

COMMUNITY VOICE



Barry Broome

Be Bold and Inclusive

Barry Broome has been building strong economies across the country for more than 20 years. As the CEO and president of the Greater Sacramento Economic Council, he has brought his years of experience to the Greater Sacramento market along with a penchant for bold action and questioning the status quo.

Broome sees economic growth as the only way for the Sacramento region to deliver true inclusion for all, which he calls a “survival objective ... you can’t have a third of people not participating in the economy and then expect your community to be sustainable.” He lays out the argument: Attracting employers leads to attracting developers, which leads to more investment, which leads to more jobs, which leads to more economic opportunity and mobility for people who are struggling.

But what attracts employers in the first place? His somewhat surprising answer is transit. He points to Seattle, which he claims has the worst roads in the country. “But their transit system is exceptional. What do you think all the Googlers and Microsoft and Amazon people are doing? They’re riding transit. It’s faster, it’s easier, it’s cleaner, it’s more comfortable. They don’t need to be wheeling out a car and paying for parking every day.”

Transit is not just about attracting employers. It’s also about the residents. “Transit allows your entire workforce to be mobile. It gives greater accessibility to people who are aren’t keeping up economically. If you don’t have a great transit system, then how do you get people who are struggling to schools, healthcare, higher education institutions, better jobs?”

He also explains that attracting more employers will reduce traffic, even if that seems counterintuitive. “The traffic is almost exclusively because people are

driving too far for employment ... when most people are driving 45 minutes to get to work, you’ve got a lot of traffic. And when the equivalent of 21 percent of your workforce [230,000 super-commuters] is either driving to the Bay Area or coming from the Bay Area, you’re going to choke out the I80 and widening it won’t help as much as building out employment centers.”

Attracting more employers and shifting the region’s economic model from one focused largely on consumption [where our competition for residents is with Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City] to one that creates value [where our competition for employers is with superstar cities like Seattle, Denver, and Austin] will take discipline and focus, Broome says.

“We need a greater vision and leadership on where we’re going as a community. It needs to be incredibly aspirational and the resources have to be aggregated and narrowly focused around the aspiration.” He says that for too long our region has been following a model of resource allocation that doles out funds and projects in a piecemeal way to ensure that every interest group and community gets a small piece of the pie. “That’s what got to change here. That’s not how Austin operates, that’s not how Denver operates, and that’s not how Seattle operates. Greater Sacramento has so much more potential than these other regions, but we haven’t capitalized on it yet.”

Instead, he believes the region needs to pick one or two transformational projects to fund that will “change the trajectory of the economy.” Increasingly he sees that “there’s no more OK. We’re either going to become dynamic and exceptional or we’re going to be a substandard community. So every decision we make has to be built upon differentiating ourselves as high standard.”