

Tech shuttle fee more than triples

Fewer stops, more parking cops push price to \$3.55

By MARK HEDIN

SHUTTLE BUSES, a flash point for frustration over the fast-changing face of San Francisco, will pay a bit more than expected for the privilege of operating freely at Muni bus stops and white curbs reserved for passenger pickup and dropoff. The Metropolitan Transportation Agency previously said the fee to pay for its 18-month study of the situation would be \$1 per shuttle “stop event,” but upped that to \$3.55 before the pilot program began Aug. 1.

The buses are so big there’s no place for them to pull over and load and unload passengers except white and Muni zones, and enough are coming and going during commute hours that their presence could throw Muni off schedule.

The 11 participating shuttle companies will no longer be subject to the \$273 fine the rest of us risk incurring when stopping in a Muni zone — although, as The Extra reported in May, that’s not such a big deal because they have already been given a pass. Shuttle companies paid \$12,195 for bus zone tickets over the past three years, while regular drivers were fined a total of \$3.6 million.

The shuttle fee does nothing to offset the big buses’ impacts, such as the \$1.08 in estimated street damage they cause for every mile they travel in San Francisco. The fee is intended to only zero-out the costs for gathering and analyzing the data needed to formulate recommendations once the study wraps up at the end of January 2016.

Under state Prop. 218 enacted in 1996, the city can’t charge more.

This January, the program was estimated to cost \$1.7 million. By July, that forecast had more than doubled to \$3.5 million, as it became clear that more parking control officers would be needed. The MTA also determined that it could lower the program’s data collection cost.

“We had an imperfect estimate because of imperfect information in the number of stop events,” MTA public relations officer Kristen Holland said.

The \$1-per-stop figure was based on an expected 4,121 daily pickups or dropoffs at 200 of the city’s 1,382 red bus zones or at white passenger loading zones. But the shuttle companies’ applications were for about 40% fewer daily stops, 2,449, and the number of Muni zones affected fell to half.

The original plan was to have eight parking control officers and a senior officer all working quarter-time. The revised budget calls for the equivalent of 10 officers at 75% time — three hours

during the morning commute and three hours in the evening, although 92 of the 98 approved stop points have a green light to be used all day — and night. There’s also an overtime budget equal to three full-time positions.

The pilot’s budget builds in a cushion with 49.3% of all salaries for overhead — real estate, electricity, accounting and human resources costs, Holland said, which comes to almost \$1 million over the 18-month study — \$967,781.

So, if all goes as planned, when the study concludes the city will have spent \$2.6 million on parking cops and their supervisors, almost a million more than the entire study was initially projected to cost.

“It really is a new plan for enforcement,” Holland said. “In addition to the PCOs that will have this as a larger part of their beat, all PCOs will be trained how to enforce the pilot’s network of

stops.”

The new pilot plan also tweaks the cost of administrative staff. This time the trajectory is downward. Instead of spending \$417,347 on eight positions, the new plan is to spend \$304,331 on nine positions, ranging from a project director at 15% time to an assistant director spending an inexplicable two hours per month supervising the supervisors. A 15% time principal administrative analyst has been added.

Nonlabor costs were similarly trimmed by requiring the shuttle providers to install GPS devices on each vehicle, saving \$166,000 from the cost of collecting their data.

One other expense the fees will pay for that initially was not included is the projected 56 hours per day of lost parking meter revenue — about \$70,000 over the 18 months — and more than \$15,000 for “meter bagging fees” — the

temporary decommissioning of five meters due to bus zone expansion.

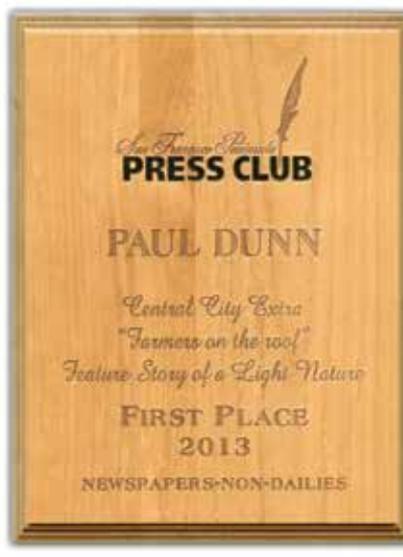
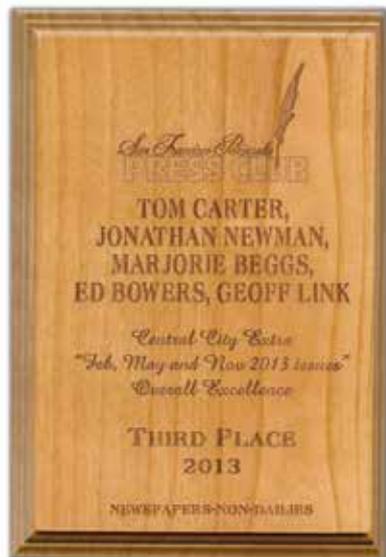
So far, the only shuttle stops in the Tenderloin are two near the Main Library.

The Extra also asked Holland why the MTA needed 18 months to study a situation that’s been around for years and grown so controversial.

“The 18-month timeframe was selected to allow sufficient time for all users (shuttle providers, Muni operations and the public) to adjust to the operational changes and for staff to conduct the evaluation,” Holland said. “The 18 months allow for analysis of data collected and development of a longer-term proposal.”

She went on to cite another MTA pilot, the just-completed citywide SFpark study, that informed decisions on parking meter and garage rates. That took two years to complete, she said. ■

3 wins for The Central City Extra



The Extra staff took home plaques from the 2013 Peninsula Press Club awards May 31 in three categories: Overall Excellence, third place behind S.F. Business Times and Palo Alto Weekly, and first place awards for Paul Dunn and Mark Hedin.

By MARJORIE BEGGS

CENTRAL CITY EXTRA once more took home awards from the San Francisco Peninsula Press Club’s “Evening of Excellence,” its 37th year of honoring Bay Area professional journalists in print, online and broadcast media. This year, winners were selected from among 392 entries from 11 Bay Area counties who distinguished themselves in 2013.

The Extra’s three awards at the May 31 event were in the Newspapers Non-

dailies category.

Reporter Mark Hedin won First Place in the News subcategory for “Gentrified,” his comprehensive November story of nonprofits displaced from the mid-Market and Tenderloin neighborhoods. The piece captured a crisis for service providers that continues to worsen.

Another First Place, for Feature of a Light Nature, went to reporter Paul Dunn’s October “Farmers on the roof.” The centerspread survey of the Tenderloin’s successful and mostly rooftop community gardens was illustrated with Dunn’s photos.

The Extra’s submission of its Febru-

ary, May and November issues won the paper third place for Overall Excellence among nondailies, a tribute to our approach that news is a community service and our designer Lise Stampfli.

After 14 years of publishing The Extra, the nonprofit San Francisco Study Center is proud to continue providing the central city stories of special concern. Many are also of citywide significance.

The Extra is a member of the San Francisco Neighborhood Newspaper Publishers Association, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary with a blow-out at the Exploratorium on Oct. 22. ■

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