

Metropolitan Transportation Commission Planning Committee
Association of Bay Area Governments Administrative Committee
101 8th Street
Oakland, CA 94607

January 10, 2012

Re: Use of OneBayArea land conservation grant funds

Dear Chairs Sperring and Green, MTC Planning and ABAG Administrative Committee members:

Thank you for your support for the OneBayArea grant program. We are particularly pleased to see the inclusion of a \$5 million pilot program for land conservation.

These funds **should be used for genuine conservation projects, not for maintenance of rural roads.**

With the exception of this tiny \$5 million pilot program, the hundreds of millions of dollars of the OneBayArea grants are available to counties to spend flexibly, including on local street and road maintenance. Counties should plan to use the portion of their OneBayArea grants that can be spent anywhere in the county – including outside Priority Development Areas – to maintain their rural roads.

To maximize effectiveness, the land conservation grant program should:

1. **Establish a clear goal for the program.** For example, “To preserve and restore a network of lands and waters for people and nature; to sustain the natural diversity, increase healthy recreational opportunities and enhance the agricultural productivity and economic vitality of the Bay Area” or “To preserve resource areas and farmland, ameliorate outward development expansion, and maintain rural character.”
2. **Provide a regional competitive grant application** and review process for projects. Applicants should show how their project supports the goal of the grant program.
3. **Clearly establish types of eligible projects**, such as conservation planning, land acquisition, policy implementation, and improving agricultural vitality.
4. **Encourage collaboration** across counties and across sectors.

Using transportation funding to support land conservation makes sense. Far-flung development – usually on open space and farmland – means more spending on transportation infrastructure and more greenhouse gas emissions from driving. But development will continue to occur in these areas unless effective land conservation measures are in place. Therefore it’s essential that the region invest in land conservation programs in order to meet our transportation cost and greenhouse gas emission goals.

The Bay Area’s natural and agricultural lands provide a myriad of benefits to residents. Our natural lands provide clean drinking water, clean air, and protection from disasters like flooding, landslides, and climate change. Agricultural lands provide fresh, affordable food from local farms and ranches, and Bay Area agriculture is a \$1.4 billion industry. Natural lands also contribute to the region’s economic competitiveness. Open spaces rich with native plants and animals, accessible parks and trails to get to them, and a plethora of local food options contribute to a high quality of life. That quality of life attracts a talented workforce, encouraging businesses to locate and stay here.

It is essential that we as a region invest in nurturing and growing our network of natural and agricultural lands to ensure they can continue to provide benefits to residents as the region grows. Done right, the conservation grant portion of the OneBayArea grant program can be an important step in that direction.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Madsen
Executive Director, Greenbelt Alliance

Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager, Santa Clara County Open Space Authority

Bettina Ring
Executive Director, Bay Area Open Space Council

Edward Thompson, Jr.
California Director, American Farmland Trust

Elizabeth O'Donoghue
Director of Infrastructure and Land Use, The Nature Conservancy

Rachel Dinno Taylor
Director, Government Relations, Trust for Public Land

Seth Adams
Land Programs Director, Save Mount Diablo

Sibella Kraus
President, Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE)