

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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TO: Commissioners and Alternates

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SUBJECT: Briefing on Bicycle, Pedestrian and Wheelchair Access on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge
(For Commission consideration on February 5, 2009)

Summary and Recommendations

Traffic forecasting and bridge operation analyses show that traffic conditions on the I-580 corridor could be significantly improved both in the short-term and in the future by increasing the lane configuration on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge from four lanes to six lanes. A roadway shoulder on both bridge decks could be converted to a travel lane to accommodate this traffic demand. One of these roadway shoulders has been studied for use as a bicycle, pedestrian and wheelchair path during non-peak commute hours, preferably with a barrier between traffic lanes and non-motorized traffic. Implementing such an option will require a permit from BCDC. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has determined that using the shoulder for public access would pose a safety hazard to motorists and has indicated that it will not construct a barrier and path, even if funding were available.

Caltrans briefed the Commission on this issue at BCDC's April 3, 2008 meeting. At that time, the Commission supported public access on the bridge and determined that bicycle and pedestrian access would further the goals of: (1) expanding the San Francisco Bay Trail; and (2) providing alternative modes of transportation. The Commission requested that Caltrans return by September 30, 2008 and provide additional details about joint use of the structure for both motorized and non-motorized trips. Specifically, the Commission requested that Caltrans



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provide traffic and safety data and a cost-benefit analysis for public access on the bridge and the eastern approach.

To date, Caltrans has not submitted the requested analysis and data described above. As a result of this, no information on the topic has been included in this staff report. It is expected that Caltrans will offer its views on these issues at the February 5, 2009 meeting and may provide the requested details about joint use of the structure for both motorized and non-motorized trips. Because of the Commission's expressed interest in providing public access on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, the public will be given an opportunity to comment and the Commission may provide further policy guidance on this issue.

Staff Report

Background. The Richmond-San Rafael Bridge opened in September 1956, providing a critical link for motorists between Marin County and Contra Costa County. Up to 77,000 vehicles cross the 4.5-mile bridge daily. The bridge has two decks, each with two 12-foot travel lanes and one 12-foot shoulder, which are reserved for emergencies and maintenance vehicles. Since 1956, direct access for pedestrians and bicycles on the bridge has been prohibited, requiring bicyclists to cross the bridge by boarding Golden Gate Transit buses or by using a taxi service.

In September 1997, the Commission issued BCDC Permit No. 1-97 to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for the seismic retrofit of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge between Point San Quentin in San Rafael and Castro Point in Richmond. As a condition of approval, public access benefits were required in the vicinity of the bridge. The Commission, however, did not require bicycle and pedestrian access on the bridge largely because the issues related to motorists and non-motorists sharing the bridge had not been adequately studied. When the Commission approved the seismic retrofit project, Caltrans voluntarily stated that it would use its best efforts to provide public access across the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge by preparing a study in consultation with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) to determine the feasibility of providing such access. Further, if the study determined that some access was feasible, Caltrans would ensure that the access was provided on the bridge as soon as the retrofit work was done.

BCDC Support for Bicycle and Pedestrian Access on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. The Commission has been a long-standing advocate for pedestrian and bicycle access across the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge and other Bay bridges. The Richmond-San Rafael Bridge is a key component of the regional San Francisco Bay Trail, a project that is envisioned to link all the counties in the Bay Area and all toll bridges crossing the Bay. BCDC's *San Francisco Bay Plan* supports the efforts of the Bay Trail Project and alternative forms of transportation. For example, the *Bay Plan* policies on public access state that:

“Federal, state, regional, and local jurisdictions, special districts, and the Commission should cooperate to provide appropriately sited, designed and managed public access, especially to link the entire series of shoreline parks, regional trail systems (such as the San Francisco Bay Trail) and existing public access areas to the extent feasible....”

The *Bay Plan* policies on transportation state that:

”Because of the continuing vulnerability of the Bay to filling for transportation projects, the Commission should continue to take an active role in Bay Area

regional transportation and related land use planning affecting the Bay, particularly to encourage alternative methods of transportation and land use planning efforts that support transit and that do not require fill.”

As part of BCDC Permit No. 1-97, the Commission found that, “[t]here are many laws and policies, including laws and policies which Caltrans operates under, and especially the Commission’s laws and policies, which state that bicycle and pedestrian access should be considered in transportation projects and should be provided wherever feasible.” The Commission went on to declare that, “[t]he Commission has analyzed the public access issues and found that the provision of bicycle and pedestrian access across the bridge is desirable and would maximize the project’s public benefits.” During an October 6, 2006 briefing by MTC to the Commission on the topic of public access on the bridge, commissioners further stated that bike paths and pedestrian ways are critical for the long-term health and quality of life, that a bicycle and pedestrian facility could offset future traffic demand, and that a moveable barrier seemed to be the most sensible way to accommodate motor vehicles and public access.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Access Studies. Much work has been done over the past 11 years studying the feasibility of access on the bridge. In an effort to honor its 1997 commitment to study the feasibility of public access on the bridge, Caltrans and others have conducted a number of studies. In 1998, Caltrans concluded that a new cantilevered bicycle/ pedestrian facility would be preferable to a buffer-separated, on-deck bicycle and pedestrian facility using the existing bridge shoulder. That study, however, cited deficiencies in available data that precluded definitive safety analyses. To address these deficiencies, Caltrans then commissioned the Mineta Transportation Institute to evaluate public access use of freeways, toll bridges and tunnels. In 2001, Caltrans found the Mineta Report to be inconclusive on the issues of capacity, operations, safety and enforcement. In 2002, BCDC requested that Caltrans, MTC and the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) prepare an additional study to assess public access on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. As part of that study, MTC and BATA presented a traffic forecasting and bridge operation analysis in November 2005 that showed that traffic conditions on the I-580 corridor could be significantly improved both in the short-term and in the future by going from a four-lane to a six-lane bridge configuration. To enable a six-lane bridge, the shoulders on both the upper and lower deck would be converted to travel lanes.

A project study report was finalized in November 2007, aiming to develop feasible, safe and fundable alternatives for bicycle and pedestrian access across the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. The project study report identified a preferred public access alternative (Alternative 1B2) consisting of a bi-directional, 10.5-foot-wide multiple-use pathway on the westbound deck of the bridge through the deployment of a movable barrier. Bicycle and pedestrian access would be available at all times except during peak commute hours for westbound traffic. The report concluded with a recommendation that the Project Approval/ Environmental Document Phase be initiated. In 2007, MTC identified funds to cover capital improvement costs associated with bicycle, pedestrian and wheelchair access on the bridge. Those funds may no longer be available.

In a March 7, 2008 letter to BATA, the California Department of Transportation stated that “Caltrans is unable to approve the non-standard features associated with Alternative 1B2.” The letter described Caltrans’ safety concerns, which included that freeway facilities without shoulders provide less recovery space for errant vehicles, that incidents involving long vehicles could result in an obstructed traveled way and that deployment of the moveable barrier would increase accident occurrences. Congestion and emergency response time on the bridge was also

stated as a concern. Lastly, the letter outlined that the actual cost, including support cost and operation and maintenance for Alternative 1B2 would be \$119.4 million, significantly higher than the \$42.5 million cost that was estimated in the 2007 project study report.

On April 3, 2008, Caltrans again briefed the Commission on this issue. At that meeting, the Commission continued its support of pedestrian, bicycle and wheelchair access on the bridge and determined that such public access would further the goals of: (1) expanding the San Francisco Bay Trail; and (2) providing alternative modes of transportation for commuters. The Commission requested that Caltrans return by September 30, 2008 and provide statistics and other details about joint use of the structure for both motorized and non-motorized trips. Specifically, the Commission requested that Caltrans provide traffic and safety data and a cost-benefit analysis for public access on the bridge and the eastern approach. It should be noted that Caltrans is not under a regulatory requirement by BCDC to provide this information. Caltrans, however, offered to provide the information.

To date, BCDC has received none of the above-mentioned details that the Commission requested at its April 3, 2008 meeting.

BCDC Permit Authority. The McAteer-Petris Act and the San Francisco Bay Plan both state that maximum feasible public access, consistent with the project, should be provided in and through every new development in the Bay or on the shoreline. Converting a roadway shoulder to a travel lane and/ or a bicycle and pedestrian pathway would require a BCDC permit because such a project would constitute a significant change in use, as described by Regulation Section 10125(b)(3), which states that a change in use includes a substantial change in the intensity of use. At this time, however, there is no BCDC permit requirement for Caltrans to provide such access.