

What is Plan Bay Area?

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The population of the Bay Area has nearly doubled in my lifetime. This means we're using twice as much water as we would have had our population remained stable, assuming per capita consumption were the same. This raises the question; do we face a water shortage or a people longage?

Looking to the future, the Association of Bay Area Governments and Metropolitan Transportation Commission recently approved Plan Bay Area 2040, a framework for future growth and development. It forecasts the addition of two million more people living in the Bay Area by 2040.

The goal of Plan Bay Area is noble. It aims to decrease per capita greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles by encouraging more housing near jobs and public transportation to reduce commutes. However, it forecasts a 31% increase in households and a 37% increase in jobs. If these projections are accurate, the region will continue to face a severe housing shortage while adding a lot more stress on our aquatic ecosystems.

Plan Bay Area states, "There has been a particular mismatch between employment growth relative to growth in housing supply. Overall, the Bay Area added nearly two jobs for every housing unit built since 1990."

This trend continues. The Plan acknowledges that key features of the regional forecast include, "Growth of 1.3 million jobs between 2010 and 2040, with nearly half of those jobs — over 600,000 — already added between 2010 and 2015," and "An increase of approximately 820,000 households. Only 13 percent of this growth occurred between 2010 and 2015."

This trend of jobs outpacing housing does not bode well for correcting the jobs/housing imbalance or reducing overall greenhouse gas emissions, let alone improving instream flows to revive our rivers and the Bay-Delta.

The main flaw in Plan Bay Area is that it fails to address the water supply needs of adding two million more people to the Bay Area. The Plan forecasts the SFPUC's customer base increasing from 2.6 million people today to 3.3 million by 2040. The SFPUC is already opposed to increasing instream flows in the Tuolumne through the Bay Delta Water Quality Plan, and the projected increase in customers makes their position even more intractable.

In commenting on the Draft Bay Delta Water Quality Control Plan, the City of San Francisco stated, "If the State Water Board were to implement LSJR (Lower San Joaquin River) Alternatives 3 or 4, the SFPUC would not have the water supply needed to accommodate the pattern of growth...considered in the three scenarios evaluated as part of the process for developing the proposed Plan Bay Area 2040."

While Plan Bay Area offers a unique opportunity to create a roadmap for sustainable development, it fails to address the fact that continued population growth is unsustainable. Efficiency can help reduce per capita impacts, but adding two million people to the Bay Area would likely offset any overall gains made to reduce resource consumption.

Bay Area Population Records and Projections (in Millions)

