

Roundtable Listening Session on the Public Transit Experiences of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders: Bay Area Meeting Summary

Friday, January 6, 2023, 1:00 – 3:00 PM PT
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
San Francisco, CA

On Friday, January 6, Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Deputy Administrator Veronica Vanterpool led a roundtable discussion in San Francisco with leaders of the Bay Area's Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AA & NHPI) communities regarding the experience of riders of Asian descent on transit systems. The discussion was the second in a series of roundtables that are part of the U.S. Department of Transportation's work to advance equity and justice in AA & NHPI communities and combat the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes.

FTA hosted the discussion in collaboration with local transit leaders, including:

- Alix Bockelman, Deputy Executive Director of Policy, Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC),
- Jeffrey Tumlin, Director of Transportation, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA),
- Janice Li, President, San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)
- Joel Young, President, Alameda-Contra Costa Transit (AC Transit)
- Pajouablai Monica Lee, Director of Strategic Partnerships, [White House Initiative on AA & NHPI](#)
- They were joined by a dozen local community organizations.

Participants discussed the importance of safe, equitable, and accessible transit service to the Bay Area's AA & NHPI communities and the critical connections it provides to jobs, healthcare, entertainment, and social services. They shared personal and community experiences as targets of anti-Asian hate crimes and harassment, including both verbal and physical assaults, and expressed concern for the safety of AA & NHPI women and seniors in particular.

The local leaders described how incidences of anti-Asian and gender-based harassment in public spaces has sharply increased since the pandemic began. They also acknowledged the challenges and limitations of transit agencies in addressing community-wide issues, like the need for more mental health care, social and other supportive services for unhoused populations. Funding sources are limited and many transit systems are ineligible for funding programs to address homelessness. Another key challenge discussed is identifying culturally competent solutions to non-criminal behavior on transit and in public spaces.

The leaders of BART, SFMTA, and AC Transit shared information about existing programs and resources meant to improve safety and combat hate crimes and harassment on their systems, including law enforcement and unarmed intervention programs. There was a shared emphasis on the value of data to better measure and analyze harassment attacks.

They also expressed the importance of riders reporting their safety concerns and any incidents of verbal harassment or physical assault on transit. The reports help agencies deploy their resources more effectively and help prevent future incidents. However, participants noted that many victims are unwilling to report crimes and, those who do, often encounter a time-consuming, laborious reporting process which further deters reporting.

The transit agencies also welcomed and received community input on ways to improve or expand their programs to better meet the needs of AA & NHPI riders. MTC committed to working closely with federal, state, and local agency partners on strategies to fund transit safety improvement projects.

The group offered diverse ideas and potential solutions to improve safety, rider comfort, and increase transit ridership. Among them:

- support for Transit Ambassador programs, which provide visible staff presence at stations and on buses and trains. Ambassadors can proactively engage riders, provide multilingual assistance, intervene or de-escalate a situation if needed. Support was strong for “aggressively helpful” programs that allow for proactive engagement and not just observation and reporting; and
- increased service frequency, which improves both transit accessibility and a sense of safety for riders who do not have to endure long waits for the next bus or train.
- improved seating design that allows for better visual awareness in the system

The solutions will require resources and collaboration at the federal, state, and local levels.

USDOT and FTA are committed to working with federal, state, and local community partners to combat discrimination and hate in all forms. Everyone should be able to ride a bus, take the subway, or simply walk down the street free from the fear of harassment and violence. The input and ideas received from the Bay Area’s AA & NHPI community will help DOT, FTA, and transit operators better understand the perceptions and challenges facing transit systems and communities and identify potential solutions to more effectively meet their needs.

Participating Organizations

- Asian Health Services
- Asian Law Caucus
- Chinatown Community Development Center
- Chinese for Affirmative Action
- East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation
- Filipino Advocates for Justice
- Lao Family Community Development
- Oakland Chinatown Chamber of Commerce
- San Francisco Transit Riders
- Southeast Asian Community Center (SEACC)
- Stop AAPI Hate
- Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce