

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

March 12, 2021

Agenda Item 3a

Advocacy Principles to Guide Legislation Aimed at Improving the Bay Area's Transit System

- Subject:** Advocacy principles to guide MTC's legislative advocacy regarding Assemblymember Chiu's anticipated 2021 legislation aimed at improving the performance and connectivity of the Bay Area's public transit system.
- Overview:** The Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force (Task Force), which was convened last May as part of the Commission's first allocation of CARES Act funds, adopted a bold transit transformation vision:
- Design, adequately invest in and effectively manage a public transit network that is equitable, inclusive, frequent, affordable, accessible, reliable; is integrated with unified service, fares, schedules, customer information and identity; and serves all Bay Area populations, resulting in increased transit ridership and reduced growth in vehicle miles traveled.
- This ambitious vision is particularly challenged by the prolonged ridership declines resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant uncertainty and financial hardship facing operators. Nonetheless, over the last two months, the task force has been working to reach consensus on a problem statement to help guide any discussion of longer-term transit topics that should be addressed in a more coordinated manner. Whereas earlier discussions were focused on establishing a new "network manager" entity, the conversation is now focused on identifying the *functions* that require better management, with subsequent conversation anticipated to cover how decisions would be made and by whom. While transit operators are coordinating like never before, without a more formal structure that requires ongoing collaboration on the topics of greatest relevance to transit riders, there is a high risk this current enhanced voluntary coordination will not be sustained over time.
- Recommendation:** Support
- Discussion:** Assemblymember Chiu plans to reintroduce the concept of "seamless transit" in a new bill this year, which is not yet in print. Last year's bill—AB 2057—was an expansive bill focused on supporting the creation of a high ridership, reliable, accessible, seamless public transit system. The bill was supported by SPUR and Seamless Bay Area. It stalled due to COVID and did not receive a hearing.
- Nonetheless, it drew significant interest and was a major impetus for the formation of the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force. The bill itself called for the formation of a Bay Area Seamless Transit Task Force tasked with assessing and/or making recommendations about 20 different topics, ranging from identifying the goals of the region's public transit system to the appropriate entity to serve as a Network Manager to managed lanes and institutional mergers. Given the formation of the Task Force, we do not expect the bill to call for the formation of a separate one.

AB 2057 also included a number of requirements aimed at accelerating various rider-focused efforts, including:

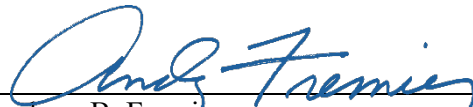
- a. Standardized discount and eligibility discounts for fares and a pilot program for a multi-agency accumulator pass pilot project to cap total daily, weekly or monthly amounts
- b. Clipper integration with Capitol Corridor and ACE
- c. Development & adoption of a regional transit mapping and wayfinding system
- d. Common data formats for route, schedule and fare information to ensure reliable real-time transit information and requirements for operators to report to MTC
- e. Targets for reducing vehicle miles traveled and targets for increased public transit and active transportation mode share

The attached principles propose a framework for this year's legislation that focuses on near-term benefits to riders, as well as a decision-making structure to institutionalize greater interagency coordination and a focus on improvements to the customer experience designed to attract former and new riders to transit.

It is critical that the Commission provide direction to Assemblymember Chiu and the Bay Area legislative delegation regarding our priorities for a transit reform bill this year. Staff will present these principles to the Task Force at its March 22 meeting, two days before they will be presented to the Commission for final approval.

Attachments:

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



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MTC Principles and Proposed Concepts for Seamless Transit Legislation

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.