

Shuttles' bus zone violations not cited

By **BRIAN RINKER**

TECH BUSES have illegally shared the city's Muni stops for years, but starting this summer, the city plans to crack down and charge the tech titans about \$1.06 for every stop they use, a fraction of the take if the city were to enforce the law the same for everybody.

Not only is it against the law for any vehicle to park in a red-curbed bus zone, it is illegal for all company buses and shuttles to use city-owned bus stops for private use. A citation costs \$271. Yet tech buses, infamously known collectively as "Google buses," have taken advantage of Muni zones with relative impunity dating back to 2004. Today, transports for 17 major tech companies dominate San Francisco's streets, shuttling uncounted thousands of workers from San Francisco to Silicon Valley and back.

The supervisors' budget analyst, in a recent report, estimated the shuttles

use 200 red-curbed bus zones around the city as pickup and drop-off locations 4,121 times every weekday. If the shuttles were cited each time they illegally pulled into a bus stop, the city would rake in fines totaling \$1,116,791 daily.

Of course, enforcing the law strictly would be akin to entrapment. So the S.F. Municipal Transportation Agency, which issues parking tickets, says it has a complaint-based policy

for citing bus-zone violations.

Over the past three years, police and parking control officers have issued 13,385 bus zone citations. Of those, only 45 were issued to commuter shuttles or buses, according to the budget analyst's report.

Another way of looking at that is that the city collected \$12,195 in bus-zone fines from commuter buses cited over three years while nonshuttle drivers paid \$3.6 million.

That is shockingly few citations even under the city's lenient shuttle enforcement policy, which SFMTA spokeswoman Kristen Holland explained:

"The practice of (parking control officers) has therefore been to issue citations to commuter shuttle buses that are using Muni zones when doing so is threatening the safety of bicyclists, pedestrians, or other drivers, or when doing so impedes Muni from entering or departing a zone or otherwise creates a hazard for Muni operations."

That policy apparently is largely ignored by meter minders if the observations of a Metropolitan Transportation Commission consultant cited in the budget analyst's study are accurate. The consultant noted that tech shuttles blocked traffic or a Muni bus an average of once every two hours.

One example the consultant noted was near the Glen Park BART station. Tech buses were unloading passengers in traffic, holding up other vehicles and endangering passengers 3½ times an hour because the buses, which can carry up to 80 passengers, didn't fully pull into the bus lane.

At Fillmore and Lombard streets, consultants spotted the private buses doing the same thing more than six times an hour. All are violations that result in citations for an average of about a dozen ordinary drivers daily.

Holland didn't explain the discrepancy in bus-zone enforcement. ■

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Vicki Mar Lane on Turk Street

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Tech buses take the heaviest toll

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TECH SHUTTLES



PHOTO MARJORIE BEGGS

A single-deck chartered Bauer bus turns into a red zone on Stanyan Street off Frederick in the Haight. Residents say buses start circling the neighborhood as early as 6 a.m. weekdays.

Making sense of \$1 fee

Why the charge for Muni stops is ridiculously low

By **MARJORIE BEGGS**

HERE'S THE MATH: According to the S.F. Municipal Transportation Agency, 375 shuttle buses — behemoths like Google's double-deckers for Silicon Valley employees and modest transports like Academy of Art University's 20-seaters for staff and students — make an estimated 4,121 stops each weekday day, largely in Muni bus zones. When the rest of us are caught idling in those red zones, we cough up \$271.

The shuttle providers not only pay zip, they don't have to divulge how many shuttles they operate, stops they make or passengers they carry.

The city is hoping to change that. It's poised to launch an 18-month, \$1.7 million pilot program July 1 to determine the extent of the burgeoning private transportation sector. MTA says the pilot data will enable it to figure out what the shuttles actually cost the city: their effect on traffic, streets, the environment, pedestrian and bicycle safety, housing prices.

The caveat: The numbers MTA used to design the pilot program are best guesses, based on years-old information handed over voluntarily from some shuttle providers. Pilot proponents insist the program will turn the guesses into facts, giving the city justification — or not — for charging providers to use our streets.

A coalition of tenant activists and labor leaders wanted a full EIR that would have produced the same data and, perhaps, had more legal teeth. The Board of Supervisors shot that down in April. May 1 the coalition filed a lawsuit to block the pilot.

But if the pilot flies, program costs will be entirely offset by a \$1.06 fee collected from buses using red zones.

At the suggestion of the County Transportation Authority, MTA in late 2011 began surveying shuttle providers about routes and stops in the city, primarily to quantify the benefits of taking private vehicles off the road. The collection continued through the summer of 2012. MTA identified 17 commuter shuttles and 20 intracity van and buses and at least 200 red zones where many were stopping illegally.

Those 200 Muni stops form the basis for the buck-plus fee, yet no one in city government will say where they are.



PHOTO TOM CARTER

Apple workers fetch their bikes from a chartered bus stopped illegally in a red zone on Valencia Street at 25th Street.

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