

**San Francisco Bay Area  
Water Emergency  
Transportation  
Authority**

**Strategic Plan  
(DRAFT)**

**January, 2016**

**WATER EMERGENCY  
TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY**

## Introduction

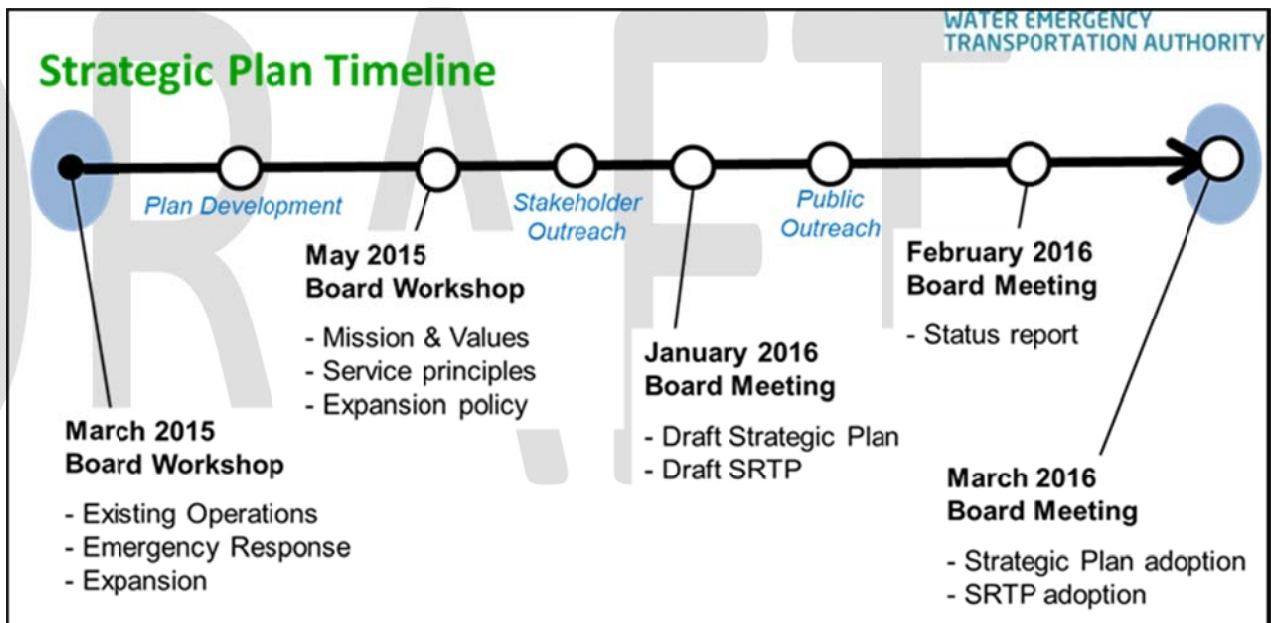
The 2016 WETA Strategic Plan presents a vision for the next 20 years of ferry service in the San Francisco Bay Area. This plan comes at a pivotal period in WETA's history. Rising ridership driven by a strong regional economy with focused job growth in San Francisco has made the ferry more popular than ever. Pre-existing services in Vallejo, Alameda and Oakland have transitioned smoothly from city-run services to WETA operations. The first new terminal built in the Bay Area in decades – in South San Francisco – is thriving after an initial ramp up period. Funded projects such as the North Bay and Central Bay maintenance facilities as well as expansion of the downtown San Francisco terminal and a new terminal in Richmond are all in the final design or construction phase. And finally, expansion candidate terminals throughout San Francisco Bay are seeking funding to enter project implementation.

This plan is preceded by the *2002 Water Transit Authority Implementation and Operations Plan*. That document helped set a course for today's WETA ferry system by calling for more funding, mapping out the consolidation of struggling city services, and proposing an ambitious expansion vision.

Strategic visions need to be revisited every ten years however as much has changed in the Bay Area and the world since 2002. The Strategic Plan maintains a focus on describing a vision for a 20-year horizon and sets out the policy framework needed to realize that vision. Near term and immediate activities, particularly those requiring more detail and specificity, are incorporated into the *2016 Short Range Transit Plan* and in supporting policy-level documents such as WETA's System Expansion Policy, Fare Program and Emergency Response Plan.



The current WETA system is enjoying historic success in terms of ridership and productivity. However, limited vessel capacity has begun to place stress on a financially constrained system. Major construction projects and vessel procurements should help to meet soaring demand in the near term but the lack of an additional operating subsidy and the fact it is a fixed amount in the future limits long term opportunities for service growth. Expanding the system to reach new terminals and add more vessels would enhance WETA's ability to fulfill its emergency response mission and support expected growth in the Bay Area.



## Mission and Values

In 2008, the WETA Board adopted a Mission Statement for the organization. At the same time, the Board approved a Vision for how WETA would pursue its Mission.

Taken together, the Mission and Vision describe and characterize WETA's multiple functional roles in the regional transportation network. This Strategic Plan provides additional detail on how WETA should perform these roles in order to successfully carry out its Mission, including priorities for balancing the deployment of system assets against available financial resources. For example, although emergency response is a clear organizational priority, WETA does not receive dedicated operating resources to support disaster preparedness. Thus, WETA must design its emergency response capabilities to fit within the envelope of a financially sustainable transit operation. Similarly, while building more connected communities is a key part of WETA's vision, it does not have the taxation or land use authority necessary to finance these activities on its own. WETA needs the support of local partners and stakeholders to develop new funding sources and advocate at the regional level to make ferry transportation a priority throughout the Bay Area. Several emerging trends will be critical to shaping WETA service, as described further below.

### WETA Mission

*WETA is a regional agency with responsibility to develop and operate a comprehensive Bay Area regional public water transportation system. WETA shall also provide water transportation services in response to natural or man-made disasters.*

### WETA Vision

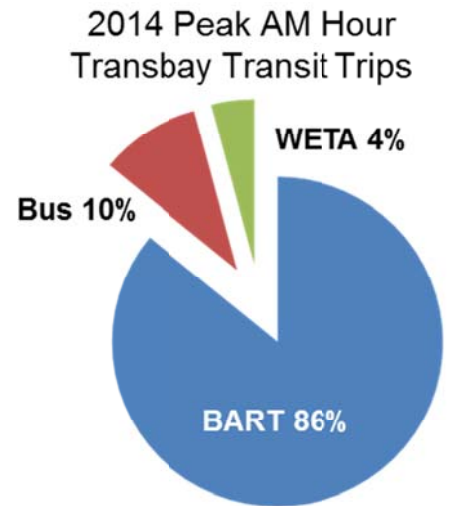
*Establish and operate a regional ferry system that connects communities, reduces congestion and provides an emergency response capability.*

## System Demand

The WETA system in 2016 is a small but meaningful component of the Bay Area's transportation system, carrying more than 8,000 travelers on an average day – over 2 million riders in a year -- from terminals in Oakland, Alameda Main Street, Alameda Harbor Bay, South San Francisco, Vallejo and San Francisco. As the Bay Area economy has surged in recent years, the other primary means of crossing the Bay – the Bay Bridge, BART, and AC Transit – have reached record levels of demand and have experienced capacity shortfalls. Ferries have been the beneficiary of crowded trains, buses, and roads, and recent disruptions to those systems have exposed commuters and recreational travelers to ferry travel.

Ridership on the WETA system has increased 56 percent between 2012 -- when city services were transitioned to WETA -- and 2015. Individual routes have grown at double digit annualized rates over the last three years. The Alameda/Oakland service has increased by 71 percent and the Vallejo, Harbor Bay and South San Francisco services each grew by over 30 percent in the same time period.

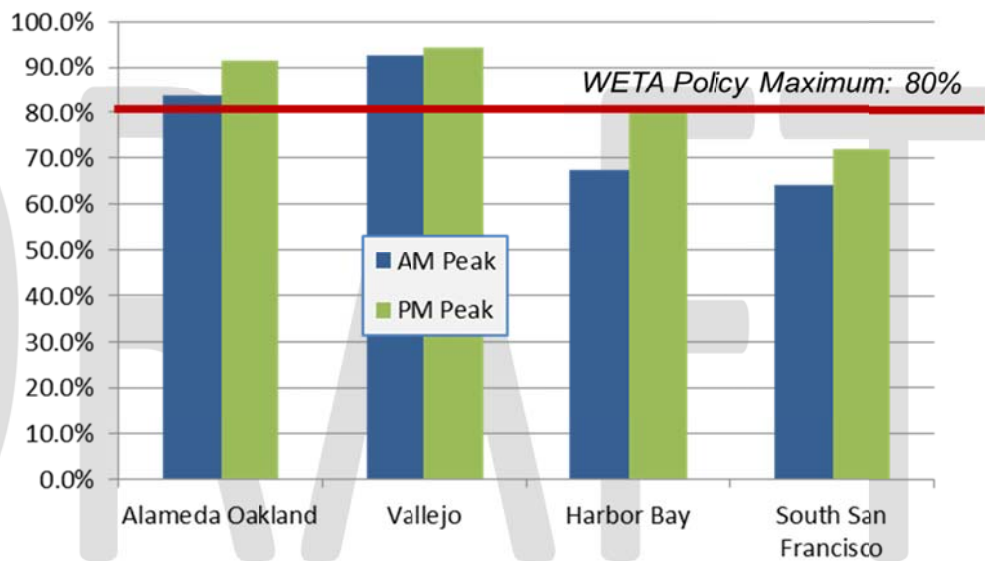
The rapid increase in ridership has caused crowding and strained capacity on the most popular trips, causing leave-behinds and disrupting travel for ferry passengers. In June 2015, the WETA Board adopted a Service Quality Policy that states a service averaging 80 percent occupancy or higher during the peak hour would justify a service enhancement. Many of WETA's services averaged between 90 and 100 percent occupancy during the summer of 2015. It is anticipated that peak period service increases within the limits of available funding will be needed over the next few years to maintain board-adopted service standards. Projections for continued



Source: MTC Transbay/Core Capacity Study

economic growth in the Bay Area – and for job growth in San Francisco in particular – are robust, while capacity on both BART and the Bay Bridge will continue to be limited, suggesting that barring significant changes in the local economy, recent positive trends in ferry ridership will continue. WETA will continue to strive to meet this demand through existing resources and advocacy for enhanced service into the future.

**August 2015 Peak Departure Utilization**



### Upcoming

- Recommendations from MTC's Transbay/Core Capacity Study
- Annual Service & Schedule Modifications

### Resources

- *Core Capacity/Transbay Study, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 2016*
- *Draft WETA Short Range Transit Plan, 2016-2026*
- WETA Annual and Seasonal Service Plans

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## Funding Challenges

While limited service enhancements and new vessels coming on line in the next three years will help address immediate capacity constraints, the long term prospect for meeting growth in demand for ferry service is limited due to insufficient operating and capital funding. Roughly half of WETA's operating funds come from the Regional Measure 2 (RM2) Bridge Toll program. That amount of funding is fixed at \$15.3 million annually and does not include provisions for escalation due to increases in expenses or inflation. The RM2 funding is a reimbursement-based program, so any unused operating funds from WETA's authorization return to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to be used for other transportation providers. This means WETA cannot capitalize on savings or use any "surplus" RM2 funding to build an operating or capital reserve that could help fund service expansions in the future. Good budgeting practice and management of WETA's other revenue sources over the past several years has ensured an operating reserve is available over the next ten years to support existing levels of service. However, the long term need to expand services and maintain an operating reserve beyond the ten year horizon will be a pressing concern into the future.

There will be a negative consequence as a result of static RM2 funding decreasing in value over time as expenses increase and inflation rises. The result is that operating reserves will have to be relied upon to maintain existing service levels and those reserves will eventually be depleted. If demand increases at even a modest level, existing services will ultimately "max out" during the peak periods and leave passengers behind on a regular basis. Given this context, needed service enhancements at existing terminals will not be possible, without new operating





revenues. Expansion into new markets will also require new capital and operating revenue sources.

#### Upcoming

- Annual WETA Fiscal Budgets
- Anticipated future county transportation sales tax measures in Contra Costa, San Mateo, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Solano
- Future regional bridge toll or gas tax administered by MTC

#### Resources

- FY2016/2017 WETA Budget
- Draft WETA Short Range Transit Plan, 2016-2026
- WETA 2015-2020 Fare Program



## Partnerships

The ferry system we have today was developed in partnership with local, regional and private sector partners. In the private sector, WETA partners on a daily basis with its contract operator and contractors or vendors working on WETA projects. The continued operation of the service also is a partnership between WETA and funding agencies. The funding structure WETA operates under will require new partners and the continuation of existing relationships to ensure the system can keep growing to meet demand. One area of new partnerships is with the development community. Ferry terminals serve as a catalyst to new development, helping to bring transit to underserved or isolated waterfront communities. This has been the case in South San Francisco where new commercial development is leveraging the ferry terminal to draw employees from the east bay. On Treasure Island, the ferry terminal provides a focal point for community development and a key connection to San Francisco. Partnerships also will be required between funding entities such as Congestion Management Agencies or the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to ensure operating and capital funding is sufficient to meet the system's needs. Partnerships with cities, ports and waterfront neighbors are an important component of safe and vital ferry operations. Cities play an important role in building ferry ridership through supportive access infrastructure such as bicycle lanes or parking and advocacy at the regional or state level. Finally, WETA plays a role within the emergency response framework of the Bay Area and the State of California. Emergency preparedness is a partnership among many different agencies and levels of government.

### Case Study: Richmond Partnership

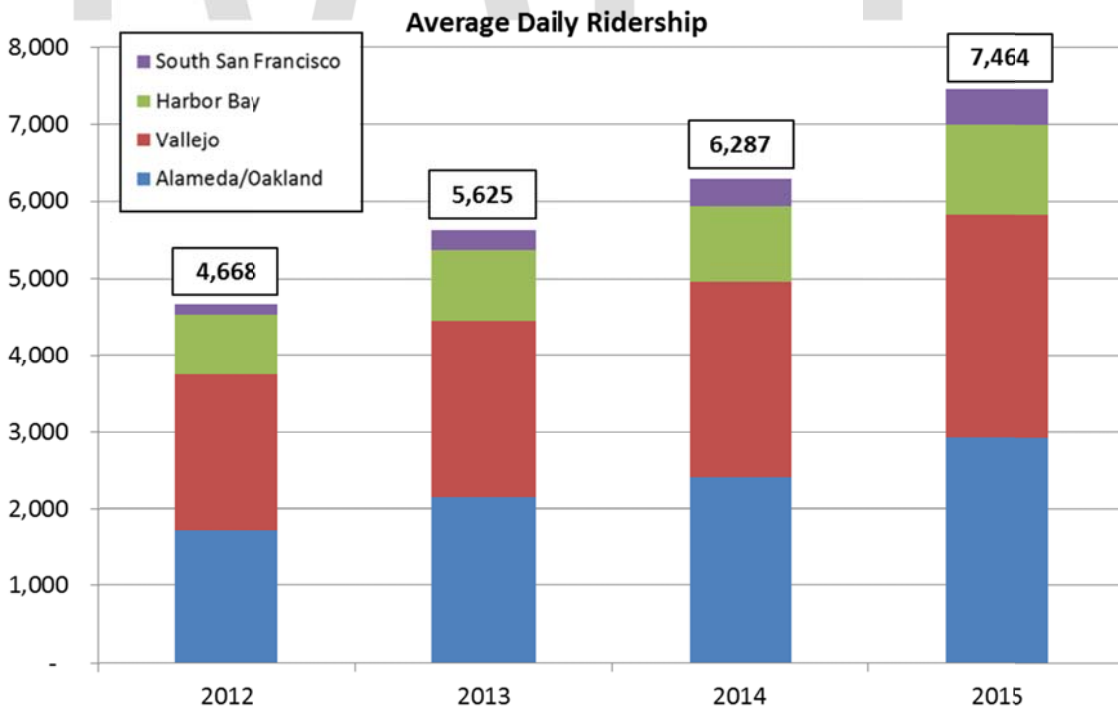
WETA will open a new ferry terminal in Richmond in 2018. The first day of service will be the culmination in a 12-year effort and an effective working partnership with the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA) and the City of Richmond. In 2013, with several Contra Costa County locations competing for limited ferry dollars provided by the Contra Costa transportation sales tax, CCTA conducted its own feasibility study of ferry services concluding Richmond was the most promising service at that time. WETA and CCTA partnered on the study and subsequent efforts led to a Memorandum of Understanding and ultimately a funding agreement that has enabled this multimillion dollar transportation investment to move forward.

### Upcoming

- Memorandums of Understanding with City of San Francisco for Treasure Island service and City of Alameda for Seaplane Lagoon planning
- WETA participation in Bay Area Council's Ferry Task Force
- WETA participation in Clipper 2.0 fare card regional effort

### Resources

- Memorandum of Understanding and Funding Agreement with Contra Costa Transportation Authority for Richmond Ferry Service
- Ferry Financial Feasibility Study, Contra Costa Transportation Authority
- Draft WETA Emergency Response Plan, 2016

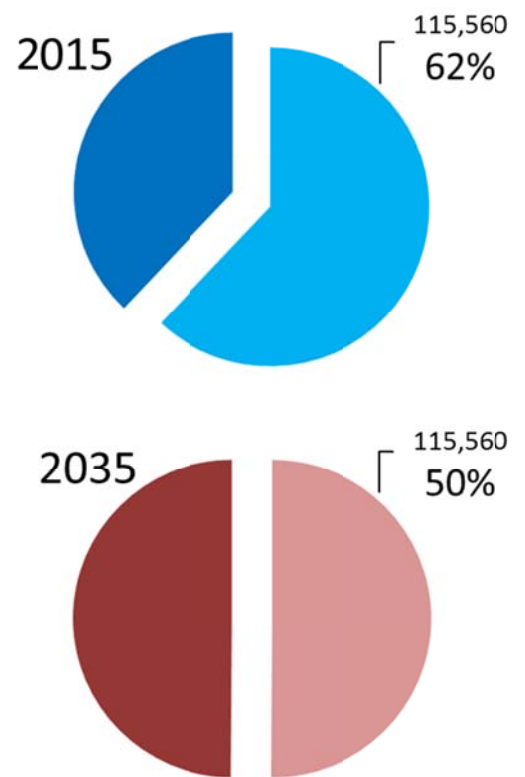


## Response to Emergencies and Transportation Disruptions

In addition to strong underlying growth in demand for Transbay travel, disruptions to the Bay Area’s transportation network – such as BART and the Bay Bridge -- have increased in recent years and will continue as existing transportation systems age and experience the stress of increased demand. This includes both scheduled facility closures for construction and maintenance activities and unscheduled closures due to equipment failures, unanticipated incidents or labor disruptions. In responding to natural disasters, emergencies or network disruptions, WETA plays an important role in coordinating the ferry transportation response and providing resources for decision makers at the regional and state level. Currently, the WETA ferry transit system has the capability of evacuating 62 percent of Downtown San Francisco’s daytime population within 48 hours using its own vessels. With assistance of other operators, WETA could evacuate a more significant share of the daytime population. However, in the recovery period after an event, WETA may be the only viable Transbay operator for a period of weeks or months. In this instance, building that capability through expansion and service enhancement will strengthen WETA’s ability to help the Bay Area recover from disruptions and emergency events.

### **Evacuating Downtown San Francisco**

*Given the existing fleet and terminals, WETA is able to evacuate 62% of Downtown San Francisco’s daytime population within a 48-hour period. With expected population and employment growth, WETA would be able to evacuate only 50% of the daytime population in 2035.*



## Upcoming

- WETA participation in bay area emergency response activities
- MTC's Transbay core capacity study

## Resources

- Draft WETA Emergency Response Plan, 2016





## The Next Ten Years

Over the next ten years, WETA will open two maintenance facilities, expand the terminal facilities in downtown San Francisco and open new terminals in Richmond and Treasure Island. In addition, up to six older vessels will be replaced while new vessels will join the fleet when Richmond and Treasure Island services begin. Based on the current fleet replacement and expansion plan, WETA's fleet should grow from 11 operating vessels today to 18 by 2026. The arrival of two replacement vessels in 2017 and three more vessels by 2018 will help to alleviate some of the immediate capacity constraints by offering larger vessels under the existing service plan. Targeted service or frequency enhancements, within current funding limitations, should also help to address increasing demand in the near term.

The *WETA 2016 Short Range Transit Plan (SRTP)* provides a fiscally constrained projection for the FY2016-2025 period. Because of funding limitations, the plan assumes a modest enhancement to existing service levels and expansion only for terminals with a dedicated funding source: Richmond and Treasure Island. Demand is expected to continue to grow as the Bay Area population is estimated to grow by almost two million more people and a million more jobs by 2040. Existing and anticipated vessel capacity will become more limited within the next ten years on most services given assumed growth rates in the 2016 SRTP. In other words, ferries will struggle to maintain their current quality of service and will have limited capacity to meet increased demand over the next ten years.



In the long term, ferries will require a new funding source and likely a change in funding structure to continue to meet demand and serve the Bay Area. WETA services are evolving from a high-cost niche service to a regular commute and general travel option for many communities. The next step in this evolution is to provide greater frequency and higher capacity on existing routes, offering flexibility and choice for travelers. Also, new terminals in competitive corridors will need to open to address anticipated population and job growth and alleviate congestion on Bay Area transit and road. Finally, as other transportation networks in the region carry more people, WETA's role in providing service in the event of emergencies and disruptions will continue to be important.

#### Upcoming

- [MTC's Transbay core capacity study](#)
- [Future Terminal feasibility studies for Redwood City/South Bay, Berkeley and Hercules](#)
- [Plan Bay Area](#)
- [Regional Transportation Plan](#)

#### Resources

- [Draft WETA Emergency Response Plan, 2016](#)
- [Draft WETA Short Range Transit Plan, 2016](#)

## The 20-year Vision

The vision for the next 20 years is to meet demand for ferry service throughout the San Francisco Bay Area while building WETA's capability to respond to emergencies and system disruptions.

The expanded service plan behind this vision enhances ferry service to the point where frequencies are so high that passengers no longer need to consult a schedule. This means 15-minute peak frequency in the highest volume locations with 30-minute peak frequencies at other terminals. It expands ferry service to communities in Richmond, Treasure Island, Berkeley, Mission Bay, the South Bay and communities along the Carquinez Strait. It changes ferry service, currently a small niche market in the Bay Area's transportation system, into a first-choice travel option for thousands more people every day. This level of expansion means that capacity will need to triple from 2015 levels and operating funds will need to more than double. It also requires additional capital funding to acquire more vessels and construct the facilities needed to support the vision. The policy basis for the vision will be this Strategic Plan and the policies that will guide its implementation over the next 20 years.

Today's WETA system is positioned for expansion with strong ridership, healthy finances and expansion of system infrastructure. Investments made over the past five years have been made with expansion and system resiliency in mind. New maintenance facilities in Vallejo and Alameda are sized to accommodate a much larger fleet. Rehabilitation projects at existing terminals enable long term safety and operational flexibility. An expanded downtown San Francisco terminal positions the system for growth. And finally, prudent use of





federal vessel replacement funds and state funding will increase the size and capacity of the WETA fleet into the future.

Current funding sources are not sufficient to fund the expansion envisioned here, however the vision can be realized through advocacy by WETA and its partners and future regional funding initiatives. This vision will not only require more absolute funding but also a change to the structure and nature of this funding from what exists today. The current RM2 requirement that new services reach 40 percent farebox recovery within their first three years of operation is structurally flawed, not

## Candidate Expansion Terminals



allowing for an adequate ramp-up period or sufficient time to realize a reasonable return on a significant capital investment. The effect is to discourage ferry system expansion, placing arbitrary restrictions on what constitutes a “successful” service. WETA’s own System Expansion Policy should serve as a guide when new regional funding discussions take place. The policy states that new services require a minimum of ten years in service to mature and be productive.

In addition, if the region expects ferries to carry a greater share of the Transbay travel market, higher levels of operational subsidy should be considered from sources that allow the flexibility to create reserves for operational stability and sustainability. Out of necessity, ferry services achieve some of the highest farebox recovery rates (the portion of operational costs covered by fare revenue) in the Bay Area. Covering a higher percentage of operating costs with fares is achieved in part by pricing fares above comparable transit services. But to have broader appeal to the general public, fares will have to be more in line with the overall transit system. Again, changes to existing RM2 farebox recovery targets and more available operational subsidy will help to open the ferry to new markets.

The possibility of structural changes to future regional funding does not mean that WETA should abandon its current practice of seeking strong, competitive expansion opportunities.

Communities throughout the Bay Area have a number of transportation needs and an investment in ferry service has to make sense from a financial perspective. Expansion of the ferry system will continue to be a partnership between WETA, local, regional, state and federal government agencies. This strategic plan provides the policy basis for building those partnerships



and presents a vision for ferry service to be an integral part of the Bay Area's growth.

### Current and Future WETA System

Service	2016 Peak Frequency	2030 Peak Frequency
Alameda/Oakland	30 minutes	15 minutes
Alameda Harbor Bay	60 minutes	30 minutes
South San Francisco	60 minutes	30 minutes
Vallejo	40 minutes	20 minutes
Richmond	N/A	30 minutes
Treasure Island	N/A	30 minutes
Berkeley	N/A	30 minutes
Redwood City/South Bay	N/A	30 minutes
Mission Bay	N/A	20 minutes
Seaplane Lagoon	N/A	60 minutes
Carquinez Strait	N/A	60 minutes

WETA System	2016	2026	2040
Vessels	12	18	28
Capacity*	2,900	5,500	11,500
Terminals	8	10	14

(\*) Number of seats

## Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priorities support the vision of an enhanced and expanded ferry system in the San Francisco Bay Area.

### 1. Provide quality ferry transportation service

*Existing customers know that ferry service is reliable, comfortable and the most pleasant means of travel across the Bay. These policies ensure that WETA's service quality will remain high, and that ferries help reduce congestion in the Bay Area by offering an attractive, competitive transit choice.*

- 1.1 Offer reliable, scheduled ferry service
- 1.2 Ensure ferry travel is comfortable and relaxing
- 1.3 Meet demand for ferry service
- 1.4 Help to reduce congestion by offering attractive, competitive transit choices for Bay Area travelers
- 1.5 Provide safe, clean, and attractive terminal facilities
- 1.6 Offer customer support through friendly, well-trained crew and staff

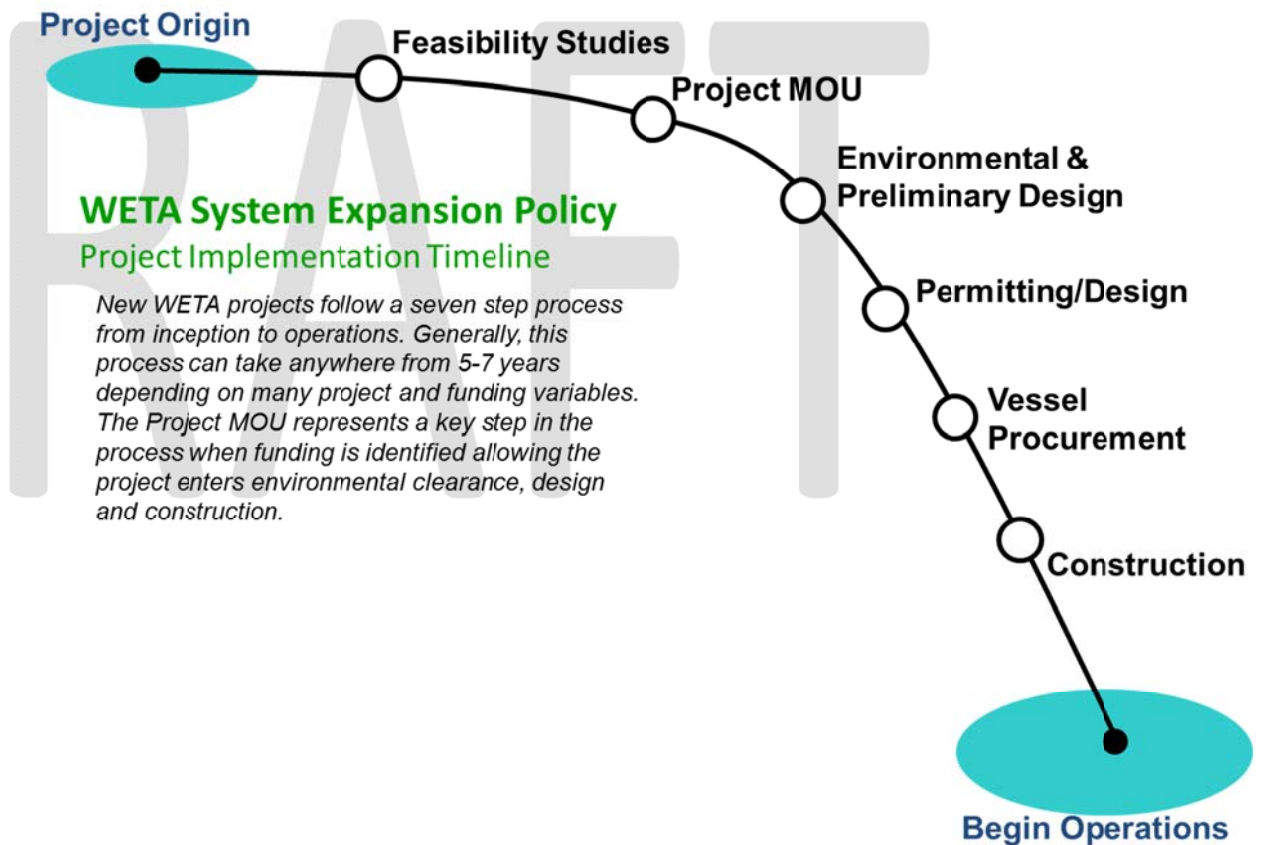
### 2. Expand ferry service in San Francisco Bay

*Communities across the Bay Area are redeveloping waterfront areas and see ferry service as not just an attractive means of transportation but as a valuable strategy to enhance communities and support economic development goals. The expansion of ferry service will help to address congestion in the Bay Area while continuing to build WETA's emergency response network.*

- 2.1 Meet demand for WETA ferry transportation service
- 2.2 Develop competitive ferry transportation services that offer commute choices and congestion relief
- 2.3 Ensure the ferry is integrated into local and regional transportation services
- 2.4 Ensure expansion efforts are consistent with emergency response and recovery needs



- 2.5 Evaluate expansion candidates using WETA’s System Expansion Policy
- 2.6 Evaluate existing WETA services for service enhancement using WETA’s Service Enhancement Policy
- 2.7 Leverage ferry grants and funding by working with funding partners in the private sector and at the local, regional, state and federal levels
- 2.8 Continue to serve as a catalyst for economic development and transit-oriented development initiatives
- 2.9 Leverage private investment to support ferry services



### **3. Achieve financial sustainability**

*WETA's current funding limitations hinder its ability to respond to increased demand as well as create an operating reserve. In the long term, without a change to the existing funding structure, ferry service will contract rather than expand to meet demand.*

- 3.1 Identify new sources of stable operating funding for future WETA ferry services
- 3.2 Create an operating reserve, ensuring sufficient operating resources to maintain flexibility
- 3.3 Pursue cost effective service delivery strategies
- 3.4 Achieve a sustainable balance between existing operating subsidies and farebox revenue
- 3.5 Explore revenue-generating opportunities that will contribute to ferry operations
- 3.6 Achieve farebox recovery goals consistent with WETA's Fare Policy and Special Events Policy

### **4. Be a responsible steward of public funds**

*Prudent fiscal management has been the practice at WETA, especially after the transition of services from the cities. Ferries require disciplined fiscal management and attention to costs to ensure public dollars are responsibly invested.*

- 4.1 Manage WETA capital grants and operating funds to ensure balanced budgets
- 4.2 Support regional initiatives offering need-based fare assistance and innovations in fare media-based programs
- 4.3 Expand and enhance ferry service using committed funding, based on partnerships with other agencies whenever possible
- 4.4 Seek out cost effective strategies to manage expenses in the provision of ferry service
- 4.5 Be consistent with WETA's fare policy and WETA's fare programs when establishing and revising fares





- 4.6 Follow best practices for procurement and fiscal management when using consultants, vendors or contractors

**5. Respond to natural disasters and disruptions to the Bay Area's transportation network**

*WETA has had several opportunities to provide relief valve service when BART or the Bay Bridge have been shut down or experienced service disruptions in recent years. This is a trend that will likely continue and the ferry is and should continue to be seen as an important resource for the Bay Area. WETA's emergency response capabilities will continue to be a focus of the organization.*

- 5.1 Build emergency response capability in conjunction with WETA's enhancement and expansion of transit service
- 5.2 Increase the size and capacity of WETA's fleet to absorb surges in ridership due to emergency response and recovery needs or disruption in Bay Area transportation
- 5.3 Ensure WETA terminals have sufficient capacity for emergency response operations
- 5.4 Develop maintenance and fueling facilities that support emergency response activities
- 5.5 Develop emergency preparedness partnerships with public safety officials and transportation operators at the federal, state and regional level
- 5.6 Maintain training programs and participate in regional joint exercises to ensure WETA and contract operator staff are prepared for emergency operations
- 5.7 Communicate WETA's emergency response capabilities and resource needs to key participants and stakeholders in the emergency response community
- 5.8 Develop, maintain and actively update WETA's emergency response plans



## **6. Ensure safe and secure ferry operations**

*Safety will continue to be a focus of WETA operations, ensuring that passengers can rely on ferry transportation as one of the safest means of travel in the Bay Area.*

- 6.1 Ensure captains and crews are properly trained in all safety procedures
- 6.2 Design and construct facilities to Essential Facilities standards
- 6.3 Maintain a constructive partnership with the US Coast Guard to ensure continued safe operations
- 6.4 Ensure vessels and facilities are properly serviced and maintained

## **7. Seek continuous environmental improvement**

*Public transit offers an alternative to the private automobile, reducing congestion and pollution due to single occupant vehicles. WETA plays a vital role in the Bay Area by providing high volume service during peak congestion periods, efficiently moving people across the Bay. As vessels and technology advance, WETA will continue to be a leader in environmental efficiency for ferries.*

- 7.1 Ensure vessels meet or exceed federal, state and regional emissions standards
- 7.2 Utilize proven technologies to improve environmental performance
- 7.3 Reduce automobile travel and congestion by maximizing ferry ridership
- 7.4 Encourage alternate mode access to ferry terminals by accommodating bicycles, transit and pedestrians
- 7.5 Build facilities that meet LEED standards for environmental efficiency, as applicable



## 8. Reach out to all populations, reducing barriers to ferry ridership and serving the larger Bay Area community

*Ferry service is a regional asset for the Bay Area population. There should be minimal barriers to accessing the ferry for all individuals and communities in the Bay Area. Although ferry service is geographically limited to water-based routes, it can be designed to support regional goals for transportation equity and broad-based access, both in the actual transportation, and in community participation and outreach.*

- 8.1 Offer public transit service that does not discriminate due to physical capability, race, color, national origin, income level or language ability.
- 8.2 Design facilities, vessels, and services that are guided by Universal Design, accessible to persons with disabilities
- 8.3 Be a responsible business partner, providing opportunities for disadvantaged or minority owned businesses to contract with WETA
- 8.4 Ensure public participation in decision making through innovative and inclusive methods of public outreach
- 8.5 Advocate for effective connecting bus service, providing a means of making the ferry accessible to transit dependent populations



**9 Ensure WETA has the organizational capacity to manage and expand ferry services, according to the strategic direction of the Board of Directors**

*The WETA Board shall establish a strategic direction through its 2016 Strategic Plan, but it will also continually revisit and reassess that direction through planning studies and public forums.*

- 9.1 Provide an environment where WETA’s strategic direction can be understood and reassessed on a periodic basis
- 9.2 Prepare the organization for continued growth by ensuring that Board direction is clearly communicated and understood
- 9.3 Maintain and develop WETA staff resources
- 9.4 Utilize contract service providers and consultants to augment the organization’s administrative and service needs.

**10 Provide leadership for the continued operation and expansion of ferry service throughout the Bay Area**

*The legislation that created WETA anticipated the agency playing a leadership role in the areas of emergency response and ferry development throughout San Francisco Bay. The WETA Board will continue to play an active role in managing the ferry system and reaching out to stakeholders throughout the Bay Area.*

- 10.1 Provide a forum for policy development and regular input through WETA Board meetings
- 10.2 Establish and maintain collaborative partnerships with WETA contractors and vendors
- 10.3 Develop cooperative relationships between WETA and organized labor
- 10.4 Seek the input of ferry riders when considering major changes to the service and the ferry system

