



May 14, 2018

Regional Transit Board of Directors  
Henry Li, General Manager/CEO  
1400 29th Street  
Sacramento, CA 95816

**Re: Microtransit Pilot Project in Downtown**

Dear Board of Directors and Mr. Li:

The Sacramento Transit Riders Union (SacTRU) is concerned about the current rollout of the Microtransit Pilot Projects and the long term implications and changes it may be used to justify making to the system as a whole. We urge the board to prioritize transit dependent riders and communities that have traditionally been underserved by our transit system, and to invest in proven services that attract and retain ridership.

Our members looked at the 10 identified areas for pilot programs on a map and asked how the target areas were chosen. Why was Downtown/Midtown, one of the few areas in our system that is fully saturated and covered with multiple public transit options, included and prioritized in this program? Our members expressed concern over the areas that were left out, such as the pocket and Natomas, which have limited service. We do not think the selection of Downtown/Midtown makes sense for the stated goals of this pilot program.

The stated goals of the pilot program are to provide:

- SacRT data and analysis to make a determination of the feasibility to provide demand response service and/or fixed route bus service in the identified areas.
- Help resolve is how SacRT may potentially address first-mile/last-mile dilemmas for riders who live too far away from fixed-route bus stops.
- Update current SacRT routes or create new routes to service areas that are underserved or were previously too expensive to serve at all.
- Replace costly underperforming fixed routes.

We are specifically concerned with the replacement of traditional fixed routes with microtransit lines. Microtransit, by definition, is a low-capacity service, carrying small numbers of people at a time. This is a way to serve very few people at very high cost, compared to fixed routes. There is simply no way that a flexible-route service, which averages under 10 riders an hour, is going to be able to match the per hour capacity of operation of fixed route service, even in a low-density suburban setting. Even for low performing fixed routes, it is incoherent to cite a desire for higher total ridership, or disappointment with declining ridership, as a reason to invest in microtransit.

According to Jarret Walker Consultants, if you want higher ridership, you invest in services that are physically capable of carrying lots of riders and have a proven ability to attract them when run at sufficient quality, such as big-bus fixed routes. Microtransit is about taking both funds and political attention away from the services that are actually relevant to ridership at a large scale.

Transit agencies, including SacRT, have decades of experience with low-performing flexible route experiments. For example, a recent Eno Foundation report promoting microtransit cited two pilots that achieved less than 1 passenger trip per vehicle service hour. A decent fixed route bus does 20-100 and

even terrible fixed routes do at least 10. The most positive data Eno's report could find was a microtransit pilot in Newark, California that achieved 3 passengers/hour, but this is down from 7 passengers/hour on the fixed route it replaced. The transit agency lost 20% of the old route's ridership when it made this change. The now-defunct Boston-based Bridj, a data driven pop-up transit service, failed to generate the ridership to be self-sustainable. Bridj launched in 2014 in Boston, offering sleek 14-seat shuttle-bus rides on routes tailored to meet the travel patterns of its customers. But while the service was deemed successful among users, the company could not build a sustainable business model and shut down abruptly last year.

Jarret Walker and Associates have stated that they can find no "logical argument from any of the commonly-cited goals of transit to the idea of investing in microtransit pilots with transit agency funds. Even if the goal is low-ridership coverage, there are vanishingly few situations where flexible routing improves on the productivity of fixed routes alone." They have found the usual outcomes of microtransit include increased economic inequality, the upward redistribution of benefits, and increased vehicle miles traveled. Effective and equitable transit generates economic growth, promotes healthier lifestyles, and enables access to opportunities while minimizing the negative externalities of transportation, like air pollution and traffic congestion.

Finally, we hope that SacRT's outreach and marketing about the new service will be extensive, targeting traditionally underserved and low-income riders, and be available in languages other than English, especially if there is the possibility of a decision to replace a fixed route. When AC Transit rolled out a similar service in 2016, they did extensive outreach and marketing. Everyone who lived within a quarter-mile of the line being replaced was sent a flyer, bus stations were plastered with ads, and the new service even ran in parallel with the 275 for eight months, giving users a chance to try it out before committing. We urge a comparable level of communication with members of the public so that they can understand how their lives and access to public transit are being impacted and can make informed decisions.

**We urge the Board and staff to limit the reliance and scope of the Microtransit Pilot Projects, and to consult with Jarret Walker and Associates throughout the route optimization study on the impact and application of the data gathered.** Please include this letter in the public record.

Sincerely,

Sac TRU