

December 8, 2023

Re: MTC Legislation Committee Item 3b: Regional Transportation Revenue Measure Updates

Chair Canepa and Committee Members,

The success of transit is an issue of great importance to SPUR. A robust and thriving transit system is essential to our region- providing mobility to our residents, supporting housing and compact development, providing critical access to disadvantaged communities and helping us address our climate goals. While our transit system has weathered the worst of the pandemic, it will need new regional funding to sustain its existing operations and to transform and improve for a new generation of riders. To that end, SPUR has engaged closely with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the region's transit operators over the last several years both to advocate for needed funding and to help shape the system's transformation. In 2021 and 2022 I participated as the Vice Chair of the Regional Network Management Business Case Advisory Group and over the course of the last year SPUR played a leading role in securing needed operating funds as part of the FY23-24 state budget.

SPUR supports the Commission's efforts to secure durable, long-term funding for Bay Area transit operations and we are excited to see work on enabling legislation for a potential funding measure advance. We are broadly supportive of the direction MTC staff has taken in developing input to such legislation and we specifically concur with staff's prior recommendations that legislation maintain strategic flexibility with regard to key issues like expenditure plan details, revenue source, geography and timing. SPUR also supports the concept, discussed in the summary sheet attachment for item 3b, of expanding the power and authority of the Regional Network Management structure in conjunction with the passage of a regional measure.

While we are broadly supportive of the approach staff has outlined with regard to the development of enabling legislation for a regional measure, we would like to emphasize two specific points of caution:

First, SPUR does not support efforts to tie transit operator consolidation or specific consolidation studies to a regional measure at this time. As referenced in the staff memo, consolidation of transit operators has long been a topic of discussion and interest in the region and we agree that there are many potential advantages that could come from advancing the full or partial integration of some of the Bay Area's 27 operators. Nonetheless, consolidation is also a highly complex and politicized issue that will require patience, nuance and collaboration to study and advance in a manner that achieves the best public outcomes. SPUR believes that tying this issue explicitly to a regional measure is a sure way to create conflict and division within the region at a time when we can least afford to do so.

Instead, we encourage MTC and transit operators to use the next several years to make good on their existing commitments and focus on delivering the ambitious program of customer improvements identified in the Transformation Action Plan. Right now, customers and the region need MTC and transit operators to provide clean, safe and reliable service and to work together through the newly established Regional Network Management structure to deliver tangible changes like a regional wayfinding pilot, an expanded Clipper BayPass program, new transit priority infrastructure and coordinated schedules and transfers at major hubs.

Second, we strongly encourage MTC and transit operators to begin developing a fallback plan to address anticipated shortfalls in the event that a regional funding measure is simply not viable in 2026. While SPUR is highly supportive of advancing enabling legislation for a measure, recent polling conducted by MTC shows that only 51-55% of Bay Area voters would support such a measure if placed on the ballot today. There is much the region can do to build voter support for transit in advance of 2026, but the polling also makes it clear that the lack of support for a measure is significantly influenced by larger economic and societal factors that are unrelated to transportation and outside of what a campaign could reasonably expect to influence.

We hope that voter sentiment will be different in 2026, but we also need to have a plan for how we keep transit running if a measure is fundamentally not viable at the polls.

Thank you for your ongoing work to support and improve our transportation system. We look forward to continuing our work together on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Alicia John-Baptiste
President and CEO, SPUR