

BLUE RIBBON



**TRANSIT RECOVERY  
TASK FORCE**

## **TRANSIT RECOVERY & TRANSFORMATION: ENGAGEMENT, RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS**

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# TRANSIT RECOVERY: “RETURN TO TRANSIT” RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

- **Employer survey (led by Bay Area Council) to help predict commuter transit demand**

- Bay Area Council developed employer network (150 local employers)
- Monthly employer survey (April-October), results to be shared with operators

- **“Return to Transit” communications campaign**

- Informed by insights learned in 11 focus groups (Jan 2021) with residents, employers and schools
- Partnering with transit operator marketing staff
- Schedule:
  - Communication messages: in development
  - Message testing: May
  - Communications tool kit: end of June
  - Campaign promotion: beginning in July
- Targeted campaign translated into Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and Tagalog.



# TRANSIT TRANSFORMATION: BLUE RIBBON RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

- **Review of over 90 transit-related studies authored by transit agencies, MTC and Air District**
  - Sara LaBatt (EMC Research) will present overview and highlight gaps
- **Blue Ribbon Poll on transit service and improvements**
  - Random poll of 1K Bay Area residents, in the field now
  - Results available in May
- **Regional CBO Focus Groups – April 2021**
  - Transit dependent populations, conducted in English, Spanish, Cantonese and with persons with disabilities
  - Focus groups will be held last week in April and will include topics of transit challenges/improvements.





*Sfmta.com*



*Bart.gov*



## Public Transit Reform – Prior Research Review

Prepared for  
Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force  
*April 2021*

# Project Purpose

- ▶ The purpose of this report is to present a comprehensive research review on the key public transit challenges faced by the public, with a particular focus on Bay Area-related transit research.
- ▶ Objectives:
  - Provide a comprehensive review of public opinion around public transit services in the Bay Area, focused on pre-pandemic perceptions.
  - Understand how the public perceived Bay Area public transit strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities for improvement.
  - Identify knowledge gaps that could be addressed with future research, including topic areas and populations studied.
  - Inform the work of the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force.

# Research Reviewed for this Report

- ▶ Approximately 90 different studies, articles, and reports were reviewed for this work, primarily covering the time period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ The studies looked at a range of transportation issues, with much of the research focused on the Bay Area as a region, as well as some individual studies from specific operators or agencies, including AC Transit, BART, Caltrain, Golden Gate Ferry, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, SMART, VTA, and WETA.
- ▶ The research included studies focused on different regions of the Bay Area, as well as varying resident populations, including public transit riders, non-riders, the general resident population (riders and non-riders), and stakeholders.
- ▶ The reports reviewed were primarily based on surveys and qualitative research (focus groups, in-depth interviews, and public outreach sessions).

- ▶ While most of the survey research in this review employed strategies designed to obtain a random sample and/or be representative of the population being surveyed, some of the surveys were not designed with this intent. Instead, they were promoted to gather as many responses as possible to an opt-in online survey tool.
- ▶ Most of research represented in this report was conducted between 2018 to early 2020, with a few studies in the years prior. Statistics provided should be viewed with caution given that views today may have evolved since the research was conducted.
- ▶ Reviewing the studies in their totality gives a clear picture of strengths and challenges facing public transit overall and for some specific agencies. However, as a result of differing research methodologies, question wording, timing, and other factors, we advise that this report be considered only for **general sense of sentiment and issue areas** rather than be interpreted as a singular voice speaking to public opinion regarding public transit in the Bay Area or among each operator.
- ▶ A complete list of each piece of research used in this report is provided in the appendix.



## Summary of Findings



# Summary of Findings

- ▶ **The factors influencing use of public transit are universal across the research:** time/speed, reliability/predictability, frequency, ease of use, safety, accessibility, cost, cleanliness/comfort, and ability to connect to first/last mile modes.
- ▶ **Convenience-related factors are the most consequential in deciding whether to ride public transit,** with time/speed, reliability (on time and as scheduled), frequency, first/last mile connectivity, and ease of use all adding up to a general perception of “convenience.”
  - A perceived lack of convenience in any of these areas is most likely to undermine use of public transit—more so than cost, cleanliness/comfort, and, to some extent, safety.
- ▶ **Factors that influence the speed of a trip (how long it takes) are where residents consistently want to see improvement most.** Frequency is generally the most often mentioned area of improvement across all modes and operators; improved reliability is an equally strong consideration, particularly on bus systems.

# Summary of Findings

- ▶ **Transfers and connections are an area of frustration and a disincentive to use public transit.** Connections often do not line up, which leads to long wait times, sometimes at stations/stops where riders may not feel safe. Furthermore, these connections require riders to keep track of different and sometimes confusing fare structures and operators' payment policies and systems.
- ▶ **Better connectivity and coordination across modes and agencies stands out in the research** as a way to improve convenience and ease of travel and increase ridership. Connectivity and coordination include the following:
  - Better transit connections between modes and agencies.
  - Better coordination between agencies on fares and schedules.
  - Better coordination with other forms of transportation, such as on-demand ride services, bike and scooter share, paratransit, and other first/last mile options.



# Summary of Findings

- ▶ The research revealed that **cost is a lower-level consideration, except for among those who it most impacts: lower income residents.** Cost is measured as a value proposition: For those without other options, is it affordable enough; for those with other options, are lower fares worth reduced convenience?
- ▶ **Better use of technology to coordinate travel**, particularly though apps, is seen as a way to improve predictability (by providing real-time arrival information), speed (by reducing waiting time, speeding up fare purchasing/payment, etc.), and first/last mile issues (by coordinating with bikeshare, ride hails, paratransit, etc.).
- ▶ There is some perception that **some improvements that could attract new riders could also burden the transit-dependent**, including people with lower incomes and underserved communities. Some of the concerns raised included:
  - More direct and faster service could mean less geographic coverage.
  - Smartphone-dependent apps could exclude those who cannot access that technology.
  - Increased peak-hour frequency could reduce off-peak, impacting shift workers who are more likely to be lower income and have fewer transportation choices.



## **Future Research: Gaps and Opportunities**



# Gap/Opportunity: Consistent Regional Data

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- ▶ Existing research is fragmented and not uniform with respect to populations studied, survey language, and positioning.
- ▶ This makes it a challenge to generalize what the overall population of the Bay Area thinks about public transit, and what improvements would best attract more riders.
- ▶ Uniform regional research would help compare the perceived value of potential improvements, as well as concerns about how improvements might impact vulnerable populations.

# Gap/Opportunity: Transit-Dependent Individuals

- ▶ How can we preserve public transit services for transit-dependent riders while also making improvements that attract new choice riders? Put another way, how can we make the kinds of changes needed to draw new riders while ensuring those who do not have other choice still have high-quality, timely, and affordable public transit services available to them?
- ▶ How can fares remain affordable for low-income riders who cannot afford other modes?
- ▶ How can technology be leveraged to improve transit for riders without leaving out transit-dependent populations, particularly seniors and lower income riders?
- ▶ For the transit-dependent, what is the value of peak-hour capacity improvements between significant origins & destinations versus expansion of service at off-peak times and/or to more locations?



# Gap/Opportunity: Regional/Multimodal Commuters

- ▶ For people currently transferring between operators on their regular trips, which aspects of coordination and integration are most important to them?
  - How can transit reform make their trip easier?
  - Would these riders prefer a “one seat” ride, even if it may take longer to get there?
  - Is a “one fare” policy that reduces their total fare more or less important than reducing transfers between agencies for their trip?
  
- ▶ Research on “the trip not taken” for regional/multi-county commuters:
  - Why is transit not an option for some of those whose commute patterns can be served by a multi-modal trip?
  - Would better-coordinated transit across agencies encourage transit use among people who currently choose to drive because they feel taking transit would be too cumbersome?
  - How significant of a barrier is the cost of transfers/additional fares to transit riding for this group?



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