



## Catherine Stefani - *Ride the Vote!*

### 2024 California State Assembly candidate questionnaire

**1. What office are you running for?**

State Assembly, District 19

**2. What is your name?**

Catherine Stefani

**3. Do you have a section on your website about public transit, transportation, or mobility? If so, please provide a link.**

I do not have a section specifically dedicated to transportation. You can find my issues page on my website at [https://www.votecatherinestefani.com/on\\_the\\_issues](https://www.votecatherinestefani.com/on_the_issues)

**4. How do you usually get around? Please tell us when and why you use cars, trains, Muni buses, bikes, walking, wheelchairs, or any other mode you frequently use for transportation.**

I own a small, fuel efficient vehicle to get to and from work, meetings across the city, and to bring my child to school and to her extra curricular activities. I walk frequently around my neighborhood to run short errands and to visit nearby small businesses. I am also an avid runner and enjoy running throughout the city's many parks and open spaces, particularly the Presidio. I occasionally take Muni and rely on it to help my children get to where they need to go on a daily basis. They most often take the 22, 45, 5, 28, 49, 24 and 33.

**5. How often do you ride public transit?**

I take Muni occasionally, primarily the 45 and, as mentioned above, I rely on it to ensure my kids can get around the City.

**6. If elected, what would your top transportation priorities be? This can include priorities related to public transit, active transportation, driving, or any other mode of transportation.**

With transportation accounting for almost half of our region's emissions, we know that we must take bigger steps to encourage sustainable trips throughout SF and San Mateo County. One of the best ways to reduce transportation-related emissions is to make walking, biking and using public transportation safer and more reliable. People won't get on their bike if they don't feel it's safe, nor will they use transit if it's unreliable. Encouraging people to transition from their car to a sustainable mode of transit, even for a few trips a week, can make a meaningful difference in addressing this crisis.

Beyond changing how we get around, our long term strategy must be paired with our housing goals. Our greatest investment in our public transportation will be building an abundance of new housing that, by design, will make walking, biking and taking transit the most attractive ways to get around.

In addition, I believe a root cause of much of the traffic violence in our communities is due to the fact that too many of our roads are unsafely designed, encourage dangerous driving, and were implemented without consideration for all users of the road, especially vulnerable populations such as children, seniors and people with disabilities. If we are serious about working towards Vision Zero, we must address unsafe road designs that encourage dangerous driving and disregard vulnerable road users.

I'm also glad that the SFMTA is taking a serious look at how we can create a citywide and interconnected bike network. In a city as dense as San Francisco, biking should be an attractive way to get around, yet we're still far from that reality – particularly on the westside. Implementation of a citywide plan should prioritize areas where safety concerns are currently greatest.

**7. San Francisco's [Transit First Policy](#) states that within San Francisco, travel by public transit, by bicycle and on foot must be an attractive alternative to travel by private automobile. Do you support the principles laid out in the full Transit First Policy? If so, how will you use your position to advance the policy, both locally and statewide?**

Yes, I support the principles laid out in San Francisco's Transit First Policy. Providing safer and more reliable transit, even in light of looming budget deficits, is so important because of the fact that 30% of San Franciscans don't drive and have no other option than relying on our transit network. With a disproportionate share of these San Franciscans being seniors, people with disabilities, children or low-income residents, transit access and safety is key to any fight for greater equity in our city and throughout the Bay Area. I am committed to ensuring that transit agencies can continue to provide frequent, reliable service and can work to improve service as more and more riders return to using transit. Especially for our seniors and for people with disabilities, our paratransit system is in dire need of additional support and attention. The pandemic was a stark reminder of how reliant so many seniors and people with disabilities are on this resource, and that it's a service we must continue to invest in and improve upon if we hope to see real equity in our city's transit network.

I also believe that transit agencies must continue to win back riders by improving rider safety and comfort while onboard. Through ambassador programs, improving fare gates (such as what BART is currently doing at select stations throughout the Bay Area), and working collaboratively with public safety agencies, I believe that our region's transit can and should be safe for our children, our seniors and all who ride. Funding for public transit from the State and Federal governments will also continue to be essential. And while the State faces a looming budget deficit, I believe that we can be creative in how we support transit, such as through the use of extra Federal Highway funding, like President Biden recommended state governments do to support public transit last year.

**8. What role do you think law enforcement, fare enforcement, community ambassadors, and private security should play, if any, in patrolling transit?**

I believe that whether you're a child taking the bus to school early in the morning or a senior riding the train home late at night, you should feel comfortable and secure throughout the entirety of your journey. Right now, I am disappointed to say that many of our region's transit agencies are failing to provide this basic service and responsibility they owe to their riders: a safe trip. As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I called for a hearing on safety for women while on public transit in our city, and will continue to push for accountability from our transit operators to ensure that harassment or violence is something that no one has to deal with while riding the bus. In addition, too many of our hardworking transit operators are forced to deal with public safety situations that simply should not fall within their purview or have been victimized while on the job. Real public safety doesn't come cheap – we can't expect

more safety on transit if we don't provide the funding our transit agencies and public safety agencies need to keep riders and their transit operators safe.

As advocates continue to fight for more transit funding, I hope that there is also a focus on the resources and funding that transit agencies will need specifically for public safety on board. Similar to what I mentioned above, I believe that community ambassadors can play an important role with our transit agencies, as an additional set of eyes, to assist with wayfinding, and to de-escalate non-threatening situations. I believe law enforcement can be involved in a collaborative fashion when emergencies arise on public transit. Due to low staffing levels, their time should be reserved for serious emergencies. Fare enforcement officers should be relied on to enforce fares, not law enforcement officers. Finally, unless it became absolutely necessary, I would not support an expansion of private security on public transit.

9. Since the pandemic, different Bay Area transit agencies have adopted a variety of fare policies to help recover ridership and revenue. This year, Muni approved a 14% fare increase for most of its riders. On the other hand, San Francisco Bay Ferry lowered fares and has seen ridership grow quickly as a result. Petaluma Transit also expects to see large increases in ridership since using the city's general fund money to make fares free this year.

Currently, only about 8% of Muni's total revenue comes from fares.

Do you view fares and fare increases as a necessary cost to provide quality transit service? When transit agencies raise fares, how should they address equity concerns for low-income riders?

Alternatively, do you support fare freezes or fare-free transit? If so, how should transit agencies make up for lost fare revenue?

At this time, I do not support fare free MUNI or fare free service on other transit agencies operating within Assembly District 19, such as BART and SamTrans. While ridership has been recovering since the pandemic, we are still ways from reaching peak 2019 numbers on MUNI, and the SFMTA continues to face major funding shortfalls over the next several years, unless additional funding sources are identified.

While I understand that MUNI fares will never cover our funding shortfalls, I do not believe now is an appropriate time for our transit agencies to lose this source of revenue. I am optimistic that a regional measure in the coming years will help us avoid any of the worst case scenarios for public transit in the Bay Area. I also believe transit agencies must be proactive about addressing equity concerns when fares are raised,

especially for communities that rely most on transit to get around. I am a strong supporter of the SFMTA's work to provide free fares and discounted fares to select groups, and I would support the expansion of similar policies at other Bay Area transit agencies.

**10. District 19 includes parts of both San Francisco and San Mateo counties, which sometimes have conflicting needs when it comes to public transit. Recently, Bay Area counties **were divided** over the distribution of funds in a potential regional transit funding measure, which would have moved some tax revenue from the Peninsula to struggling San Francisco, East Bay, and regional transit agencies. Some San Mateo transit agencies have also opposed efforts to study the benefits of consolidating some of the Bay Area's 27 transit agencies. If you are elected, how will you balance San Francisco's and San Mateo's transit needs? How will you use your position to help advance regional policies that benefit transit riders, no matter their county?**

As a region, I believe we must do a much better job at coordinating between our 27 transit agencies. I am eager to be a voice for establishing dialogue between San Francisco and San Mateo county elected officials, transit agencies and other stakeholders about how service can be more complimentary towards one another and to have necessary discussions about what the future of transit in the Bay Area should look like. I think we must prioritize the perspective of transit riders in any decisions that are made, and while changes in service can be hard, they are sometimes necessary to improve reliability and accessibility for the general public. As I said above, our greatest investment in our transit system will be our investment in housing that makes it convenient and affordable to use transit to go about your day. Our regional housing goals must continue to focus on investing in the housing we need around transit hubs and corridors. The success of our regional transit is reliant upon our ability to work together and ensure that riders have a safe, frequent and seamless journey.

**11. Historically, California has **invested more** in cars and highways than in public transportation. This is more apparent coming out of the pandemic, as Muni faces a \$322m deficit and the Bay Area's public transit agencies struggle to find the funds necessary to continue providing the service that riders rely on at prices that they can afford. What policy or budgetary changes, if any, should California enact to move California towards your vision for transportation?**

California needs to find a long-term and reliable source of funding for public transit that won't be blindsided by uncertain economic times or be reliant upon temporary

relief measures. We learned this lesson during the pandemic and are still trying to find our way out of it. While there may be opportunities to allocate a portion of state revenues towards the day-to-day operations of public transit, we must be looking at how we allocate funds towards transportation overall. Redirecting some of the state's funds that currently go to highways and moving them towards transit is one option that I believe must be further examined. California's cap-and-trade funds should also be levied whenever possible to generate revenue for public transit. As I mentioned above, investing in housing around transit will, in the long term, be the best thing we can do to ensure that our public transit network is efficient, safe and accessible for generations to come. I also believe that, whenever it is cost-effective and an improvement to the rider experience, we should look at fare integration and better coordination between the many agencies operating within the Bay Area.

### Rapid-fire questions

*Feel free to expand on your answers to any of these questions, but all that we're looking for is a quick "yes" or "no."*

1. Did you support [Proposition A \(2022\)](#), which would have authorized up to \$400m in general obligation bonds to support SF transportation infrastructure projects?

Yes

2. Did you support [Proposition I \(2022\)](#), which would have reopened the Great Highway to cars at all times, and reopened JFK Promenade to cars on weekdays?

No

3. Did you support [Proposition J \(2022\)](#) which codified a permanent car-free JFK Promenade?

Yes

4. Did you support [Proposition L \(2022\)](#), which approved a new 2022 Transportation Expenditure Plan and extended an existing half-cent sales tax for transportation for 30 years to fund the plan?

Yes

5. Did you support [SB 1031 \(2024; Wiener, Wahab\)](#), the authorizing legislation for a regional transportation funding measure?

Yes

6. Do you support this year's [\*\*Proposition L \(Fund the Bus\)\*\*](#), which will tax ride-hail companies to generate up to \$30 million annually for transit in San Francisco?

While I support the objectives of this measure, I am unable to support it at this time due to concerns with how it may impact other measures on the November ballot and a possible future regional transit measure.

7. Do you support this year's [\*\*Proposition K \(Ocean Beach Park\)\*\*](#), which will create a new park by permanently closing the Upper Great Highway between Lincoln Way and Sloat Boulevard to cars?

Whether or not this is a good or bad idea, I voted "no endorsement" at the DCCC because I have an issue with putting this on the ballot without going through the legislative process at the Board of Supervisors as we did for car-free JFK.

*Note: This Ride the Vote! questionnaire is provided to the public for informational purposes only and does not imply endorsement by San Francisco Transit Riders. San Francisco Transit Riders does not endorse electoral candidates. Responses to this questionnaire are presented as submitted by the candidate unless otherwise noted.*



San Francisco Transit Riders is the city's member-supported, grassroots, nonprofit advocate for excellent, affordable, and growing public transit. We believe that empowering everyday transit riders to speak up for rider-first policies will bring us the world-class transit system we need for a livable, sustainable, and accessible San Francisco.

[www.sftransitriders.org](http://www.sftransitriders.org)

**[Donate to SFTR to support more projects like this one!](#)**

Follow us @SFTRU: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#)