

First Agreement of its Kind in the Nation Enhances Public Safety with State-of-the Art Signaling Devices, Averts Potential Litigation

SAN FRANCISCO (June 20, 2007) San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) Executive Director and CEO Nathaniel P. Ford, Sr. and City Attorney Dennis Herrera today announced a comprehensive agreement with representatives for the blind and visually impaired community, in which the City will commit at least \$1.6 million over the next two and a half years to install accessible pedestrian signals. The state-of-the art signaling devices will assist visually impaired pedestrians by emitting a rapid ticking sound in tandem with the familiar "WALK" symbol displayed for sighted pedestrians. Other accessibility features include locator tones and vibrating pushbuttons to help those with visual impairments locate the devices, and the ability to provide helpful audible information such as street names when pedestrians press the pushbutton for one second or longer.

The agreement - which was reached without litigation through a collaborative process known as structured negotiations - represents the first of its kind in the nation, according to advocates for the blind and visually impaired community. In addition to the \$1.6 million committed to install accessible pedestrian signals at no fewer than 80 intersections over the next two and a half years, the agreement provides that the City will seek additional funding for more installations and develop a policy for San Francisco residents to request accessible pedestrian signals at other intersections.

"The agreement to install accessible pedestrian signals puts San Francisco in the national vanguard in working to enhance public safety for blind and visually impaired pedestrians. The SFMTA is committed to do everything it can to expand this program to its fullest potential in the years to come," said SFMTA Executive Director and CEO Nathaniel Ford. "I am very grateful to the advocates for San Francisco's blind community in working to advance this comprehensive agreement, especially Anita Aaron of LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and Eugene Lozano, Jr. and many members of the California Council of the Blind. I also appreciate the hard work of City Attorney Dennis Herrera and his deputies, whose commitment to finding a mutually beneficial solution made this agreement possible."

"This agreement reflects far more than our commitment to public safety - it represents San Francisco's commitment to engage the disability community in a manner that is cooperative rather than confrontational on matters involving accessibility and compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act," said City Attorney Dennis Herrera. "I'm very proud to have reached an accord that is the first of its kind in the nation, committing to install state of the art signaling devices while averting the possibility of costly litigation. I'm grateful to Nat Ford for his leadership and vision on this issue, and thankful, too, for the positive approach taken by advocates for the blind and visually impaired community."

Representatives of San Francisco's blind community applauded today's announcement. "We commend San Francisco for being the first public entity in the United States to

voluntarily sign a comprehensive agreement regarding accessible pedestrian signals - devices that are critical for pedestrian safety," said Anita Aaron, Executive Director of the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired on Van Ness Avenue.

Linda Porelle, President of the San Francisco Chapter of the California Council of the Blind, praised the City of San Francisco for "recognizing, through this historic agreement, the fundamental importance of Accessible Pedestrian Signals to the safety of blind and visually impaired pedestrians. We look forward to working closely with the City to fully implement the terms of the agreement."

In addition to the City, parties to the agreement are the California Council of the Blind, the LightHouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Independent Living Resource Center San Francisco, and Damien Pickering, a blind individual. In the negotiations, the blind and visually impaired community was represented by disability rights lawyers Lainey Feingold and Linda M. Dardarian.

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