

1 [Motion to Approve a Letter on the Lack of Board of Supervisors Action on the Proposed
2 Caltrain 1/8th cent Tax, and Rejection of the City's 47-year-old Transit First Policy]

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4 Supplementary Information:

5 Letter of Opposition approved as attached (see below).

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July 20, 2020

San Francisco Board of Supervisors
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
City Hall, Room 244
San Francisco, Ca. 94102-4689

RE: Lack of action on the proposed Caltrain 1/8th cent tax & rejection of City's 47-year-old transit first policy

Dear Supervisors,

The Youth Commission opposes the actions taken by two members of this board on July 14, 2020, where Supervisors Walton and Peskin failed to introduce a critical tax measure that would benefit Caltrain. The Youth Commission supports the tax going on the November ballot.

The Youth Commission is a body of 17 youth from San Francisco between the ages of 12 and 23. Created by the voters under a 1995 amendment to the City Charter, the commission is responsible for advising the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor on policies and laws related to young people. The Youth Commission is also charged with providing comment and recommendation on all proposed laws that would primarily affect youth before the Board takes final action.

On July 14, 2020, a tax measure that would have given a boost to a transit agency should have been introduced, but it was not, due to concerns about governance. For the would-be sponsors, that was more important than the fact that a transit agency's existence was on the line. This happened in San Francisco, not some historically anti-transit locale, and it happened in a city that has had a transit first policy for the past 47 years in its charter. That very policy and section, in its most current form, states in subsection 8A.115-a-1 that "To ensure quality of life and economic health in San Francisco, the primary objective of the transportation system must be the safe and efficient movement of people and goods." The mere thought of letting a train die to be replaced by a far less efficient, safe, and environmentally friendly bus (not forgetting that the train supports social distancing and efficient safe movement in current times), violates that subsection. These actions which took place on July 14 also represent a violation in the charter, section 8A.115-a, "The following principles shall constitute the City and County's transit-first policy and shall be incorporated into the General Plan of the City and County. All officers, boards, commissions, and departments shall implement these principles in conducting the City and County's affairs." Letting transit, with all of its environmental benefits, take second priority during a climate crisis is unconscionable. And yet it happened. Here, in San Francisco.

Mass transit is the most efficient, sustainable, and affordable mode of transport for a large number of people who seek to get from point A to point B. To that end, the bigger the vehicle, the better. Also, if said vehicle has its own right of way and dedicated infrastructure, the better. Many youth take mass transit around the world, and in the Bay Area, that is also true. Youth use mass transit to get to school, afterschool activities, employment opportunities, social gatherings, and because traveling on public transit is good for the environment. The youth of today are fully aware that their decisions and decisions of the current government (who they do NOT have the power to elect) will end up affecting their lives in massive ways in the future. Youth deserve the opportunity to choose the sustainable option, and those who can vote deserve the opportunity to vote on the measure to enable youth to ride the sustainable train.

Simply throwing a childish meltdown, and ruining a commuter rail system that other urban areas can only dream of, because of an unsuccessful attempt to reform its governance is downright ridiculous. The Youth Commission agrees that there should be reforms to how Caltrain is governed.

The current system, voted in by Supervisor Peskin, has not worked out. Setting fire to the whole operation accomplishes nothing. To reform how Caltrain is run, Caltrain must exist. A surgeon cannot operate on a patient and expect that patient to one day leave the hospital if the patient was left to die by those who thought the patient was unworthy of saving. Caltrain is needed, reform is needed, and political nonsense is not.

Caltrain would not be the only agency to suffer from this error in judgement made on July 14, 2020. In order for Caltrain riders to be transported safely (as the charter requires), 60-foot long bendy busses would be needed. These would need to be borrowed from other transit agencies, and that would adversely affect the agencies and their riders. As the SFMTA has noted, agencies need to transport as many people as safely possible in order to avoid even worse financial peril. Borrowing a bus, to cover for a train is ludicrous. The Bay Area only has four Federal Railroad Administration regulated commuter railways. It has countless bus lines, and a quarter of that number are corridors served by high capacity busses. It would be a big error to replace a train with a bus, a bus that could save an agency if deployed elsewhere. Youth need to be able to get around when the pandemic and the associated mitigation measures are over. They do not want to be stranded because a San Francisco politician had a grievance and decided to incapacitate the transit system they serve on the board of. The Youth Commission sincerely hopes that this would not be the reality for any youth in San Francisco, and especially not the reality in other locales Caltrain serves. Imagine not having an efficient and sustainable transit system, maybe the only one in your town, because somebody up in a city, spoiled with many mass transit options, did not know how to compromise.


Caltrain needs funding, and it needs it now. As it stands, this board has pushed the SFMTA, and Caltrain to the brink. Yet, the Police and Sheriff's departments have yet to see their budgets cut. Transit services help youth, policing does not. The Youth Commission is dismayed that the Board has yet to make formative action towards editing a budget that would make San Francisco a better place for youth. The action of not introducing the tax measure by Supervisors Peskin and Walton, one as the SFCTA chair, the other as a Joint Powers Board member, make crystal clear their opinions on transit. The rest of the board must realize that it has an obligation to make the world a better place for the next generation, the current youth. We cannot vote, and we would not be able to anyways if the reforms at the JPB that Supervisors Peskin and Walton want enacted come to fruition. We trust the Board to make decisions, and the Youth Commission to make sure those decisions have a positive impact on youth. We see that members of the Board have not acted on this crucial issue, and that decision has a negative impact on youth. One way to create a positive impact for youth would be to call an emergency meeting, not just making statements on a social media platform that is not frequented by youth. The Youth Commission has been, and will always be an advocate for action, not wordplay.

The time to act is now. The tax deserves to be before the voters, and the other counties and advocates deserve an explanation from Supervisors Peskin and Walton. May Caltrain continue to run, and the city finally follow the charter and truly put Transit First.

For all these reasons, the Youth Commission opposes the actions taken by two members of this board on July 14, 2020, where Supervisors Walton and Peskin failed to introduce a critical tax measure that would benefit Caltrain, supports this tax going on the November ballot, and we thank Supervisor Haney for working to make this tax go before voters in November.

Sincerely,

San Francisco Youth Commission



Josephine Cureton, Chair
Adopted on July 20, 2020
2019-2020 San Francisco Youth Commission