SPUR
San Francisco | San Jose | Oakland

September 11, 2015

Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Association of Bay Area Governments
101 Eighth Street
Oakland, California 94607

Dear MTC Commissioners and ABAG Board Members:

SPUR is a nonprofit civic organization based in San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland. For many decades, SPUR has worked on and advocated for improved regional planning.[1] We were involved in prior efforts to establish a single regional planning agency, such as Bay Vision 2020, and remain committed to such a goal.

We are writing to share our perspective on the question of the ABAG/MTC relationship and MTC's proposal to establish a single planning department within MTC. We have spoken with many stakeholders, including current and former ABAG and MTC staff and board members, local elected officials and their staffs, and regional and local leaders in the private and nonprofit sectors.

Based on these conversations, we have four recommendations. Our attached white paper further details our recommendations and lays out key findings and our perspective on the issues facing MTC and ABAG. We look forward to an ongoing collaboration on behalf of a better Bay Area.

1. Move deliberately and carefully toward establishing a unified planning department that combines land use and transportation planning functions.

We fully support the idea of creating a single regional planning department. A merged department could more efficiently produce the needed products for Plan Bay Area while also working on other important regional issues, such as economic development and climate change. This is a significant decision with many complications, and it should not be made hastily. We urge staff and leadership to begin working on the merger as soon as possible in order to allow the time necessary to get the details right. For this reason, the MTC contribution to ABAG's FY 15-16 budget should be approved for an entire year to ensure proper time to manage the merger and transition. It may be appropriate for MTC to provide additional funding beyond 12 months to support ABAG's overhead costs. Ultimately, the issue of ABAG's budget should be separated from the need to begin working on creating a single planning department.

2. Elevate the Joint MTC Planning Committee/ABAG Administrative Committee as the core decision-making body for the evaluation and approval of the 2017 Plan Bay Area update.

To meet the Plan Bay Area 2017 deadline, it will be necessary to make use of existing boards and committees for plan approval. During the production of the Plan Bay Area update, MTC and ABAG

[1] See: http://www.spur.org/sites/default/files/publications_pdfs/Strengthening_Regional_Governance.pdf

SAN FRANCISCO
654 Mission Street
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 781-8726

SAN JOSE
76 South First Street
San Jose, CA 95113
(408) 638-0083

OAKLAND
c/o Impact Hub Oakland
2323 Broadway
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 250-8210

spur.org

should jointly establish a single merged committee (such as the current Joint MTC Planning Committee/ABAG Administrative Committee) as the formal adoption and review committee for Plan Bay Area and elevate the role of this committee as the core policy review body for the plan update.

3. Make a commitment that the 2017 Plan Bay Area update will be the last one produced with joint reporting to two separate boards.

Maintaining joint reporting and approval by two boards and their associated committees is not a long-term solution and should only be employed for one more RTP/SCS cycle. We urge the boards of MTC and ABAG to make a commitment that the current update should be the last one with a joint reporting structure to two separate boards. The subsequent Plan Bay Area (2021) should be completed with a single staff and an updated governance system that includes a single board.

4. Form a study commission with a range of regional stakeholders to develop options for a single regional planning agency that combines the functions of ABAG and MTC.

SPUR supports a long-term strategy to establish the highest functioning system of regional planning in the Bay Area. We believe that this will only be possible with a single regional planning agency. We call on ABAG and MTC to support the establishment of a Study Commission that would explore a range of alternative options, from a full agency-wide merger to establishing a new agency that MTC and ABAG would fold into. This Study Commission's work should be completed by 2017.

Our single-purpose regional agencies are not equipped to respond to the complexity and interrelatedness of the region's challenges. We think that merging the MTC and ABAG planning departments over the next 12 months is a valuable first step. The next step must be to reform the governance of the two agencies and move in the direction of a single regional planning entity, integrating staff, committees and board. Now is the time to resolve this long-standing issue for the benefit of the Bay Area.

Regards,

Egon Terplan
SPUR Regional Planning Director