

Two days ago, the [Emmett Center](#) hosted what we thought would be a tidy, manageable panel and “roundtable discussion” on [SB 375](#), California’s new anti-sprawl law and the state’s latest legislative attempt to tackle GHG emissions from passenger vehicles. In line with turnout to similar past events, we booked a room that holds 90 people and crossed our fingers that we’d fill it.

After more than 260 people (community members, local city staffers, environmental lawyers, journalists, land use planning professionals, academics and students) had registered, we were forced to close the list, scramble for our largest room, and arrange for a live webcast. In the end, about 210 people attended in person, and so many people logged onto the webcast that our server temporarily crashed. The roundtable discussion turned into an auditorium outcry.

What accounts for the unprecedented turnout? SB 375 is admittedly [a complex bill](#) (thanks to Bill Higgins for this technical summary), one that may require more-than-usual exposition. Or perhaps it was the time of day, morning rather than our usual afternoon schedule. The fact that a good chunk of California bar members have CLE compliance cards due next week might also have played a role.

But a friend asked me last night: Could this, too, be attributed to Obama and a general rise in community engagement he’s inspired? Walking across campus yesterday, I spotted a scrawled message on a brick wall: Gobama. Have others planning similar community events felt the Gobama Effect?

And for those (four) of you following the ins and outs of SB 375 implementation: Perhaps the most interesting revelation of the session came from Hasan Ikhata, executive director of the Southern California Ass’n of Governments, who is charged with figuring out how sprawling SoCal might buck its development trends to meet the GHG reduction targets that will be set by the Air Resources Board under the bill. ❌ He told us that (1) despite the difficulties, he won’t come to his board with anything less than a full Sustainable Communities Strategy, the more aggressive (and effective) of the two possible types of plans for reducing GHG allowed by the bill, and (2) in fact, SCAG already possesses, in a locked drawer somewhere back at Hasan’s office, the equivalent of a conforming SCS. Now all he needs is help winning buy-in from cities and counties to adopt it.

Gobama anyone?