

## DRAFT MEETING NOTES

### **Downtown Congestion Pricing Study Policy Advisory Committee Meeting #4**

**Date:** April 30, 2020

**Packet:** [Follow this link](#) for all materials shared in the meeting.

**Watch video:** [Follow this link](#) to watch a recording of the session.

#### **Project staff:**

- Tilly Chang, Executive Director, Transportation Authority
- Rachel Hiatt, Assistant Deputy Director for Planning, Transportation Authority
- Colin Dentel-Post, Senior Transportation Planner, Planning
- Eric Young, Director of Communications, Transportation Authority
- Paige Miller, Senior Communications Manager, Transportation Authority
- Drew Cooper, Senior Transportation Modeler, Technology, Data, and Analysis, Transportation Authority
- Michelle Beaulieu, Senior Transportation Planner, Policy and Programming, Transportation Authority
- Kimberly Venegas, Communications Coordinator
- Brooke Staton, Co-Founder, Managing Partner, Reflex Design Collective
- Julia Kong, Managing Partner, Reflex Design Collective
- Paisley Strellis, Director, Civic Edge Consulting

#### **Policy Advisory Committee Members in Attendance**

APA Family Support Services, Central City SRO Collaborative (Evan Oravec), Chinatown Community Development Center (Chris Man), ClimatePlan (Amy Hartman), Commission on the Environment (Tiffany Chu), El Centro Bayview (Christina Olague), Greenlining Institute (Alvaro Sanchez), Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association (Robin Levitt), La Raza Centro Legal (James Ford), Mission Economic Development Agency (Rajni Banthia), Potrero Boosters Neighborhood Association (J.R. Eppler), San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (Sarah Jo Szambelan), San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (Janice Li), San Francisco Council of District Merchants Associations (Maryo Mogannam), San Francisco Giants (Josh Karlin-Resnick), San Francisco Transit Riders (Peter Straus), San Francisco Travel (Jessica Lum), South Beach | Rincon | Mission Bay Neighborhood Association (Bruce Agid), Senior and Disability Action (Pi Ra), TransForm (Hayley Currier), UCSF Mission Bay (Amit Kothari), Uber (Chris Pangilinan), Union Square Business Improvement District (Bri Caspersen), Walk San Francisco (Jodie Medeiros), West of Twin Peaks Central Council (Steve Martin-Pinto), Yellow Cab of San Francisco (Chris Sweis)

## Not in Attendance

A. Philip Randolph Institute, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, San Francisco Human Rights Commission, San Francisco Labor Council, South of Market Community Action Network, Transportation Authority Citizens Advisory Committee, Vietnamese Youth Development Center, Young Community Developers

### **Agenda Item 1: Coronavirus and the Downtown Congestion Pricing Study [[Presentation](#)]**

Transportation Authority staff went over meeting logistics, introductions, and study updates related to coronavirus. PAC members broke into Zoom breakout rooms to discuss their feedback on coronavirus responses for the Downtown Congestion Pricing Study.

#### Breakout Room 1: Report Out

- Initial reactions to the COVID-19 response ideas
  - **Committee member:** It seemed like a very thorough list of how to continue engagement. I'm glad that SFCTA is continuing to move forward. We are in a similar spot as we were in 2009, when things were paused, and back then we saw that congestion and traffic fatalities went right back up.
- Is there anything you would want to add or change about what we shared?
  - There are no suggestions for changes to what was shared.
- What else should we keep in mind as we adapt to the changing circumstances?
  - **Committee member:** It will be interesting to see the types of trips that people make following COVID-19 and shelter-in-place.
  - **Committee member:** There is a concern that people will use Lyft and Uber rather than taking public transportation when they return to work. There is anecdotal information that big companies are going to subsidize Lyft and Uber rides for their employees since public transit isn't feeling "safe." There is a concern about how drivers will be compensated for their Lyft/Uber rides. There is anecdotal info that Lyft and Uber will be laying off drivers. Lyft and Uber have paused shared rides during COVID-19. We should consider only allowing shared/pool Lyft and Uber rides.
  - **Committee member:** UCSF has a transit system and one of their concerns is whether they need to limit the number of passengers to maintain social distancing. They are trying to figure out how to balance safety and capacity. There are also questions about how people will travel when transit cannot accommodate them.
  - **Committee member:** BART is running a lot of trains to allow for social distancing. There is a concern that once shelter-in-place restrictions are lifted, there will be crowding on BART once again.
  - **Committee member:** How are people who cannot drive being impacted?
  - **Committee member:** We should be looking to other cities that are ahead of us in terms of recovery. Paris and Milan seem to be prioritizing walking, biking, and

non-motorized forms of transportation. They are rededicating street space to these modes.

- **Committee member:** There is a concern that those who can drive will go back to driving as the restrictions are lifted, so our work on congestion pricing is more important than ever.
- **Committee member:** When you look at work from home from a business perspective, businesses can save a lot of money since they can reduce real estate costs. Labor costs can also go down. We need to monitor these things and see how the market reacts.
- Other comments
  - **Committee member:** We've learned that a lot of commuters can work remotely and traffic has gone down incredibly. What can we do to incentivize telecommuting to meet our goal of reducing congestion?

#### Breakout Room 2: Report Out

- Initial reactions to the COVID-19 response ideas?
  - **Committee member:** In terms of outreach, our community has a lot of seniors and in-person outreach is the most effective way to engage with them.
  - **Staff response:** Outreach based on phone calls and sending out mail is the best compromise we can come up with.
- Is there anything you would want to add or change about what we shared?
  - **Committee member:** As you are conducting outreach, new questions will come up and you need to incorporate them into the study on a rolling basis.
- What else should we keep in mind as we adapt to the changing circumstances?
  - **Committee member:** I don't think it would be the best idea to conduct outreach right now. It will be hard to engage people in a meaningful way. Not to say this is not important, but people are dealing with a lot right now.
  - **Committee member:** We have been spending a lot of time on rent issues and evictions. We are encountering many issues we have never worked on before. We understand this is important, but is this the right time to do this study?
  - **Committee member:** Even if we do find a way to engage with everyone, people will have a lot of questions. People are not even sure what the tradeoffs are. If you ask me four months from now, my opinion on this study might change. So what is the value of getting feedback from the communities, if they are unsure of what tomorrow will look like.
  - **Committee member:** I think the world might look very different after this, the economy is going to take a while to recover. Some organizations might commit to permanently working from home. Congestion still needs to be tracked since it will return, but we might not need the same type of solution to address it. We need to consider the equity aspects of the study. A lot of people will be hit hard economically. We shouldn't add an extra burden to low income communities.

- **Committee member:** The original congestion plan was based on the idea of moving people out of their cars and into public transit. As a result of COVID-19, that is not an acceptable strategy because public transit cannot be crowded in order to maintain people's safety.
- **Committee member:** Senior Disability Action is currently working from home. Before COVID-19, half of our staff commuted by BART. Now we are wondering how many of our staff will be willing to take BART again.
- **Committee member:** I think that we know how terrible traffic congestion can be. While we don't know when congestion will return, we know that it will at some point. People who were not regular drivers prior to COVID-19 may now become regular drivers. Their input towards the study might change.
- **Committee member:** There is concern for people who do not have access to a computer or internet.

### Breakout Room 3: Report Out

- Clarifying Questions
  - **Committee member:** Are we considering other options to reduce congestion like Open Streets?
  - **Staff response:** the charge of the study is to investigate congestion pricing, but there is an opportunity to consider options for how revenue will be allocated.
- Initial reactions to the COVID-19 response ideas?
  - **Committee member:** Open Streets programs are happening in more communities. Many people will want those changes to become permanent. Second, I suggest that you rename the study to something other than "congestion pricing".
  - **Committee member:** You need to find another name besides congestion pricing because there's a lot of capacity now. A good name may be "mobility pricing." Transit agency budgets are running low, so we need to think about congestion pricing as a possible source of revenue for them. Also, another positive impact of congestion pricing is how it would allocate space on our streets to other modes.
- Is there anything you would want to add or change about what we shared?
  - **Committee member:** We need to be mindful of the precarious economic situation brought by COVID-19. Congestion will come back, and so will the need for congestion pricing. However, we need to have the discussion in a way that's sensitive to people's current experience.
- What else should we keep in mind as we adapt to the changing circumstances?
  - **Committee member:** Health is first and foremost on our minds. We need to connect the reduction in congestion to positive long-run health impacts. I wonder if congestion won't reach previous levels because more people may work from home? Will that mean that the people left driving on the road will tend to be less affluent and will bear more of the costs of congestion?

- **Committee member:** There is an opportunity to see behavior of traffic in low volumes. What is the impact on air quality? Will there be changes in respiratory health? We need to investigate these things so we can make educated decisions. Some people may continue telework/remote meetings like through Zoom. We should reduce congestion, whether or not if it's through pricing. Middle class will bear the burden of congestion pricing. They are not interested in just another tax to generate revenue.
- **Committee member:** In COVID-era, there is also a conversation about density as a health issue. We need to frame as "overcrowding" as the real problem.

### Breakout Room 3: Report Out

- Clarifying Questions
  - **Committee member:** Have you talked to the Community-Based Organization (CBO) partners about the plan to mail materials?
  - **Staff response:** we approached the CBOs with questions about whether they have the capacity to help us with outreach and we asked about the types of methods we are considering for outreach. We are developing different strategies to reach different communities. We are figuring it out with them.
  - **Committee member:** Can zoom be in another language?
- Initial reactions to the COVID-19 response ideas
  - **Committee member:** Revenue isn't properly presented in the goals presented at earlier PAC meeting.
  - **Committee member:** SFCTA presented to our organization and we were able to get a broader audience to attend the meeting since it was done through video conferencing. As long as SFCTA can organize or accommodate via video conferencing, I think that would work.
- Is there anything you would want to add or change about what we shared?
  - **Committee member:** We would like to see congestion pricing implemented sooner rather than later. We want the schedule to be faster. One concern about congestion pricing is that we need to be ahead of autonomous vehicles. We should be responsive to that as part of the recovery.
  - **Committee member:** In China, it was noticed that car traffic came back much faster than anticipated. Congestion pricing can produce revenue for transportation. There is a wide spectrum between shelter-in-place, a recession, and a new normal. We should not be stopped if there is a recession. Instead, we should use congestion pricing to boost the economy.

### Large group discussion

**Committee member:** The SFMTA is working with the entire taxicab industry to ensure a contactless experience when we're transporting customers. For example, we're installing driver shields.

## ***Agenda Item 2: Goals and performance metrics [Presentation]***

Transportation Authority staff presented updated draft goals and performance metrics for the study. Following PAC discussion and public comment, the PAC voted on the goals. The vote was an average of 4.1 in favor of the goals out of a total possible total of 5. Voting items must average a 3 or higher in order to pass, meaning the Goals and Metrics were adopted by the PAC.

**Committee member:** I think the four goals that you have are fine, but we might need a goal that declares that the program will be self-sustaining. This would mean not only paying for itself, but also paying for an increase in transit service to accommodate more in riders. I know that London took their congestion pricing revenue and reinvested it into their public transit.

- **Dentel-Post:** We are thinking of the program as a holistic package. We're envisioning that we will propose a program that balances out fees, investments, and discounts.

**Public comment from chat:** Writ large, this is still clearly a concept hunting for a reason to implement, rather than a problem with a search for solutions. Nevertheless, nobody has yet made any coherent and comprehensive case for tangible transit-related benefits of a Congestion Pricing scheme in SF, a city that does not have a wide-reaching intracity rapid transit system... especially since implementation would make SF unique -- an outlier city with CP, but with no viable and reliable rapid transit alternative for the overwhelming majority of city residents. (Aside, the "air pollution" issue is a complete fraud. BAAQMD recently evaluated pm2.5 pollution in SF, and determined it's not from passenger vehicles -- what little there is in a coastal wind-swept small city.)

**Public comment:** I am grateful that the issue of equity is included in the 4 goals.

## ***Agenda Item 3: Scenario screening process [Presentation]***

The Transportation Authority shared proposed scenario development and screening processes. This was followed by PAC member discussion.

**Committee member:** When figuring how to achieve a 15% trip reduction with the basic design, do you factor in how someone's willingness to pay to get downtown might change depending on whether there are alternative options that are cheaper, better, or faster?

- **Cooper:** Transit service investments work with you in favor of encouraging mode shift, and so it probably is not going to eat away at the 15% vehicle trip reduction. However, we might end up with a situation where we charge people an amount of money that is now higher than is necessary to meet that 15%, or we could be looking at a situation where we are not fully funding the investments. So, we need to balance not overcharging people, the desire to get 15% reduction in trips, and the need to increase transit service.

**Committee member:** I think placing the cordon area boundary at 18th St will cause a lot of consternation from all of the neighborhoods that would essentially be split in two. It would be

easier if you moved that line further north or further south so that you didn't go straight down through a commercial area. That was one of the major issues that this neighborhood had with the 2010 study.

- **Dentel-Post:** We want to test the 2010 recommended area because it can provide a point of comparison. Back in 2010, we did find that there were some concerns with the different parts of the border, but we also found that there were significant benefits that came along with the scenario. We are open to discussing boundary alternatives and plan to test an alternate geography to see how the performance would compare.

**Committee member:** I view the 15% trip reduction as a minimum goal to achieve. I don't want to put us in a box and decide now that we don't want to divert 20% of car trips or earn too much revenue.

**Committee member:** Are you considering investing the revenue in just Muni or in all different kinds of transit?

- **Dentel-Post:** We want to keep in mind both regional and local travel and make sure that everyone has access to good transit options to make the trips they need to make. We do know that  $\frac{3}{4}$  of people who drive into northeast San Francisco come from within the city, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  from outside the city.

#### **Agenda Item 4: Next Steps [[Presentation](#)]**

Transportation Authority staff went over their proposed future work in CBO outreach coordination and scenario modeling.

#### **Agenda Item 3: Public Comment**

**Public comment:** MTC recently suspended congestion charging on all bridges. What is the impact of this suspension on the SFCTA study?

- **Dentel-Post:** We do not intend to implement a congestion pricing program in the middle of a pandemic or a recession. Instead, we want to move forward with the study to ensure that we are ready with a program design once traffic and the economy return to their normal state.

**Public comment:** Congestion pricing shouldn't only be implemented during peak times, it should also be enforced during event periods, such as game night at the Chase center. Also, there should be subzone congestion pricing areas. Finally, will the proposal for congestion pricing go through a CEQA process?

- **Dentel-Post:** We could do a pilot study to determine how well congestion pricing works when implemented only during peak periods and depending on how that goes, we can consider expanding it. We looked at a double ring design for the zone in our 2010 congestion pricing study and it wasn't popular with the public because they said it was too complicated. We can start with a simple design, and once people learn how that

works, we can consider adding more complexity to the design. There will likely need to be some level of environmental review, but the extent of it depends on the program design.

**Public comment from chat:** You have already acknowledged the woeful inadequacy of the 2010 model, yet you are STILL using it as the foundation for your analyses. Furthermore, you continue to ignore any analysis of "balloon-squeezing" effects that simply move congestion and parking issues to just outside any chosen cordon. Worst of all, the entire scheme offers tremendous comparative advantages to the very few people, relatively, who live along Muni Metro (when it's functioning, that is), and need to travel efficiently to the FiDi or CC areas. Everybody else gets [censored], with a highly-regressive and virtually inescapable travel tax, or gets forced onto a systemically-failed transit mode that preposterously has buses that stop every 110 yards. AFTER you build a wide-serving subway system in SF, like every single other city in the world that uses congestion pricing, THEN AND ONLY THEN might it be sensible to consider a CP scheme.

**Public comment:** London is NOT a comparable city! It has a fabulous wide-reaching rapid transit system. SF does not. At all.

- **Dentel-Post:** Although those cities do have a more robust rail system, most of the increase in transit ridership was through bus ridership. Buses are much more effective once congestion pricing reduces traffic and they can move faster and on time.

**Public comment:** Does traffic increase in the streets surrounding the congestion pricing zone?

- **Dentel-Post:** Looking at other cities with congestion pricing, we have seen that the streets surrounding the congestion pricing zone experienced a reduction in traffic because there was so much less traffic coming in and out of the zone. However, we know from our 2010 study that if the zone is too small, some people will divert around it and increase traffic in adjacent neighborhoods that way. The design of the zone is very important.