

Transportation Questionnaire for Bay Area Candidates

March 5th, 2024 Primary Election

Name: Jovanka Beckles

Which office are you running for?: California State Senate District 7

1. Which counties does the jurisdiction of the office cover?

Alameda, Contra Costa

2. Which forms of transit and active transportation (bicycling, walking, scooters, wheelchair) do you use on a regular basis and for what types of trips-- and why?

I have an electric bike that I use to run errands such as grocery shopping and other personal errands. I also use it for basic self-care and exercise. I use my bike as often as I'm able to reduce my carbon footprint.

3. Would you seek additional funding for Bay Area transit and what form of funding do you think makes sense?

Yes, I will seek additional funding for Bay Area transit. An efficient and accessible transit system is a vital resource for our community, especially for working people and students. I believe this funding should come from taxes on the rich as well as corporations like UBER, LYFT, the fossil fuel companies (who have played a significant role in the environmental damage that public transit is a step towards reversing). While I will not be voting on federal tax rates, on the state level we can start by charging an additional surtax for the most profitable corporations, ending corporate tax breaks, and increasing transparency and oversight so that all revenue is taxed. This money can be reinvested in social programs, such as the transit system.

4. Public transit in the Bay Area is highly fragmented, with 27 transit agencies, each with different fares, schedules, branding, and customer information. Do you believe it should be a priority for the region to create a well-coordinated transit system? And as an elected leader or potential member of a local transit agency board, would you support state legislation that advances a more integrated, high ridership system, even if it diminishes local control?

I strongly support a seamless transit system and am the only candidate running on this platform. Consistent transportation across regions would make travel faster and more accessible for working-class people who travel distances that span transit agencies. We need a transit system that is comprehensive in its ability to take a person wherever they might need to reasonably go, reliable, fast, integrated, and no-cost transfers. The benefits of this (the ability to pursue better jobs and education now available, saved transportation costs, the environmental benefits of a viable car-free for working people, employment even in construction, maintenance, and operation) are huge. So the expenses will be large in short, but the benefits will outweigh it for our state, environment, and our residents. I also believe we need a Transit manager to better coordinate our 27 transit systems.

5. Transportation is the largest single source of carbon emissions in California, and in the Bay Area, and the largest share of transportation emissions come from single occupancy vehicles. What are your top priorities to achieve substantial reduction in transportation-related GHG

emissions?

I believe that the top priority and really the only way to achieve such a reduction in transportation-related GHG emissions is to work towards a community sustained through public transit. I am unique in standing for a seamless, electrified statewide public transit system. This would require a variety of efforts. I would focus on making the community more walkable and bikeable, thus eliminating the need for single-occupancy vehicles. As previously mentioned, I would also prioritize efforts to make the public transit system more efficient and affordable, hopefully motivating community members that depend on private transit to make that shift. And finally, as an AC Transit Director, I'm proud of our efforts to transition into zero emission buses. We currently have the largest fleet and are on our way to 100% of our buses being ZEBs, ensuring that the shift to public transport would not come at the cost of the environment in any way.

6. The Bay Area still has road projects under development that would increase Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), greenhouse gas emissions, and air pollution. What decisions would you make about projects that increase VMT and pollution?

Broadly, I will not support projects that increase VMT and pollution. I favor seamless, comprehensive, electrified public transit and walk/bike-ability. Expanding road projects attracts more drivers, keeps traffic the same in the long run, and contributes to carbon emissions. A green transition requires that we invest instead in public transit alternatives such as investing in more bicycle lanes, and street diets.

7. Transit priority improvements are proven to make taking the bus faster and more reliable, while also reducing operating costs. Should local governments be able to stop transit priority improvements on local roads?

No, local governments should not have the power to obstruct public transit projects that will ultimately benefit the mobility and economic opportunity of their constituents. California needs a seamless, robust transit system that spans across localities. For that to be possible, local governments will have to sacrifice their short-term interests to allow transit priority improvements on local roads.

8. What do you think are the most important actions that can be taken to make public transit comfortable, accessible, and safe for all communities?

Access to public transportation is a deep passion of mine that starts with people's rights to unionize and implement what we envision public transportation to look like for the entire region. Accessibility of transportation is crucial to a growing and strengthening economy. It's how cities can connect with one another. Without expanded public transportation there cannot be job growth, access to education, and access to affordable housing options. Most students and workers still make up a high percentage of public transit riders. Accessibility is also a way to expand the free youth in education passes and senior passes.

Our public transit system should prioritize areas and demographics with the greatest and most immediate transit needs for riders to go home, to work, to school, to their healthcare providers, and even access to leisure are the priority, and I intend to fight for what will eventually be a truly comprehensive and seamless public transit system, which will allow working people- and kids, students, everyone- access to the entirety of their cities, and every town without needing to rely on cars or private transit.

To accomplish this, I will champion increased investment in public transit. The end goal is to reduce or eliminate transit fares, particularly for the elderly and disabled, and expand bus and train lines to connect neighborhoods and workplaces across racial and socioeconomic lines. As an AC Transit

Director, I championed and directed staff to build protective barriers for bus operators due to an increase in assaults. I'm committed to keeping workers and riders safe.

9. Traffic violence and deaths in California are increasing annually; in 2021, 4,258 people died in vehicle crashes, a 10.7% increase from the prior year. If elected, what will you do to reverse the trend, increase street safety, save lives and reduce injuries in our community? What policies or specific projects would make the greatest impact?

Once elected I would prioritize implementing comprehensive traffic safety measures, such as investing in improved infrastructure, promoting public awareness campaigns. Specific projects like enhancing pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, implementing traffic calming measures, and supporting community education initiatives on responsible driving. I would also advocate for legislation aimed at addressing root causes of accidents and fatalities, like distracted driving or impaired driving.

10. What do you think are the biggest access and mobility needs for disadvantaged populations in your district, and how would you propose to solve them?

What I have heard from my constituency is that bus stops in some areas are too far to access if one is in a wheelchair or blind or deaf. Wayfinding signs are also a challenge for those with visual and hearing challenges. I would fight to fund better wayfinding tools and invest in door to door service for seniors and those with other abilities. The working poor also are challenged with the current cost of public transportation, therefore, I believe that in the fourth largest economy in the world, California, specifically the Bay Area, can afford free public transit. Fare boxes only generate approximately 12% of revenue, therefore, transitioning to a free system should be considered. I am ready to fight for that.

11. In what circumstances do you support removing parking or repurposing vehicle travel lanes to create safer and more efficient bus, biking, and walking options? How do you propose balancing the demands of different interest groups who may disagree on how streets should be designed?

I am in full support of removing parking and repurposing vehicle travel lanes to improve the public transit system and walking/biking. Maintaining the status quo would not only shut out community members who cannot access private transit but it would also continue contributing to carbon emissions and climate change. As previously mentioned, a green transition requires a shift towards public transit alternatives. Balancing the demands of different stakeholders is not always easy, but I believe that we must listen to the different groups and in the end be courageous enough to make decisions based on what's right and best.

The "Transportation Questionnaire for Bay Area Candidates for Office" is sponsored by a coalition of partners- Transbay Coalition, SPUR, Seamless Bay Area, San Francisco Transit Riders, Silicon Valley Bike Coalition, and Bike East Bay to help educate the public on these important issues.

