



# SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

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September 15, 2015

Steve Heminger, Executive Director of Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
Ezra Rapport, Executive Director of The Association of Bay Area Governments  
101 Eight Street  
Oakland, CA 94607

**Re: MTC/ABAG Relationship**

Dear Executive Director Heminger and Executive Director Rapport,

As the largest and oldest local Planning agency in the Bay Area, the San Francisco Planning Department has had extensive experience in both successful and non-successful mergers of public functions related to Planning. The Department believes that at its best, Planning is a function that is robustly multi-disciplinary, inclusive and transparent.

Further, this Department believes strongly in the need for and value of regional planning and cooperation. To be clear, I would like to state unequivocally that SF Planning is a major advocate for regional collaboration on planning, land use and transportation concerns. Further, we believe that regional planning is in fact essential for us to address the major land use and transportation issues facing all the counties in the Bay Area today.

In that light, the current discussions about the possibility of a single regional planning agency for the Bay Area may be an historic opportunity. Since the Bay Area Council of Governments created ABAG in 1961, true regional planning has been both valued and feared. Legislators have incrementally identified increasing needs for regional governance and responded by creating new single-issue bureaucracies. After ABAG formed, BCDC was made permanent guardian of the Bay in 1969. MTC was created in 1970 for transportation planning and funding. In 1995, BAAQMD was created to regulate air quality. In 2003, ABAG and MTC formed a "Joint Policy Committee" to coordinate their regional planning efforts. And, subsequent actions by the state legislature included BCDC and BAAQMD in this policy coordination. At each step of the way, planners have discussed, studied, and dreamed about consolidation and unification of Bay Area regional agencies.

SF Planning strongly supports the notion of planning related functions in a combined agency that addresses land use, transportation and all related functions regarding the physical growth of the region. *With that said, we encourage you to do so in a way that results in true multi-disciplinary planning, where transportation serves desired land use patterns, and these programs collectively address environmental and social concerns*

As real momentum for change builds within both MTC and ABAG, planning professionals should be asked to advise on best practices so that our policymakers can achieve integrated planning. It is our regional task to further the goals of SB 375 and pursue planning that

1650 Mission St.  
Suite 400  
San Francisco,  
CA 94103-2479

Reception:  
**415.558.6378**

Fax:  
**415.558.6409**

Planning  
Information:  
**415.558.6377**

prioritizes compact growth. From this strong policy grounding, infrastructure funding should flow. This requires more than a shifting of land use planning staff into a transportation agency. Rather, we would advocate for a true merger of the functions of the two agencies that reflects the true need for an integrated approach. To do so would indeed require more time to address policy and logistical issues, but in the end, be worth the effort.

In our experience, successful mergers require the commitment of time and resources for two key functions:

1. An adopted statement of the purpose for the merger, and the mission of the combined organization. Ultimately the goal should be to establish a comprehensive regional planning process that leads to an optimal use of land in the region, supported by and closely coordinated with transportation improvements and funding.
2. A merger process that is transparent and involves a broad range of stakeholders so that the ultimate organization can succeed.

### **The San Francisco Example**

Functional planning and change work best when that change is grounded in a solid policy framework; has buy-in from the public, policymakers, and staff; and includes metrics for evaluating the effort. Even within this context, new organizational structures often present efficiency challenges for years after the merger. For instance, within San Francisco, we saw a similar movement in 1999, when our voters passed Proposition E. This proposition mandated the merger of our Department of Parking and Traffic with our Muni public transportation agency into the new San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency. Strong public advocacy and Political support helped the Charter Amendment pass handily and signaled broad enthusiasm not only for the organizational merger, but also for shifting the new agency's underlying policy framework.

Yet, while this effort seemed to have grounded policy and community support, staff cited collaboration difficulties for years. The entrenched differences can mean that unity is far away even with the best-laid plans. Certainly, a lack of support from the public, policymakers, or staff can hinder unification. Further, a process that appears rushed or has an unclear goal may result in a dysfunctional and inefficient agency.

### **Articulation of Intent and Development of Buy In**

I would strongly urge you consider the two steps noted above as a prerequisite to any formal action by the Board to establish a combined regional entity. To reassure the public and underscore your commitment to a thoughtful process, we urge you to extend ABAG funding through at least June of 2016. The goal should not be a merger merely for efficiency's sake, as surely efficiencies will be lost for some time and will be lost entirely, if not properly planned. Instead, care should be taken to clearly articulate the goals of the merger and to develop support for this important change. A deliberate, collaborative process and the public accountability it demands will take time and should not be rushed.

**In summary, I**

- 1) applaud the opportunity to achieve consolidated planning;
- 2) encourage agreement on the intent of the merger prior to any action;
- 3) ask that a merger be pursued through a deliberate and open process;
- 4) stress that for a merger to be successful, consensus needs to be developed; and
- 5) ask for immediate action to maintain ABAG funding through at least June 2016.

The San Francisco Planning Department stands ready to assist in these important efforts. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this further and enlist our assistance to develop a new model for Bay Area regional governance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Rahaim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping tail.

John Rahaim  
Director of Planning

Cc: Director of Planning Miriam Chion, ABAG  
Planning Director Ken Kirkey, MTC  
Senior Policy Advisor AnMarie Rodgers, SF Planning  
Director of Citywide Planning Gil Kelley, SF Planning

