

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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TO: Design Review Board Members

FROM: Lawrence J. Goldzband, Executive Director (415/352-3653; larry.goldzband@bcdc.ca.gov)
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SUBJECT: Approved Minutes of January 11, 2016 BCDC Design Review Board Meeting

1. **Call to Order and Attendance.** Board Vice Chair Steve Thompson called the meeting to order at approximately 5:40 p.m. Other Design Review Board (DRB or Board) members in attendance included Karen Alschuler, Ephraim Hirsch, Jacinta McCann and Gary Strang. BCDC staff in attendance included Jhon Arbelaez-Novak, Elizabeth Felter, Ethan Lavine, Jaime Michaels, Hanna Miller, Ellen Miramontes and Matthew Trujillo.

2. **Approval of Draft Minutes for the December 7, 2015 Meeting.** The Board approved these minutes with no revisions.

3. **Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Access Improvement Project (1st Pre-Application Review).** The Board conducted a first pre-application review of a proposal to convert the existing shoulder on the lower eastbound deck of the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge to a new vehicular travel lane during peak period hours, and to convert the existing shoulder on the upper westbound deck of the bridge to a bi-directional bicycle and pedestrian pathway. A moveable barrier would separate bicyclists and pedestrians from motorists on the upper deck, and a railing would be added on the outside edge of the upper bridge deck. The project would also include public access connections to the proposed bridge pathway in both Contra Costa County and Marin County.

a. **Staff Presentation.** Jhon Arbelaez-Novak introduced the project and the issues identified in the staff report, which focused on the design of the proposed bicycle and pedestrian pathway, potential impacts on scenic views from the proposed railing, and the design and adequacy of the proposed public access connections to the bridge pathway on both sides of the bridge.

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b. **Project Presentation.** Chadi Chazbek of HNTB, project consultant to the Bay Area Transit Authority (BATA) began by playing a video developed by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) describing the project, including the proposed bicycle and pedestrian improvements in Marin and Contra Costa Counties. He mentioned that although the video was a good introduction, several design aspects of the project had changed since the video was produced.

Mr. Chazbek then presented the proposed project in detail. He described that the project is a four-year pilot project. After four years, the changes would be evaluated and determined if they could be made permanent, or would be removed. The project is currently undergoing environmental review and final design process simultaneously. The connections on both sides of the bridge were described in detail, including paths that would be removed and replaced with new bicycle/pedestrian paths in Contra Costa County, and new paths that would be added in Marin County. Mesh railing would screen high-security areas in Contra Costa County near the Chevron facilities. Mr. Chazbek mentioned that connections to the existing Bay Trail on Grange Avenue are not a part of the planned project, and that plans are being considered for better connections to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. On the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, a third lane managed by electronic signage contained within the existing structure of the bridge would be added on the eastbound direction (lower deck) to be used during peak period only.

The proposed bicycle/pedestrian path would be located on the upper deck of the bridge, separated from vehicles by a moveable barrier 42 inches in height. The barrier could be moved in sections or the full length if necessary. To meet current safety standards, the railing on the bridge would need to be increased from its current height of 32 inches. Three types of railings are proposed: tubular, mesh, and cable. The cable railing is the preferred railing for the project proponents, as it would allow for clearer views of the Bay for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists. Railings would be attached to existing structures on the bridge, with vertical structures added to increase height where necessary. All additions on the bridge would be painted to match existing bridge elements. Mr. Chazbek mentioned that current lighting on the bridge is sufficient for the proposed pathway, but lighting would be added on Marin County side of the project, including along Francisco Boulevard.

c. **Board Questions.** During and following the presentation, the Board asked several questions.

Mr. Thompson asked why there are no markings proposed to differentiate between the pedestrian/bicycle lanes and the vehicle lanes, such as diamonds or dashed lines. Mr. Chazbek explained that because in times of emergency when the moveable barrier is moved, it would be pushed against the railing, closing the bicycle/pedestrian path. Markings on the pavement would confuse motorists. However, other signage would be installed.

Mr. Hirsch asked why an extra vehicular lane was not being added on the westbound direction as well in order to alleviate traffic on the bridge. Mr. Chazbek explained that the toll plaza on the Contra Costa County side of the bridge helps manage traffic heading towards Marin County.

Mr. Thompson asked if the bridge is structurally sound enough to accommodate the moveable barrier.

Mr. Hirsch asked for clarification on where the barrier would move, and if the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge would have its own machine to move the barrier, or would share with the machine used on the Golden Gate Bridge. Mr. Chazbek reiterated his response regarding the location of the barrier in times of emergency, and stated that this bridge would have its own machine to move the barrier.

Mr. Thompson stated that current conditions on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard are “pretty spooky” for bicycles.

Mr. Hirsch asked if the cable railing were used, would the existing horizontal structures be removed to improve views of the Bay. Mr. Chazbek responded that if the cable railing were used, the horizontal structures would be left in place until the pilot study is completed at the end of four years. If it is decided that the pedestrian/bicycle pathway would remain, the horizontal structures would be removed.

Mr. Hirsch asked if the cable railings would be welded or bolted to steel sections.

Mr. Thompson asked if existing areas with little to no landscaping would be improved. Mr. Chazbek responded that landscaping would be improved in all areas where construction would take place.

Mr. Thompson asked if all areas and connections to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard would be clearly marked.

Ms. Alschuler asked why the width of the pedestrian/bicycle pathway would not be 15 feet, as with the path on the new east span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. Mr. Chazbek responded that a ten-foot-wide path was chosen because of the limited space available on the bridge.

Mr. Strang asked why the third lane on the lower bridge deck would only be open during rush hour, why not all the time. Mr. Chazbek responded that the pilot program would evaluate the times the lane is open.

Mr. Hirsch asked which railing the project proponent liked best. Mr. Chazbek mentioned that the cable railing is preferable to increase views of the Bay for all users, and that the cable railing is less expensive, and easier to alter if necessary.

Mr. Thompson asked if the project proponents had considered suicide prevention programs since the bridge would now be open to pedestrians. Mr. Chazbek responded that proposals are in the works to install signage and to provide easy access to call boxes.

Ms. Alschuler mentioned that views of the Bay towards the south/southwest are very beautiful and important. She asked if it was considered to place the pedestrian/bicycle

path on the south side of the bridge. Mr. Chazbek responded that the path was placed on the north side in order to provide connections on both sides of the bridge.

Mr. Strang asked what the maintenance issues for the cable railing would be. Mr. Chazbek responded that the tension cables would be securely fastened and have a 4-inch-gap between the cables to allow for some sag since 6-inch-gaps are now allowed at this height in the railing.. The cables would be tightened periodically as needed.

Mr. Hirsh wondered if people could more easily climb the cable railings than the other types.

Mr. Strang asked if the existing horizontal members could be removed if the mesh railing were installed, thereby increasing views of the Bay. Mr. Chazbek responded that this proposal could be considered.

Mr. Thompson asked how the new railings would affect nesting birds. Mr. Chazbek responded that surveys have shown that birds nest under the bridge, not on the railing.. Caltrans Biology Branch Chief, Chris States, added that birds would not nest on the railings due to wind.

Ms. McCann asked if things such as drinking fountains and other “human comforts” would be added due to the great length of the bridge, including video surveillance. Mr. Chaznek responded that 30 cameras would be added to monitor the upper and lower decks.. Chris Lillie with BATA added that amenities would be located on land, and may be added on the bridge if the path remains after the four-year pilot program.

Mr. Hirsch asked how spaced apart the lighting on the bridge is, and whether it would be adequate for pedestrians and bicycles. Lighting needs are different for vehicles than for bicyclists and pedestrians. Mr. Chazbek responded that the project proponents are confident that the existing bridge lighting would be sufficient.

Mr. Thompson stated concerns that the proposed project will not connect to the existing Bay Trail in Point Richmond.

d. **Public Hearing.** Two members of the public commented on the project.

Maureen Gaffney with the San Francisco Bay Trail Project spoke in favor of the project, mentioning that it would connect to 27 miles of existing Bay Trail in Contra Costa County, and would connect to upcoming Bay Trail improvements in Marin County. There is concern that the pilot program timeframe of four years is too short. She asked for continued planning and implementation of connections in Marin County, including bike lanes on Grange Avenue. She stated the importance of better connections to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, and expressed concern that plans would not be ready by 2017. She expressed concern that existing conditions are dangerous for bicyclists, and proposed ideas for improvements, including cutting back the hillside to provide more space, installing a solid barrier to protect bicyclists and pedestrians, and using soft sticks as a last resort. She requested that the moveable barrier on the bridge be as transparent as possible to provide visual access.

Alisha O'Loughlin with the Marin County Bicycle Coalition expressed the need for complete connections on both sides of the bridge, as it would provide more accurate and representative usage numbers of the path at the conclusion of the pilot program. She expressed concern that current conditions on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard are dangerous, and these connections need improvement.

e. **Board Discussion.** The Board members discussed the following:

Mr. Strang expressed preference for the mesh screen, because it's more unifying with other elements of the bridge.

Mr. Hirsch expressed concern that current lighting on the bridge would not be enough for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Mr. Thompson expressed concern about discontinuity on both sides of the bridge, especially if it affects usage numbers at the end of the pilot program.

Ms. Alschuler wants the project proponents to look at the "bigger picture" regarding this project, and ensure good connections on both sides of the bridge.

Ms. McCann mentioned that the project needs to be positioned for success. Anything that can be done to improve connections, and encourage people to use the path should be done.

Ms. Alschuler expressed amazement at the rapid timeframe for completion of the proposed project.

Mr. Thompson encouraged the placement of bike lanes on Grange Avenue.

Ms. McCann asked whether the mesh railing would have a mitigating effect on wind, and increase perceived safety by bicyclists and pedestrians. Mr. Chazbek responded that the mesh would need to have much smaller openings to mitigate wind, and would thus prevent views of the Bay.

Mr. Thompson wants the top portion of the moveable barrier to be clear, and expressed that it is an extreme disadvantage that the proposed path does not connect to Point Richmond.

Ms. Alschuler and Mr. Thompson stressed the need for rest areas on the bridge.

Ms. McCann wants the path to be as user-friendly as possible.

Mr. Thompson wondered about access to water on the bridge, both for people and pets.

Mr. Alschuler asked if extra lighting could be added on the proposed camera poles. Mr. Hirsch suggested adding lighting along the bridge at a lower height.

Ms. Alschuler wants additional parking on both sides of the bridge so people can walk across the bridge.

Ms. McCann mentioned the long distance of the bridge, and recommended markings denoting the distance. She also would like to see periodic rain protection on the pedestrian/bicycle path if it becomes permanent after the four-year pilot program.

Overall the Board is supportive of the proposed project. They did not request a second review, but asked the project applicant to look closely at their suggestions.

f. **Applicant Response.** The applicant responded positively to the Board's discussion and suggestions. They mentioned they would consider all suggestions closely.

g. **Board Summary and Conclusions.** The Board made the following summary and conclusions:

(1) **Consider the proposed bridge pathway and its connections from a regional perspective.** The Board encouraged the project team to map present and future pedestrian and bicycle routes within this region of the Bay to learn how the project will best fit within this network. They also recommended indicating the location of existing public parking areas near the bridge on this map.

(2) **Make clear and safe connections to the bridge pathway on both sides of the bridge in order to "position the project for success."** On the Contra Costa County side, the Board stated that the gap in pedestrian and bicycle connections between where the proposed project improvements stop and to the other areas in Richmond should be addressed. Regarding the Marin County side, the Board stated that bicycle lanes should be added on Grange Avenue in order to provide a connection between the proposed improvements on Francisco Boulevard East and the existing Bay Trail along the shoreline. And while the Board recognized the difficulty of coordinating between four jurisdictions (Caltrans, Marin County, San Rafael and Larkspur) in order to create a safe connection to and from Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, they did not believe that difficulty should pose a barrier to creating safe connections.

(3) **Positive feedback was provided for both the cable railing and the mesh railing design options, although overall the Board preferred the cable railing.** If the cable railing were to be used, the Board recommended decreasing the size of the vertical posts as much as possible. And if the mesh railing were used, the Board recommended removing the existing round horizontal members behind the new mesh panels.

(4) **Provide amenities for pathway users on land on both sides of the bridge.** Given the length of the bridge (approximately 5.5 miles), the Board recommended providing resting areas on each landside that would include seating, signage, shelter, water and parking. Ideally, they recommended there should be a place to sit approximately every 1,000 feet along these landside connections. If the bridge pathway were to become permanent, they recommended adding light, transparent shelters and some seating every half-mile on the bridge itself as well.

(5) **Evaluate whether current lighting is adequate for pathway users.** The Board expressed concern whether the existing bridge lights would be sufficient and suggested this be looked at more closely. They recommended exploring the possibility of including some lower lighting closer to the pathway to supplement the tall pole lights that exist now.

(6) **Top portion of moveable barrier should be transparent.** In order to maintain views for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians in addition to increasing the sense of personal safety for pathway users, the Board stated that the top of the moveable barrier should be transparent.

(7) **Mark pathways that lead to bridge and include mile markers on bridge.** The Board recommended adding mile markers for safety and orientation purposes on the bridge. They also suggested adding color or patterns on the pavement of the landside connections leading to the bridge.

4. **Adjournment.** Mr. Thompson adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

ELLEN MIRAMONTES
Bay Design Analyst

Approved, with no corrections at the
Design Review Board Meeting of April 11, 2016.