



## TRANSIT RECOVERY TASK FORCE

Transit Recovery Blue Ribbon Task Force

DATE: January 25, 2021

FR: Steve Kinsey

### RE: Draft Problem Statement for Review and Comment

I am providing you with a one-page Draft Problem Statement Context statement followed by a one-page Draft Problem Statement for BRTF review and comment at the January 25, 2021 meeting of the Task Force. Five categories of transit challenges were presented at the December 14, 2020, in tandem with an Operators' presentation highlighting their coordinated efforts to improve transit. At that meeting, Task Force members and the public shared comments used to inform these documents.

The Task Force also approved the use of a 13-person Working Group whose purpose was to help guide development of the enclosed draft Problem Statement. The Working Group met twice, on January 8<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>, and reviewed information provided in advance of each meeting. In addition, many Working Group members spent time outside of the joint meetings preparing and submitting suggested content and language. Much of the document that you are receiving reflects their own words.

The Task Force and the public will be asked to comment on the draft documents at the January 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, after which further revisions will be made in advance of the Task Force's final review and approval at its February 22, 2021 meeting. Once adopted by the Task Force, the Problem Statement will be used to guide development of several Network Management concepts that will be evaluated in order to identify a preferred network management approach in the Transit Recovery Action Plan.

I want to thank all of the members of the Working Group listed below, as well as Karin Betts, MTC staff, who recorded excellent meeting notes at both meetings.

### **Problem Statement Working Group**

#### **Large Transit Operators (3)**

Alexandra Hallowell (SMTA)  
Robert del Rosario (AC Transit)  
Sebastian Petty (Caltrain)

#### **MTC staff (2)**

Andy Fremier  
Rebecca Long

#### **CBO Planner (1)**

Jonathan Kass (SPUR)

#### **Advisory Council (1)**

Randi Kinman

#### **Smaller Transit Operators (2)**

Ruby Horta (County Connection)  
Michael Gougherty (WETA)

#### **Social Justice (1)**

Bob Allen (Urban Habitat)

#### **Business (1)**

Gwen Litvak (Bay Area Council)

#### **Cal/STA (1)**

Chad Edison

#### **Labor (1)**

John Courtney (ATU)



## TRANSIT RECOVERY TASK FORCE

### Problem Statement Context

January 25, 2021

By June 2021, the **Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force (BRTF)** is expected to submit a Transit Transformation Action Plan (Plan) that identifies actions needed to re-shape the region's transit system into a more connected, more efficient, and more user-focused mobility network across the entire Bay Area and beyond. In November 2020, the BRTF adopted four Plan goals, including Goal 3A, which states:

*"Develop a clear Problem Statement that addresses what issues or problems Network Management reforms seek to resolve."*

The BRTF also adopted a definition of "transit transformation" that establishes the desired outcome from implementing its Action Plan:

*"Design, adequately invest in and effectively manage a public transit network that is equitable, inclusive, frequent, affordable, accessible, reliable, and integrated with unified service, fares, schedules, customer information and identity, serving all Bay Area populations, resulting in increased transit ridership and reduced growth in vehicle miles traveled."*

Working toward this result is not a new idea. MTC's Resolution 3866 incorporates nearly 50 years of legislated transit coordination mandates, including administering fare revenue-sharing, governing inter-operator transfers, and deciding discretionary fund sources and amounts to achieve coordination and connectivity. In spite of this, significant barriers to the BRTF's vision still exist and must be addressed in a region where physical geography, jurisdictional boundaries, urban settlement patterns and travel patterns overlap and intersect in complicated ways, while also considering how megaregional and interregional travel services will interface with the Bay Area system.

In 2017 and 2018, the Bay Area lost over 5% of its annual riders, despite a booming economy and service increases. The decline occurred even as most major operators increased service in terms of both mileage and hours of operation. The steepest ridership losses came on buses, at off-peak times, on weekends, in non-commute directions, on outlying lines, and on lines that did not serve the region's core employment clusters. Systems with falling overall ridership but increased commute time ridership saw limited operational savings. COVID greatly compounded declining transit ridership trends, with an average reduction in ridership of 77% by the end of 2020.

Transit also faces substantial financial challenges. Operating expenses are subject to intense inflationary pressures and capital construction costs have escalated precipitously over the past decades. Locally-generated sales or property taxes have restrictions limiting an agency's ability to serve areas outside their county and local return on services is critical to retain public support.

Some factors contributing to transit's ridership decline and equitable access cannot be solved by operators alone. Bay Area governments and the planning profession at large have played a central role in systematically denying opportunities to Black people and other minorities through practices like redlining, the clearance of neighborhoods for construction of urban highways, exclusionary zoning, redevelopment, policing bias and outright discrimination and segregation. Furthermore, macro-economic trends, locally decided land uses, housing affordability and low gasoline prices also affect public transit ridership in the Bay Area.

If sustained, this decline in ridership threatens to plunge the region's transit system into a downward spiral, jeopardizing both the near and long term financial viability of individual transit operators, negatively impacting riders, and fundamentally undermining the value of the public's past and future investments in transit as a public good. makes it harder to raise new revenue.

## **Draft Problem Statement Summary**

**January 19, 2021**

To advance Plan Bay Area 2050's vision of a more affordable, connected, diverse, healthy, and vibrant Bay Area for all by meeting its ambitious transit ridership target, action is needed to restore and grow transit ridership. The current organizational structure of the San Francisco Bay Area's 27 agencies is not envisioned, designed, governed, or funded to deliver equitable, convenient, efficient sub-regional, regional or interregional transit mobility. There is no network management entity with sufficient resources to ensure that multiple separate transit agencies plan, operate and are held accountable for providing equitable, inclusive, frequent, affordable, accessible, reliable, and integrated service in all nine Bay Area counties and beyond. Also, there is a lack of public agency urgency and coordination to implement travel time advantages for buses on state highways and key local corridors.

Below are key problems identified by the Ad Hoc Problem Statement Working Group.

### **Organizational/Institutional Challenges**

- Independent locally-oriented governance makes it difficult to achieve beneficial regional consensus and cooperation across multiple agencies is time-consuming at all staff levels.
- Nimble and coordinated responses to unpredictable and evolving travel patterns, continuously advancing technology, and environmental/health emergencies is impeded.
- Consolidated planning and service delivery for long-distance and cross-jurisdictional trips, paratransit and school services, micro-mobility integration and demand management is limited.

### **Customer Experience**

- Transit is too slow and unreliable because vehicles are stuck in traffic, transfers are inefficient, and wait times are often long.
- Fares are confusing, vary by agency, create penalties for using more than one operator, have inconsistent discount policies, are unaffordable for low-income riders and have been slow to change.
- The lack of unified trip planning, real-time information, inconsistent signage and wayfinding is confusing to riders.
- Real and perceived security concerns for riders and transit staff frustrate ridership and inhibit attracting new riders.

### **Past and Current Disparities**

- Transit riders who have low incomes, disabilities or reside in communities of color have been and remain marginalized in transit planning and decisions, making it difficult to obtain proportionally greater transit access benefits in outlying areas, low-income neighborhoods, and communities of color.
- Trips that currently rely on uncoordinated and costly transfers attract only those who lack alternative travel options and force many other low income riders into costly car ownership.

### **Transit Costs and Funding**

- Regional transit coordination will require new funding that has not been identified.
- The current structure reduces opportunities for administrative and operational efficiencies, such as centralization of certain business functions and systems, unified data collection, procurement and delivery of capital investments.
- Poor coordination and lack of a service vision across transit agencies reduces public support for transit in a way that makes it harder to raise new revenue.