

Bay Area Toll Authority
Oversight Committee

May 14, 2025

Agenda Item 5b-25-0542

Richmond-San Rafael Bridge Project Updates

Subject:

Request for committee approval to pursue next steps of a project as recommended by the Richmond San Rafael (RSR) Bridge West Bound Upper Deck Study, which explored feasibility of providing a third High Occupancy Vehicle Lane (HOV) on the Bridge. Staff will also provide a status update on ongoing projects including proposed modifications to the RSR Bridge Access Improvement Pilot (Pilot) and the RSR Forward Open Road Tolling (ORT) and Interstate 580 Westbound HOV Lane Project.

Background:

The 5.5-mile long RSR Bridge has served the traveling public of the region connecting the North Bay and East Bay for over 65 years. BATA has been collaborating with partner agencies including Caltrans, Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), and Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA) on a series of projects and programs that work collectively to improve safety, mobility, multi-modal access, and transit performance in the corridor and on the bridge consistent with Plan Bay Area 2050 guiding principles. Efforts include the ongoing RSR Bridge Pilot, proposed modifications to the Pilot as directed by BATA, and the RSR Forward Program, and the recently completed RSR Bridge Westbound Upper Deck Study.

1. RSR Bridge Pilot Proposed Modifications:

In 2018 and 2019, BATA and the partner agencies implemented a 4-year Pilot that converted the shoulder on the lower deck of the RSR bridge to a peak-period use lane and converted the shoulder on the upper deck to a bicycle and pedestrian path separated from vehicle traffic by a movable barrier. The Pilot goal was to reduce commute time and improve non-motorized access in the corridor. As previously reported to BATA, the Pilot study found the lower-deck Pilot to be highly successful in reducing travel time; however, the Pilot raised questions about the role of the emergency shoulder (or lack thereof) on safety and incident response. In May 2024, BATA authorized staff to pursue changes to the initial 4-year Pilot on the RSR

Bridge. The two changes involve making the lower deck peak-period use travel lane permanent and modifying the upper deck's bike/ped path operations part-time to restore the emergency shoulder during the weekday and preserve the path on weekends. BATA and Caltrans submitted a permit amendment application to the San Francisco Bay Conservation Development Commission (BCDC) in July 2024 seeking approval for the changes. After review, BCDC agendized the permit for April 3, 2025. However, as the Chair reported in the recent April 2025 BATA Oversight Committee, BATA and Caltrans asked to postpone the item in order to refine and amend the permit application to incorporate BATA's and MTC's approved actions to study an HOV lane, advance the RSR Forward initiatives and support public access. Staff plans to be back in front of BCDC for a hearing and vote in Summer 2025.

- **RSR Forward – Open Road Tolling (ORT) and I-580 HOV:**

The RSR Forward Project seeks to provide safety and operational improvements on the westbound I-580 approach to the RSR Bridge by replacing the existing toll plaza with ORT and encourage carpooling and transit ridership by reinstating the previous HOV lane along westbound I-580. In addition to the safety benefits offered by ORT improvements, the project is expected to provide significant travel time savings for carpools and buses as well as improve travel time for general traffic.

BATA staff have completed preliminary engineering, environmental studies, project approval documents and final design of the RSR Forward Project. Under item 4b. staff is requesting referral of Resolution No. 186 to the Authority delegating authority to the Executive Director or designee to sign a recommendation to Caltrans to approve the Project Study Report – Project Report (PSR-PR) and directing staff to file a Notice of Exemption pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). BATA has partnered with Caltrans to construct RSR Forward and the other ORT projects on the State owned toll bridges using a Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) contract.

Construction will be conducted in two phases to allow quicker implementation of ORT operations for the RSR Bridge. As reported in the March 2024 BATA Oversight Committee, the first phase is to construct all project improvements with the current Toll System Integrator and an interim toll system structure while BATA awaits procurement of the new

BATA ORT Toll System Integrator. The construction phase is scheduled to start Summer 2025, subject to reaching agreement on price with the CMGC contractor, with major roadway work to beginning in the Fall. Phase 1 of the construction is anticipated to be completed in Spring 2026. The second phase is to remove the interim toll system structure and install the permanent toll system when the new Toll System Integrator is under contract.

2. RSR Bridge Westbound Upper Deck Study:

At its March 2024 meeting, the Committee authorized staff to conduct a Design Alternatives Analysis (DAA) to analyze the feasibility of a third travel lane as a HOV lane on the westbound upper deck of the RSR Bridge. BATA, Caltrans, CCTA and TAM have completed the DAA. The feasibility study assessed implementation of a part-time HOV lane as a third lane on the bridge during the weekdays while retaining the multi-use bike/ped path on weekends. The study's objective is to evaluate alternatives that could increase carpooling and transit use by providing a travel time advantage through a continuous HOV lane from Regatta Blvd. (built with RSR Forward project as described above) across the bridge during peak periods.

The study identified two alternatives to be carried forward to the Caltrans project delivery process. The first alternative would terminate the HOV lane just before the bridge ends in Marin County, and the second alternative would terminate the HOV lane before the Sir Francis Drake exit ramp, requiring additional freeway widening and some ramp modifications in Marin County. Based on the DAA's preliminary traffic analysis, both alternatives are viable solutions that would maintain bike/ped usage on the bridge when it is expected to be highest and provide travel time savings for transit/carpool and general traffic, reducing the heavy morning congestion when compared to no-project condition.

The DAA's environmental assessment indicated that the current project's physical improvements are not expected to have a significant impact on environmental effects with the exception of Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). Under the current State guidelines, the added HOV lane on the bridge is likely considered VMT inducing, which could result in a more involved environmental process.

The preliminary cost estimates are \$14 million for Alternative 1 (Bridge only improvements) and \$45 million for Alternative 2 (Bridge and Marin County improvements). These estimates do not include cost for any potential environmental mitigation.

As the project moves forward into the Caltrans project delivery process, additional investigation and analysis will confirm these findings and further define a preferred alternative.

Structural strengthening will be needed if the moveable barrier remains on the bridge long-term. Caltrans will proceed with environmental review for strengthening during the Pilot modification period and would further develop the project following results of the modified pilot and Westbound Upper Deck project environmental review, provided there is a need for the barrier to remain, i.e., to provide a bike/pedestrian path on the shoulder in some fashion.

Recommendations:

Staff requests that the Committee approve direction to staff to pursue the next phase of project delivery of a project to implement HOV lane as the 3rd lane on the RSR Bridge in the westbound direction. This would allow staff to work with Caltrans to conduct the project initiation and environmental approval process. Staff will come back in the Summer 2025 with cost, schedule and contract / agreement approval to deliver the next phases of a proposed project.

Attachments:

- Presentation: Richmond San Rafael Bridge Updates

Andrew B. Fremier