



Memorandum

AGENDA ITEM 8

DATE: November 19, 2020
TO: Transportation Authority Board
FROM: Hugh Louch - Deputy Director for Planning
SUBJECT: 12/08/20 Board Meeting: Adopt the 15 Third Bus Study Final Report

RECOMMENDATION Information Action

Adopt the 15 Third Bus Study Final Report

SUMMARY

In December 2019, the Transportation Authority approved \$30,000 in Neighborhood Transportation Improvement Program (NTIP) Planning funds for the 15 Third Bus Study. At the request of Commissioner Walton, we conducted the study to evaluate the viability of returning the 15 Third bus to service, which was replaced by the T Third light rail line in 2007. The community has raised concerns about the T Third related to delays, switchbacks and train switching required at the Muni Metro East facility and the timeline to improve travel time and reliability of the current service. The request was made to evaluate returning bus service in advance of the signal improvements planned as part of the Central Subway.

We reviewed existing conditions and identified two potential express bus routes for consideration to provide faster service to downtown. The service options included an express service along Third Street, terminating at Arleta Ave and Bayshore Blvd, and a loop service through Hunters Point, primarily using Hudson Avenue, Ingalls Street, and Palou Avenue. We expect each service to attract approximately 7,000 riders, with 2,000 to 3,000 of these new Muni riders. We estimated cost per passenger for these service below the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Authority's (SFMTA)'s current average for trolley bus services.

We presented draft study findings to the Citizens Advisory Committee and Board in July 2020. Since then, we have completed an analysis of operating cost and cost effectiveness and SFTMA has conducted outreach on short-term implementation of a 15 Third express bus route.

- Fund Allocation
- Fund Programming
- Policy/Legislation
- Plan/Study
- Capital Project Oversight/Delivery
- Budget/Finance
- Contract/Agreement
- Other: _____



BACKGROUND

The NTIP is intended to strengthen project pipelines and advance the delivery of community supported neighborhood-scale projects, especially in Communities of Concern and other underserved neighborhoods and areas with at-risk populations (e.g. seniors, children, and/or people with disabilities).

In 2007, San Francisco began service on the new T Third Muni metro line, the first new light rail line in over half a century. Planned as part of a major expansion of transit service within San Francisco, the T Third route has long experienced delays, operational challenges, and poor reliability. While some improvements have been made to the current service and more are planned as part of the Central Subway, community members have expressed significant frustration with the current service and many have requested the return of the 15 Third bus service that the T replaced.

At the request of Commissioner Walton, Transportation Authority staff, in coordination with staff from the SFMTA, conducted a technical evaluation of returning the 15 Third bus route to service to address community concerns.

DISCUSSION

We conducted a technical analysis of a proposed addition of a new 15 Third transit service. The steps of the study included:

- Reviewing the T third service from Fall 2019 and former 15 Third service operations, ridership, and performance, using readily available data.
- Summarizing existing and proposed changes in land use and development since the transition from the 15 to the T.
- Conducting a transit and walking tour of the corridor.
- Working with Commissioner Walton's office to identify options for a 15 Third bus service.
- Evaluating potential impact of these options, including ridership and cost effectiveness.
- Developing a draft and final report.

Background Conditions. The T Third service that operated in 2019 was less frequent, but higher capacity, than the 15 Third service that it replaced. The first phase of this service also included a more circuitous route, traveling along the Embarcadero and entering the Market Street subway. The 15 Third bus service used Third and Fourth streets to make a faster connection to downtown. A more direct connection will be restored when the Central Subway opens in 2021, but the delay in implementing this project has yielded a corresponding delay in benefits to travelers in Southeastern neighborhoods.

We reviewed changes to land use in the Third Street corridor. Since the implementation of the T Third, over 2,400 new units were added in the corridor and major projects are in progress or completed along the waterfront from Mission Bay to Hunters Point.



We reviewed existing transit travel times and ridership to identify gaps in service. We also evaluated travel patterns by time of day to determine what type of service would best support travel, confirming the need to improve connections from the Bayview and Hunters Point to downtown in both peak periods and the middle of the day.

Evaluated Options. We evaluated two options:

- An express bus service on Third Street from Arleta Avenue and Bayshore Boulevard to Third/Fourth streets and Market Street. This service would operate as an express from Islais Creek south to SoMa to provide enhanced travel times for Bayview residents. This route has been labeled the 15AX.
- An express bus service that would loop through Hunters Point, primarily using Hudson Avenue, Ingalls Street, and Palou Avenue. This service also would operate as an express service from Islais Creek south to SoMa to provide enhanced travel times for Hunters Point and Bayview residents. This route has been labeled the 15BX.

We evaluated the two services with 8-minute headways in the AM Peak, 10-minute headways mid-day, and 10-minute headways in the PM peak. These headways are generally consistent with other express services, except for the mid-day service, which is not provided on most express routes.

We modeled these two services using the San Francisco Chained Activity Modeling Process (SF-CHAMP), which can evaluate the impact of changes in land use, transportation networks, and services on travel patterns of San Francisco and regional travelers. We conducted the analysis for 2020 assuming travel patterns similar to what we experienced before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The project timeline and budget allowed for two model runs. We modeled the 15AX service alone - the primary service requested - and the 15AX and 15BX together. These two runs chosen to ensure that the analysis did not overcount the number of expected riders where the two services overlap.

Evaluation. We used three key metrics to evaluate these services:

- Transit ridership of the proposed routes, including by time of day and direction
- Net transit ridership of the routes, including riders who shift from existing services
- Operating cost of the proposed routes and cost per passenger mile, for comparison to other similar services

The key findings of the analysis included:

- We expect approximately 7,000 riders to use each service on an average weekday. Slightly more riders use the 15AX service when both services are provided, but these come exclusively from people traveling from downtown to the 4th and King Caltrain station



- We expect a net of 2,000 riders to use the 15AX and a net of 2,800 riders to use the 15BX, when we exclude riders who shift from an existing Muni rail or bus service. The shifts come primarily from the T Third, other bus services in the Bayview and Hunters Point (19, 24, 29, 44, and 54), the 30 Stockton service (which would overlap with the proposed services on Third and Fourth Streets), and to some extent the 8 and 9 services.
- Ridership on these routes is consistent with other express services operated today. We estimate that about 1,000 riders travel in peak period and direction (inbound AM and outbound PM) on each of the services, consistent with the number of riders using the 1BX and 7X; substantially higher than the number of riders using the 38AX/BX, 80X, 31AX/BX, 1AX, and 82X; but less than the number of riders using 30X, 14X, and 8AX/BX.
- We estimate that both services have significant levels of ridership in the mid-day.
- We estimate operating costs ranging from \$3 to \$3.4 million per year for each service and between \$1.3 and \$1.4 million per year if the service were operated like a typical express bus service (traveling only in the peak period and direction). We estimate the cost per rider of each service to be below the \$3.05 average SFMTA cost per rider for trolley bus services.

Stakeholder Feedback on Short Term Implementation Options. Building on the findings of this study, the SFMTA convened a working group drawn from organizations and community leaders in the corridor to identify a route for short-term implementation. This route would be focused on addressing short term considerations for social distancing and travel for essential workers, as well as providing a quicker trip to downtown from the Bayview. SFMTA collaborated with the working group to identify three proposed options for short term implementation of a single route and conducted a public survey of these options in November 2020. SFMTA anticipates implementing the service in Winter 2021.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The recommended action would not have an impact on the adopted Fiscal Year 2020/21 budget.

CAC POSITION

The CAC will consider this item at its December 2, 2020 meeting.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

Enclosure 1 - 15 Third Bus Study Final Report.