



SAN FRANCISCO
STATE UNIVERSITY

November 4th, 2021

Mr. Sean Elsbernd
Chief of Staff
Office of Mayor London N. Breed
City Hall, Room 200
1 Dr. Carleton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Mr. Elsbernd,

Thank you for taking the time to continue to engage in conversations regarding the collection of the City's parking tax from those utilizing university parking facilities considering the California Supreme Court's holding in *City & County of San Francisco v. Regents of the University of California, et.al.* Following the passage of SF State Associated Students resolution requesting a parking tax exemption for SF State students, we write to provide some additional information for the City's consideration and to offer a proposal, which we at the University believe is in the best interests of our students, the City's transit-first policy, and aligns with our mission as an engine of educational equity and social mobility.

While the Supreme Court's decision holds that the city can require San Francisco State to collect the parking tax from those who park on our campus, we respectfully believe it is not in the best interest of the City to do so from our students. Therefore, we propose an alternative approach that can both bolster the university and the City's commitment to sustainable transportation and support for our diverse student bodies.

Our Student Body

As one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation, the SF State community takes great pride in offering a transformational education to its students—the majority of whom are from underrepresented communities, many who come to San Francisco, and remain in the city after completion of their studies. Nearly half of our students are eligible for Pell Grants,¹ meaning that they display exceptional financial need, with household incomes below \$50,000. In a recent study, 56% of our students reported financial hardship.² Nearly 50% of students who did not return to SF State after their first year cited financial concerns and the high cost of living as the primary reason for not continuing their education.³

¹ SF State Office of Research and sponsored programs: <https://research.sfsu.edu/applyforgrant/boilerplate>

² SF State Office of Health, Promotion & Wellness: *State of Student Basic Needs*, citing Yoo, Grace: *Students Who Left Survey* (2019).

³ Ibid.



SF State students often face extraordinary hurdles in pursuit of their education. Many of our students take on significant debt to pay for tuition and cost of living, often work while attending classes, and sometimes provide care to family members. In many instances, our students will avoid coming to the University merely to save the costs associated with their commute. We aim to keep costs for our students as low as possible so that we do not create additional barriers to their success. These hurdles and challenges have only been exacerbated during the pandemic and as our students transition back to campus this fall.

Transportation Background

In 2007, guided by a shared value in transit-first policies, SF State and the City entered into a very exciting partnership, which was set out in a memorandum of understanding. In it, we committed to partnering on cooperative transportation planning, increasing usage of public transportation, and minimizing drive-alone vehicle trips. The University aims to promote commutes on public transportation, walking, and biking. In 2008, the University then adopted its first transportation demand management (TDM) plan and in the intervening decade, we have enacted nearly all of the measures set out in the plan. And then in 2018, we updated the TDM plan to be even more proactive and forward-looking, aggressively adopting strategies that would further our cooperative planning efforts.

Recognizing that collaboration with the City and County of San Francisco would enable us to devise creative and innovative solutions to reducing vehicle commuting, the University administration, in coordination with student leaders, approached the SFMTA, BART, SFCTA, and MTC with new ideas. A close partnership was formed, and collectively, we set out to provide students with a special Muni Fast Pass, as well as discounts on all rides to and from the Daly City BART station (the one most frequented by our student body).

Remarkably - SF State students overwhelming voted to assess on themselves a mandatory student fee of \$180 per semester to fund the program in 2017. Given our student population, and the economic challenges they already face in making their university education possible, this was extraordinary. It reflected their commitment to sustainability and affordable public transit. Through significant transit discounts and a robust free shuttle program, we have created an alternative that makes it less expensive for nearly everyone to take public transportation rather than drive. Today, 57% of students have noted that the Gator Pass has changed their commute behavior.⁴

Additionally, the students who do drive to campus must pay a fee of \$8 each day, or \$640 for a semester-long permit. Under California law and CSU policy, parking fees must generate the revenue needed to support parking operations and maintenance. Some of the fees help to support components of the ambitious TDM program.⁵

⁴ SF State Transportation Survey (Nelson Nygaard, 2018): Figure 3-22.

⁵ If the University were to reduce the cost of parking to mitigate the impact of the parking tax on our students, it would undermine our ability to operate parking facilities, ensure their upkeep and invest in our TDM programs.



These collaborative efforts with our students, the City, and other governmental agencies, has led to an extraordinary 77% of the campus community traveling to SF State by means other than driving alone. The predominant modes of arrival at SF State are Muni and the SF State shuttle from Daly City BART.⁶ Not only are we reducing our campus community's carbon footprint and impact, but we are incentivizing our student population to invest in and contribute to strong public transportation systems through usage. We see this as an extension of our on-campus educational goals and strategic plan, which includes resiliency. As we confront such problems as environmental sustainability and climate change in our classrooms and labs, we recognize our responsibility to help forge resilience in our daily lives through the actions we take—which includes our commute. We remain deeply committed to this transit-first approach, and to furthering the great strides our community has already made in advancing a sustainable commuting culture.

Proposal

As set out above, SF State students have already imposed a significant transportation fee on themselves: nearly 30,000 students pay \$180 each semester for a Gator Pass—leading to nearly \$3.7 million in revenues for SFMTA each semester prior to the pandemic.⁷ They pay this amount whether or not they use the transit benefits associated with the pass (unlimited rides on Muni, and a 50% discount on rides to and from the Daly City BART Station).

Since the program's implementation in Fall 2017, the program has been modified to provide the most robust transit benefits possible, while also maintaining its financial viability. For instance, after the program's first year, the transit benefit on BART doubled from a discount of 25% to 50%. Based on current projections, we anticipate additional reserves in the transit fund in the coming years. In 2021, our student body began the required consultative process to expand the Gator Pass to include SamTrans, and this push from our student body further illustrates their alignment the shared mission of the University and the City for an equitable transportation for all.

Given the significant cost savings measures available to students who commute on public transportation, we firmly believe that many of those students who drive do so because they do not have any viable alternative: they may be coming to and from jobs, meeting family obligations such as taking children to or from school or day care, and or living in a transportation desert.

Accordingly, the University proposes the following approach:

⁶ SF State Transportation Survey (Nelson Nygaard, 2018): Figure 3-6

⁷ See invoice from SFMTA, dated November 13, 2019.

⁸ During the COVID-19 pandemic, SF State has worked cooperatively with SFMTA to continue to offer the Gator Pass program. Given decreased student ridership and the economic impacts that many faced over the past two years, the university has waived the fee and relied on Gator Pass program reserves to continue to pay for the program. The university and SFMTA negotiated a modified payment plan to account for the lower use of Muni services through 2020 and 2021. We anticipate that the program will return to its prior model by fall 2022.



- 1) The City exempts all SF State students from assessment of the parking tax, and SF State will work to encourage further reliance on public transportation through the following:
 - a. SF State will continue to collect the mandatory student fee associated with the Gator Pass program, which provides each student with unlimited rides on Muni and a 50% discount on BART rides to and from Daly City Station.
 - b. SF State will invest all Gator Pass program revenues in excess of its needed reserves in additional TDM measures, which may include the following:
 - i. Increased shuttle service to and from the Daly City BART Station: we propose doubling the number of shuttle buses during peak travel time.
 - ii. Engaging in conversations to expand the Gator Pass program to include SamTrans and/or AC Transit
 - iii. Expanding the Gator Pass program to include providing students with transit benefits throughout the summer when registered for summer classes.
 - iv. Expanding the Gator Pass program to include providing students with transit benefits in January--between the fall and spring semesters.

As a mandatory student fee enacted through a referendum process, State law requires that modifications to the program require consultation with the student body. The administration would undertake this consultation process in collaboration with student leaders and we fully anticipate overwhelming support for the approach.

- 2) SF State will provide the City with an annual report on its TDM measures, including a comprehensive report on the Gator Pass program and its expansion.
- 3) SF State will work with the City on collecting the tax from all non-exempt users, including staff, faculty and administrators.

If enacted, this proposal would provide several critically important outcomes:

- 1) SF State students—the vast majority of whom are already commuting to and from campus by means other than driving alone, will be able to afford to come to their classes.
- 2) The proceeds from the investments our students are already making in the University's TDM program will be more fully leveraged, providing even more robust TDM offerings.
- 3) Students who might otherwise avoid the tax by parking in the neighborhoods surrounding the University will not be incentivized to do so.



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Among the rationales for a parking tax is discouraging driving. In 2017, SF State students launched an extraordinarily progressive program to fulfill this same goal by incentivizing public transportation. In fact, the fee they placed on themselves exceeds that of the 25% parking tax that the City seeks to impose.⁸ Our students are heavily invested in public transportation, and rather than tax those students who drive for reasons that may be beyond their control, we urge the City to join us in investing in our transit-first programs. Given the costs of finding housing, paying for tuition, books and course materials, and securing food, it is hard enough to be a university student in San Francisco. Our aim in coming to you with this proposal is to offer a student-centered approach that will prioritize both public transit and social justice and equity.

On behalf of the University community, we are grateful for your consideration, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss this approach in more detail. Additionally, if your office would find it useful to meet with our student leaders to hear first-hand about their experiences, we would welcome the opportunity to arrange it.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Lim-Tepper".

Noriko Lim-Tepper
Chief of Staff
Office of the President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason M. Porth".

Jason Porth
Vice President
University Enterprises

⁸ A student driving 5 days each week would pay approximately \$160 in taxes each semester (\$2 per day for 20 days each month for 4 months), compared to the \$180 Gator Pass fee.