

Bike to Wherever Day Another Victim of COVID-19 Pandemic

Office of the Inspector General



Investigation Results

Bike East Bay ran out of free tote bags with BART roundtrip weekend passes during the Bike to Wherever event. This was a result of event changes made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Bike East Bay ordered only 2,000 passes versus the normal 13,000 in anticipation of a significant reduction in participants,

reduced volunteer capacity, and cancelation of their bag stuffing event due to public health safety regulations. They divided the 2,000 passes among their tote bags: 500 in their larger tote that came with the purchase of a \$35 membership and 1,500 in the smaller, free tote bags. Bike East Bay has always provided both types of tote bags, but this was the first year they had so few BART roundtrip weekend passes. Bike East Bay ordered the bags before shelter-in-place orders went into effect in March 2020, which meant they had far more totes than passes. When the free tote bags with the passes ran out, volunteers provided them without the passes and communicated that the passes were available in only the larger tote bags that came with the purchase of a Bike East Bay membership. This left some participants believing Bike East Bay had created a new requirement to purchase their membership in order to get the BART roundtrip weekend pass and dismayed that they could not receive a pass for free as they had been able to in the past. That was not Bike East Bay's intent. Unprecedented circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic made it difficult to plan appropriately for Bike to Wherever. Public health safety guidelines required Bike East Bay to make changes to their long-established event plans, and it was difficult for them to know how many people would be able to participate this year.

Response to Findings and Conclusions

There are no recommendations associated with this report. However, the District took action to prevent future complaints about the distribution of promotional BART passes. The BART Marketing and Research Department reported to the OIG that they "discussed the complaint with Bike East Bay then informed them the 2021 co-promotional agreement will include language stating any future BART promotional tickets provided for their events may only be placed in free bags and not in bags requiring a Bike East Bay membership donation. Additionally, Bike East Bay will be required to clearly communicate to their staff and volunteers, who prepare event bags, that BART promotional tickets may only be placed in free bags." Similarly, Bike East Bay reported to the OIG that they are committed to ensuring Bike to Wherever (Work) Day participants receive a free BART pass so long as supplies last.



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Background



Bike to Work Day is an annual event promoting cycling as an option for commuting to work. The national event is celebrated throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and made possible through a coalition of local nonprofits and transit agencies. Bike East Bay is one of the participating organizations that helps implement the event and does so in partnership with BART. Bike East Bay provides participants' tote bags with educational and promotional items, including a BART roundtrip weekend pass. Bike East Bay enters into an annual Partnership Proposal agreement with BART to receive the passes. The agreement specifies the number of passes BART will provide, how Bike East Bay is to distribute them to some other nonprofits that help implement the event, and the services that Bike East Bay is to provide to promote BART. BART and Bike East Bay entered into this year's Partnership Proposal agreement on March 12, 2020, and the event was originally planned for May 14, 2020. BART committed to providing 24,000 roundtrip weekend passes, 13,000 of which were for Bike East Bay. Four days after entering into the agreement, shelter-in-place orders went into effect throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Bike to Work Day was then canceled due to public health and safety restrictions. Event organizers eventually rescheduled the event for September 24, 2020 and renamed it Bike to Wherever. Bike East Bay reduced the number of BART roundtrip weekend passes they needed to 7,000 in expectation of fewer participants, reduced volunteer capacity, and cancellation of their bag stuffing event due to public health safety regulations. Bike East Bay gave 5,000 of the passes to the Silicon Valley Bike Coalition to distribute in the Peninsula and kept 2,000 for distribution at a small number of select bike shops and libraries throughout Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. To help reduce waste and meet public health safety guidelines, Bike East Bay made the information and coupons normally placed in the tote bags available online only. Participants could pick up their tote bags over a two-week period, for example, the bags were available in Contra Costa County September 15th-30th.

Key Findings and Investigation



There was no evidence that Bike East Bay intentionally limited the BART passes to only their tote bags that came with the purchase of a \$35 Bike East Bay membership. Supplies were substantially limited this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "New normal" under the pandemic, including significant restrictions on community activities, made it difficult to determine how many BART roundtrip weekend passes were needed for this year's Bike to Wherever event. Bike East Bay estimated 2,000 would be sufficient for their needs and divided the passes among their tote bags: 500 in their larger tote that required purchase of a \$35 membership and 1,500 in the smaller, free tote bags. Bike East Bay has long offered both tote bags at their energizer stations, but they historically had enough BART roundtrip weekend passes to fill all their bags. The bags have always been available only as long as supplies lasted. Bike East Bay ordered their tote bags prior to the shelter-in-place orders that went into effect in March 2020, which resulted in them having far more totes than BART passes. This resulted in Bike East Bay running out of the free tote bags that included the BART roundtrip weekend passes. When that happened, volunteers provided participants the free tote bag without the passes and communicated that the passes were available in only the larger tote bags that came with the \$35 purchase of a Bike East Bay membership. This left some participants believing Bike East Bay had created a requirement to purchase their membership in order to get the BART roundtrip weekend pass and dismayed that they could not receive a pass for free as they had in the past.



The Office of the Inspector General received a complaint questioning why Bike East Bay was requiring participants to pay for membership in order to receive BART roundtrip weekend passes that were previously available free as part of Bike to Work Day. We launched an investigation to determine if there was evidence of intentional abuse of position in requiring event participants to buy the membership to receive the BART roundtrip weekend pass.

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