



# Bay Area Monitor

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A Bimonthly Review of Regional Issues

## Marquee Attraction or Money Pit?

By Alec MacDonald

They stand as some of the most dominating structures on the urban landscape, massive monuments of steel and concrete that flaunt the immense power of engineering and ambition. They possess the capacity to host enormous crowds for events whose broadcast can capture exponentially bigger international audiences. Stadiums and arenas, by this logic, help put a city on the proverbial map.

Given their potential civic impact, major athletic facilities arguably deserve as much scrutiny as the teams they house. Yet the public saves its heartiest

congratulations and harshest criticisms for the actions of players and coaches, paying comparatively little attention to decisions that guide the planning and management of venues. This pattern has held in the Bay Area, where the recent exhilarating success of several franchises has overshadowed an ongoing shake-up of the region's sports geography.

The next temblor will hit in 2014, when the 49ers bring their storied football legacy from San Francisco down to the City of Santa Clara. The South Bay could also eventually see the arrival of baseball if San Jose draws the Athletics away from Oakland. While that possibility has thus far been blocked by the league on account of a territorial rights dispute with the Giants, A's ownership has expressed the resolute desire



**This artistic rendering depicts the stadium in the City of Santa Clara where the San Francisco 49ers will start playing in 2014.** *Image courtesy of the Santa Clara Convention and Visitors Bureau*

to vacate the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum. Their co-tenants, the Raiders, share this inclination, while their next-door neighbors, the Warriors, intend to depart Oracle Arena in 2017 and return to San Francisco (which they originally left more than four decades ago).

With all of these organizations casting about for a change in accommodations, residents may want to take a closer look at the larger consequences of such moves — what costs and benefits accompany stadiums and arenas?

Depends on whom you ask. Elected officials, diehard fans, and of course the sports franchises themselves tend to exhibit the most bullish outlook. They contend that the construction and management of new facilities creates jobs, while the sale of tickets, concessions, merchandise, and parking generates revenue. Proponents point to a variety of other advantages as well, but financial justifications have the broadest appeal and serve as the cornerstone of any serious campaign to raise an arena or stadium.

Monetary arguments don't always convince independent

*continued on page 2*

### ISSUE CONTENTS

<b>Gearing Up for Bike Sharing</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Making Streets Complete</b>	<b>Page 6</b>
<b>What's Coming Down the Pipe</b>	<b>Page 7</b>

## Marquee Attraction or Money Pit? (from page 1)

observers, however, and many experts have remained skeptical. As journalists Neil deMause and Joanna Cagan declared in the 2008 update of their book *Field of Schemes*, “The piles of economic studies showing that sports facilities are a net drain on public coffers have now grown into towering stacks.” The authors asserted that the dollars spent at sports venues provide less lift than proponents suggest, since absent the venue, those dollars would just get spent elsewhere in town. Referred to as the “substitution effect,” this factor is compounded by another called “leakage,” which posits that dollars paid to team owners and players have lower rates of recirculation than those paid to local businesses.

In addition to describing these two factors in their 2011 paper *Financing Professional Sports Facilities*, economics professors Victor Matheson and Robert Baade covered a third known as “crowding out,” whereby event attendees displace everyday consumers seeking to avoid congestion on game days. The scholars also addressed the issue of employment growth, noting that “as many as 98 percent of the jobs created through sports subsidies are in the relatively low-paying, non-manufacturing sector.” Not only do these positions pay poorly, but they prove relatively expensive to establish compared to other subsidized positions.

Highlighting this disparity in his own paper entitled *Professional Sports Subsidy as Economic Development*, former UC Berkeley researcher Jack Sylvan wrote that “if the goal is simply employment and income generation in and of themselves, any number of targeted actions might produce similar results at a fraction of the cost, with perhaps greater long-term benefits for city residents.” Although published back in 1998, Sylvan’s paper seems particularly instructive for this region, given that he examined seven California cities — including San Francisco, San Jose, and Oakland — who hosted professional football, baseball, basketball, or hockey organizations for some duration between 1972 and 1995. By

analyzing retail and total taxable sales data in conjunction with attendance figures and team migrations, he found evidence that “refutes the claim of professional sports boosters that sports franchises stimulate the local economy.”

Refuting this claim more ardently, Stanford economics professor Roger Noll characterized stadiums as “financial black holes” in an interview last August with George Mason University’s Russell Roberts. The co-editor of 1997’s foundational compilation *Sports, Jobs, and Taxes* reserved his strongest reproach for football stadiums, which can only schedule eight regular season home games per team; as Noll remarked, “Even in the best of circumstances what you’ve created is something that essentially sucks the blood out of a neighborhood because it’s so rarely used. And indeed, they create slums, as opposed to being engines of growth.” He rated baseball stadiums as somewhat less dubious propositions due to their league’s higher number of regular season home games (81), and allowed that basketball or hockey arenas make for safe bets because they can handle non-sporting events and therefore have the potential to operate 250 to 300 times a year.

Despite all the foreboding assessments, stakeholders awaiting the 2014 completion of Santa Clara’s \$1.2 billion football stadium have several reasons to feel optimistic. Although the public has footed most of the bill with a loan, taxpayers can take assurance from the fact that project income has stayed on track toward repayment. In March, the 49ers announced they had already sold \$403 million worth of season ticket reservation fees dubbed “Stadium Builders Licenses.” The willingness of fans to buy in early has staved off the type of troubling scenario facing UC Berkeley, which has struggled to sell premium seating packages at Memorial Stadium as part of a plan to offset the 90-year-old structure’s recent \$321 million renovation. Also working in Santa Clara’s favor, Levi Strauss & Co. just agreed to purchase the naming rights to the stadium for a princely \$220 million, and the National Football League

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slated it for the 2016 Super Bowl. Hosting this preeminent game has no bearing on the facility's construction costs, but the event should provide a healthy infusion of revenue into the South Bay and possibly the region as a whole.

How much revenue is debatable, and following the news about the 2016 Super Bowl, Victor Matheson questioned the NFL's estimates in an appearance on KQED Public Radio's "Forum" broadcast. He put the figure between \$30 million and \$120 million, approximately a tenth to a quarter of the windfall predicted by the league. However, he also forecast the influx of another kind of asset for which no straightforward metric exists, mentioning, "We do have some good evidence that big events like this actually tend to make people happy... that's certainly not something you should discount."

This point echoes what Matheson wrote with Robert Baade in 2011 when they observed, "Although the professional sports industry in the United States is only roughly the same size as the cardboard box industry, cardboard boxes don't warrant multiple channels on cable television, have a dedicated section in most newspapers, and are not the focus of frequent discussions around the office water cooler. Sports serve as a municipal amenity that can create social capital and improve the quality of life."

What is the conversion rate of social capital into financial capital, and how do you price quality of life? In a 2007 evaluation prepared for Santa Clara decision makers, real estate consultants from Keyser Marston Associates compared the proposed stadium's fiscal impact with that of a hypothetical "Class A office building" at the same location, and determined the latter would produce \$275 million more in economic activity, 1,680 more jobs, and \$122 million more in personal earnings. How many touchdowns will the 49ers need to score to make up the difference?

Even if it were possible to measure such things, doing so against an imaginary alternative isn't exactly fair. Real life has a way of being more complicated — just ask the people of Rohnert Park, where in 2003 officials sought to alleviate



**On May 5, 2013, the Golden State Warriors released preliminary concept designs (such as this image) for a 18,000-seat arena that the franchise has proposed building on the San Francisco waterfront. The City of Oakland has similarly been working on plans to potentially construct new facilities for the Warriors, the Oakland Athletics, and the Oakland Raiders in hopes of retaining the teams at their current location (more online at [oaklandnet.com/coliseumcity](http://oaklandnet.com/coliseumcity)).** © Snohetta & AECOM

budgetary woes by trading in the city's minor league baseball stadium for a shopping center. Back then, Sonoma State University professor of finance Doug Jordan told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I think they have lowered the quality of life permanently in an attempt to find a short-term solution." Yet nothing was solved, at least not in the short-term; no shopping center ever happened, the city collected only a slim fraction of the money promised by the company who optioned the property, and the site remained in limbo until earlier this year, when the planning commission voted to develop it into an apartment complex.

Land use deals can be fickle, no matter the intended use of the land; a jurisdiction assumes some amount of risk regardless. This unstable context makes it even harder to gauge the advisability of trying to secure an athletic venue. Throw in their unique and intangible social benefits, and the question of their worthiness can appear overwhelmingly enigmatic. Communities looking for answers therefore face a daunting task. Whatever course their representatives and constituents choose, perhaps they would be wise to keep the bigger picture in mind, as described in Jack Sylvan's paper: "Political leaders often latch onto issues which can send a signal to the public that the municipal system is capable of directing its future. The management of a few ultimately symbolic issues can redirect attention away from the failure to address such complex problems as lack of affordable housing, inadequate health care, unemployment, drugs, crime, education, discrimination, segregated poverty, and economic stagnation. Ignoring these issues only exacerbates the situation, and little evidence exists to show that a professional sports franchise or public stadium/arena addresses any of these problems." 

## Gearing Up: Bike Sharing Pilot Program to Launch This Summer

By Beth Hillman

Anyone who has gotten frustrated lugging a bike on a crowded train, waiting for a bus that was supposed to arrive 20 minutes ago, or walking that long last mile home from BART will have cause to celebrate this summer. After years of planning and preparation, a pilot bike sharing program will be launched in San Francisco, Redwood City, Mountain View, Palo Alto, and San Jose in August.

Members will be able to check out one of 700 bikes, cycle to their destination, and return the bike to a station of their choice. Stations will be located near transportation hubs, key destination points, and high-density residential areas to maximize effectiveness. Pending funding, the number of bikes

will eventually be increased to as many as 10,000 throughout the region, with more stations also planned.

Similar programs have thrived across the country, in cities like Washington, D.C., Minneapolis, Denver, and Boston, as well as overseas, where Paris' Vélib', perhaps the most famous such system, boasts 20,000 bikes and 1,800 stations. The San Francisco pilot is part of an uptick in such programs in this country, where similar programs are being planned in cities like Portland, Miami, and Baltimore, and a massive bike share system just launched in New York City at the end of May.

A full rate schedule is yet to be determined, but rides under 30 minutes will be free for members and a yearly membership will cost under \$100, said Karen Schkolnick, district grant programs manager at the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the agency that is leading the pilot program. Rates will likely be similar to those in Boston, Washington, D.C., and New York, Schkolnick added, noting that the goal is to develop rates that encourage short-term trips to keep the bikes circulating.

San Francisco is a natural fit for a bike share program, said Leah Shahum, executive director of the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. "We already have such a strong bicycling culture, which makes bicycling easy and comfortable in San Francisco," Shahum said. "So many trips in San Francisco are relatively short, just a mile or two — a great biking distance."

With drivers accustomed to sharing the road with bicyclists and a good system of bike lanes, adapting to the program should be an easy transition. Northern California's excellent weather will also be a boon for the program, as it can operate year round, unlike some programs that are hindered by snow, Shahum said.

Nonetheless, there have also been challenges to launching the program. Heath Maddox, transportation manager at the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency and head of the project for the organization, said that finding locations for the bike stations in the downtown San Francisco area has been a complex process. Given the often narrow sidewalks and heavy

pedestrian traffic, some stations will be placed in parking lanes, repurposing the equivalent of two or three spaces. But the abundance of peak-hour tow-away zones in the downtown area has also created some restrictions.

Another obvious issue is San Francisco's hills, a bane to bicyclists. The bikes have up to seven gears and are "not great for going up steep hills," said Schkolnick, but she said she believes this will not represent a huge inconvenience, particularly in the relatively flat downtown area.

This bike share program has been in the works for several years. The program is the first bike share to launch simultaneously in five non-contiguous cities, said Schkolnick, and, as such, it is being executed as a partnership among several government entities: the Air District, SFMTA, SamTrans, Caltrain, the County of San Mateo, the City of Redwood City, and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. Obtaining the necessary permits for the various cities has been a laborious process, Schkolnick said, although one that planners knew to start early, based on lessons learned from other cities' experiences. Implementing a project in multiple jurisdictions requires multiple layers of government to be navigated. Such partnerships naturally require cooperation and time.

But users will reap clear benefits from the regional nature of the program. A commuter starting out in San Jose to come to work in San Francisco, for example, could feasibly round



**Bike sharing programs already operate in many cities, such as Hubway in Boston.**

*photo courtesy of Alta Bicycle Share*

out her trip with a short bike ride on either end of the train journey when she previously might have needed to take both a car and a bus — or carried her own bike onto the train.

Safety issues are a natural concern in any bike sharing program, but studies have shown that users of bike share programs are less likely to be involved in accidents than regular bicyclists, Schkolnick said. She also said that the program is “very intensively managed to ensure the bikes are in good working order” and that they will be inspected regularly.

Riders over the age of 18 are not legally required to wear helmets, and the program does not currently have provisions for supplying them. Ways to make low-cost helmets available to users are being explored, Schkolnick said. Users will sign a waiver that restricts liability, limiting lawsuits and other legal complications.

Another obvious worry, theft, is assuaged by the construction of the bikes. The bikes are built so that they cannot be dismantled and mined for parts, Schkolnick said, which should act as a deterrent.

Some worry that the pilot program is not large enough in scope. Without sufficient bikes and stations to make the system convenient to a large number of users, some argue, it might not gain the popularity it needs to succeed.

Shahum, for one, said that she believes there is great demand for the program and that the public would be better served with a more ambitious scale.

“We understand there are some limits initially, but we are really encouraging city leaders to grow the program quickly. With a bike share system, it’s important that there be good density,” Shahum said. “We just hope it happens sooner rather than later. You want to have the momentum.”

Schkolnick recognizes the concern, but said that expansion is, at this point, still contingent on funding. “It’s a pilot — this is what we’re starting with,” Schkolnick said. “We want more bike sharing. It will take funding and it will take time.”

Shahum, Maddox, and Schkolnick all said that they expect corporate funding for the project to come forward. There are hopes of finding a title

sponsor, similar to New York’s program, which was funded by Citibank to the tune of \$41 million, with the program being dubbed “Citi Bike.” But Schkolnick said that a more near-term goal is finding station sponsors, most likely businesses that want to invest in nearby stations for the convenience of their employees or customers.

One benefit of starting with a pilot program is the opportunity to evaluate the system and make adjustments as it moves forward. Approximately half of the bikes in the pilot will be equipped with GPS technology that collects anonymous data, allowing for a clear understanding of how, when, and where bikes are being used. Surveys will be conducted with both users and non-users of the program, before and after its implementation, Schkolnick said, which will provide qualitative data about its effectiveness.

Another upside to a pilot is that it allows user feedback to be incorporated into subsequent planning. Maddox, who, with his team at SFMTA, decided the locations for the initial stations, indicated that users will have the opportunity to comment on the existing stations and offer their ideas for expansion.

“It will be a dialogue back and forth,” Maddox said. “There’s a lot of room for input.”

Despite her concerns about the size of the initial pilot, Shahum is optimistic that the program will have a positive impact for all bicyclists.

“More people on bikes will help everyone who bikes; it will raise visibility. The fact that more people will bike will help others be more aware,” she said. 



**Bike sharing program members can pick up and drop off bikes at stations in various convenient locations.**

*photo courtesy of Alta Bicycle Share*

## Making Streets Complete

By Cecily O'Connor

What would make the roads in your town better? Wider sidewalks with landscape buffers? Trails for pedestrian and bike traffic? Or peak-time restricted parking lanes?

These are just a few street design ideas being presented during a spring series of four “complete streets” workshops by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission to make roads safe, comfortable, and convenient — whether you’re a walker, bicyclist, or motorist. Cities need information because a new MTC grant program requires jurisdictions within the nine Bay Area counties satisfy its complete streets requirement,

including adopting a complete streets resolution, by June 30 to be eligible for funding.

“My guess is a pretty big chunk of the counties” are seeking funding, said Sean Co, transportation planner at MTC.

Complete streets provide benefits such as safety, improved air and water quality, and the potential for a local economic boost. Better transportation options also provide individuals increased mobility and independence. That’s important at a time when the U.S. population is aging, and some older individuals will face physical or cognitive challenges that make it hard to drive.

On the other side of the spectrum, fewer teens are obtaining driver’s licenses, and instead opting for public transportation, according to 2012 research from the Oregon State Public Interest Research Group.

Designing a complete street involves “thinking of roads in terms of appropriate widths and features for that [traffic] volume,” said Brett Hondrop, a principal at Alta Planning & Design, during the Marin-Sonoma MTC workshop in May.

Cesar Chavez Street in San Francisco and Charleston Road in Palo Alto are two recent examples of “road diets” where the roadways have been narrowed and bike lanes added, among other changes, to revitalize and make better use of a busy artery. As a result, connections to schools, parks, and shopping have improved.



**Complete streets accommodate all users, including bicyclists, public transportation vehicles and riders, and pedestrians of all ages and abilities.**

*photo by Alec MacDonald*

“Having a street that supports people traveling along it and to it is important in creating a strong local economy and keeping businesses and jobs in the community,” said Stefanie Seskin, deputy director of Smart Growth America’s National Complete Streets Coalition.

“We want to encourage people to get out of their cars and do things that are better for their health and the environment, and tackle the traffic problem,” added Jill Barnes, public works director for the City of Mill Valley, where the Miller Avenue Streetscape Plan was a case study at the Marin-Sonoma workshop.

Certain Bay Area street makeovers will be possible, in part, by MTC’s One Bay Area Grant program. The program promotes various types of housing, preservation, and transportation-related improvements to help cities implement the climate change mitigation strategies of 2008’s Senate Bill 375 (Steinberg). To be eligible for any OBAG funds, cities first had to adopt a resolution establishing a complete streets policy, or have a general plan that complies with the California Complete Streets Act of 2008. That law requires cities and counties, when making any local plan revisions that affect streets or traffic flow, to ensure new plans take into account needs of all roadway users. “Complete streets are like the backbone policy to encourage all communities ... to make these careful decisions every time they are renovating a

road or putting in a new road,” said Kim Baenisch, executive director of the Marin County Bicycle Coalition.

For example, city officials in Fremont are applying for \$6.3 million in OBAG funding to help cover the cost of key infrastructure for the development of their downtown, said Jim Pierson, public works director. It’s a nearly \$15 million project that would extend Capital Avenue, now a dead-end, to Fremont Boulevard, effectively making it a two-lane street with a landscaped median, wide sidewalks, bike lanes, and street parking. The end result would create a pedestrian-friendly environment that offers better access to retail shopping, residential areas, and connections to a nearby BART station, Pierson said.

“It’s not just about the car anymore,” Pierson said.

A total of \$320 million of OBAG funding is available, and will be distributed among the nine counties based on population and housing, among other factors. Santa Clara County, for example, stands to receive the largest piece of the pie, with \$88 million. However, just how much of that amount will go to complete streets projects is up to each Bay Area county’s congestion management agency.

Outside the Bay Area, U.S. cities are steering toward complete streets, too. Approximately 488 communities nationwide had complete streets policies at the end of 2012,

up from 31 in 2005, according to Smart Growth America. Furthermore, 125 communities adopted policies last year.

“Certainly, at the national level we have put out a concerted effort to share this idea, but much of the work has come from grassroots talking to neighbors and officials,” Seskin said.

Like many city projects, finding funds to create a complete street can be a challenge when budgets are spread thin. Some roads may only require minimal, low-cost changes such as adding countdown clocks at intersections, which can be done at an estimated \$2,000 per intersection, according to Smart Growth America.

Road reconstruction projects come with bigger price tags — and vary based on cost of labor, materials, and other factors — but are being treated as long-term community investment. The Miller Avenue Streetscape Plan is currently estimated at \$20 million to provide bike lanes, wider sidewalks, new landscaping, and other improvements along the two-mile stretch.

Barnes said she thinks that cost will come down once the design is finalized. Mill Valley did not apply for OBAG grant money because it did not meet the approved housing element required earlier this year.

“We have been successful in [finding] other grants,” Barnes said. 

## What’s Coming Down the Pipe: The Future of Bay Area Water

By Chris Ingraham

People are coming; water is going. That’s the prognosis for the greater Bay Area as we look ahead into the remainder of the century. Do we have enough water to support the anticipated growth of the coming years? How should we best prepare to meet our growing population’s water needs? These are the questions guiding *Future-Proof Water*, a recent report by SPUR (the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association) assessing, anticipating, and addressing the exigencies of the Bay Area’s water-related problems in the twenty-first century.

According to the report, as soon as 2040, the current population of 7 million people in our region will likely grow by another 2 million. With that growth we’ll need more water. Right now, over two-thirds of our water supply comes from areas outside our own region: it’s brought in from the Mokelumne and Tuolumne rivers, the Central Valley and State Water projects, and various other sources mostly in the Sierra Nevada and Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Even under optimal conditions, getting that water here can be imperiled by transportation inefficiencies and high costs. But, as infrastructure wears down and the area continues to be wracked by earthquakes, drought, and diminished snowmelt in the years ahead, our water resources will be put in even greater jeopardy, making very real the prospect that our usable supply will be insufficient to meet our projected demands.

*Future-Proof Water* finds several variables in play when assessing the problem. The dangers of earthquakes in particular recur as among the more pernicious factors, in part because earthquakes are thought to be inevitable but also erratic and unpredictable. The fault lines that wrinkle our region like a perplexed forehead make us especially susceptible to seismic activity, and even mild quakes, in the right places, could have calamitous effects on the water pipelines and storage facilities that are located in a hazardous position relative to the faults.

The outlook is grim: almost 95 percent of the Bay Area’s

*continued on page 8*

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## What's Coming Down the Pipe (*from page 7*)

critical water systems facilities are vulnerable to severe seismic activity. A rupture along the Hayward Fault in the East Bay, for instance, could greatly impair the Hetch Hetchy, Mokelumne, and South Bay aqueducts, with the result that huge amounts of water are lost or unable to move from point A to point B. The Hetch Hetchy reservoir is the largest in the regional system, providing water for some 2.5 million Bay Area residents daily. According to the report, though, the most ominous seismic risk is the prospect of a levee failure in the Delta, an area mostly below sea level but protected by some 1,000 miles of earthen levees that keep the Bay's salt water from contaminating the fresh. Whether they know it or not, the Delta is a primary water source for as many as 25 million Californians. If its levees break, their normal access to drinking water may be interrupted for well over a year. More grim still: the report cites figures suggesting a 55 percent chance that a quake capable of wreaking such havoc will occur in the next 25 years.

Another harmful factor the report isolates is the ongoing march of climate change. Like earthquakes, rising temperatures are thought to be inevitable. And as temperatures rise, droughts increase. According to the report, under drought conditions snowpack on the Sierra Nevada is expected to diminish to as much as 20 percent of the historical average

by century's end. Given the formidable role this snowpack plays in providing water for the state, runoff will radically decrease, meaning not only is the infrastructure that stores and transports water vulnerable to earthquakes, but the sheer quantity of water likely to be available in the years ahead appears to be dwindling as well.

Despite the gloominess of these findings, the report does more than predict the worst and shrug its proverbial shoulders. Its purpose, rather, is to offer prudent suggestions for how we might prepare now for some of the frightening possibilities ahead of us. To this end, the report considers ways both to reduce the demand for water and to augment the supply. In regard to the former, it proposes the implementation of water efficiency ordinances, rate structure reforms, compact infill development, and more stringent standards for green building programs. With respect to the latter, it recommends managing surface and groundwater resources together through conjunctive use, as well as establishing potable reuse projects, and to a lesser extent moving forward with water recycling and desalination efforts.

We are not yet in a crisis, but by being aware of the exigency soon approaching, and by exercising caution now, signs indicate we may well avert disaster. 