

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

AB 1837 (Papan) – As Amended March 21, 2024

SUBJECT: San Francisco Bay area: public transit: Regional Network Management Council

SUMMARY: Codifies the existing Regional Network Management Council (RNMC). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) to facilitate the creation of the RNMC consisting of 11 members, including the executive director of (MTC), and the general managers and executive directors of San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit), Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) Peninsula Rail Transit District (Caltrain), Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (Golden Gate Transit), San Mateo County Transit District (SMCTD) and the general managers from three other transit providers serving the San Francisco Bay Area, chosen at the sole discretion of those transit providers.
- 2) Requires RNMC to represent the interests of its stakeholders, provide leadership and critical input on regional transit policies, and provide executive guidance on regional transit policies and actionable implementation plans in pursuit of transformative improvements to the customer experience for San Francisco Bay Area transit

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes MTC as the transportation planning, coordinating, and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. (Public Utilities Code (PUC) 131001).
- 2) Establishes the regional transit coordinating council (RTCC) within MTC, to better coordinate routes, schedules, fares, and transfers among the San Francisco Bay area transit operators and to explore potential advantages of joint ventures in areas such as marketing, maintenance, and purchasing. (PUC 66516)
- 3) Authorizes MTC, in coordination with RTCC, to adopt rules and regulations to promote the coordination of fares and schedules for all public transit systems within its jurisdiction. (PUC 66516)
- 4) Requires every transit system to enter into a joint fare revenue sharing agreement with connecting systems consistent with MTC's rules and regulations. (PUC 66516)
- 5) Authorizes MTC, in coordination with RTCC, to identify the functions performed by individual transit systems that could be consolidated to improve the efficiency of regional transit service, and recommend that those functions be consolidated and performed through inter-operator agreements or as services contracted to a single entity. (PUC 66516.5)
- 6) Authorizes MTC, in coordination with RTCC, to improve service coordination and effectiveness in those transit corridors identified as transit corridors of regional significance by recommending improvements in those corridors, including, but not limited to, reduction

of duplicative service and institution of coordinated service across public transit system boundaries. (PUC 66516.5)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, during the first half of 2020, transit ridership plunged from 50% to as much as 94%. In efforts to stave off financial losses from declining transit ridership the federal government provided relief for transit operators across the country. In March of 2020, Congress passed and the President signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which provided \$25 billion in relief to transit agencies. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 added an additional \$14 billion in transit relief. The American Rescue Plan in March of 2021 provided an additional \$30.5 billion.

According to the author, “It has been clear for many years that a collaborative approach is urgently required to increase transit ridership in the Bay Area. This is not a new issue, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, transit operators were struggling with a loss of ridership. As the Legislature contemplates a funding mechanism for transit, it is imperative that the right structure and oversight is in place to ensure that any new revenues are used in the most efficient and effective ways possible. Following a legislative effort in 2020, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) created a coordinating council to establish a plan for improving transit. However, because the council’s tasks entail competing interests of many transit operators, it is crucial that the State has oversight over this council. AB 1837 is a step towards ensuring the MTC’s coordinating council’s goals are accomplished in a fair and comprehensive manner.”

Transit ridership has improved since 2020, but is still far below January 2020 levels. As of April of 2024, transit ridership nationally is at 73% of what it was prior to the pandemic. However, transit ridership in the Bay Area has remained low. BART’s weekly ridership is still at 41% of previous levels, Caltrain is 32% of previous levels, and San Francisco Muni is at 72% of their previous levels. AC Transit and VTA have seen a larger return of their customers, with ridership at 87% and 82% respectively.

In May of 2020, MTC created the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force (Blue Ribbon Task Force) to “guide the future of the Bay Area’s public transportation network as the region adjusts to the new conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic.” The Blue Ribbon Task Force was chaired by MTC Commissioner and Solano County Supervisor Jim Sperling, and includes other local elected officials, advocates for people with disabilities, representatives from the state Senate and Assembly, the California State Transportation Agency; transit operators; business and labor groups; and transit and social justice advocates.

The Blue Ribbon Task Force is the latest attempt to address a concern that has been raised for decades: how do you better coordinate the 27 different transit agencies in the Bay Area? SB 1474 (Kopp) Chapter 256, Statutes of 1996 authorized MTC, through RTCC, to identify functions performed by individual public transit systems that could be consolidated to improve the efficiency of regional transit service and authorized MTC to withhold the full allocation of its transit dollars until the operators have been found to have made a reasonable effort to implement productivity improvements.

In February of 2023, MTC established the RNMC to implement the regional network management framework based on recommendations from the Blue Ribbon Recovery Task Force. The action plan for the regional management network framework includes the creation of equitable fare and payment systems, integrated mapping, signage and real-time schedule information, improving the speed and reliability of Bay Area buses and light rail trains, and improving accessibility for older adults and persons with disabilities.

Committee comments: SB 1031 (Weiner) of 2024 would authorize MTC to propose a ballot measure in the Bay Area to both improve public transit and help provide additional funding to Bay Area Transit agencies that are facing budget shortfalls. Pre-COVID, Caltrain, BART and other systems were able to successfully rely on fares for the vast majority of their budgets. However the massive decline in ridership, likely due to a change in work patterns, has resulted in a significant loss in revenue for these agencies. As of April 13th, that bill requires MTC to be responsible for implementing a “seamless transit rider experience across the region.” The bill requires MTC to develop many of the goals currently outlined for the existing RNMC. The bill also states that it is the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation to strengthen regional network management within the region, including the possibility of establishing a body within the commission to guide regional network management efforts.

When, or if SB 1031 is amended, it is possible the regional network management envisioned in that bill is different from the one MTC has currently established and is codified in this bill. Even if it ultimately does not, this bill, if signed into law, would prevent MTC from potentially establishing a different framework for regional coordination in the future by imposing a state mandate on them.

Related Legislation: SB 1031 (Weiner) authorizes MTC to propose a ballot measure in the Bay Area to fund transportation needs. That bill is pending before Senate Transportation Committee.

SB 917 (Becker) would have required MTC to adopt a Connected Network Plan; adopt an integrated transit fare structure; develop a standardized regional transit mapping and wayfinding system; and establish open data standards, as specified, for the 27 transit agencies of the Bay Area region. Requires the region’s transit agencies to comply or come into compliance with the established programs; or be ineligible to receive a portion of state transit funding in an amount determined by MTC. That bill was held on suspense in Assembly Transportation Committee.

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REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Seamless Bay Area

Oppose

None on file

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