



Muni Metro Core Capacity Study Community Working Group

Thursday, March 20th, 2025, 6:00 p.m.

Union Square conference room and Microsoft Teams meeting

CWG Members	Project Staff	Other
Cyrus Hall Lian Chang Kath Tsakalakis Karl Aguilar Adrienne Leifer Dylan Fabris Alice Duesdieker Mark Sawchuk Aaron Leifer Caitlin Steele Tammy Chan Darren Iverson Jean-Paul Torres	Liz Brisson (SFMTA) Mariana Maguire (SFMTA) David Sindel (SFMTA) Chester Fung (HNTB) Erin McMillan (SFMTA) Michael Randolph (SFMTA) Chester Fung (HNTB)	Dan Tischler (SFCTA- Study funder) Tyler Brown (Caltrans – Study funder) Stephen Conteh (Caltrans – Study funder) Kathy Seitan (Observer) Peter Strauss (Obsverer) Paula Katz (Observer) Karen Kennard (Observer)

Meeting Summary

Recap of Study progress

- CWG member asked for clarification on what Study approval by the SFMTA Board meant.
 - Staff responded that one of the grants funding the Study requires the SFMTA Board to “accept” the final report and that the team did not foresee seeking Board approval of any specific policy action.

Updated forecasting progress update

- CWG member requested to see further information on the forecasting by individual Muni rail line, as well as during different time periods.
 - Staff responded that the next steps in forecasting work will translate this system-wide average weekday ridership to peak period ridership by line. In our analysis comparing pre-COVID to current ridership, we are seeing that in addition to lower levels of ridership, the ridership is less “peaked”, meaning a higher share of ridership happens outside peak commute hours. There may be other variations across lines as well.
- CWG member commented that broader analysis SFMTA has shared on system-wide ridership trends has shown that travel patterns have changed post-Covid, and that Muni ridership isn’t as downtown centric as it used to be. For example, the 22 Fillmore has among the highest recovery.



- Staff added that Muni Metro is only 60% recovered while the whole Muni system including buses is closer to 80%, which is likely a reflection of Muni Metro's orientation to serving downtown destinations.
- CWG member asked for clarification on what ridership was projected to be in the original forecast.
 - Staff responded that the original forecast had over 300,000 riders in 2050, three times more than today
 - Staff added that the original forecast anticipated a doubling from pre-pandemic levels, from approximately 170,000 daily riders to 340,000.

Forecasting scenarios

- CWG member shared that UCSF has noticed that while the overall traditional peak has gone down, this is not true for shift workers and students.
- CWG member mentioned that the y-axis starting at 100,000 exaggerated how large ridership increases appear and suggested starting the y-axis at zero.
- CWG member suggested starting the x-axis at 2019 or 2020 to better contextualize how the possible future trends relate to recent historical trends.
- CWG member noted that the way the line slope changes dramatically at 2035 is distracting. Even though this reflects an assumption that pandemic recovery will normalize at this year, consider modifying the lines to make the trend appear more gradual which would be more realistic.
- CWG member said distilling the different ridership lines to a few "bands" will help the public understand
 - Staff replied that we can set the boundary between two of the bands to reflect where 3-car trains and higher frequencies serve all demand and where they don't.

Initial Study findings

3-car

- CWG member asked what service changes would need to accompany pursuing 3-car trains on the "inner" M Ocean View line.
 - Staff responded that operating 3 car trains past SF State is challenging for 3-car trains in revenue service. For example, some of the blocks in that portion are shorter than 3-car trains.
 - Staff added that this study aims to set up a future capital investment program, not decide on future service plans, although there are some cases where they are inter-related. Three car trains on the inner M would require some change to the service plan, but there are multiple possibilities. The future service plan would not be decided through this Study; there would be a future community planning process to get feedback and whichever one is selected could still have the flexibility to change over time. Three possible options are:

- The M is operated with a mix of “M long” (2-car trains to Balboa Park) and “M short” (3-car trains to SF State)
- J/M swap where all M trains turn back at SF State and service between SF State and Balboa Park is provided by an extension of the J line.
- Hybrid option: some “M long” trains and some extended J trains

Each option has different pros and cons. Staff mentioned that centering Ocean View community members in a future planning process would be key to considering these options.

Level boarding

- CWG member asked if you could inform people that a stop will only serve 2 cars of a 3-car train, thereby decreasing the length of boarding platforms, where needed.
 - Staff responded that the Train Control Upgrade Project will provide the capability for selective door opening
 - CWG member added that this could cause a delay due to the need to lock the doors on the third train.
 - Staff added that we already lock the 2nd door cars on the K Ingleside line today (although the location this happens has been shifted due to the new platforms installed along Ocean Ave).
- CWG member asked if there could be different stations for inbound and outbound stops to make level boarding fit in narrower rights-of-way.
 - Staff responded that this configuration would be feasible in some locations. In this Study, we are not planning stop-level specific designs, but will take a closer look in later phases. A potential drawback of such a split configuration is it could require us to re-align the tracks.
 - Staff added that the Study team thinks we are heading in the direction of not pursuing level boarding for segments of the system with very narrow rights-of-way. Specific to the N-line, we think the line should be upgraded to provide a mini-high at every stop so each stop is accessible. But, if we don’t pursue all-door level boarding for the “inner N” due to the narrow right-of-way, pursuing for the “outer N” would yield significantly lower benefits since people needing accessible boarding would still need to board from the front door to ensure they could alight from the front door if their trip ended in the “inner N” segment.
- CWG member asked, if the issue is driveways, can we work with property owners on a case-by-case basis to remove their driveway.
 - Staff responded that we theoretically could, but in many cases it is not just one driveway but three or four, and is unlikely to be an option that the SFMTA would pursue.
- CWG member asked about the possibility for new surface lines, noting Noriega was built wide to enable future rail service.

- Staff indicated that considering new rail lines was, generally, beyond the scope of this Study. We expect that the capacity strategies under study like more frequent 3-car N service will accommodate future forecast Sunset Muni Metro demand.
- CWG member asked what staff meant by the inner section on the N Judah being too narrow, as that is the section where there is significant crowding today.
 - Staff responded that staff is moving towards a recommendation related to all-door level boarding not being appropriate to pursue within the “inner N”; however, 3-car service is feasible on the entire N line and is likely needed to mitigate future crowding on the N Judah.
- CWG member added that they like the function of mini-high platforms, but they are really ugly.
 - CWG member asked for clarification of what a mini-high platform is.
 - Staff responded that one example is at Church & Market.
 - Staff added that a mini-high is a ramp that allows one door of the train to have level boarding. Some more recent ones have been built that are more aesthetically pleasing.
 - CWG member noted that at Jules and Ocean, the train needs to stop a second time to serve the mini-high and that new mini-highs should be placed in locations that don’t require double stops.

Low Floor Fleet

- CWG member said that low-floor vehicles would be great if we were building a system from scratch.
- CWG member asked if it would be feasible to raise tracks in the subway and keep the platforms at the same height.
 - Staff responded that this would interfere with the mezzanine level; there are three levels that are tightly packed.
 - CWG member added that it is like the Northern Line in London, where the older tunnels are very narrow and have large gaps at platforms. They added that they do not like the low-floor fleet strategy.
- Observer from the Teams Chat: “Actually, the subway was initially designed for street-level boarding PCCs, which is why the high platforms are hollow”
- CWG member said if a low-floor subfleet is recommended, there should be analysis of the tradeoffs between dedicating the capital resources to it vs. extending lines or creating new lines that might provide better ridership gains and be more cost effective?
 - Staff responded that we would not expect much of a ridership increase from moving to a low-floor fleet.
 - CWG member added that having a mixed fleets would have more costs – two different yards.
 - Staff added that we would need to make modifications to one of our rail facilities which would create some capital cost; other systems like Boston do have mixed fleets

- Staff added that Boston is in the process of converting to a fully low-floor system and has had a mixed fleet since 2000.
- CWG member asked if this would include redoing rail yards similar to the SFMTA's plans for bus yards
 - Staff said that Muni Metro East is relatively new. Green Yard is older, but it has been incrementally modernized with each new LRV fleet.

Crossing Gates

- CWG member said that they want crossing gates on where the M Ocean View crosses Ocean Avenue and Eucalyptus Drive as cars “fly through” to get to 19th Avenue.
 - Staff responded that these are examples of the types of locations where this strategy may be effective. These locations also have comparably higher rates of train collisions.
- CWG member said St. Francis Circle is a scary place to cross as a pedestrian, and having a separate project to improve this location would be nice.
 - Staff added that gates would only be protecting the trains, not pedestrians.
- Staff noted that the Study considered this strategy's potential feasibility specifically along the inner M line, but there could be other locations in the city where pre-emption and crossing gates could work. Our findings are that it would be most appropriate at select locations where cars driving may not otherwise expect to need to stop (as is the case for the Ocean and Eucalyptus M line stops discussed earlier).
- CWG member asked if crossing gates improve travel time along the N Judah in the Sunset.
 - Staff responded that the N Judah has a mix of signalized intersections, 2-way stops, and 4-way stops through this portion of the line. The strategies that could improve travel time would be to upgrade four-way stops to two-way, signalize unsignalized intersections, and add signal priority or pre-emption to signalized intersections. Only in signalized locations with pre-emption would we consider crossing gates, primarily to improve safety at locations where cars driving may not otherwise expect to need to stop.
 - Staff added that you can think of crossing gates as a really big red signal – while they provide additional warning to drivers, they don't change the actual signal timing for the train.
- Chat from CWG member: “For the crossing gates discussion, would any consideration be given to employing LiDAR technology similar to what Caltrain is currently implementing at high injury crossings such as Broadway in Burlingame. For our use, perhaps prioritize for use at high injury intersections”
 - Follow-up since the meeting: this strategy seems less relevant to the Muni Metro system as compared to Caltrain (e.g. Caltrain operates at significantly faster speeds on the surface).



Muni Metro rider focus groups

- CWG member asked whether, for those who considered route restructuring acceptable, did you get a sense of what lines they rode
 - Staff responded that we asked about multiple route restructuring scenarios. Some focus groups participants understood one or more scenarios would disbenefit a trip they regularly make, and still indicated it would be acceptable.
 - CWG member suggested that there should be a slide talking about transferring. They think it would be worth it to have a working group focused on how to make transfers more seamless in general across the Muni system. More seamless transfers could maybe even improve Muni's revenue.
 - Staff asked whether the CWG member was thinking about transfers between Muni lines or transfers between Muni and another system like BART or Caltrain.
 - CWG member added that for Muni, the T Third Street line comes to mind, as it is far from a seamless transfer. Start with Muni and then the ideas could be applied regionally.
 - CWG member added that they felt it was odd to be so averse to transfers.
 - CWG member responded that they have to make transfers now, if you make it seamless you improve the experience and make it less controversial. They also noted that the SFMTA is currently considering shortening some lines to terminate at Market Street (thus requiring transfers for riders going downtown) due to the agency's operating budget shortfall.
- CWG member asked about having J Church service run on the surface Market Street, rather than using the subway or being terminated at Church.
 - Staff replied that this configuration is considered in one of the Study's packages. In order to operate the J Church on the surface, it would either need to use historic streetcars or modern low-floor LRVs.
 - CWG member added that that brings up the mixed-fleet question again.
 - Staff noted that a new connecting track would also be needed in one direction at Church and Market, and that the existing LRV fleet cannot pass the existing mini-high platforms (for historic streetcars) on Market Street.
 - Staff noted that at this time, it appears that a surface-only J Church will be unlikely to be needed in order to meet capacity needs in the timeframe considered in the Study.

Discussion after presentation

- CWG member commented that they like the idea of developing bands of possible future ridership levels and the possibility of different recommendations for each band. They commented that for messaging, the idea that transit is needed for growth to work would be useful. Therefore, the highest forecast option should be included in one of the bands.
 - CWG member commented that they also like the idea of "bands". The Study should also communicate which solutions are needed, depending on which band of future ridership happens. This would give us a sense of what level of ridership growth would

trigger more serious changes such as route restructuring.

- CWG member commented that they like the direction overall. They wondered if with the additional development coming to the west side of 19th Avenue it might be worth revisiting the idea of moving the M Ocean View to the west side of 19th Avenue.
 - Staff replied that while such a move could help with safety, it wouldn't improve capacity or travel time.
 - CWG member added that it might make the service more appealing
 - CWG member added that the housing density is lower on the east side of the corridor and higher on the west side.
 - Staff added that if we start operating longer and more frequent trains, there would be less people on the existing length of platform, thereby mitigating the issue of platform crowding raised. The timing of Parkmerced's build out schedule is unknown.
 - CWG member noted that SF State, before Stonestown redevelopment, had worked with Parkmerced to consider moving to the west side of 19th Avenue. However, the costs were very high; 3-car trains are more feasible.
- CWG member asked whether the forecasting scenarios consider State legislative changes under discussion now that could incentivize higher density housing construction in San Francisco.
 - Staff replied that the highest trend line represents the San Francisco Housing Element level of future growth as analyzed in the EIR – any growth higher than that is not covered in these ridership scenarios.
- CWG member commented that they found the meeting helpful and well presented. When all the ideas were discussed earlier as a part of the packages, it was hard to know what options would be best, and these findings have provided significant clarity. They feel communicating about forecasting via bands is something public would understand. They were surprised by the relative high cost for less of an impact for low floor and commented that it was useful to understand/evaluate the benefits of maintaining the high floor system. Staff's summary of the technical considerations was helpful.
 - Staff agreed that the team began the Study assuming low-floor vehicles would provide significant benefits, but have learned that the benefits aren't very significant and the costs are. Our legacy system makes it very difficult to implement.
- CWG member also agreed with the approach of updating the ridership chart to a few bands. They suggested making changes to help explain the transition in slope at 2035. They said that they appreciate that the comments from the CWG have influenced the study. They recommended that as SFMTA presents to the public, it would be helpful to mention the things that aren't going to work – that didn't see good benefit versus cost. They hope that crossing gates stay in the plan for safety purposes; they mentioned that private vehicles occasionally end up on the tracks at 19th Avenue

- CWG member added that the Study should communicate how the strategies build on each other as ridership could move from a lower band to a higher one. The strategies aren't alternatives, but would build on each other. It would be helpful to the public to see what is added at each level.
- CWG member commented that crossing gates might be pressed on Muni by a tragic accident, similar to how changes at West Portal were motivated by the crash there, even if they don't make sense at that location.
- CWG member asked why other transit priority strategies like transit lanes were not discussed at this meeting.
 - Staff replied that tonight's meeting only covered about half the Study's findings. Transit priority will be at the next meeting.
 - Staff added that there's not much to say from an engineering feasibility perspective since we have a lot of transit priority and some preemption in the city already.
 - Staff added that there is a T Third Street project focused on signal issues and timing. The TCUP project will also provide better interface with traffic signals.
- CWG member commented that the focus group findings were very helpful. They demonstrate that Muni Metro riders are open to changes and it's great to hear the feedback from user's perspectives comparing it to international systems.

Wrap-up

- There were no comments from observers.
- CWG member commented that they could feel how the public input has affected the study and called it a great trust-building exercise.