

Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments Joint MTC ABAG Legislation Committee

April 9, 2021

Agenda Item 3e

Assembly Bill 629 (Chiu): Seamless and Resilient Transit Act

Subject: Requires MTC to designate transit priority corridors to support fast and reliable transit service and to create a pilot of a multi-operator transit fare pass. MTC develop a regional transit mapping and wayfinding system and operators comply with it by a specified date. Sets new rules for transit operators with respect to real time transit information.

Overview: AB 629 is Assembly Member Chiu’s legislation aimed at making the Bay Area’s transit system a more seamless, easy-to-use network that attracts riders. The bill will be amended over the next few months to incorporate feedback from key stakeholders as it moves through the legislative process. AB 629 takes immediate, short-term steps towards a more coordinated Bay Area transit system by requiring MTC to work with agencies to design a single regional transit map, standardize wayfinding mechanisms, and report real time transit data across the region.

Big Picture Stuff

The bill includes several sections that are not substantive in the sense of requiring any specified actions but are nonetheless noteworthy for the policy statement they make. For instance, the bill includes a specific reference to the vision adopted by the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force (Task Force) of a network that is “inclusive, appropriately frequent, 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.” The bill also includes provisions declaring that it is the state’s policy that *all transportation agencies* in the Bay Area work towards common goals, including integrating all transit in the region to operate as “one seamless easy-to-use, multimodal transit system from the perspective of the user.” Other goals identified are to 1) equitably expand and improve access to reliable and affordable public transportation and 2) prioritize institutional reforms that support creation of a more seamless and resilient transit network.

Priority Transit Network

The bill requires MTC, in consultation with transit agencies, county transportation agencies, and the public, to identify a transit priority network of corridors that will most benefit from interventions to support fast and reliable transit service. The bill specifies items that should be considered in development of the network. It requires inclusion of any transit corridor funded through the Solutions for Congested Corridors Program and requires the Commission consider for inclusion any high-quality bus corridor, defined as a corridor with service intervals no longer than 15 minutes during peak commute hours.

Managed Lanes Review and Report

The bill requires MTC, on or before January 1, 2024, to submit a report to the Legislature recommending changes to state and federal law that would support a more efficient and sustainable managed lanes network and regional high-capacity transit. The bill also requires that MTC, in partnership with the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the operators of managed lanes, develop goals, performance measures and targets to guide decision-making for the buildout and

operation of the regional managed lanes network. The bill also requires that MTC initiate a process with Caltrans and the Department of the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to establish options for delivering the managed lanes while minimizing roadway capacity expansion.

Accumulator Pass Pilot Project

The bill requires MTC to create a pilot program by July 1, 2023 to implement a transit pass among multiple operators providing service in at least three adjacent counties whereby the rider pays a standard fare for individual trips, up to a specified amount, at which “accumulated” point the fares are capped. This pass is known as an “accumulator pass” and the time period could be daily, weekly, or monthly. The bill requires MTC to submit a copy of the Fare Coordination and Integration Study and Business Case to the Legislature on or before February 1, 2022 as well as a progress report on steps taken to implement the study’s recommendations by January 1, 2023.

Mapping/Wayfinding

The bill requires MTC, on or before July 1, 2024, to 1) develop a comprehensive, standardized regional transit mapping and wayfinding system, including common branding for regional transit service and a shared digital mapping platform; and 2) develop an implementation and maintenance strategy and funding plan for deployment. Finally, the bill requires each transit agency to exclusively use that system by July 1, 2025, unless the commission adopts an alternate timeline.

Real-Time Transit Information

The bill includes legislative findings that transit riders across the region should have access to consistent and uniform real-time information across all transit services in the region. To that end, the bill requires all Bay Area operators to use open data standards to make key information available in the industry standard format, known as GTFS for General Transit Feed Specification. Operators are also required to make real-time transit vehicle data available in real-time format and track actual transmission of real-time information by transit vehicles. The bill assigns to MTC the role of coordinating this work and serving as the point of contact for data development and dissemination to third parties, consistent with our current role via 511. MTC is also tasked with developing an implementation and funding plan for deployment of real-time information.

Recommendation: Support and Seek Amendments

Discussion: The March 22, 2021, amendments to AB 629 incorporate a number of the near-term recommendations that were included in Assembly Member Chiu’s legislation from 2020, including provisions requiring the development and adoption of a regional transit mapping/wayfinding system; integrated fares; real-time transit information; and managed lanes. The bill is largely consistent with the advocacy principles staff presented and the Committee referred to the Commission last month, though some key items are missing. Staff recommends a “support and seek amendment” position on the bill to indicate our interest in provisions being incorporated to reflect Advocacy Principles #2-5 in Attachment A. In developing specific amendment suggestions, our advocacy will also be informed by the ongoing dialogue at the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force.

Legislative Deadlines

Under the 2021 legislative calendar, the bill must be heard in the Assembly Transportation Committee by April 30th. The bill will then be referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee which it must pass by May 21st. The bill must then pass the Assembly Floor by June 4. The process then repeats itself in the Senate with the deadline for policy committee being July 14, the deadline for the Senate Appropriations Committee being August 27 and the deadline for Senate Floor being September 10.

Conclusion

Assembly Member Chiu has indicated his interest in incorporating recommendations emerging from the Task Force. However, since the Task Force will not complete its work until after the final meeting on July 26th, it is vital that MTC engage in the legislative process on a parallel track, but in close and frequent coordination with the Task Force. As ideas of consensus emerge over the next few months, such ideas can be incorporated into the bill. Consistent with our 2021 Advocacy Program, staff recommends a “support and seek amendments” position on AB 629.

Bill Positions:

Support:


Seamless Bay Area

Oppose:

None on file

Attachment:

Attachment A: MTC Principles and Proposed Concepts for Seamless Transit Legislation


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MTC Principles and Proposed Concepts for Seamless Transit Legislation
(As Approved by the Joint MTC/ABAG Legislation Committee, 3/12/21)

Background

The Blue-Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force (Task Force) has a goal of creating a more connected, efficient, equitable, and affordable network that better serves Bay Area residents and our economy. COVID-19 has caused ridership to plummet, but transit ridership was falling even before the pandemic for a variety of reasons. Assemblymember David Chiu plans to introduce legislation in 2021 to transform the region's fragmented transit system into a more integrated one that will help achieve Plan Bay Area 2050's ambitious climate and equity goals, including at least 20 percent of workers commuting via public transit by 2050.

MTC, as the metropolitan planning organization, has a strong interest in this legislation. As a member and convener of the Task Force, we are committed to engaging in that process in good faith. However, we also believe it is critical to engage early in the legislative process. MTC's primary goal in this effort is to secure near-term, customer-facing improvements for Bay Area transit riders as they navigate across the nine counties and between over two dozen operators, while creating a framework for decision-making that will sustain enhanced, ongoing regional transit coordination and accountability for performance over time. Importantly, we believe this can be done by building on existing institutions, expertise, and authority but will require additional, stable resources to be fully implemented.

Proposed Principles

1. Provide Tangible, Near-Term Benefits for Riders

MTC is engaged in two major regional transit planning efforts with the potential to greatly simplify the experience of riding transit in the Bay Area, the Fare Coordination/Integration Study + Business Case (Fare Study) and the Regional Transit Mapping and Wayfinding Study. Given both of these projects are anticipated to be completed this summer, legislation should include provisions to help ensure these studies deliver tangible results. This could be done by requiring that recommendations from the studies are implemented by specific dates, with reasonable flexibility provided, and incorporating a process to facilitate implementation over the long-term. Two priority ideas for inclusion are below.

- a. ***Simplified and More Affordable Transit Fares.*** There appears to be growing consensus in support of fare policies that reward frequent transit riders. One example is a multi-operator pass that gives riders the option to pay per trip, but with the assurance that they won't pay above a certain limit per day, month, or another timeframe, depending on the pass. MTC would seek to include provisions in the legislation requiring that recommendations emerging from the study be implemented on or before a date that is ambitious but also feasible, with details of the fare policies to be determined outside the legislative process in consultation with transit operators.

- b. ***Regional Transit Mapping & Wayfinding.*** For the last two years, MTC has been engaged in an extensive study and business case with extensive consultation with transit operators regarding development of a comprehensive, regional transit mapping and wayfinding system. The legislation should require that MTC develop, in consultation with operators, a transit mapping and wayfinding system and an implementation and maintenance strategy for such system. The legislation should also specify a date certain for when it shall be adhered to by operators, with reasonable flexibility provided for any implementation schedule, conditioned upon the availability of technical and financial resources to effectively deliver the new system.
- c. ***Real-Time Transit Information.*** Support provisions to provide all Bay Area transit riders with consistent and reliable real-time travel information, including arrival and departure predictions, by requiring that every transit operator implements real-time transit information using consistent, open data standards, including routes, schedules, and fares, and makes real-time transit vehicle data available in the industry-standard format.

2. Increase the Priority of Service Coordination

For many transit trips, it is not efficient or effective to provide a one-seat ride and many multiple-seat rides include more than one transit operator. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, transit operators have been engaging in enhanced schedule coordination to minimize disruption to riders from service changes when a trip involves multiple operators. Going forward, the region would benefit from clear guidance from the state to ensure that coordination among operators remains a top priority and is incorporated into long-term business practices. Accordingly, support provisions that emerge from the Task Force's network management analyses designed to help reduce trip length and wait times for Bay Area riders taking trips on multiple operators; examples may include:

- a. Require the elimination of transfers created solely by the inability of one operator to operate within the geographic service boundaries of another operator, whenever possible, and remove provisions in state law that may force these unnecessary transfers.
- b. Elevate the importance of service coordination by *requiring* that MTC make operator's compliance with coordination goals a condition for the receipt of STA and TDA funding.
- c. Require timed transfers for all connections between fixed route rail operators, wherever possible.
- d. For multi-operator trips, elevate the priority of timed transfers between major bus routes run by different operators, and between major bus routes and fixed route rail and ferry service run by different operators, with "major" definitions emerging from the network management analyses.
- e. Elevate the priority of routing transfers through regionally designated transit hubs.

3. Give Transit Greater Priority on Local Roads and Highways

Incorporate ideas to enhance transit priority such as those listed below and others that may emerge

from future Task Force discussions, such as:

- a. Include provisions ensuring that local jurisdictions take impact on bus speeds into account, consider transit priority improvements, and consult with relevant transit agencies when making changes to their right of way.
- b. Authorize MTC to designate regionally significant transit corridors on Caltrans right of way, in consultation with Caltrans, transit operators, county transportation authorities, stakeholders and the public. Authorize MTC to implement transit priority improvements, including, but not limited to transit bus priority lanes, part-time bus-only lanes, and general-purpose lane or shoulder conversions to bus priority lanes on such corridors.

4. Transit Network Management: Formalize Transit Coordination & Collaboration

- a. Approach the concept of transit network management as a *process* to be made by existing organizations (i.e., transit operators and MTC); oppose the establishment of a new transit network management agency, at this time.
- b. Instead, support establishment of a network management decision-making process that involves existing organizations and facilitates enhanced focus on improving the customer experience from the rider's perspective, with a focus on multi-operator trips.
- c. Structure a new network management decision-making process in a manner that includes transit operators, key stakeholders, and the public in the development of policy recommendations that are forwarded to MTC for action.
- d. Preserve and strengthen MTC's existing authority and responsibility for transit coordination while also avoiding unfunded mandates. While transit coordination is a core MTC function, our current resources cannot support a substantially greater role at this time. Ensure that any new requirements or responsibilities are either: 1) feasible within existing resources; 2) accompanied by additional funding; or 3) conditioned upon when new resources are available.

5. Improve Access to Transit Hubs

There are multiple examples in the region where connectivity between systems, particularly between bus and fixed-guideway (rail or ferry) systems has been designed in a way that forces riders to walk greater distances than necessary, had access between systems been prioritized in the original stations designs. Support provisions in the legislation that require operators to consult and collaborate with each other at transit hubs to minimize transfer distances between systems and prioritize rider access. Require that operators consult with the applicable local jurisdiction in the development of station access plans, particularly for end of line stations. Require that MTC monitor and hold operators accountable for such provisions.

6. Avoid Rushing Complex Items that Require More Evaluation

The Task Force has identified many transit-related items that may benefit from a more coordinated approach, but for which there is not sufficient time between now and June to fully analyze the details in order to develop sound recommendations. This includes items such as mega-project delivery, regional rail governance, joint procurement, and new mobility. For now, support limiting the scope of the legislation to the items mentioned in #1-4, while remaining open to others recommended by the Task Force in the Transformation Action Plan. Advocate that complex items that warrant further examination be deferred altogether or incorporated into the bill for further analysis, but only if sufficient funds are available to conduct such work.