



History of the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area and Regional Governance

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area was first organized by a number of local Leagues in 1959, and it is one of the oldest organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area dedicated to the concept of regional solutions to areawide problems. The LWVBA was made a permanent inter-league organization in 1961.

In the 1940s, concern about the overlapping problems between city and county services resulted in the formation of League county councils. In 1953, as urban dwellers moved to the ever-expanding suburbs, the LWV of the United States issued a study outline, *A Guide to a Metropolitan Area Study*, calling attention to the new political and social problems related to economic regions, rather than to existing governmental jurisdictions.

In 1960, the LWVBA's first position was established on Regional Governance. In that year, the LWVBA supported the formation of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) as a step in the right direction. In 1961 criteria were defined for evaluating areawide agencies and LWVBA decided it was not sufficient for a regional agency to have power only to plan, it must also have power to implement its plan. After more studies, LWVBA stated support for (1) the development of a regional multi-function government which included directly elected representatives or a combination of directly elected representatives and representatives appointed by cities and counties; (2) is securely financed, by using federal, state or local funds; and (3) having all necessary communications with appropriate agencies of government.

During the late '60s and '70s, several studies of regional problems and possible solutions were authorized by the State Legislature. During this time both single-purpose and multi-purpose agencies were proposed, but only the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) came into existence. (The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) and the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) had been established earlier.)

Based on our Land Use positions, LWVBA actively supported the McAteer-Petris Act which established BCDC in 1965. We then worked with other organizations to develop a SF Bay Plan (1968) and to make the BCDC permanent in 1969.

The final event of the decade was the Legislature's 1970 creation of yet another single purpose agency, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). It was later designated as the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization by the U.S. Department of Transportation to receive substantial annual planning funds. This narrowed ABAG's role primarily to land use, with less funding.

LWVBA also participated in development of legislation to create a multi-purpose regional agency and supported several bills: AB 2310 in 1970, SB 1057 in 1971, AB 2040 in 1973 and AB 625 in 1975. These bills usually passed the State Assembly, but then failed to obtain agreement by the Senate.

We did advocate for the elimination of the Bay Area Sewer Services Authority (BASSA) which was formed in 1971. BASSA was subsequently dissolved by the Legislature.

In 1990, governmental, business and environmental groups formed the Bay Vision 2020 Commission (BV2020) to examine problems created by growth and change in the Bay Area and to propose a vision for the future and measures to achieve it. League appointees to the commission participated in the development of that vision. SB 797 (Morgan) was introduced in 1991. Embodying the principles of the BV2020 report, the bill proposed to consolidate ABAG, MTC and BAAQMD. The new regional commission would be charged with developing and implementing a comprehensive, regional growth management strategy. LWVBA supported the bill; it passed the Assembly, but it failed narrowly in the Senate. LWVBA opposed AB 395, an ABAG-proposed bill that would have had an all-appointed governing board.

In 1998, LWVBA began a new two-year study entitled: *Local Decisions/Regional Impacts*. The position adopted by delegates at the 2000 Convention is attached.

In 2004, we monitored the Joint Policy Committee, created by SB 849 (Torlakson). The JPC was composed of representatives of ABAG, MTC and BAAQMD in an attempt to better coordinate the policies for the region. The JPC, is now known as the Bay Area Regional Collaborative, and includes 5 representatives each from ABAG, MTC, BAAQMD and BCDC.

SB 375 (Steinberg) the Sustainable Communities Strategies Act, effective in 2009, required the integration of planning processes within each of the 18 regions in the State for transportation, land-use and housing to meet greenhouse gas reduction targets. Development of the regional plan was subject to an extensive public review process. LWVBA members participated in many hearings throughout the Bay Area, as did others who objected to the concept of regional planning. Plan Bay Area 2035 was adopted after this challenging process both in the public arena and at the staff level.

In June, 2015, MTC Chair Dave Cortese called for a different process for the next round of Plan Bay Area 2040. In particular, he called for a consolidation of staff efforts between MTC and ABAG, and provision of only six months funding to ABAG for the project.

Merger Proposal and Study

ABAG and MTC agreed in October, 2015 to proceed with a plan to merge the two agencies, rather than to simply transfer ABAG planning staff to MTC. They hired a consultant, Management Partners, to evaluate options for merger between the agencies. LWVBA supported this move and participated in the process of selecting a preferred option. We stated that LWVBA wants governance at the regional level to have a comprehensive, unified vision that incorporates those issues that need to be addressed regionally, and be able to fulfill their missions effectively and efficiently, in a manner that includes all concerned interests in an open and transparent process.

In June, 2017, it was announced that MTC and ABAG staff have merged, except for remaining “enterprise” projects that continue under ABAG. Plan Bay Area 2040 was adopted without incident or lawsuits. Both governing boards, as well as subcommittees, remain. In the coming year, efforts will resume to consider legislation to restructure or merge the agencies. Meanwhile ABAG, MTC, BAAQMD offices are now co-located in the same building, with BCDC to follow in the future.

Linda Craig, LWVBA Board Member 1974-76, 2004-2016

REGIONAL GOVERNMENT POSITION

Support legislative action to establish a multi-purpose regional planning agency for the nine Bay Area counties with directly elected representatives from newly established districts

Support, in the interim, state or local government action to consolidate existing regional agencies Support measures to make regional decision-making bodies representative of the population distribution and region-wide governmental, environmental, social equity, and economic interests

1. Recognition that many regional functions require cooperation between the level of government closest to the people and regional governing bodies

2. Concerted effort to maintain local government identity within the regional framework

3. Authority for the designated regional planning agency (currently ABAG) to prepare and implement a long-term, comprehensive regional plan and capital improvements program according to state policies and guidelines, with:

a. power of eminent domain

b. authority to review local general plans and major development proposals for consistency with the regional plan

c. power to allocate or withhold federal and state funds to implement the comprehensive regional plan and capital improvements program

4. Mandatory local general and special district plan compliance with the comprehensive regional plan

5. Reform of the state/local finance system to provide local governments with sufficient and dependable funding, and adequate funding for comprehensive regional planning and implementation

(updated 5/2000)