

SF Bay Area needs regional plan for big quakes

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A major quake strikes the Bay Area on the Hayward or San Andreas fault. This is a certainty—all we don't know is the date.

When it does, there are several alternate futures. The one we will live is the one we choose:

Future One: The Bay Area weathered the quake. First-responder teams had planned for decades for the event, and each city quickly established shelters for residents whose homes were damaged. Emergency services such as mobile kitchens sprang up overnight.

But eight months after the quake, highways remained impassable and cities were still rationing water. Low-lying communities, inundated when levees failed, were abandoned. Cash-strapped municipalities had run through their funds for emergency services, and aid to rebuild road and water systems from Washington was too little, too late. With so much of the regional infrastructure damaged, and no prospect for quick improvement, the engines of the economy—the technology companies and the innovators—one by one began to leave.

Future Two: The Japanese quake and tsunami of 2011 were a wake-up call to the quake-prone San Francisco Bay Area. Cities and counties went into high gear to create plans and processes for a coordinated regional recovery. When the Bay Area quake did hit, a regional plan was in place to rebuild crucial infrastructure and services. But severe budget problems in the state in 2011 and 2012 had so distracted government officials that the plan never received the political and financial support it needed. The Bay Area knew how to recover but lacked the means to act. With fiefdoms, not regional entities, controlling transportation systems and water delivery, a once-great region devolved into competing entities, all struggling. The economy limped along for decades.

Future Three: By 2011, the San Francisco Bay Area already was recognized as an emerging city-state—a region with the vision, economic resources and connectivity to set its own course. In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan, Bay Area leaders recognized the importance of Japan's shared sense of purpose to rebuilding its shattered infrastructure, as they crafted their own regional recovery plan.

When the earthquake struck on April 6, 2030, emergency teams took on the immediate needs, and recovery teams activated the first phase of the regional plan to fully restore water, power and transportation services. Businesses bounced back, sustaining employment, and new investment flowed in. Reconstruction began immediately. Within a year, it was as if the temblor had never happened.

Crises—war, economic collapse or natural disaster—force communities to pull together. Those that rise to the occasion emerge stronger. Those that don't fail, as we've illustrated in our scenarios. As challenges mount—global competition, disarray in Washington and Sacramento, underinvestment—the imperative is growing for the Bay Area to take greater responsibility for its

future. Regional cooperation—among local governments, special districts and business—hasn't been our strong suit. That's why the aftermath of the Japanese quake and tsunami should focus our attention.

If the lessons of a painfully slow recovery from Hurricane Katrina weren't already enough, the magnitude of the disaster in Japan should tell us what to expect from a major quake here. We have seven faults capable of producing earthquakes of magnitude 6.7 or larger. In the next 30 years, there is a 63 percent probability that an earthquake will occur on one or more of them. When it does, as many as 350,000 people will be displaced, 2,000 roads will become impassable, and thousands of water-distribution pipes will break. If delta levees fail, the situation will be worse. A slow recovery will cause businesses to relocate and many won't return.

To instill confidence, the Bay Area needs a recovery plan in place *before* the quake occurs. It should facilitate decision-making, speed the reconstruction of housing, streamline post-disaster permitting, attract project finance, address the needs of employers and small businesses and prioritize the rebuilding of infrastructure. The Association of Bay Area Governments has created a Recovery Planning Council, but it has received only minimal support from state and federal governments. Regional leadership and cooperation will be essential to get the job done.

The issue of regional governance goes well beyond quakes. With climate change, the Bay Area faces a host of new planning challenges. It is already grappling with a state mandate to produce a regional sustainable-communities strategy. To deal with sea-level rise, it will also need an adaptation plan—something that individual jurisdictions are ill equipped to address and that requires solutions at the regional level.

As others around the world plan for the future and invest to compete, we need to do the same. A resilient region is one that is sustainable, creates businesses and jobs, invests strategically, educates its residents and plans for the future. For this to happen, Bay Area governments must find new ways to work with each other and with business.

Because it is the only place where the region's governmental bodies formally connect, the Joint Policy Committee of regional agencies (Association of Bay Area Governments, Bay Area Air Quality Management District, Bay Conservation and Development Commission and Metropolitan Transportation Commission) is a good place to start.

As a community and a region, we must act to ensure that the Bay Area emerges from both quakes and economic challenges with a competitive economy. This will require the Bay Area to act not as 101 cities and nine counties but as a region.

<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/04/03/IN7E1IL5FQ.DTL>

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