

DRAFT **Agenda Item 7**
Caltrain CAC resolution
Distance-based fares
June 16, 2021

WHEREAS, passenger rail service on the modernizing Caltrain rail line dates back to its steam train era construction in 1863, and is the oldest continuously operating service of its kind west of the Mississippi;

WHEREAS, Caltrain still uses a historic fare zone-based tariff dating back to the last century and which was designed to help speed and simplify the job of Southern Pacific Railroad (SPRR) conductors who sold tickets on board in all-cash transactions based on memorized fares;

WHEREAS, until the 1998 installation of state-of-the-art automated ticket vending machines (TVMs), all Caltrain tickets were still sold by on-board conductors and station agents based on SPRR's zone-based tariff in which riders must pay for each entire fare zone entered, no matter how slightly;

WHEREAS, the current tariff is so inequitable that it results in some very short 1- or 2-stop rides (e.g. from Redwood City to Menlo Park or Palo Alto) that happen to cross a zone boundary to cost the same as a long 13-stop ride (to San Francisco), and actually cost **more** than an 8-stop ride (to Millbrae) from the same station going in the opposite direction, thereby discouraging an unknowably large segment of potential Caltrain riders who would otherwise to make short or medium-length trips or commutes that just happen to cross into and/or out of a zone boundary by one or two stations;

WHEREAS, while some price-sensitive riders simply choose not to ride, numerous others have for many years told or written of going well out of their way to travel to and from more distant and otherwise less convenient stations solely to avoid the inequitably large "fare penalty" of crossing into or out of an additional fare zone by only one or two stations;

WHEREAS, despite calls by rider-advocates and some board members for equitable distance-based fares enabled by TVM-based ticket sales during a 2003 fare study, Caltrain staff instead urged keeping the zone system, but decreased zones from 9 to 6 by lengthening them to approximately 13 miles each, thereby worsening inequities caused by longer zones ... but staff reassured disappointed advocates that an equitable distance-based fare scheme would be "looked at" the next time fares were revisited;

WHEREAS, the simplification rationale for moving to a reduced number of longer 13-mile zones instead of equitable distance-based fares disappeared ever since all ticket sales were shifted to TVMs and Clipper following the end of on-board ticket sales beginning with the 2003 switchover to proof-of-payment (POP) self-ticketing;

WHEREAS, equitable distance-based station-to-station fares 1) will ensure that all riders pay the same fares for the same ticket types for the same distances traveled, 2) will make more intuitive sense, and be conceptually easier for new riders to learn and understand using origin & destination station names instead of arbitrary fare zones, 3) would be automatically and effortlessly calculated by TVMs, phone apps, web pages for all paper- or Clipper-based ticket types, 4) and as BART has done for 50 years, can also be published and/or printed as an origin-destination station table, and 5) can easily be queried with web- or app-based “fare calculators” in which the correct fare is displayed for any origin, destination, and ticket type;

WHEREAS, such a fare scheme is also compatible with unlimited time-based passes (e.g. 24-hour or calendar day, weekend, 7-day or calendar week, 30-day or calendar month, annual or GoPass), multi-ride passes, single-use station-to-station pass upgrades, discounted youth/disabled/senior fares, etc., as well as with pay-as-you-go “Clipper cash” and/or with fare accumulator & capping features. Distance-based fares typically consist of a base fare plus a distance-based component, while still allowing for possible future station-specific surcharges. A transition to distance-based fares can be ridership and fare revenue-neutral, -positive, or -negative, depending on how the base and distance-based fare components are initially priced;

WHEREAS, due to the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, including suffering one of the deepest and slowest-to-recover ridership & revenue losses among all North American transit systems, it is now more critical than at any time in Caltrain’s history to expeditiously take all reasonable steps possible to maximize the appeal, equity and ease of use of the Caltrain service and its fares to a broader, new set of riders comprised of a wider socio-economic and demographic spectrum of people and trip types more typical of a regional transit rail system as well as to returning “choice” riders that had disproportionately comprised Caltrain’s ridership under the pre-pandemic peak-period-focused service model more typical of “commuter rail.”

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: that Caltrain now develop and propose an equitable distance-based station-to-station fare tariff along with a transition implementation & deployment plan to be presented to its Citizens Advisory Committee for review and constructive feedback before its formal presentation at a public hearing and before its formal presentation to the Board for review and potential approval and adoption.