

## Extending CalTrain Is Top Priority

**O**NE OF THE MORE dispiriting aspects of contemporary times in San Francisco and the Bay Area is a predilection to repeat the mistakes of the past. A prime example is the treatment accorded the CalTrain system and, more particularly, the supervening of the good sense of relocating the train terminal from 4th and Townsend Streets to the Transbay Terminal at First and Mission Streets in San Francisco.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission last May deferred action until next month on approving such relocation, which would involve extending CalTrain approximately 1.3 miles, and, even more un auspiciously, the California Transportation Commission on May 28, 1987 voted against the extension.

The fecklessness behind such actions emanates from a misguided band of business types, as well as some shortsighted parochialists from the East Bay and elsewhere who seem bent on repeating mistakes like the denouement of the Key System and the recently intended removal of trolley car tracks on Market Street. One myth of contemporary thought in the Bay Area is that BART is a "rapid" transit system whose average speed exceeds anything CalTrain produces. The fact is just the opposite: the average CalTrain speed is equal to or slightly faster than BART.

Yet forces at work are willing to sell out the CalTrain extension and the system itself for the Mission Bay project or a baseball stadium at 7th and Townsend Streets. Make no mistake about it: a failure to relocate the CalTrain terminal to downtown San Francisco will result inescapably in a closure of the system after the state's contract with Southern Pacific expires in 1990.

**T**HE BASIC REASON for the downtown extension is that the current terminal at 4th and Townsend Streets is simply too remote from downtown jobs. Riders must either walk a couple of miles, wait for a Muni bus or take a cab. A transit system is only as attractive as its termination point. A high speed monorail to the middle of nowhere is useless, and CalTrain will never realize its full ridership potential without a convenient downtown San Francisco terminal. (That's why the mayor's plan to move the CalTrain terminal even farther away to an "interim" location at 7th and Channel Streets would kill the commute service outright.)

Still, critics of the extension continue to insist that relocation to the Transbay terminal would generate few new CalTrain passengers. On the

contrary, the exhaustive study of Wilbur Smith and Associates, a recognized public transit expert, concluded that only the downtown extension could capitalize on line improvements and increasing growth along the Peninsula corridor by tripling daily ridership to 44,000 by the year 2000.

**A** RECENT SURVEY of CalTrain commuters revealed that 68 percent favored relocation of the CalTrain terminal to First and Mission Streets. It also showed that 73 percent said they would be forced to drive to work in San Francisco if CalTrain commute service were terminated, which will happen if the downtown extension is not pursued and implemented rapidly and aggressively.

The specter of an additional 2,200 automobiles every day on the Bayshore Freeway alone because of the destruction of CalTrain as a system apparently does not trouble the opponents of the rail extension. It, however, troubles me immensely.

There is already a commitment by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration to fund at least \$20 million for acquisition of the railroad right of way. State matching funds may also be available. Furthermore, a financial study has shown that disposition of air rights at the Transbay Terminal could generate another \$140 million toward the \$317 million estimated cost of the extension.

Finally, opposition to the CalTrain extension usually manifests itself in the support of the rather fanciful, seductive notion of extending BART "to the San Francisco Airport." Therein lies the genesis of attacks on the terminal relocation. But the proposed extension of BART in San Mateo County is not to the airport; rather, it would be to a wasteland west of the Bayshore and approximately a mile and one half from the airline terminals. I unequivocally predict that should such a venture ever be effectuated, it will be a debilitating money loser and a system which produces little usage by airline passengers or airport employees. It has been proven time and again that people will not utilize public transit to an airport if it requires transferring to another mode of transportation.

**E**QUALLY IMPORTANT, major political, financial and operational obstacles that must be overcome before BART can expand further in San Mateo County means the "BART to the airport" is at least 20-30 years from reality. Preservation and extension of CalTrain to downtown San Francisco is not just our best chance; it's our only chance to avoid a full scale transportation catastrophe along the San Francisco Peninsula. Subverters of the CalTrain would do well to examine more carefully the cards dealt us before folding the hand.

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*(Quentin L. Kopp is state senator from San Francisco and the northern Peninsula.)*