



June 2, 2012

Senator Mark DeSaulnier , Chair
Senate Transportation and Housing Committee
State Capitol, Room 5035
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for SB 878 Regional Governance and Bay Area Economic Development

We support this bill which asks for a report on regional governance in the San Francisco Bay Area. We have no position on the economic agenda that it proposes, and the time frame for reporting back seems optimistic.

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area was formed in the 1960's out of concern for Bay Area issues that needed region-wide solutions. For more than forty years we have urged that there be a regional agency in the Bay Area that has the authority to develop integrated regional planning involving land use, air quality, transportation planning , bay preservation and water quality planning. While we ultimately want to have an agency with at least a portion of directly elected members, we believed that the formation of the Joint Policy Committee (JPC) in 2004 was a good move toward that goal.

There has been a substantially improved, and more unified, planning program for the San Francisco Bay region since the JPC was formed seven years ago. Progress has been made simply by having regional agency representatives meeting together and coordinating efforts – both at the commissioner level and at the staff level. However, things have not been perfect, and more needs to be done.

SB 878 would charge the JPC, composed of representatives of the MTC, ABAG, BAAQMD and BCDC, to submit a report by January 2013 as to future organizational reforms to address the overarching regional challenges, and would add a plan for regional economic development strategy and other now-known regional or global issues, including a public outreach program.

LWVBA agrees that this is a good time to reassess the function and priorities of the Joint Policy Committee. The time frame proposed in the bill seems too short .

1. There is still a need to clarify roles and responsibilities of the agencies who currently have decision making authority under the regional umbrella. Coordination among the executive staff at the regional level has greatly improved. There still seems to be confusion, and even frustration, about the number of duplicative committee/commissioner meetings, and then who makes the decision, and how does the flow of decision making work. For example, does the JPC decision affect or reflect those of member agencies? What does coordination mean?



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE BAY AREA

An Inter-League Organization of the San Francisco Bay Area



2. We support efforts to consolidate operations. Regarding organizational reforms mentioned - shared operation/consolidation was evaluated in accordance with prior JPC legislation. Maybe the new shared facility will make a difference, but even within the existing Metro Center the differences in organizational culture between ABAG and MTC were not considered viable.
3. The new regional challenges such as climate change – including SB 375 regional emission target reductions, land use adaption to sea level rise, need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from non-vehicle sources, add to the regional decision burden.
4. It might be worthwhile to look at other regional governance structures, both within the state and in other metropolitan regions, particularly as other regions in California have addressed the challenges of climate change and SB 375.
5. We always support public outreach, in general, and as provided in the legislation. There is often too much, and very unclearly focused public outreach and it , frankly, has been a challenge for even the LWVBA to know which meetings (or which strategies – Envision Bay Area, One Bay Area, Plan Bay Area, etc.) are important, when are decisions to be made, and the like. There are also advisory committees, which have structured membership.

In conclusion, LWVBA supports coordinated, if not consolidated, regional decision making for the San Francisco Bay Area. We agree that this is a good time to revisit or enhance the process that incorporates current challenges and future needs.

Sincerely,

Marion Taylor
President