



Edward Wright - *Ride the Vote!*

2024 San Francisco BART Board candidate questionnaire

1. What office are you running for?

BART Board, District 9

2. What is your name?

Edward Wright

3. Do you have a section on your website that details your platform? If so, please provide a link.

<https://www.wrightforbart.com/items>

4. How often do you ride BART?

Several times a week

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

I walk to work, to the grocery store and farmer's market, to dog parks, and for many local trips under a mile. I take transit virtually everywhere else – to visit friends and family, for haircuts and medical appointments, and to access restaurants and shopping and recreation. I use bikeshare primarily for recreational trips to visit Golden Gate Park, the Panhandle, and the Great Highway Park. On rare occasions, I'll take a taxi or ride-hail if there isn't a good transit connection.

6. If elected, what would be your top priorities for BART?

My top priority is addressing BART's fiscal cliff and securing a stable financial future for the system, while making it safer, cleaner, more affordable and accessible, and more vibrant and welcoming:

1) Modernize Funding

We need to modernize BART's funding model – treating it like the public service it is with public subsidy, rather than treating transit like a private business. This means building the political support needed to run and win a regional funding measure in 2026.

To do that, we need to increase ridership and trust in the system by improving safety and cleanliness, activating BART stations, plazas, and properties, and improving BART's fare policies to increase revenue.

2) Modernize Fares

Offering day passes, monthly passes, or fare capping are all options worth pursuing to make sure the fare products BART offers meet the needs of its riders and increase both transit access and fare revenues. Expanding BayPass (universal, regional fare-free transit passes) beyond the pilot phase, to reach as many people as possible, will be another early priority when I'm elected.

3) Modernize Stations and Plazas

Partnering with Cultural Districts and community-serving nonprofits to bring event programming and activations to BART plazas is another priority. Events, food purveyors, retail, and performance programming are all achievable, and activating stations and plazas for public uses will not only make them feel safer and more vibrant and welcoming, but offer new amenities for riders, and bring in revenue for BART.

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. If elected, how will you use your position on the BART Board to advance the Transit First Policy?

To put it simply, green options need to be the best options for getting around. The most effective strategy for shifting modes of travel from single occupancy vehicles to

public transit is making sure transit service is fast, frequent, clean, safe, reliable, affordable, and accessible, and that will be my priority on the BART Board.

In my role as a strategy and communications advisor for Muni, I see the impact of service improvements in bringing more riders on board every day, and I would bring the same focus to BART. Muni's customer satisfaction is the highest it's been in decades, and its growing ridership on routes where we have invested in improving service proves that when transit service is excellent, people take it.

While BART's customer satisfaction has dramatically improved from its all-time low right before the pandemic began, it faces the same ridership challenge Muni Metro does: high office vacancies and a shift towards remote work have significantly eroded its ridership base. To recover, BART needs to provide consistent, affordable, frequent, and reliable service to drive mode shift for non-commute trips, including evening, weekend, and off-peak service.

8. What role do you think law enforcement, fare enforcement, community ambassadors, and private security should play, if any, in patrolling transit? What should BART do to improve safety and the sense of safety for riders?

BART has paved the way in making investments and establishing new programs to redefine what a modern transit police department looks like, including civilian ambassadors, crisis intervention specialists, and attendants for stations, elevators, and bathrooms. Thanks to these programs, BART PD response times are down to 4 minutes.

I want to ensure these programs continue and expand when possible. When the new fare gates are fully installed, we should be able to shift fare enforcement resources to other priorities like ambassadors and attendants. I also want to increase data collection and establish a BART PD data program with a public dashboard.

Like our public streets, public transit contends with the outcome of decades of divestment from behavioral health services. Unfortunately, transit operators are given few tools and virtually zero funding to address this. When elected, I would advocate for prioritizing transit stations and agencies in the statewide Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Grant Program. While BART cannot solve our crises of homelessness, substance abuse, and behavioral health challenges itself, it can and must do a better job of connecting and coordinating with service providers, and this will be a priority for me when elected.

In my day job, I'm actively leading a program to address discrimination and harassment on transit. BART has shown success with its Not One More Girl campaign addressing gender-based harassment, and I would expand this approach to cover all forms of bigotry and harassment. By conducting in-depth surveys of riders we can better understand what strategies make them safer – and feel safer – and invest in them.

And finally, I supported AB 819 to decriminalize fare evasion, and opposed the BART Board's vote against it.

9. BART is facing a budget deficit of up to \$385m starting in 2026. How would you work towards financial stability for BART? What new revenue sources would be on (or off) the table? If new sources of funding aren't found, how should BART address the deficit?

I support any regional tax measure to modernize transit funding and solve the fiscal cliffs facing BART and Muni. Sales taxes are inherently regressive and would not be my first choice of revenue source, and I would prefer any number of more progressive sources – from parcel taxes to income taxes. But letting BART fail is far more regressive than any sales tax, and if it's what we end up with I will do everything in my power to ensure it secures the support it needs to pass.

BART needs to maximize revenue and public benefits from the sources it already controls to build trust in the fiscal management of the system, and to help address the deficit. We also need to make meaningful progress in the other factors keeping riders away, including safety, cleanliness, affordability and accessibility.

Additional ideas I have for increasing revenue in the near term include:

- Reforming BayPass to be revenue-positive (a.k.a make money) from contracts with large private employers
- Shift highway funds at the state and regional level to support public transit
- Consider reopening agreements with San Mateo County to make sure they're paying their fair share into the BART system
- State legislation and/or rule-making to allow transit districts to be recipients of funding for homeless services (e.g. Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Grant Program), offsetting current operational spending

- Increase Prop L SFCTA sales tax to full-cent, as other counties including Alameda and Santa Clara already have, in addition to passing a regional transit funding measure (ideally from a more progressive revenue source – like a payroll or tiered parcel tax)
- EV tax or a transition for gas tax as California mandates EVs

If we fail to secure new funding sources for BART, the result would be devastating. It would take a roughly 85% service reduction to close the operating deficit, which would further decrease ridership – and fare revenue – and likely trigger a death spiral for BART. If some but not all of the deficit were addressed, and some service cuts were unavoidable, airport connectors would likely be cut first, as they're the least cost effective service BART operates. These would most likely be followed by a significant reduction in weekend service, and then closing or partially closing stations and reducing night service. BART would not recoup anything close to the cost it imposes on riders for any of these scenarios, but it is reality of what service cuts would look like, and it's why we must avoid cuts if at all possible.

10. Since the pandemic, different Bay Area transit agencies have adopted a variety of fare policies to help recover ridership and revenue. This year, BART **raised fares** 5.5%, and will do so again at the start of next year. 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, about **one-third** of BART's total revenue comes from fares.

What role should fares and fare increases play in the future of BART? Do you support raising fares to balance BART's budget and keep up with the cost of inflation, or should BART consider lowering or freezing fares to grow ridership? If you support raising fares, how should BART address equity concerns for low-income riders? If you support fare-free public transportation or fare freezes, what alternative funding sources do you support?

We cannot balance BART's budget on the backs of its workers or riders. An austerity approach would only further bleed BART's ridership and make its fiscal outlook worse, not better. Regrowing ridership is critical for BART's long term stability – and our climate and housing goals – and fare increases would only set us back. What we can do is activate BART stations, plazas, and properties, and improve BART's fare policies to increase revenue. This will be my early focus on the BART Board.

And I'm a huge supporter of the BayPass program, which provides fare-free access not only to BART, but to all 27 transit operators that use Clipper, and expanding it will be an early priority. That means quickly moving beyond the pilot phase to sign as many new BayPass contracts as possible, being more flexible in what entities are eligible to buy-in to the program, and going beyond cost-recovery to generate more revenue from large private companies.

11. How can BART work toward equitable access to public transit for all people, no matter their race, gender, abilities, neighborhood, income, or other characteristics? Do you support or oppose any existing or proposed BART policies or projects because of the effect they will have on equitable transit access?

BART is critical to our racial equity and economic equity goals and disproportionately serves low-income riders and communities of color. Ensuring that BART's service not only continues to survive, but thrives, is critical to ensuring an equitable transportation option for the diverse communities of the Bay Area. In my role as a transit strategy advisor for the City and County of San Francisco, I'm actively engaged in both the Safety Equity Initiative and the Muni Service Equity Strategy that seek to provide equitable transit access for communities that disproportionately rely on transit service, and have been harmed by transportation policies and planning decisions that further systemic racism. When elected, I will seek to advance a similar strategy for BART service, that uses an evidence based framework rooted in both quantitative data and qualitative community input to ensure that as BART balances its budget, it prioritizes transit access and equity for the communities that need it the most. I will also seek to expand BART's efforts to address gender-based harassment to cover all forms of discrimination, and promote strategies to reduce, address, and prevent harassment and discrimination based on any form of identity; including racism, anti-AAPI hate, homophobia, and transphobia.

When BART was originally designed, it prioritized fast trips for predominantly white suburban communities to downtown job centers, and bypassed potential sites near communities of color to do it. This is a clear example of system racism, and infill stations should be seriously studied before any further expansion plans move forward – to right a historic wrong, and provide better access and service for the densest parts of the Bay Area.

Finally, while it may sound less exciting, maintaining a state of good repair for the existing system should be prioritized over expansions. Especially in a post-pandemic context where BART's ridership remains below 50% recovery, ensuring the service we already provide is reliable, frequent, fast, clean, and safe – and sustained – needs to be the priority.

12. How can BART improve transfers between BART and other modes of transportation, including other transit agencies?

I support the goals of Seamless Bay Area, and will advocate for them on the BART Board – which was notably the first transit board to endorse the Seamless Transit Principles in 2020. In my current role as a transit advisor for the City and County of San Francisco, I am actively engaged in the efforts to improve coordination and consistency in wayfinding, signage, and transfers for transit operators across the Bay Area.

Transfer discounts are happening, and should be continued, and BART needs to continue its leadership in regional coordination. I'm proud to have the sole endorsement of BART Board Director Janice Li, who spearheads this work as BART's representative on MTC's Regional Network Management Committee.

And again, I think BayPass should play a big role in the future of making transfers smoother and more affordable and accessible. Beyond securing more contracts with colleges and universities to expand access for students, outreach should include public and private employers to expand access for workers and building owners and property managers to expand access for tenants.

13. Do you support BART spending \$90 million on [new hardened fare gates](#)? Why or why not?

I support the fare gate modernization program for a few reasons. One, they'll go a long way towards modernizing and improving the experience for passengers with wheelchairs, strollers, luggage, or mobility challenges. Two, it's a way to spend capital dollars that will both save and generate operating dollars in the long term, which is a smart move given BART's operating budget deficit. And finally, they offer an alternative to law enforcement for addressing fare evasion, which should reduce law enforcement interactions with vulnerable community members and allow us to invest fare inspection resources towards other needs.

14. BART District 9 contains several BART stations that double as stations for Muni Metro, but [with limited exceptions](#), there is currently no way to directly transfer between the two

agencies without first climbing back up to the concourse level. Do you think BART and Muni should work together to facilitate easier transfers between their platforms at these stations? If so, how?

As a Muni worker running for BART Board, I'm all about improving how Muni and BART work together. I do support developing a long term plan or strategy to allow for interagency transfers without returning to the concourse level, though it would depend on funding, and I think there are things we can do faster, easier, and less expensively to improve the transfer experience. Some of these are already underway – like developing a regional standard for wayfinding – and others are making slow but steady progress, including the forthcoming Clipper 2.0, the BayPass program, and improving timed transfers.

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.



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