

JOHN C. KOEPKE

MILL VALLEY, CALIFORNIA 94941

Ashley Nguyen
Project Manager
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
101 Eighth Street
Oakland, CA 94607

Dear Ms. Nguyen,

In accordance with the provision for public review and comment regarding the proposed revisions to the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, (RSR) I submit the following.

As a frequent user of the RSR, like thousands of others I have been frustrated with the impossible traffic buildups, particularly in the eastbound direction. I am therefore pleased that the MTC and presumably CalTrans, are proposing to open the third lane for vehicular traffic. My only concern is that the planned implementation is much too slow. For a bridge that was originally designed and built with three lanes in each direction, and for many years operated in that manner, the bureaucratic delays now being put forward to explain the long implementation period are unacceptable. CalTrans, which when under extreme pressure, as in the rebuilding of earthquake damaged freeways in Southern California, can move with amazing alacrity, should sweep aside the paperwork and put these changes into effect immediately. The number of lost and wasted hours sitting in eastbound delays simply cannot be justified by the presumed need to shuffle papers and obtain clearances.

My primary reason for writing this letter however is to vehemently object to the portion of the changes which propose to place a bicycle lane on the westbound upper deck. While there appears to be no exact cost attached to this folly, the local press reports it in the vicinity of \$55 million. It would seem utterly impossible to justify this expenditure on a purely cost/benefit analysis.

I recognize that MTC in its long range planning wishes to reduce, or at least minimize, automobile usage, and that cycling is in some cases an attractive option. But the program providing, and/or marking bicycle lanes on existing roadways, hardly begins to approach the proposed costs involved in the RSR revamp.

Presumably, this proposal is conceptually part of the plan to encircle the Bay with bicycle access, and the politically strong Bicycle Coalitions are vocal in their support, but a “damn the cost” approach is simply not realistic. There is also a presumption that if the improvements were made, that cyclists would flock to the RSR. Have you ever driven that Bridge? It is long, undulating and can be subject to really nasty weather, including winds high enough that CalTrans roadside warning signs occasionally post high wind warnings for the Bridge.

A usual argument for improving bicycle access is that commuters will abandon their automobiles and substitute bicycles instead. The eastern area around the bridge is hardly a commuter generating area---consisting of a large refinery and housing which hardly accommodates the technical skills required for Marin jobs. Thus, a RSR bicycle lane becomes nothing more than a possible recreational alternative for weekend jaunts of a few dedicated cyclists.

The Governor has recently indicated that the necessary road repairs required to bring California highways back to satisfactory condition is approximately 59 BILLION. I suppose that special interest groups would argue that the \$55 million for the RSR improvements is only one tenth of 1 % of that, a mere rounding number. I can certainly think of far better ways to spend that \$55 million which will make a much greater impact upon transportation in the State.

Lest you feel that this is no more than an angry and negative response, I do have a suggested alternative for your consideration.

Let us assume that the MTC considers linking the East Bay and Marin with some form of continuity access for bicycles as an imperative, with costs as a minor consideration. You can provide a link between Richmond and Larkspur by instituting ferry service. The Golden Gate Ferry system already has a fully functioning terminal at Larkspur. Funding has just been approved for moving forward with the development of a Richmond—San Francisco ferry service, which includes improving docking facilities at the Craneway Pavilion.

CalTrans already provides two ferry services in the Delta, the Ryer Island boats. Admittedly, these are rudimentary vessels and they traverse very short distances over calm water. Nevertheless, they offer a precedent for state highway involvement.

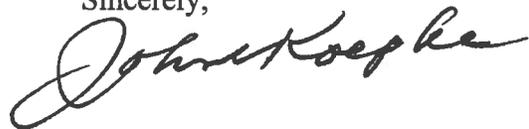
While those two Ryer ferries would be wholly inappropriate for a Bay crossing, one would not have to scale up to ferries such as those operated on the Larkspur—San Francisco run. First, because they would cater almost exclusively to cyclists, they would have minimal enclosed space, but a great deal more deck space. They also do not need the speed of the Larkspur ferries (and thus the operating expense) because even at 15 to 20 knots they would make the crossing more rapidly than a cyclist could pedal across the RSR. Lastly, they would not have to operate on intensive schedules---perhaps making single round trips during daytime weekday hours, with

schedules being adjusted as demand is established. In really bad weather, they could operate on demand, such as the Ryer Island ferries do. Weekend trips catering to the recreational cyclists could be adjusted again according to demand.

According to recently released information from WETA, the proposed annual operating cost for the Richmond-San Francisco service (covered by Measure J funds) is \$3.7 million. That is for operating TWO catamaran vessels on a much more intensive service. In other words, you could operate such a service for perhaps fifteen one years for the same proposed cost as the RSR bikeway improvement, and still have enough money to cover the cost of a properly designed vessel. Lastly, there would be a charge for the trip, which would probably not cover the cost, but would contribute to the overall expense.

In any event, I urge you to abandon the concept of a bikeway on the RSR. I was involved in the early stages of the Golden Gate Bridge Ferry system, and later managed one of the larger ocean transportation fleets in the country. If you wish, I would be pleased to explore this alternative with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John Koepke". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".