



MARIN COUNTY BICYCLE COALITION

July 20, 2021

TO: Plan Bay Area 2050 Team

Via email: info@planbayarea.org

The Marin County Bicycle Coalition (MCBC), established in 1998, aims to create a healthy, connected, and sustainable Marin by promoting bicycling for everyday transportation and recreation. MCBC appreciates the opportunity to comment on Plan Bay Area 2050.

We would like to first applaud the important step taken by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission/Association of Bay Area Governments (MTC/ABAG) to include expansion of off-road trails, green infrastructure, and equitable access to parks and open spaces as part of Plan Bay Area 2050. The importance of these resources has been highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, as has 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 the heart of **five of the nine** Environmental Strategies listed in Plan Bay Area 2050. In order to advance these strategies, coordinate regional trail development, advocate for and direct resources, a Regional Trail Plan would be invaluable and should be prepared by MTC/ABAG. 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 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, connected and protected open space, recreation and habitat corridors.

EN5. Protect and manage high-value conservation lands. Provide strategic matching funds to help conserve and maintain high-priority natural and agricultural lands, including but not limited to Priority Conservation Areas and wildland-urban interface areas. \$15 BILLION

It is our understanding that the PCA program will be significantly restructured over the next few years. 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. 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.

EN6. Modernize and expand parks, trails and recreation facilities. Invest in quality parks, trails and open spaces that provide inclusive recreation opportunities for people from all backgrounds, abilities and ages to enjoy. \$30 BILLION

This is a critically important goal for the Bay Area, and we commend MTC for including it as a strategy. Marin County hosts several regional trails—the SMART pathway, the Bay, Ridge, and Water Trails, the California Coastal trail, and hundreds of miles of local trails through town, city, county, state and national recreation areas/shorelines. Investments in each of these trail systems, and the parks and open spaces they traverse, is long overdue. Programs like Transit to Trails, as well as a redoubled effort to complete key trail segments in Equity Priority Communities (EPCs), can begin to address equity and inclusivity.

EN7. Expand commute trip reduction programs at major employers. Set a sustainable commute target for major employers as part of an expanded Bay Area Commuter Benefits Program, with employers responsible for funding incentives and disincentives to shift auto commuters to any combination of telecommuting, transit, walking and/or bicycling.

Approximately 2.7 million people—nearly 40% of the region’s population—live within two miles of the Bay Trail. Millions more live and work in close proximity to the SMART Pathway, Napa Valley Vine Trail, the East Bay Regional Park District’s Iron Horse Trail, the Stevens Creek Trail, and many other active transportation facilities. The capacity for mode shift represented by these trail networks is immense, a latent resource with massive potential to reduce the number of local and inter-city auto trips. MTC already plays a major role in coordinating bikeshare programs across the region, and has done well to accommodate the growing popularity and value of e-bikes as they relate to auto trip reduction. Regional trails, local trails, active transportation facilities, and subsidization of bike/e-bike purchases should be a key focus for MTC when implementing EN7.

EN8. Expand clean vehicle initiatives. Expand investments in clean vehicles, including more fuel-efficient vehicles and electric vehicle subsidies and chargers.

Electric bicycles **must** be included in these ‘clean vehicle’ initiatives. While electric automobiles are an important part of a clean future, Americans are already buying more e-bikes per year than electric cars, despite their current lack of subsidy. Additionally, electric cars come with harmful externalities, such as pollution from tires and brake dust, peak hour roadway congestion, and the need for lithium ion batteries many times larger than those that power e-bikes. These factors ultimately make the e-bike a vastly superior option from an environmental,

public health, economic, resource, and land use perspective. E-bike purchase subsidies should be a first choice when considering expansion of clean vehicle initiatives.

EN9. *Expand transportation demand management initiatives. Expand investments in programs like vanpools, bikeshare, carshare and parking fees to discourage solo driving.*

Expanded bikeshare is important and worthy of additional resources. However, without safe streets and trails that are connected, easy to navigate, and seamlessly link transit, jobs, neighborhoods, parks, and schools, an expanded bikeshare will ultimately deliver diminishing returns. Our region has spent untold billions facilitating driving, and people have responded in kind by choosing that mode for most trips. When riding, walking, or taking transit are made as safe, convenient, and direct as driving alone, we will see the mode shift we desire and deserve.

Access to parks and open space has been a key relief valve for many during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people have eschewed indoor recreation and socialization for safety reasons. However, for many lower-income communities, transportation to suburban and rural open space areas remains a challenge. Transit to Trails programs can help fill this gap by providing meaningful, regular, and timely service to recreation destinations, particularly during weekends. This should be coordinated with a build out of trail and other active transportation connections both to transit and directly to open space. Because traveling to open space areas incurs high vehicle-miles traveled (VMT), improving transit and active transportation connections has the additional benefit of reducing carbon emissions.

On page 97 of the Plan Bay Area draft, we recommend that “can” should be replaced with “will” in this sentence:

“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.”

In closing, we want to convey that we remain committed to being active partners with MTC in pursuing the strategies and goals of Plan Bay Area 2050. We are inspired by the ambitious objectives to create equitable multi-modal transportation networks, affordable housing, and a resilient, sustainable environment, and we look forward to working with you on these exciting initiatives.

Sincerely,



Maureen Gaffney, Acting Executive Director
Marin County Bicycle Coalition