

March 20, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

In order to fulfill the directives of your COVID-19 state of emergency and stay at home executive orders, the San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transit Authority (WETA) remains ready to provide emergency ferry service to essential infrastructure workers and first-responders, including physicians, nurses and health care workers. To remain ready and able to provide all of the emergency water transit services the present crisis may require, WETA is seeking emergency funding to replace lost fare revenue and sustain current ferry staff levels.

We are requesting an allocation of \$4 million from the emergency funds authorized by the legislature on March 17, 2020 to cover half of our estimated \$8 million in lost fare revenue resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic through the end of June 2020. This funding would allow WETA to maintain current ferry staff levels, which are essential to being prepared to carry out further operations that may be required in order to carry out your executive orders. This would also allow WETA to ramp-up San Francisco Bay Ferry service to normal levels more quickly as the crisis abates. This will be critical because as transportation demand increases, other regional and local transit providers may experience delays or disruptions in their service ramp ups.

Passenger fares make up 60% of the agency's operating budget yet our ridership has declined to just those who are essential workers. We experienced a 40% ridership drop the week of March 9 and more than an 80% ridership drop the week of March 16.

As a result, we have been forced to drastically cut ferry service effective March 17. This was done to help the region achieve the public health goals of reducing transmission of COVID-19 and in acknowledgement that ridership had already dwindled on most ferry routes. Minimal service was maintained on the two most heavily used San Francisco Bay Ferry routes – those connecting Vallejo and Alameda/Oakland to Downtown San Francisco – for essential workers. The Vallejo route in particular is used by many healthcare professionals who work in San Francisco's medical centers.

As you know, passenger ferry service is just one part of our mission. Being ready to deploy water transit resources in the event of disaster or emergency – including those related to the COVID-19 crisis – is an essential role. WETA is only funded as a transit agency and without emergency funding to supplant the lost fare revenues that typically support operation of the ferry system and emergency readiness, WETA and its contract operator Blue & Gold Fleet would need to cut labor costs, dramatically reducing the availability of dozens of the essential workers we rely on to keep the Bay Area equipped to provide emergency water transit.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,



Jim Wunderman
Chair, Board of Directors
San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority