



PUBLIC COMMENT

BART Accessibility Task Force (BATF)

November 21, 2024

Agenda 2

Email message dated November 05, 2024 at 5:08 AM from Aleta Dupree

Elena Van Loo, with thanks, please forward this message to the full BATF group in advance of the next Regular Meeting.

Greetings Chair Christine Arsenault and Members.

Aleta Dupree for the record, she, her, with Team Folds.

I bring you my comments concerning the work and mission of the BART Accessibility Task Force of the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District.

I write letters as a means to share more about myself, in greater detail and context than what can be said in a two minute period of Public Comment. I had some technical issues at your last Meeting given that the Board Meeting was happening at the same time. And I was trying to share in both Meetings, which is rare but somehow things lined up, and I wasn't able to effectively share at either very well, perhaps next time it will be easier. And so it is hard to attend your BATF Meetings because the Board usually meets on the same day. The Board and your committee are no less or more than the other. Yet sometimes there are matters taken up by the Board that I feel I need to comment on, and sometimes the Board is still in session at the time you commence your Meeting.

I can only relate my experiences as I know them, and share them respectfully with you. You see, I am a real Disabled Veteran of Operation Desert Storm, from US Army service, and my disability is considered to be service connected. And so I refer to myself as a real Veteran, because I have to vehemently claim standing as a Veteran deployed into that specific conflict. You see, there are many who are woefully misinformed about the Gulf War Era, and the various deployments within. Some I met have referred to Operation Desert Storm as a "camping trip." Some I have known who have served in earlier conflicts such as Vietnam have suggested that they were in a "real war", and that I was not. And some people, even close to me, have even doubted my disability, and attempting to convince me that I am not. And so there is a real deep problem in our society when it comes to recognition and understanding of people with disabilities, and our disability community is far more diverse than many would think.

I submit to you that I am a user of Reduced Fares on BART, and I claim such through the use of a Reduced Fare Clipper Card, that which I have had since 2013. And I qualified for a Reduced Fare Clipper Card in being a Veteran with a service connected disability rating of fifty percent or greater. And I have various disability related discounts on other transportation systems beyond the Bay Area. Most of these systems offer me half fare, and on all of the systems I use, I am able to use plastic fare cards, mobile applications, and in one case, discounted open payment (New York City Transit).

Yet some have wondered about me, asking “how do you get reduced fare on BART”, saying things like “you don’t look old enough for the senior discount.” I mention the Reduced Fare Clipper Card for people with qualifying disabilities. A few have then said to me, “you don’t really look disabled.” And so I have to advocate for myself in my being a real Veteran of Operation Desert Storm. And the vast majority of people seem to understand, though there is a history in the Bay Area of lack of respect for Veterans going back to the Vietnam War. And so how do I navigate the world as a person with disabilities often not seen or heard?

I often ask myself, am I disabled enough for BATF? I would like to think that I am. You see, I think anyone regardless of whether they have disabilities or not should be able to engage respectfully with BATF and have full and equal standing to do so. It is true there are some policies and mechanisms that recognize disability according to severity. The Veterans Administration uses percentage ratings when determining levels of monetary compensation. Yet on a larger scale I don’t see disability as being on a continuum, but more like a pedestrian scramble. (FYI, a pedestrian scramble is where all traffic is stopped at an intersection and pedestrians can cross the intersection in any and all directions.

I would like to see a greater engagement with the Board among you, though I don’t really have an answer as to what that might mean. I endeavor to engage with the Board, and often, and share my comments on various items when given the opportunity to do so. And so I can share more about life as a person with disabilities during General Public Comment, and when such is relevant to an Agenda Item, and through the writing of letters. I can’t claim to be an expert on the things of BART. I often wonder if I approach with diminished standing, especially given that I frequently skipped fare on the New York City Subway in 1980-81. I can say though, that I have never skipped fare in Grand Central Terminal, and that I have never avoided the payment of appropriate fare on BART. Today I make amends to the Subway by paying the appropriate fare, following their rules of conduct, and I enjoy attending and speaking at their Meetings.

It is my hope to again be at one of your Meetings, hopefully in person. At least I have Zoom, which I believe to be a necessary and inclusive option. I am different from you, yet I am no less. I can only share my experiences as I know them, and to be a good listener, and respect people where they are at. I ask this of you, as you go about the business of BATF, to remember and practice this most paramount of ideals, that BART is The Peoples System.

Thank you.