



July 20, 2021

Plan Bay Area 2050 Team  
Via email: [info@planbayarea.org](mailto:info@planbayarea.org)

Dear Plan Bay Area Team:

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council appreciates the opportunity to comment on Plan Bay Area 2050. The mission of the Ridge Trail is to plan, promote and sustain a connected regional hiking, cycling, and equestrian trail on the ridgelines around San Francisco Bay—linking people, parks and open space for today and future generations.

We would like to first recognize the important step the Metropolitan Transportation Commission/Association of Bay Area Governments (MTC/ABAG) has taken to include trails for recreation, transportation, green infrastructure and expansion of equitable access to parks and open spaces in Plan Bay Area. The significance of these resources has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic, as was the unequal access to these mental and physical health refuges that many low-income and communities of color experience. As stated in Plan Bay Area 2050, “...quality outdoor spaces near home are more essential for health and recreation than ever before.”

#### *Request to Prepare a Regional Trails Plan*

A robust, connected network of regional and local trails has the potential to address key aspects of five of the nine Environmental Strategies listed in Plan Bay Area. Trails benefits go beyond active transportation and include healthy exercise, recreation, environmental stewardship, land conservation, economic vitality and tourism. Trails can reduce congestion for commuting, other local trips, and by providing close-to-home recreation opportunities.

To capitalize on these synergies, to effectively coordinate cross-jurisdictional and regional trail issues and opportunities, and to thoughtfully advocate for and direct resources, a Regional Trail Plan would be invaluable and should be prepared by MTC/ABAG as part of the near-term implementation program. Many Metropolitan Planning Organizations across the country have prepared, adopted and are implementing regional trail plans.

- Oregon Metro
- Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council
- Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization
- Madison Area Transportation Planning Board

- Southern California Association of Governments
- San Diego Association of Governments

San Diego is one such example where the trails program addresses regional trail facilities affecting areas not within the County’s land use jurisdiction. For these regional trails, many policies involve coordination and cooperation with the region's cities on trail planning, siting and funding. For example:

*Countywide Policy 2.3: Participate in completing missing segments of regional trails to satisfy the need for long range trail opportunities.*

“Regional trails are significant on a countywide, state or national level...these trails are important, desirable, provide a public benefit, serve as the backbone for a larger trail network, provide connectivity to existing trails, and provide an overall significant regional resource worthy of consideration for various forms of future funding. The Regional Trails Map identifies approved general alignment corridors of regional trails in the County. These trails have characteristics and conditions that serve a regional function by covering long linear distances, transcending community and/or municipal borders, having state or national significance, or providing important connections to existing parks and open space preserves.”

Efforts like the Biden Administration’s “30 x 30” plan, aiming to conserve 30% of American lands by 2030, and the federal infrastructure bill give reason to believe that some of this much-needed funding may be available in the coming years. Being ready with a Regional Trail Plan will demonstrate the region’s commitment to the environmental strategies laid out in Plan Bay Area—equitable access to parks, trails, clean air and water, GHG and congestion reduction, and connected and protected open space, recreation and habitat corridors.

#### *Priority Conservation Area (PCA) Program*

We understand that the PCA program will be significantly restructured over the next few years. Funding for PCA projects has been insufficient and should be increased. This is an important and long-overdue effort, and will provide an excellent opportunity to support projects with multiple benefits--wetland restoration efforts that include Bay Trail gap closures; conservation acquisitions that provide Ridge Trail easements; shoreline protection projects that include Water Trail facilities. Both habitat and regional open space and trails need landscape scale planning to create connected and protected corridors. Continued recognition of the Bay Area’s unique regional trails--Bay, Ridge, and Water--as Priority Conservation Areas is of the utmost importance and will facilitate the realization of multi-benefit projects.

We are pleased to see that the price tags in the billions recognize the investment needed to achieve each of these strategies, however “can” should be replaced with “will” in this sentence regarding funding from page 97 of Plan Bay Area:

“Through advocacy, legislation, initiatives, planning and research over the next 30 years, MTC and ABAG **can** work with partners to secure a \$102 billion investment into our region’s future health and safety, ensuring that our natural land, air and water belongs to everyone — especially those historically marginalized and currently underserved.”

The rolling hills, mountains, forests, calm bay, and rugged ocean shorelines are fundamental to our regional identity and quality of life in the Bay Area. As the past year and a half has shown, equitable access to these lands is more important than ever. Trails--regional and local--have the potential and capacity to significantly contribute to the majority of the environmental strategies set out in Plan Bay Area, and can play a vital role in reducing congestion and vehicle miles traveled. We look forward to participating in and supporting further efforts, including developing a Regional Trail Plan and revamping the PCA Program.

Sincerely,



Janet McBride, Executive Director  
Bay Area Ridge Trail Council