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July 19, 2024

Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Bay Area Metro Center
375 Beale Street, Suite 800
San Francisco, CA 94105

Subject: Regional Network Management Council Agenda Item 3b. Transit 2050+: Draft Project Performance and Draft Niche Network – Inclusion of Berkeley Ferry Service

Regional Network Management Council Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Bay Planning Coalition (BPC) to express our concern regarding the exclusion of the Berkeley Ferry Service from the current draft of the Regional Transportation Plan, Plan Bay Area 2050+. As you know, MTC is developing this comprehensive, financially constrained plan, which lays out a \$1.4 trillion vision for a more equitable and resilient future for Bay Area residents. Plan Bay Area 2050+ integrates strategies for transportation, housing, the economy, and the environment to guide the region toward an affordable, connected, diverse, healthy, and vibrant future by 2050.

It has come to our attention that the current draft, which will be presented to the Regional Network Management Council on Monday, July 22, does not include the Berkeley Ferry Service—a project that has historically been included in previous versions of Plan Bay Area, has secured over eleven million dollars in funding, and is currently in detailed design and environmental review. Projects can be excluded from Plan Bay Area if it is duplicative of other transit or is not cost effective. Neither of these are the case for the Berkeley Ferry Service project. The exclusion of this project is an oversight, and we urge this Council to ensure that the Berkeley Ferry Service project is included in the next draft of this document.

The Berkeley Ferry service is not a duplicative proposed transit service. MTC has identified the link between the East Bay and San Francisco as a service/capacity gap for both peak and non-peak periods. Providing a new alternative means of transportation between Berkeley and San Francisco would directly reduce the existing demand between both the Berkeley-Downtown Oakland and Downtown Oakland-Downtown San Francisco links. The proposed Berkeley-San Francisco Ferry Service has been described as the ‘missing link’ in the San Francisco Bay ferry system, and was included as Tier 1 Project in the recently adopted WETA 2050 Service Vision and Expansion Policy. The Alameda County Community-Based Transportation Plan 2020 identified the Berkeley Ferry as a priority project. Establishing a ferry service in this area is critical to ensure the equitable distribution of emergency services. The Berkeley Ferry Service enhances emergency preparedness by enabling the movement of first responders and supplies by water after a catastrophic event.

From a cost-efficiency standpoint, SF Bay Ferry operates at a cost per passenger mile similar to other transit modes carrying passengers along important long-distance trips, many of which would otherwise be completed in cars adding to congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, it has the sixth lowest cost per passenger mile among the region’s 20-plus transit operators.

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We understand that Plan Bay Area 2050+ is fiscally constrained, however, the Berkeley Ferry Service will be funded with sources that can **only** be used for ferry transit projects and will not take away funding from other projects in the region. These specific funding sources include \$11.1 million already secured for the Berkeley Ferry Service project, an allocation of SF Bay Ferry’s Regional Measure 3 capital funds and potential funding from federal ferry programs including the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Passenger Ferry Grant Program, the FTA Electric/Low Emission Ferry Program, and the Federal Highway Administration Ferry Boat Program. All of these federal ferry programs, which can only be used on eligible public ferry projects, require that proposed projects are included in the Metropolitan Planning Organization’s Regional Transportation Plan.

Excluding the Berkeley Ferry service from Plan Bay Area 2050+ reduces the amount of funding coming to the region and reduces mode shift to transit. SF Bay Ferry will not be able to apply for “ferry only” funding to support the Berkeley ferry service if it is not included in the region’s transportation plan. This includes federal funds that can be leveraged for the region. In terms of mode shift, SF Bay Ferry was the fastest-growing transit system in the region prior to the pandemic and has been the fastest to recover. As of July 2024, SF Bay Ferry is carrying nearly 90% of its pre-pandemic riders. People are choosing to ride the ferry for a variety of reasons. SF Bay Ferry has aligned its fares with other transit modes, becoming a travel mode of choice for riders from all income categories. It also has the highest customer satisfaction rating of any transit system in the country and was the first transit operator in the region to fully restore service following the pandemic, making equity-focused, ridership-incentivizing changes that many other operators have since adopted.

Finally, the Draft Plan Bay Area 2050+ currently has a three-point Greenhouse Gas gap that must be closed by advancing climate-friendly investments in the final phase. The Berkeley Ferry terminal is being designed to serve an all-electric, zero-emission ferry. This will be the first ferry terminal purposely built solely for electric service in the San Francisco Bay.

The Berkeley Ferry Service will be a vital component of our regional transportation infrastructure, providing essential transit links, enhancing emergency response capabilities, and leveraging dedicated funding sources that benefit the entire Bay Area. We urge this Council to include the Berkeley Ferry Service in the next draft of Plan Bay Area 2050+.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cameron Carr
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Bay Planning Coalition
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