

November 7, 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:

We write to request that the Bay Area Toll Authority formally study opening the third lane on the upper deck of the Richmond Bridge in the morning; add a second, protected, movable-barrier bike lane on the lower deck of the Richmond Bridge; implement roadway changes on the Marin side, including direct connection options to south-bound 101 that bypass local streets and roads; eliminate the physical toll booths; and other needed improvements to grant morning commuters (and residents) stuck in Richmond the same relief that was granted Marin drivers in the afternoon (via previous recent improvements). This would allow a continuously operating protected bike lane and Bay Trail, reduce emissions, reduce backups on local streets and roads in the local Richmond Community, and grant very significant time savings to thousands and thousands of East Bay residents (often essential workers who cannot work remotely), who have no realistic way to bike or ride transit to their jobs. Further, when BATA and MTC are actively considering more expensive freeway congestion improvements for roadways with less travelers, we believe this study and expenditure is essential if MTC is to fulfill its stated goal to “advance equity through carefully considered investments directed at historically underserved and systemically marginalized groups, including people with low incomes and communities of color.”

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. In fact, according to air monitors in Richmond, this morning freeway backup is now the largest source of non-wildfire air pollution in Richmond.

The congestion and pollution from the backup are predicted to significantly worsen in the next three years, with a peak hour 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.)

We advocate that BATA 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, open the new zipper-wall bike lane on the lower deck to allow bikes and pedestrians to still have a protected lane, improve the bridge's touchdown on the west side, modify the Sir Francis Drake interchange, make a direct connection to US 101 South, and other necessary improvements.

In initial engineering, these improvements have been estimated at approximately \$300 million. The Richmond Bridge has 82,610 (45-day average) daily cars and trucks and 77 (45-day average) daily bike riders. Highway 37 between Marin and Napa has 50,000 drivers a day. We are planning to spend \$300-400 million to help Highway 37 in the short term, and \$1.5-4 billion to help Hwy 37 commuters in the long term. And, everyone agrees that's the right thing to do.

Yet, the Richmond Bridge has 80,000 drivers a day - that's almost twice as many – and we advocate that this population deserves a \$300 million expenditure.

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.

For reasons we do not understand – and even though we are advocating creating an additional bike lane to guarantee access – several bike groups have opposed these improvements for Richmond and East Bay drivers. While these drivers are generally lower income and from historically underserved and systemically marginalized groups, according to the US Census Bureau, in the Bay Area, white riders represent 61% of the bike commuters, followed by Hispanics at 17%, Asians at 15% and African Americans at 2.4%. And bike riders are well off, with 1 in 4 making \$250,000 or more a year.

As we understand it, instead of backing the above improvements to help the Richmond community – and the rest of the East Bay 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, the Bay Area Council requests that BATA study, select and then fund the improvements to allow the 18 bikers to have a protected commute in the morning (on the lower deck), the other 59 bike riders and then have a protected ride the rest of the day (on the upper deck), while also allowing the 80,000 car and truck drivers to have a gridlock-free trip across the bridge.

Sincerely,



Jim Wunderman
President and CEO