Town of Moraga

MAYOR'S OFFICE

October 14, 2015

Chair Dave Cortese and Commissioners
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
101 Eighth Street
Oakland, CA 94607

RE: Opposition to Proposed Transfer of ABAG Planning and Research Department to MTC

Dear Chairperson Cortese:

On October 14 the Town Council of the Town of Moraga discussed at its meeting the proposed consolidation of ABAG's 15 member planning and research department into MTC as proposed by the Commission and defined further by MTC staff. Although the Moraga Town Council supports consideration of a full merger of the Bay Area's regional transportation and planning agencies if it meets local interests, the Council strongly opposes the MTC consolidation of planning staff as currently proposed. The Council urges ABAG and MTC to first hire an independent, unbiased third party to analyze and provide recommendations to accomplish a full merger that meets the goals specified below and, until a full merger is fully implemented, honor the Commission's previous funding commitments to ABAG as approved in June 2014.

The Town Council opposes the consolidation of the agencies' planning departments as proposed because as proposed it is not cost-effective, is not responsive to local interests, and would create unacceptable financial uncertainty for ABAG's remaining programs and for the organization as whole. Moreover, the proposal does not result in a practicable governance structure that would allow the mandates of SB375 to be fulfilled. Specifically, according to the MTC staff report, dated September 18, 2015:

- The salaries of planners in MTC are 35% higher than ABAG for the same position, doing comparable work.
- MTC's overhead charges substantially exceed those of ABAG, representing 53% of ABAG's salaries and 103% of MTC's planner salaries, respectively.
- ABAG's organizational culture favors a 'bottom up' perspective that values public input and achieving consensus that balances the diverse interests of its member cities and counties. MTC states that it is 'action-oriented' and values organizational control, exemplified in its statement that it has 'complete discretion' over its previous commitments to ABAG.

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- The transfer of ABAG's planning and research department into MTC would segregate the remaining planning functions in ABAG, limiting essential coordination and support that exists under the current integrated structure.
- Board membership on ABAG is comprised exclusively of cities and counties while the MTC Commission is solely represented by the three largest cities in the Bay Area, the nine counties, and State and Federal representatives. Under the proposal, the majority of Bay Area cities, including small cities like Moraga, would see a diminished representation of local interests and perspectives over that of larger agencies.
- A fully merged regional agency should be governed by a Board that has appropriate oversight, responsibility, and authority. By maintaining the same Board governance, yet eliminating staff responsible for planning, research, and state mandated regional planning activities, the ABAG Board remains statutorily responsibe but loses its authority to effectively oversee and set the policy direction necessary to fulfill State mandates.
- In June, 2014, the MTC Commissioners passed a funding agreement to ABAG until 2020/21 that was intended to "provide ABAG a more predictable basis for their annual budgeting." That commitment should be honored.
- In summary, the Moraga Town Council recommends MTC and ABAG hire an independent, unbiased third party to analyze and provide recommendations to accomplish a full merger of the Bay Area's regional agencies and in the interim, honor the funding commitments MTC approved in June 2013. The third party review should create a method that considers merging all of the San Francisco Bay Area regional agencies only if such a merger would be:
    - Cost effective, measured by a net saving of taxpayer dollars
    - Responsive to the diverse needs and interests of all Bay Area cities and counties
    - Integrated with all regional planning efforts to ensure coordination and consistency
    - Equitable in the makeup of its Governing Board
    - Responsible and accountable to its Governing Board.

Thank you for taking on this important issue in an effort to make the regional agencies more integrated. It is an effort worth taking the time to be thoughtful and deliberate.

Sincerely,

Roger N. Wykle, Mayor
Town of Moraga