

San Jose development: MTC-ABAG plan short changes city on jobs

This Op Ed was authored by Dave Fadness and published by the San Jose Mercury News on June 25, 2013
Responding letters have been sent to the Mercury News by
Doug Keller
Rich Crowley and Bob Strain

A Mercury News editorial headline last week said: "San Jose's budget is the best it can be." That is the sad truth. And if our City Council allows regional planners to have their way, budgets won't get better anytime soon.

On July 18, ABAG (the Association of Bay Area Governments) and MTC (the Metropolitan Transportation Commission) are scheduled to approve PlanBayArea, a seriously flawed regional plan that attempts to implement SB 375, the law designed to deal with greenhouse gases. Unless drastically changed, PlanBayArea will destroy San Jose's plans for jobs and an adequate tax base.

We have too few jobs per resident. As Santa Clara County's bedroom, San Jose sends a daily flow of traffic and sales tax dollars to other cities. In addition to environmental impacts, the result is our inability to afford acceptable urban services.

San Jose's General Plan Task Force spent four years grappling with how to correct this long-standing jobs/housing imbalance. We reached broad consensus for redefining "sustainability" to include equal fiscal, economic, and environmental components. We placed a heavy emphasis on job growth, the economic engine that finally will provide fiscal sustainability for San Jose. Historically at 0.8 jobs per employed resident, Envision 2040's goal is 1.3 J/ER by 2040.

This plan also will gradually reverse and reduce some commute patterns, more efficiently utilize transportation systems and reduce energy consumption and congestion-related air and heat pollution. It will reduce commute time and improve family life and finances. More growth in jobs than housing in San Jose will enable a higher level of service and quality of life for residents and businesses. The balance it strikes will benefit surrounding cities.

The City Council approved Envision 2040 without dissent on Nov. 1, 2011. Our task force made its jobs/housing goals and justification emphatically clear. The city attorney advised council members that they were within their rights to oppose any regional attempt to undermine them.

But PlanBayArea jobs/housing numbers are in serious conflict with ours. Envision 2040 calls for 470,000 new jobs in San Jose by 2040; PlanBayArea allows us only 146,680. That's 323,320 fewer. Adding insult to injury, PlanBayArea requires us to build 9,170 more homes than Envision 2040 calls for. These major differences were called to ABAG's and MTC's attention two years ago, to no avail.

PlanBayArea threatens San Jose's hopes for sustainability. And, if we fail to comply with its mandates, desperately needed transportation funding will be withheld. San Jose's mayor and City Council should be outraged and in vocal opposition. Their land-use planning authority is

being usurped by ABAG and MTC.

PlanBayArea's call to "defiscalize" land use decisions is an irresponsible counter to San Jose's new philosophy of analyzing growth for its benefits to fiscal, economic and environmental sustainability. We've learned from experience why fiscal considerations are imperative.

SB 375's objectives can be met without yielding local control to central planners. The sensitive interplay of objectives embraced in Envision 2040 is proof that legal compliance and our broadened definition of sustainability can be achieved locally. For San Jose, PlanBayArea as written means never realizing that goal.

Beyond threatening San Jose's plans, PlanBayArea satisfies just six of its own 15 adopted performance measures. It actually makes matters worse in four.

PlanBayArea must be revised to meet its own objectives and to accommodate goals of cities like San Jose, which have adopted general plans that comply with state law and are tailored to their citizens' desire for fiscal, economic, and environmental sustainability.

San Jose must make that happen.

Responding letters from CFR Members:

Doug Keller, CFR (Published by the [Mercury News](#) on June 29, 2013):

Dave Fadness' article about how the Association of Bay Area Governments in collaboration with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission is set to approve PlanBayArea is very troubling. Not only that, if this plan is implemented, it will set back future attempts to get our San Jose police, fire, and other essential services back to where they need to be. Job creation from growing businesses in our city is the key to solving these problems. That must be the focus of our city leadership. The central planning scheme from PlanBayArea is more interested in cramming more housing into our city without creating enough jobs to support housing growth. San Jose's General Plan Task Force did an excellent job over four years completing a reasonable plan to address our environmental, economic, and social needs for sustainability. Our council and mayor should make sure their land-use authority for the city is respected.

Rich Crowley & Bob Strain (CFR)

As noted here on Tuesday, there is a huge discrepancy between PlanBayArea's meager prescription for San Jose's job growth and that adopted in our General Plan. San Jose's Envision 2040 plan acknowledges the city's need for fiscal sustainability, and that cannot be achieved by being a bedroom for San Francisco, Palo Alto and Santa Clara. San Jose must increase its employment base. A land-use analysis by ADR, Inc. showed that each new job in San Jose improved the city budget by about \$600, but each new dwelling unit made the budget worse by about the same amount. In their last budgets, the City and County of San Francisco spent roughly \$9000 per resident, but the City of San Jose and Santa Clara County spent about \$5000 per city resident. Acting as the regions' bedroom has done nothing to improve the quality of life in San Jose.