

**TRANSIT RECOVERY
TASK FORCE**

TO: Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force

DATE: February 22, 2021

FR: Steve Kinsey, CivicKnit

RE: Modifications to Draft Problem Statement

Following Task Force input in December, a draft Problem statement was presented at the January 25th Task Force meeting for review and discussion. At its upcoming meeting the Task is scheduled to adopt a Final Problem Statement.

The revised Problem Statement provided for your review incorporates comments made at the January BRTF meeting and individual emails and one submitted by jointly by large and smaller operators. The following list describes the key changes proposed in the Revised Draft Problem Statement:

- **Context** section specifically identifies statistical information sources.
- **Problem Statement Summary**
 - modified to use operators' preferred text to describe their institutional purpose
 - Text on lack system-wide coordination entity moved to bulleted section
- **Organizational/Institutional Challenges** section was modified as follows:
 - a stand-alone indication of the importance of transit priority projects
 - school service was removed because of great local variation in need and service
- **Customer Experience**
 - changed in several instances to reflect variations among operator's situations and acknowledge some studies are underway.
- **Past and Current Disparities**
 - Substantially rewritten based on alternative text provided by Operators
- **Transit Costs and Funding**
 - additional funding needed for more than regional transit coordination
 - policy tradeoffs must be considered before shifting existing funding.

On February 11th, the Operators submitted comments via email on the draft Problem Statement and proposed an alternative approach. A copy is provided for your review and consideration. The operators may ask the Task Force to replace the revised draft Problem Statement with their version. If so, there will be discussion and potential action on their request.

BLUE RIBBON



TRANSIT RECOVERY TASK FORCE

Context

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.”

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 2012, MTC adopted the Transit Sustainability Project, which identified specific goals and objectives related to ridership, customer-focus, and regional coordination.¹
- In 2019-2020, FASTER, a multi-stakeholder effort, developed a strategy and funding plan to achieve more coordinated transit planning, effective project delivery, and more integrated fares and schedules.
- In 2019- Assembly Member Chiu introduced AB2057, state legislation that prioritized institutional reforms that would support a more seamless public transportation network, including ensuring core levels for transit-dependent populations.
- In 2021, MTC's Plan Bay Area 2050 Blueprint identified a number of beneficial transit program enhancements needed to create an expanded, fast, frequent, efficient and safe multi-modal transportation system that includes efficient intercity trips complemented by a suite of local transportation options.

In spite of these efforts, 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. Currently, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an acute, existential crisis for transit, with an average reduction in ridership of 77% by the end of 2020,² and it is unclear when, and to what extent, ridership will return.

¹ MTC-Transit Sustainability Project, May 2012- Five agencies (AC Transit, BART, Caltrain, Muni, and VTA) identified customer focus as a goal. Three agencies (AC Transit, Caltrain, and SamTrans) specifically identified connecting to, coordinating with, or cooperating with other transportation or transit providers as a goal. AC Transit described its goal as providing a “transit system [that is] seamless to the passenger regardless of the agency. Services, transfers and fares must be transparent to the passenger.”

² Operator provided information; from BRTF meeting/ December 14, 2020

Pre-pandemic, a UCLA study³ determined that 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. It also cited ride-sharing as a possible cause of declining transit ridership.

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. In world-wide systems cited as comparison, there is significantly greater funding dedicated to public transit.

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. 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.

³ "What's Behind Recent Transit Ridership Trends in the Bay Area?" February, 2020. **Authors:** Evelyn Blumenberg, PhD, Mark Garrett, PhD, Hannah King, Julene Paul, Madeline Ruvolo, Andrew Schouten, PhD, Brian D. Taylor, PhD, FAICP, Jacob Wasserman

Problem Statement Summary

Public transit services in the San Francisco Bay Area are operated by 27 agencies, each with its own unique policies, procedures and operating practices best suited for their immediate service areas and local priorities, and not organized to support customer-friendly, cross-jurisdictional travel. Strong collaborative action is needed to restore and grow transit ridership to reach the ambitious targets⁴ associated with Plan Bay Area 2050's vision of a more affordable, connected, diverse, healthy, and vibrant Bay Area for all.

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

Organizational/Institutional Challenges

- There is lack of transit priority on surface roads.⁵ Transportation institutions and decision-making procedures are not developing and managing rights of way in a coordinated manner, both regionally and in many cases locally, to optimize transit speed, service investments and the region's efforts to grow transit mode share and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- No network management entity with sufficient resources and authority ensures that multiple separate transit agencies plan, operate and are held accountable for providing equitable, inclusive, frequent, affordable, accessible, reliable, and integrated long-distance and cross-jurisdictional service.
- Cooperation on coordinated approaches across multiple agencies is time-consuming and unpredictable.
- Coordinated planning and services for paratransit and seniors does not exist.⁶
- A lack of unified, robust data collection and management impedes nimble, *equivalent* service planning and performance evaluation.

Customer Experience

- Bus travel is slow and unreliable because of vehicles getting stuck in traffic, inefficient stop spacing and transfer facilities, and where schedules create long wait times.
- While being studied now, fares remain confusing, vary by agency, create penalties for using more than one operator, have inconsistent discount policies and are unaffordable for low income riders.
- *While being studied now*, a lack of unified services for trip planning, real-time information, mobile payment technologies and wayfinding maps and signage confuses existing riders and impedes opportunities to grow ridership.
- Large operators' customers are expressing greater rider health and safety concerns.⁷

Past and Current Disparities

- Failed regional housing and development policies have resulted in the displacement of low income and people of color to car-dependent communities, reducing full access to economic opportunities due to longer, less convenient, and more expensive mobility options.⁸
- There is no centralized plan to address the legacy of disenfranchisement and marginalization of these communities. Those most harmed by past and current exclusion are not centered throughout the development and implementation of future solutions.

Transit Costs and Funding

- Current and future service coordination efforts can only offer limited benefits without additional funding, which has not yet been identified.⁹
- Opportunities for administrative and operational efficiencies such as centralization of business functions and systems, unified data collection, procurement and delivery of capital investments varies greatly among transit operators depending on the type of service each provides.¹⁰
- No institutional leader is facilitating development of new transit revenue strategies that voters will support.
- Changing current funding levels or priorities cannot be done without understanding difficult tradeoffs.

⁴ MTC-PBA2050- A Blueprint for the Bay Area's Future, December 2020

⁵ MTC- Bay Area Core Capacity Study, September 2017

⁶ MTC- Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan Update, March 2013

⁷ BART, Caltrain Rider surveys

⁸ MTC- PBA2040 Equity Analysis, July 2017 / MTC- PBA 2050 Equity and Performance Outcomes

⁹ MTC-Transit Sustainability Project, May 2012

¹⁰ MTC-Transit Sustainability Project, May 2012