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1.2 Million Shuttle Stops Will Soon Clog Roadways

SFMTA Makes "Tech Buses" Permanent

by Patrick Monette-Shaw

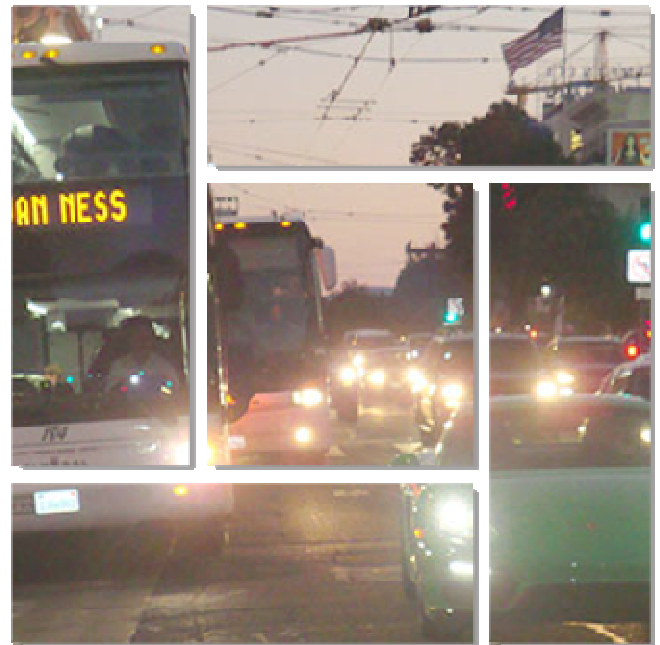
After publishing my November [article](#) describing problems with the trial of "tech" shuttle buses all over the City, including on the West Side, and noting problems may rapidly worsen if the program is made permanent, that's just what SFMTA's Board of Directors did when it approved a permanent program on November 17, after presenting them on November 16 a detailed Secondary Analysis highlighting deep flaws in SFMTA's October 5 Evaluation Report of the 18-month trial period.

Concerned citizens may want to make a point of reading the [full Secondary Analysis](#) on-line.

After MTA's Board received impassioned testimony from members of the public opposing making the Commuter Shuttle Program permanent, it did so anyway, including allowing the permanent program to expand from 124 shuttle zones to up to 200 shuttle zones.

Not one of MTA's Board of Directors bothered questioning in depth SFMTA's Shuttle Project Manager, Hank Willson, about data in the October 5 MTA Evaluation Report concerning problems with commuter shuttles interfering with red Muni bus zones. Worse, none of MTA's Board of Directors even thought to ask questions about the Planning Department's second EIR Exemption letter.

Of note, the 41% increase in shuttles the Planning Department anticipates may worsen incidents in Muni red zones, which MTA's Board didn't even discuss, let alone discuss in depth. Extrapolating data from MTA's October 5 Evaluation Report, things may rapidly worsen:



"Google Bus" Disruption: The streets of San Francisco will quickly worsen by unlimited expansion of the shuttle buses.

"How SFMTA calculated shuttles blocked Muni buses just 2.7% of the 2,978 daily shuttle stop events, when 25% of 1,200 citations issued were for blocking Muni bus zones, wasn't explained and MTA's Board of Directors simply didn't ask."

Shuttles Blocked ...	MTA's October 5 Evaluation Report				Planning Department 2nd EIR Memo		
	Freq.	Current Stop-Events	Daily	Annually	Projected Increase	Additional Annually	New Annual Total
Muni access to bus zones daily	2.70%	2,978	= 80	= 21,629	41.00%	8,868	30,497
Crosswalks daily	2.00%	2,978	= 60	= 16,022	41.00%	6,569	22,591
Travel and bike lanes	35.00%	2,978	= 1,042	= 280,379	41.00%	114,955	395,334

- The report noted an average of 2.7% of shuttle stop-events resulted in blocking Muni bus access to red zones. Of 2,978 daily stop-events, 2.7% represents at least 80 blocked Muni buses daily, which annualizes to 21,629 occurrences per year, and may grow to 30,497 annually if there's a 41% increase in permanent shuttles.
- The report noted shuttle buses "block other drivers' views of pedestrians, or block crosswalks, less than 2% of the time they stop." Of the 2,978 daily stop-events, 2% translates to approximately 60 blocked crosswalks and blocked views of pedestrians daily, which annualizes to 16,022 occurrences per year, and may grow to 22,591 annually if there's a 41% increase in shuttles.
- The Report noted "shuttles block travel and bike lanes about 35% of the time that they stop." Of 2,978 daily stop-events, 35% translates to 1,042 blocked travel lanes and bike lanes **daily**, which annualizes to a staggering 280,379 per year and may surge to 395,334 if there's a 41% increase in shuttles!

And not one of the SFMTA's Board of Directors bothered asking whether the Evaluation Report may have low-balled data in the Evaluation Report.

That's because a public request to obtain data concerning the 1,200 citations issued against shuttle operators mentioned in the Evaluation Report revealed that 394 of the 1,200 citations issued — fully 25% — were for blocking Muni red bus zones. Had the enforcement efforts been scaled up and not restricted to just the 10-person shuttle enforcement team, many more citations against the shuttle operators may have been issued. How SFMTA calculated shuttles blocked Muni buses just 2.7% of the 2,978 daily shuttle stop-events, when 25% of 1,200 citations issued were for blocking Muni bus zones, wasn't explained and MTA's Board of Directors simply didn't ask.

Similarly, of the [1,200 citations](#) issued to shuttle buses, 232 (19%) were issued to shuttles double-parking, and 201 of the citations (17%) were issued to shuttle buses blocking the City's street cleaning equipment, two issues that clearly affect quality of life in San Francisco that weren't even mentioned in the October 5 Evaluation Report.

None of MTA's Board members bothered asking about an apparently much larger problem with blocked Muni red zones.

The same public records request about the 1,200 shuttle bus citations revealed a much larger problem: Fully [6,629 citations](#) were issued to all sorts of vehicle types blocking Muni zones, including limousines, trucks, convertibles, SUV's, two-door and four-door cars, etc. in the 11-month period between August 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015, in addition to the tech shuttle buses.

Compelling Public Testimony During Hearing

One member of the public who [testified](#) on November 17 indicated he is a lawyer who uses the shuttle buses. He noted not only that his tech company employer is able to, but would be more than happy to, pay higher fees to help fund public transportation infrastructure. He testified Muni may have set ridiculously low per-stop-event fees because Proposition 216 requires that voters approve increases to property fees. But "usage" fees, he said, are a different issue, and San Francisco City Attorney's may have been overly cautious in interpreting fees — property taxes vs. usage fees — that the City is allowed to assess, and he urged MTA's Board to raise shuttle "usage" fees to help pay their fair share. It's a no-brainer that the per-stop-event fees should be significantly increased to fund additional shuttle detail enforcement staff!

One reader of my November [article](#) noted she has become increasingly vexed by tech shuttles in public bus stops at 19th and Wawona as she drives home northbound from her daughter's preschool every day. Every shuttle bus she's encountered takes up part of the lane next to the stop, as well as the stop itself, causing frustrated drivers to make dangerous maneuvers swerving around shuttle buses and moving into oncoming middle traffic lanes. She's not alone.

For her part, Amy Farah Weiss — who just garnered 23,236 votes in her campaign for mayor against incumbent Ed Lee — testified during the SFMTA hearing on November 17 about why a full EIR is needed before making the commuter shuttle program permanent, in particular how it may be adversely impacting San Francisco's housing crunch.

Ironically, although the SFMTA was required to accept the Board of Supervisors March 2015 "[Labor Harmony Resolution](#)" with tech shuttle operators in order to prevent tech bus drivers striking during labor disputes and picketing in, and blocking access to, Muni bus zones, it appears SFMTA sought no input from Muni's own 2,706 Transit Operators represented by Transport Workers Union Local 250-A.

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Ignoring the Elephant in the Room: Transbay Terminal as “Hub”

Ignoring the elephant in the room, SFMTA has all but turned a blind eye towards considering making the commuter shuttle bus program use a “hub” approach, as most transportation planners have used since the mid-1800’s.

Did SFMTA simply forget that the San Francisco County Transportation Authority and the Transbay Joint Powers Authority (TJPA) are building the \$4.5 *billion* Transbay Transit Center a transportation *hub*?

“ Did SFMTA simply forget that the San Francisco County Transportation Authority and the Transbay Joint Powers Authority are building the \$4.5 billion Transbay Transit Center as a transportation *hub*?”

San Francisco’s Transbay Terminal is a transportation complex in San Francisco that opened in 1939 but was relocated on August 7, 2010 to build the Transbay Transit Center. Its function during the past 75 years was being a transportation *hub*.

During public testimony on November 17, at least five members of the public advocated that SFMTA use a central hub location for shuttle bus operators.

One member of the public reported that the idea of utilizing a hub was rejected outright, because the ever-entitled “tech” employees need a one-seat ride, without the bother of having to transfer from one transportation modality to another.

Another member of the public testified that having a central hub location where folks could bicycle to (or, God forbid, take a Muni bus to) a hub to catch a shuttle to work without having Google buses clogging San Francisco streets would be a step in the right direction, but the special-interest group of tech employees has been catered to by allowing shuttle buses to stop in Muni zones all over the City.

A third member of the public testified that calling the commuter buses “shuttles” glosses over that they are really [inter-city] bus companies, not [intra-city] shuttles, and suggested reframing and repositioning the issue as dealing with bus companies, not shuttle companies. They urged the SFMTA board to postpone a decision, obtain more information, and seriously study hub options before making the program permanent.

A fourth member of the public indicated he would like to see a full EIR study done with further consideration for a hub. A fifth member of the public expressed concern that allowing private companies to use public resources doesn’t solve the problem, and private shuttle services could use parking lots on private property as a hub where people could go to and [transfer to] a commuter bus.

“ After hearing concerns from members of the public, one SFMTA Board member thoughtfully asked what next steps might be taken in terms of a hub option, or offering hubs around the City.”

Thankfully, after hearing concerns from members of the public about options for utilizing a “hub” approach, one SFMTA Board member thoughtfully asked on November 17 about whether setting more aggressive goals and targets is something MTA could do, and what next steps might be taken in terms of a hub option, or offering hubs around the City, if SFMTA’s Board of Directors approved making the program permanent that day.

For his part, Hank Willson, SFMTA’s Commuter Shuttle Program manager responded, saying in part:

“The hub-and-spoke system, as we have termed it, was something that was considered as part the program and something we thought about before the pilot program. And we talked about what to do after the pilot, we think and view our role as striking a balance between what we call the Wild West, and a hub-and-spoke system is on the other end of that, and we think we have gone a long way [towards] something like a hub system, [implementing the new] arterial restrictions and consolidating the network on 120 [bus] zones rather than stopping wherever shuttles want to.

The hesitation with a hub system is there are not any particular on-street locations that can accommodate the buses. ... If we found a parking lot as a place shuttles can gather, dozens or hundreds of buses trying to access a single spot at a time would cause traffic and air quality impacts we felt would be unacceptable to those that live or work near the hubs, so that is why we went toward the middle [ground] — with arterial [street] restrictions.”

In other words, rather than creating one, or a few, central hubs, SFMTA simply turned the major and minor arterial streets of San Francisco all over the City into “*spokes*” — that poke into the flow of Muni buses and cause greater traffic congestion — and converted up to 200 restricted Muni red bus zones into commuter shuttle “hubs” scattered across the City.

This is nonsense, as transit planners have known since the mid-1800’s. On September 20, 1853, the Indianapolis Union Station opened as the nation’s first “hub” for multiple railroad operators to share. Since then, 134 train stations had opened under the moniker of being a “Union Station” in 39 states, the most notable of them Union Station in Chicago. Another notable “station” is Grand Central Station in New York City. Transit planners in fully 39 states couldn’t have missed understanding why “hubs” are important.

For its part, Wikipedia lists 96 Greyhound Bus stations/hubs/terminals in 32 states alone. Indeed, one Greyhound Bus station was, and probably still is, located in San Francisco’s Transbay Terminal. Then there are probably hundreds of other bus depots and bus terminals across the U.S. run by other regional bus carriers.

The Transbay Transit Center/Caltrain Downtown Extension (TTC/DTX) project was designed to “transform downtown San Francisco and regional transportation well into the 21st Century.” Transbay project goals include:

- Improved access to rail and bus services
- Enhanced connectivity between Caltrain and other major transit providers
- Accommodating projected growth in travel demand in the San Jose-San Francisco corridor
- Reduced traffic congestion on U.S. Highway 101 and I-280 between San Jose and San Francisco and reduced vehicle hours of delay on major freeways in the Peninsula corridor
- Improved regional air quality by reducing auto emissions
- Direct access to downtown San Francisco for future intercity and high-speed rail service
- Alleviation of blight and revitalization of the Transbay Terminal Area
- Construction of dedicated bus ramps from I-80 to the terminal
- Bus operations in the new Transbay Transit Center are scheduled to start in August 2017

By opting for a “hub-and-spoke” system for the commuter shuttle buses, SFMTA appears to be undermining several of the Transbay Center’s “hub” goals. Using the Transbay Transit Center as a “hub” for commuter shuttle buses would provide ready access to freeways to San Jose and the Peninsula, and we’d remove the 45-foot-long buses from San Francisco roaming all over the City in a hunt to pick up these “entitled” special passengers.

Many of those Google bus passengers might opt to take Caltrain to the South Bay from the Transbay Center, instead of using a fleet of commercial buses, and it might help alleviate traffic congestion on Highways 101 and I-280 by taking those commercial buses off of our highways, in addition to alleviating hours of vehicle delays on major freeways, too!

Given the ready access to the Transbay Transit Center, SFMTA’s project manager Hank Willson appears to be completely wrong.

MTA doesn’t need to find parking lots or other street locations as places dozens or hundreds of commuter buses could converge at a time. Instead, the Transbay Center — in the shadows of San Francisco’s soon-to-be most phallic building, the 1,070-foot-high, 61-story Transbay Tower (eventually renamed “Salesforce” Tower) — is a perfect, and obvious, location for a central “hub” for the commuter shuttle buses.

It’s almost as if Mr. Willson, and SFMTA’s Board of Directors, have complete amnesia that the Transbay Transit Center is currently under construction, bus operations will start in 2017, and is a perfect site for “Google buses” to become an anchor tenant at the Transbay Center.

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According to the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) on December 3, 2015, these privileged “tech workers” had average compensation of \$176,275 in San Francisco in 2014 (up 12.8% from 2013), and average compensation in 2014 of \$240,663 in San Mateo County and \$211,874 in Santa Clara County. They can well afford travelling to a hub at the Transbay Center to get to their jobs in the South Bay, like everyone else.

Worse, the [Chronicle reported](#) many “tech” employers pocketed \$34 million in “Twitter tax breaks” in San Francisco during 2014.

On top of that, SFMTA is simply pandering to multibillion-dollar tech companies in giving them cheap access to the public right-of-way by converting up to 200 Muni red bus zones into miniature neighborhood “hubs” so these privileged tech employees can avoid the fuss of having to commute to the Transbay Center to get to their jobs in the Peninsula.

Muni Drivers Locked Out of Process

TWU Local 250-A president Eric Williams [testified](#) during the MTA Board’s November 17 hearing, that the shuttle program was a “done deal no matter what we say in here, bought and paid for [by the tech companies].” Williams testified that nobody from SFMTA’s Shuttle Program had “contacted my office as a stakeholder,” and said the tech companies are “subdued because they know everybody is watching,” and the tech buses don’t go in the zones because they are trying to get the permanent program passed. But once the program is made permanent, Williams warned, “you will see buses lined up,” apparently referring to Muni buses lined up waiting behind commuter tech shuttle buses, apparently all over the City.

An MTA Board member subsequently indicated concern hearing from the largest union, Local 250-A presenting Muni drivers, and hearing Mr. Williams’ testimony that he felt Muni drivers were not solicited on how the shuttle program may be working. The process suggests that soliciting feedback from Muni drivers may have been all but ignored.

The Board member questioned Muni’s Commuter Shuttle Project manager, Hank Willson, about whether Williams’ statement was correct and whether there is a plan to get feedback from Muni drivers.

Willson claimed that the Shuttle Project team did talk to drivers and that he had himself “went out and talked to [drivers] on the 12 and 27 [bus lines] because they are impacted at Valencia and 25th and 24th ... and we had [staff] talk to [drivers] on the 47 and 49 [bus lines].” Muni’s managers on the Shuttle Project say they asked what the drivers’ experience with commuter shuttle was and how much commuter shuttles may get in the way of Muni drivers. But Willson provided no actual comments or feedback from Muni drivers, and provided no statistics from driver feedback.

Willson admitted that while Shuttle Program managers had apparently talked to a handful of drivers — without stating the precise number of drivers who had been informally contacted — the Shuttle Project didn’t go through the Union structure but would be “happy to go through that.” But rather than wait for formal feedback from drivers represented by TWU 250-A, MTA’s Board of Directors didn’t wait, and approved making the shuttle program permanent.

In hindsight, it’s sad that Mr. Williams and TWU 250-A hadn’t filed a grievance — and may not have even asked for a “meet-and-confer” session to discuss the impact of the commuter shuttle buses on the working conditions of Muni drivers — during the 18-month trial period, and apparently hadn’t asked to have a seat at the table.

“ ‘Tech’ employers pocketed \$34 million in ‘Twitter tax breaks’ in San Francisco during 2014, and on top of that SFMTA is simply pandering to tech companies in giving them cheap access to the public right-of-way by converting up to 200 Muni red bus zones into miniature neighborhood ‘hubs’.”

“ TWU Local 250-A president Eric Williams testified that nobody from SFMTA’s Shuttle Program had ‘contacted my office as a stakeholder,’ and warned once the program is made permanent ‘you will see [Muni] buses lined up,’ waiting behind commuter tech shuttle buses.”

“ It’s even sadder that it didn’t occur to Muni’s 132 senior managers and deputy directors paid \$17.2 million annually in FY 2014–2015, or to SFMTA Director Ed Reiskin, to formally survey Muni bus drivers during evaluation of the Commuter Shuttle Program.”

It's even sadder that as of June 30, 2015, Muni had 132 senior managers and deputy directors in the job classification code series 9172 to 9186 who were paid \$17.2 million annually in FY 2014–2015, and apparently it didn't occur to any of the 132 managers or to SFMTA Director Ed Reiskin to formally survey the Muni bus drivers during evaluation processes of the Commuter Shuttle Program's October 5 premature Evaluation Report.

SFMTA Director Ed Reiskin: “Open Mouth, Insert Foot”

Comically, two days after the SFMTA Board approved making the shuttle program permanent, the *San Francisco Chronicle* carried an [article](#) on January 19 reporting on the MTA's Central Subway project, in which MTA's director, Ed Reiskin, noted:

“As the second-most-densely populated city in the country (New York City is first), I think our roadways are nearly at capacity, and our streets are not going to get any wider.”

How can it be that Reiskin knows our surface-street roadways are at capacity, but is OK with allowing the commuter shuttle buses — who appear not to obey sharing the roadway with Muni buses, pedestrians, and people with disabilities — to gobble roadway capacity and flood the streets of San Francisco with “Google buses”?

Perhaps Reiskin hasn't read the billing data for commercial shuttle operators for October 2015, and hasn't understood the scope of the problem. In response to a records request placed by this author, SFMTA produced an Excel file on November 24 [reporting](#) shuttle operators made 70,356 stops during October 2015, apparently in Muni red zones and perhaps white zones. Extrapolating to an annual volume of “capacity,” that portends 844,272 shuttle stop events annually, simply by multiplying by 12 months.

When pressed for more robust billing data, SFMTA finally coughed up a [PDF file](#) (not Microsoft Excel data, as requested) on Thanksgiving Eve, November 25. Re-keying the data [shows](#) that between September 2014 and October 2015, shuttle stop-events increased by 21,134 monthly — from 49,322 to 70,356 — an increase of 42.65% since the program was implemented in August 2014, including an 11.23% increase between September 2015 and October 2015 alone. Neither Reiskin nor the SFMTA Board members discussed this on November 17 before making the program permanent.¹

While the October 5 Evaluation Report claimed a 30% increase in daily shuttle stop-events since August 2014, this new data suggests it increased nearly 43% during the 18-month trial period, contradicting the Evaluation Report!

If the program actually expands by 41% when it is made permanent in February 2016, does this suggest we'll get another 346,152 additional stop-events annually, pushing the total commuter shuttle bus stops to 1.19 million stops each year — without a full EIR? Does Ed Reiskin and our full Board of Supervisors *not* understand this impact, or how to mitigate it?

Second EIR Appeal Is Right Around the Corner

Since MTA's Board approved making the program permanent without conducting a full EIR, many observers have concluded that the streets of San Francisco are going to become even more dangerous for mom's and pre-schooler's, along with pedestrians, bicyclists, and passengers. After all, our streets, as Reiskin noted, aren't going to get any wider, anytime soon.

“How can it be MTA director Ed Reiskin knows our surface-street roadways are nearly at capacity, but is OK with allowing the commuter shuttle buses to gobble roadway capacity and flood the streets of San Francisco with ‘Google buses’?”

“SFMTA produced an Excel file reporting shuttle operators made 70,356 stops during October 2015. Extrapolating to an annual volume of ‘capacity,’ that portends 844,272 shuttle stop events annually, by multiplying by 12 months during the pilot program. If the program actually expands by 41% when it is made permanent, does this suggest it will push the total commuter shuttle bus stops to 1.19 million stops annually, without a full EIR?”

¹ Rekeying the data from PDF format to Excel captured monthly stop-event totals, and fees paid by the shuttle operators between June 2015 and October 2015. Although SFMTA had been asked to provide billing data from August 2014 to October 2015, it provided incomplete data.

The Wild West of San Francisco's misuse of Muni red zones is about to worsen, and we'll see more Muni passengers and people with disabilities disembarking in traffic lanes!

That's because the problem with blocked Muni zones is about to worsen come February 2016, since the MTA Board also approved on November 17 allowing smaller shuttle bus operators who provide free intra-city rides to also use Muni red zones, apparently without having to pay any usage fee and without risking fines from citations.

How will Muni buses possibly be able to compete for access to Muni red zones with a glut of commuter and free shuttle buses hogging space? In effect, we're just trading the Wild, Wild West of unregulated commercial shuttle buses prior to the pilot program stopping wherever they want, for a just-as-ugly Wild, Wild West of upwards of 1.2 million shuttle buses blocking Muni red zones!

Some observer's remain leery about having additional shuttles operating in public Muni bus stops, and are leery about private enterprise having such cheap access to the public right-of-way.

The permanent commuter shuttle program claims it will curtail shuttles to only arterial streets, but other observers already worry that restricting them to large arterial streets will just concentrate the problem, especially as more and more shuttles get added to City streets. For instance, Apple plans to expand in North San Jose, adding up to 18,000 new employees, many of whom will probably want to, and will opt to, live in San Francisco and commute to San Jose.

And while on the one hand it's good to restrict where the shuttles can go, on the other hand, it's still illegal for them to pull into Muni bus stops, given that the State's vehicle code preempts the City from allowing shuttles in red zones.

"Everyone knows tech companies up and down the Peninsula want to offer living in San Francisco as a job perk to their employees, and we all know there's a lot of expansion going on down there. But there's still no analysis about the impact of turning San Francisco into a bedroom community for Silicon Valley, and no analysis about gentrification and the impacts of gentrification on sprawl and greenhouse gas emissions," notes Sue Vaughan.

It is widely expected that the Coalition for Fair, Legal, and Environmental Transit will appeal the absence of a second EIR for making the commuter shuttle program permanent to the full Board of Supervisors, since the potential for unlimited expansion is the heart of the issue going forward.

And for all anyone knows, Superior Court Judge Garrett Wong may — hopefully — rule that a full EIR was required for the pilot program and should have been performed, and a permanent expansion definitely requires a full EIR.

An increase to 1.19 million commercial commuter shuttle buses stopping in Muni red zones, plus an additional as yet unknown number of smaller "free" shuttles the SFMTA Board approved using Muni red zones, must surely have quality of life, housing displacement, roadway wear-and-tear, and other environmental impacts that must be mitigated through an EIR.

Contact members of the Board of Supervisors and urge them to require a full EIR!

"The MTA Board also approved November 17 allowing smaller shuttle bus operators who provide free intra-city rides to also use Muni red zones, in addition to the 1.19 million commuter shuttle stops. How will Muni buses possibly be able to compete for access to Muni red zones?"

"It is widely expected that the Coalition for Fair, Legal, and Environmental Transit will appeal the absence of a second EIR for making the commuter shuttle program permanent to the full Board of Supervisors, since unlimited expansion potential will be the heart of the issue going forward."

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