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Plan Bay Area 2050 Strategy EN7: Office-Based Employee 60% Telecommute Mandate

On September 23rd, the Municipal Transportation Commission affirmed its support for the current iteration of “Plan Bay Area 2050” including 35 strategies aimed at advancing the goal of “a more affordable, connected, diverse, healthy, and vibrant Bay Area for all.” While most of the strategies align well with the communities’ collective goals of effective transportation and reducing the carbon footprint, the proposed telecommuting mandate raises serious concerns. Strategy EN7: “Institute Telecommuting Mandates for Major Office-Based Employers,” which was not included in the initial drafts of Plan Bay Area 2050, is a clear outlier. This strategy was introduced without sufficient analysis to understand the countless negative implications it would inflict on Bay Area residents and businesses across the spectrum. There are at least four major problematic areas with this strategy as currently written: equity and inclusion, economic implications, urban planning and housing, and public services.

Due to COVID-19 shelter in place restrictions, we have already seen how mandated working from home can significantly impact individuals who do not have an optimal work from home situation. These impacts can include space limitations in a modest home, challenges with family care for children or elders in the home, lack of adequate internet infrastructure, isolation-related mental health challenges, and even networking and growth opportunities lost in a virtual setting. While working from home is a welcomed reprieve for some, it raises serious challenges for others and should not be broadly mandated.

Beyond the undeniable burden on employees, this mandate is a major threat to local economies and especially small businesses that serve large employment centers and residents who live near them. The Bay Area has built its economy around large employers that call it home. Presuming to stipulate who can work from a physical location raises serious questions of why a business should choose to retain a physical footprint in such municipalities at all. The 60% work from home mandate is extreme and a clear overreach that will drive employers out of the Bay Area, taking ten’s of thousands of jobs, millions in tax revenues, and the base of our small business economy with them.

Dismantling the basis for urban job centers and forcing employees to work from home will have ripple effects through our municipal services and planning. A reduction in commuting on public transport could jeopardize revenue of critical public transportation services. This effective deprioritization of



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clean public transportation as a strategy for emissions reduction will also hurt housing development in transit-rich areas as employees look outside the cities. Urban sprawl resulting from work from home will promote more car ownership. A turn towards reliance on cars will further damage public transportation ridership and increase encroachment into risky housing environments and wildfire zones.

This mandate is a broad brushstroke approach to a nuanced series of challenges. It disregards individual circumstances and needs and fails to account for employees who already commute in carbon-free or extremely low-impact modes like walking, biking, and taking public transportation. This strategy mandate puts an undue burden on employees and welcomes in a slew of economic, planning, and public service impacts that cannot be ignored.

While the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce supports strategies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work to fight climate change, it is crucial to pursue strategies that are known to be effective without disenfranchising vulnerable members of our community and derailing decades of progress. It is clear that there are many other strategies that should be explored further that align with the vision for an efficient and connected Bay Area. Furthermore, decisions that will have overwhelming impacts on the business community and employees should have significantly more engagement with key stakeholders. Therefore, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce urges the MTC Board to reconsider and remove mandate EN7 from further iterations of the plan.

Sincerely,

Rodney Fong
President and CEO, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce

Co-Signers:

Delta Dental

Pier 39

California Life Sciences Association

Salesforce

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Cliff's Happy Healthy Office



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