

The Climate Action Plan (CAP) Con

The "CAP CON" is a dramatic play in three Acts being performed by local politicians for the benefit of developers but the paying customers are the citizens of Encinitas.

Prologue: What's Really Going On

NARRATOR (ON-STAGE CENTER): *".. In fair Encinitas, where we lay our scene, From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, Where civil actions make civil hands unclean."*

Senate Bill 379, Land Use: General Plan: Safety Element (2015) requires local governments of California to put a lot of new environmental stuff in their *General Plan* unless they have a separate document to mostly address it. So, *voila*, now we have 2018 City of Encinitas's Climate Action Plan (CAP) which the City makes a point of being a *CA Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)-qualified CAP*? And, hmmm, why is SANDAG involved?

Well, no one likes CEQA because it requires developers to do bad things like traffic studies that might lead to nasty estimates of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. *Whoa Nellie!* Things could get *out of control* here and we could have a bunch of angry developers. So, lets all get SANDAG to run some models for us and build us a CAP!

CHORUS (OFF-STAGE LEFT): *"SANDAG, SANDAG, SANDAG is our friend. No CEQA, no studies, just permits, growth and money."*

SANDAG's models say that transportation is the greatest source of greenhouse gases (GHG) so reducing the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) will reduce GHG but they won't tell you exactly where: no particular location is identifiable, just more or less the whole City: everyone's problem and no one's. Yet the City of Encinitas is using this to justify up-zoning the coastal corridor in a way that will increase population density and therefore GHG emissions within the City without any accountability or realistic transportation means other than more cars, existing limited bus and train service already in place and some new, **unusually dangerous**, bicycle routes.

The most insidious part of the "CAP CON" is that, at best, putting in higher-density housing will will increase VMT, therefore GHG, as a multiple of the number of new housing units under the guise of progressive environmental policy.

CHORUS (OFF-STAGE LEFT): *"Green, green, green. We're so green."*

NARRATOR (OFFSTAGE-RIGHT): *"But, but, but, ..., where is the logic? Where is the data? The questions keep growing like the lengths of their noses!"*

Nada, Zip, Zilch, Zero... This is simply a gift to developers without concern for the existing neighborhoods where traffic and parking will become worse on Highway 101 and neighborhood streets. They need **Highway 101 Leucadia STREETSCAPE AND** up-zoning to make this profitable and they are pulling the "CAP CON" under the pretense of a Climate Action Plan. It goes like this.

Act I: The High Road

POLITICIAN (FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP): " ...There is a climate emergency that I, as your thought-leader, understand even though you don't and I am going to appropriate your rights and your property for a higher purpose because I'm a climate warrior and I have a *Climate Action Plan!*"

Now, quite beside the arrogant, anti-democratic nature of this attitude, it provides a dramatic theme around the question of why would someone behave this way despite the unwillingness of the *otherwise tree-hugging citizens* to rally themselves to such avowedly wise thought-leaders? Who benefits? Let's see how the drama plays out.

Let's assume for the moment that the *POLITICIAN* is motivated only by a concern for the Earth and the future of the human race and feels the need to act given the power of their elected office to change everybody's lives for the better and save the Earth at the same time. What facts are they using to organize their thinking and actions? Perhaps most importantly, what does *better* mean?

It is true that Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) are a key driver of global-warming (cf. IPCC). Therefore, reduction of total GHGs and their production rate is broadly agreed, at least among scientists, to be a critical element in mitigating human-induced climate change.

So, SANDAG ran their models and found that the *On-Road Transportation* contribution to GHG is the greatest portion of total GHG: 54%. Because this is vehicular transportation, it is converted to Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). **This will be important later.** So, people talk about reducing GHG by reducing VMT.

NARRATOR (OFFSTAGE-RIGHT): "Why are they using the 2012 GHG target year rather than the AB32 1990 baseline? Doesn't the CAP say, right in the RESOLUTION at the front, that they will fully implement the AB32 legislation? Why don't they talk about SB379? Ah, methinks something is afoot!"

Act II: The Coast Road: Highway 101

The stage is set by the DEVELOPER'S DILEMMA.

DEVELOPER: "Oh woe is me, my coastal property lacks sufficient parking. I need to grow because, you know, that's how I make my money. Dear POLITICIAN, please agree to help me fix this problem. The *Highway 101 Leucadia STREETSCAPE* plan is only half of what I need to prosper. Along with this, I need to fix the housing-density limits. Your *Zoning Plan*, I mean *Climate Action Plan* (CHORUS FROM STAGE LEFT: "So Green and Grand..."), is all we need for cover. You see, at last, your greenhouse gas works to our combined advantage."

CHORUS (DEVELOPER and POLITICIAN): 'Hi-dee-ho, away we go, to the bank and Sacramento. You go that way, I'll go my way and hope no one's the wiser.'

This requires some unpacking for the audience. The first few unnumbered pages of the [Encinitas CAP](#) opens with *RESOLUTION 2018-04:... APPROVING AND ADOPTING THE UPDATED CITY OF ENCINITAS CLIMATE ACTION PLAN* which is signed by the Encinitas Mayor and City Clerk. This is a long list of *WHEREAS* clauses but among them are a few notables paraphrased here except where quoted. *NO KIDDING*, the quotes are verbatim.

1. **WE THOUGHT-LEADERS ARE USING YOU FOR A TEST:** "... local actions, whenever taken by cities and counties nationwide, can help provide a collective response and may also provide the benefits of **testing and developing** model programs, methods, and technologies for achieving greenhouse gas reductions.";
2. **THIS PLAN WILL HAVE NO EFFECT (WTF?):** "... an *Environmental Initial Study* determined that the **Climate Action Plan would not have a significant impact on the environment**";
3. **EVERYONE WILL ACTIVELY TRANSPORT (WALK AND RIDE BIKES):** ...greenhouse gas reduction actions [include] ... reducing **vehicle miles traveled** [VMT] and promoting active transportation,

Act III: Footnote 5

The approach to achieving these goals is listed in the [CAP, P.3-11, Table 3-6: Strategy 4: Clean and Efficient Transportation and Footnote 5](#)). *When the audience stops laughing*, this will be seen to boil down to:

1. **BIKES, BIKES, BIKES:** Build some bike racks and put in some bike paths and encourage people to ride bikes, AND BTW,
2. **RE-ZONING:** Update the City's Housing Element and implement and enforce the City's existing specific plans (*Downtown Encinitas Specific Plan and the North 101 Corridor*) to reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled [VMT] and encourage dense, infill development.

What? Something's missing, you say? Where are the big reductions in VMT that the CAP is all about? *Uh-uh*, not in the *Specific Plans*: no, no, no. Those are 20-ish years old, although they've been mucked with since their inception.

Remember the 54% of the GHG due to transportation that has to be reduced? The "CAP CON" strikes again. Bikes are not an alternative for most transportation users and **the really big deal, RE-ZONING, is hidden in Footnote 5?** Denser housing is simply going to create *MORE GHG* (i.e., more people, more VMT + residential power-use) unless there is some piece of this puzzle not accounted for here because this is apparently all there is. There is no logic or data anywhere to support the following magical thinking:

*" ... The Housing Element will aim to add at least **1286 new affordable housing units**. ... more densely developed areas can support greater usage of alternative transportation modes, including biking, walking and transit."*

Our MAGICAL-THOUGH-LEADERS (i.e., POLITICIANS) are simply proposing to increase the number of housing units which, BTW, do have parking requirements, albeit inadequate, so there definitely will be more vehicles ([Sec 3.2, Encinitas North 101 Corridor Specific Plan](#)) with a lot of people walking and biking around them and somehow, magically, the new residents will forgo the use of their cars and leave them in their inadequate parking and nearby neighborhood streets so they don't increase VMT.

CHORUS STAGE LEFT (UP-TEMPO): "So Green and Grand, So Green and Grand..."

It also turns out that the 1286 number of housing units is, magically, a lowball mis-representation or worse (cf. [Coast News, Dan Brendel, July 16, 2020](#)). People working in local service industry businesses may, hopefully not magically, benefit from some of this additional housing and be able to bike, walk, or use public transit IF these units are really affordable by service industry wage-earners. How likely is that?

NARRATOR (ONSTAGE-CENTER): *So, Gentle People, is the "CAP CON" just A) magical thinking, B) a gift to developers, C) both or D) something else? As for us, we leave you here to ponder.*

NARRATOR (WALKING OFFSTAGE-RIGHT): *"Perhaps Tom Waits said it best, "... you got it buddy, the large print giveth and the small print taketh away.": unless, of course, you want to build more stuff in **Encinitas: the city with the Climate Action Plan that will have no effect on the environment!**"*

STAGE DIRECTOR: CURTAIN. LAST ONE OUT, TURN OFF THE LIGHTS (*Sotto voce: Gotta cut those GHGs!*)