

October 4, 2019

Programming and Allocations Committee  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
375 Beale St, Suite 800  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Item 3a: Business Case for Transit Fare Integration Project

Dear Chair Josefowitz and Programming and Allocations Committee Members:

SPUR is a member-supported non-profit organization that promotes good planning and good government in the San Francisco Bay Area through research, education and advocacy. Improving public transportation and increasing public transportation use in cities are core SPUR priorities.

As detailed in our recently published report *Solving the Bay Area's Fare Policy Problem*, disparate and disjointed fares create customer confusion, inhibit people from using more than one transit service and undermine the benefits the region should derive from the significant investments it is making in new transit infrastructure and fare payment technology. The region's fragmented approach to fares pushes people to make inefficient and often costly transit decisions — or to get behind the wheel and drive themselves, adding to traffic congestion, pollution and carbon emissions.

A solution to the Bay Area's fare policy problem is long overdue. Other regions around the globe have streamlined fares across transit operators to improve user experience and grow transit use. The Clipper upgrade offers a rare window of opportunity to reimagine regional fare policy.

We commend the Clipper Executive Board for approving an allocation of funding for a business case to study regional fare integration. This is a major step forward. The potential impacts of regional fare integration are not well understood; the issue has not been studied for over a decade. The business case can help uncover how strategic changes to the region's fare policy can make transit more convenient to use and affordable for more people.

At the same time, we are mindful of the fact that the 2008 Fare Integration study was a failed effort. It was a staff-led process that did not include non-transit stakeholders, nor any user research. The shortcomings of that study are evident in the fact that its findings were dismissed for their infeasibility and that it did not build a constituency willing to work through the complexity. Given the current draft business case for fare integration scope of work, we are concerned about repeating that study's mistakes.

**SPUR strongly supports the business case and we recommend that as a condition for MTC allocating funding, the study include the following elements:**

**1. Prioritize user research to identify fare barriers.**

The business case scope of work proposes using existing transit agency studies to identify what transit riders perceive as issues with the current fare system and what should be the priorities for a future integrated and coordinated regional fare system. Transit operator customer satisfaction

surveys were suggested as a source for this information; however, these surveys do not ask questions about fares from a regional perspective. (See Attachment 1 for the fare related questions included in select transit operator customer satisfaction surveys).

Furthermore, existing studies provide no insight into how fares are a barrier for non-riders, nor do they identify what institutional customers, such as employers and cities, want from the region's fare policy.

Using existing agency studies is likely to be insufficient to identify the problems integrated fares should solve for. We urge you to ensure the study prioritizes comprehensive user research and seeks to understand what all potential customers -- including current regular riders, occasional riders, non-riders from all parts of the region and visitors -- as well as institutional customers such as employers and cities, need, want and expect from the region's fare policy. Examples of ethnographic style user research could include, customer narrative workshops, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, customer intercept surveys at transit hubs, observational research, journey mapping workshops, and ride-alongs. We believe this research should seek to unearth the following:

- Legibility of the current fare system and what information matters to different customer types for the purposes of their trip.
- Customers' decision-making process leading to and during the trip, including how and why fares impact choices between transit and other transportation modes.
- Awareness of existing transfer discounts and their behavior shift potential.
- Value of existing transit operator passes; challenges to accessing and using transit passes.
- Meaning of fares and its relationship to customer experience.

## **2. Create a stakeholder advisory group to help guide and inform the study.**

Fare policy is a regional equity, funding and customer experience issue. As such, the study would benefit significantly from the input of stakeholders who represent the interests of groups of riders, in addition to the perspective of transit agencies.

We urge you to ensure the study has a stakeholder advisory group, comprised of representatives from the business community, nonprofits and community groups, to provide guidance and input about the study periodically during the process. This group can help ensure the study is meeting customer needs and is a way to build and grow support for the study and its outcomes.

Convening an advisory group is standard practice for complex transportation studies conducted in the Bay Area. For example, the 101 Managed Lane Mobility Action Plan and the Caltrain Business Plan both convened advisory groups to provide counsel and direction. For each, a broad set of stakeholders provided valuable insights that resulted in additions and changes to the proposals of staff and consultants.

## **3. Create a steering committee of transit agency board members and MTC Commissioners.**

Many transit agency board members and MTC Commissioners participated in the fare integration seminar MTC held earlier this year and emerged from the session with a shared enthusiasm to solve the region's fare policy problem. As the ultimate decision-makers whose approval will be required for new a regional fare policy, their support is critical. We are concerned that the study process does not include opportunities for them to be engaged, informed

and cultivated as champions. We urge you to ensure that a steering committee made up of transit agency board members and MTC commissioners is created to advise this study.

**4. Include transit affordability as a study goal.**

MTC staff developed seven draft principles for an integrated fare system. SPUR strongly supported these principles which included, among others, a principle that transit should be affordable for all. Future iterations of the scope of work no longer included these principles; instead, the study goals shifted to improving the passenger experience and growing transit ridership across the Bay Area. While we think these are good goals, we also think the study should hold as a value transit affordability.

The Means-Based Fare Pilot is seeking to improve transit affordability, yet the options recommended did not include regional inter-agency passes, fare caps, or more affordable transfers. This means that how and in what ways integrated fares could especially benefit riders with low incomes has yet to be assessed.

While the business case for fare integration has the potential to impact transit affordability by removing penalties for transferring between systems and making the transit network work as one system, pursuing these outcomes through a ridership growth lens could produce different results than if they were pursued through an affordability lens. For these reasons, we urge you to ensure transit affordability is explicitly included as a study goal.

Integrating transit fares will not be easy, but it is our responsibility as leaders to delve into the complexity so that we can create simplicity for riders. We ask that you pursue regional fare integration and move forward with the business case, with a focus on affordability and with the involvement of Bay Area cities, transit riders and others who care.

Thank you for your leadership on this crucial issue for the Bay Area.

Sincerely,



Arielle Fleisher  
Transportation Policy Director

Attachment 1: Fare related questions included in transit operator Customer Satisfaction Surveys

[Muni 2016 Customer Satisfaction Survey](#)

- How do you usually pay your Muni fare?
- What aspects of Muni would you most like to see improved? (overall) (*“Fares” is a choice.*)
- Finally, what is one thing Muni could do to get you to ride more often? (*“Cheaper fares/longer time transfers/ other fare complaints” are choices.*)

[BART 2018 Customer Satisfaction Survey](#)

- What type of fare did you pay for this BART trip?
- Please help BART improve service by rating each of the following attributes (*“Reliability of fare gates; enforcement against fare evasion” are choices.*)

[Caltrain 2018 Customer Satisfaction Survey](#)

- How did you pay for this train trip (today)?

[AC Transit 2017 On-Board Transit Survey](#)

- What kind of fare did you pay for this trip?
- What fare category did you pay?

[SamTrans 2017 Customer Experience Survey](#)

- What is your fare category?
- How do you typically pay for your trip when taking SamTrans?