

San Francisco Transit Effectiveness Project (SFTEP)

SUMMARY

SFTEP Policy Advisory Group July 12, 2006 Meeting
City Hall

Following is a summary of the first 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 development of the Transit Effectiveness Project (TEP). The PAG will be meeting throughout the project. The second meeting helped to kick off the “visioning” phase – an early step to broadly define big picture goals before developing proposed service changes.

PARTICIPANTS

<i>PAG Members</i> Tilly Chang, SFCTA Will Din, MTA Board of Directors Bevin Dufty, SF Board of Supervisors Ann Flemer, MTC Nat Ford, MTA Ed Harrington, CCSF Controller Kevin Hughes, IBEW Local 6 Steve Kawa, Mayor’s Office Irwin Lum, TWU Local 250 A Peter Mezey, MTA Board of Directors Dan Murphy, MTA CAC	<i>MTA Staff</i> Bill Lieberman Peter Straus <i>Controller’s Office Staff</i> Sally Allen Corina Monzón Peg Stevenson Liz Garcia <i>TEP Consultant Team</i> Bonnie Nelson, Nelson Nygaard Jay Primus, Nelson Nygaard Julie Ortiz, CirclePoint
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OVERVIEW

Eleven PAG members, as well as representatives from the MTA, the Controller’s Office, and the TEP consultant team attended the two-hour meeting.

MTA Executive Director/CEO Nat Ford opened the meeting, noting that the TEP is a top priority for the MTA and will determine the shape and patterns of transit in the City for decades to come. MTA Planning Director Bill Lieberman provided a broad overview of the 18-month study being done jointly by the MTA and Controller’s Office. He noted that the City’s transit system works well, but it needs improvement to reflect current travel patterns and attract more riders, and the TEP will provide a blueprint for service delivery and financial stability. The study is not just about how service is planned, but also how it is put on the street, and it will provide MTA a program of projects for years to come.

Bonnie Nelson with the TEP consultant team explained 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 working independently on visioning. These visions will be presented both independently and in an amalgamated form to the TEP Project Working Group. The team will try to help each group achieve as much consensus as possible, although majority and minority comments will be noted. Final decision-making will rest with the MTA Board and Board of Supervisors.

Bonnie then provided an overview of a TEP briefing book given to members of all three advisory groups as a resource. (See www.sftep.com/Available Documents for a copy). She highlighted some overall trends based on data from a recent SFCTA on-board survey of MUNI riders and Census information. This data looks at the system as a whole and not line-by-line. The TEP will focus on line-by-line evaluation.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Following are questions/comments raised during review of the briefing book.

Coordination with Other Departments

Q: How will San Francisco Planning Department input get incorporated into the TEP, particularly projections for development planned for the 20-30 years and associated population growth? **A:** The TEP team is getting this through analysis of the San Francisco County Transportation Agency (SFCTA) transportation model that models future conditions and feeds into our study, as well as by input from the TAC. Also, a staff member from the City's Planning Department sits on the TAC.

Q: How does the Department of Parking and Traffic factor into the TEP? No mention is made of DPT as a co-partner. Increasing transit ridership is an important goal, and parking and traffic plays a role and needs to be addressed. **A:** The TEP focuses on MUNI service. While the TEP won't be looking at other department operations in detail, it certainly will to the extent they affect MUNI service. Conducting an overall analysis of the entire MTA would be too big to tackle at one time. The TEP team is trying to be comprehensive, but in a focused way. Also, a staff member from DPT sits on the TAC.

While making DPT more effective should be a separate study/process from the TEP, it is important to note that this is distinct from looking at how DPT affects MUNI service in speeding up/slowing down transit. In parts of the City, this has considerable impact on how MUNI operates.

Ridership Demographics

Q: Urban systems typically have many transit dependent riders. How does San Francisco compare? **A:** San Francisco has many fewer transit dependent riders, testimony to MUNI's place in the fabric of the City. It is the first and only choice

for many, unlike in other cities where transit is primarily a safety net for the poor who have no choice. For comparison purposes, in Atlanta, 60% of the population is transit dependent, primarily for work trips.

Q: Do you know where people who choose not to own cars are located?

A: Some of the lowest car ownership is located in the highest income brackets. Dense urban areas with good transit and walkable streets have the highest amount of people without cars regardless of income.

Q: How significant is the mode share for bicycles? **A:** Minor

Q: It has been difficult to get accurate ridership data; how will this be addressed?

A: When the TEP team began to analyze existing ridership data, the need to expedite purchase of more Automatic Passenger Counters (APC) became apparent. More APCs will help ensure the team gathers accurate data on a line-by-line basis. The team also needs to cross reference data with fare box revenue for each line to get a better handle on how many people get on and off vehicles and where.

Service Delivery

Q: Does decline in speed reflect service cutbacks? **A:** Yes, but while there have been cuts in service, there have been additions, too. We also have to account for putting time in for proper breaks for drivers and this factors into speed.

Proposition E data shows that almost 20% more time has to be assumed just to maintain the current schedule. Roughly 5% of scheduled service is not provided every day due to a variety of reasons.

Q: MUNI's fleet is geared toward rush hour -- heavy, dense trips, but this runs counter to setting up a system for off-hours. **A:** This is always a balance; small buses are not much cheaper to run than big buses, because you have to pay operators the same. Transit agencies have to design service for the largest crowd of day, which means less will be off peak unless you have a back-up fleet of smaller vehicles.

Maintaining a separate smaller fleet would pose challenges on multiple fronts: operators would have to change buses during shifts and facilities would be necessary to store buses when switching fleets in a land locked City. Our stakeholders need to understand these challenges.

The question of night service is worth examining further. In Richmond, for example many people have requested off peak service, but in other areas it might make more sense to have a dial a ride approach. Knowing the operational cost per route will help address this.

MUNI has the flattest peak to off peak ratio in the industry; buses stay out all day, so it is interesting that people still have this perception.

Public sentiment about evening service is connected with how easy people perceive living in the City without a car; whether or not they use night service, knowing that they could go to a movie and get home on MUNI is important.

Q: How do the variety of vehicles and associated parts MUNI must maintain affect overall cost? Is it a lot higher than for other transit agencies?

A: AECOM, part of the TEP consulting team, will be looking at this and whether standardization would be more cost effective. While there are great examples of standardization in the industry at large, such as Southwest Airlines, in San Francisco we need to bid everything out and this may not work.

Balancing economical operation with riders' interests is difficult and there is inherent tension between the two. You could consider differentiated costs to provide amenities for riders willing to pay more.

Potholes and poor roadway condition damage buses, contribute to high maintenance costs, and should also be considered.

VISIONING

Following is summary of PAG member responses to the question, "What should the vision for MUNI be and how would you measure its success?"

- Attract choice riders without disenfranchising current ridership. Measures: mode share and sustainability.
- Provide a safe, clean environment for drivers and riders. Reliability. A reliable revenue source without budget cuts one year to the next. A redirected, continual funding source that can always improve itself.
- Create a reliable system with attractive service that draws passengers. Measures: total passengers and mode share, but these aren't the end all, be all.
- Fiscal sustainability, cost effectiveness per trip. A fully realized MUNI should be competitive w/auto for travel time. Even in a dense City like ours, it shouldn't take as long as it does to travel 3-4 miles.
- Make MUNI the number one choice of San Franciscans to get around the City. Measure: people choose to ride.
- Provide a safe, comfortable service that is informative and easy for riders to maneuver. Time is lost time from people trying to figure things out.
- MUNI should improve mankind and the quality of life in San Francisco. People should see MUNI like our vistas and landmarks – it's what makes

the City where people want to live. Measures: significant increase in mode share, increased speed with a target of the best travel speeds from the last 10 years or in history. Fares held at the same level.

- All that has been mentioned plus travel time and safety, and consideration of space and crowding on vehicles. Unless you can get on vehicle, everything else doesn't do much good.
- Make MUNI the number one choice for riders. Ensure reliability and cleanliness.
- Address the linkage with traffic and parking. Given that MUNI doesn't have extensive, dedicated Right of Way, this limits us and contributes to the cost per mile and schedule delays. Explore how effective dedicated right of way has been, and use the new Third Street corridor as a way to measure from the beginning.
- Evaluate the impact of mechanical failure rate. Which modes fail and what causes this? What is the correlation between these failures and ridership and how to they affect cost? What can we do to address elapsed time? All of this can be done without a major capital investment. MUNI has dedicated funding through Prop E, we are close, just need more. How do we attract more riders?
- Focus on service areas with low car ownership and in other areas, during AM and PM peak hours. Overall, MUNI moves more people over an area with limited right of way in high density, hilly terrain, under difficult circumstances, per dollar spent than any other transit provider.
- Emphasize public safety, which is not just the responsibility of police. We need a community transit perspective, and multiple city department involvement: Reward members of public who help us improve the system. Continue to educate the public to support transit.
- Address the budget deficit. One third of vehicles are not on the street. There is an environment of poor maintenance and scarcity; we need more honesty.
- Involve youth in this effort to ensure transit meets their needs. Young people make up largest number of riders.
- Further examine vehicle head count. One thing to say cost effective, but if not getting job done, doesn't matter. MUNI is lean on staff.
- With cuts over last few years, head count of mechanics and operators is down, and this delayed the opening of Third Street. I'd like to see benchmarking. We have many riders and higher maintenance needs and

costs than agencies that run just one type of vehicle. A diverse fleet has cost implications. With this diversity, how can we be more cost effective?

- Address management issues. Data shows that the number of labor hours to revenue hours is very high. For every revenue hour on the street, the actual number of labor hours is 40% higher than other cities like Boston. This may be a partly a factor of our contractual arrangements, although we don't know all the reasons.
- Be seen as the #1 transit provider in America.
- Create a vision that adds a little poetry to the prose to all that has been said: for example, after having taken a ride, the rider feels he/she had a satisfactory experience and feels good.
- Look at how to take advantage of leverage that other transit agencies bring. Look at the mode share of all transit, not just MUNI. Draw on examples like when Fast Pass was expanded to BART, which for little cost got more of the market. Explore more ways to make SAMTRANS, Golden Gate, and others more accessible to public. Participate in technology advances being tested in other cities. Expedite MUNI's Next Bus system. Look at keeping fares steady while taking advantage of premium service through TransLink technology, fare policies, etc.
- Address the idea of ubiquity. Can you get with one size fits all, one fare, one look, one feel? This is what we have been trying to do, but should we differentiate service? Maybe differentiating by price will keep riders who don't choose MUNI from dropping out.
- Consider the inherent tension between efficiency and effectiveness. Would take effectiveness first any day versus just looking at bottom line.
- Make service more accessible to the casual rider and information about service more legible. Address youth and diversity of ridership that may have very different transit experiences.
- Address the needs of Spanish-speaking and Asian riders who constitute much of the ridership on weekends and for young riders that comprise a big population in the summer. Provide the public more comprehensive, understandable information about special event service.
- Consider the cost implications of growing paratransit needs of the disabled and senior communities.
- Make the trip on MUNI become the destination.