

Bay Area Toll Authority Oversight Committee
375 Beale Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

February 11, 2020

Re: Item 6a: San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge: Bus Lane Assessment and Bay Bridge Forward

Dear Chair Worth and members of the Bay Area Toll Authority Oversight Committee:

SPUR is a member-supported nonprofit organization that promotes good planning and good government in the San Francisco Bay Area through research, education and advocacy. Improving public transportation and increasing public transportation use in cities are core SPUR priorities.

SPUR strongly supports a transit-only lane on the Bay Bridge. The region's bridges and highways are valuable transportation assets that must be leveraged to deliver efficient, reliable, sustainable and equitable transportation. The Bay Bridge corridor is the region's most congested link. Daily the tens of thousands of riders who cross the bridge in express buses are forced to slog through bumper-to-bumper traffic. And we are far from leveraging our significant investment in the Salesforce Transit Center. Fewer than 120 buses per hour use the bus deck in the peak times when it can accommodate up to 300 buses per hour.

To address this issue, MTC is prioritizing relieving congestion on the Bay Bridge approaches. While we strongly agree that we must do something about the terrible congestion that buses confront on and off the bridge, we are concerned that this focus is being pursued without an overarching goal or performance metrics.

Currently, regional express bus riders experience an average of six minutes of delay in the AM peak on the Bay Bridge. A six-minute delay is not inconsequential. Moreover, this is an *average* metric; on some days, the delay can be upwards of 10 minutes. This metric furthermore reflects the current situation. It does not take into account the fact that projected growth is likely to make congestion even worse. The lack of bus reliability weighs on people — and makes the bus a non-option. We would not tolerate it if every BART train were delayed six minutes; we should not tolerate this level of delay for our regional express buses either.

We agree that speeding buses through the congested bridge approaches is the right first step, and encourage MTC to pursue swift action and results. We disagree, however, with just committing to improving the approaches and then seeing how things work. Now is the appropriate moment to make a promise to the riders who choose to use regional express buses that they should reach their destination without unnecessary delay. That promise should be quantified and if not met, should trigger next steps towards a transit-only lane on the Bay Bridge.

SPUR recommends the BATA Oversight Committee direct MTC staff to work in partnership with Caltrans and the regional express bus operators to develop performance targets for minimum peak hour bus speeds, including a reliability target. BATA should stipulate that if these performance metrics are not met within the next five years, MTC must begin planning and design for a transit-only lane on the Bay Bridge.

There is precedent for this approach: Caltrans considers an HOV lane to be degraded if average traffic speed is less than 45 miles per hour more than 10 percent of the time. There is no reason why we shouldn't have a similar metric for regional express bus speeds and reliability.

Finally, a bus-only lane on the Bay Bridge opens opportunities to serve additional markets with regional express buses. 70% of peak hour Bay Bridge trips end in the Core, but 30% of people travel through to other destinations. People drive (among many other reasons) because existing regional express buses do not take them where they need to go. If buses were able to get across the Bay Bridge faster, it makes it feasible to serve markets in addition to the Salesforce Transit Center, such as Mission Bay, Civic Center or the Peninsula. We will be hard-pressed to meet the 20 percent mode shift goal without a more expansive regional express bus network. We need to see the Bay Bridge as a critical link in a highway-based transit network that if optimized can help us move many more people in fewer cars more efficiently and sustainably.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Fleisher', with a stylized, wavy line extending from the end.

Arielle Fleisher
Transportation Policy Director