



Our Children's Earth Foundation | 100 First Street, Suite 100-367, San Francisco, CA 94105

NEWS RELEASE

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MUNI SETTLES LAWSUIT WITH COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS: MUNI TO DO ITS PART TO INCREASE RIDERSHIP, MEET REGIONAL AIR QUALITY GOALS; SUIT CONTINUES AGAINST MTC FOR NEGLECT OF RIDERSHIP INCREASE REQUIREMENT

SAN FRANCISCO -- An agreement submitted in federal court today settled a lawsuit against San Francisco Municipal Railway (MUNI) by a coalition of community and environmental groups. In the settlement, MUNI agrees to do its part to increase regional transit ridership in the Bay Area to help meet air quality goals under the Clean Air Act. A similar settlement in the same lawsuit was reached with AC Transit in February 2001

In order to reduce ozone pollution levels, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) committed in 1982 to shifting people out of cars by increasing the number of people using transit in the Bay Area by 15 percent. Nearly twenty years later, despite a 30 percent increase in population, the number of transit riders today remains close to 1982 levels.

Litigation is still pending against MTC, the agency responsible for transportation planning and funding throughout the Bay Area. While MTC bears ultimate responsibility for providing the funds necessary to increase transit ridership, MUNI and AC Transit had been named in the lawsuit for failing to develop fundable projects that would significantly increase ridership.

"Rather than settle immediately and get to work on developing projects to make transit faster and more reliable as AC Transit did, MUNI chose to litigate for over a year," said Deborah Reames, an attorney for Earthjustice representing the coalition. "Meanwhile, MUNI's staff already had good projects on the drawing board that would help clean the region's air and get more people on transit. For some reason, many of these ideas had never been submitted to MTC for funding."

"We are pleased that MUNI is finally willing to commit to make the improvements to its system necessary to increase ridership. We only wish that MUNI and MTC had not allowed the system to decay to the current state where it was necessary to bring in the federal court to force the necessary improvements," said Richard Drury, Legal Director for Communities for a Better Environment.

Tiffany Schauer, of Our Children's Earth, one of the groups in the lawsuit, said, "Considering how many children are needlessly suffering from asthma in the region our public transit agencies should be at the forefront of the solution, not at the back of the bus."

"Latino families, especially children, suffer disproportionately from the respiratory illnesses caused by air pollution," said Enrique Gallardo of Latino Issues Forum, "We also hope this settlement means that resources will be better used to serve transit-dependent communities."

Federal Ruling Requires Transit Operators to Help Increase Ridership
In November 2001, federal judge Thelton Henderson ruled in favor of the coalition that "[W]hile MTC bears the greatest responsibility in ensuring that the region achieves the target increase, the region's six major transit operators also share collective responsibility" to achieve the ridership increase.

"What a pity that it took a lawsuit to get some of these innovative transit plans off the shelf and into the funding queue," said John Holtzclaw, Transportation Chair for the Sierra Club. "Good ideas that make transit easier to use and better for our environment should go to the top of the list, not be ignored."

BACKGROUND: MUNI COMMITMENTS UNDER THE SETTLEMENT

The two main tools for improving transit service that MUNI agreed to utilize are Transit Preferential Street treatments (TPS) and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). TPS includes: giving traffic signal priority to transit vehicles, building sidewalk "bulbs" and boarding islands, creating dedicated transit lanes, re-spacing and relocating transit stops. BRT builds on the TPS elements but essentially mimics a light rail system using buses that travel in separated transit lanes with limited stops.

MUNI agreed to write a plan that includes a ridership and financial analysis of each of the projects listed below that will be adopted by December 1, 2002 and submitted to MTC for funding consideration 30 days later.

Transit Equity to Be Addressed

The plan will include an analysis of the population served by each project using the 2000 U.S. census categories, including race, ethnic background, national origin and income. Additionally, MUNI agreed to conduct further analysis of transit improvements for the Bayview Hunters Point community. In order to do this, MUNI agreed to conduct a public meeting to solicit ideas for ridership increase projects on the 54-Felton, 29-Sunset, 44-O'Shaughnessy and 23-Monterey bus lines. Any suggested projects emerging from this meeting will be discussed with the coalition, and those projects deemed feasible will be included in MUNI's plan.

Projects to be Included in Plan

Under the settlement, MUNI agreed that, if fund promptly by MTC, the following projects could be completed and operating by November 2006:

- Transit Preferential Streets ("TPS") treatments for J-Church from Duboce Portal to 30th Street
- TPS treatments for K-Ingleside from St. Francis Circle to Green Terminal
- TPS treatments for L-Taraval from West Portal to Wawona/46th Avenue
- TPS treatments for M-Ocean View from St. Francis Circle to Green Terminal
- TPS treatments for N-Judah from Duboce Portal to La Playa
- TPS treatments on Market Street from Castro to the Embarcadero
- TPS treatments from Stockton/Market to the Presidio through North Beach and the Marina
- TPS treatments on Fillmore
- TPS treatments on Geneva
- Electrification of 47-Van Ness
- Electrification of 9-San Bruno

Projects that could be feasibly by completed and fully operational within 5 years after initial funding:

- TPS treatments on 19-Polk route to Hunters Point
- Terminal loop for historic E-line on the Embarcadero
- Bus Rapid Transit "BRT" on Folsom from the Embarcadero to 16th Street
- BRT on Potrero and TPS on San Bruno
- BRT on Geary from Pacific Ocean to Van Ness, and TPS to Transbay Terminal
- TPS treatment on Ocean from Junipero Serra to Bayshore/Sunnydale

Additional projects MUNI agreed to analyze include:

- BRT on 16th Street, including electrification on 16th Street
- BRT on Van Ness and TPS on Mission
- BRT on 19th Avenue and Park Presidio from Stonestown to Lake
- Electrification of 19-Polk

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