



February 17, 2021

The Honorable Jim Sperring, Commissioner
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Bay Area Metro Center
375 Beale St., Suite 800
San Francisco, CA 94105-2066

Dear Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force Chair Sperring:

While we all continue to operate still very much in the throes of the effects of this devastating pandemic, recognizing the dire state of our collective finances, we continue to be optimistic that recent developments offer small glimmers of hope toward a recovery. One thing is certain: The landscape of public transportation will be forever changed. Our agencies are staying on top of this paradigm shift by remaining agile to new information and adapting to meet the needs of our customers and communities. One silver lining to this dark cloud is the collaboration and partnership of our agencies during this difficult time. This letter provides an update and information on several areas of interest to the Task Force.

COVID-19 Vaccination Access

With COVID-19 vaccinations ramping up and the creation of mass-vaccination sites across the Bay Area, public transportation is playing a key role in getting people, especially disadvantaged communities, and the transit dependent, to these sites. A few ways we are helping to ensure the common goal of our state and counties to equitably distribute vaccines include:

- Two VTA light rail and three bus lines offering direct service to Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, which opened as the state's largest mass-vaccination site on Feb. 9 with Gov. Newsom on hand.
- A coordinated launch of reduced and fare-free service by BART and AC Transit, as well as dedicated bus lines, which connect East Bay seniors, the disabled, and low-income residents directly from its hubs to the Oakland Coliseum, another life-saving mass-vaccination site that recently opened.
- SFMTA has worked closely with the San Francisco Department of Public Health to ensure access to all San Francisco vaccination sites. Dozens of SFMTA transit operators serving as Disaster Service Workers at two of the city's high-volume vaccination locations, with parking control officers also helping with traffic. They have also deployed a Muni bus to another testing site for use as a staff breakroom.

- The Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (Bridge District) offering Marin County the use of its Larkspur Ferry Terminal as a mass-vaccination site, to open Feb. 21. The site is well-served by rail, bus and ferry with SMART and Marin Transit connecting to the site, as well as the Bridge District's buses and ferries.
- A number of North Bay bus operators are planning to provide free rides to vaccination centers.

Obviously, the sooner more people are vaccinated, the sooner we can return to some semblance of normalcy and transit agencies are keenly focused on being part of the solution in reaching a post-pandemic society.

Providing better access to the vaccine is an example of public transit's agility and adaptability. It also shines a spotlight on why it is so important to continue our collaborative advocacy efforts centered around getting our frontline transit workers prioritized to receive the vaccine. Our essential workers are moving other essential workers, so we also continue to advocate for the health and safety of our riders.

Despite the original intent to have transit workers vaccinated early in the process, the CDC decision to prioritize vaccinations for age 65 and older has seriously delayed the opportunity for transit workers. The Bay Area Transit Operators collectively and individually wrote to the governor and local Public Health officials requesting priority for transit workers. Given the overall problems with vaccine availability, the number of people now eligible ahead of transit workers and the obvious need to have transit workers vaccinated, this is a major issue.

Without healthy Operators moving people to sites, pandemic recovery will take longer. We have made progress on the COVID testing front of transit employees, offering weekly on-site testing at operating divisions, for example. Internal surveys have shown that vaccine hesitancy is of critical concern to our frontline workers. Additionally, inaccurate information about the COVID-19 vaccine has spread widely and with reckless speed, leading to a refusal to vaccinate or delaying vaccination. As a result, Operators are developing employee-focused campaigns designed to dispel misinformation, and achieve a high level of buy-in, while making the public aware that proactive actions for a healthy workforce and safer ride are underway.

Return to Transit Public and Employer Research

Another ongoing effort, spearheaded by our communications subcommittee, is the "Return to Transit" Qualitative Research effort with MTC and EMC Research. This effort will help us craft common communications to be used regionwide that we can use to encourage people to return to transit. Over the past several weeks, focus groups have been conducted in English and Spanish with transit-dependent current and potential future riders. These have provided valuable insight into some of the key issues that we will incorporate into a survey being developed for both the public and employers. Valuable survey data from surveys conducted previously by regional operators has also been gathered to help with this effort. Ultimately, we will craft adaptable messages for all to use and promote regionwide. A comprehensive findings report will be developed after the survey is launched. An update to this effort will be included as a brief consent item at the Feb. 22 Blue Ribbon Task Force meeting.

Improving Paratransit Service

Recognizing the need to improve paratransit service for regional trips, BART and AC Transit worked with other operators to prepare and submit an application for a Caltrans planning grant. If funded, this work could start as early as 2022.

Draft Problem Statement

Regarding the Draft Problem Statement as proposed at the January 2021 Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force meeting, Bay Area Transit Operators hope to ensure the statement represents an accurate assessment of the problem that will in turn set the stage to deliver solutions that will restore and increase ridership, enhance customer experience, foster equity, and create the financial means needed to advance meaningful improvements. We remain committed to employing practical solutions that will create a more integrated regional network while also preserving the critical services that so many Bay Area residents depend on. We look forward to the further discussion of this at the next meeting.

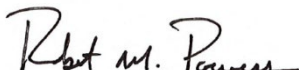
Appointment of Acting VTA General Manager/CEO

During a special meeting on Jan. 22, VTA appointed General Counsel Evelynn Tran as its Acting General Manager/CEO in addition to maintaining her current role. Nuria Fernandez was appointed by President Biden to be Acting Administrator of the Federal Transit Administration. Evelynn has been with VTA for 14 years, serving the last two and a half years as VTA's chief legal advisor, providing counsel to VTA's 12-member appointed Board of Directors. She replaces Nuria as the representative for VTA on the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force.

Sincerely,



Michael Hursh,
General Manager
Alameda-Contra Costa
Transit District (AC Transit)



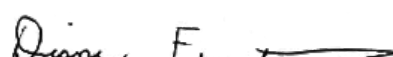
Robert Powers,
General Manager
San Francisco Bay Area
Rapid Transit District
(BART)



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



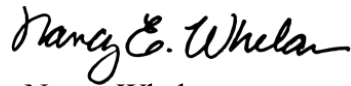
Rick Ramacier,
General Manager
County Connection



Diane Feinstein,
Transportation Manager
Fairfield and Suisun Transit
(FAST)



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



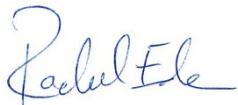
Nancy Whelan,
General Manager
Marin Transit



Kate Miller,
Executive Director
Napa Valley Transportation
Authority (NVTA)



Jared Hall,
Transit Manager
Petaluma Transit



Rachel Ede,
Deputy Director
City of Santa Rosa
Transportation and Public
Works



Seamus Murphy,
Executive Director
Water Emergency
Transportation Authority
(SF Bay Ferry)



Jeffrey Tumlin,
General Manager
San Francisco Municipal
Transportation Agency
(SFMTA)



Farhad Mansourian,
General Manager
Sonoma-Marín Area Rail
Transit (SMART)



Beth Kranda,
Executive Director
Solano County Transit
(SolTrans)



Bryan Albee,
Transit Systems Manager
Sonoma County Transit



Jeanne Krieg,
Chief Executive Officer
Tri Delta Transit



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



Joan Malloy,
City Manager
Union City Transit



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



Charles Anderson,
General Manager
Western Contra Costa
Transit Authority
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