



April 20, 2020

Metropolitan Transportation Commission
375 Beale St, Suite 800
San Francisco, CA 94105

RE: Prioritizing CARES Transit Investment in the Face of COVID-19 (Agenda Item 7F)

Dear Chair Haggerty and Members of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission,

COVID-19 -- in addition to causing a public health crisis -- is decimating our public transit systems. Our operators are losing staff, riders, and revenue. These challenges will likely persist even after the worst of the public health crisis is over. We are thankful for the leadership of the Commission and our representatives in Washington during this unprecedented time.

We encourage MTC, through this crisis, to redouble your efforts to create a more sustainable, equitable, efficient, and seamless transit network--not abandon them. In its quick and successful effort to flatten the curve, the Bay Area has shown how successful it can be when each jurisdiction collaborates to serve the region as a whole. Now is the time to choose new, previously hard paths, because we have no other choice.

We encourage MTC to deploy the CARES Act emergency funds to meet immediate needs while creating the foundations of a more effective, efficient, equitable and resilient regional transit network that will best serve our region during the long tail of this public health crisis, the economic downturn that will follow, and beyond.

We believe the deployment of CARES Act emergency funding should be driven by the following goals.

- **Protect the health of transit operators.** People who operate and maintain our buses and trains are essential workers. The region must prioritize providing all transit agencies with an adequate supply of personal protective equipment and funding support to enhance industrial hygiene to keep operators and riders safe. Any less puts the health of these workers and the riders they serve at risk, and will undermine our collective efforts to flatten the curve.
- **Restore and grow ridership.** As a result of the lingering public health concerns, many people will default to driving alone and transit is going to have to fight for every single rider. To do that, the region needs to prioritize investments in affordable and integrated fares, consistent wayfinding and customer information, innovation, and coordinated service planning as a regional network. In other countries, these efforts (coupled with efforts to make driving less attractive) have led to increases in ridership ranging from 14-72%.¹

¹ Buehler, Ralph, John Pucher and Oliver Dummler (2018). Verkehrsverbund: The evolution and spread of fully integrated regional public transport in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, *International Journal of Sustainable Transportation*, DOI: 10.1080/15568318.2018.143182

- **Prioritize serving people who rely on transit the most, and provide it cost-effectively.** This is also an important time to implement means-based fares and discounted passes. People will need this now, more than ever. Transit is the only option for many essential workers to get to work. And as a result of this crisis, fewer Bay Area families will be able to afford cars and even more will be dependent on transit to get to work and school. In a severely funding constrained environment, the region must prioritize funding the transit service that most cost-effectively serves people who need it most.
- **Focus on financial sustainability.** Transit agencies will have to do more with less for the foreseeable future. At the same time, the costs of operating transit in the Bay Area are among the highest in the world. This is a time to focus on delivering as much transit as possible with the limited funding we will have available. The region should prioritize funding the transit service that can be provided most cost-effectively, and encourage operators to reduce operating costs. In addition, the region should prioritize funding service that can be financially sustainable through the public health crisis and the economic downturn that will follow. Agencies should be rewarded for finding creative solutions such as consolidating services and functions to add efficiency.
- **Promote experimentation and data-driven solutions.** As we seek to restore service with a focus on the most transit dependent riders, some routes may be more cost-effectively served using services other than traditional fixed-route transit. Our transit recovery efforts should encourage flexibility and experimentation with new modes, pricing strategies, and service designs. Additionally, the region should encourage transit operators to explore partnering with private sector mobility providers who could provide more cost-effective service where appropriate.

The spirit of collaboration that we have seen in the Bay Area over the past months has been profound. Let's keep it going. As we move from immediate emergency needs into recovery, we further encourage the Commission to take the lead in developing a more comprehensive regional recovery strategy for transit and transit riders that goes beyond the allocation of CARES funding. We look forward to supporting and collaborating with MTC in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Alicia John-Baptiste
President and CEO, SPUR

Jim Wunderman
President and CEO, Bay Area Council