture Vision: Protected agricultural lands.**

GOAL: Promote the long-term preservation and productivity of agricultural lands.

*Objectives:*

1. Preserve important farmlands by making more efficient use of existing urban infrastructure.
2. Minimize the proliferation of ranchette development on important farmland.
3. Expand agricultural and urban water/energy use efficiency programs.
4. Promote the use of biomass for fuel and energy production.

## Natural Areas/Habitat

### **Natural Areas/Habitat Vision: Protected scarce and finite resources.**

GOAL: Preserve natural areas and open space.

*Objectives:*

1. Preserve and maintain natural systems, waterways, open space, biological communities, and species native to the region.
2. Promote fire management techniques that conserve biological resources, reduce hazards to humans and their property, and enhance wildlife habitat.
3. Develop linear parks and biking/walking trails through conservation easements.
4. Establish an interconnected network of open spaces and natural areas, such as greenways, wetlands, parks, forest preserves, and native plant vegetation, that allows for biological migration, naturally manages storm water, reduces flood risk, and improves water quality.





## Chapter 6 Preferred Growth Scenario

### Background

The Preferred Growth Scenario was created by developing a number of growth guidelines that were used as inputs in the UPLAN model. TCAG sought the input from hundreds of residents and the city councils from each of the member agencies when creating these guidelines. Ultimately, six key guidelines were agreed upon to guide the Preferred Growth Scenario creation process. Those guidelines are:

- Increased Densities
- Establish Light Rail
- Extend Highway 65
- Expand Transit
- Maintain Urban Separators
- Encourage Growth in Urban Areas

These guidelines were considered when using UPLAN and influenced the placement and density of future growth in the county. The guidelines produced a scenario that would result in a more efficient and connected county than would be expected if the county were to continue to develop in a “status quo” fashion. The map and guidelines found in this section were created to paint a picture of the potential direction the county could be headed in the future and are not intended to act as a land use map or policy document.

## Preferred Growth Scenario Principles

Increase densities county-wide by 25% over the status quo densities.

Establish light rail between cities.

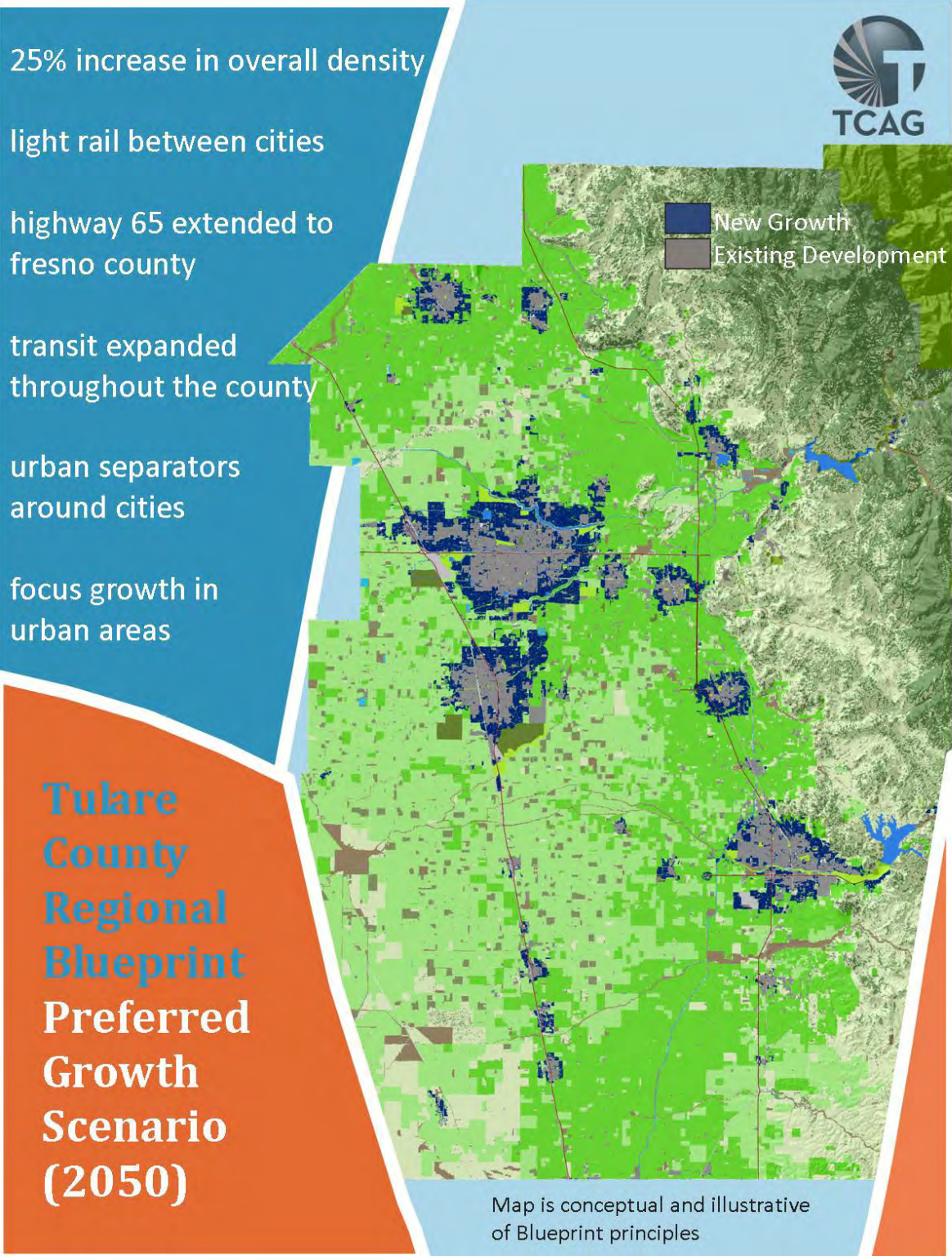
Extend Highway 65 north to Fresno County.

Expand transit throughout the county.

Maintain urban separators around cities.

Growth would be directed toward incorporated cities and communities where urban development exists and where comprehensive services and infrastructure are or will be provided.

Preferred Growth Scenario Map



## Chapter 7 Next Steps

TCAG continues to work with other Valley agencies on the Regional Blueprint. Following the adoption of the Local and Regional Blueprint, TCAG will work with member agencies to implement many of the goals and objectives found in those two documents. Both of these documents are meant to assist member agencies in securing future grant funding opportunities.