

Fare Fragmentation Prevents Transformative Transit

There is a good deal of coverage about how society incentivizes driving, but transformative transit ridership is also obstructed by self-inflicted fragmentation wounds like this, even in one of the nation's most transit-supportive metro regions: the San Francisco Bay Area:



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In San Mateo:

Cost of bus=\$2.05

Cost of BART=\$3.30-\$3.80

Cost of Caltrain=\$3.75-6.00

Transfer discount between any 2=\$0

Messages this sends:

- 1) If you are poor, take the bus (only)
- 2) Don't mix different kinds of transit
- 3) For most trips, drive - you'll save \$\$

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Ian – a director of the Seamless Bay Area transit improvement campaign – sums up not only the conditions but the ramifications of parochial thinking on fare policy by Bay Area transit providers. Transit agencies need to be in the business of making transit as seamless and usable as possible, as it seldom can beat the convenience of a personal vehicle. Anything that adds complexity or hardship to the transit experience is a disincentive to ride.

In fairness to individual transit agencies, there is little incentive to collaborate on regional fare structures. Federal and state regulations make the creation of regional transportation authorities difficult to achieve (especially those vested with any authority or autonomy), while the number of local jurisdictions means elected officials focus only on the fiscal performance of their community's system. That means generating as high a farebox recovery ratio as possible in most cases. What happens to a rider once they exit their train or bus is of little concern to the city manager or council member.

Positive international models exist of regional fare strategies that – in nearly every instance – result in dramatically increased ridership. Federal policies that incentivize regional fare collaboration should be championed by both political leaders and mobility advocates seeking to make transit as appealing as possible as well as those seeking the best use of public investment.