

## John Cunningham

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**From:** Seamus Murphy <murphy@watertransit.org>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, September 14, 2022 11:39 AM  
**To:** John Cunningham  
**Subject:** A note to WETA/SF Bay Ferry stakeholders

### WATER EMERGENCY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY



Dear SF Bay Ferry Stakeholder,

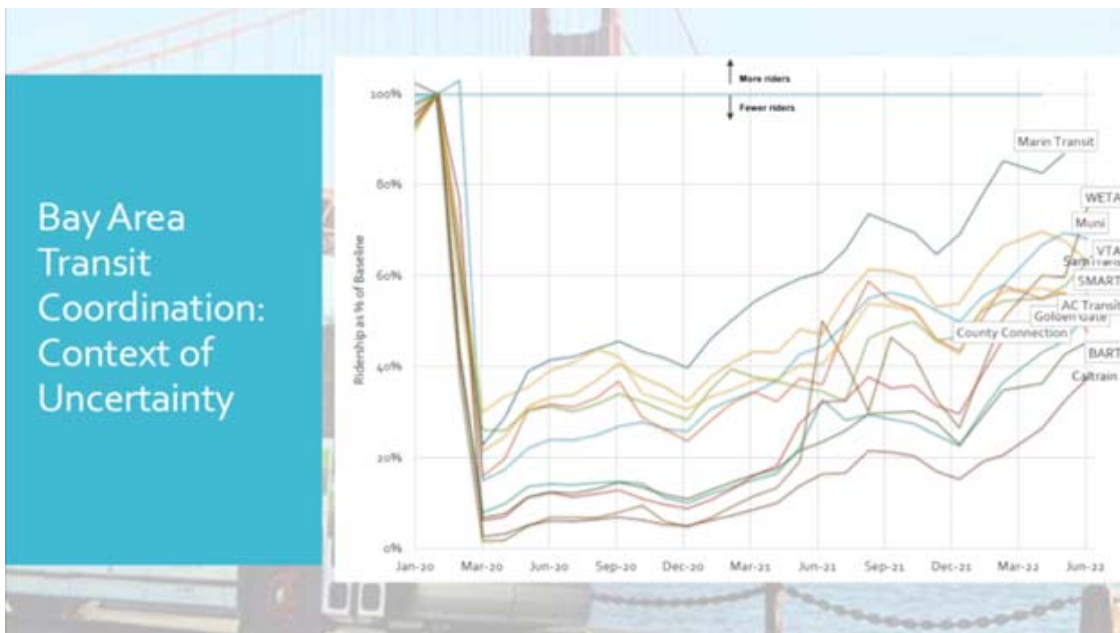
You may have seen a recent story in the Mercury News/East Bay Times about the expense of ferry service (<https://www.eastbaytimes.com/2022/09/13/343-a-trip-san-francisco-ferry-costs-led-nation-despite-slashed-service/>). While the story focuses primarily on the Golden Gate Ferry system, it also mentions data for the SF Bay Ferry system that WETA operates.

Despite the points made in the article, **SF Bay Ferry's operating costs are very much in line with other ferry operators and other transit systems providing regional service.**

#### **FLAWED DATA ANALYSIS**

The data in the story is from Fiscal Year 2020-21, when transit ridership was at an all-time low, and systems like SF Bay Ferry were maintaining service for essential workers. Data from this period is clearly tainted by the pandemic and cannot represent a viable or accurate reflection of the cost-effectiveness of the region's ferry services.

Since then, SF Bay Ferry became the first Bay Area transit agency to restore full service. At the same time, the agency lowered fares to make sure that the system would be accessible and affordable to a broad and diverse ridership base. We are in a transformative time for transit and how we measure efficiency and effectiveness is changing. COVID relief funding was made available to transit agencies to restore service and preserve jobs for transit workers, and that is exactly what it is being used for at SF Bay Ferry. **After restoring service, ridership SF Bay Ferry ridership nearly doubled immediately and it has risen steadily, putting WETA near the top of the list when it comes to ridership return.**



Looking at pandemic data isn't illustrative of the enormous shift we're undergoing. This is especially true given the need to preserve reliable transit for lower income travelers and essential workers in the health care, service, and construction industries. With respect to WETA, we also have a mandate to respond to disasters that disrupt the transportation network with emergency water transit. We cannot do that without investing in the employment of skilled captains, engineers and crews and to keep the fleet well-maintained and ready.

#### **FERRY/REGIONAL TRANSIT COST-PER-MILE**

The article also fails to distinguish between local and regional systems. Local systems like bus agencies carry passengers over a relatively short distance, so their cost/passenger is comparatively low. Regional commuter rail, intercity rail and ferry systems carry riders further. Longer trips reduce a larger share of emissions, and they also cost more to operate. **A more accurate analysis would look at cost per passenger mile and would demonstrate that the cost effectiveness of ferry service is comparable to other modes.**



**UNIQUE BENEFITS OF WATER TRANSIT**

Ferry transit is also different from other modes in some unique ways. Ferries can carry up to 445 passengers. These capacities provide superior congestion relief on freeways, bridges, and other transit modes. The system also provides access to areas that other modes don't. **SF Bay Ferry's Vallejo route provides the only single seat transit option connecting Solano County and San Francisco, and there are no BART stations on Alameda Island, where SF Bay Ferry operates three routes.** These are huge reasons why SF Bay Ferry saw its ridership double from 2012 through 2019, and why the ridership rebound from pandemic lows has been so impressive. They are also evidence that more ferry service will be needed to serve the tremendous amount of job and population growth that the Bay Area is seeing on the waterfront.

**NEW TRANSIT INVESTMENT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER**

Bay Area transit recovery has a long way to go and maintaining service over the next several years will almost certainly require new investment. But like other transit operators, WETA is not simply waiting for passengers to reappear. The region has been working collaboratively to improve our transit network so that we can attract a larger share of travelers to our systems. **For SF Bay Ferry that means aligning our fares with other modes, efficiently adding service during the off-peak, coordinating new first/last mile connections, and bringing enhancements like real-time departure info to the system.**

It is unfortunate that the article above uses flawed data to question the value of this transit service at a time when the focus should be on investing more in our regional network so that it can survive, evolve, and thrive as the region recovers. Thank you, as always, for your continued support of WETA, SF Bay Ferry, and our transit partners. If you have any questions or concerns, please be in touch ([murphy@watertransit.org](mailto:murphy@watertransit.org)).

Sincerely,  
**Seamus Murphy and the SF Bay Ferry Team**

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