



Memorandum

AGENDA ITEM 9

DATE: May 23, 2025
TO: Transportation Authority Board
FROM: Carl Holmes – Deputy Director for Capital Projects
SUBJECT: 06/10/25 Board Meeting: SFMTA Muni Metro Core Capacity Planning Study Update

RECOMMENDATION ☒ Information ☐ Action

N/A – this is an information item.

SUMMARY

In March 2022, the Transportation Authority Board allocated \$1,000,000 in Prop K funds to SFMTA for the Muni Metro Core Capacity Planning Study (Study). SFMTA was subsequently successful in receiving a \$500,000 Caltrans Planning Grant to leverage the Prop K allocation and proceed with the full scope of the Study. The purpose of the Study is to define a program of capital investment in the Muni Metro rail system, with the goal that this program subsequently advance for grant funding through the federal Core Capacity program. The Study's scope and budget are divided into two phases, with Phase 1 intended to conduct preliminary analysis to guide the further development of the recommended program during Phase 2. The allocation of Prop K funds in 2022 specified that reimbursement of SFMTA costs for Phase 2 of the Study would be conditioned on SFMTA presenting to the Transportation Authority Board a summary of Study progress to date. The Board also concurrently appropriated \$150,000 in Prop K funds to provide for enhanced oversight of the Study by Transportation Authority staff. SFMTA project staff will present an update to the Board on the Study status and answer any questions the Board may have.

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

BACKGROUND



The Muni Metro system is a backbone of San Francisco's transit system and consists of multiple tunnels and street-level light rail lines. Muni Metro currently serves approximately 100,000 daily riders. As the system ages, SFMTA is working to address state of good repair needs as well as support capacity expansion to accommodate future growth, including through investments such as the new light-rail vehicle (LRV) fleet and the Train Control Upgrade Program (TCUP). The Transportation Authority is a key funding partner for these and other projects serving the Muni Metro system.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) awards Capital Investment Grant (CIG) capital funds through three programs: New Starts, for new or extended transit lines; Small Starts, for smaller or less expensive new or extended transit lines; and Core Capacity, for programmatic investments that expand the capacity of existing transit services. The Prop L Expenditure Plan includes a Muni Rail Core Capacity program with up to \$57 million (2020 dollars) intended to provide early local matching funds to leverage federal Core Capacity funding for an eligible SFMTA project similar to what BART is implementing through its Transbay Core Capacity Program. With the completion of the Central Subway project, SFMTA does not currently have an active project or program within either the CIG New Starts or CIG Core Capacity programs.

DISCUSSION

Study Progress to Date. The Study's analysis to date has consisted of: identifying potential projects to expand capacity on the Muni Metro system; grouping these potential solutions into comparative packages; and evaluating the performance of the packages under multiple scenarios for future demand. Evaluation is underway presently, and SFMTA will prepare Study findings and recommendations during Phase 2 of the Study.

Potential improvement strategies being considered by the Study include: transit lanes and other priority upgrades; improved traffic signal priority; state of good repair improvements that also help to increase capacity; 3-car trains; and modern and accessible stops. Not all solutions evaluated by the Study would necessarily be strong candidates for inclusion in a federally-funded Core Capacity program, and the Study will identify the anticipated packaging of projects for such a grant.

Community Outreach. The Study has been supported by intensive public outreach efforts. SFMTA has convened a 21-member Community Working Group, which has met six times to date, with two more meetings planned this year. In October 2024, SFMTA convened four Muni Metro rider focus groups, which were conducted in English, Chinese, and Spanish. SFMTA has also met with and made presentations to



interested community-based organizations and stakeholders. Specific projects recommended by the Study would be further developed through specific community-based and corridor-focused outreach efforts.

Transportation Authority Participation and Oversight. We are actively engaged in the Study, to provide technical planning support and oversight of this important initiative. Transportation Authority staff are participating in the Study team, to provide review and feedback to SFMTA as the Study advances. In particular, we have an interest in the Study's work to define a program of investment that would be a strong candidate for future federal CIG Core Capacity funding, which is a highly competitive federal grant program. We also have provided feedback regarding land use and transit ridership demand forecasts and the analysis methodology for evaluation of potential solutions.

Next Steps. SFMTA plans to complete the Study by year's end, culminating in bringing a final report forward for consideration by the SFMTA Board. This work will be supported by continuing engagement with Study's Community Working Group. The Study will make a set of recommendations to guide further project planning and future environmental review. We will continue to actively participate in the Study team, including review of draft findings and recommendations.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

None. This is an information item.

CAC POSITION

The Community Advisory Committee will consider this information item at its May 28, 2025, meeting.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

- Attachment 1 – SFMTA Presentation



Muni Metro Capacity Study

Community Advisory Committee - Agenda Item 9
May 28, 2025



What is the Muni Metro Capacity Study ?

The problem: Muni Metro is experiencing

- **Aging pains:** old infrastructure is in need of renewal
- **Growing pains:** some crowding today and more growth planned

The opportunity: Develop a capital program to expand **system capacity** and address **state of good repair** over the next 10-15 years so that we can apply for an FTA Core Capacity grant



Federal Core Capacity Program presents a unique funding opportunity

- For existing fixed-guideway systems that will experience overcrowding within 10 years
- **Funds up to 80% of project cost**
- **Benefits systems like Muni Metro that need to improve capacity and fix aging infrastructure at the same time**
- SFCTA Prop L Sales Tax plan sets aside money that can be used as local match for this federal grant, to increase our competitiveness



BART: \$1,170 million federal grant



Chicago: \$957 million federal grant

Why now?

- A Core Capacity grant could provide ~\$1 billion
- Lead time to award is significant (~4-6 years from application to award)
- Segments of system that are overdue for major renewal (e.g. new rail, overhead) such as the N Judah are unfunded and are good candidates for combining capacity enhancements with infrastructure renewal
- After completing Study, we would take initial steps to enter grant pipeline to position ourselves to receive a grant and begin construction in the early 2030s.



Muni Metro's unusual history – 100+ year old streetcar lines + 1970s era Market Street subway



What is the Muni Metro?

That portion of the new Municipal Railway which will operate in the upper level of the Market Street subway and in Twin Peaks Tunnel out to West Portal will be the Muni Metro.



The Muni Metro is a subway-surface system. In the subway the Metro cars are rapid transit; on the surface they are streetcars.

Muni Metro today

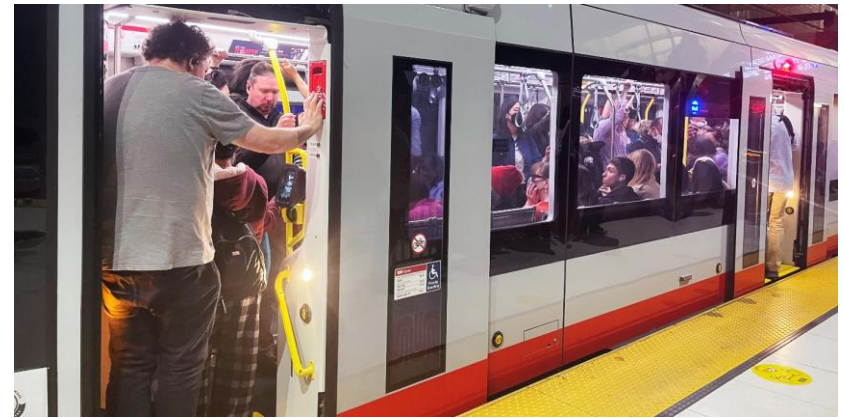
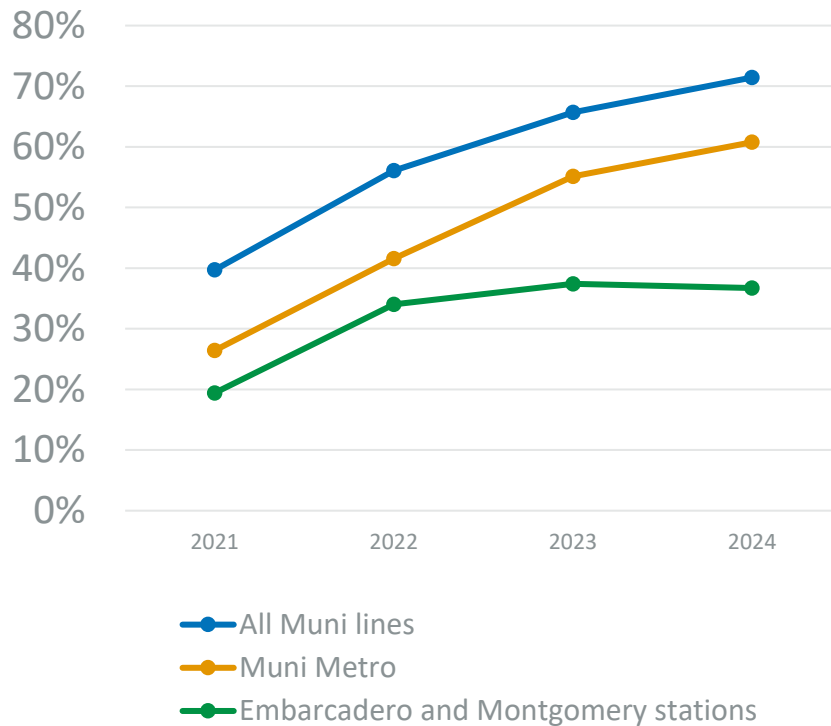


- Light-rail vehicle expansion to 219 cars near completion, ~200 stops, ~100,000 ridership
- 4th busiest light-rail system in the nation. Busiest transit corridor in the Bay Area, after the Transbay Tube
- Subway delays have been cut by ~2/3 since the pandemic, in part due to scheduling fewer trains



Muni Metro ridership is recovering more slowly than system average, but overcrowding is re-appearing

Ridership recovery (Average October weekday boardings as a percent of 2019)



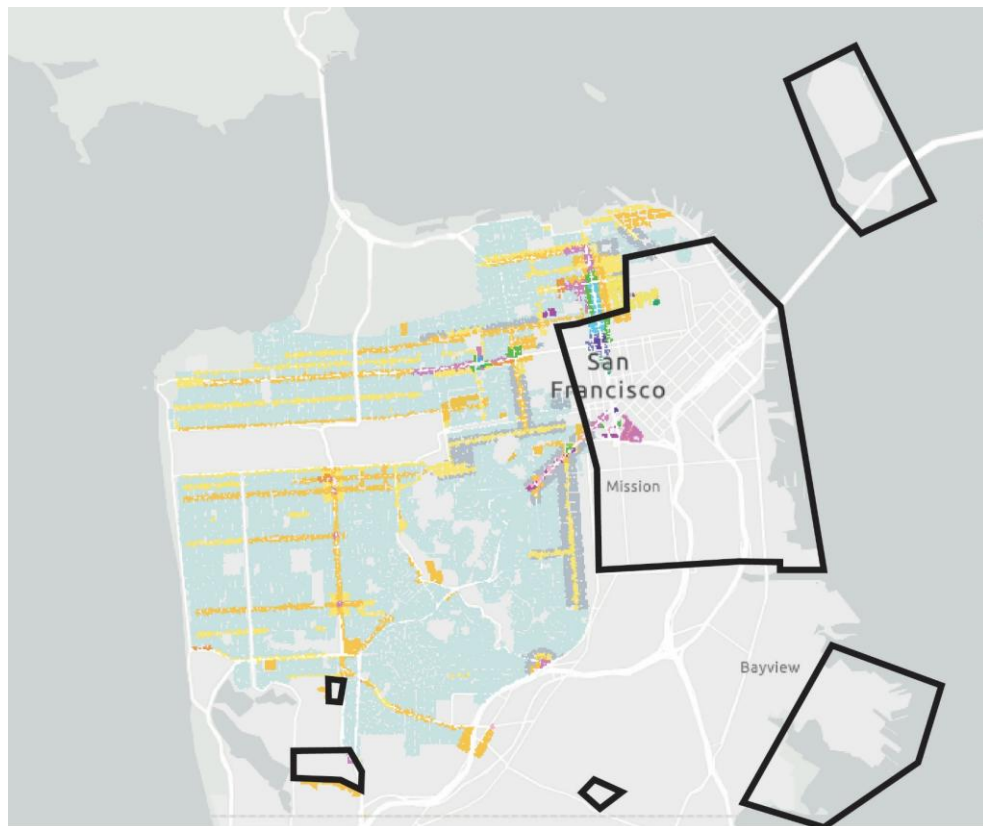
Recent crowding on the N Judah line

The future is uncertain, but we are preparing for more growth and more ridership in the long-term

- In 2023, the city approved a Housing Plan to add over 82,000 units of housing for 150,000 people by 2031
- While some of this growth may take longer to realize, we need a vision to accommodate growth and help the City meet its housing affordability, climate and equity goals.

San Francisco housing growth areas

Colored areas indicate locations proposed for re-zoning. Black outlines indicate approximate areas with existing capacity for more housing growth.

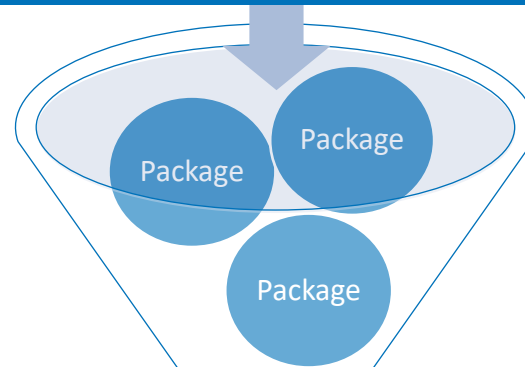


Study process

Outreach:

- Community Working Group meetings
- Muni rider focus groups
- Presentations to interested community groups

Assessment of capacity solutions



We are here

Evaluation

Recommendations

Funding and Implementation Strategy

Core Capacity Grant Program (10-15 years)

Other Recommendations for Longer-Term Future Muni Metro (Vision, >15 years)

Improvement strategies we're studying

Transit lanes and other transit priority



Better signal priority and preemption



State of Good Repair + capacity work



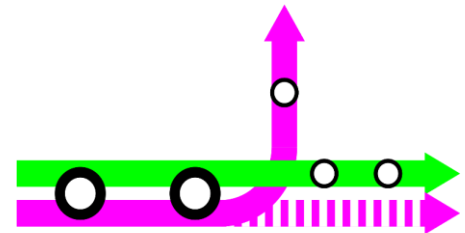
3-car trains



Modern, accessible stops



Route restructuring



Route restructuring: where are we headed?

- **The Study will not result in decisions about whether to restructure lines**
- Study is focused primarily on defining a future capital program
- Route restructuring is largely an operational strategy that could be considered in the future to boost other capital-focused capacity strategies
- Study will lay out benefits and impacts of different route restructuring options
- Future exploration of route restructuring would only be considered if ridership increases significantly or subway performance declines. Any work in this area would include extensive community outreach.

Outreach

- **2023-2024:** Six meetings with 21-member Community Working Group, with at least two more planned in 2025
- **October 2024:** Four Muni Metro rider focus groups in English, Chinese, and Spanish
- **Summer 2025:** Draft recommendations shared for public feedback
- **Ongoing:** As-needed presentations/meetings with community-based organizations
- **Ongoing:** Study webpage, subscriber email updates
- Projects that are recommended by the Study would be further developed with more traditional community-based, corridor-focused outreach

Key feedback we're working on incorporating into Study's recommendations

- **Be visionary** → There is broad agreement on the importance for Muni Metro to continue to serve San Franciscans' mobility needs. The Study should be bold in defining what it will need to ensure its ongoing success.
- **Focus on rider needs** → Recommendations will be explained in terms of rider-oriented outcomes (e.g. if we do not renew old infrastructure, Muni riders will be unable to rely on Metro to get where they need to go)
- **Plan for multiple future scenarios** → We are preparing multiple growth scenarios to inform our recommendations and will defer more difficult capacity-enhancing strategies to only if or when they are needed.
- **Set future corridor-based outreach up for success** → Instead of “zero-sum” pitting different interests (modes, lines) against one another, frame future outreach broadly to strive for consensus-building
- **Route restructuring should be left as “last resort”** → Study will quantify approximate future year ranges when capacity constraints become large enough to potentially necessitate route restructuring, given different possible growth trajectories.

Study timeline and future

The Muni Metro Capacity Study is just the beginning of a larger planning effort.

Decisions at this stage are about what recommendations and opportunities to continue to explore further.

The Study does not commit the SFMTA to any major expenditures.

Early-mid 2025

Mid 2025

Late 2025-onward

Develop Draft Study findings and recommendations



Prepare Final recommendations



Project Planning, Environmental, Design, FTA Core Capacity Application, Phased implementation



Circulate draft Study findings and recommendations for public feedback



Final report presented to SFMTA Board for approval

Thank you!



Study funded by Caltrans Planning Grant (MTC Partnership), SFCTA sales tax, and TIRCP

