

From: [Tarang Shah](#)
To: info@planbayarea.org
Subject: Public Comment
Date: Monday, August 10, 2020 9:57:01 PM

External Email

Dear Plan Bay Area Team,

I have attached my comments on the Plan Bay Area 2050 below. Thank you so much for your efforts in outreach. Citations are at the end.

I am a Civil Engineering and Humanities and Arts student at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and would like feedback on these comments.

Please keep me in the loop and confirm receipt!

Thank you,

Tarang Shah



Massively decrease car use to below 25% of overall modeshare to meet Greenhouse gas targets

As planners, I am sure you are aware of the negative effects of cars: congestion, pedestrian fatalities, sprawl, urban heat island effects, decreased area, parking lots. Roadway and parking areas occupy far too much of our cities and take too much money. Eliminating large parts of it would allow the construction of many new units of affordable housing, as well as new urban forest, park and playground areas, and better alternative transportation infrastructure.

Your presentation brought up electric vehicles a lot. Do not rely on them, and please do not subsidize them. They are expensive (to incentivize them, you may increase the cost of fuel/petrol cars or prohibit those). I am aware that many people have expressed interest in such a measure, but these cars will only take up more parking and do not solve the fundamental issues of cars. We need space for affordable housing by removing car parking! We need to end what causes pedestrian and cyclist and teen deaths. Cars are also fiscally irresponsible: Copenhagen, for example, calculated that the City loses 5.28 DKK per kilometer of travel by car, but gains 4.80 DKK for every kilometer biked ([City of Copenhagen](#)). For that reason, cars should be a last resort. All car (and airplane) travel should be discouraged and rapid transit must be available everywhere, starting with underserved areas like most of Oakland.

Electric vehicles are perceived to be cleaner. They decrease CO2 emissions (certainly not nearly as much as transit, biking or walking, but it is a decrease). However, their particulate matter (PM 10) emissions are the same. This is because 90% of toxic emissions are from the tires of vehicles, not the tailpipe. As electric vehicles are generally around 25% heavier, they put more weight on tires. Therefore they actually may cause the same amount of toxic pollution (Timmers et al. 2016). Put simply, our polluted cities with extraordinary air pollution (some of the worst in the nation, and considered terrible by the American Lung Association)

will actually change minimally from electric vehicles. They do not account for environmental justice. I live near a freeway and the study indicates that an electric vehicle may not significantly change the amount of toxic particles I will be breathing. Even if technology improves, it is unlikely to decrease it enough to offset the increase in number of vehicles.

For freeway tolling, please do not give discounts for carpoolers and low-income residents. Carpoolers already get a discount by splitting the cost of tolling, and low-income residents should receive free/discounted transit instead. There are very few low-income people who really need a car when the freeway has a transit alternative, and this low-income exemption is a potential loophole as well (who knows who is really in the car?), not to mention that enforcement of these is likely to be more expensive. Carpoolers save money by carpooling already and low-income people get subsidized transit. They should not receive subsidies for occupying the same amount of space on our congested freeways. Also it is far more preferable to try and make sure low-income people get enough money for working — raise minimum wage so they are not low income! (among other things of course).

One concern about freeway tolling — people may be diverted onto city streets. Therefore, city streets must have congestion pricing as well to protect residents and alternative modes of travel. We need fewer cars, period! And car parking can be converted into affordable housing, like in Fruitvale. Car sharing (like zipcars) can also help here where cars are necessary and public transit does not help.

Alternative Transportation

Clearly, we need to discourage car use, electric or otherwise. Freeway tolling, private parking taxation and congestion pricing in cities is necessary. However, we need an alternative.

The cheapest and quickest way is to build Freeway BRT, using the ReXBus network as a starting point as suggested by TransForm. The TransForm report suggests building stations on the side of highways, but I would argue that median stations should be built quickly to use existing HOV lanes, and as people start taking the bus, the HOV lanes should be converted into bus only lanes when bus frequencies are at least once every 5 minutes. Freeway BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) is incredibly cheap and can be retrofitted onto existing highways and provide transit in underserved areas. One suggested corridor is I-580 across Oakland to I-80 across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco South on 101. This provides transit to underserved areas in East Oakland and connects them with the Transbay Bus Hub and to the Mission District, as well as supporting transfers to BART (at Embarcadero and MacArthur) and Caltrain (if the bus is designed to end at Millbrae or another Caltrain Station, or if the DTX is built). I do not agree completely with TransForm's assessment of routes, however, as I said earlier, it is a good place to start, and the I-580 to I-80 to 101 corridor between Oakland and San Francisco is a good place to start. Other places include highway 101 in San Mateo and Santa Clara county to provide rapid transit in underserved Silicon Valley (and Google). We have an intensive freeway system — let's use it!

Eventually freeway BRT can be expanded, similar to TransMilenio in Bogota, Columbia. To make the ReXBus network, note that Seattle has and is planning freeway BRT (Bond 2014; [Sound Transit](#)).

We should not build expensive subways anytime soon, with the exception of the second Transbay Tube. To improve rail infrastructure, we should electrify the Capitol Corridor and

ACE and build the Dumbarton Corridor. Don't rely on BART to San Jose which will take an hour to get to Oakland — an electrified Capitol Corridor can go from San Jose to Richmond via Oakland and underserved areas in Fremont within 50 minutes or so (assuming I-980 is removed to make room for this and tracks are straightened) — significantly faster than any car. Building a fast rail network operating at 110 mph is how we can get people to not use cars (BART just isn't fast enough).

A note about bikeways: we should not have ordinary bike lanes — we should have Protected Dutch bikeways, as highlighted in this great document by MassDOT ([Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#)). Protected bicycle lanes are safer, as shown by the Telegraph transformation. Additionally, while men are generally bikers, women actually use protected bicycle lanes more, because they are actually safe and friendly for them and children. Cities have been designed for men — protected bicycle lanes are part of making them designed for women as well. Not to mention that they encourage more bicycle use as well. This should not be negotiable. All residents in the Bay Area should have a network of protected bicycle lanes near their home which allow them to safely access all essential businesses.

Environmental Justice Considerations

I stated earlier that electric vehicles release just as much of hazardous emissions as non-electric vehicles because most hazardous emissions are from tires. So commit to massively decreasing air pollution and remove cars rather than greenwash them by electrifying. Why should Oakland take the burden of suburban commuters? According to the American Lung Association, our air is some of the worst in the nation ([American Lung Association](#)). Since over 200,000 people die premature deaths due to air pollution every year just in the USA ([MIT Research Library for Aviation and the Environment](#)) (that's more than Covid-19 has killed so far (163,000), and exposure to air pollution is a risk factor which has caused susceptibility to this virus, particularly in environmental justice communities ([Lerner 2020](#))).

While emissions from road transportation are the leading cause of these deaths, emissions from diesel and freight trains, marine shipping and industrial areas are notable as well ([MIT Research Library for Aviation and the Environment](#)). Oakland is extremely important because it has the worst of them all. THAT is what I live in, sadly. Electrification and regulation of these as far as possible is necessary, and their usage should be decreased. Freight trains and passenger rail should have a timeline to electrify.

Basically, we need to clean the air. Immediately. And get rid of cars. People who can afford cars are killing those who can't afford one because we have a system that encourages that.

To clean the air, we need to address green space and park inequality. We need to build green roofs (Portland actually has an ordinance requiring new developments to have green roofs with trees on top), build urban forests and create green streets (again, look to Portland!).

There's also a history of inequitable investment. One example is supermarket redlining, where residents in East Oakland have to drive for 25 minutes to get to the nearest supermarket (but have over 30 alcohol stores in their zip code). This is unacceptable. The result is only wealthier people can get essential services nearby and the others are incentivized to get wasted ([OaklandNorth](#)). West Oakland has a similar problem leading to poor health (City On A Hill Press). This is not only true for supermarkets, but for all sorts of local businesses businesses. There is a lack of capital in less wealthy neighborhoods and those people find it difficult to get

capital (for-profit banks don't give money to these areas!) (Pink 2018; Shannon 2018). These areas are vulnerable to larger companies which simply suck resources out of the area and leave without investing anything in return, simply contributing to their decline (Gantz et al. 2017; MacGillis 2020). These areas, generally having low-income and minority people, need local businesses owned by them.

Incubating local and minority businesses is a good idea, but we need financial capital. Grants and loans can help, but we really need a public bank to handle this. The North Dakota State Bank (one of two public banks in USA, the other being the federal reserve) gives out student loans at low interest, supports local business, and has turned profits without a bailout continuously for at least the past 15 years (yes, even during the 2008 recession) ([Brown, 2017](#)). It is not perfect, but this is a strategy we need to try here!

Despite our strong economy, 12.2% of Alameda County citizens experience food insecurity ([Feeding America](#)). This is no surprise, given the difficulties with obtaining fresh, healthy food. Let's include community gardens, green roofs with gardens, farmers markets and other tactics to get fresh food for everyone, fast. Poverty and food insecurity are linked — such tactics help both.

We also need to build a framework and suggest tools for removing or demolishing freeways. I understand that the 2050 plan cannot commit to demolishing freeways, but cities should be able to plan such events and have tools to do so. Provide suggestions on what could replace a freeway, and suggest this as a potential action to freeways. Their very history is rooted in segregation and environmental injustice.

We need to say by 2050, no more environmental injustice. We cannot perpetuate it. Because of perpetual systemic racism, these communities are going to face the worst impacts of climate change unless we act fast.

The 15-minute City Framework

Paris has committed to build in such a way that all residents will have access to every essential service/amenity within 15-minutes (Portland, OR has a 20-minute concept). A lot of strategies in the report support this, but they should explicitly make this a requirement **everywhere**. The reason is, it is likely for some communities to receive the majority of improvements while others remain neglected. The 15-minute Bay Area means that black and minority communities can get benefits, not just people in gentrified areas (which has been so far the case).

The 15-minute framework also creates a coherent goal to tie these strategies together in a way that enhances overall liveability. These strategies must work together to create a picture — that is a city which works for everyone. The 15-minute framework also addresses investment inequality listed earlier as well as environmental justice.

Also, this encourages community interaction, which is great for resilience and helps communities take care of each other and prevent deaths during heat waves and disasters ([Klinenberg 2013](#)) (a problem that is getting more and more frequent with climate change). This also decreases crime, as observed by Jane Jacobs in her book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

The 15-minute city plan also introduces new strategies — for example, the change in travel

demand can allow parking to be made into housing or park area. Schools can be converted into gyms in the evening. Sidewalks, protected bicycle lanes and transit is available for everyone, everywhere.

Other notes

For Objective number 7 in the Strategies Blueprint ("Protect, Preserve, and Produce More Affordable Housing"), the image shows single family zoning (number 6 appears to as well). Single family zoning is not affordable. We need to legalize fourplexes and affordable sixplexes automatically in all non-hazardous lands and build the missing middle of housing (We cannot prohibit the missing middle! That's just not fair and is exclusionary).

Is that it, really?

I appreciate that in the plan, residents pay less on housing and transportation. But it's not enough — low income residents will still have to pay over 80% of their income on housing! This plan is not going to solve homelessness or truly end our problems. In 30 years, by harnessing the economic growth, we should be able to guarantee **everyone** a house, food, and a job with a liveable wage. We should massively decrease poverty rather than maintain a norm of homelessness. **This plan does not go nearly far enough. It maintains a status quo that barely addresses the largest societal problems we face. Let's create a plan that actually alleviates these problems.**

I know much of this is beyond the scope. However, I am sure that if you all can create a plan that alleviates these problems, you will receive grassroots support from many activists and government officials that can make it a reality.

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