

Memorandum

DATE: November 25, 2024

TO: AC Transit Board of Directors/File

FROM: Murphy McCalley, Director Ward 4

RE: Notes from the California Transit Association Annual Conference/Expo

I attended the California Transit Association's 59th annual conference held in San Jose, CA and hosted by the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, November 20-22nd 2024. Below are the highlights/take aways from the sessions attended.

November 20th Sessions

Keynote Address Chad Edison, CalSTA:

- Indicated that we should not look for new money from the State. The "fiscal cliff" will be hard to solve at the State level.
- SB 125, saw \$2.4 billion distributed to transit agencies. The remaining \$3.6 billion appropriated will be distributed based on new requirements/guidelines including increased ridership as a goal. We are waiting for the final report from the task force.
- CTA is seeking to have Cap & Trade program reauthorized with 15% dedicated to transit with hopes of increasing the transit allocation. Also, the CTA is planning to advocate to have the voter threshold lowered from 2/3rd to 55 percent for local funding initiatives.
- Carolyn Gonot, GM SCVTA, spoke about the ridership turnaround reaching 100% of pre-covid level.
- Summer Saunders, Olympic Medal winner provided an inspirational speech about her Olympic experience and the motivation and drive which helped to propel her professional career.

November 21st Sessions

Keynote Address, Jarrett Walker, Transportation Planner:

- Mr. Walker, a renowned transportation planner, spoke of the challenges faced by transit systems, post covid.
- It was suggested that we not focus as much on "choice riders" vs. transit dependent riders. But rather seek to attract a "diverse ridership" which promotes personal freedom. Also, there is a need to increase "access" to transit.

- Importantly, Transit Boards need to decide whether they want to emphasize “ridership” vs. “coverage”. Specifically, how much of the transit network should focus on ridership and how much on coverage. For example, VTA sought to have an 85/15 ridership/coverage ratio.
- He also promoted his books “Human Transit” and “Planning Cities for Successful Bus Services”.

Session: Grow Ridership with Innovative Mobility Solutions for All:

- Transit agencies discussed their approach to increasing ridership. For example, Marin Transit used their demand responsive services to increase ridership. Gold Coast Transit used a free student fare program and implemented a “safe rides” micro transit program. SF Muni discussed its many traffic/street improvements which decrease transit travel times, resulting in higher ridership. MTC discussed their “Clipper Bay Pass program. People with the Bay Pass took 40 percent more transit trips.

Session: Innovative Way to Recruit Bus Operators:

- A consultant spoke about creating a “psychological safe” environment. Meaning an environment where employees are permitted to speak up and be heard. They also discussed how to utilize the sign ups to improve the operator experience. For example, using a mobile app for sign-ups. Improve run times and reduce split shifts were also mentioned. Other ideas included looking at a 4/10 work week, am vs. pm extra board, and cafeteria rostering.

Session: Expo and Caltrain Tour

- Spent time at the vendor expo and had an opportunity to talk with many of the vendors AC Transit currently utilizes, like Hayden AI, Hastius, MCI and Trapaze. I had a demo with a company (Rosco Vision) that makes a “virtual mirror”. Apparently, VTA is currently conducting a pilot program of the product. Using cameras, these mirrors allow the bus operator to see their whole surrounding, much like what is installed on newer automobiles, thus eliminating the need for physical mirror (which the State has temporarily permitted).
- The Caltrain tour was impressive. We took a short ride on the new electric trains up to the Mountain View Station. The ride was very smooth and quiet. The cars are very comfortable and offer many amenities (device charging, WIFI, restrooms, a bike car). Caltrain has experience an increase in ridership since the new system has been introduced.