



November 28, 2010

Scott Haggerty, Chair, and Commissioners
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
101 Eighth Street, Oakland, CA 94607

Dear Mr. Haggerty and Commissioners

Re: Revised Draft Public Participation Plan

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area appreciates your careful review of comments from the public on the draft Public Participation Plan, as well as the revisions you made on the basis of public input. We have reviewed the revised Plan as well as the appendices and the document, “Plan for Special Language Services to Limited English Proficiency Populations,” and we have a few suggestions, both on the Plan itself and on some of the ways current practices appear to frustrate or complicate efforts to participate in MTC’s planning processes.

Comments on the revised Draft Plan

MTC’s work with focus groups and community organizations, documented in Appendix A to the Plan, are commendable. They have generated important and useful suggestions for improving the accessibility and readability of communications. Nevertheless, we are not entirely satisfied that our concerns for the clarity of MTC’s public communications have been thoroughly addressed. For example, an Information box on page 22 of the Plan that describes an “easy way” to get involved with MTC provides a good illustration of our concerns. The message begins

GET INVOLVED! Sign up for MTC’s RTP Database at www.OneBayArea.org

Consider the readers of this message who may have limited English language proficiency. Not only would the language be unfamiliar, but neither this lead-in nor the text that follows gives a clue to its meaning. This brief headline includes two acronyms, “RTP” and “MTC,” a phrase, “Database” that can be mystifying, and instructions to go to a website which would require that the reader be computer-savvy.

Most important, readers unfamiliar with MTC could not be expected to assume this message has any relevance to their needs, even though many of them probably have important, often unmet transportation needs. In fact, it is likely that many English-proficient people in the Bay Area would be equally confused and, therefore, uninterested.



We also suspect that one reason few non-English speaking persons have responded to MTC's offers to translate written and oral communications may be that the messages they receive from MTC fail to make it clear how or if these materials would be useful and important to them. We urge MTC to carefully and transparently implement its decision to rely on contracted reviewers of public documents to ensure clarity, and to consider enlisting reviewers from the affected communities which may be unfamiliar with MTC, its planning, and its practices, and who may have limited English language skills. The League has the experience of laboriously producing a jargon-free "Easy Reader Voter Guide" for the same communities that MTC is targeting. The exercise required is intellectually challenging, but the results are worthwhile. We have one minor technical comment on the revised plan: the link on page 29 to Caltrans does not work. Repeated trials brought only the message "file not found."

Barriers to Public Participation

We are concerned that some important meetings at MTC are not available as audio play-backs. This audio feature is an effective way to advance public knowledge and participation on a wide scale. Consider some reasons people may not attend MTC's meetings, even though they are interested and wish to be involved: they may work or have other obligations during the day; or, for them getting to and from MTC is difficult or daunting due to physical impairments, a lack of good transportation, or the distance they must travel to MTC's headquarters. Consider, also, that some who don't attend have personal and professional interests in what transpires there. While MTC is making efforts to reach out to people currently uninvolved in their work, it makes good sense to keep the involvement of those who are already interested and who wish to make a contribution.

The meetings that apparently will not be available on audio include the important Regional Advisory Working Group and the Transit Sustainability Project Committees, which are noted in the revised draft Plan. Please make all of these proceedings available as audio files in a timely fashion.

We are also concerned that posting of some meetings appears to have deteriorated recently. As examples for November, the meeting of the "Ad Hoc Performance Measures" working group was not publicly listed at all, and meeting materials including an agenda for the "Equity Subcommittee" of the Policy Advisory Council could be found only within the link for the full PAC. We urge you to be more attentive to proper notification and materials for the public.

Sincerely,

Marion Taylor, President