

To: Commission Streamlining Task Force

I understand that the Commission Streamlining Task Force (Task Force) is reviewing the SFMTA Citizens Advisory Council (MTA CAC) and has made a preliminary recommendation that it be “possibly eliminated or combined,” likely with the MTA Board of Directors (MTAB). This would be a major disruption and threat to the success of SFMTA in achieving its mandate of serving the public and the city at large.

The Task Force correctly points out that the MTA CAC and the MTAB play different roles: the CAC provides critical community input while the MTAB is a governing body. In fact, the MTAB decision-making would be seriously impaired without the necessary input of the rider and community focused MTA CAC.

A good example of the MTA CAC’s vital role in representing the community and enabling the MTAB to make the right decision happened in December 2021 concerning the routing of the J Church. The SFMTA administration at that time made the grievous error of truncating the J Church so that it would be a surface-only line, and would require a forced transfer to go downtown. The SFMTA administration mistakenly proposed that instead of providing service to *where people want to go*, they would provide more frequent service to *where riders do NOT want to go*. The MTA CAC demonstrated to the MTAB that the unintended consequences of a forced transfer at Market St. would disproportionately affect the most vulnerable riders: seniors, people with disabilities, children, and women traveling alone after dark. The MTA CAC further stated that the SFMTA administration significantly understated public opposition to the forced transfer, as backed up by data from SFMTA survey results. Furthermore, the administration proposal would work against the City’s stated goal of rejuvenating downtown. And the supposed “benefit” of reducing subway congestion was a red herring due to changed patterns of work (including work-at-home). Thanks to input from the MTA CAC, the MTAB voted unanimously to override SFMTA administration and return the J Church to its full route. Three years of operational data show that this was the right decision. This is one of many situations in which the MTA CAC made an invaluable decision and perhaps “saved Muni from itself”.

The Task Force staff discussion also makes an error of alleging that MTA CAC input results in “months long review and approval timelines”. The Task Force does not present data to support this assertion. In the case of the J Church cited above, the MTA CAC process operated concurrent with the MTAB process and concluded in time for the scheduled MTAB decision meeting. Even if the public participation process conducted by the MTA CAC were to take extra time, this is time well spent so that the MTAB would be adequately informed about the views of Muni ridership - the customer is worth it!

The Task Force staff discussion then goes on to cite the many benefits of the MTA CAC including bolstering trust in the MTA, and the criticality of this trust when MTA plans to ask voters to approve new taxes. Indeed, the Staff Discussion is correct that the MTA CAC provides public engagement, transparency and oversight at a time when the MTA needs to draw upon public trust and support to fund its ongoing operations.

Therefore, I urge you to change the “outcome” for the MTA CAC to “Consider Keeping” from “Consider combining or eliminating”.

Sincerely,
Kathy Setian
Restore the J Workgroup