



SVBC is a 501(c)(3) non profit organization with the mission of promoting the bicycle for everyday use.

September 9, 2008

Caltrain  
Attn: Planning and Development  
P.O. Box 3006  
San Carlos, CA 94070

re: Caltrain Bicycle Access and Parking Plan, Draft August 11, 2008

Dear Caltrain Planner:

The Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition (SVBC) appreciates that in the field of public transportation, Caltrain has historically served as a leader in accommodating bicyclists. In the spirit of encouraging Caltrain to continue to occupy that leadership position, we provide the following comments on the Draft Caltrain Bicycle Access and Parking Plan (hereafter called the "Bike Plan").

With high gas prices, increasing emphasis on global warming, and an increased awareness of how physical activity promotes health and well-being, bicycle usage is surging on the peninsula. Given that bicycles and trains are natural transportation partners, since bicycles provide an efficient and environmentally friendly way to get to and from train stations, bike service demand within the Caltrain system has dramatically increased. This growing demand should not be ignored, but should be viewed as an opportunity to further enhance the regional transportation system.

The Bike Plan is explicitly limited to bicycle access and parking issues. Although access and parking are both very important, they are only part of a comprehensive Master Plan for integrating bicycle transportation with the Caltrain system: Caltrain also needs to plan for more bicyclists traveling with their bikes on board trains in both the near- and long-term. For this reason, the remainder of this letter targets two distinct issues: 1) the need for bikes on board planning, and 2) comments on the current Bicycle Access and Parking Plan components.

The need for bikes-on-board planning

Bicyclists who take their bikes on board trains are a growing class of ridership that should be embraced. Caltrain's on-board program has

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been hugely successful and has greatly enhanced the utility of Caltrain for bicyclists in the region. For many, taking a bicycle on board the train has distinct advantages over parking a bike at a station in terms of convenience, flexibility, and security. If Caltrain is to achieve its Strategic Plan goal of making its service the "preferred mode of travel along the Peninsula Corridor", even more bicyclists will need to be accommodated in many ways, including on-board.

We appreciate that the draft Bike Plan acknowledges the current lack of supply in the on-board program, and the frustration of those who attempt to take their bikes on board and are "bumped"; however, general statements about "capacity constraints" and "increased dwell time" are not a satisfactory answer to this very real problem. Caltrain needs to address this current capacity issue immediately.

Furthermore, we urge Caltrain to be candid about the operational impacts of bicycles. Since bicyclists are always requested to board and exit last, any delay can always be attributable to bicyclists. We welcome the suggestion that passengers without bicycles be discouraged from boarding the bike car. We suspect that other creative solutions exist regarding this problem.

SVBC believes that the on-board program has tremendous benefits. The trade-off between these benefits and their financial and operational costs should be a matter for public debate. Caltrain should prepare another plan that specifically addresses the options for accommodating bicycles on board trains for both the current and future fleets and quantifies the costs and benefits of each option. With proper study, we think many of the perceived obstacles (capacity, operations, financial, etc) to implementing an expanded on-board program can be overcome.

Given Caltrain's plans to start specifying the requirements for new cars in 2009, it is imperative that Caltrain commit now that future rolling stock will take fully into account the needs of the on-board bike program and that new cars are equipped with sufficient bike capacity and allow efficient boarding and exiting of bicycles.

We look forward to continuing our work with you to address this important issue.

Comments on the current Bicycle Access and Parking Plan components

SVBC strongly supports most of the concepts in Chapter 5, including on-board bicycle capacity information, bikesharing, and a subsidy for

folding bikes. Having information about the composition of each train, which trains had multiple bike cars, and which trains were made up of gallery or Bombarier cars would be extremely valuable, and this seems relatively simple to implement. Regarding charging fees for on-board bicycles, we feel that this should only be considered if space on board could be guaranteed. Although we are not opposed to fees in concept, the operational difficulties in this approach seem large.

Most of the station-specific improvements of Chapter 4 appear to be well thought out. Bike channels on stairs are very helpful. Additional secure racks, and removing abandoned bikes are good ideas. Electronic bicycle lockers should be valuable to passengers needing secure storage, who may not need a locker every day. Bikestations should be encouraged: they are very convenient and are highly successful in European cities. A bikestation with staff can serve as a gathering place and community resource for local information, bike repairs, etc. A staffed bikestation also makes bike drop-off extremely quick and simple.

In proposing bike parking facilities, the Bike Plan suggests that "bumped" bicyclists could instead quickly lock their bikes at the origin station and board without their bikes. Additional bike parking near the platform waiting area is proposed to handle this situation. We feel that this logic is flawed. Parking a bike takes some time. Unless Caltrain explicitly adopts a policy of waiting for bicyclists to park their bikes after determining they cannot board, bicyclists will be left behind in an effort to keep trains on time. Furthermore, bicyclists boarding with their bikes expect to have their bikes at the destination station. Quickly parking a bike and boarding would leave the bicyclist as an unexpected pedestrian at the destination. In this situation, it is likely the bicyclist would simply prefer to wait for a later train.

Providing better parking, access, and information for bicyclists at the station will encourage more passengers to ride bikes, rather than drive to Caltrain. This would be a positive development, and we strongly encourage Caltrain to proceed with these recommendations in the Bike Plan.

Sincerely,

Corinne Winter  
Executive Director

cc:

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