

From: Jon Spangler [REDACTED]

Sent: Sunday, May 19, 2024 10:12 PM

To: MTC-ABAG Info <info@bayareametro.gov>

Cc: [REDACTED]

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Subject: BATA May 22, 2024 - Item 4a: BART Bicycle Advisory Task Force Opposes Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Path Restrictions

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Roster

Alfredo Pedroza (Chair), Nick Josefowitz (Vice Chair),
Chair Pedroza, Vice-chair Josefowitz, Members of the Bay Area Toll Authority, and staff,

The BART Bicycle Advisory Task Force (BBATF) strongly opposes the staff recommendation under Item 4a for the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge for many reasons, as detailed in both our previous comments to the BATA Oversight Committee on May 8 and our new letter (attached in PDF) for your meeting on May 22 (Item 4a).

The entire text is also appended below for your convenience.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jon Spangler

Chair, BART Bicycle Advisory Task Force (BBATF)

League Cycling Instructor #3175

[REDACTED]

"Bicycling has done more to emancipate women than any one thing in the world. It gives her a feeling of self-reliance and independence the moment she takes her seat; and away she goes, the picture of untrammelled womanhood."

— Susan B. Anthony

BART Bicycle Advisory Task Force

May 19, 2024

TO: Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA)
Metro Center
375 Beale Street, Board Room
San Francisco, CA 94105

FROM: BART Bicycle Advisory Task Force

RE: Proposed Closure of Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Bicycle Path Is Unjustified
(MTC-Bay Area Toll Authority, May 22, Item 4a)

The Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) are proposing to replace the multi-use path on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge (RSR Bridge) with a westbound breakdown lane (shoulder) every week from Monday through Thursday. This will leave people who walk or ride bicycles without a safe and direct path of travel between Marin County and the East Bay for four work days every week.

The BART Bicycle Advisory Task Force (BBATF) strongly opposes this proposal. Instead, the BBATF urges the Bay Area Toll Authority to support a permanent RSR Bridge multi-use path that is open all day, every day (24/7/365) to walkers, bicyclists, and others. There are better solutions to traffic congestion: some of them are already planned and ready for implementation in 2025.

Critical background information, data analysis, and attention to significant MTC, ABAG, BCDC, and state goals and policies are either missing or under-represented in the proposal to modify the current RSR Bridge Pilot Project. These omitted or underemphasized factors all affect congestion on and around the RSR Bridge. Here are some of those missing factors.

MISSING BACKGROUND: MARIN'S DECISIONS (BART, AFFORDABLE HOUSING)

Had Marin County voted to join BART in the 1960s, there might not be as much congestion on the RSR Bridge today. Unfortunately, the board of the Golden Gate Bridge District feared losing bridge toll revenue and prevented Marin voters from choosing BART. How would BART service to Marin County have affected congestion on the RSR Bridge today?

For decades, Marin County has failed to build enough affordable multifamily and workforce housing for its teachers, firefighters, hospital workers, and restaurant employees — leaving these workers to face arduous daily commutes from the nearest affordable housing in the East Bay and North Bay. Housing policies affect transportation reality.

Neither of these conscious decisions made by Marin County officials are mentioned in the MTC staff discussions of congestion on the RSR Bridge or the Multi-use Path but these past — and current — choices helped create significant traffic congestion plus serious social and economic inequities. Why are these causes absent from discussions of bridge congestion?

IS MTC ACTUALLY SERIOUS ABOUT REDUCING VMT, CARBON EMISSIONS, CLIMATE CHANGE, SEA LEVEL RISE, AND TRAFFIC CONGESTION?

If the MTC and CalTrans were taking climate change, sea level rise, congestion management, and/or sustainable transportation seriously, would it seriously propose to decrease sustainable commute options, reduce access to the Bay Trail, and favor single-occupancy vehicle drivers over people who take transit, walk, bicycle, ride scooters and e-bikes, or use wheelchairs?

CONGESTION: A MISSING VARIABLE, MISSING DATA, AND ABSENT ANALYSIS

Studies and anecdotal reports abound about changes in driver behaviors (increased aggression, impatience, distraction, depression, and other negative factors that increase collisions) following the recent “end” of the COVID epidemic. The epidemic — and its effects on driver behaviors — overlapped the RSR Bridge Multi-use Path Pilot Project and its data collection, but the pilot’s data analysis does not mention or address changes in driver behavior — a known independent variable — as a potential cause of the increased collision rates, especially within the approaches to the bridge.

How can the increased collision rates be ascribed solely to the physical changes made to the bridge in 2019 without also examining the known changes in driver behaviors that have increased collisions worldwide? Would different strategies be used to reduce the collision increases if they were attributable to broader COVID-related behavioral changes in drivers since 2020 rather than to the changes made to the RSR Bridge in 2019? How will we know the real cause(s) unless we examine them?

Here are three examples — not an exhaustive list — of international studies that address post-epidemic changes in driver behavior that increased conflict and collision rates:

1. “How did COVID-19 impact driving behaviors and crash severity? A multigroup structural equation modeling” by Xiaomeng Dong, Kun Xie, and Hong Yang. (2022) *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 172 (2022) 106687. www.elsevier.com/locate/aap

2. “Psychological impacts on the travel behaviour post COVID-19” by Vikram Singh, Kamini Gupta, Amit Agarwal, and Neelima Chakrabarty. (2022). *Asian Transport Studies* 8 (2022) 100087. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/asian-transport-studies>

3. "Driver behaviour, cyclists, and COVID-19" by Marton Kocsis. (2022).
["This preprint research paper has not been peer reviewed. Electronic copy
available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4537083>"]

TRANSPORTATION JUSTICE AND CONGESTION MANAGEMENT

Transportation justice (AKA equitable access to transit, economic justice, social justice) is given short shrift in the various reports on the RSR Bridge, Bay Trail access, and related topics. Here are a few points to consider:

- 1) When was the last time that a section of the Bay Trail was removed to accommodate traffic congestion that is allegedly caused by physical changes to a bridge? This is a serious equity concern: many low-income people cannot afford autos and depend on bicycles, walking, or public transit such as BART and buses) to get to work, school, run errands, and pursue recreation. Marin County politicians have exacerbated the RSR Bridge congestion by maintaining its shortage of affordable workforce housing and by torpedoing BART behind the scenes in 1961.
- 2) The current hourly to half-hourly transbay bus service between Richmond and San Rafael cannot compete with driving in convenience and does not offer a viable alternative to car use. In contrast, AC Transit operates 16 transbay lines across the Bay Bridge. Just one of these 16 lines, the "O" bus, serving Oakland and my home city of Alameda, runs from 5:00 am to 9:00 pm Monday-Friday with 30-minute headways. Reducing RSR Bridge bus headways to as short as 12 minutes — the point at which commuters begin to consider bus service as an alternative to driving — is never mentioned as a congestion mitigation option for the RSR Bridge corridor. Why not?
- 3) The planned RSR Forward improvements to westbound bridge access should be implemented and measured before the end of the current pilot project ends or access to the RSR Multi-use Path is curtailed. In other words, **the Pilot Project should be extended "as is" through at least 2026 to see if the "Forward" toll plaza improvements could reduce or eliminate the collisions that seem so worrisome to MTC and CalTrans** — especially since post-COVID driver behavioral changes were not considered as a potential cause of increased collision rates.
- 4) Establishing a westbound HOV lane will not significantly reduce traffic or congestion on the bridge or its approaches — especially without frequent and convenient express buses with headways as frequent as 12-20 minutes to serve the communities in which commuters live and work. Why were specific transbay bus frequency improvement options missing from the alternatives, presentations, and recommendations?

- 5) Demand pricing changes in westbound tolls is not mentioned in the staff report as a way to reduce the morning backups and, therefore, reduce collisions. Were economic incentives or disincentives even considered as a means of reducing the collision rates on the bridge approaches? These could have negative transportation justice impacts on lower-income drivers but should at least be investigated.

CONCLUSION

The Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Multi-use Path Pilot Project offered a fleeting glimpse of new and sustainable commute and recreation options on a new section of the Bay Trail. Because of the gaps and omissions in the evaluation of the RSR Bridge Path Pilot Project, **the current pilot project should — at the very least — be extended “as is” through at least 2026, until the pending toll plaza and access improvements can be implemented. The Multi-use Path should remain open and accessible every day of the week through at least 2026.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Jon Spangler, Chair

BART Bicycle Advisory Task Force

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