

January 7, 2016

MTC Planning Committee  
ABAG Administrative Committee  
101 Eighth Street  
Oakland, CA 94607

**RE: MTC-ABAG Merger Study**

Dear MTC and ABAG Commissioners:

We write today to share our perspectives on the upcoming Merger Study and Merger Implementation Plan.

We are pleased that MTC and ABAG are undertaking this process and believe it provides a unique opportunity to improve regional planning and better address the critical interrelated challenges facing our region. For years, our organizations have believed that the Bay Area would benefit from better integration of MTC and ABAG—including a merger of the two agencies—to more effectively address these challenges.

The issues of housing, transportation, conservation of natural and agricultural landscapes, social equity, and economic development are all essential to planning for a vibrant, sustainable region that improves the health, well-being and economic security of all Bay Area residents. The Bay Area needs a regional governance structure capable of effectively engaging communities and stakeholders across the region in reaching integrated solutions to these multiple issues to ensure the best future for our region. Emerging topics, including climate change resilience, sustainable water management, displacement, and the retention and expansion of middle wage jobs, also deserve a robust, coordinated regional response.

We recognize that MTC and ABAG have been increasingly attentive to the intersection of these issues and appreciate the progress that both agencies have made to foster greater regional collaboration. Now, the Bay Area has the chance to build on this progress by conducting a merger study that thoughtfully determines the appropriate role for a new regional planning agency, integrates the public in a transparent and inclusive process, and leads to meaningful change.

To ensure that these efforts are successful, we offer the following:

- 1. Proposed Guiding Principles for a New Regional Agency***
- 2. Process Recommendations for the Merger Study***

The first document lays out some of the principles that should guide the study of options for a new regional planning agency and also serve as a yardstick to assess the extent to which each proposed option will meet the region's needs for effective, accountable, and inclusive regional governance. The second outlines how the merger study should be completed, providing a roadmap to reach the desired destination. Together, these materials can shape the forthcoming deliberations to help

deliver the regional governance structure that the Bay Area needs and deserves.  
We appreciate this opportunity to inform the merger study and look forward to being deeply engaged in future decisions about the Bay Area's regional planning functions to create a better Bay Area for all.

Sincerely,

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Program Director      Managing Attorney  
Greenbelt Alliance      Public Advocates Inc.

Liz O'Donoghue      Linda Craig  
Director of Infrastructure and Land Use      President  
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CC:

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## ***What Kind of Regional Planning Agency Does the Bay Area Need? Guiding Principles for a New Regional Agency***

The Bay Area needs a transformative regional planning agency that fosters a more sustainable, equitable, and economically-prosperous region. To achieve this goal, the creation of a new agency should be based on the following guiding principles:

1. **MISSION:** The mission of the new agency should be to address the interrelated regional issues of housing, transportation, conservation of natural and agricultural landscapes, social equity, economic development that creates middle wage jobs, and climate change in a truly integrated and holistic fashion. In particular, the new agency should be charged with:
  - a. Forging a broadly inclusive consensus across all sectors of the region and be structured to be capable of doing so.
  - b. Fostering a sustainable and equitable region of shared economic prosperity, with the authority and resources commensurate to the task.
  - c. Integrating social equity throughout its activities to meet the needs of the Bay Area's most underserved communities and populations, reduce segregation, displacement, extreme inequality and suburban poverty, and ensure broadly shared access to opportunity.

The new agency should explicitly focus on roles that promote regional well-being and the well-being of local communities, and that cannot be solved through local government action alone.

2. **GOVERNANCE:** The governing board of the new agency should fairly represent each resident of the region. The members of the board of the new agency should be well-informed and able to form independent judgment about complex issues.
3. **RELATIONSHIP TO THE PUBLIC:** The new agency should be accountable for achieving its mission, inclusive of all voices and perspectives, especially those of low-income communities and people of color, and should measure the impact of its activities based on meaningful performance criteria. It should be highly transparent in its operations, finances, and decision making.

### ***How Do We Get There?***

#### **Process Recommendations for the MTC-ABAG Merger Study**

To ensure an effective outcome, the merger study should be carried out in the following manner:

## **Structure the merger study to address the most pressing needs of the Bay Area**

1. Start by adopting a set of guiding principles for a new regional planning agency, based on the recommendations above.
2. Select the mission, authority, governance structure, and work program for the agency that best reflect those guiding principles. Look beyond the current functions of ABAG and MTC to identify new mandates or activities that should be incorporated into a new agency to deliver the best possible results to the public.

## **Ensure an open, transparent, public, and inclusive process**

3. Use a robust suite of engagement measures to gather public input so that residents across the region have the opportunity to participate throughout the merger study process.
4. Hold several regional convenings or workshops in which stakeholders, academics, and experts can present their findings and perspectives and engage in open discussion with regional agency staff and board members.
5. Establish an advisory group of stakeholders, open and advertised to the public, to meet on an ongoing basis and inform each stage of the process.
6. Distribute written documents well in advance of meetings and host events in locations that are well served by transit and easily accessible for seniors and the disabled.
7. Provide transparency in all decisionmaking stages, clearly identifying the options under consideration, the opportunities for public input, and the decisionmaking entities involved.
8. Conduct an independent review of both agencies' finances to understand the full financial ramifications of all alternatives on current and future agency activities.

## **Take a Solutions-Oriented Approach**

9. Examine regional governance models from across the country and identify best practices and shortcomings to identify which options may be most appropriate. Explore past integration efforts in the Bay Area to identify successful strategies and pitfalls to avoid.
10. Identify methods to successfully integrate distinct institutional cultures and staff functions.
11. Study a broad enough range of alternatives so that if one approach proves truly infeasible at this time other choices can be examined and enacted.
12. Stay focused on identifying and resolving the most critical issues related to a merger in a timely fashion to deliver a clear, actionable implementation plan.