



January 6, 2019

Hon. London N. Breed
City Hall, Room 200
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA, 94102

Dear Mayor Breed,

On behalf of the Alice B. Toklas LGBT Democratic Club, we are writing to express our growing concern over our City's public transit system, its management, and its oversight body. We believe now is the time for new leadership on the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) Board of Directors.

We strongly supported your August 20th letter to SFMTA Director of Transportation Ed Reiskin, calling for improved service in light of a \$60 million increase to Muni's budget in the past year alone. Yet, there has been little follow up. We were also extremely dismayed to see that since then, transit director John Haley was able to quietly retire with high praise from Director Reiskin amid multiple allegations of sexual harassment and verbal abuse that was apparently a poorly-kept secret inside the agency for quite some time.

When the SFMTA Board was established nearly twenty years ago, an on-time rate of 85 percent was promised for Muni. It currently has an on-time performance of 55 percent. With SFMTA's driver shortage now double what was reported by the agency over the summer, we cannot help but question the current leadership's candor and trustworthiness.

Passengers are often stranded in the middle of routes when a vehicle is rerouted inexplicably and with no warning (a violation of its own rules). As of last year, these "switchbacks" had doubled on every rail line since 2013. During rush hour throughout the City, packed trains and buses pass by commuters, stranding them or, for those who can afford it, forcing them to look for private transit options. In the evenings, it is not uncommon to wait 20-30 minutes for a train, as is

reflected in Muni's nearly 25 percent rate of "bunching and gaps," according to the City Controller. At all times of the day, trains often idle without warning or explanation for several minutes at stops along a route as a handover occurs between operators. Muni stations remain unsafe for people with disabilities who must navigate between poorly marked and unacceptably dangerous and filthy elevators, which are often out of service. Many people, women in particular, increasingly pay to take Uber, Lyft, or cabs at night because they do not feel safe due to dimly lit stops, longer waits, and harassment.

At a time when we need to increase transit services and investments, current leadership is not spending the money it already has. While the agency has previously pointed to lack of funding, it has yet to spend the \$500 million Transportation and Road Improvement Bond, approved by the voters in 2014 (and supported by Alice). SFMTA's projections to the Citizens General Obligation Bond Oversight Committee indicate that the agency plans to spend *less than half* by 2021. Further, we note that SFMTA's projections also leave bond funding for pedestrian safety, traffic signal, and bicycle infrastructure unspent, which is at odds with what you called for in your August 20th letter.

SFMTA has demonstrated its inability to fulfill its basic responsibilities, let alone large infrastructure projects. These projects, which we so desperately need completed, drag on for months or even years behind schedule, with inexplicable effects and no accountability. In 2017, the Market Street tunnel project shut down evening subway service for the entire City for months. For the 2.2-mile Sunset Tunnel Trackway Improvement Project, started in 2014, SFMTA frequently shut down the N route on weekends for three years. The Twin Peaks tunnel was closed for two months this summer, and SFMTA dealt with that by surreptitiously reducing bus service throughout the City with little to no notice, causing widespread chaos throughout the system. The Van Ness BRT project has been delayed over two years. The T rail line, serving one of the most low-income and transit poor areas of our City, continues to struggle with providing regular service (in just late December, the rail trains were replaced by crowded buses due to yet another delay in an infrastructure project). Meanwhile, the Central Subway project has been delayed by nearly two years with no end in sight, is tens of millions of dollars over budget, and the SFMTA knowingly signed off on miles of the wrong steel for the rail tracks, which must now be replaced.

It appears that SFMTA cannot be trusted to manage even the most basic tasks: Escalators remain out of service and boarded up at our Muni stations throughout the City, in some cases for years. Ticket machines are often out of service, information booths are rarely staffed, predicted arrival times are routinely incorrect or not working at all, Clipper machines are often offline or malfunctioning, needles are found strewn about, and the stench of urine often greets passengers as they walk into a station. Installing new digital signs on platforms also proved to be

challenging; they were delivered to underground stations, but sat in their shrinkwrap for *years* before being turned on. San Francisco is home to some of the greatest minds and problem solvers, yet our transit system is more closely aligned with a developing country than the tech capital of the world. We are at a loss as to how or why this is the case. This is particularly concerning as automation and Internet-connected transit options become more widely available, and more enticing to individuals who can afford them, making Muni the transit option of last resort rather than the first-class system it could be.

It is clear that these issues primarily indicate poor management, planning, and policymaking, not lack of resources. While Director Reiskin bears much of the responsibility for the management of his agency, the SFMTA Board of Directors – the body charged with appointing and overseeing him – has proven itself to be ineffective. Of the current Board of Directors, a majority has been serving for four years or more. Because they are not fulfilling their responsibilities, Alice believes they should step down to make room for new leadership and members who frequent Muni – and are therefore familiar with the system and would have more of a stake in the agency’s success.

We respectfully request to discuss this in more depth with you or the appropriate person in your office at the earliest opportunity. We understand these are complicated issues and that there is no simple fix, but it is clear that what we have been doing for years is not working. What we need is a bold and thorough change, one that places people who can correct the ills of the system in charge so that it works for all of us.

Thank you for your commitment to a safe and reliable public transit system in San Francisco. We look forward to supporting and working with you to make this a reality.

Sincerely,



Eric Lukoff
Co-Chair



Gina Simi
Co-Chair

cc: Cheryl Brinkman, Chair of the Board, SFMTA
Malcolm Heinicke, Vice Chairman of the Board, SFMTA
Gwyneth Borden, Director, SFMTA

Amanda Eaken, Director, SFMTA

Lee Hsu, Director, SFMTA

Cristina Rubke, Director, SFMTA

Art Torres, Director, SFMTA

Ed Reiskin, Director of Transportation, SFMTA