

League of Women Voters of Marin County

Response to Plan Bay Area

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I. Importance of regional outlook and long range planning: Since the 1960s the League of Women Voters has supported the idea of communities around the Bay Area examining together the need for clean air and water, environmental and agricultural protection, transit infrastructure, and a range of housing appropriate for all segments of the community.

All of these issues impact everyone in the Bay Area. There are no boundaries, so a plan to approach these issues in a collective way is imperative. Plan Bay Area presents an opportunity to fulfill this need.

Plan Bay Area does not introduce concepts that are foreign to planning in Marin County. In 2007 the Marin County General Plan focused on sustainability, including many of the same issues and future visioning as Plan Bay Area. It needs to be remembered that Plan Bay Area provides a general context for local planning. Land use planning, including housing and commercial uses, continues to be the responsibility of each jurisdiction. The Plan does not take away that mandated local decision making, but places it in the context of the future of our interconnected counties.

The draft Plan is a good example of successful collaboration among the Bay Area's regional agencies, primarily MTC and ABAG with input from other regional agencies. The draft Environmental Impact Report for the plan concludes that the plan will result in 100% of the Bay Area's population growth being housed in urban areas, with no new sprawl development, during the 18-year period covered by the Plan. Overall, over two thirds of all regional growth by 2040 is allocated within Priority Development Areas, which are expected to accommodate 79% of new housing and 63% of new jobs. No Marin jurisdiction is listed in the top 15 Bay Area cities for jobs or for housing.

II. Climate change response requires transportation and land use dimensions: All possible tools to address climate change need to be part of planning. Any attempt to combat climate change requires the inclusion of land use, transportation and housing as part of the planning. The preferred alternative would keep 100% of new development within the current built environment and 12% or approximately 30,000 fewer residents living in homes at risk of flooding from expected sea-level rise. It lowers polluting emissions encouraging a strong shift from cars to transit, walking, biking and other alternative transportation modes. The greatest need is to reduce the number of vehicle miles travelled per household.

III. Open space and agriculture preservation: The League supports the inclusion of careful preservation of open space and agriculture around the Bay Area. Marin County has been a leader in this regard and can offer assistance to other counties in combined

planning for best use of built areas while protecting green areas. A regional agricultural and farmland protection plan will be needed to further this goal. Preventing sprawl in these areas is a key to preservation.

IV. Equity/access is a priority for any future visioning. Marin County has not been as successful in planning for adequate housing and transportation that includes a large number of its service economy. The Equity, Environment and Jobs Scenario is the environmentally superior alternative according to MTC and ABAG. This preferred alternative proposes creating more housing opportunities, including affordable homes, in all of the region's job centers, which include all job-rich, transit-connected, high-opportunity communities. It proposes investing an additional \$8 billion in increased transit services tailored to fit the equitable housing plan and adds incentives for affordable housing. This alternative provides for the lowest combined housing and transportation costs for low-income households, a key to the health and stability of working families.

V. High need for rental housing: When planning for housing in Marin County, the highest priority is for a range of rental housing. Our less than 1% vacancy rate promotes very high rents and a hardship on many families and seniors. We have within our midst outstanding examples of attractive, affordable infill rental housing complexes built by non-profits as permanently affordable and accessible to transit. Plan Bay Area offers a context for Marin communities to prioritize this kind of development. Marin has been growing, but only in large single-family homes that do not address the housing needs of our workforce. These increase single occupancy vehicle travel and add to Marin's large ecological foot print. We need affordable homes to support our public transit investments. Affordable homes for our workforce at all income levels are essential to a vibrant local and regional economy. The shortfall of affordable homes near jobs is causing traffic congestion and air pollution.

AREAS OF THE PLAN THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT:

- 1. Analysis of sea rise is minimal and yet crucial with so many areas of the Bay impacted.** We commend the regional agencies for their collaborative work to study the rise in sea and bay water levels that will increase at an accelerating rate over the Plan's duration. We are concerned, however, that many draft Plan investments will be located in areas projected to be in flood zones as the sea levels rise. The draft Environmental Impact report for the draft Plan states that all nine Bay Area Counties are vulnerable to the rising seas. Sea levels are predicted to increase 6", plus or minus 2", by the year 2030, and by 11", plus or minus 3.6", by 2050. In addition, intermittent high tides can be as much as 12" higher than median sea levels. Unfortunately, areas most vulnerable to the rise contain some of the Bay Area's most significant transportation infrastructure, and the draft Plan includes projects to expand and improve many of these facilities. Recommended mitigations range from risk assessments to new designs for infrastructure, levees, seawalls and setbacks (for more information on recommended mitigations, see the table beginning on page 2.5-42 of the draft EIR.) All proposed projects in

vulnerable areas need to be evaluated for their designs and their needs for mitigation.

1. **‘Fiscalization’ of land use is just mentioned, yet it has been a promoter of retail/big box retail to support the economics of California jurisdictions.** Proposals to reverse it need to be considered.
1. **CEQA streamlining is not required to achieve goals proposed in Plan Bay Area.** It is important to look at ways CEQA is misused, not to minimize its importance or effectiveness.
1. **To intensify growth in the urban centers will require more than investment in housing and transit.** Growth areas in the Plan are centered in Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose. There will be needed investment in safety, school and other livability requirements. We know from other locations that it is possible for families to thrive in cities. It is something we have to work on in the Bay Area.
1. **The funds allocated to transit operations in the draft Plan do not appear to be adequate to restore the service cuts made during the past few years or to meet the needs of the Bay Area’s growing population.** Moreover, the Plan specifies that transit agencies are to be given funds as rewards for increasing ridership and improving productivity – goals that do not take into account the diverse needs of many residents for affordable transit.
1. **The focus on a narrow mission for transit – that of cutting operating costs – threatens the public-service goal of meeting the needs of all residents.** We urge that consideration be given to shifting draft Plan funding from high-cost, low-cost/effective projects to transit operations and transit system maintenance. Additional transit services are needed to multiple destinations and at off-peak hours to serve a diverse population. Reliable connections are needed in order to meet the service requirements of such groups as the elderly, service workers and families. Services that provide reliable connections to multiple modes such as ferry and bus services should be considered.

An assessment of the draft Plan’s impact on transportation costs for low-income households shows that these costs, combined with housing costs under the Plan, will rise steeply - a 69% increase over current conditions. A vision for transit limited to cost-cutting is too narrow to ensure that the Bay Area will have a world-class transit system that will act as an incentive to drivers to leave their cars at home.

The “Equity, Environment, and Jobs (EEJ)” alternative in the Draft Plan is judged the “environmentally preferred alternative,” and the “Transit Priority Focus (TPF)” alternative is judged superior for transportation. We strongly urge that the elements of the alternatives that offer superior benefits to the environment, provide robust incentives for affordable housing, and enhance the services of the transit systems be included in the draft Plan.

