

Projections 2009 Frequently Asked Questions

What is Projections?

As a regional land use planning agency, ABAG is responsible for describing existing conditions, forecasting changes to the population and economy, and assisting local governments to identify policies that address a changing environment. Projections is ABAG's biennial forecast of population, housing, jobs, and income for the nine-county 101-city region. Since 2003 ABAG has included a set of policy assumptions in its models that assign more growth to areas around transit. This is in recognition of evolving government policies and market conditions that promote growth in those areas.

While many local plans in the Bay Area (general and specific) extend to 2015 or 2020, ABAG's Projections go out to 2035. ABAG anticipates that most of the population growth to the Bay Area will occur beyond the scope of local plans now in place. This assumes that local plans will need to be updated to provide for growth.

Why does ABAG produce forecasts?

The primary reason that ABAG produces forecasts is so that other regional agencies, including the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) can use the forecast in their modeling and planning work. Projections is also widely used by local land-use planning agencies to plan for future change. By 2035, an additional 2 million people and 1.8 million jobs will be in the Bay Area. If we are to house all our workers and newly formed households within this region, then the Bay Area will need nearly 700,000 new housing units. If housing for these workers and new families is not produced in the region, our current pattern of commuting to the region for jobs – with its bi-products of increased traffic, increased greenhouse gas emissions, and increased traffic – will become more entrenched. Not planning for housing will not stop population growth and in-migration.

How accurate are these forecasts?

Local governments often ask about the accuracy of ABAG's forecast as compared to the state forecasts and other sources like the U.S. Census or the California Department of Finance. Past ABAG forecasts have typically been within 5 percent of actual population, household and job estimates, at the county level. Conveying to local governments our track record on the accuracy of the regional land-use forecast, in the short-term, may be helpful. However, policy-based projections in the long-term are intended to encourage change to reach specific growth policies, which does not lend to measuring accuracy of the forecast but does lend to determining attainment of regional growth policies.

My city is built out: How can we plan for growth?

Aerial photographs of the Bay Area show San Francisco to have been largely "built out" in the early 1900s before the earthquake. However, the city looked nothing like it looks today. Things change: an army base closes, a warehouse burns down, a shopping mall becomes unprofitable. Jurisdictions update their general and specific plans. Within the next decade,

every jurisdiction in the Bay Area will see new housing added. With forethought and good planning, new housing and businesses can be added to enhance our communities.

How does my local plan fit into the regional forecast?

In the summer of 2006, ABAG contacted every city and county in the region to acquire the current version of their General Plan and other available planning documents. Most of these plans extend to 2015 or 2020. So the short term forecasts rely heavily on the local plans. As the forecasts move into the long term, policy based assumptions come into greater play. ABAG assumes that cities will update their plans to provide for more growth.

How are economic conditions factored into ABAG's model?

Projections is a long range forecast to year 2035. Current economic conditions have long term consequences. But current difficulties shouldn't be extrapolated 25-30 years in the future. Our models don't attempt to look at economic cycles, but instead show a smooth trend.

What makes Projections 2009 so forward thinking?

ABAG has developed multiple land use scenarios to test how well the regional and local land use policies will meet the challenges posed by growth over the next 30 years. Assuming that the general and specific plans currently in place will be updated or replaced in the next 10 to 20 years, and that the updates will provide for growth, ABAG has developed a number of scenarios to measure our success in meeting a variety of bench-marks such as:

- Reduce person hours of delay by 20 percent below today's levels by 2035
- Reduce CO2 emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2035
- Reduce PM2.5 emissions by 10 percent below today's levels by 2035
- Reduce emissions of coarser particulate mater (PM10) by 45 percent under today's levels by 2035
- Reduce VMT per capita by 10 percent compared to today by 2035
- Limit regional greenfield development to 900 acres per year
- Increase non-automobile dependent access to jobs and essential services by 20 percent compared to today by 2035

These targets are not mandates; rather, they will provide a measuring stick to see how well we are achieving regional transportation, equity, and environmental objectives. These targets and the scenarios developed by ABAG have been brought before policy-makers at both Joint Policy Committee and ABAG's Executive Board.

Why is ABAG using targets instead of just a base case forecast?

We felt that it was important to describe policy assumptions in comparison to specific goals. Past efforts at policy assumptions have been too general, and have not helped the discussion with local jurisdictions or other stakeholders. In its current Regional Transportation Plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) adopted targets that are consistent with those used by ABAG. As the agencies have worked to improve the coordination of their work, we felt it was appropriate to consider land use in the same way that MTC has been considering transportation.

The State of California has recently adopted regional planning legislation in the form of SB 375. It will require all of the regions in the state to consider land use and transportation plans in a coordinated way. In addition to what we are currently doing in the Bay Area, SB 375 directs the Air Resources Board to adopt regional targets for greenhouse gas emissions.

How does the Projections forecast relate to Priority Development Areas?

The regional agencies are working with local jurisdictions to identify Priority Development Areas (PDAs), which are places near transit where local communities want to focus growth. These areas are eligible for financial incentives and support for development in these areas.

The projections alternatives both emphasize growth near transit, areas that overlap with the PDAs. The Focused Future alternative, which provides a more aggressive distribution of growth near transit, may not be consistent with local estimates of growth in the PDAs. The alternatives are meant to encourage discussion about land use patterns and the need to meet regional goals. Neither is a final forecast.

Isn't it inappropriate to focus growth in areas that have problems with schools or crime or infrastructure?

Growth in any area will cause some challenges. But it can also mean additional tax base, new households that can contribute to a community and changes to the built environment that might help address some of these issues.

We should also recognize that there is 20-25 years to try and address regional and local concerns. Growth and the opportunities to solve problems, occur over the entire period. We need to try and make improvements for existing communities, and for people moving to these areas.