

Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments
MTC Planning Committee and ABAG Administrative Committee

July 11, 2025

Agenda Item 8b

Background on MTC and ABAG Wildfire Efforts

Subject:

Overview of past and ongoing MTC and ABAG wildfire resilience and preparedness efforts, share updates on current research, and invite committee feedback to help shape future regional initiatives.

Background:

Wildfire has long been a policy concern in the Bay Area. The 1991 Tunnel Fire in Oakland and Berkeley stood as the most destructive fire in California history for over two decades. That record was surpassed by the 2017 Tubbs Fire, which heavily impacted Santa Rosa and surrounding communities in Sonoma and Napa counties. Since then, nearly every Bay Area county has experienced large-scale, damaging wildfires, while fires elsewhere in the state have continued to set new records for destruction. Most recently, the 2025 Southern California wildfires renewed statewide attention on the need for more coordinated and proactive action.

MTC & ABAG Wildfire and Preparedness Efforts:

MTC and ABAG have undertaken past and ongoing initiatives related to wildfire that generally fall into two categories: integrating wildfire considerations into housing and resilience planning (the primary focus of this item) and preparing for a coordinated transportation response during emergencies. Attachment B outlines these efforts, highlighting guidance developed for local planning and strategies for emergency transportation coordination.

- **Integrating wildfire considerations into housing and resilience planning.** In 2017, ABAG developed a white paper on existing wildfire planning efforts in the Bay Area as part of a FEMA-funded project. As part of this work, staff assessed the potential agency role in addressing wildfire risk. Building on ABAG's prior experience providing technical assistance on seismically safe housing — including model policies for residential retrofits — the need for wildfire-safe housing, particularly home hardening, emerged as a relevant focus. This work was expanded in 2021 through an additional FEMA grant and aligned with the Regional Housing Technical Assistance initiative to

support local governments in developing their housing elements. The effort produced resources and webinars for local jurisdictions and was later incorporated into Strategy EN2 of Plan Bay Area 2050+, which promotes means-based financial support for seismic, wildfire, and accessibility home retrofits.

- **Preparing for a coordinated transportation response during emergencies.** MTC leads the development of the Regional Transportation Emergency Management Plan (RTEMP) and coordinates emergency response planning with Caltrans, the California Highway Patrol, the San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA), and the region's largest transit operators. Through ongoing collaboration with these partners and the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, MTC engages in regular planning efforts that have also produced related resources on evacuation in recent years.

In fiscal year 2025-26, the agency plans to update the 2021 wildfire and housing technical assistance efforts and share findings with local government staff. Unlike past efforts supported by grant funding, this work will rely on more limited internal resources, requiring a narrower scope. It is tentatively planned to be supported by a CivicSpark fellow, contingent upon uncertain federal AmeriCorps funding.

Current Wildfire Research – Intersection of Wildfire Mapping and Development

MTC/ABAG staff are updating existing resource guides to reflect the evolving intersection of wildfire risk, regulatory mapping, housing policy, and building codes. As the regulatory landscape shifts, staff are analyzing the regional implications for new development and existing communities across the Bay Area. Three key policy changes are reshaping where and how wildfire considerations influence development:

- **Assembly Bill 642 (2021):** Expanded Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) mapping in Local Responsibility Areas (LRAs) to include high and moderate risk categories, aligning them with the mapping approach used in State Responsibility Areas (SRAs). Previously, only very high risk zones were mapped in LRAs.
- **Senate Bill 63 (2021):** Extended wildfire-resistant building standards (Chapter 7A of the building code) to areas designated as high risk in LRAs. The bill also requires the state to evaluate whether similar standards should apply to moderate risk areas within LRAs.

- **Updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps and Methodology (2025):** CAL FIRE released updated Fire Hazard Severity Zone (FHSZ) maps for Local Responsibility Areas (LRA) in February 2025, replacing maps developed in 2007–2009. The updates incorporate advancements in science and localized climate data, factoring in elements such as fire history, terrain, fuel loads, urban vegetation, wind-blown embers, and flame lengths to estimate the likelihood and behavior of wildfires over a 50-year horizon. CAL FIRE FHSZ maps are developed by the state and adopted by local jurisdictions. In addition, some Bay Area jurisdictions have created their own mapping layers—such as Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) maps—which serve as additional tools for local wildfire planning.

With mapping largely complete and new building code requirements for LRA High FHSZ areas set to take effect in 2026, MTC and ABAG are reviewing the changes to assess potential implications for regional and local planning and policy. Staff will share findings with local jurisdictions in late summer through a webinar targeted to previous wildfire and housing technical assistance participants and local planning collaboratives.

Future Wildfire Research and Technical Assistance

Input from committee members and local government staff will help prioritize potential technical assistance activities for fiscal year 2025–26. Final direction will depend on staff capacity, expertise, and feedback from policymakers and stakeholders. The list below outlines possible areas of focus, with room to refine or expand based on evolving needs and partner interest.

- **Home Hardening Program Reviews** - Examine a range of home hardening programs implemented across California, with an emphasis on funding mechanisms. Develop case studies highlighting programs supported by local, state, and federal sources, and summarize strategies jurisdictions have used to reduce implementation barriers and fund retrofits.
- **Integrate Wildfire Considerations into Objective Design Standards** – As more jurisdictions face requirements or growing interest in wildfire-resilient design, staff could explore integration of wildfire best practices into the 2024 ABAG Objective Design Standards Handbook. Recent changes in State law require that for certain types of

housing, jurisdictions may only consider objective criteria to streamline the approval process. This work would be conducted in coordination with partners and informed by recent state guidance and regional needs.

- **Wildfire Funding Landscape** – The 2024 State Climate Bond includes new or expanded funding streams for wildfire resilience. At the same time, some federal programs are being reduced or discontinued. Staff could inventory current funding opportunities and develop case studies based on recent grant awards to help jurisdictions understand funding pathways and administrative challenges.
- **Other Potential Topics for Exploration** – The following topics may warrant additional attention given their relevance to local wildfire risk reduction, though staff may have limited technical expertise in these areas:
 - Evacuation Planning
 - Evacuation-Related Capital Improvements
 - Vegetation Management
 - Insurance Market Dynamics

Next Steps:

Staff will continue monitoring state and non-profit initiatives in this space and will update existing resource guides on wildfire mapping, planning, and development standards accordingly. Staff will promote the upcoming webinar to all interested stakeholders later this summer.

Issues:

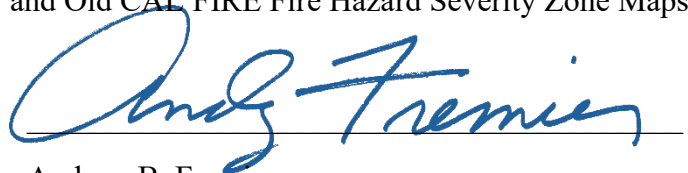
Staff capacity and funding currently limit expanded efforts in this area. Given the enhanced role of state agencies in recent years, it is important to reassess where ABAG and MTC can best add value and determine whether additional technical assistance resources are needed.

Recommendations:

Information

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Presentation
- Attachment B: Annotated Bibliography of MTC and ABAG Wildfire and Wildfire-Adjacent Initiatives
- Attachment C: Comparison of New and Old CAL FIRE Fire Hazard Severity Zone Maps



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