

Transit-Oriented Housing

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**To: Ms. Ursala Volgen
Facilitator, Plan 2050 EIR**

Dear Ursala,

I made a few comments about transit-oriented housing at yesterday's meeting. Here's a bit of elaboration.

The clustering of housing near transit stops and calling it "transit-oriented" came into vogue two or more years ago, with little if any substantiating evidence as to its viability. "Well at least it's better than more sprawl or more urban stack-and-pack", we were told.

But is it enough?! Is it really the best we can do?

Pre-COVID, roughly 25% of Bay Area trips were commute trips. Meaning that the other 75% were non-commute trips. Will those moving into the transit-oriented housing be abandoning their cars? Not hardly; there are just too many types of non-commute trips that currently work only with cars.

Pre-COVID, 15% of the Bay Area's commuters were transit commuters. That means that pre-COVID less than 4% of Bay Area total trips were transit-commute trips. Even if that number doubled, we'd still have all those non-commute trips and remaining auto commute trips. For this reason the primary transportation emphasis of Plan 2050, the BRTF and other regional improvement efforts should be on how to persuade more non-commuters to drive less. Not enough attention has been paid to this category of traveler and the great economic and environmental damage that he and she unwittingly cause.

Post-COVID. From all indications, thanks to the surprising popularity of the work-at-home arrangement, there will be a substantial reduction in transit commuting and perhaps also in auto-commuting. Recent studies have suggested that packing oneself into crowded transit vehicles full of strangers is not likely to

become very popular any time soon. These fundamental societal changes are occurring long after the assumptions underpinning Plan 2050 were formulated.

Bonafide transit communities might work (Peter Calthrope may have had the right idea way back in the early 1980's). Transit-oriented housing as currently defined, even with the usual smattering of commercial uses stuck on to make things look better, is highly unlikely to produce the desired effect, especially when applied to the 75% or greater percentage of travelers who are not commuters. It is not enough to sing the praises of transit-oriented housing. Absent firm evidence that putting housing near bus stops or a BART Station will both ease congestion and significantly cut regional GHG emissions, basing the future of the region on this house of cards is an extremely risky proposition.

Sincerely,

Gerald Cauthen P.E.

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