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Fwd: To the EPAC: Demand project delivery reform

1 message

Thu, Oct 28, 2021 at 6:20 PM

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From: **andrew sullivan** <andrew@sulli.org>

Date: Thu, Oct 28, 2021, 5:53 PM

Subject: To the EPAC: Demand project delivery reform

To: <expenditureplan@sfcta.org>

Cc: <Board.of.Supervisors@sfgov.org>, MTABoard <MTABoard@sfmta.com>

To:
SFCTA Expenditure Plan Advisory Committee
SFCTA Board and Staff
SFMTA Board and Director

I am writing to urge you not to renew the 2003 Prop K sales tax without taking action to reform project delivery by the agencies that we trust to build and maintain critical mass transit infrastructure. This includes SFMTA, BART, DPW, TJPA, Caltrain, and any other agencies that might get grants from the SFCTA as part of the proposed sales tax extension.

As you well know, San Francisco and the Bay Area have an appalling record of high costs, budget overruns, huge delays, and "value engineering" that removes useful features when building major capital projects. Major projects funded by Proposition K, with one major exception, have been years to decades late, and have delivered dubious value. Just looking at the "Prop K" signature projects listed on the SFCTA website (<https://www.sfcta.org/funding/prop-k-half-cent-sales-tax>), five of six are late or incomplete:

- The Central Subway is now projected to open in 2022, nineteen years after Proposition K, four years late and \$600 million over budget, and with a cost per mile more than ten times international best practice.
- Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit is also projected to open in 2022, again nineteen years after Proposition K, and three years late and over \$40 million over budget.
- Geary Bus Rapid Transit, initially proposed as a major investment that could be upgraded in the future to light rail has been descoped to side-running transit lanes and a few bulbouts, and does not yet have a plan for completion.
- Caltrain Electrification is now on track for completion in 2024, two years late and 21 years after Proposition K, and over \$300 million over budget.
- Caltrain Downtown Extension is not even under construction, though the \$2 billion bus station that sits over the train box is complete.

Only the Presidio Parkway - a highway project that should never have been funded by sales taxes at all, given that it serves as an access ramp to a toll bridge, was completed close to on schedule and budget.

This problem is by no means unique to San Francisco - witness recent estimates of BART to Downtown San Jose costing \$9 billion to complete - but it is a problem that we must not allow to continue.

For this reason, I urge you to insist that San Francisco commit to project delivery reform as a condition of sales tax renewal. This means establishing international best practices for speed and cost control, so that we get our money's

worth as taxpayers and transit riders. SPUR has proposed some very interesting ideas (<https://www.spur.org/news/2020-09-29/why-bay-area-struggles-transit-project-delivery-and-how-fix-it>) which the SFCTA should study, and alongside the Board of Supervisors, SFMTA Board, and regional agencies, must evaluate them and implement the ones that make sense. In particular, a strong statement by the SFCTA in favor of a regional construction agency as proposed by SPUR alongside CEQA reform, along with enabling legislation by the Board of Supervisors, would help build public confidence that we are serious about controlling costs.

Please do not just roll over the tax and fund new projects the same way we did it last time. I was on the 2003 EPAC and very much regret not taking more decisive action then to demand cost controls. Don't repeat that mistake!

Thanks,
Andrew Sullivan
San Francisco