AGENDA ITEM 5

TO: MTC Advisory Council
From: MTC Advisory Council Evaluation Subcommittee
(Margaret Okuzumi, Xiao-Yun Lu, Mike Pechner)
Date: February 26, 2010

Re: Recommendation to MTC from Advisory Council Evaluation Subcommittee

Last month we presented a draft recommendation to you from our committee. In response to your input and that of MTC staff we have substantially overhauled our recommendation.

We determined that a less prescriptive approach which emphasizes analysis of the projections made in the 1994 RTP, would be more likely to succeed. This would avoid difficulties in making comparisons when future outcomes for RTP projects were projected for different years. Because some types of data we consider important now was not a primary consideration back then, it is more difficult, though perhaps not impossible, to obtain the data for comparison purposes. While we can still attempt to learn from the past, it is perhaps even more important for MTC to lay the groundwork for future evaluations that occur progressively and in parallel with the execution of the 2035 RTP.

We request your approval to submit the following memo and recommendations to the Commission.

To MTC Commissioners
From: MTC Advisory Council
Re: Recommendation to MTC on Evaluation of Past Investments and Looking into the Future

An Evaluation Subcommittee of the Advisory Council was established to recommend how MTC might evaluate its past work, and also communicate the results of its investments to the public. In an environment where the public has been increasingly uneasy about the stewardship of public funds, it's important for MTC to show how regional investment has impacted our infrastructure and our quality of life. It's also important for MTC to periodically assess what has actually transpired in our region as a result of these investments. Such evaluation and feedback should assist the Commission in making decisions that shape our region to come.

RTP Performance

Fifteen years have passed since MTC was first required to prepare a financially constrained RTP under ISTEA, in 1994. The 1994 RTP contained projections as to what our region would be like as a result of the transportation investments that were planned to be made. The year 2010 has now arrived. How well did we do? Did the ABAG land use projections hold up? How well did our region deliver transportation projects, and did those projects perform as anticipated? This brings us to our first recommendation:

Recommendation #1: Evaluate 1994 RTP Outcomes

MTC should direct staff to revisit the 1994 RTP and prepare a report that compares the projected outcomes to the actual outcomes. The report should evaluate, in an easy-to-understand chart, each major freeway and public transit capital project in the 1994 RTP and address such things as

- was the project built?
- was the project built on time? If not, how did the actual years to completion compare to what was initially projected?
- what volume of usage (VMT or ridership) did the transportation facility experience compared to what was projected?
- how did the actual costs of each project compare to what was projected?
- are there any lessons to be learned from what actually transpired?

Regional Investment

More than $2 billion is spent on transportation projects and programs in the Bay Area each year, but no single source of information lists the sources and expenditures of funds by MTC, the nine county Congestion Management Agencies, the transit operators and the city and county public works agencies. Nowhere can the public get a comprehensive picture of the totality of this investment.

Recommendation #2: Show the Locations and Magnitude of Past Investment

MTC should publish a map that graphically represents the sum total of actual transportation funds expended in the Bay Area for the period between 1994 -2009, from all sources of state, federal, and local government funds. This would exclude funds not tracked by MTC, such as private investments in airports, seaports, freight lines, and private expenditures on automobiles, gasoline, insurance, and so forth. Expenditures for any transportation facilities should be represented by apportioning the sums as evenly distributed over the physical area of the transportation facility on the map, in consistent year dollars, with a level of detail that will allow people to identify the major transportation facilities. MTC should publish annually thereafter a report showing actual expenditures made, with GIS data included for each project and program.

In this way the public will be assisted in grasping the totality of this investment and the locations invested in. It will help people to understand the magnitude of the sums involved and how these have shaped the transportation system that we have today.

Regional Outcomes

If the point of regional planning is to make a beneficial impact on our region's quality of life, then it would be helpful to the region to begin tracking and reporting on certain metrics. This will also help the region to assess how well it is implementing AB 32 and SB 375.

MTC should also be mindful that, in keeping with the public's desired for accountability, the federal government has increasingly focused on performance-based metrics in deciding where to allocate funds. For example, the recent federal TIGER (Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery) program requested that projects demonstrate contribution toward a) State of Good Repair b) Economic Competitiveness c) Livability d) Sustainability, and e) Safety. It may be that similar criteria will be incorporated into the next federal transportation reauthorization bill. The trend is such that it would be prudent for MTC to begin tracking related metrics for major projects to better position them for funding.

Recommendation #3: Evaluate Regional Progress and Plan Execution Continuously

The recommendation to look back the performance of the projects executed between 1994~2009 should not be the end of MTC's evaluation process. MTC should setup a continuous evaluation mechanism for progressive evaluation of the execution of the 2035 RTP.

We recommend that MTC, for the region generally, regularly track and report, in graphical format similar to that of Recommendation #2, the following data:

a) Estimated greenhouse gases emitted due to transportation, per capita
b) Particulate emissions emitted due to transportation, per capita
c) Change in safety (from traffic injury/death rates), per mile and per capita
d) Change in energy use (BTUs) for transportation, per capita
e) Change in percent of household income spent on transportation, broken down by income level
f) Total travel delay in each RTP project corridor, minutes
g) In addition we suggest that MTC track the energy efficiency of our major transportation facilities and modes, and how additional investments impact the energy efficiency of these facilities

The purpose of this type of quantitative evaluation is to track whether projects executed according to the plan are generating the planned outcomes in emission improvement and so forth. If the evaluations show that we are not on track to meeting our goals with the 2035 Plan, then modifications to the plan will be necessary. Regular evaluation will help us to ensure that goals set in the 2035 Plan are achieved.

Such evaluation and reporting would also help the public and decision makers understand the big picture of actual transportation outcomes produced by our investments. The public is wanting to know what we got for our investments. Are we succeeding at shaping the region in a way that meets our goals? To what extent are these investments improving our region's quality of life?

It is possible that Graduate Research Students at the U.C. Berkeley, Institute of Transportation Studies would be able to assist in the compilation of this data and to do a systematic and progressive evaluation.

We hope that you will adopt these three recommendations to further public understanding of our major investments and to help our region stay on track toward its goals.