

RESCUE MUNI

Transfer

No. 26,
March 2011

Where Are My Rapid Buses?

Update of Geary and Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit Projects

By **Andrew Sullivan**, Chair, Rescue Muni

Rescue Muni is very concerned about the pace of progress being made by the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) on the Van Ness and Geary bus rapid transit (BRT) projects. These projects will build dedicated bus lanes on these major corridors, providing much faster, more reliable, and higher capacity bus service to hundreds of thousands of Muni riders daily.

Since our Service Expansion Committee workshops ten years ago, we have been strong advocates for a rapid transit network in San Francisco that does not depend solely on more expensive subway projects. In 2003, we participated in the Expenditure Plan Advisory Committee process that led to BRT being one of the top priorities in the Proposition K sales tax

extension, with Geary and Van Ness being the two top priority projects.

Since that time, Los Angeles and Mexico City, among others, have completed significant BRT projects, and San Francisco remains stuck in what seems like an endless planning process. Both the LAMTA Orange Line and Mexico City's Metrobus are widely viewed as successful, exceeding ridership projections well ahead of schedule.

For the Geary project, first there was a three-year feasibility study, completed in 2007. Now the SFCTA is engaged in an environmental review, which has taken three years to-date. According to the SFCTA website, preliminary engineering could begin this year with construction beginning in two years

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Geary and Van Ness BRT Update *(Continued from page 1)*

and service in four to five (by 2015 or 2016). However, the environmental impact report (EIR) does not appear to be close to complete, with the only recent progress being a 2009 “Alternatives Screening Report” - so it seems likely that the dates will slip further.

Current Schedule of the Geary BRT Project **(likely to slip further)**

- 2010-11: Complete Preliminary Engineering
 - 2011-12: Final Design
 - 2013-14: Construction & Mitigation (duration of construction segments under evaluation)
 - 2015/16: **Potential** Start of Service
- (from SFCTA website)

The Van Ness project is further along than Geary, but again only planning has been done, no concrete action. A Feasibility Study was completed four years ago, in

December 2006, and the SFCTA is now in the midst of environmental studies and preliminary engineering. Final environmental studies are planned for release later this year.

Current Schedule of the Van Ness BRT Project

- Draft Environmental Studies and Conceptual Engineering: 2008–2011
 - Final Environmental Studies and Preliminary Engineering: 2011–2012
 - Final Design and PS&E (Plans, Specifications, and Engineering): 2012–2013
 - Construction: 2013–2015
 - Begin Revenue Service: 2015
- (from SFCTA website)

Rescue Muni remains very concerned at the seemingly glacial pace of the BRT projects, while other projects headed by the SFCTA (notably Doyle Drive) are under construction now.

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Contributing Writers: Andrew Sullivan,
Daniel Krause, Greg Dewar

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Web: www.rescuemuni.org
Email: transit1@rescuemuni.org

Particularly since the result of the BRT projects will be a *reduction* in operating costs due to faster service, we would have thought these would get a higher priority.

Based on all our concerns, we invited SFCTA officials to speak to Rescue Muni at our general meeting, which took place on February 28 at the County Fair building in Golden Gate Park. At this meeting we expressed our concerns regarding project delays.

Rachel Hiatt, a planner at the SFCTA, spoke about the Van Ness project. Various alternatives are still under consideration. One alternative seriously being considered envisions center lanes with center platforms. This alternative would allow for the preservation of much of the existing landscaping in the center of Van Ness. However, new buses would be needed with left doors. Rescue Muni members expressed that if this alternative is chosen, they would like to see a physical separation between the bus lanes and the adjacent automobile lanes. Other alternatives include curb-bus lanes and center-bus lanes with right side boarding. Construction is projected to begin in approximately two years with revenue service commencing in 2015.

The Geary BRT project update was provided by a consultant working with the SFCTA. Based

on his presentation, the Geary project still seems to be on the slow track. In fact less information was provided about the design of the project than three years ago. There was some discussion of the intersections at Masonic and Fillmore. A BRT station is being considered in the existing automobile tunnel, a design Rescue Muni supports. However, it is not clear where exactly the platforms would be located. Therefore, we will continue to monitor the design of this station in the coming days. It also appears the SFCTA is leaning towards filling the trench at Fillmore, something Rescue Muni has not supported in the past.

There was also discussion of the possibility of shortening the length of the project. Currently, the project western terminus is planned for 33rd Street. The SFCTA is now considering terminating the projects several blocks east. Rescue Muni is quite concerned about shortening the project and will closely follow this development.

While Rescue Muni remains concerned about the pace of planning for both Van Ness and Geary, the Geary project is of particular concern. We strongly urge the SFCTA to kick this project into high gear. Rescue Muni will be pushing the SFCTA to speed up this critical link in the coming days.

Central Subway Moves Forward

By **Daniel Krause**, Rescue Muni Board Member

Construction of the Central Subway is finally underway! Underground utility relocation work is now taking place along Fourth and Stockton Streets for the Moscone and Union Square/Market Street subway stations. While this is only preliminary work to prepare the corridor for tunneling, this is a huge milestone, as the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) proceeds towards full subway construction and an opening date sometime in 2018.

Current Schedule of the Central Subway Project

- 2010 - 2011: Utilities relocation
- 2010 - 2013: Final design
- Fall 2011: Full funding grant agreement
- 2010 - 2017: Construction
- 2018: Begin service (from SFMTA website)

To follow project developments closely, please refer to the Central Subway blog at <http://www.centralsubwayblog.com/blog>, which as been set up by the SFMTA to provide project updates.

SFMTA Votes to Close \$137 Million Funding Gap

In recent months, an approximately \$137 million funding gap was

identified for the Central Subway project. SFMTA officials have been working with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to close this gap. In November, they announced an arrangement that closes the funding shortfall as follows:

- \$21 million is planned from the high-speed rail bond (there was a separate pot of money for connecting transportation in this bond).
- \$85.5 million from other state transportation bond funds.
- \$30.75 million from savings or unused funds smaller Muni projects, which include a radio replacement project, an operator's restroom, a canopy over Muni's Geneva Yard, and the construction of the Islais Creek bus maintenance facility.

On January 18, 2011, SFMTA formally approved this funding plan, a huge milestone for the project. This allows the SFMTA to continue to pursue a full funding agreement with the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA), which is anticipated to be finalized this fall.

New Congress Poses a Final Challenge

With preliminary construction

underway, and the project rapidly moving toward a full funding agreement with the FTA, the Central Subway has excellent momentum. The last hope for project opponents is whether the proposal by the House of Representatives are successful in reducing Federal New Starts funding. This is a highly popular program nationwide and has generally been bi-partisan. Rescue Muni believes that this is very unlikely to happen due to the exploding interest nationwide in building high quality transit expansion projects such as bus rapid transit, light rail, commuter rail and heavy rail.

The New Starts program funds new transit expansion projects, including the Central Subway. Originally, the House had proposed a total elimination of the New Starts program, but approximately \$1.5 billion was put back in the House budget bill that passed. However, this is still approximately \$500 million less than last year's budget. It is possible that this cut to the New Starts program could slow the funding for the Central Subway, potentially impacting the schedule of the project.

Please contact California Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer and ask them to commit to restoring all funding to the New Starts Program in the final budget deal.

Rescue Muni Exploring Strategies for Creation of a North Beach Station

Though there is some uncertainty with the federal funding picture, Rescue Muni feels that this situation will blow over as the economy recovers and oil prices continue to rise. Therefore, we are currently exploring strategies to move the planning forward for the creation of an additional station in North Beach. As part of the Central Subway, the SFMTA is already planning to construct the tunnels under Columbus Avenue all the way to Washington Square in North Beach. Therefore, it is conceivable that a station could be added in North Beach without any additional tunneling expense.

Given this situation, Rescue Muni is considering creating a conceptual plan for a North Beach Central Subway station, as well as a broader vision for an extension of the subway line further north and west of North Beach. Rescue Muni has been promoting the idea of a North Beach Station for several years in this newsletter and in our conversations with various stakeholders. Now, we are hoping to expand this effort more formally in the form of a conceptual plan. If you are interested in getting involved, please email me at dankrause@rescuemuni.org.

Tracking Unannounced Switchbacks

By **Greg Dewar**, *Rescue Muni Member*

Regular riders of Muni's Metro lines know the scenario all too well: while taking a ride home, they find themselves being asked to get off the train, with no warning, long before arriving at their destination. For L and N riders, this often happens at 19th Ave., for other lines its elsewhere. Regardless, it's very frustrating, and unfortunately, a growing problem.

Last month Supervisor Carmen Chu, as chair of the City Neighborhoods and Operations Committee (NOC), held a hearing on the issue. Supervisor Chu's move came after years of promises by Muni management to "fix" the problem, while little has changed. Supervisor John Avalos, another member of the committee, shared his frustration as he has had many complaints about the M-Oceanview as well.

Reading the Chronicle's coverage of the hearing, the party line from Muni's management is that such turnarounds "only" happen if another train is 5 minutes behind. This was backed up with hand-selected statistics from a few months in 2010. The projected attitude of John Haley, Muni's Director of Transit, was that the switchbacks are "not a big deal." Several times during the hearing both Supervisors grew increasingly frustrated with Muni management as their questions were either ignored, or stale lines repeated.

Supervisor Avalos made the point that such short turns aren't just an inconvenience - they go against the city's transit first policy and end up driving people back into cars.

The most effective testimony came from the public, who expressed that this isn't just an inconvenience - it can be downright dangerous. Some of the most moving testimony came from Katie Haverkamp who is disabled and lives along the L-Taraval line. She described in detail how Muni's failings aren't just an inconvenience - they cause serious physical pain for her as she tries to get home in the evening. In an ironic twist, she later reported to me that on her way home from work that evening, she was the victim of a L-Taraval switchback. Since the meeting it was announced that Katie Haverkamp was appointed to the CAC by Supervisor Chu.

In the end, the root causes of these problems were not addressed and Supervisor Chu voted to continue the hearing so that this issue won't go by the wayside. Since the hearing, Supervisor Chu has been moved to become chair of the Budget Committee, and Supervisor Avalos now chairs the NOC. It would be wise for those concerned about this issue to encourage Supervisor Avalos to keep the heat on Muni and continue to demand better service for Muni's riders.

Cameron Beach: 1949-2011

By **Daniel Murphy**, *Vice-Chair, Rescue Muni*

When Rescue Muni joined with like-minded groups to draft Proposition E, creating the SFMTA, we didn't yet know Cameron Beach. But if, in 1999, we were asked to create the ideal SFMTA Board member from whole cloth, that person would sound a lot like—maybe even exactly like—him.

Cam's career in transit began in San Francisco at the age of 16, sweeping buses, and he spent a lifetime in transportation: rail, air, bus, and mass transit, ending his 25 years at Sacramento RTD as its chief operating officer. After returning to San Francisco, he became vice president of Market Street Railway, and served on so many industry-wide bodies within the American Public Transportation Association that to list them all would risk drowning the reader in abbreviations and acronyms. He brought a rider's perspective as well; he rode Muni often, and knew the system like the back of his hand.

In 2007, then-Mayor Gavin Newsom appointed him to the SFMTA Board. Cam brought a lifetime of experience to the post: the experience to ask the right questions and to know whether he was getting an answer. Our friends at Streetsblog recounted a meeting in which he pressed staff to find out why trains in the Twin Peaks Tun-

nel traveled at far less than their old top speed of 50 miles per hour. He was told staff and consultants planned to analyze the issue, and would meet with executive director Nat Ford at some unspecified point in the future. Cam wasn't satisfied:

"What I'm hearing now is there are a number of studies being analyzed with no target for an answer or closure on the issue. To say that I'm frustrated with that is an understatement," said Beach. "I would like staff to come back not only to this committee but the full board with a comprehensive report on where you're at and a schedule of finishing this task."

Beach will get his wish - for a schedule, if not for faster speeds - at the January 12 meeting of the MTA Board's Policy and Governance Committee. "We'll get to the bottom of this and get this resolved," said Ford.

He knew that any project without a deadline, clearly defined next steps, and someone responsible, was no project at all. That's what experience means. That's why experience is more than just bullet points on a résumé.

I chaired the SFMTA's Citizens Advisory Council throughout Cam's term on the board; part of my job involves presenting our

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Debate Over Muni's New Bus Shelters

By **Daniel Krause**, *Rescue Muni Board Member*

Recently, there have been reports of Muni riders finding that the new bus stop shelters currently being installed citywide by Clear Channel are not performing very well as shelters. According to riders, seats are wet in the shelters when it rains because the rear glass panels do not fully cover the back of the shelters. Muni has intentionally designed the shelters to leave a large space without a panel to allow the disabled to access the shelter from the back side (see picture below).



Note missing glass panel.

Often shelters are too close to the curb to allow people in wheelchairs to safely navigate into the shelter from the front. Hence the rationale for omitting one of the glass panels.

Another design element noticed by riders that allows rain into the shelters includes a gap between the roof and the back and side walls of the shelter (see picture top right).



Gaps between roof and walls.

In some cases, rain has also been observed seeping through a joint connecting the two pieces of the plastic roof (see picture below).



Seam connecting roof sections.

Rescue Muni wonders why it was decided to design the roof as two pieces rather than one to avoid this type of weakness. If they are already leaking, one can imagine it will get worse as time goes on. Furthermore, according to many online comments to a recent Examiner article, there has been great concern regarding the height of the seats. Apparently the elderly and others with physical impairments are having difficulty

getting out of the seats.

Many people have also expressed that the design of the shelters appears tacky. I personally agree with this assessment. The bright red, wavy roof is often totally out of character with the architecture of the surrounding buildings. It is shocking that this type of design was even considered for a city such as San Francisco. The design of the shelters seems more appropriate for locations adjacent to buildings with modern architectural styles rather than juxtaposed to the many historic structures that are prevalent throughout San Francisco.

Status of Implementation

Rescue Muni is hopeful that there is still time to correct some of these problems before the remaining shelters are installed. Rescue Muni is currently assessing how many of the shelters have been installed and how many remain to be installed. It is our understanding that most shelters still have not been installed citywide.

Implications of Clear Channel's Involvement

The involvement of Clear Channel, whose main motivation is to display advertising, may be one source of the design problems. The fact that advertising is obviously the highest priority for Clear Channel may have something to do with design problems facing the

shelters. There is always a danger to having private entities design public infrastructure and manage public services. Ideally, SFMTA would have been very strict about the design of the shelters as well as providing strong oversight to ensure the public's needs are met. However, this appears to have not happened. Now we are potentially stuck with shelters that lack function and clash with the urban design of San Francisco. Based on these initial assessments of the new shelters, it appears SFMTA has not adequately looked out for the public interest in their venture into partnering with a private entity.

Rescue Muni's Recommendations

All is not lost however if corrective measures are taken immediately. Rescue Muni believes that the quality of the rider experience at bus shelters is a critical issue. Therefore, whatever problems are occurring with the design should be addressed BEFORE the remaining shelters are installed. Therefore, we recommend the following adjustment to the design:

- 1) Close the gap between the roof line and the framing of the shelter so rain and wind can not blow through the back and sides of the shelter.
- 2) Raise the seats.
- 3) Reseal the seam between the

(Continued on following page)

New Bus Shelter Design (Continued from page 9)

- two plastic roof sections and consider adhering a piece of material directly on top of the seam.
- 4) Relocate shelters to allow for better handicap access from the front where feasible (i.e. where the sidewalk is of sufficient width).
- 5) For shelters that can't be relocated and must continue omitting a single glass panel along the back wall of the shelter, create a vertical barrier inside the shelter than separates the seating area from the portion of the shelter that has handicap access for wheelchairs.
- 6) Consider a new roof design for shelters not yet installed that does not clash with historical architecture of San Francisco. As for the shelters already installed, consider replacing the existing roofs over time as the plastic wears out to improve the urban design of the shelters. This change would not require rebuilding the entire shelter.

Cameron Beach (Continued from page 7)

recommendations to the board and trying to persuade directors and staff that the agency ought to take some action or look into some issue. One time, Cam disagreed with our recommendation—a somewhat arcane issue around the agency's liability insurance—and he voted against our position. He called me and said, "I don't vote against CAC recommendations often; I try not to do that." As if he owed me an explanation or an apology for an honest disagreement over policy. I would've liked his vote, sure, but I considered it quite the compliment to the CAC's work that someone with the scope and depth of his experience in transit felt any reluctance at all about voting against our position.

He understood that Muni isn't

just a transportation system within San Francisco, but an essential and inseparable part of the city, without which city life would be vastly diminished, even for those who don't often ride the system. And every delayed or frustrated passenger had an ally in Cam Beach, even if they didn't know his name. His sudden and unexpected death at age 62 has been a stunning blow to everyone who works for a better Muni.

Rick Laubscher, president of Market Street Railway, said, "He loved Muni more than anyone I ever knew." So it should be no mystery why those of us who love San Francisco and love Muni loved him, and will miss him terribly as we try, as best we can, to carry on his life's work.

Membership Form

We need YOU to help us Rescue Muni.

Join us by mailing this form to: P.O. Box 190966, San Francisco, CA 94119-0966.

You can also join online at www.rescuemuni.org.

Credit Cards now accepted!

Name: _____ \$5 Limited Income

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I would like to volunteer! Y N

Membership category:

Rescue Muni may from time to time publish membership lists *with names only*. May we publish your name only as a member? Y N

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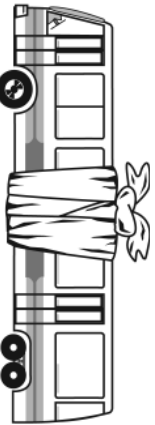
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Muni may form a committee. If it meets at least four times per year, the committee may request appointment of a representative to Rescue Muni's Board of Directors. Please e-mail Andrew Sullivan, Chair of Rescue Muni at suldrew371@gmail.com if you are interested in forming a committee.

Form a committee!

We encourage the formation of committees. Any member of Rescue

Past committees have included Metro, Service Expansion, and Membership.



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