

January 26, 2021

**BY ELECTRONIC MAIL**

Scott Haggerty, Chair, and Commissioners  
Bay Area Metro Center  
375 Beale Street  
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Emergency Transit Operating Funding Agenda Item 9b

Dear Chair Haggerty and Commissioners:

Public transportation, the drivers who operate it, and the frontline workers and transit riders who depend on it continue to face an existential crisis in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is an issue of pandemic safety, economic recovery, and social justice. While federal relief funds have softened the blow, we must use every tool in our toolbox to ensure public transportation is functioning for those who need it now, and to allow us to rebuild the economy once the public health crisis is under control.

We strongly support the staff proposal to provide additional flexibility for Transit Capital Priorities dollars to be directed to transit operations. Transit service has already been cut drastically, transit job layoffs are likely without immediate action, and the economy cannot reopen without transit operations support. This policy allows transit agencies common-sense flexibility in light of the crisis they face. We commend MTC for responding to the calls of riders, workers, and advocates by proposing this solution, and **we encourage MTC commissioners to approve the proposal.**

The new relief funding for emergency transit operations enacted by Congress in December will bring an estimated \$975 million to the Bay Area. We support Executive Director McMillan's proposal that this money be distributed on the basis of agency need, and take into account the extent to which transit-dependent people are current users of the agency's service. We also believe that the assessment of need should include riders who are being passed up by buses that are loaded to maximum COVID-safe limits.

However, we know both the new relief funding and this additional flexibility is not enough to ensure that transit survives the current crisis, or that sufficient service is available to meet the needs of riders and communities. As Executive Director McMillan's helpful [presentation](#) to the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force noted in October, our Bay Area transit agencies will fall short of the funding needed to operate pre-pandemic service levels by up to \$1.7 billion in FY 2021–22.

We encourage the Commission to use every available avenue to address the current crisis, and appreciate staff's commitment to bring back to the Commission a complete inventory of tools at MTC's disposal. As one example, new, highly-flexible Federal Highway Administration relief dollars will soon be sub-allocated to the region, and we encourage MTC to prioritize those dollars for public transit. These dollars can be used for transit operations, or to backfill capital replacement needs of agencies that flex TCP funds for operations to protect jobs and service. It is public transit that is facing an existential crisis, and public transit that is necessary to reopen the economy, not highways.

We also support staff's commitment to share an analysis of each agency's fiscal need. We encourage that analysis to include budget gaps for operations and state of good repair, as well as an analysis of the needs of current riders and pass up rates. This will help MTC better support the needs of all riders around the region, and ensure budget changes do not create immediate and long-term operational challenges.

Thank you for taking strong, decisive action on addressing the immediate crisis transit faces and making Transit Capital Priorities dollars available for transit operations.

Sincerely,

Darnell Grisby  
**Executive Director, TransForm**

Mark Cordes  
**Executive Director, San Francisco Transit Riders**

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**East Bay Democratic Socialists of America**

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**Community Connections Program Coordinator, The Center for Independent Living**

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Shoshana Wechsler  
**Coordinator, Sunflower Alliance**

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**Co-Leader, Mothers Out Front San Francisco**

Steve Ongerth  
**Co-founder, IWW Environmental Union Caucus\***  
**Executive Committee, Bay Area Inland Boatman's Union\***  
**\*organizations listed for ID Purposes, not endorsements.**

Adina Levin  
**Executive Director, Friends of Caltrain**

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**350 Contra Costa**

Nicole Kemeny  
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**Peninsula for Everyone**

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cc: Therese McMillan, Executive Director ([tmcmillan@bayareametro.gov](mailto:tmcmillan@bayareametro.gov))