

BART INFLATES SFO COUNTS

COLMA RIDERS IMPROPERLY ADDED TO IMPROVE BLEAK RESULTS

SFO-X trains are so vacant that SamTrans has tapped District reserves to triple its 2004 BART subsidy to \$6 million. A better answer would be to cut train miles and simplify the service.

by Richard F. Tolmach

A month after the long-awaited BART SFO extension began running, the \$1.6 billion line carried only 16,600 daily riders, only half of them new to transit, say observers who have parsed BART data published in the San Mateo County *Times*. Real traffic bears little resemblance to the optimistic initial projected ridership of 39,500 or the 2010 projection of 68,600 trips in BART's Environmental Impact Report.

While Airport traffic itself is meeting projections at 6,500 daily, the two big disappointments are park and ride traffic and Millbrae service. Only one-third of 12,400 new reserved parking spaces are in use, and the Millbrae services produced only 4,600 weekday rides, barely one-quarter of what BART projected for starting ridership at the terminal station.

Even as a starting point for future growth, the July result of 17 riders per BART train serving Millbrae has to be deeply discouraging for BART planners who predicted that Caltrain would empty its passenger loads on the broad Millbrae platforms. In July, only about 1000 riders per weekday made a Caltrain transfer.

The ridership failure at Millbrae may be partly because of the ill-considered weekend closure of Caltrain, which has thwarted commuters from trying the Caltrain-BART connection at a less stressful time than a work trip. Other probable causes are the uncompetitive 42 minutes average elapsed time from arrival Millbrae to arrival at BART Montgomery St. Caltrain riders can do just about as well staying on board their trains and jumping on MUNI Metro at San Francisco.

Peninsula observer Jeff Carter believes that Caltrain will use its new Millbrae zone break to try to divert more passengers to BART. "I was at the community meeting in Burlingame: 'What Does BART Mean For Burlingame,' and I think the BART representatives confirmed my conspiracy theory about the change in zones."

"While they were discussing ridership on the SFO extension," Carter says, "they mentioned that ridership patterns may change because CalTrain is making some fare changes at Millbrae. I think this pretty much proves that zones were set at 13 miles in order to bring the Millbrae to SF (CalTrain) fare closer to match the Millbrae to SF BART fare."

Carter and other critics call the BART ridership figures purposely misleading because they included ridership at previously existing Colma station in summary tables to be able to claim 24,400 daily trips for the SFO extension. The real July figure was actually about 16,400. Carter suggests that the motivation for BART and SamTrans to include Colma figures was to "make the SFO extension ridership look much better than it really is."

Carter notes that the SFO Extension EIR claimed there would be no diversion of current transit trips, but, "SamTrans has reported that Daly City is about 90-95% of normal and Colma is about 65-70% of normal," says Carter. With an average weekday ridership of 8,080 at Colma, Carter figures it is about 62% of what it was before the SFO extension.

Carter's analysis is that Daly City ridership is about 12,000, down about 1,000 because of diversion to new stations, and that the 62% decline at Colma represents 5,000 trips divert-

ed to the line from SamTrans routes. Carter concludes that the diversion totals about 7,670 trips shifted from Daly City, Colma, and discontinued SamTrans routes BX/193. In all, about 47 percent of SFOX traffic represents trips diverted from bus transfers that formerly happened at Daly City and Colma. If you figure in diverted Caltrain trips, BART has produced fewer than 8,000 daily new transit trips.

BART's pre-construction claim of tens of thousands of new riders has fallen flat. Two key elements of the failure are BART's slow route and its mistaken choice of the unpopular Dublin route as the through route to SFO.

The bizarre triangular end of the line, dictated by a political entente between BART officials, the Airport staff, and San Mateo County's BART collaborators, has also been a disaster. Division of the route into three separate services: Dublin-SFO, Bay Point-Millbrae, and Millbrae-SFO has led to confusion among passengers and a major waste of resources. In its attempt to thwart Caltrain access to the Airport, BART seriously degraded the quality and convenience of its own Airport link.

Passengers from eight of the ten most popular East Bay stations must transfer to get to SFO, because BART chose to give its weakest route, the Dublin line, exclusive Airport access. This bad choice also forces riders from Berkeley, El Cerrito, and Richmond to make double transfers or backtrack to Lake Merritt anytime Richmond-San Francisco trains do not operate. This is particularly ironic in view of the high percentage of Berkeley use of the Airport trains.

Planning of the transfers is also flawed. In the SFO direction, Bay Point-Millbrae trains run four minutes behind the Dublin-SFO trains for a good portion of the day, making the SFO transfer unattractively slow.

This problem could have been solved by giving the Bay Point-Millbrae runs timed connections to the Millbrae-SFO shuttle, but unfortunately, the two routes are haplessly discoordinated, with Millbrae-SFO running every 15 minutes and the shuttle every 20 on weekdays. BART's false economy of 20 minute shuttle headways means the train sits as much as it moves, and in doing so, sabotages BART's own connections at the same time as Caltrain.

BART's malignant culture of irrationality and waste seems to have hit an apogee in Millbrae. The whole arrangement appears planned by someone who hates transit riders. Nights and weekends when it should be easy to coordinate matching 20 minute headways, passengers still needlessly face a 12 minute delay. The Millbrae-SFO shuttle may be the most inefficient California rail service put into service in the past 50 years.

Six car trains were originally assigned to the one-stop shuttle line, but a pair of taxis would suffice to carry the passengers on most departures seen to date. Millbrae-SFO takes less than five minutes to run, and it is unclear why it is not operated strictly matching Bay Point arrivals and departures.

In a devastating letter to the Palo Alto *Weekly*, Armando Fox of Stanford dissects the shuttle: "The ill-conceived 'Millbrae BART shuttle' - over-engineered, overpriced and no more convenient than the previous bus shuttle - shows what happens when the whims of politicians, not the findings of professional transportation planners, dictate how a system gets built."

Peninsula humorists have suggested that perhaps to give credit where credit is due, this curious, useless appendage at the end of the line should be renamed the Quentin.

