

TO: Marketing, Planning & Legislative Committee

DATE: October 29, 2019

FROM: Rick Ramacier
General Manager *RR*

SUBJECT: Status of FASTER Bay Area

Summary

As you know, a coalition of interests calling themselves FASTER, are strongly considering putting together a package of significant and regional transportation improvements for the Bay Area. These interests include the Silicon Valley Leadership Group (SVLG), the Bay Area Council (BAC), San Francisco Planning & Urban Research (SPUR), Transform, and leading Bay Area tech businesses (i.e. Facebook). Their goal is to receive legislative authority to place an initiative on the ballot in all nine counties of the Bay Area in November of 2020, that if enacted would raise upwards of \$110 billion over 40 years for transportation improvements.

State Senator Jim Beall has expressed strong interest in sponsoring legislation that would place FASTER's initiative on the ballot in November 2020. It is unknown at this time if other Bay Area state legislatures are looking to support such legislation. However, it is likely that these discussions have begun.

Unanswered Questions

Many questions remain to be answered relative to a FASTER initiative. Perhaps first is the question of who would actually place something on the ballot and then be responsible for its implementation oversight and resource allocation processes. As of this writing, FASTER has not made a definitive statement on this question. They have expressed that one consideration is possibly having the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) take on these roles. For its part, MTC – via a letter to FASTER signed by MTC Chair, Scott Haggerty – has stated that they see MTC taking on these roles, should the state legislature authorize a FASTER initiative be placed on the ballot. However, until legislation authorizing FASTER going to the ballot, the role of MTC will not be totally clear.

Another question is what will be funded. To date, most of the talk been around regional and “seamless” transit improvements. Projects such as a second BART tube across the bay, building a one brand seamless express bus network, additional ferry service, and providing “low income” people with “half fares” are among the things most commonly mentioned by FASTER proponents. I would note that as of this writing, neither members of the Bay Area state delegation, nor MTC have indicated any kind project or program preferences for a FASTER related ballot initiative.

There are also questions of revenue sources to fund a FASTER initiative, while a number of different ideas have been discussed, it would seem there is a good deal of coalescing around the idea of a nine-county one cent sales tax levy to support FASTER.

While this would raise the \$110 billion that would be sought in FASTER, legislatively a number of challenges are posed by a one cent sales tax increase within much of the Bay Area. These issues include various local sales tax cap issues as well as perceived opportunity cost issues, not to mention other competing measures. Finally, the regressive nature of sales taxes may be starting to emerge as issue of concern within the political debate landscape.

County Connection Response

The larger transit operators have included us in providing the FASTER proponents with some general broad project areas to fund with a FASTER initiative. These concepts have included funding express bus or bus rapid transit in the I-680 and SR4 corridors. We have indicated a strong willingness to have such services be a part of a larger - one brand - regional express bus package that is part of a larger regional transit system. The FASTER proponents have responded positively to this.

Given, that the authorization to place a FASTER initiative on the ballot in the nine-county region has to go through the state legislature, it is more than likely that members of the Bay Area delegation will want to leave their mark on such legislation. And, given that this legislation will likely move in January 2020 if it does at all, now is the time for County Connection to weigh in with our delegation members with our interests.

Thus, as mentioned at your October 24, 2019 board meeting, we will schedule meetings with our delegation members starting in early November, 2019. And, we will work with other East Bay suburban transit operators to create a unified approach to FASTER.

Action Requested

No action is requested as this is provided for information only. Staff would also welcome any feedback on any projects or programs to be included in FASTER, or on FASTER itself.