

Consolidation of Bay Area Transit Agencies

Dan Howard and Teo Wickland, UC Berkeley – City Planning 217 / Civil Engineering 250

Abstract

The San Francisco Bay Area transit system is anything but a single system. Twenty-seven transit operators provide service in the area. The discontinuity between agencies contributes to high cost, poor perceptions of service quality, and redundancy in the transit system.

We investigated the role of consolidating certain functions of these agencies in saving transit dollars, improving the passenger experience, and providing a more coherent regional identity for the transit system. To that end, we conducted a review of literature, focusing on current issues facing transit, historical attempts at consolidation in the Bay Area, comparative examples, and identifying key elements of a consolidated system. We then interviewed transit officials from the seven major Bay Area transit agencies and MTC in an effort to understand the environment in which consolidation attempts would have to be made.

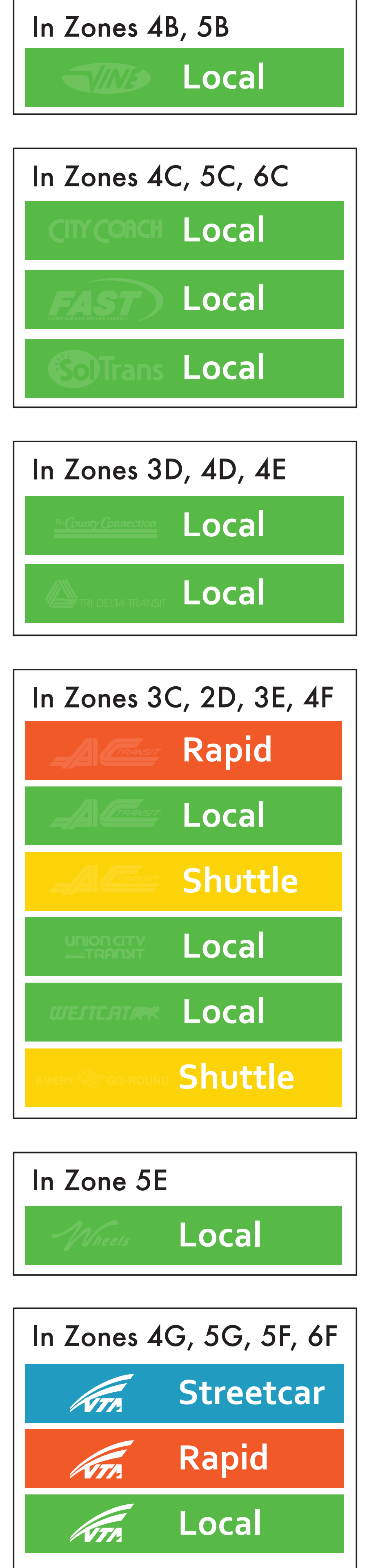
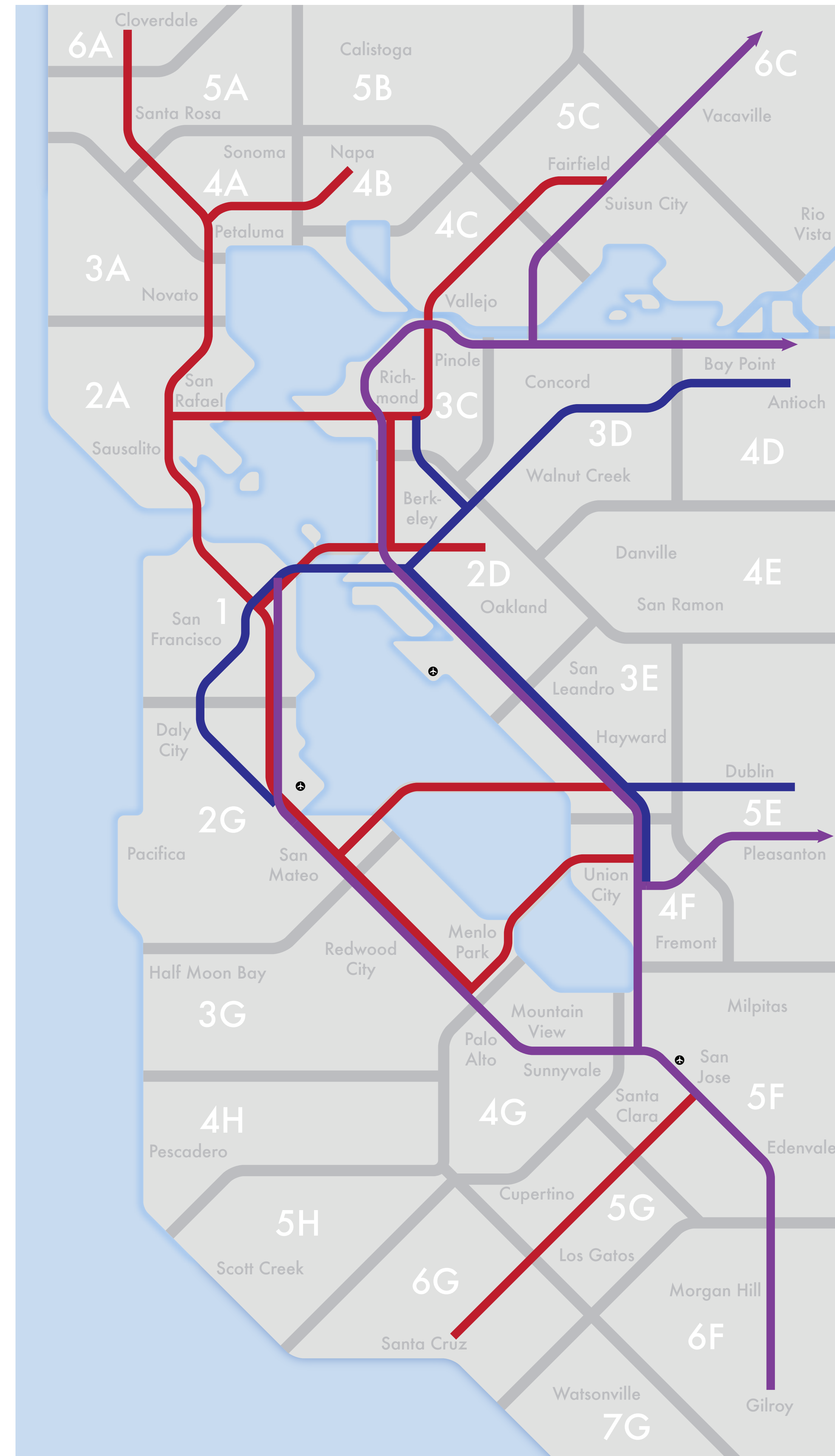
We conclude that a unified fare structure and clear Bay Area branding may improve perceptions of service quality in the entire system; that regional bus and rail service could be combined into one agency to improve service quality and reduce capital and operating expenses; and that agencies should attempt to consolidate their procurement, operations and maintenance efforts to potentially eliminate redundancy and reduce cost.


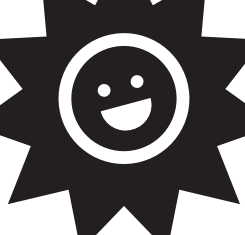


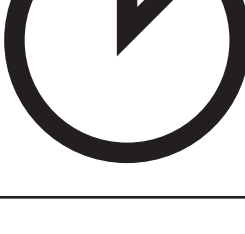
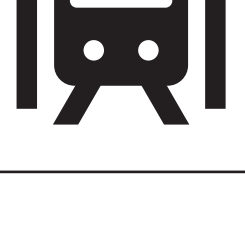
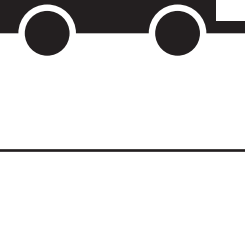

However, support for many aspects of consolidation appears to be limited among area transit agencies. Respondents were concerned about loss of local control in governance and funding; some feared a potential loss of legitimacy in the public's view. Many respondents also justified their opposition to consolidation based on current usage patterns, rather than potential usage patterns in a consolidated scenario. For example, schedule coordination was sometimes described as fruitless because few riders currently transfer between systems, despite the possibility that transfers may be depressed precisely because schedules are uncoordinated.

Status Quo



Potential Consolidation Scenario



Practice Area	Status Quo	Consolidation Scenario	Mitigation of Concerns
 Organization & Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent, weakly-coordinated agencies MTC has responsibility, little authority High administrative costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional transit authority (RTA) oversees all regional transit policies and decisions Single regional operator (RTO) for all regional rail, bus and ferry routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local operators operate service within their jurisdictions Local decisions driven by local operators
 Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wholly independent branding Few non-operator branding efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear, unified Bay Area branding for all transit operators, authorities, agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-branding of regional brand with individual operator brands
 Information for Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little regional info provided in field No authoritative information source 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unified info on vehicles, at stations Combined open data feeds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nurture culture of openness Legislation enforces access to info
 Fare Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-uniform, confusing fare and transfer policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unified zone-based fare structure Ex: \$2 within 1 zone; \$1/ea. add'l zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guarantee revenue neutrality for each local agency
 Schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited coordination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTA coordinates schedules Single software provider for scheduling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTA weighs costs and benefits RTA covers cost of software transition
 Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor coordination Redundant or mismatched investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTA coordinates all investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local operators or RTA can initiate infrastructure improvements
 Procurement & Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fleets procured independently Maintenance facilities not shared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint procurement; shared facilities Common vehicle types for all operators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTA ensures all operator needs met
 Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not linked to performance measures Poor incentives for agencies to innovate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RTA controls regional funding, allocates based on performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local operators control local funding Legislation provides regional funding

In our scenario, RTA would also coordinate planning, research, data collection, data sharing, special event management & emergency preparedness.