



METROPOLITAN
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COMMISSION

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Memorandum

TO: All Staff

DATE: June 11, 2001

FR: Executive Director

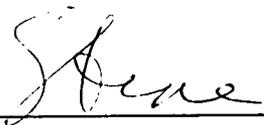
RE: Regional governance

The attached article appeared over the weekend in the Contra Costa Times. It describes a forthcoming proposal from Commissioner Mark DeSaulnier under which the staffs of MTC and ABAG could be consolidated, with a subsequent study process to determine whether the two agencies should be merged outright.

The notion of merging some or all of the Bay Area's regional agencies has been debated since the creation of ABAG and MTC in the 1960's and 1970's. The most recent effort (Bay Vision 2020) involved a proposed merger of MTC, ABAG, and the Air District, and culminated in the failure of state enabling legislation in the early 1990's.

The Commission will first discuss this latest proposal at its workshop on June 27-28 in Sonoma. I would expect that the Commission might establish some process to study Commissioner DeSaulnier's proposal, so any action is probably some time away.

I know such discussions may create some anxiety for members of both staffs. However, I have no doubt that you will continue to carry out your responsibilities with the usual professionalism and aplomb. I will certainly keep you posted of material developments as they occur. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to talk to Ann, Therese, or me.



Steve Heminger

Attachment

A REGIONAL PUZZLE



TIMES ILLUSTRATION

Centralization could be missing piece

■ Contra Costa Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier pushes for a merger of Bay Area planning agencies

By Lisa Vorderbrueggen
TIMES STAFF WRITER

TO CURB SPRAWL And congestion, preserve open spaces and clean the air, the Bay Area must abandon its fractured system and govern regionally, said Contra Costa County Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier.

To that end, DeSaulnier will this summer propose merging the staffs of the Association of Bay Area Governments and the

Metropolitan Transportation Commission. He sits on the boards of both agencies.

And later this year, he will ask Bay Area lawmakers to carry legislation that would allow the region to explore consolidating agencies to create a regional governing board.

Its powers likely would include regional planning responsibility for areas such as land use and transportation, air and water quality, and affordable housing.

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someone to be in charge.

"I see it as an agency that helps cities do the right thing through incentives, not mandates."

ABAG Executive Director Eugene Leong supports it. So does the chairwoman of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

"Our residents and the business community have been telling us for years that we have too many agencies doing too many of the same things," said Sharon Brown, commission chairwoman and San Pablo city councilwoman. "This is something we should look at again."

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Puzzle

FROM PAGE 1

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"Our infrastructure crisis is so severe that it's imperative that we plan differently than we have in the past," Torlakson said. He plans to have a hearing on the issue in September.

DeSaulnier's pitch is the latest example of "new regionalism," a shift in many of the nation's metropolitan areas toward a more centralized government in response to the dark side of growth.

Besieged with smog, long commutes and sprawling subdivisions on valuable farmland, regional government is emerging as a means to manage what traditional city and county structures cannot.

Portland, Ore., was among the first to do it more than 20 years ago.

Governed by an eight-member elected board, Portland Metro provides transportation and land-use planning services, and oversees garbage and recycling programs. It also manages parks, the zoo and performing arts facilities.

More recently, Georgia's governor formed a regional board in Atlanta and appointed a growth czar. Maryland, Florida and Washington state have created regional governments.

The regionalism movement is showing up on the California landscape, too.

Assemblyman Robert Hertzberg, D-Van Nuys, formed a Commission on Regionalism last year.

More than 20 California communities have or are developing what are called collaborative regional initiatives, including the Tri-Valley's "The Golden Valley: A 2010 Vision."

San Diego County agencies are evaluating consolidation as a precursor to regional governance after the Legislature authorized it with a pilot bill last year.

"What we are seeing in California for the first time is numerous local government officials who are coming forward as willing partners in regional collaboration," said Nick Bollman, president of the San Francisco-based California Center for Regional Leadership.

"It's not about who has to give up power, but how can they share power if it means better outcomes for cities and counties."

The Bay Area historically has managed its regional pressures through specialty boards formed to meet federal mandates in areas such as transportation, air and water quality.

Ad hoc boards are being formed continually, as well.

For example, the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development, a coalition of businesses and government agencies, is distributing throughout the region a growth plan it wrote.

In 1999, DeSaulnier co-created the Inter-Regional Partnership, a five-county coalition representing Contra Costa, Alameda, San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Santa Clara to talk about the growing numbers of people forced to commute from affordable housing in the Central Valley to the plentiful jobs in the Tri-Valley and Silicon Valley.

But despite several attempts, including a Bay Vision 2020 initiative in the 1980s, the Bay Area has resisted forming a regional "super-agency."

Small cities and sparsely pop-

AND TWO SHALL BECOME ONE?

Contra Costa County Supervisor Mark DeSaulnier, who also sits on the boards of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments, says the two agencies should be combined. Here's a look at what each organization does and what it costs each year to run them.

Metropolitan Transportation Commission

■ 2000-01 operating budget: \$52 million

■ Number of employees: 121

■ **Governing board:** Nineteen members include 14 appointed by elected city and county boards, two who represent the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, and three nonvoting members who represent federal and state transportation agencies and the federal housing department.

■ **Major responsibilities:** It is the state and federally designated transportation planning agency for the nine-county Bay Area. Its most visible job is developing the Regional Transportation Plan, a blueprint for funding transit, highway, airport, seaport, railroad, bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The agency also oversees how a portion of bridge toll proceeds is spent.

Association of Bay Area Governments

■ 2000-01 operating budget: \$12.7 million

■ Number of employees: 75

■ **Governing board:** The General Assembly is composed of an elected representative from each city and county member. Its operations are directed by an executive board of 38 elected officials.

■ **Major responsibilities:** Formed in 1961 to protect local control, plan for the future and promote regional cooperation. Its central job is to provide growth and economic projections its members and other regional agencies use for planning. It also determines how much housing — including affordable housing — needs to be built and where.

NEW REGIONALISM

To learn more about the regionalism movement in California and across the nation, here are Web sites and a book devoted to the issue:

■ **California Center for Regional Leadership:** Find "The State of California's Regions: 2001" at www.caeregions.org.

■ **Assembly Speaker Robert Hertzberg's Commission on Regions:** www.regionalism.org

■ **"The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl,"** by Peter Calthorpe and William Fulton. Calthorpe is a Berkeley architect renowned for his work in the New Urbanist movement. Fulton is a Southern California resident, author of several books and publisher of a California newsletter devoted to state planning issues.

■ **Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development:** The draft Compact for Sustainable Development can be found at www.bayareaalliance.org.

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ulated counties feared such an agency would usurp local control and foist upon them unwanted projects such as landfills or prisons, and the vision faded.

"What the history of Bay Vision 2020 suggests is that no matter how good an idea combining regional agencies might be, it's not something that electrifies people as a solution," said Bill Fulton, co-author with Berkeley architect and new urbanist Peter Calthorpe of "The Regional City: Planning for the End of Sprawl."

What needs to happen for true regional planning to occur, Fulton said, is a "determined effort across the Bay Area, and not just in government but in the business community, to implement it."

To avoid the failures of the past, DeSaulnier said he will start small and focus on how the region can grow smarter, provide affordable housing, clean up the air and improve traffic conditions.

Combining the staffs of ABAG and the MTC is a logical first step, he said.

Most councils of governments across the country have responsibility for both land-use planning and transportation.

The agencies are in the same Oakland building. The merger can be done with a vote of the two boards without a change in state law.

Each agency's governing board, appointed by city and county elected boards, would remain intact.

Common jobs or departments such as the executive director or

payroll services would be merged. Comparable programs would be combined.

"It's the minimum of what we should do if we want to make regional land-use planning more integrated into our transportation planning," DeSaulnier said.

For example, the transportation commission recently began giving grants to cities that encourage housing construction near public transit.

The association, meanwhile, prepares growth projections and determines how much housing each city needs to build.

"We're working with local governments on their housing elements and providing growth projections while MTC is out there providing incentives to build housing without much coordination with us," said Leong. "We need to change that."

Next, DeSaulnier said he will push for the Legislature early next year to establish what he calls the Bay Area Regional Coordinating Council.

Modeled after San Diego County, the council would evaluate the potential for regional governance and report its findings to the Legislature.

It could call for consolidating agencies or it might recommend a series of agreements between them designed to better coordinate programs and money.

As DeSaulnier envisions the process, it will be up to the council to find out what the Bay Area wants and to determine the structure and extent of a regional agency's powers.

Portland Metro, for example, has an at-large elected director and seven council members elected by district. But its population is a sixth of the Bay Area's and it has only three counties and 24 cities.

"Clearly, the Bay Area is going to be more difficult," DeSaulnier said. "But we have one of the country's most dysfunctional regions. We have to try."

Lisa Vorderbruggen covers land use and transportation. Reach her at 925-945-4773 or [lvorderbruggen@ctimes.com](mailto:l Vorderbruggen@ctimes.com).

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