

Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments Plan Bay Area 2050: Public Engagement Overview

August 17, 2021

Draft Plan Bay Area 2050: Summary of Public Input Received

To kick-off the final round of Plan Bay Area 2050 engagement, MTC and ABAG released Draft Plan Bay Area 2050 (Draft Plan) and its related supplemental reports on May 26, 2021, followed by the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) on June 4, 2021. The formal public comment period for both documents closed at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, July 20, 2021. This last round of engagement caps off over three and a half years of dialogue and consultation on the Plan Bay Area 2050 process with residents, local partners, regional, state and federal collaborators, and many other public and private stakeholders.

As the Bay Area continued to contend with the COVID-19 pandemic, which initially required residents to shelter in place and maintain physical distancing, MTC and ABAG staff sought alternatives for planned in-person public engagement activities. What transpired were record-breaking levels of engagement with the largest number of participants to date. In total, we engaged over 22,000 individuals, agencies and organizations, and received over 220,000 comments over the course of the plan.

This memorandum summarizes what we heard during the Draft Plan and Draft EIR comment period (a detailed report is included as **Attachment A**. Correspondence for the [Draft Plan](#) and [Draft EIR](#) are posted on the Plan Bay Area website. **Attachment B** provides a recap of the various engagement efforts, public meetings, and other opportunities for the public and partners to participate in the Plan Bay Area 2050 process conducted over the 3+ years of developing the Draft Plan. Furthermore, **Attachment C** highlights the successes of our digital engagement efforts — a key driver of awareness and participation — over the last three and a half years.

Final Round of Engagement

For the final round of engagement on the Draft Plan Bay Area 2050 and its related supplemental reports, including the Draft EIR and Draft Implementation Plan, MTC and ABAG staff continued to use digital promotion to increase awareness and participation on key deliverables and events, which substantially increased engagement outcomes. Below is an overview of the engagement activities conducted during the final round of engagement that focused on Implementation Plan development (late 2020/early 2021) and the Draft Plan, Draft EIR and Draft Implementation Plan (mid-2021):

- **One workshop tailored to high school students** where participants learned about the Draft Plan's 35 strategies. The presentation provided at the workshop is included in Attachment A.
- **One online Plan Bay Area 2050 Video Challenge** in partnership with the Spare the Air Youth program that encouraged students and their families to record a short video speaking about their favorite Draft Plan strategy and its impact on their future. A video compilation of the videos submitted is available at sparetheairyouth.org/video-challenge.
- **One Plan Bay Area Listening Line** allowed residents without access to internet the ability to engage in the process by leaving a voicemail with their comments.
- **One multi-lingual (English, Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog and Vietnamese) brochure** detailing the various opportunities to participate and outlining the different ways to submit comments on the Draft Plan and the Draft EIR was mailed to over 20,000 addresses in Equity Priority Communities throughout the nine Bay Area counties.
- **One tribal summit** and one government-to-government consultation. MTC and ABAG staff provided an overview of the Draft Plan to tribal representatives and answered their questions at these

events. A summary of these activities will be included in the Final Native American Tribal Engagement and Government-to-Government Consultation Report.

- **Two educational videos** that highlighted the benefits of the Draft Plan. The first included appearances from various Commissioners and ABAG Board members outlining various plan elements, while the second was animated and directed viewers to information on the Draft Plan and provided them the ability to comment.
- **Two online- and telephone-based surveys** on the Implementation Plan (conducted in English, Chinese and Spanish).
- **Three public hearings** on the Draft Plan and three public hearings on the Draft EIR. An example of the presentation provided at the public hearings is included in Attachment A.
- **Four digital workshops via Zoom** focused on the Draft Plan, one for each subregion: North Bay (Marin, Napa, Solano and Sonoma Counties), East Bay (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties), West Bay (San Francisco and San Mateo Counties) and South Bay (Santa Clara County). An example of the presentation provided at the workshops is included in Attachment A.
- **Four technical workshops** with agency partners and technical stakeholders. MTC and ABAG staff solicited early input on the Implementation Plan in the winter received feedback on the Draft Plan and the Draft Implementation Plan from stakeholders and partners in the summer.
- **Nine briefings with elected officials.**¹ Throughout May and June, staff provided an overview of the Draft Plan and answered questions of elected officials at county transportation agency board meetings.
- **Ten qualitative small-group discussions on the Implementation Plan** with community-based organization members, staff and students.
- **Approximately 70 one-on-one and small group focused discussions** with agency partners and technical stakeholders to discuss various elements of the Draft Implementation Plan.

What We Heard

In all, 322 individuals and organizations submitted comments in the form of emails, web comments, phone comments and letters sent via email. Of those, 140 pieces of correspondence were received via eircomments@bayareametro.gov and the remaining correspondence and comments were submitted either via info@planbayarea.org, via webform or via telephone. It's important to note that many of the letters submitted combined their Draft Plan and Draft EIR comments. The next page outlines the major themes we heard from the various engagement activities, organized by the three key reports mentioned above. A detailed account of what we heard on the Draft Plan, Draft Implementation Plan and the Draft EIR is included as **Attachment A**. A detailed listing of comments and responses on the Draft EIR will also be included in the Final EIR, as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Draft Plan Document & Supplemental Reports

General Comments

Based on the hundreds of comments received, there is strong support for the Draft Plan and its 35 strategies, albeit with numerous requested changes, additions, modifications and clarifications from individuals, organizations and partner agencies. There were several comments received opposing the Draft Plan in general, and ABAG, RHNA, growth, density and development specifically, while others wanted to see more of the plan's strategies, especially environmental protections and transportation improvements. Additionally, the theme of equity rose to the top, with more commenters supporting the plan's equity focus and a handful

¹ Meeting with San Francisco County Transportation Agency is scheduled for September 2021.

of residents opposed to equity goals and strategies. Last, perceived concerns over land use authority and concerns about the impacts of growth on utilities and infrastructure also rose as top themes.

Transportation Comments

The Transportation element of the plan received the most comments. The most-cited issues, at over 30 comments each, were support for more active transportation, support for Express Lanes, and opposition to highway or freeway expansion. Commenters expressed support for public transit, including support of more frequent and reliable service and expansion of transit lines, including the SMART train in Sonoma and Marin counties. Commenters also indicated a desire for enhanced safety for all who use active transportation and transit. An interest in transportation-related climate mitigation efforts, such as electrification and transportation demand management initiatives, rounded out the transportation comments.

Housing Comments

The housing element received the second greatest number of comments. Support and opposition to housing was almost evenly split. Supporters called for the building of more housing in general, and more affordable housing specifically, with most of the opposition to new and affordable housing coming from South Bay residents. There was continued concern over the jobs-housing imbalance. Commenters supported most of the housing strategies, with Strategy H1 (strengthen renter protections) as the noticeable exception. Interest in varying housing types also rose as a top theme, with some supporting single-family housing specifically. There were calls for jurisdictions to meet their Regional Housing Needs Allocation numbers. Additionally, there was specific concern from local jurisdictions that implementation of Strategy H5 (integrate affordable housing into all major housing projects) could weaken existing local policies.

Environment Comments

The environment element followed closely behind housing in the number of comments received. Environmental topics focused largely on hazards, including sea level rise and wildfire preparedness, followed by water supply concerns, and then climate mitigation. Overall, the comments are supportive of the intent of the plan's nine environmental strategies, but many offered suggestions for expanding or modifying specific strategies. On sea level rise, for example, commenters suggested that this strategy should be further integrated into other strategies, while others questioned the assumptions used and suggest further research on the topic. Other themes that rose to the top include adding e-bikes to a few strategies, as well as building more regional trails. A handful of commenters mentioned the Priority Conservation Area program, agreeing that more funding is needed; supporting building retrofits and work-from-home options; and setting more ambitious environmental goals to address the climate crisis.

Economy Comments

The economy element received the least number of comments. Overall, the top theme was workforce development, specifically support for training and prioritizing local labor from Equity Priority Communities, as well as a specific call to add a construction-focused workforce development strategy. The second theme that rose to the top was Strategy EC1 (universal basic income), with an even split among supporters and opponents. The other top themes included support for Priority Production Areas, support for expanded internet access and support for better access to jobs, in that order.

Draft Implementation Plan

Of the 322 total comments received, nearly 40 were specifically related to the Draft Implementation Plan. Feedback on the Draft Implementation Plan was also discussed during a partner and stakeholder technical workshop held on July 19, which drew approximately 70 attendees, as well as during more than 30 separate small group and one-on-one focused discussions held from July 27 to August 13.

Comments and feedback came largely from partner organizations and covered a wide range of topics, but in general were focused on specifying what strategies to prioritize and what roles partners envision playing in implementing them. Local transit and regional agencies, local jurisdictions, county transportation authorities, advocates, and non-profits all noted specific strategies that they support or would like to see tweaked or expanded. Overall, more feedback on implementation priorities and partnership was received on the transportation and environment elements of the plan, versus the housing and economy elements of the plan.

Key themes to emerge included a broad interest in partnering on advocacy efforts to raise the revenues needed to support plan implementation as well as collaborating on sea level rise adaptation efforts — with the caveat that more clarity is needed on MTC and ABAG’s role in the sea level rise adaptation space. Other themes to emerge included concerns around workforce development and workforce needs, an interest from many partners in working together to revamp the Priority Conservation Area (PCA) planning framework, as well as the need for metrics, tracking and regular progress reports to support accountability over the implementation period.

Based on the comment letters and feedback received, MTC and ABAG staff identified 45 partnership commitments or statements of support to help advance strategy implementation over the next one-to-five years. These and other potential partnerships will be discussed in greater detail at committee meetings slated for September 2021.

Draft EIR

After the formal public comment period, the next step in the CEQA process is to respond to written and oral comments on the environmental analysis in the Draft EIR received during the public review period, and to revise the Draft EIR as needed. The Final EIR includes the Draft EIR, a copy of each comment on the Draft EIR received by MTC/ABAG during the public comment period, responses to comments on environmental issues raised in those comments, and corrections and clarifications to the Draft EIR. Many commenters raised points relating to both Draft Plan Bay Area 2050 and the Draft EIR.

Comments on the Draft EIR covered a broad range of topic areas, many of which were reflected in the summary of comments on the Draft Plan, discussed above. There were general categories of comments raised by multiple commenters, including assumptions related to the regional growth forecast, implications of COVID-19, hydrology and utilities analyses, the alternatives analysis, the potential effects of sea level rise inundation, as well as MTC and ABAG’s authority to implement the Plan and the Draft EIR’s mitigation measures. All comments submitted on the Draft EIR will be responded to in the Final EIR when released this fall.

Conclusion

Plan Bay Area 2050 engagement yielded greater participation than ever before. The use of digital promotion and innovative engagement techniques attracted a diverse group of Bay Area residents who had previously not participated in the regional planning process. Importantly, public input was integral in defining various key elements of the plan and achieving staff’s goal of inclusive and equitable engagement. The Plan Bay Area 2050’s public engagement [webinar](#) will be held on Tuesday, August 17, 2021 at 9:30 am.

Attachments

- A. Draft Plan Bay Area 2050 and Draft EIR Engagement: What We Heard Summary Report — Late Spring-Early Summer 2021
- B. Plan Bay Area 2050 Engagement Activities: From Horizon through Draft Plan Bay Area 2050
- C. Digital Promotions Summary: From Horizon through Draft Plan Bay Area 2050 (2018-2021)