



May 25, 2022

Metropolitan Transportation Commission
375 Beale Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: **Prioritize steps to create a unified regional rail operator**
MTC Workshop, May 26, 2022,
Agenda Item #3: MTC's Role in Getting Major Projects Delivered and Coordinated

Dear Chair Pedroza and Commissioners:

Thank you for dedicating your annual workshop to the topic of major projects and opportunities for reform. We are pleased to see long-awaited progress on the Caltrans-funded *Rail Partnerships: Project Delivery and Governance* study, which was identified in the Transformation Action Plan as one of 27 actions to help rebuild and recover transit ridership.

Considering both the initial findings of the Rail Partnerships study and [existing research on world-class transit systems](#), **it is clear that the creation of a single lead regional rail transit operator for the Bay Area with a unified governance structure could provide tremendous benefits for our region, especially when it comes to delivering major projects.** A unified lead regional rail operator is a common feature in the two examples cited in the materials - Greater Toronto and Greater London - and also in many of the highest performing transit regions/countries of the world including the Netherlands, Switzerland, Greater Berlin, Greater Frankfurt, Greater Paris, Greater Montreal, and others.

Creating a unified regional operator must involve bringing together BART and Caltrain, which form the core of the rail network in the Bay Area. Building off of the Rail Partnerships Study, we urge MTC to prioritize actions that can lead to a unified regional rail operator, including supporting BART and Caltrain in jointly developing a detailed study of the costs and benefits of a merging into one system with a unified board.

Improved Major Project Delivery as Key Benefit of Unified Bay Area Rail Agency

Of greatest relevance to this workshop, a unified Bay Area regional rail operator would provide significant advantages for more efficient, effective major project advancement and delivery.

Our region's biggest planned megaprojects included in Plan Bay Area - Link21, Caltrain's Downtown Extension, BART to Silicon Valley, ValleyLink, and others - have complicated governance arrangements that have already compromised these projects and will continue to stand in the way of their timely and cost-efficient delivery - potential to attract more riders. A unified regional rail agency that includes BART and Caltrain would provide a far more

appropriate governance structure for all these projects, whose impacts and benefits extend across the entire region and beyond. With a combined cost of over \$50 billion dollars, the fact is we can't afford *not* to create a unified regional rail operator if doing so could result in cost savings or better decision-making on these projects.

Additional Benefits of a Unified Bay Area Rail Agency

In addition to supporting improved project delivery, a unified regional rail operator would have tremendous other benefits, including:

- **Enabling the Bay Area to more quickly and effectively deliver a seamless rail system around the Bay with integrated service, fares, and customer experience.**

With one unified board overseeing regional service, integrating service, fares and branding can occur much more quickly.

- **Improved accountability to riders and the public for regional transit service and connections.**

Riders would benefit from having one accountable board responsible for regional transit and connections, in comparison to now, where no agencies take true responsibility for poor connections between services.

- **Improved agency capacity, and attraction of better leadership and professional expertise.**

Having combined staffs increases our ability to oversee complicated projects and invest in innovation; this is especially important as the region looks to advance more large projects.

In closing, it is worth noting that past mergers in California and elsewhere have led to good customer outcomes - SolTrans, WETA, and LA Metro are all highly successful examples of agency mergers that at one point were controversial, but have proven their worth through improved ridership and customer experience. To happen, though these mergers required political leadership to even get a study of a merger to happen.

With the Regional Rail Partnerships set to complete its evaluation by this summer, let's not miss this opportunity to do what most riders know is the right thing to do - create a clear lead regional rail operator. This begins with a detailed study of the steps needed to bring BART and Caltrain together, and a detailed cost benefit analysis.

Alongside your Major Project Advancement Policy and a Connected Network Plan, your clear direction to prioritize creating a unified rail operator is one of the most effective things you could do to improve major project delivery in the Bay Area.

Sincerely,

Ian Griffiths, Policy Director
Seamless Bay Area

Russ Hancock, President & CEO
Joint Venture Silicon Valley