ASSOCIATION OF BAY AREA GOVERNMENTS
Representing City and County Governments of the San Francisco Bay Area

ABAG

October 23, 2015

Ken Kirkey
Planning Director
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Oakland, California

Dear Ken,

I encountered the letter you sent to our local planning directors on the MTC proposal to move ABAG land use planning staff under the MTC management structure. I would like to provide my perspective on the issues you presented. I know we will have the opportunity to engage in a thoughtful conversation at the next Bay Area Planning Directors Association conference. Thus I take this exchange as a warm up. As you know I continue to be open for a thoughtful dialogue anytime.

I would like to recognize that we both, individually and institutionally, agree that coordination of land use and transportation is essential for our region. We both agree that collaboration among our staff is essential for a functional regional planning process. We both agree on the importance of the regional planning tasks that you identified. However, I would like to clarify that most of the tasks that you proposed as potential benefits of departmental consolidation (i.e. technical assistance to local jurisdiction staff, coordination of housing and economic development strategies, PDA Planning and Technical Assistance grant programs, identifying Priority Industrial Areas, attending local and sub-regional meetings, etc.) are already being performed well by ABAG and MTC staff, so they aren't a compelling rationale for merging the planning departments.

We fundamentally disagree on whether a direct line of authority from regional land use planning staff to the Council of Governments is essential. I believe it is because the relationship between regional agencies and cities and counties is of paramount importance when discussing regional strategies that will help shape the qualities of our neighborhoods.

For land use planners, the negative experience of urban renewal—where many communities were devastated by large-scale projects made in the name of economic development, improved mobility, and "progress"—provides a touchstone that guides the emphasis on inclusiveness that is the foundation for land use planning today. The manner in which MTC has pursued this consolidation project demonstrates a lack of commitment to the principles of inclusive planning that allows those affected by an action to be involved in the decision-making process.

Thus, I am concerned that there are no specifics in MTC's proposals for how the significant input into land use planning that local governments and stakeholders have currently would be maintained under the new structure. How would the ABAG Board—which would still retain the authority to adopt the Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) and the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS)— be able to

guide the efforts of planning staff who would be working at the direction of the MTC planning director and executive director?

De-linking the land use planning department from the political structure of cities and counties, would undermine the substantial accomplishments in our regional planning efforts. As long as a new structure includes the active participation and control of local governments, ABAG is open to considering a full agency merger. MTC and ABAG should be engaging in a mediated discussion about completely merging the two agencies. We are open to start this conversation.

Cordially,

Miriam Chion
Planning and Research Director
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Oakland, California

cc: Planning Directors of the Cities and Counties of the Bay Area