



April 16, 2021

Assemblymember David Chiu
California State Capitol, Room 4112
Sacramento, CA 94293

Re: Assembly Bill 629 (Chiu) - Support

Dear Assemblymember Chiu,

The Bay Area Council, SPUR and the Silicon Valley Leadership Group support Assembly Bill 629, which implements key reforms and accountability measures to move toward a seamless, equitable, high ridership, and efficient public transit system in the Bay Area.

The institutional setup of the Bay Area's public transit system is arguably the most complex in the United States. Riders navigate more than two dozen unique public transit operators and each of them independently plans and operates its system. For regional transit riders, this means a confusing array of fares and maps, gaps in service with long waits and difficult transfers, and uncoordinated capital planning and investments that cost us more in the end. Without better integration, we will see lower regional transit ridership and longer travel times. Communities won't have confidence in putting new growth near regional transit, we will pay more for regional transit that goes underused, and we will fail to meet our regional climate and equity goals.

Better transit integration can help regional transit recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has pushed transit operators to the brink of financial ruin. Regional transit in the Bay Area is the most dependent on riders for revenue. An integrated and seamless regional transit network will be easier to understand, and more affordable to use and to operate, making it a more competitive choice for thousands of potential riders, while also improving speed, reliability, and affordability for current users. This will help restore and grow the regional ridership that operators need for long-term financial security.

In response to COVID-19, in 2020 the Metropolitan Transportation Commission convened a 32-member Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force (BRTF) composed of transit agency managers, advocates, and local lawmakers. The BRTF is working to prepare governance recommendations to help our region move forward with regional transit integration. In the meantime, additional efforts are needed to improve customer experience in the near-term.

AB 629 meaningfully advances near-term actions that improve customer experience. It scales up integration efforts and helps accomplish more integration sooner. It will establish accountability metrics and deadlines for transit agencies to create a long-overdue regional transit map and wayfinding system, establish a transit priority network for future regional improvements, pilot a multi-agency



regional fare pass to incentivize rather than penalize transfers, and use open data standards to provide real-time transit information to all riders. These simple, common-sense improvements will bring near-term benefits to regional transit riders, while setting the Bay Area on the path to a seamlessly integrated, customer-focused regional transit system.

AB 629 can improve regional transit access and mobility, especially for people who are low-income and people of color, who are overrepresented on the low end of the income spectrum. The current fragmented system leads to a number of inequities. For instance, our disparate fare policies hurt people who depend on transit the most because the trips cost more and penalize them for transferring between operators. Access and mobility are too limited; many types of trips simply aren't possible on the existing regional system. A lack of service coordination means that daytime and off-peak trips are limited and time consuming, making transit slower and forcing low-income people into car ownership. This can lead to inefficiency, waste, and over-building that can degrade communities, as each agency aims to solve operational issues or rush hour crowding independently.

AB 629 ensures that our system of managed lanes and regional express bus service will not replicate fragmentation, and helps ensure that new high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) and bus infrastructure efficiently serves many more regional transit customers. The Bay Area seeks to manage its vast existing freeway infrastructure to support reliable, uncongested and affordable travel for regional bus service and HOVs, yet doing so will be challenging without significant interagency coordination. If we act quickly, it is possible to set regional bus service on a better course.

Thank you for your commitment to improving Bay Area regional transit by accelerating integration.

Sincerely,

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Laura Tolkoff
Transportation Policy Director
SPUR

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Gwen", written over a horizontal line.

Gwen Litvak
Senior Vice President, Public Policy
Bay Area Council



Jason T. Baker

Jason Baker
Senior Vice President, Transportation, Health & Housing
Silicon Valley Leadership Group