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# Rolling Out Geary BRT:

## Key Questions, Answered!

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**SFMTA**  
Municipal  
Transportation  
Agency

San Francisco County Transportation Authority  
San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency

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## Why Geary Needs Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

Over 52,000 people a day rely on Geary bus routes to get where they need to go. But uneven wait times, overcrowded buses and inconsistent travel times are a daily reality. These issues persist even with recent improvements, like more rush hour service and red bus-only lanes.

Our transportation system must provide quick, convenient and safe ways to get around other than by car to help reduce traffic congestion and meet rising transportation demands. Geary Bus Rapid Transit would give buses a dedicated lane to make bus service quicker, with travel times comparable to driving and more frequent service.

## How will Bus Rapid Transit make travelling on Geary safer?

A person walking across Geary is eight times more likely to be hit by traffic than the city average. This is unacceptable.

The Geary BRT project includes a full suite of design treatments to help the City achieve safer streets and reach its goal of zero traffic deaths by 2024, referred to as Vision Zero. Design treatments would slow down through traffic and turning cars where there is frequent speeding and make crossings safer by shortening crossing distances and increasing the visibility of people walking.

## In addition to dedicated bus lanes, what are some of the other features of Geary BRT?

The Geary BRT project is a package of improvements that includes dedicated bus lanes from Market Street to 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue, as well as other treatments like:

- Stop spacing adjustments to improve efficiency, including relocating and removing bus stops
  - Accessible bus stops with boarding islands and sidewalk extensions making it easier for bus operators to stop and easier for people to get on and off the bus
  - Sidewalk extensions at 91 street corners increasing the visibility of people crossing, slowing down right-turning vehicles and shortening crossing distances for people walking
  - Traffic signals at intersections where they do not exist today
  - Traffic signal upgrades including:
    - Smart signals that give the green light to buses and emergency vehicles
    - Signal synchronization to improve traffic flow
    - A head start for people walking before vehicles are given the green light to improve visibility
  - New crossings for people walking and accessible waiting areas in the median
  - More landscaping —an increase of thirteen percent!
  - New water and sewer infrastructure to ensure reliability
  - New sidewalk lighting for people walking
  - Repaving and pavement repairs
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## Who is involved in the planning and implementation of the project?

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) is the project lead through the environmental review phase of the project. Following the environmental review phase, the project will transition to the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) as the lead to design and construct the proposed improvements. Curb changes, utilities upgrades and paving would be coordinated with Public Works and the SF Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC).

## How has community feedback shaped the project?

Residents, community leaders, advocates and merchants, all along the corridor contributed to the latest design proposals for Geary BRT. The input resulted in a refined project design that:

- Saves 95 percent of parking spaces within one to two blocks of Geary;
- Preserves the Webster Street pedestrian bridge, while also adding surface crossings for people walking;
- Adds sidewalk extensions and bike improvements to make crossing Geary safer;
- Features a local-only Muni stop at Geary and Spruce Street to make rapid bus service more reliable and preserves parking for adjacent businesses
- Maintains key left turns without restricting right turns

## What is the overall cost of the Geary BRT project? How will it be funded?

The proposed project, including utility upgrades, paving work and transit and pedestrian safety improvements is estimated to cost approximately \$300 million, and would be funded by a combination of federal and local sources.

Improvements between Market and Stanyan streets are fully funded, and would roll out fall 2017 pending project approvals. Center-running BRT on Geary west of Stanyan Street is a candidate for the Federal Transit Administrations Small Starts Grant program that would provide \$100 million in funding. Center-running BRT in the Richmond District would be built in a separate phase from the improvements east of Stanyan Street.

## How would Geary BRT address traffic congestion and make bus service more efficient?

It may sound like competing outcomes – to speed up the bus and slow down traffic – but the project has a plan in place to achieve both.

Speeding is the lead cause of traffic injuries and deaths on San Francisco streets. The Geary BRT project would calm traffic along segments where there is frequent speeding by reducing the number of lanes from four or three lanes to two traffic lanes and a dedicated bus lane. These changes would improve safety by reducing speeding along the corridor.

By giving buses a dedicated lane, buses can move efficiently from stop to stop without conflicts with other vehicles. And, by removing buses from mixed traffic, cars won't queue behind loading buses. When transit is quick and convenient, fewer people drive. This helps manage and reduce traffic congestion with fewer cars on the street. Overall, transit features like bus-only lanes would make transit

a preferred option for more people moving around in San Francisco and save people who rely on Geary bus routes an average of 20 minutes round trip.

With the proposed project, traffic on parallel streets, like Anza, would see at most a 10 percent increase in traffic, or three to four cars a minute.

## How would 38 rapid, local and express service change along the corridor with Geary BRT?

To make bus service quicker and more reliable with bus-only lanes from Market Street to 34th Avenue requires some trade-offs, including:

- Parking loss in some locations, such as near the Fillmore and Masonic tunnels
- Tree replacement in the Richmond to construct bus-only lanes and new medians
- Fewer stops along Geary bus routes
  - *West of Arguello* all buses would travel in center-running bus-only lanes and stop at all stops known as consolidated service. Proposals include two additional rapid stops, and five fewer local stops.
  - *East of Arguello* express buses would head downtown and local buses would stop more frequently than rapid buses, similar to today. Proposals along this segment include two less rapid stops and six less local stops.

## Will Geary BRT make biking safer along the Geary corridor?

With parallel bike routes on Cabrillo, Post and Sutter streets, the Geary BRT project's focus on biking improvements is on treatments that would improve the experience for people biking across Geary along north-south biking routes including Masonic Avenue, Webster Street and Steiner Street. These improvements include biking guidelines that signal to drivers where people bike through the intersection; bike traffic signals that give people biking a head start, and green waiting areas at the Webster Street intersection to get people biking ahead of cars.

The intersection at Masonic Avenue would be reconfigured in the second phase of improvements to connect the Masonic cycletrack that is currently under construction with biking facilities along Presidio Avenue. Biking improvements at the Arguello Boulevard intersection would be coordinated with the Arguello Boulevard Safety Project.

## What are the proposed changes to parking for the project?

Thanks to community input, the project's design was modified so that 95 percent of parking would be saved within one to two blocks of Geary, along the 6.5 mile corridor. Parking loss is a trade-off for enhanced bus service and safer crossings. These trade-offs are mainly a result of design elements that use the same curb space as parking including:

- Sidewalk extensions for bus and pedestrian bulbs, which extend the sidewalk at the corner of the street;
  - "Daylighting," that makes people easier to see by converting a parking space to a red painted curb; and
  - Dedicated bus lanes along the frontage roads on Geary at Fillmore Street and Masonic Avenue.
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## Why invest in better bus service and not rail?

Rail on Geary is not possible in this decade due to its high cost and the amount of time it would take to design and construct. There is a clear need to improve bus service in the meantime.

High-quality bus service complements rail. In the meantime, BRT could help pave the way for rail in the center-running segment by preserving right-of-way and building stations at the appropriate spacing for rail service.

San Francisco's *Four Corridor Plan* (1995) identified Geary Boulevard, Van Ness Avenue, Stockton and Third streets as priority corridors for rail investment. Early efforts to advance Geary rail were met with neighborhood opposition, so San Francisco prioritized planning for the T-Third (which opened in 2007) and Central Subway (opening 2019). Meanwhile, given funding constraints, the 2003 San Francisco Countywide Transportation Plan, prepared by the Transportation Authority, proposed BRT for Van Ness and Geary as a solution to rising transportation demands.

The city is excited about the potential for long-term rail investment on Geary. It is identified in existing SFMTA planning documents including the SFMTA Rail Capacity Strategy and the SFMTA Capital Plan. It will be considered in upcoming long-range planning and prioritization as a part of the Subway Vision and Connect SF. Depending on the design for rail that moves forward, BRT could be an incremental or complementary investment offering more efficient and reliable bus service.

## What are the outstanding community concerns?

The project team is still working with community groups to address concerns about several proposed project elements, including:

- A transition from center-running dedicated bus lanes to side-running dedicated bus lanes at 26<sup>th</sup> Avenue;
- A 38 Geary stop at Laguna Street modified to serve only local buses; and
- Removal of the Collins Street stop adjacent to Russian American Community Services.

The transition from center-running dedicated bus lanes to side-running dedicated bus lanes at 26th Avenue would require removing parking in front of the Holy Virgin Cathedral. While the project team has identified some side streets where parking could be added back, there are some concerns with the transition location and space needed for loading and unloading during Cathedral events.

To consider the trade-offs of keeping the Laguna Street stop rapid versus making the Laguna stop local-only, the project team analyzed how different service options would impact travel time. The analysis found that a local-only stop would save about 50 seconds for over 13,000 people traveling on 38 rapid buses, the equivalent to 180 hours. A rapid stop would save time for the 1,800 people who rely on rapid service at Laguna, but slow down bus service for the other 13,000.

The design recommendation to make Laguna a local-only stop remains. Adjacent communities are contributing to communications and wayfinding strategies on buses and at bus stops to make it easier to navigate the two service options.

The project team continues to meet with representatives from the Holy Virgin Cathedral, Russian American Community Services and the Japantown and Cathedral Hill stakeholders to better understand

their concerns and consider ways to address them while still improving bus service and making the corridor safer.

### What's coming up next for Geary BRT?

The Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be released to the public December 9, 2016 and will be available for review at [GearyBRT.org](http://GearyBRT.org) and public libraries adjacent to the Geary corridor. On January 5, 2017, the Transportation Authority Board (comprised of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors) will vote to approve the project and the Final EIR. Their vote will be followed by a similar action by SFMTA's Board of Directors to approve the preferred design for BRT later in 2017.

The next step after SFMTA approval of the design is more is detailed design and engineering where the project team, with input from the community, takes a deeper look at design constraints including driveways, underground utilities and basements under the sidewalk.

When design related outreach and engineering is complete the SFMTA will present a package to the SFMTA Board of Directors for final approval of each proposed parking, traffic and transit change, focusing first on proposed improvements between Market and Stanyan streets (Phase 1) and then on the remaining improvements proposed improvements in the Richmond District (Phase 2). Pending approval of Phase 1 proposals, anticipated summer 2017, stop changes and bus-only lanes would roll out fall 2017.

Design for Phase 2 requires more complex engineering work because of potential utility conflicts with the proposed center-running bus-only lanes. When engineering and outreach is complete for Phase 2 project proposals will be presented to the SFMTA Board. If approved construction is anticipated to begin in 2019.

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