

SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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TO: All Design Review Board Members

FROM: Will Travis, Executive Director [415/352-3653 travis@bcdc.ca.gov]
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SUBJECT: Yerba Buena Island Ramps Improvement Project, City and County of San Francisco; Second Pre-Application Review
(For Board consideration on June 7, 2010)

Project Summary

Project Sponsor: San Francisco County Transportation Authority

Project Representatives: Eric Cordoba, San Francisco County Transportation Authority and Dave Dickinson, WMH Corporation.

Overview. Yerba Buena Island is located in the center of the San Francisco Bay within the City and County of San Francisco. The proposed project site is located along the eastern side of Yerba Buena Island (YBI). The project, which would be federally funded, involves the addition of new entrance and exit ramps between YBI and the new east span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (Bay Bridge), which the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is currently constructing. However, it should be noted that the ramps project is proposed by the San Francisco County Transportation Authority, not by Caltrans. The project sponsors state that the replacement ramps are needed to address seismic safety, traffic safety, and new design standards.

Existing Site. Yerba Buena Island is currently primarily owned and controlled by the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Coast Guard. The existing ramps have not been updated since the 1930s and do not meet current Caltrans seismic safety standards (Exhibit 1X). The existing westbound entrance ramp has a 141-foot-long merge lane and a steep grade with a 19 mile-per-hour design speed. These factors impact a vehicle's ability to accelerate and merge into traffic and, therefore, increase the potential for collisions. The existing westbound exit ramp diverges from the left-hand lane, which is not standard and increases the potential for collisions.

Access to Yerba Buena Island is available only by vehicle or boat. Currently, there is limited public access on the island. The project site is currently impacted by massive construction due to the building of the new east span of the Bay Bridge. The site includes buildings, including the Nimitz House, that are on the National Register of Historic Places. The project site is located outside of the Commission's 100-foot shoreline band, but within the Commission's Waterfront Park and Beach Priority Use Area depicted in the *San Francisco Bay Plan*.



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Proposed Project and Public Access. The proposed project includes two alternatives: Alternative 2B and Alternative 4. Both alternatives include removing and replacing the existing westbound entrance and exit ramps, and providing a link from the new east span of the Bay Bridge bicycle/pedestrian lane down Macalla Road. Both alternatives also include widening an existing 20-foot-wide, 656-foot-long section of Macalla Road adjacent to both of the ramps. The proposed roadway would accommodate a 12-foot-wide multi-use pedestrian/bicycle path and two 12-foot-wide vehicle lanes (Exhibit 15). In order to complete this widening project, a 4-foot to 16-foot retaining wall would be built adjacent to Macalla Road and a stairway adjacent to the Caltrans Substation would be relocated to the west side of the station.

Alternative 2B includes constructing both the westbound entrance ramp and the westbound exit ramp north of the Bay Bridge (Exhibit 2). The proposed westbound entrance ramp would begin at a “T” intersection at Macalla Road, loop right, and merge onto the westbound lanes of the Bay Bridge. The ramp would be approximately 875 feet long with one high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane and a mixed-flow lane; both lanes would be controlled by ramp metering and patrolled by the California Highway Patrol. The proposed exit ramp would be approximately 1,115 feet long, and diverge from bents W3 and W4 north of the Bay Bridge Transition Structure. It would terminate at a stop sign at the “T” intersection at Macalla Road. In order to accommodate the new entrance ramps near Macalla Road for Alternative 2B, two historic structures (Quarters 10 and Building 267) would be relocated on YBI at a location yet to be determined (Exhibit 13). Building 57 would be demolished.

Alternative 4 involves beginning the westbound entrance ramp south of the Bay Bridge from South Gate Road, and constructing the westbound exit ramp north of the Bay Bridge, connecting to Macalla Road (Exhibit 3). The westbound entrance ramp would be approximately 2,883 feet long. Beginning at South Gate Road, the entrance ramp would proceed east, parallel to the eastbound entrance ramp, loop under the new Bay Bridge Transition Structure, cross over the westbound exit ramp along the north side of the Bay Bridge and merge with westbound traffic on the Bay Bridge. The westbound exit ramp would diverge from the Bay Bridge Transition Structure between bents W2 and W3 for approximately 1,168 feet, and terminate with a stop sign at the “T” intersection at Macalla Road. Under Alternative 4, Quarters 10, Building 267 and 57 would remain in place.

Prior Board Comments and Plan Revisions. In its April 2009 review, the Board requested more information on the following design aspects: (1) information on potential project impacts on views to the Bay from the project site and a better understanding of the existing and proposed ground plan of YBI; (2) information on the architectural quality of the proposed ramps, including a vivid depiction of the placement, size, and colors of the proposed columns; (3) information on any impacts at the ground plane and a landscape plan that depicts the area of impact; and (4) a better understanding of the arrival and departure sequence to the public spaces in the vicinity of the proposed project. These issues are addressed below.

Public Access Issues. The *San Francisco Bay Plan* Public Access policies state that access should “be provided in and through every new development in the Bay or on the shoreline,” be designed – using the Commission’s *Public Access Design Guidelines* – “to encourage diverse Bay-related activities and movement to and along the shoreline.” The goals of the Public Access Design Guidelines for the San Francisco Bay are in part, to maximize views and physical connections to the bay and to create a “sense of place.” The staff believes that the project raises three primary issues for the Board to address in its review: (1) does the proposed project

provide, maintain and enhance visual access and quality to the Bay and the shoreline; (2) does the proposed development provide connections to and continuity along the shoreline; and (3) does the proposed project make the public access useable.

1. **Does the proposed project provide, maintain and enhance visual access and quality to the Bay and the shoreline?** The *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that visual access should organize structures to “enhance and dramatize views of the Bay and the shoreline from public thoroughfares and other public spaces,” and to “allow Bay views and access between buildings.” Regarding visual quality, the *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that a shoreline development should, “use building footprints to create a diversity of public spaces along the Bay,” and “utilize the shoreline for Bay-related land uses as much as possible.”

Currently, visual and physical access to the project site is limited due to the construction of the east span of the Bay Bridge. As proposed, Alternative 2B introduces two columns between the Nimitz House and the Bay, which generally align with the proposed Bay Bridge columns (Exhibits 9 and 11). On the other hand, Alternative 4 includes several columns between the Nimitz House and the Bay (Exhibits 9 and 11). The project as proposed would also provide views from the pedestrian/bicycle access towards the Bay and Treasure Island.

The Board should evaluate the proposal and advise the Commission on whether the proposed project would enhance and dramatize views of the Bay and the shoreline from public thoroughfares and other public spaces and allow Bay views and access between the proposed columns and buildings.

2. **Does the proposed development provide connections to and continuity along the shoreline?** The *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that a shoreline development should, “incorporate the designated Bay Trail route,” and “provide a clear and continuous transition to adjacent developments.” It also states that a development should, “use local public street networks to inform shoreline site design and to extend the public realm to the Bay,” ...“provide connections perpendicular to the shoreline,” and ...“promote safe pedestrian and bicycle access.”

This proposed project would provide a significant link in the Bay Trail between the proposed bicycle/pedestrian access along the east span of the Bay Bridge and the proposed access to Treasure Island (Exhibit 14). Located along a public street, the proposed access would be an approximately 12-foot-wide, 656-foot-long Class One Bicycle/Pedestrian lane that would serve as part of the Bay Trail. This link would also include a connection from Macalla Road to the eastern edge of YBI. In the future, a bicycle/pedestrian link to Treasure Island is proposed by a separate project. The project sponsors state that the proposed Bay Trail connection is limited by the proposed connections to the south by Caltrans and to the north by the Treasure Island Redevelopment Agency.

The Board should evaluate the connections to the shoreline and advise the staff, the applicant and the Commission on whether they provide a clear and continuous transition to the adjacent developments, extend the public realm to the Bay, provide connections perpendicular to the shoreline, and promote safe pedestrian and bicycle access.

3. **Does the proposed project provide adequate, usable, and attractive public access spaces?** In addition to the Bay Plan Public Access policies, the *Public Access Design Guidelines* (Guidelines) state that public access spaces should be “designed and built to encourage diverse, Bay-related activities along the shoreline”, to create a “sense of place”, and be “designed for a wide range of users.” The Guidelines also state that, “access areas are utilized most if they provide direct connections to public rights-of-way such as streets and sidewalks...” The Guidelines further state that this may be accomplished by “incorporating the designated Bay Trail route into shoreline projects and providing clear and continuous transitions to adjacent developments.”

The project as proposed would allow a continuous Bay Trail connection from the east span of the Bay Bridge, throughout YBI, and to Treasure Island. In order to enhance the landscaping in and around the project site, the applicants have proposed a preliminary landscaping report, which includes close coordination with Caltrans to develop a consistent landscaping plan. The initial landscaping plan incorporates native California trees, shrubs, ground cover and accent plants, slope restoration and a plant establishment period (Exhibit 16).

The Board should advise the staff, the applicant and the Commission on whether the project provides adequate, usable and attractive public access spaces.