



AB 650 (Blumenfeld) the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Public Transportation for the 21st Century

California's public transportation system is in crisis. A short-term task force of smart citizens is needed to find a path out of the crisis. AB 650 will establish a task force to recommend solutions.

The Conundrum: Growing Demand for Transit and Cuts to Service

Demand for transit services has increased around the state. Gas prices have risen, traffic congestion persists, and Californians are pressed for ways to cut commuting costs and reduce their environmental impact. Meanwhile, funding for transit has not kept pace with demand. In recent years the situation has grown worse as public dollars once dedicated to maintaining and expanding transit services are cut to accommodate state general fund deficits. As a result, service has been cut around the state, putting drivers and maintenance staff out of work and leaving bus and rail riders scrambling for other ways to get to jobs and school.

The transit crisis is not just a California phenomenon. Similar scenarios are playing out across the country. Nevertheless, our transit crisis is something Californians must solve largely on our own. So how do we do that?

The Path to a Solution

AB 650 establishes a blue ribbon task force of smart citizens to help solve the crisis. The bill calls for a task force of volunteers, representing different segments of society and including two members of the state legislature, to prepare a report that lays out the current state of public transit in the state, what is needed to make the system meet projected demand, how much it would cost and, most importantly, how to pay for the system California needs.

In carrying out its duties, the task force will conduct at least nine hearings around the state to allow the public, transit agencies, and the business community to submit information about

service needs and costs and ideas to help solve the transit funding crisis. The task force will also rely on data, reports and system plans already compiled by other agencies and organizations.

The task force would not create a new transit system; rather it would illuminate existing plans and expert thinking on what California needs. The task force will not have authority to establish any new taxes or fees but will develop a list of funding options and recommendations for the legislature.

The legislature will appoint task force members by March, 2012, and the task force's report will be due to the legislature by March 31, 2013. The legislation allows the task force to request staffing by the University of California Institute for Transportation Studies. The total cost for the task force's work—including holding hearings around the state, conducting and compiling research and analysis, and developing a report— will be appropriated by the legislature and will not exceed \$750,000.

Special Task Forces Have Proven Successful

The state and the legislature have often turned to task forces of committed citizens to grapple with tough problems that require thoughtful consideration outside the realm of daily legislative work. For example, when looking for a way to effectively respond to the growing incidents of autism, the legislature created a task force whose findings and recommendations have since guided legislative action.

A blue ribbon transit task force will afford an opportunity to shine a spotlight on California's public transit needs, engage the public around the state in the conversation, and offer a roadmap for sustainable funding as well as system expansion and operation.

For More Information

A working group representing health, environment, transit, and business interests have helped develop the task force proposal. For more information, contact:

Kathryn Phillips
Environmental Defense Fund
Tel: 916-492-7072
kphillips@edf.org

Erica Morehouse
Environmental Defense Fund
Tel: 916-492-4680
emorehouse@edf.org