

Envision Bay Area: Building a Healthier Region through Informed Communities

A Call to Action

California's groundbreaking climate legislation, AB32, requires that the state reduce its carbon emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. In addition, the Bay Area must set its regional transportation goals by 2013 under another California law, SB375. Because 40% of total carbon emissions in California result from the transportation sector, both laws can be seen to address the same goal: to slow down the rate of climate change in hopes of avoiding irreversible damage to the planet.

This can only be accomplished if the public is willing to make some personal and community changes that align with regional and local land-use and transportation decisions. Change requires understanding, dialogue and ownership based on accurate information, education and engagement.

The Response: Envision Bay Area

Envision Bay Area (EBA) is designed to help residents and community leaders make informed decisions about the growth and development that will shape the future environment, economy and everyday life in their communities. The core of EBA will be an interactive, web-based simulation tool that will demonstrate various growth scenarios in the coming decades and help people see the potential impacts they may have on the things they value most. It will graphically illustrate how land-use and transportation decisions impact greenhouse gas emissions, energy and water consumption, quality of community life, and social equity. The project will engage residents throughout the region through the news media, simulation tools, and community dialogue.

Partnerships

EBA is a two-year, multi-disciplinary partnership involving Silicon Valley Community Foundation as the managing partner, Greenbelt Alliance, Transform, Northern California Public Broadcasting, Calthorpe Associates, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

A 23-member Advisory Group composed of leading environmental and social-equity advocates, business groups, public health experts, labor representatives, community-based organizations and academics has been formed to guide the creation and deployment of the web-based tool. As the project develops, community-based organizations might also become partners, bringing non-traditional participants, such as immigrant residents and leaders, into the planning process.

Project Description

Growth Scenarios

During the first year of the project, the EBA Advisory Group will guide the shaping and selection of a series of possible growth scenarios to illustrate the range of land use options for the Bay Area and possible outcomes implicit in each. Calthorpe Associates, a firm widely recognized for its innovative leadership in urban design, community planning and regional growth strategies, will collect and analyze existing data sets and map outcomes from this series of regional growth scenarios.

Interactive, web-based tool

As the scenarios are developed, MetroQuest, a firm experienced in public engagement projects for regional planning, will build the interactive web portal to present this data and illustrate the interplay and trade-offs of various growth possibilities. The website will allow users to experiment with possible futures and easily visualize how different development and growth policies could impact the issues they care most about in their communities. The Advisory Group will also test the tool's accessibility and ease of navigation by the lay public and provide opportunities through this portal for users to become more engaged in the planning process.

Outreach through media

As the simulation tool is completed, the Bay Area's renowned public broadcasting stations, KQED Public Radio and KTEH Public Television, will provide programming about the connections between climate change, smart growth and livable communities. They will feature the simulation tool in their television and online programming and help viewers and listeners learn how they can become better informed and more directly involved.

Community dialogues

During the second year, EBA will sponsor a series of public meetings around the region to explore various growth scenarios to launch active dialogues among residents, elected officials, and community leaders. These meetings will be timed to coincide with local and regional planning efforts that are currently underway, including initiatives to develop "Sustainable Community Strategies" per the requirements of SB 375.

Outcomes

Increase of community involvement

At the end of the project, an increased number of residents will understand the relationship of land use to livable communities and the role that smart growth can play, not only in decreasing greenhouse gas emissions, but also in improving public health, preserving open space, decreasing energy consumption and water use and promoting social equity. Through their interaction with the visioning tool and community dialogues, they will become aware of ways to become involved in the processes and be able to make informed decisions for their communities.

Collection of data

As people work through the web-based tool, they will have a chance to vote on the growth scenarios they prefer for the region. Their votes will be collected on the website as well as through keypad polling at the community meetings and relayed to the regional and planning agencies so they will have additional information on community preferences upon which to base their targets and decisions.