

J Church Transfer Experience Survey Results



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Overview

The SFMTA distributed a survey in summer 2021 to ask J Church riders and residents near Church Street for their feedback about the transfer experience at Church and Market streets between the J line and the subway. The survey sought feedback on [temporary transit stop and traffic changes](#) that were implemented to allow for safe, wheelchair-accessible transfers for J line riders near this intersection.



These improvements were made in late summer and fall 2020 to support a [pilot](#) for the J Church to operate as a surface-only line. Keeping the J on the surface is intended to improve the reliability and frequency of the J line, enhance Muni Metro subway operations, and reduce crowding. In addition, the project provided accessibility and pedestrian safety upgrades at an intersection that is on the city's High-Injury Network, as well as adding wheelchair accessibility for southbound J Church passengers at one of the city's most important transit hubs.

This survey was focused on the transfer experience, including accessibility and pedestrian safety components that may be beneficial even if the J Church returns to the subway in the future. The future alignment of the J Church line is being considered separately through the [2022 Muni Service Network](#) design and outreach process, but many of the survey respondents touched on this topic and their feedback will help inform that process.

Initial findings have shown improved reliability on the J Church and in the subway as a result of the new surface-only alignment, and ridership has returned at a similar rate to other Muni lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, about two-thirds of survey respondents found navigating the new transfer somewhat or very difficult, with the most frequent concern being wait times when transferring. To address this, the SFMTA increased frequency in the subway at Church Street Station from 10 minutes to 5 minutes in August and will increase frequency on the J Church in early October. A follow-up survey will be issued in fall after these service investments and additional improvements based on rider feedback are in place. A full summary of the survey results is included in the appendix to this report.

Changes Based on Community Feedback

Based on initial feedback and survey responses from neighbors and merchants, the SFMTA has made several changes to improve the transfer experience and support local access.

Service and transfer improvements

- Increased service in the subway:** To better serve Muni riders in the subway and provide a faster transfer for J Church riders, service frequency was increased in the Muni Metro subway on August 14, 2021 through the reintroduction of the M Oceanview line. This reduced the scheduled



time between trains at Church Street Station from 10 minutes to 5 minutes and reduced the average wait time for a train at Church Street Station from 5 minutes to 2.5 minutes.

- **Increased J Church frequency:** Frequency on the J Church will be increased October 2 to reduce wait times, with headway improving from 12 minutes to 10 minutes all-day.
- **Church and Duboce stop.** When rail service first returned on the J Church as a surface-only line, riders provided feedback that some trains were not stopping to pick up passengers at the Church and Duboce stop, which provides an important transfer option to the N Judah and access to the Safeway grocery store. SFMTA staff have worked closely with the field operations team and rail division staff to ensure operators are serving this stop and continue to monitor it.
- **Signage improvements.** Based on rider feedback, the SFMTA updated and improved wayfinding signage between the J Church platform and the subway to improve the legibility of the transfer. Additional signage improvements will be installed this fall.

Parking and traffic changes

- **Reopening northbound Church Street to through traffic.** Neighbors and merchants provided extensive feedback that closing Church Street to through traffic in the northbound direction was particularly impactful. The SFMTA determined that the northbound curb lane closure was no longer required for transit purposes once the J was extended from Market Street to Duboce Avenue, and reopened the roadway once merchants were no longer using it for outdoor dining.
- **Customer parking improvements.** Based on feedback from merchants, the project team added several “green zone” short-term parking spaces on the east side of Church Street between 15th and Market streets to facilitate pickup from restaurants and other businesses on the block.
- **Signage updates.** Some residents and merchants provided feedback about the initial roadway signage for the transfer project, which they said was not clear regarding local access. The project team updated this signage to more clearly indicate that local access is permitted and advised Parking Control Officers to ensure residents and customers are allowed to drive on the block to access driveways and short-term loading spaces.

Next Steps

Transit stop and streetscape improvements

The J Church Transfer Improvements project was implemented as a temporary measure to enable transfers between the J Church surface-only route and the Muni Metro subway as part of the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project team is now conducting a full evaluation of the temporary improvements and is developing proposals for permanent accessibility, pedestrian safety, and streetscape improvements in the project area. These proposals will be informed by the results of this survey and would be compatible with the J Church remaining surface-only or returning to the subway.

All treatments implemented in the project area are temporary and reversible. The project team will share an initial concept for permanent transit stop improvements with the community this fall to gather feedback. The SFMTA Board is expected to consider making the transfer improvements permanent this December. If the project is approved, further outreach on detailed design for the transit stop and streetscape improvements would begin in early 2022.

When the Board considers the project in December, the project team will also share more detail on possible permanent treatments, such as upgrading the temporary wooden platforms to a wide extension of the Church Street sidewalk with high-quality accessibility features, seating with shelter for passengers,



real-time bus and train arrival displays, pedestrian-scale lighting, and attractive streetscape elements. Similar to the recently completed Inner Sunset Streetscape Improvements, a permanent project would support making the Church and Market intersection an appealing public space for residents, transit riders, and people shopping in the neighborhood.

J Church surface-only configuration

This survey was focused on safety and accessibility upgrades at Church and Market streets that helped facilitate transfers between the shortened J Church line and trains to downtown, but many riders also had feedback on the broader issue of whether the J Church should return to the subway. Survey respondents provided important feedback about accessibility, wait times and safety that will be taken into consideration along with the transit reliability and capacity benefits of operating the J Church as a surface-only line.

A full outreach and evaluation process is underway focused on the J Church alignment in conjunction with the [2022 Muni Service Network](#) outreach process. J Church riders will have an opportunity to provide feedback through several channels, including open houses in September and October of 2021. In addition, a new survey will focus specifically on the trade-offs of operating the J Church as a surface-only line or returning to the subway. The survey will begin after October 2 to ensure the results reflect the rider experience with increased frequencies in the subway and on the J Church. Later in October and into November, SFMTA staff will present a revised proposal based on the initial round of public feedback. Once the proposal is refined during this stage, it will be brought to the SFMTA Board for its consideration for approval, expected December 2021.

Initial data has shown improved reliability due to the J Church operating as a surface-only line. The average travel time from Noe Valley to downtown improved by about 6 minutes, even when accounting for the added walk and wait time when transferring. Headway adherence (the percent of trains arriving without gaps) improved from about 75% to 85-90%. Additionally, ridership on the J Church has returned at a similar rate to the N Judah, which still operates in the subway, as well as to the overall Muni system, and has returned at more than twice the rate of BART ridership on the segment parallel to the J Church. Additional evaluation will be completed prior to the SFMTA Board vote in December.

Providing feedback

Members of the public can continue to send feedback or questions to tellmuni@sfmta.com or call 415.646.2350.

Appendix: Summary of Survey Feedback

Methods

The survey was promoted by sending postcard mailers to all residential addresses near the Church Street corridor, by posting signs in the project area, through the SFMTA blog, and through emails to stakeholders including J Church riders, elected officials, and community groups. It was available to take by phone or online in English, Chinese or Spanish from July 5 to August 16, 2021.

Survey respondents

Of the 681 survey responses, nearly all (679) were completed in English. Twelve percent of respondents reside in the immediate project area zip code (94114) and 70% were from other neighborhoods along the J Church corridor. Of those who responded, 17% (114) shared that they have a disability that affects their daily life.

Travel mode

Most respondents (73%) said they had ridden the J Church at least once since May 2021 and more than half (58%) said their primary mode of travel on Church Street between Duboce Avenue and Noe Valley is Muni. The remainder mostly walk (17%) or drive (16%) in the area.

Navigating the transfer

When asked “how would you describe navigating the transfer”, most respondents (68%) reported that they find it somewhat difficult (40%) or very difficult (28%). Another 31% described the transfer as easy (23%) or very easy (8%).

In the open-ended response section of the survey, some of the specific issues that respondents identified with the transfer included:

- Long wait times when transferring (most common feedback)
- Challenges with walking/rolling between the J Church stop and Church Street Station
- Some trains not serving the Duboce stop
- A general preference for a one-seat ride
- Lack of shelter at the new stop and exposure to rain when transferring
- A need for improved signage



- Personal safety at the new transfer stop
- Traffic illegally using the red transit lane adjacent to the stop
- Potential crowding on trains in the subway after transferring from the J Church

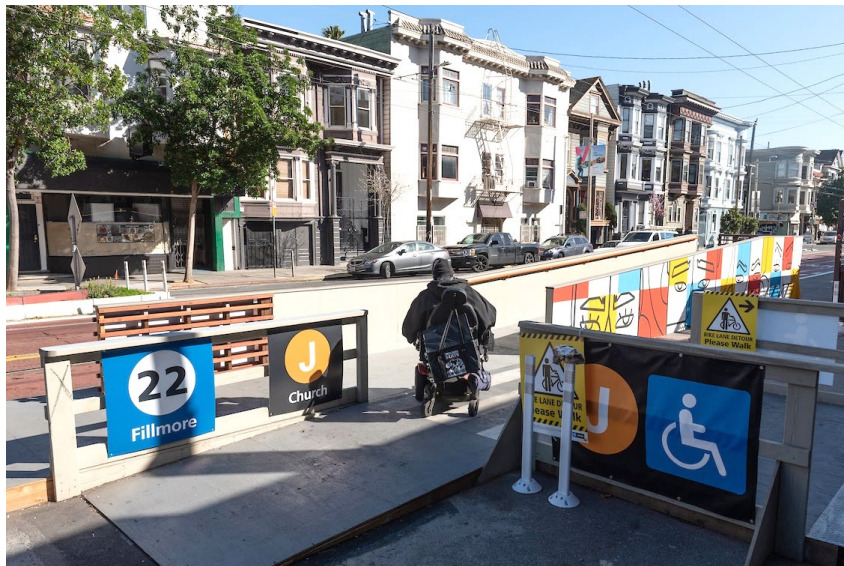
Among respondents with a disability, 73% said they find the transfer difficult. The primary concerns with the transfer cited by people with disabilities included long wait times (41%) and the difficulty of traveling between the J Church stop and Church Street Station due to the need to walk down steps or cross Market Street to reach the elevator (28%).

Wait time when transferring was the most frequently cited concern in the survey. In response to this feedback from riders, frequency was increased in the subway from 10 minutes to 5 minutes in August (reducing average wait time from 10 minutes to 5 minutes) and frequency will be increased on the J Church from 12 minutes to 10 minutes all-day starting October 2. A follow-up survey this fall will provide insight into whether the shortened J Church is better meeting riders' needs after implementation of these investments in J line and subway frequency.

Permanent project

Most respondents (68%) definitely or probably opposed making the project permanent, while less than a quarter (22%) definitely or probably supported keeping it in place.

In the open-ended survey responses, it was evident that many of the respondents did not necessarily oppose permanent accessibility and safety upgrades but were against keeping the J Church as a surface-only line because of difficulties they encountered when transferring, such as long wait times, wayfinding challenges, and the environment at the stop.



The SFMTA will conduct a new survey in fall to determine if support increases with the implementation of feedback from this survey, such as improved transit frequency, signage, and ensuring all trains serve the Church/Duboce stop.

Impacts on driving

The area surrounding the intersection of Church and Market streets is one of the most important transit hubs in San Francisco, with tens of thousands of Muni riders getting on and off buses and trains and passing through every day. The intersection is also densely populated with people walking to access transit service, dine, shop, travel to and from work, and access other services. This intersection and its vicinity are identified in the San Francisco General Plan as a Transit Center and Transit Preferential Street, where transit and walking are given the highest priority, consistent with the city's Transit-First Policy. The project sought to prioritize transit and walking near this key intersection, while



accommodating essential driving trips, such as residents, merchants and customers accessing destinations immediately on the block; commercial vehicles serving businesses; taxis and paratransit vehicles providing service to people with disabilities; and emergency vehicles.

Drivers generally found navigating Church Street more difficult because of the project. Out of the 681 survey respondents, 115 (17%) answered the question about how driving on Church Street changed because of the project. Of those who responded to this question, 74 (64%) said it was more difficult.

The project initially closed Church Street between 15th and Market streets in both directions to through traffic (commercial vehicles, taxis, and local access were still allowed). However, based on survey responses and resident and merchant feedback, northbound through traffic was restored in mid-July 2021. About one quarter of the driving-related responses specifically mentioned northbound travel as a challenge; this particular concern was addressed through the reopening of northbound through traffic.

Protecting the J Church from traffic delay

Most survey respondents (88%) said it was important that the J Church does not get delayed in traffic. Improvements to protect the J Church from traffic congestion will be evaluated through a future Muni Forward transit priority project on the J Church line.