



## Muni Metro Core Capacity Study Community Working Group

Thursday, September 19, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

Union Square conference room and Microsoft Teams meeting

CWG Members	Project Staff	Other
Adrienne Leifer Karl Aguilar Aaron Leifer Cyrus Hall Sharon (filling in for Tommy Chan) Krista Judge	Liz Brisson (SFMTA) Mariana Maguire (SFMTA) David Sindel (SFMTA) Chester Fung (HNTB) Erin McMillan (SFMTA)	Tyler Brown (Caltrans – Study funder) Kathy Seitan (Observer) Peter Strauss (Observer)

### Meeting Summary

#### Packages components (Slide 7)

- CWG member asked why which lines are in the Market Street subway for each package does not mention the S Shuttle.
  - Staff responded that thus far the maps have not shown shuttles to make it more clear which surface lines use the subway. In most scenarios, subway slots freed up by service restructuring would be used by longer trains on other lines. However, in some scenarios where the K and L become a surface-only line, some slots may used by longer shuttle trains instead.
- The group discussed the SFMTA’s current practices of scheduling S Shuttle trains which provide limited supplementary service.
  - Two CWG members would prefer for the available subway slots used by the S to be prioritized for other lines and indicated that when the S turns around at St. Francis Circle it slows down other lines.
- CWG member noted that current subway frequencies are not as high as they were pre-pandemic.
  - Staff explained that in the Study’s future 2050 forecast, the service plan assumes that all available subway slots are filled and that in the Study’s baseline (including the Train Control Upgrade Project but not including any other possible capacity expanding strategies under study through the Muni Capacity Study), there are portions of the system where, during peak times, riders would be passed up due to overcrowded trains.

#### Route restructuring (Slides 8-11)

- CWG Member liked that with the J/M swap, a benefit may be that there is a more balanced load as more riders may choose to ride on the less utilized portion of the line to reach destinations like Stonestown. They thought if a J/M line were to be implemented, it would need to run more frequently than the J Church does today to serve rider needs.

- CWG Member asked what type of light rail vehicles would be used for the J Surface only line if it were to continue down Market Street. Staff explained that the assumption is that in this scenario, the J-line would operate with low-floor modern streetcar vehicles.

### Station platform heights (Slides 12-13)

- CWG Member asked about the requirements for ramps for different heights of platforms. Staff responded that even with low floor vehicles, boarding platforms must be higher than a normal sidewalk, 14 inches off the ground, to accommodate level boarding. If only one door is made accessible, a shorter ramp (aka a “mini-low”) would need to be constructed.
- In response to CWG Member’s question whether platform heights for low-floor vehicles are standard, Staff responded that most light rail systems, such as Seattle or San Diego, have similar platform heights between 12-inch and 14-inch platforms.
- CWG Member asked how much less expensive it would be to construct a “mini-low” vs. a “mini-high ramp. Staff responded that staff will be sharing package evaluation results at the January CWG meeting, including the cost estimate differentials for these elements.
- Staff added that in scenarios that are targeting full level boarding (rather than making just one door accessible), initial evaluation results are indicating that engineering challenges (such as impacts to driveways or construction disruption) are not that different between 14-inch and 36-inch platforms.

### Street design options to accommodate accessible boarding (Slide 15)

- CWG Member asked whether a general travel lane had to be retained in all the options and if showing it was necessary in some scenarios to accommodate driveway access. Staff responded that these drawings aim to provide a few representative examples, but no designs have been ruled out at this point. There may be specific blocks where a car-free street is possible, and others where it is not. However, if it is a commercial street, we would need to figure out how loading could be accommodated.

### Capacity-improve packages (Slides 16-21)

- CWG Member asked whether converting all lines to low-floor platforms would waste some of the useful life of the current high-floor Siemens light rail vehicles.
  - Staff responded that the Muni Capacity Study is a long-term planning effort. The first Siemens light-rail vehicles went into operation in 2017. A typical useful life assumption for a light-rail vehicle is 30-35 years, which is within the future 2050 time horizon of this Study. When we get to the Funding and Implementation Strategy part of this study, we will consider timing with greater granularity. If a recommendation is made to pursue low-floor vehicles, the recommended timing could sync up with fleet replacement planning.
  - Staff added that the timing of future projects this Study may help shape could range significantly. For example, on the nearer-term end, the N Judah may be re-railed in

about ten years and is a likely candidate to be bundled with capacity-enhancement elements recommended in this Study. On the much longer-term end, we are not going to touch the L Taraval line for a very long time.

Consultant added that the upcoming evaluation task will consider how the packages compare on a variety of metrics, including costs. Given the future horizon is 2050, the Study provides an opportunity for big thinking.

- CWG Member commented that they'd like to see other upgrades to the J line, and that there are stops that could be upgraded, removed, or relocated to accommodate 2-car trains.
- CWG Member commented that they like Package A (all low-floor vehicles) the best of the three Full Modernization packages because it would be easier to implement, i.e. less disruptive, on the surface. San Franciscans are weary of constant street construction. Staff noted that the Study's evaluation task is underway and will be shared at the January CWG meeting, but staff is learning that there is not much difference between the level of construction disruption associated with low and high platform construction.
- CWG Member asked if Option H (Retained J Church) has a mini-high at every stop. Staff confirmed that it would. Mini-highs to accommodate accessible boarding at every stop are assumed in Packages D, F, G, and H. Fully level boarding is assumed in packages A-C. Package E assumes some stops that are inaccessible today remain so.
- CWG Member asked why package H assumes that the K and L lines are out of the subway. CWG Member asked why the J/M swap isn't sufficient on its own without one of the restructuring concepts that removes a line from the subway. Staff responded that all the packages were designed to provide enough capacity to meet the Study's future 2050 ridership forecast and that there was not a capacity package that solves for that and does not include removing a line in the subway.
- Staff added that the J/M swap provides capacity because it would allow every M line to operate 3 car trains. If the M were to still serve the Ocean View, we would need to operate a mix of 2- and 3-car trains and turn the 3-car trains around at SF state. Only 2-car trains can operate between SF State and Balboa Park.
- CWG members do not want to pit riders from different lines against each other. Staff responded that the reason SFMTA set up this working group is because we want to have an in-depth conversation about this with a group that brings a variety of different perspectives to the table. We want to work together to determine what might make a strategy like this tenable at some point in the future. The good news is that this Study is long-range and we don't see a need to do any route restructuring to solve for capacity needs in the near-term (although other groups at the agency may consider variations on this idea in the nearer term if needed for operational reasons). When route restructuring was piloted during the pandemic, it happened very quickly, and we couldn't have an in-depth conversation like we are having now. As we complete and share our evaluation work, we will also be able to share how travel time would change throughout various parts of the system. Our early evaluation results are showing that some of the packages save so much travel time, that a rider transferring still ends up with a faster journey.



## Q+A

- CWG Member asked how the J/M swap would impact travel time on the J. The J is not fast, but the M after SF State is fast. Staff responded that we will have more to share about this when we share the evaluation results. CWG Member asked for clarification on how this will be measured. Staff responded that this metric is calculated by taking a set of representative points around the system and estimating what future travel time would be between them for each package.

## Discussion Question 1 – Limited Street Width/Prioritization.

*“Street space on Muni Metro corridors is limited. We may not be able to accommodate every desired street use. Which of the representative street configurations for a fifty-foot street width would be most palatable? Are there nuances to where you would swap the priorities? (e.g. commercial vs. residential area)?”*

- CWG Member said they are a L rider and get around using Muni and walking and does not own a car. They like option 1 (center platform, maintain travel lane and parking/loading on both sides of the street), followed by option 2 (side platforms with small accessible ramps, travel lanes on both sides and parking/loading on only one). It is less realistic to remove parking in commercial areas.
- CWG Member mentioned that other cities and countries have solved delivery by doing it at night; If we are looking 20 or 30 years ahead, we should look at new solutions to logistics, rather than random deliveries throughout the day. He also mentioned that people in wheelchairs may have different views on center v. side boarding and asked if there was any CWG member who uses a wheelchair. Staff noted that we do have a CWG member who uses a wheelchair, but he is not in attendance today. Staff added that level boarding is also relevant for folks using strollers and shopping carts.
- CWG Member mentioned that they are a J-rider, and during the surface J pilot during the pandemic dealt with difficult transfers while temporarily disabled. They noted that many people with strollers ride the J. In addition, the preferred street design should consider which is best to achieve the City’s Vision Zero policy goal. Additionally, recent projects that have required any parking loss have been politically difficult. CWG Member also worries about creating more barriers for small businesses. They like all options depending on the location.
- CWG Member said that because there are significantly different conditions in different neighborhoods in the city, that the best design will be unique for that community. If you work with the community, there may be solutions that do not create a false dichotomy of Parking v. Transit v. Cars.
- CWG Member said that as a small business owner, it is difficult for businesses to receive deliveries after hours because of buying power – they cannot tell vendors when things will arrive.

- CWG Member responded that they understand that the logistics system will not change quickly but wants us to look to international examples such as Amsterdam where delivery is at night, and to envision this with long-term thinking.
- Staff agreed that there may be creative opportunities to accommodate everyone’s needs. The benefit of doing this system-wide vision and considering preferences of representative designs like these is to try to give the future planners/project managers of individual corridor projects a guiding vision to use as they have community/place-based planning processes.

## Question 2 – Level Boarding

*Level boarding on all Muni Metro rail lines (as envisioned in the “Full Modernization” packages) provides significant accessibility improvements and improves speed and reliability, but it comes with significant trade-offs as illustrated in the example configurations. Instead, adding mini-high accessible ramps would take up less street space. Do you think we should pursue full level boarding or a mix of level boarding and “mini highs?”*

- CWG Member said that while they love the idea of a fully low-floor system with fully level boarding, they think a mix of low and mini-low platforms is practical.
- CWG Member said that long-term, focusing on low floor is better given the smaller streets.
- CWG Member asked how does using low-floor vehicles effect sidewalk versus center boarding. Does a high-floor platform remove the advantages of sidewalk boarding? Staff responded that on a block with driveways, it would not be possible to install side platforms that accommodate level boarding (either low- or high-floor). To accommodate driveway-access, it is possible to have mini-highs/mini-lows for boarding to occur from the sidewalk, or center boarding islands (either low- or high-floor) can avoid driveway impacts and provide fully level boarding.
- CWG Member said that ignoring costs, they would prefer low-floor boarding, as it is friendlier to the disabled and seniors.

## Question 3 – Route Restructuring

*Muni Metro is the 3rd busiest light rail in the U.S. and the only one that still merges five lines into one subway tunnel. If current forecasts are realized, we will need to begin planning for removing one line from the subway at some point in the future. Does this Study finding resonate with you? If not, what else is needed to better make the case? Please deliberate on the benefits and tradeoffs you see with each restructuring concept. What can we do to mitigate the tradeoffs for those negatively impacted by each idea?*

- CWG Member said this finding did not resonate with them and that capacity was very abstract to them. They don’t see the people in the term “capacity” and are skeptical about the Study’s forecasting  
Staff responded that the Study has been using the word “capacity” due to the potential to receive a federal grant via a program that is specifically designed to fund systems that are at or approaching capacity. However, Staff agreed with CWG Member that when explaining this work to the public, it would be better frame capacity in terms that riders understand such as



explaining that we are trying to minimize crowding and pass-ups. Any future forecast is uncertain. Given this reality, we plan to formulate recommendations that stem from hitting certain future ridership levels.

- CWG Member said liked the surface J idea because riders could still get downtown without needing to transfer, whereas with the LK surface line, Outer Sunset would lose access to a one seat ride downtown. Another CWG Member agreed on the Surface J. CWG Member added that they did not like the interlining of the L/K and saw it as something making numbers happy but not people. They want a focus on mitigating tradeoffs, even if it is out of scope – however, they don't see a way to mitigate the negatives of transfers in this case. CWG Member wants no forced transfers, even if riders are no longer in the subway.
- CWG Member said they felt that a Surface J was reasonable, however they are not a J-rider. They added that riders will want to know what increase in travel time they would experience not being in the subway. With cars removed from Market Street downtown, this answer is probably different than it was 20 years ago. CWG Member also likes the J/M swap idea, because it brings riders in Noe Valley to Stonestown, and that makes sense with the housing coming to that area. With the surface K/L, they are concerned it would create a very congested transfer at West Portal Station and they think it would be better for St. Francis Circle to be reimagined as a seamless transfer. Staff noted that for L riders, it would be unlikely they would want to travel past West Portal Station to transfer at St. Francis Circle, but perhaps there would be opportunity to encourage K riders to transfer there with improved transfer facilities.
- CWG Member seconded the previous member's comments. They said that while they understand the logic of route restructuring, they do not think it will resonate with riders if presented the way it has been presented. It may not resonate widely to the public that the study is constrained by an assumption that we are not building new rail lines. When presented publicly, the options also need to include an explanation of how SFMTA is going to reduce the pain of transfers. CWG Member agreed.
- Staff added that because our CWG member who represents the Ocean View is not here tonight, they wanted to add that there have been past community discussion of the J/M swap idea in the Ocean View and the neighborhood has previously not been supportive.
- Staff thanked the group for the helpful feedback that the SFMTA will incorporate into future Study products.

The group ran out of time for Discussion Questions 4 and 5 and expressed interest in meeting again in November to continue the conversation.