



October 26, 2012

The Honorable Katherine Feinstein
Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco
400 McAllister Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Judge Feinstein:

The following is in response to the 2011-2012 Civil Grand Jury report, "Better MUNI Service Needed, Without Switchbacks: An Investigation into the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency."

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency ("SFMTA") continues to address challenges to its system. As with any transit system, service delays do occur and transit officials must utilize a variety of tools to address the delays. I share the position of the SFMTA that the root causes of any service delay needs to be resolved, whether it be replacing outdated systems and infrastructure or making improvements to its staffing levels. I also believe the SFMTA looks to use proper measures to mitigate any service disruption.

At the same time, I share the concerns of the riding public that relies on Muni that any mitigation efforts on the part of the SFMTA should be done in the least disruptive and most appropriate manner. Where a situation necessitates the use of a particular service tool, in this case switchbacks, it should be used sparingly and when looking at the impact on the system as a whole. As the SFMTA notes in its response, the practice of switchbacks is used less than one percent of the time in order to restore scheduled service.

Despite staffing shortages and aging infrastructure, the SFMTA is working to reduce the instances where it uses switchbacks. The SFMTA's focus on periods where ridership is low and where the use of switchbacks would feel the least disruptive demonstrates that the Agency strives to minimize the impact on as few customers as possible. Nevertheless, I believe the SFMTA should continue to address the underlying causes of service delays to ensure it will require fewer uses of disruptive solutions in the future.

The Mayor's Office response to the Civil Grand Jury's findings is as follows:

Finding F1: Muni switchbacks violate the spirit of the San Francisco Charter.

Response: Disagree. The Civil Grand Jury did not elaborate how the use of switchbacks specifically violates the spirit of Charter section 8A.100, added by voters with Proposition E of 1999. While the Charter requires the SFMTA to provide "reliable, safe, timely, frequent and convenient" service to the entire City and to reduce "breakdowns, delays, over-crowding, preventable accidents", the Civil Grand Jury fails to show how utilizing switchbacks may run counter to Charter mandates. As the SFMTA

states in its response, switchbacks are intended to improve service by reducing scheduling delays, which is in keeping with Charter mandates.

Finding F2: Muni management has expressed very little interest in finding alternatives to switchbacks.

Response: Disagree. The SFMTA has an obligation to reduce delays and service impacts, and it must look at all appropriate avenues. The SFMTA has stated that it uses a variety of alternatives as part of its service management strategy. Switchbacks are utilized infrequently, and the Agency has only used switchbacks at times when they are the least disruptive to customers.

Finding F3: There is not statistical or other evidence that switchbacks alleviate delays or improve scheduling.

Response: Disagree. While the Civil Grand Jury states that the SFMTA cannot provide data to show the effectiveness of switchbacks, the SFMTA has stated that data does exist to show the effectiveness of this tool.

Finding F4: Muni officials show a callous disregard for the welfare of riders overall in their use of switchbacks.

Response: Disagree. While the Civil Grand Jury may not agree with the use of switchbacks, and while the use of switchbacks may cause momentary impacts during off-peak hours, the Civil Grand Jury fails to back up its assertion that the SFMTA shows a "callous disregard" for its customers by using this service tool. The SFMTA is cognizant of the disruption switchbacks pose to its customers, and the Agency has been working to reduce the use of switchbacks. Please see the SFMTA response.

Finding F6: Other comparable transit systems refuse to subject passengers to switchbacks for any reasons other than equipment breakdowns, accidents, or unavoidable emergencies.

Response: Disagree. As the SFMTA notes in its response, many other comparable transit agencies utilize switchbacks to alleviate service delays.

Finding F7: Muni has failed to fully implement basic technological improvements in the system.

Response: Disagree. The SFMTA has been in the process of implementing various technological improvements, such as upgrades to its radio communications system, train control system, and providing a tablet based service management tool for its field supervisors.

Finding F8: Muni's newest and most advanced control centers lack adequate operating personnel and cannot communicate directly with Muni drivers.

Response: Agree. Although I agree with this finding, please note that the SFMTA is making improvements to its Line Management Center ("LMC") staffing as well as developing new tools for its field supervisors to improve communications throughout its system.

Finding F9: Muni has failed to conduct and publish monthly rider surveys as recommended in the FY 2008 and 2010 quality review.

Response: Agree. Although I agree with this finding, please note that while the SFMTA does not provide monthly rider surveys, the SFMTA will begin conducting quarterly surveys in September 2012 as outlined in its FY 2013-FY 2018 Strategic Plan. The SFMTA has and will continue its annual customer service survey.

The Mayor's Office response to the Civil Grand Jury's recommendations is as follows:

Recommendation R1: Eliminate switchbacks except for equipment breakdowns, accidents, or unavoidable emergencies.

Response: Disagree; Will Not be Implemented. The SFMTA must have all available tools at its disposal to address all types of service delays. Nonetheless, the Agency will continue to address the underlying causes of service delays and minimize the use of switchbacks.

Recommendation R2: Contact and learn from comparable transit systems that do not resort to switchbacks as a regular solution to their problems.

Response: Agree; Will be Implemented in the Future. The SFMTA indicates that it continually communicates with other transit systems to develop new operating procedures and service recovery techniques in order to enhance its systems. As the SFMTA states in its response, within the next six months the Agency will connect with other transit systems and study methods that will help the Agency better manage its service.

Recommendation R3: The Controller audit Muni funds to determine if there are additional resources that may be available to rectify delays and scheduling problems.

Response: Agree; Already Implemented. As the SFMTA notes, it welcomes any audit by the Controller of the Agency to help it find additional resources to improve service reliability. Pursuant to requests by the Board of Supervisors, the Controller began auditing SFMTA two years ago, and the Controller has a regular audit program of the SFMTA's programs and projects. Furthermore, the SFMTA has worked with the Controller's Office on the Transit Effectiveness Project (TEP) and on revenue panels to review the revenues of the Agency.

Recommendation R4: Train and employ sufficient staff to operate the new control center and establish communication from there with Muni drivers.

Response: Agree; Will be Implemented in the Future. The SFMTA has already begun the process to staff its Line Management Center ("LMC"). Furthermore, the Agency is working with a contractor to modernize a 1970s era radio communications system that will allow direct communications between operators and supervisors. The Agency notes in its response that it should complete this effort by the end of the 2012-2013 fiscal year. The SFMTA also expects its new radio communications system to be completed by 2015.

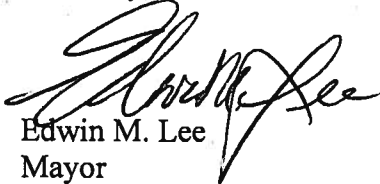
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Recommendation R5: Conduct and publish monthly rider satisfaction surveys in accordance with the FY 2008 and 2010 quality review recommendations.

Response: Disagree; Will Not be Implemented. The SFMTA does agree that periodic customer surveys are important to gauge customer satisfaction. At this time, the SFMTA conducts an annual customer survey, and it will perform a comprehensive on-board passenger survey in early 2013. In September 2012, the SFMTA will also begin conducting quarterly surveys. The frequency of surveys is dependent upon the available resources, and so this recommendation warrants further analysis by the SFMTA as to whether it has available resources.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the Civil Grand Jury report.

Sincerely,



Edwin M. Lee
Mayor