

The Grand Central Terminal of the West



Image courtesy of Transbay Joint Powers Authority

San Francisco's Transbay Terminal Promises to Change the City

By Scott Bogren

Rail stations were once powerful statements of a city's self image, ushering visitors and residents alike directly into the core of the community with appropriate splendor and utility. They were magnificent structures built to high architectural standards that truly told passengers that they had arrived.

In many cases, these grandiose monuments to passenger rail became synonymous with the cities they serve – Grand Central and the original Penn Station in New York City, North and South Station in Boston, the Union Passenger Terminal in Los Angeles and King Street Station in Seattle, to name but a few. These stations and many like them became far more than mere brick and mortar; they were potent symbols and economic engines that offered a strong sense of place, of civic permanence. Retail, office and residential areas thrived around the great stations, early examples of today's mixed-use development.

The era of the great rail station was once thought to be over. But in downtown San Francisco plans are underway to build a 1 million square-foot station that does more than merely hark back to passenger rail's history – the proposed new Transbay Terminal just might usher in a new era of grand, multi-modal transit centers.

"This new Transbay Terminal will be far more than a transfer point – it will be a destination," says Nathaniel Ford, Executive Director of the San

Francisco Municipal Transit Agency – MUNI – and vice-chair of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority.

The promise of intermodal transit connectivity that this new station holds – bus, commuter rail, subway, intercity rail and ferry – will assuredly become a model. But first, this nearly \$4 billion project which includes the new Transbay Terminal with a 5-acre city park on its roof and an 82-story office tower taller than any other in San Francisco, must be built, which will be no small feat.

Maria Ayerdi, the Executive Director of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority (TJPA), is charged with bringing this massive project to fruition. She has been on the job of building this new station for over a decade, having started in then-Mayor Willie Brown's office.

"This will be the first major urban intermodal station to be built in the U.S. in nearly 70 years," says Ayerdi. "We're hoping the project can be a national model where several forms of transit, housing and jobs all come together to transform a neighborhood and a city."

Bijan Sartipi, CalTrans' (the California Department of Transportation) District Director for the Bay Area and a member of the TJPA Board, agrees: "This new station is a visionary project that is very fitting with how Bay Area residents want to live."

The Past is Prologue

The current Transbay Terminal was designed by noted San Francisco architect Timothy Pflueger – famed for, among others, the Bay Bridge, the Telephone Building and the Pacific Stock Exchange Building. It was built in 1939 as a rail terminal for the electric-powered trains that plied the lower deck of the Bay Bridge connecting San Francisco with Oakland. One such train operator was the famed Key System railcars connecting Oakland, Alameda and Berkeley (among other East Bay communities) with San Francisco. The Key System saw its peak ridership in the 1940s right after the Terminal was completed, but ridership soon waned and in 1958 the tracks on the bridge were removed and the lower deck converted to automobile use. By 1959 the Transbay Terminal was a bus-only facility, as it remains today. And in 1960 the Key System was replaced altogether by AC Transit, whose buses – ironically – will serve the new facility.

Currently, the terminal is served by AC Transit, Golden Gate Transit, MUNI and Greyhound, but has fallen into disrepair. It has no internal retail capacity and adds little economically to a South of Market Street neighborhood rapidly experiencing booming development. With San Francisco's need for a modern intermodal transit hub and the current

The famed Key System called the Transbay Terminal home (left)...Today (right) the station serves bus traffic only.





Plans for the new Transbay call for several bus ramp levels and vibrant retail options – all to entice more travelers.

state of the Transbay Terminal, plans for a new station have been bandied about for decades, but today a clear plan has emerged – and it’s one of the nation’s most ambitious transit projects.

“The new Terminal will recreate its predecessor’s role as being a real transportation hub,” says MUNI’s Ford.

“We (CalTrans) are the owners of the current facility and will soon transfer that ownership to the TJPA so it can be revitalized,” says Sartipi. “With the Bay Area’s growing population and congestion we’ve realized we need to help change the way people travel here.”

The Time Was Right

In April 2001, a joint powers agency – the Transbay Joint Powers Authority – was created under California state law, consisting of the following members: the City and County of San Francisco, the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District, and the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board. The TJPA was charged with the design, construction and operation of a new Transbay Transit Center and associated facilities on a 12-acre plot of land in San Francisco.

It was not the first time that replacing the aging Transbay Terminal has been discussed. The first study to scrutinize the need for a new transit

facility was conducted in 1967 and several similar efforts had followed – all to no avail.

“We reached consensus in the late 1990s,” recalls Ayerdi. “The stakeholders who will benefit from the Transbay Transit Center sat down and agreed on the need for a new terminal and its site, the need for a regional approach and the necessity of having an entity to design, build and operate the entire project.”

Bay area residents are receptive to passenger rail and public transit projects – which also provides great support for the project.

“We’re a transit region,” says MUNI’s Nathaniel Ford. “This project fits with what our residents want and what our political leaders want – we get it.”

Last September, the TJPA selected the project plan proposed by the development firm Hines and architects Pelli Clarke Pelli from three finalists. The plan calls for implementation in two construction phases beginning this fall and completing in 2014.

Overall, the project includes three key outcomes – a new Transbay Terminal, the extension of Caltrain lines into the new station, and a new neighborhood. Perhaps most critically, the plan calls for concentrating the following bus and rail operators into the new facility: MUNI, AC Transit, SamTrans, Golden Gate Transit, WestCAT, Greyhound, Amtrak Bus Link, BART, Caltrain and, eventually, California High-Speed Rail. In fact, the new Transbay Terminal has the potential to nearly double the number of daily passengers that its predecessor saw during its peak period of the 1940s. The winning design included the tower project, and understandably larger aspirations.

“We see the transit center as one of San Francisco’s great civic places,” a Pelli Clarke Pelli official told Architecture Plus Magazine. “Its architecture is open, full of light and clean air, and environmentally sustainable.”

TJPA estimates that the new terminal will have a significant impact on transit ridership throughout the Bay Area. BART daily ridership will increase by nearly 10,000 riders, AC Transit bus patronage will grow 160 percent and Caltrain passenger loads

will swell 74 percent. If high-speed rail is brought to the new terminal, as is planned, TJPA estimates a ridership increase of more than 150 percent.

In addition to greatly increasing ridership and enhancing the public transportation experience for local residents, the TJPA plan will greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and overall energy consumption in the Bay Area. Development and jobs in the immediate vicinity will increase as will land values. The plan also includes a real commitment to affordable housing – of the 3,400 planned residential units in the vicinity of the new Transit Center, more than a third will be affordable housing.

Time to Begin Building

There will be two phases to the construction of the Transbay Terminal. The first phase will include the elevated regional bus facility and foundations for future rail access to the terminal. Phase one also includes land acquisition that's already well underway, as well as the demolition of the existing terminal and the building of a temporary terminal and bus storage in order to continue vital commuter services.

The above-ground features of the new Transbay Transit Center include buses operating at both ground level and an elevated bus level. Golden Gate, MUNI and SamTrans will operate at ground level while AC Transit, Greyhound, MUNI Treasure Island and WestCat will ply the elevated level. A bus ramp connecting the station's 30 bus bays with Interstate-80 will be constructed to ease vehicles into the above-ground sections of the terminal.

A five-acre city park will adorn the roof of the new Transit Center, providing a green footprint for the project and will assist in absorbing bus exhaust, be used to recycle water and provide a habitat for local wildlife. To usher people up to the roof-top park, the Terminal will feature a funicular flanked by redwood trees. In the park, fountains will be used to both beautify the surroundings and signal arriving buses and trains. Several typical California terrains will be simulated in the park and a jogging trail will wind its way through its length.

The interior of the new station promises to have a number of retail outlets for passengers to enjoy.

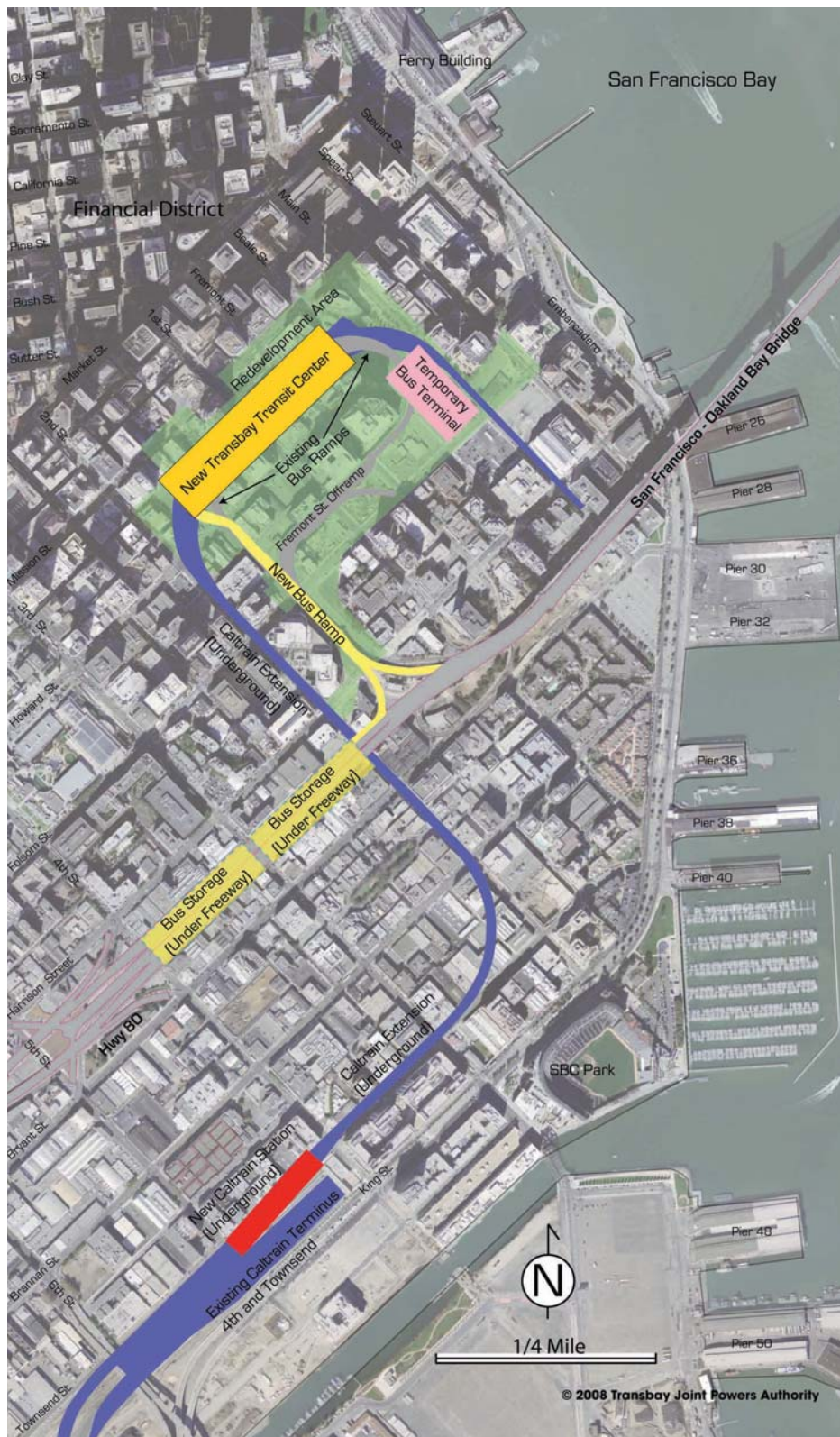
The second phase will include extending Caltrain from its current



Above, the proposed design includes a new five-acre city park atop the station.



More than a station, plans for the new Transbay Terminal hope to transform an entire neighborhood.



A key component is connecting CalTrain with the new station.

terminus at 4th and King Street a little over mile to the new station, as well as building the underground sections of the train station. The tunneling will be completed using both the mined and cut-and-cover methods. CalTrain is a commuter rail system operated – under contract – by Amtrak and funded jointly

by the City and County of San Francisco, San Mateo County Transit District, and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. It connects San Francisco with San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley and serves nearly 40,000 riders a day.

“Right now, many of our customers have to transfer to get to their final

destinations,” says CalTrain Public Information Officer Christine Dunn. “We know this more direct connection, along with the connections at the new station itself, will be great.”

“The seamless nature of the intermodalism at the new Transbay Terminal is very important,” says CalTrans’ Sartipi. “Having all the modes together will address a tremendous need and provide real options to passengers. We have 26 transit operators in the Bay Area so creating a hub is vital.”

The connection is vital as the TJPA believes more than 30,000 riders a day would take their commuter trains into the new station. Dunn agrees: “Anytime you can provide your customers with more options, you end up with more passengers.”

Another vital connection to the Transbay Terminal will be constructed during Phase 2 – underground walkways to the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system, which transports more than 350,000 people a day along more than 100 miles of both above and underground track.

“The Terminal’s connection to BART will be a one-block underground walkway,” says Ayerdi. “It’s important to have as many systems as possible connecting here and these walkways will certainly offer more options to passengers.”

This November, California voters will decide on Proposition 1 – a nearly \$10 billion state bonding proposal to fund the building of an 800-mile fully or partially grade-separated high-speed rail system linking Northern California and Southern California with 200-mile-per-hour trains. Eventually, the plan calls for two-and-a-half hour trips between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Caltrain officials note that they have already agreed to share their track with any future high-speed rail project.

“The public here in California is interested in passenger rail,” says CalTrans’ Sartipi.

A New Neighborhood: Tower, Housing and Jobs

The Transbay Terminal is really the heart of a complete neighborhood transformation in this monumental project that includes the largest skyscraper on the West Coast, thousands of new housing units, as well as significant office and retail space.

The 82-story obelisk Transit Tower, as it will be known, will provide more than 1.6 million square feet in office space and will include a series of wind turbines on the penthouse, housed in a 100-foot tall metal cage, that will power a beacon of light atop the structure. The more powerful the wind, the brighter the light.

“In many ways, this project and tower is the missing tooth in the smile,” says Ayerdi. “It’s the last area in San Francisco where you can achieve this type of development – and the station is absolutely the central element.”

The tapered tower and connected Transbay Terminal are the centerpieces for a complete neighborhood revitalization. Six additional structures and another park will add 3,500 new residential units to the area – more than a third of which will be designated affordable. Additionally, the project is expected to create and sustain nearly 30,000 new jobs. In sum, what emerges from an area long known for parking structures and lots will be a modern mixed-use, transit-oriented development neighborhood.

The current proposal calls for a diverse stock of housing types in the area to appeal to a variety of income levels and household sizes. The developer has promised to include 100 percent affordable housing developments within the project, as well as senior housing.

Multimodalism writ large: the new station will bring together bus and rail as never before in the Bay Area.

Folsom Street in envisioned in the plans as the focal point of the new neighborhood and will be recast with larger sidewalks able to sustain both pedestrian and retail space, cafes, markets and spectacular views of San Francisco Bay.

“We’re going to pursue all of these smaller elements – like benches and streetscaping – because they all add up to a better neighborhood,” says Ayerdi.

The construction, the ongoing management of the station and the other buildings and the entities that will occupy the space will create thousands of jobs in the new neighborhood. The nearly \$4 billion construction, design and management budget alone guarantees significant employment opportunities for professionals and skilled tradespeople alike from across the Bay Area. The TJPA estimates that another 28,000 jobs are likely to be created in the finished neighborhood.

Innovative Funding

As is the case with many large-scale public works projects, local, regional, state and federal funding sources are all utilized to fund the building of the Transbay Transit Center. Thus far, the TJPA has secured nearly \$1.2 billion of the needed \$3.6 billion for the entire

project.

Land sales, a local sales tax, federal funds, regional bridge tolls, state investment and a Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 1998 (TIFIA) loan comprise the necessary money to complete phase one of the Transbay Transit Center.

The California Transportation Commission approved the transfer of state-owned land, some 19 acres, to the city and county of San Francisco and TJPA. This land transfer is part of an arrangement agreed to in 2003 by the California Department of Transportation, the City and County of San Francisco and the TJPA. Twelve of these acres will be devoted to the new Transbay Transit Center.

“The TIFIA loan allows us to minimize the borrowing we need for Phase 1 of the project,” says Ayerdi, “which will provide us maximum leverage for Phase 2”

TIFIA, enacted as part of TEA-21, established a new federal program under which the U.S. Department of Transportation provides credit assistance to major surface transportation projects of national or regional significance. TEA-21 authorized up to \$10.6 billion in TIFIA credit assistance over the FY 1999-2003 period. This was continued at a rate

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Image courtesy of Transbay Joint Powers Authority

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of \$2.4 billion per year prior to the passage of SAFETEA-LU in August 2005. SAFETEA-LU continues the TIFIA credit program established under TEA-21. The program is designed to fill market gaps and leverage substantial private co-investment by providing projects with supplemental or subordinate debt.

“Projects like this one,” says TJPA’s Ayerdi, “are why TIFIA was created.”

The real impact of the TIFIA loan is that it can be repaid with the increased taxes generated by the increased land value, the housing and the retail and office space developed by the project itself. In a sense, it’s economic development paying for sustainable transit development.

Much, Much More than a Station


“Transportation, in all its forms, is the key to California’s economic future,” says Sartipi. “It creates jobs, helps the environment, moves goods and improves the quality of life.”

Four decades in the making, plans are now set and this November ground will be broken on a massive transportation project that promises to fundamentally reconnect the entire

Bay Area of Northern California. And this connection will have at its heart the buses and trains of the many public transit providers that for too many years have operated without a focal point. The Transbay Terminal project is so much more than just a wonderful new intermodal transit center. It is an ideal example of how effective use of architecture, land-use, development and all modes of transportation can combine to build a more economically competitive, environmentally friendly and – perhaps most importantly – livable city.

“Projects like these are what needs to be happening all around the country,” says Ayerdi. “We’re eager to get started.”

The onset of this massive project comes at an auspicious time for passenger rail and public transit. Rising fuel prices, gridlocked congestion and environmental concerns have many Americans and their elected officials looking for mobility alternatives. San Francisco’s new Transbay Terminal will certainly help.

“It’s a great time to be building a facility like this,” says MUNI’s Ford. “San Francisco and Bay Area residents want choices, and this project will tie all those choices together seamlessly.”

COMING DOWN THE LINE: RAIL #22

Our next edition will feature several new and innovative passenger rail systems that expand the definition for how rail service can serve its community. We’ll take a closer look at the Las Vegas Monorail – the nation’s only privately-constructed and operated rail transit system – and how it connects the city’s unique attractions. Additionally, we’ll report on the progress of two extensions to Los Angeles’ ever-expanding passenger rail network: the Exposition Line to Culver City and Santa Monica, and the expansion of the Gold Line from Union Station to East Los Angeles.

