

DRAFT MTC BAY AREA TRANSIT PRIORITY POLICY FOR ROADWAYS

PURPOSE AND GOALS

The purpose of the MTC Bay Area Transit Priority Policy for Roadways (Policy) is to enhance the transit rider experience by supporting the implementation of transit priority infrastructure and policies that improve transit travel times and reliability, and promote active interagency engagement necessary to be successful.

The goals of the Policy include:

- Establish a common understanding of transit priority;
- Inform prioritization of funding for transit priority projects;
- Reinforce and strengthen interjurisdictional collaboration; and
- Require that roadway improvement projects consider transit priority and/or accommodation of transit.

The Policy aligns with Plan Bay Area 2050+ Final Blueprint Transportation Element Strategy T11, which aims to improve the vitality and viability of existing transit services throughout the Bay Area by providing increased frequency, improved reliability, and greater capacity to reduce wait time, decrease travel time, and encourage ridership growth. Further, the Policy fulfills Action 12 identified in the Bay Area Transit Transformation Action Plan (2021), which calls for the development and adoption of a Transit Priority Policy for improving bus speed and reliability on high-transit corridors and arterials.

TRANSIT PRIORITY DEFINITION

For the purpose of this policy, “Transit Priority” refers to transit-supportive infrastructure, design, and policies that decrease transit vehicle travel times and enable them to move more reliably by avoiding traffic congestion and minimizing delays. Transit-supportive infrastructure and design treatments include, but are not limited to, transit lanes, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, bus-on-shoulder lanes, transit signal priority, queue-jump lanes, and transit stop design elements such as bus bulbs or boarding islands. Transit-supportive policies include, but are not limited to, strategic traffic/parking regulations, optimized transit stop placement and spacing, boarding/fare payment practices such as off-board fare payment and all-door boarding, and application of the physical infrastructure and design treatments mentioned previously.

WHERE POLICY APPLIES

The Policy would apply to all public roadways in the nine-county Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma) that have existing or planned scheduled, fixed-route, publicly-accessible transit service that operates in shared or semi-dedicated right-of-way (i.e., bus, light rail, and streetcar services), including both surface streets and access-controlled highways. This ensures the needs of all transit vehicles operating in mixed traffic environments are considered.

FUTURE TRANSIT PRIORITY NETWORK

MTC is conducting a Transit Priority Roadway Assessment, referenced in Action 12 of the Transit Transformation Action Plan, to define a regional Transit Priority Network (TPN). The TPN will be used to:

- Inform the distribution of regional discretionary funding by identifying roadways which should be prioritized for transit priority investments; and
- Determine where projects should incorporate transit-supportive design measures from best practice national, state, and local design guidance to improve transit travel time and reliability.

COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION WITH COMPLETE STREETS POLICY

MTC will incorporate the transit agency review requirements of the Transit Priority Policy for Roadways into the existing MTC Complete Streets Policy Checklist (CS Checklist). MTC Resolution No. 4493, Complete Streets Policy (CS Policy) (2022), aims to ensure that people biking, walking, rolling, and taking transit have safe, connected, and convenient trips within the Bay Area transportation network. While transit is included within MTC's CS Policy, transit is not a focus of the CS Policy. The CS Policy and the Transit Priority Policy for Roadways are complementary to each other, and both apply to transportation project planning, design, funding, construction, reconstruction, and maintenance activities.

All projects seeking MTC endorsement or regional discretionary funding¹ over the threshold identified in MTC Resolution No. 4493 (or its future update), regardless of project type or sponsor, must complete a CS Checklist and comply with the most recent CS Policy.

Consolidating implementation of both the CS Policy and Transit Priority Policy for Roadways into the CS Checklist simplifies project adherence to these policies, ensures requirements of both policies are sufficiently incorporated into projects, and ensures that appropriate transit agency coordination has occurred.

POLICY REQUIREMENTS

The following Policy requirements would be added to the CS Checklist:

- Any project on a roadway with qualifying transit services, as defined previously, must be reviewed by all affected transit agencies to ensure the project considers the needs of transit and/or mitigates project elements that may adversely impact transit operations. Transit agencies must finish this high-level review and provide comments to project sponsors within 20 business days of receipt of project information. For complex projects or extenuating circumstances, transit agencies may request an additional 10 days to complete the review.
- In addition to the previous requirement, projects along the regional TPN should incorporate reasonable transit-supportive design elements from best practice national, state, and local design guidance to improve transit travel time and reliability. *This requirement would not go into effect until after the regional TPN is adopted, which is anticipated no sooner than late 2026;* and
- For all projects requiring transit review, Project Sponsors update the project scope and/or design information on Complete Streets Checklist portal, based on project review by and discussions with Transit Agencies, or explain why project was not modified. If project is on TPN, document the transit-supportive design elements considered, and detail the design elements proposed to be included in the project or reasons why they could not be included.

¹ MTC regional discretionary funds include federal, state, and regional fund sources administered by MTC, including but not limited to: Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) funding, Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) funding, Carbon Reduction Program (CRP), Transportation Alternatives (TA) set-aside/Active Transportation Program (ATP) funding, regional bridge tolls, and Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) funding.

- Projects along roadways without existing or planned scheduled, fixed-route, publicly-accessible transit service, as defined previously, would not be affected by these new requirements.

EXCEPTIONS

The Policy shall apply to all phases of project development. However, project sponsors may seek an exception to the transit agency review process and/or incorporation of transit-supportive design elements, which must be documented and signed by senior-level staff or authorized designee at the project sponsor agency. Eligible exceptions include:

1. **Lack of response.** Transit agency did not review project within 20 business days and did not ask for a 10-business day extension;
2. **Infeasibility.** Requested transit-impact mitigations are infeasible along the roadway due to conflicts with fire code, designation as evacuation route or similar public safety code requirements, and/or environmental concerns defined as abutting conservation land or severe topological constraints, and alternative transit-supportive design elements cannot be identified;
3. **Disproportionate Cost (for projects on TPN).** The cost to add transit-supportive design elements to the non-transit project is excessively disproportionate to the base project cost. Generally, “disproportionate” is defined as greater than 20 percent² If the cost of preferred accommodation is considered excessively disproportionate, project sponsors shall consider alternatives that represent a feasible share of the total project cost but still provide transit supportive design to improve transit travel time and reliability; or
4. **Separate Transit Project (for projects on TPN).** Transit-supportive design elements to be addressed through a separate process or project.

² Per FHWA Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation Regulations and Recommendations: “A cost may be considered excessively disproportionate when the cost of providing the accommodation would be more than 20% of the cost of the larger transportation project.”

To claim an exception from transit agency review, project sponsors must provide documentation in the Complete Streets Checklist detailing how the project meets one or more of the exception conditions above. Exceptions must be documented and signed by senior-level or an authorized delegate at the project sponsor.

COORDINATION & COLLABORATION ON PROJECT SCOPE

Agencies are encouraged to work collaboratively to develop a project that considers the needs of transit while meeting the project goals. If agreement cannot be reached by the project sponsor and transit agency regarding transit-impact mitigations or transit-supportive design elements, MTC may convene a stakeholder meeting with the affected agencies to aid in discussions, but MTC would not take a lead role or be a mediator. If a resolution cannot be reached, project sponsors should document efforts made to resolve the dispute and include documentation in the Complete Streets Checklist submission, and describe project design dispute in the grant application.

OPTIONAL LOCAL TRANSIT PRIORITY RESOLUTION OR POLICY

Right-of-way owners and roadway operators should consider adopting resolutions in support of the regional Policy, adopting standalone local transit priority policies, or modifying existing related local policies or plans (e.g., complete streets policies) to include language on transit priority. Such local action is encouraged to reinforce local support to improve transit travel times and reliability and promote coordination with transit agencies.

Staff are considering how funding incentives could be provided to encourage local jurisdictions to adopt local transit priority resolutions or policies, such as awarding bonus points to MTC transit priority discretionary funding applications from jurisdictions that have adopted a resolution or policy. Any funding incentives would be implemented through MTC funding programs, not through the Policy.

PHASED IMPLEMENTATION

The Policy would be implemented in phases to give affected agencies the opportunity to gradually adapt to new Policy criteria when applying for discretionary funding:

- (1) Upon adoption of Policy (anticipated late 2025 or early 2026): all project sponsors with projects along roadways with transit service would be required to review the project with affected transit agencies, via the CS Checklist process.
- (2) After adoption of the regional TPN (anticipated late 2026 or early 2027): all project sponsors with projects along the TPN would need to consider incorporating reasonable transit-supportive design elements into projects. The TPN will be developed through the Transit Priority Roadway Assessment in 2026.

The Policy would promote broader local support of transit priority by encouraging local jurisdictions to adopt resolutions in support of the regional Policy, adopt standalone local transit priority policies, or modify existing related local policies or plans (e.g., complete streets policies) to include language on transit priority. Staff are considering how funding incentives could be provided to encourage local jurisdictions to adopt local transit priority resolutions or policies, such as awarding bonus points to MTC transit priority discretionary funding applications from jurisdictions that have adopted a resolution or policy. Any funding incentives would be implemented through MTC funding programs, not through the Policy.

EQUITY

Projects should improve the travel time and reliability of transit routes serving disadvantaged populations, including Equity Priority Communities (EPCs) or other similar designations. Some MTC discretionary funding programs prioritize projects with larger anticipated equity benefits; the exact prioritization methodology is subject to a particular funding program's equity priorities and approaches.

EVALUATION

Project sponsors that receive MTC discretionary funding, regardless of project type, should consider the transit customer experience and transit operations throughout project planning and design, proactively incorporating transit-supportive design treatments or mitigating project elements that may adversely impact transit operations. Some MTC funding programs require

project sponsors to conduct a pre-/post-implementation evaluation of project impacts on transit travel time and reliability, to be conducted by the project sponsor or delivery agency. Periodic monitoring of transit priority investments is also encouraged to maintain project effectiveness. For network-level evaluation, MTC will develop an existing conditions baseline of transit operations in the region through the Transit Priority Roadway Assessment, and utilize Regional Network Management Performance Measures (MTC Resolution No. 4648, adopted May 2024) to routinely track progress toward improving transit travel time and reliability along the TPN. MTC staff will produce reports every four years, in coordination with regular CS Policy reports, to summarize funded projects, report changes in transit performance, and update the Policy and TPN, if needed.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

Regardless of project type, a project sponsor should coordinate early with transit agencies affected by the project and other relevant stakeholder agencies to evaluate the potential to incorporate transit-supportive design elements into the project and/or mitigate any potential adverse impacts to transit operations. The updated CS checklist process will provide structure to interagency coordination by requiring that transit agencies provide feedback to project sponsors within 20 business days, and that project sponsors update the project description to reflect changes made in response to transit agency feedback or explain why the project proposal was not modified. Project sponsors shall complete the CS Checklist before receiving MTC's discretionary funding or endorsement. In addition to project delivery, agencies or local jurisdictions introducing policies or other work that may potentially impact transit operations should similarly coordinate with transit agencies.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

As resources allow, MTC will educate and assist project sponsors, transit agencies, and local jurisdictions to promote transit priority and implement the Policy. MTC will continue to advocate for and advance transit priority through leadership at the regional level.