

Date of Hearing: April 26, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Laura Friedman, Chair

AB 455 (Bonta) – As Amended March 25, 2021

SUBJECT: San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge: transit-only traffic lanes

SUMMARY: Authorizes the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) to designate transit-only traffic lanes on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (Bay Bridge), in consultation with the Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines “transit-only traffic lane” to mean any designated transit-only lane on which use is restricted to mass transit vehicles, or other designated vehicles including taxis and vanpools, during posted times.
- 2) Defines “other designated vehicles” to include high-occupancy vehicles (HOV) if the occupancy threshold is established in a manner that does not prevent mass transit vehicles from meeting weekday peak commute average travel times of at least 45 miles per hour (mph) in both directions along the Bay Bridge at least 90% of the weekdays of each calendar month.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) as the transportation planning, coordinating, and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.
- 2) Establishes MTC as the transportation planning, coordinating, and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.
- 3) Authorizes Caltrans to construct exclusive or preferential lanes for buses only or for buses and other high-occupancy vehicles on the state highway system.
- 4) Designates the Bay Bridge as a state highway.
- 5) Authorizes BATA, a division of MTC, to designate the occupancy requirements for any bridge or segments of a highway that connects to a bridge in MTC’s jurisdiction if BATA establishes high-occupancy vehicle lane fee discounts, in consultation with Caltrans.
- 6) Identifies the following state-owned toll bridges within MTC's jurisdiction:
 - a) Antioch Bridge;
 - b) Benicia-Martinez Bridge;
 - c) Carquinez Bridges;
 - d) Richmond-San Rafael Bridge;
 - e) Dumbarton Bridge;
 - f) San Mateo-Hayward Bridge; and,
 - g) San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: In June of 2018, Bay Area voters approved Regional Measure 3 (RM3), a ballot measure authorized by the Legislature with the passage of SB 595 (Beall), Chapter 650, Statutes of 2017. RM 3 increased toll revenues on Bay Area bridges that will ultimately finance \$4.45 billion of highway and transit improvements in the toll bridge corridors.

The need for this funding increase was justified based on several projections. It is estimated that the population of the Bay Area is forecasted to grow by 2.3 million between 2010 and 2040. Traffic congestion has been growing. Between 2010 and 2015, combined volumes of the region's seven state-owned toll bridges grew by 11 percent. Bay Bridge corridors speeds pre-pandemic were averaging less than 35 miles per hour (mph) during peak travel. At the time of SB 595's passage, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) ridership had increased 27% since 2010, and Transbay bus service from Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit) had risen 33%.

\$300 million in RM3 was specifically set aside for Bay Area Corridor Express Lanes that MTC has a program referred to as Bay Bridge Forward, which seeks to implement a suite of near-term investments to improve efficiency in crossing the Bay Bridge. Bay Bridge Forward is currently slated to add bus/ HOV lanes on several of the approaches to the Bay Bridge, but not on the Bay Bridge itself.

According to data provided by BATA, traffic delays for the Bay Bridge are generally on the approaches, not the Bridge itself. From Interstate 80, the average delay of traffic is 31 minutes, from Interstate 580, the delay is 13 minutes, while the approach on Interstate 880 is delayed by 11 minutes. The delay on the bridge itself is currently 6 minutes, with travel speeds averaging 36 mph.

The West Grand Avenue HOV/ Bus only Lane has improved travel times for buses by 21 minutes. Increased travel times, in addition to the use of double decker buses, has increased AC Transit ridership across the Bay Bridge by 7%.

In 2017, MTC released a study entitled *Bay Area Core Capacity Transit Study*. The report indicates that vehicle demand on the Bay Bridge has surpassed capacity. BART is operating at 110% capacity. AC Transit and the ferries have also nearly reached capacity. By 2030, the Transbay Corridor is expected to hit 120% capacity, and by 2040 capacity will hit 152%. As of 2015, 53% of the corridor trips were already made using transit.

This bill authorizes BATA to convert a lane on the Bay Bridge to a transit-only lane. The bill authorizes the lane to include high occupancy vehicles other than transit vehicles so long as it does not result in a 10% or more decrease of speeds below 45 mph for transit, consistent with federal requirements for managed lanes on interstate highways.

According to the author, "AB 455 would promote greater equity, accessibility, and sustainability by prioritizing buses in the Bay Area region's most congested passageway. This is critical since public transit is often the primary means of travel for many lower-income residents. Now more than ever, it's important that we take equitable actions to improve transit efficiency, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and provide more ridership options."

BATA would have several options available to them when it comes to converting a lane. The most likely one would be to create a contraflow lane on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge, an

option suggested in *Bay Area Core Capacity Transit Study*. The idea is to convert a lane on the east bound lower deck to a west bound lane. This has been done before. In 1962, Caltrans repurposed one of the lower deck lanes on the Bay Bridge to be a dedicated lane for AC Transit. Buses were able to get across the bridge in 2 or 13 minutes, twice as fast as cars. Ticket sales for AC Transit increased by 12.8%. The lane was converted back to a general purpose lane after complaints from drivers about losing the lane. Congestion worsened as a result.

MTC, writing in support of the bill, argues, “For decades, the Bay Bridge corridor has been one of the region’s most congested roadways. While carpool lanes feed into the bridge and provide travel time savings for carpools and bus riders, those lanes are often backed up, leading many to look to the bridge itself as another opportunity to help speed up buses.

In 2019, we performed an assessment of implementing a bus-only lane on the bridge and determined that bus travel is primarily delayed on the approaches to the bridge rather than the bridge itself. Additionally, reserving the lane for bus travel could have significant delay impacts for other motorists downstream if mode shift to buses isn’t sufficiently high. We identified priority operational and capital projects that could speed up bus travel and thereby help attract more riders to transit over time. We believe before a bus-only lane on the bridge should be implemented, these projects should be completed first to provide maximum benefit to mobility in the corridor.”

MTC is seeking amendments to help accelerate its current projects to speed up bus travel time on the Bay Bridge approaches. MTC has not shared specific language with this Committee on what those amendments would look like.

SPUR, the Transbay Coalition and other transit advocacy groups writing in support of this bill, argue “AB 455 establishes bus speed and reliability targets and authorizes relevant authorities to implement stronger lane priority for buses and high-occupancy vehicles in order to deliver on those performance targets. This will drive more equitable transit access, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce commute times for thousands of Californians, and entice single-occupancy drivers to switch to buses or very high occupancy carpools. AB455 will also improve the quality of life for Californians who must continue to drive across the Bay Bridge by reducing congestion and parking competition in San Francisco.”

Committee comments: MTC has prioritized adding transit-only lanes on the approaches to the Bay Bridge. This bill will additionally authorize local control over a lane on the bridge to prioritize transit, but also authorize higher occupancy vehicles. The one year experiment in 1962 proved that adding a transit-only lane to the bridge increased demand by 12.8%. If the Bay Area is going to manage congestion caused by expected population growth over the next 40 years, then it needs to find a way to transition more of its riders from a single car to public transit or other high occupancy vehicles. Doing so has the potential to not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also ultimately make commutes faster for all users as people transition to higher occupancy vehicles that take up less space than a single occupancy vehicle.

Related Legislation:

AB 629 (Chiu) of 2021 requires MTC to consult with transit agencies in its jurisdiction to provide more seamless service across its jurisdiction. That bill will be heard in this committee on April 26th.

Previous Legislation:

SB 595 (Beall) Chapter 650, Statutes of 2017, directs RM3 to be placed on the ballot in the San Francisco Bay Area that, if approved by a majority of the voters, would increase tolls on the seven state-owned toll bridges by up to \$3.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

350 Bay Area Action
Alameda County Taxpayers' Association
Alameda-contra Costa Transit District (ac Transit)
East Bay for Everyone
East Bay Transit Riders Union
Greenbelt Alliance
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
Oakland; City of
People Protected
San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART)
San Francisco Transit Riders
Seamless Bay Area
Sierra Club California
Silicon Valley Leadership Group
Spur
Transbay Coalition
Transform
Urban Environmentalists
Walk Bike Berkeley
Over 400 individuals

Opposition

None on file

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