

Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund

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January 5, 2020
By E-Mail

Damon Connolly, President
Board of Directors
Marin County Transit District
711 Grand Ave, Suite 110
San Rafael, CA 94901

Re: SRTP Comments

Dear Supervisor Connolly:

The Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund (TRANSDEF) is a Marin-based advocate for improved regional planning in the Bay Area. We are die-hard transit advocates, and use Marin Transit services frequently. In general, we are very pleased with the District's service. In recognition of transit's essential role in a sustainable future, we are pleased to offer the following comments on the Draft Short-Range Transit Plan (Plan). (All citations are to the Plan.)

Making better use of District Resources

The Plan identifies four serious challenges facing the District. The one that your Board can do the most to remedy is this one:

"Defining transit's priority within the county's transportation hierarchy."
(p. 3-1.)

TRANSDEF opposed TAM's recent Measure AA precisely because of TAM's prioritization of the needs of solo drivers. TRANSDEF believes there simply are no solutions for ever-increasing numbers of solo drivers on existing roadways. Eventually, the entire system will congest into massive gridlock. Our policy focus on reducing solo driving was addressed in a front page story in today's Mercury News, with the somewhat confusing title "Region at crossroads between less congestion and growing gridlock." (attached.) Either transit agencies provide convenient transit to make it easy for a niche segment of choice drivers to switch modes, thereby beginning the process of generating public support for more far-reaching transit investments, or the status quo will descend into gridlock. We don't see any other options.

As traffic continues to get worse, the District is forced to respond by adding more time to its schedules. (p. 3-11.) Over time, this will result in an inevitable reduction in service, as well as declining ridership due to the unattractiveness of increased travel times, unless countermeasures are taken. (See proposals below.)

Towards that end, TRANSDEF submitted our 4/12/19 "Network Improvement Suggestions--Update #1." (attached.) The thrust of the suggestions was utilizing the District's bountiful existing resources more effectively, to produce frequent service on Highway 101, by coordinating planning with Golden Gate Transit to have departures at least every 10 minutes to the north and south of San Rafael. While the Plan accepted some of our recommendations (e.g, modifying Strawberry Village service), for the most part, they were ignored.

What's need now is Board direction to staff, requesting a maximum effort to strategically combine north-south routes. We suggested these trunk route realignments be coupled with neighborhood shuttles, acknowledging that a higher percentage of trips would require transfers. However, if there are equally frequent shuttles, timed connections and places to wait out of the rain, this should encourage--rather than discourage--transit use.

We believe that a strategic restructuring of the District's trunk routes could have a tremendously beneficial impact on ridership, at essentially no increased cost. This increase in choice riders would be politically significant in starting to raise transit's priority in the District challenge identified above. TRANSDEF urges the Board to try the realignments suggested, before cutting service on the very routes that would be benefitted by the proposal: Route 17, Route 22, Routes 23/23X, Route 29, Route 36, Route 49, and Route 71X. (List of underperforming routes, pp. 3-11, 12.)

Highway 101 HOV lanes

TAM took a reactionary stance to last year's proposal to increase HOV lane hours of operation, explicitly favoring solo drivers over transit passengers. This is a prime example of "transit's priority within the county's transportation hierarchy" being unacceptably low. This action amounted to a TAM declaration that "We refuse to provide transit users with an incentive to not drive alone. If they don't drive, fine!"

TRANSDEF started writing memos before the construction of the Gap Closure project was complete, calling for HOV hours of operation to extend to all hours where the freeway was routinely congested. Neither TAM nor Caltrans ever expressed any interest in operating the HOV lane to consistently provide a travel time advantage to transit users. That indicated to TRANSDEF that Caltrans was never actually interested in facilitating HOVs, but instead just wanted to keep widening highways.

Bus Rapid Transit

Fairfax to the San Rafael Transit Center is a major congested corridor, in which too many solo drivers compete for space. Transit is unable to perform its function there, because of all the traffic. The creation of a peak-period arterial HOV lane would increase throughput in this corridor, by providing an uncongested route for buses and carpools. This would represent a new policy approach in the County: "Our resources are committed to moving the greatest number of people possible in congested corridors." This would mean establishing a clear priority for HOVs on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, Red Hill Avenue and Third Street.

After the successful introduction of HOV lanes (with signals hung suspended over the lane like the ones on the Richmond Bridge), the next step would be to have fares paid before boarding, to speed up the route.

Transfers with GGT Vehicles

TRANSDEF has observed District Passengers asking the operator of late-running buses to call ahead to hold a bus at a transfer point. All too often, they are told "We can't communicate with Golden Gate operators--they have a different dispatcher. The time has come to put an end to the silos that prevent communications. TRANSDEF urges the Board to direct staff to initiate discussions with Golden Gate Transit to establish a Hot Line between the GGT and MT dispatchers, so that transfers can be coordinated when traffic conditions make buses run late. Nothing is worse than missing a bus by a couple of minutes, and having to wait an hour for the next one.

On-Board Technology

We note two specific problems with information systems that have been added to buses not working well:

- 1) Seemingly half the buses use a natural voice synthesizer to announce upcoming stops. The other half, however, use a mechanical-sounding synthesizer that is very difficult to understand, because the pronunciations are alien. For example, the word "Marin" is pronounced "MAH rin" rather than "muh RIN." It took hearing it four times before understanding that.
- 2) The Automatic Vehicle Locator data feed is unreliable. When working properly, this technology eliminates worrying about when the next bus will come. When it is unreliable, however, it is essentially useless.

Conclusion

TRANSDEF is pleased with how the District has improved service over the past few years. We look forward to assisting in the optimization and finalization of the Plan. Please call us with any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ DAVID SCHONBRUNN

David Schonbrunn,
President

Attachments: Mercury News article, 1/5/20
Network Improvement Suggestions--Update #1

DRIVING TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE?

Traffic

Region at crossroads between less congestion and growing gridlock

WISH LIST FOR THE 2020s

By Nico Savidge

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By 2030, Bay Area commuters could be taking autonomous shuttles to work and boarding next-generation BART trains bound for downtown San Jose. We could be zipping up and down the Peninsula on an electrified Caltrain and cruising past rush-hour congestion aboard regional buses on trafficfree express lanes.

Or we could be stuck crawling down increasingly jammed freeways and cramming into slower, less reliable public transit — while watching the wealthy buy their way out of traffic misery with tolls and self-driving vehicles.

The 2020s have just begun, but transportation experts say this decade the Bay Area must unwind the decisions that have led to grinding traffic, long commutes and Balkanized public transportation systems so that we can realize that first vision of the future instead of the second.

“Unless something drastically changes, it’s going to get bad,” pre-

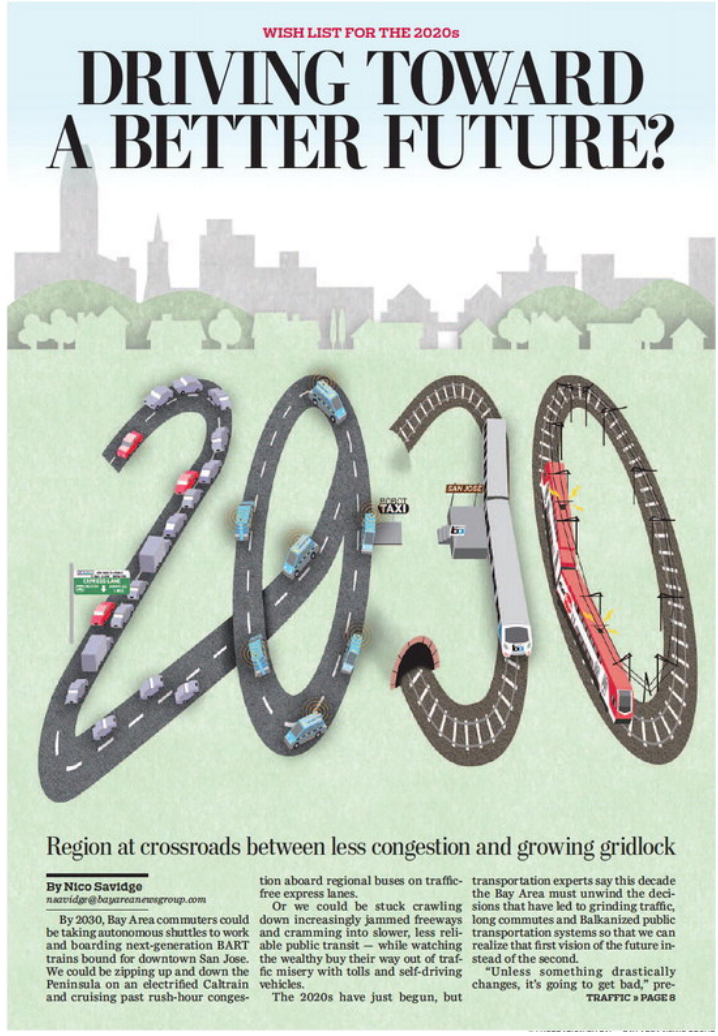


ILLUSTRATION BY PAI — BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

DRIVING TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE?

Traffic

dicted Gaby Sanchez, an Oakland resident who takes BART and occasionally drives to her job in San Francisco.

BART says its new Fleet of the Future train cars, which are set to fully replace the older “legacy” fleet by 2023, should ease crowding on packed rushhour trips because their layout provides more space for standing passengers. A new control system will allow longer trains to run

This past decade, commuters on the front lines suffered as the Bay Area's housing crisis magnified long-standing problems with its transportation systems, as a booming economy pushed legions of new workers into San Francisco and Silicon Valley while fueling an exodus to the more affordable fringes of this growing mega-region.

Although population growth slowed in recent years, by 2030 the Bay Area is projected to add more than 750,000 new residents — more than the population of Seattle.

“This is the time when we have to address our biggest challenges and set ourselves on a different course,” said Laura Tolkoﬀ, regional planning policy director for the urban planning think tank SPUR.

The organization is one of several leading a campaign for a 1-cent sales tax increase, set to go before voters in November, that would raise billions of dollars to fund Bay Area transportation projects.

Sanchez and her sister, Michelle, rattled off a wish list of changes they would like to see to make getting around the Bay Area easier: more frequent BART service to cut down on crowding, more bus routes, less expensive public transit fares and more affordable housing close to job centers like San Francisco.

Both were hopeful those changes could become a reality in the 2020s. But they also were tempering their optimism.

“I've only seen it get worse and worse,” Michelle Sanchez said.

Bad news for drivers

No matter which kind of future the Bay Area moves toward, life will probably not get much easier for drivers. Commuting by car —

through the Transbay Tube more frequently once it's in place in 2028.

In all, BART says, the changes will allow the system to carry 30,000 passengers through the tube per hour at peak times, compared with about 21,000 now.

Caltrain's electrified service, which is set to begin in 2023, would mean a faster trip between San Jose and San Francisco, as well as more frequent service as the commuter railroad moves to remake itself as a BART-like urban transit system.

And the new express lanes that are set to eventually blanket freeways around the Bay Area could be a boon for regional bus routes by getting vehicles out of the traffic that slows them down today.

Transit agencies also will try to attract new passengers by expanding their reach, most notably with BART's extension into Santa Clara County.

Other ideas are in the works for new rail lines — one that would link the East Bay and the Peninsula across the long neglected Dumbarton Rail Bridge, and a line between the Central Valley and East Bay aimed at commuters who now struggle through some of the region's most brutal drives.

San Francisco Bay Ferry, which has doubled its ridership over the past five years, hopes to run trips every 15 minutes between the East Bay and San Francisco and plans to start offering new service from Berkeley, Redwood City and Treasure Island over the coming decade, in addition to adding terminals in Alameda and San Francisco's growing Mission Bay neighborhood.

Of course, all of these plans will take money.

especially if you're one of the nearly two-thirds of Bay Area workers who drive their cars alone each day — seems poised to get more difficult and more expensive through the 2020s. These days, the focus is on luring people out of their cars rather than making more space for drivers.

“We aren't looking to expand road infrastructure in the same way that we might have in decades before,” said Hilary Nixon, chair of San Jose State University's Department of Urban and Regional Planning. “We just don't have the land space to accommodate that.”

Instead, cities have been taking another look at streets that were engineered for decades to move cars as quickly as possible. And you can expect that trend to accelerate in the 2020s, Nixon said.

San Jose has re-engineered much of its downtown to better protect bicyclists and pedestrians, in large part by slowing down cars.

Oakland will reserve one lane in each direction of International Boulevard for buses once a long anticipated bus rapid transit project opens next year, and it could do the same for parts of Broadway.

Drivers eventually could pay congestion tolls to enter some of the busiest parts of downtown San Francisco, where city officials also recently approved a plan to banish private vehicles from the busiest parts of Market Street.

Berkeley officials have proposed plans for a carfree Telegraph Avenue.

There will be some bright spots for drivers.

You'll find one at bridge toll plazas, which John Goodwin, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, said will be far quicker by the end of the decade once the commission completes its plan to eliminate cash toll lanes and go fully automated.

Supporters of a proposed transportation sales tax increase known as FASTER Bay Area say that vote in November will play a major role in determining which direction the region moves in the decade to come.

Big fixes, long delays

But even if voters approve the measure, the Bay Area will need to avoid the mistakes of its past for the money the tax raises to change the region's course.

Griffiths said that means ensuring big projects are delivered on time, noting major changes during the 2010s, such as the Transbay transit center and BART's extension to Warm Springs, were “plagued by delays.”

BART's Silicon Valley extension, which is being built by the Valley Transportation Authority, has been showing signs of the same problem.

The Milpitas and Berryessa stations were supposed to open in 2016 when ground broke on the extension, but won't start welcoming passengers until sometime next year; VTA officials this fall pushed back their estimate for when the downtown San Jose stations could open by several years, to 2029 or 2030.

Perhaps most important, transit advocates say, the Bay Area needs to get out of the locally focused way it has long viewed transportation.

The region today is stitched together by more than two-dozen public transit agencies, which have long failed to coordinate the trains, buses and ferries people rely upon.

Syncing up schedules so that riders don't waste time waiting for a transfer, and integrating fares so people don't pay a penalty for needing to travel on two different systems, will be key to making sure the new transportation

“I feel pretty confident that toll booths in the Bay Area will be a thing of the past” by the end of the decade, Goodwin said, as will human toll-takers and the delays caused by slower cash lanes.

Of course, the cost to cross most Bay Area bridges will rise by \$1 in 2022 and another dollar in 2025 under Regional Measure 3, the toll hike voters approved in 2018 to fund a host of measures aimed at curbing traffic.

Meanwhile, the Bay Area’s network of express lanes — which popped up on a handful of freeway stretches — could grow substantially in the coming years to include dreaded corridors like Highway 101 between San Francisco and San Jose, or Interstate 80 between the Bay Bridge and the Carquinez Strait. That will provide a quicker route for carpoolers, as well as drivers willing to pony up for the potentially pricey toll, Goodwin said.

Will people ditch cars?

Jessica Ross has the kind of commute that transit advocates hope more Bay Area residents will have in the 2020s. To get from her home in Oakland’s Jack London Square neighborhood to her job at Salesforce in San Francisco, Ross can hop on a ferry or use a ride-hailing app to get to a BART station for a quick trip across the bay.

“The worst option is driving,” Ross said.

If traffic is only going to get worse, the coming decade needs to be one in which the Bay Area’s mass transit systems make themselves into faster and less expensive options than driving, said Ian Griffiths, policy director for the transportation advocacy nonprofit Seamless Bay Area.

“You cannot pursue something like congestion pricing or increasing tolls if you are not improving what people’s alternatives are,” Griffiths said.

infrastructure that gets built is useful to riders, said Tolkoff, the SPUR policy director.

“The worst-case scenario is that we could end up building a lot of projects that don’t actually deliver real benefits,” Tolkoff said.

If problems with the Bay Area’s fractured public transit systems continue, the 2010s proved that the private sector — from ridehailing apps Uber and Lyft to electric scooters, to tech company employee shuttles — has plenty of interest in transportation as well.

BART and other transit agencies say the rise of ride-hailing companies has siphoned off riders.

But Nixon, the San Jose State professor, said private transportation could prove helpful by delivering riders to public transit systems; just think of all the electric scooters you see parked outside BART stations.

As the decade goes on and autonomous vehicle technology develops, Nixon said, riders could one day hop onto self-driving shuttles for a trip from their neighborhood to BART or Caltrain.

“We are much closer than we realize,” Nixon said, to that future.



A San Francisco Bay Ferry arrives at Seaplane Lagoon in Alameda. The public transit system plans to start offering new service from Berkeley, Redwood City and Treasure Island

The Bay Area's public transportation agencies over the coming decade and adding terminals have a number of plans they say will make those elsewhere. improvements.

ARIC CRABB — STAFF ARCHIVES

Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund

P.O. Box 151439 San Rafael, CA 94915 415-331-1982

Network Improvement Suggestions--Update #1

Transit Riches

Although few may recognize it, the Marin County Transit District is in a strikingly good position: It has managed to secure the resources for a large fleet of modern, low-noise, non-polluting buses and the operating budget to run them. Up-to-date electronics make it possible to inform riders of approaching buses, and on-board displays let passengers know when their stop is coming up. The system has large amounts of surplus capacity. At little to no marginal cost, this capacity could be put to use carrying choice riders, thereby making a dent in the county's chronic traffic congestion. This memo describes how to accomplish that.

It appears that the current route structure is the result of years of accretion of new routes. TRANSDEF suggests that now the time for a rethinking of the network structure. While we have no formal training in the art and science of network optimization, and therefore make no claims of expertise, we offer these thoughts that have resulted from close observation of the system.

The strategy proposed here is to shrink the number of trunk lines and use the resources thus freed up to increase their frequencies. These lines would connect by convenient transfer to high-frequency local circulators. Reducing the total number of routes should make the system far more understandable by a public that is now only starting to consider using transit. The current large number of routes, while an admirable improvement over the system of the 1990s, is confusing and hard to use.

The proposal would eliminate the SRTC pulse, replacing it with coordinated MT and GGT schedules that eliminate bunched departures and provide the maximum number of frequencies per hour.

The goal of this paper is a network design that reconfigures existing resources to provide higher frequencies. On the 101 backbone, interspersing MT trips with the 30, 70 and 101 would enable 7.5 minute peak headways to Novato and 10 minute headways to southern Marin. That would make it possible for passengers to no longer need schedules, eliminating two of the greatest disincentives to transit use: arcane schedules and waiting for a bus. This would open up transit use to a much broader public.

Aggressively promote the system with the theme: "Avoid the hassle--leave the driving to us." Frequent service that eliminates traffic frustrations and provides auto-competitive trip times would capture choice riders. The system has enough surplus capacity that many more passengers can be accommodated within the existing operating budget. The result would begin to change how Marinites expect to get around--an absolutely necessary step forced by the dual challenges of congestion and climate change.

Elimination of Duplication

Marin Transit has many routes that duplicate service of other routes. This resource will be tapped to optimize headways.

22/23

The 22 has always been a mysterious route. It seems unlikely that anyone rides it end-to-end, when the 36 is so much faster. We see no justification for the 22's duplication of the 23 between SRTC and The Hub. Properly redesigning legacy routes like the 22 will require good data on where current users are going.

Changing the 22 into a Marin City to Fairfax (if there's enough demand, or COM if not) route would make more sense. If scheduling permits, the route could be extended to Sausalito.

35/71X

Routes 35 and 71X are the same route north of SRTC, with two branches to the south. The 35 could be renamed the 71XC, for example, to indicate that it originates and ends in the Canal, rather than Sausalito. (The diversions to Civic Center and Northgate will be addressed below.) The advantage of this nomenclature is that it allows a doubling of express frequencies to Novato, all with the same route number. This would be a big benefit in terms of making the system easier to comprehend and use. Even more important, though, is the ability to space the departures out among the GGT departures--avoiding clumping--to achieve optimal headways.

36/71X

The 36 is essentially the same route as the 71X south of SRTC. The 36 should be extended to Sausalito and be renamed the 71XC.

228

The 228 seems to duplicate everything the 22, 29 and a segment of 23 do. The only detectable difference is the jog to MGH, and the SFDB segment from Bon Air to COM. The route can be eliminated if the suggestions about the 29, which are addressed below, are implemented. If that SFDB segment has significant ridership, the NB 22 could be turned right at COM to cover it, looping through MGH and S. Eliseo Dr. This would create a one-seat ride from Marin City to MGH, replacing a failed prior shuttle.

245

Most of Route 245 would be replaced by increasing the frequency of the 257. The Smith Ranch Road service might be able to be covered by an agreement with Lyft.

Comment

Note: implementing these changes would have the added benefit of demonstrating that MT is providing the disadvantaged communities of the Canal and Marin City with one-seat rides to major destinations.

Elimination of Diversions--speed up existing routes 17 and 22

Eliminate low-usage stops at Strawberry Village/Reed Blvd. by the 17 and 22. These loops are a tremendous time-drag. Stop the 22 at Tiburon Wye bus pads, and build a stop for the 17 on the overpass (similar to the Paradise Dr. stop for the 22), before the NB onramp. Use the Tower Dr. stop for the WB 17. Extend the 219 to Marin City, to provide service for the Strawberry Village stop. Use the GGT stop on the East side of Reed Blvd. for the NB 219.

29

When SMART service to Larkspur starts, the WB 29 should turn left on Bon Air, stop at MGH and then make the S. Eliseo loop. (COM has its own Route 122 on school days, so the rest of the 29 is duplication.) Eliminating COM would allow higher frequencies. Have the 29 meet each train and ferry (and push these agencies to coordinate), giving connecting passengers a fast and largely express ride to MGH.

Eliminate the confusion caused by swapping the route number between the 29 and 23X. Reformat the printed schedule to show Kerner Blvd./Larkspur St. as the originating stop of the WB 29, and as the terminus of the EB 29.

49

The non-trunkline Route 49 suffers from several diversions that not only literally lengthen the trip time, they make the journey feel endless. The route would be linear, faster and much more attractive with the following changes:

- Eliminate the crossing of the freeway to Northgate Mall and Terra Linda. Increased service on a truncated route 257 will cover that area (see below). Keep the 49 on the East side of the freeway.
- Replace the 49 loop through Hamilton with a local circulator. See below.
- Add service to a neighborhood with no service now: the light industrial area centered around Mitchell Blvd. in San Rafael. Run the NB 49 on the Redwood frontage road to Smith Ranch Rd.

49 Enhancements

- Build a transit center similar to Marin City on the Hwy. 101 overpass at Ignacio Blvd and Enfrente Rd. This would be phased in, as resources become available for it.
- This will optimize access to fast frequent transit (70, 71X) for Hamilton residents and employees, and allow the various Novato shuttles to connect without duplication.

251

To speed up the route, the 251 would no longer serve Vintage Oaks. Once the transit center is built, it would terminate at the new Ignacio Blvd and Enfrente Rd. Bus pads.

257

The 257 becomes the frequent route connecting the Novato and San Rafael transit centers to Terra Linda. It would operate express north of Alameda del Prado, leaving

Hamilton and Ignacio to other routes. It would remain on Lincoln at the south end, leaving service to Dominican to Route 233.

New Routes

Vintage Oaks Shuttle

A separate shuttle from the Novato transit center would directly serve the shopping center. With an agreement to carry a promotional wrap and exclusive service, Vintage Oaks might be persuaded to pay for all or part of the shuttle.

Hamilton Circulator

The circulator would make a continuous loop through the former base, connecting to the freeway bus pads, Pacheco Plaza and Hamilton Marketplace. After the construction of the new transit center, the circulator would go south on Alameda del Prado from the overpass, picking up the part of the 251 that is truncated. That would avoid having to turn around at Pacheco Plaza.

Terra Linda Local Circulator

This frequent circulator would loop between the Civic Center campus, the SMART station, Northgate Mall and Kaiser. The route eliminations described above may be enough to provide funding for this new service. In some ways, it might replace the Connect micro-transit pilot project.

SMART/Ferry Shuttle for Southern Marin Riders

A way of getting to the SMART station is described below under New Stops. Unfortunately, there is no convenient way to return home. An arrangement with Lyft Pool could enable paying passengers from the Ferry and SMART to get a free ride to the Lucky Drive bus ramp. Pickup locations could be located at the Ferry and SMART station.

BRT

We've long advocated the 23 as perfect for BRT and peak-hour HOV lanes. This proposal would require resources beyond the current budget. It would be a perfect RTP submission, if TAM can be brought to see its benefits.

New Stops

ESFDB

A bus pad on the NB on-ramp at SFD could connect directly to the SMART station, which is just up the hill from there. This stop would enable Southern Marin riders to connect conveniently with SMART. Fewer Southern Marin residents would be going to the Ferry, because of the availability of the Sausalito and Tiburon ferries. However, walking to the Ferry is feasible from the on-ramp if a path to ESFDB is provided. We don't have a suggestion for a SB stop, as the bridge over Corte Madera Creek would not allow for a safe pull-out.

Relocated Bus Pads

The Central and Southern Transit Study proposed relocating several of the freeway bus pads, to increase pedestrian safety. Please keep these alternatives in mind.