

# LPoV Candidate Questionnaire Nov 2022

## General Questions

Candidate Name \*

Janice Li

Candidate Website

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Why are you running for *this* office?

I love public transit and spent several years working as a transportation advocate, which led me to running for office in 2018. After some convincing, I felt that I had the knowledge and competency to do the job, that the board was well-positioned to make meaningful change based on the current membership, and that I had the background and connections to stay grounded and represent everyday riders.

In my four years on the BART Board, I'm proud of what I've been able to accomplish. I successfully led efforts to prioritize service recovery during the pandemic, created BART's first-ever low-income fare program, established BART's ambassador program to increase safety presence, and supported several affordable housing projects at BART stations.

Now, I'm running to serve another term to continue this work. As the board's vice president currently, I am poised to become board president next year and would be able to bring more attention and energy to San Francisco.

If elected, do you commit to completing your entire term?

I hope to.

What are your values, and how did you get them?

My values were formed much by my formative experiences of being a queer immigrant from Hong Kong who was raised by a single mother. It took many years for me to unpack my own upbringing and the privilege – and more often, the lack of privilege – that I had. This has taught me to understand the impact of the work I do by centering those who are the most marginalized and the most disparately harmed by existing policies.

What communities do you represent, and how do they hold you accountable?

I belong to and identify with a variety of communities. One in particular that's meaningful to me is the AAPI community, as an immigrant to the U.S. who was born in Hong Kong.

Since January, I have been working for the Coalition for Community Safety and Justice, a collaborative formed by CCDC, CYC, CPA, and CAA to address anti-AAPI hate and violence locally in SF through joint programming and advocacy. For many reasons including the desire to work within my own community, I decided to go beyond just repping the AAPI community as BART Board's first-ever AAPI woman and shift my career to being focused on working within the AAPI community.

My job now holds me accountable; even when I'm considering making a statement, taking a position, or endorsing a ballot measure as an individual, I make sure that I know where AAPI community leaders at the CCSJ orgs, API Council, and beyond stand.

It is also important to me that a lot of the AAPI leaders I look up to have long histories of cross-racial organizing as a foundation of how they advocate and rep their communities, which is to say, I also fundamentally believe in shared liberation as the only way to defeat white supremacy. The AAPI community cannot achieve justice and equity alone; our ability to fight for and win housing security, high-quality jobs, community safety, education equity and more is directly tied to the collective fights across all communities of color, especially for the Black and brown communities.

What three endorsements are you most proud of?

SF Labor Council, LGBTQ orgs (Equality, Victory), Rose Pak Dem Club

What are the top three issues you will work on, and how will you implement solutions in a timely manner?

Safety: I support increasing uniformed, civilian staff presence, including ambassadors and social workers, at stations and on trains to keep BART welcoming for all riders. I have also been a vocal advocate for BART's Not One More Girl campaign to address gender-based harassment on public transit. These are all new programs I supported and voted on since elected, and if re-elected, I would look to continue and expand these programs.

Affordability: I am committed to expanding Clipper START, BART's new low-income fare program we approved in 2019, so that more people can receive an even bigger discount if they qualify. I also support using BART land to build more affordable housing so that Bay Area residents can afford to stay here.

Better, more frequent service: I believe that the best way to bring riders back is by providing great transit service. Given the change in commute patterns due to the pandemic, I have prioritized and will continue to advocate for more trains on weekends, weekday evenings, and for SFO airport connections. I also support improving wayfinding and signage at stations to provide a better ridership experience.

Given all I was able to achieve in my first term, I would look to continue my approach of building allies on the board, engaging with advocates to establish support, partnering with labor unions closely, and developing strong relationships with BART management to hold them accountable.

What for-profit or non-profit boards do you serve on, including political organizations?

Currently none.

What local and state commissions or policy bodies do you serve on?

I serve on the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority Board and the OCII Oversight Board as appointments via my role on the BART Board.

Please describe specific accomplishments in your activism. What did you get done, and what was your role?

In my 8+ years working at the SF Bicycle Coalition, I worked on countless of transportation revenue measures; advocated for billions of dollars in allocation to bike-friendly, pedestrian-friendly, and transit-first projects; turned out community members to support approvals of individual projects; crafted legislation to fast-track bike, walk, and transit projects; and more. One accomplishment that I'm particularly proud of is the passage of 2019's Prop D, which is our local rideshare tax.

My role stemmed from about four years earlier, having been the main organizer of the Transportation Justice Coalition, which included several progressive organizations that SFBC did not historically have strong relationships with (CCHO, SDA, Urban Habitat, etc.). We worked towards a progressive transportation measure in 2016 that finally funded transit operations and not just capital improvements, but unfortunately, the powers that be tied that to a regressive measure. The dual Props J and K failed.

In the fallout of that measure, our TJ Coalition brainstormed and developed a list of progressive revenue mechanisms that could fund the same priorities we outlined. I facilitated the meetings, did the research on the measures, and worked closely with SFCTA staff so that these mechanisms became formalized in a year-long planning process in 2019 called Transportation Task Force 2045. Thanks to leadership from Supervisor Peskin and his office, TTF 2045 led to the implementation of several recommendations, including what eventually became the successful Prop D in 2019.

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Please list specific ways you have shown up for immigrants at risk of deportation.

I have not been deeply involved in this work, but as an immigrant myself who grew up with experiences of being harassed by Border Patrol regularly when crossing the U.S.-Canada border, this issue is personal to me.

I am proud to now work at Chinese for Affirmative Action, which was the founder of SFILEN and is on the front lines of defending immigrants from deportation. I have also attended multiple rapid response trainings (including one facilitated by SFILEN) on how to respond to ICE raids and best practices to ensure the safety of undocumented immigrants in particular when federal immigration agents are present.

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Please list specific ways you have fought against racism and white supremacy.

As a person of color, this issue is also personal for me.

I believe that BART must decrease and ideally end enforcement of low-level offenses, which we know disparately target Black and brown BART riders. I've been one of the most vocal board members in opposing attempts to ban panhandling and busking, and I directed BART Police to provide a demographic breakdown of low-level enforcement after the breakfast sandwich incident at Pleasant Hill Station in 2019.

In 2021, the BART board received a presentation from the Center of Policing Equity, which showed that fare enforcement policies had led to significant racial disparities. I'm proud that, with support from the board, BART management accepted all the recommendations from that report, including a review of fare enforcement policies.

Lastly, in my work as CCSJ Coalition Director, cross-racial healing and solidarity is central to all of our programming because we believe that AAPI community safety can only be achieved when all communities of color are safe, because the common enemy is white supremacy. I led the grant application process to expand CCSJ's programming and in June this year, we were successfully awarded \$5.7 million through this CA Department of Social Services' new Transformative Grants program. This funding will allow CCDC to create new, cross-racial programming at two key housing sites (Tenderloin Family Housing and Ping Yuen) while expanding CPA's cross-racial programming with Black- and brown-led organizations to engage youth.

Please give us some examples of situations you've encountered where gender and LGBTQ inequity was evident and what you did or would do to address it.

As a queer person in a same-sex relationship, this issue (again) is also personal to me.

One example I'm particularly proud of is that our Not One More Girl initiative (mentioned above) particularly centered the experiences of young women and gender non-binary individuals, and we featured trans women in our marketing campaign. The Not One More Girl initiative was so transformative that Stop AAPI Hate used this campaign as a model for a currently active state bill SB 1161, which directs the top 10 largest transit districts in California to address gender-based harassment in their system. What I am proud of is the work to acknowledge that gender-based harassment is truly and LGBTQ issue, and I have used by position to uplift the particular intersection of AAPI and LGBTQ communities. Read B.A.R.'s coverage here:

<https://www.ebar.com/story.php?ch=Politics&sc=&id=317753>

Amid a homelessness crisis, how can the City and County of San Francisco improve the effectiveness of our city's homelessness and supportive housing services?

I am certainly not an expert in this field, so any policy ideas I would look to develop regarding homelessness and supporting housing services would be done in partnership with homeless advocates, first and foremost.

With that said, we have to look at the macro issue first. We've reached an untenable point where everything has become so expensive that low-income folks are struggling to survive and the historic lack of investment in our public infrastructure means that our public institutions (schools, public transit, parks, etc.) are unable to keep up with the widening inequities. The outcome is displacement or even worse, the criminalization of poverty that shows up in visible ways such as the homelessness crisis we see on our streets or disproportionate incarceration rates of Black men.

Finding compassionate solutions to addressing the real homelessness that exist at BART was a priority for me when I was elected. I joined a few allies on the board to direct BART staff and police to engage in a broad, community-driven process to develop new approaches to homelessness, substance use, and behavioral health issues at BART as an alternative to law enforcement. This outreach wrapped up in early 2021 and led to the creation of a new crisis intervention team, which would be staffed by people with social work experience. After passing our FY22 budget a few months later, we have now staffed up this team and have begun regular deployment.

Based on our outreach, there was broad agreement across riders, frontline staff, and community groups that we need civilian, non-police responses. I also joined my BART board allies in noting the need for our local counties to step up more; a transit agency cannot and should not be responsible for solving deep systemic issues that our region faces.

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What is your favorite park, and why?

Heron's Head Park. It was one of the first parks I visited (on a work trip learning about the Blue Greenway) when I moved to the city, and I've loved it since for what a special place it has been to reconnect the community with the San Francisco Bay.

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Why do you want the League of Pissed Off Voters' endorsement?

I received The League of Pissed Off Voters' endorsement when I ran for BART Board in 2018. I can't count the number of bar crawls I've attended to pass out League guides, which included the one we held for my campaign (which started at the Little Shamrock on Lincoln). I will seek an endorsement from any local club that I feel I'm aligned with in values, and I believe that in the case for the League. I also believe that supporting someone also means holding them accountable, and I want more opportunities to be held accountable particularly by those whom I share values with.

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Is there anything else you want to tell us?

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## BART Board

How would you advance equitable public safety? How do you envision police reform within BART's policing services? How do you envision working with BART Police Citizen Review Board? (Please answer all three questions.)

Since I've joined the BART board, we have created several new programs that have increased civilian safety presence including bathroom attendants, elevator attendants, ambassadors, and crisis intervention specialists. We are in the process of showing that civilian, unarmed staff can meaningfully increase actual and perceived safety for riders, and I've pushed hard on staff to collect and show data so we understand and continue increasing the effectiveness of these programs.

I worked with my BART Police Citizen Review Board (BPCRB) appointed representative who was chair in 2021 and supported efforts to put together a task force to more deeply understand fare evasion at BART – the numbers of people who fare evade, why they do it, the impact it has on BART, and the effectiveness of BART's efforts. I believe our current efforts are not data-driven and therefore ineffective.

I admit that the movement to form this task force has been slow, especially since my BPCRB rep is no longer chair. With that said, I'm proud that we have moved to no longer conflate issues of homelessness or behavioral health issues with fare evasion; rather than bringing law enforcement approaches to social issues, I strongly supported the formation of Crisis Intervention Specialists who would be trained, professional social workers to engage with those experiencing homelessness, behavioral health issues, or substance use at our stations. I am now actively working with staff to develop metrics to understand the positive impact, particularly on safety, that this new presence has.

Lastly, I continue to be in regular contact with Rev. Wanda Johnson and Cephus "Uncle Bobby" Jones, Oscar Grant's mother and uncle, who have led the charge for his justice after being murdered by BART cops in 2009. I do believe that BART has taken the reforms (e.g. formation of BPCRB, creation of an Independent Police Auditor role) but those reforms require constant accountability from the BART board to remain effective.

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Please explain your position on maintaining and improving BART's infrastructure, specifically whether you support expanding BART's service throughout the Bay Area versus focusing on supporting BART's existing core system. How would you pay for expansions and core system support?

I have always supported the strengthening of BART's core system, and most recently, I successfully advocated SFCTA alongside Dir. Bevan Dufty to dedicate more funding to BART's core capacity through their transportation sales tax reauthorization ballot measure.

There are only two expansion efforts that I'm supportive of, but I believe that my role being on the BART board is to closely watchdog these processes, work with staff to make improvements to the processes, and bring political leadership when things aren't going well. These two projects are Link 21 (project managed by BART), which is the mega-region project that includes the planning and development of a second transbay rail crossing, and BART to San Jose (project managed by VTA), which opened its Phase 1 to Berryessa during the pandemic and is now about to break ground for the Phase 2 to downtown SJ.

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How do you think BART should be responding to the COVID-19 pandemic at this point?

With strong support from the BART board, BART has focused on bringing back service rather than austerity measures. I strongly continue that path and look to further increase service on weekday evenings, on the weekends, and to/from SFO.

We also have been a vocal board pushing for strong COVID policies, including passing a vaccine mandate for employees, board members, and contractors doing on-site work for BART in October 2021. Then after a ruling by a Trump-appointed judge in Florida overturned the mask mandate implemented by FTA and CDC, I worked with disability advocates to pass a BART-specific mask mandate to address the safety needs of all, particularly those who are immuno-compromised. BART is currently the only transit agency in the Bay Area that still requires wearing masks. I would look to continue this sort of leadership if re-elected.

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Would you make any changes to the way BART currently calculates fares?

Yes, I'm definitely open to it. Because BART uniquely uses distance-based fares, it has made fare coordination difficult though I recognize any changes would require a significant amount of work and engagement with other transit agencies and with our riders. In general, I strongly support increasing seamlessness between the 27 transit operators in the Bay Area, which create balkanized and uncoordinated fare policies and service schedules. I've been strongly supportive of seamless transit policies, brought a resolution to the board that was passed unanimously to support these policies, and have supported state bills (notably SB 917, which unfortunately was just stalled in Assembly Appropriations Committee) to actually implement them. With my lead, BART was actually the first transit agency to support seamless principles, which include coordinated schedules, broader fare discounts, more coherent fare pricing, restructuring of our government agencies to support coordination, and more.

How would you address transit affordability?

As noted above, I strongly support the expansion of BART's low-income fare program. Currently, the discount is only 20% (compared to Muni's 50% discount) and eligibility is for individuals making 200% of the federal poverty level, which is incredibly low given the high AMIs in the Bay Area. Ultimately, we will need more investments from MTC (which convenes the Clipper Executive Board) into expanding fare programs, and we need more state and federal funds to be eligible for fare programs.

I believe that expanding low-income fare programs are the most realistic and practical way to get to free fare programs. It's also possible that state legislation (like the current AB 1919) could help fast-track these efforts as well.

Do you support eliminating the "excursion fare"?

☐ Option 1

BART's Board of Directors has only two persons of color on its nine-person board. If elected, how will you bring in the voices of marginalized communities?

☐ Option 1

What metrics would you use to determine your success as Board Member in four years?

It's all about the ridership. Our weekday ridership has plateaued in the past month around 35% pre-pandemic levels while our weekend swing can be anywhere from 55% to over 70% pre-pandemic levels. We need to be nimble to the changing travel and commute patterns and match high-quality, safe, reliable service to meet those needs, and if we do it right, the main metric will be the return of ridership.

As noted above, we launched several new programs since I joined the board and we need to show that those programs are effective and meaningful so that they can continue. For example, with our low-income fare program, we have to show that more people are enrolling, which is leading to increased ridership, particularly for low-income folks.

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