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Pro: A bill badly needed for more Bay Area housing



AB 2923 would enable the creation
of thousands of new affordable
homes at and around BART stations



(Laura A. Oda/Bay Area News Group)

Construction in February of new housing and retail across from
the MacArthur BART station in Oakland.

By **MICHAEL LANE** |

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As our state lawmakers return from summer recess and get back to unfinished business, there remain a number of critical bills needed to address our housing crisis.

Among them, still to be taken up by the full Senate, is Assembly Bill 2923, a high-profile bill that would deliver a crucial opportunity for working families looking for a home they can afford within a BART trip to their work or school.

AB 2923, authored by Assemblymen David Chiu, D-San Francisco, and Tim Grayson, D-Concord, would enable the creation of thousands of new affordable homes at and around BART stations, resulting in fewer cars and less congestion on our region's roads. East Bay legislators should support this innovative housing and transit solution.

It's no secret among affordable-housing advocates and experts that transit-oriented development is one of our most critical tools in addressing our region's housing and transportation needs. When the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California last year authored and released a report titled "On Track Together," we emphasized the well-established connection between transit-oriented affordable housing and getting cars off the roads: A nearly 40 percent reduction in driving.

This is precisely the type of solution Bay Area voters are looking for: The Bay Area News Group and Silicon Valley Leadership Group recently released polling that showed Bay Area residents overwhelmingly want more housing and improved traffic circulation.

Proposals such as AB 2923 are the answer to our region's dual challenges. We need solutions that recognize that housing and traffic are not problems with an either/or solution but a both/and approach. By building more affordable homes near BART transit nodes, we can both create more housing and reduce congestion on our roads.

AB 2923 is an opportunity to expand on existing, successful transit-oriented development already surrounding BART stations. You can see mixed-income housing at stations throughout the region, such as Fruitvale Transit Village in Oakland and Marea Alta in San Leandro. These communities are affordable and walkable and improve nearby neighborhoods by filling a void, improving safety and making the BART station more of a community asset.

By setting basic guidelines for BART-owned land developed through a public process, this bill delivers crucial opportunities around the Bay Area. BART is the largest public owner of opportunity sites in our region's core. These properties are not greenfields nor part of existing community fabric; quite the opposite, these are vast surface parking lots, disruptive to the community and to the natural environment. By consolidating parking into structures at the appropriate locations, we can better connect surrounding communities with their BART stations while improving public safety, walkability and transit access.

AB 2923 strikes a sensible balance between local land use and zoning control and delivering the affordable housing that our region needs, right next to our region's best transit.

The bill would require the elected BART Board of Directors to establish guidelines for transit-oriented development for BART-owned land at or around a BART station. Cities would then update their local zoning to be consistent with these standards while retaining control over community design standards and final permitting authority.

Bay Area voters have demonstrated their strong support for investing in and implementing solutions to our housing-affordability challenge. We must also plan for success — which means ensuring there are places to receive housing that support our equity, sustainability and economic development goals. BART stations are the place that can deliver. We urge the state Legislature to approve AB 2923.

Michael Lane is Policy Director of the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California, which represents more than 750 developers, community leaders, businesses, and advocates promoting affordable Bay Area housing.



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