



# TRANSIT TRANSPARENCY

**To create a system of accountability to customers and taxpayers, transit agencies should strive for transparency. Applying this standard to institutional practices and governance, open data policies and planning processes provides the public with the opportunity to judge a transit agency's effectiveness, and ask for improvements where necessary.**

**By this measure, agencies in the US vary greatly. Many agencies still adhere to unofficial policies or use opaque decision-making criteria in planning processes. The majority have opened schedule and real-time data to trip-planning apps, but few have gone beyond that in their public reporting.**

Bay Area Rapid Transit is a leader in transparency. It was the first large transit agency to open its schedule data, and it urges developers to build on top of new releases. It has also used its communication channels to have an honest conversation about funding and maintenance needs. The agency's recent \$3.5 billion bond measure, the "Better Bart Initiative" was subject to a robust public planning process and has a website that details every project along with a timeline and budget, establishing accountability.

The adoption of a truly "open" philosophy requires internal champions. Staff at some transit agencies have a bunker mentality, and an abiding concern that the public cannot be trusted. We find, however, that the public simply wants better transit service and to know what is going on. Transparency has few real costs but many benefits - a public that understands more about how transit works can lead to less overall cynicism and a greater ability to get things done.

# Three key arenas for transit transparency

## 1. Institutional Transparency

Institutional transparency means daylight is shown on decision-making processes, finances, hiring practices and service planning guidelines. It also means transit agencies should strive to adhere to the spirit rather than simply the letter of open records laws.

Agencies should:

- Schedule board meetings at times of day and in locations accessible to the public.
- Establish clear decision-making processes and policies with regard to service guidelines and planning criteria, and publicize what those processes are.
- Have a webpage that includes budget, contracts, open meeting laws, audit results, and name of person fulfilling open record request. Open records requests should receive a response within 30 days.

## 3. Transparent planning & communications

At times, transit agencies find themselves in the position of asking the public for increases in funding. A long-term commitment to transparency can make that job easier.

Agencies should:

- Solicit public input in planning processes by establishing accessible in-person and online mechanisms, and let constituents know what was done with their feedback.
- Maintain a digital list of current and future projects with budgets and project trackers.
- Build trust by communicating frankly about funding and policy needs, and being honest about what transit can and cannot do.

LET'S  
Hack  
THE  
Bus  
Every  
DAY



## 2. Open Data & Information

Open transit data are useful to enable trip routing, inform transit advocacy, and to improve operations for agencies themselves. Agencies who have implemented open data policies often report net cost savings (and improved rider experience).

Agencies should:

- Make open data easily downloadable in machine-readable formats when possible, and commit to regular updates.
- Make data that supports trip-planning available in real-time via open APIs, and use data to engage civic and business communities.
- Publish agency progress toward major service improvement, planning, and strategic goals in a public performance dashboard that features rider-oriented metrics and aligns with personnel evaluation criteria.

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#### DASHBOARD

Reliability  
Ridership  
Financials  
Customer Satisfaction

#### DATA BLOG

#### SURVEYS

#### MORE DATA

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CHART DATA ?

### Reliability

How dependable is our service?

Bus | 70% [VIEW TRENDS](#)

Commuter Rail | 90% [VIEW TRENDS](#)

Subway | 86% [VIEW TRENDS](#)