

Looking Ahead to 2023: Plan Bay Area 2050+ and Transit 2050+

Subject:

Overview of anticipated priorities and timeline for a focused update to Plan Bay Area 2050, tentatively referred to as Plan Bay Area 2050+, as well as an opportunity to integrate more robust connected network planning consistent with Transit Transformation Action Plan priorities.

Background:

Every four years under federal and state law, MTC and ABAG are responsible for updating the regional plan, known as Plan Bay Area. To date, MTC and ABAG have adopted three such regional plans integrating transportation and land use, with the latest iteration known as Plan Bay Area 2050 being approved in October 2021. Plan Bay Area 2050 was the most comprehensive effort to-date, reflecting four years of deep and sustained public and stakeholder engagement, as well as robust analytical exploration of “what if…” scenarios to make the Plan’s strategies more resilient and equitable than prior cycles. Composed of 35 strategies identifying priorities for transportation, housing, economic development, and environmental resilience, the adopted Plan also included a near-term Implementation Plan spotlighting more than 80 actions for MTC and ABAG to advance through 2025. MTC/ABAG staff continue to await a final determination from the California Air Resources Board (CARB), which has an oversight role on regional plans, one year after Plan Bay Area 2050’s adoption.

Regional Planning Requirements:

In addition to being updated every four years, regional plans must align with numerous federal and state requirements, including but not limited to fiscal constraint, robust public engagement, and climate targets set by the State. Fiscal constraint – aligning reasonably-anticipated revenues with anticipated costs to create a realistic vision for the future – is a central concept to regional plans nationwide. Similarly, regional plans must feature a robust public process with ample opportunities for public and stakeholder input to shape the plan’s strategies. Furthermore, in California, regional plans must comply with the requirements of Senate Bill 375, including a statutory greenhouse gas reduction target for year 2035 and a thorough review of the plan’s technical methodologies, inputs, and outputs by CARB.

Implementation Focus:

Given that Plan Bay Area 2050 was a major update to the regional vision connecting transportation, housing, economic development, and environmental resilience, MTC/ABAG staff have been intently focused on implementation for the past year. Recent highlights include the recent adoption of the new Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC) Policy, the advancement of key Bay Area Housing Financing Authority (BAHFA) pilot programs, preparation for new cycles of planning grants for Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and pilot Priority Production Areas (PPAs), and accelerated efforts on parking and electrification to advance climate strategies in Plan Bay Area 2050, among others. With further initiatives in the queue for 2023 and constrained resources to implement the Plan's strategies, it will be essential to balance efforts in the long-range planning space with the important work of implementing the robust strategies already adopted by MTC and ABAG last year.

Plan Bay Area 2050+:

To that end, staff proposes to advance a focused update to Plan Bay Area 2050, known as Plan Bay Area 2050+, commencing in summer 2023 and wrapping up in late 2025. This effort would build upon Plan Bay Area 2050, making high-impact refinements to select Blueprint strategies while retaining the remaining strategies given the existing Plan's firm foundation. This approach would enable implementation efforts to continue apace, rather than shifting considerable staff and financial resources toward long-range planning to accommodate more significant updates. In addition, Plan Bay Area 2050+ would identify a new suite of implementation actions, recognizing that many of the implementation activities identified in Plan Bay Area 2050 will be substantively complete by 2025. This would then allow a major update to Plan Bay Area to be advanced starting in early 2026, on par with the magnitude of Plan Bay Area 2050, with robust exploratory scenario planning and deep-dive policy analyses. Given that subsequent planning cycle would likely face more aggressive climate goals, feature an extended time horizon, and sync up with a brand-new RHNA cycle, it would be better primed to enact more significant policy changes to the 30-year regional vision. Further context on the proposed timelines of the next two regional plans, and the high-level scope of Plan Bay Area 2050+, can be found in **Attachment B**.

Impetus for Transit 2050+:

Pivoting from the broader regional plan to a specific mode of transportation – public transit – there is significant interest in prioritizing revisions to six transit-related strategies in Plan Bay Area 2050+, recognizing the continued financial challenges in this space and the need to re-evaluate legacy (i.e., pre-COVID) transportation projects to ensure they align with current and future regional needs. At the same time, both the Transit Transformation Action Plan and the Plan Bay Area 2050 Implementation Plan identified development of a new transit modal plan known as the Connected Network Plan, which would take a service-oriented approach to creating an aspirational transit vision for the Bay Area. If advanced as-is, the region would concurrently generate two separate and potentially quite different transit visions for the Bay Area, one integrated into the next long-range regional plan and the other developed through a separate process. Staff’s opinion is that proceeding with this status-quo approach could create significant policy and staffing challenges.

Transit 2050+ Path Forward:

As such, MTC/ABAG staff recommend a harmonized approach where connected network planning directly informs the core of Plan Bay Area 2050+, assigning the task of comprehensively re-imagining the six transit-related strategies in the Plan Bay Area 2050+ Transportation Element using a service-based, hub-oriented, and fiscally responsible approach. Initiating this effort in early 2023 would help ensure that the updated transit strategies can be integrated into the Plan Bay Area 2050+ Final Blueprint by summer 2024. MTC/ABAG staff would work closely with the region’s transit operators to co-create this next-generation vision. Further public and stakeholder engagement, including with county transportation agencies and advocacy organizations, would be key to the success of the Transit 2050+ approach. Further context on the timeline and milestones can be found in **Attachment B**.

Next Steps:

Staff anticipate issuing an RFQ for Transit 2050+ later this year and will seek authorization for the final contract award from the MTC Administration Committee in early 2023. Preparatory work for the broader Plan Bay Area 2050+ effort will begin in late spring 2023, with the official kickoff anticipated in July 2023 at the Joint MTC Planning/ABAG Administrative Committee.