



July 3, 2008

San Mateo County Transit District
Planning and Development
1250 San Carlos Avenue
San Carlos, CA 94070

Comments on Caltrain Draft Bicycle Master Plan

As of July 3, 2008, a draft of Caltrain's Bicycle Master Plan has not been made available for public review. Nevertheless, we will endeavor to provide comments based on what we know about the planning process underway since January 2007 and the "Key Findings" document posted on Caltrain's website and presented at public meetings during the month of June, 2008.

Caltrain's Bicycle Service – History and Background

"Bikes on board" (bicycle bring-along by Caltrain passengers) is a service success that built Caltrain's ridership, enhanced its reputation, and has been studied and admired by transit systems all over the nation.

Work to develop the service predates the formation of Caltrain/Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board. Bicycle advocates worked with Southern Pacific Railroad for several years before winning a 4-month demonstration project in 1982 that permitted four bikes being held in the aisle of the cab car. Despite the popularity of the service, Southern Pacific refused to continue the project.

It wasn't until Caltrain was established in 1992 that provision of the service was resumed; advocates were successful in identifying and allocating funding that allowed Caltrain to remove cab car seats and provide bike racks, resulting in 8 bike spaces per train. By 1996, 24 bikes were accommodated per train and by 2002, the current maximum of 32 had been reached (Baby Bullet trains accommodate 16 bikes in a single Bombardier car, but sometimes one or even two 32-bike galley cars are provided on a Baby Bullet train, resulting in irregular, unpredictable capacity, from 16 to 64 bikes).

Over the past 15 years, the bicycling community has continued to build on this proven track record of working collaboratively with Caltrain to implement and

improve on-board bicycle service. This legacy of partnership and collaboration has served Caltrain's and our communities' fundamental interests in reducing traffic congestion on highways and local streets and protecting our environment (particularly climate-change concerns), as well as providing a regional transportation option that rivals the automobile in convenience and flexibility.

Unfortunately, Caltrain's engagement in maintaining and enhancing this essential service has been badly distracted and grossly undercommitted. The present "Master Planning" effort for bicycles should have been a prime opportunity to evaluate and plan for bikes on board, but instead Caltrain appears to have squandered that opportunity and gone very well in the wrong direction.

Planning for Bikes on Board Caltrain

"Bikes on board" is the central and essential element of Caltrain's bicycle service and must be addressed fully in any planning process. Far from being a "special interest" service for Caltrain, bicycle bring-along by Caltrain passengers serves the system's and region's goals more perfectly than almost any other trip type and should be supported and enhanced by Caltrain with energy and focus.

We appreciate the effort that Caltrain has put into exploring improvements to bike access to stations and increasing bike parking at stations. Nonetheless, it is gravely misguided to ignore the 80% of cyclists who need to bring their bike on board the train (according to the *Caltrain 2007 Online Bicycle Survey*), and fails to appreciate the intrinsic benefits to the entire system which onboard bicycle carriage provides:

- A bike-plus-train combination gets a passenger from door to door, making it the *only* option that matches the (heavily-subsidized) convenience of cars for these distances. That's why bikes on board has been such a success, and that's why whittling away at this convenience with schemes like requiring two bikes and locker rentals, charging fees to reserve spaces, and the current failure to provide capacity, are all policy mistakes that injure the broad appeal and utility of this service.
- Bicyclists actually place the least demand on transit overall. Non-biking riders generally require parking lots or garages, buses, and/or shuttles, burdening roads and transit systems. Usually the comparison is made between cyclists "needing more" than other riders, but that only makes sense if the other riders are all walking at both ends of the train journey, and the number of people who can do that is extremely small – much smaller than the number who can bike at both ends.

Even while the Bicycle Master Planning process has been actively underway, Caltrain has neglected to bring meaningful attention to planning for improved on-board bike capacity as it procures eight new Bombardier cars. While other regional rail systems (such as ACE Rail - Altamont Commuter Express) explore

and implement improvements to bike carriage on the very same Bombardier rolling stock, Caltrain appears to neglect the issue outright.

In the absence of any engagement by Caltrain planning, we have developed a mathematical model to estimate required bike capacity. Current bike capacity is 7% bike space, compared with seats averaged over all train sets. Due to latent demand, we estimate that the required bike capacity today is 13%, or nearly double the actual capacity. The Bicycle Master Plan is meant to have a five-year planning horizon, and our model shows that five years from now, in the year 2013, bike space on Caltrain may need to be at 20% to meet the expected demand.

Comments on the *Key Findings* document and planning process

- 1) Caltrain was awarded a Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) grant in 2007 to develop a Bicycle Master Plan. To the extent that the scope and premise of Caltrain's planning process has excluded any consideration of, or planning for, carriage of bicycles on board trains, the planning process is unlikely to result in an actual "Master Plan" for bicycle service on Caltrain.
- 2) We presume that the FTA grant contract obliges Caltrain to produce a complete and thorough Bicycle Master Plan, and are concerned that Caltrain may fail to satisfy its grant obligations to the FTA.
- 3) The product of the Caltrain bicycle master planning process so far appears to be a project list for bicycle access and parking improvements at 10 stations. This is undoubtedly a worthy thing, but gets ahead of a proper master planning process and is based on assumptions about current and future ridership, operations, and funding that are not supported by anything developed by the planning process itself, or by any data or findings available to the public or Caltrain's board of directors.
- 4) Caltrain's Bicycle Master Plan should be developed as a planning framework for the next ten years of bicycle service, as a complement to Caltrain's existing and adopted *Short Range Transit Plan – FY 2008 to 2017* and *2004-2023 Strategic Plan*. Bicycle-involved service should be analyzed as a component of all Caltrain service and integrated into Caltrain's service goals and scenarios as a central premise.
- 5) The Bicycle Master Plan framework should lead to development of a second, related document of priority bicycle service improvements, from which a list of priority projects should be developed for evaluation by Caltrain's board of directors for further action/implementation.
- 6) The Bicycle Master Plan should include an element concerning funding sources and opportunities for maintenance and enhancement of bicycle service on Caltrain, identifying known and anticipated opportunities,

including California High Speed Rail bonds and state/regional climate protection funding.

- 7) Caltrain currently provides onboard bike capacity in a haphazard manner, resulting in inconsistent and unpredictable service to its customers. This planning effort should analyze what it would take (in equipment and operations) to provide consistent onboard bike capacity during peak and off-peak times in the near term (12-24 months) for two or three level-of-service scenarios, for further deliberation and action by Caltrain's board of directors.

Comments on "Innovative Concepts" in the *Key Findings* document

- 8) Real-time information systems may help distribute the load, but they will not solve the bike capacity problem. We strongly support sharing real-time information about the number of bike cars on each train and the number of available bike spaces. The former should be implemented immediately by posting the train assignment on Caltrain's website each morning, and the latter should be implemented via electronic signage at stations and via standard web and mobile messaging channels.
- 9) We do not support additional-fare or fee ideas as a "demand management" strategy for onboard bike service. Reducing demand by raising prices until the customer goes away is unacceptable. Even a nominal fee is potentially discriminatory, and won't effectively distinguish real need for the service from affordable discretion – "those who need it most" may still be left behind while those who can/are willing to pay the premium get onboard.
- 10) Bicycle sharing at Caltrain stations may be interesting as a tourist feature but it's not a solution for commute trips using Caltrain. To the extent that a shared bike is borrowed from a station to complete a trip, and sits unused and unshared in an office for 8 hours (or at a home for 12-14 hours) before returning to the station, it is not truly shared and does not serve the system well. Further concerns with scalability, technology, and administrative complexity preclude serious consideration of bike sharing as a real element of Caltrain's commute service.
- 11) We do not support subsidies for folding bikes. Apart from administrative complexities and the questionable equity of such a program, it leads quickly to the same question of sufficient capacity: Bicyclists with folding bikes are already being bumped from trains, because there is not enough space for all the folding bikes.

We call on Caltrain to carry out a full and proper Master Planning process for bicycle service, with maintenance and enhancement of bicycle carriage as a central premise. The SFBC is developing its own draft Bicycle Master Plan

framework and stands ready to assist Caltrain's planning and operations staff in completing this essential work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Thornley', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Andy Thornley
Program Director
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition

cc: Michael Scanlon, Caltrain
Caltrain Board of Directors
San Francisco Bicycle Advisory Committee
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition
Bay Area Bicycle Coalition