

# Maintain the local voice in regional land use

By **Revan Tranter**

There is still time to have your voice heard on local land-use planning. The Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission are embroiled in a fight that could result in the former — responsible for creating the Bay Trail, cleaning up the bay, putting solar on roof tops, funding affordable housing, restoring wetlands, strengthening homes against earthquake damage and teaching small businesses to be greener — being subsumed by the all-powerful MTC solely because MTC holds the purse strings.

The Bay Area's local governments formed ABAG 55 years ago. MTC, the state-created transportation funding agency, has decided that it wants to expand its portfolio to include land use and housing by grabbing ABAG's staff and undermining ABAG's responsibilities by defunding its land-use work.

Since its start, MTC

has relied on ABAG's land-use planning work to qualify the transportation agency for federal funding. California's green planning law, SB375, requires ABAG and MTC to carry out specific responsibilities in the development of a Sustainable Communities strategy to guide land use, housing development and transportation. ABAG has responsibility for the land-use component. In this region, the strategy is called Plan Bay Area. Because of the creative tension in the development of the original plan and the fact that the two agencies are in the middle of updating it, MTC has charged that the process is dysfunctional. Its officials say that ABAG is process-oriented while they are project-oriented. Their remedy? Take away funding and force ABAG into submission.

Last October, MTC adopted Resolution 4210, which would transfer to itself most of ABAG's planning functions and staff as well as end its decades of funding agree-



Connor Radnovich / The Chronicle

**Two agencies plan to relocate and share a building downtown later this month.**

## Get involved

If you are interested in maintaining transparency at the regional level and retaining local government's voice in land use and housing decision making, please contact your city and county representatives to ABAG.

ments. Without this funding, ABAG would have severe financial difficulty that jeopardizes its continued existence. After strong objections from local governments, labor unions (ABAG is unionized; MTC is not),

professional bodies and nonprofit organizations, that decision was reluctantly postponed by MTC in favor of a merger study paid for by the two agencies.

Because of a petition presented by Novato

Mayor Pat Eklund and signed by the required number of counties and cities, a special meeting of all Bay Area cities and counties is scheduled to begin at noon on Thursday. The outcome should guide the decision of the

ABAG Executive Board meeting at 7 that evening.

The best path forward is Option 4 of the consultants' study. It is by far the best choice for ABAG's member governments, and for the taxpayer. This option avoids the turmoil that would result from one agency grabbing the other's staff. If we do this, the Bay Area joins the rest of the country with an integrated regional land-use and transportation agency. Option 4 retains the voice and integrity of local government in the planning process. We call on ABAG to seek MTC's agreement to approve Option 4.

If these steps are taken, then we can at last begin work on creating what the Bay Area lacks and needs — a first-rate comprehensive regional planning agency.

*Revan Tranter is a former executive director of the Association of Bay Area Governments. He is joined in this view by former ABAG executive directors Eugene Leong and Henry Gardner.*