

**Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Policy Advisory Council**

June 10, 2020

Agenda Item 7

Staff Liaison Report – June 2020

Subject: Relevant MTC policy decisions and other activities.

Recommendation: Information

Attachments: Attachment A: Staff Liaison Report – June 2020



METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

**Agenda Item 7
Attachment A**
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Memorandum

TO: Policy Advisory Council
FR: Marti Paschal, Staff Liaison
RE: Staff Liaison Report – June 2020

DATE: June 10, 2020

W.I. 1114

Tolling on Bay Area Express Lanes Resumed June 1

In light of steadily rising traffic volumes on Bay Area freeways as shelter-in-place restrictions prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic begin to ease, the region's three Express Lane operators — the Alameda County Transportation Commission, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission — resumed weekday tolling on Monday, June 1 to ensure that travelers in key corridors have an option for a fast, reliable trip.

Express Lanes on Interstate 580 in Alameda County; Interstate 680 in Contra Costa County; State Route 237 in Santa Clara County; and southbound I-680 over the Sunol Grade in Alameda and Santa Clara counties reinstated the variable-rate tolling policies that were temporarily suspended March 20. On weekdays from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., changeable electronic signs over the Express Lanes once again display current toll rates for solo drivers who wish to travel in the Express Lane. Tolls rise or fall based on congestion in the corridor.

Along with the return of Express Lane tolling, commuters can expect several Bay Area transit agencies in the coming weeks to resume express bus services that had been temporarily suspended earlier this spring. Weekday traffic volume in most Bay Area freeway corridors is now reaching at least 60 percent of spring 2019 levels. Traffic counts in some Express Lane corridors, including I-580 through Dublin, Pleasanton and Livermore; and Highway 237 in Milpitas, San Jose and Sunnyvale in May registered close to 80 percent of last year's levels during certain high-travel periods.

All vehicles using the I-580 Express Lanes, the State Route 237 Express Lanes and the 680 Contra Costa Express Lanes during weekday operating hours must be equipped with a FasTrak toll tag or an adjustable FasTrak Flex tag. Carpoolers and motorcyclists can use these lanes free of charge with a FasTrak Flex tag set to the "2" or "3+" position. While solo drivers must have FasTrak to use the southbound I-680 Sunol Express Lane, carpools and motorcycles can still use this lane without FasTrak.

Executive Director's Report

The following items are excerpts from the May 2020 Executive Director's Report to the Commission. To read the report in its entirety go to:

<http://www.mtc.ca.gov/whats-happening/news/executive-directors-report>.

COVID-19 Related Items

Blue Ribbon Task Force, Federal Transit Funds

A 30-member Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force, designated by Chair Haggerty and chaired by MTC Commissioner Jim Spering, will guide the future of the Bay Area's public transportation network, including distribution of emergency federal funds. It will include other Commissioners; representatives from the state Senate and Assembly and the California State Transportation Agency; transit operators; business and labor groups; and advocates for people with disabilities and the social justice community. The first of two distributions of roughly \$1.3 billion in CARES Act funding for which Bay Area transit agencies are eligible has been distributed, and MTC is expected to take action in the ensuing months to distribute the region's remaining funding, once transit agencies have had time to assess the full scope of revenue losses. The first meeting of the Blue Ribbon Task Force is May 29th.

State Budget Update

The May Revise of the FY 2020-21 State Budget was released on May 14. While the situation is dire for the General Fund and its primary programs, such as education and health care, the Administration's cost cutting measures generally spare transportation and housing from deep cuts. The May Revise retains a \$500 million low-income housing tax credit expansion proposal and local and regional housing planning funding – the Local Early Action Program and the Regional Early Action Program – but does reduce funding in a number of other housing programs where funds have not yet been allocated to specific projects. In transportation, the Administration forecasts that State Transit Assistance, a source of transit operating funds, will be down by 40% resulting in a \$100 million hit to the Bay Area. On a positive note, related to local government funding, Governor Newsom is proposing to direct \$1.7 billion in CARES Act funds that went directly to the state to local governments, including \$450 million to the cities that did not receive a direct allocation from CARES Act and \$1.3 billion to counties to be used toward homelessness, public health, public safety and other services to combat the pandemic. For details see the Attachments to my report.

Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) ACT

On May 15, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a \$3 trillion COVID-19 relief package - the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act (H.R. 6800) - to supplement the nearly \$3 trillion in aid Congress has approved since March. The HEROES Act would fund \$875 billion in state and local government direct aid as a supplement to the \$150 billion in direct aid approved in March, and provide an additional \$10 billion to cities and counties through Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). The bill would also make a substantial investment to keep residents in their homes, providing \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance, nearly \$20 billion in homelessness and traditional U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) rental assistance, and \$75 billion to assist homeowners in paying housing costs. With respect to transportation, the bill would provide an additional \$15.75 billion in transit funding plus \$15 billion in resources to states and locals to backfill lost highway funding.

More detail will be provided in the June Legislation Committee Report including any updates on Senate action on this item.

Traffic impacts

Traffic is starting to come back. A pre-COVID daily average of 421,000 trips on bridges in the tollpaying direction hit a new low the week of April 6, with an average of just 208,000 bridge crossings per day, and has since been trending upwards. In the last week of April, average daily bridge traffic exceeded 243,000 toll-paid trips – a 16 percent increase over the shelter-in-place low. Caltrans and other agencies have been able to take advantage of this period of reduced traffic by undertaking infrastructure improvement projects, including the replacement of the twin freeway decks at the U.S. 101/Alemany Circle junction, completed ahead of schedule this past Saturday.

Staff are closely monitoring conditions and considering when to restart tolling on express lanes. New lane striping has also begun for new lane configurations on I-880 in Alameda County, to gear up for the fall 2020 opening of new Express Lanes between Oakland and the Santa Clara County line.

Clipper and FasTrak

The FasTrak and Clipper call centers continue to operate to serve their customers, but with modified days and hours of operation--Clipper call center operates Monday through Friday from 8 am to 5 pm; FasTrak call center operates Monday through Friday 9 am to 5 pm. The in-person customer service centers of both programs, however, are closed indefinitely, with the exception of the Clipper customer service center at Bay Crossings in the Ferry Building which is open with limited hours.

Other News

Planning and Environmental Linkages Study

MTC, Caltrans and four North Bay agencies are launching a planning and environmental linkages study (PEL), the first in California. The states of Colorado, Texas and Florida have conducted these studies and staff have been in touch with them about the benefits. This is an opportunity to streamline the environmental review for Highway 37. The PEL study will begin in a couple of months.

Bay Bridge Pedestrian Piers Award from American Society of Landscape Architects

Two new public access piers retain and repurpose select Bay Bridge foundations to serve the public. The project earned a 2020 Merit Design Award from the ASLA Northern California chapter, demonstrating how funds earmarked for decommissioning old structures can be better spent modifying them to provide social, ecological and economic benefits.

Equity Program Update

We are moving forward with developing a bench of equity experts who can partner with our agency in the coming months and years as we assess, design, and implement an effective equity platform. Now more than ever, we recognize that engaging with community-based organizations and thought partners to assist agencies like MTC and ABAG with applying an equity lens will be invaluable as we transition into a Covid-19 recovery phase.

Special Note

Mark Zabaneh, the Executive Director of the Transbay Joint Powers Association (TJPA) has resigned effective this September to accept another position.

The BART to Berryessa extension is opening on June 13th. This has been a regional priority through Resolution 3434 and related planning and funding advocacy, and is an important milestone to celebrate.

While remote work has been a challenge to navigate, it has also brought about positive changes in the public's attendance at our meetings. To highlight:

Joint ABAG Admin/MTC Exec: 104 attendees

ABAG HMC: 217 attendees

MTC Budget Study/BATA Oversight: 153 attendees