
Bay Area must step up to climate, housing needs

By **Jim Wunderman** | January 15, 2016 | Updated: January 18, 2016 11:31am

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Photo: Michael Macor, The Chronicle

The morning commute traffic backed up on the I-580 freeway approach to the Bay Bridge, in Oakland, Calif., on Thurs. November 19, 2015.

Well-coordinated regional planning is absolutely critical if the Bay Area hopes to address the region's housing shortage and affordability crisis, upgrade its congested transportation

networks, sustain its economic growth and meet aggressive climate goals laid out in state policy and international accords. However, planning alone will not solve our many challenges.

It's going to take bold and decisive action. It's going to take all of us in the Bay Area working together to get it done — local and regional government, big cities and suburbs, the business community, elected leaders, nonprofit and civic organizations, residents and many, many others. Most important, it's going to take strong regional leadership.

The need is big, urgent and obvious. We're in the midst of an historic housing crisis. Rents and home prices are skyrocketing, surging in many places by double digits. Many residents are paying up to 50 percent and more of their income on housing. Others are being forced to move out. Employers are having trouble attracting talent.

Traffic is at crisis levels, regularly placing us at the top of national rankings for congestion and delays. Longer commutes in grinding traffic equal more carbon and sabotage our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They also are a serious drag on our economy. Our public transportation systems, including BART and Caltrain, are bursting at the seams, with insufficient funding to maintain what we have.

These challenges are deeply concerning, but we have what it takes to address them. **Plan Bay Area**, a sweeping blueprint linking regional housing and transportation planning will help meet the region's obligations for statewide greenhouse gas reductions. And voters repeatedly have stepped up to approve local funding measures as state and federal money for transportation declines.

A recent report by the Bay Area Council Economic Institute ("**Roadmap for Economic Resilience**") also offered a raft of readily available ideas and approaches, including both sticks and carrots, for delivering the housing our residents and workforce desperately need and speeding investment in our beleaguered transportation network.

Our two regional agencies — the **Metropolitan Transportation Commission** and

Association of Bay Area Governments — have led our housing and transportation planning efforts. But under state and federal law, they don't have the authority to implement solutions on their own. Decision-making resides largely at the local level. Some of our 101 cities have taken action to add the types of higher-density housing near transit that we need, but many others are lagging. Over the past several decades, Bay Area cities have built just a little over half the housing called for. The numbers for affordable housing are even worse.

There is now a serious process in place for merging MTC and ABAG. The Bay Area Council believes this is badly needed and overdue.

There is another ray of opportunity. The mayors of San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland have shown that they understand how urgent our problems are. And, perhaps at no other time in history have the mayors of the Bay Area's three largest cities worked so closely on housing, transportation and regional coordination.

Such a display of political leadership could be just what is needed to drive serious regional solutions and unite the Bay Area behind a common vision. That would be a welcome balm for a region where parochial interests and narrow agendas often derail our best-laid plans.

*Jim Wunderman is president and CEO of the **Bay Area Council**, a regional business association. To comment, submit your letter to the editor at www.sfgate.com/submissions.*