



JPB Board of Directors
Meeting of April 2, 2026

Correspondence as of March 13, 2026

Subject

1. Re: Request for Permission to Use Caltrain Parking for Event – May 3 – *Staff Response*
2. SJJPA 2026 Draft Business Plan
3. Re: Request for Timeline on Quiet Car Pilot – *Staff Response*
4. Millbrae Train Museum
5. Fwd: Oversized Bike Policy concerns
6. A Solution to Caltrain's Bike Capacity Problem
7. Public Comment: Subject: Request to Reconsider New Bike Restrictions and Improve Bike Access on Caltrain
8. Caltrain Merchandise for My Daughter
9. Stolen emails used to lobby board

From: [Caltrain BOD Public Support](#)
To: ameliasmexipino@gmail.com
Cc: [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](mailto:Board (@caltrain.com))
Subject: Re: Request for Permission to Use Caltrain Parking for Event – May 3
Date: Friday, March 6, 2026 2:07:08 PM

Dear Althea Corpuz,

Thank you for reaching out to Caltrain regarding the use of the parking area in front of ECR Pub in Belmont for your upcoming events on May 3 and August 16.

We have shared your request with the appropriate staff for review. A member of our team will follow up with you directly to discuss the request and provide guidance on any permissions, coordination, or procedures that may be required.

Thank you for your patience, and we appreciate you contacting us in advance to coordinate.

Sincerely,

Your Caltrain BOD Public Support Team

-----Original Message-----

From: Althea Corpuz <ameliasmexipino@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 27, 2025 5:01 PM
To: Board (@caltrain.com) <Board@caltrain.com>
Cc: info.ecrpub@gmail.com
Subject: Request for Permission to Use Caltrain Parking for Event – May 3

To whom it may concern,

I hope this email finds you well. I am reaching out to inquire about the possibility of using the Caltrain parking area in front of ECR Pub (864 el Camino real, Belmont) during our event on May 3 and August 16. We would like to understand the necessary permissions and any coordination required to ensure proper use of the space.

Could you please advise on whom we should coordinate with for approval? Additionally, would we need to seek permission from the Belmont Police Department or any other local authorities?

We appreciate your guidance and look forward to your response. Please let us know if there are any forms or procedures we need to complete.

Thank you for your time and assistance.

Best regards,
Althea Corpuz | Owner
Amelia's Mexipino Cuisine
(415) 919-8722

From: San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority <donotreply@sjjpa.com>
Sent: Friday, March 6, 2026 2:09 PM
To: Board (@caltrain.com)
Subject: SJJPA 2026 Draft Business Plan

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San Joaquin
Joint Powers Authority



The San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority 2026 Business Plan Draft is now available for review.

Comments on the draft plan may be submitted [here](#) until March 18, 2026, at 12pm. These will be presented to the SJJPA Board on March 19, 2026. Any comments received after the deadline will be included in the final Staff Report for the May 15, 2026, meeting.

DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN

Plan: https://cdn.sjjpa.com/wp-content/uploads/20250311120849/2025-SJJPA-Business-Plan_Public-Review-Draft_DRAFT.pdf
Replies: mhanebutt@sjrrc.com

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San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority 949 E Channel St Stockton, CA 95202

From: [Caltrain BOD Public Support](#)
To: [Helene Grossman](#)
Cc: [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#)
Subject: Re: Request for Timeline on Quiet Car Pilot
Date: Friday, March 6, 2026 4:21:09 PM

Dear Helene Grossman,

Thank you for your inquiry.

At this time, there is not yet a confirmed timeline for when the project will roll out.

Please know that our team is actively working through the internal review process and moving the project forward as quickly as we reasonably can. We anticipate making progress over the next few months and will share updates once a more definitive timeline is available.

We appreciate your interest and patience.

Sincerely,

Your Caltrain BOD Public Support Team

From: Helene Grossman <helenegrossman@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, March 2, 2026 6:36 PM
To: Caltrain BOD Public Support <CaltrainBODPublicSupport@caltrain.com>
Cc: Board (@caltrain.com) <Board@caltrain.com>
Subject: Re: Request for Timeline on Quiet Car Pilot

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Thanks very much! This looks wonderful!

Could you let me know what date/timeframe we can expect this to roll out? It says 2-3 months from final internal sign-off. Has that sign-off happened yet, or when will it happen?

Thank you,

Helene Grossman

On Thu, Feb 26, 2026 at 9:02 AM Caltrain BOD Public Support <CaltrainBODPublicSupport@caltrain.com> wrote:

Dear Helene Grossman,

Your message to the Caltrain Board of Directors was forwarded to me for response. A copy of this correspondence will also be shared with the Board. Thank you for following up and

for sharing your thoughtful perspective regarding the Quiet Car pilot.

For the most recent update on this item, we encourage you to refer to the presentation provided to the Caltrain Citizens Advisory Committee on February 18. The presentation includes information regarding the status of the Quiet Car pilot exploration and next steps. You may review it here: <https://www.caltrain.com/media/36640/download>

Thank you again for reaching out and for your support of Caltrain.

Sincerely,
Your Caltrain BOD Public Support Team

From: Helene Grossman <helenegrossman@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 15, 2026 2:45:35 AM (UTC+00:00) Monrovia, Reykjavik
To: Board (@caltrain.com) <Board@caltrain.com>
Subject: Request for Timeline on Quiet Car Pilot

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Dear Members of the Caltrain Board,

I am writing to follow up on the Quiet Car pilot that Caltrain committed to exploring in August. I was told that Caltrain aimed to "roll it out in the coming months," but it has now been six months, and there has been no visible progress or timeline shared. What is the current status, and when can riders expect next steps?

For many of us, a Quiet Car would be truly life-changing. My current commute often involves switching seats multiple times per ride to avoid extended phone conversations. What should be productive or relaxing time becomes stressful. A clearly designated quiet space would allow riders to work, study, read, or simply relax without disruption. It would make an enormous difference in the daily experience of thousands of commuters.

Ironically, I have recently found myself driving instead of taking Caltrain simply to guarantee a quiet environment. I would much prefer to return to rail -- and a Quiet Car pilot would meaningfully influence that choice.

This proposal is modest and low-cost. As a pilot, it does not require a full systemwide overhaul -- just some signage / expectations posted on the onboard digital screens. The purpose of a pilot is to test, gather feedback, and iterate quickly. But without a timeline or plan after six months, the concept of a "pilot" loses its meaning.

Could the Board provide a projected timeline so riders understand what to expect?

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this request. I look forward to seeing this promising project move forward!

Sincerely,

| Helene Grossman

From: [StandingAwesome3221](#)
To: [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#)
Subject: Millbrae Train Museum
Date: Saturday, March 7, 2026 2:17:24 PM

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Hello,

My name is Robby Hillman and I am a volunteer for the Millbrae Train Museum. We are interested in preserving one or more of your remaining 1985 Nippon Sharyo Gallery Cars because they represent a significant part of Millbrae railroad history. The late Millbrae resident William E. Thomford spent most of his working career as an engineer for Southern Pacific, and after he retired from SP, Thomford started a consulting business, which got a contract with Caltrain to help design the 1985 gallery cars.

Thomford was a notable figure in railroad equipment, and his other major contributions to the industry include:

- Designing a hydraulically buffered coupler system, called HydraCushion, that reduced freight damage by 85 times. This won him and an engineer from SRI a notable award from the Franklin Institute.
- Designing two auto carriers for General Motors, the Vert-a-Pack and the StackPack. The Vert-a-Pack was notable for transporting 30 Chevy Vegas at a time on one railcar.
- Designing the first ISO shipping container railcar system that could support double-stacking containers. The prototype is preserved at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento.

In addition to these cars being an iconic part of Bay Area Railroading for the last 40 years, they represent the last major engineering achievement of perhaps the most notable mechanical engineer on the Peninsula. It would be an awesome STEM opportunity for us to be able to preserve one of these cars, preferably a cab car, and use it to demonstrate and teach local youth on a significant part of Caltrain history, which was designed by our local engineer.

We are willing to cooperate with you in any way possible in order to preserve those great parts of Bay Area History.

In addition to obtaining a Gallery Car from you, we would also like to request a tour of your Central Engineering, Maintenance, and Operations Facility so that we may do some in-person research in order to build exhibits around your current and recent history.

Thank you.

Signed,

Robert R. Hillman

From: [Brian Thomas](#)
To: [Public Comment; Caltrain, Bac \(@caltrain.com\)](#)
Subject: Fwd: Oversized Bike Policy concerns
Date: Monday, March 9, 2026 9:00:28 PM

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Brian Thomas** <brianthomas@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Mar 9, 2026 at 8:22 PM
Subject: Oversized Bike Policy concerns
To: <BATAC@samtrans.com>

Hello,

I am writing to express in the strongest possible terms that Caltrain's proposed oversized bike policy is a mistake. The policy as currently proposed represents an unworkable hardship to some of your most dedicated riders, right as you come hat-in-hand hoping for additional funding. This policy tells me that my commute (25+ years, 20 of those with a bicycle) doesn't matter to you. **This will not win my vote in November, full stop.**

I understand the need to manage space on bike cars efficiently, and I don't know anyone who objects to that. Existing policies (e.g.- alternating handlebars) are completely unenforced in my experience, and surely we can do better. Similarly, there is a surge in what can only be described as motorcycles being dragged onto bike cars, and that should probably be addressed with a new policy.

However, **the proposed policy is an indiscriminate bludgeon.** The proposed policy 1) bans bicycles that present no issues in practice, and 2) offers no real alternative for a rider whose commute relies on a bicycle that doesn't comply.

1) Consider a very typical city commuter bicycle with a very typical child seat. The child seat is narrower than the bike's handlebars or pedals, and in any case extends mostly upwards, not outwards. This bicycle is trivially easy to park efficiently in your existing bike cars. At worst, two such bikes parked right next to each other would be unwieldy, but this is easily avoided. Note that this child seat is designed to carry a 40+ pound child safely in traffic, and is fixed in place with bolts and nuts. It is not removable in any practical sense. What is this parent supposed to do? They have to drop off a preschooler and then haul themselves promptly across town to the train station. Once at their destination, that bicycle is a crucial link in their "last mile" plan. **Your policy puts this rider in a car.** Is that Caltrain's hoped-for-outcome? Where can I find a reference to that in Caltrain's mission?

2) **Why on earth would the proposed policy make no distinction between crowded trains and empty trains?** A sensible policy would redistribute traffic across a larger array of trains and increase the efficiency of the system as a whole. I sometimes find myself on a mid-day

train northbound from the Peninsula to San Francisco. That train is, to be charitable, not crowded. Will I be left on the platform because my bicycle has a basket on the front (a basket narrower than my handlebars)? Will I be left on the platform because my non-electric, perfectly normal, non-cargo bicycle happens to be 6'2" long? **You could play a pickup soccer game on that bike car at 1pm, but I can't board with my bicycle?** IF a sweeping policy change is genuinely required (and I don't concede that at all), why would it not only apply to the most crowded trains? Conductors can monitor boarding once a bike car is approaching capacity (which they already generally do and should do in any case). Or perhaps **the policy could apply only to limited and express trains. Leave the locals alone.** It's clear to any regular rider that local trains are under-utilized, and that the trains most impacted by odd-sized bicycles are the commute hour expresses.

This is a really frustrating time for anyone who believes in public transit befitting a world class metropolis. The fiscal health of Caltrain, to say nothing of the broader interconnected transit systems of the Bay Area, is hanging by a thread. ***This is what you choose to work on?*** Is Caltrain flush enough that it is scrambling to alienate an entire customer segment with a policy that nitpicks, and nickle-and-dimes, and that would require conductors to carry tape measures? Right now you are deciding my vote on the transit funding measure that will appear on the ballot later this year. You are deciding the votes of everyone I know: people who don't ride the train all that often and don't care much about this measure until I tell them what I think. Please think about what you're doing. **This has all the fingerprints of a policy maker who thinks the issue at hand is a simple, logistical rounding error. It is not.**

Sincerely,
Brian, a very long-time rider and cyclist

From: [Daniel Karpelevitch](#)
To: [Caltrain, Bac \(@caltrain.com\)](#); [cacsecretary \[@caltrain.com\]](#); [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#)
Subject: A Solution to Caltrain's Bike Capacity Problem
Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 11:59:43 AM

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Dear Members of the Caltrain Board of Directors, CAC, and BATAAC,

Since the beginning of 2026, 16 alerts have been sent out advising riders that a train had reached full bike capacity. Of those alerts, 15 of the 16 were for southbound morning Limited or Express trains, and 9 were for Express 510 alone. While we may not yet be at the capacity crush Caltrain experienced pre-pandemic, regularly having trains reach capacity serves as a damper on continued ridership recovery.

The pattern in these alerts is worth examining closely. The overwhelming concentration of bike capacity issues on southbound morning trains — rather than northbound ones — suggests that the problem is fundamentally about last-mile access in Silicon Valley, not first-mile access. BikeLink lockers have been a genuine success for riders who bike to a Caltrain station and don't need their bicycle at their destination. However, for someone traveling into Silicon Valley, where the last mile to many employers is not easily served by transit or on foot, a locker at the destination station offers no relief. This likely explains why we are seeing bike bumps on trains like Express 510 rather than on northbound services. Recent efforts to more strictly enforce onboard rules are a reasonable step, but if capacity is already being reached at or above the nominal maximum, enforcement alone will not resolve the underlying mismatch between supply and demand for last-mile cycling options.

With that context in mind, I would like to propose that Caltrain consider piloting an OV-Fiets-style station-based daily bike rental program at one or more high-demand Silicon Valley stations. For those unfamiliar, OV-Fiets is a Dutch rail-integrated bikeshare service that operates on a simple model: bikes are available for daily rental exclusively at train stations, users pick up a bike upon arrival and return it to the same station at the end of the day. At approximately €4.80 per day, it is priced below traditional bikeshare while serving a very different purpose — it is designed specifically for multimodal commuters, not point-to-point urban trips.

This model is a significantly better fit for Silicon Valley's commute geography than conventional bikeshare services like Bay Wheels. Systems like Bay Wheels are well-suited to dense urban environments where a single bike can serve many trips throughout the day. In a lower-density, office-park environment, a bike is more likely to make a single round trip daily, sitting idle the rest of the time. Worse, the point-to-point nature of traditional bikeshare creates rebalancing challenges that are difficult to solve when destinations are spread across a large area with unpredictable demand. Building sufficient dock infrastructure at every office location within biking distance of a Caltrain station would require enormous capital investment and would almost certainly result in significant over-building. A station-anchored model sidesteps these challenges entirely: the bikes stay at the station, and riders return them at the end of the day, so there is no need for rebalancing.

This also has favorable implications for operating costs. Because bikes are concentrated in one location, maintenance is efficient — a mechanic can visit a single station and service an entire fleet at once, rather than driving across a service area to address individual bikes scattered across many docks. Tasks as simple as tire inflation and brake adjustments become far easier to manage at scale. A pilot could be operated with a staff member on-site during commute hours, and future iterations could incorporate automated or self-service systems to reduce staffing needs further.

A pilot need not be complex or expensive to launch. A modest fleet of bikes parked at a platform-adjacent location, a waiver and deposit process, and staffed hours aligned with express and limited train departures would be sufficient to test the concept. Hours could be defined practically — pickup available from the first express or limited service of the morning through the last of the morning peak, and drop-off available from just before the first afternoon express or limited through the end of the evening peak, based on that station's schedule. Pricing integration with the Caltrain monthly pass — either bundled or available as an add-on — could further lower barriers and make the program attractive to regular commuters.

The potential demand upside is also worth highlighting. In addition to reducing pressure on bike car capacity from existing riders, a well-priced last-mile rental option could induce new ridership from commuters who currently do not take Caltrain because they lack a reliable way to reach their workplace from the station. The combination of BikeLink for the first mile and a station rental for the last mile could meaningfully expand the viable catchment area for Caltrain commuters in Santa Clara County.

I recognize that any new program requires resources and carries implementation risk, which is why I believe a limited pilot at a single busy Santa Clara County station, such as Palo Alto, Mountain View, or Sunnyvale, would be a prudent starting point. The infrastructure requirements are modest, the model is proven in comparable contexts abroad, and the station-anchored design makes it easy to scale gradually — or wind down — based on observed demand. I hope the board will consider this proposal and would welcome the opportunity to discuss it further.

Thank you for your time and for your continued work on behalf of Caltrain riders.

Respectfully,
Daniel Karpelevitch

From: [Quynh Bui](#)
To: [Customer Service](#); [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#); [PRA](#); [cacsecretary \[@caltrain.com\]](#); [CaltrainGCA](#)
Subject: Request to Reconsider New Bike Restrictions and Improve Bike Access on Caltrain
Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 12:19:40 PM

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Dear Caltrain,

My name is Quynh Bui, and I am a commuter who is actively trying to combine biking and public transit for my daily commute, as opposed to driving.

The idea of biking to Caltrain, bringing my bike on the train, and biking to work seemed like an ideal solution for a sustainable commute. My bike has a child carrier and panniers. These accessories can be removed to comply with Caltrain's current bike rules.

However, after reviewing the current rules more closely, I realized that I am physically unable to lift my 50-pound e-bike onto the train. Because ramps are not allowed under the current rules, riders like me (5 ft 100 lbs) — who rely on heavier bikes but cannot physically lift them — are effectively excluded from bringing our bikes onboard.

As a law-abiding rider who genuinely wants to use Caltrain instead of driving, I have tried multiple commuting configurations to make this work:

1. Bike + Scooter Combination

I biked to Caltrain, parked my bike using the bike valet at 4th & King, and brought a folding scooter on the train.

2. E-bike + Folding Bike Combination

I purchased a folding bike that I carry on my e-bike. I bike to the station, leave my e-bike at the bike valet, and bring the folding bike on the train. However, the bike valet hours are restrictive and often do not align with my schedule.

3. Folding Bike Only

I commute using only my folding bike and bring it on the train. While this works for the train portion of my commute, it prevents me from picking up my children after work. I often have to go home, get my e-bike, and double back to pick them up.

Even under the current rules, bringing bikes on Caltrain can already be difficult for someone like me. The new restrictions planned for March appear to make bike access even more limited. In a region like the Bay Area — where traffic congestion is among the worst in the nation — policies that discourage bike-to-transit commuting seem counterproductive.

If Caltrain truly wants to encourage multimodal commuting and reduce car dependency, I encourage consideration of the following policy improvements:

1. Allow ramps or boarding assistance for heavier bikes such as e-bikes.

Many modern bikes — including family bikes, cargo bikes, and e-bikes — are significantly heavier than traditional bikes. Allowing small portable ramps or providing boarding assistance would make Caltrain accessible to more riders.

2. Expand bike access across more train cars.

Limiting bike space to only certain cars creates bottlenecks and conflicts. Expanding bike accommodation across additional cars would distribute demand and reduce stress during boarding.

3. Increase and extend bike valet hours at major stations.

Bike valet is a fantastic service, but the limited hours reduce its usefulness for commuters with variable schedules or family obligations.

4. Create designated e-bike or heavier-bike spaces.

As e-bike usage grows rapidly throughout the Bay Area, transit systems should adapt to support them safely and effectively.

5. Continue to prioritize bike-transit integration in Caltrain modernization efforts.

Bike access is critical to solving the first-mile and last-mile problem and reducing reliance on cars.

Many Bay Area residents want to reduce driving and rely more on transit and bicycles. I am one of those people. However, the current and proposed bike policies make it very difficult for riders like me to make Caltrain part of our daily lives.

I hope Caltrain will reconsider policies that restrict bike access and instead move toward solutions that support multimodal commuting for a wider range of riders.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Quynh Bui

From: [Matthew Guo](#)
To: [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#)
Subject: Caltrain Merchandise for My Daughter
Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2026 4:44:40 PM

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Hi there,

My daughter is absolutely obsessed with Caltrain - she talks about the trains constantly and her dream is to be a conductor when she grows up. She especially loves the red vests the attendants wear and asks about them every time we ride.

I was wondering if there's any way to purchase a Caltrain vest, or if you have any old/retired ones you might be able to part with? It would absolutely make her year.

Thank you so much for running such a wonderful service - you've created a lifelong fan.

Best regards,
Matthew

From: [Jen McDonald](#)
To: [Board \(@caltrain.com\)](#)
Subject: Stolen emails used to lobby board
Date: Thursday, March 12, 2026 5:48:44 PM
Attachments: [SF Chon fake emails to BAAD.pdf](#)

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Dear Caltrain directors,

Today's SF Chronicle broke the story that local public agencies were being lobbied with fake emails using stolen email addresses. The group behind it? The Bay Area Council, of which Caltrain is a member.

I'm sure you more than most know how critical it is to hear from your constituents, and not be influenced by professional lobbyists using identity theft to fake genuine contact. So, I'm asking you to take a minute, just now, to contact Caltrain staff responsible for Bay Area Council membership, and ask them to demand that the Council abandon this reprehensible campaign, and break ties with the lobbying group doing the identity theft. After all, you could well be their next target.

I've attached a copy of the Chronicle article. Also, here is a [link](#) to a rather desperate PR that the BAC sent out last night. Instead of apologizing or backing down, they double down, and claim that the many individuals who had their identities stolen were somehow mistaken. This brazen response, I think, demands that members of the BAC react strongly to this, particularly public agencies such as yourself.

Incidentally, the air district rules that they are opposing through their front group "Common Sense Coalition" are designed to eliminate more than 5 **million tonnes** of CO2 emissions every year, avoid 85 deaths a year, and costs of almost 1 billion dollars. Even if they weren't stealing identities to do so, does Caltrain - a leader in greening the area - really want to oppose such life-saving rules?

Thanks for all you do - I'm an occasional but very happy Caltrain passenger, and live close to the now-much-quieter tracks, so benefit greatly from your work. I'm also profoundly grateful for how much electrification has done to reduce diesel pollution and greenhouse gas emissions - well done on realizing such a long-held dream!

Sincerely,

Jen McDonald

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BAY AREA

‘This was forged’: Residents deny sending emails pushing Bay Area air policy change

By **Jennifer Gollan**, Staff Writer

March 12, 2026



Anthony Glavin stands outside of his home in San Pablo. Glavin is one of several who deny sending an

Anthony Clewis stands outside of his home in San Pablo. Clewis is one of 10 people whose names were on emails sent to a regional air quality board to support a policy change but told the Chronicle they played no part in the messages and did not consent to use of their information.

Jessica Christian/S.F. Chronicle


Listen Now:
'This was forged': Residents deny sending emails pushing Bay Area air policy change
About 6 Minutes
1x


Several months ago, dozens of missives hit the inboxes of members of a regional air quality board, seeking to sway them before they considered a policy change. The proposal was relatively banal, but there was a problem: Several of the people identified as having sent statements say they never did so.

The Bay Area Council, an influential business advocacy organization, is overseeing the campaign that prompted the messages. It hired Speak4, a firm whose software allows corporations and other entities to send “custom letters... directly to decision makers,” according to its website, to create a platform for local voters to send emails to the Bay Area Air District, which regulates air pollution across nine counties.

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The streamlining and bulk submission of letter-writing is a long-standing political tactic that critics call “astroturfing,” in which special interest groups try to display broad grassroots support for a policy, even though the letters are being generated by professionals rather than ordinary residents. What sets this situation apart is that some of the people credited with sending the messages dispute that they played any part.

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In interviews, 10 people whose names were on the emails told the Chronicle they did not send them, nor did they consent to Speak4 using their names.

In an email dated Nov. 25, 2025, San Pablo resident Anthony Clewis purportedly wrote: “Any new rule adopted by BAAD must include a new, more robust socio-economic impact study before implementation. Such a requirement would give families, renters, and small businesses a clear picture of the financial impacts before new costs appear on their bills.”

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“This was forged,” Clewis, a 48-year-old Navy veteran, said in a phone interview. “I never wrote the letter. It’s a travesty and conflict of interest and an invasion of privacy. ... It made me feel like someone is cyberhacking me.”

It’s unclear how Clewis’ and the other disputed names ended up in the lobbying messages.

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The 85 emails reviewed by the Chronicle were form letters

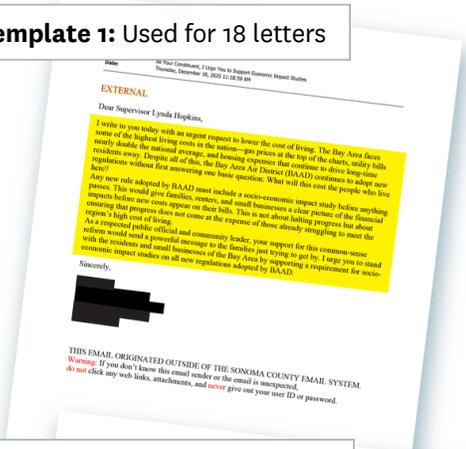
sent to Lynda Hopkins, the board’s chairperson, between Nov. 12 and Dec. 19, urging the board to first conduct a socio-economic analysis of potential impacts of each new regulation it adopts.

The emails, which originated from domains ending in @Speak4.co, were obtained under a public records request filed by the Energy and Policy Institute, a watchdog organization based in Sonoma County that is focused on the fossil-fuel and utility industries, and then shared with the Chronicle.

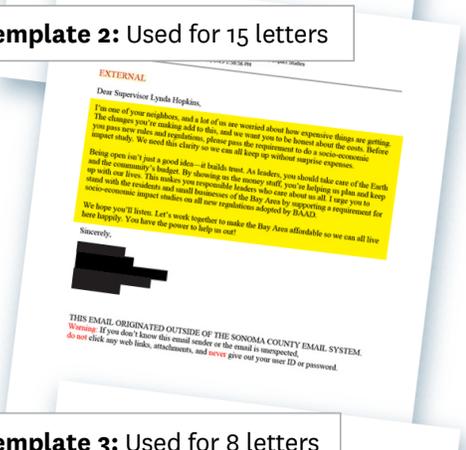
Analysis of lobbying emails sent to Bay Area Air District

The Chronicle reviewed 85 emails sent to Lynda Hopkins, the chairperson of the Bay Area Air District. The letters followed one of five templates and were sent from a variety of email addresses.

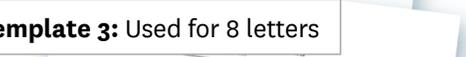
Template 1: Used for 18 letters

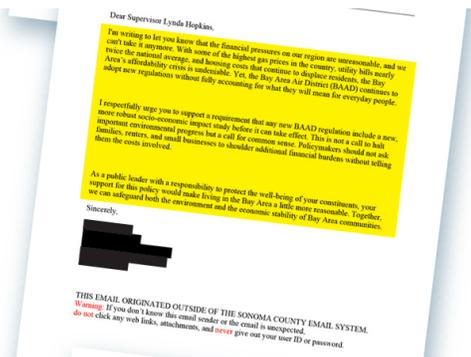


Template 2: Used for 15 letters

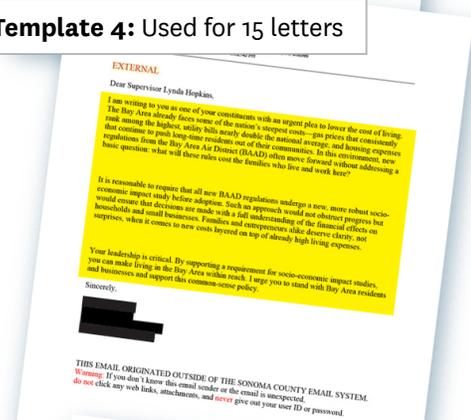


Template 3: Used for 8 letters

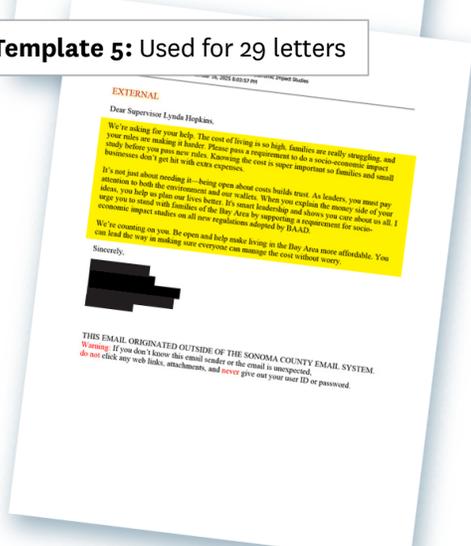




Template 4: Used for 15 letters



Template 5: Used for 29 letters



Graphic: Todd Trumbull/S.F. Chronicle · Source: Chronicle analysis of emails obtained from a public records request by the Energy and Policy Institute

Note: The names and email addresses of the senders have been masked for privacy, and the template body text has been highlighted.

Rufus Jeffris, a spokesperson for the Bay Area Council, whose members include charities, major retailers, tech firms and oil companies, said neither the council nor Speak4 submitted letters without permission. “We didn’t

submit any letters on anyone's behalf, this was all done by the users themselves," he said.

Speak4 did not respond to emails requesting comment.

Jeffris said people who support the campaign can visit the website of the Bay Area Council's Common Sense Coalition, which was created to support the change. They can submit a letter via a "Sign Now" button that takes them to a Speak4 website. A "Join the Coalition" button on the coalition's homepage also takes visitors to Speak4's website.

"The only way through our campaign for a letter to be initiated is by the direct action of a person entering their first and last name, an email address, and a zip code, then hitting Send," Jeffris said in a written statement. "That's it. Period."

The website includes a portal — "SIGN THE PETITION" — that generates a prewritten statement, though users can change the text.

But several of the people named in the Speak4 emails told the Chronicle they weren't aware of the campaign, nor were they aware of how to submit letters.

Eric Jordan, a behavioral health case manager who lives in Emeryville, told the Chronicle he did not write the letter attributed to him.

"Whoever is behind this, they should have gotten our consent," he said. "You're forging a check almost. You need to get permission if you're sending stuff out like that. When it comes down to politics, it's all about what people think and feel. That's what keeps it organic and authentic."

Reached by phone, another person whose name was on an email to the air quality board said he did not write it.

“I rarely write emails because I don’t think it makes a difference,” said the person, who asked not to be identified publicly, saying he fears being misused in another campaign. “I’m not going to change anyone’s opinion about anything. Maybe a special interest group wrote these letters. Maybe their intent is to bombard the district with emails.”

For at least the last decade, the district has conducted a socio-economic analysis before the board adopts or changes a regulation, as required under state law. District staff are drafting a policy to formalize this practice, and ensure staff apply consistent criteria when they perform studies that go beyond the state’s statutory requirements. Critics of the move worry making the analysis standard could discourage more stringent air pollution regulations.

The district intends to publish a proposed policy for public comment and present it to a sub-committee for a vote in July. If approved, the district board would vote on it as early as September. Jeffris said the Bay Area Council began advocating for the measure last fall, though it’s unclear at whose behest.

Greg Nudd, deputy executive officer of policy for the air quality district, said in an interview that the agency is still accepting comments via emails. However, it will replace that system with a website where people must submit their comments to address “this email spamming problem,” he said. It’s unclear when that website will go live.

“It’s unfortunate because the policymakers need to have an understanding of what the various stakeholders in the Bay

area think about a proposed action,” Nudd said.

While Speak4 touts its ability to produce “AI-powered custom letters,” Jeffris said that Speak4 did not use AI in its Bay Area campaign.

The use of platforms powered by AI to generate comments from constituents have been used to influence public officials elsewhere, signaling a new lobbying frontier. A Los Angeles Times investigation last month showed how an AI platform, CiviClick, was used to deluge the South Coast Air Quality Management District with more than 20,000 comments that helped thwart a proposal to phase out gas-powered appliances in Southern California.

Dylan Plummer, acting deputy director of the Sierra Club’s Clean Heat Campaign, said the emails to air district officials subvert the democratic process and undermine regulations.

“The ethical ramifications of these misleading tactics are significant,” Plummer said, “and there are real questions about whether laws safeguarding against identity theft have been broken.”

March 12, 2026



Jennifer Gollan

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER



Jennifer Gollan is an investigative reporter at the San Francisco Chronicle. She joined the Chronicle from the Center for Investigative Reporting, where she led national investigations that appeared in the Associated Press, the Guardian US and Politico Magazine. She also worked with PBS NewsHour and Al Jazeera English’s “Fault Lines” on special television reports and documentaries.

Her investigations have prompted sweeping changes in federal law that expanded the power of local and state police and prosecutors to crack down on abusers with illegal guns; congressional hearings and new legislation to thwart labor abuse in elder care homes; and a review by the Pentagon and federal legislation to protect workers building warships for the U.S. Navy.

Projects she led have received various honors. In 2022, she received the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award and was nominated for an Emmy Award for “When Abusers Keep Their Guns,” an investigation that exposed how perpetrators often kill their partners with firearms they possess unlawfully. Her work has also earned a national Emmy Award, a Hillman Prize for web journalism, two Sigma Delta Chi Awards from the Society of Professional Journalists, a National Headliner Award, a Gracie Award and two Society for Advancing Business Editing and Writing awards.

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