

Planning and Land Use Schizophrenia Hits Richmond's South Shoreline

How Richmond Forgets Its Past and Neglects Its Future



**Tom Butt
Richmond City Council Member**

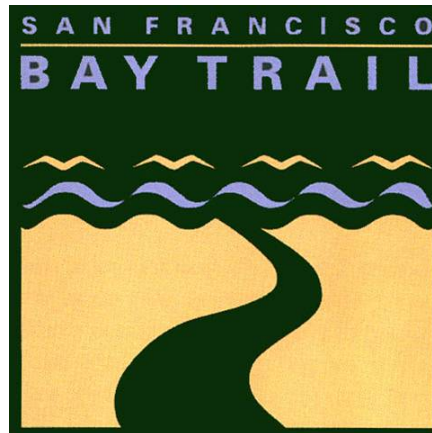
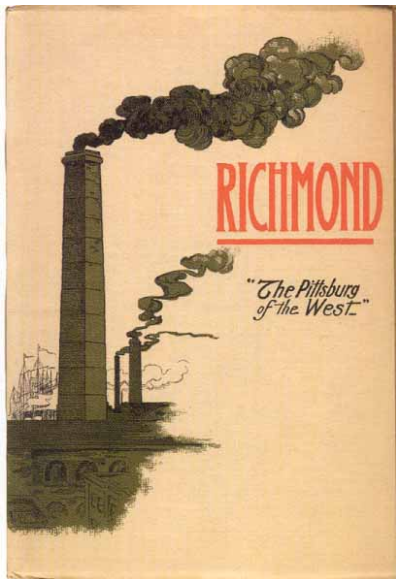
April 5, 2005

Lack of Coordinated Planning and Unified Vision Places Future of Marina Bay in Jeopardy

While Marina Bay continues to be one of Richmond's all time success stories, not all public policy decisions regarding Marina Bay have been in the best interest of either the City or the Marina Bay area. This paper will examine three such issues:

1. Harbour Gate Retail Center and the Marina Bay Village Center
2. Railroad Grade Crossings
3. Proposed Toyota Automobile Import Center

In each of the three issues, the City of Richmond had a serious lapse in sticking with a unified vision of the future. We are one city and one city government where policy is made by one City Council, and pursuing a unified vision should not be a debatable objective.



For a hundred years, Richmond dreamed of becoming an industrial giant. Then it discovered the value of its waterfront and embraced parks, trails and ferry service

Harbour Gate Retail Center and Marina Bay Village Center

As visionary as the 30-year old Marina Bay plan was, it had some flaws. The biggest was the lack of a village center, where people could walk to cafes and neighborhood markets, drop off dry cleaning, get a haircut or just hang out. Think Point Richmond.

In the 1970's, however, the automobile was still king, and the mindset was that people should drive to the mall for all their needs.

The following is from an E-FORUM I wrote on May 8, 2001, entitled "Harbour Gate Shopping Center -- Bad Urban Design and a Bust for Marina Bay Village Center."

On May 8, 2001, ground was broken for a Richmond Redevelopment Agency project known as the Harbor Gate Shopping Center, located on the southwest corner of the interchange of I-580 and Marina Bay Parkway. According to the account in the *West County Times*, "The anchor tenant will be a 21,000-square-foot Longs Drug superstore -- one of the largest in the Bay Area-- offering produce and dairy products, along with the usual drugstore fare, said Alan Wolken, senior development projects manager for the city Redevelopment Agency. The strip mall also is expected to house a deli, coffee shop, dry cleaner, video store and bank outlets and a 7,000-square-foot restaurant."

I was the only city council member who voted against this project when it first came before the redevelopment agency, and I still believe that is not the type of project that our Redevelopment Agency should be pursuing. The community of Marina Bay has a crying need for a "village center," where residents can, if they desire, easily walk to a place to obtain services such as a neighborhood grocery store, deli, video store, barber shop, coffee shop, cafes, etc. Ideally, such services would be combined with or be on the lower floors of buildings providing medium density housing. The architectural and urban design of such a village center would include a central plaza or park, a "living room" for the community, where people could stroll, sit, visit, intermingle and socialize with others while they shop or eat. It would also be of a scale that promotes such interaction. Such a project would have been consistent with the Ahwahnee Principles (TOM BUTT E-FORUM, April 7, 2001, and http://www.lgc.org/community_design/index.html), adopted by the City Council on April 10, 2001.



Harbour Gate Center on April 3, 2005

Instead of a "village center" within walking distance of those it would serve, Harbor Gate Shopping Center is a plain conventional, retail only, strip mall designed to be accessed solely by automobile and dominated by parking lots. It could be anywhere. Neither the residents and

employees of Marina Bay nor those of the

neighborhoods north of the freeway are expected to become pedestrian patrons. If these folks want a latte or a video, they will likely drive the few blocks required to make the purchase and will then find few excuses to linger. By including such services as the deli, coffee shop, dry cleaner, video store and bank outlets, the center will suck up what minimal market exists for these services in Marina Bay, and severely limit or postpone the economic incentives for development of a village center within Marina Bay. If this had been purely a project of a private

entrepreneur with the City having simply a regulatory role, perhaps we would have had little choice. But it was not. It was a public-private partnership with the City having an integral role in planning, subsidizing and promoting it.

One of the reasons for having redevelopment agencies is to be able to shape development in ways that break the mold of conventional thinking in order to provide a better urban environment. There is nothing wrong with a Longs Drug store and the services and jobs that go with it. However, just imagine how much more good it could have done for the community if it had been located as a part of a walkable, transit served, neighborhood center somewhere in the same general vicinity.

Completing the Marina Bay Village Center should have been the highest priority of the Redevelopment Agency, but they instead put that project on the back burner in favor of making a few bucks (on paper) turning over a piece of property with highway frontage. Our Redevelopment Agency is capable of better, as can be seen by the plan for the innovative and appropriate "Transit Village" surrounding the Richmond BART station. The Richmond Transit Village is a marvelous piece of urban design and clear demonstration of adherence to the Ahwahnee Principles.

The residents of Marina Bay have been poorly served by the Redevelopment Agency and by the master developer, Virtual Development, in the delay in building the Marina Bay Village Center. I fear that the Harbor Gate Shopping Center will just further hamper progress toward the completion of Marina Bay as a fully-serviced community. Shame on us.

Today, Harbor Gate consists of a drugstore, a mailing center, a coffee shop and a sandwich shop. Patrons typically come and go by automobile. What has been envisioned for years as the north shore village center consists largely of piles of dirt covered by plastic.



The site of what was once envisioned as the Marina Bay North Shore Village Center consists of weeds and piles of contaminated soil

To add insult to injury, the City Council approved the final map last week for a Signature Properties project called "Anchor Cove," which fills over half of the location anticipated for the North Shore Village Center with medium density housing. For the last few years, the Redevelopment Agency has given consistent lip service to a mixed use village center at this location and has committed to not approving the residential component without the retail or mixed use component. Although there are commitments by Signature to develop the village center in the future, they have no teeth.

My previous prediction that Harbour Gate would suck up any market for retail in the Marina Bay Area has proven correct.

Railroad Grade Crossings

This issue is perhaps more forgivable than the first. It involves the complete lack of historical recognition that all of the access routes to Marina Bay had railroad grade crossings that could become a major impediment to roadway vehicle circulation. When Marina Bay was in the planning stage, the railroad infrastructure south of what is now I-580 was virtually abandoned. The 1987 Shoreline Conservation and Development Strategy concluded:

As a result of changing service requirements, several railroad properties may become surplus to railroad use...Suitable for redevelopment are the railroad yards in Marina Bay... if these yards are to be phased out.

The *Knox Freeway/Cutting Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan* adopted by the City Council in 1991 still did not anticipate a level of rail activity sufficient to even consider a grade separation in the Marina Bay area:

Railroad operations will continue to be a vital part of the circulation system serving the West Cutting Boulevard, Ford Peninsula, and South Shoreline Sub-areas... In the long-term, rail trackage in the Sub-areas should be reduced and consolidated to facilitate service and allow for planned uses. In accordance with this objective, the Circulation Plan identifies alternative railroad alignments and yard locations to serve future needs. ..*Grade Crossings* - Grade crossings would be at Cutting Boulevard, Marina Way South, Harbour Way South, Regatta Boulevard, Marina Bay Parkway, and South 32nd Street. These crossings should be controlled by signalized rail guards.¹

The significant problems caused by mile-long trains traveling at slow speeds arose only as recently as 2002, but it came on with a vengeance and has continued unabated.² With this new transportation-related development that has severely impacted the lives of those who live and work in Marina Bay, not to mention those persons who visit the temporary City Hall, you would think the Planning Department would recognize the fact that new residential developments in the area would generate additional traffic that exacerbates the long lines and long waits at grade crossings. You would think the Planning Department would find that these additional residents would further degrade the level of traffic circulation already impeded by mile-long trains and suggest suitable mitigations, like commitments to help pay for future grade separations to replace grade crossings.

¹ *Knox Freeway/Cutting Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan* 4-38 through 4-42

² See [More On Train Blockages](#), March 5, 2003, [City Council Authorizes Quiet Zones and Federal Action to Reduce Long Trains](#), April 16, 2004, [Update on Train Horns and Long Trains](#), July 28, 2004 and [Quiet Zones and Long Trains](#), February 4, 2005.

Currently, there are three projects with a total of 659 units in various entitlement stages at Marina Bay (Pulte 221 units, Signature 138 units and Toll Brothers 300 units) with not a single word by the Planning Department about railroad grade crossings or possible mitigations. All of these could have been requested to commit to a future benefit assessment district to support one or more grade separations or to provide funding outright.



The impetus for even studying a grade separation came not from City staff at all, but from a local business owner Jim Cannon. After reviewing Cannon's research, I placed an item on the February 1, 2005 agenda to authorize the Redevelopment Agency to fund a feasibility study. It was passed unanimously by the City Council.

Ford Peninsula

The City of Richmond continues to have a hard time deciding what it wants to be when it grows up. Like an enthusiastic child, the City seems to aspire to whatever future was most recently brought to its attention. Yesterday's cowboy is quickly forgotten for today's astronaut. Tomorrow it may be a juggler or a musician.

A hundred years ago, Richmond aspired to be the "Pittsburg of the West," and it nearly made it during World War II. Although reality dashed that dream on the rocks of a different post-war era, Richmond continued to hope for a revival. But the dream faded and beginning in the early 1990s, Richmond began dreaming a new dream of a city with a waterfront of parks, homes and research and development dominated businesses. A new national park, the Bay Trail and a regional ferry terminal would be icons of the City's future.

Now in the first half of the first decade of the millennium, Richmond appears to have yet another dream, becoming the car import capital of California.

Unfortunately, the City is not a child, and these are not dreams. The City of Richmond has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Marina Bay, turning a contaminated former shipyard into an attractive bayfront community where thousands of people live. The dream that created Marina Bay began in the 1960's, and it started to become reality in the 1970's. Today, it is almost built out, with only three projects left to complete the original master plan. Two of these are currently in the entitlement phase.

The recent action by the Richmond City Council to grant Auto Warehousing Company an exclusive right to negotiate a deal with Toyota to turn Port of Richmond Terminal 3 (west

of Harbour Way) into another auto importation and distribution center seems to make good sense on the surface, but is one of several public policy decisions (or indecisions) in recent years that could have dramatic adverse impacts on the future of the Marina Bay area.

Terminal 3 had been leased to Stevedoring Services of America (SSA) several years ago with the anticipation that it would continue its moderate success in bulk commodities, principally steel. I might add that I was the only City Council member voting against it because I believed the contract should have been awarded on a competitive basis. The steel business eventually dried up, and Terminal 3 became a ghost town.

With the revival in interest for auto importation into the Bay Area, the City of Richmond scored what may be a coup in bringing Auto Warehousing Company to the Point Potrero (Shipyard 3) terminal, where cars are brought in by ship and distributed out by rail.

For the Ford Peninsula and South Shoreline Sub-areas, the Land Use Plan envisions gradual redevelopment of existing underutilized or vacant property into an integrated urban high-technology center capitalizing on the Ford Peninsula and South Shoreline Sub-area's accessibility, location, and land availability for large scale development. Future development in the Ford Peninsula and South Shoreline Sub-areas should build on the success of the Marina Bay Project and encourage the proposed University of California Berkeley Field Station concept of a research campus and technology transfer center, the Point Richmond Tech Center project, and the reuse of the historic Ford Building for mixed uses.

Development in the Ford Peninsula and South Shoreline Sub-areas generally should be characterized by attractive high quality buildings and aesthetically-pleasing working environments. It should be recognized, however, that the properties on the Ford Peninsula between Harbour and Marina Ways South are within a transitional zone between the Port/Maritime uses to the west and the mixed-use Marina Bay Development to the east. Further, this area acts as an entry from the I-580/Harbour Way interchange into the South Shoreline area. It is important that this area develop carefully and appropriately to establish a buffer between existing incompatible uses and to provide an appropriate entrance into the area.

Knox Freeway/Cutting Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan 4-3

When an opportunity opened up to bid on Toyota importation, the Port of Richmond and Auto warehousing Company jumped on it. A plan was hatched to utilize all of Terminal 3 and perhaps part of Terminal 2 to store imported Toyotas. Despite statements by the Port of Richmond that the anticipated operation is isolated to the area west of Harbour Way, plans shown to the City Council show expansion areas mapped out for portions of the Ford Plant site and the Marina Center Site and the entire Plant reclamation site. The parking area for the 1999-2000 ferry terminal is marked as "employee parking."

When asked about the conflict between employee parking and the future ferry terminal, the Port of Richmond responded that it was not even known if the ferry terminal would be located on the Ford Peninsula, and in any case, the amount of necessary parking was unknown – all being under study currently by the Water Transit Authority. Furthermore, the employee parking could be relocated, but no location was identified.

For years, the City of Richmond has envisioned a ferry terminal at Marina Bay. In 1999 and 2000, the Red & White Fleet experimented with ferry service with a terminal at Ford Point but failed to attract sufficient passengers. The failure was widely accepted as being due to a slow boat and minimal scheduled trips. In 2001, the Richmond Redevelopment Agency commissioned a study of the feasibility of ferry service that laid out a plan of how Richmond could realize a viable ferry operation. The study noted;

Under the direction of its elected leadership and staff, Richmond has fostered a remarkable transformation of its waterfront. Heavy industrial properties are being redeveloped for high technology and other commercial uses, bringing new jobs to the City. Concurrently, residential and service business development is creating new communities around the waterfront. Recreation and entertainment destinations, including a new national historic park, may further increase Richmond's attraction to visitors.

Richmond's metamorphosis introduces key considerations for those who plan and implement the community's change. In particular, transportation is among the leading issues associated with Richmond's development, as it is for the entire bay area. New businesses depend on convenient access for their employees, clientele and operations. Likewise, residents require convenient transportation within Richmond and to the rest of the Bay area.³

In a presentation to the Richmond City Council on March 27, 2001, Booz-Allen Hamilton, inc., concluded that "Richmond may realize significant benefits from maintaining a commitment to water transit," as follows:

- Increase transportation options
- Improve quality of life
- Foster waterfront development and business potential
- Develop maritime focus and character for waterfront
- Improve public perception and attraction of Richmond

The value of Richmond's location and bay frontage are exceptional, and should be factored into the City's development and transportation plans.

On April 1, 2003, Mayor Anderson wrote:

During the past several weeks I have worked diligently on a Richmond Ferry with regional planning bodies that include but are not limited to: Water Transportation Authority (WTA), Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA), West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Commission (WCCCTAC), and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). Richard Mitchell of Redevelopment has been staffing the project during this endeavor to prioritize a Richmond ferry service in any future Bay Area transportation plans...Additionally, the Richmond City Council approved the attached

³ *Business Case for Water Transit* for Richmond Redevelopment Agency (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, February 20, 2001) ES 1-2

resolution to support ferry service in Richmond which copies of the WTA study of bay Area ferry service were distributed.

When the Water Transit Authority was formed by the California legislature, Richmond fought hard to become recognized as a future terminal location. On April 3, 2003, County Supervisor John Gioia wrote to Senator Don Perata:

The Board of Supervisors today authorized me to request a Richmond ferry project be included in the Tier 1 project list for the Bay Area Bridge Toll expenditure plan being prepared by your office.

Ultimately, Richmond has become a planned ferry terminal location by the Water Transit Authority. If you go to the WTA web site⁴, you will find a complete summary of the implementation schedule and funding sources for Richmond ferry service along with the following:



In 1999, the entire Richmond City Council took the inaugural Red and White ferry trip to San Francisco

Why Richmond Ferry Service?

Richmond ferry service could potentially reduce traffic congestion on the Richmond Parkway, Interstates 80 and 580, as well as on the Richmond-San Rafael and Bay bridges. The proximity of new development including the adaptation of the historic Ford Plant allows water transit to serve both commuters and residents. Ford Point includes sites for

the Regatta Center, Westshore Business Park and Marina Center Developments. The planned development of employment centers is

likely to transform Richmond into a destination as well as an origin for ferry service. The WTA will also evaluate the ridership benefits of locating the terminal close to the Rosie the Riveter National Park.⁵

Finally, Measure J (Measure C Reauthorization – Contra Costa’s Transportation Sales Tax Expenditure Plan) passed by the Contra Costa County voters in 2004 will provide \$45 million for West County ferry service.

There has been no other location in Richmond seriously considered as a commute ferry terminal other than Ford Point at the foot of Harbor Way and the location of the 1999-2000 ferry terminal.

With this level of previous political commitment and secured funding sources, one would think ferry service in Richmond would remain a high priority and a

⁴ http://www.watertransit.org/richmond_overview.shtml

⁵ http://www.watertransit.org/richmond_overview.shtml

subject of continuing keen interest. Not so. During the discussion of the Auto Warehousing Exclusive Right to Negotiate for the Toyota deal at the March 29 City Council meeting, the location and size of a future ferry terminal was simply dismissed. City Council members acted as if it had been some passing fancy that may or may not revive in the future. “We don’t have any idea where the WTA will locate it or how much parking it will require,” was the common refrain of both staff and Council members.

In addition to a long commitment to ferry service, the City has invested millions of dollars into a rehabilitated Ford Assembly Building where the future visitor center of the Rosie the Riveter World War II/Home Front National Historical Park will be located. Funding for the visitor center is now in the National Park Service queue. Eddie Orton, who recently acquired the Ford Building with a \$25 million commitment to complete its rehabilitation, does not believe either it or the Ford Peninsula can reach its full potential when drowned in a “sea of cars.”

Similarly, the owner and developer of Marina Center, which includes the ongoing rehabilitation of the historic Felice & Perelli cannery, are concerned that an overwhelming automobile import project dominating the Ford Peninsula would be a disaster for the future of their project.

The Knox Freeway/Cutting Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan limits new development in the area between Harbour Way and Marina Way to the following:

Research and Development/Business (R&D/Business) - R&D/Business land uses include research and development office, professional office, hybrid flexible office and distribution space, and light assembly and manufacturing. Light assembly and manufacturing are uses conducted wholly within a completely enclosed building which is generally one tone and a half stories in height and designed for flexible space. Typical types of uses include the following:

- a. The manufacture, compounding, processing, packaging or treatment of such light industrial products as bakery goods, candy, cosmetics, drugs, perfumes, pharmaceutical, toiletries and food products (except fish and meat products, vinegar and similar odorous materials).
- b. The manufacture, compounding, assembling or treatment of articles or merchandise from previously prepared materials such as bone, cellophane, canvas, clothing materials, cork, feathers, felt, paper, plastics, and precious or semiprecious metals or stones.
- c. Assembly of electrical appliances, electronic instruments and devices, radios, and stereos, including the manufacture of small parts only. Other allowable uses include convenience retail, sales and services, regional commercial uses such as off-price retail, hotel and motel, health and fitness centers, day care centers, restaurants, and public assembly space.

Residential medium and high density are conditional uses. Open lot storage and residential low density uses are prohibited.⁶

⁶ *Knox Freeway/Cutting Boulevard Corridor Specific Plan 4-5*

Port operations or storage of imported automobiles under long term leases are not allowable uses.

The Port has produced no cash flow projections that show what the net income would be from the Toyota operation after taking into account costs for infrastructure debt service, supplementary land leases administrative costs and lost opportunities. The impact on other Ford Point businesses and projects has not been considered, nor has the job density from alternative uses.

Regardless of the size of the automobile import project, the logistics of operating it would add significant rail traffic to the tracks traversing Marina Bay from east to west, exacerbating frequently blocked grade crossings. The Port's response has been that "...this is only a bid, we may not even be selected, and if we are, we will have to go through a CEQA process where three problems will be addressed. Well, the Auto Warehousing operation at Point Potrero went through a CEQA review and received the Planning Department's favorite present, a negative declaration (see [Richmond Planning Department - A Negative Declaration Mill?](#), TOM BUTT E-FORUM, December 21, 2002). Unfortunately, the negative declaration ignored the high mast lights that shine into living rooms at Seacliff Estates, and it misrepresented the amount of train traffic and horn blowing through point Richmond in the early hours of almost every morning.

Finally, there appear to be unresolved differences of opinion about the Toyota deal among department heads that share common membership in what has become known as the Community and Economic Development (CED) Group. Instead of working through these in a rational manner, the CED Group, which was supposed to represent a unified and coordinated approach to economic development, is Balkanized into internal political factions, each of which is supported by City Council factions.

What a way to run a city!