

BART THINKS CRITICS OF ITS SFO MESS ARE A BUNCH OF RAIL FANS

BART TO CALIFORNIA RAIL NEWS:

Someone sent me a copy of your September 10, 2003 California Rail News because it had several articles about BART's SFO Extension service and the BART to Santa Clara County project. I must say after reading these articles, I felt I should drop you a line to let you know that the facts you presented are very slanted and, in most cases, completely wrong.

With regard to the BART SFO Extension, we have never inflated the passenger counts. We have reported them exactly as they are. These trips included Colma because Colma is actually part of the SFO Extension. Colma trips are also included in the EIR projections so we have always been careful to compare apples to apples.

I also take great exception to your characterization of BART as a "malignant culture of irrationality and waste." I think this is not only a disservice to the BART operation, but also an insult to the people who work very hard to make BART the success that it is. It seems that certain people who are rail fans think that a 4'8-1/2" gauge is the only thing that is a real railroad. However, real professionals know better.

Regarding the BART Extension to Santa Clara County, the financial decisions that you refer to regarding the bonding is strictly the provence [sic] of Santa Clara County. Again, however, I do take issue with your characterization of BART as outmoded technology and your comment regarding "payoffs by BART contractors."

Finally, on your alternative proposal regarding substituting high-speed rail, your estimates of construction costs, operating costs, and especially a revenue service opening date are highly speculative. I think you do a real disservice to the community by providing information that is not based on hard data and is so clearly slanted towards one rail mode. BART has always worked cooperatively with all members of the transportation community. When we were working on the EIR and construction of the BART SFO Extension, we always advocated for Caltrain and never tried to set up a competition between the two modes. Our belief is that the more options people have and the better transportation we can provide improves quality of life. While we can all have our own opinion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of various types of rail modes, it would seem that it would be better to try to work in concert than the alternative.

Rest assured that after reading this article, while I had at one time in the past thought of subscribing, this has convinced me to save my money.

Sincerely,
THOMAS E. MARGRO
 BART General Manager

BART SFO/MILLBRAE REVAMP FAILS TO SATISFY SAN MATEO

by Richard Tolmach

Regional leaders have told BART and San Mateo County to mediate their contract dispute, so that lawsuits don't jeopardize future transit funding. However, the battle is not over. So far, all that the parties have been willing to agree on is to make parking free in the three empty lots in South San Francisco, San Bruno and Millbrae.

BART's inflated ridership projections and misleading statements regarding actual rider counts have precipitated a loss of faith by its most loyal Peninsula political allies, who want service cut back to affordable levels.

BART's aggressive public relations spin and two reshufflings of the schedule—one in January, another in mid-February—did almost nothing to bolster ridership, and trimmed only a marginal amount of costs.

San Mateo County was led by BART to believe that its annual costs of subsidizing the service would be \$6 million, an amount that in practice was expended in three months. County auditors, who believe the annual cost of BART payments could exceed \$26 million, say the cost overrun threatens to bankrupt the transit account, undermining both Caltrain and SamTrans.

BART was widely criticized for its threat to sue San Mateo County unless it receives \$11 million owed under a formula the County views as unfair. San Mateo County Board Chair Mike Nevin, who wants peace on the agreement he helped foster, has told BART the County will pay, but only if BART agrees to a reduced schedule with quarter-hourly weekdays.

As San Mateo see it, the doubled peak service provides almost no benefits, yet

pumps up payments by as much as 40 percent. "BART doesn't insist on running a second route to Walnut Creek where they have strong ridership, so why do they demand it in Millbrae, where you could literally shoot a cannon down the platform and not hit anyone?" said TRAC Board Member Dan McNamara.

"The only logical explanation for BART's desire to continue empty trains is that the payment formula BART wrote must be a cash cow for the district, whether the trains are full or empty!"

BART'S FOLLY

by William E. Drake

Have you ever wondered why so much public infrastructure money gets wasted on foolish projects? Here's the lowdown on the recent BART debacles: The genesis of the various proposals to extend BART to here, there and everywhere usually starts with the flapping of some business group with absolutely no knowledge of public transportation. Take the promoters of the now failed Tanforan Shopping Center for instance.

Back in the early 1980s the Tanforan people decided that a BART line past the graveyards and through their Center would be just the ticket to resurrect their moribund retail operation. So they began whispering in the ears of various local commissioners, Supervisors and would-be State Senators.

In short order we began hearing that to be like other cities, San Francisco just must have a rapid transit line to its airport. Never mind that the Caltrain commuter rail service was already at the Airport. Never mind that the now completed Airport Shuttle, extended for a connection with Caltrain, could access all four airport terminals, whereas the BART system could directly access only the International Terminal. Never mind that a fast and free shuttle bus from the Colma BART Station could serve all four terminals for just over 4 percent the cost of extending BART.

From the outset, many groups and individuals saw the flaws in the BART/SFIA plan and said so. There was much testimony and many letters pointing out that the benefits of the proposal were worth perhaps \$350 million, but by no stretch of the imagination could the estimated price tag of \$1.8 billion be justified, especially given the ready availability of a high-class alternative that was both better and much cheaper.

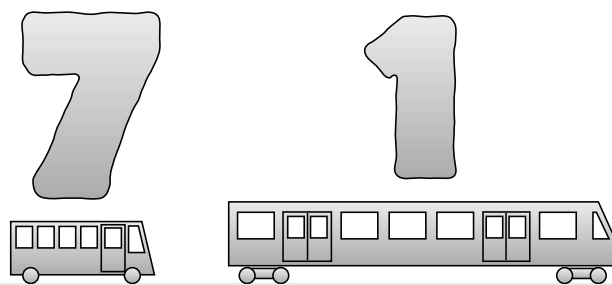
The promoters and their political facilitators, however, were certain they knew best. They scoffed at the opposition and comforted each other with the thought that all large projects have their detractors.

So they built, and the region is left with the results. The BART/Airport Extension Project is a failed project. We have BART but no Tanforan Shopping Center; it died anyway. BART now goes to the International Terminal and the patronage is plain dismal.

In this region those able to influence policy makers and funding agencies have come to believe that the detractors of BART extensions are always wrong. The official response to "outsiders" from agencies like MTC has virtually always been to either reject their comments out of hand or, as has lately become fashionable, to listen politely and patiently, to document carefully, and then to reject the comments out of hand.

Well, insiders, the BART to Airport Extension is one case where the outsiders were right and you were dead wrong.

SFO-Millbrae PASSENGERS PER VEHICLE



CALTRAIN VAN OUTPERFORMED BART TRAIN SHUTTLE

The 3-car one-mile Quentin Shuttle died quietly earlier this year. BART's shortest route, between SFO and Millbrae, was consigned to the dustbin of California rail history on February 7, 2004 after only eight months of service.

Over the period of its operation, it averaged about three passengers per train, or one per car on the minimum 3-car set BART's train operating system requires.

By comparison, the prior Caltrain shuttle van operated in collaboration with SFO and was free to all passengers. It cost approximately \$300,000 annually to operate and averaged seven passengers per trip.

BART still operates trains linking SFO and Millbrae, but their ridership is now folded into the Millbrae-Bay Point route, so as to avoid the embarrassment of low figures.