

February 10, 2021

To: Therese McMillan and Steve Kinsey

Re: Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force Problem Statement

Dear Therese McMillan and Steve Kinsey,

The General Managers of the Bay Area's largest transit system have reviewed the Draft Problem Statement and appreciate the time and energy of the representatives that participated in its development. We exist to serve the region and the public, and recognize that riders from across the region face challenges moving throughout our systems. We support improvements to our networks to better serve riders and meet the expectations of the public.

There is broad agreement that improvements to speed, frequency and reliability that can enhance transit service are critical to addressing the rider experience. Improved system coordination is another area that has been identified, with work already underway. These are critical items that can be addressed now, can assist our recovery over the next year, and can be achieved with or without the creation of a network manager.

We are concerned that the Draft Problem Statement needs more focus and clarity, with less generalization, in order to address the intent of the exercise itself: to distill the challenges facing transit riders in the Bay Area and to set the stage for identifying solutions. This letter reiterates the comments expressed by various General Managers in multiple forums over the past several weeks and presents them in a consolidated format. Attached to this document you will find detailed comments on the Draft Problem Statement (Attachment A).

As we are seeking to make meaningful and impactful changes to our existing transit system, we do want to advocate that adequate time is given to analysis and evaluation. The Problem Statement should be founded on an analysis of the existing system before we can proceed to the development of a business case that considers how to most effectively address the challenges faced by riders without undermining the viability of the existing network. The current timeline may not be adequate to fully evaluate if or where a network manager provides unique value.

Of paramount importance to the region's transit operators is recognition of the dire state of our collective finances. While SB1 was significant in restoring STA for transit and increasing overall transportation funding, funding needs continue to outpace revenues. Regionally, transit systems have long been underfunded and even quick action from the Task Force leaves new revenues years away. This legacy of underfunding our operations has eroded the foundations of our financial stability, a process which has exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Our Agencies have largely avoided layoffs thanks to a combination of unprecedented levels of emergency support at the Federal level and by retrenching and consolidating our existing resources. Our attention has been dedicated to near-term safety, service and staffing imperatives. This work makes it challenging to consider longer-term changes that require a substantial reallocation of our limited resources without imperiling the service that our most vulnerable riders continue to depend upon in these uncertain times.

Acknowledging this reality, we are fully aware of the work we must undertake in order to re-attract riders as we begin to recover over this next year. We believe that there are several areas that this task force has identified that we can commit to addressing that are within our existing statutory authority. To that end we have included an Alternative Problem Statement and Approach (Attachment B), including a simplified problem statement, which we feel distills the issues and potential approach to increasing transit ridership and

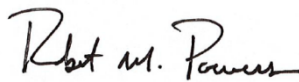
improving the customer experience. It also outlines an approach that focuses on the areas where we have seen a consensus among Task Force participants to date and where we believe we can make progress in the near term.

We also want to be clear: our work does not end with these measures, rather, it begins here. We can start the work of improving our existing network while we take the necessary time to complete the Bay Area Fare Coordination and Integration and Regional Wayfinding studies. We also propose additional new research to bring a data-backed foundation to the much-needed business case for regional integration across key areas while bringing in the context of our post-COVID realities, incorporating the findings from recent and current studies, and establishing a path for growing the necessary new revenues to implement this work successfully.

Sincerely,



Michael Hursh,
General Manager
Alameda-Contra Costa Transit
District



Robert Powers,
General Manager
San Francisco Bay Area Rapid
Transit District (BART)



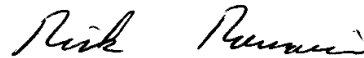
Jim Hartnett, General
Manager/Executive Director
San Mateo County Transit
District/Caltrain



Evelynn Tran,
General Counsel & Interim
General Manager/CEO
Santa Clara Valley
Transportation Authority



Denis Mulligan,
General Manager
Golden Gate Bridge, Highway
and Transportation District



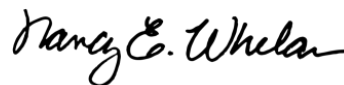
Rick Ramacier,
General Manager
County Connection



Jeffrey Tumlin,
General Manager
San Francisco Municipal
Transportation Agency



Michael S. Tree,
General Manager
Livermore Amador Valley
Transport Authority



Nancy Whelan,
General Manager
Marin Transit



Seamus Murphy,
Executive Director
Water Emergency Transportation
Authority

Attachment A:

Comments on the Draft Problem Statement

The Transit Operators collectively have the following comments with regard to the current Draft Problem Statement.

Addressing Equity

Of particular concern is that the “Past and Current Disparities” section doesn’t fully capture the inequities associated with access to affordable and reliable transportation alternatives, particularly for people of color. Therefore, we recommend replacing the language in the section with:

- Local and regional transit systems are expected to address failed regional housing and development policies that have resulted in the displacement of low income and people of color to car-dependent communities. This has resulted in both increased costs associated with car ownership and an increasing share of disposable time spent commuting.
- This past and current exclusion has led to both intentional and unintentional disparities in accessible, affordable and reliable transportation.
- There is no centralized plan to address the legacy of disenfranchisement and marginalization of these communities. If those most harmed by past and current exclusion are not centered throughout the development and implementation of future solutions, the past and current harms will be perpetuated and/or exacerbated.

In addition, the language below should be added in the “Context” section to better explain how the region has come to inequitable transportation access:

Bay Area governments and the planning profession at large have played a central role in systematically denying opportunities to people of color through practices like redlining, the clearance of neighborhoods for construction of urban highways, exclusionary zoning, redevelopment, policing bias and outright discrimination and segregation in past decades.

Additional Context and Data Required to Support

The context section appears to draw information from the “What’s Behind Recent Transit Ridership Trends in the Bay Area?” study completed by UCLA in early 2020. The study should explicitly be identified, especially since it was sponsored by MTC and is the most recent study on ridership, just prior to the pandemic. The study also identifies ride-sharing as a possible cause of declining transit ridership and thus should be mentioned in the context section.

Other Comments

Introductory Paragraph

- Replace: *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.*

With previous language that better incorporates the purpose of the regional providers: *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, inter-agency regional travel.*

- The working group was unified about the lack of transit priority on surface roads being a major problem. We would like to see this presented more prominently and explicitly. Where mentioned in last sentence of intro, lack of "public agency urgency" could be interpreted as the transit operators not advocating for transit priority strong enough, which wasn't the notion expressed by the Ad-hoc group. The public agencies should refer to the local jurisdictions or those that own public right-of-way that transit operates on.

Organizational/Institutional Challenges

- This section is overstated and makes generalized conclusions when, in fact, there are clear examples of regular transit operator coordination throughout the Bay Area, whether it be intentional, sub-regional planning and scheduling coordination in the North Bay, paratransit and fare discount coordination in Contra Costa County or mutual-aid coordination between BART and AC Transit.
- As expressed by board members at the recent outreach meetings, local control can benefit riders by being responsive to specific needs of unique communities. This may be lost depending on the proposed oversight structure.

Customer Experience

- We appreciate that the customer service section leads with speed and reliability as top bullet issues.
- There are efforts underway by MTC to improve transit wayfinding and fare coordination in the region. Though there are deficiencies, these efforts, which include broad transit operator participation, should be acknowledged.
- Though security is a major concern for some transit agencies (e.g. BART, AC Transit and SFMTA), it is not a primary concern for all transit agencies.

Transit Costs and Funding

- Funding is needed for much more than regional transit coordination. This point was made in both working group meetings and in written comments requesting to expand this characterization
- The type of administrative and operational efficiencies needed by each of the transit operators varies greatly and can depend on the type of service each provides. Additional research should be conducted to understand what efficiencies across agencies could be achieved through improved coordination.
- Though the Problem Statement attempts to point out the coordination deficiencies across transit agencies, it has not affected public perception relative to raising new revenue. Caltrain's Measure RR (2020), BART's Measure RR (2016), Regional Measure 2 (2004), Regional Measure 3 (2018) and multiple county sales tax measures have passed with strong public support. However, acknowledgment that far more revenue is needed should be emphasized.

Attachment B:

Alternative Problem Statement and Approach

Simplified Problem Statement

The COVID-19 Pandemic has dramatically reduced the ridership of the Bay Area's transit system – and it is unclear when, and to what extent, ridership will return. In the near-term, the pandemic has created an acute, existential crisis for transit, and it has underscored and deepened the pre-existing problem of declining demand for transit in the region as a whole. 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 our ability to effectively serve the region. Pre-pandemic, the "What's Behind Recent Transit Ridership Trends in the Bay Area?" study completed by UCLA for MTC in early 2020 (UCLA Study) provides some guidance with Policy Framework to rebuild transit ridership.

Restoring and growing transit ridership will require an ongoing multi-front effort that addresses the challenges that transit faces across multiple geographies and levels of government. Much of this work is and will be focused at the local and sub-regional level- where the vast majority of transit trips currently occur. As we emerge from the pandemic, however, there is also a significant opportunity at the regional scale for us to work together - making our systems more efficient and coordinating and enhancing our services in ways that allow for the growth of a renewed and expanded regional transit network that better serves existing riders and attracts new ones to our service.

Proposed Approach

Using the UCLA Study, as well as transit operators data and expertise, the region's operators believe the Bay Area can focus improvements on the key trips, routes, and transfer points within the regional network that will make transit more attractive and convenient to all. As identified in the UCLA Study, key to this is increasing frequency and improving the speed and reliability of regional trips. To that end, we believe that the most important areas of focus for improvement should include:

- Developing equity initiatives that ensure regional transit is accessible and convenient to all, but especially the Bay Area's most vulnerable populations.
- Improving cross-jurisdictional trips and connections at regionally-significant hubs through better reliability and frequency.
- Advancing transit priority improvements that improve the speed and reliability of regional trips.
- Implementing capital improvements that improve conditions on key streets/corridors especially those shared by multiple agencies or that serve regional hubs.
- Providing clear and intuitive wayfinding and information across regional systems consistent with MTC's wayfinding study.
- Implementing the recommendations of the Fare Integration Study, due out later this year.