

MTC Blue Ribbon Task Force Feb. 22, 2021
Transit Operator Proposed Modifications

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.

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.

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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 to improve cross-jurisdictional travel, and connections at regionally-significant hubs to ensure better reliability and frequency. 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.

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- There is a need to improve paratransit service for cross-jurisdictional trips in an effective and efficient manner. 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
- New transit revenue strategies are needed, and the region should identify a clear No institutional leader forum for 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.

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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-HumanServices 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