AGENDA ITEM 6: Regional Opportunity Index for the Delta

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Requested Action: Receive report on Regional Opportunity Index for the Delta

As the Commission’s Vision 2030 Strategic Plan recognizes, for more than 20 years the Commission has been the voice of the Delta and a catalyst for identifying and implementing solutions for the challenges facing Delta residents. Under theme of “Regional Economy,” the Strategic Plan calls for updating the Economic Sustainability Plan (ESP) and identifying regional infrastructure needs and investment opportunities to maximize Delta regional benefits—activities critical to supporting the Delta as an evolving place.

These goals coincide with those of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change, whose mission is to support building healthy, equitable, prosperous, and sustainable communities in California. The Center pursues this work in part through applying a GIS-based tool that uses publicly available data, such as the U.S. Census and American Community Survey, to identify social, educational, economic, and environmental assets and disparities by geographic regions. This tool, the Regional Opportunity Index (ROI), analyzes the socio-economic conditions of both the people living in an area and the characteristics of the communities in which they live. The ROI integrates statistical information about indicators that are usually considered separately, producing color-coded maps that identify areas of urgent need and opportunity. The ROI assists business, non-profit, research, and government organizations to identify people and places in need of investment.

As part of our effort to update the Land Use and Resource Management Plan, we commissioned a report on the Delta from the UC Davis Center for Regional Change. The report analyzes key community and regional disparities, and identifies areas for further research and investments to improve education, health, civic engagement, and economic prosperity for Delta residents.

Dr. Chris Benner will present the results of the ROI analysis for the Delta. Dr. Benner is a Research Associate of the UC Davis Center for Regional Change and a former Professor at UC Davis in the Community and Regional Development Program. He is currently the Dorothy E. Everett Chair in Global Information and Social Entrepreneurship, Director of the Everett Program for Digital Tools for Social Innovation, and a Professor of Environmental Studies and Sociology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His research examines the relationships between technological change, regional development, and the structure of economic opportunity, focusing on regional labor markets and the transformation of work and employment. He received his Ph.D. in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley.