

Date of Hearing: April 26, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Laura Friedman, Chair

AB 629 (Chiu) – As Amended March 22, 2021

SUBJECT: San Francisco Bay area: public transportation

SUMMARY: Requires the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to consult with transit agencies in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area to provide more seamless service across its jurisdiction. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires MTC to consult with transit agencies, local jurisdictions, county transportation agencies, and the general public to establish and maintain transit priority network for the region that designates corridors that will most benefit from interventions to support fast and reliable transit service.
- 2) Requires MTC when designating corridors as part of the transit priority network to do the following:
 - a) Consider transit ridership, equity, network connectivity, current and future growth patterns, and the importance of the segment to the overall network.
 - b) Evaluate all road segments nominated by transit agencies, local jurisdictions, and county transportation agencies.
 - c) Consider for inclusion any high-quality bus corridor.
 - d) Include transit corridors funding through the state's Solutions for Congested Corridors Program.
- 3) Requires MTC, in consultation with the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the operators of managed lanes in the region, to take the following steps to ensure regional managed lanes networks support seamless operation of high-capacity transit by January 1, 2024:
 - a) Develop regional policy goals, performance measures, and targets that will guide decision making for the buildout and operation of the regional managed lanes network.
 - b) Initiate a process with Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to establish options for delivering managed lanes that support reliable bus travel while minimizing roadway expansions that may increase vehicle miles traveled (VMT).
 - c) Submit a report to the Legislature and relevant committees of the United States Congress recommending changes to state and federal law that would support a more efficient and sustainable regional managed lanes network and regional high-capacity transit.
- 4) Requires MTC to submit a copy of the study entitled the Fare Coordination and Integration Study and Business Case to the Senate and Assembly Transportation

Committees by February 1, 2022, and on January 1, 2023 requires MTC to submit a follow up report on the progress of implementing the recommendations made in the prior report.

- 5) Requires MTC to create a pilot program to implement an accumulator pass among multiple operators providing service in the last three adjacent counties.
- 6) Defines “accumulator pass” to mean a fare product that charges users for their transit usage on a per-trip basis, but limits total user costs to a daily, weekly, or monthly maximum amount, with the goal of incentivizing and rewarding frequent transit use.
- 7) Requires MTC, in consultation with transit agencies, to do both of the following before July 1, 2024:
 - a) Develop a comprehensive, standardized regional transit mapping and wayfinding system, including common branding for regional transit service and a shared digital mapping platform, and requires these standards and resources to display this information on print, digital and interactive media.
 - b) Develop an implementation and maintenance strategy and funding plan to deploy the comprehensive, standardized regional transit mapping and wayfinding system, and permits MTC to adopt a phased deployment for each system.
- 8) Requires each transit agency in MTC’s jurisdiction to only use the comprehensive, standardized regional transit mapping and wayfinding system by July 1, 2025, unless MTC adopts a schedule that sets out an alternative deployment timeline.
- 9) Requires transit operators in the MTC region to do all of the following by January 1, 2023:
 - a) Use open data standards to make available all routes, schedules, and fares in the General Transit Feed Specifications (GTFS) data format.
 - b) Make real-time transit vehicle data available in GTFS-Realtime or a similar data format considered best practice in the industry.
 - c) Track actual transmission of real-time information by transit vehicles and report that information to the commission to ensure that schedule predictions are available.
- 10) Make various findings and declarations.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes MTC as the transportation planning, coordinating, and financing agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.
- 2) Establishes the Regional Transit Coordinated Council (RTCC) within the MTC.
- 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.

- 4) Requires every transit system to enter into a joint fare revenue sharing agreement with connecting systems consistent with MTC's rules and regulations.
- 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.
- 6) Authorizes MTC, in coordination with CTCC, 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.
- 7) Authorizes MTC to withhold transit funding from a transit agency if a transit agency is not participating in CTCC and that they have complied with the standards.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS:

Public transit ridership has been declining for decades nationally and in California for many reasons, such the ability of more people to afford cars. The San Francisco Bay Area, which has the state's highest rates of transit use, has until recently resisted those trends. In 2017 and 2018, the region lost over five percent of its annual riders despite service increases. The COVID-19 pandemic and stay-at-home order led to a massive decline in transit ridership. Caltrain saw a 98% decline in ridership, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) saw an 88% decline in transit ridership. Bus lines in the Bay Area fared slightly better. San Francisco Metropolitan Transit Association (SFMTA) saw a 70% decline in ridership and AC Transit saw a 72% decline.

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.

Out of concern of the decline in transit ridership, coupled with the potential increase in population growth, MTC commissioned the University of California Institute of Transportation Studies (UC ITS) to conduct a study on the declining transit use in the Bay Area and to provide recommendations on how to improve it. The report, *What's Behind Recent Transit Ridership Trends in the Bay Area?* provides recommendations to improve transit ridership in the Bay Area. One of those recommendations was for the Bay Area's Partnership Board to initiate a

customer-oriented transportation program, with near-term actions focused in three areas. First, they should work to advance technology platforms that integrate trip planning and fare payment across jurisdictions and service providers. Travelers should be able to seamlessly pay for a ride on any transit operator (or combination of operators) the way they pay for anything else—by credit card, by mobile app, or by cash for the unbanked—instead of having separate, non-fungible accounts and applications for each operator. Second, they should explore and evaluate new mobility pilots, either in partnership with private sector mobility providers of various stripes or operated publicly, to improve first-last mile access to and from transit stations as a potential alternative to traditional fixed-route transit service in suburban parts of the region, where

subsidies of traditional transit service are high and the utility of this service is low. And third, they should work to develop regional support for policy standards, such as standards for data-sharing with private ridehail and other shared mobility operators.

In May of 2020, MTC created the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery 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 Task Force is 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 Task Force is expected to make recommendations in June of 2021.

The 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.

According to the author, “For decades, the San Francisco Bay Area has had dozens of different transit agencies providing disconnected, slow, and costly transit service to residents and visitors. Our institutions are siloed and decision-making processes and governance structures are byzantine. AB 629, the Bay Area Seamless and Resilient Transit Act, is an urgent and long-overdue measure that would finally put the Bay Area’s public transit systems on the path to seamlessness. While an important conversation regarding long-term network management reform is ongoing, this bill will take immediate, feasible steps toward integration and coordination between the systems. This will include a multi-agency fare pass pilot, implementation of real-time transit data for riders, and creation of a comprehensive wayfinding and mapping system at the regional level. In a post-COVID 19 world, AB 629 grasps the opportunity to rebuild the Bay Area’s transit system better than it was before, instead of returning us to a broken status quo in which only 4 percent of all trips were made with transit. The simple, commonsense improvements in AB 629 will bring near-term benefits to transit riders, while setting the Bay Area on the path to a seamlessly integrated, customer-focused transit system.”

This bill requires MTC to use the authority given by SB 1474 to require the 27 transit agencies to establish and maintain transit priority networks that will provide greater connectivity. In line with the UC ITS recommendation, it also requires MTC to create a pilot program for an accumulator pass that will reward users for taking multiple trips by capping the daily, weekly or monthly costs of riding transit. The accumulator pass would work across various transit agencies in the Bay Area.

Also in line with the UC ITS recommendation, this bill requires MTC to develop a comprehensive, standardized regional transit mapping and wayfinding system, including common branding for regional transit service and a shared digital mapping system. This bill also requires MTC to send three different reports to the Legislature on its progress.

SPUR, the Bay Area Council and Silicon Valley Leadership Group, writing in support of this bill, argue “Better transit integration can help regional transit recover from the COVID-19

pandemic, which has pushed transit operators to the brink of financial ruin. Regional transit in the Bay Area is the most dependent on riders for revenue. An integrated and seamless regional transit network will be easier to understand, and more affordable to use and to operate, making it a more competitive choice for thousands of potential riders, while also improving speed, reliability, and affordability for current users. This will help restore and grow the regional ridership that operators need for long-term financial security.”

Committee concerns: MTC currently has the authority to perform all the requirements set forth in this bill, and is considering these actions as part of the Blue Ribbon Task Force. The reports this bill requires MTC to send to the Legislature are reports they are currently in the process of drafting or likely will draft in the near future.

The Legislature should consider if it wishes to mandate a local agency to take actions it is already taking. This mandate could trigger a reimbursable mandate that the state originally was not responsible for paying.

Finally Blue Ribbon Task Force has not finalized its recommendations, and does not plan on finalizing them until June of 2021. The Legislature should consider if this bill is premature and should wait for the findings by the Task Force to be released.

Related Legislation: AB 455 (Bonta) 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). That bill will be heard in this committee on April 26th.

Previous legislation: 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 has been found to have made a reasonable effort to implement productivity improvements.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Interfaith Power & Light
 California Yimby
 Elders Climate Action, Norcal and SoCal Chapters
 Metropolitan Transportation Commission
 North Bay Leadership Council
 Silicon Valley Leadership Group
 Spur
 The Bay Area Council

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: David Sforza / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093