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To: info@planbayarea.org
Cc: [Matt Maloney](#)
Subject: FW: Comment on PBA 2050 Blueprint: Advocating Walking TOD
Date: Wednesday, July 29, 2020 8:26:28 PM

External Email

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From: Peter Lydon <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, July 29, 2020 5:04 PM
To: Matt Maloney <mmaloney@bayareametro.gov>
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Subject: Comment on PBA 2050 Blueprint: Advocating Walking TOD

External Email

Matt Maloney, Planning Director July 29, 2020
Bay Area Metro Center
375 Beale Street, San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Mr. Maloney,

This is a comment on the Draft Blueprint for Plan Bay Area 2050, Housing Section, Objective 6, a central, core part of PBA 2050. Objective 6 has three points:

- Allow more housing types and densities in growth areas;
- Reduce barriers to housing near transit;
- Convert old malls and office parks to neighborhoods.

Each of these objectives is fine, but does not go far enough.

PBA 2050 should seize the opportunity to create an intensified version of Transit Oriented Development. That is “walking TOD,” which is multi-unit housing built so that residents can walk or bike safely and conveniently to a high quality transit station without obstruction.

A walking TOD community is a form that provides an excellent solution to the housing

and mobility needs of families and other residents, at the same time that it helps the region's climate change goals and lowers vehicle traffic congestion.

Encouraging the creation of such communities is a much stronger step forward by the region's planners than the Blueprint's present mild call "to reduce barriers to housing near transit" and "allow more housing types and densities."

More than the simple TOD now mentioned in the Blueprint, WTOD is an innovation that helps in a major way with **both** housing and transportation, the capital dilemmas facing the Bay Area. It helps the region as a whole, since mobility will be improved as CO2 emissions are reduced and air quality improves, but most importantly, it provides really excellent housing and mobility for its diverse families and residents at much lower cost than the present dependence on personal cars.

It is important that regional planners think about the serious merits of WTOD as a concept that responds to both transportation and housing needs, and will reduce the cost of both. They should provide in PBA 2050 for one, two, or more prototype examples of WTOD communities made welcoming to both market-level and below-market residents.

It is recommended that Bay Area Metro call for a planning study/proposal, led perhaps by Vishaan Chakraborty at UC Berkeley, of a prototype WTOD community to be located on a rail transit stop in a non-affluent location, such as BART Fruitvale.

Sincerely yours,

Peter Lydon



Appendix: Argument for Walking Transit Oriented Development (WTOD)

Bay Area transportation and housing planners, both official and voluntary, need to raise their heads conceptually and look out higher and further ahead--and they need to work together cooperatively to integrate housing and transportation planning much more, as well.

Due to COVID-19, MTC/ABAG has an extra six months for a deep breath and a deeper look. The pandemic's depopulated roads and transit, along with the shift toward virtual communications and work from home, may have shown new ways the region can function.

We live in a successful, growing, region whose urban character is intensifying, but our familiar traditional style of freeway and sprawl has become expensive, unequal, unsustainable and wasteful. We should continue, but at a quicker rhythm, to detach ourselves from our ramified hundred-year old commitment to the private car as our main means of mobility. The old spatial dispersion in pursuit of an individualistic upper-middle class culture for only a part of our population can no longer work for the stage of regional development ahead of us..

For new construction in the PBA 2050 period, we must shift toward a more collective and cooperative urban form in which high quality apartments and condominiums clustered around public transit gradually take a place alongside dispersed individual houses as a major accepted form.

We continue to pay heavy penalties for slowness in getting this transition underway. But it is also true that tradition has a grip on all of us, and change is difficult. These economic and cultural changes loom large in the daily life of many people, especially for those who want to resist them. The transition requires careful thought and gradualness, but it also needs conceptual clarity and perseverance.

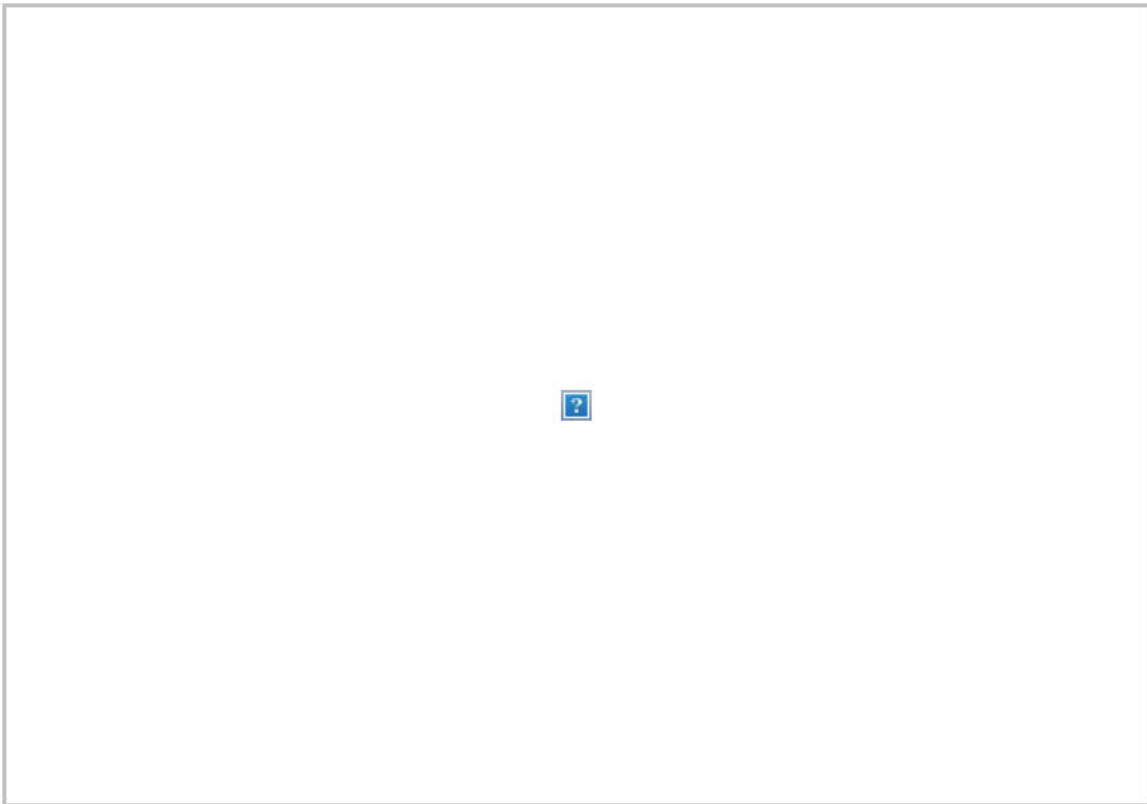
Transportation in the Bay Area absorbs now perhaps a quarter of our economy, focused on and served almost exclusively by the private car, which is plagued by massive issues of idle time for vehicles, road congestion, and parking.

For Plan Bay Area 2050, how do we get beyond creeping incrementalism and improve in real forward strategic steps?

We must spend the large public (and even corporate) housing funding being generated by the housing crisis in such a way that each new resident in a dwelling of high quality does not mean an additional car for the swamped road system. The new housing we will build in large volumes should be carbon-neutral and well served by high-quality public transit, which is economical and efficient for users because it is collective. Living spaces should be close enough to transit that it can be reached with convenience and safety by foot or bike with no need for a car or for street crossings for access. This implies a pedestrian community around the station of substantial size and density. A mixed-use plaza with shops and services would likely surround stations.

But a transit station must also serve people who come by car from further away who need access roads and parking. These should be underground so that auto movement does not endanger and inconvenience community residents and other people on foot, notably children. A transit community's unavoidable density should be mitigated by as much open space as possible, again with the lives of families and children in mind.

A walking community of about 10,000 people within 2,000 feet of a central transit station could be achieved by many designs. Here is one possibility, with converging walking paths, that conveys the idea.



The next step would be an analytical work-up and a more specific design done for a real site, such as Oakland's Fruitvale Station or a Peninsula Caltrain stop. The assignment to design a "Center" could well go first to UC Berkeley's Departments of Architecture and City Planning, now under the deanship of Vishaan Chakrabarty, a leading designer of such projects, coming from New York. In addition to a new Center's many layout and architectural issues, the study exercise should focus on the critical financing/social challenge of keeping it open to all income groups.

Generalizing: A new Bay Area as a Broad Set of such Linked Centers

Let us imagine that in the future such Centers were built at a substantial number of the region's BART, Caltrain and VTA stations producing an array of Centers and downtowns connected to each other by an intensely upgraded rail system. Such Centers could aim to absorb perhaps a million of the projected additional 2.7 million residents in the coming 30 years. We would be growing in effect a new Bay Area overlaid in the form of a group, or archipelago, of connected islands on our existing region. Mobility for the many short trips *within* a Center to places like the supermarket, the post office, primary school or a playground would be on foot or by bike. Moving *among* Centers, perhaps mainly for work, would be by high frequency transit, usually rail. In either case, mobility is more available, inexpensive, and convenient than it is now--and auto trips by the millions no longer take place.

The many residents of the region not living in a Center will continue to use cars, but they will have a much richer menu of kinds of vehicles, including Uber/Lyft, self-driving Uber/Lyft, electric bikes and scooters, and shared pool vehicles as well as privately owned ones. .

The car-driving person from nearby or coming from a distance who has a destination or several destinations within one or more of the Centers will need to park. Therefore the

interface between the Center and traditional less dense car-using territory is a garage, which should be underground. A major special case is a transit station and garage at the frontier of the region, (for example, at Richmond or El Cerrito del Norte for vehicles coming from Sacramento), where the underground garage must be very large, but where, as electric and self-driving vehicles become common, there can be automated valet parking.

Evolution of the Bay Area region into a set of transit-served islands in a traditional auto-served sea is a multi-decade public-private proposition. The public side of it will be a major investment, especially to provide substantial green open space within Centers, and to excavate underground roads and parking, but these large-capital public investments can be drawn from both the housing and transportation budgets. The Bay Area will achieve excellent and equitable mobility at far below the costs of the present car-based system, which at \$10,000 per car performs badly and costs as much as \$50 billion per year.

More concretely, the Bay Area 2050 RTP/SCS now in preparation should support one or two prototype Centers, meaning supply regional public funding for the open space and the undergrounded roads and parking which are intrinsic to the project but which the private sector would not purchase.

This public money should also be used to provide affordable, that is to say, subsidized, living spaces for lower income residents, both workforce and non-working, so that a Center can be inclusive and not gentrifying, drawing a cross-subsidy from market-rate purchasers to help out the majority in today's society who cannot afford present sky-high market rates. Early prototype Center(s) should be proposed for communities that need people and investment, rather than be seen as an assault on already prosperous and density-resistant communities, like Lafayette, where intense NIMBY opposition is a certainty.

Such a region-wide patterning into linked transit-oriented Centers is unquestionably a far better long term policy alternative and investment for the region than the \$15+ billion Second Transbay Tunnel now being deliberated.