

J Church Transfer Improvements Community Survey Results



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Background

The SFMTA distributed a public survey in the summer of 2021 to ask J Church riders and residents near Church Street for their feedback about the J Church Transfer Improvements. The project implemented temporary transit stop and traffic changes on Church Street between Duboce Avenue and 15th Street in late 2020 to allow for safe, wheelchair-accessible transfers between the J Church and Muni Metro subway service.

These improvements were made to allow the J Church to operate as a surface-only line during the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid crowding and delays in the subway. In addition, the project provided accessibility and pedestrian safety upgrades at an intersection that is on the city's High-Injury Network, as well as adding wheelchair accessibility for southbound J Church passengers at one of the city's most important transit hubs.



This survey was focused on the transfer experience, including accessibility and pedestrian safety components that may be beneficial even if the J Church returns to the subway in the future. The future alignment of the J Church line is being evaluated separately through the 2022 Muni Service Network design and outreach process, but many of the survey respondents touched on this topic and their feedback will be shared with the team leading that process.

Methods

The survey was promoted by sending postcard mailers to all residential addresses near the Church Street corridor, by posting signs in the project area, through the SFMTA blog, and through emails to stakeholders including J Church riders, elected officials, and community groups. It was available to take by phone or online in English, Chinese or Spanish from July 5 to August 16, 2021.

Summary of Feedback

Survey respondents

Of the 681 survey responses, nearly all (679) were completed in English. Twelve percent of respondents reside in the immediate project area zip code (94114) and 70% were from other neighborhoods along the J Church corridor. Of those who responded, 17% (114) shared that they have a disability that affects their daily life.

Travel mode

More than half (58%) of those who provided an answer about their primary mode of travel on Church Street between Duboce Avenue and Noe Valley reported that they rely on Muni. The remainder mostly walk (17%) or drive (16%).

Most respondents (73%) said they had ridden the J Church at least once since May 2021. About half (48%) said they take the J Church at least once a week.

Navigating the transfer

When asked “how would you describe navigating the transfer”, most respondents (68%) reported that they find it somewhat difficult (40%) or very difficult (28%). Another 31% described the transfer as easy (23%) or very easy (8%).

In the open-ended response section of the survey, some of the specific issues that respondents identified with the transfer included:

- Long wait times when transferring (most common feedback)
- Challenges with walking/rolling between the J Church stop and Church Street Station
- A general preference for a one-seat ride
- Lack of shelter at the new stop and exposure to rain when transferring
- A need for improved signage
- Personal safety at the new transfer stop
- Traffic illegally using the red transit lane adjacent to the stop
- Potential crowding on trains in the subway after transferring from the J Church



Among respondents with a disability, 73% said they find the transfer difficult. The primary concerns with the transfer cited by people with disabilities included long wait times (41%) and the difficulty of traveling between the J Church stop and Church Street Station due to the need to walk down steps or cross Market Street to reach the elevator (28%).

Note: Most survey responses (98%) were submitted before service frequency was increased in the Muni Metro subway on August 14, 2021. This reduced the scheduled time between trains at Church Street Station from 10 minutes to 5 minutes.

Permanent project

Most respondents (68%) definitely or probably opposed making the project permanent, while less than a quarter (22%) definitely or probably supported keeping it in place.

In the open-ended survey responses, it was evident that many of the respondents did not necessarily oppose permanent accessibility and safety upgrades but were against keeping the J Church as a surface-only line because of the inconvenience of



transferring. As noted above, the future configuration of the J Church line is being evaluated through a separate process from the transfer improvements, but the survey results provided input that the transfer project team can use in developing improvements to the design for permanent accessibility and safety upgrades, regardless of the long-term configuration of the J Church line.

Impacts on driving

Drivers generally found navigating Church Street more difficult because of the project. Out of the 681 survey respondents, 115 (17%) answered the question about how driving on Church Street changed because of the project. Of those who responded to this question, 74 (64%) said it was more difficult.

The project initially closed Church Street between 15th and Market streets in both directions to through traffic (commercial vehicles, taxis, and local access were still allowed). Northbound through traffic was restored in mid-July 2021, after many of the survey responses had been collected. About one quarter of the driving-related responses specifically mentioned northbound travel as a challenge; this particular concern should be addressed through the reopening of northbound through traffic.

Protecting the J Church from traffic delay

Most survey respondents (88%) said it was important that the J Church does not get delayed in traffic. Improvements to protect the J Church from traffic congestion will be evaluated through a future Muni Forward transit priority project on the J Church line.

Next Steps

Transit stop and streetscape improvements

The J Church Transfer Improvements project was implemented as a temporary measure to enable transfers between the J Church surface-only route and the Muni Metro subway as an emergency measure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project team is now conducting an evaluation of

the temporary improvements and developing proposals for permanent accessibility, pedestrian safety and streetscape improvements in the project area. These improvements would be compatible with the J Church remaining surface-only or returning to the subway.

The project team will share a design concept for permanent transit stop improvements with the community in fall 2021 to gather feedback and will bring the proposed accessibility and safety features to the SFMTA Board for approval in late 2021 or early 2022.

The long-term vision for these improvements will seek to address many of the concerns identified in the survey about accessibility, safety, and the streetscape environment. Similar to the recently completed Irving Streetscape Improvements, these permanent improvements would utilize more durable materials, such as

upgrading the temporary wooden platforms to a wide extension of the Church Street sidewalk with high-quality accessibility features, seating with shelter for passengers, real-time bus and train arrival displays, pedestrian-scale lighting, and attractive streetscape elements that support making the Church and Market intersection an appealing public space for residents, transit riders, people shopping in the neighborhood, and other visitors.



Transit stop and streetscape improvements on Irving Street

J Church surface-only configuration

The SFMTA is working to complete both a full evaluation of the transfer improvements project as well as a service evaluation of whether to keep the J Church as a surface-only line or return the J Church to the subway. While the complete service evaluation will be conducted through a separate outreach and analysis process, in conjunction with the 2022 Muni Service Network outreach process, initial data collection has shown improved travel time and headway reliability. This survey was intended to focus on safety and accessibility upgrades at Church and Market for transit riders irrespective of the future J Church service configuration, but the project team will share the feedback gathered here with the 2022 Muni Service Network project team to ensure it informs the service planning process.

Survey respondents provided important feedback about accessibility, wait times and safety that will be taken into consideration along with the transit reliability benefits of operating the J Church as a surface-only line. In the near term, frequency on the J Church will be increased to reduce wait times, and staff are monitoring the line to ensure the J Church is serving the Church and Duboce stop, which provides an important transfer option to the N Judah and access to the Safeway grocery store.

Members of the public can continue to send feedback or questions about either the transfer improvements or the J Church alignment to tellmuni@sfmta.com.