

# Focusing Our Vision

Background

April 2006

## Collaborative Planning for the Bay Area

*Focusing Our Vision* is about working together: regional agencies, local governments and communities collaborating to protect and improve the quality of life in the Bay Area.

The seeds for collaboration were planted back in 2002 with the *Smart Growth Strategy / Regional Livability Footprint Project*. Completed by five regional agencies and the multi-sector Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities, this pioneer effort involved the participation of thousands of Bay Area residents and produced the first smart-growth vision for a major metropolitan area in California.

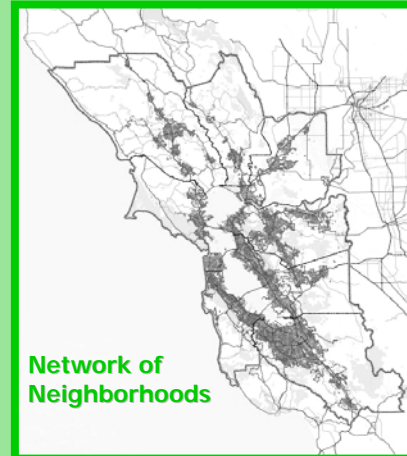
Over the ensuing years, Bay Area regional agencies have taken a number of actions to pursue the vision. These actions have been necessary, but not sufficient. We need to do more. The present effort explicitly recognizes that a great region is built from great communities. Efforts by communities and their local governments, complementing regional initiatives, are essential for a Bay Area solution that works.

*Focusing Our Vision* seeks to meld regional and local objectives in a more refined, sharper planning strategy for the Bay Area. Our aim is to negotiate a set of strategic agreements that are owned jointly by the region and its constituent local governments. With broad agreement on a direction in common, we can then take tangible steps together that better serve the Bay Area and its future.

## Actions Support the Vision

In service of the vision, the Bay Area's regional agencies have taken a number of actions:

- ▶ Multi-agency adoption of a common *Smart Growth Preamble and Policies* as the official expression of the Bay Area's smart-growth strategy and a summary statement of the principles underlying the region's vision.
- ▶ Production of policy-based projections for the region's future. Adopted by ABAG, these projections are the region's official population, household, jobs, labor force, and income forecasts. They are used by MTC and the Air District to provide the demographic and economic assumptions for their official plans. These forecasts assume that growth will be reshaped by public policy to conform more closely to the vision.
- ▶ Inclusion of a Transportation/Land-Use Platform in *Transportation 2030*, the regional transportation plan. The Platform expresses MTC's policy commitment to smart-growth principles and implementation of the smart-growth vision.
- ▶ Implementation of a Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program, including a Housing Incentives Program (HIP), which uses regional grants and transportation investments to encourage local-government projects related to smart growth.
- ▶ Adoption of a Transit-Oriented Development Policy. Approved by MTC in July 2005, this policy establishes planned housing-unit thresholds that corridors slated for transit expansions or extensions will have to meet in order to qualify for regional discretionary funding. The policy also provides a funding program for station-area specific plans to assist corridors in meeting their thresholds.



### The Bay Area's Vision: A Network of Neighborhoods

Development which is:

- ▶ Compact
- ▶ Transit-oriented
- ▶ Supportive of existing communities
- ▶ Resource conserving
- ▶ Socially equitable
- ▶ More affordable

## An Emphasis on Housing

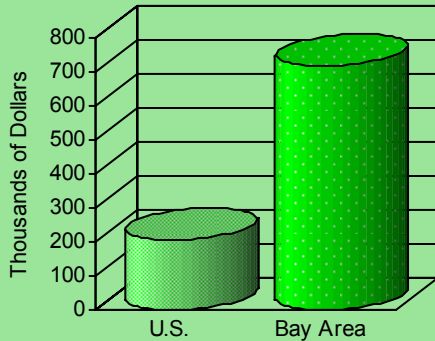
The Bay Area's vision is built upon the connections among four key elements of regional concern: (1) environmental assets (natural features and resources), (2) housing (the dwellings required by a regional population), (3) economic activity (which creates jobs at employment locations), and (4) transportation and infrastructure (the network of public facilities that ties together jobs and housing and serves the region's development).

Without diminishing the long-term importance of the other three elements, *Focusing Our Vision* emphasizes *housing* as the critical element of greatest strategic importance at this moment in time. This emphasis is supported by a number of observations:

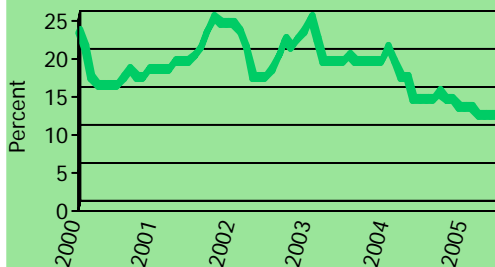
- ▶ There has been an unprecedented escalation of housing prices in the Bay Area over the last several years, making homeownership prohibitively expensive to all but a small percentage of new households. Rents also remain high.
- ▶ The unaffordability of housing threatens the health and competitiveness of the regional economy by making it difficult to recruit and retain skilled employees and necessitating higher salaries than those prevailing in other regions.
- ▶ Housing costs have a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable segments of our society, for whom decent shelter is becoming an increasingly unattainable commodity.
- ▶ New housing development is the prime consumer of one of the region's principal environmental assets: agricultural land.
- ▶ Many worry that high-value housing will outbid traditional uses for current centrally-located manufacturing, storage, and distribution lands. This will make goods movement more difficult and more expensive, contribute to increased pollution from truck exhausts, and further threaten the economic competitiveness of the region.
- ▶ MTC has determined that locating housing and hence population closer to existing points of transit access will have a greater positive impact on transit ridership than new investment in transit infrastructure. In a time of constrained fiscal capacity, getting greater bang for our public transportation buck is more important than ever. Residential proximity will also reduce vehicle miles traveled and have a positive impact on air quality.
- ▶ With high vacancy rates in existing industrial and commercial space, there is not as much regional urgency or leverage attached to the location and density of future economic activity as there is to housing.
- ▶ There is a strong and growing public and political imperative to effectively address what is widely perceived to be a "housing crisis."

As all four key elements of regional concern are inextricably interconnected, an emphasis on housing will not exclude, and indeed *will require*, parallel considerations of environment, economic-activity and transportation elements. Complementary work will address these elements—at this time primarily as they relate to housing. In future planning efforts, as the relative urgency of regional issues shifts, other elements may take primacy and replace housing as the principal emphasis of our work efforts.

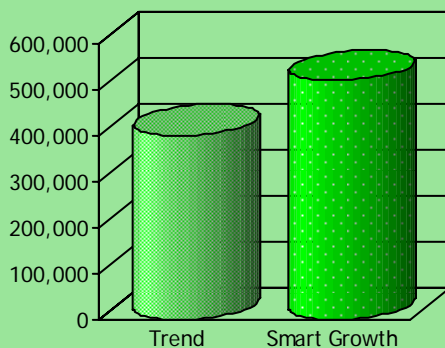
Median Sales Price of Existing Single-Family Homes, 2005



Percent Able to Afford Median-Priced Bay Area Home



Increase in Daily Transit Trips, 2000-2020



## Three Parallel Initiatives

ABAG and MTC are working with local governments and communities on three interrelated efforts.

### 1. Transit-Oriented Development

In 2005, MTC set corridor thresholds for station-area housing development in association with planned transit extensions. The region is currently assisting groups of local jurisdictions in allocating development among stations on each corridor.

With local governments and transportation agencies, MTC and ABAG have also embarked on a pilot program of corridor and station-area plans. Plans are underway for:

- ▶ The Alameda Point ferry terminal;
- ▶ The eBART corridor in eastern Contra Costa County;
- ▶ The Fairfield multi-modal station on the Capital Corridor rail line;
- ▶ The Warm Springs station on the BART to San Jose extension;
- ▶ The Menlo Park station on the Dumbarton rail line;
- ▶ The Coliseum BART Station in association with a rail connection to the Oakland Airport;
- ▶ The Pleasanton BART station (Hacienda Area);
- ▶ The Santa Clara station on the San Jose BART extension;
- ▶ The downtown San Leandro bus rapid transit station;
- ▶ The downtown Santa Rosa SMART station.

### 2. Multi-modal Corridor Planning

The Bay Area's smart-growth vision is described as a "Network of Neighborhoods," a set of lively communities strung like a necklace along major transportation routes.

ABAG and MTC are assisting in polishing the necklace's jewels. Working with jurisdictions along three major corridors, we are looking for opportunities to build and reinforce livable and walkable neighborhoods: places that work as complete communities; that reduce the need to make long trips to meet everyday needs; that provide ample and enjoy-



able opportunities to live, work and recreate; and that function in harmony with the street and transit infrastructure.

Our attention is currently focused on three corridors, which together nearly encircle the Bay:

- ▶ San Pablo Avenue, from Hercules through Oakland;
- ▶ East Fourteenth and International Boulevard, through Oakland, San Leandro and unincorporated Alameda County;
- ▶ El Camino Real, from Daly City, through a string of cities in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties, terminating in the City of Santa Clara

### 3. Priority Development Areas

The areas around transit stations and along major developed corridors are two examples of where the region's smart-growth vision would prefer to see new housing development. To

take advantage of existing infrastructure (particularly transit), to reduce travel demands, and to help conserve the region's open-space land resource, the vision places a general priority on in-fill development within existing communities. The designation of "priority development areas" will seek to make this general priority specific.

Development priority areas will be identified in draft by overlaying geographic representations of the smart-growth principles underlying the Network of Neighborhoods vision. We will then negotiate specific boundaries and development intensities in discussion with our local partners, merging and melding regional objectives with local objectives. The result will be a set of maps that identify the parts of the region meriting incentives and other special assistance to achieve the desired level of development.

We will also use a similar process to demarcate those areas where development is clearly inappropriate and where the region might focus its conservation efforts. Development priority areas and their negative complement will constitute the core of a basic, first-cut regional plan, owned jointly by the regional agencies and by local governments and enjoying the support of a broad spectrum of Bay Area communities and interests.

## Making a Difference

Nudging development toward the Network of Neighborhoods vision could make a substantial difference to how we live and work in the Bay Area. Comparing our policy-based smart growth projections to the business-as-normal trend results in these differences by 2020:

- ▶ 120,000 additional transit trips per day, or enough to fill 180 10-car BART trains;
- ▶ 160,000 additional daily walking and bicycle trips;
- ▶ 3.6 million fewer vehicle miles per day;
- ▶ 60,000 fewer vehicle hours of delay per day;
- ▶ At least 150 thousand gallons of gasoline saved every day;
- ▶ Daily water consumption decreased by 50 gallons per new household;
- ▶ 102,000 acres of open space saved, or the equivalent of about 100 Golden Gate Parks;
- ▶ 60,000 additional families able to live within the region, or the equivalent of about two Walnut Creeks.

## Incentives on the Horizon

The Governor and the Legislature did not make the deadline to get an infrastructure bond issue on the June ballot, but there was broad-based agreement on including a set of smart-growth incentives in the bond package. These incentives stand a good possibility of showing up in a revised bond proposal later this year or appearing in another legislative vehicle.

The incentives under active consideration include:

- ▶ Funding for local general plans and specific plans to assist in making them consistent with regional development objectives;
- ▶ Transportation and infrastructure funding to support infill and transit-oriented development;
- ▶ Grants to conserve open-space areas and other environmental assets;
- ▶ Assistance for contaminated site (brownfield) remediation;
- ▶ Affordable housing assistance.



Continuing state funding for regional plans is also proposed. Conformity with these regional plans may be a gateway to receiving some infrastructure funding. For the Bay Area, progress on building the Network of Neighborhoods vision is also progress on building this gateway.

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*Focusing Our Vision* is a project of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). It is supported by a grant from the State of California Business, Transportation and Housing Agency. We welcome your questions and comments.

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