

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - MARCH 25, 2020

WETA Seeks Emergency Funding to Maintain Disaster Response Capabilities During COVID-19 Crisis

Emergency funding is required to ensure required staffing levels

SAN FRANCISCO - The San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA) Board of Directors today announced that it is seeking \$4 million of emergency funding from regional, state and federal sources. The emergency funding would ensure WETA can maintain critical staffing levels and remain ready to mobilize in response to a natural disaster, or to assist in the COVID-19 pandemic response if necessary, through the end of June 2020.

On Tuesday, March 17, WETA cut service levels on all San Francisco Bay Ferry routes in response to public health orders directing residents to stop all non-essential travel. Local transportation demand - including ferry ridership -- had fallen dramatically as residents reduced their travel. Ferry ridership had dropped 80 percent before the orders went into effect. The emergency funding WETA is seeking will replace lost fare revenue and allow the agency to maintain full readiness staffing levels through the end of its fiscal year.

Despite reductions in its San Francisco Bay Ferry service due to regional efforts to reduce the spread of coronavirus, WETA is currently maintaining critical ferry staffing levels so that it can provide emergency water transit. Ferry workers continue to maintain WETA's 15 high-speed passenger ferries so the fleet is ready for immediate action.

"WETA's mission is not just to deliver a world-class ferry system for the Bay Area, but to deliver emergency water transit when a crisis strikes," said Jim Wunderman, Chair of the WETA Board of Directors. "This is an unprecedented crisis. We need to remain ready to help our heroic first-responders and healthcare workers with the transportation they need. For that, WETA needs emergency funding now."

WETA's operations are funded largely by fare revenues and bridge tolls. WETA's fare revenues, normally 60 percent of its operating budget, and regional bridge toll revenue have both dropped precipitously amid the COVID-19 crisis. There is no dedicated funding stream to finance WETA's emergency readiness, preparation or response.

Letters to Governor Gavin Newsom and Bay Area legislators can be found at <https://sanfranciscobayferry.com/news/coronavirus-2020>.

WETA is also reaching out to hospitals to identify opportunities to assist in providing ferry transportation for healthcare workers who need it. Staff continues to coordinate with regional transportation and emergency management agencies to ensure acute needs are being met throughout the Bay Area.

WETA is a regional public transit agency tasked with operating and expanding ferry service on the San Francisco Bay and with coordinating the water transit response to regional emergencies. San Francisco Bay Ferry, a service of WETA, operates ferry routes connecting the cities of Alameda, Oakland, Richmond, San Francisco, South San Francisco and Vallejo. More information is available at <https://sanfranciscobayferry.com/media-center>.

Media Inquiries: Thomas Hall, WETA, hall@watertransit.org, (707) 722-5280