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Dear Foreperson Schafer and Grand Jurors:

Thank you for inviting San Francisco Public Works to comment on the Civil Grand Jury report, *Van Ness Avenue: What Lies Beneath* (June 28, 2021). Public Works shares your goal of using lessons learned to improve how we deliver capital projects for public benefit. We appreciate this opportunity to share our insight and experience.

The ultimate goals of the Van Ness Corridor Transit Improvement Project are to improve public transit for passengers and implement bus rapid transit services. How best to move people around San Francisco is wholly within the expertise of our colleagues at SFMTA. What Public Works can share is our expertise in working in, under and on San Francisco streets and sidewalks to deliver infrastructure improvement projects.

Public Works has a special role in delivering a wide range of building and infrastructure projects

Public Works is responsible for maintaining streets and sidewalks and, by law, being *the* provider of construction services for almost all City agencies.¹ This gives us a unique responsibility and perspective. Our design, construction and project management professionals pride themselves on consistently delivering a diverse portfolio of major capital projects on time and on budget. Working in every part of the City, as well as on properties outside of San Francisco under City jurisdiction, has allowed our staff to develop expertise and institutional knowledge that consistently deliver quality projects.

Our staff of more than 70 architects have planned, designed and built the SFPD Crime Lab, Moscone Center, Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center, public libraries, SFFD fire houses and museums. They are currently managing 177 projects budgeted at greater than \$2.1 billion. The more than 190 engineers on our Infrastructure team have delivered major improvements along such corridors as to Geary Boulevard, Lombard Street, 19th Avenue, Polk Street, Cesar Chavez and Second Street. In 2021 alone, our Infrastructure Division received bids for 28 projects valued at more than \$225 million. Our landscape architects are integral to all of the above projects and have helped improve parks, playgrounds and recreation centers, including recent renovations of Margaret Hayward playground, George Christopher playground, Joe DiMaggio playground and Glen Canyon Park.

¹ Under San Francisco Administrative Code Chapter 6, the departments permitted to engage in construction are SFMTA, PUC, SFO, RPD, the Port and Public Works. All other construction is managed by Public Works on behalf of client departments.

Public Works has a track record of successful project delivery

More than 100 years ago, Public Works built a transformational gravity-based system to get water from Hetch Hetchy to San Francisco and has been delivering capital projects ever since. The department's experience and institutional knowledge include professional design, project management, construction management and maintenance. Having these functions centralized in one department allows for efficient and effective project delivery – from concept to final completion.

What Public Works brings are processes of quality control based on foundations of both technical principles, adoption of best practices, and the institutional knowledge of hundreds of engineers, architects and inspectors.

Public Works is among the most audited department in the City, and it helps us deliver better projects

Due to the diversity of our project portfolio and our commitment to continuous improvement, San Francisco Public Works welcomes being among the most audited department in the City. Our projects and practices are regularly audited by the Civil Grand Jury, the Budget and Legislative Analyst and the City Services Auditor of the Office of the Controller, which have conducted more than 30 audits of our practices over the last 10 years.

Major construction projects are inherently risky and complicated, especially when they involve multiple agencies, a busy corridor supporting competing interests and underground work in one of the densest cities in the United States. As policymakers consider revisions to how construction departments do business, we recommend that they proceed with these principles in mind:

- **Policy should be flexible enough to promote innovation and accountability, but not so prescriptive as to slow projects or be inflexible.** Industry practices constantly change in response to the market and the best policies allow quick adaptation.
- **Continue the practice of construction professionals driving revisions to Chapter 6, which governs contracting policies and procedures.** In partnership with the City Attorney and Controller, Chapter 6 is revised regularly, and changes are driven by professional construction experts at all of the departments. In updating our code to account for technological innovation and provide flexibility and accountability, we incorporate lessons from our own experience, industry best practices and changes in state and federal law.
- **Continue to invest in collaborative partnering.** Construction departments and industry associations strive to make San Francisco recognized as an Owner of Choice by the construction industry. We do this by identifying process improvements and empowering project teams to resolve issues in the field at the lowest possible level before issues can fester and balloon. Small investments in partnering for each project result in tangible reductions in cost and schedule overruns.
- **Invest in and appreciate our professionals.** Managing construction projects requires more than attempting to use best practices. Public Works combines best practices and mandatory minimum trainings hours with staff who already have extensive institutional knowledge. Promote adoption of integrated project delivery methods, such as the Construction Manager/General Contractor (CM/GC) process. Public Works pioneered the use of CM/GC in San

Francisco in building the California Academy of Sciences and Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center. Based on our experience, we long have practiced the nuances of CM/GC projects, including identifying underground obstructions prior to full excavation to minimize unexpected finds.² The procedures of Public Works and the framework of practices within the Building Design and Construction Division illustrate processes of Quality Control and Assurance based on a foundation of technical principles.

- **There would be benefits to project delivery if one experienced City department had control and management of undergrounding activities in the right of way – one city, one entity and one system of managing it.** One entity should collect and maintain a record of everything that is put in the road and everything that is taken out, especially by corporations (e.g., PG&E, Comcast, AT&T), but also government entities, including the SFPUC and the Department of Technology. Establishing under one entity a well-documented central clearing point for everyone who puts something into the ground or takes it out of the road would minimize risk and confusion.

We look forward to applying the lessons of the SFMTA's Van Ness Corridor Transit Improvement Project to advance how we as a city do business.

Sincerely,



Carla Short

Interim Director, San Francisco Public Works

² As a long-standing practice, Public Works coordinates with public and private utility agencies for all projects in the public right of way, requiring that they submit drawings of all of their surface and subsurface facilities within the project footprint. Drawings include active, inactive and abandoned facilities. Then, utility composite drawings are prepared and compared against the proposed scope of work to identify potential conflicts and to coordinate the appropriate agencies for resolution of conflicts. The Public Works project team also works closely with private utilities during the design phase of major projects to account for utilities, whether active, deactivated or abandoned. Additional risk assessment tools, such as exploratory potholing, slot trenching and field measurements, may be utilized on a project-by-project basis to identify underground obstructions.