

Date: November 9, 2010
To: Regional Advisory Working Group
From: Marisa Raya, Regional Planner
Subject: **Priority Development Area Assessment: Completeness – Schools**

Relationship of Schools to the Sustainable Communities Strategy

Schools affect land use and transportation sustainability on local, state, and regional levels. In addition to being an essential neighborhood service and a center for community activity, schools also currently represent 35% of all statewide infrastructure spending¹. According to the 2000 Bay Area Travel Survey, 12% of all trips made in the Bay Area are school-based.² The ability to walk to school has a strong correlation with public health, childhood obesity and mental health. And finally, schools play a significant role in many households' decisions about where to live.

Stable, transit-oriented housing, particularly affordable housing, is an essential resource for both families with children and teachers, and both cities and school districts can benefit from linking schools to transit-oriented development. For Priority Development Areas (PDAs), access to high quality schools – defined by both the educational quality of school programs and a school's role as a local, place-based community asset – is a key metric for assessing the development of a complete community (completeness).

In the surveys and interviews conducted as part of the Priority Development Area (PDA) Assessment, many local planners identified schools as a significant neighborhood quality factor that impacted the PDA's development potential. MTC's *Choosing Where We Live* report corroborates this finding; residents surveyed for the study highlighted access to quality schools as a key value in choosing their neighborhoods. While childless singles and couples form a portion of the demand for housing in walkable and transit-oriented neighborhoods, families with children also represent a sizeable market. However, their desire to live near transit is weighed against their perception of the local schools.

The purpose of investigating these links within the context of developing the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) is to assess the role schools and school districts play in regional growth. Some work has already been done to establish how transit-oriented neighborhoods can support schools. The UC Berkeley Center for Cities & Schools, a consultant for this work, identified core connections in their 2010 report, *Putting Schools on the Map: Linking Transit-Oriented Development, Families, and Schools in the San Francisco Bay Area*:

¹ Vincent, Jeffrey M. School Construction Policies to Support Sustainable Communities: California's Golden Opportunity. Testimony at the Joint Informational Hearing for the California Senate Committee on Housing and Transportation and the Senate Select Committee on State School Facilities: "Schools as Centers of Sustainable Communities: A Vision for Future School Facility Construction," December 15, 2009.
<http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/Vincent-testimony-121509.pdf>

² 2000 Bay Area Travel Survey (http://www.mtc.ca.gov/maps_and_data/datamart/survey/)

1. School quality plays a major role in families' housing choices.
2. A wide housing unit mix is needed to attract families.
3. Housing unit mix, school enrollment, and school funding are intricately related.
4. Children often use transit to get to and from school and afterschool activities.
5. Multi-modal transit alternatives support access to the increasing landscape of school options.
6. Mixed-income TOD provides opportunities for educational workforce housing.
7. TOD design principles support walkability and safety for children and families.
8. TOD brings amenities and services that can serve families closer to residential areas.
9. When schools are integrated with TOD planning, opportunities emerge for the shared use of public space.
10. TOD offers opportunities for renovating and building new schools in developments, which draws families.

PDA Assessment: Analysis of Schools

In order to understand school issues in Priority Development Areas, regional agencies staff identified the following indicators:

1. School Quality—Collective PDA status compared to schools region-wide regarding four measures: school, student, and staff characteristics, and school performance. All data is from the California Department of Education (CDE).
2. Physical Accessibility—Identification of the number/proportion of schools that students living in the PDAs are able to walk or take transit to. A joint effort between MTC and ABAG established a GIS-based methodology to identify the following:
 - a. Schools within ¼ mile of a bus or rail transit stop serving a PDA within the school district geography.
 - b. Schools within a half mile of a PDA via MTC's walkable streets network
 - c. Residential PDA acres within a half mile of a school.
3. School Choice: CDE and American Community Survey data shows the proportions of students in Public, Charter, and Private Schools for each jurisdiction.
4. Collaboration—Data from PDA Assessment Survey addresses the current state of City-School collaboration in PDA jurisdictions, including shared facilities, transit coordination, impact fees or involvement in planning activities.

PDA Assessment Findings

The following are highlighted findings from the PDA Assessment and suggestions for how they may impact the Sustainable Communities Strategy.

1. School Quality in PDAs

- Taken as an average, these schools have a lower Academic Performance Index rating than schools outside of the PDAs, both elsewhere in the region and statewide.
- PDA Public schools have a greater number of students receiving free or reduced-cost lunches because of their family's income level
- School demographics vary widely among PDAs, but overall schools in PDAs have more students of color than schools outside of PDAs.

To the extent that planning for PDAs should support complete communities with access to quality jobs and services, low school performance is a significant concern. A perception that some PDAs have lower quality schools may restrain the amount of new development the market will support in these areas. There are several ways in which planning and new development can benefit lower-performing school districts, including more secure housing, increased safety and walkability, and more revenues for the school district. An increase in residents could bring more revenue to the district through both per-pupil formula funding and taxes, while new 'eyes on the street' and urban designs for walkability could increase student safety from both crime and collisions.

2. Physical Accessibility

- About half of PDAs have schools within a half-mile walk of their residential or mixed-use neighborhoods. Similarly, 45 out of 92 PDAs assessed have one or more transit routes that stop within a ¼ mile of a school in their area. Most PDAs have either one or the other, however, there are 7 Planned PDAs which appear to not have schools within a half-mile distance of their residences or have regular transit service providing school connections. Schools in these areas may have transit running every 40 minutes; most see a bus or train less than hourly during peak times. Two Planned PDAs have no transit connection to schools in their district.

Given the high level of interest in improving public health through the Sustainable Communities Strategy, some PDAs or County Public Health agencies may want to identify strategies for improving school accessibility. Increases in neighborhood safety as well as improvements for walking and bicycling will increase non-auto access to school, but in some areas the lack of school proximity to the PDA may suggest new school siting, school buses or an improved transit connection.

3. School Choice

- 11% of the region's 1676 Public Schools are within the PDA boundaries.
- Nearly one-fifth of PDA schools are Charter schools, compared to 6% of schools elsewhere in the region.
- 13.5% of students in those jurisdictions that have nominated PDAs are in private schools. These students are primarily in the West Bay

PDAs have a high percentage of both charter schools and private school students. It is important to keep in mind that the above categories only apply to the public and charter schools, covering approximately 86.5% of all students in PDAs. However, multi-modal transit alternatives support access to the landscape of school options.

4. Collaboration

- While a substantial number of local jurisdictions surveyed have Joint Use facilities or other examples of City-School collaboration, most do not have a strong vision of the relationship between potential new development and the school district.

Even in cities that have regularly scheduled coordinating meetings with school districts, there may be misconceptions about the positive and negative impacts of new development relative to the school system, and school districts and parents of current students may oppose new development due to uncertainty over its impacts. The majority of public schools are funded on the basis of their student enrollment numbers; new housing will likely affect enrollments at nearby schools, which by extension impacts school operations and school district funding. Enrollment and school capacity situations will differ from school to school, but in general, unexpected changes in enrollment—increases or decreases—are difficult for districts to manage and can be cause for tension.³ Furthermore, while the number of students expected to live in future development increases substantially when the units are affordable, school districts may require impact fees that raise the cost of new homes or deter development.

Questions for Informing the Sustainable Communities Strategy

The results of this analysis raise questions to be considered in the development of the SCS:

- The purpose of the assessment is to help local and regional agencies in the analysis of planning strategies and development conditions. Although some PDAs have excellent, walkable schools, the jurisdictions as a whole share some concerns related to physical access, quality, and development impacts. How might the SCS addresses those concerns?
- Can PDAs attract the majority of the region’s growth if the schools are perceived to be lower quality or less stable than non-PDA schools?
- Given the lack of influence of the regional agencies on non-transportation school issues, what other forum might be appropriate to present this analysis?
- What other planning tasks, community participation, rules and regulations, investments, and interagency coordination are needed to support the creation of complete communities?

³ Ariel Bierbaum, Jeffrey Vincent, and Deborah McKoy, Center for Cities & Schools. “Linking Transit-Oriented Development, Families and Schools.” *Community Investments*: Vol. 22 No. 2: Summer 2010

