

The Transit Effectiveness Project

Testimony for December 3, 2013

The Transit Effectiveness Project has been flawed since its inception.

To remedy the problems of public transportation, it was proposed to add coaches to the most heavily used runs and alter or discontinue runs that were least utilized. No net increase in the total amount of available coaches or the entire fleet itself would result. In essence, this was a cost-effective, zero-sum solution with additional discontinuances and consolidations of bus stops.

The human impact was ignored. Residents complained about their discontinuance of service and the hardship of walking long distances to secure a bus, notably for those who are physically impaired. These protests were ignored with the discontinuances and alterations going through.

The first stage of TEP has been instituted with no improvement in public transportation and its provided services.

Now, it will be implemented further with more discontinuances and alterations in service to the detriment of the public, notably those in the neighborhoods.

The real solution is to add more buses to the most heavily used runs without sacrificing the buses in the neighborhoods. In essence, there will be a higher net total of available buses. The discontinued and altered routes should be restored. An example of the severity of the cuts is that there are no bus stops at the Cliff House or at Crissy Field, San Francisco landmarks.

One can state that no money is available. But there is plenty of money for new bike lanes, the Central Subway and a public relations firm to sell the TEP to the detriment of MUNI passengers.

It is time to either change the focus of the Transit Effectiveness Project or discontinue the Project itself.

It is a portent of disaster.

Reflections on The Transit Effectiveness Project

The Transit Effectiveness Project has finally hit home to many city residents.

On December 3, 2013, residents of Lower Pacific Heights protested the proposed discontinuance of the 3 Jackson line. Mark Farrell, the District Supervisor, showed up to the Municipal Transit Agency meeting to add his protest. Many testified as to their concerns. The voices could not be called isolated but many.

I wish to express my interpretation of the events leading to this protest.

The Transit Effectiveness Project is the legacy of Nathaniel Ford, the previous Executive Director of MTA, who left the agency under a cloud. He proposed in 2007 that he could fix the problems of public transportation by 2012 if his ballot measure was passed. After the measure was passed, Gavin Newsom appropriated money approved in the ballot for his own personal staff without any protest from MTA.

During this period, the Transit Effectiveness Project was formulated by MTA in conjunction with the Controller's Office. The underlying philosophy was to reallocate existing resources to the most heavily used runs without concern for the impact on the neighborhoods. In essence, this was cost-containment with a zero sum solution. It, seemingly, was part and parcel of Nathaniel Ford's solution to fix MTA.

The first implementation of the TEP came with the budgetary shortfall in 2008. Bus routes were altered or discontinued on the basis of TEP proposals. Notable casualties were the discontinuance of the 26 Valencia which stopped at St. Luke's Hospital and the alteration of the 2 Clement line which would end at Park Presidio Boulevard. While some of these drastic changes were restored with new funding, some remained to the detriment of the neighborhoods.

It should be noted that these runs were altered or eliminated on the basis of utilization and not on actual need. Not everyone is severely impaired or handicapped, but those who are desperately need these services. While it could be said that these populations are a minority, they are a significant one, and, because public transportation should serve all, they require attention. A public service can be evaluated on the most vulnerable people served. The Transit Effectiveness Project, while acknowledging hardship, does not fully address this. In fact, some in the Agency and the public are scornful of this

disadvantaged group, complaining that their needs are slowing down the buses.

To be fair to the present Executive Director and the present MTA Board, they did not formulate the Transit Effectiveness Project which, in essence, is the dead hand of Nathaniel Ford. It is difficult to overcome the momentum and precedence set by previous administrators. It requires forcefulness against the precedents. But, given the protests of December 3rd, MTA and its Executive Director would be wise in taking the concerns into account.

The solutions would appear to be two fold: 1) the revision of proposals for the Transit Effectiveness Project; and 2) the examination of internal operations of MTA.

The Transit Effectiveness Project

Simply, the Project itself proposes the reallocation of resources without net additions to the MTA fleet itself.

How realistic is this in the face of the growing population of San Francisco? There clearly is the demand for more public transportation which would result in greater revenue for the cash starved MTA.

There is the argument that there won't be money available for a net addition of buses and coaches for the fleet. Money is allocated for projects other than public transportation. There has been money allocated for projects as the Central Subway, bike lanes which are already quite plentiful and a public relations firm to sell the TEP to the tune of \$1.5 million dollars. While there is concern over bridging the gap in shortfalls, money is still being heavily spent for questionable projects as the Central Subway. Money is constantly moved from one section of MTA to another—a form of fiscal magic which should be provided for public transportation in an agency that claims the policy of *Transit First*.

Before the Transit Effectiveness Project, the city had an intricate, complex system of transportation which covered the majority of the city. Had buses run on time, this system would have been a national showpiece. Instead, you had people advising visitors during the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco not to take public transportation, according to an article in *The Wall Street Journal*. The challenge was to make the system workable. And, given the present problem of missing buses, switchbacks and long waits at the bus stop, there is no guarantee that the Transit Effectiveness Project will solve

this. Too much money will have been spent on bogus consultations, personnel hours and glitzy promotions for bond issues.

What is a more appropriate solution?

The internal operations of the San Francisco Municipal Railway

MUNI is not a poor agency. It has seven Deputy Directors and other administrators making six digit salaries. It claims that they are paid these salaries to attract the best qualified personnel. But, given the slipshod performance of MUNI, how valid is this argument?

With the constant delay of buses which show up crowded with little or no chance for seating for the disabled, breakdowns and missing vehicles, there has been little or no attempt to address MUNI's internal operations.

What is the command structure of this department of MTA? What are the processes of internal communications? How are concerns addressed? In respect to the latter, several e-mails of mine have gone unanswered? Given this problem, is this a reflection of the entire operations of MUNI?

How are concerns of the community addressed? Given the actions of the Transit Effectiveness Project after their proclaimed community outreach, there seems to be indifference or insensitivity to public concerns. An example of this is the lack of utilization of city medical personnel to evaluate the impact of cutbacks and alterations of routes and bus stops on the physically impaired. Some callousness was even evident in an internal communication which described the long distances to be walked by the physically disadvantaged as "challenges". Another important issue is the inability of being unable to drive, due to visual and other physical and mental impairments, and, if they did so, constituting a danger to themselves and others. MUNI provides an invaluable service to them by providing transportation. To require these individuals to walk long distances to catch a bus is a disservice to them and the community.

Because the policies and basic assumptions of the TEP of the administration of Nathaniel Ford have not been addressed, I wonder if this does not represent a culture of groupthink where staff thinks the same and does not call policies into question. In history, this has resulted in many catastrophies, too numerous to be described here. That is why management must be sensitive to dissent and different ideas of innovation within its ranks. How many concerns of bus drivers have been adequately addressed. Surely, they did not, to their credit, formulate the Transit Effectiveness Project.

Before the Transit Effectiveness Project was proposed, there should have been a thorough examination of internal operations. This would have been difficult with many defending their cherished turfs. But it was necessary. Instead, the problem was externalized with the TEP proposals.

I do feel that there is one advantage with the present Executive Director who has advanced degrees in Business and Public Administration from NYU and Harvard, respectively. He has a fund of administrative knowledge which could be skillfully applied to the evaluation of internal operations.

In sum, the Transit Effectiveness Project should result in the net addition of vehicles in the face of a growing city population, the retention of existing bus stops, and the restoration of previously deleted or altered runs. There should also be a thorough, rigorous evaluation of internal operations to understand the present breakdown of services which the Executive Director has publicly acknowledged.

The Transit Effectiveness Project, as it now stands, is too simplistic and tramples on the disadvantaged of the city. The actual transportation needs of the city, notably those who are physically impaired, are not being addressed. TEP can be called "The Rosemary's Baby of MTA". This is not inevitable and should not be. No one needed to do this, should be doing this and should never do this. This project is clearly off the tracks and requires solutions such as those suggested above.