



METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

Agenda Item 3a

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Memorandum

TO: Legislation Committee

DATE: February 10, 2012

FR: Executive Director

W. I. 1131

RE: Evaluation of MTC's Policy Advisory Council

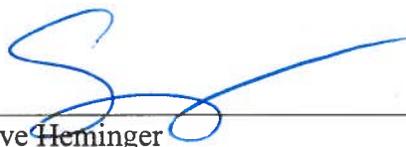
Background

In November 2009, MTC adopted Resolution 3931, which consolidated the Commission's three advisory committees into a new Policy Advisory Council to advise MTC on transportation policies in the region, incorporating diverse perspectives relating to the environment, the economy and social equity. Of the 27 members, one third represent communities of color, environmental justice or low-income interests; one third represent senior or disabled interests, and one third represent economic and environmental interests.

The first Advisory council was seated in April 2010, and current members' terms run through March 2012. Before opening recruitment for a new term, and based on feedback from Commissioners involved in the original member recruitment, staff sought an independent review of the current Advisory Council structure and procedures. Kendall Flint with Flint Strategies conducted the evaluation and her findings and recommendations are attached.

The evaluation results and recommendations were presented to your Policy Advisory Council at its February 8 meeting. Advisors especially appreciated recommendations calling for a more interactive annual work plan meeting, better communication between Council and Commission chairs and vice chairs, and clearer delineation on agendas when items are presented for comment and recommendations versus information. They also liked the idea of more frequent updates from staff on the ultimate action by the Commission on items the Council had offered specific advice. Some felt that MTC decisions on items such as the building relocation, while not strictly policy-oriented, nonetheless should be brought before the Council.

Staff seeks the Committee's reaction to these results of the evaluation and your input on how the Policy Advisory Council can add value to Commission deliberations and inform your decisions.



Steve Heminger

Attachment



Metropolitan
Transportation Commission
Policy Advisory Council
Evaluation

December 2011

Prepared by Kendall Flint, Flint Strategies

Table of Contents

Metropolitan Transportation Commission Policy Advisory Council Evaluation	1
Introduction	1
Research	3
Key Findings	4
Recommendations	6
Summary	8

Metropolitan Transportation Commission Policy Advisory Council Evaluation

Introduction

The purpose of Metropolitan Transportation Commission's (MTC) 27-seat Policy Advisory Council is to provide ongoing community participation and guidance to the Commission. The advisory council reviews transportation issues being considered by the Commission and is encouraged to bring additional transportation issues before the Council and the Commission. MTC recognizes the significant positive impact of citizen advisors in vetting MTC policy decisions, providing innovative policy guidance and maintaining open lines of communication between representatives of key constituencies and MTC staff and Commissioners.

The Council was created by Resolution 3931 following an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the previous advisor structure, which included the Minority Citizens Advisory Committee (MCAC), the Elderly and Disabled Advisory Committee (EDAC), and the MTC Advisory Council. The report concluded that establishing one inclusive citizen's Policy Advisory Council would be a more effective means to provide meaningful policy influence from those populations. These three former advisory committees ended in March 2010 with the formation of the Policy Advisory Council.

"By focusing and reinforcing the strength of one single citizen committee that reports to the Commission, advisors can expect to have greater influence on MTC's policy direction. Additionally, the new advisors will have a better understanding of and opportunity for discussion of different

constituencies' perspectives. The composition of the new, more inclusive committee should honor the third guiding principle of the Public Participation Plan as well as MTC's Environmental Justice Principles—providing a forum to hear the many voices of the Bay Area and empowering low-income communities and communities of color to participate in decision making that affects them."

- 2009 Evaluation Report

Membership of the Policy Advisory Council is structured around issues relating to the economy, the environment and social equity. In the areas of economy and the environment, a total of nine members are appointed, with four members representing economic interests and four bringing an environmental perspective; the ninth member can be selected from either category. In addition, five of the nine must be from each of the five most populous Bay Area counties – Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara.

In the area of social equity, nine members (one from each county) represent communities of color and issues affecting low-income communities or environmental justice. Of these, four members represent communities of color and four members represent environmental justice/low-income issues; the ninth member can be selected from either category.

In addition, nine members (one from each county) represent issues related to transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities. Four members represent seniors and four members represent people with disabilities; the ninth member can be selected from either category.

The Council structure was expected to result in number of positive outcomes including:

- Greater influence on policy decisions by the MTC Commission;
- Better communication between Council members and Commission members; and
- Better access to executive and senior level MTC staff members,

In November 2011, MTC selected Flint Strategies to prepare an evaluation of the Policy Advisory Council to determine how well those goals were reached and what improvements, enhancements and/or changes should be considered to make the Council a more effective tool for public involvement.

Research

A substantial amount of research was conducted as a part of this evaluation. The purpose of the effort was to objectively review the Policy Advisory Council's form and function from a variety of viewpoints. Research was conducted during November and December of 2011 and included the following:

- Interviews with current Commission members including the Commission Chair and Vice Chair;
- Interviews with current Council members including the Chair and Vice Chair;
- Interviews with former advisors currently not serving on the Council;
- Interviews with MTC executive staff and advisory committee staff liaisons;
- Review of all Council and Commission agendas and minutes from 2009 through 2011;
- An electronic survey sent to all former advisors;
- An electronic survey sent to all current Council members; and
- A review of the original research and recommendations, which resulted in the formation of the Policy Advisory Council.

Complete results of the electronic surveys are included in the appendix of this document.

Key Findings

Overall, both Council and Commission members said they feel the Policy Advisory Council is better suited to serving the needs of the Bay Area than the previous advisory committee structure. Commission members said they appreciated receiving more focused policy direction incorporating diverse perspectives representing equity, environmental and economic viewpoints. Council members appreciate the increased access to decision makers and MTC staff.

Concerns remain from current Council members and previous advisors that the new structure is not inclusive enough. Several of those interviewed suggested increasing the size of the Council; however, none were able to cite instances or examples of issues the Council was unable to provide direction on due to lack of representation.

A number of Policy Advisory Council members expressed a desire to be more actively involved in setting their annual work plan; however, most understood the need for the Policy Advisory Council to follow the Commission's agenda in order to provide input on issues the Commission planned to discuss.

Agendas from the Policy Advisory Council and the Commission show consistent communication between the two and a specific pattern of education and solicitation of policy direction from the Council. There appears to be room for improvement however in the manner in which the Council is told how the Commission uses its direction.

The form and function of the Council is working as intended; however it is clear that improvements need to be made in the areas of communication with the MTC Commission, developing the Policy Advisory Council work plan, and training for Council members.

“I believe the Council has made a very strong effort to advise the Commission. I believe staff hears us and is very responsive, but sometimes it's a little unclear if the Commission hears us. Even a negative response, if they disagree with us, might be helpful.”

*-Policy Advisory
Council Member*

Other key findings include:

- 78% of current Policy Advisory Council members said they agreed or strongly agreed that the Council incorporates diverse perspectives relating to the environment, the economy and social equity.
- 95% of the Council members described MTC staff as attentive and responsive. Those interviewed singled Council liaison Pam Grove as particularly helpful to the group.
- Slightly more than half of the current Policy Advisory Council members feel that the Council is effective in advising the Commission on transportation policies in the Bay Area. Roughly a third were neutral.
- 38% felt that there is not enough communication between Advisors and Commissioners; just 18% felt that communication was adequate.
- 88% of current Policy Advisory Council members believe monthly reports from the Council enhance communication with the Commission, but just 25% believe the Commission actually considers its advice.
- Almost all members have a clear understanding of the Council's mission and goals but despite the joint work plan annual conference, just 43% of the Policy Advisory Council members felt that the Commission gives them clear direction on the issues it would like them to consider.
- 55% of former advisors do not believe that the newly reconstituted Policy Advisory Council has had greater influence and/or added more value to MTC's policy direction; however, 65% of former advisors also indicated that they no longer follow actions taken by the current Policy Advisory Council.

Recommendations

Based on the research and review of the Policy Advisory Council's work effort, we believe its current structure is well suited to meeting the needs of the Commission and the Bay Area's diverse constituencies. Recommendations included in this evaluation are meant to enhance communication between the Policy Advisory Council and the Commission and to improve the ability for Council members to give meaningful policy direction to the Commission.

■ 1: Annual Work Plan Conference

This annual event should be a more collaborative session with MTC Commission members and their appointees sitting together and establishing an overall rapport. The session should be inclusive and engaging, establishing the overall direction for the coming year and laying the foundation for more regular, open communication between Commissioners and their appointees. The planning session should allow for smaller breakout sessions representing equity, environmental and economic interests – all of which would be attended by Commissioners and appropriate MTC senior staff. It is highly recommended that a dinner be shared among all participants.

■ 2: Training for Council Members

A more expansive training program for new and returning Policy Advisory Council members should be developed. Areas of focus should include emphasis on the regional nature of the Council's role; appointees represent not only their local interests but those of the entire Bay Area. Training should also include a clear definition of the role of the Policy Advisory Council and its mission and goals.

■ 3: Clearer Definition of Education and Policy Items

Agendas should be simplified for a clear delineation between educational items intended to give Policy Advisory Council

members background on various topics of interest and policy items seeking specific relevant direction. Several respondents said they were unclear when they were being asked to comment on a particular item.

■ 4: Quarterly Meetings Between Commissioners and Council Chairs/Vice-Chairs

These meeting should focus on upcoming policy discussions and areas of concern that may influence future Commission actions. This would provide an opportunity to generate options for policy language to be vetted at Council meetings. The Policy Advisory Council would be able to use the options generated in these meetings as a starting point for discussion in formulating their recommendations to the Commission.

■ 5: Expanded Policy Advisory Council Liaison Reports

Several Council members expressed a desire to learn more about the results of their policy direction on Commission and/or staff action. While this has been reported in the past, it's clear that a greater emphasis needs to be placed on this so that Council members feel that their work effort is valued and useful to MTC's overall mission and goals. We recommend that on ongoing list of accomplishments be highlighted in the monthly staff report reiterating the important role that the Policy Advisory Council plays in the Bay Area.

Summary

The Policy Advisory Council is one of several channels that provide the MTC Commission with insights and guidance regarding transportation issues and concerns in the Bay Area. Its members say the group has been more effective in their second year as appointees become more comfortable with the structure and process of serving. While improvements in communication between the Council and the Commission can be made, the Council is fulfilling its mission and providing a valuable service to the community.