



July News

An Idea for Saving Muni

In the midst of the pandemic and the global response to systemic racism, there's an opportunity for real substantive change - specifically, in how we fund San Francisco's public transportation: MUNI.

Because of the economic fallout of the pandemic, Muni faces an existential threat -- [the permanent loss of up to 40 of its 68 lines](#) - almost 59% - absent new sources of funding. How about defunding the military and increasing investment in public mass transit to better reflect our values? The truth is, San Francisco's economy, [like New York City's](#), cannot come back unless its public mass transit is fully funded.



Senator Bernie Sanders has called for a [10 percent cut](#) in appropriations for this year's [National Defense Authorization Act](#), and that's a great start. He wants to put those savings into housing, clean water, and education among other necessities. How about dedicating a portion of those savings to our mass public transportation systems as well?

Some of you have some trepidation about boarding our bus lines again in this time of coronavirus. But if Hong Kong, a dense city of 7.5 million people very dependent on its mass transit, could keep its infection rate low, we can too. In fact, [evidence suggests public transit is not a major source of transmission of the virus](#).

A return to car-choked cities, on the other hand, would increase dangers for pedestrians and bicyclists, degrade air quality, and exacerbate climate change, as well as worsening socio-economic inequities. Public transit agencies are required by federal law to serve all demographics equitably - but Ubers, Lyfts or even taxis are not. Without adequate public transit, those who can't afford cars lose out. In fact, a recent study indicates that Uber and Lyft may charge more for "[transportation in predominantly non-white neighborhoods](#)".

We can get through this together. Please call our California Senators and Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi to urge them to support defunding our military and refunding our public mass transit:

Senator Dianne Feinstein: DC office (202) 224-3841, SF office (415) 393-0707

Senator Kamala Harris: DC office (202) 224-5555, SF office (415) 981-9509

Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi: DC office (202) 225-4965, SF office (415) 556-4862

~ ~ *Sue Vaughan*

San Francisco Climate Emergency Coalition Update

Here's something you can do which could have a great impact in the overall climate fight. As you may know, on June 30th [Supervisor Mandelman introduced](#) an ordinance that would ban natural gas in new construction in the City. This is really important because:

- Burning natural gas in buildings accounts for 36% of SF's greenhouse-gas emissions, and 9% of U.S. emissions. Our natural-gas distribution infrastructure also directly leaks its main component, methane, which drives short-term warming effects, and would be the gas to trigger climate tipping points. The first step (this one) is to stop the further expansion of natural gas pipelines and the installation of additional natural gas appliances.
- Natural gas appliances contribute to both indoor and outdoor air pollution, increasing childhood asthma rates by 42% in homes with gas stoves, and more severely impacting lower-income communities with smaller homes in denser areas. Natural gas consumption in CA buildings is estimated to cause billions a year in health damages.
- Economically, it's vitally important that we start constructing buildings for an all-electric future: doing so today is already less expensive than building with natural gas. Developers and homeowners who don't do so today (often due to lack of awareness) face steep retrofitting costs in the future. It's painful to know that many people are currently throwing away their hard-earned money making poor construction decisions. Further expanding the natural gas pipeline now would be making a public investment in infrastructure that we know will be a "stranded asset" before its natural end of life, and will mean increased utility costs for all ratepayers.
- A handful of cities in California have led the nation in passing legislation of this type, and there's work at the state level to make California the first state to pass building electrification policy. If/when SF passes this ordinance, we'd be the largest city yet to do so, which would help the effort to pass the California legislation, which in turn could be a model for the rest of the country to follow.



To make sure the ordinance passes, the Coalition is organizing public comment at upcoming city meetings where the legislation is on the agenda, as well as constituent meetings with Supervisors - to make sure that voting legislators are aware of all of the above and know that local citizens are in support. Since it's a pretty wonky issue, public turnout so far has been fairly light, which means that a small group of dedicated people (you!) can make a meaningful difference. We expect some resistance to the legislation at least from the restaurant industry and one labor union, and the fossil fuel industry itself [can fight dirty](#) (though fortunately in NorCal our utility - PG&E - is actually on our side).

What you can do:

- **Show up** (virtually of course, because pandemic) and chime in to register your support for the gas ban.
- **Sign up** [here](#) to tell us which district you live in and to indicate which meetings* you might be able to attend. We'll send you login info and talking points beforehand.
- **Share** this with other SF residents who may be interested in helping.

*Upcoming meetings at which to give public comment:
Tues Jul 28, 5-7pm, Commission on the Environment
Wed Aug 12, 9:30-11:30am, Code Advisory Committee
Wed Aug 19, 9-11am, Building Inspection Commission
Sep (TBD), Board of Supervisors Land Use Committee
Sep (TBD), Full Board vote

~~ *Joni Eisen*

About Those Power Shutdowns

Hot, high-speed winds have been damaging electrical equipment around the state in recent years, causing an increasing number of destructive, often uncontrollable wildfires. In response, PG&E has developed its “Public Safety Power Shutoff” program, which deactivates transmission lines during periods of high winds, and tries to find potential trouble spots before problems can arise. These shutdowns can and have occurred across large areas over many days.

The response has been predictable. After one PSPS left 738,000 customers (meters, not people) across 34 counties in the dark for several days last year, Governor Newsom [called](#) the situation “inexcusable” and blamed “decades of PG&E prioritizing profit over public safety, mismanagement, inadequate investment in fire safety and fire prevention measures, and neglect of critical infrastructure.” CPUC President Marybel Batjer demanded the company limit the duration of such events to twelve hours and “limit the scope” of future shut-offs, which begs the question: if power is restored prematurely and causes a fire, who takes the blame? Others have demanded closer supervision of the company's activities by other agencies.

PG&E has certainly invited criticism as a result of its historical negligence and greed. In 2016, safety violations committed by the company were [deemed](#) responsible for the 2010 San Bruno fire, and more recently PG&E equipment was determined to have sparked both the Camp Fire, the state's deadliest wildfire, and the wine country conflagrations of the previous year. In 2012, state regulators discovered company funds intended for maintenance instead going to bonuses and stockholder dividends.

Prolonged shutoffs are not a good thing. Food spoils, people are unable to operate their business or work from home, alarms and electric doors no longer function, gas pumps don't work and electric vehicles cannot be charged. Disabled traffic and crossing signals present a hazard, especially at night; cabs can't be called nor emergencies reported on dead phones. We know of several people who had to temporarily move into motel rooms in distant towns to do their jobs or schoolwork.



Photo: Paul Chinn, SF Chronicle

But the biggest price is paid by the disabled and unwell. Equipment like nebulizers and ventilators run on electricity; they might have battery backup, but for how long? The same applies to stair lifts: they usually have a backup charge, but only for a few trips. The most vulnerable will need to be moved to another facility; let's hope their phones are functioning. One man [died](#) twelve minutes into the October 11 shutdown because he couldn't get to his battery-powered oxygen tank in time.

Unfortunately, preventive power shutdowns are likely the new normal. Outages caused by extreme weather are rising in frequency and intensity nationwide as the globe heats up. Do you prefer your

poles with metal ones, or \$243 billion to underground everything. Meanwhile SoCal Edison has had similar problems, [conducting](#) two PSPSs of its own last year; and even San Diego Gas and Electric, which is at the national forefront of climateproofing their equipment, preemptively shut parts of their grid down on October 4 and 25.

On October 17, 2019, San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo [petitioned](#) the city council to explore the possibility of implementing microgrids in the city after it was affected by the Oct 9-12 PSPS. Microgrids combine solar power with batteries and occasionally a wind component to site the generation of power at the home or neighborhood level. A single-home microgrid can currently be implemented for around \$15,000 (or \$800 if you live in India), and the industry has experienced a [30% decline in cost](#) between 2014 and 2018. This is the future for California.

~~ Glenn Rogers, Jeff Whittington