

To: Marketing, Planning, & Legislative Committee

Date: 10/25/2023

From: Melody Reeb, Director of Planning, Marketing, & Innovation

Reviewed by: WC.

SUBJECT: Regional Transportation Planning Studies

Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on public transit in terms of ridership, operations, and funding. These impacts have continued to linger as we emerge from the pandemic, and transit agencies must figure out how to respond to changes that will likely become the new normal. This is particularly significant for the Bay Area, where high rates of remote work and a transit network oriented towards traditional commuter patterns have resulted in an imbalance between ridership demand and supply of service. Congestion has also increased significantly despite the fact that workers are commuting less, and as the economy has recovered, traffic patterns have evolved and become more unpredictable due to an increase in non-commute travel. In addition, rising costs and inflation have furthered the gap between operating revenues and expenses, particularly among transit agencies that have historically relied heavily on fare revenues.

In order to address these challenges and plan for a new normal, County Connection staff is actively involved in various strategic planning studies being conducted regionally, countywide, and more specifically within the agency. These efforts are very much interrelated and will require close coordination to ensure consistency in how investments are prioritized. These plans will also provide an opportunity to better understand and more clearly define the ways in which transit agencies can improve coordination on the regional, countywide, and/or local level.

Regional Plans:

There are several planning efforts and projects currently being developed or already underway across the Bay Area region to address these issues, some of which began before the pandemic in an effort to increase coordination among the region's transit operators. These pre-pandemic efforts included the Fare Coordination and Integration Study (FCIS) and the Regional Mapping & Wayfinding Project. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) established the Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force in May 2020, which ultimately led to the development of the Bay Area Transit Transformation Action Plan (Action Plan). The Action Plan identified near-term actions, which included advancing the existing fare integration and wayfinding projects as well as new initiatives around bus transit priority and regional network planning.

Fare Coordination and Integration

The FCIS study began in late 2019 and ultimately recommended implementing a phased set of pilot projects. This included the Clipper BayPass pilot, which was rolled out last year, as well as unified inter-operator transfers, which will be implemented with the rollout of the next generation Clipper system in 2024.

Regional Mapping & Wayfinding

MTC's Regional Mapping & Wayfinding project will develop regional branding and design standards, prototypes for pilot implementation, and a governance and O&M strategy. A subregional pilot is planned for the East Bay and will include County Connection's service area.

BusAID & Transit Priority Policy

The initiative to advance bus transit priority will be twofold. The first component, Bus Accelerated Infrastructure Delivery (BusAID), will focus on near-term, quick-build projects that can be implemented within the next year. The second component will be the development of a regional Transit Priority Policy that will complement a similar statewide policy being developed by Caltrans.

Transit 2050+

Regional network planning will be incorporated into MTC's Regional Transportation Plan update, Plan Bay Area 2050+. Historically, projects are submitted by individual agencies or project sponsors and prioritized based on a set of evaluation criteria. In contrast, Transit 2050+ will develop transit strategies with the goal of creating a comprehensive regional network concept to be incorporated into the broader Plan Bay Area 2050+ plan.

Countywide Plans:

In parallel with many of the regional efforts, there are also several countywide transportation plans and projects currently being led by the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA) in coordination with the local jurisdictions and transit agencies. These plans are meant to establish the vision and priorities for the transportation network within the more specific context of Contra Costa County.

Countywide Transportation Plan

The Countywide Transportation Plan (CTP) is the county's long-range transportation plan that parallels and provides input into the regional plan, Plan Bay Area. The last CTP update was in 2017, and the update will respond to changes in the transportation landscape and incorporate the recently updated Action Plans from each of the five subregions.

Integrated Transit Plan

The Integrated Transit Plan (ITP) will provide guidance on improving the transit network within the County to better serve local and regional travelers. The plan will inform the broader CTP and identify projects that support enhanced services with the goal of attracting more riders to transit.

Countywide Smart Signals Project & IDEA TSP

The goal of the Countywide Smart Signals project is to upgrade traffic signal and communications systems throughout the County and allow for interconnectivity between the local jurisdictions and other agencies. One of the key features will be Transit Signal Priority (TSP), a technology that is currently being tested in the Cities of Concord and Walnut Creek as part of the IDEA TSP project.

Agency Plans:

Finally, staff will be undertaking three major planning efforts within the next year. An onboard passenger survey is currently underway and will provide important insight into our riders and what their needs are, which can help inform the decisions made in the ITP and Transit 2050+. In addition, County Connection was awarded a grant earlier this spring to study four major corridors within its service area to identify transit priority improvements that will increase the speed and reliability of buses. TSP will almost certainly be considered as a potential strategy, and the results of the IDEA TSP pilot will be used in that assessment. Finally, staff will be completing a bus stop access study that will consider stop consolidation

and improvements. Both studies are intended to provide a list of recommended projects that can be included in the various countywide and regional plans.

Financial Implications:

None, for information only.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

None