

Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board (JPB) Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
San Mateo County Transit District Administrative Building
1250 San Carlos Avenue, San Carlos CA 94070

MINUTES OF JUNE 15, 2011

MEMBERS PRESENT: P. Bendix, G. Graham, F. Granade, J. Hronowski, B. Jenkins (Chair),
S. Richardson, C. Tucker, B. Wilfley

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: T. Bartholomew, M. Bouchard, T. McIntyre, N. McKenna, M. Simon

Chair Bruce Jenkins called the meeting to order at 5:43 p.m. Gerald Graham led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Minutes

A motion (Richardson/Hronowski) to approve the minutes of May 18, 2011 was passed.

Public Comment

Jeff Carter, Burlingame, said the way newspapers are reporting high salaries of Caltrain staff are completely untrue. Caltrain's administrative costs are among the lowest of rail agencies throughout the country. Accidents are reported as "Caltrain kills someone," but, tragically, the person goes out of his or her way to get hit by the train.

Greg Conlon, Atherton, said he is alarmed about public safety on the railroad; automobiles are the major risk. Quad gates need to be installed at an intersection along the Caltrain corridor in Atherton.

Andy Chow, Redwood City, said recent events along the railroad have impacted Caltrain's on-time performance. Political support is more critical because non-riders may see Caltrain as a dangerous system, which may hurt Caltrain's political chances. Caltrain should and can do more to deter certain negative behavior at stations.

Director, Rail Transportation Michelle Bouchard said Caltrain has engaged its community partners in working on these disturbing issues of intentional acts of suicide on the Caltrain right of way. Caltrain acknowledges its part with this issue but is only one of many groups that need to work with other groups including mental health professionals, schools and communities along the right of way to enhance awareness of safety along the corridor. Caltrain has embarked on many infrastructure projects and engaged many community groups to raise awareness.

Chairperson's Report – Bruce Jenkins

Introduced newly appointed CAC member Kevin Gardiner.

Ms. Bouchard said in light of recurring misrepresentation by media, Executive Officer, Public Affairs Mark Simon will provide a presentation on the responsibilities of the Public Affairs Department.

Presentation: Caltrain Public Affairs Overview

Mr. Simon provided details on suicides along the Caltrain right of way:

- More than \$7 million of fencing has been installed along the Caltrain right of way and accidents due to the use of shortcuts across the right of way have decreased dramatically but suicides are a different matter.
- A Mineta Transportation Institute study indicates there is no spot or range of spots within 25 miles of where the tracks are most accessible, which shows where suicides occur. Eighty percent of fatalities, especially suicides, are within one-half mile or less of a grade crossing or station. There are two ways to reduce suicides to zero: fully grade-separate the railroad or stop running trains.
- There has been an average of 10 suicides per year on the Caltrain right of way but more than 300 per year in the three Joint Powers Board counties. Staff has reviewed numerous solutions that are impossible or unproven science. Caltrain will shortly be providing suicide prevention materials on trains. Staff completed a six-month pilot project with the American Association of Suicidology to install signs in a test stretch along the right of way with a local telephone number for suicide prevention; no phone calls were received in a six-month period.
- Caltrain will continue its role to help people embrace the idea they must get help if needed and help is available.

Mr. Simon reported on the Office of Public Affairs:

- The Office of Public Affairs is responsible for public information, government affairs and community relations.
- News media staff deals on a daily basis with the *Mercury News*, *San Mateo County Times*, *Palo Alto Daily Post*, *Palo Daily News*, AOL's New Patch.com, radio and blogs.
- Media relations issues include:
 - Caltrain's profile in the community changed with the introduction of the Baby Bullets and more media scrutiny.
 - There is growing skepticism of public agencies, especially relating to salaries and pensions.
 - Caltrain is a source of good stories to make the front pages of newspapers.
 - Funding of Caltrain is particularly complicated and can be a challenge to get across to some reporters.
- Key messages to deliver about the San Mateo County Transit District (District) include who we are, what we do, how we do it and why, that there is transparency, and Caltrain is a successful agency with outstanding ridership and revenues, a good steward of public funds, and has the lowest administrative staff costs in the Bay Area.
- Outreach opportunities underway include social media, e-newsletters, a network of communication and credible surrogates.
- There is an effort underway to put a measure on the November 2012 ballot for long-term funding for Caltrain. Staff is working with the Silicon Valley Leadership Group and Friends of Caltrain to establish support for the ballot measure.

Francois Granade arrived at 6:12 p.m.

- Next steps include focus on transparency, key consistent messages, establishing new policies, and procedures and processes for delivering information while being more adept.
- A communications manager position is being created to be more active and affirmative in getting the story out.

Cat Tucker said most people she speaks with do not blame Caltrain for fatalities. She said the concern is how information on delays is transmitted to riders. Mr. Simon said the Marketing Department is tasked specifically with communicating directly with Caltrain customers.

Ms. Tucker asked about using Twitter as a resource. Mr. Simon said there is a useful customer-based Twitter that distributes information.

Ms. Bouchard said staff understands the biggest challenge in terms of fatalities and/or major disruptions is providing a consistent response through platform announcements, visual messaging signs, conductor announcements and information from staff's public information officer. Caltrain has hired a consulting firm to do. This is to be adopted by the contract operator and in coordination with customer service and various departments to allow for Twitter and push messages.

Ms. Bouchard said a Twitter feed has been installed in the control center to monitor real-time information.

Mr. Simon said staff may not be able to say something as quickly as someone on Twitter because staff must ensure the information is accurate.

Mr. Simon said staff held a media event with a representative of every news media outlet in the Bay Area to talk about how they cover suicides, and particularly those on Caltrain's right of way. Newspapers are beginning to show more restraint in reporting.

Sepi Richardson said sometimes when reporters write a story it is not how they hear the story, but how they interpret the story. Mr. Simon said staff will make a good faith effort to counter misinformation. Ms. Richardson said credible people must tell the story.

Chair Jenkins said JPB Director Art Lloyd contacted the Golden Gate Bridge about the number of their suicides in the past and was told the emphasis is now on Caltrain. Mr. Simon said some suicides on the bridge are due to the iconic nature of the bridge and do not disrupt performance on the bridge.

Brian Wilfley said the situation changes from the community at large when dealing with the community in which the suicides occur as seen with the extreme pain of the community related to the Gunn High School events. He said that group cannot amortize the event in operational terms. Mr. Wilfley said there is a need to reestablish Caltrain's brand on Twitter. Mr. Simon said if information coming through that particular Twitter feed is by and large accurate and

useful to our customers, staff may need to recognize, in the brave new world of social media, some things that staff will ever be in control of are illusory.

Mr. Wilfley said the community is skeptical of what is said by public agency officials. He said this causes everybody to stop talking unless they know that what they are going to say is thought through and accurate in all details. He said the affect of this is that the casual chat about Caltrain goes down and one is left with very official pronouncements, which are ripped apart. He asked if staff could return to a phase when not every statement has to be so carefully constructed and could be offered by one who is not so expert as to be able to offer it. Mr. Simon said this is the crux of the dilemma for moving the organization to a place where they are more comfortable with more people talking. He said the organization needs more people like Mr. Wilfley to be free to talk about this in the next 18 months and to be comfortable in the way it's done.

Paul Bendix said he is aware there are fewer journalists behind more newsprint than ever and it must be an exasperating environment. He would appreciate hearing more about how social media could play a role in moving a ballot measure in 2012.

Public Comment

Andy Chow, Redwood City, said the community doesn't want more taxes or cuts to schools. He said Caltrain has a very dedicated board and staff and it is up to them to make sure the community knows tax dollars will be spent wisely and dedicated funding would be a community asset. He said Caltrain's efforts dealing with suicides are all very important, especially fencing. Mr. Chow said everyone supports Caltrain and it must use its own perspective to tell the community why it is so important.

Jeff Carter, Burlingame, said suicide is a difficult subject to discuss and thanked Mr. Simon for his efforts with outreach in the community. He said he supports more fencing and grade separations. Mr. Carter suggested it might be better to put out a message that there are 41,000 weekly car trips taken off the road by using Caltrain.

Staff Report

Ms. Bouchard reported:

- May 2011 total ridership is up 9.7 percent, average daily ridership is up 6.3 percent and revenue is up 16.4 percent.
- Effective July 1 fares will be raised 25-cents on the base and parking will increase to \$4 per day and to \$40 for the monthly parking permit.
- Deputy CEO Chuck Harvey provided an extensive presentation on Caltrain's on-time performance at the last JPB meeting. Caltrain has maintained its ridership during hard times because it is a very reliable system but has had challenges with on-time performance. Staff is working with Amtrak to identify trends that can be controlled in terms of on-time performance and start to identify action plans to get back to the standard of 95 percent on-time performance. On-time performance in April was 89.8 percent and 90 percent in May. June on-time performance is about 86 percent due to three fatalities. The measure of on-time performance is arriving within five minutes at the end of line. The majority of late trains are arriving between 5-10 minutes due to increased ridership, bikes, and wheelchairs. Staff needs to develop new means and methods of getting people onboard the train more quickly. Now

that there are two bike cars on every train, there may be a need to channelize the bike riders to split themselves up and help Caltrain stay on time. Staff acknowledges it needs to do a little bit better job communicating with the public during unfortunate incidents. The real-time information project has been delayed until later in the year but staff hopes to provide an update when more concrete details are available about implementation.

- All consists have two bike cars as of the end of May.

Public Comment

Greg Conlon, Atherton, said non-suicide fatalities should be given more attention.

Ms. Tucker asked if staff has information on non-suicide fatalities vs. suicides.

Ms. Bouchard said many incidents are pending investigation for many months before final determination and staff would be happy to share the information from past years. She said the vast number of incidents on the right of way are intentional.

Committee Comments

Mr. Bendix said he heard there have been increased persons needing assistance on Caltrain. He speculates this is a trend due in part to nicer weather, the economic climate and a very heavy unemployment rate. He is seeing an increase of wheelchair riders denied boarding. He asked if the policy could be revised for Gallery cars, where there is wheelchair and bike space, that a conductor, at his/her discretion, could allow a wheelchair in a bike car.

Mr. Wilfley said it is time to increase service with all the boarding issues.

Gerald Graham said he receives comments that the Clipper card is terrible with tagging on and off. He said the system should mimic BART where you need to tag to get into and out of the system.

John Hronowski said car 231 on train 261, which was the rear car next to the locomotive, had no air conditioning on June 15. He thanked staff for two bike cars on every train and asked if it was possible to put gallery cars in place of Bombardier cars that have the most bicycle bumps.

Ms. Bouchard said Caltrain is experiencing the highest ridership ever for bikes and passengers.

A number of seats have been removed from the fleet, which is a tradeoff of seats vs. spaces.

Seats are lost when a Gallery set is switched with a Bombardier set. Train 324 is full with standees already and to replace that with a train with even fewer seats is doing a disservice to a certain group of passengers. Caltrain makes every best effort to match capacity for both bike and seated capacity when it can.

Ms. Tucker asked when the two bike car process was complete because complaints she received came in May. Ms. Bouchard said at the end of May.

Ms. Tucker asked Ms. Bouchard to respond to an email in the correspondence packet about a fight on a train after a Giants game. Ms. Bouchard said Transit Police are investigating. Giants ridership and police presence have both increased. San Francisco police have been pulled due to staff cutbacks. There has been a ramp up of ridership and passengers can be rowdy due to alcohol and crowding. As these incidents are logged into the system, staff continues to look at

ways to diffuse the situation including deployment of a third southbound train to keep crowding to a minimum trains at about 1,000 passengers. Staff is also looking at conductor resources and all ridership details.

Francois Granade said this was his last CAC meeting. He was happy to see there is going to be a focus on better communication in getting information to the public. Caltrain needs to be positive about its future and focus on the benefits and potential.

Chair Jenkins thanked Mr. Granade for his service to the CAC and wished him luck.

Mr. Hronowski said it was a pleasure serving on the CAC with Mr. Granade.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting:

Wednesday, July 20, 2011, 5:40 p.m., San Mateo County Transit District Administrative Building, 2nd Floor Bacciocco Auditorium, 1250 San Carlos Avenue, San Carlos, CA.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.