

Regional Measure 2 in the Bay Area:

Our Top Three Priorities Should Be

The Transbay Terminal,

Translink and the

BART Tube Seismic Retrofit

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In the Bay Area, there is a growing need to more effectively manage growth in travel demand. While there is a high desire to increase capacity on the fringes, where capacity increases are easier to implement, the Bay Area should focus on first shoring up the existing transit infrastructure. The opportunity exists now to capitalize on the excellent existing transit infrastructure. All too often, new projects overshadow existing infrastructure, when better infrastructure management and re-investment often can produce the greatest benefits to the largest number of people.

Regional Measure 2 was designed to relieve pressure on freeways by providing options to driving alone. However, in order to more efficiently utilize current infrastructure, the first items of Measure 2 that should be implemented are those that aim to improve the existing transit system and create more integration with existing regional services. Not only will these improvements have the potential to benefit the greatest number of people who already use transit, they will improve the overall transit network, encouraging more people to utilize it.

While all of the projects listed under Regional Measure 2 are beneficial, the Transbay Terminal project, the TransLink project, and the BART tube seismic retrofit project are the three that should receive priority. These three projects serve the goal of encouraging greater use of the existing transit infrastructure, maximizing efficiency. Each project is unique and serves a specific purpose, however all three will increase the viability and attractiveness of the Bay Area's transit network. This paper will describe the benefits of these three projects and how they will best help attain the goals of Regional Measure 2.

Transbay Terminal Project

San Francisco has a thriving downtown and is the region's principal transportation hub. However, transit converging on downtown San Francisco from other parts of the region is poorly connected to the city's own extensive transit system. Furthermore, connections from one part of the region to another are often slow and difficult. The Transbay Terminal has the potential to be the hub of the region's transit network, linking the various modes making it easier for people to get where they are going in San Francisco and beyond.

Among the largest deterrents to transit use are wait and transfer times, for example, if one needs to walk between buses and BART or Muni, as is often the case in downtown San Francisco. Currently, there is no direct connection between BART, Muni, CalTrain and the Transbay bus terminal. Proposed improvements to the Transbay Terminal will create such connections among the various Bay Area transit modes and will greatly help to simplify and expedite transfers and therefore commutes. From Pleasanton to Fairfield to San Jose to Petaluma, all regions of the Bay Area will benefit from speedier transfers and a more unified transit system.

The importance of focusing on this transportation hub cannot be stressed enough. Improving transit and highways on the fringes only serves to encourage people to locate where commutes appear to be shorter and less stressful – where the highways are wide, the trains empty and subsidies high. Reducing travel times within downtown San Francisco will continue to make San Francisco an attractive place for businesses to locate in comparison to the fringe areas of the region, where business location simply encourages more drive-alone behavior. Investing in a new Transbay Terminal will make

the city center more attractive to private investors and in the process, will encourage greater transit use.

It is also essential to implement projects that are highly useful to the greatest number of people. This describes the Transbay Terminal project. All too often in the past, public support for big projects falters after cheaper fringe projects are completed and then fail to succeed. This will not happen with Transbay Terminal improvements because transit demand already exists so the project will show results immediately.

Translink Project

Electronic multi-system transit fare cards are a cost-effective means for improving the ease of use of the transportation system. Implementation of the Translink farecard at all major transit providers throughout the region will play an important part in improving the attractiveness and efficiency of the existing transit system. Simply put, it is more efficient to fill empty seats on an existing system than to expand the system.

The Translink farecard, by enabling people to seamlessly pay for a journey that may span several modes and several operators, enables transit properties to fill those empty seats on services that already exist. Furthermore, a uniform payment system shared among the transit operators may be a first step toward greater agency coordination, reducing redundant agency overhead costs. After a phase-in period using the more streamlined technology, the Translink card should be a great sales incentive, and a method for agencies to emphasize ease of use. A contactless card that decreases boarding time and allows for more accurate accounting is also beneficial to each transit agency. Additionally, greater trip information can be collected to learn the real travel behavior of customers so that service can be more optimally designed.

If transit is seen as a burdensome way of moving around the Bay Area, with different fare cards required for different services, more people may decide to drive. Implementing the Translink farecard system quickly will encourage people to utilize the current transit system – and will do so without any major new infrastructure investment.

BART Tube Seismic Retrofit

Ensuring the stability and safety of the existing transit infrastructure should be a top priority because hundreds of thousands of people already rely upon it, and the transbay BART tube is one of the most critical links in the Bay Area if a major earthquake strikes the region. In fact, the U.S. Geological Survey has predicted that at least one major earthquake may hit the Bay Area within the next 30 years, one potentially as strong or stronger than the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake which was centered about 50 miles south of the San Francisco¹.

In the aftermath of the Loma Prieta earthquake, BART was the primary link between the East Bay and San Francisco while the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge was closed. A future earthquake could pose a serious threat to the transbay tube. The importance of preventing loss of life and maintaining this physical connection is vital to the economy and sense of normalcy to the public.

A major earthquake that disrupts the commute pattern of the Bay Area will have serious economic impacts on businesses and industry on both sides of the Bay. Service disruptions will create longer commutes, or worse - blocked commutes, causing businesses to lose money in an already taxing situation. Furthermore, low-income workers may not be able to get to work, creating financial difficulty for those who do not

¹ www.BART.gov

have such luxuries as time-off pay with salaried jobs. While the few days after an earthquake will cause disruption regardless of whether or not transportation links are severed, prolonged disruption of service will cause further strain in an already difficult situation.

After a major traumatic event such as a devastating earthquake, having something familiar, such as BART, return to service within days helps put the pieces of normalcy back into everyday life. This is a very important aspect of ensuring that service remains stable. Returning to normal after a major disaster is a potent force in the healing process, and seismically retrofitting the transbay tube will help to insure that in the event of an earthquake it will be less likely that a critical link between San Francisco and the East Bay will be severely impacted.

The BART seismic retrofit project is the third project that should receive high-priority status under Regional Measure 2, because it maintains the vitality of the current infrastructure, while perhaps putting to ease safety concerns among current and future customers.

Conclusion

This paper has presented reasons for investing and re-investing in the existing transit network. Maintaining the vitality of the existing system is essential in maintaining customer service levels and insuring safety, while at the same time encouraging increased efficiency. Making the current system easier to use will keep existing customers using the system and their happiness will encourage others to look into transit, without having to resort to spending on piece-meal projects on the fringe.

The other projects under Regional Measure 2 are very important, but creating a desirable, safe, unified system beforehand will increase demand on existing services, which is when the other projects should follow. To a large extent, the success of projects further out depends on a system that currently works well and is customer friendly. By unifying all transit systems with a new Transbay terminal and the Translink farecard system, and by insuring the safety of the transbay tube in the event of an earthquake, the goals of Regional Measure 2 will be met.

Finally, preserving the vitality of existing transit system is also important so the sprawling growth trend is slowed. Population growth is inevitable, but congestion growth may not be. The first step in utilizing the funds that Regional Measure 2 provides should be to sustain the already-built transit system, and maximizing its utilization and desirability. If commutes on existing infrastructure decline in level of service in the public eye, development further out (where transit is less feasible and more expensive) becomes more enticing. Therefore, the goals of Regional Measure 2 are accomplished more effectively if the Transbay terminal, Translink farecard and the BART tube seismic retrofit projects are implemented before all other projects.