

STREETSBLOG

Lawmaker Wants Transit Agencies to Play Nice

New bill would force Bay Area operators to rationalize fares, put customers first

By Roger Rudick | Feb 4, 2020 | 3 COMMENTS



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BART fare gate. Not to be confused with a Muni subway fare gate. Or any of the 27 Bay Area operator's fare/payment systems. Photo: BART

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Transferring between the Bay Area's trains, buses, and ferries involves navigating a dizzying and irrational set of fares and rules. All of that may change one day if San Francisco Assemblymember David Chiu and advocates succeed in passing Assembly Bill 2057, the "Bay Area Seamless Transit Act," which would force the Bay Area's 27 transit

agencies to unify fares and work on creating schedules that facilitate easy transfers between systems.  

From [Seamless Bay Area](#), the lead advocacy group behind the legislation: 

Every day, hundreds of thousands of Bay Area residents and visitors navigate a public transportation system that is fragmented and unreliable, enduring long travel times, gaps in service, and uncoordinated transfers and fares. A.B. 2057, or the Bay Area Seamless Transit Act, seeks to implement key reforms and accountability measures to: 

- Create a more integrated and reliable transportation network in the Bay Area
- Make transit more efficient, easy to use, and affordable for riders
- Ensure future regional and state funds for public transportation are connected to the goals of a seamless, customer-first system
- Boost overall transit usage and reduce traffic, in line with the state of California's environmental goals

Seamless Bay Area is proud to be the main sponsor of this legislation, which is informed by our advocacy and policy reform proposals.

In [London, Zurich, Berlin, and a lot of other cities](#), transit riders purchase one pass, paying a single distance-based fare, regardless of whether they ride a bus, subway, surface train, ferry, or some combination of these. In the Bay Area, however, “navigating our disjointed transit system can be an intimidating and frustrating experience for riders, which leads to less transit ridership overall,” said Chiu at an event this morning at the Salesforce Transit Center to announce the bill. “We need to put riders first and take steps to make our transportation system reliable, convenient, and intuitive.”



This morning's legislative press event at the Transit Center. Asm. David Chiu, San Francisco Supervisor and County Transportation Authority Chair Aaron Peskin, BART Board Director Rebecca Saltzman, MTC Commissioner and Rohnert Park Vice Mayor Jake Mackenzie, and supportive transit riders. Photo: Jen Kwart

And from a release from Chiu's office:

Taking a new transit operator can be intimidating because a rider needs to navigate the unique fare structure, nomenclature, and wayfinding mechanisms for each individual operator. Despite substantial investment in transportation infrastructure over several decades, transit ridership in the Bay Area has not increased. Only 12 percent of the population have used transit to commute since 1970. Between 2016 and 2018, ridership across Bay Area public transit systems fell by 5.2 percent. In comparison, regions that have high transit ridership, like [Seattle or London, have highly integrated networks](#) of local and regional transit services, aligned routes and schedules, coordinated transfers, high-quality transit hubs, and common branding and customer information. A.B. 2057 would require Bay Area transit agencies to establish a universal local bus fare, create uniform transfer and discount policies for bus trips, design a single regional transit map, standardize wayfinding mechanisms, and report real-time transit data.

The legislation promises to [follow the examples set by Zurich and other cities overseas](#) and “establish accountability metrics and deadlines for transit agencies to achieve fare and

payment integration, standardized wayfinding and mapping, and real-time transit data to improve the transit rider experience” and to “create a path for stakeholder entities to discuss institutional reforms and propose system integration opportunities, including schedule coordination and project delivery standards.”



A map of the Bay Area's 27 transit operators. Image: Seamless Bay Area

“For several decades, our region has attempted [and largely failed to coordinate different transit systems through voluntary coordination](#),” said Ian Griffith, Seamless Bay Area’s Policy Director. “The public expects their transit to work as one seamless, affordable, integrated system, and [they want to see bold reforms](#) that will get their public agencies to do this as soon as possible. They are tired of excuses of why it’s not possible. The Bay Area



Seamless Transit Act is a critical first step to reforming our region's transit to work as an integrated, rational network.”



On Feb. 19, Seamless Bay Area is throwing a [launch party](#) to share more information about the Seamless Transit Act. RSVP [here](#).



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**Chris** • 10 hours ago

This sounds terrific, but also daunting. How would a universal bus fare work financially given that the different transit districts have very different resources? For example, Muni is considering making fares free for all youth. Would other districts with very different resources be required to do the same thing? Or would Muni be prohibited from fare innovations such as that?

Also, why only a universal bus fare? Excluding rail and ferry fares seems to be contrary to the entire point of this effort.

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**JT** • 13 hours ago

The SF Bay Area has always self-Balkanized. It is one urban area but there are nine counties and dozens of cities. And they all want their own power and autonomy.

It's not just transportation that suffers but housing and anything else that would benefit from planning. And that duplication of authorities is very expensive and inefficient. Plus you get ideological extremes, from SF and Berkeley on the one hand, to the conservative unincorporated areas further out.

Ironically the one transportation mode that is unitary and seamless is the highway system.

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**thielges** • 13 hours ago

A good example of what is possible is the VRR agency providing transit for a conurbation in northwest Germany: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VRR>

The VRR covers a sprawling region about the same size, density, and population as the SF Bay area. It binds together about 30 transit agencies and 60 municipalities.



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By Roger Rudick | Sep 9, 2019

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Transit Week Kick Off

By Roger Rudick | Sep 25, 2017

It's the one time of the year "to say thanks to transit riders," said Rachel Hyden, Executive Director of the San Francisco Transit Riders (SFTR), at today's noontime Transit Week kick off event, held on the steps of San Francisco City Hall. "The transit rider contributes to SF. We lower carbon emissions, reduce congestion, and [...]"



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CA Legislators Turn Their Attention to Transit Funding

By Melanie Curry | Aug 18, 2015

California legislators held press events in Los Angeles and San Francisco on Friday to present new bills to boost transit funding as part of the special legislative session on transportation infrastructure. "Anyone who hits a pothole or sits in traffic knows that our transportation system is in crisis, but so does anyone who has to rely [...]"

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