

Regional Network Management Customer Advisory Group

June 28, 2024

Agenda Item 4a

Regional Mapping and Wayfinding Project – Implementation Updates

Subject:

Update on the design and evaluation of the signage prototypes being installed later this year and the subsequent pilot stage of the Regional Mapping & Wayfinding Project (RMWP).

Background:

The Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force (Task Force) recommended a regionally harmonized mapping and wayfinding system as a key action item in the Task Force’s Transformation Action Plan. The goal of the RMWP is to develop and deploy fully standardized wayfinding, mapping, and transit information throughout the Bay Area in all transit environments, while also providing guidance for pedestrian wayfinding and first/last mile opportunities extending from transit areas, to retain existing and attract new transit riders.

In 2022, MTC approved a contract with Applied Wayfinding, Inc. (Applied), to design and support implementation of the new wayfinding system. In 2023, the project team completed a review of wayfinding existing conditions and conducted initial engagement with transit operator working groups, transit riders and non-riders, and members of Equity Priority Communities (EPCs) to develop initial design specifications for a family of wayfinding signs (“standards”). In January 2024, MTC publicly introduced some of these new signs, including the “regional network identity,” a consistent design language that seeks to simplify finding and using transit services throughout the region.

Given the complexities of regional transit services, the RMWP is taking an iterative design approach, wherein wayfinding signage and materials will be tested and refined with feedback from transit riders and operators at progressively wider scales. The first stage is to install wayfinding prototypes at El Cerrito del Norte BART station and the Santa Rosa Transit Mall and SMART station, which are served by a variety of transit agencies covering all nine Bay Area counties, offer transfers between bus and rail modes, and are within or near MTC Equity Priority Communities (EPCs). Some preliminary wayfinding designs will also be tested at the Powell Street station in downtown San Francisco.

MTC will solicit public, stakeholder, and transit agency feedback on the prototype signage to inform a revised set of standards for the next development stage, the pilot projects. Expected to be rolled out in 2025 and 2026, the pilots are intended to test the operational feasibility of widescale production, installation, and maintenance of the new wayfinding system. Similar to the prototypes, feedback gathered from the pilot stage will inform potential improvements for expansion throughout the region.

Prototype evaluation plan

The draft prototype evaluation plan includes a wide range of proposed engagement methods with transit riders, stakeholder groups, and transit operators to collect feedback on three main indicators: signage design effectiveness, benefits to travelers, and operational feasibility. More active engagement methods such as recruitment or in-person surveys would be prioritized among current and potential transit riders and customers with disabilities and/or limited English proficiency, as well as disability advocacy groups and frontline operator staff. MTC would also use open surveys to engage the general public for feedback about the prototypes. Evaluation activities will occur throughout the prototype implementation, including before, during, and after wayfinding materials are installed. Lessons learned from the prototype evaluation will be used to improve future community engagement efforts during the pilot stages.

Modification of the pilot stage

The original scope of the pilot projects was to implement new wayfinding signage throughout 1-3 counties including Sonoma, Solano, and eastern Contra Costa and Alameda. During project planning over the past year, staff have received feedback from transit operators and other stakeholders, including:

- Need to test complex urban locations;
- Need to have more geographic diversity of pilot projects throughout the region;
- Consider riders new to transit or new to the area, like tourists; and
- Some agencies have existing projects with signage improvements that are currently on hold pending new regional standards.

In consideration of the feedback received, staff is proposing changes to the scope of the pilots.

The modified pilot concept includes the following components:

1. Test customer experience at complex transfer stations, ideally one in each of the nine Bay Area counties (2025)
2. Test customer experience on a selection of end-to-end bus lines of up to two transit agencies each in Sonoma and Solano Counties (2026)
3. Facilitate transit agencies' use of Wayfinding Standards Version 1 (2025) to implement signage projects that are currently on hold

At their May 20, 2024 meeting, the RNM Council expressed support for the prototype evaluation and revised pilot approach. Additionally, Council members stressed the importance of:

- Delivering the prototypes for public feedback to inform next year's pilot projects;
- Managing coordinated transfers;
- Harmonizing static and digital interfaces, including third-party applications; and
- Studying international examples to inform solutions for complex station environments.

Next Steps:

Staff will continue to work with transit agency staff to finalize prototype sign designs that will be tested later this year. In tandem with the prototype implementation, MTC will begin outreach to riders, stakeholder groups, and operators. MTC staff will also work with transit agency staff to identify new pilot locations for implementation in 2025 and 2026.

Issues:

None identified.

Recommendations:

Information.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Presentation