



Sharon Lai - *Ride the Vote!*

2024 San Francisco Board of Supervisors candidate questionnaire

1. What office are you running for?

Board of Supervisors, District 3

2. What is your name?

Sharon Lai

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

Yes, <https://www.sharonlaisf.com/issues>, Section #4

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.

Living in District 3, the vast majority of my trips are on foot and bus when I'm by myself. I am lucky to live in Nob Hill, which is easily accessible by foot and by Muni and one of the reasons our family chose this area as our home and which, as a former SFMTA Director, I am proud to take on a daily basis.

My family is multimodal, my partner bikes daily for his commute and both my school aged children have been trained to be road bikers through the Wheel Kids Bicycle Club. My older son takes a school bus and muni to commute to and from his middle school on the west side of the city, and we walk our younger son to school in our District. When they were younger we used to commute with them on our cargo bike and on muni daily. When traveling with my kids on my own for further trips or activities

requiring transporting supplies we take the bus and for destinations not well served by transit, we drive our electric vehicle.

5. How often do you ride public transit?

Multiple times a 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.

As a former SFMTA Board Director, I am the only candidate who has fought for funding, improved operations, and a better passenger experience on Muni. I believe that access to public transportation is a fundamental right and should be regarded and funded by the government in that manner, which is why I have in the past led and championed the recent transit measures including Prop A in June 2022 (Transit GO Bond) and Prop L in November 2022 (Transit Sales Tax Renewal). I'm also currently endorsing and championing the Community Transit Act, Prop L, in this election.

I'm also a trained Urban Planner and practiced for a decade and believe that land use and transportation should be integrated considerations. While serving on the Treasure Island Development Authority as a Board member, I also chaired the Infrastructure and Transportation Committee.

As Supervisor, I would prioritize resourcing and improving public transportation and other modes in San Francisco. Some key areas I have focused on are:

Ensuring transit is well funded: Public transit should be a right that everyone has access to, especially for people who don't have alternatives. I'm in favor of providing transit access to low income communities for those who cannot afford to pay their fair share. Fare enforcement is necessary in order to keep the current system running.

Safe streets for vulnerable road users: Pedestrian safety is an incredibly important issue in District 3, with many of our streets being part of the city's high injury network. As Supervisor, I'd work with the SFMTA and the community to improve pedestrian safety in our most vulnerable neighborhoods such as Chinatown. While progress has been made, including pedestrian scrambles throughout Chinatown, I believe more can be done to ensure our seniors, children and families are safe when walking in the District.

Expand paratransit: For our residents who can not access various modes of transportation, we need to ensure that our paratransit programs are well-funded and readily accessible.

Expand SFUSD school bus program: As a parent, I know how challenging getting children to school is via different modes of transportation, particularly as San Francisco does not have a neighborhood schools system which leads to more inefficient cross town commutes. I would work with SFUSD to expand the school bus program and continue to increase buses during peak student commute times so that fewer children get driven to school in private cars.

Micro mobility: Providing protections, road designs and regulation on the safe use of micro mobility options is essential so that everyone can safely share the road while encouraging alternative modes of transportation.

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?

As a former SFMTA Commissioner, I know just how important it is to incentivize people to drive less. I absolutely support the principles laid out in the Transit First Policy and would work hard as Supervisor to uphold them and additional efforts to make it easy for City officers and employees to adhere to our transit first policy.

As Supervisor, I would advocate for policies and funding that enables city officers and leaders to prioritize transportation. Including ensuring that there would be shuttle service available for transportation workers who have to commute to operate our public transportation in the early hours or other city staff whose hours are outside of the operating hours of public transit. As a large employer, the City of San Francisco should be a leader in Transportation Demand Management strategies, which is required of private developments and operators. I would push for the expansion of transit passes and facilities that would make taking public transit or micro mobility an easier option.

Anyone who chooses to walk, bike or roll as their mode of transportation in San Francisco should be able to get to their destination along a network of safe routes and lanes. My vision includes a network that resolves existing conflicts and supports all people on their daily needs to work, shop, play and make family trips.

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?

This question is incredibly personal to me. I was attacked on Muni myself, and found little recourse going through the appropriate channels to try to bring about change and justice for myself as a victim. This event led me to join the SFMTA Board, and worked to triple the public safety budget to increase visibility staff to make future attacks less likely, and when violence occurs that help is more available.

I believe that we need more community ambassadors and outreach on our transit system to make passengers feel safe, including use of security cameras and public education on bystander training. There is a need for SFMTA and SFPD to be partners and collaborators, including the work I championed while serving on the Board for the agencies to share data so that we can more effectively align resources. When it comes to police, many of our vulnerable community members including students still do not feel safe interacting with Police. Police officers need to be trained with a focus on community policing, de-escalation, and cultural competence in mind to avoid potentially fatal interactions.

Until our public transit system is funded reliably and fully, fare evasion is a barrier to maintaining our transit system and keeping it safe and reliable. Especially when our system is under difficult budget constraints, fare evasion erodes much needed funding for all our transit. To combat fare evasion we need to improve our fare gates as a preventative measure while increasing fare enforcement staffing.

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?

I believe public transit is a basic need and I support funding it in a sustainable and reliable manner. As a former MTA commissioner, I took the structural and operating fiscal deficit scenario very seriously and led the 2022 Transit GO Bond in hopes of plugging that gap and also supporting the November 2022 Transit Sales Tax continuation. I believe the current Community Transit Act is an important funding strategy to supplement the operating deficit, which is why I'm supporting it.

We have to continue to go after one-time dollars through competitive grants and revenue increase strategies such as prepayment programs to fill the near term needs. In the long run, we have to look at restructuring the way the system addresses the long term deficit and advance funding models that will keep the agency's long term sustainability.

I would support increasing collaboration and coordination between the various transit providers in the city, support seamless transfers across operators and reduce overlapping service lines to gain efficiencies.

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?

While serving on MTA during the pandemic, I voted against fare increases. I believe that the primary focus for Muni should be on increasing ridership rather than relying on fare increases to balance the budget. SFMTA is not structured for farebox recovery, which is why I have been a consistent leader in advocating for recurring funding for public transit.

During my tenure serving on MTAB, I was an advocate for fare programs for our vulnerable and low-income community, Lifeline discounts paratransit, and free muni for youth. I will continue my support of expanding fare programs including increasing the riders who can qualify for discount fares and ensure our system continues to support those who don't have alternatives to public transit.

I've been and continue to be open to fare-free public transit if there can be reliable long term funding. I would continue to be a leader and supporter of continuing to explore non-regressive funding sources that are reliable and sustainable to properly

fund public transit as a basic need. Most funding options require $\frac{2}{3}$ votes to pass, which is a very high bar. I am supportive of the current state measure ACA 1 to lower voting thresholds to pass funding measures for transportation and housing.

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?

To ensure equitable access to public transit, I advocate for a comprehensive approach that includes aligning transit coverage to underserved neighborhoods, improving service frequency, and ensuring that transit stops are accessible to all people, including those with disabilities. As a former SFMTAB Director, I advocated to align resources with our priority communities and opposed the consolidation of bus lines that forced transfers for underserved communities. We must also prioritize safety and security on public transit to make it a viable option for everyone, regardless of their gender or race. While serving on MTAB, I was an advocate in addressing the pink tax on transportation, reforming the translation protocol to ensure cultural competence and accuracy, and advocating for more hiring from within minority communities. I was also an advocate and passed the agency's Racial Equity Action plan and pushed for regular reporting to ensure accountability on the implementation of the plan.

I'm a strong advocate for expanding and restoring transit routes. I fought alongside Supervisor Walton to bring back important community lines like the 8AX/BX during the pandemic that connects the historically black and asian communities in the Bayview and Chinatown. Expanding MUNI's service coverage, increasing frequency and reliability of buses and trains is something I have and will continue to lead. The Board of Supervisors can address this by engaging with stakeholders, advocating for state and federal funding, holding SFMTA accountable and expanding local funding.

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 will continue to ride muni everyday as Supervisor.

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 believe that SFMTA has been doing a good job, despite financial concerns, in keeping our Muni system operational, improving infrastructure, reducing headways along key lines, and limiting emissions (only contributes to .5% of city's emissions). One of the highlights is the agency's responsiveness during the pandemic in things like rolling out shared spaces, which were vital for small businesses.

The SFMTA should do a better job of community outreach, transparency, project management and building trust and consensus around street changes. As Supervisor, I will commit to ensuring that the SFMTA does more to reach impacted communities and stakeholders around projects in District 3 and the city. It will take time to build back trust, but I consider it as part of a Supervisor's duty to be collaborators and help shepard projects while holding the SFMTA accountable to the public.

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 am open to expanding transit-only lanes and have supported it in the past. However, transportation planning should be done in a network and not in a piecemeal fashion. As a transportation enthusiast and not a professional engineer, I would consult with the transit professional and other stakeholders. Transit-only lanes where high ridership lines located in larger corridors generally make more sense to accommodate than transit-only lanes in smaller streets.

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, I was intimately involved with putting together this GO Bond effort. led and championed Prop A in June 2022, including acting as the interim principal officer.

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, I was a champion for Prop. L in 2022.

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

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, I have endorsed and am a signator on the proponent's argument.

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?

I have not taken an official position.

22. Do you support expanding the Central Subway to serve more San Francisco communities? Why or why not? If you support an extension, to where should it be extended, and how will you help make that happen?

As a former SFMTA Commissioner, I am 100% pro transit and am supportive of the concept. I'm open to SFMTA's plan to study the Central Subway extension, but financial feasibility, small business and neighborhood impacts are critical considerations.

At the moment, the budget outlook for the SFMTA does not favor pursuing capital projects. The SFMTA should prioritize serving the most residents possible and those most dependent on transit during uncertain budget times.

As a part of any public infrastructure project, we need robust community input and disruption planning. The extremely disruptive impacts from Central Subway construction in Chinatown and Van Ness BRT should not be repeated.

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.

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