

San Francisco Transit Effectiveness Project (SFTEP)

SUMMARY

SFTEP Policy Advisory Group August 16, 2006 Meeting

City Hall, Room 201

Participants:

PAG Members

Steve Clark, TWU Local 200
Will Din, MTA Board of Directors
Bevin Dufty, SF Board of Supervisors
Steve Heminger, MTC
Nathaniel Ford, MTA
Irwin Lum, TWU Local 250-A
Peter Mezey, MTA Board of Directors
Jose Luis Moscovich, SFTCA
Dan Murphy, MTA CAC

MTA Staff

William Lieberman
Peter Straus
Ross Maxwell

Controller's Office Staff

Sally Allen
Liz Garcia
Corina Monzón
Peg Stevenson

TEP Consultant Team

Russ Chisholm, TMD
Bonnie Nelson, Nelson
Nygaard
Jay Primus, Nelson
Nygaard

Meeting Overview:

This document summarizes the third meeting of the SFTEP Policy Advisory Group (PAG). The PAG is one of three advisory bodies established to provide input, review, and policy-level guidance during the Transit Effectiveness Project (TEP). The PAG will be meeting throughout the TEP.

Nine PAG members, as well as representatives from the MTA, the Controller's Office, and the TEP consultant team attended this two-hour meeting. This was a second meeting of the PAG focused on the visioning process. The goals of this process are: to refine a vision for Muni, determine characteristics of a Muni system that will help it achieve that vision, determine measures of success, and identify policies that will need to be reviewed to achieve the vision.

Project Status Report:

MTA Planning Director William Lieberman opened the meeting. He reviewed the project's status, reporting that:

- Briefing book and stakeholder interviews are complete.
- Visioning is underway.
- Market research is underway.
- Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs) are being installed on 110 rubber-tired vehicles to collect necessary data for all bus routes for service analysis. Muni traffic checkers will focus on Light Rail Vehicle routes.

- Operations review is underway.
- Preliminary draft of cost allocation model has been developed.
- Development of Early Action Plan is underway, due to be ready for mid-September. Project team may elect to defer consideration of bus stop consolidation so that it can be joined with a more complete set of recommendations.

The following comments (**C:**) and responses (**R:**) were raised during the review of the project status.

C: Stop consolidation should be considered as an early action item, even if it is controversial. **R:** Discussion of item tabled until later.

C: More express and/or limited-stop service could be an early action item. **R:** These additional services would likely require additional funding and may obscure fundamental issues that the TEP is meant to address.

C: One possibility for an early action item is to improve day-to-day Muni operations, especially in terms of reliability, which may be accomplished with minimal capital investment.

Visioning:

Bonnie Nelson reviewed the role of the three advisory groups (PAG, Citizen Advisory Committee or CAC, and Technical/Regional Advisory Committee or TAC) and opportunities for public involvement during the study. Each advisory committee is independently going through the same visioning process, and the goal is to create an integrated overall vision from all three committees to be presented to the TEP Project Working Group, who will then submit the vision to the MTA Board for approval.

Bonnie presented the integrated vision document as it stood after the August 10th CAC and TAC visioning meetings. This was the CAC and TAC's second round of vision work. She provided a brief overview of the four sections of the vision document – vision, characteristics, measures, and policies – and then led a discussion of each section, summarized below.

Vision

Car ownership vs. driving

C: One comment was made to say that curbing excessive driving is more important than reducing car ownership. A dissenting comment was made to say that San Francisco's unique geography makes an emphasis on reducing car ownership appropriate in this vision statement because fewer cars in San Francisco would reduce the demand for parking and thereby improve quality of life.

Explicitness of vision and scope of TEP

C: A vision statement is about what Muni is aiming to do. So this vision statement should, perhaps, include language about improving Muni's efficiency.

C: The vision statement should be explicit about the notion that Muni needs to improve and meet its goals.

C: Is this vision too aggressive, or too big a leap from where Muni is today? If the goal of the TEP is to reshape Muni, then the vision needs to be big and bold. But if the goal of TEP is to just tweak the current Muni system, then there should be more focus in the vision statement itself on smaller, incremental, more measurable improvements. The latter seems more appropriate as a goal for the TEP than the former.

R: Project team has been asked to look at both short and long-term improvements. Visions are not tactical, they are about where we want the world to be, and are necessarily long-term. Good visions stand the test of time, and can serve several generations. Tactics to achieve a vision do not belong in a vision statement because they may change over time as Muni strives to achieve its vision. For example, a highly efficient Muni may not be sufficient to achieve a vision if it cannot carry enough people.

C: Would like to also see the pointed objectives of the TEP itself so that it has a clearly defined roadmap and clear measures of success. This may help to generate a clear connection between the TEP and the overall Muni vision.

Effectiveness

C: The first bullet should say "depends to a major extent" on transit, so as not to imply that it's completely dependent. The word "effectiveness" is too mushy and should be made more concrete and meaningful.

C: What makes Muni effective is sound service delivery; we need to make sure that it is delivered well.

Muni System Characteristics

Bonnie Nelson asked the group whether there were any characteristics not on the current list that should be added.

C: Should add "better local integration" (in addition to "regional integration") because transfers should not be an undue burden.

C: Efficient – a focus on bottom line unit costs, and that they increase at a reasonable rate.

C: Ubiquitous – serves every part of the City.

C: Frequent – must comment on the span of frequency, so that service runs more frequently later into the night to better match changing work schedules as well as increased travel demand on evenings/weekends.

C: Flexible

C: Responsive, reflecting the wishes/needs/expectations of customers.

C: Independent – Proposition E did not do enough to allow Muni to act autonomously, independent of political pressure.

C: Regional leader

C: Innovative

C: Customer service

C: Consistent, exceptional leadership (Board, ED, staff, unions)

Prioritization of characteristics

In order to provide a sense of priority from a comprehensive list of characteristics, PAG members were asked to name what they considered the top three characteristics. *Note: Only those characteristics that were named at least once are included in the following table.*

Characteristic	Nominations	Nominations (% of total)
Reliable	9	24%
Financially sustainable	6	16%
Fast	5	14%
Frequent	4	11%
Seamless integration with region	2	5%
Safe	2	5%
Understandable and legible	2	5%
Efficient	2	5%
Strategic	1	3%
Responsive	1	3%
Customer service	1	3%
Clean, comfortable, attractive	1	3%
Consistent exceptional leadership	1	3%

The process of prioritizing characteristics generated more discussion of the nature of the TEP and the vision for Muni. This included the following comments and questions:

Aspirational nature of TEP

C: The TEP process should be aspirational – it is Muni’s aspiration to become a world-class transit system, so financial considerations should not constrain the visioning process. As a subsequent task, financial realities will force the TEP to prioritize and remain grounded in reality, but that should not happen yet (though care must be taken not to inflate expectations). The public wants us to look at the big picture and create a big vision; that’s the expectation of the TEP. For the mid to long term, we should define the vision, how much it will cost, and then locate the funding rather than plan around current funding.

C: Muni’s own internal organizational inertia may be the biggest barrier to realizing the vision. As part of the TEP, Muni needs to do some soul searching within the organization, and this organizational development needs to be part of the TEP.

C: Muni must prove that it is a sound investment that merits additional investment. Delivering good service and providing a bold vision to make Muni truly exceptional will generate more public buy-in and excitement than a less aggressive vision. Pride in Muni is crucial, and one of the more poignant points made in stakeholder interviews.

Financial constraints

C: It would be good if the TEP would anticipate Muni’s financial needs to provide the desired amount and type of service, and then develop a predictable picture of Muni’s financial needs, both capital and operating. Much of this information has already been developed for Muni’s Short Range Transit Plans (SRTPs), but may need to be refined and made more realistic.

C: Muni has large opportunity and need to squeeze more service from the financial resources that it already has. To do this it must solve some of its operational issues.

Q: Do we have a good idea of Muni’s current infrastructure and potential (to become more efficient)? **R:** One task of the TEP is to figure out Muni’s latent potential.

C: Previous visions for Muni have not been realized because the funding resources were not aligned with these visions. The TEP needs to clearly define the financial path to realizing the vision.

C: Remember that the financial analysis is a subsequent step. It is likely that this analysis will not deflate a vision; Muni is, in some sense, in a relatively sound financial position, so the financial prospect for realizing the vision may be OK.

Measures of Success

C: Though Muni already provides a quarterly report on an extensive set of performance measures, the TEP presents an opportunity to rethink how to measure Muni's success, and could refine those existing measures to help make sure that Muni is moving in the right direction.

C: Cost effectiveness and financial sustainability are linked.

C: Passenger load may not be the best measure of crowding.

C: Ridership per capita may be a good proxy for mode share.

C: Muni should be accountable to passengers that it serves, but this is not easily measured.

C: The percent of scheduled service that is delivered is very important, including how Muni responds to unscheduled removals of vehicles from service.

C: Muni should focus on just 2-3 key measures so its focus is not too diffuse.

C: The list of measures is very strictly transit-oriented, but does not get at some of transit's purpose, such as economic vitality, economic development, access to jobs, or environmental impact.

C: As a way to avoid some tradeoffs (e.g., between access and speed), Muni should consider some more flexible ways of delivering service in low density areas. **R:** For foreseeable future, the vast majority of Muni service will be fixed-route, and TEP should focus on Muni's fixed route service.

C: If Muni is going to carefully monitor its performance, more attention must be paid to the quality and reliability of the data that is collected and reported.

C: Measures of success are better if they measure something that Muni can be held accountable for, so mode share may not be appropriate because it is influenced by many larger social changes and outside influences. But, on the other hand, mode share is a good measure for Muni because, along with customer satisfaction, it's a bottom line measure of its relative attractiveness and success.

C: Environmental progress will be made if Muni follows CARB mandates for cleaner vehicles, but meeting and funding that mandate is not automatic. Bus manufacturers are behind the mandate. As over half of Muni service is already zero-emission (electric), we should not emphasize this – it's one area in which Muni is already doing really well.

C: Accessibility is important issue, because population is aging, and paratransit costs can increase quickly.

Prioritization of measures

In order to provide a sense of priority from a comprehensive list of measures of success, PAG members were asked to name what they considered the top three measures. *Note: Only those measures that were named at least once are included in the following table.*

Measure	Nominations	Nominations (% of total)
Reliability	9	27%
Customer satisfaction	6	18%
Financial sustainability	6	18%
Transit travel speed	3	9%
Cost effectiveness	3	9%
Safety	2	6%
Coverage and access	2	6%
Mode share	1	3%
Customer experience	1	3%

The process of prioritizing measures generated discussion about reliability, which included the following comments and questions:

C: Real-time information will make reliability somewhat less important as a measure, but will not diminish the need for measuring it or its importance for many riders.

C: More frequent service will improve reliability because it will reduce crowding which makes the boarding process more variable.

Policies to be Reviewed

C: TEP should evaluate employer-funded parking downtown because it generates congestion that slows Muni.

C: TEP should evaluate Muni governance and independence; MTA needs more autonomy.

C: TEP should improve relationship between unions and Muni management.

C: Parking tax should be extended to hotels.

C: Parking tax collection efficiency should be improved.

C: TEP should explore financial implications of offering fare-free Muni service.

C: Customer information is sorely deficient and needs to be improved; perhaps there should be a new policy for customer information.

C: TEP should consider policies regarding privatization of at least some Muni service; not necessarily a recommendation, but should be open to all possibilities to best fulfill its mission and vision.