

MOBILITY NEWSLETTER

Research and reporting from California, the U.S.,
and around the world.

July 04, 2023



July News Update:

Mobility headlines around California from the past month



SacRT opens new high-speed charging hub at the Power Inn light rail station, result of innovative public-private partnership

June 14th, 2023

The Sacramento Regional Transit District (SacRT) and the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) partnered with GiddyUp – a private firm that provided the capital needed for construction – to build the newly-opened hub. The parties instituted a revenue-sharing agreement to split proceeds from paid charging going forward.

The location for the hub was chosen due to nearby mixed-use retail and housing, the US-50 freeway, and surrounding industrial and commercial developments. The chargers - which were built on the existing underutilized park-and-ride lot - can accommodate both passenger vehicles and heavy-duty buses.

The goals of the project include **increasing ridership** on the train, providing much-needed **fast-charging capacity**, and increasing the availability of public chargers that accommodate **heavy-duty vehicles**, which remains a challenge.

SMUD added new grid connections to provide the needed electricity on-site for high-voltage charging, and the hub includes solar panels to supplement capacity and charge vehicles in the case of an outage.



A photo of the “plug-in” celebration at the opening of the Hub. Source: [SacRT](#)

LA Metro opens long-awaited Regional Connector lines and stations, celebrates with a weekend of free rides system-wide

June 16th 2023

This past month, LA Metro opened two new regional connector lines and three new [art-packed](#) underground stations in the center of downtown Los Angeles. The project has been under construction **since October 2014**.

LA Metro expects that the new connector will save many commuters **up to 20 minutes per trip**, as they will no longer need to transfer to reach the core of the city.

The project cost \$1.4 billion, and was funded by the sales tax ballot measure approved by L.A. County voters in 2008, bonds from the California high-speed rail project which will benefit from the new connections, and almost \$1 billion in federal grants and loans.

To celebrate the opening, LA Metro offered free rides on all Metro buses, trains, Metro Bike and Metro Micro for the Friday-Monday period after launch.



This map from LA Metro shows the extent of the new connector, which brought together existing lines to provide continuous service.

Source: [LA Metro](#)

Cal-ITP Wins an Excellence in Transportation Award!



Caltrans has announced the winners of the 2022 Excellence in Transportation Awards, which honor outstanding projects across 9 innovation categories.

The California Integrated Travel Project (Cal-ITP) received the award for “**Cultivating Excellence**,” which called out the project’s **commitment to ensuring equity in the payment experience on transit**.

Cal-ITP has helped local agencies install card readers on over 100 vehicles to date, providing riders with a convenient way to pay in line with global standards. In addition, Cal-ITP has worked to help increase financial inclusion for un- and under-banked people throughout the state, and to increase the accessibility and convenience of reduced fare programs.

A big congratulations to the team at Cal-ITP, in addition to the other outstanding awardees across the state!

California Legislature Passes FY 23/24 Budget, restoring critical transportation funding slated for cuts

June 27th, 2023

In our last news edition, we highlighted serious financial concerns for California transit, including **significant state funding reductions** for transit and other sectors due to the budget deficit.

In early June, these proposed cuts caused **significant outcry**, especially **in the Bay Area**, and agencies went public about the catastrophic impacts. Some of the cut funds are slated for projects where they are needed to receive matching federal grants, which would have created knock-on effects and jeopardized major transportation projects statewide.

After speedy renegotiation, the new budget **returns \$2 billion this year and \$2 billion next year** to the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) that was proposed to be cut. Additional appropriations include **\$811 million** in new and previously cut funds for the new Zero-Emission Transit Capital Program.

The agreement allows **more flexibility** for funds to be used for operations where money is urgently needed, helping avert a crisis, but still may not be enough to cover the needed long-term investments. The budget also includes **new accountability measures** for agencies to access funding. They must submit financial plans to CalSTA going forward, and must “support the transit goals” of the state by working with Caltrans to identify opportunities to improve service and grow ridership in line with the State’s vision.

The CEO of the **Bay Area Council** called it a “lifeline” for transit to prevent a “death spiral,” but consensus among transit stakeholders seems to be that it still isn’t enough for the larger infrastructure improvements needed statewide.



Gov. Gavin Newsom unveils the FY 23/24 budget in Sacramento on Jan. 10, 2023. Source: [CalMatters](#)

Covid recovery remains a challenge for Californian agencies, but for some agencies, modes, and routes more than others...

June 21st, 2023

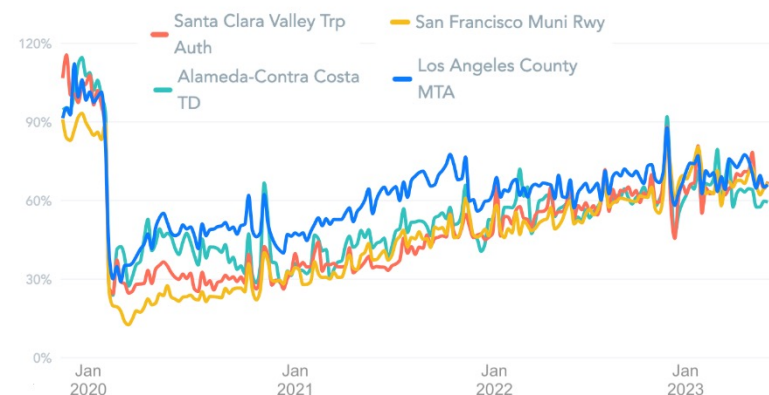
Over the past month, we saw some interesting coverage of the uneven recovery of pre-pandemic ridership on California's public transit systems. **Recovery has been volatile - it looks different across agencies, modes, and even between routes.**

As reported in the New York Times, commuter rail services like BART and Caltrain have struggled to get riders back on their vehicles and are currently serving just 35% and 27% of pre-pandemic riders, respectively. Across a selection of multi-modal agencies in California, APTA is reporting 55-65% recovery systemwide (right).

On LA Metro's system, ridership recovered more swiftly over the course of the pandemic and peaked this year at about 80% in May. The Times reported that Metro buses tend to serve lower-income riders who are less likely to have other options or work in remote-flexible jobs. Interviewed experts noted other factors at play; shifts away from rush-hour commutes to more mid-day and weekend trips, in addition to changing concentrations of trip destinations away from downtown business districts.

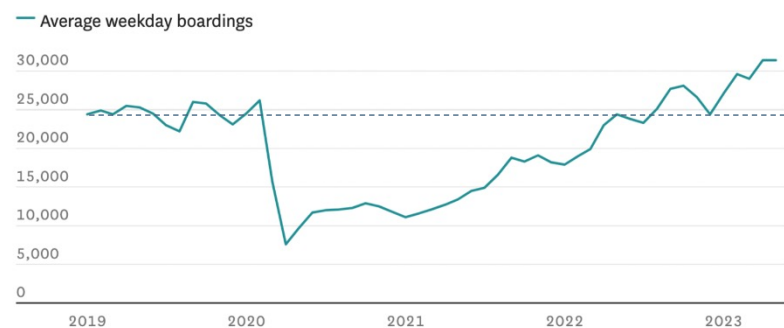
But even in cities like San Francisco that have been especially hard-hit, some Muni bus lines are performing above pre-pandemic levels. As reported in The San Francisco Chronicle, the top-performing lines (the 49-Van Ness/Mission and the 22-Fillmore) benefit from dedicated lanes which have increased speed and frequency of service, and neither serve the downtown core. For reference, while current ridership recovery for San Francisco Muni Railway is at -33% compared to the 2019 baseline, the Muni 49-Van Ness/Mission bus line is at +28%, as the graphs on the right show, while the 22-Fillmore is at +18%.

System-wide ridership recovery compared to Jan 2020



Source: [The American Public Transit Association / Transit App](#)

Ridership on Muni's 49-Van Ness/Mission bus since 2019



Source: [The San Francisco Chronicle](#)



Caltrain further delays fare increases by six months, citing the need to continue growing ridership

June 21st, 2023

A 20% (50 cents) increase in the cost of monthly passes on Caltrain has been delayed through the end of the year. The [proposed increases](#) were originally approved in August of 2022.

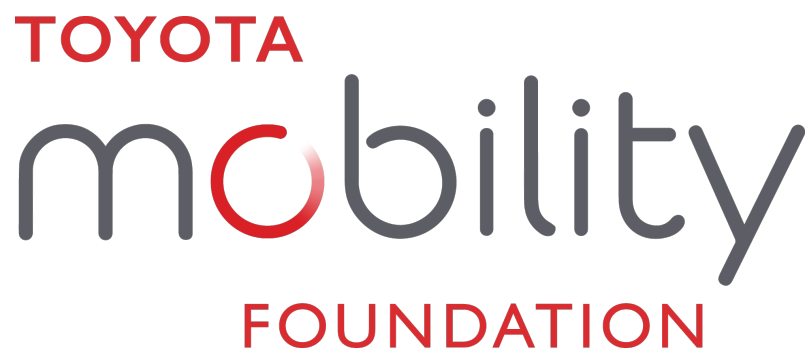
This delay is due to a **continued lag in ridership recovery** on Caltrain, which primarily serves regions where office attendance has remained particularly low, even compared to downtown San Francisco.

As noted in the previous story, Caltrain's system-wide ridership is hovering just above 25% of pre-pandemic levels, less than half of what most other Californian agencies have seen in recent months.

Despite an impending fiscal cliff and ongoing ridership woes, Caltrain continues to run over 104 trains on weekdays, its **"highest-ever service level."**

Funding Announcement: Toyota Sustainable Cities Challenge

June 21st, 2023



The Toyota Mobility Foundation has announced the **Sustainable Cities Challenge**, which will provide **\$9 million over three years to three selected cities.**

The top 10 entrants will come together in November of this year for a capacity-building academy, peer exchange, and a follow-up challenge to select the final winners. The challenge is open to all cities with over 100,000 inhabitants "interested and invested in improving access to safe, inclusive, and sustainable mobility solutions for all."

Entries must be led by one of the following:

- City/municipal governments or local authorities
- Public sector agencies with responsibility for delivering transportation services for the city/region
- Any other local/regional public entities, such as a country, metropolitan planning organization, agglomeration community or council of governments

Submissions are due September 18th.

