

California Watch

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Report: State struggling to reduce vehicle emissions

February 17, 2011 | [Marie C. Baca \(/user/marie-c-baca\)](#)

California faces significant obstacles in complying with a 2008 state law aimed at reducing passenger vehicle usage, according to a report by the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California.

[The report \(http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=948\)](http://www.ppic.org/main/publication.asp?i=948) points to unrealized rail transit investments and resistance to pricing tools like fuel taxes as factors that have slowed reduction in car usage.

The two-year-old [SB 375 \[PDF\] \(http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/sen/sb_0351-0400/sb_375_bill_20080930_chaptered.pdf\)](#) mandates that California's major metropolitan areas reduce per capita emissions from driving by 7 percent by 2020 and by 15 percent in 2035. While the primary focus of the bill is a reduction in the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming, the legislation places a special emphasis on addressing traffic and public health concerns by reducing the number of miles residents drive.

In a prepared statement, Ellen Hanak, a senior fellow at the institute, summarized the findings, which were based on interviews with government officials and city planners as well as data from the state:

“The law encourages an integrated approach to reducing emissions – changing land use patterns to reduce the need to drive, investing in mass transit and other alternatives to driving, and increasing the cost of driving and parking to encourage the use of these alternatives. But it will be up to regional and local leaders to turn the vision into reality,

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The report lauds California officials for encouraging public transportation ridership, but outlines several issues that must be addressed before the state can meet the 2020 and 2035 targets:

- The number of jobs per square mile in California is lower than the national average and declining, so local governments need to find ways to encourage the growth of jobs near public transit.
- SB 375 encourages residential instead of commercial development near transit; this should be amended.
- Local governments need to improve access to areas surrounding major transit hubs by providing feeder bus services.
- Officials should consider mileage fees, which are used in other countries and are extremely effective at reducing vehicle usage.

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