

Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Policy Advisory Council Equity and Access Subcommittee

March 1, 2021

Agenda Item 5

Communities of Concern Update

Subject: Update on recent outreach through community-based organizations on the Communities of Concern framework and nomenclature.

Background: In December 2020, staff provided an update to the Subcommittee on the Communities of Concern framework, including the impact of the American Community Survey (ACS) Census data refresh and consequent updates in census tracts identified as Communities of Concern (meeting recording https://baha.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=7891). Staff also addressed some of the challenges with the existing framework and provided initial thoughts on revising the nomenclature. Since then, staff has engaged with underserved communities through community-based organizations to get feedback on the overall framework itself and the nomenclature.

Despite this being an abstract topic to discuss, the small group discussions were rich and offered diverse feedback. Staff will share a summary of synthesized feedback based on recurring themes and provide initial recommendations for future reexamination of the framework and the short-term change in nomenclature. Prior to the adoption of Plan Bay Area 2050 this fall, staff envisions updating the Community of Concern nomenclature. Further work on reexamining the framework is slated to begin next year, in advance of the next long-range regional plan, and in sync with the Equity Platform effort underway across the organization.

Staff is seeking discussion on a few questions:

Framework:

- Does the Subcommittee have feedback on staff recommendations?
- Are there any other issues that the Subcommittee recommends for study in the future?

Nomenclature:

- Can Subcommittee members provide opinions on why they may or may not favor each of the names that staff has shortlisted?
- Do the Subcommittee members have a preference towards any of the names, or have other suggestions?

Recommendation: Information

Attachments: Attachment A: Memo - Communities of Concern Update Details for Plan Bay Area 2050 (*December 2020, attached for reference*)
Attachment B: Presentation - Rethinking Communities of Concern (*March 2021*)

M E M O R A N D U M



TO: Policy Advisory Council Equity & Access Subcommittee DATE: December 2020
FR: Anup Tapase, Jeremy Halpern
RE: Communities of Concern Update Details for Plan Bay Area 2050

Summary

This memorandum presents an update to the MTC Communities of Concern (CoCs) for use in Plan Bay Area 2050 and related efforts. While the methodology to determine whether a census tract is a CoC is consistent with past updates, the concentration thresholds for the disadvantage factors and the concentration of disadvantaged populations within census tracts have been re-calculated using the most recent American Communities Survey data (ACS 2014-2018). Recent demographic shifts since Plan Bay Area 2040 have driven a considerable shift in CoCs at the census tract level.

Methodology to Determine Communities of Concern

Previous Updates: MTC defined “Communities of Concern” for the Regional Transportation Plans (RTPs) adopted in 1999, 2003 and 2007 as areas with a significant concentration of *either people of color or* low-income households. For Plan Bay Area (2013), CoCs were defined either as census tracts with a significant concentration of people of color AND low-income households OR as census tracts that have a concentration of four or more of eight disadvantage factors. For Plan Bay Area 2040 (2017), this definition was further modified based on Regional Equity Working Group (REWG) feedback to census tracts that have a concentration of BOTH people of color AND low-income households, OR that have a concentration of 3 or more of the remaining 6 factors (#3 to #8), but only IF they also have a concentration of low-income households. This methodology is detailed in MTC Resolution No.4217-Equity Framework for Plan Bay Area 2040 in **Attachment 1**. In 2018, staff released an intermediate update with the most recent ACS data using the PBA2040 methodology.

Staff Recommendation: Staff is recommending keeping this methodology consistent for Plan Bay Area 2050. However, a closer re-examination of this methodology may be appropriate given demographic shifts explained later in this memo. Given this will require a process of significant engagement with communities and advocates that is not feasible in the Plan Bay Area 2050 timeline, staff is recommending this re-examination as part of the agency’s Equity Platform initiative in 2021.

Concentration Thresholds for CoC Disadvantage Factors

Previous Updates: The thresholds to determine “significant concentration” for each disadvantage factor at the tract level is based on the regional mean and the standard deviation above the regional mean. In Plan Bay Area and Plan Bay Area 2040, given large standards of deviation for some of the factors, the thresholds were set somewhat arbitrarily

between the regional mean and one standard deviation above the mean, and rounded to the nearest multiple of five. In the intermediate update in 2018, staff recalculated thresholds using the latest ACS data to be exactly the regional mean plus half a standard deviation.

Staff Recommendation: Staff has recalculated thresholds using the latest ACS data, as shown in **Table 1**, and is proposing to set the threshold at exactly mean plus half a standard deviation to maintain a sound methodology. With this, seven of the eight factors have lower concentration thresholds than Plan Bay Area 2040. Lower thresholds imply that a greater number of census tracts would be CoCs if the underlying demographics were held constant.

Table 1: Communities of Concern for Plan Bay Area 2040 vs. Plan Bay Area 2050

<i>Disadvantage Factor</i>	Adopted Thresholds PBA2040		Proposed Thresholds PBA2050	
	<i>% Regional Population</i>	<i>Concentration Threshold</i>	<i>% Regional Population</i>	<i>Concentration Threshold</i>
1. People of Color	58%	70%	60%	70%
2. Low Income (<200% Federal Poverty Level - FPL)	25%	30%	21%	28%
3. Limited English Proficiency	9%	20%	8%	12%
4. Zero-Vehicle Household	10%	10%	9%	15%
5. Seniors 75 Years and Over	6%	10%	6%	8%
6. People with Disability	9%	25%	10%	12%
7. Single-Parent Family	14%	20%	13%	18%
8. Severely Rent-Burdened Household	11%	15%	10%	14%
<i>Definition</i> - census tracts that have a concentration of BOTH people of color AND low-income households, OR that have a concentration of 3 or more of the remaining 6 factors (#3 to #8) but only IF they also have a concentration of low-income households.				

Context: Recent Demographic Shifts

The largest overall demographic shift among the disadvantage factors since Plan Bay Area 2040 has been in the share of low-income households in the region, which decreased from 25% to 21%, as shown in **Table 1**. All Bay Area counties have a smaller percentage of low-income residents relative to the Plan Bay Area 2040. Two explanations for changes to low-income household share are migration and changes in the minimum wage. The net migration of low-income households out of the nine-county Bay Area¹ could be out of the region entirely or to more affordable neighboring areas such as the San Joaquin Valley, where workers “super-commute” to the Bay Area. Second, recent municipal increases in minimum wage may have put more households above the 200% federal poverty line.² Households may still rely on incomes that are by no means sufficient given the region’s high cost of living,

¹ Romem, Issi and Elizabeth Kneebone. 2018. “Disparity in Departure: Who Leaves the Bay Area and Where Do They Go?” Turner Center for Housing Innovation

² Dube, Arindrajit. 2019. “Minimum Wages and the Distribution of Family Incomes.” American Economic Journal: Applied Economics

but would not be captured by this measure - a reason to revise the definition in the future. Continuing the trend of the last several decades, the region has continued to become more racially diverse. All counties experienced an increase in the share of the population that is people of color since Plan Bay Area 2040. The share of White residents in the region has held relatively constant with significant increases in Asian and Latino populations as shown in **Table 2**. The growth in ‘Other’ is primarily driven by an increase of people identifying as two or more races. Continuing a troubling trend for several decades, the Black population declined by 2% since Plan Bay Area 2040. The Black population has shrunk in the Big Three cities - San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland, with more living in exurban areas.

Table 2: Racial Composition of the Bay Area Population³

Race/Ethnicity	2013 ⁴		2018		Change	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
White	3,047,000	42%	3,046,000	40%	-1,000	0%
Asian & Pacific Islander ⁵	1,747,000	24%	2,013,000	26%	266,000	15%
Latino (any race)	1,711,000	24%	1,811,000	24%	100,000	6%
Black	457,000	6%	447,000	6%	-10,000	-2%
Other ⁶	294,000	4%	359,000	5%	64,000	22%
Total Population	7,258,000	-	7,676,000	-	418,000	6%

Impact of Demographic Shifts and Data Update on Communities of Concern

The recent demographic shifts noted above have considerable impact on the classification of census tracts as CoCs. There are fewer tracts with a high concentration of low-income households. As shown in **Table 3**, there is a 19 percent drop in the number of tracts with a concentration of low-income households above the thresholds. Consequently, there is a net loss of 42 tracts that were classified as CoC in Plan Bay Area 2040 under the first definition of concentrated low-income and people of color households. At the same time, 19 more tracts fall under both definitions for CoC, indicating a compounding of disadvantages. In sum, 26 fewer tracts are classified as Communities of Concern. Regional maps highlighting the CoC tracts in both Plan Bay Area 2040 (ACS 2009-13) and Plan Bay Area 2050 (ACS 2014-18) are included in **Attachment 2**.

³ Compares American Community Survey 5-yr estimates 2009-2013 and 2014-2018 B03002.

⁴ ACS 2009-2013 is used in the Plan Bay Area 2040 Equity Framework document though the final Equity Analysis Report uses ACS 2010-2014 data. The 2009-2013 is used in this context for statistical accuracy given the overlap of 2010-2014 and 2014-2018 5-year estimates.

⁵ Includes ‘Asian’ and ‘Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander’

⁶ ‘American Indian or Alaska Native’, ‘Two or More Races’, ‘Other Race’

Table 3: Change in CoCs based on Tract-Level Thresholds of Disadvantaged Populations

Criteria	Plan Bay Area 2040		Plan Bay Area 2050		Change	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Definition 1 only: Low-Income and People of Color	158	10%	97	6%	-61	-39%
More than Low-Income Threshold only ⁷	517	33%	421	27%	-96	-19%
More than POC Threshold only	542	34%	577	36%	35	6%
Definition 2 only: Low-Income and Three Or More Disadvantage Factors	50	3%	66	4%	16	32%
Definition 1 and Definition 2	157	10%	176	11%	19	12%
Total CoC Tracts	365	23%	339	21%	-26	-7%
Total Census Tracts	1,588	100%	1,588	100%	-	-

Shifts in CoCs at the county level, shown in **Table 4**, are indicative of displacement and align with Bay Area displacement research⁸. 79 tracts lost CoC status, 53 tracts gained CoC status and 286 remained CoC tracts. The largest county-level changes are in Alameda and Santa Clara counties, which have a net loss of 19 and 21 CoC tracts respectively since Plan Bay Area 2040. While San Francisco has a net gain of 3, there is significant shift, with 31 tracts gaining or losing CoC status. Such significant shifts in the CoC status of tracts signal that there is a need to reexamine the framework and definitions to ensure they still align with the agency's equity goals. Changes by county are further described below; a comparison map is in **Attachment 2**.

- In Alameda County, several tracts lost CoC status in Union City, Hayward and Oakland. New CoC tracts emerged in West Berkeley and southeast Emeryville, among others.
- In Santa Clara County, San Jose saw large losses particularly in the eastern part of the city, and new CoC tracts emerged in Sunnyvale.
- In San Francisco, tracts gained CoC status in the northeast quadrant of the city including the Western Addition, parts of the Tenderloin, SoMa and Fisherman's Wharf. While there are some new CoC tracts in the Mission and southern San Francisco, there are losses in the same areas too.
- In Contra Costa County, new CoCs emerged around Antioch/Oakley and Hercules.
- In Marin County, there is a new CoC tract in Fairfax.
- In Napa County, new CoCs emerged in Calistoga and Napa, with one CoC lost in Saint Helena.
- In San Mateo County, new CoC tracts are centered around San Mateo City with CoC tract losses in Column and Daly City.
- In Sonoma County, there were CoC tracts both gained and lost in Santa Rosa, with additional tracts in Santa Rosa suburbs and rural areas.
- In Solano County, there are new CoCs in Dixon, Suisun and Vallejo, with parallel losses in

⁷ Thresholds are set at .5 standard deviation above the mean. Plan Bay Area 2040 threshold is more than or equal to 30% low-income households in a census tract. Plan Bay Area 2050 threshold is more than or equal to 28% low-income households

⁸ Rising Housing Costs and Re-Segregation in the San Francisco Bay Area, 2019, Urban Displacement Project.

Vacaville, Vallejo and Suisun City.

Table 4: Change in CoC tracts by County

<i>County</i>	<i>Total # Tracts</i>	<i># CoC Tracts PBA2040</i>	<i># CoC Tracts PBA2050</i>	<i># CoC Tracts Gained</i>	<i># CoC Tracts Lost</i>	<i>Net Change in # CoC Tracts</i>
Alameda	361	120	101	7	26	-19
Contra Costa	208	45	50	7	2	5
Marin	56	3	4	1	0	1
Napa	40	4	5	2	1	1
San Francisco	197	48	51	17	14	3
San Mateo	158	22	22	4	4	0
Santa Clara	372	84	63	6	27	-21
Solano	96	28	28	3	3	0
Sonoma	100	11	15	6	2	4
Total	1,488	365	339	53	79	-26

Attachments:

1. MTC Resolution No.4217-Equity Framework for Plan Bay Area 2040
2. Maps: Plan Bay Area 2040 and Plan Bay Area 2050 Communities of Concern Maps, and Comparison Map

Rethinking Communities of Concern

Anup Tapase

*Policy Advisory Council Equity and Access Subcommittee
March 2021*

In fall 2020, staff proposed the following next steps for the Communities of Concern framework...

Near Term *within Plan Bay Area 2050*

Augment Community of Concern Methodology

- Measure disparities not only between CoCs and rest of the region, but also High-Resource Areas.
- Measure disparities based on income status where feasible and appropriate.

Revise Nomenclature

- Engage communities in January 2021.
- Propose nomenclature for use in Plan document in February 2021.

Long Term *Part of Equity Platform in 2021+*

Re-examine Community of Concern Methodology

- Engage with community, advocates and partner agencies.
- Survey communities to better identify needs and values.
- Research tools/methodologies to forecast disaggregate impacts on basis of race/ethnicity.

Today's Update

- In January 2021, staff reviewed the Communities of Concern framework and nomenclature with six focus groups, facilitated by community-based organizations.
- Based on internal staff deliberations and the feedback received so far from the E&A Subcommittee, Regional Equity Working Group and the focus groups, this presentation outlines:
 - Recommendations for long-term re-examination of the framework
 - Recommendations for nomenclature, for use in Plan Bay Area 2050 document

Which community-based organizations (CBOs) did we engage with?

- **Acterra** (Palo Alto, environmental education + action)
- **Community Resources for Independent Living** (Hayward, people with disabilities)
- **Green Hive** (Vallejo, sustainable small businesses)
- **Hamilton Families** (San Francisco, families experiencing homelessness)
- **Rose Foundation** (Oakland, youth for environmental justice)
- **Roots Community Health Center** (Oakland, community health center)
- **Sacred Heart** (San Jose, housing unstable community)

How did we engage on this topic?

- **Began with open-ended question:** what does “Communities of Concern” mean to you?
- Followed with **definition** and **how designations are used** by MTC/ABAG
- Highlighted **why these designations are important** (historical/existing racist planning policies leading to disinvestment in communities, etc.)
- Sought discussion on two aspects:
 - Opinions on overall framework
 - Opinions on nomenclature (provided a list of names as prompts to spark dialogue)

Reactions to Communities of Concern Framework

Recurring Themes

Overall definition is too broad	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“catch-all phrase that is not really specific”</i>• <i>“too vague”; “does not strike to the core”</i>• <i>“could be an umbrella term that captures different communities at risk”</i>
Overall definition is too narrow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“need to differentiate between renters and homeowners”</i>• <i>“missing LGBTQ+”</i>• <i>“rural communities face different issues”</i>
Communities face varied but specific issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“more useful if different attributes were split out”</i>• <i>“need to identify specific issues, like food or transit deserts or environmental vulnerability - would like to know what the concern is”</i>
Does not capture historical themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>“easy way to take accountability while not reflecting on the intentionality; these communities are not an accident”</i>• <i>“this is a point-in-time map that could be strengthened with other views in time”</i>

Staff Recommendations for Communities of Concern Framework Longer-Term Reexamination

Overall Definition

- Consider different “typologies” of Communities of Concern that can directly relate to specific issues under an umbrella definition; e.g. transit deficient, rent burdened, displacement pressure, food deserts.
- Tie definition with historical issues that have led to Communities of Concern.

Methodology

- Include flexibility - e.g., changes in definition of low-income, differences across sub-regions.
- Address issues arising from gentrification and displacement over time.
- Consider that some demographic groups do not lend themselves to place-based equity discussions given lack of concentration: e.g., seniors, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ communities.
- Coordinate with local governments and non-profits that have on-the-ground knowledge.

Use of Framework

- Recognize that place-based discussion is only one dimension and do not over-rely on communities of concern framework in analyses.
- Co-relate disinvestment in communities with inequities arising from concentrated affluence.

Reactions to Communities of Concern Nomenclature

Across the board, a resounding desire to use a different name.

Problematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Sounds like problem with the communities”• “Sounds like a dog whistle”• “Triggers fear”
Demeaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Makes it sound like the communities’ fault”• “May bring stigma”
Negative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Concern is a negative word”• “Sounds like communities we should be concerned about in a defensive way”
Vague/ Passive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Detached from communities”• “Does not address struggles”• ““Concern” feels passive - for people from these communities, the community is always a concern /a priority; but from an agency perspective, there are problems to be addressed”

Recurring Feedback Themes for New Name

- Term needs to be “empowering”, “forward-looking” “positive”
- Communicate “priority” and “action”
- “We already know these communities are marginalized - the term should show what we are going to do about it”
- “Communities are continuously changing, so term should not feel stagnant”
- Term should “not be too long”, but should be “clear and understood across audiences”

Communities of Concern Nomenclature: Options Provided as Prompts

“Equity”

- Equity Focus Communities
- Equity Focus Areas
- Equity Emphasis Areas
- Equity and Access Zones
- Equity Zones

“Priority” or “Opportunity”

- Equity Prioritized Opportunity Communities
- Equity Prioritized Investment Communities
- Opportunity Zones

“Disadvantage”

- Disadvantaged Communities
- Underserved Communities
- Areas of Concentrated Poverty
- Economically Distressed Areas
- Historically Marginalized Communities
- Systemically Marginalized Communities
- Communities of Concern

“Environmental Justice ”

- Environmental Justice Areas
- Environmental Justice Communities

Other Terms We Heard

- Sensitive Communities
- Under-resourced Communities
- Underrepresented Communities
- Impacted Communities
- Developing Communities
- Areas Of Community Advancement
- Priority Neighborhoods

Communities of Concern Nomenclature: Feedback (1 of 2)

Names

“Equity”

- Equity Focus Communities
- Equity Focus Areas
- Equity Emphasis Areas
- Equity and Access Zones
- Equity Zones

“Priority” or “Opportunity”

- Equity Prioritized Opportunity Communities
- Equity Prioritized Investment Communities
- Opportunity Zones

Feedback

- Generally favorable and well-liked
 - No negative feedback
 - **Most liked : “Equity Focus ____”** - positive and describes what we are trying to bring about
-
- Generally favorable and well-liked
 - Terms are too long and can sound technocratic/detached; need to be simple
 - “Priority” was strongly favored across groups
 - “Opportunity” does not sound as urgent as the situation is
 - “Opportunity zones” is a tainted word due to use by federal government
 - “EPIC” sounds nice
 - **Most liked: “Priority Communities”**

Communities of Concern Nomenclature: Feedback (2 of 2)

Names

“Disadvantage”

- Disadvantaged Communities
- Underserved Communities
- Areas of Concentrated Poverty
- Economically Distressed Areas
- Historically Marginalized Communities
- Systemically Marginalized Communities
- Communities of Concern

“Environmental Justice ”

- Environmental Justice Areas
- Environmental Justice Communities

Feedback

- Mostly negative feedback - offensive, demeaning, inferior, judgmental
- Communities are constantly changing and these terms do not capture that
- Terms capture that there is a lot to address by “naming the wrongs that have been done”
- **Most liked: “Underserved Communities”**
- Consistently disliked: “Disadvantaged”
- Very little positive feedback
- Too narrow, wide, confusing, vague
- Does not sufficiently capture issues

Communities of Concern Nomenclature: Four Options Based on Feedback To-Date

Prioritized Requirements for Nomenclature

- ✓ Positive, empowering
- ✓ Forward-looking, action-oriented
- ✓ Communicate “priority”
- ✓ Short and easily understood

Staff Suggestions to Advance:

- Equity Focus Communities
- Equity Prioritized Communities
- Equity Priority Neighborhoods
- Equity Action Areas

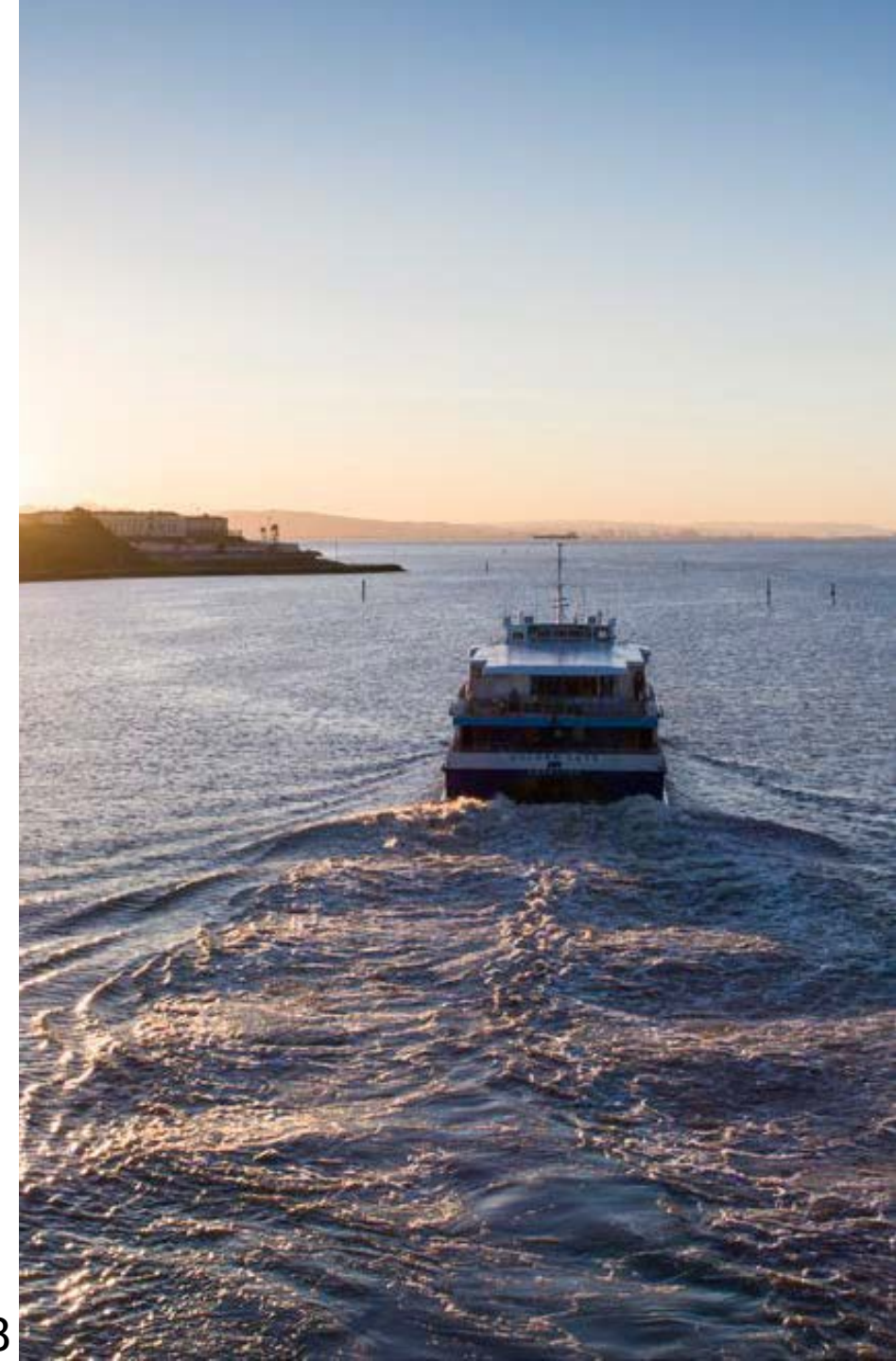
What's Next?

Spring
2021

- Share recommendations with Joint MTC Planning Committee and ABAG Admin Committee
- Adopt nomenclature for use in Plan document

2022

- Re-examine Community of Concern Methodology



Discussion Questions

Framework:

- Does the Subcommittee have feedback on staff recommendations?
- Are there any other issues that the Subcommittee recommends for study in the future?

Nomenclature:

- Can Subcommittee members provide opinions on why or why they may not favor each of the names that staff has shortlisted?
- Do the Subcommittee members have a preference towards any of the names, or have other suggestions?

Thank you.

Contact Anup Tapase at:
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For more information, visit
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