Date: May 23, 2014

To: ABAG Regional Planning Committee

From: Brad Paul
Deputy Executive Director

Subject: **How We Talk About Plan Bay Area 2017**

Executive Summary

As we get ready to update Plan Bay Area 2017, we're looking at what worked well and what didn't in preparing the first Plan to help us create a more responsive, interactive process this time around. After reviewing what we've learned to date, this memo focuses on the biggest criticism we heard this year, that ABAG did not communicate as effectively as we could have with our delegates, electeds and the public about the Plan.

This memo reviews those elements we think would make for a more responsive and transparent way to talk about Plan Bay Area going forward. Also included are some questions to facilitate discussion with the RPC and clarify the next steps. Once we have a clearer sense of how we can improve our listening and communication efforts around the Plan, we'll come back to you soon to discuss how to restructure the public engagement process for Plan Bay Area 2017.

Recommended Action

No action is required; this item is for discussion only.

Next Steps

No action is required; this item is for discussion only.

Lessons Learned
Plan Bay Area, adopted in July 2013, forms the baseline for future Plan Bay Area updates every four years. Since its passage, staff has had time to reflect on what went well and what didn't in the first process. Two of the most frequently cited problems were how we presented the three year schedule for developing Plan Bay Area—and when some people first heard about it—and the ways in which we described and discussed the Plan. Early on, our outreach and communications efforts used technical and planning language such as GHG (greenhouse gas) reduction, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and density and sustainable development, that either did not resonate with or engage the public or angered them because it sounded too much like insider jargon.

Schedule: This was the first time MTC and ABAG worked jointly on a regional plan that combined the Bay Area's Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) with land use issues. It was a challenge, but as we gained experience, the work flowed more smoothly. We were also up against statutory deadlines to complete a complex Plan that was being done for the first time.

Communications: Neither ABAG nor MTC anticipated the intensity of the public response to the first Plan. We were also slow responding to misinformation which left the impression that this misinformation was correct and left elected officials feeling unsupported. We responded more quickly at the end but didn't always coordinate well with our Executive Board (e.g. alerting them to upcoming op-eds in their local papers).

Last fall we began holding meetings to inform us about how delegates and local jurisdictions felt about the Plan and the challenges they faced. These meetings included county by county delegate meetings, PDA site visits and discussions with ABAG's Regional Planning Committee and at our annual Administrative Committee retreat.

ABAG Delegate Meetings
To date, we've held delegate meetings in San Mateo, Santa Clara, Alameda, Solano, Sonoma and Marin counties with 50 delegates (see attached list). From these meetings a consensus has emerged around what worked and what needs improvement, much of it focused on communication issues.

What Went Well

- The self-nominated Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs) used as the Plan's organizing framework helped local jurisdictions set boundaries and place types that reflected each community's unique character and needs.
- This is a flexible blueprint that can be updated every four years based on new jobs/housing/population forecasts, local experience and available resources.
- All local land use decisions remained solely under the control of local officials.
- Local jurisdictions will be able to nominate additional PDAs and PCAs, as well as modify or remove existing ones, solely at their discretion prior to the next Plan.
- The Plan created greater dialogue among the regional agencies and between local jurisdictions and the ABAG Executive Board and staff.

What Didn't Go Well

- Use of technical jargon/acronyms (VMT, GHG) was a barrier to communication – it was off putting, didn't connect with our key audiences (delegates, elected officials and the public) and made it feel like a top down plan.
- People felt we were trying to sell them a predetermined, one size fits all plan that met big city needs, pushed higher density everywhere and ignored the needs of smaller towns and rural areas.
- Beginning presentations with 30-year cumulative population, jobs and housing numbers for the entire region reinforced concerns about this being a top down, one size fits all plan.
- Despite very specific language in SB375 and the Plan itself stating nothing in the Plan could undermine local control over local land use decisions, people are still worried about this issue.
- Increasing infrastructure and housing in PDAs without identifying new funding for it. Without a replacement for Redevelopment funding, affordable housing will be much harder to build.
- People felt several water issues were not adequately addressed (regional water capacity and supply issues and impact of sea level rise on PDAs and highway, rail and port facilities).
- Despite joint memo from DOF/ABAG/HCD confirming Plan's population, housing and jobs projections, DOF's earlier release of conflicting numbers created confusion and skepticism.
- Didn't provide jurisdictions with good visuals of existing, locally appropriate development at slightly higher densities to counter opponents ugly "Stack & Pack" visuals.
- People who heard about the Plan late in the process felt there wasn't sufficient time for them to adequately comment on it.
- We didn't clearly explain the roles of each regional agency (ABAG/MTC/BCDC/BAAQMD).

We also asked ABAG delegates what we could do to help them implement their PDAs, PCAs and development appropriate to their jurisdictions and found consensus on the need to identify and secure new sources of funding for housing and infrastructure as well as developing greater flexibility in ways the state allows local jurisdictions to meet their affordable housing goals.

Effective Communications to Get Ready for Plan Bay Area 2017

Prior to starting the process for Plan Bay Area 2017, staff is working on more effective ways to talk about the Plan as well as ABAG's role in it. Our communications work – the way we talk about the plan – and the research and analysis that goes into it will inform and guide the formal public participation plan we'll be bringing before you soon.

This time we won't be starting from scratch, but using Plan Bay Area 2013 as a baseline and building on existing public awareness of the Plan. As we look at ways to improve our communications work several questions arise:

1. What are our overall goals in this next phase of work?
2. What are the most effective tools and venues for communicating with elected officials, major stakeholders and the public in a more open, interactive way?
3. Who are our key audiences in this conversation?
4. What major opportunities and outcomes should we be prepared to discuss?

5. What are key recommendations for improving the way we communicate about the Plan?

What are our overall goals in this next phase of work?
As we prepare for the *State of the Region Report* (2015) and Plan Bay Area (2017) there are several related goals staff has identified so far.

1. Inspire confidence in the Plan's overall objectives, ABAG and the planning process.
2. Convey clear, concise information on all aspects of the Plan while avoiding technical jargon.
3. Focus on the needs of local residents, families and communities first by asking the question 'How will this plan make life better for me and my family."
4. Quickly respond to all local concerns and quickly correct any factual misinformation.
5. Ensure everyone feels their concerns are taken seriously and adequately addressed.
6. Use Executive Board members as public spokespersons whenever possible.

Having such goals helps us carry out our work in a more open and accessible way.

Tools for Initial Research and Discussion
We're currently revising our website to make it more user friendly and easier to navigate. This will allow us to use the website and social media to engage audiences (e.g. elected officials, city planners, local residents) in a more timely, transparent way. As we revise Plan Bay Area, we'll have the benefit of having the new website up and running for some months and expanding the number of staff engaged in content management so we can quickly update website pages as new information or questions arise.

We will continue to use Basecamp, which allows us to quickly interact with local planners, and continue to hold meetings with ABAG delegates and other agencies such as the Congestion Management Agencies, Bay Area Planning Directors Association, Regional Advisory Working Group, Regional Planning Committee, Regional Prosperity Consortium, and MTC. Depending on what issues surface during the next planning process we may also conduct focus groups on various issues and undertake traditional and online public opinion surveys.

Key Audiences
Based on our experience, the key audiences we will be communicating with include:

- Local elected officials
- Cities and town staff:
  - City Managers
  - Planning Directors and staff
  - Community Development
  - Public Works
- Public at large:
  - Residents
  - Workers
  - Businesses
- Congestion Management Agencies
- Stakeholders:
  - Businesses
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Environment
  - Health
  - Neighborhood Groups
  - Developers
- Regional, state and federal agencies.

The way we communicate with each of these audiences may differ. For example, local officials may want to focus on parts of the Plan that guarantee local governments retain sole discretion over local land use decisions (e.g. where future growth goes, what it looks like) while local residents will also want to know if the Plan will make their daily lives better (e.g. more choices) or not (fewer choices). Both groups will want to know where the new resources will be coming from to implement their PDAs, PCAs and affordable housing.

Opportunities

The run up to Plan Bay Area 2017 provides us with a second chance to point out that, if done right, Plan Bay Area, can continue to champion:

- A variety of locally nominated PDAs and Place-types, that recognize the value and diversity of very different places in our region, from big cities and older suburbs to small towns and rural communities.
- More choices to reduce commuting time (and GHG emissions), and increase family time.
- Complete communities that range from high quality urban neighborhoods to small towns.
- A regional economy that is growing rapidly overall, but has impacts and benefits that vary widely from place to place.
- Plans and planning are local processes, done by local governments.

The State of the Region report will also provide a unique opportunity to demonstrate progress made in some of our more successful PDAs and PCAs and address lessons learned to date.

Key Recommendations

1. Demonstrate this isn't top down planning by starting discussions from the individual's perspective "how will this plan make life better for me and my family," not gross regional population and housing numbers for the next 30 years.
2. Show progress using examples of location appropriate activity from a variety of PDAs, and PCAs that are judged successful by local residents. Provide good visuals.
3. Leverage social media and our new website to tell stories related to Plan Bay Area, PDAs, PCAs and local control over all land use decisions.
4. Use consistent, accessible language throughout all of our communications about this work.
5. Use the next iteration of Plan Bay Area and our new communications plan to strengthen relationships with local elected officials, local planners and planning agencies, and the people who live and work in the Bay Area.

Questions for Regional Planning Committee

1. Do you agree with our assessment of what worked in preparing for Plan Bay Area 2013 and what needs improvement going forward?
2. What is your reaction to the suggested goals of our communications work, the tools we have outlined, key audiences, opportunities and key recommendations?
3. Will this proposed work be more helpful in the communities you represent?
4. What have we missed or forgotten?

Attachments:
List of participants in county Delegate meetings
List of PDA site visits