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TO: Board of Supervisors, SF

FROM: Julie Kirschbaum, Director of Transit 

Cc: Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of Transportation

DATE: June 4, 2021

SUBJ: Response to Resolution 210100 Urging MTA to Expediate Reinstating Transit Lines to Equitably Service All Neighborhoods

Introduction

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) appreciates the support for public transportation articulated in File No. [210100](#), authored by Supervisor Melgar, co-sponsored by Supervisors Mandelman, Mar, Safai, Chan, Stefani, Haney, Preston, Peskin and Walton, and passed unanimously.

The San Francisco Board of Supervisors has expressed a clear vision and strong understanding of public transportation's vital role — a vision the SFMTA shares. The agency has focused on providing safe Muni service for essential travel, despite its extremely limited resources and an uncertain fiscal future. Muni is a lifeline to economic opportunity and education and has been key to our recovery during the pandemic. Public transportation is heavily relied upon by seniors, people with disabilities, low-income households and people of color, and this has been especially evident throughout the duration of this pandemic. We have seen the importance of public transportation reinforced as it continues to serve as a critical lifeline for thousands of San Franciscans.

This memo details next steps for reinstating Muni service with improved access and reliability, where possible. The constraints of Muni's service restoration and the tradeoffs needed to not only bring service fully back, but to responsibly bring it back in consult with community members so that it is better than before are also detailed in this document. We communicate a vision for the evolution of Muni service and articulate how our priorities and decisions about the agency's finances lay the groundwork for an even faster and more reliable system in the future.

Restoration Plan

Throughout the pandemic, the SFMTA has balanced the twin goals of providing sufficient capacity on its most-used routes and covering the broadest geographic area. As of January 23, 2021, we restored service that provided 91% of residences with access to a Muni stop within a quarter mile, or two to three blocks. This includes 100% of the eight neighborhoods focused on in the Muni Service Equity Strategy: Chinatown, Tenderloin/SoMa, Western Addition, Mission, Bayview, Visitacion Valley, Outer Mission/Excelsior and Oceanview/Ingleside.

The May 15 and August service changes will allow us to bring this convenient Muni access (within two to three blocks) to 98% of San Franciscans ahead of schools reopening later this summer. We are optimistic about our ability to restore service to this level, based on current trends. However, the continued easing of pandemic restrictions will be required to reach this critical goal and is dependent on public health guidelines. This easing

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of restrictions is necessary because without distancing requirements Muni vehicles can comfortably carry up to three times more customers. They also allow us to return to the industry standard of cleaning vehicles at the end of the day and eliminate the pandemic practice of returning a vehicle at the end of each operator's shift for sanitization, which notably limits vehicle availability.

We have also seen our vehicle availability reduced due to the Subway Renewal Program and the need for buses to substitute for Muni Metro trains to support that work. The SFMTA maintenance, engineering and technology teams have worked hard over the last 10 months to ensure that subway service will open with improved reliability. With the first phase of the Subway Renewal Program complete and the May 15 service changes underway, the bus substitution will no longer be needed on the N Judah and K Ingleside lines, freeing up buses for use on other routes.

May 15, 2021 Muni Service Changes

The SFMTA will reopen all its Muni Metro subway stations on Saturday, May 15, with the return of rail service on the N Judah and KT Ingleside-Third routes. To continue maximizing access to Muni citywide, we are creating a new temporary combined bus route, the 36/52 Special, serving hilltop neighborhoods, and bringing back the historic F Market & Wharves.

N Judah rail service will resume its full route between Ocean Beach and 4th and King Street (Caltrain), and the T Third will be extended to West Portal, continuing as the K Ingleside to Balboa Park Station. With the return of rail service to these routes, customers will have faster transit times downtown, as well as to other important and popular destinations including the Castro District, City College, West Portal, Ocean Beach, Golden Gate Park, Oracle Park, Chase Center, UCSF Parnassus, UCSF Mission Bay and Caltrain.

After working closely with Castro District, mid-Market, and Fisherman's Wharf merchants, the full F Market & Wharves route from Fisherman's Wharf to Market and Castro will return to service on our beloved, historic streetcars, aiding the city's reopening and return of tourism.

We are introducing the new temporary combined route the 36/52 Special, in response to customer feedback for improved service from hilly areas to hospitals, grocery stores, and vaccination sites. This bus route will serve the hilltop neighborhoods of Dimond Heights, Forest Hill, Miraloma, and Sunnyside in a loop between Forest Hill Station and Glen Park Station.

Below is the complete list of service changes being implemented May 15, 2021. Service hours for each route are noted below. Owl network service hours are 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. daily.

F Market & Wharves: The historic streetcar will return to service between 17th and Castro streets and Jones and Beach Streets. Service hours: From Castro: Approximately 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. From Fisherman's Wharf: Approximately 12 p.m. to 8 p.m. The L Bus or L Owl provide local service along Market Street during the hours when the F is not running.

KT Ingleside-Third: The K Ingleside and T Third will interline as the KT Ingleside-Third, expanding service between Balboa Park and Sunnydale. This route will use the newly reopened Muni Metro subway, serving all stations between West Portal and Embarcadero.

Service hours:

- Weekdays: 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Weekends: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.
- Between the hours of Owl service (10 p.m. to 5 a.m.) and rail service, Muni buses will provide service from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. on weekdays, and 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. on weekends.
- The K Bus will run between Balboa Park and West Portal Station from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. daily.



- During the weekend, for the hours between Owl service (10 p.m. to 5 a.m.) and rail service, the K Ingleside bus will run between Balboa Park and Embarcadero-Ferry Plaza from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. and the T Third bus will run between Embarcadero-Ferry Plaza and Sunnydale.

N Judah: Rail service will resume for the entire route with two-car trains replacing Metro buses. Service hours: Weekdays: 6 am to 9 p.m. Weekends: 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Muni Metro buses will cover the hours between Owl Service and rail service, running 5 a.m. to 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. on weekdays and 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. on weekends.

K Bus, L Bus and L Owl: These lines will no longer serve Forest Hill Station directly as they will be served by the Muni Metro KT Ingleside-Third rail service.

36/52 Special: Temporary new combined route between Forest Hill Station and Glen Park Station serving the Glen Park, Sunnyside, Midtown Terrace and Miraloma communities. The route will serve Laguna Honda Hospital. The inbound (clockwise) route will include an additional loop on Clarendon.

8 Bayshore: The current 8AX Bayshore "A" Express service will become the 8 Bayshore short between City College and Kearny at Pacific. Service for this route ends at 7:30 p.m. daily. The 8 Bayshore long will continue to travel between City College and Fisherman's Wharf. The 8 Bayshore will return to its pre-pandemic route traveling north on Kearny, instead of Stockton.

Anticipated August, 2021 Muni Service Changes

There are several services currently be considered for restoration this summer ahead of the new school year. While developing the proposed service changes, the SFMTA has been focused on improving connections over offering parallel route service, to maximize coverage with the constrained number of operators and vehicles available. This focus has also allowed us to continue improving service for the eight neighborhoods identified in the Muni Service Equity Strategy: Chinatown, Tenderloin/SoMa, Western Addition, Mission, Bayview, Visitacion Valley, Outer Mission/Excelsior and Oceanview/Ingleside.

Work is underway to finalize the August 7 slate of changes and there are several lines being considered for reinstatement including the following:

5R Fulton Rapid

The 5R is one of the most successful new routes instituted by the SFMTA over the past decade. The reinstatement of Rapid service on this corridor would meet demand as the current ridership on the 5 Fulton increases.

18 46th Avenue

The 18 46th Avenue would provide westside residents in the Richmond District, Outer Sunset and around Stonestown with a critical north-south connection that should ease demand on the Great Highway and surrounding streets and provide a boost to local businesses.

23 Monterey (Bayview District to West Portal Station)

This augmented restoration would close a gap on the hills around Sunnyside and St. Francis Wood. The route would be reinstated eastward to the Bayview District to provide that neighborhood with a renewed east-west connection. However, rather than travel along the slower and lightly used Sloat section of the route, the restored 23 Monterey would instead terminate at West Portal Station, providing a new high-quality link to Muni Metro.



35 Eureka

This route would provide additional access from hilly districts to Muni Metro and BART while requiring few buses to operate.

36 Teresita

The 36/52 Special launched on May 15 would be supplanted by the restoration of the full route, providing new access for hilly districts.

39 Coit

This route would provide additional access from hilly districts to high-frequency service in North Beach and Fisherman’s Wharf while requiring few buses to operate.

52 Excelsior

The 36/52 Special launched on May 15 would be supplanted by the restoration of the full route, providing access for hilly districts and the Excelsior District, a neighborhood identified by the Muni Service Equity Strategy. In addition, the route would run along a segment previously covered by the 6 Parnassus along 9th Avenue and Quintara Street in Golden Gate Heights.

56 Rutland

The 56 Rutland would restore access to sections of Visitacion Valley and Little Hollywood. In addition, a new extension to Mansell would provide direct connections to the 29 Sunset and Burton High School.

57 Park Merced

The 57 Park Merced saw much higher demand in the Park Merced portion of the route than the eastern portion along John Muir Drive, so the route is being segmented. The rerouted 57 Park Merced would connect Stonestown and Park Merced directly to Stonestown, BART and the M Ocean View.

58 Lake Merced

This new route would pick up the John Muir portion of the 57 Lake Merced and Sloat section of the 23 Monterey while still connecting to BART, as well as providing new connections to shopping districts at Stonestown, Lakeshore and John Daly Boulevard at and Top of the Hill in Daly City.

66 Quintara

The full 66 Quintara route would be restored, providing residents in Golden Gate Heights access to shopping and Muni connections in the Inner Sunset and Taraval. In addition, the route that serves Lincoln High School would be extended, eastward to UCSF and Haight Street via Parnassus Avenue.

Two other routes would be extended in summer. The **12 Folsom** would be extended to Rincon Hill, SOMA and the Mission District. Also, the **48 Quintara/24th Street** would be extended from West Portal to Ocean Beach via Quintara Street.

With the start of school, some of Muni’s “school trippers”—additional runs on key routes at peak school hours—would be reinstated, as well.

Implementing these changes may necessitate slightly reducing frequencies on routes such as the 9 San Bruno, 9R San Bruno Rapid, F Market & Wharves, 14 Mission, 14R Mission Rapid, 19 Polk and 38 Geary lines, but not lower than pre-pandemic levels.

The Future of Muni



On the immediate horizon for the SFMTA are key conversations about appropriately staffing Muni's fleet, stretching limited resources to move customers more quickly with transit lanes and critical tradeoffs that will influence future service changes.

Service Position Staffing

Essential to providing great Muni service is retaining staff talent. Staff vacancies and the shortage of operators continue to constrain our capacity to provide great Muni service. Due to a 15% pre-pandemic vacancy rate across the agency and very limited hiring over the past year, we have vacancies in many critical service positions from mechanics to supervisors. Before we can restore even more service, we need to conduct exams, hire, and train.

Additionally, a high wave of retirements in June 2021 is expected due to a reduced number of retirements during the pandemic to date. We are expecting a challenging summer due to high levels of promotions and attrition, and as we restore Muni service, we will do so schedule that can be filled 100% with available operators without gaps. We want to make sure that as we restart service, we can sustain it long term.

Permanent Transit Lanes

Efforts are currently underway to make 20 miles of temporary transit lanes permanent. Transit lanes allow buses to complete routes in less time and return to service more quickly. This enables us to provide more service with the same number of buses and stretches limited resources so that we can pick up customers more frequently. Discussions concerning permanent transit lanes will continue and be incorporated into SFMTA's Post-Pandemic Service Plan that is in development.

Post-Pandemic Service Plan

As we look to continuing to expand service, we will continue working with policy makers and stakeholders to weigh tradeoffs as we identify a Post-Pandemic Service Plan through winter 2022.

For example, we would like policy makers, and other stakeholders, to help us prioritize and choose between options, including:

- Delivering a 5-minute network, a series of routes that come as frequently as every 5 minutes or better, in line with equity priorities
- Supporting the core network with a grid of 10-minute lines that serve neighborhood centers and connect to 5-minute lines that serve job centers.
- Complimenting the core network with community service routes that connect lower-density and steeper-topography neighborhoods to neighborhood commercial centers
- Reintroducing routes with parallel service
- Fully restoring cable car system
- Increasing evening service 10 p.m. to midnight
- Re-introducing downtown express buses
- Overlaying of Rapid and Express lines on the core network for efficient longer-distance travel

The service changes being made May 15 and being planned for August 7 are laying the groundwork for these possible efforts.

Funding Reality

We acknowledge that the pandemic continues to make our funding future uncertain. With ridership expected to initially take several years to reach pre-pandemic levels, we are cautiously bringing back service we can sustain to meet the city's transit needs without over-extending our resources. If we bring back Muni service that is reliable and convenient, we believe demand will return stronger than ever.



Thanks to the diligent efforts of our hard-working transit divisions, we are making cost-efficient improvements to Muni service. SFMTA staff looked closely where we had vulnerabilities and talked openly about how to learn from past mistakes. Union leadership has fought tirelessly for the needs of their team members and continue to show up every day to solve tough problems. From headway management to installing temporary emergency transit lanes, we believe these changes are creating an enhanced customer experience that will foster financial sustainability for the long term.

It is important to note, while we are on our way to increasing service, getting Muni back to 100% of pre-pandemic service, as well as any increases, does require more sustained funding. Even before the pandemic, the agency had seen declining revenues from parking fees and transit fares. Now, with ridership slow to return to past levels and tax revenues down, our future is even less clear. One-time federal funding has saved the SFMTA from devastating cuts and layoffs, but this one-time funding runs out in 2023 and does not solve the long-term funding challenge. The problems identified by the Mayor's Transportation Working Group prior to the pandemic will continue to persist, and perhaps even more urgently than before, since have lost much of this year due to the pandemic to address them.

The SFMTA is exploring several options including revenue measures to secure our future. And while we plan to passionately pursue expanded funding, we will not expand service beyond what we can sustain with ongoing revenue to protect jobs and prevent future layoffs.