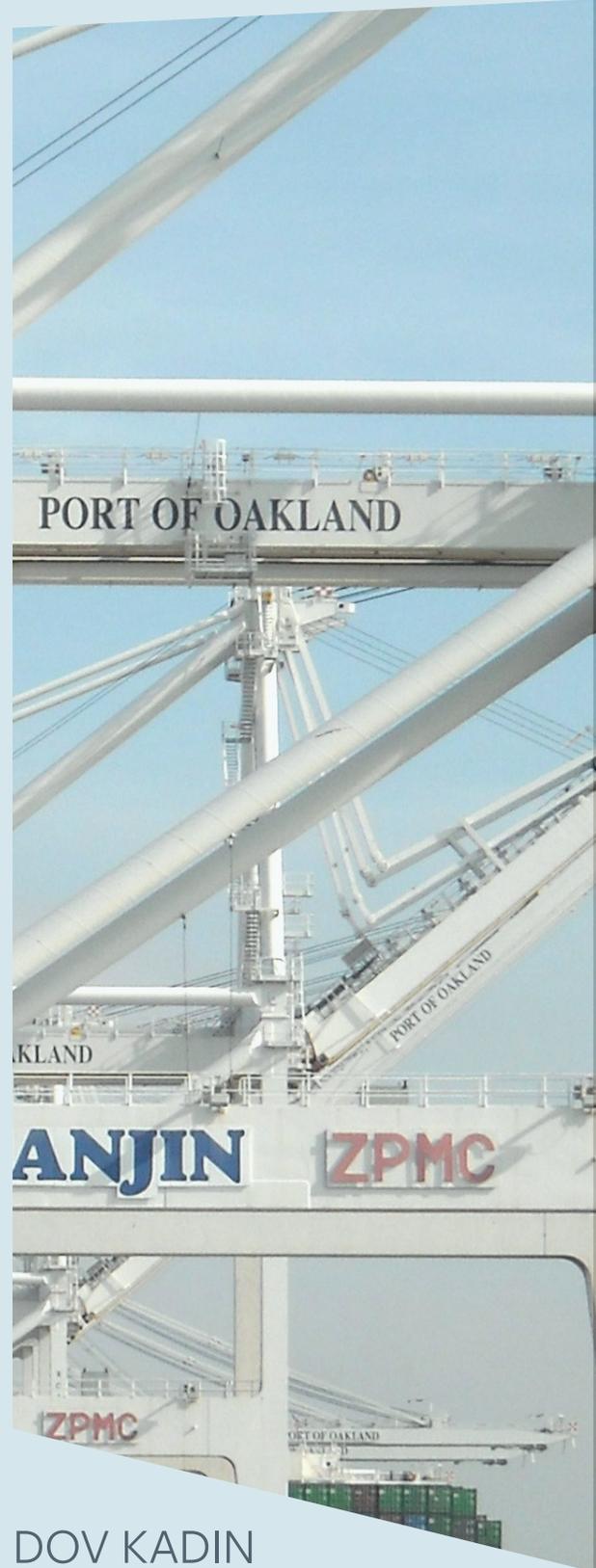


# REGIONAL PLANNING IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

*Context for HUD's  
Sustainable Communities  
Initiative • May 2016*



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# REGIONAL PLANNING IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

## Bay Area Beginnings

### Pre-1998 Regional Planning - A Brief History

Regional planning in the San Francisco Bay Area can be traced back nearly as far as one chooses to define it. One year before the 1906 earthquake, there was Daniel Burnham's plan for San Francisco. In the 1930s, the Olmsted-Hall team developed plans for a regional parks system. The '50s saw ideals of American exceptionalism emerge in regional plans by John Reber and others: Grand schemes for regional tidelands reclamation, economic development, military, and transportation apparatuses.

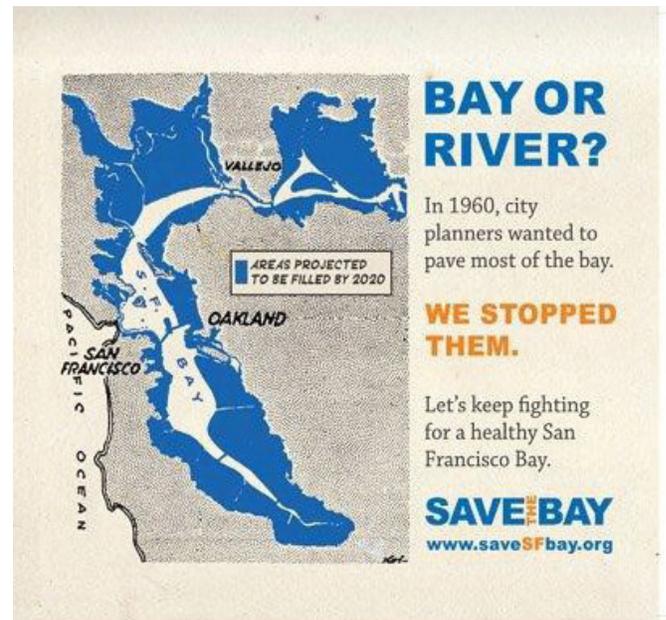
Slowly, throughout the 20th-century and with the prodding of higher-level governments or grassroots constituencies, Bay Area regional agencies and organizations developed with specific missions, powers, and goals.

Regional planning organizations of major importance are addressed in the section below. Other salient regional organizations that are not addressed in depth for this report include the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD, formed in 1923), the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD, formed in 1934), the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BART, founded in 1951), and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD, founded in 1957) (Association of Bay Area Governments, 1976).

## Bay Area Regional Governments

### Roles & Responsibilities

In the 1950s, shortly after the creation of business advocacy group the Bay Area Council (BAC), elements of BAC and other regional leaders began pushing for the creation of a San Francisco Bay management agency like New York and New Jersey's Port Authority (The Assembly Interim Fact-Finding Committee, 1951, pp. 15–18; Thibert, 2015). The proposed Golden Gate Authority (GGA), which would operate bridges, seaports, airports, and other transportation infrastructure, was to have no locally-elected officials (LEOs) on its corporate board. This element of the GGA proposal drew ire from municipalities and counties in the region; they were nervous to give up local control to a larger regional agency and pushed back.



Soon after, in 1960, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), a regional body with LEO board members, held its founding meeting. Some argue that ABAG was developed in opposition to the top-down regionalism proposed via the GGA, although there is also evidence suggesting this was not the case (Thibert, 2015, pp. 106–108). Initially a voluntary organization, ABAG was given real power in 1966 when California designated it a Council of Government (COG), thereby delegating it the ability to receive and distribute federal grants, including programs associated with the Housing and Urban Redevelopment Act of 1965.

ABAG, in addition to carrying out a number of non-statutory regional efforts, was eventually tasked with the California COG-specific duty of performing the Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA). The RHNA process, where ABAG distributes the region's projected housing needs amongst local governments' general plans, remains controversial today (State of California, 1980).

The Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) was awarded permanent status by the legislature in 1969 and won real power over development decisions surrounding the San Francisco Bay. The creation of the governmental agency was catalyzed by the concern of military, environmental, and business organizations over the rapid filling of the Bay with silt, dredge material, and 'reclaimed' land.

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In 1970, the California state legislature created MTC to provide the Bay Area with a new, federally-required Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), through which national transportation funding programs would be funneled. The legislature eschewed ABAG and created a new agency at least partially because of a major embezzlement scandal at the agency, two years prior (Thibert, 2015, p. 123). Today, MTC wields far more regional power than ABAG, given the body's control over billions of dollars of federal transportation funding.

The development of these major regional agencies and their responsibilities lays the groundwork for our understanding of themes for regional planning projects in the future. The first of these major regional planning efforts – Bay Vision 2020 - was an important stab at an ages-old problem in the Bay: regional agency siloing and limited power.

## **Summary: Bay Vision 2020**

Bay Vision 2020 was a regional planning vision document for the San Francisco Bay Area. Published in 1991, the pamphlet was a primarily non-governmental effort to help chart the Bay Area's future. The most important and controversial recommendation of the plan was the suggestion of a new, multifunctional regional government, named the Regional Commission.

The process for developing Bay Vision 2020 began in 1989 when both regional elected officials and the non-governmental Regional Issues Forum (a civic alliance of pro-business BAC and environmental advocacy group Greenbelt Alliance) combined efforts to address perceived worsening regional issues of sprawl and accompanying loss of open space, a lack of affordable housing, traffic congestion, fiscalization of land use, air pollution, and the economic deterioration of central cities.

Urban growth boundaries and densification of metro centers were a focus of the Vision, as was protection of air, water, and natural ecosystems. Bay Vision 2020 also called for single-occupancy vehicle trip reduction, affordable housing production, and, most

controversially, a consolidation of Bay Area governmental authorities. The plan proposed combining ABAG, MTC, and BAAQMD into a single "democratic, accountable, responsive" Regional Commission (Bay Vision 2020 Commission, 1991).

This Regional Commission would combine the responsibilities and authority of, at the very least, ABAG, MTC, and BAAQMD (other authorities might eventually be folded in), and wield new powers based on a Regional Plan. These new powers might have included disapproval of local land use decisions that were inconsistent with the Regional Plan, control of region-wide shared tax revenues, and final say on major regional development projects (Bay Vision 2020 Commission, 1991). The 35-40 board members of the Regional Commission were proposed to be full-time, paid positions made up of LEOs and other representatives. The Commission was to be funded by the cost savings achieved through the consolidation and streamlining of the subsumed authorities. After finalizing the plan in 1991, Bay Vision 2020 advocates worked quickly to push legislation through state government to make the proposed Regional Commission a reality. First heard in 1991 as SB 797, the bill to condense regional authorities in the Bay Area passed in the Assembly but was voted down in the 1992 Senate.

In 1993, the same bill was renumbered SB 153 and sponsored again by Republican Senator Rebecca Morgan. The bill was never brought to the floor for a vote, despite minor changes being made to the content. Bay Vision 2020 advocates developed another bill (friendly to ABAG, which was not in favor of consolidation), California Assembly Bill (AB) 398, but were unsuccessful in achieving consolidation of regional authorities (Lydon, 1993).

At the same time as the SB 797 and 153 failures, the Economic and Environmental Recovery Act (SB 929) was being heard in the Senate. This legislative package would have taken concrete steps towards allowing Bay Vision 2020's Regional Commission to wield real regional power. It did not, however, pass.

## Equity

Early Bay Area regional planning efforts were very much the domain of local civic and cultural elites. The BAC, which represented the upper echelons of the Bay Area business community, was particularly influential. The Council's roots are in Standard Oil, Bechtel, Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), Kaiser Industries, and Clorox. Today, names like Deloitte, Oliver Wyman, HSBC, PG&E, Comcast, Wells Fargo, and Intel populate the board of directors. This domination by cultures of privilege and power meant that issues of social equity were often attended to in a cursory manner.

Civic-minded elites outside of the business community did also wield influence - particularly in the formation of BCDC. Geographer Richard Walker writes of BCDC originators:

"One of the triumvirate was the wife of university president Clark Kerr, another was the wife of Board of Regents and Homestake Mining Company president Donald McLaughlin, and the third was married to an economics professor. They were well connected and used those contacts well, whether to lobby the governor at university functions or bring friends into the association." (2007, p. 114)

This elite influence was demographically representative of the Bay Area's diversity by the time of the Bay Vision Commission (the body that chaired the Bay Vision 2020 process). Bay Area regional planning scholar Peter Lydon notes, however, that commissioner diversity was "...very much attended to in a business-as-usual sort of way... It was understood that...they were not direct representatives of their community. They did not come from organizations from within their community" (Peter Lydon, personal communication, 2016).

Lydon, who personally observed Bay Vision Commission meetings as a UC Berkeley-affiliated researcher, describes their attitudes towards issues of social equity:

"They certainly didn't consciously and intentionally neglect it, and on the other hand, it was not the central business... These days, you'd say: 'Well, where's the equity community? Where's that world?' The answer was no, not in there. Because at that time there wasn't really leadership that could function in a regional debate at that level..." (2016)

Larry Orman, director of the Greenbelt Alliance at the time of Bay Vision, saw some place - however ineffective - for equity in the Bay Vision Commission's approach to addressing social equity:

"In the Bay Vision process there was a better attention to the equity issues and so housing equity and income equity started to get more of a purchase place. After Bay Vision didn't go anywhere, there was another effort to keep that conversation going - that had a much stronger equity frame - but actually it just went nowhere. (Larry Orman, personal communication, 2016)

Equity, in short, was not a process or outcome priority for early regional planning efforts.

## Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholder engagement in this era was limited primarily to the privileged, 'blue ribbon' elite of business and environmental interests. One of the key stakeholders in the regional government efforts from the late 1940s to 1990s was the Bay Area Council, whose first push for regional government came with its 1957 proposal for the GGA (Thibert, 2015, p. 106) and Orman considers them the primary interest group in the push for regional air quality improvement:

"Air quality gets dealt with right after WWII because the business community says we have problems with smog. We are gonna' lose our economic base if we have lousy air. And so you get the Bay Area Council really being the institution that pushes for the air district in 1948." (2016)

The power and influence of the BAC was unmatched by other regional interest groups until the 1960s,

when the area environmental movement developed around a rallying cry of “Save the Bay!” In 1969, environmentalists had won BCDC as a permanent regional government of their own and begun morphing their advocacy into the powerful Greenbelt Alliance.

Orman describes how the two powerful stakeholders in the Bay Area led the charge for Bay Vision 2020 in the mid-1980s:

“Greenbelt is engaged in a wide range of land use campaigns. And we think that there’s a chance to have a conversation. So we and the Bay Area Council each get a couple people; we sit down and talk to each other. And we say: ‘Look, let’s figure out some way to get reasonable regional governmental controls in place for just the most important regional issues.’ That ‘conversation’ becomes the Regional Issues Forum, which is a private conversation that engages about a dozen people over about two years and leads to the proposal for Bay Vision and a set of policy agreements between the Council and Greenbelt Alliance.” (2016)

Lydon, an observer to the only public stakeholder meetings, observed “three components” of important regional stakeholders: “1.) The regionalist elected officials...who are interested in regional matters,” including Santa Clara County Supervisor Rod Diridon and others, 2.) philanthropic foundations, led by Larry Orman and the “Greenbelt Alliance”, and 3.) “industry...the big economic players who are gathered in the Bay Area Council, led by Angelo Siracusa.” (2016). The major stakeholders in early Bay Area regional planning are clear. From the 1940s through the 1991 completion of Bay Vision 2020, the elites of BAC held enormous influence. The rising tide of environmentalism carried a new representative, albeit upper-class, stakeholder into the arena in the 1960s, and LEOs and other politicians carried weight at times.

## Implementation Mechanisms

Regional Planning in this era was aggressive in attempts to win real power and sought out clear

implementation mechanisms. BCDC was developed with the authority to issue or deny bayfill development permits. MTC was inaugurated with the power of programming funds through the RTP process. Even ABAG - considered by many the weakest of the regional organizations - wielded some power through the RHNA process.

Bay Vision 2020 and its aftermath were an attempt to legislate a regional government with significant land use controls, although it was unsuccessful. The Bay Vision 2020 plan was distinct in the history of Bay Area regional planning, however, because “it was formed around the objective of reforming government rather than that of tackling a perceptible regional issue or problem” (Thibert, 2015, p. 127). The nature of this vision was to legislate change.

## State Influence in Regional Planning

Regional planning in California has been largely subject to the cycles of tension between cities and counties (local jurisdictions) and state government. The current planning climate sees local control as both the dominant, and limiting, factor in carrying out regional planning goals. This priority of local control, which regional planning expert Elisa Barbour describes as being as “American as apple pie,” has historically characterized planning efforts. Regional planning has largely benefited from top-down decision making, both from state and federal legislation. This next section examines the influence of such legislation on the field.

The early 1990s represented a distinct shift in the field of regional planning in California. Until this period, MPO planning largely centered around mobility, specifically how to enhance transportation capacity. With the introduction of federal legislation that began to include environmental factors and assessment in its review of planning projects the paradigm shifted to a focus on accessibility, specifically looking at location efficiency and land-use.

The introduction of the 1991 federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and the 1990 Clean Air Act assisted in this paradigm

transformation. ISTEA was the first major federal transportation legislation in the wake of the Federal Highway Act. Passage of ISTEA resulted in greater planning capacity for MPOs nationwide by allocating a portion of federal transportation funding directly to MPOs instead of through the state, as was previously done (Gage, 134). In the Bay Area, this resulted in an increased allocation of block grant funding to MTC and also created a new provision that required all projects to be filtered through another new bout of top-down legislation, the Clean Air Act. The Clean Air Act provided for the flexible use of ISTEA funds by mandating improvements in air quality through transportation congestion reduction (Gage, 138). MPOs were required to include potential projects that would have an impact on reducing air quality. MPOs were provided additional authority by California legislation. In 1997, the State legislature adopted Senate Bill 45 (SB 45), which devolved planning and programmatic decision-making from the State to MPOs. This shift further legitimized MPO autonomy in California and differed from other states, which typically guard their own transportation funds much more jealously (Barbour, personal interview 2016). MTC is able to take this autonomy even further due to the fact that the institution receives additional revenue through bridge tolls. MTC can then administer these funds directly without the conditions imposed through ISTEA and the Clean Air Act. Pivoting to an accessibility paradigm was seen by MPOs as a way to address these new legislative standards that focused on environmental integrity. By re-coupling land-use and transportation, a bridge was applied that solved the previous fractured environment of regional planning and improved effectiveness in terms of sustainability. This accessibility paradigm is further explored in our next section.

## **Smart Growth Paradigm: 1998 – 2008** **Introduction**

From 1998 to 2008, the United States saw the rise of the 'Smart Growth' planning paradigm. This new planning approach arose in direct response to decades of low-density, auto-centric development producing "profound changes" in the urban landscape (Daniels, 2001, p. 272). Typical smart growth

strategies include public-private approaches to promote denser development that is more economically feasible to service, consumes less land, preserves the environment, and creates more aesthetically-pleasing built environments when compared to sprawl. For the Bay Area, this period also represented a distinct transition time for regional planning. It was the time frame where the two dominant regional planning agencies, ABAG and MTC, came together to unite land-use and transportation policy in a regionally unprecedented effort to address projected population growth. The union, however, did not form naturally. Tension between both ABAG and MTC - along with strong sentiments of localism amongst their member jurisdictions - created a tense environment that produced strong-arm tactics from local community coalitions pushing for more comprehensive planning efforts.

## **Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint**

Smart Growth Strategy Regional Livability Footprint Project

Shaping the Future of the Nine-County Bay Area



Final Report  
October 2002

In 1998, strong organizing efforts on behalf of community groups like Urban Habitat ultimately forced inter-agency cooperation between MTC and ABAG. Community groups had obtained a draft version of MTC's 1998 RTP and were pushing for MTC to include an alternative growth scenario in the plan, given the plan's dire forecast of intense transportation congestion growth. The community groups publicized the draft plan and held a well-attended press conference outside MTC headquarters, pressuring the agency into providing formal comment on the plan to acknowledge community concerns. It worked: MTC Commissioners made public comments that

concrete steps needed to be taken to address the abysmal forecasts. MTC further promised to adopt a smart growth process in its next RTP, thereby officially considering the transportation effects of ABAG's alternative land use strategies.

The inclusion of a land use strategy in the RTP was a giant step forward for regional planning in the Bay Area. Previously, MTC and ABAG had viewed one another as distinctly separate entities, working on mutually exclusive topics and had coordinated little, if at all (Cohen, 2016). The political dominance of localism was prominent and according to one interviewee, MTC could be characterized as an agency that was "all about politics and not about good ideas," with deference to local jurisdictional preferences.

## Stakeholder Involvement

In 2002, these efforts at coordination coalesced into the Sustainable Growth Strategy-Regional Livability Footprint, a stakeholder-rich visioning document that fed directly into MTC's 2004 RTP. Led by the region's five dominant planning agencies (ABAG, MTC, BAAQMD, BCDC, and RWQCB) the SGS-RLF was a document produced jointly amongst the regional agencies and the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development (BAASD, later Sustainable Communities). The Alliance was a multi-stakeholder coalition of over 40 different organizations and agencies. It is viewed by TransForm Executive Director Cohen as a business-friendly coalition and somewhat problematic advocacy tool, due to its size (2016). While more community-oriented organizations, like TransForm and Local Cities for Climate Action, were involved as stakeholder groups, BAASD's participation was viewed by government more as a formality than as a necessity for creating good planning, according to observer Peter Lydon (2016). This is largely because many BAASD members were involved very loosely and the general sign on of the group at large, versus more intimate interactions with its many members, was preferred.

This process-oriented view of equitable stakeholder inclusion continued into the formal SGS- RLF process. Agencies consolidated the feedback gathered

at numerous public workshops held across the region between 2001 and 2002, producing three different planning alternatives: the Central City alternative, the Network of Neighborhoods alternative, and the Smarter Suburb alternative. The density and location of development plans in the alternate scenarios were varied, with the Central City version the most progressive and the Smarter Suburb the least. Regional agencies then held additional public workshops where attendees voted on their preferred alternative. The Network of Neighborhoods alternative won; It called for denser development in urban cores (though less dense than the Central City alternative) and for more compact, mixed-use development along rail corridors in existing communities.

Opinions on this this alternatives process are mixed. Former ABAG chief economist Paul Fassinger described the process as a method used to ensure community concerns were addressed, while Stuart Cohen called it a groundbreaking tool for planners (2016; 2016). The tactic was so new, in fact, the EPA was unsure how to approach the model and if they could approve the resultant RTP. EPA approval was eventually gained with the stipulation that the agency be given regional growth pattern updates every two years.

The SGS-RLF reflects many of the priorities touted by the smart growth paradigm and describes smart growth itself as a strategy that "seeks to revitalize the already-built environment and...foster efficient development at the edges of the region, with the goal of creating more livable communities" (Association of Bay Area Governments, 2002, p. 13).

The SGS-RLF puts many of its smart growth goals into a sustainability paradigm. At this time, the collective conception of sustainability was evolving but still primarily defined in an environmental context (e.g. air quality and health impacts per Cohen)(2016). The term had not yet become inclusive of the social component.

## Equity

Between 1999 and 2008, the concept of equity was still largely viewed as a process outcome, a desirable goal that would be a result of the creation of the plan rather than an integral part of the designing and vetting the plan itself. In the early years of this period (1997-'98), equity was often defined as access, primarily to transportation, affordable housing, and employment. Where equity is mentioned in the SGS-RLF, it is similarly described as an outcome that would "ensure that people of all income levels have access," to the aforementioned services (Association of Bay Area Governments, 2002, p. 4).

At the time of the SGS-RLF, PolicyLink's Victor Rubin - who was working as the plan's 'equity analyst' - had asked for a contemporary equity analysis from UC Berkeley students. The document isn't mentioned in the actual report, although Rubin and the students received an award from the Congress of New Urbanism for their work. The analysis otherwise examines the SGS-RLF's three alternative scenarios and evaluates outcomes for five communities in the region. The report also analyzes each scenario through an equity outcome lens, determining if income and access to skillset-appropriate employment opportunities would be improved for existing residents.

According to Cohen, anytime a full consensus approach is used in a decision-making process it can result in a watered-down approach, particularly as it relates to equity (2016). Cohen pointed out that because the process of tying investment explicitly to planned projects was extremely new and politically progressive, regional agencies didn't want to push the envelope on equity and unnecessarily pit jurisdictions against one another (2016). Because equity was not a universally-defined concept, the potentially difficult process of reaching a consensus on the subject was avoided for the time being. The role of equity, however, would eventually evolve and take on a larger, more socially-oriented position that acknowledged inequality up front and attempted to incorporate diverse needs within a community as part of the process, rather than as an outcome.

## Implementation Mechanisms

The SGS-RLF helped initiate a new approach to regional planning, empowering both ABAG and MTC to a new era where the threat of localism didn't push the two agencies into a corner of good intentions with little ability to implement. After 2002, the start of the Smart Growth era, tying federal funding to local growth approvals became a central bargaining tool for the regional agencies. The RTP was a process that had previously involved little planning but the 2004 RTP helped launch a new advocacy tool for Bay Area regional planning and represented the beginning of the end of sprawl subsidies.

New programs emerged in the post-2002 planning landscape, directly tying money to how localities projected their growth. One of the initial important programs was FOCUS. FOCUS was an incentive-based development and conservation strategy led by MTC that was a foundational precursor to Plan Bay Area's Priority Development Areas (PDAs). The program provided funds to projects located within FOCUS incentive areas. Though FOCUS lacked some of the tougher funding connections of modern programs, Stuart Cohen describes it as helping to begin a seemingly-innocuous process of planning transformation that "helped avoid rebellion" among local governments, largely because it was a voluntary standalone incentive program for localities (2016).

MTC's 2005 Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) program is another example of an early effort to tie investment directly to planning. This TOD program established housing unit minimum thresholds for corridors slated for transportation improvements and/or expansion through a formal resolution (Resolution 3434). Qualifying development projects could apply to MTC for funding directly or to help develop station-area plans for neighborhood corridors. By conditioning regional funds on smarter development patterns, regional agencies were able to set the stage for a general, if begrudging, acceptance that regional planning was a legitimate form of governance and was here to stay.

## SB 375: Catalyst for Plan Bay Area

California AB 32, which passed in 2006, requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) to 1990 levels by 2020. From a transportation and land use perspective, however, AB 32 was a little vague. Although approximately 40% of California's GHGs are generated by cars and light trucks, the bill did not provide a concrete mechanism to address the connection between land use and transportation (Yang, McCollum, McCarthy, & Leighty, 2009).

SB 375, which passed two years later, attempts to address this connection by reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) through coordinated land use and transportation decisions. SB 375 calls on the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to establish GHG reduction targets for each MPO. To reach these reduction targets, MPOs are required to produce an SCS that demonstrates how the region reduce VMT. The SCS is developed in tandem with the RTP and includes a regional emissions target, a land use plan for more compact development, and CEQA incentives to encourage denser development.

SB 375 aligns three previously siloed planning processes under the SCS:

1. **Transportation planning and funding:** In the Bay Area, MTC is responsible for adopting an RTP, which lays out regional transportation investments for a 25 or 30 year timeline. In 2009, the last RTP was adopted as Transportation 2035.
2. **Regional land use planning:** Although not required by federal or state law, many MPOs (MTC included) were already creating blueprint land use models to feed forecasts and other planning processes. SB 375 took this process to the next level by requiring MPOs to produce a land use scenario in their SCS that accommodates all forecasted growth in such a way that the region could reach its mandated GHG reduction targets.
3. **RHNA:** The RHNA process takes Department of Finance demographic projections for housing needs and assigns them to each region in Cali-

fornia. The COGs in each region then divide this regional projection into income categories and allocate them to jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction then demonstrates, in its General Plan housing element, how it will accommodate its allocation. SB 375 changes the RHNA process by:

- Adjusting the RHNA planning horizon and housing element to eight years, to match the horizon for GHG reduction and SCS preparation.
- Establishing a three-year deadline for jurisdictions to re-zone land consistent with their housing elements, if needed to accommodate their RHNA allocation.
- Requiring jurisdictions that do not adopt their housing element on time to update their housing element every four years instead of every eight.

A critical aspect of this SB 375-induced consolidation of planning processes is the mandated internal consistency. For example, RHNA allocations and transportation investments must be consistent with the geographic distribution of housing and employment assumed in the land use scenario. This requirement forces decision-making to consider factors that may not have been considered before SB 375.

It is important to note that SB 375 does not supersede local land use authority. Cities still have sole power to approve projects, provided they do not violate existing state laws (e.g. not demonstrating an ability to accommodate their RHNA allocation). SB 375 does, however, provide incentives for projects deemed 'consistent' with the SCS. The primary SB 375 incentive is CEQA streamlining: If a residential or mixed-use project demonstrates 'consistency', it is not required to undergo the costly process of documenting growth-inducing impacts, climate change impacts, or alternatives that address auto effects in its EIR. If certain other requirements are met, projects may be eligible for a full CEQA exemption, meaning even less environmental review is required.

## Plan Bay Area

Plan Bay Area is an RTP and land use blueprint plan jointly adopted by MTC and ABAG. The 158-page plan (and 1,300-page EIR) acts as the region's first SCS, establishing transportation investments and land use priorities in the Bay Area until 2040. The core difference between Plan Bay Area and previous regional planning efforts (such as SGS-RLF) is the mandate of SB 375. To meet the required GHG reduction targets of SB 375, Plan Bay Area's adopted land use scenario directs more future development



to existing communities close to public transit, jobs, schools, shopping, parks, recreation, and other amenities.

While Plan Bay Area meets federal requirements as an RTP and state requirements as an SCS, the document also goes beyond these requirements and provides a comprehensive regional vision for transportation and land use. To compare land use and transportation investment scenarios, Plan Bay Area establishes ten quantified performance targets, each of which takes aim at a distinct planning goal. This quantification of outcomes is a critical part of Plan Bay Area and represents an evolution in the regional planning process.

Stuart Cohen attributes this quantification to better modeling methods, greater political will and the introduction of GHG reduction targets as a required metric (2016). To some, Plan Bay Area isn't only promoting generally-accepted ideas of good planning - it is demonstrating how the included policies will achieve the outcomes the region is looking for. To some extent, this approach has helped further legitimize the regional planning process. The first two performance targets represent requirements under

SB 375 and the other eight are voluntary targets. Table 1 describes each of the adopted Plan Bay Area performance targets.

## Equity

Plan Bay Area treats equity like any of its other outcomes: As a performance metric. However, as David Ory, a principal planner and modeler at MTC, puts it, "equity outcomes are often local in nature and can be conflicting at the regional scale" (2016). It was a challenge for MTC and ABAG to develop equity targets that best represented the goals of the entire region. To this end, regional agencies worked with key regional equity stakeholders, public agency staff, and community representatives to identify the boundaries of communities of concern (areas with higher than average concentrations of socioeconomically disadvantaged or vulnerable populations). These stakeholders also helped identify Bay Area equity issues in the context of future growth, which guided the creation of the five equity performance targets shown below, in Table 2. The scenarios were evaluated based on these metrics at both the regional scale and within communities of concern.

Unlike previous planning efforts, which focused entirely on access to opportunity and local pollution, these metrics place an emphasis on housing and transportation affordability. The point of these metrics was to realistically evaluate whether the benefits and burdens of Plan Bay Area were shared equitably among all residents. These metrics were included as part of a supplemental Equity Analysis Report and were integrated into the scenario performance analysis to help inform selection of the preferred scenario.

In addition to scenario-level equity assessment, Plan Bay Area also included a project-level equity assessment for each individual transportation investment included in the plan. Although MTC had experimented with this in the 2009 RTP, Plan Bay Area's project-level approach is, in the words of Stuart Cohen, "groundbreaking" (2016). Over 900 transportation projects in the plan were evaluated with a rigorous cost-benefit analysis and equity assessment. To Co-

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hen, the most revolutionary aspect of this approach was the use of the project-level performance assessment “to cut individual projects in or out of the list of transportation investments” (2016).

scenarios, it formally recommended one scenario as the proposed plan in the Draft EIR. At this point, two coalitions approached MTC, each asking for alternative scenarios.

**Table 1: Plan Bay Area Performance Targets**

Goal		Performance Target
<b>Required</b>		
Climate Protection	<b>1</b>	Reduce per-capita CO2 emissions from cars and light-duty trucks by 15% (statutory requirement is for year 2035, per SB 375).
Adequate Housing	<b>2</b>	House 100% of the region’s projected growth (from a 2010 baseline year) by income level without displacing current low-income residents (statutory requirement, per SB 375).
<b>Voluntary</b>		
Healthy & Safe Communities	<b>3</b>	Reduce premature deaths from exposure to particulate emissions:
	<b>4</b>	Reduce by 50% the number of injuries and fatalities from all collisions (including bike and pedestrian).
	<b>5</b>	Increase the average daily time walking or biking per person for transportation by 70% (for an average of 15 minutes per person per day).
Open Space & Agricultural Land	<b>6</b>	Direct all non-agricultural development within the urban footprint (existing urban development and urban growth boundaries).
Equitable Access	<b>7</b>	Decrease by 10% (to 56% from 66%) the share of low-income and lower-middle income residents’ household income consumed by transportation and housing.
Economic Vitality	<b>8</b>	Increase gross regional product (GRP) by 110% - an average annual growth rate of approximately 2% (in current dollars).
Transportation System Effectiveness	<b>9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase non-auto mode share by 10% (to 26% of trips).</li> <li>● Decrease automobile VMT per capita by 10%.</li> </ul>
	<b>10</b>	Maintain the transportation system in a state of good repair: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase local road pavement condition index (PCI) to 75 or better.</li> <li>● Decrease distressed lane-miles of state highways to less than 10% of total lane-miles.</li> <li>● Reduce share of transit assets past useful life to 0%.</li> </ul>

*Source: (Association of Bay Area Governments & Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 2013)*

## Stakeholder Involvement

The stakeholder involvement in Plan Bay Area was more robust than any plan before it. In addition to community meetings and outreach, the Plan Bay Area process included advocacy groups in the development of alternatives for the EIR. After staff analyzed five different land use and transportation

The first group, which included Public Advocates, Urban Habitat, and TransForm, created the Environment, Equity, and Jobs (EEJ) Alternative. This alternative took many of the environmental and equity initiatives of the proposed plan one step further. The alternative included no additional roadway capacity, a VMT tax to fund expanded transit service, and assumed extensive upzoning of low-density commercial property in wealthy neighborhoods.

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A second group of primarily business advocates created an alternative called Enhanced Network of Communities, which increased the assumed number of housing units in the region as a whole. Both groups worked with MTC’s David Ory to translate their visions into model-friendly alternatives. Ory described the collaboration as “constructive” and a learning experience for both parties, although neither alternative received any final votes from the MTC Board (2016).

these groups have a right to pursue litigation - despite the cost to taxpayers - as a way to push their issues in the public planning process (2016). He did express concern that the high price of entry into this “second tier” of advocacy could limit participation from individuals and groups lacking the requisite financial resources (Ory, 2016).

**Table 2: Plan Bay Area Equity Performance Targets**

Goal		Performance Target
1	Housing & Transportation Affordability	% of income spent on housing and transportation by low-income households.
2	Potential for Displacement	% of rent-burdened households in high-growth areas.
3	Healthy Communities	Average daily VMT per populated square mile within 1,000 feet of heavily used roadways.
4	Access to Jobs	Average travel time in minutes for commute trips.
5	Equitable Mobility	Average travel time in minutes for non-work-based trips.

*Source: (Association of Bay Area Governments & Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 2013)*

Local jurisdictions were also crucial stakeholders in the regional planning process. ABAG included cities early in the planning process by soliciting input from municipal governments in forming boundaries for PDAs (areas of infill development that are well-served by transit). Lacking land use authority, ABAG saw bringing local jurisdictions on board early as critical for implementing the goals of Plan Bay Area. In the words of Ory, the PDA planning process was a compromise between a “bottom-up mentality” and a “recognition on the part of the state that local control has failed” (2016).

Litigation was another major avenue for stakeholder participation in the Plan Bay Area process. The plan was eventually sued by four different groups: Building Industry Association, Post-Sustainability Institute, Bay Area Citizens and Communities for a Better Environment, and the Sierra Club. Ory described the experience of being sued as “frustrating and antagonistic, but ultimately healthy” (2016). In Ory’s view,

### Implementation Mechanisms

Implementing regional plans is a challenging endeavor in the current political climate and regulatory framework. SB 375 adds ambitious goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions through land use changes, but offers little in the way of funding or concrete strategies for reaching those goals. In some ways, the implementation mechanisms in the SB 375 era are merely an extension of what was started in the smart growth era. That being said, MTC/ABAG make good use of traditional transportation funding strategies, CEQA streamlining incentives created by SB 375, and other implementation mechanisms unique to the Bay Area. One example of this initiative is the 2008 joint ABAG-MTC FOCUS program to incentivize development in existing communities well-served by transit. Stuart Cohen described this program as having “set the stage” for Plan Bay Area’s PDAs (2016). The PDA concept is important: Plan Bay Area envisions 80% of

new housing built within these development areas. Although Plan Bay Area can't force jurisdictions to approve projects, MTC can incentivize them through funding for planning and transportation projects within the PDAs.

**Transportation funding:** The transportation investments included in Plan Bay Area support the land use strategy in the SCS by focusing the vast majority of MTC's discretionary funds towards maintaining and improving the existing transit and road system. **CEQA streamlining:** Under SB 375, projects qualify for CEQA streamlining if they are deemed "consistent" with land use designations, employment distribution densities, building space intensities, and applicable policies in the SCS. Projects can also win CEQA relief if considered a residential/mixed-use residential project or a transit priority project (TPP). These terms have specific definitions.

**Grant programs:** Stuart Cohen notes the "growing importance and funding of programs as opposed to projects" as a peculiar trend in Bay Area regional planning (2016). In our Smart Growth Era, MTC began tying funding to certain types of land use. In short, the agency realized it could leverage their discretionary power over transportation funding to influence land use decisions. This began with policies and programs like FOCUS, the Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing (TOAH) Fund, and the Transportation for Livable Communities Grant. In the SB 375 Era, MTC created the One Bay Area Grant (OBAG) program to consolidate many of these programs and provide a powerful, overarching mechanism for implementing Plan Bay Area's land use goals. OBAG directs \$14.6 billion and accounts for 23% of discretionary investments over the life of the plan. The program requires Congestion Management Agencies (CMAs) to develop PDA investment and growth strategies for each county. In order to receive OBAG funds, CMAs must promise to direct a certain percentage of those funds to PDAs. Additionally, if a jurisdiction is to receive an OBAG grant, its general plan must comply with the California Complete Streets Act of 2008 and must demonstrate compliance with the RHNA.

The formula for distribution of OBAG funds to each county is based on population (50%), past housing production (12.5%), past low-income housing production (12.5%), total RHNA commitments (12.5%), and low-income RHNA commitments (12.5%). In this way, OBAG is ostensibly able to use regional transportation dollars to both invest in PDAs and encourage sustainable, equitable development.

In addition to the CMA-administered funds, OBAG directly supports PDAs through TOAH and a PDA Planning Program. TOAH helps finance affordable housing in PDAs through housing acquisition, rehabilitation, and land banking. The PDA Planning Program provides funds to cities and counties to create planning documents that help facilitate growth in city centers and near transit stations.

## **The Sustainable Communities Initiative**

HUD's Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) was approved by Congress in 2010 and renewed in 2011 for a total of \$250 million in appropriated funding. SCI was a grant program formed out of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an interagency collaboration between HUD, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Unique in scope, SCI supported planning efforts in 143 regions across the country with the intention of fostering cross-sector, cross-jurisdictional planning processes that address social, environmental, and economic challenges. More specifically, 74 regional grants were awarded to tackle interconnected issues of economic competitiveness, community revitalization, climate change, environmental damage, and public health - all in an inclusive process emphasizing social equity and access to opportunity. Regions were organized as consortia of public, nonprofit, and private sector entities and were required to consider and coordinate strategies across historically 'silos' sectors, such as housing, transportation, water and energy infrastructure, and land use planning. Other requirements for grantees included funding matches, community engagement commitments, performance tracking, and demonstrated alignment with other HUD, DOT, and EPA programs and policies.

The managing office for the program, HUD's Office of Economic Resilience, received four and a half times the amount of funding available in requests. Two-thirds of eligible metropolitan regions across the country applied to the first round of the program. Clearly, there was a hunger for this type of program. A former HUD employee highlighted the interest at HUD in taking SCI and the office it came from, the Office of Economic Resilience, from being "a boutique program to a way of doing businesses." But with major political turnover around this time, the Office of Economic Resilience became an easy target to zero out and a continuing resolution effectively ended all advocacy efforts to keep the SCI program alive after the second round of grants were distributed.

## The Regional Prosperity Plan

After unsuccessfully applying to the first round of SCI funding, the San Francisco Bay Area received \$5 million from HUD under the second round of the SCI program. The three-year initiative, known as the Regional Prosperity Plan (RPP), was led by MTC in partnership with ABAG. The funds were administered locally from 2012-2014.

The RPP organizational structure was originally intended to function with one high-level steering committee and two subcommittees: the Economic Prosperity Working Group and the Housing Working Group. Both subcommittees were meant to focus their work on addressing income inequality and other disparities in the region's poorest communities. By the time funding was in place, a third working group, the Equity Collaborative, had been incorporated. The original RPP grant application identified four main areas of focus: limited opportunities for lower-income workers, unaffordability of housing for the regional workforce, spatial mismatch between housing and jobs, and gentrification and displacement pressure. To address these needs, the RPP focused on developing an Economic Prosperity Strategy to understand and expand opportunities for low- and moderate-income individuals. The RPP also focused on supporting and financing community-based organization-led pilot projects aimed at addressing economic and housing disparities.

## Stakeholder Involvement

A major tenet of HUD's SCI program was to invest in the creation of nontraditional partnerships and focus on integration and coordination of work across sectors that historically have not successfully collaborated. In the Bay Area, the RPP proved most successful at engaging CBOs and local governments and showed less success at engaging the business community.

**CBOs:** A strategic use of funding helped the RPP meaningfully engage with CBOs and non-profits throughout the SCI process. Through the working groups, the RPP gave out almost \$3 million in sub-grants for pilot projects, generally led by CBOs. Sub-grantees were then required to attend regular meetings to report on project progress, creating opportunities for relationship building and information sharing. This success was exemplified by the enhanced connections gained among local CBOs. Many interviewees mentioned that their organizations were able to establish relationships with individuals and entities that had previously been either unaware or not involved with the community engagement work being done on the ground.

Additionally, the RPP directly resourced participation in the consortia through stipends to working group leadership. These stipends provided the necessary resources for some organizations to be involved who otherwise would not have had the capacity.

According to the ICF evaluation report of the RPP, the process "created a wealth of new partnerships, including many that broke down silos." In their survey of more than 35 RPP stakeholders, 37% of respondents expected to increase their collaboration with other organizations and 29% planned to collaborate with organizations outside of their own sector more frequently.

**Business Community:** The business community was largely absent from the regional planning process in the Bay Area. The Bay Area Council (BAC) is a business-sponsored, public policy advocacy organization that could have served the role of large business liai-

son, and did initially engage in the process. However, according to BAC, the organization had concerns with policies around economic security being added late in the engagement process and ultimately decided to break off their engagement in the RPP as a result. The small business voice appeared absent from the process at a regional scale, but may have been engaged with local pilot projects. Other consortium members, particularly those from CBO groups, expressed frustration with the business community's lack of willingness to collaborate.

**Jurisdictional Dynamics:** Many interviewees noted the tensions that exist between the urban core and the more suburban entities. But rather than competing or fighting with each other, a local elected official commented "the heated conversations within the steering committee in the various convenings I was in were healthy and respectful."

One major challenge that arose from cross-jurisdictional collaboration was identifying and pursuing issues and strategies that would apply to the priorities of both core cities and more suburban jurisdictions. For example, "in the inner core, we're talking about more bus lines, more service on existing bus routes, connecting last mile connections between transit hubs and job centers" but in Contra Costa County, they're talking "about Uber, and shuttle apps and rideshare mobile apps that would help with rideshares, those kinds of strategies which are much more diffuse. We tried to hear those ideas and incorporate them, but they're different" (CBO Representative).

A CBO member from the South Bay noted that even where these tensions were felt between the core cities and the more outer ring suburbs such as Antioch, Vallejo, and Benicia – particularly around economic development - the conversations about how to address broad needs are taking place and are considered an important part of future plans. "It's not like [outer rim cities] were left out of the process, they were engaged, they weren't always happy with all of the recommendations and we feel that tension in an ongoing way as we work on the next round of Plan Bay Area."

Some officials explained ways in which outlying jurisdictions may have benefited from the increased collaboration with the core cities, like the building of new technical tools for suburban jurisdictions with traditionally less planning capacity, and the ability to learn from the core cities about how to address issues (such as gentrification and displacement), which may be more applicable to them as they continue to grow. While not all suburban jurisdictions chose to actively participate in the RPP process, those that did seem to have benefitted.

Broadly, the stakeholder engagement under SCI was described as a step forward from the approach under Plan Bay Area:

"My sense is that we had a lot more people engaged through the SCI than we did in PLAN Bay Area. So just as a contrast, in the last round of PLAN Bay Area, there were a series of outreach meetings all around the Bay Area... those kinds of engagements do not ask what matters most to you, so it's driven by an agenda and gets feedback to an agenda. Public feedback, but that's not the same as asking the public what they want. I think the SCI process did more of that, asked what does your community care about, what in your community is working, could we learn from your community for the purposes of sharing that in different parts of the region. I think that is a different quality of community engagement." (CBO Representative)

## Equity

Much like under Plan Bay Area, the RPP's equity focus centered around housing affordability, and to a lesser extent, transportation affordability. Additionally the RPP considered economic opportunities for low-wage workers as a major equity metric. But while issues of economic opportunity for low-wage workers and affordable housing were central to MTC's SCI application, an equity-specific workgroup did not emerge until after the consortium's initial formation. Even then, the exact charge of the equity working group was not always clear, even to some of its participants:

“That was really confusing, I have to say. I chaired that group and I was like, I don’t know what we’re supposed to do here. I don’t think I understood fully that it was an add-on, because people recognized equity wasn’t really being addressed well enough through the other lenses...I didn’t realize until way later that it was a group that had been added on because of this critique.” (Government Representative) Some CBOs argued that equity had not historically been a key component of MTC’s work, and if the goal of SCI was to truly advance regional equity, MTC should never have been in the position of leading the charge. Along these lines, some CBOs lamented that MTC did not embrace equity-focused organizations more fully in the proposal and implementation of the grant, resulting in an inadequate incorporation of equity issues. “My sense of it was that, you know, it was never an intention of the regional agency at the highest level to take seriously that this was a process that was going to produce a shift in terms of how the regional agency thought, acted, reacted, and invested in equity” (CBO representative). However, others indicated that some progress was made. At the very least, as noted above, the grant engaged MTC and other agencies in a common conversation around equity.

“I think equity for whatever reason is a hard topic to talk about. I think what one of the really huge parts of the grant is that it created a formal space and legitimacy through which this conversation could occur...It allowed the conversation to occur, and it allowed for equity to become an increasing core component of what agencies are either talking about or are going to be implementing. MTC is beginning to have that as a key component...” (Regional Agency Representative)

But through these conversations a commonly shared understanding of equity did not emerge. While participants appreciated the space created to discuss equity issues, most interviewees were not optimistic about motivating a meaningful shift in the dialogue. According to several participants from community-based organizations, much of the emphasis on equity was placed on residential displacement and improving conditions for low-wage workers, with

specific references to race and ethnicity lacking in the conversation. As one foundation representative observed, “If you sit down and listen to the discussions people are having about housing, jobs, or economic development, there’s very little discussion around race.” This speaks to a potential narrowness in the scope of equity conversations, and a reticence among some in the Bay Area to confront race head on.

## Implementation Mechanisms

In spite of receiving what technically was an implementation grant from HUD, the three year \$5 million program lacked mechanisms for long-term implementation. Once the funding ran out, MTC was unable to incentivize sustained involvement from CBOs and outlying jurisdictions and did not successfully obtain outside funding to maintain an official table for SCI-inspired conversations. And in spite of funding \$3 million in interesting and innovative pilot projects, this work has not yet been scaled up to the regional level. The RPP did release an Action Plan in June of 2015 for implementing strategies identified during the SCI process. While this plan does identify a myriad of strategies, actions, and potential partners, the route to implementation remains unclear. Most strategies require coordination among many diverse partners to implement and this will require more than the year between grant closeout and this review to come to fruition.

There do appear to be other lasting impacts and signs of institutionalization of the SCI work however: “There are some really hopeful signs. MTC is now considering a new 10 million dollar investment in affordable homes near transit...A housing preservation fund coming out of MTC, that could be a great step forward. There’s the second round of OBAG, and in a couple months there will be more talk about-staff proposal on how to incorporate housing affordability and displacement in criteria in OBAG- \$350 million over five years to reward regions that are growing in sustainable and equitable ways.” (Regional Planning Agency Representative)

Funding so many individual projects through the RPP may be seen as a step away from recent trends in Bay Area regional grant programming. However any lessons that can be drawn from those pilot projects and incorporated into MTC's larger funding structures, such as OBAG and TOAH would the earlier idea that MTC is shifting towards funding programs instead of projects.

While some interviewees feel that MTC commissioners are still not convinced that there are issues of equity that the agency needs to address, participating in this grant has helped CBOs develop a more direct relationship with MTC. These groups now have a better understanding of how they can push the agency to focus implementation efforts around equity in the future.

"So now we're in a moment where many more of the local equity groups are aware of the regional agencies...we are aware of what they do. We are aware of who they are. We are aware of where they're located. We understand their programs, their policies, etc. and so that is shifting and so as we understand that then we're able to do a better job sharing that kind of information with the folks who are impacted by the policies and decisions of the regional agencies. So we are now in a new period where there's beginning to be a much more of a direct engagement..." (CBO Representative)

Ultimately, the RPP is only one piece of the work that feeds into MTC's much larger Plan Bay Area. The next update to Plan Bay Area has already kicked-off in advance of a scheduled 2017 adoption. The real test of SCI implementation will come during this round of One Bay Area planning. It remains to be seen whether and how MTC will adopt the ideas and conversations that developed during the SCI process into their larger work. At least some of the interviewees are hopeful about SCI's lasting impacts: "I think that... the grant changes the way we have this conversation in the planning processes in the next round of how Plan Bay Area is playing out. And that's pretty important I think to all of us" (CBO Representative)

## Conclusion

The San Francisco Bay Area, like other regions, is continuously evolving in its approach to regional planning. For decades, the region has struggled to prepare for increased growth while maintaining the integrity and sustainability of its natural environment. Emerging from a tangle of public and private stakeholders in the mid-twentieth century, two agencies - ABAG and MTC - have established their dominance in the region's contemporary regional planning, despite wielding limited land use authority. Despite their prominence, both agencies have struggled with tension between themselves and amongst local jurisdictions that reject regional authority.

Despite this friction, progress in regional planning is occurring. Regional conceptions and approaches to equity, stakeholder involvement, and implementation mechanisms have evolved over time. Equity has come to be viewed as an upfront necessity in a good planning process, rather than as a hoped for outcome. Stakeholder involvement has expanded to include voices outside traditional planning spheres, as evidenced in the SB 375 process. It can also be argued that regional planning agencies (e.g. MTC) have made progress toward being able to tie financial incentives to actual implementation of plans - a shift from where this narrative starts in the mid twentieth century. In the late 1990s, ABAG and MTC began tying regional transportation planning to land use decisions by creating incentive grant programs for land use decisions that matched their regional plans. These evolutions, amongst others, provide context for what occurred with the Bay Area's SCI grant.

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