



IN BRIEF

SB 917, the Seamless Transit Transformation Act, requires transit agencies in the San Francisco Bay Area to work together to improve coordination and integration in a variety of areas, including fares, service standards, mapping and wayfinding, in order to improve the rider experience.

THE PROBLEM

For decades, the Bay Area's public transportation system has been fragmented, unreliable, difficult to navigate, inefficient, and inequitable. The challenges of navigating between 27 different transit operators in the Bay Area has acted as a barrier for residents and visitors, while disproportionately burdening low-income and vulnerable populations. The system requires riders to use multiple systems operated independently with little coordination, to pay multiple separate fares, experience unpredictable transfers, and to navigate different wayfinding systems.

Despite substantial investments over the past five decades, public transit in the Bay Area has not addressed these issues. The system is also poorly positioned to respond to competition from ride-hailing apps or the impact of the regional housing crisis, which has pushed more people further from job centers. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed fault lines in new, urgent ways, as transit operators already decimated by the crisis face unique challenges in recovering from the pandemic. While the current decline in transit use has been necessitated by public health, it has devastated the system, and post-COVID recovery cannot simply replicate a system that was already struggling.

Historically, only about 4% of all trips taken in the Bay Area involve transit, and transit has never been used by more than 12% of the population for commute trips since 1970. By contrast, cars comprise over 75% of commute trips. The quality of public transit in the Bay Area has also declined; average bus speeds dropped by 9%, and commute times increased by 11% between 2001 and 2016. Despite gridlock on the region's roads in recent years, ridership across the Bay Area fell by 5.2%, between 2016 and 2018.

In contrast, other regions around the world that have high-ridership public transit systems have managed to integrate networks of quality local and regional transit services that make traveling without a private automobile convenient and easy for all types of trips. They feature aligned routes and schedules, coordinated transfers, high quality transit hubs, common branding and customer information, and other regional customer experience standards. Those systems have been able to significantly increase overall public transit usage, expand mobility options, and achieve cost

savings for riders while reducing emissions and improving quality of life.

The Bay Area has already seen the tangible benefits of initial agency coordination over the past two years as Caltrain has aligned schedules with BART at Millbrae station and other operators have made incremental steps toward further coordination. Important efforts are underway at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and among the transit agencies to examine the potential creation of a regional network management framework – but in the meantime, action is needed to ensure progress does not stall on other important efforts, including the recently concluded work of the MTC Fare Integration Task Force and the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force.

THE SOLUTION

SB 917 will help transform the Bay Area's transit system into a world-class, seamless experience for the public, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving access to jobs and housing for residents by requiring transit agencies to work together to improve coordination and integration in multiple service areas.

Specifically, SB 917 requires MTC and transit agencies to:

- Create an integrated fare structure that would become effective July 1, 2024 and adjusted annually thereafter. The integrated fare structure must include no-cost local and local-regional transfers across the same and multiple transit agencies – ending the current 'transfer penalty' that many people pay by virtue of having to pay double or triple fares no matter the length of their respective trip segments.
- Design and implement a single regional transit map, standardized wayfinding mechanisms, and reporting of real-time transit data across the region.
- Create a Connected Network Plan to identify a network of regional and local corridors that need service-level standards and improvements. This Connected Network Plan would eventually support creation of a regional bus rapid transit system.

SUPPORT

Bay Area Council (cosponsor)
Seamless Bay Area (cosponsor)
TransForm (cosponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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