

SF MAYOR'S RAILYARDS STUDY SIDETRACKS DTX

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The most important Bay Area transit expansion to come along in over half a century is the extension of Caltrain (DTX) into downtown San Francisco. DTX consists of a 1.3 mile long tunnel from the existing 4th and King St. terminal of the 78-mile long Caltrain line to San Francisco's new Transbay Transit Center (TTC) at First and Mission. When completed, the new TTC/DTX connection will cause tens of thousands of Peninsula and San Francisco motorists to shift from car to train.

So, one might ask, "What is City Hall doing to advance the project"? So far as we can determine, nothing. On the contrary, instead of helping, members of Mayor Ed Lee's staff are holding DTX hostage while they sort out the future of Mission Bay, located in southeast San Francisco. This delaying action is embodied in what the Mayor calls the Railyards Alternative and I-280 Boulevard (RAB) Feasibility Study. The RAB Study appears to be a direct response to the demands of influential Mission Bay developers that the full and profitable build-out of Mission Bay take precedence over all other considerations.

Transportation experts in San Francisco, Sacramento, Washington D.C. and elsewhere have long recognized the importance of DTX. When Caltrain finally arrives, it will be in the heart of San Francisco's 340,000 person employment center, within easy walking distance of tens of thousands of transit-oriented housing units. It will connect Caltrain and HSR to four BART lines, six Muni light rail lines and over 40 bus lines, thereby making the new TTC the most significant nexus of public transit systems in western North America. More importantly, it will significantly reduce the need to drive into and through San Francisco.

On November 9, 1999, the San Francisco voters weighed in. Recognizing the value of bringing passenger trains into the heart of the city, they voted overwhelmingly to approve Proposition H. Prop H called on City Government to give DTX its highest fund-raising and implementation priority and that it refrain from "taking any actions that would conflict with the extension."

The TTC will be complete and open for bus service in 2017. Yet if the RAB planners have their way, the space far below the TTC already created for the new train terminal will stand empty and waiting for trains for additional decades (see photo).

This is because in recent years San Francisco's City Hall politicians have unaccountably thumbed their noses at the Proposition H mandate to bring Caltrain (and



Gare du Nord, Paris
One of the world's great train stations



Empty train level in San Francisco's TTC.
S.F. Mayor Edwin Lee's legacy?

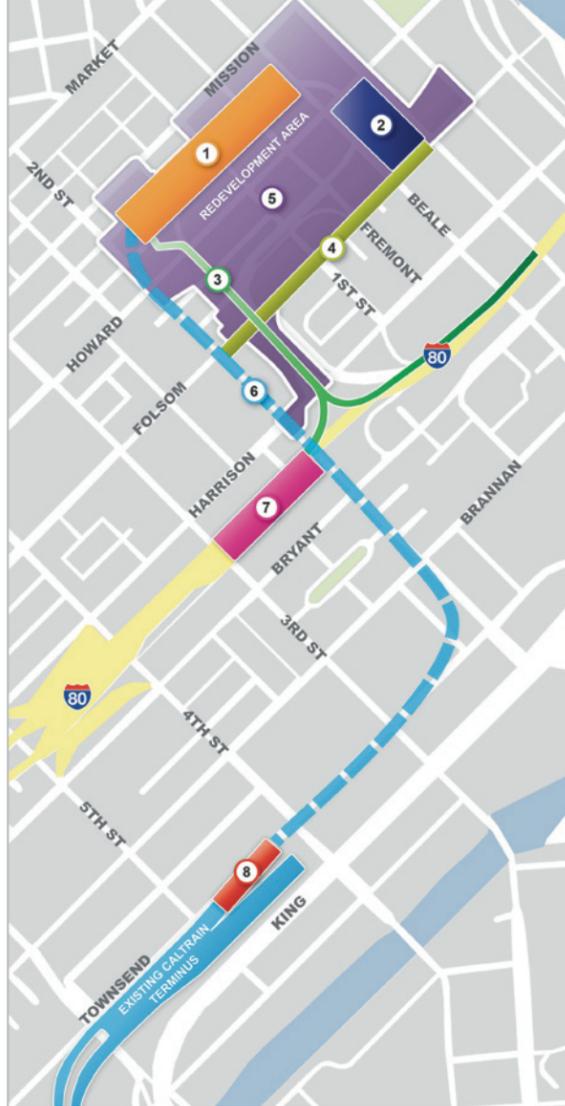
future high-speed rail) into downtown San Francisco. Here are seven destructive elements of Mayor Lee's ongoing RAB Study that are compounding the problem:

1. The Risk of Delay

Because of past SF City Hall support, the DTX project is currently first in line for

Bay Area federal New Starts funding. But unfortunately, thanks to Mission Bay "planning", the DTX project is currently stalled while Lee Administration planners stew over grandiose but demonstrably impractical Mission Bay build-out alternatives. (The planners like to say that because Caltrain isn't as yet electrified they aren't holding up the project. This is false; if electrification funding falls through, it would still be possible to access the TTC using hybrid locomotives)

If DTX continues to be locally impeded in this way, it will sooner or later be knocked out of the New Starts running by a "ready-to-go" project in some other city. Current expectations are that, if the Mayor and his inexperienced Mission Bay planners persist, they will delay DTX by at least 25 years and increase the cost of getting Caltrain downtown by at least six billion dollars.



1. Transbay Transit Center
2. Temporary bus terminal
3. New bus ramps
4. Folsom Street
5. Transit Center District & Redevelopment Area
6. Downtown Rail Extension
7. Bus Storage
8. New Fourth & King Caltrain Station

2. Trip Times

The Mission Bay planners have repeatedly stated that their proposals would reduce train trip times. How? By how many seconds? And at what cost? The planners don't say.

3. Criticisms of TTC/DTX

The Mayor's Mission Bay planners have no experience in engineering design, passenger rail operations or construction cost estimating. Yet in the furtherance of their Mission Bay development goals, they often take gratuitous and usually incorrect public slaps at the TTC/DTX program. Such criticisms are not helpful.

4. Traffic Impact of Removing I-280

According to MTC, by 2035, over 250,000 automobiles will be entering San Francisco from the south every day, much of it on I-280. If the entire north end of I-280 is removed as SPUR and the Mayor's planners desire, what happens to all that traffic? How would it affect the Mission District? How would it affect Mission Bay? Again, the planners don't say.

5. Traffic Impact of the Arena

It is proposed that an Arena for the Golden

State Warriors be placed east of Third and 16th Streets at the edge of the Bay (not shown on map). This idea is one that has been eagerly promoted by Mayor Lee and other local politicians. Project sponsors boast that the new Arena would play host to no fewer than 225 major events a year. If things go ahead as planned, each of these events would attract thousands of cars to Mission Bay, often during afternoon rush periods. Despite City Hall efforts to obfuscate the fact, this monumental squeeze would create massive new traffic jams and parking agonies in the South-of-Market and Mission Bay districts.

On January 8, 2016 the Mission Bay Alliance filed a lawsuit demanding that the Arena developers properly identify and mitigate the environmental impacts of their facility. Eight days later, the developers elected to put their project on hold for a year in order to give themselves time to deal with the environmental issues they previously ignored.

6. Impact of Eliminating Caltrain's 4th and King Rail Yard

In accordance with the demands of Mission Bay developers that "there be no visible railroad tracks anywhere in Mission Bay", the Mayor's planners say they want to move Caltrain's existing San Francisco rail yard to some as yet undefined site to the south. This reveals an abysmal lack of understanding of passenger rail operations and the value of a train marshalling and storage yard located near the end of a train line. The staffs of Caltrain and the California High-Speed Rail Authority are understandably opposed to this idea. Mission Bay can be developed without the process undermining San Francisco's passenger rail connection to Silicon Valley and beyond.



S.F. Mayor's Freeway Replacement

7. Impact of Relocating the 4th and King Station to Third Street

The long-established 4th and King Street Station is well served by three Muni light rail lines and at least 8 bus lines. Moreover it is strategically located to serve the South-of-Market area and Mission Bay District. Moving it a half a mile to an out-of-the-way location on Third Street where it would be less well served by Muni makes no sense.

Conclusion

DTX is the most important transit-integrating project to come along in the Bay Area since the original BART system was conceived in the 1950's. San Franciscans have been calling for the extension of Caltrain for decades. It's been over 16 years since the voters of San Francisco voted 69.3% for Proposition H.

San Francisco's Mayor and Board of Supervisors should immediately begin conforming to the priorities established in Proposition H. They should be leading the effort to ensure that DTX is funded and built without further delay. If City Hall gets behind DTX, the Caltrain trains could be up and running in the new TTC by 2024.

What You Can Do

Contact the San Francisco's Mayors office (415 554-6141, mayoredwinlee@sfgov.org) and Board of Supervisors (415 554 5184, board.of.supervisors@sfgov.com). Demand they honor the mandate of the people of San Francisco as expressed in Prop H in 1999 by completing the DTX Project without further delay.

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