Downtown In Danger

Transportation Expert Warns Against Apathy On Improving Public Transit

A do-nothing attitude toward public transit problems could prove disastrous to downtown areas.

Furthermore, projected freeway plans for Alameda and Contra Costa counties will cause "chaotic traffic congestion" unless accompanied by a comparable program of transit improvement.

These views were expressed recently by Charles E. De Leuw, president of De Leuw, Cather & Company of Chicago, and consultant to the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District.

Freeways Not Enough

De Leuw, who addressed some 200 East Bay businessmen and civic officials at a public transit luncheon, declared:

"Thoughtful citizens in virtually all of the larger cities in the nation are concerned with the welfare of their central areas."

Studies have shown that accessibility to downtown areas is of fundamental importance, he said.

"Convenient access requires not only an adequate system of highways, effective traffic control and suitable parking facilities, but more important still—adequate public transit facilities," he said.

De Leuw, who has planned transportation systems for New York, Cleveland, St. Louis, Toronto and other large cities, noted that the East Bay presently lacks fast express service for long trips.

For this reason, he said, his firm has recommended five new express bus routes linking communities between El Cerrito and Decoto and utilizing freeways wherever possible.

New Express Lines

Express lines would help to alleviate congestion and would stimulate trade, thus contributing to "maintaining and developing the economic stability and influence" of downtown areas, De Leuw said.

"Unless it is made more accessible to more people, this stability and the promising hope for this area's future will be most seriously threatened."

The transit expert said that facilities for passengers transferring from local to express lines also are needed.

An integrated long haul-short haul system, together with more service and improved equipment, is the only way to stop the downward trend of transit patronage in the East Bay, now "next to the lowest in the nation," De Leuw said.

Sponsors of the public meeting were the Downtown Associations, Retail Merchants Association, Uptown Development Association and the Oakland Chamber of Commerce.
Castro Valley Proposes Shopper Buses

The possible operation of a special shoppers' shuttle bus in Castro Valley is being explored by engineers of the Transit District.

The special shopper bus line serving Castro Valley residential and business areas was suggested to the District by the Castro Valley Chamber of Commerce. The proposal was one of several recommended by the chamber following a review of the District's preliminary transit plan.

Alan L. Bingham, district public information manager, told a recent meeting of the Castro Valley Kiwanis Club that district engineering consultants "recognize the need for greater convenience in public transit serving East Bay business and shopping centers."

"The engineers, De Leuw Cather & Company, in drafting a final transit program for the District, are giving the idea of special shopper buses a great deal of attention," Bingham said.

"In some cities, for example, merchants validate free rides for public transit passengers just as they do for free auto parking privileges," he said.

A final transit plan for the District is expected to be completed this summer, following an extensive review of the preliminary plan by more than 100 East Bay municipal and civic organizations.

El Cerrito-Richmond Lines Undergo Study

Residents of El Cerrito will be provided through service to Richmond by the Transit District even though Richmond might remain outside of the District.

This possibility was disclosed by John R. Worthington, district general manager, in a recent appearance before the El Cerrito City Council.

The transit official said the District could operate mainline trunk service to Richmond if the service pays for itself.

Trunk Service Continued

He indicated this might be the case with respect to the No. 72 Richmond-Oakland line via San Pablo Avenue, and the L Richmond-San Francisco line.

"Most of the local lines serving Richmond do not support themselves, and we therefore could not operate them unless Richmond was a part of the District," Worthington said.

"But whatever may be the fate of transit in the Richmond area, we will make certain that residents of El Cerrito are provided the best and most convenient public transit services possible," he said.

Residents of Richmond and San Pablo voted themselves into the District when it was formed in 1956. But a subsequent court decision excluded the area from the District, holding that absentee ballots were improperly canvassed after the formation election.

District Aims For 1960 Operating Date; $458,925 'Activation' Budget Approved

Directors of the Transit District have adopted a budget of $458,925 which contemplates the District will be in actual transit business next year.

The 1959-60 financing will require an estimated tax levy of 2.3 cents per $100 assessed property valuation. The current year's rate is 1.4 cents.

The total budget is about $189,000 higher than last year, but a carry-over of approximately $53,000 in unspent funds will mean that only $46,000 must be raised by taxes.

John McDonnell, chairman of the finance committee which made the budget proposal, noted that the only source of district revenue at the present time is the property tax levy.

"Once the District is in operation, however, we anticipate that revenues from fares will be sufficient to meet all of our costs," he said.

The budget increases were due mainly to preparations for actual commencement of transit operations.

These expenses include a reserve for election costs, $125,000; engineering studies, $40,000, and tax refund contingencies, $40,000. The last item is to meet requests for refunds from property owners in the cities of Richmond and San Pablo who were excluded from the District last year by court order.

"Minimum" Budget

McDonnell pointed out that the $125,000 in election costs can be recovered in the sale of bonds if a proposed district bond issue is passed by the voters this November. This could mean substantial savings in the budget next year.

"Even though the District needs considerably more funds than last year in order to get into actual operation, the budget has been held down to the minimum," McDonnell said.

Bay Farm Island Cites Transit Needs

Residents of Bay Farm Island have asked the Transit District to include in its plans additional service over what the area is now receiving.

Robert DeCelle, president of the Bay Farm Island Improvement League, noted in a report to the District that population is on the increase.

"Transportation facilities to Bay Farm Island could be worsened only by complete removal of the line" serving the community, DeCelle said.

While population has more than doubled, Bay Farm Island presently is without public transportation services on weekends, and the line serving the area stops operations on weekdays at 7 p.m., according to the Improvement League.

"In the near future we should like to submit to the (transit district) proposed changes that would benefit not only the population of Bay Farm Island, but also the merchants in town," DeCelle said.

A meeting between District and Improvement League officials will be arranged for the near future to discuss ways service can be improved in the area, according to a report by John R. Worthington, general manager.
Special Report

Slumping Land Values Directly Affect Your Pocketbook

Value Of Property Threatened By Growing Traffic Congestion Crises; Improved Accessibility Held Essential

Wholesome land value is a vital mainstay to a prosperous and economically healthy community. Real estate values and their influence on the property tax base affect everyone in the city.

Reprinted below, in part, is an address delivered recently by William H. Coburn, Jr., a Director of the Transit District, before a meeting of the Berkeley Realty Board. Its title: "The Impact of Public Transit on Land Value."

Since the end of World War II, approximately two billion dollars has been invested in the East Bay in new industry and plant expansion. With this huge industrial expansion, which has similarly taken place throughout much of the West, has come one of the largest population migrations in the history of the country.

More than 1,200,000 people now live in the two East Bay counties. This represents about a 35 per cent increase in population since the end of the second World War.

We find that about 1,000 new residents are moving to Alameda County every month, and that by 1980, it is estimated twelve as many people will be living in the East Bay as are residing here today. As is to be expected with this phenomenal growth in population, additional autos are pouring into our streets and freeways at a still greater pace.

No Room For The Private Car

There are about 1,300,000 autos in the Bay Area now—about one auto to every two people, on a state-wide average. Within 30 years, it is estimated there will be 3,500,000 autos in the Bay Area—almost three times as many as at the present time.

The State Division of Highways, in attempting to meet this relatively new problem of automania, proposes spending, for example, nearly $750,000,000 in Alameda and Contra Costa counties for new freeways during the past 20 years. This will buy approximately 400 miles of new freeways. Millions more will be spent for new and improved city streets and county roadways.

In Alameda County alone, about 3,500 acres of land will be removed from the tax rolls and devoted to these new freeways. This land area, lumped together, is equivalent to half the size of the entire city of Berkeley.

And yet, despite this accelerated program, highway engineers recognize that freeways and city streets will not be able to carry the number of vehicles anticipated in the next two decades.

In other words, it is vital that all of us recognize that Berkeley and the surrounding cities are fast approaching a congestion crisis.

Land Value Depends On Accessibility

The consequences of this crisis could be economically and socially disastrous to every resident, but they will be immediately and particularly felt in the field of real estate.

Property has little or no value for any purpose if it is not accessible to people, and its value increases in direct proportion to the number of people who have access to it and inducement to take advantage of that accessibility.

Today, real estate values, the property tax base and the health of our Bay Area communities are being threatened by congestion that grows worse with each passing day.

In downtown Los Angeles, for example, some two-thirds of the land area already is devoted to freeways, streets and off-street parking. One-third of the entire Los Angeles metropolitan area is devoted to vehicular transportation facilities.

Half of Berkeley Is Tax Free

Already in Berkeley, nearly half of the land area is either tax free or tax exempt and a third of this total is in freeways and city streets.

We of the Transit District are convinced that the only way we can protect our great East Bay metropolis from almost certain stagnation of its streets and larger arterials is to improve public transit to such an extent that it will begin to attract a larger portion of the traveling public to its services.

To accomplish this, an entirely new approach to encourage transit riding is essential.

Nearly 1,200 Miles Of Freeways and Transit

Area planning, as it stands today, will provide 400 miles of new freeways in the East Bay, 61 miles of interurban rail service between major centers of Alameda and Contra Costa counties and San Francisco, and approximately 700 miles of East Bay local and feeder service essential to augment and support of the regional rail system.

Proposed new express services in the East Bay and across the Bay Bridge are particularly important to the city of Berkeley. Of the 3,500,000 people that are moving into Alameda and Contra Costa counties every month, and that by 1980, it is estimated six times as many people will be living in the East Bay as are residing here today. As is to be expected with this phenomenal growth in population, additional autos are pouring into our streets and freeways at a still greater pace.

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Union Transit Depot Urged For Oakland
Block-long Terminal To Serve Rails, Bus and Airlines;
Other Transport Centers Seen For Hayward, Berkeley

A centralized transportation terminal is needed in the main Oakland business district to serve bus, rail and airline passengers.

Charles E. De Leuw of Chicago, a nationally-known transit expert, proposed a terminal occupying an entire city block or more.

Special ramps connecting the terminal with nearby freeways would serve express bus operations. Interurban rapid rail facilities would enter the terminal via a subway in the sub-basement area.

De Leuw forecast that no other single development would be of greater benefit to the central business district of Oakland. And, he said, the development of the city heart as a regional center for business, finance, commerce, culture and amusement is of importance to the entire East Bay metropolitan area.

A new concept of off-street transit terminals designed to serve all travel needs is called for today, the engineer said. It is needed both for the benefit of the traveling public and for the economic health of transportation systems.

He described a terminal that would serve local transit, high-speed interurban lines, motor bus-rail connections, intercity and intercontinental bus operations, airline buses and limousines and airline, bus and railroad ticket offices. The terminal would be ringed with stores and shops and its interior devoted to such facilities as waiting rooms, parcel lockers and dining facilities.

De Leuw said he will recommend that the Transit District undertake early studies of off-street terminals in other East Bay cities as well. However, he indicated, he will not propose including terminal costs in the District's proposed bond issue next November. Financing of terminals should be worked out after more study, he said.

Transit Vital To Hayward Area Growth

The future development of Hayward as a major East Bay metropolitan city with a population of 215,000 residents will demand an extensive network of local transit services and interurban rapid transit lines.

Robert E. Nisbet, attorney-secretary of the Transit District, told a meeting of the Southern Alameda Rotary Club recently that by 1980 Hayward will have nearly two and a half times the number of residents it has today.

The number of workers employed by business and industry in the city will increase from 18,500 to 69,400—a staggering jump of nearly 400 per cent,” the official added.

"No city the future size of Hayward can possibly fulfill its role as a major commercial center without a greatly expanded local as well as interurban transportation system,” Nisbet said.

“There will be so many automobiles crowding for highway space and off-street parking stalls that the city would become one large street and parking lot unless adequate public transportation was provided.”

"It is incumbent on the leaders of Southern Alameda County to begin planning now for the free and convenient movement of these large numbers of people of the future if the promising future of the city is not to be stifled,” Nisbet said.
At an adjourned regular meeting June 17, 1959, the Board of Directors:

- Approved preliminary 1959-60 budget and scheduled consideration and adoption for regular meeting July 1, on motion of Director McDonnell. (Details, Page 3.)
- Adopted a report of the Committee on Program Planning, Director Deadrich, chairman, recommending against a district trolley coach operation, on motion of Director Deadrich.
- Approved contract agreement with De Leuw, Cather & Company for engineering services required to prepare final transit plan, on motion of Director Copeland.
- Scheduled a public hearing July 9, 8 p.m., Alameda County Court House, to consider petitions filed by Concord and Walnut Creek City Councils and Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors requesting withdrawal of area from Transit District, on motion of Vice President Betcourt.

At its regular meeting July 1, 1959, the Board of Directors:

- Adopted 1959-60 budget, on motion of Director McDonnell.
- Adjourned meeting to July 9 at 8 p.m. to conduct public hearing on petitions concerning exclusion of portions of Contra Costa County from the District.

Transit Times
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More Information
The District can make available speakers and a 20-minute color film on transit to interested organizations. A note or phone call to the District also will place your name on the mailing list for Transit Times if you are not already regularly receiving the monthly newsletter.

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