



Michael Lai - *Ride the Vote!*

2024 San Francisco Board of Supervisors candidate questionnaire

1. What office are you running for?

Board of Supervisors, District 11

2. What is your name?

Michael Lai

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

The candidate did not provide an answer to this question.

4. How do you usually get around San Francisco? 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 mostly take public transit, especially the 14R, 49, and 29 Muni buses, and BART from Balboa Station, to get around the city. I also bike and walk, and take the occasional Uber when I'm running late (though it really hurts the wallet ...).

5. How often do you ride public transit?

I take it just about every day.

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

Zooming out, I had a chat recently with former SPUR executive director & big transit advocate Gabe Metcalf, and he said the fundamental thing is the US rarely has enough density to sustain healthy public transit systems. So I do support the need to upzone & build on certain transit corridors to increase ridership.

My top priority is saving MUNI & making it more reliable & efficient - e.g. helping Senator Wiener & Wahab develop the coalition needed to pass their state bill, looking for federal levers via IRA and more to fund infrastructure improvements, and more, such that transit lines are not cut. I would also partner with the BART Board to save BART from its fiscal cliff.

I would also be focused on pedestrian safety (e.g. bulbouts, painted crosswalks, different lights, and more) & activations around existing slow streets like Cayuga (Slowyuga) in D11.

Finally, within District 11, parking management is a big need in a district with cash rich, house poor intergenerational immigrant working families many with several cars; this includes turning some streets from parallel to angled to thoughtfully add spots, and a type of residential parking permit system.

7. San Francisco's **Transit First Policy** applies to all officers, boards, commissions, and departments of the city and county, and 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?

Yes, I do. I will work to expand public transit, improve bicycle infrastructure, and enhance pedestrian safety, including more frequent and reliable service, protected bike lanes, and safer, more walkable streets. I would be data driven (for example this recent transit poll <https://growsf.org/pulse/growsf-pulse-may-2024/> suggests that the best ways to increase ridership are increasing the frequency of bikes & trains, increasing pedestrian safety infrastructure, and speeding up transit times)

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

I think law enforcement plays an important role in making sure that traffic violations are enforced for private automobiles, which will increase pedestrian safety. I also think

fare enforcement is important for a sense of orderliness (not broken windows theory) and partnerships with community ambassadors, SFPD, and MUNI are helpful for safety.

9. Muni is facing a budget deficit of up to \$322m starting in 2026. How would you work towards financial stability for Muni? What new revenue sources should be on (or off) the table? How should the City address the deficit if funding from other levels of government do not materialize? If new sources of funding are not found, what kinds of SFMTA cuts would you support or oppose?

First, I've been endorsed by state level transit champions Senator Scott Wiener & Assembly Appropriations Chair Buffy Wicks, and I support Senator Wiener's state level legislation and I'm sad it was killed this legislative cycle.

Second, if the city can't address the deficit, we should explore additional taxes & also cuts, though service cuts should be last on the table.

Third, we should look at private advertising, sponsorship, and renaming of various MUNI stops & bus lines (e.g. imagine an SF Giants MUNI line or Golden State Warriors 14 Bus).

I would not support service line cuts to the most popular lines; for example the 29 bus, which is the city's School Bus, already skips many kids.

10. 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.

What role should fares and fare increases play in the future of Muni? Do you support raising fares to balance Muni's budget and keep up with the cost of inflation, or should Muni consider lowering or freezing fares to grow ridership? If you support raising fares, how should Muni address equity concerns for low-income riders, most of whom are not enrolled in Muni's Lifeline discount program? If you support fare-free public transportation or fare freezes, what alternative funding sources do you support?

We need to do an ROI analysis of the relative demand elasticity curve, and thus if fees are raised by a certain amount how much that affects ridership. Increasing passes vs. one time payments would also help with both smoother revenues & with lower need

for fare enforcement. I think we should be extra sensitive about service cuts for low-income riders.

11. How should San Francisco 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 local or regional transportation projects or policies because of the effect they will have on equitable transit access?

Equity concerns are essential for public transit, since in parts of the city people can choose to opt out into private automobiles, rideshare or other options.

We need a fast, reliable, spider-webbed network of buses, trains, and lightrail across the city.

I support almost all regional transportation projects & policies to streamline the regional complexity & lack of interoperability across transit systems across the Bay Area.

12. A [1993 ballot measure](#) made it official city policy that all elected city officials must ride Muni or other public transit to work at least twice a week. If elected, how closely will you abide by this policy?

I love this, and would see myself doing it just about daily, taking the 14R up from Mission → near City Hall, or 29 → Balboa Park Station then taking BART → City Hall.

13. San Franciscans have strongly supported SFMTA's independence from the city's electoral politics in two separate elections over the past several decades, including Prop E in 1999 and Prop A in 2007. What are your positions on SFMTA's independence from the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor's office? How would you make SFMTA more accountable to San Franciscans?

I've been endorsed by former SFMTA commissioner Lydia So and support SFMTA's independence with a 7 person board appointed to the mayor, but I have three concerns to work through:

(a) having a citywide perspective alone on parking enforcement can lead to certain communities that are more working class but have more cars, like D11, getting the short end of the stick with solutions like ticketing people whose cars extend slightly out of their driveways.

(b) we need better, faster, and more democratic signal from community outreach, not just politicized community outreach by activists or narrow interests. I would pledge to strongly partner with MTA in this process in using my 4 person team for community outreach. Public comment only pulls from particular ppl who are free then and there are creative ways to do better community outreach — for example the idea of demographically representative citizen assemblies, or using AI chatbots in various languages & various apps (e.g. wechat for chinese speakers, whatsapp for spanish speakers) to gather a lot more information.

(c) more prototyping & quick builds

14. Transit-only lanes provide faster and more reliable service. They prevent buses from being stuck in traffic and save money that can be reinvested in additional transit service. If elected, would you work to expedite the creation of new transit-only lanes in San Francisco? What streets in your district would you prioritize for transit-only lanes and other needed transit improvements?

I would support this, as long as there are strong ways to redirect car traffic. In D11, I would want to look at the car traffic for broad / randolph and how much people just take the M.

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

Yes

16. 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

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

Yes

18. 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

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

Big yes!

20. 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?

Yes

21. 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?

No - I've heard repeatedly from

[sic]

22. Do you think the City should be doing more to improve public transit and encourage transit ridership in District 11? If so, how can the City better meet those goals?

Yes! First, we need to increase the speed, reliability, and safety of buses and trains: the reliability speed of the 29, which takes so many kids to and from school and often skips kids; on-time arrivals for the 44; and making sure the J, which often does not come once every 15 minutes, is reliable.

Second, we need better pedestrian safety, especially in car busy areas like San Jose, Geneva, and Brotherhood Way. We have not moved quickly enough — and done enough — to implement better lighting, curb extensions, and automated speed cameras ensure the safety of children, family, and elders in District 11.

Finally, certain areas of the district, such as Crocker Amazon, Outer Mission, and parts of OMI, need more access to public transit.

While about 30 percent of District 11 residents take public transit to work, more than half use a car to get to work, especially our immigrant working families and elders, so it's important to consider all modes of transit when we think about transportation in our district.

All of this requires the Wiener / Wahab bill to pass to save MUNI from it's fiscal cliff; we also need to upzone & build housing along Ocean, Broad/Randolph, Mission & Geneva to increase density and more transit ridership.

23. Earlier this year, the SFMTA Board approved the M Ocean View Transit and Safety Project, which aims to improve transit reliability and accessibility and enhance safety for people walking on San Jose Avenue. What are your opinions on the project and its final design? What is your vision for the future of the M? Are there other transit lines in your district that you would like to see outfitted with similar improvements?

I think that the design is overall good, but there are a couple of areas I am concerned about: (a) taking away a stop at Juniper Serra, which is close to Catholic Charities Senior Center which serves hundreds of seniors and (b) taking away a stop at Orizaba & Broad in the case the new library is there.

I would like to add a 29R bus for students who take it & are often skipped.

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

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