

Re: Charter Amendment - Mayor Approval Required for Certain SFMTA Budget Proposals

November 6, 2023

To the San Francisco Board of Supervisors,

We write to express our opposition to [the proposed charter amendment](#) which would require mayoral approval of certain SFMTA budget proposals. A robust, accountable, and adequately-funded SFMTA is necessary to meet our city's ambitious goals to reduce climate change, advance equity, create a world-class transit system, and reduce traffic deaths and injuries. We are concerned that the proposed charter amendment would introduce the potential for unnecessary political interference in SFMTA's budgeting process at the expense of transit riders, who will often be the first to feel the impacts of inadequate budgets in the form of service cuts.

This amendment fails to hold anyone accountable for the service cuts that will be a direct result of insufficient funding in the absence of fee or meter hour increases. The SFMTA has direct control over only a few revenue options to fund the transit service that hundreds of thousands of people rely on every day. In periods of fiscal uncertainty, SFMTA may need to make the difficult choice to either increase revenue by raising fees or meter hours, or cut transit service. Under the newly-proposed charter amendment, however, the SFMTA's ability to modify fares, fees, and parking hours would be in jeopardy – putting thousands of transit-dependent San Franciscans at risk of losing Muni service. By silently withholding approval of these fiscal changes, the mayor could single-handedly put the SFMTA in a position where service cuts are the only option to expediently balance the budget, leaving Muni riders waiting at the curb.

Hundreds of thousands of San Franciscans rely on Muni to connect them with jobs, healthcare, food, and other essential services. As the stewards of our city's transportation system, the SFMTA must be allowed to maintain all the budgetary tools necessary to ensure these connections are not severed. San Franciscans have strongly supported SFMTA's independence from the city's electoral politics in two separate elections over the past several decades, including Prop E in 1999 and Prop A in 2007.

By depoliticizing the SFMTA, the agency is empowered to make the hard choices that are necessary for our city's transportation system. No mayor wants to be seen as solely responsible for raising fares or meter hours, but burdening one official with this responsibility is a sure way to ensure the fares and rates are never changed. The status quo, which requires the entire Board of Supervisors to act on the entire SFMTA budget, ensures that the agency's budget represents the best interests of all San Franciscans. The current requirement that a two-thirds majority of the Board is necessary to override the agency's budget shows that our

elected officials can get engaged when needed, but only when they agree to work together—not when one elected official may be scared away from making a hard choice.

We understand that there is still work to be done to transform Muni into the system that San Franciscans deserve. This work will be necessary to meet many of our city’s critical goals in the coming years. While there may be a need for greater accountability from SFMTA regarding its budgeting process, this amendment is not the solution—instead of increasing transparency, it increases the mayor’s power to single-handedly reject the funding the agency needs to deliver a world-class transportation system to San Francisco.

We urge you to vote “no” on the proposed charter amendment.

Sincerely,



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