

Caltrain Loses Ridership and Ticket Revenue by Denying Service to Cyclists

**BIKES ONboard project
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
September 21, 2010**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. PUBLIC COMMENT AT JOINT POWERS BOARD MEETING.....	3
3. LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	3
3.1 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #14: CALTRAIN MAKES DRIVING ATTRACTIVE	3
3.2 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #20: CALTRAIN, LET MORE BIKES ON.....	4
3.3 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #25: PROMPTLY IGNORED	4
3.4 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #31: SEE YOU ON THE FREEWAY	5
3.5 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #33: CALTRAIN: PLAN FOR RUSH HOUR	5
3.6 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #50: BIKES ONBOARD CALTRAIN.....	6
3.7 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #57: THANK YOU, CALTRAIN.....	6
3.8 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #65: CALTRAIN NO PLACE FOR BIKES	7
3.9 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #67: CALTRAIN INCONVENIENCE NECESSITATES DRIVING	7
3.10 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #87: BIKES AND CALTRAIN.....	7
3.11 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #94: BE BIKE FRIENDLY, CALTRAIN.....	8
3.12 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #102: ROOM FOR CYCLISTS, PLEASE.....	8
3.13 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #110: CALTRAIN BUMPS ITSELF OUT OF MONEY.....	8
3.14 LETTER TO THE EDITOR #118: BUMPING BIKES	9
4. SURVEY OF CYCLISTS.....	9
5. ANALYSIS OF INCREASE IN BICYCLE RIDERSHIP.....	11
6. CONCLUSION	11

1. Introduction

There appears to be a pervasive belief among Caltrain staff that service denial does not drive cyclists away from using Caltrain. This belief is exemplified by statements such as:

"I personally haven't seen any of the correspondence from people saying that they no longer are taking the train."

Todd McIntyre, stated at the Caltrain Bicycle Advisory Committee meeting, August 25, 2010.

"Just adding more bike spaces doesn't necessarily mean all these spaces will be occupied. In fact, we already have a lot of trains during the day with plenty of (bike) capacity."

Christine Dunn, quoted in the San Mateo County Times in an article titled "Caltrain riders fight back against service cut proposals, offer new ideas", August 22, 2010.

"We don't know that there is latent demand for onboard bike space."

Michelle Bouchard, stated at Caltrain public meeting about raising fares and cutting service, San Francisco, May 27, 2009.

The documentation in this report demonstrates that many who have been denied onboard bicycle service (bumped) caused by capacity constraints have stopped riding Caltrain, because it has proved to be an unreliable commute method. By providing sufficient and consistent onboard bike capacity, Caltrain could win back these customers, entice new bikes-on-board clientele, and thereby increase ticket revenue.

2. Public Comment at Joint Powers Board Meeting

From minutes of the Joint Powers Board Meeting held April 1, 2010, posted at http://www.caltrain.com/Assets/_Agendas+and+Minutes/JPB/Board+of+Directors/Minutes/040110+JPB+Minutes+Final.pdf.

Public Comment

Elizabeth Newton, Sunnyvale, said every time she has tried to take Caltrain with her bike there have been capacity issues. Getting bumped from Caltrain is a large risk for passengers and she has gone back to driving her car.

3. Letters to the Editor

The following letters to the editor are posted at www.sfbike.org/caltrain_bob_media. The pertinent statements are highlighted in yellow below.

3.1 Letter to the Editor #14: Caltrain makes driving attractive

Published in the *San Jose Mercury News* – September 20, 2008; published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – October 2, 2008

When I started employment with the city of Mountain View over two years ago, I drove from San Francisco four days a week. When I began using my bike and Caltrain, the change in my commute changed my life: my commute actually took less time, I was less stressed out when I got to work and when I got home from work — and I saved a ton of money on gas.

Unfortunately my commute has become inconvenient because I have been "bumped" multiple times and spent up to 45 minutes waiting for another train. This has happened so often, I've taken back to commuting by myself, in my car. It's a bummer, but it's now the less stressful mode of commuting, which is ludicrous. It seems to me that the more customers Caltrain has, the more revenue it has, and therefore the more money Caltrain can spend on getting the trains rolling in the most efficient manner. I understand that Caltrain is proposing and hoping more bike commuters will leave their bikes in lockers; but for those of us that have a mile or two to ride to each destination it is not feasible to ditch the bike.

I absolutely think the world of Caltrain employees, but the way it meters out the bike-cars absolutely mystifies me. I really hope Caltrain listens to the bike commuters themselves. We can make Caltrain more efficient, and hopefully run much smoother together.

Carrie Sandahl
Mountain View

3.2 Letter to the Editor #20: Caltrain, let more bikes on

Published in the *San Mateo Daily News* – October 2, 2008; published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – October 2, 2008

I'm a longtime daily Caltrain bike commuter and have recently been getting bumped from my relatively short rides between Mountain View and Palo Alto.

I've reviewed Caltrain's Draft Bicycle Access and Parking Plan, which doesn't address the fundamental problem of removing cars at both ends of the commute, mitigating the need for more parking spaces. The key is simply providing more bike capacity on board during heavy commute hours.

I therefore support the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition's Draft Plan for Bicycle Carriage.

I greatly appreciate the work Caltrain has invested during the past few years upgrading our rail transit and introducing Baby Bullet service. Clearly, there is a financial gain made by these investments which has resulted in increased ridership. Unfortunately, Caltrain is now turning away bicyclists like me who cannot accept the unpredictability of getting to work or returning home on time.

Case in point: I stopped purchasing monthly passes when bicyclists began getting bumped so am now driving on the two days when I cannot be late. I'm asking Caltrain to please invest in bikes on board by increasing bike capacity during heavy commute hours.

Gary Downing
Menlo Park

3.3 Letter to the Editor #25: Promptly ignored

Published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – October 14, 2008

Bike parking will not resolve the current issue for 99 percent of the bicyclists who use the train onboard capacity.

I, too, have stopped taking the train. I could not afford any more missed appointments, late arrival times for meetings, etc., due to lack of capacity on the train. Leaving my bike at a station is not an option for me, or most others who use the system. It is depressing that after more than six years of riding I had to

give it up because everyone else suddenly realized what a good idea it was. Now, it doesn't work for anyone anymore.

For me, there is no point to attending any more meetings with Caltrain staff. So far, we have been asked for our opinions; we've given them; and they have been promptly ignored. Why continue to make the effort to tell Caltrain what is needed when the reciprocal effort to do something about it does not exist. The calls for help have been clear — we need more bike capacity on the trains. When will Caltrain be ready to stop ignoring its customers and start providing the service that people have asked for time and time again? Until then, I will not waste my time repeating myself over and over again. It's obvious, no one is listening.

Christina Becher
San Mateo

3.4 Letter to the Editor #31: See you on the freeway

Published in the *Palo Alto Weekly* – November 7, 2008

Last week I was "bumped" from the bicycle portion of Caltrain not once but twice at the Mountain View station. This is not the first time I was denied boarding as I have commuted by bicycle via Caltrain for nearly seven years. November will be my last month of ridership.

In addition ... there are no rain or wind shelters in the bicycle waiting area. ... Being bumped and standing in the rain is not my idea of a tolerable commute!

... Summer is no picnic either. At the Palo Alto (downtown) station, lack of sun shelter on the concrete waiting platform causes northbound passengers to crowd into the tunnel ... to escape the heat, thereby making tunnel access for passers-by more difficult.

My challenge to those cities that are always crowing about how "green" they are becoming is this: Please consider putting your money where your mouth is and contributing funding to Caltrain (perhaps based on population) so that an additional bicycle car can be purchased along with shelters for sun and rain. More benches would be welcome, too! Train passengers ... are also your residents. Until then, **I'll see you on the freeway.**

Karen Escobar
Mountain View

3.5 Letter to the Editor #33: Caltrain: plan for rush hour

Published in the *Burlingame Daily News* – November 12, 2008; published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – November 18, 2008

First off, I love Caltrain. I live down in Palo Alto and work in SoMa and I couldn't imagine a more convenient mode of public transit. Only downside is the occasional bump I get during rush hours to and from San Francisco: The bike cars are often full, leaving me and sometimes up to 20 other bikers stranded until the next train comes through.

Being able to carry my bike on Caltrain is an essential component of my commuting, saving me on average 45 minutes a day so I don't have to get on Muni or take a cab or (deep breath) drive to work. **Every time I'm prevented from getting on Caltrain due to capacity issues, the time savings is eliminated and I think a little more about driving the car to work just to avoid the hassle and uncertainty.**

I understand there are budgetary constraints, and that adding an extra car might seem unnecessary given the fact that many more non-bikers use Caltrain than bikers, but the current capacity issues are causing similar reservations in the minds of many other bike commuters as well. By adding another bike car to rush-hour trains, Caltrain would keep us from ditching the bikes and encourage others to ditch their cars and get two wheels.

Max Haines-Stiles
Palo Alto

3.6 Letter to the Editor #50: Bikes onboard Caltrain

Published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – January 20, 2009

Without the Bikes Onboard program, I would drive rather than take Caltrain. Bumping is a real deterrent to biking with Caltrain. If a transit mode cannot offer reliable time of arrival, people will not use it.

I take Caltrain for several reasons. It is the right thing to do for the environment and the future of the planet, it is the right thing to offer my fellow Bay Area residents, to relieve traffic congestion and it provides me with personal benefits — a healthy brief workout four times each day with no traffic stress, and extra time to work and relax.

Caltrain riders who are deterred from biking (due to bumping fears) represent lost ridership. In this new era of cheap-again gas and recession-induced reduced traffic congestion, last year's recent gains in ridership are at risk of loss if Caltrain riders and bikers revert to driving.

Jaime Guerrero
San Francisco

3.7 Letter to the Editor #57: Thank you, Caltrain

Published in the *Palo Alto Daily News* – March 10, 2009; published in the *San Mateo County Times* – March 11, 2009

I am a commuter dependent on Caltrain to get me to work. I have put up with being bumped routinely by sucking it up and walking to and from the station most days, extending my commute at least half an hour each day, rather than risk the high likelihood of being bumped from several trains and waiting an hour or more at the station to get to work or home late. I have been driving more frequently rather than risk sitting on the platform wasting my time.

I'm glad Caltrain finally sees the larger picture and I'm glad the plan to remove extra seating has finally caught on. The trains have almost never been 100 percent full of non-bike passengers (the only time it's even close is during Giants games!), yet cyclists get bumped while seats are still empty. I have never seen a train turn away an on-time non-bike passenger, but I have seen several trains turn away more than 30 cyclists waiting to get home, and have been bumped more times than I can count.

Taking out the empty passenger seats that make no money to allow additional fare paying cyclists on board makes too much sense to ignore. I would go back to riding my bike on Caltrain more often for days I now normally drive, and I'm sure more cyclists that have reverted to driving will again start riding the train if the likelihood of being bumped is greatly reduced.

Theral Mackey
Burlingame

3.8 Letter to the Editor #65: Caltrain no place for bikes

Published in the *San Francisco Examiner* – June 11, 2009

I was recently bumped from Caltrain twice on the same day due to limited bike capacity. On 22nd Street at 8:19 a.m. going south, about 10 other bikers were there and some had been bumped three consecutive times that morning. Then, I was bumped again in Palo Alto heading north at 6:06 p.m.

I need to get to work on time, and if this happens with any regularity I will be forced to drive rather than take Caltrain. The railway needs to add more bike capacity during peak commuting hours.

Jason Wolfe
San Francisco

3.9 Letter to the Editor #67: Caltrain inconvenience necessitates driving

Published in the *San Francisco Examiner* – September 22, 2009; published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – September 23, 2009; published in the *San Mateo Daily News* – September 24, 2009; published in the *Mountain View Voice* – September 25, 2009

I am a Caltrain monthly pass holder who, along with other cyclists, is regularly bumped at the San Antonio stop. I occasionally have an early meeting and need to take this train, and now always drive to work instead because I know I cannot rely on this train. Ridiculous!

Matt Foist
Mountain View

3.10 Letter to the Editor #87: Bikes and Caltrain

Published in the *San Mateo Daily News* – December 3, 2009

I greatly appreciate bringing my bike on Caltrain every morning to get to work. Having used public trains everywhere from New York to Chicago to Shanghai, I've been very impressed with the punctuality of the service, comfort and cleanliness of the trains, and the professionalism of the personnel. I was extremely satisfied with the provisions for bringing bicycles onboard when, unfortunately, two days in a row my regular morning Caltrain No. 230 arrived with only a single bike car and I was unable to board. As a result, I was approximately 40 minutes late.

I really want to be able to ride Caltrain, but I need a reliable way of getting to work. If this keeps happening, I'm not going to have any choice but to drive to work, since punctuality is important to me and my company. It's unfeasible to take advantage of Caltrain without my bicycle, as I live too far from the nearest station to make walking an option.

With expanded and standardized bicycle capacity, it would make Caltrain a more viable option for commuting. This would be an easy win for everyone involved, as it could increase ridership and revenues while reducing traffic congestion and pollution.

Felix Pomerantz
San Francisco

3.11 Letter to the Editor #94: Be bike friendly, Caltrain

Published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* – January 3, 2010

As a frequent Caltrain rider, it is very important to me that Caltrain's Short-Range Transit Plan do as much as possible to facilitate bicycle commuters (like me) who bring their bicycles on the train.

I greatly appreciate the addition of second bike cars to some peak-hour routes. Even so, I continue to be bumped once every week or two.

The risk of experiencing such a disruptive event discourages me from riding Caltrain when I am on a tight schedule. I would like to ride Caltrain five days a week, but with current bike capacity I cannot do this (and choose to drive instead).

Some concrete suggestions that would enable me to rely on Caltrain more often are: meet pent-up bike demand by replacing empty seats with additional bike racks, and add bike cars to the Bombardier trains, because bike capacity on a Bombardier bike car is about half the capacity on a Gallery car.

Additional bike capacity and the improved reliability it would bring are the surest ways to increase my personal Caltrain ridership.

Michael Dworsky
San Francisco

3.12 Letter to the Editor #102: Room for cyclists, please

Published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – May 14, 2010; published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* – May 17, 2010

There is a clear indication that two bike cars are necessary on all limited and baby bullet trains. These are heavily utilized commuter trains and it is unacceptable that a train can be overfilled before it has begun service at the Fourth and King Caltrain Station. Turning away paying customers who are trying to get to work or return home is unacceptable. I would prefer to keep control over my commute schedule and drive home if Caltrain cannot maintain appropriate space for all of its riders.

If Caltrain cannot guarantee space on the train for me after I have purchased a ticket then I will simply not ride anymore. Caltrain must provide enough room for cyclists or inform us before we purchase our tickets that they will not be honored.

DJ Allison
San Francisco

3.13 Letter to the Editor #110: Caltrain bumps itself out of money

Published in the *San Mateo Daily News* – August 6, 2010; published in the *San Mateo Daily Journal* – August 11, 2010

Once again, five bicyclists with valid tickets were denied boarding on the southbound Caltrain bullet No. 324 at the 22nd Street station as the conductor claimed both bike cars were full. For a limited bullet train service, more bike capacity is required to serve customers.

My journey to work in San Jose took 45 minutes longer than planned and the unreliability of Caltrain will require me to drive rather than take the train on any working day when being late is unacceptable.

As Caltrain faces budget cuts, wouldn't the additional revenue from carrying more bikes help to fill the gap?

Simon Aspinall
San Francisco

3.14 Letter to the Editor #118: Bumping bikes

Letter to the Editor, published in the San Mateo Daily Journal – September 7, 2010

On my morning commute on Caltrain, it came to my attention that there were several fewer bike racks than bikers. One guy was bumped off the train, and several people had to stack bikes hilariously deep or simply stand for their entire ride.

Looking around the rest of the train, there were more than enough seats for everyone. I would estimate this only has to happen a few times before I would just start driving to work, and I've been told that droves of people have done exactly that.

Caltrain probably says they don't have the money to replace empty seats with bike racks, but this is such a quick payback that I'll preemptively say that Caltrain's reasoning is off a bit. I don't know how hard it is to remove seats and install racks, but I have a power drill and it would only take a few hours I bet.



Steve Connor
San Francisco

4. Survey of Cyclists











The BIKES ONboard project conducted a survey of all cyclists who reported bumps to Caltrain Customer Service from August 5, 2008 through August 28, 2010 . The survey was sent via email on August 29, 2010, and results were compiled September 2, 2010. Fifty-nine cyclists responded to the survey.

The survey results demonstrate that Caltrain has lost ridership due to unreliable bike capacity, forcing cyclists to find other commute methods. The most common alternate commute method is driving alone, increasing traffic congestion, pollution, and fossil fuel usage. Survey responses are shown on the next page.

Have you ever decided not to ride Caltrain with your bicycle to avoid the risk of getting bumped?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		79.7%	47
No		20.3%	12
		answered question	59
		skipped question	0

If you have ever chosen another commute method to avoid the risk of getting bumped, what was it (select all that apply)?

		Response Percent	Response Count
I have not chosen another commute method to avoid the risk of getting bumped		17.2%	10
Drive alone		53.4%	31
Bike the whole way		27.6%	16
Park my bike at the station, ride Caltrain, and then use bus, shuttle, or walk at the other end		24.1%	14
Carpool or vanpool		6.9%	4
Bus		8.6%	5
Shuttle		8.6%	5
BART		8.6%	5
Walk		8.6%	5
Telecommute		22.4%	13
		answered question	58
		skipped question	1

5. Analysis of Increase in Bicycle Ridership

Figure 1 shows that Caltrain bicycle boardings were increasing at the same rate as citywide bike counts in San Francisco. In 2006, however, Caltrain ran out of bike space, and started routinely denying service to cyclists. As a result, bicycle boardings on Caltrain suddenly fell off, while citywide bike counts continued the same upward trajectory. Caltrain lost over one million dollars in ticket revenue last year due to limited bike capacity.

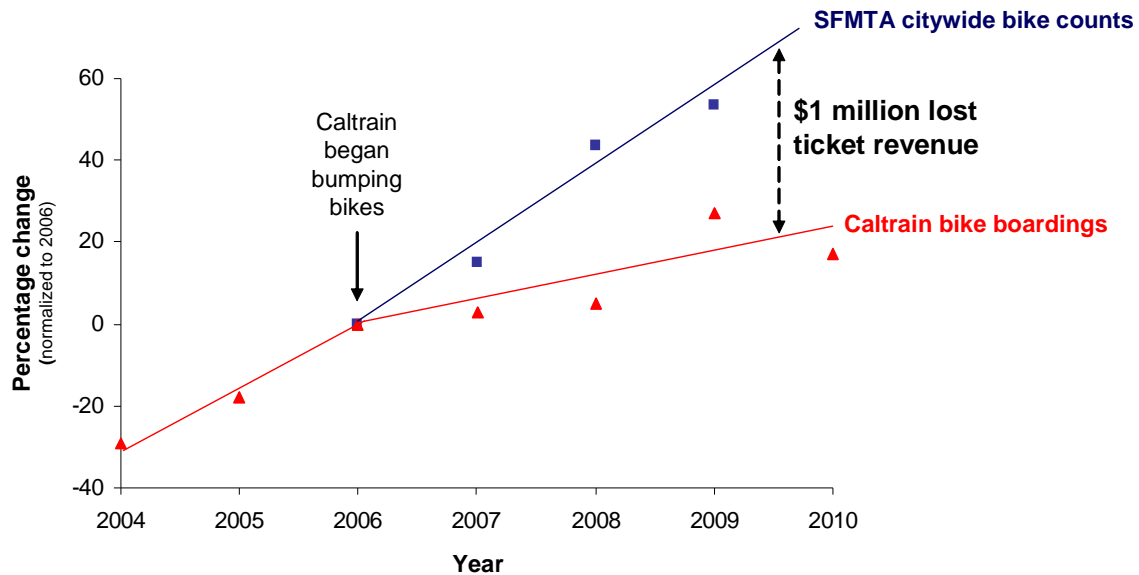


Figure 1: Increase in bicycle ridership as measured by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) and Caltrain annual passenger counts. Lost ticket revenue was calculated assuming an average ticket price of \$3.60.

6. Conclusion

Unreliable service due to insufficient bike capacity has forced many cyclists back into their cars, costing Caltrain ridership and revenue.

Caltrain can win these customers back by increasing bike capacity to consistent 80 bikes per train. Eight train sets already have 80 bike spaces, so Caltrain just needs to upgrade the remaining 12. With reliable bike capacity, more cyclists will ride the train and bring badly needed operating revenue to Caltrain.