



November 3, 2023

Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Regional Network Management Committee
Re: Item 4, Public Comment/Other Business

Honorable Committee Members and Chair Rabbitt,

At the last meeting of the Regional Network Management Committee meeting, on October 13, 2023, several committee members expressed support for examining transit agency consolidation in order to provide a better public transit system for the public - especially as the region looks towards making the case for a major ballot measure.

Subsequently, at the BART Board workshop last week, several BART Board Directors expressed support in studying consolidation.

Attached is a blog post further detailing the potential goals and enormous benefits of consolidation and why it is critical that MTC take the lead on analyzing consolidations.

It is up to MTC, which has a regional purview, to take the next step. MTC has a strong case to study consolidation - it's in MTC's mandate to identify consolidations. Also, the Regional Rail Partnerships Study that MTC led - which was also one of the 27 actions in the Transformation Action Plan - recommended in its March 2023 final report that a next step should be to do a cost-benefit analysis of rail consolidation, with the goals of increasing agency capacity and improving regional decision-making.

We ask that the Rail Partnerships Study recommendations be agendaized for the next RNM Committee meeting so that potential next steps to conduct a cost benefit analysis on consolidations can be discussed.

Sincerely,

Ian Griffiths
Policy Director, Seamless Bay Area

Attachment: Blog post from November 2, 2023:
<https://www.seamlessbayarea.org/blog/2023/11/2/a-path-forward-to-the-unified-transit-agency-the-bay-area-deserves>

A path forward to the unified transit agency the Bay Area deserves

IAN GRIFFITHS

Last week, the BART board [made headlines](#) when several board members expressed that exploring consolidation with other Bay Area transit agencies should be considered in order to help address the agency's long term financial challenges.

Bringing up consolidation in the context of a budget crisis implies that the primary goal of consolidation is to cut costs by eliminating duplicative functions of Bay Area transit agencies. However, as Seamless Bay Area [has stated before](#), while there are certainly opportunities to be more efficient, the creation of a well-governed, empowered, unified Bay Area transit agency - made possible by consolidation - covering the majority of the region could have potentially enormous benefits that go far beyond improving efficiency.

The benefits of creating a unified Bay Area transit agency with authority over regional rail, bus, and ferry services include:

Quicker deployment seamless rail and bus system around the Bay with integrated service, fares, and customer experience.

Improved accountability to riders and the public for regional transit service and connections.

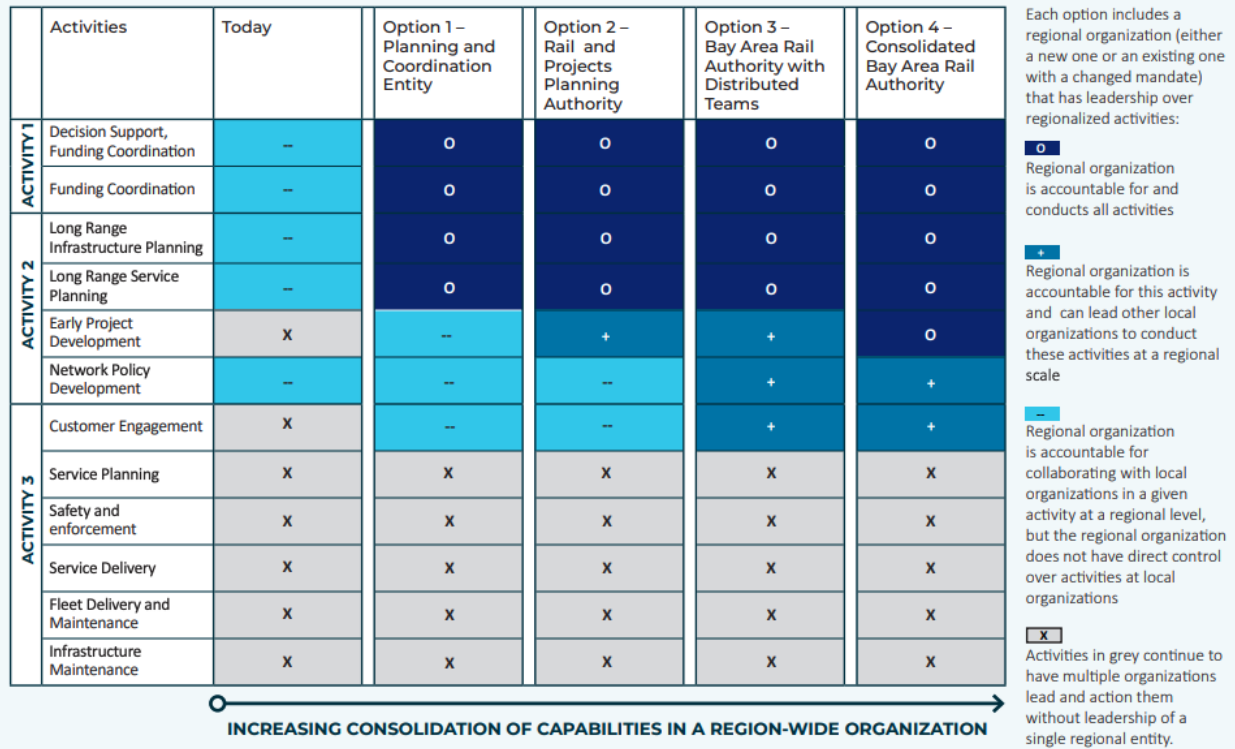
Better and faster project definition and design, reducing the costs of capital projects

Faster and cheaper project construction for transit projects

Improved agency capacity, and attraction of better leadership and professional expertise.

It is not just the opinion of advocacy groups, [a vast majority of the public](#), and numerous [state legislators](#) that consolidation would bring benefits. Transit agencies themselves explored and documented the benefits of consolidating regional rail. The MTC-led Rail Partnerships study, which was done with participation of Caltrain, BART, Capitol Corridor, ACE, and other California rail agencies. It concluded that “there are key potential benefits of ‘regionalizing’ some decision making and organizational capabilities”, and identified the next step “conducting a detailed-cost benefit analysis” on several restructuring, including a Consolidated Bay Area rail authority. Unfortunately, eight months after the Caltrans-funded [Bay Area Rail Partnerships Study](#) concluded, MTC has not taken any additional actions that were identified in the study.

Figure 3.5: Organizational Models Compared to Existing Conditions



NEXT STEPS FOR CONTINUED ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

It is proposed that MTC take the following actions:

- Conduct a detailed cost-benefit analysis of each option to test and challenge the initial analysis in the Rail Partnership Study – this analysis should provide an evidence driven view on the activities to regionalize and the organizational structure to develop for them
- Conduct additional analysis on the implications of decision making change and organizational change (assessing how the models in Chapter 2 for a decision making entity could impact a regional organization for rail activities)

Above: Excerpts from MTC’s *Bay Area Rail Partnership Study Summary Report* (Page 26-27). In March 2023, MTC, working with Caltrans and Bay Area rail agencies, concluded the *Rail Partnership Study*, which was one of the 27 Actions in the Transformation Action Plan. The study recommended conducting “a detailed cost-benefit analysis” of four different options to reorganize governance of Bay Area rail agencies, including a Consolidated Rail Authority. The study has not been presented to the commission since its final report was posted, and no follow-up analyses have been initiated.

While the recent interest from the BART board in this topic is welcome - BART is clearly a key stakeholder in any consolidation scenario - it’s critical that MTC, with support from

experts with experience in this topic, take a central role on any next steps to examine and recommend a specific consolidation option. Regional leadership, not driven by a specific agency's needs or interest, can help ensure that an analysis is legitimate, objective, and done in the interest of the public. Examining consolidation options should happen in consultation with BART, Caltrain, other regional agencies - and most importantly, riders - and be oriented toward developing a proposal that could be introduced in coordination with a regional funding measure that could bring in new funding that can increase service.

Developing a robust, fundable concept for a unified, empowered Bay Area transit authority is needed to reignite the public's faith in the future of public transportation. There is not a moment to lose. If the Bay Area wishes to ask voters in November 2026 to raise taxes to fund public transit, we need to identify reforms - including consolidations that will bring benefits and improve efficiency - as soon as possible, ideally in the next six months.

It's time for MTC to follow through with the recommended next steps identified in its own study. In the next six months, MTC should analyze feasible options for transit agency consolidation - bringing key stakeholders from all transit regional agencies together to identify a unified transit agency that can best serve the Bay Area for the next generation of transit riders.