

FOCUS



Regional agencies address climate change, transportation, housing, the economy, and other issues that transcend city boundaries but impact all members of Bay Area. One of the best ways to reduce traffic, promote housing and help the environment is to concentrate future growth near transit and within the communities that surround the San Francisco Bay, enhancing existing neighborhoods and providing housing and transportation choices for all residents.

FOCUSING OUR VISION (FOCUS)

FOCUS, short for the *Focusing Our Vision* initiative, unites the efforts of four regional agencies into a single program. FOCUS is a regional planning initiative spearheaded by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), in coordination with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). It is partially funded by a Blueprint Grant from the State of California Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency.

The goals of FOCUS are to:

- Strengthen and support existing communities
- Create compact, healthy communities with a diversity of housing, jobs, activities, and services to meet the daily needs of residents
- Increase housing choices
- Improve housing affordability
- Increase transportation efficiency and choices
- Protect and steward natural habitat, open space, and agricultural land
- Improve social and economic equity
- Promote economic and fiscal health
- Conserve resources, promote sustainability, and improve environmental quality
- Protect public health and safety.

VOLUNTARY PROCESS FOR WILLING JURISDICTIONS

In the FOCUS process, local governments partner with regional agencies to create a specific and shared concept of where growth can best be accommodated and what areas need protection in the region. Local governments have identified areas that are priorities for development and conservation. The region supports their efforts by working to direct existing and future incentives to these areas. Only willing jurisdictions receive priority area designations.

PLATFORM FOR REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

FOCUS serves as a platform for engaging San Francisco Bay Area local governments and stakeholders in a regional dialogue around accommodating growth and protecting natural areas. The FOCUS Technical Advisory Committee and FOCUS Working Group are key forums for this regional dialogue. Representatives for each of the region's nine counties serve on these groups alongside stakeholders who represent affordable housing, economic development, the environment, environmental justice, social equity, and transportation interests. Education and broader representation in regional issues are an ongoing part of the process. Regional agencies have held a stakeholder conference, a series of county-wide local government forums, and made presentations to a variety of interest groups. To investigate the potential impacts of FOCUS, the region also convened three policy-based discussions around the economy, the environment, and social equity. The region continually seeks venues for engaging the region's diverse groups on the designation of regional priorities.

DESIGNATION OF PRIORITY DEVELOPMENT AREAS

During the summer of 2007, over 50 jurisdictions submitted applications for Priority Development Areas. Designation requires three basic criteria: 1) areas within an existing community, 2) areas near existing or planned fixed transit or served by comparable bus capacity, and 3) areas planned or in the planning process for more housing. The Priority Development Areas will be presented for adoption at the ABAG General Assembly/MTC Regional Transportation Summit on October 26, 2007.

DESIGNATION OF PRIORITY CONSERVATION AREAS

Regional agencies are working with the Green Vision group, a coalition of regional and local open space organizations, to identify areas that are priorities for conservation efforts. FOCUS will collaborate with local governments to determine Priority Conservation Areas, based upon local plans and the results of the Green Vision project. Local governments interested in having Priority Conservation Area Designations can submit a nomination form by August 17, 2007.

INCENTIVES

Regional agencies are working to align many existing and future financial incentives for local governments that have designated priority areas. Potential sources include future funding from MTC's Transportation for Livable Communities and Housing Incentive Program, as well as additional discretionary transportation funds from MTC's Regional Transportation Plan 2009 Update. The State is also considering aligning funding from the recently passed housing and resource bonds to regional priorities, potentially including FOCUS priority areas.

LONG-TERM REGIONAL STRATEGY

FOCUS is a long-term strategy, and new sources of incentives are likely to arise in the future that will be available to Priority Development and Conservation Areas. The intention of FOCUS is to target areas for development and conservation incentives for the next few decades. If a city does not receive incentives in the first round, it will remain eligible for future rounds of funding as available. There will also be opportunities for other cities to apply for priority area designations if they do not participate in the first round of applications.

ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

Priority areas will also be focal points for regional agency efforts. In addition to assistance, regional agencies will offer services to assist local governments with priority area planning and development activities. These services will include technical and outreach assistance, networking assistance, and best practices information.

www.bayareavision.org/focus

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