



October 27, 2015

Dear MTC Chair Cortese:

The Bay Area Planning Directors Association (BAPDA) Steering Committee commends the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) on opening the discussion regarding the organization of the Bay Area's regional transportation and land use planning agencies. In light of rapidly changing regional planning and transportation demands and evolving economic climate, it is an opportunity to explore the potential for a more effective and efficient organizational structure. However, we remain concerned generally about the process that has been pursued, and in particular about the proposal to proceed with moving the Planning and Research function from the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) to MTC.

While it has been traditional in other metropolitan areas to integrate land use and transportation in one organization, the Bay Area is unique in many ways. Precisely because of the region's unique transportation, planning and economic conditions, the current separation of planning and transportation functions has worked very well especially at the local level. Historically, services, programs, coordination and collaboration provided by MTC and ABAG have been admirably accomplished. Moving forward, this configuration is likely to continue to serve the region well if internal conflict at the staff and management level is addressed. The region's future prosperity and sustainability vitally depend on an effective regional transportation and land use planning process being in place.

During deliberation following public input at the MTC meeting on September 23, 2015, some Commissioners acknowledged the benefit of a more inclusive process that would allow time to gather input from city officials and the public. However, we believe the recommendation from the MTC Executive Director to proceed with the merger immediately is in error.

The following issues have not been thoroughly addressed:

- If a merger were to occur, MTC regional planning efforts may not be based on local information and instead be driven by top-down transportation investments. What organizational structure would be conducive to a healthy dialog between land use and transportation?
- Local governments rely on the ABAG Planning and Research Department's forecasting for local general plan and housing element updates, and research regarding hazard mitigation planning and best practices. ABAG also provides cost effective insurance and financial expertise that cities throughout the region have come to rely upon. The loss of these valuable technical services will have a very real financial impact at the local level. How will a planning function within a transportation agency continue to provide such services?
- As stakeholders, we would like to be more actively engaged in this process in a more thoughtful and deliberate way. We would like our policymakers, city and county managers, and the public to be heard. Will the process be adjusted to allow for more thoughtful consideration of the issues and for public input?

As you move forward in your deliberations, we urge you to carefully evaluate the implications and consequences of this proposal and to consider the following:

CONSIDERATIONS FOR A REORGANIZATION PROCESS

- Extend the budget for ABAG at least until June 2016 and commit to allow time for a more inclusive and careful examination and discussion of a potential merger.
- Engage an independent outside management consultant to objectively evaluate current organizational issues and provide recommendations on a potential reorganization that would provide the most effective regional transportation and land use planning process for the region.
- Consider alternative arrangements other than integrating ABAG's planning function into the MTC.
- Provide an inclusive process to review the recommendations and determine a course of action that involves the local jurisdictions served by both agencies and allows for input from local public officials, city and county managers, planners and the public.

OBJECTIVES THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED FOR ANY REORGANIZATION

- A reorganization must maintain the effective performance of all of the services now provided by both regional agencies, except those identified as no longer necessary following public review of a proposed reorganization.
- A reorganization must provide for differences between land use and transportation planning perspectives and recommendations to be recognized and publicly debated within the region.
- A reorganization must include a commitment and strategies to continue to understand what is happening at the local level and engage local communities in the formulation of policy and plans.
- The reorganization should include broad representation on the governing body or bodies for the regional transportation and land use agencies.

We recommend that both agencies move forward deliberatively and thoughtfully with the benefit of input from the public and local jurisdictions.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We ask that you provide this letter to your Commission members. We welcome the opportunity to engage in further discussion.

Sincerely,



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