

The LATA Review

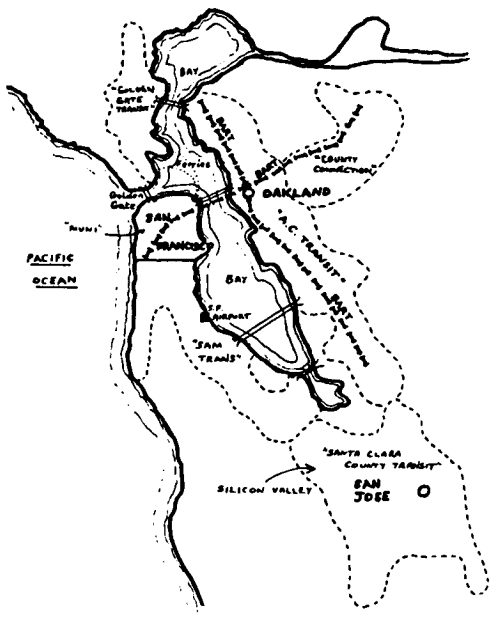
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SAN FRANCISCO TRANSPORT

by Tim Pharoah

Leaving the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) at San Francisco's Market Street station, one is soon aware of being in the heart of a public transport city. Take Market Street itself. The BART regional rail, now 10 years old, is the lower tier of 3 fixed-track systems. Above that is the "MUNI-METRO" - a modern tram system which goes underground in the downtown area. On top at street level is a downtown shuttle service operated by historic trams from all over the world. The street also has four lanes of trolleybus operation, shared with diesel buses. At Market Street are termini for the two famous cable car routes that take you over some of the city's steepest hills. The severity of the gradients helps to explain why S.F. has retained the cables and trolleys: diesel buses on gradients of 1 in 5 stall easily, are incredibly noisy, and wear out fast. So \$60m has been spent renovating the cable car system, whilst a further \$100m investment in trolleybuses is planned for the next 5 years.

The city also has jitneys, dial-a-ride, even rickshaws at Fishermans Wharf, and feeder buses to rail stations - my favourite is the Berkeley campus shuttle called "Humphrey Go-BART"! Ferry boats, with cocktail bars, link downtown S.F. with the wealthy Marin County suburbs across the Bay;



Public transport in S.F. is comprehensive, modern and efficient. Most services are part of the city-owned "MUNI" system which has a flat fare of 60 cents including one free transfer. MUNI carries more passengers than the rest of the Bay area transit agencies put together. So although transit outside S.F. city is reasonable, it serves a small portion of total travel. There are 7 major transit agencies including MUNI, plus 40 smaller private agencies, 15 independent airport services and 44 para-transit services for the elderly and handicapped.

Aid for Disabled

A State ordinance requires proper provision for the disabled, and a third of MUNI's buses are now

equipped with wheelchair lifts, and half the fleet are "Kneeling buses". The policy of designing the regular transit services for access by the disabled seems much better than London's ad hoc (and inadequate) provision.

With so many independent operators, intergration of services is difficult. There are travelcards for MUNI, but not for the Bay area as a whole, and through tickets are rare. The main transit agencies serve exclusive areas and longer journeys often involve a change of mode, fare, and ticket system. It is clear that with the exception of MUNI and BART local transit is used mainly by the poor.

75% Subsidy

MUNI support is indeed considerable. Fares cover only 25% of operating costs, and the balance is met by subsidies, mainly from local and State sources. Heavy subsidy and capital investment over the past 10-15 years has increased the number of passengers from 1/2 million per day in 1975 to 3/4 million in 1985, a major achievement in a city with a stable population of around 700,000. MUNI's ridership per capita is the highest in North America, and this fact alone defines San Francisco as the most "European" city in the USA.

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