



June 11, 2020

Metropolitan Transportation Commission  
375 Beale Street, Suite 700  
San Francisco, CA 94105

RE: Bay Area Express Lanes Network for Plan Bay Area 2050 - MTC Operations Committee  
Agenda Item #6b

Dear MTC Operations Committee Members and Staff:

We write to you today regarding the Bay Area Express Lanes Network for Plan Bay Area 2050 amidst unprecedented economic scarcity and uncertainty and a society grappling with racial and economic inequality like no other time in recent history.

We would like to thank Commissioners for your support of an equitable and GHG-reducing express lane plan at the May 7th Operations Committee meeting, including:

- "Support for a regional express bus network, with emphasis on increasing equity outcomes, filling in transit gaps, and lowering GHG emissions";
- "Support for projects which help minimize greenhouse gas emission (GHG) increases by not constructing new lanes"; and
- "Support for greater connectivity by closing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane gaps to prevent degradation of HOV lanes."

As conveyed in the SPUR/Transform May 7th letter to the Commission, we strongly support staff's analysis that in completing the Bay Area Express Lanes Network, MTC should prioritize:

- **Conversion of existing travel lanes** to express lanes, and
- Significant **enhancement and equity-focused design of our regional express bus service**, other high-capacity travel options such as carpool and vanpool programs, and travel demand management measures.

### **Recommended Strategy Changes**

Unfortunately, staff's proposal still includes 160 miles of highway lane widening projects without presenting sufficient justification. Plan Bay Area 2050 must advance a regional express lanes network that can be delivered quickly within our ever-tightening fiscal constraints, and that maximizes person throughput, single occupancy vehicle trip reduction, local and global air pollution reduction, and social equity. Toward these objectives, we recommend the following:

- Regional *express lane network infrastructure* prioritization:
  - **Commit to directing future federal, state, and regional funding for express lane projects that convert carpool and general purpose lanes before any widenings**, excluding those projects that are already under construction or already candidates for 2020 funding.<sup>1</sup>
- Regional express lane network *mobility strategies*:
  - **Commit to planning, funding, and implementing a regionally integrated high ridership express bus network, including high-priority Regional Express Transit Network (ReX) lines and other high ridership express bus improvements submitted by public agencies** (see Attachment A) for inclusion in Plan Bay Area 2050, with improvements taking place within the next ten years.
  - **Create a flexible fund to support additional equity-centered actions that emphasize person-throughput and trip reduction across the region --** including projects, programs, and policies -- similar to those contemplated by the Hwy 101 Mobility Action Plan.<sup>2</sup>
- Additional regional *equity mitigations*:
  - Commit to a **regional low-income discount** for express lane users, and **discounted or free** express bus service for low income residents.
  - Commit to delivering **express bus options that serve low income and communities of color** through route selection, service plans, and first/last mile investments that are reflective of community feedback and engagement.

### Ongoing work following Plan Bay Area Blueprint Adoption

We also recommend the following ongoing planning actions after the adoption of the Plan Bay Area Blueprint:

- Commit to launching a collaborative **planning process for a regionally integrated high quality express bus network within the next two years** in partnership with relevant agencies.
- Partner with relevant countywide agencies and key stakeholders to **establish regionally consistent express lane metrics and targets** related to cost-effectiveness, VMT, GHG, air pollution, person throughput, operating speeds, estimated out of pocket costs to communities of concern, and other outcomes.
- In cases where a highway widening/expansion project is being considered, and where the project has not yet proceeded into the construction phase, **require countywide agencies to prepare a study that compares (a) expansion and (b) conversion in terms of VMT reduction, person throughput, equity measures, and other key performance targets**. For each widening/expansion proposal, this study must be completed prior to:
  - The inclusion of the express lane widening project in the RTP, and

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<sup>1</sup> This includes dual express lane projects that involve converting one lane and widening one lane in each direction. In these cases, convert the lane first and only widen if performance metrics are not met with the conversion.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.101mobilityactionplan.com/>

- The provision of funding or recommendation of funding by MTC to the express lane widening project.
- Require countywide transportation agencies to study and implement mobility and equity strategies prior to the allocation of funds for express lane projects beyond the design phase, including:
  - **A Mobility Action Plan for each corridor** to identify the most promising equitable person throughput and VMT reduction strategies.
  - **An Equity Study for each corridor** to identify and commit to actions that result in maximum benefits to Communities of Concern as it relates to access to opportunity, affordability, and community health.

## Summary

MTC must prioritize a wiser, not wider, approach to express lane planning, unlocking untapped capacity on our highways. A frequent and truly rapid regional express bus network, coupled with other mode shift strategies, running on existing and future express lanes and other transit-priority lanes offers a practical, efficient, cost-effective, and adaptable approach to expanding high quality regional transportation options in uncertain times. Planned carefully, these transportation strategies are also essential to shift express lanes from a regressive pain point in Plan Bay Area 2050 to a progressive vehicle for equitable access.

If MTC adopts the above recommendations, our organizations will gain greater confidence that MTC's Express Lane network will be a powerful component of our regional plan that we can afford to implement to help our region achieve the goals set out in Plan Bay Area 2050. The time for bold, principled, and pragmatic action is now.

Thank you for your consideration,

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# Attachment A: Regional Express Bus Concept for Plan Bay Area 2050

