

Setting the Standard in Coyote Valley



*A Scenarios for Sustainability (S2) Analysis
of Preliminary Development Options
Executive Summary*

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Executive Summary

Scenarios for Sustainability (S2) is an urban planning tool that provides decision makers with quantitative information about the degree to which alternative development options achieve environmental, economic, and social sustainability objectives. S2 combines elements of two well-known sustainability indicators created by Redefining Progress: the Ecological Footprint (EF) and the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI). The EF is a measure of humanity's cumulative effect on nature, including environmental, economic, social and long-term impacts. The GPI assigns monetary value to gains and losses in quality of life associated with changes in ecological health, social and cultural cohesion, and equity

This report applies S2 to the debate over the future of San José's Coyote Valley by providing a preliminary comparison of the City's Specific Plan with the *Getting it Right* vision advanced by Greenbelt Alliance.

Coyote Valley is a largely undeveloped tract of agricultural land just south of San José, some of which lies within the city's urban growth boundary, some within its sphere of influence. As it is the largest development project now contemplated in the Bay Area and as issues of sprawl, pollution, farmland loss, traffic congestion and affordability make daily headlines, all eyes are focused on how San José develops this sensitive area and if it can achieve a delicate balance between accommodation of growth and preservation of the Bay Area's unique quality of life.

The debate over how much and where to develop and what form that development should take is a debate that is often highly politicized but one that cries out for impartial analysis. S2 meets this need by addressing multifaceted concerns over environmental, economic, and social sustainability in a quantitative fashion. Here, our quantitative measures include the ecological footprint, the costs of lost farmland, non-market costs of carbon dioxide emissions, capital exports needed to pay for oil from afar, and equity in the distribution of housing types and access to open space. By providing quantitative measures of sustainability that vary as planning parameters are modified, S2 is a tool the City can use to design a final development plan in Coyote Valley that minimizes its ecological footprint and maximizes its contribution to genuine human progress.

While a complete S2 analysis cannot be completed until the City releases a final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and supporting documentation, preliminary analysis indicates the following:

- By promoting a more compact urban form, a better mix of jobs and residences, and fewer vehicle miles traveled and by converting fewer acres of biologically productive land to impervious surface, *Getting it Right*'s ecological footprint will be at least 17% less than that of the Specific Plan.
- By preserving more agricultural land, reducing carbon dioxide emissions damage, and exporting fewer dollars out of the local economy to pay for imported oil relative to the Specific Plan, *Getting it Right* will cost at least \$6.4 million less each year in terms of externalized economic costs to future generations.
- *Getting it Right* represents a 30% improvement in the equitable distribution of housing types as compared with the distribution envisioned by the Specific Plan.
- *Getting it Right* would allow 7% more families to have immediate access to open space, thereby mitigating the tendency for open space to be clustered near high income areas alone.

Conclusion

Under each measure, the *Getting it Right* vision advanced by the Greenbelt Alliance is superior to the City of San José Specific Plan. These differences initially suggest that *Getting it Right* would preserve more open space, discourage unnecessary trips by automobile, foster energy conservation, and create a more livable local and regional environment than would the City's plan.

With the City of San José Specific Plan still under development and subject to change, and with a large amount of information still to emerge from the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process, an updated assessment will likely be needed to ensure that the findings presented here hold true. This report is intended as an exploratory analysis at the pre-EIR stage before these data are made available. As such, it highlights important differences between the two plans, with significant implications for the sustainability of Coyote Valley's development and the entire Bay Area region. These nuances may become even more apparent as the EIR process unfolds over the coming months.