

# The State of San Francisco Bay Ferry 2022





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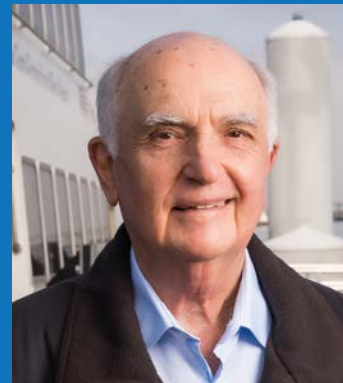
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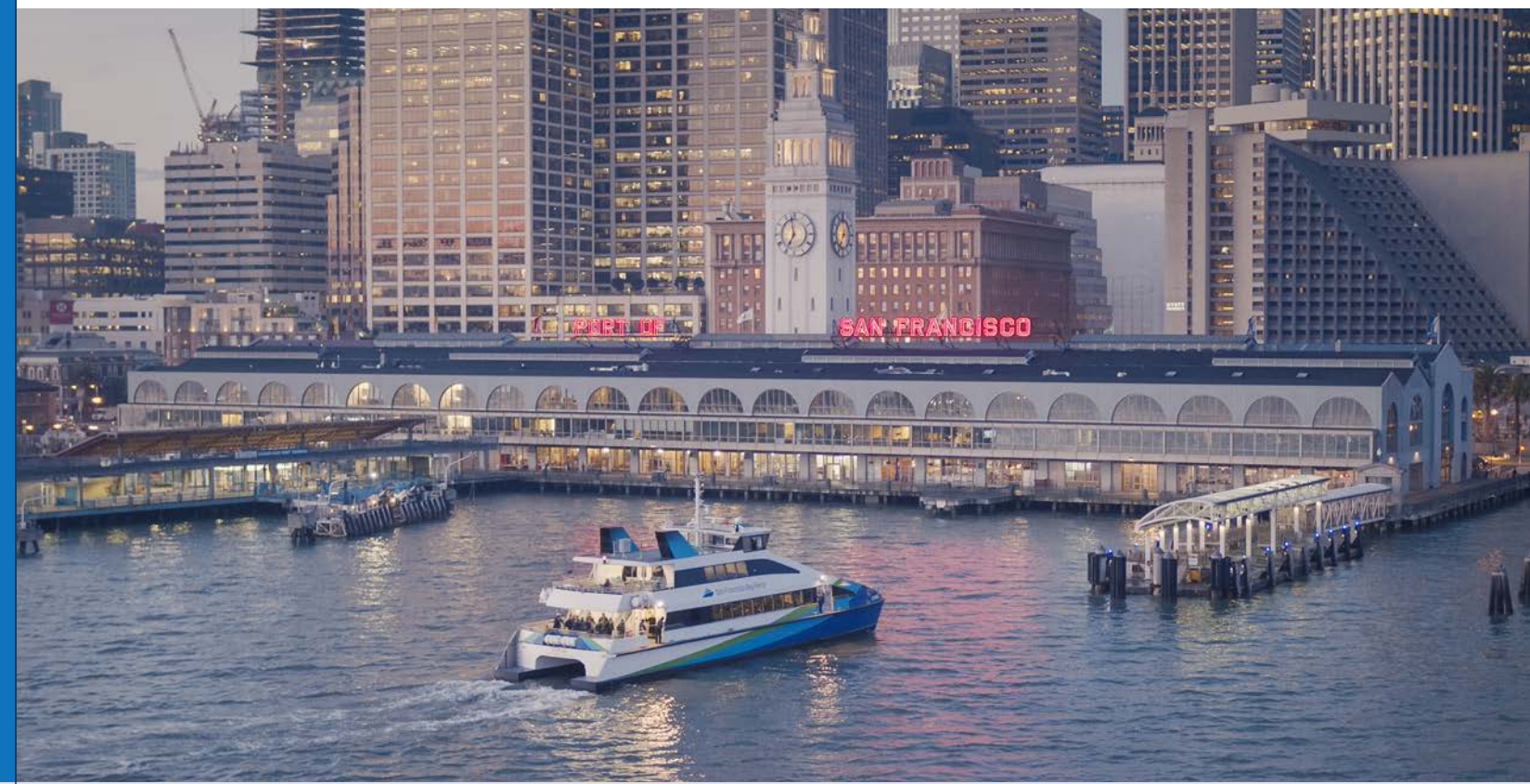


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# LETTER FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SEAMUS MURPHY

Dear Friends of San Francisco Bay Ferry:

As the region continues to be challenged by the evolving impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, transit agencies are doing their best to navigate continued uncertainty. For WETA that means ongoing implementation of a Pandemic Recovery Program that brought full service restoration and lower fares to ferry riders in 2021. The Recovery Program was developed with the underlying philosophy that we cannot sit idle and wait for ridership to return. Instead, we should incentivize it and make decisions that are designed specifically to maximize and diversify the system's ridership during what is proving to be a very long pandemic recovery.

Despite prolonged uncertainty, the Recovery Program has yielded tremendous results. Thanks to leadership and guidance from the WETA Board of Directors, the Recovery Program:

- **Nearly doubled ferry ridership** almost immediately when it was implemented in July 2021, demonstrating that riders will respond to the restoration of service even with a limited pandemic travel market
- **Created sustained ridership growth**, positioning San Francisco Bay Ferry as the regional system with the highest percentage of pre-pandemic ridership
- **Provided more off-peak and weekend service** than before the pandemic, serving lower income riders that are more likely to work outside of commute hours and bringing weekend ridership close to pre-pandemic levels earlier than anticipated

- **Significantly increased the system's percentage of low-income, transit-dependent riders** by aligning fares with other transit modes and removing cost as a factor when deciding which transit option to choose

This report discusses the Pandemic Recovery Program in addition to a number of other initiatives WETA advanced in 2021 to increase ridership, improve the rider experience, and plan for the future, including: the opening of the Seaplane Lagoon Ferry Terminal in Alameda; a pilot bus feeder for Alameda ferry riders through a partnership with AC Transit; a special lineup of local "Brews with Views" to highlight one of the ferry's most beloved amenities; and the launch of San Francisco Bay Ferry Business Plan and 2050 Service Vision.

None of these improvements would be possible without the support of the Bay Area's Congressional delegation. Thanks to their help, federal COVID relief funding has maintained public transit operations and has preserved jobs for transit workers, including San Francisco Bay Ferry crews.

We are proud of the work we have done over the last year and excited to preview some of what's coming in 2022.

Thank you for riding San Francisco Bay Ferry, supporting the work we do, and helping us plan for the future. Together, we will make sure San Francisco Bay Ferry stays full throttle in 2022!



See you on the Bay,  
**Seamus Murphy**  
*Executive Director*  
WETA, San Francisco Bay Ferry



# SUCCESS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC RECOVERY PROGRAM

Bringing riders back to San Francisco Bay Ferry was central to WETA's work in 2021.

For over a year, beginning in March 2020, ferries operated on a dramatically reduced weekday-only schedule. This service schedule matched the drastically reduced demand during the initial shelter-at-home public health orders, but preserved service for essential workers and essential travel.

In 2021, ridership began to increase following the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines. In response, WETA's Board of Directors approved 13 pandemic recovery principles to guide the relaunch of ferry service. The principles included:

- Enhancing equity and access to ferry service for Bay Area residents, including expanding availability for transit-dependent riders
- Phasing in increased service levels with lower fares to reflect and support the region's economic recovery
- Pursuing coordinated fare strategies and better connectivity with other Bay Area transit operators

Following adoption of those principles, the WETA Board approved the Pandemic Recovery Program in April, with an effective date of July 1. To meet the objectives laid out in the recovery principles, the Program:

- Lowered fares for one year across all routes by up to 30 percent to incentivize a return to the ferries
- Brought fares in line with comparable public transit services in an effort to align regional transit prices and take cost out of the decision-making process for travelers

- Enhanced off-peak ferry service to provide more flexible schedules for passengers with changing travel needs and to enhance accessibility of the ferry system for essential workers who may travel outside the traditional peak commute windows
- Phased in service enhancements to anticipate the needs of travelers as the Bay Area economy ramped back up
- Reinstated robust weekend service on three routes to offer a fresh-air, low-stress travel option for commuters and those seeking recreation opportunities

Leveraging federal relief funds to backfill fare revenue lost during the pandemic, WETA aimed to bring service back ahead of demand, providing a reliable travel method as residents returned to work sites and other activities. Building the Program on top of the recovery principles created a new, more equitable ferry system that could also serve as a platform for further enhancement as resources stabilize and increase.

Ferry ridership responded immediately. July 1 was San Francisco Bay Ferry's highest day of ridership since March 2020, and July 2 beat that. The weekend that followed saw robust ridership across all routes, and commute ridership continued to climb.

Preliminary data suggests that approximately 30 percent of current San Francisco Bay Ferry passengers began riding the system since the Program went into effect, and the share of passengers with household incomes below \$50,000 has doubled compared to pre-pandemic levels. WETA plans to complete an onboard survey this spring to further assess changes in ridership under the Program.



The ongoing pandemic and new variants have blunted the growth potential for weekday commute ridership, with many major employers delaying their return-to-office plans. But the Recovery Program anticipated that ridership growth would be robust on non-commute service, and so far, that has proven to be the case. Off-peak, special event, and weekend

ridership continued to perform strongly despite the variant waves.

More time is needed to assess what fare and service changes might be needed to maximize ridership as pandemic recovery continues, but the Pandemic Recovery Program has given WETA a huge head start in what will be a long road toward restored ridership.

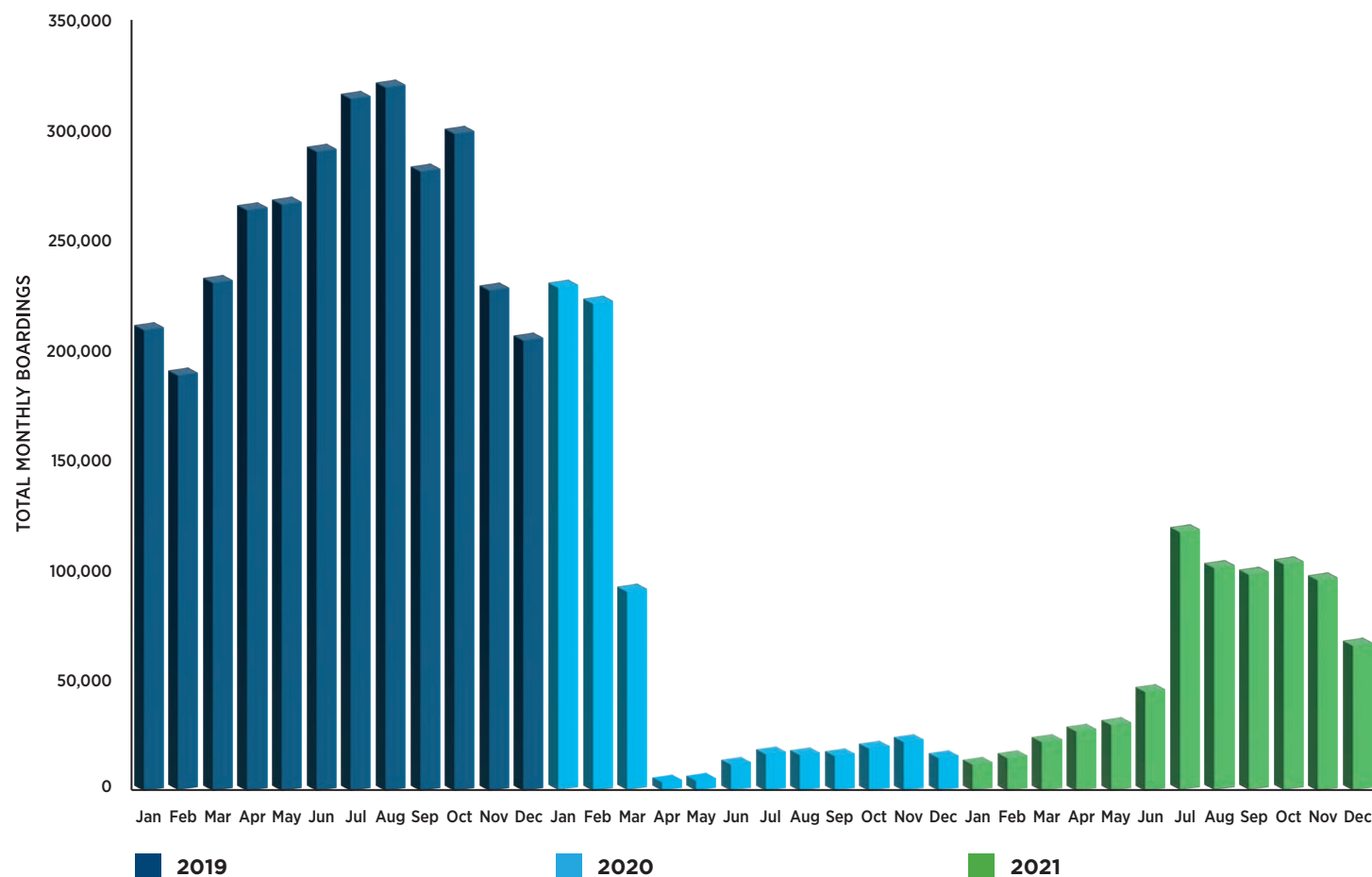


## RIDERSHIP TRENDS OVER THE LAST THREE YEARS

A record **3.2 MILLION** passengers in 2019.

Daily ridership **DROPPED 92%** in the immediate aftermath of COVID-19 shelter-at-home orders.

**164% INCREASE** in total ridership in July vs. June when the Pandemic Recovery Program went into effect.



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS THROUGH 2021

In addition to developing and implementing the Pandemic Recovery Program, WETA celebrated several other major accomplishments in 2021.



### New Connections — Alameda Seaplane and Direct Oakland Commute Service

The Pandemic Recovery Program featured the addition of two new services to the San Francisco Bay Ferry network. The new Alameda Seaplane route features weekday commute service connecting the new Seaplane Lagoon Ferry Terminal at Alameda Point to Downtown San Francisco. The launch of this service marks San Francisco Bay Ferry's sixth regular service route in the system and fourth serving a terminal within the city of Alameda.

Alameda Point Partners and the City of Alameda built the terminal with funding support from the Alameda County Transportation Commission and WETA.

The new service improves travel time and reliability for Alameda commuters by avoiding the Oakland Estuary where ship traffic can cause delays.

The new terminal also features enhanced access

for cyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders. The Cross Alameda Trail provides protected bike and pedestrian access to the terminal from much of Alameda Island and in August, AC Transit launched Line 78, providing timed connecting bus service to morning and evening ferry arrivals and departures with stops along the spine of the island. A mutual transfer discount between WETA and AC Transit makes the bus ride free for ferry passengers.

As of the end of 2021, the Alameda Seaplane route had the third highest daily ridership in the San Francisco Bay Ferry system and second highest ridership during weekday commute periods.

The launch of Alameda Seaplane also created an opportunity to improve service for Oakland riders. Service to San Francisco from the Oakland Ferry Terminal used to stop at Alameda's Main Street Terminal; the route now offers non-stop service and travel times that are 20 minutes faster. There are four trips in each direction between Oakland and Downtown S.F. during the peak commute period.

### Weekend and Sports Ridership Storms Back

While commute ridership growth has been slow through 2021 due to COVID-19 case levels, the same cannot be said for weekend ridership or trips serving sporting events.

San Francisco Bay Ferry service for home Giants games at Oracle Park began in late June as the ballpark re-opened to full capacity. Baseball ferry tickets were as hot as ever, with most weekend trips to the park selling out in advance. To meet high demand, WETA even leased a larger tour boat — MV Bay Monarch, with its 700-passenger capacity — for the Giants' playoff run. With Bay Monarch and high-capacity Pyxis-class vessels in Vallejo,



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS (CONT)

more fans than ever took the ferry to Giants playoff games in 2021.

Ferry service for Warriors home games at Chase Center has been a success as well, with ridership through the first half of the 2021-22 season outpacing ridership during the team's debut season in the City (2019-20). Many ferry trips to and from games have neared sell-out status.



Weekend ferry service resumed on July 3 after a 15-month pandemic hiatus. Multiple trips reached maximum capacity on that first Saturday back. As high weekend ridership continued through July and August, WETA added more weekend departures to the schedule starting Labor Day Weekend.

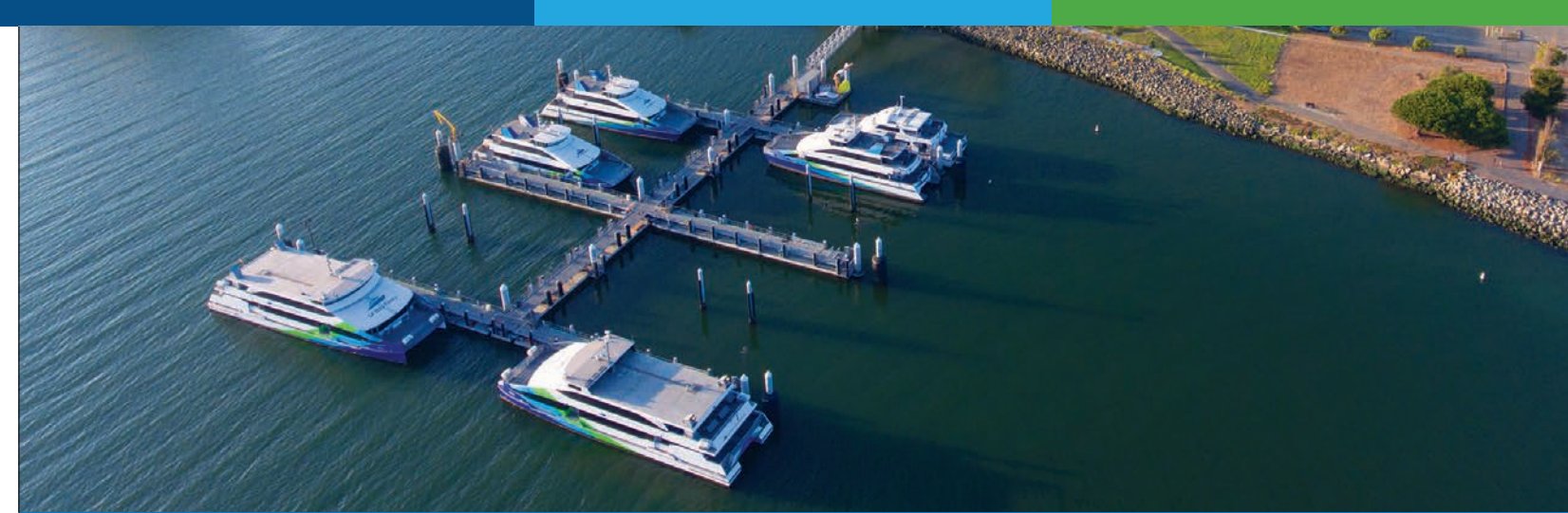
During San Francisco Fleet Week in early October – one of the biggest weekends for ferry ridership every year — passenger counts hit 80 percent of 2019 levels, with thousands more passengers riding the free Pier 41 Short Hop to enjoy the events on the waterfront.

### Brews With Views

Onboard concessions are one of the highlights of the ferry experience. Three local craft

breweries celebrated the relaunch of ferry service by partnering with San Francisco Bay Ferry's concessionaire and WETA to develop and offer three new ferry-themed beers onboard the boats and at their taprooms.

Mare Island Brewing Co. (Vallejo), East Brother Beer Co. (Richmond), and Faction Brewing (Alameda) launched a series of ales dubbed "Brews With Views." This effort connected the ferry with craft beer enthusiasts throughout the Bay Area and drew major positive social media attention to the San Francisco Bay Ferry brand. The new beers have also been excellent sellers. WETA is working with its concessionaire to continue to offer local craft beers at the ferry bars in addition to spirits and other products created in the Bay Area.



## SAN FRANCISCO BAY FERRY'S SERVICE VISION

In 2016, WETA adopted a 20-year strategic plan that called for major expansion of the San Francisco Bay Ferry system, both enhancing existing routes with additional frequency and adding new terminals in more communities throughout the region. This expansion would amplify ridership capacity while also extending WETA's emergency response capabilities. But how do we get there?

That's what WETA's new long-term planning effort, the 2050 Service Vision and Business Plan, intends to lay out.

The effort was launched in 2021, starting with stakeholder outreach focused on a 30-year service vision. Last year, WETA held an in-depth workshop with dozens of highly engaged business and labor leaders, community representatives, environmental advocates, and policy makers. Hundreds more shared their vision for the future of San Francisco Bay Ferry service through an online survey.

This robust input led to the creation of six focus areas that will be the basis for the remainder of the business plan development:

- **Regional Ferry Network:** service expansion and enhancement
- **Emergency Response:** capacity and organizational structure
- **Environmental Stewardship:** fleet planning, environmental justice, and ecological protection
- **Community Connections:** landside integration, passenger experience, rider equity, and multi-modal coordination
- **Organizational Capacity**
- **Financial Capacity**

Over the first half of 2022, WETA and its consultants will work on ridership forecasting, fleet plan development, and emergency response policy analysis. In the second half of 2022, attention will turn toward assessing WETA's organizational and financial capacity and opportunities prior to the creation of the draft Service Vision and Business Plan in late 2022. Community and stakeholder engagement will continue through the year.

More information on this effort, including a detailed report on initial outreach in 2021, can be found at [weta.sanfranciscobayferry.com/2050-service-vision](https://weta.sanfranciscobayferry.com/2050-service-vision).



# FINANCIAL PLANNING CREATES SMOOTH TRIPS

San Francisco Bay Ferry was the fastest growing transit system in the region prior to the pandemic, and even though fares covered most operating costs, the system relies on a combination of other funding sources, including bridge tolls and local taxes and fees to balance its budget.

## MAINTAINING SERVICE Fare Revenue and Federal Relief

Prior to the pandemic, San Francisco Bay Ferry had one of the highest farebox recovery rates among all transit agencies in the nation, but the pandemic ridership decline erased this funding stream overnight.

The return of ridership is incredibly important to the long-term financial stability of San Francisco Bay Ferry service because it restores an important operating funding source.

For now, lower ridership and lost fare revenue is being covered by federal COVID-19 relief funding thanks to U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Bay Area Congressional delegation.

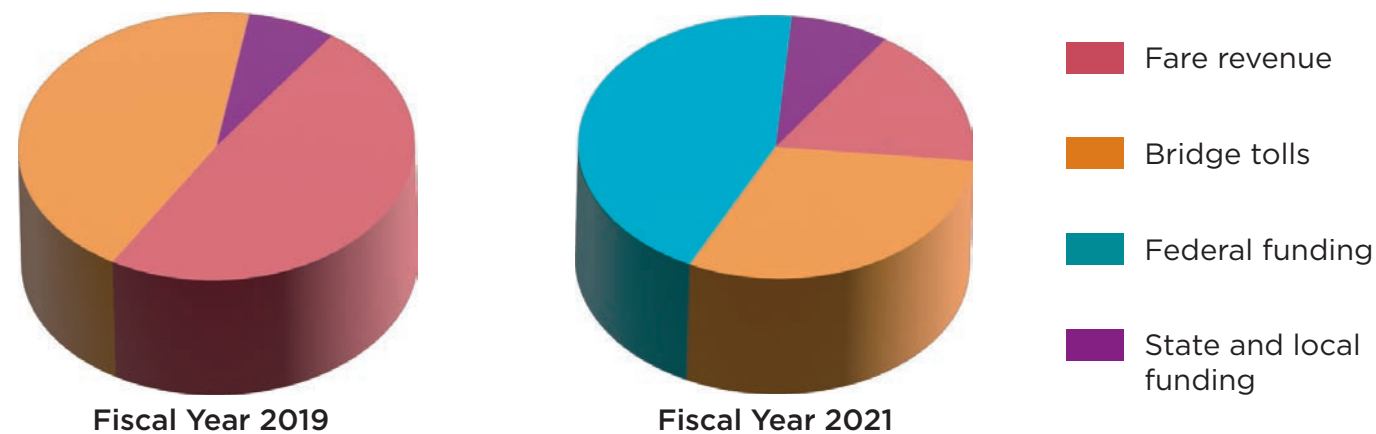
WETA has been allocated the following federal relief funds to offset pandemic-related revenue losses since 2020:

- **Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act:** \$18.8 million
- **Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA):** \$18.4 million
- **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA):** \$24.8 million

Due to strong ridership growth in 2019 and early 2020, WETA was able to set aside much of this funding and use it to offset low fare revenue in the 2020-21 fiscal year (FY21) and beyond. With ridership still working its way back, WETA is continuing to rely on these funds to maintain its service. By all accounts, it will take years for the region's transit ridership to return, and until it does, these funds will be critical to maintaining operations. The region's transit systems are collectively exploring strategies that would create new funding to preserve service over a prolonged recovery.

### How ferry operations are funded: 2019 vs. 2021

Farebox and bridge toll revenue — WETA's most important sources of operating funding — dropped significantly during the pandemic. New federal relief funding helped fill the gap.



### Other Funding

Ferry operations are also supported by regional bridge tolls that are administered by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. These funds were also reduced during the pandemic due to lower traffic volumes, but bridge traffic is nearing pre-pandemic levels again, which should mean the restoration of this critical funding source next year.

San Francisco Bay Ferry's Richmond service is supported by local contributions from the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA). Other East Bay routes operate thanks to investment from the Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC), the City of Alameda, and the Harbor Bay Business Park Association.

### EXPANDING SERVICE

#### Future Funding from Regional Measure 3

Regional Measure 3 (RM3) is a multi-stage bridge toll increase approved by voters in the nine Bay Area counties in 2018. RM3 would invest up to \$300 million in capital funding to enhance and expand WETA service throughout the Bay. The

measure also includes an additional \$35 million per year to maintain those expanded operations.

Even though RM3 tolls are being collected, the allocation of these funds is being held up due to a legal challenge, which is expected to be resolved in 2022.

### State and Federal Funding

With more than a \$30 billion budget surplus, California is preparing to make landmark investments that address some of the state's biggest challenges, including transportation. WETA joined other transit advocates in requesting at least \$5 billion for public transit. These funds could be used to bolster operations during pandemic recovery, invest in ferry service expansion, and fund the beginning of WETA's transition to zero-emission technology.

WETA's zero-emission fleet transition will also benefit from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which provides \$250 million for projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from water transit.



## LOOKING AHEAD

In addition to other projects and initiatives discussed in this report — including the 2050 Service Vision and Business Plan, the Pandemic Recovery Program, and efforts to secure funding for sustain ferry service and deliver key projects — WETA has plenty of important work ahead in 2022.

### Planning Our Future Ferry Fleet

One of the most exciting projects on the horizon is WETA's two-pronged zero-emission ferry study.

In 2022, WETA staff will unveil a comprehensive study defining the shoreside charging infrastructure that will be needed to support a new fleet of zero-emission ferries. A parallel study focused on zero-emission vessel technology will set the stage for the agency's transition to a zero-emission future that helps meet the State's long-term greenhouse gas reduction goals.

### Short Hop Network for New S.F. Neighborhoods

New and burgeoning San Francisco neighborhoods at Treasure Island and Mission Bay can look forward to ferries rolling in soon.

In 2022 WETA will continue work with the San Francisco County Transportation Authority on plans to provide ferry service to Treasure Island as residents and businesses move into new development. The ferry terminal on the west side of Treasure Island has been built. The ferry trip will be the most convenient and scenic route to and from the Island.

WETA is also continuing work with the Port of San Francisco to build a permanent ferry landing in Mission Bay, across the street from Chase Center. This terminal would provide connector service to Downtown San Francisco with ferry riders from Vallejo, Oakland,

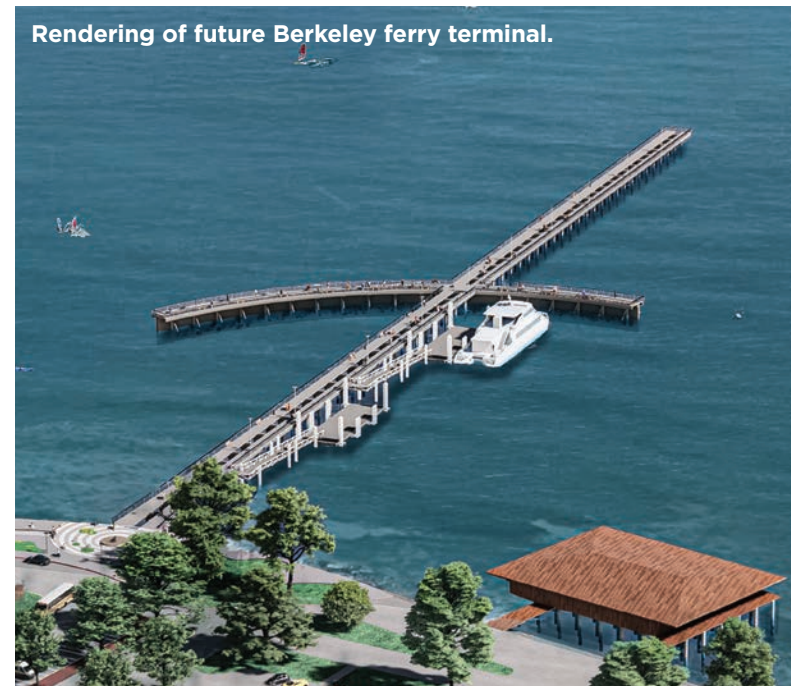
Richmond, and Alameda being able to transfer easily for work or recreational trips.

The long-term vision for these terminals is to expand WETA's network of service on the San Francisco waterfront with zero-emission ferries, providing even better transit access for those who live, work, and play in the City.

### Redwood City Ferry Terminal Project

Riders looking forward to new, congestion-reducing service connecting San Francisco and the East Bay to the Mid-Peninsula have a lot to look forward to in 2022. WETA and its partners in Redwood City and San Mateo County are getting closer to making this service a reality. The Redwood City Ferry Terminal received \$5 million in funding in the FY21 California state budget thanks to support from Assemblymember Kevin Mullin, and a business plan for the new service will be completed in early 2022, clearing the way for environmental review and eventually terminal construction.

Rendering of future Berkeley ferry terminal.





## LOOKING AHEAD (CONT)

### Berkeley Pier/Ferry Project

Another plan for service expansion is nearing completion thanks to WETA's collaboration with the City of Berkeley. 2021 saw substantial progress toward a project that will combine the construction of a new recreational pier with a new San Francisco Bay Ferry terminal located at the Berkeley marina. The WETA Board and Berkeley City Council will be asked to take next steps in design, permitting, and funding in early 2022.

The project will improve transit access for West Berkeley residents as well as employers in the cutting edge biotechnology, food, and medical industries within a mile of the proposed location. It will also provide residents with new recreational opportunities by building a new pier on the Berkeley waterfront. Surveys of Berkeley residents found wide support for new public ferry service.

### New Boats

WETA expects to bring MV Dorado into service in 2022. The 320-passenger, 34-knot jet boat will be the first of four in its class of ferries. Designed to be a versatile vessel — fast enough to handle the Vallejo route in an hour, small enough to fit into the South San Francisco terminal — Dorado will debut in the North Bay as we re-balance our fleet.

Once MV Dorado is delivered, work will accelerate on its twin ferry MV Delphinus, expected in another year.

### Terminal Reconfiguration in Vallejo

The need for dredging has accelerated in Vallejo over recent years, increasing WETA's ongoing costs and causing inconvenience for passengers. WETA is exploring a terminal realignment in Vallejo that would reduce or eliminate dredging

needs by changing the position of the float and gangways. This would also potentially increase docking capacity in Vallejo and provide smoother, more efficient berthing.

WETA plans to begin outreach, design, and permitting work on the project in 2022.

### Terminal Refurbishment in Alameda

WETA will undertake a major refurbishment of the Main Street Alameda Ferry Terminal in 2022.

The terminal, built in 1991, currently serves passengers on the Oakland & Alameda ferry route as well as the South San Francisco ferry route and trips to Oracle Park and Chase Center. The passenger float at Main Street Alameda was originally built in the 1960s and will be replaced with a new float. Pilings and ramps will also be refurbished.

The Federal Transit Administration awarded WETA a \$4.4 million grant for the project in 2020.

### Improving Passenger Experience, Increasing Passenger Counts

Increasing ridership on San Francisco Bay Ferry is critical to recovering from the pandemic and ensuring the long-term survival of ferry service in the Bay Area. WETA is continually working to attract new riders by improving the rider experience with new amenities and enhancements that make the service easier to use.

In 2022 WETA plans to roll out real-time transit information, an improved ticketing system, improved concessions, branded ferry merchandise, and opt-in onboard experiences.





## STAY CONNECTED

Interested in keeping up with important San Francisco Bay Ferry news, updates and events? Be sure to sign up for our monthly newsletter and follow us on social media for exciting announcements and updates. Here are a few ways to stay connected:

Sign up for our monthly passenger newsletter, Full Speed Ahead for news, tips, and fun insights.

URL: <https://bit.ly/FullSpeedAheadSFBE>

Sign up for BayAlerts to get real-time service information and notifications.

URL: <https://bit.ly/SFBFAlerts>

### Follow Us On Social Media:

Instagram: @sanfranciscobayferry

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“  
Most people dread  
their commute.  
For me, it's what I  
look forward to most.

*Joe M.,  
Alameda Passenger*

”





This report was written by WETA staff  
and designed by MacKenzie.

February 2022

[weta.sanfranciscobayferry.com](http://weta.sanfranciscobayferry.com)