



Date: Dec 16, 2020
Attention: County Connection Board Members,
Chair Keith L. Haydon, Jr, County Connection Board
Re: Item 7.b.1. Potential State Legislation on Bay Area Transit Governance or
Coordination*

Dear Board Members,

We are writing today to urge you to consider the benefits of reforms that can lead to a more connected, higher ridership, and more equitable transit system for Central Contra Costa County residents, and to address concerns about potential risks.

Seamless Bay Area is one of dozens of advocacy groups that support creating a more connected, equitable, effective, and high ridership transit system in the San Francisco Bay Area for both local and regional travel. The initiative to bring about a regionally coordinated transit system includes at least sixty supporters in the County Connection service area. Seamless Bay Area was a primary sponsor of the legislation referenced in the staff report, AB 2057, and we are an active participant in the region's Blue Ribbon Task Force, working alongside other groups like SPUR, TransForm, Urban Habitat, and Bay Area Council.

The reforms we advocate for have the potential to provide significant benefits to Central Contra Costa County residents, and especially to low-income and transit dependent riders by enabling more service, better connectivity, affordable fares, and a seamless customer experience. Reforms supporting a more connected, seamless system are also critical to building the public support for reliable, long-term funding for transit's expansion and improvement, both locally and regionally. They are critical to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, the Bay Area's largest source, and averting irreversible climate change expected within 11 years unless drastic steps are taken.

We wish to give credit where credit is certainly due: We believe that County Connection is a well-run, efficient, highly competent medium-sized bus operator in the Bay Area. County Connection has shown a strong commitment to serving its riders; to equity in prioritizing service to disadvantaged communities; and to providing innovative discount programs like fare capping and free transit on certain lines. County Connection has relatively low operating costs compared to many Bay Area Transit agencies. County Connection's leadership has shown notable willingness to collaborate regionally on important issues such as regional fare integration.

Yet, despite its effective leadership, County Connection faces many of the same challenges as the Bay Area's 26 other transit agencies; declining per capita ridership; buses getting stuck in

traffic on highways and roads; and limited resources to implement policies and programs due to its small size and limited budget.

Recent research from the funded by Mineta Transportation Institute (<https://transweb.sjsu.edu/sites/default/files/2001-DeRobertis-Characteritistics-Effective-Metropolitan-Transit.pdf>) examined other regions with high and growing transit ridership that provide greater levels of mobility for residents of all incomes. Those regions share in common policies such as integrated fares, integrated routes and schedules, and higher levels of service overall in both suburban areas and urban areas. To implement such policies, those regions also share in common a “Transit Network Manager” entity that has the clear mandate to integrate and coordinate multiple modes and agencies. In addition to governance reforms that enable seamless integration of modes, greater levels of funding are essential to get more people on transit - Seamless Bay Area supports a major regional funding measure to raise billions more for transit operations.

The staff report asserts that the main goal of prior legislation, AB 2057, was to “to build a better regional system, possibly at the expense of local transit services.” We believe the evidence from other regions demonstrates that governance reforms to create a seamless regional system actually correlate with *better* local service, evidenced by more local service hours and higher ridership overall -- not worse service. The prior legislation seeks to create a more connected, multi-modal, equitable system and makes no reference to prioritizing regional service or regional needs over local service. I encourage you to read the full text of AB 2057 here: https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200AB2057.

We welcome the deeper engagement with local elected officials in ongoing processes to identify reforms and additional funding that can lead to a higher-ridership transit system, building off of the best practices in other regions. We hope that we can together advance legislation that supports and expands local transit, enables better connectivity and access with other systems, and puts us in the position to win the public’s confidence to support significant additional new funding for transit expansion.

Sincerely,

Ron Kilcoyne, Vice Chair & Board Member, Seamless Bay Area
Walnut Creek Resident

Ian Griffiths, Policy Director, Seamless Bay Area
www.seamlessbayarea.org