



San Francisco Tomorrow

Working to Protect the Urban Environment

Issue 334

Will you want to live in San Francisco – Tomorrow?

March 2010

SFT Opposes Bloated Water Bond

The battle over California water has once again taken center stage. The Governor and State Legislature have placed an \$11.14 billion water bond on the November 2010 ballot. Don't let the name fool you! The so-called "Safe Clean and Reliable Drinking Water Act of 2010" provides funding to build new dams and mitigate some of the environmental damage caused by a Peripheral Canal.

You heard right – the **Peripheral Canal!** The debate over that boondoggle has resurfaced. South of Delta water agencies and irrigation districts have never given up hope for it. And now that a judge has ruled that the constantly increasing exports from the Delta (now over 6 million acre feet – that's roughly 1.96 **trillion** gallons per year) are hurting fish and have to be scaled back, they feel that this is the time to push for it.

For those of you who don't recall the 1982 ballot fight, the Peripheral Canal would draw water out of the Sacramento River north of the Delta and send it via a canal around the Delta to the huge state and federal pumps at the southern end of the Delta. This would

presumably allow the pumps to take less water (and kill fewer fish) from the Delta. In 2007, California's Department of Water Resources conducted a feasibility study showing that such a canal could be built and operated to allow **increased** water exports. Now we're being told that exports would be no greater than the recent high level of pumping. Unfortunately, building a canal is like building a new highway – once the capacity exists, it is eventually used.

The bond also contains \$3 billion in subsidies for new dams and provides up to \$1 billion for desalination projects. The entire \$11 billion in bonds will cost the General Fund \$800 million per year in repayment - that's money taken away from environmental programs, social services, and county coffers.

It really is time for us to start thinking differently about how we use (and waste) water. San Francisco is taking steps; the SFPUC has committed to replacing about 10% of its Hetch Hetchy water supply with local resources (groundwater, conservation, recycled water).

GETTING TO KNOW YERBA BUENA ISLAND

Coming up are two opportunities to visit Yerba Buena Island and explore this little-known reserve of indigenous Bay Area ecosystems right in the middle of SF Bay. Learn about its cultural and natural history and restoration needs while observing vegetation, critters, geologic features, cultural landmarks, great vistas, etc. Both tours will include strenuous uphill hiking, and sturdy shoes are a must.

- Saturday April 3, 2010, 1:00 to 2:40 PM, sponsored by Nature in the City, <http://natureinthecity.org/TREKS.php>
RSVP required as spaces are limited; \$10-20 donation requested to support Nature in the City programs!
- Saturday, May 8, 10:00am to 2:00 PM, sponsored by the Yerba Buena Chapter of the CA Native Plant Society, http://www.cnps-yerbabuena.org/calendar/allupcoming_events.html (Scroll down to "Nature Walks.")
Reservations required.



Photo: Clipper Cove Beach and the TI/YBI connecting Causeway.

Feds Question Central Subway Funding & Demand Proof it's No Boondoggle

With multi-year devastating budget deficits ahead for San Francisco, current and future expenditures for the Central Subway will be a drastic drain on Muni funds citywide. Mayor Gavin Newsom, at a "groundbreaking" ceremony, said he hoped "a boondoggle" would not strike the \$1.6 billion Central Subway Project.

But the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is demanding that the local Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA) secure commitments for ALL non-federal funds before they can expect approval of federal funding. This includes \$164 million in local funding, still unspecified and uncommitted---while MTA is also seeking \$88 million in state funding. In other words, local officials are gambling with taxpayer dollars to finance the Central Subway construction project while Muni teeters on a multiyear death spiral of budget deficits.

So what was the significance of "groundbreaking"? Partly public relations and greatly premature, the media blitz set up the taking of more public funds by the Central Subway even as riders decry more fare increases and service cuts.

Furthermore, the FTA is requiring that local funding cover **all** project cost increases and notes that: "The Central Subway Project is a high risk project located in a densely populated urban center. It is the largest, most complex project ever undertaken by SFMTA."

High risk construction, boring below BART and densely populated historic neighborhoods, will be exorbitantly expensive. An initial management contract is a dire predictor, increasing from an estimated \$82 million to \$147 million. The Central Subway could well bankrupt the City and County of San Francisco.

The proposed shortened, 3-car length stations were redesigned to save money---but will forever curtail passenger capacity. No, we will never have Hong Kong's 8-car trains!

The Central Subway's own EIR projects large reductions in surface buses to offset higher operating costs. Tens of thousands of riders, north of the Washington Street Subway Station, will have reduced service. Few riders will benefit from the one-half mile subway ride from Washington Street to Union Square. South of Market Street, the rerouted T-Line will short-circuit direct service to the Embarcadero Station, Montgomery Station, Powell Station.... for perpetuity. Far worse, from Stockton & Pacific Avenue, the total travel time by bus to Market St. is faster than the total travel time by Subway.

OPTIONS? How about a \$1.5 billion investment in 300 miles of transit-priority streets with pedestrian/bicycle realms---a streetscape heaven of self-reinforcing economic interactions. Like Alaska's shift of funds from the "Bridge to No Where" and similar reallocations from the Oakland Airport Connector, political will can work miracles.

10th Annual People's Earth Day 2010 & EcoCenter Grand Opening



Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) will celebrate the grand opening of the EcoCenter at Heron's Head Park on Sunday, April 18 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The public is invited for ceremony, food, and entertainment!

Founded in 1998 by a coalition of youth, educators, and community leaders, LEJ addresses the ecological and health concerns of Bayview Hunters Point and the surrounding communities of southeast San Francisco. LEJ has been helping to restore the habitat at Heron's Head Park (formerly called Pier 98) for many years, and has been using the park as **an outdoor classroom** to provide environmental education to students from throughout the City. **The EcoCenter (the Living Classroom)** is a project of LEJ. (see related story on EcoCenter on page 3)

The Living Classroom at the Eco Center

LIBRARY BRANCH RENOVATION PLAN NEEDS AN AUDIT!

There are increasing concerns regarding capital costs at San Francisco Public Library. The branch renovation and construction program, which SFPL began in 2000 (with \$106 million in general obligation bonds) just passed its halfway point, though the original completion date was 2010. Someone needs to apply the fiscal brakes. An audit would help.

And there's more to come. To date, the budget has climbed to \$189 million for the 24-library project. Part of the problem comes from what the General Obligation Bond Oversight Committee (GOBOC) has criticized as "scope creep." The original plan to renovate 19 branches and build four new ones has morphed into a plan to build as many new libraries as possible.

This means an \$8 million library in North Beach, despite the fact that the two key neighborhood groups favor the original \$3.5 million plan to modernize, expand and preserve the graceful branch, which a Planning Department study termed an "historic resource" and the most authentic of the eight libraries designed by Appleton & Wolfard in the 1950s. It also means a large new branch in the Bayview, as opposed to the original plan to renovate. Shutdown threats by minority contractors forced a three-step bidding process and costs rose.

Here's a little history. The library's \$109 million plan to build a new Main Library was intended to renovate all 26 branches. But the money ran out and only a few were remodeled. Then came the \$106 million GO bond of 1999 and millions more from FEMA. There was still a \$50 million shortfall. The controller's office investigated and found that poor communication, unclear standards and numerous delays accounted for SFPL's money gap.

SAVE MUNI SUMMIT TAKES A FRESH LOOK

With the San Francisco Municipal Railway (Muni) facing multi-year budget deficits and service cuts, more than 120 representatives of 60 neighborhood organizations and transportation advocacy groups met on a Saturday morning in March to analyze and search for creative and innovative solutions to Muni's problems. San Francisco Tomorrow provided early leadership for the Save Muni Summit, holding a charrette in early December at the home of Jane Morrison to plan this grassroots, citywide forum.

Because of the economic downturn and lost opportunities, Muni has fallen on hard times. The December 5th service cuts included six discontinued routes, 16 shortened routes and shorter operating hours for 22 additional routes. Muni riders were already feeling the painful cuts when on February 26, things got worse. The SFMTA Board of Directors voted to cut service by another 10 percent to close the Fiscal Year 2010 budget gap. Given the projected Muni deficits of \$53 million in 2011 and \$45 million in 2012, it's almost a certainty that additional fare increases and cuts will be proposed in the future. The situation is exacerbated by the expiration of State Transit Assistance Funds, declining General Fund contributions and a \$609 million structural deficit for basic maintenance. Community groups hope that the Summit will lead to a **citywide movement** to address and resolve San Francisco's critical public transit needs. Here are the imperatives that emerged from the Summit:

- **Fix it first:** "Make the 70 plus existing lines work." – *Jerry Cauthen, Sierra Club Bay Area Transportation Forum*
- **Transit first:** "More for Muni, less for private automobiles." – *Alice Moseley, San Francisco Tomorrow*
- **Muni for Everyone:** "700,000 Muni rides a day serve 80,000 small businesses and employ over 5,000 people at Muni." -- *Zach Stewart, SaveMuni.com*

The library pledged to mend its ways. Grand total for library construction to date: nearing \$300 million. And they still need a big cash infusion to finish the project.

Making up the Fiscal Gap

San Franciscans love their libraries and in 2007 passed a measure authorizing revenue bonds to make up the fiscal gap. The catch was that SFPL's set-aside would be used to pay for the bonds. So far, the library has sold \$34 million in revenue bonds and must sell more to build the embattled North Beach branch. The source of Bayview's funding is still up in the air. Clearly, SFPL has expanded its horizons at a time when San Francisco is facing economic austerity unrivaled since the Great Depression. .

This game change dovetails with the SFPL plan to sell the revenue bonds and retire them with its set-aside. The library abandoned its original pledge to retain and modernize the library system, building high-cost, giant-size new libraries instead. Catch is that the set-aside was originally intended to provide more books and open hours. The greater the construction cost, the greater the drain on the set-aside and the greater chance for reductions in library services.

It's time to pause and look at what is going on. A recent audit of the West Portal project found several discrepancies. It is clearly advisable to undertake more of the same. SFPL can profit from its successes and learn from its mistakes.

San Francisco Tomorrow unanimously passed a motion urging an independent audit of the overall branch modernization project to provide much-needed objective fiscal and legal oversight. Let's do the audit now.

The EcoCenter

Now in the final phases of construction, the **EcoCenter at Heron's Head Park** will be the first environmental education facility in southeast San Francisco. It will turn Hunters Point into a citywide magnet, a green beacon on the southern shoreline.

The EcoCenter will be San Francisco's first 100% "off-grid" building, modeling solar power and alternative wastewater technologies. Nearly every feature of this 1,500-square-foot facility will be innovative and used to educate the public about renewable energy, pollution and greenhouse gas reduction, wastewater treatment, "green" building materials, and the green economy. Technologies will include:

- **Eco Machine wastewater treatment.** This series of wetland cells and ultraviolet sterilization lamps will treat wastewater and recycle treated water for landscape irrigation.
- **A Green Living Roof** to reduce building needs for heating and cooling, provide retention of stormwater on site for reuse, reduce heat island effect of building on site, and encourage wildlife habitat.
- **Solar panels and wind turbine** to meet all electricity demands of the building.

- **Structurally Insulated Panels (SIPs)** that provide high energy efficiency and strength in the walls and roof as well as seismic support and fire resistance.
- **Native landscaping** to help promote water conservation, the elimination of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and encourage education around native plant propagation.

More than 400 high school students provided input throughout the design and siting of the EcoCenter. Over the course of the coming year, community workdays will be used to install the native landscape, living roof, and community-created art, with every phase and feature intended to engage or teach the public. ☐☐When it opens, the EcoCenter will offer a full menu of hands-on programs focusing on Ecology, Society, and Well Being: clean air and water, safe energy, healthy food, non-toxic homes and schools, open space restoration, and equitable education and employment. LEJ Youth Interns will serve as resident naturalists and docents. For more information about the EcoCenter, visit <http://www.lejyouth.org/ecocenter/eco.html> or <http://www.lejyouth.org/news/news.html>

SAN FRANCISCO TOMORROW seeks your participation. Would you offer two hours a month to work on a committee? Choose Transportation, Open Space, Membership, Housing/Planning/Urban Design Annual and/or Dinner/Awards. Would you consider attending a couple to Board meetings and putting in your "two cents"? We have a website and we need a webmaster (and we're willing to pay for your time). Contact SFT President Jennifer Clary at jenclary@sbcglobal.net.

Visit www.sanfranciscotomorrow.org for current events and past newsletter issues!



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