

Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Association of Bay Area Governments

Joint MTC ABAG Legislation Committee

March 8, 2023

Agenda Item 3c

Senate Bill 960 (Wiener): Transit Priority and Complete Streets

Subject:

Requires Caltrans incorporate infrastructure needs for all road users – including bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders – into the state asset management plan, adopt a transit priority policy and make other changes to streamline transit priority project implementation.

Background:

California's state highway system, owned and managed by Caltrans, comprises roughly 50,000 lane miles and 13,000 bridges, including both federal and state highways. State and federal law requires Caltrans to develop an asset management plan to guide state spending on the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP), a four-year program of capital projects to improve state highway conditions and keep the system in a state of good repair. It includes roadway rehabilitation and operational improvements, among other categories. The SHOPP is the largest state transportation program; the proposed 2024 SHOPP is a \$21 billion spending plan.

Like most state departments of transportation, Caltrans has historically been an automobile-centric organization. Since 2008, Caltrans has expanded the department's focus to consider all road users, including bicyclists, pedestrians and transit riders, including through adopting a Complete Streets Policy. In 2019, the Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 127 (Wiener), which would have further required Caltrans to prioritize safe and connected facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders on all SHOPP projects and in the asset management plan. Governor Newsom vetoed SB 127 – citing concerns with the level of prescription and cost associated with implementing the bill – but issued [Executive Orders N-19-19](https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/9.20.19-Climate-EO-N-19-19.pdf) and [N-79-20](https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/9.23.20-EO-N-79-20-Climate.pdf), which spurred Caltrans to develop a [Director's Policy for Complete Streets](https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/esta/documents/dp-37-complete-streets-a11y.pdf). This policy – which went into effect in December 2021 – aimed to set department-wide standards and processes for how mobility for people walking, biking, and taking transit or passenger rail can be integrated into projects on the state highway system, whether led by Caltrans or another transportation partner. To date, Caltrans implementation has focused mainly on improving mobility options for bicyclists and pedestrians. In recognition of this, Caltrans has recently initiated stakeholder engagement to develop a Director's Policy for Transit Priority, though the timeline for development is unclear.

SB 960 would codify several existing Caltrans Complete Streets practices, including requiring that Caltrans consider complete streets within the development of the asset management plan and prioritize the implementation of safe, convenient, and connected facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users

on all SHOPP projects, where applicable. Regarding transit priority, the bill would require Caltrans adopt a transit priority policy for projects on state highways, establish performance targets related to transit travel time reliability, speeds, reduced transit and rider delay, and improved accessibility at stops, stations, and boarding facilities, and develop a list of transit priority projects for inclusion in the SHOPP. The bill would also require Caltrans take specific actions to expedite transit priority project approvals, including requiring the department to develop streamlined transit approval processes and establish a list of automatic and expedited design exemptions. SB 960 would also set deadlines for various transit priority project approvals related to encroachment permits and traffic analyses.

Recommendation:

Support in Concept / MTC Commission Approval

Discussion:

Transit priority is one of three accelerated action items in the [Bay Area Transit Transformation Action Plan](https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2021-09/Transit_Action_Plan_1.pdf) (TAP) (https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2021-09/Transit_Action_Plan_1.pdf), which lays out near-term actions to improve the Bay Area transit network. Transit priority treatments such as transit-only lanes, transit signal priority and queue jump lanes help buses and other transit vehicles operate faster and more reliably by avoiding delays from traffic congestion and traffic signals. Faster and more reliable transit has equity benefits including expanded mobility and access to opportunities for those who rely on public transit as their primary mode of travel as well as climate and congestion relief benefits as faster transit service will help attract riders who would otherwise drive.

Since adopting the TAP, MTC has been working to foster faster and more efficient implementation of transit priority treatments throughout the Bay Area. As part of this effort, MTC has conducted extensive outreach to identify local, regional, and state-level barriers to transit priority implementation.

Stakeholders consistently identified a lack of clear, consistent state-level policies and procedures related to transit priority project approval as a significant challenge contributing to lengthy delays. Navigating the Caltrans process is complex; conflicting Caltrans staff opinions can hold up project approvals. Staff turnover can also result in a reversal or new interpretation of project requirements. Stakeholders also shared numerous examples of missed opportunities for integrating transit priority improvements into state-led projects on the state highway system.

Staff supports SB 960's goals to 1) Enhance state leadership on transit priority, including through elevating transit priority within the asset management plan and expenditure priorities (such as the SHOPP) and 2) Remove state-level barriers faced by local jurisdictions and transit agencies who want to implement transit priority projects on the state highway system. A Caltrans Transit Priority Policy can advance both goals by providing clear direction to the department on how and when to integrate transit priority elements into state highway system improvements and standardizing the process for transit

priority project approvals. Project streamlining provisions would further address many of the state-level implementation challenges transit operator partners identified in our stakeholder engagement sessions. Staff recommends support for this bill in concept as the bill is still evolving. Staff finds that, as proposed, the bill would mitigate state-level barriers to implementing transit priority projects, a key recommendation from the transit priority component of the TAP. However, there are several areas that would benefit from refinement to better align with the goals outlined above and address potential implementation challenges. In general, we think the bill would be strengthened by focusing on integrating the movement of people on transit into the state's approach to managing and improving the road network. Specifically, we recommend revising the component about the SHOPP to move away from requiring Caltrans to identify *specific transit priority projects* for inclusion in the SHOPP and instead focus on ensuring Caltrans considers transit priority improvements when upgrading state highways, similar to how complete streets policies work. We also recommend simplifying the performance metrics and refining the state transit priority policy provisions to ensure the policy could both support the department in integrating transit priority provisions into Caltrans-led highway system improvements and standardizing the process for local projects sponsors seeking Caltrans approvals for transit priority projects. We have been coordinating closely with SPUR, the sponsor leading the transit priority component of the bill, and have shared these friendly amendment recommendations with the author's office. While we have received commitments to work with us, amendments are not yet in print. Nonetheless, given that removing state barriers to transit priority is a long-standing MTC advocacy priority and a key recommendation from the TAP, staff recommends MTC support the bill "in concept." Should amendments be made in line with our recommendations, we would modify the position to "support."

Known Positions:

Support

SPUR (co-sponsor)

Calbike (co-sponsor)

Streets for All (co-sponsor)

AARP (co-sponsor)

KidSafeSF (co-sponsor)

WalkSF (co-sponsor)

Natural Resources Defense Council

San Francisco Mayor London Breed

San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency
(SFMTA)

Transform

Oppose: None on file

Attachments:

None



Andrew B. Fremier