



San Francisco Tomorrow

Working to Protect the Urban Environment

Issue 372

Will you want to live in San Francisco... Tomorrow?

Apr / May 2016

M Streetcar Reconfiguration

The most recent reconfiguration of the M streetcar plan, presented in February, is a great improvement over the elevated solution that preceded it. With the M and K streetcars now going underground, congestion is relieved at both the Ocean Avenue and terrible St. Francis Circle crossings. The 19th Avenue crossing near Stonestown is eliminated, as is the one at 19th and Serra; after travelling underground all the way from West Portal, the line would finally make grade at Randolph, where the road widens. Additionally, the new configuration would feature two tracks in each direction, instead of the current single track.

Where the new M streetcar fails

Unfortunately, the new configuration ends the M line at Parkmerced, where passengers must transfer to a J train for the Oceanview district. Besides this strange inconvenience, service into Oceanview is likely to deteriorate, since it is a less well-connected neighborhood politically. Both new configurations eliminate the current stop at the Senior Center at Temple Methodist Church. Seniors and handicapped persons who have depended on the Beverly Street stop for decades will now have to find a way to another stop; this is something the neighborhood should fight. Removal of the current Lakeside stop, an option in the plan, could have a dramatic effect on the businesses there.

Why the new M streetcar line is better

In my opinion, this underground solution was necessary because the 18,000 new residents of Parkmerced would be poorly served by the previous transportation plan. It provided no solution for the St Francis Circle congestion which is probably the biggest hiccup on both the M and K lines. The dual lines in each direction will certainly speed things up, and will perhaps spur similar changes in the tunnel itself.

The elevated track of the Junipero Serra / 19th Avenue exchange would have had numerous failings. The noise created by an elevated platform would have been hard to mitigate, causing blight in at least two nearby towers. One of the elevated plans would also have the streetcar make

grade on the narrow part of Randolph Street (39' 6" wide). This would leave 11' 6" for two rows of parking and two rows of traffic, obviously not enough space for either activity. If the section has to be elevated, better to end it at 19th Avenue.

Oceanview's difficulties

For quite some time, Oceanview has had to endure the hardship of I-280 creating an impassible barrier along its southern border. The entrances to the neighborhood have also been minimized by traffic engineers more interested in traffic flow than economic opportunity for the residents. Also, many parts of the neighborhood were designed with "super blocks" 3 or 4 times larger than normal ones in San Francisco. These giant blocks, popular in the early 1920s, minimize the opportunity for commerce by having fewer intersections. Street corners typically encourage family and other neighborhood businesses, which is why the concept of super blocks has been abandoned by city planners.

The Oceanview district does not need a divided J line to add to its woes.

-- Glenn Rogers, PLA

**Come to SFT's Annual Awards Dinner
Wednesday, May 18, 2016**

Delancey Street, 600 Embarcadero

**Honorees: Hene Kelly, Michael Lyon, Sue
Vaughan, Ed Mason**

Dinner only: \$55

Sponsor: \$80

Patron (includes guest): \$150

**RSVP: 415-585-9489 or
jenclary@sbcglobal.net**

Vote NO on Proposition B

Are you willing to give up all outside control on how the Department of Recreation and Park spends its money? You will, if you vote to support Proposition B on the June ballot.

Of course, Rec and Park needs funding, as does every other city department. But even though Proposition B provides a guaranteed flow of funds to Rec and Park, it comes at a high cost to the public -- the City loses the ability to give that money to departments that may desperately need it and you lose the little say you have now in how Rec and Park spends its money.

How is Rec and Park funded now?

Rec and Park currently gets funding from various sources, including appropriations from the discretionary funds in the General Fund. The pool of discretionary funds is also used to fund non-enterprise departments such as the Department of Children, Youth, and Families. During the yearly budget process, the Board of Supervisors decides who gets what percent of those discretionary funds.

What changes if Proposition B passes?

- Proposition B mandates approximately \$4.5 billion of funding for Rec and Park's exclusive use over the next 30 years.
- Proposition B takes away from the Board of Supervisors the authority to adjust that funding during the budget process. The Board is our voice in City government; if the Board loses their authority over Rec and Park's funding, then we do too.
- By committing funding to Rec and Park, Proposition B potentially takes away those funds from other General Fund Departments, regardless of the level of need in those departments. Need money for childrens' services? No matter how many people you send to City Hall during the budget hearings, you are not going to be able to touch the amounts reserved for Rec and Park.
- Proposition B is not a bond; there is no list of specific projects or uses for you to review. This is just funding for Rec and Park to use as they see fit.
- There is no teeth in Proposition B's requirement that Rec and Park adopt annual plans, including a so-called 'equity analysis' to ensure that the funding will be used equally all over San Francisco. Rec and Park gets to create the equity analysis and Rec and Park gets to evaluate how well they are meeting their own goals. No matter how unfairly the money is distributed throughout the City, the Supervisors cannot force Rec and Park to change where they spend their money.
- Even the Controller's opinion letter states that Proposition B violates City policy and "would have a significant impact on the cost of government."
- Once approved by the voters, the City is stuck with this set-aside for 30 years. Proposition B can only be reversed by going back to the voters with a new Charter Amendment.

Opposing Proposition B will not deprive Rec and Park of funding; they can still make a case for their needs along with every other department during the budget process. In fact, they are planning to ask for yet another bond in 2 years!

It is vital that the people of San Francisco have a voice through the Board as to what happens to their parks and recreation facilities. By giving Rec and Park a blank check, Proposition B would deprive the people of this voice.

-- *Kathy Howard*

Voters' Right to Know Update

First, the bad news.

In March, the petition drive to place the Voters Right to Know Act (VRTK) - intended to address systemic issues in California's campaign finance and disclosure laws - on the November 2016 ballot was suspended. Jim Heerwagen, proponent/funder who was paying petition circulators to collect most of the signatures (700,000), was unable to secure the additional funds he had been counting on to match his own contribution. He had collected about 200,000 paid signatures, and volunteers like you and me had collected about 15,000.

Now, the good news.

The initiative effort has had important impacts on bills before the Legislature. First, the VRTK's disclosure provisions, stronger than those of the Legislature's previously watered-down California DISCLOSE Act, were put into the DISCLOSE Act (AB 700, Gomez-Levine). Then the Legislature, noticing the large number of people circulating and signing the VRTK initiative, passed AB 700 in the Assembly on January 27 with a 75%, bipartisan vote (every Democrat, nine Republicans). And this time, there was no opposition from the leadership of statewide labor unions. The California DISCLOSE Act establishes a first-in-the-nation requirement that political ads clearly disclose their top three true funders on the ads themselves, and uses language nearly identical to the VRTK initiative.

Second, SB 1349, introduced in February by Senator Bob Hertzberg to modernize Cal-Access, the Secretary of State's lobbying and campaign filings database, has passed the Senate Elections committee and is now in Appropriations. SB 1349 thus puts in place one of the most important parts of the VRTK initiative, mirroring ideas in VRTK such as a unique identifier for each donor and improved search tools for the public to access these important disclosures. It also makes filing easier.

AB 1200 (Gordon), introduced last year and revived this year in February, is another active bill with tough disclosures similar to those in the Voters' Right to Know initiative. AB 1200 extends laws on lobbying to require those seeking government contracts to register as lobbyists.

With all the attention paid to the disclosure in the VRTK initiative, AB 700 is now in a much better position to pass the Senate and to be signed into law by the Governor. Jim Heerwagen and his Voters' Right to Know team are now working with the California Clean Money Action Fund in support of AB 700 and SB 1349. The fight against Dark Money continues.

- *Joni Eisen*

Housing: Solutions vs. Palliatives

Two major reasons for the destructive inflation besetting our City are being effectively ignored. First, San Francisco properties have become pawns in the global economy. We are a piggy bank for cheap, mostly offshore speculative money. Secondly, the city has pushed beyond its holding capacity for infrastructure and geotechnical risks. This raises costs and reduces sustainability.

How can the leadership of this City meaningfully address these problems?

So far, what's been proposed are mostly palliatives and placebos: requiring a higher percentage of inclusionary housing (over 25% vs. 12%) and giving density (and height) bonuses for building additional affordable units. The gains from inclusionary housing targets are paltry, inflationary, & often not even being built. Increasing supply of primarily midrise to high-rise housing benefits mostly affluent tenants and buyers and furthers the inexorable upward push of inflation.

Planning policies also ignore, at peril to our population, fundamental seismic and climatic constraints to growth and the need to improve the safety of existing structures.

The city cannot continue to grant cheap paper rights to build in some politically promised future. We urgently need to go deeper and address both "bad" money and safety/sustainability issues:

Limitations on offshore speculative money. San Francisco, together with other highly impacted cities,

should propose and support State and Federal regulation of offshore money and financial derivatives based on U.S government loans to overseas investors.

Credible planning based on holding capacity. We cannot build ever upward on our seismically active land and our ocean and bay surroundings without a great burden of future costs and loss of life.

Taxes to put brakes on land costs. There should a speculative value tax on any land costs that exceed the normal proportion of land to development costs.

Public Development Corporation. The County, as an administrative district of the state, should create a public development corporation to act as a preservation and development partner to private enterprise using the Local Agency Formation Commission process. Projects would be those meeting public needs as defined through Planning.

Expansion of public ownership of land. Projects using substantial public resources should not get free rides. San Francisco should make aggressive and appropriate use of ground rents or proportionate revenues from public investments.

We have the tools to leverage and moderate market forces. And to retrofit and build a safe city. There is no "free market" just as there is no free lunch or invisible hand. The need is now and it is urgent to change our ways or to change our leadership.

-- Bernard Choden

Recycle or Not To Recycle

When I worked for the San Francisco Department of Social Services my boss suggested I go to a seminar on recycling. At the seminar, I mentioned to a man I was having coffee with that this kind of event would not be necessary if we did not have companies foisting on us all the stuff that needed to be recycled. Without comment, he subsequently mounted the stage and began to tall us the importance of recycling with hints on how to accomplish it. It turned out he was a spokesperson for manufacturers of plastic and other packaging material.

I still recycle. However, now I am wise enough to know that recycling is definitely not the whole answer. Recycling puts the burden on the purchaser to figure out how to dispose of the waste. It thus leaves the manufacturers of packaging free to come up with even more over packaging. For instance, at Senior Lunch Centers, Seniors were given cartons of milk. The cartons were compostable. Now the same Seniors are given miniature plastic bottles of milk. These require recycling and that adds to the cost of the milk, both to our pocketbooks and the environment.

Recycling does have aspects of imperialism. For instance, used electronic and automotive parts are shipped from the US to factories overseas that wreck the environment and expose low wage workers to dangerous, even lethal materials. Volatile mercury is used to extract gold from incalculable tons of circuit boards in China. High concentrations of lead contaminate acres of ground around battery recycling factories in Mexico.

How could we produce less stuff that needs to be recycled? A few ideas. Less product packaging. Produce longer lasting durable products so they will not have to be replaced as often. Less emphasis on our having to get the latest product with the latest gimmicks. More lending of things through libraries, like tools to avoid buying individual items for use only a few times. Using material that could be composted at home instead of needing recycling.

(continued)



SFT's June Endorsements

Prop B - Open Space set-aside - **No**
Prop D - OCC review of police shootings - **Yes**
Prop E - Paid sick leave revision - **Yes**
Prop AA - Bay Restoration Fund - **Yes**

Be an active member!

SFT will soon begin sending out notifications of public meetings and other ways you can make your voice heard via email, twitter, and possibly sms. You can sign up for email notifications on our website. You can unsubscribe from event notifications at any time without unsubscribing from our other emails by following the instructions in the notification.

Recycle or Not To Recycle (continued)

For products like electronics or car batteries, the issue is more complex since some of these products exist to solve other environmental problems. Electric cars for one. But technological advances also use increasingly toxic materials. Some obvious solutions: better mass transit that would obviate the need for cars; restoring downtown shopping areas vs. car dependent malls; getting rid of gigantic internet server farms devoted to porn, violent on-line videogames, etc. all could reduce electronic waste.

But how might we reduce electronic waste from useful and beneficial electronic hardware? Paradoxically, producing only higher-power circuit boards, speedy with lots of memory, means we would not have to upgrade as much software advances. Eliminating patents (gasp!) so many more devices could work with others could mean we could buy and dispose of fewer devices. Developing less toxic materials for electronics is always a goal, though we are sometimes disappointed when these materials show up as toxic years later. What we would give up is probably miniaturization.

Ultimately, we would have to make many choices, balancing convenience with the greater good of society. But in order to have these choices take effect, we have to gain much more power in society.

-- Denise D'Anne; Michael Lyon

(Michael Lyon and Denise D'Anne are both on the Board of Gray Panthers and other organizations together. Both are deeply concerned about the trajectory of our environment.)

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