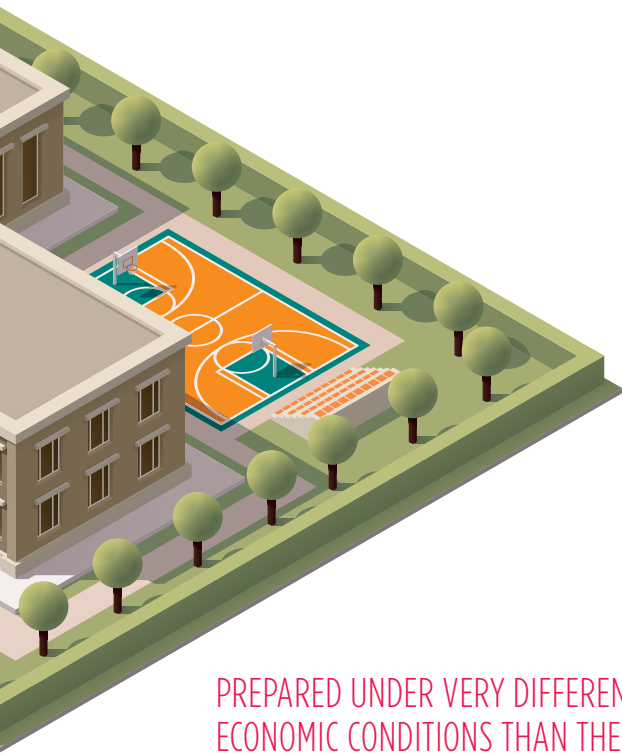


REGIONAL PLANNING DO-OVER

Summarizing Plan Bay Area 2040 and California Sustainable Communities strategies

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PREPARED UNDER VERY DIFFERENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS THAN THE ORIGINAL PLAN, PLAN BAY AREA 2040 IS LIKELY TO PROVE EQUALLY CONTROVERSIAL.

The Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission recently conducted public outreach meetings in all nine San Francisco Bay Area counties for “Plan Bay Area 2040.” The new plan, scheduled for adoption in summer 2017, will replace the original 2013 Plan Bay Area as the region’s sustainable communities strategy. Prepared under very different economic conditions than the original plan, Plan Bay Area 2040 is likely to prove equally controversial.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES BACKGROUND

As part of the state’s effort to achieve ambitious greenhouse gas reduction goals, Senate Bill 375 (2008) seeks to reduce vehicle miles traveled by changing California’s land use patterns. SB 375 requires each of the state’s 18 metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) to adopt a “sustainable communities strategy.”

SB 375 first tasked the California Air Resources Board with establishing emissions reduction targets from automobiles and light trucks for each region of California that has an MPO. The targets, described as the “most ambitious achievable,” represent a per capita percentage of greenhouse gas emission reduction, relative to 2005 levels. The targets are designed to be achieved through regional land use and transportation strategies and not to reflect changes in vehicle emissions standards or fuel economy that are expected to independently reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The current reduction targets for the Bay Area are seven percent by 2020 and 15 percent by 2035.

The sustainable communities strategy must include a development pattern that, when integrated with the regional transportation network and policies, will reduce emissions from cars and trucks to achieve the CARB targets for the region “if there is a feasible way to do so.” The MPO must quantify the expected reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and state whether it will meet the regional target.



A sustainable communities strategy does not supersede a city's or county's general plan, specific plans or zoning ordinance. Nor does SB 375 require any consistency between the sustainable communities strategy and these planning documents. Nevertheless, because transportation funding is now tied to SB 375 compliance, local agencies are likely to take those strategies seriously in their land use decision-making. In addition, the regional housing needs allocations that form the basis of each city's and county's general plan housing element must, under SB 375, be consistent with the sustainable communities strategy, so SB 375 is intended to directly affect local planning and zoning for housing.

For more comprehensive discussion of SB 375 and other current topics in sustainable development, including water supply planning and water conservation legislation; guidance for evaluating climate change impacts in CEQA documents; CEQA streamlining provisions intended to encourage infill and renewable energy development; and adaptation to climate change, see C. Barclay & M. Gray, *California Land Use & Planning Law* (Solano Press, 35th ed. 2016), Chapter 16, Sustainable Development.

PLAN BAY AREA 2040

As required, Plan Bay Area 2040 will be based on ABAG's projections of employment, population, household and housing growth from 2010 through 2040. ABAG projects that the Bay Area will add 1.3 million jobs, 2.4 million people, 783,000 households and 823,000 housing units during those 30 years. No one familiar with the Bay Area economy would be surprised to learn that the region added almost half of the job growth projected for 2010–2040 in just five years during the 2010 to 2015 timeframe (600,000 jobs), while household formation and housing unit growth were much slower.

Following public outreach, MTC and ABAG identified 13 targets for Plan Bay Area 2040. Two of these—reduction of per capita greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent, and provision of adequate housing for the region's population—are required by law; the other 11 targets are the agencies' own.


At their recent outreach meetings, MTC and ABAG presented three different scenarios for Plan Bay Area 2040:

- The Main Streets Scenario targets future population and employment growth in the downtowns of every Bay Area city, to foster a region of moderately sized, integrated town centers.

This scenario offers the most dispersed growth pattern, meaning cities outside of the region's largest are likely to see higher levels of growth. In this scenario, more growth would occur in currently undeveloped areas than the other two scenarios.

- The Connected Neighborhoods Scenario targets future population and employment growth in locally adopted Priority Development Areas throughout the region. This scenario emphasizes growth in medium-sized cities with access to the region's major rail services. This scenario builds on the existing Plan Bay Area 2013.
- The Big Cities Scenario targets future population and employment growth in locally adopted Priority Development Areas within San Jose, San Francisco and Oakland. Neighboring cities already well-connected to the region's three largest cities would also see growth.

As would be expected from these descriptions, the agencies anticipate that the Big Cities Scenario would achieve the greatest greenhouse gas reductions but also create the greatest risk of displacing existing households; the Main Street Scenario would build and maintain the most roadways while placing the most open space and agricultural lands at risk of development; and the Connected Neighborhoods Scenario would fall between the other two when measured against most of the agencies' 13 performance targets. The agencies plan to identify a "preferred scenario" in fall 2016, which could be one of the three draft scenarios or a hybrid incorporating elements of different scenarios.

It should be noted that although all three scenarios are assumed to meet the legal mandate to accommodate 100 percent of the region's population growth, housing production may remain the region's most intractable problem. ABAG, in making its projections for 2040, stated that its employment forecasts were "created under the assumption that the major efforts to expand housing production described in Plan Bay Area succeed in restoring regional housing production to levels achieved in earlier decades, while providing housing available to the mix of income ranges expected for the region's workforce." Whether and, if so, how Plan Bay Area could help achieve this success is unclear and will be vigorously debated as plan development proceeds. 

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