

Consolidation of Bay Area Transit Agencies

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The San Francisco Bay Area transit system is anything but a single system. Twenty-seven transit operators provide service in the area, and the discontinuity between agencies contributes to high cost, poor perceptions of service quality, and redundancy in the transit system. We investigate the role of consolidating certain functions of these agencies in saving transit dollars, improving the passenger experience, and providing a more regional transit system; examining agency willingness to coordinate or consolidate certain functions through interviews.

CURRENT ISSUES WITH BAY AREA TRANSIT SERVICE

From a 2012 MTC study and other sources, we identify current problems with Bay Area transit that could be addressed with consolidation.





- Fare transfer policies between agencies are non-uniform and difficult to understand.
- Bay Area transit administrative costs are higher than national peers.
- Transportation policies are not always coordinated across jurisdictions and modes leading to duplicative or ineffective investment and service decisions.
- Funding is tangentially connected to service quality and other performance measures, creating little incentive to improve service quality, especially in situations where ridership is at or near capacity.
- Passenger confusion and the friction created by disparate agency policies leads to low inter-agency transfer rates in some cases, fosters a poor public perception of transit service, and makes transit less competitive with other modes of transportation.

METHODOLOGY
















We interviewed transit officials at MTC, BART, SFCTA, SFMTA, AC Transit, and VTA. Officials at SamTrans and Golden Gate BHTA were contacted but declined to be interviewed. We developed three consolidation scenarios to present to our interview subjects. Scenario I represented the status quo. Scenario II represented a 'halfway consolidation' wherein a regional transit agency (RTA) would consolidate administration, planning, and procurement activities; a regional operator (RTO) would provide regional bus and rail service; and individual operators would provide service in their respective areas, with a higher level of coordination enforced by the RTA.

Scenario III described a fully consolidated Bay Area transit system as being operated by a single Bay Area transit agency that would combine the functions of an RTA and RTO, as well as consolidate local agency operations. From the participants' responses to these scenarios, we first identified elements of consolidation that professionals believe are in place today, and secondly we outline potential policies that enjoy support among transit officials.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS shared by a majority of respondents:

POLICY	PROS identified by respondents	CONS identified by respondents
 Unified fare structure	Improved service quality Promote ridership	Difficulty in making this change revenue neutral across agencies Technical issues with Clipper
 Bay Area-wide branding for similar service types	Improved service quality Promote ridership	Questions of cost vs. benefit to agencies Loss of agencies' individual identities
 Creation of regional transit operator (RTO) to provide regional bus and rail service	Assist with information integration Improved service quality Potential reduction in capital and/or operating expenses.	Institutional difficulties in creating RTO; eg. does BART take over bus service or is a new agency created? Potential political & community opposition
 Joint procurement and maintenance	Potential reduction in capital expenses Potential reduction in maintenance expenses	Difficulty creating a single set of specifications for vehicles Potential opposition by operator unions.

ELEMENTS OF CONSOLIDATED TRANSIT SERVICE

SUPPORT	IMPLEMENTATION	
		INFRASTRUCTURE INTEGRATION involves physical changes to the routes, establishment of transfer centers, or both, to facilitate the movement of people between different transit modes or between different routes of the same mode.
		SCHEDULE INTEGRATION involves the coordination and synchronization of arrival and departure times between single or multiple transit service providers or transit modes, or both.
		FARE STRUCTURE INTEGRATION consists of the establishment of a single, easily understandable fare system enabling transit customers to pay only once for transit services from multiple providers. Fare zones would be one way to implement this.
		INFORMATION INTEGRATION includes a single way of delivering information, such as itinerary planning transit delays, incidents, and arrival times to existing and potential transit customers.
		BRANDING INTEGRATION represents a single brand for similar services, regardless of provider. This would not preclude each agency from having its own livery, but a Bay Area-wide icon and color would indicate instantly the type of service.
		ORGANIZATION/GOVERNANCE refers to the creation of a regional transit agency, its governance structure and how the directors should be apportioned between the different counties.
		SPECIAL EVENTS AND EMERGENCY COORDINATION consists of coordinated multi-organizational policies with an action plan to implement during or in response to particular events.
		DATA SHARING consists of enabling policies within individual agencies promoting sharing of data between agencies, including standard collection methods and formats.
		JOINT PROCUREMENT OF EQUIPMENT / MAINTENANCE involves cooperative purchasing of vehicles, as well as sharing of maintenance facilities between agencies.
		JOINT FUNDING encompasses restructuring the way agencies are funded to promote attainment of regional goals, rather than intracity or intracounty goals. Such goals may related to ridership, congestion reduction, or improved service quality.
		JOINT PLANNING AND RESEARCH refers to increased cooperation and coordination of these efforts between agencies.

SUPPORT ★ indicates proportion of the six Bay Area agency officials interviewed in the study who support the efforts described. Range: 1/2 - 4 stars.

IMPLEMENTATION  indicates how much the interviewees believe this element is being practiced today. Range: 1-4 bars.

CONSOLIDATION-RELATED POLICIES IN PLACE / NEXT STEPS

ELEMENT	EXAMPLE identified by respondents	NEXT STEPS identified by respondents
Infrastructure Integration	Millbrae BART/Caltrain/SamTrans station	Transbay Terminal (under construction)
Fare Structure Integration	Clipper payment card	Fare zones / free transfers
Information Integration	MTC's transit.511.org website	Clearly branded website / better functionality
Emerg/Event Coordination	Emergency plan exists at MTC	Greater service coordination for special events
Data Sharing	Enabling policies exist at agencies	Regional data collection and format standards
Joint Planning & Research	Agencies coordinate planning efforts	Regional plan can supercede local at times

ELEMENTS WITH MINIMAL SUPPORT

ELEMENT	WHY based on responses
Schedule Integration	Rail: schedules constrained by other factors; Bus: incompatible software, policies.
Organization/Governance	Anticipated political opposition; issues related to apportionment of directors
Joint Funding	Issues with targeting capital vs. O&M funds; support for using different performance metrics to allocate funding varied widely depending on locality

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