



F A C T S H E E T

Proposed Consolidation of MTC-ABAG Planning Departments

Proposal

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) is proposing to establish an integrated regional planning department serving the policy boards of both MTC and the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) within the management structure of MTC. The proposed consolidation is a structural change that would enable the Bay Area to deliver a more integrated land-use and transportation planning approach that is central to achieving the greenhouse gas reduction benefits anticipated from Senate Bill 375 (Steinberg, 2008). In terms of policy decisions, the existing statutory authority of MTC and the ABAG Executive Board would be respected and maintained.

Financially, the proposal is simple: MTC currently provides ABAG with an annual payment of about \$4 million per year for planning services that are shared by the two agencies. Under the proposal, MTC would hire the staff currently working in ABAG's planning department directly and ABAG would be provided a larger planning group for the board policy decisions it will maintain. All other aspects of ABAG's budget and workload (e.g. finance authority, insurance pooling, estuary programs, etc.) would remain unchanged. MTC is also proposing to provide transition funding to ABAG to help it cover some of its post-consolidation overhead expenses.

Background

ABAG was established in 1961 by local cities as a voluntary council of governments in response to concerns that the State Legislature would impose a much stronger form of multi-purpose regional government upon the Bay Area. MTC was created by the Legislature in 1970 to establish a regional planner and coordinator in the field of transportation. MTC and ABAG's offices have always been co-located and MTC has likewise provided financial assistance to ABAG for its planning work since MTC's inception.

What's the Problem?

- The Bay Area is the only region in the state where the sustainable communities strategy (SCS) is developed by two agencies, instead of just a single metropolitan planning organization (MPO). This bifurcated structure leads to significant duplication, confusion, conflict and missed opportunities to better serve the Bay Area's complex needs.
- Plan Bay Area — the region's first SCS, adopted in 2013 — was developed several months late at much greater cost due to disagreements between the agencies' staff.

Benefits of a Consolidated Planning Department

- Strengthen the development and implementation of a more comprehensive regional plan by integrating staff expertise on transportation, housing, economic development and sustainability;
- Create a "one-stop-shop" for effective technical assistance to local governments by providing expert planning services and data sharing; and
- Use taxpayer dollars more efficiently by speeding up internal processes and improving the quality of external communications.

MTC History of Linking Regional Transportation Planning and Local Land Use Decisions

- Building on research that people who live or work close to transit are far more likely to use it, in 1997, MTC launched our award-winning Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program. The program provided planning and capital funds to communities across the Bay Area to support transit-oriented development by enhancing walkability and improving the links between transit facilities, housing and other key amenities.
- In 2005, MTC adopted a Transit-Oriented Development Policy focused on improving the cost-effectiveness of regional investment in transit expansion. This led to the launch of the Station Area Planning Program and the development of locally-nominated Priority Development Areas (PDA) and Priority Conservation Areas (PCA) in which local communities voluntarily designate specific areas to provide for more housing or reserve as open space, respectively.
- To respond to SB 375 (Steinberg, 2008) and provide an even stronger link between land-use and transportation, in 2012, MTC launched the One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) program, leveraging its federal discretionary funds to incentivize and reward Bay Area jurisdictions that plan for and construct new housing with a greater share of transportation funds.

MTC Has a Strong Track Record of Assuming New Responsibilities

- In 2014, MTC and ABAG consolidated analytical modeling teams into a single unit housed at MTC. Specifically, a former ABAG staff person responsible for developing, maintaining and applying ABAG's simulation model of land development activity joined MTC's Analytical Services Unit – a part of MTC's Planning Section. Functionally, this team operates as a service bureau to both MTC and ABAG.
- Over the course of MTC's existence, the Commission has been designated either by statute or its own action to wear multiple hats, assuming responsibility for FasTrak[®] toll revenue collection as the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) and for motorist aid as the region's Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (SAFE). MTC has also taken the lead on development of the region's electronic transit fare payment card, Clipper[®] and developing and operating of the region's award-winning real-time traveler information system, 511.
- A single MTC staffing structure serves each of these independent boards and functions without the duplication and conflict inherent in the current relationship.

For More Information

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