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PRESS RELEASE

SFMTA Acting Director of Transportation Julie Kirschbaum Wins Trailblazer Award Inspired by Groundbreaking NASA Rocket Scientist

San Francisco, CA – The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) is proud to announce that Acting Director of Transportation Julie Kirschbaum has been awarded the 2024/25 Katherine G. Johnson Trailblazer Award by the Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) SF-Bay Area Chapter.

This prestigious honor is given in celebration of the legacy and achievements of Katherine G. Johnson – a trailblazer during her 35-year career as a rocket scientist for NASA. Recently recognized as the math genius behind the successful Apollo 11 mission to the moon profiled in the film Hidden Figures, Ms. Johnson's unwavering personal courage, brilliance, and accuracy were indispensable to the United States space exploration program, and in 2015 she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. This award seeks to honor an individual who embodies and carries on Ms. Johnson's legacy.

Acting Director Kirschbaum is being recognized for her exceptional leadership as the SFMTA's Director of Transit from 2018 to 2024. Under her guidance, Muni – one of the largest transit systems in the U.S. with over 500,000 daily riders – is performing at its highest level in decades. Muni is a bright spot in a city full of real challenges, with customer satisfaction recently reaching the highest level ever recorded, improving 15 percentage points from 2021 to 2024.

Thousands of people came together to achieve these outstanding results, but SFMTA's Acting Director of Transportation, Julie Kirschbaum, orchestrated them, humbly and out of the spotlight. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kirschbaum oversaw rebuilding the entire Muni service system multiple times, adapting to changing conditions with innovative strategies that ensured 100% service delivery. Then and now, she focuses relentlessly on the customer experience.

She and her team have transformed Muni's fleet management strategy to deliver more reliable service. They've embraced innovative approaches in response to customer feedback, helping to better space out buses and trains to avoid bunching and gaps. They have used data to pinpoint exactly which routes are most crowded at what times. They've strategically added more buses and

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trains precisely where and when needed to reduce crowding hotspots. The outcome is a better experience for Muni riders, whether they're traveling to school, work, parks or any of the destinations that make San Francisco so vibrant.

Drawing together an interdisciplinary team of planners, engineers and public outreach experts, Kirschbaum also launched the [Muni Forward program](#), which has delivered over 100 miles of transit priority infrastructure – with projects like the Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit Corridor and Geary Boulevard Improvement Project. Muni Forward projects have sped up transit service on improved routes by up to 35% and reduced injuries by more than 50% on multiple corridors.

Kirschbaum's leadership set a new standard for prioritizing and measuring equity in service planning. Director Kirschbaum co-developed the [Muni Service Equity Strategy](#) with transit, housing and social justice advocates. The Strategy is an agency-wide commitment to correct historical inequities in transit investments and prioritize the needs of historically underserved communities. The Muni Service Equity Strategy has received international recognition and is quickly becoming an Industry standard.

Kirschbaum has shifted Muni's culture to one of continuous improvement, where team members are encouraged to take risks and constantly iterate. She stresses the importance of collaboration and mentoring employees into new and more challenging roles. This has led to operational improvements throughout the system, including the embrace of proactive, preventative maintenance practices that have helped reduce subway delays by an astonishing 70%.

"I am truly humbled to receive the Katherine G. Johnson Trailblazer Award," said **Julie Kirschbaum, SFMTA's Acting Director of Transportation.** "This recognition is a testament to the work of all the Muni operators, maintenance workers, schedulers, planners, cleaners and others on behalf of every rider in San Francisco. I feel incredibly lucky to be able to do work that makes a real difference in people's lives. Transportation is more than just moving people from place to place—it's about creating access, opportunity and connection. When we can reduce how long it takes someone to get to work or to school on the bus, it means they have more time to enjoy with their families and do the things they love."

"Under Julie's dynamic leadership, Muni has achieved unprecedented levels of speed, cleanliness, safety, and reliability—outcomes directly driven by the groundbreaking Muni Forward strategy she conceived and expertly led," said **San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie**. "I am thrilled to see Director Kirschbaum rightfully recognized for her exceptional contributions to San Francisco transportation."

"I have worked closely with Director Kirschbaum for over six years on a number of critical infrastructure projects, including upgrades to our train control system and improvements to the Twin Peaks tunnel," said **Rafael Mandelman, President of the San Francisco Board of**

Supervisors. "She embodies the qualities that this award recognizes: courage, innovation, and mastery of her field."

"If anyone is going to lead our city out of a crisis, it's Julie Kirschbaum," said **San Francisco Supervisor Myrna Melgar.** "I know that she has what it takes to secure MUNI's future with San Francisco's economic recovery as her central focus. She is no nonsense, no drama, and has the track record to prove that she can get the job done."

"The reforms Director Kirschbaum spearheaded have dramatically improved Muni speed, reliability, and customer satisfaction, maximizing limited resources in the face of immense fiscal constraints, "said **Janet Tarlov, Chair of the SFMTA Board of Directors.** "Her transformative leadership throughout unprecedented challenges absolutely deserves recognition."

"Julie is a true champion for equitable, inclusive public transportation," said **Jaime Viloria, Outreach & Organizing Manager at SF Transit Riders and a member of the Tenderloin Traffic Safety Task Force**. "Director Kirschbaum's innate qualities of caring, listening, humility will serve her and the organization extremely well at this moment in time. A much-needed expert with a genuine drive to make our transit system work for all of San Francisco."

 "San Francisco's downtown recovery depends on a strong and reliable transit system," said **Robbie Silver, President and CEO of Downtown SF Partnership.** "By reducing delays in the subway by 70%, Director Kirschbaum is delivering for downtown San Francisco, and I'm grateful for her innovative leadership and partnership."

ABOUT THE SFMTA
The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) is a department of the City and County of San Francisco responsible for the management of all ground transportation in the city. The SFMTA has oversight over the Municipal Railway (Muni) public transit, as well as bicycling, paratransit, parking, traffic, walking, and taxis. Established by voter mandate in 1999, the SFMTA aggregated multiple San Francisco city agencies, including the Department of Parking and Traffic, Muni, and since 2007, the Taxi Commission.

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