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PUBLIC COMMENT SFCTA 6-13-23 AGENDA ITEM 6 OCTAVIA STUDY

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To: clerk@sfcta.org

Mon, Jun 12, 2023 at 4:27 PM

FROM:

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TO:

Clerk of the Transportation Authority

San Francisco County Transportation Authority (“SFCTA”)

and Members of the SFCTA Board

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DATE: June 12, 2023

PUBLIC COMMENT: OPPOSITION AND OBJECTIONS TO ITEM 6, SFCTA AGENDA, JUNE 13, 2023

This public comment OPPOSES AND OBJECTS to ITEM 6 on the SFCTA Agenda of June 13, 2023 (Proposed Adoption of “Octavia Improvements Study Final Report (NTIP)” (“the Study”). Please assure that this Comment is distributed to all members of the SFCTA Board and it is placed in all applicable SFCTA files. This Comment is incomplete, since not enough time has been provided to review and comment on Item 6.

The Study is a project under CEQA, since it proposes physical changes to the environment that will impact traffic and safety in the project area and proposes to fund those changes. Yet there is no CEQA review of the Study and its direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts.

Octavia Boulevard was created by the City’s Planning Department to replace the raised ramps to and from the freeway connections that are vital to Bay Area travel and economy. The present street-level “boulevard” has been a documented failure, since it eliminated two lanes of freeway ramps that efficiently moved 90,000 vehicles per day, unlike the present stop-and-go street-level system that accommodates only half that capacity and causes 24/7 congestion, which City’s Transportation Agency acknowledged shortly after opening it. (See, *e.g.*, San Francisco Department of Parking & Traffic: Octavia Boulevard Operation, Six

Month Report, March 2, 2006.) Instead of addressing the troubling conditions documented in that Report, MTA has worsened conditions on Octavia Boulevard and in a square mile of surrounding streets by hindering travel on those neighborhood streets for 17 years.

1. The Study Is *Years* Out of Date, Resulting In False Conclusions

The Study proposed for Board approval is inaccurate, and that inaccuracy invalidates its conclusions and its proposed expenditures of public funds. For example, the Study fails to note that streets in the Project area described based on conditions in 2019 *four years ago and before Covid*, have *already been changed*. For example, eastbound Page Street was obstructed preventing vehicle access east of Laguna Street to create MTA's hazardous downhill bicycle raceway on the steep grade from Buchanan to Market Street wherein pedestrians are endangered by speeding bicyclists who do not observe Stop signs at intersections.

Meanwhile, thousands of residents on Page and Haight Streets have to navigate MTA's obstructions and lack of capacity to accommodate fire and emergency vehicles, and evacuation routes in case of emergency. Hundreds of parking spaces have now been eliminated on residential streets with MTA now installing parking meters and opportunistically selling expensive "neighborhood residential" parking permits where no parking spaces can actually be found.

The Page, Haight, Fell, and Oak Street changes *have already been implemented* at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars and do not justify spending more public funds from the Market-Octavia mitigation fund. Far from mitigating the Market-Octavia Project that is the source of the "community improvement" funds, those actions have actually worsened conditions for travelers, and have not furthered the alleged goal of the Market-Octavia Project to provide affordable housing on the former freeway parcels.^[1] None of the suggested additional anti-car spending is appropriate from the Market-Octavia Fund or any other source of public money.

More out-of-date proposals for spending millions more in public funds:

--the Fell "emergency" bicycle path, which, as admitted, *has already been implemented*.

--the Haight Street bus red lane, already implemented

--the Van Ness BRT, *already implemented* at public cost (including bonds) approaching one *billion* dollars, including funds from the Market-Octavia fund. This Project resulted in a Grand Jury report on the improper contract deals, congestion, and damage to the historic Van Ness Avenue/Highway 101 through the center of San Francisco, removal of nearly all parking on Van Ness Avenue, removal of two travel lanes creating congestion throughout the area, causing business closures, and removal of the historic 100-year-old antique street lamps. Since it has already been implemented, this destructive, failed project should receive NO MORE PUBLIC MONEY FROM ANY SOURCE.

--bicycle paths, slow street obstructions, and pointless millions spent on decorative "raingardens," fake "brick" circles, and other actions to eliminate public parking and obstruct vehicle travel have *already been implemented* and require NO MORE PUBLIC MONEY from Market-Octavia funds or any other source.

2. The Obstructions To Car Travel On Neighborhood Streets Diverts Traffic Onto Oak And Fell With More Anti-Car Proposals On Oak And Fell Streets, Including Bulbouts On Oak Street And Speed Humps On Octavia

The obstructions to car travel on both Page and Haight Streets have now diverted traffic to Oak and Fell Streets to access the freeway ramps on Octavia Boulevard.

The Study admits that most travel is by motor vehicles (Study, *e.g.*, pp. 11, 14-16), but instead of proposing making that traffic move smoothly, the Project proposes more obstructions.

The already-implemented Page Street obstructions do not require spending more millions on anti-car projects.

Proposed bulbouts on Oak Street will only cause more delays, impacts, and unsafe conditions for travelers. Obstructing traffic is dangerous to residents and travelers, since it also obstructs emergency vehicles and blocks potential evacuation routes.

The same is true of the proposed speed humps on Octavia Boulevard, where traffic already moves at a slow speed, due to MTA-created obstructions to through traffic. “Traffic calming” is a frivolous concept here, since it has already been “calmed” to the point of congestion. NO MORE obstructions should be allowed or funded in this extremely congested area.

3. SFCTA’s *Pro Forma* “Outreach” Only Reached Out To Anti-Car Advocacy Groups And Failed To Consider The 60 Percent Of Travelers Whose Mode Is Vehicles

SFCTA’s “outreach” went to the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, Walk SF, and several other anti-car groups. [2]

The “outreach” respondents were overwhelmingly affluent white males. (Study, p. 43.)

The Study admits that the vast majority of respondents to its “outreach” were affluent white males and underrepresents other residents and travelers in the “Study” area-- people who drive to get to jobs and other important destinations. The idea that the vast majority of travelers may just be “passing through” this area is ludicrous in view of the historical purpose of Octavia Boulevard and the need for freeway access and access to downtown and Civic Center employment hubs.

Further, the Market-Octavia project’s CIP was never intended to pay for regional projects, such as freeway and local “HOV lanes” requiring tolls for travel on public highways, not to mention SFCTA’s congestion pricing project, an unpopular plan to charge tolls on motorists, including residents, to travel in the city.

The disproportionate expenditures and emphasis on anti-car projects are an inappropriate attempt to legitimize the unpopular rhetoric of SFBC and other anti-car groups. NO MORE PUBLIC MONEY should be provided for projects advocated by one-issue private organizations. For ethical reasons, none of these advocacy organizations should receive public money from the City or determine public transportation policy.

Nor should the City continue its extravagant spending for bicycle projects that represent special interest groups of less than 3 percent of travelers in San Francisco. (Corey, Canapary & Galanis Research: San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) Travel Decisions Survey 2021, p. 5 [bicycling mode share is less than three percent of San Francisco travelers].)

This Comment also objects to SFCTA’s short time for public comment on this “Study” Project, which clearly requires CEQA review and has received none. The “Study” and its recommendations will not improve travel conditions in the city but instead will have significant adverse impacts on traffic, parking, air quality, VMT, energy consumption,

All of those impacts must be addressed under CEQA.

4. Neither The Market-Octavia Fund Nor the Study Should Be Used To Endorse “HOV” (Toll Lanes) Or Congestion Pricing (Tolls For Inter-City Travel)

The “Study” spends several pages on “Regional Congestion Management Strategies,” which are irrelevant and inappropriate, since the Market-Octavia “community improvement” public money does not authorize such expenditures or projects that far exceed the scope of that CIP Fund.

This thinly-disguised anti-car agenda should be rejected by this Board. Regional proposals should not be part of the Study, and such expenditures are not authorized under the Market-Octavia legislation.

For the above and other reasons that cannot be stated due to inadequate time allowed by SFCTA, this Board should reject Agenda Item 6 and **NOT** approve the “Octavia Improvements Study.”


Sincerely,

Mary Miles

Attachment: PDF Copy of this Comment including footnotes

[1] The Market-Octavia Project rezoned more than 7,000 parcels in the area for high-rise, high-density development. The so-called “Community Improvements Program” [“CIP”] was proposed to spend specific developer fees to mitigate the significant impacts of that overdevelopment by funding public parks and other amenities, few of which have materialized. Instead, the Market-Octavia project’s CIP developer fees have been spent almost exclusively on bicycle lanes and anti-car measures. (See, e.g., SFMTA, “Proposed FY 2019-2023 Capital Improvement Program, May 21, 2018.)

[2] SFBC (San Francisco Bicycle Coalition) is a private 501(c)(4) corporation that improperly receives public money from City contracts and grants. Both SFBC and WalkSF are under investigation by the FPPC, and Walk SF has received a “Very Poor” rating from Charity Navigator, due to IRS issues. (<https://www.charitynavigator.org/ein/472000881>; <https://sfstandard.com/politics/jfk-drive-great-highway-sf-bicycle-coalition-walk-campaign>)

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