

County Connection Advisory Committee Board Report, March 2022

Our purpose is to bring stakeholder/rider feedback to the County Connection Board to help it understand factors which impact the system's ridership.

Actions since January 2022

- Welcomed Amina Bret-Mounet as a strong new voice and she will be an asset.
- With the support of staff, we are building the team and its effectiveness by:
 - Reaching out to directors to encourage continued recruitment efforts.
 - Using the consent calendar to free-up time in our meetings for ideation and discussions.
 - Developing a member orientation program to improve our advisory capacity.
- Learned about the budget process and the impact of current geopolitical/economic issues on operating factors.
- Received updates on the Board's current initiatives and the agency's fiscal and operating environment.
- Started a dialogue about key rider/demand-side considerations and ideas for addressing them. (See below)

Insights for the Board

At our March meeting, we focused on the rider (demand-side) of services and the current concerns of the ridership. We ask the Board to consider:

- What will be the impact of rising fuel prices on the agency's cost structure? How might that impact fares?
- How can escalating gas prices and rising commuting costs help attract more riders, especially as more return to their workplace?
 - Consider developing marketing campaigns and strategies to reach new riders (e.g., social media, advertising, booths in popular downtown gathering areas, at BART stations, schools, high volume pedestrian areas, incentive programs, etc.)
- What programs can be developed to encourage former commuters to start using transit again? Where are the opportunities?
 - Commuters reconcile longer travel times and rising fuel costs with the perceived risks that go with taking transit (e.g., wait times, delays, COVID19 and public safety). Factored into this will be a continued desire for the sense of control and comfort felt when one is in their own car. Drivers will be less likely to abandon their cars for public transit unless there are strong incentives, the ride is timely and convenient, and there are measures to overcome those concerns:
 - Virus worries remain and along with them continued tensions of shifting social/ public health norms
 - Anecdotes from "early adopters" focus on disruptive riders on BART. Ongoing concerns about community transmission of COVID reinforce commonly held negative perceptions.
 - Changed service headways and routes can mean longer commutes than driving or rideshare.
 - All of this will be difficult to overcome, requiring concerted programs/marketing to change the widely-held notions and make it as convenient for riders to use transit as possible. Public information campaigns that help overcome the negative notions and assure riders they can ride safely while reaping the other benefits will make a difference.
- Review existing routes and schedules to reflect evolving rider/trip demand, especially for intra-county riders not relying on BART for a segment of their trip.
- What programs can be developed to engage students of all ages on the merits of public transit use and plant seeds for the future?
 - The pandemic shift away from public transit usage impacts youth awareness of the merits of using transit—as well as the life skills on how to use it. Parental aversion spills over to influence them.
 - Parent and school-focused public information/outreach campaigns and programs could be developed for all forms of public transit to encourage transit use for daily trips, especially as parents begin to commute to work again.

Requests of the Board

- 1) Please consider the strategic questions posed above and let us know how we can provide further feedback on them.
- 2) For the unrepresented districts listed below, please continue your recruiting efforts. Consider constituents who will bring a range of stakeholder perspectives such as students of all ages, commuters, intra-county travelers, veterans, disabled, seniors, parents, and other underrepresented groups.

We seek representation for:

- Clayton
- Lafayette
- Walnut Creek
- Concord
- Martinez
- San Ramon

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie McWee, Chair