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July 11, 2022

Chairwoman Amy Worth and Commissioners
Bay Area Toll Authority
Bay Area Metro Center
375 Beale Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Chairwoman Worth and Commissioners:

North Bay Leadership Council (NBLC) urges you to schedule a hearing and take action on the morning backup for the Richmond San Rafael Bridge as soon as possible.

NBLC is an employer-led public policy advocacy organization committed to providing leadership in ways to make the North Bay sustainable, prosperous and innovative. As business and civic leaders, our goal is to ensure economic health by building more housing, promoting better education, and creating jobs to make our region a better place to live and work. Collectively, our members have over 25,000 employees.

As you know, each workday, during the morning commute, approximately 18,000 Bay Area residents try to cross the Richmond San Rafael Bridge in their car or pick-up truck going to work. The vast majority of them (63%) are people of color. Sixty-nine percent of them do not have a college degree, and the majority of them (60%) make less than Bay Area's median income.

Virtually all of these drivers have no other practical means to get to work. Since they often come from very long distances and from all over the East Bay, biking, walking, and public transit are not practical commute options.

As these 18,000 drivers approach the Richmond San Rafael Bridge, they hit a very significant and growing traffic jam. During the peak hour, on average, they face 16 minutes of gridlocked, stop-and-go traffic. This traffic jam on the freeway also backs up local streets and roads in the city of Richmond, impacting many local families who aren't even trying to get on the Richmond Bridge. This stop-and-go congestion produces 2-3 times the particulate and emissions pollution as a free-flowing freeway, according to research by the University of California. In the Bay Area, particulate matter and other emissions have been concentrated in poorer communities.

The congestion and pollution from the backup are predicted to significantly worsen in the next three years, with a 15-minute delay-per-person-per-day growing to 24 minutes, meaning that unless something is done, in three years these drivers will spend 2 hours, per week, sitting in gridlock waiting to cross the Richmond San Rafael Bridge in the morning! (This will also further impact local streets and roads in Richmond).

An easy solution is to shift to all electronic tolling and remove the 1950's toll booths to clear the roadway, then shift the zipper-wall installed two-years ago as an experimental bike lane to the right in the morning, creating a third lane, plus some minor improvements at the bridge's touchdown on the west side. These improvements will cut 11-16 minutes of traffic a day, or an hour a week, or 50 hours a year, per driver.

The facts:

- Morning commuters: 18,000
- Morning bike riders: 18

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- Daily cars and trucks (not just morning commute): 82,610 (45-day average)
- Daily bike riders: 77 (45-day average)

In 2016, the Bay Area Toll Authority and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission declared that the Marin side of the bridge (not the Richmond side), had “unacceptable levels of service,” not only on the freeway, but the local Marin streets in Larkspur and San Rafael. You authorized a \$74 million project to re-open the third lane of the lower deck. Completed two years later, Caltrans and MTC proudly reported that the new lane “has eliminated afternoon congestion on eastbound I-580 onto the bridge saving drivers approximately 15 minutes daily on their seven-mile trip from Marin to Contra Costa County. This equates to annual savings of 700,000 vehicle- hours of delay on weekdays and another 91,000 vehicle hours on weekends,” you said. The project was put up for awards and won “Project of the Year” in California.

What can be done for Richmond?

According to recent engineering reports for the Transportation Authority of Marin, a \$70-90 million improvement package would save 13 minutes a day, or about 1 hour a week for every driver during the peak of the morning commute. These include:

- Improvements on the Bridge (signage): up to \$20 M
- Widening of portion of the bridge: \$30 M
- Relocate Francisco Blvd. on-ramp and widen I-580: \$35 M
- Barrier Operating Costs (\$1M per year for 5-Year Pilot): \$5 M

For an additional approximate \$10 million MTC/BATA can add a second, moveable barrier on the bottom deck of the bridge. This would allow the 18 bikers to have a protected commute in the morning (on the lower deck), and then have a protected commute home (on the upper deck), while also allowing the 80,000 car and truck drivers to have a gridlock-free trip across the bridge.

These relatively simple improvements, at a very similar budget to what was spent on the Marin side, would save 79% of the drivers 11 minutes a day during the peak commute.

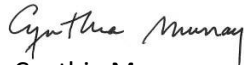
An additional \$220 million connector to Southbound 101 (potentially paired with a parallel connector Marin plans to install in the other direction, which could reduce the cost) would comprehensively eliminate the back-up.

As we understand it, instead of backing the above improvements to help the Richmond community – and the rest of the East Bay and Marin commuters stuck trying to get on the bridge – MTC and Bay Area Toll Authority staff are backing a package of improvements that include “rebates and incentives for e-bikes,” and “e-bike share program,” a Miles app with rewards for people that take “Green Trips” and “Signing and Stripping” for the bike lane, and a potential new bus route. There is also active discussion to increase tolls on the 18,000 drivers as a “congestion fee” with the plan that higher prices will force these largely low income, minority commuters to stop crossing the bridge in the morning. If implemented, engineering reports show this staff backed package would worsen the commute, adding an additional 9 minutes of delay per day, during the peak commute.

Instead, for equity, environmental, economic, and just common-sense reasons, we request that BATA fully fund the improvements with the \$210 million specifically set aside in the voter-approved Regional Measure 3 funds for “Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Access Improvements” and a portion of the \$9 billion in freeway funds from the Federal Government from regular funding and the new Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Law coming to the Bay Area in the next five years. Engineering and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process should be started immediately.

Please let me know when the hearing is scheduled to discuss our request. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cynthia Murray
President & CEO