



April 1, 2024

Senator Dave Cortese, Chair, and Members  
Senate Transportation Committee  
State Capitol, Room 405  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: SB 1031 (Wiener, Wahab) — **SUPPORT IF AMENDED**

Chair Cortese and Members:

The Voices for Public Transportation coalition has worked since 2017 to bring a regional transit funding measure to the ballot. We celebrate the introduction of bill language that will raise a dedicated source of desperately needed transit operating funding, with the explicit goal of “Protecting and enhancing transit service” in the Bay Area. (Sec. 1, (d)(1))

Voices for Public Transportation is a coalition of over 40 community, rider, labor, and policy groups in the Bay Area. We came together in 2017 to develop a vision and principles for a regional measure for public transit in the Bay Area that puts transit workers and riders at the center. When former Sen. Jim Beall introduced spot language in SB 278 just before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, we conducted a professional field poll which determined that Bay Area voters were significantly more supportive of a means-based income tax than of a sales tax. In June 2022, after prolonged advocacy by the VPT coalition, the nine-county Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) agreed to bring forward a bill to authorize a Bay Area ballot measure for public transit. The express purpose was to address the transit operating “fiscal cliff.” MTC also voted to pursue “bridge” operating funding in the Legislature, to carry the region over until a measure could be authorized and placed on the ballot. Last year, the Legislature responded when the VPT coalition joined with MTC and other transportation agencies to ask it to bridge that funding gap through 2026.

Now we are in phase two of that plan — the long-term solution to the region’s transit operating crisis.

SB 1031 is well-aligned with our coalition’s priorities in several important respects. At the same time, we appreciate Senator Wiener’s invitation to “perfect” the bill, and in that spirit offer several amendments that we believe are important to achieving its goals.

**The Voices Coalition supports the primary intent and believes the strengths of SB 1031 as introduced include the following:**

- Focus on sustaining and improving transit service with **operating funding**, and advancement of transit transformation through customer and service improvements, with a minimum set-aside of

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*Voices for Public Transportation (VPT) is a coalition of transit rider and worker unions, community-based organizations, and equity advocates across the Bay Area.*

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\$750 million a year.

- Support for **safe, complete streets**, walking and biking, roadway state of good repair, and climate resilience.
- Inclusion of some **progressive revenue** mechanisms such as payroll tax, parcel tax and vehicle registration surcharge.
- Authorization for MTC to bring **multiple successive measures** to the voters.
- Study with intent to **achieve outcomes and benefits to transit riders** that may result from transit agency consolidation or coordination.

**To ensure the bill achieves its primary purpose to fully fund transit operations and does not burden those least able to pay, the VPT Coalition recommends the following amendments to SB 1031:**

- Set aside **a minimum of \$750 million or 70 percent of revenues, whichever is greater**, in annual operating spending in the first ballot measure and **protect that minimum from payment obligations on capital bonds**.
- Set a goal for **transit service levels that exceed and enhance pre-pandemic levels**, and for **improved quality of paratransit service**.
- Limit roadway expenditures to state of good repair and safe and complete streets only.
- Include **additional progressive revenue mechanisms**, such as a means-based income tax, a corporate tax, and a per-square-foot parcel tax with a higher rate for non-residential property, and limit the use of the sales tax.

Transit service levels were inadequate before the pandemic, and face a looming fiscal cliff when federal emergency operating funds, and 2023 state budget funds, run out. It is imperative to our transportation, climate, and equity goals that a measure come before the voters in 2026. Authorizing legislation amended as proposed above will raise the operating funding needed to sustain and increase transit service levels, and frontline transit jobs. We urge your support of the bill with the inclusion of these amendments.

Please feel free to contact Jeanie Ward-Waller ([jeanie@fearlessadvocacy.com](mailto:jeanie@fearlessadvocacy.com), 401-241-8559) or Andrés Ramos ([aramos@publicadvocates.org](mailto:aramos@publicadvocates.org), 916-271-0428) with any questions.

Very truly yours,

Richard Marcantonio & Laurel Paget-Seekins (Public Advocates), Zack Deutsch-Gross & Abibat Rahman-Davies (TransForm), Dylan Fabris & Peter Straus (San Francisco Transit Riders)

*Members of the Voices for Public Transportation Coordinating Committee*