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Paying the Toll
A Political History of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1923-1971

by

Amy Louise Nelson Dyble

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Professor Kerwin Klein
Professor Richard Walker

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Paying the Toll
A Political History of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1923-1971

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by

Amy Louise Nelson Dyble

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Preface

This dissertation began with a challenge: gaining access to the vast and chaotic historical records of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District. I sought to unravel the secrets of the bridge, a striking physical manifestation of the power of local government. My initial request to view these records in 1996 was met with dismay on the part of the district's public relations department, and not without reason: over three hundred boxes of documents, reports, correspondence, and a variety of other materials from the period before 1971 were disorganized, unaccounted for, and in a state of disarray. Some were deteriorating in a damp paint tunnel within the bridge itself. Citing my right to access public records, I managed to gain access to the long-neglected records. Eventually, archives coordinator Trubee Schock compiled a rough index and many records were moved to a private storage facility where they were slightly more accessible and better preserved. Still, the task of sorting through them was formidable.

A \$5 million "restricted museum reserve fund," earmarked for the preservation of bridge history was created in the early 1970s, though plans for a museum never got off the ground. Some of the money was used for the restoration and conversion of a restaurant at the toll plaza to a gift shop for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the bridge in 1987. Although the storage and management of the records presents an ongoing problem for bridge district administrators, the prospect of a museum is one factor preventing the donation of the records to an established archive. Hopefully, these invaluable documents and artifacts will not remain in limbo forever.

Since my initiation to bridge district history, sorting through a mountain of dusty (and rusty) records, I have benefited from the insight and assistance of a wide variety of people associated in one way or another with the bridge. Though they may not agree with all of my conclusions, I owe a debt of gratitude to the staff of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District. I would especially like to thank Schock, with whom I spent many a pleasant afternoon discussing our mutual interest in Golden Gate Bridge history, and District Secretary Janet Tarantino, who often went out of her way to accommodate my requests.

I would also like to thank to William T. Bagley, not only for discussing his role in bridge district history, but also for sponsoring the California Public Records Act (and amending it to specifically name the Bridge District). It was this law that gave me the leverage to begin my research. David Greene at the First Amendment Project in Oakland offered very helpful advice on gaining access to public records. Carney Campion, James Haugabook, Steve Leonoudakis, and Paul Peterzell all devoted considerable time to discussing their relationship with the bridge district, and made important suggestions for interpreting its history. Chris McCarthy was very generous in allowing me to examine family papers, and in sharing his recollections of time spent as a youth in his father's Sacramento office.

This dissertation benefited tremendously from the high standards and thought-provoking commentary of my advisor and mentor, Robin Einhorn, who is not only a brilliant scholar but also a truly inspirational teacher. Sally Fairfax deserves special thanks, not only for helping me to expand the breadth of my research and encouraging me to delve into theory, but also for her patience. Professor Fairfax and the Northern California Research Group in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Management at the University of California, Berkeley provided financial support by funding related research. Both Kerwin

Klein and Mary Ryan offered valuable guidance on the project. Richard Walker's contributions to this dissertation have been many and varied, particularly relating to Bay Area history, and he deserves credit for any awareness of landscape or place that I have managed to communicate. Of course, any mistakes of fact or interpretation are entirely my own responsibility. Thanks to Elizabeth Deakin and the University of California Transportation Center for funding at a critical juncture.

None of this would have been possible without the support and encouragement of my large and loving family, especially Beth Nelson, Theron Dyble, and my parents Ann Burbank Nelson and Ken Nelson. My erudite grandmother, Louise King Burbank, offered thoughtful comments and editing. Also, the humor, insight, and confidence of Nora Heaphy helped keep me convinced that it was all worth while.

Abstract

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This dissertation traces the history of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District from its inception in 1919 through its reorganization and expansion in the early 1970s, examining its influence on the physical landscape and government of the San Francisco Bay Area. Although the agency came under fire for mismanagement, extravagance, and a lack of accountability almost immediately after its incorporation, its representatives nevertheless steadily increased its independence and power. Defending the interests of the bridge district, they mobilized its substantial autonomy and independent resources. The bridge district was instrumental in the defeat of a comprehensive regional transportation authority that threatened its autonomy in 1958; in 1961 it stopped the extension of rapid transit from San Francisco to the North Bay which would have reduced its toll revenues. By the late 1960s, the bridge district was at the nadir of its public image and its dissolution with the retirement of the last of its construction bonds in 1971 seemed certain. In 1969 it won state authorization to expand its operations to include transportation. Two years later it had unquestioned control over all major bus and ferry routes between the North Bay and San Francisco. The survival of the agency was ensured when it took on mass transportation obligations.

The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District is an example of a regional special district, an institutional form that proliferated in metropolitan areas across the United States in the twentieth century, part of the rise of modern bureaucracy initiated in the Progressive era. Its history reveals the practical mechanisms by which these public corporations influence the policy and politics of urban areas. Exploring the concept of institutional agency and its implications for the history of metropolitan area government in the United States, this study asserts the importance of the organizational characteristics and internal dynamics of government organizations. The corporate structure of special districts is central to understanding their power; once in existence, they develop their own constituencies, interests, and independent agency.

Introduction

On July 6, 1994 the front page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* announced a sweeping exposé of the “Gate Bridge’s Transit Empire,” detailing criticism of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District. The feature traced the problems of the bridge district back to 1971, when it first took on mass transportation. At that time, the organization faced redundancy with the retirement of the last of the original construction bonds for the bridge. Rather than risk dissolution, bridge district officials “pushed for eternal life,” according to the *Chronicle*, transforming the organization “from a relatively simple toll-taking operation to a smug transit authority so impregnable that it has spurned all attempts to reform it.” The agency originated with the 1923 California Bridge and Highway District Act, specifically intended to allow for the public financing, construction, and administration of a bridge across the Golden Gate; in 1969 legislation authorized it to take on mass transportation.¹ With a new name and a new purpose, its officials took over a failing private bus system and began the revival of ferry service in the Golden Gate corridor. The *Chronicle* described the bridge district two decades later, with exclusive control over all modes of transportation from San Francisco to the north, a \$77 million budget, and a staff of 900, as a “hydra-headed oddity” and an “agency run amok.”²

This dissertation describes why and how the transformation of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District took place, looking back to its inception to account for its endurance in the face of persistent unpopularity, even notoriety. Its power and durability derives primarily

¹ *Statutes of California* 1969 reg. sess, ch. 805, 1625-1627.

² *San Francisco Chronicle* July 6, 1994.

from its organizational structure. A “quasi-municipal corporation,” the bridge district represented an innovation in government, a new institutional form adopted for financial, political, and ideological reasons. Its autonomy, corporate form, and toll revenues add up to significant institutional agency, and have allowed the bridge district to exert a powerful influence over regional transportation policy. Its appointed board of directors, hierarchical management, flexibility and independence were all intended to encourage the business-like management of public enterprise but also translated into imperviousness to reform and a lack of accountability or oversight. The construction of the Golden Gate Bridge was just one of many consequences of the creation of the bridge district.

The bridge district’s notoriety is unusual; it functions within the context of the tumultuous, contested politics of Bay Area transportation. The values, priorities, and procedures of the institution were forged in the heat of constant battle. Fending off efforts for dissolution or reform from the moment of its incorporation, bridge district officials erected a political fortress to protect the agency’s jurisdiction and authority, wielding its considerable resources with increasing proficiency to build constituencies, relationships with other organizations, and a variety of important individual alliances. A culture arose within the bridge district that encouraged a sense of embattlement and a proprietary attitude toward the bridge, and led to traditions of public defiance, secrecy, and active though often covert engagement in the political decision-making process.

Although its ever-increasing resources and coherence as an organization were important to its success prior to the retirement of its bonds, ultimately the survival of the bridge district depended on the outcome of a larger struggle. By the 1960s, there were a number of independent governmental agencies with a variety of regional functions in the San

Francisco Bay Area; there was also a growing movement to consolidate and centralize regional government in the interests of efficiency, coordinated planning, and economic integration. Alongside local governments, Bay Area special districts including the bridge district defended their autonomy, working to perpetuate the existing, decentralized structure of metropolitan government. The transformation of the bridge district into a permanent transportation agency was one outcome of their collective victory, and a convenient way to fill a gap in the existing network of regional government. The influence of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District derived to a significant degree from its association with other regional special districts; similarly, its historical significance is as one of thousands of similar agencies. Its endurance indicates the collective power of regional special districts, in the San Francisco Bay Area and in metropolitan areas around the country.

This history could be characterized as an institutional biography. It adds to a growing literature emphasizing the importance of political institutions and institutional structures generally, both in the context of national policy and in the field of urban history. It applies the concept of institutional agency, the idea that these organizations have the capacity to pursue their own, independent agenda and interests, making the bridge district the central subject, not just part of an institutional context or a tool. While it will no doubt take a place on the shelf alongside chronicles of other, more powerful and famous special districts such as the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, it does more than just add another chapter to the history of regional special districts.³ These remarkable, high-profile agencies have inspired scores of scholarly studies, but the bridge district is representative of a multitude of more modest,

³ E.g., Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Jameson W. Doig, *Empire on the Hudson: Entrepreneurial Vision and Political Power at the Port of New*

limited-purpose government agencies that have also shaped policy in metropolitan areas. The various ways in which the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District has influenced the Bay Area suggests the enormous but largely unacknowledged power of ordinary special districts. In recognizing their potential as independent agents in the regional decision-making process, I am suggesting a fundamental revision of prevailing assumptions about the role of local government in the decision-making process.

Finally, this history contributes a new perspective on the lasting legacy of Progressive era reform; the special district as an institution was shaped by ideals of scientific administration, efficiency, and rationality as well as broad-based support for public enterprise. In a larger sense, this story is about bureaucracy, not only as the structure of the modern state, but as the organizational form that came to dominate the social, economic, and political institutions of the twentieth century. The many unintended consequences of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, cumulating in the development of an intractable, untouchable organization whose overriding purpose was its own perpetuation, reflect problems inherent to its corporate form and bureaucratic structure. Despite the good intentions of reformers, the institutions that they constructed in the name of progress and public enterprise often transcended their purpose and took on imperatives of their own. In assigning primary importance to organizational dynamics and institutional structure in narrating the history of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, this study addresses issues fundamental to public life in the twentieth century, dominated by ever-expanding bureaucracies, both public and private. Max Weber, who pioneered the study of organizational behavior, observed in 1917

York Authority (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Erwin C. Hargrove, *Prisoners of Myth: the Leadership of the Tennessee Valley Authority, 1933-1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Philip Selznick, *T.V.A. and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953).

that government bureaucracy was “far more persistent and ‘escape proof’” than “other historical agencies of the modern rational order of life.” He noted with apprehension the “irresistible advance of bureaucratization” and the “practically indestructible” power of its officials. Weber posed the question: “In view of the growing indispensability of the state bureaucracy and its corresponding increase in power, how can there be any guarantee that any powers will remain which can check and effectively control the tremendous influence of this stratum? How will democracy even in this limited sense be *at all possible?*”⁴ The history of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District suggests similar questions, albeit on a much smaller scale: have special districts, the predominant government bureaucracy of metropolitan areas, undermined democracy in the United States? Is it possible to reform these agencies once they have been established, to restructure the local state to allow for greater public participation and oversight?

One Among Many

The *Chronicle* investigation suggested that the “fame and beauty of the bridge” have obscured the political maneuverings of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, that the bridge is “a technical achievement so daring that it has all but overshadowed the institution that runs it.”⁵ Actually, the bridge’s high profile has contributed to the public scrutiny of its administration. It undoubtedly helped garner attention for the agency’s critics, who have uncovered transgressions that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. The bridge district had been subject to decades of public censure; the passionate 1994 *Chronicle* exposé was just another example of a venerable tradition. Journalists have instigated grand jury hearings, state

⁴ Max Weber, “Bureaucracy and Political Leadership,” in vol. 2, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 6, 1994.

investigations, reform bills, audits, refinancing drives, even the resignation of directors.⁶ Nevertheless, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District persists, its operations and policies largely unchanged.

Few special districts can rival the notoriety of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District; most escape attention, intentionally designed to operate outside of the influence of electoral politics. Robert G. Smith remarks that many special districts lack scrutiny and oversight, noting that they do not, as a rule, have a “loyal opposition.”⁷ The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was exceptional in this; it had many persistent and vociferous critics in the press, major civic associations, and political establishment of San Francisco and Marin. While this may detract slightly from the argument that the bridge district’s primary historical significance is in its representative nature, it greatly enhances the documentation of its development and history.

Special districts vary widely in their form, function, financing, and degree of independence. Their diversity makes generalizations difficult, but they do share some basic characteristics, both in terms of their structure and their behavior as organizations. Special districts started to appear in metropolitan areas in the United States around the turn of the century; the lineage of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District can be traced back to the Massachusetts Metropolitan Water Board, formed in 1895.⁸ Though their numbers increased steadily in the 1920s and rapidly following World War II, it was not until 1952 that they were

⁶ A few examples: *San Rafael Independent* December 14, 1940; *San Francisco Examiner*, June 2, 13, 1950, August 14-16, 1960, June 11-13, 1973, December 13, 1992; *San Francisco Chronicle* November, 28-29, 1950, December 5, 1950, October 9, 1961, May 26, 1966; *San Rafael Independent Journal* June 7, 1952.

⁷ Robert G. Smith, *Public Authorities, Special Districts, and Local Government* (Washington: National Association of Counties Research Foundation, 1964).

⁸ George H. Harlan to Francis V. Keesling, September 13, 1929, box 61, Francis V. Keesling Papers, M0100, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Library. On the history of the Boston area agency, see Sarah Elkind, *Bay Cities and Water Politics: the Battle for Resources in Boston and Oakland* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

formally defined by federal statisticians. Officially adopting the designation special district, the United States Census of Government tallied the “local districts, authorities, commissions, boards, and other entities [that] should be classified as independent local governments.” They are distinct “special-purpose” governments, neither part of traditional, “general purpose” local government (municipalities and counties) nor divisions of states or the federal government.⁹ In order to qualify as special districts, these entities must possess corporate powers, described in 1952 as “perpetual succession, the right to sue and be sued, have a name, make contracts, acquire and dispose of property,” and “substantial autonomy” in the form of “considerable fiscal and administrative independence” from other governmental entities.¹⁰ Their governing boards and operations must be distinct from and independent of other governmental agencies. They are public corporations, either explicitly (the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District is a “quasi-municipal corporation”), or effectively.

Most special districts are not charged with duties as spectacular as the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge: they provide water, manage parks, control pollution, administer schools, and dispose of waste and sewage in urban and suburban areas across the county. In the rural West, including California, early special districts took on the tasks of irrigation and flood control.¹¹ They have been major players in the development and management of transportation facilities, from ports and airports to mass transportation and, of course, bridges, tunnels, and toll roads.

Special districts appealed to progressive advocates of public enterprise, and provided a convenient means of bypassing debt ceilings that limited existing local governments. Their

⁹ United States. Bureau of the Census, *Governments in the United States in 1952* (Washington, DC, 1953), 4. The same basic criteria for defining special districts have been used by the Census Bureau since 1952.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ Donald J. Pisani, *From the Family Farm to Agribusiness: The Irrigation Crusade in California and the West, 1850-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

corporate structure, hierarchical organization, and professional management reassured those who opposed the administration of public works by existing governments. These agencies were designed to uphold ideals of scientific administration, business-like government, efficiency and rationality. They were usually assigned a specific, limited purpose or task, and could be expected to perform. Often, their boundaries included multiple cities and counties as they took on responsibilities that transcended the capacities of existing local governments. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District built an expensive and risky bridge that was untenable as a private undertaking and could not be financed by existing governments.

Special districts have proven to be invaluable as a tool in a crisis. Both twentieth-century world wars and the Great Depression produced federal public corporations based on the same general model, among them the Emergency Fleet Corporation, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, and the Tennessee Valley Authority.¹² The Roosevelt administration actively encouraged their creation. Their ranks swelled in metropolitan areas as the rapid and sustained growth after World War II created urgent problems in the nation's cities: between 1942 and 1952 the number of special districts more than doubled in metropolitan areas, increasing from 1,097 to 2,661. They maintained their popularity: by 1972 there were more than eight thousand urban or suburban special districts. More and more agencies appeared with regional scope, independent revenues, and significant responsibilities, particularly as the successes and profits of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey garnered national attention in the 1950s. Authorities, special districts distinguished by their exclusive reliance on user fees rather than property taxes, became more common. Since the Bureau of the

¹² Hargrove, *Prisoners*; John McDiarmid, *Government Corporations and Federal Funds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938); Gail Radford, "William Gibbs McAdoo, the Emergency Fleet Corporation, and the Origins of the Public-Authority Model of Government Action," *Journal of Policy History* 11, no. 1 (1999), 59-88; Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, "State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal," *Political Science Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (1982), 255-78.

Census started publishing comprehensive statistics on their operations in 1932, special districts have been the fastest growing segment of local government in the United States, both in their sheer numbers and in terms of their overall debt, revenue, and assets.¹³

In most ways the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District is a typical special district. Its institutional culture and procedures may have been shaped in response to persistent and coherent criticism, but the agency's resistance to change or interference and stalwart defense of its autonomy, resources, and institutional integrity are not unusual. The governing boards of special districts are generally appointed rather than elected, and if they are elected they rarely inspire much discussion or competition. The covert efforts of the bridge district to influence regional policy and its impulse for secrecy are the norm; these organizations often go to great lengths to avoid referenda or public policy debates. One Bay Area analyst noted in 1962 that "many citizens are completely unaware of the districts to which they pay taxes and from which they receive services. Even the residents who know the districts exist seldom are really interested in and informed on their affairs."¹⁴ The bridge district is not especially large or powerful; there are a number of regional special districts just in the Bay Area that have considerably more political weight. Its corporate structure, hierarchical organization, and autonomy are all commonplace characteristics of special districts, designed to ensure the business-like operation of public enterprise. Many metropolitan special districts rely on user fees for their revenues, like the bridge district, which depends primarily on tolls. Contrary to Bay Area perceptions, its move into mass transportation was not extraordinary, either; special districts often take on new responsibilities as they neared the retirement of their original debt.

¹³G. Ross Stephens and Nelson Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18-20; United States Bureau of the Census, "Governmental Organization," in *2002 Census of Governments* (Washington, DC, 2002).

¹⁴ Stanley Scott and John Corzine, "Special Districts in the San Francisco Bay Area: An Excess of Home Rule?" *Public Affairs Report* 3, no. 5 (1963), 75-78.

Once they are created, these agencies are notoriously difficult to abolish—they guard their independence and resources with jealousy and fervor. The significance of the bridge district is representative; its influence in the San Francisco Bay Area, illuminated by decades of public scrutiny, indicates the collective power of these agencies.¹⁵

This history focuses on the implications of special districts for metropolitan areas. The specific geography of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District may seem at first glance to belie this emphasis—it not only includes the counties of San Francisco and suburban Marin, but also encompasses rural territory stretching all the way north to Del Norte County on the Oregon border. Although its boundaries extend beyond what is usually defined as the metropolitan region, the significance of the bridge district, both functional and political, is located squarely in the San Francisco Bay Area. First of all, the bridge itself is an important element of Bay Area transportation infrastructure. It maintains San Francisco's position as the region's central city, economically, socially and politically. In addition, the bridge district has been a major force in shaping regional transportation policy since the 1950s. Its critics have frequently charged that its representational structure is unjust and anachronistic, empowering rural counties with little stake in the bridge to the detriment of urban interests in a vital urban transportation link. Several concerted attempts have been made to turn the bridge and its tolls over to a larger, more powerful agency with the ability to plan and administer transportation for the metropolitan area as a whole.

These efforts are not unique to the Bay Area; would-be reformers have long focused on the representational structure and jurisdiction of special districts, seeking to replace

¹⁵ For more detailed discussion of the general characteristics of special districts see John C. Bollens, *Special District Governments in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); Annmarie Hauk Walsh, *The Public's Business: the Politics and Practices of Government Corporations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978); Kathryn Ann Foster, *The Political Economy of Special-Purpose Government* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997).

decentralized government networks with comprehensive general-purpose metropolitan governments, but rarely succeeding in abolishing existing agencies. Authorities, financed through revenue bonds (while they are tax-exempt and often subsidized, they do not have the direct authority to impose taxes), were especially popular in the decades after World War II. Increase the jurisdiction and power of these agencies, policy analysts argued, and they will be able to effectively govern the metropolis.¹⁶ The results are clearly reflected in the rapid growth of special districts, both in terms of their size and their overall numbers.

While many special districts have been able to avoid scrutiny, they have been the subject of intense criticism by scholars and policy analysts almost since their emergence. Early in the century, analysts began to sound alarm at the rapid and uncoordinated creation of new agencies in urban areas.¹⁷ Several important studies of metropolitan government in the 1930s and 40s warned that reliance on this institutional form to solve short-term problems could have long-term negative consequences.¹⁸ By the end of the 1950s “the metropolitan problem,” or the inability of local governments to direct growth and control its impact in rapidly growing cities and sprawling suburbs, was attributed primarily to the proliferation of special districts.¹⁹ The next two decades were marked by frequent conferences, summits, and task forces devoted to finding ways to limit their influence, federal and state programs to encourage governmental coordination, and a nation-wide movement supporting regional

¹⁶ E.g. Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 260-61; Council of State Governments, *The States and the Metropolitan Problem* (Chicago: Council of State Governments, 1956), 122-23; Luther Gulick, “Authorities” and *How to Use Them* (San Francisco: San Francisco: Committee for Trade and Transportation Development, [1958]).

¹⁷ See Stephens and Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government*, 33. Also discussion below, chapter one.

¹⁸ Among the most influential were Victor Jones, *Metropolitan Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); R. D. McKenzie, *The Metropolitan Community* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1933); Paul Studenski, *The Government of Metropolitan Areas in the United States* (New York: National Municipal League, 1930).

¹⁹ Council of State Governments, *The States and the Metropolitan Problem*; Luther Halsey Gulick, *The Metropolitan Problem and American Ideas*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1962); Max A. Pock, *Independent Special Districts: A Solution to Metropolitan Area Problems* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Law School, 1962); Robert C. Wood, *1400 Governments: the Political Economy of the New York Metropolitan Region* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

planning and centralization. For the most part, these efforts failed to check the ascent of special districts.

Criticism culminated with Annmarie Hauk Walsh's 1978 study of public corporations, *The Public's Business*, the most incisive analysis to date. Describing how they came to permeate local government and dominate public enterprise in the United States, Walsh assesses the results of nearly a century of proliferation. Her conclusions are alarming: she describes how government corporations, in a myriad of manifestations and roles, have effectively avoided oversight and bypassed democracy. Bankers, brokers, and lawyers, all with a stake in financing public enterprise, can dominate them by controlling their purse-strings, getting away with frequent and severe conflicts of interest. These agencies take on alarming amounts of debt, often on terms that are extremely burdensome and expensive. Walsh attacks the perception that these organizations are above politics, pointing to the built-in bias toward business interests and the profound implications of their policies for government and society at large. Walsh also examines the internal power structure of public corporations. She notes that their governing boards rarely wield significant decision-making power. Regardless of whether they are appointed or elected, part-time directors generally lack the desire and resources to guide these organizations (though often they profit from their association with them). Instead, Walsh argues the administrative "mandarins" managing these organizations effectively control the process of policy formation and implementation, guiding governing boards by controlling their access to information and its interface with the operations of the organization. Walsh describes the relationship between management and leadership as public corporations develop and stabilize:

Far from being temporary corporations that will go out of business when their initial construction costs are paid off, public authorities show a strong will to survive and

expand. A young organization may be dependent on the prestige of its board of directors or its sponsors to garner money and support, but over time, sponsors, board members, and the community that created the corporation give way to professionalized management and operating routines. When the corporation has developed its own financial resources, its professional staff takes control of policy initiation and defends the organization from outside intrusion. (The board and political supporters remain important at times of special stress and providing a protective mantle of reputation and representation.) During public conflicts, the corporation's management can shift to leaders more oriented to politics and public relations, but politicization of management is often short-lived. This flexibility in leadership that allows response to the needs of the organization rather than being controlled by voting trends, political debts, or civil service rules gives an authority greater independent strength than a typical government bureau has.²⁰

In reality, these officials rarely live up to the ideals of expert professionalism and defense of the public interest that their empowerment was intended to promote. Walsh goes on to show that public corporations are just as susceptible to “unethical or illegal behavior,” mismanagement, and corruption as other government agencies.²¹ She suggests a number of reforms to “harness” the energy of public authorities, emphasizing the need for better information and investigation of their policies, increased oversight and accountability, and a general recognition of the political nature of their operations.

Walsh is one in a long line of public-policy Cassandras who have called for controls on the operations and creation of special districts. Obviously, these organizations did not rise to such predominance without politicians who were willing to ignore their admonitions. The Council of State Governments, advocating the adoption of authorities for a wide variety of public enterprises in 1953, praised the “corporate form of organization” as a “leading symbol of effective and efficient business administration in an urban industrial society.”²² Jameson

²⁰ Walsh, *The Public's Business*, 231-32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9, 233-55.

²² Council of State Governments, *Public Authorities in the States: A Report to the Governors' Conference* (Chicago: Council of State Governments, 1953), 9.

Doig notes that, despite concern about the haphazard creation of special districts, their efficacy won widespread approval:

[B]oth elected officials and the media emphasized the positive, ‘curative’ aspects of the authority.... Even those who have been unfriendly to the widespread use of public authorities have generally concluded that the performance of these agencies, as perceived both by the general public and by close observers, has been better than that of other governmental units.²³

In addition, even as Walsh began her research in 1972, “public choice” theory was gaining influence, both with local defenders of home rule who had always resisted planning and governmental centralization, and with federal policy-makers. Scholars argued that a decentralized state structure was not detrimental; rather, it encouraged healthy competition among localities and government agencies, making them more responsive to the needs and desires of citizens.²⁴ Special districts, particularly the large and independent authorities, began to enjoy a new legitimacy: federal and state programs designed to encourage regional planning and coordination were abandoned in the 1980s. In the 1990s, interest in the question of metropolitan area governmental coordination was revived with the “new regionalism,” which promoted the concept of “governance” rather than “government,” emphasizing the coordination of existing governments through voluntary measures rather than the consolidation of governments or the creation of new, general purpose governments and bureaucracies.²⁵

²³ Jameson W. Doig, “‘If I See a Murderous Fellow Sharpening a Knife Cleverly’: the Wilsonian Dichotomy and the Public Authority Tradition,” *Public Administration Review* 43 (July/August 1983), 292-304.

²⁴ The founding statement of public choice theory was Charles Tiebout, “A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures,” *Journal of Political Economy* 64 (1956). Tiebout introduced the oft-cited concept of urban residents “voting with their feet,” forcing localities to compete for population and for investment. Also see Vincent Ostrom, Charles Tiebout, and Robert Warren, “The Organization of Government in Metropolitan Areas,” *American Political Science Review* 60 *American Political Science Review* 60, no. 3 (1961), 831-42.

²⁵ Prominent among the “new regionalists” are Myron Orfield, David Rusk, Anthony Downs and Robert Cisneros. Peter Dreier, and John Mollenkopf have contributed more historical perspectives on the need for greater governmental coordination in metropolitan areas. Henry Cisneros, *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and the Nation*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1993); Anthony Downs, *New Visions for Metropolitan America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1994); John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997); David Rusk, *Cities Without*

Although special districts and metropolitan government has inspired a longstanding and heated debate among scholars, historical studies of urban areas seem strangely oblivious to special districts as they comprise metropolitan area government. Despite a growing awareness of regional systems that develop around and support urban areas, especially since the publication of William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* in 1991, regional government has yet to inspire much interest among historians.²⁶ This may be due to a perception that the institutional fragmentation of metropolitan area government means that it is weak, ineffective, and therefore unimportant.²⁷ Kathryn Foster, a prominent analyst of contemporary special districts, ventures to explain the general neglect of the subject:

Perhaps it is because—dare I suggest?—metropolitan governance structure simply does not matter that much for regional development. Regardless of form, metropolitan systems... prove too powerless, purposeless, or discouraged to shape urban outcomes.²⁸

Scholars who have dealt with the history of metropolitan government in the United States tend to characterize its persistent fragmentation as a symptom of regional economic, political, and/or social fragmentation, generally failing to recognize the possibility of an opposite

Suburbs (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993). For analysis of the contemporary debate, see Frances Frisken and Donald F. Norris, "Regionalism Reconsidered," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2001), 467-78; Samuel Nunn and Carl Schoedel, "Special Districts, City Governments, and Infrastructure: Spending in 105 US Metropolitan Areas," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 19, no. 1 (1997), 59-72 ; Andrew Sancton, "Canadian Cities and the New Regionalism," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2001), 543-55; Stephens and Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government*, 47-50, 105-21; Todd Swanstrom, "Philosopher in the City: the New Regionalism Debate," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 17, no. 3 (1995), 309-314 ; Todd Swanstrom, "What we Argue About when we Argue About Regionalism," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23 (2001); Mitchell-Weaver, Clyde, David Miller, and Ronald Deal Jr. "Multilevel Governance and Metropolitan Regionalism in the USA." *Urban Studies* 37 no. 5 (2000), 851-876 .

²⁶ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Raymond A. Mohl, "City and Region: the Missing Dimension in U.S. Urban History," *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 1 (1998), 3-22.

²⁷ Lewis makes this point with reference to Joel Garreau. Paul G. Lewis, *Shaping Suburbia: How Political Institutions Organize Urban Development* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 45.

²⁸ Kathryn A. Foster, "The Challenges of Governing." (Review) *Journal of the American Planning Association* 66 (2000), 90.

causality.²⁹ John C. Bollens remarked in one of the first systematic studies of special districts that they are in a sense “phantom governments”:

People who receive services from them often do not know that they exist or exactly where they function... Districts often create a crazy-quilt pattern of governmental areas and boundaries with only very slight public knowledge that they do so. Their phantom-like quality does not diminish their collective and sometimes individual importance. It merely increases the difficulty of comprehending a class of governments which is of rising significance.³⁰

As for the public at large, it is easy for academics, conditioned to pay attention to high-profile elected leaders taking well-publicized positions on the issues of the day in the upper echelons of traditional government hierarchies, to overlook or discount the deliberately discreet but often immensely significant decisions made by appointed officials from within the complex tangle of local and regional special districts.

The most prominent exception to the general neglect of special districts by historians confirms these problems: the powerful and inclusive regional special districts of the greater New York metropolitan area have been consistently portrayed as unique and exceptional (usually either heroic or sinister) accomplishments in corporate governance.³¹ A few large metropolitan area special districts, among them the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, have inspired investigation, but without much regard for their institutional form, but rather in their specific, local context and with attention to other questions of political

²⁹ The most influential and specifically relevant example of this is Jon C. Teaford, *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). See also Peter Drier, John Mollenkopf, and Todd Swanstrom, *Place Matters: Metropolitcs for the Twenty-First Century* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001); Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: the Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); William B. Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: the Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (Point Arena, CA: Solano Press Books, 1997); Joel Garreau, *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

³⁰ Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 30.

³¹ Caro, *Power Broker*; Jameson W. Doig, “Coalition-Building by a Regional Agency: Austin Tobin and the Port of New York Authority,” in *Politics of Urban Development*, ed. Clarence Stone and Heywood Sanders (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987); Doig, *Empire*; Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993).

economy.³² National public corporations, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, have also gotten significant attention from scholars.³³ As early as 1938, a political scientist expressed concern that interest in them had overshadowed more numerous and equally important state and local public corporations.³⁴ Compounding the problem of scholarly neglect, studies of large agencies often limited analysis of their origins to preceding authorities, defined by the specifics of their financing through revenue bonds.³⁵ That authorities do not have the ability to collect taxes does not override the many structural, legal, and administrative commonalities that they share with their forebears and contemporaries that did. Separating authorities from other special districts effectively precludes consideration of their ideological origins, particularly since authorities only became common after federal programs initiated in the Depression encouraged self-liquidating and self-supporting agencies.³⁶ Citing two of California's early regional special districts, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, John McDiarmid pointed out in 1940 that authorities were a variation on an old theme:

The State of California illustrates the growth of public authorities at the state and local levels, and also indicates quite clearly that this form of agency did not, like Minerva, “spring full-panoplied from the brow of Jove,” but rather is little removed from older forms that have for years occasioned no astonishment. Special districts, with widespread corporate powers, have long been used by states for the administration of

³² Erwin Cooper, *Aqueduct Empire: a Guide to Water in California, its Turbulent History and its Management Today* (Glendale, CA: A.H. Clark Co., 1968); Robert Gottlieb and Margaret FitzSimmons, *Thirst for Growth: Water Agencies as Hidden Government in California* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991).

³³ E.g., Hargrove, *Prisoners*; Radford, “William Gibbs McAdoo.”

³⁴ McDiarmid, *Government Corporations and Federal Funds*. Robert G. Smith, discussing the popularity of authorities in 1964, remarked on the disproportionate attention given to the largest organizations by scholars and policy analysts, observing that “the meaning of even the big ones cannot be seen in its proper perspective except in relation to the total complex of all authorities and their combined overall impact.” Smith asserted that the numerous smaller, single-purpose “municipal corporations” that emerged prior to the creation of the Port Authority of New York were much more important to understanding their structure, function, and proliferation in the 1950s and 1960s. Smith, *Public Authorities*, 9-13.

³⁵ E.g. Doig, “‘If I See a Murderous Fellow Sharpening a Knife Cleverly’.”

³⁶ For an overview of the lineage of authorities as a form of special districts, see Council of State Governments, *Public Authorities*, 9-28.

particular governmental functions, whether of a commercial nature or otherwise.³⁷

The Bureau of the Census has distinguished authorities as a distinct type of special districts since 1967 but it still includes them within the category. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, though it only exercised the power to assess property taxes twice in its history, is not technically an authority. Large-scale metropolitan organizations emerged from the same ideological roots as other special districts, representing an expansion of their jurisdiction and an enhancement of their autonomy.

As a demonstration of the key role of institutions and institutional structures in the urban political economy, this study suggests the need for a fundamental revision of the political history of American cities and suburbs, one that takes local and regional special purpose government into account, even relatively small and limited special districts. Growth and economic change in the decades after World War II made the metropolis the primary unit of social and economic organization and the special district became the dominant institutional form for its governance.

Institutional Agency

In emphasizing the importance of the independence, hierarchical organization, and corporate powers of special districts, I argue that their power and autonomy derives from their *organizational structure* as public corporations. The composition of their governing boards, scale, and even finances are all secondary variables. Many scholars have observed that the

³⁷ John McDiarmid, "California Uses the Government Corporation," *The American Political Science Review* 34, no. 2 (1940), 300-01.

election of governing boards has little influence on their membership or the level of their accountability: the positions are usually unopposed and voters are usually uninformed about the issues involved in their administration. In addition, as Walsh points out, the top management and staff of these agencies often enjoy unquestioned discretion over their policies, making the composition of the governing board largely irrelevant. The idea of a strong and independent executive, able to pursue the public interest with all of the initiative and flexibility of the business executive, was an important part of the appeal of public corporations from the beginning. Permeating these organizations, even more fundamental to determining their policies than their internal hierarchies and lines of authority, are the institutional qualities that they develop over time: the rules, procedures, culture, even myths that shape their meaning and significance in the minds of individuals associated with them. Both agency officials and administrators come to identify with the organization, taking on the role of its defenders. Staff members have almost limitless discretion in part because they share the basic values and priorities of officials, defined by a mutual understanding of the purpose and essential character of the organization. Based on this understanding, they defend organizational interests, especially autonomy and independence, using the often considerable resources at their disposal. Because of this dynamic, once in existence, these governmental agencies, despite their non-political pretenses, can effectively develop their own constituencies and political agency. Eventually, they become actors in their own right as their influence and imperatives transcend those of the individuals and groups associated with them.³⁸

Accordingly, the central idea defining this study is institutional agency. In developing this concept, I draw upon organizational theory and ideas associated with historical

³⁸ John C. Bollens, *The Problems of Government in the San Francisco Bay Region* (Berkeley: University of California Bureau of Public Administration, 1948), 123; David K. Hamilton, *Governing Metropolitan Areas: Response to Growth and Change* (New York: Garland, 1999), 186-89.

institutionalism in political science that are useful in describing and explaining the dynamics of the bridge district and their implications.³⁹ The concept of institutional agency is not new; prior to the 1960s, the centrality of governmental institutions in determining political outcomes was a basic tenet of political science, and organizational theory a core field. The assumption that organizations could function as collective actors was implicit; organizational behavior and implications of structure and form for policy and governance were examined in the interest the creation of an effective and efficient government. Philip Selznick's 1953 study of the Tennessee Valley Authority was among the most influential early contributions to organizational theory and became an important foundation for later analysis of political institutions. The TVA is an agency that shares many of the characteristics of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. Selznick points out the disparity between the rhetoric of grass-roots initiative and control associated with the TVA and its strong-arming and pragmatic power politics. Selznick accounts for this gap by describing the TVA both as an organization with a "life of its own" as well as an instrument of policy:

[It] is essential to think of an organization as a dynamic conditioning field which effectively shapes the behavior of those who are attempting to remain at the helm. We can best understand the behavior of officials when we are able to trace that behavior to the needs and structures of the organization as a living social institution.⁴⁰

Selznick points out that the social environment of the organization is shaped by its symbolic and mythical qualities as well as its official doctrines. "Self-defensive" behavior on the part of

³⁹ The relationships between the new institutionalism and organizational theory are discussed in Paul DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life," *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1983), 734-749; James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: the Organizational Basis of Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Johan P. Olsen, "Political Science and Organization Theory: Parallel Agendas but Mutual Disregard," in *Institutions and Political Choice: On the Limits of Rationality*, ed. Hans Keman (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1996); W. Richard Scott, "The Adolescence of Institutional Theory," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1987), 493-511; Donald D. Searing, "Roles, Rules, and Rationality in the New Institutionalism," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 4 (1991), 1239-1260.

⁴⁰ Selznick, *T.V.A. and the Grass Roots*, 10.

the organization derives from this environment. He observes “strenuous efforts to indoctrinate all who are involved in administration on a policy-affecting level” in the meaning and purpose of the organization, reflecting a self-consciousness identification with the organization by its officials. This study and other studies of government organizations by political scientists of the time were executed in a distinctly historical vein, with attention to and consideration of historical context, development, and contingency.

However, this paradigm was overthrown in the late 1950s as interest in the behavior of individuals within political contexts overshadowed studies of governmental organizations. The state went out of fashion; politics was located at the level of the individual, both as the primary actor and the locus of decision-making. Behavioralism rose to predominance, a positivistic approach to analysis which assigned primary importance to the choices of individuals as determined by a single set of personal interests and preferences.⁴¹ Rational choice theory, also coming into vogue among political scientists at the time, was based on a similar set of assumptions: it stressed rationality, asserting the human capacity and even compulsion to base decisions on a calculation of individual interests and advantages. This approach had profound consequences for political science; the social identifications and economic interests of individuals took the place of ideology and political allegiances in analysis of motive and purpose in the political decision-making process in addition to displacing interest in institutions and organizations. A related methodological shift took place as scientific and quantitative analysis eclipsed historical narrative, and a primary concern for abstract models and formal theory replaced the qualitative descriptions that supported the previous generation of political theory. Not surprisingly, this created a divide between history

⁴¹ A general description of the origins and ideas of this school: David Sanders, “Behavioral Analysis,” in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, ed. Gerry Stoker (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

and political science, disciplines that had been intimately related. Formal theory displaced empirical analysis, and despite new interest in scientific methods and statistical tools by historians at the same time, historical studies and methodologies were abandoned.

It was the shortcomings of behavioralism that generated a revival of interest in institutions among scholars of politics in the 1980s. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen outlined the fundamental elements of a widespread critique of political theory in their seminal essay, "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life."⁴² Behavioralism relegated institutions to a functional status, describing them as arenas of decision-making activity carried out by socially-defined actors. This perspective, March and Olsen argued, leads to unrealistic and inaccurate predictions of political behavior due to the neglect of the influence of considerations of obligation and duty, ceremony or routine, and symbolism and myth. Accounts of institutions that are overly contextual, reductionist, utilitarian, functionalist and instrumentalist, to use their terms, result.⁴³ An overemphasis on class structures and other social identifications in shaping interests leads to the neglect of political institutions as a factor in determining individual preferences and a failure to recognize the influence of politically-defined collective actors. March and Olsen understood the new institutionalism as a cyclical reform of the discipline of political science, a renewal of interest in a neglected but fundamental political element. More than a coherent set of ideas, the new institutionalism was, at that point, "a narrow collection of challenges to contemporary theoretical thinking in political science."⁴⁴ March and Olsen outline the characteristics of the new institutionalism:

The ideas deemphasize the dependence of the polity on society in favor of an independence between relatively autonomous social and political institutions; they deemphasize the simple primary of micro processes and efficient histories in favor of

⁴² March and Olsen, "The New Institutionalism."

⁴³ Ibid., 735.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 738.

relatively complex process and historical inefficiency; they deemphasize metaphors of choice and allocative outcomes in favor of other logics of action and the centrality of meaning and symbolic action.⁴⁵

The portrayal of political institutions as “rationally coherent autonomous actors” based on empirical observation was at the core of this challenge to behavioralism: “what we observe in the world is inconsistent with the ways in which contemporary theories ask us to talk.”⁴⁶

March and Olsen provided a handle for an intellectual movement that was developing quickly. Over the next decade or so, “new institutionalism” was applied in a number of distinct theoretical contexts to a rapidly proliferating body of work that transcended disciplinary boundaries. The new institutionalism was particularly influential among sociologists, who never abandoned the study of social and political institutions to extent that political scientists had, and in organizational analysis, a sub-field devoted to the study of formal organizations, both private and public.⁴⁷ The term came to indicate something of a theoretical revolution in the social sciences, although the definitions of institution and the

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 747.

⁴⁷ Since the 1950s, organization theory has been a significant though intellectually isolated sub-field of political science and sociology. It sustained the study of public administration, bureaucracy, and governmental organization, though it has not had a significant impact on political science as a whole until recently. R.A.W. Rhodes, “The Institutional Approach,” in Stoker, *Theory and Methods*, 52-53. Olsen, “Political Science and Organization Theory: Parallel Agendas but Mutual Disregard.” A 1991 volume edited by Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio represented new institutional perspectives in organization analysis. Walter W. Powell and Paul DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). This volume includes several landmark articles, including Meyer and Rowan, “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony,” 41-62, and Lynne G. Zucker, “The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence,” 83-108, both originally published in 1977. Organization analysts generally describe institutions as a context or environment in which organizations function, made up of rules, procedures, and ideas. See also Paul M. Hirsch and Michael Lounsbury, “Ending the family quarrel: toward a reconciliation of “old” and “new” institutionalisms,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 40, no. 4 (1997), 406-418; Olsen, “Political Science and Organization Theory”; W. Richard Scott, “Institutions and Organizations: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis,” in *Institutional Environments and Organizations: Structural Complexity and Individualism*, ed. John W. Meyer (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994), 55-80.

context of its application vary widely within this literature. At its most basic level, the new institutionalism simply represents a broad assertion that institutions matter.⁴⁸

Studies of political and state institutions that questioned the assumptions and conventions of behavioralism began to appear, drawing upon organization theory, venerable sociological institutional theory, as well as the neo-Marxist recognition of the relative autonomy of the state. Stephen Skowronek famously described a nineteenth-century American “state of courts and parties” in 1982, inspiring a new regard for institutional structure in interpreting the development of the national state and understanding the dynamics of large-scale change.⁴⁹ Peter Hall’s *Governing the Economy* was an influential early example of a comparative argument for the central importance of state structure, arguing that preexisting institutions determined and differentiated economic policies in Britain and France in the decades after World War II.⁵⁰ Stephen Krasner accounted for the power of state interests in international contexts based on the concept of hegemony, and later, the defense of

⁴⁸ Overviews and critiques include DiMaggio and Powell, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*; Gunnar Grenstad and Per Selle, “Cultural Theory and the New Institutionalism,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 7, 1 (1995), 5-27; Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” in *Institutions and Social Order*, ed. Virginia Haufler (Ann Arbor, 1998), 15-43; Colin Hay and Daniel Wincott, “Structure, Agency and Historical Institutionalism,” *Political Studies* 46, no. 5 (1998), 951-957; Ellen M. Immergut, “The Theoretical Core of the New Institutionalism,” *Politics & Society* 26, no. 1 (1998), 5-34; Ira Katznelson, “The Doleful Dance of Politics and Policy: Can Historical Institutionalism Make a Difference?” *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 1 (1998), 191-198; Hans Keman, “Public Institutions and Public Governance,” in *Institutions and Political Choice: On the Limits of Rationality*, ed. Ronald Czada, Adrienne Hertier, and Hans Keman (Amsterdam, 1996); Thomas A. Koelble, “The New Institutionalism in Political Science and Sociology,” *Comparative Politics* 27, no. 2 (1995), 231-243; Victor Nee, “Sources of the New Institutionalism,” in *The New Institutionalism in Sociology*, eds. Mary C. Brinton and Victor Nee (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998); B. Guy Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science: the New Institutionalism* (London: Pinter, 1999). The self-consciousness of the field, represented by these and many other recently published assessments, had been described as a symptom of the “adolescence” of new institutionalist theory by the late 1980s. Scott, “The Adolescence of Institutional Theory.”

⁴⁹ Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: the Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁵⁰ Peter A. Hall, *Governing the Economy: the Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

sovereignty.⁵¹ John Ikenberry, Peter Katzenstein, and Judith Goldstein dealt with the influence of national level institutional structures in the formulation of foreign policy.⁵² Collectively, the work of these scholars not only represented a revival of concern for institutions (state agencies, governmental organizations, or political entities such as parties and grass-roots activist groups) but also incorporated qualitative and historical methodologies that had been out of fashion for a generation. They examined the influence of political institutions or state structures on policy outcomes over the long-term, relinquishing the individual as a focal point.

The “new institutionalism” also made inroads on the study of the local state. Ted Gurr and Desmond King discussed the implications of the concept state autonomy for the analysis of city politics, emphasizing contention between national, regional and local levels of government.⁵³ Ira Katznelson explained how the structure of social and political institutions could define as well as reflect class identity in urban settings in *City Trenches*.⁵⁴ *The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy*, Terrence McDonald’s study of municipal taxation and fiscal policy in San Francisco, demonstrated that constraints on policies, including prevalent ideologies of government, institutional frameworks, and political considerations, were more important than functional imperatives in determining the outcome of fiscal decision-making.⁵⁵

Another landmark study, Stephen Elkin’s *City and Regime in the American Republic*, describes urban institutional structures as formative of urban political regimes, citizenry, and

⁵¹ Stephen D. Krasner, “Sovereignty: An Institutional Perspective,” in *The Elusive State: International and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. James A. Caporaso (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1989), 69-96; Stephen D. Krasner, “State Power and the Structure of International Trade,” *World Politics* 28, no. 1 (1976), 317-347.

⁵² Judith Goldstein, “Ideas, institutions, and American trade policy,” *International Organization* 42, no. 1 (1988), 179-217; G. John Ikenberry, David A. Lake, and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *The State and American Foreign Economic Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *Between Power and Plenty: Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).

⁵³ Ted Robert Gurr and Desmond S. King, *The State and the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Terrence J. McDonald, *The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy: Socioeconomic Change and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1860-1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁵⁴ Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

⁵⁵ McDonald, *Parameters*.

development policy. Elkin showed how, once established, Dallas' city-manager system of government became an important force for perpetuating its pro-business political culture and pro-growth policies.⁵⁶ Robin Einhorn detailed the ideological underpinnings of nineteenth century Chicago's property tax structure and its consequences for the urban political economy in *Property Rules*.⁵⁷ Amy Bridges' *Morning Glories* addressed the implications of the structure of electoral politics in the southwestern cities, describing the unintentional consequences of progressive reform.⁵⁸ These are among the innovative historical studies promising a general reinvigoration of interest in local government and recognition of the importance of institutional structures to political processes and outcomes. They indicate a larger rapprochement between political science and history that took place as the implications of the new institutionalism were explored; a new regard among historians for politics and state institutions coincided with an emphasis on historical contexts and institutional development over time and a methodological shift toward qualitative research in political science.⁵⁹

A decade after the "new institutionalism" was identified it became clear that a more specific designation was needed to distinguish studies that centered on the historical development of state institutions from perspectives that added institutions as a variable in

⁵⁶ Stephen L. Elkin, *City and Regime in the American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁵⁷ Robin L. Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1833-1872* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Amy Bridges, *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Amy Bridges, "Winning the West to Municipal Reform," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1992), 494-514; Amy Bridges and Richard Kronick, "Writing the Rules to Win the Game: the Middle-Class Regimes of Municipal Reformers," *Urban Affairs Review* 34, no. 5 (1999), 691-706 .

⁵⁹ Terrence J. McDonald, "What We Talk About When We Talk About History: The Conversations of History and Sociology," in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, ed. Terrence J. McDonald (Ann Arbor, 1996), 91-118; David Brian Robertson, "The Return to History and the New Institutionalism in American Political Science," *Social Science History* 17, no. 1 (1993), 1-36.

analysis of individual choices, particularly “new institutionalist” rational choice theory.⁶⁰ In 1992, a line was formally drawn with the publication of *Structuring Politics*, a volume of essays dedicated to describing these differences and representing the basic ideas of a “historical institutionalism,” a term introduced by Theda Skocpol.⁶¹ Kathleen Thelen and Sven Steinmo, introducing historical institutionalism as a school, defined it in direct opposition to rational choice theory, explaining that historical institutionalists assign a much greater importance to institutions and institutional structures:

[I]nstitutions are not just another variable, and the institutionalist claim is more than just that ‘institutions matter too.’ By shaping not just actors’ strategies (as in rational choice), but their goals as well, and by mediating their relations of cooperation and conflict, institutions structure political situations and leave their own imprint on political outcomes.⁶²

Thelen and Steinmo pointed to the dialectical relationship between institutional structures and individual or socially-defined political actors, both affecting the other and interacting in the context of complex historical circumstances. They also described the methodology and research strategy that make historical institutionalism so controversial and such a radical departure from the prevailing norms of political science:

Historical institutionalists lack the kind of universal tool kit and universally applicable concepts on which these more deductive theories are based. Rather than deducing hypotheses on the basis of global assumptions and prior to the analysis, historical institutionalists generally develop their hypotheses more inductively, in the course of interpreting the empirical material itself. The more inductive approach of historical institutionalists reflects a different approach to the study of politics that essentially rejects the idea that political behavior can be analyzed with the same techniques that may be useful in economics.⁶³

⁶⁰ For an especially clear early discussion of this division, see Rogers M. Smith, “If Politics Matters: Implications for a ‘New Institutionalism,’” *Studies in American Political Development* 6 (1992), 1-36.

⁶¹ Kathleen Ann Thelen and Sven Steinmo, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics,” in *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Ann Thelen, and Frank Longstreth, eds. (Cambridge, UK; Cambridge University Press, 1992), 28n4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 12.

Historical institutionalism combined an emphasis on state agency and formal political institutions with an awareness of the complexity and long-term development of political systems and structures.⁶⁴

Two basic paradigms within historical institutionalism describe the ways in which institutions influence policy: the most generally applicable is as the structural context of the decision-making process (though highly influential and even decisive to policy making as such).⁶⁵ As Skocpol describes it, “[state] organizational configurations, along with their overall patterns of activity, affect political culture, encourage some kinds of group formation and collective political actions (but not others), and make possible the raising of certain political issues (but not others).”⁶⁶ This influence is always relative to and embedded within changing political (social, economic, institutional) environments: “institutions constrain and refract politics, but they are never the only cause of outcomes.”⁶⁷ This approach incorporates institutions into analysis, but they remain secondary, as a context rather than a subject.

A second, more controversial approach has developed in association with historical institutionalism: an understanding of institutions as actual sources of policy initiative. In this paradigm, governmental organizations, as institutions, can be autonomous actors in the political decision-making process: they have the capacity to formulate and pursue policies independently. Historical institutionalism allows for an understanding of state institutions as actors, but does not assume agency in every case; obviously, institutional autonomy and capacities for policy-making vary. Institutional agency arises when the structural form of the

⁶⁴ Efforts to position historical institutionalism within political science include Phillip Eddington and Eileen L. McDonagh, “Polity Forum: Institutions and Institutionalism,” *Polity* 28, no. 1 (1995); Hall and Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms”; Hay and Wincott, “Structure, Agency and Historical Institutionalism”; Peters, *Institutional Theory*.

⁶⁵ March and Olsen, *Rediscovering*; Theda Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Theda Skocpol (Cambridge; New York, 1985), 3-367.

⁶⁶ Skocpol, “Bringing.”

⁶⁷ Thelen and Steinmo, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics,” 13.

institution, determining its authority, capacities, and resources, endows an organization with sufficient power and independence. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, like many other metropolitan area special districts in the United States, has the qualities that make recognition of its agency crucial to understanding its influence.

Theda Skocpol was one of the first of the historical institutionalists to argue directly for a consideration of states and state institutions as autonomous actors in political contexts. She highlights the relationship between organizations and officials and politicians associated with them apart from social interests:

[S]tate actions will regularly take forms that attempt to reinforce the authority, political longevity, and social control of the state organizations whose incumbents generated the relevant policies or policy ideas. We can hypothesize that one (hidden or overt) feature of all autonomous state actions will be the reinforcement of the prerogatives of collectivities of state officials. Whether rational policies result may depend upon how “rational” is defined and might even be largely accidental. The point is that policies different from those demanded by societal actors are produced.⁶⁸

Skocpol emphasizes the range of state capacities, relative to state sovereignty, stability, resources, and other historical variables. She demonstrates the capacity of state organizations can act independently, even within the relatively decentralized patterns of government of the United States, in a study of New Deal policy with Kenneth Finegold.⁶⁹ In *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, Skocpol examines the influence of state actors within a more complex and comprehensive political sphere of politically and socially defined agents and institutions that she terms “the polity.”⁷⁰

March and Olsen develop the idea of institutional agency at the level of governmental organizations, drawing upon well-established tenets of organizational theory. March and

⁶⁸ Skocpol, “Bringing.”

⁶⁹ Skocpol and Finegold, “State Capacity and Economic Intervention.”

⁷⁰ Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

Olsen's concept of institutional agency is based on their broad definition of institution. In political contexts, institutions are typically described as the formal (and often informal) rules that define an organization and determine its procedures and practices.⁷¹ March and Olsen's rules are comprehensive:

By "rules" we mean the routines, procedures, conventions, roles, strategies, organizational forms, and technologies around which political activity is structured. We also mean the beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures and knowledge that surround, support, elaborate, and contradict those routines and rules.⁷²

These rules govern the behavior of an organization and those associated with it by defining appropriate behavior. An institutional approach to governmental organizations allows for a fuller understanding of their political role through the recognition of their informal characteristics in addition to the formal rules that determine their structure and procedures. In order for the concept of institutional agency to work, the dynamics of relationship between the individuals (officials, administrators, politicians) and the organizations they are associated with must be understood and accounted for. The cognitive and cultural aspects of institutions shape this relationship. Identification of the individual with the institution and his understanding of its ideal purpose, as well as his own role within this ideal, becomes a basic determinant of his objectives, identity, and therefore decisions and actions.⁷³ March and Olsen explain institutional agency:

The argument that institutions can be treated as political actors is a claim of institutional coherence and autonomy. A claim of coherence is necessary if we wish to treat institutions as decision makers. From such a point of view, the issue is whether we choose to picture the state (or some other political institution) as making choices on the basis of some collective interest or intention (e.g., preferences, goals, purposes)

⁷¹ Historical institutionalists have been criticized for failing to develop a sufficiently rigorous definition of institution, often relying upon examples to describe their subject matter. Peter Hall's definition is the most widely cited: "formal rules, compliance procedures, and standard operating practices that structure the relationship between individuals in various units of the polity and economy." Hall, *Governing the Economy*, 19.

⁷² March and Olsen, *Rediscovering*, 22.

⁷³ Building upon March and Olsen's work, Donald Searing makes an interesting argument for consideration of political roles in institutional settings. Searing, "Roles, Rules, and Rationality."

alternatives, and expectations... The pragmatic answer appears to be that the coherence of institutions varies but it is sometimes substantial enough to justify viewing a collectivity as acting coherently.⁷⁴

This coherence derives from a “logic of appropriateness” that evolves as the rules, routines, and identity of an institution determine the political actions taken by those associated with it.

In a similar vein, Stephen Krasner describes the elements determining the influence of institutions over time in terms of “vertical depth and horizontal linkage,” or breadth. The extent of an institution’s ties to interests outside of its direct jurisdiction determines its breadth. Depth describes its influence over the preferences and behavior of individuals associated with it:

Depth refers to the extent to which the institutional structure defines the individual actors.... The definition of actors involves a specification of : (a) endowments in the form of property rights; (b) utilities in the sense of preferences; (c) capabilities in the form of material, symbolic, and institutional resources; (d) self-identity in the way in which individuals identify themselves is affected or determined by their place within an institutional structure.⁷⁵

Krasner argues that the greater the resources and contextual linkages of an institution and the stronger its influence over individual identities and interests, the more persistent it becomes, and the greater its capacity to alter its environment to reinforce its status and position. Krasner ties this directly to the dynamics of institutional change, arguing that, as a rule, the stability of institutions is important to their function and to their influence on policy outcomes; their endurance gives them autonomy and makes them significant over the long-term. Krasner points out that, without their static character, institutions would be “up for grabs,” truly tools to be mobilized on behalf of individuals or outside interest groups rather than independent interests themselves. Individuals associated with an institution have a multifarious stake in its stability and endurance, consistently opposing change. Sufficient impetus for change, often

⁷⁴ March and Olsen, *Rediscovering*, 17-18.

⁷⁵ Krasner, “Sovereignty,” 77.

threatening the existence of an organization, overcomes institutional inertia and leads to organizational change that takes place all at once. Krasner describes this dynamic as “punctuated equilibrium,” an analogy with evolutionary theory, maintaining that while institutional stability is important to understanding their influence over time, changing contexts can result in major transformations, necessary in the long run to their endurance.⁷⁶

While a number of studies have described how ideas and ideology shape institutions or institutional structures as they are created,⁷⁷ few have dealt directly with the culture, ideals, and informal rules that develop within organizations over time, a key element of the basis for the concept of institutional agency. This gap in research is despite, rather than because of, the theoretical foundation of the new institutionalism as it was described in the late 1980s. Erwin Hargrove is one of the few scholars in recent years to examine the institutional culture and agency of a governmental organization, drawing directly on organizational theory in his study of the Tennessee Valley Authority, *Prisoners of Myth*.⁷⁸ Hargrove describes how the TVA developed a unique culture, including a conception of the purpose and character of the organization itself, powerfully influencing the policies and decisions of its leadership over time.⁷⁹ Hargrove argues that its leaders draw upon its past to inspire and justify new programs, thereby participating the creation and perpetuation of a powerful organizational myth:

[L]eaders rely heavily on past examples for inspiration, even as they seek to adapt that spirit to new work. Past glories are invoked as the basis for new achievements. To abandon that spirit and the ideology that supports it is to face the world naked, without resources.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ E.g., Bridges, *Morning Glories*; Einhorn, *Property Rules*; Hall, *Governing the Economy*; Ellen M. Immergut, *Health Politics: Interests and Institutions in Western Europe* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); McDonald, *Parameters*.

⁷⁸ Hargrove, *Prisoners*.

⁷⁹ Doig, *Empire*; Hargrove, *Prisoners*.

⁸⁰ Hargrove, *Prisoners*, 3.

Hargrove accounts for the persistence and centrality of this “spirit and ideology” in the TVA by recognizing its nature as an institution, embodying “ideals, values, and norms, as well as cognitive styles, over time.”⁸¹ He examines the creation of an organizational myth in the Tennessee Valley Authority—an interpretation of the purpose, policy and role of the organization fabricated by its early leaders—and traces its implications for the policy of the agency over time. He documents the endurance and power of this myth, despite the fact that it was not reflected in the early policies that it was created to justify. As time went on, the ideal of the organization surpassed the legacy of its genuine policies in importance, determining decisions made by its leaders at the expense of pragmatic considerations and rational analysis. And, Hargrove shows how the politically determined structure of the organization, with three largely independent branches lacking coordination and centralized guidance, became an entrenched procedure to the detriment of the organization as whole.

Like Hargrove, I recognize the importance of a distinct organizational culture in shaping policies and decisions developed by the leaders and officials of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, though I have emphasized individuals’ perceptions of institutional interests rather than organizational myth as the primary motivation behind them. The bridge district was a complex institution with its own set of norms, myths, cultural practices, all of which motivated its associates to formulate policy based on their understanding of the organization and its interests.⁸² It was because its associates and officials identified with the agency and defined their interests with relation to it, that Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District went from an instrument to an independent political agent.

⁸¹ Ibid., 8.

⁸² John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan provide a useful framework for the analysis of institutionalized myths developing in conflict with the functional efficiency of formal organizations. John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony,” *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (1977), 340-363.

Institutions and Urban Political History

In treating the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District as the primary subject of analysis I am making a significant break with the predominant tradition of biographical analysis in political history. The scholarship on the most famous special district, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, represents this tradition. Robert Caro's 1979 biography of Robert Moses, for example, not only discounts both the social context in which he operated, but also the structure and strength of the organizations that enabled him to achieve such public power.⁸³ A very recent work, Jameson Doig's *Empire on the Hudson*, takes a similar analytical approach. Doig emphasizes the importance of the agency's leaders to determining the character, development, and accomplishments of the Port Authority, representing the early history of the organization through a series of biographical sketches, looking closely at the character and personality of the leaders in relative isolation from the rest of the organization.⁸⁴ The fundamental assumption of both Doig and Caro is that organizations follow the imperatives of their leaders, and not the other way around. My study, in contrast, emphasizes the continuity and the resilience of the bridge district as an organization, with its own interests and agency, revealing the ways in which the institution came to influence the decisions of its leadership and not vice versa.

Although special districts occupy an undeniably important position in the government of metropolitan areas in the twentieth century, they have often been neglected by urban historians. Though it may seem paradoxical, the institutions of the local state have not always been regarded as a significant or particularly influential aspect of urban governance or politics.

⁸³ Joel Schwartz criticized Caro on this point. See Schwartz, *The New York Approach*.

⁸⁴ Doig, *Empire*. See also Doig, "Coalition-Building by a Regional Agency."

Samuel P. Hays famously described the ascending “social analysis” of political history in 1965, including its statistical basis and emphasis on cultural and social imperatives. Hays noted that this shift marked “an almost complete neglect of the examination of the structure of political groups” forecasting that future “historians will be less concerned with the formal and the episodic and more with social analysis.”⁸⁵ The “new history” of the 1970s bore out his predictions; government went out of fashion among historians. In urban history, analysis of the local state was displaced by a focus on social and cultural subject matter largely outside of the political sphere. In 1982, Terrence McDonald pointed out that the dominant schools of thought regarding municipal politics and policy-making, including elite theory, pluralism and various neo-Marxisms, emphasized the importance of social influences, class structures and relationships, and/or economic forces in the outcome of policy and in determining the fate of the city.⁸⁶ These approaches did not recognize state structure or government institutions as significant factors in the decision-making process, assuming instead that politics and political outcomes ultimately reflected the balance of power in society. How power was distributed among competing socioeconomic groups was still the major issue of contention; governmental agencies remained essentially tools, wielded by interests defined by their socioeconomic characteristics.

While there has been a revival of interest in politics among urban historians, and a few important studies have explored the implications of institutionalist theory for urban politics as noted above, in general urban historians have approached urban politics from a very different direction. Functionalism, what McDonald called “the dirty secret of urban studies” in 1989,

⁸⁵ Samuel P. Hays, “The Social Analysis of American Political History,” *Political Science Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (1965), 393-94.

⁸⁶ Terrence J. McDonald, “The Problem of the Political in Recent American Urban History: Liberal Pluralism and the Rise of Functionalism,” *Social History* 10, no. 3 (1985), 323-345; McDonald, “Putting Politics Back into the History of the American City,” *American Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1982), 200-209.

persists.⁸⁷ One reason for a continued disregard for the local state generally and special districts specifically is that historians dealing with urban politics have turned to urban regime theory for inspiration rather than historical institutionalism. Regime theory was popularized by Clarence Stone's 1989 study of Atlanta, Georgia.⁸⁸ This approach to the question of power adds elected officials to the list of interests engaged in political decision-making in American cities, describing regimes as based on ties between politicians and private (economic) interests. These alliances, regime theorists argue, are necessary to successful governance and policy formulation—neither political nor economic interests can wield power without alliances with the other. While regime theorists have added a political element to debates on the nature and structure of power in cities, institutions remain secondary in their view, tools of politicians and their allies.

Regime theory originated as a critique of a venerable debate over the source and nature of urban power. During the 1960s and 70s, scholarship on urban power as expressed through local politics coalesced into two general schools: those emphasizing the balance of political power and the process of negotiation between interests in a model of democratic pluralism, and those emphasizing class struggle and the dominance of socio-economic elites in local politics. Both sides of this debate understood political conflict as a manifestation of the competition between social groups, generally divided along lines of class or ethnicity, and attempted to measure their relative influence primarily through case studies of discrete, localized political conflicts. Fundamentally, the question at hand was how political contests

⁸⁷ Terrence J. McDonald, "Reply to Professor Katznelson," *Studies in American Political Development* 3 (1989), 54.

⁸⁸ Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989).

reflected power in urban society. The debate between “pluralists” and “elite theorists” in urban history reached something of a stalemate and lost its vigor during the 70s and 80s.⁸⁹

Out of this impasse emerged a new “economic determinism” denying that power resides in urban society or the political sphere; rather, cities were described as at the mercy of market forces, in competing to attract mobile capital. Paul Peterson’s highly controversial *City Limits* described normative, market-oriented understanding of urban politics in 1981.⁹⁰

Peterson argued that political or social interests were largely irrelevant to urban policies; in order to compete for limited resources, city officials, administrators, and politicians have to put the interests of growth and investment first or risk ruin with the failure of the city due to loss of prosperity.⁹¹ Peterson’s argument reflected an ‘ecological’ understanding of cities that was gaining popularity at the time, a metaphorical understanding of cities as organisms, whose political processes are inseparable from the function of the whole in fulfilling the imperatives of human society, and competing for limited resources with other cities. Peterson’s argument was widely influential outside of academia, striking a chord with Reagan-era conservatives opposing economic regulation or planning by local government.

Neo-Marxist theorists also argued for the primacy of economic considerations in determining urban politics. For example, John Logan and Harvey Molotch famously described American cities as “growth machines,” dominated by profit-driven real estate developers backed up by socioeconomic elites.⁹² Politicians and planners, according to this perspective,

⁸⁹ Overviews include David C. Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982); Hammack, “Problems in the Historical Study of Power in the Cities and Towns of the United States, 1800-1960” *American Historical Review* 83 (1979), 323-49; William Issel and Robert Cheney, *San Francisco, 1865-1932* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 202-203; McDonald, “Putting Politics Back.”

⁹⁰ Paul Peterson, *City Limits* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² John R. Logan and Harvey Lusk Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

merely administrative development, systematically excluding other possible public agendas or goals from consideration. Embattled, competing local governments are tools devoted to facilitating never-ending urban growth motivated by the promise of real estate profit.⁹³ While Peterson depicted an impersonal and insurmountable environmental market of competing places, Logan and Molotch described how this market was constructed and enforced by those classes that profit from it. Although they differ on the source of power, from both perspectives political considerations remain at most secondary to the fate of urban areas.

Stephen Elkin, Clarence Stone, and Susan and Norm Fainstein introduced the concept of the regime into the question of urban power in the late 1980s.⁹⁴ They undertook to resurrect the independent significance of political interests in urban contexts. The regime represents the alliance of private (usually economic) and public interests (elected officials) shaping policy and political decisions based on a recognition of their interdependence in achieving goals involving urban economy and development. They describe power not as a given, to be grasped by the dominant socially or economically defined group, but something that alliances of economic and political players actively and consciously create. Stone explains: “What is at issue is not so much domination and subordination as a capacity to act and accomplish goals. The power struggle concerns, not control and resistance, but gaining and fusing a capacity to act—*power to not power over*.”⁹⁵ Political leaders require the support of local economic elites to govern effectively and to maintain power, regardless of how they win elections. At the same time, local government policy can and does affect economic interests substantially,

⁹³ Developing this theme, Anthony Orum elaborates on the element of timing in shaping the course of urban growth, emphasizing the need for historical consideration of development patterns and cycles, though his interpretation of varied local state capacities is basically functional and his conception of the city is corporate. Anthony M. Orum, *City-Building in America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 62.

⁹⁴ Elkin, *City and Regime*; Susan S. Fainstein and Norman I. Fainstein, “Regime Strategies, Communal Resistance, and Economic Forces,” in Susan Fainstein et al., eds., *Restructuring the City: the Political Economy of Urban Redevelopment*, ed. Michael Peter Smith (New York: Longman, 1983); Stone, *Regime Politics*.

⁹⁵ Stone, *Regime Politics*, 229.

particularly those of local businessmen and those with fixed assets such as real estate (in contrast to Peterson's thesis stressing the mobility of capital). The regulatory power of urban government, the resources of the local state, and the capacity of planning to shape development and influence land values are all potential obstacles—and potential tools—that cannot be ignored by private interests.

Stone adopts a rational choice approach to preference formation, stressing the informal alliances of economic elites and political leaders based on the conscious, calculated interest (political and economic) of individuals who would benefit personally from such relationships. He recognizes that a regime requires “access to institutional resources,” but describes formal governmental institutions essentially as tools, subject to manipulation and control by political actors. Formal institutions do not represent significant structural elements to public/private arrangements for Stone: “...in a world of limited and dispersed authority, actors work together across institutional lines to produce a capacity to govern and to bring about publicly significant results.”⁹⁶ Action occurs at the level of the regime, and it is the features of the regime that determine the relationship between the local state and society, as well as the local state and the urban economy. Following Stone's lead, most regime theorists treat the local state as a monolith, assuming organizational structures to be tangential to the decision-making process: “even though the institutions of local government bear most of the formal responsibility for governing, they lack the resources and scope of authority to govern without the active support and cooperation of significant private interests.”⁹⁷

Regime theory's revision of the urban power question is incomplete—it has brought out the importance of policy and public officials to urban development and economies, but

⁹⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

fails to recognize the extent and complexity of the political sphere, which must include state structures and institutions. Critiques form the foundation of both regime theory and historical institutionalism. Like the new institutionalism, regime theory involves a reconceptualization of power based on a recognition of the importance of government and the political sphere in general. Both offer powerful conceptual tools for analyzing urban politics, but the intellectual context of their development was important to determining their parameters and priorities. Initially new institutionalism (and later historical institutionalism) represented a reaction against the atomism of behavioralism (and later rational choice analysis) in political analysis. Therefore, issues of structure and agency were foremost among these theorists' concerns, including the importance of political institutions as structural contexts and in defining collective actors. Regime theory arose out of a different set of concerns. The question of "who rules" dominated discourse on urban power in the United States for decades, but by the 1980s, the importance of the market forces and capital interests were superceding socially-defined interests in analysis of urban power and policy. Political actors and local governments were in danger of dropping out altogether.

The most pressing concern of regime theorists was to counter the assumption of economic imperatives dominating local political economy. The implications for urban policy were enormous—arguments like Peterson's justified the withdrawal of urban government from all engagement with social problems and the accommodation of capital regardless of the consequences, resulting in a "paralysis of urban policy."⁹⁸ Regime theorists were not only describing a new mode of analysis—they were explicitly defending the legitimacy of urban governance, particularly urban planning, as a means of achieving social goals as well as

⁹⁸ John R. Logan and Todd Swanstrom, "Urban Restructuring: A Critical View," in *Beyond the City Limits: Urban Policy and Economic Restructuring in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Todd Swanstrom (Philadelphia, 1990), 12.

promoting economic development.⁹⁹ They have successfully countered social and economic determinism in relation to urban politics, reintegrating political concerns and a recognition of political agency into the discourse on urban development. In doing so regime theorists have failed to question many of the ideas the new institutionalism was beginning to overcome in other subject areas: an instrumentalist understanding of institutions; the assumption of rational calculation on the part of individuals at the expense of identity, ideas, ideology, and political culture; a neglect of historical developments and path dependency; and a disregard for the constraints that institutional structures impose on the development of policy.¹⁰⁰

I share with regime theorists a focus on collective action; regimes are understood as “informal arrangements” that unite various interests and individuals through the common goal of governing a city. Regime theory has made an important contribution in adding the element of local politics to urban analysis previously dominated by economic determinism. But, the analysis of urban politics needs to go farther than that, it needs to finally “bring the state back in,” as Skocpol and others have asserted, by recognizing the importance of institutional

⁹⁹ For example, Clarence N. Stone, “The Study of the Politics of Urban Development,” in Stone and Sanders, *Politics of Urban Development*, 3-22.

¹⁰⁰ While it remains the most influential mode of analysis in urban policy analysis, regime theory has been the subject of considerable criticism and extensive revision since its introduction in the late 1980s. Many have sought to expand its narrow focus on a dualistic public/private alliance to include the social and cultural environments in which local politics takes place. Others, prominent among them Susan Fainstein, have called for greater consideration of macroeconomic forces and the larger economic context in which cities operate. A few have devoted new attention to institutions and institutional structures in urban contexts, following Elkin’s lead, including Barbara Ferman, Joe Painter, and Meredith Ramsay. Harvey K. Newman, “Black Clergy and Urban Regimes: the Role of Atlanta’s Concerned Black Clergy,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 16, no. 1 (1994), 23-86; Harvey K. Newman, “Historic Preservation Policy and Regime Politics in Atlanta,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23:1 (2001), 72-86; Robert K. Whelan, Alma H. Young, and Mickey Lauria, “Urban Regimes and Racial Politics in New Orleans,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 16, no. 1 (1994), 1-21; Susan S. Fainstein, *The City Builders: Property, Politics, and Planning in London and New York* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell Press, 1994); Susan S. Fainstein, “Economics, Politics, and Development Policy: The Convergence of New York and London,” in Swanstrom, *Beyond the City Limits*, 119-149; Paul Kantor, H. V. Savitch, and Serena Vicari Haddock, “The Political Economy of Urban Regimes: a Comparative Perspective,” *Urban Affairs Review* 32, no. 3(1997), 348-377; William Sites, “The Limits of Urban Regime Theory: New York City under Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani,” *Urban Affairs Review* 32, no. 4 (1997), 536-557; Barbara Ferman, *Challenging the Growth Machine: Neighborhood Politics in Chicago and Pittsburgh* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

structures and governmental organizations over time.¹⁰¹ In emphasizing the idea of institutional agency in this study, I do not intend to neglect the other factors; I agree that regimes, as the relationships of elected officials to private interests, *are* important in the determination of policy. Economic interests and social allegiances and identities (including considerations of class, race, and gender) *do* influence the choices of individual decision-makers. Institutional structures and institutional interests must be considered, especially in cases where sufficient institutional autonomy exists to endow governmental and other organizations with political agency. But, these interests can also be determined by individuals' relationship to a governmental organization. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District is one facet of Bay Area's political economy, representative of a much larger class of organizations, with immense collective power.

Tracing the expansion and entrenchment of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District from its inception in the Progressive era to its reorganization in the early 1970s reveals profound and unanticipated consequences for the physical development and government of the San Francisco Bay Area. By casting the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, an independent, "quasi-municipal" government agency, as an independent actor engaged in San Francisco Bay Area politics and policy-making, this study is built upon the concept of institutional agency. The survival and expansion of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District required its active participation in the formulation of transportation policy for the San Francisco Bay Area. The bridge district's representatives shaped the governmental structures of the region as well as its economic and physical landscape. The history of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District represents an effort to understand the consequences of special

¹⁰¹ See Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Skocpol's title essay outlined a research agenda that was formative for what came to be known as "historical institutionalism."

districts generally, and to account for their power, durability, and pervasiveness in the twentieth century.

I

Progressivism, Bureaucracy, and the Inexorable Rise of Special Districts

The rapid rise of regional special districts in the twentieth century began with the Progressive era impulse for structural reform. Appearing in scattered locations at the end of the nineteenth century, they were part of a much larger reorganization, a pervasive bureaucratization that changed the structure of private enterprise, social and political organization, as well as the form and function of the local state. While public corporations date back to the beginnings of the American Republic, they were neither widespread nor enduring until Progressives embraced them as a means of reforming local government.¹ Special districts took on a variety of public works projects and services early on; later they were adapted to function as *de facto* regional government, dominating public enterprise, coordinating services, and regulating and planning in the absence of metropolitan government. As special districts became a fundamental and increasingly significant element of government over the course of the twentieth century, they in turn shaped local politics and policy, even the functional imperatives of government. This chapter traces the rise of special districts and perceptions of them, from historical interpretations of their origins, to the mid-century initiatives to define them and quantify their rapid growth, to analysts' and policy makers'

¹ Nancy Burns, *The Formation of American Local Governments: Private Values in Public Institutions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46; Kathryn Ann Foster, *The Political Economy of Special-Purpose Government* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1997), 15; Paul Studenski, *The Government of Metropolitan Areas in the United States* (New York: National Municipal League, 1930), 257-62.

attempts to grapple with their consequences. Understanding the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District requires approaching it as representative of a much larger phenomenon.

The rise of special districts is a dramatic, momentous, and largely untold story; there are no comprehensive histories of this important governmental form in the United States. Typically, historians attribute their creation to structural constraints on cities and the imperatives of growth and technological change. They emphasize the usefulness of special districts as tools; the creation of independent agencies whose obligations would not be counted against constitutional debt limits was a strategy for addressing urgent problems and undertaking expensive new projects, an easy through somewhat piecemeal way of increasing the capacity of local government.² In metropolitan areas, they could also maintain the “delicate balance of power” between those defending a suburban independence while fulfilling the traditional functions of city governments.³ They provided regional services and undertook large-scale projects without threatening the political and fiscal independence of suburbs from cities.

Scholars generally recognize the functional advantages of special districts, which helped existing governments address problems that transcend their capacities. Their ideological foundations are more controversial. They are often portrayed as straightforward solutions to urban problems, without any conscious political philosophy behind their creation: “public corporations have multiplied for pragmatic rather than theoretical reasons,” explains Walsh. “With no positive concept of public enterprise, no popular movement for social ownership, American politics has shaped public corporations haphazardly to fit specific,

² E.g., Burns, *Formation of American Local Governments*, 16.

³ Jon C. Teaford, *Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 8.

practical problems.”⁴ Special districts appeared despite ideology, so the argument goes, propelled by functional imperatives: “changing dimensions of resource supply and demand, of technology, of business conditions and of material expectations... [underlie] the multiplication of public authorities.”⁵ Ernest S. Griffith calls them a “palliative” for the failure of urban governments in the early twentieth century; Jon C. Teaford portrays them as a triumph of pragmatic problem-solving.⁶

Similarly, Sarah Elkind contends that special districts appeared around the country primarily as a response to local crises, drawing upon political theory that interprets all state reorganization as an extraordinary outcome of emergency. She also stresses the implications of their creation for democratic processes in these areas, stressing the shift of control to elites that they represented. Her comparative study of water districts in Boston and Oakland, California, *Bay Cities and Water Politics*, accounts for the creation of regional special districts in Boston in the 1890s and two decades later in California. Elkind argues that they were both established as problems involving the use of natural resources in urban areas reached critical proportions, and private solutions could no longer meet the needs of urban residents. In Elkind’s cases local governments were forced to rise to the challenge and find a way to address regional demands for waste disposal and clean water. Progressive reformers took advantage of uncertainty and urgency to “[seize] upon the political opportunities presented by widespread

⁴ Annmarie Hauk Walsh, *The Public’s Business: the Politics and Practices of Government Corporations* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶ Griffith echoes political scientist John C. Bollen’s 1957 overview of special districts, which also describes them as a “palliative” in a generally critical account. Teaford’s analysis reflects the more positive attitudes of public choice theory. John C. Bollen, *Special District Governments in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 256; Ernest S. Griffith, *A History of American City Government: The Progressive Years and Their Aftermath, 1900-1920* (New York: Published for the National Municipal League by Praeger, 1974), 297; Jon C. Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870-1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

public dissatisfaction” to “wrest public works from municipal hands and take control of regional agencies.”⁷ Elkind sees the rhetoric of scientific management and efficiency as more a justification than a motivation. Their ultimate, intentional political consequence, the disenfranchisement of urban voters, she argues, reflected elite reformers’ general distrust of and hostility toward urban voters.⁸

Special districts’ usefulness and record of success in accomplishing their tasks and fulfilling their purposes gives credence to the idea that they were essentially pragmatic solutions to urgent problems, though not necessarily desirable ones in hindsight. And, the idea that special districts were an expression of class conflict is compelling in light of their long-term consequences for urban government. These institutions were designed to limit the interface of voters with public enterprise, and their consequences were often decidedly undemocratic. However, several scholars have made the case that, from the beginning, special districts were more than just tools, with significant intellectual support in the Progressive era and popular support across the decades. The ideals that their founders professed were more than simply justifications, however misguided or naïve they may seem to subsequent critics.

Gail Radford stresses the popular commitment to municipal ownership around the turn of the century, describing special districts as a major product of this movement and a significant but often unrecognized form of public enterprise. She identifies widespread grassroots support for these “quasi-governmental” agencies around the turn of the century, expressed in a variety of public referenda. “Direct public involvement in the economy often had wide support, but was impossible given legal barriers,” she explains. Public authorities, as

⁷ Sarah Elkind, *Bay Cities and Water Politics: the Battle for Resources in Boston and Oakland* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 162.

⁸ See also Sarah S. Elkind, “Building a Better Jungle: Anti-Urban Sentiment, Public Works, and Political Reform in American Cities, 1880-1930,” *Journal of Urban History* 24, no. 1 (1997), 53-78.

she calls them, were an “alternative method... for getting at least some of the desired results” of actual municipal ownership.⁹ Radford also extends the traditional recognition of institutional barriers as important factors in necessitating the creation of special districts to the judiciary, tracing the relaxation of prohibitions on public enterprise through public corporations as local courts came to recognize their indispensability for urban government. The municipal ownership movement failed because the legal and structural obstacles to cities’ engagement in public enterprise were too difficult to overcome. Special districts represented the path of least resistance to reaching the basic goal of public ownership—it was much easier to create a new government agency than to expand the functions and capacities of existing governments.¹⁰

While Radford recognizes the political ideals behind the creation of special districts, she stops short of recognizing special districts as expressions of Progressive values in and of themselves. Other scholars including Jameson Doig and Susan Tenenbaum have acknowledged the influence of moral conceptions of the state and the ideal of scientific administration in shaping the form and in propelling their creation, particularly Woodrow Wilson’s famous argument for strong and independent government executives.¹¹ Susan Tenenbaum takes the importance of ideology to public corporations most seriously, describing them not as simply as a pragmatic means of achieving goals of public enterprise and

⁹ Gail Radford, “From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities: Institutional Factors in the Shaping of American Public Enterprise” (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Radford also discusses related issues in “Beyond Political Culture: Institutional Barriers to Public Enterprise,” paper presented at the First Biennial Conference of the Urban History Association, Pittsburgh, PA, September 27 2002; “William Gibbs McAdoo, the Emergency Fleet Corporation, and the Origins of the Public-Authority Model of Government Action,” *Journal of Policy History* 11, no. 1 (1999), 59-88.

¹¹ Jameson W. Doig, “‘If I See a Murderous Fellow Sharpening a Knife Cleverly’: the Wilsonian Dichotomy and the Public Authority Tradition,” *Public Administration Review* 43, July/August (1983), 292-304; Susan Tenenbaum, “The Progressive Legacy and the Public Corporation: Entrepreneurship and Public Virtue,” *Journal of Policy History* 3, no. 3 (1991), 309-30.

ownership of utilities, but as a positive expression of the Progressive governmental ideal. She explains that the public corporation came into being as public and private values converged:

[T]he public corporation reflected the erosion of public-private boundaries manifest in the functional and ethical dimensions of Progressive thought. The perception that the managerial function was the essence of the corporation and, correspondingly, that managerial efficiency was a matter of scientific expertise detachable from the dynamics of the profit-driven private marketplace allowed for the assimilation of the corporate form into the public sphere... The public corporation, which gave institutional expression to the transcendence of public-private distinctions, epitomized the Progressive marriage of corporate efficiency and the pursuit of public purposes.¹²

These organizations enabled the expert administration of governmental agencies by a “service-minded elite of virtue,” based on a “newly invigorated ideal of the public interest.”¹³

Reformers supported public ownership and enterprise, observing the widespread “perversion of public power by private interests” even while they maintained their faith in corporate form, separating the means of private enterprise from its ends, and adapting it to serve the public interest.¹⁴ They developed an “institutional critique” of existing governments, blaming corruption on flawed organizational structures that allowed economic and individual interests to dominate politics.¹⁵ The new field of public administration added a scientific dimension— incentives for efficiency and independent leadership were built into corporate structure and could be adapted to serve the public interest as they served the pursuit of profit. Freedom from interference was considered to be critical to their success as public businesses enterprises; it was not just a rationale for removing control of public enterprises from lower-class voters and politicians. Strong leadership was the most important element of corporate form: “The public entrepreneur, professionally trained and freed from direct control by elected officials, stood above the partiality of private interests as a moral agent possessed of the capacity and

¹² Tenenbaum, “Progressive Legacy,” 315.

¹³ Ibid., 309.

¹⁴ Ibid., 310.

¹⁵ Ibid., 312.

discretionary powers to interpret and act upon the collective interest.”¹⁶ Advocates of this ideal assumed the morality of professional administrators and the existence of an identifiable, unified public interest. As Tenenbaum puts it, “the public corporation as an institutional form was wedded to expectations regarding the public-spiritedness of its leadership and the civic cohesion of the political community.”¹⁷

Adding the ideological dimension to discussion of special districts is more than an exercise in historical exposition, the question of the relationship between state structure and ideology goes to the core of understanding Progressivism and its legacy. Special districts were just one expression of a broad and multifaceted movement that swept the nation starting in the late nineteenth century. Under the rubric of Progressivism, historians have addressed a multitude of interrelated impulses and trends; they are so varied that making generalizations about the period is extremely difficult or, some argue, impossible.¹⁸ If there is one point of consensus it is that the United States underwent a wholesale transformation: turn of the century reform reflected and contributed to a profound transformation of the American economy, state, and society.

An influential though much-contested “organizational synthesis” of the Progressive era rose to predominance in the 1960s emphasizing the structural transformation of the state and the expansion of bureaucracy (both public and private). This approach places special emphasis on the restructuring of the local state, the initial focus of both efforts for reform and the early locus of public enterprise, generally interpreting it as the outcome of larger social and

¹⁶ Ibid., 315.

¹⁷ Ibid., 322.

¹⁸ Peter G. Filene, “An Obituary for the Progressive Movement,” *American Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (1970), 451-73.

economic change.¹⁹ Obviously, this framework for analysis does not answer some difficult questions, particularly how those excluded from decision-making and detached from political institutions should be incorporated into the narrative, leaving ample leeway for other models and approaches. However, the organizational synthesis did turn scholarly attention to bureaucracy and the state, raising the question of causality, the motivations for reform and the intentions of reformers. Who or what was behind this reorganization? Often, answers to this question were posed in terms of whose interests it served, based on the assumption that the consequences of reorganization reflected the intentions of those who initiated it.

Many attribute the reorganization of the state to the expansion of industrial capitalism—reformers were responding to the imperatives of a changing economy. Since Samuel P. Hays and Robert H. Wiebe developed this interpretation, and James Weinstein, Gabriel Kolko and Martin Sklar explored some of its more radical implications, scholars have emphasized the influence of business in public policy around the turn of the century.²⁰ These

¹⁹ Samuel P. Hays' 1957 overview of the Progressive era, *The Response to Industrialism*, was one of the earliest examples of this approach. He goes on to make the case that elites were behind efforts for municipal reform in several influential articles. Robert H. Wiebe presents the reorganization of government bureaucracy as the culmination of a variety of social and political transformations in his influential analysis of the era, *A Search for Order*. James Weinstein also emphasizes the significance of state structure, arguing that the ideas of business-government cooperation, "social engineering and social efficiency" resulted from the ascendancy of business interests and their effective capture of the state. "The Progressive Era witnessed rapid strides toward centralization and a decline in importance of those institutions which were based upon local representation," he observes. Louis Galambos, "The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History," *Business History Review* 44, no. 3 (1970), 279-90; Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (1964), 157-69; Samuel P. Hays, "The Social Analysis of American Political History," *Political Science Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (1965), 373-94; Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism*, second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1995); Skowronek, *Building a New American State: the Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920*; James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); James Weinstein, "Organized Business and the City Commission and Manager Movements," *Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 2 (1962), 166-82; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

²⁰ Samuel P. Hays, "The Changing Political Structure of the City in Industrial America," *Journal of Urban History* 1, no. 1 (1974), 3-68; Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (1964), 157-69; Hays, *The Response to Industrialism*; Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: The Free Press, 1963); Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism: The Market, the Law, and*

historians stress reformers' upper class backgrounds, high regard for business practices and efficiency, and mistrust of electoral politics. It is easy to make a case that business interests were behind the efforts of Progressive reformers, even that they were unwitting pawns of large corporations. These interpretations downplay the ideological elements of Progressivism, portraying them as a byproduct or even a rationale. If they were not actually disingenuous, the ideas and ideals of reformers were at least secondary to other considerations and more powerful forces, they argue: not in themselves causal.

Since Louis Galambos identified the basic ideas of the organizational synthesis in 1970, its basic precept has remained at the core of historical accounts of the period: that the impulse to establish new organizations, to expand bureaucracy was a fundamental, defining commonality that linked all of the varied and various efforts for reform. However, even as the assumptions that social and/or economic change was the most powerful force behind Progressive reform came to dominate historical discourse 1970s and 80s, there was a persistent minority protesting that these interpretations ignored some of the most basic motivations of reformers. In 1981, Richard McCormick pointed out in a highly influential critique that the organizational synthesis underestimated the "moral intensity" of Progressive reformers, falsely assuming that their professed values were specious and that the actual outcome of policy was the best indication of their intentions.²¹ Since then, a growing body of scholarship insisting upon the importance of the ideas and ideology in shaping modern bureaucratic institutions has been gaining in prominence. New synthetic treatments of the period reflect interest in the genesis of ideas and the intellectual foundations of state reform, including work by Morton

Politics (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1988); Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918*; Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*.

²¹ Richard L. McCormick, "The Discovery that Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," *American Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (1981), 249.

Keller, Allan Dawley's *Struggles for Justice*, and Daniel T. Rodgers' *Atlantic Crossings*.²²

Rodgers pays special attention to the influence of German theories embraced and adapted by American intellectuals studying abroad as well as the socialist ideals of British reformers that helped inspire a "social politics" that ultimately led to the rise of the American welfare state, first in cities and later at the national level during the New Deal. Many other, more specific studies indicate a growing regard for the ideological and intellectual foundations of the modern state in the Progressive era.²³

At the same time, many scholars stress that the ideas and ideals behind state reform did not necessarily translate into reality.²⁴ Schiesl remarks that bureaucracies were not the neutral tools that their designers envisioned:

Most of this insulated power of urban bureaucracy is the unfortunate legacy of the progressive structural reformers... the legislative and executive offices reformed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are incapable of effectively wresting power away from the bureaucratic organizations established to implement the public policies that they were supposed to have been formulating.²⁵

McCormick also observes that reformers were not the visionaries that they fancied themselves to be: "progressive reform was not characterized by remarkable rationality or foresight... Often the results the Progressives achieved were unexpected and ironical; and, along the way, crucial roles were sometimes played by men and ideas that, in the end, met defeat."²⁶ Special districts are a prime example of unintended consequences. At the same time that they were

²² Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Morton Keller, *Regulating a New Society: Public Policy and Social Change in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

²³ E.g., Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Kenneth Finegold, *Experts and Politicians: Reform Challenges to Machine Politics in New York, Cleveland, and Chicago* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Camilla Stivers, *Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era* (Topeka: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

²⁴ Martin J. Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1800-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 189-98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁶ McCormick, "The Discovery that Business Corrupts Politics," 249.

removing public works and utilities from the control of private corporations, Progressive reformers were recreating those corporations in the public sphere. Progressive era reformers supported special districts based on the idea that government enterprises should have the design and administration of a successful private enterprise, believing that business practices could be successfully adapted for public purposes. At the turn of the century, those purposes included municipal ownership and an increased involvement of the local state in the promotion of economic growth and development.

An organization or an institution can quickly transcend its original purpose, regardless of whether the intentions of its creators were cynical or sincere. Special districts were originally designed to reform and strengthen government by Progressive reformers and at the same time appealed to business interests recognizing the potential for profit from public enterprise. That does not mean that their founders did not honestly believe in the idea that the interests of the public would be served by these agencies, or that reformers were misled by their business allies. These two groups both supported special districts, but it was not necessarily a problematic partnership; both groups held similar values, and Progressive ideology sanctioned state support for private enterprises in the name of general prosperity and economic growth.²⁷ But special districts, conceived of as tools, quickly evolved into independent agents in the decision-making process. Once incorporated, special districts could use their resources to promote organizational interests, independent of the intentions of their

²⁷ This aspect of Progressive ideology and the direct involvement of business leaders in the making of public policy have been discussed by a number of historians, and have been especially influential and persistent in the Bay Area. See, for example, Ellis Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State,'" *Journal of American History* 61, no. 1 (1974), 116-40; William Issel, "'Citizens Outside the Government': Business and Urban Policy in San Francisco and Los Angeles, 1890-1932," *Pacific Historical Review* 57, no. 2 (1988), 117-45; Issel, "Business Power and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1900-1940," *Journal of Urban History* 16, no. 1 (1989), 52-77; Richard L. McCormick, "The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," *American Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (1981), 247-74

original creators and backers. The circumstances of their creation were important to determining the characteristics of these institutions, but their consequences could not necessarily be foreseen. Special districts emerged from a Pandora's box of Progressive ideology; once they were released, their usefulness and pragmatic advantages remained compelling even after intellectual support for them disappeared. It seemed that nothing could effectively rein them in or stop their proliferation.

The Rapid Rise of Special Districts

In the late nineteenth special districts began appearing in significant numbers in rural areas; drainage, levee, and irrigation districts first appeared in areas with limited general-purpose government, primarily aimed at promoting rural development and agriculture. These agencies were inextricably linked with local land values and boosterism, reflecting the conception of the role of local government as primarily serving the interests of growth and prosperity. They were public corporations that functioned as governments in only the most limited sense, created in the pursuit of common economic goals, to control the natural environment to allow for its profitable exploitation. These agencies were devoted to the management of natural resources, carrying out tasks that were vital to promoting economic activity but were too large and expensive for all but the wealthiest individuals or largest private corporations. Drainage was the most common early special district, appearing in the greatest numbers in the South and Midwest starting in the 1870s, taking on local flood control, land reclamation projects, and sometimes water provision. Their functional inverse, irrigation districts, enabled traditional agriculture in relatively arid regions across the West; in California, the first general legislation enabling the formation of irrigation districts was the

Wright Act, passed in 1887.²⁸ Road districts, also in the service of economic development, appeared in rural areas the early decades of the twentieth century, coincident with the increasing popularity of the automobile.

As special districts became more common in rural areas the institutional form was also adopted in urban and suburban regions. Among the earliest metropolitan special districts were water districts; Massachusetts formed the Metropolitan Water Board in 1895.²⁹ Sanitation districts were also common around the turn of the century. In Illinois, consistently a leader in special district government, the Chicago Sanitary District was created in 1889 to serve both the city and surrounding communities.³⁰ The Boston-area Board of Metropolitan Sewer Commissioners was formed the same year to oversee the extension of services to poorer areas, and in 1901 merged with the Water Board.³¹ The Passiac Valley Sewage District, serving 100 square miles of New Jersey, was incorporated in 1902.³² Many large ports were taken over by special districts including the Port of New Orleans in 1890. The Port of Portland was incorporated in 1891; the Port of Seattle Commission was formed in 1913; and the Port of Tacoma incorporated in 1918.³³ Early park districts in Chicago constructed miles of parkways in the 1890s, and similar agencies were formed in other urban areas to establish and administer regional parks.³⁴

²⁸ Norris Hundley, *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, a History*, Rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 99-103; Gordon Miller, "Shaping California Water Law, 1871 to 1928," *Southern California Quarterly* 55 (1973); Donald J. Pisani, *From the Family Farm to Agribusiness: the Irrigation Crusade in California and the West, 1850-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²⁹ See Elkind, *Bay Cities*, 5.

³⁰ Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 74-77; Teaford, *City and Suburb*, 79.

³¹ Ernest S. Griffith, *A History of American City Government: the Conspicuous Failure, 1870-1900* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 154-55.

³² Council of State Governments, *The States and the Metropolitan Problem* (Chicago: Council of State Governments, 1956), 125.

³³ *Ibid.*, 124-26.

³⁴ The Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria began its operations in 1884. *Ibid.*, 124; Clay McShane, *Down the Asphalt Path: the Automobile and the American City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

By the 1910s, it was clear to observers that special districts were already an important element of local government in the United States, but because of their tremendous variety and relative newness, they were difficult to quantify. The task of defining special districts and making meaningful distinctions among them also posed a significant challenge. Early efforts to collect information on their operations and to distinguish them from other types of governmental organizations were extremely inconsistent. The early data accumulated by the Bureau of the Census on the number and type of governmental units was just a shadow of the changes going on in local and regional governmental structure. Nevertheless, the numbers that are available, starting with the 1913 report on *Wealth, Debt and Taxation*, provide a sense of the emergence of special districts. Although there was no common standard for independent governmental agencies, twenty-five states reported other “civil divisions having the authority to incur debt,” and the census included a general account of their various functions. Based on the descriptions provided in the state reports, it is safe to say that most of the “other civil divisions” reported were special districts, both in name and in function. The census recorded similar state-by-state accounts for 1922, with thirty-eight states reporting special districts with debt and/or revenues.

Table 1.1: States Reporting Revenue or Debt for Special Districts, 1913-1932.

	1913	1922	1932
Number of states reporting special districts	25	38	40
Types of special districts reported by more than one state	drainage (12) levee (6) irrigation (5) road (4) fire (2)	drainage (27) road (13) irrigation (12) levee (8) water (8) fire (7) sewer or sanitary (7) light or power (4) bridge (3) park (3) conservancy or conservation (2) highway (2)	drainage (28) sanitary or sewer (12) irrigation (11) road (10) water (9) fire (8) conservancy or conservation (7) electric, light, or power (7) port (7) levee (6) park (5) bridge (3) cemetery (3) dike (3) navigation (3) Reclamation (3) weed control (3) ditch (2) flood control (2)

Note: Number of states reporting each type of special district in parentheses.

Sources: United States Bureau of the Census, *Wealth, Debt and Taxation 1913* (Washington, DC, 1915), 228-29; United States Bureau of the Census, *Wealth, Public Debt, and Taxation: 1922* (Washington DC, 1924); United States Bureau of the Census, *Financial Statistics of State and Local Governments: 1932* (Washington, DC, 1935).

While these figures cannot be taken as anything much more than a sketch of the proliferation of special districts in the early decades of the century, observers noted the general trend that they suggest. The *American Political Science Review* published periodical reports on the status of what it termed “special municipal corporations,” including drainage, irrigation, road, and water districts, starting in 1914.³⁵ By 1918, it was clear to the *APSR* legislative observer that, despite the “haze and maze” of their legal particulars, “all these districts for special purposes are one in essential nature.”³⁶ The 1918 report noted that the power of these agencies was steadily increasing, with expanded jurisdiction (e.g. irrigation districts developing and selling electricity) and, increasingly, to contract directly with the federal government bypassing local authorities.³⁷ While there was no effort to make a systematic, nationwide count of special districts until the 1930s, by 1913 a majority of states were reporting various “civil divisions” with debt or revenues distinct from counties or incorporated places.³⁸ Eight states reported over a million dollars in special district debt in 1913, including Illinois (\$5.3 million), Missouri (\$4.1 million), Arkansas (\$2.4 million) and California (\$1.6 million).³⁹ By 1922, the numbers reported had risen dramatically, with 16 states reporting over a million dollars in special district debt, and some much more: California reported \$102 million, Arkansas \$77 million, and Illinois \$58 million.⁴⁰ Illinois and California, with important, rapidly growing metropolitan regions and strong Progressive movements, have consistently been among the leading states in terms of special district numbers and outstanding

³⁵ Charles Kettleborough, “Special Municipal Corporations,” *American Political Science Review* 8, no. 4 (1914), 614-21.

³⁶ Frederic H. Guild, “Special Municipal Corporations,” *American Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (1918), 679.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 680.

³⁸ See Bureau of the Census, *Taxation and Revenue Systems of State and Local Governments: a Digest of Constitutional and Statutory Provisions Relating to Taxation in the Different States in 1912* (Washington, DC, 1914).

³⁹ The other states were Louisiana, Maine, Mississippi, and Ohio. Bureau of the Census, *Wealth, Debt and Taxation 1913*, 446.

⁴⁰ Bureau of the Census, *Wealth, Public Debt, and Taxation: 1922* (Washington, DC, 1924), 180.

debt. Early on, special districts were concentrated in the western and southern states, but by 1942 they were reported by all of the states and the District of Columbia.⁴¹

The special district developed into a much more expansive institution after World War I. Several federal public corporations were created to assist in financing and coordinating of the war effort. Although these agencies were short-lived, they gave “renewed force to the Progressive ideal of a nation as a moral community united in a common purpose,” as Tenenbaum notes, bolstering support for public corporations locally around the country.⁴² State governments began to approve these entities at the local level, creating large-scale special districts with multiple purposes, and adding new powers and responsibilities to existing agencies.⁴³ A variety of special districts transcending municipal and county boundaries appeared around the country; regional agencies undertook major projects (such as the Golden Gate Bridge) and multi-purpose agencies appeared in a number of metropolitan areas. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey was established in 1921.⁴⁴ The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California was formed to build an aqueduct to bring Colorado River Water to the Los Angeles metropolitan area in 1928. Metropolitan special districts extended basic services outside of city limits in smaller urban areas, including Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Washington, D. C.⁴⁵ The potential of the special district as a public policy tool was slowly being realized as the power and autonomy of individual agencies grew steadily.

In 1932, for the first time, the census included statistics on the revenues, costs, debt, and tax levies, all quantified by type of government with “other civil divisions” counted

⁴¹ Bureau of the Census, *Governmental Units in the United States 1942* (Washington, DC, 1944).

⁴² Tenenbaum, “Progressive Legacy,” 316.

⁴³ Elkind, *Bay Cities*, 80.

⁴⁴ Merrill R. Goodall, John D. Sullivan, and Timothy De Young, *Water Districts in California: An Analysis by Type of Enabling Act and Political Decision Process*, Rev. ed. (Sacramento: California Department of Water Resources, 1977); Hundley, *Great Thirst*, 239-41.

⁴⁵ Studenski, *Government of Metropolitan Areas*, 271.

separately from states, counties, municipalities, school districts, and townships. The 1932 census did not offer a clear definition of what constituted a “civil division” or a governmental unit other than “the power to levy taxes or incur debt.” The national totals were based on the unsystematic reports of individual states, which varied in their standards for and definitions of independent local governmental units.⁴⁶ In 1934, William Anderson published a pioneering survey of governmental units in an effort to address some of the shortcomings of the 1932 census, describing it as “meager, unsystematic, and marred by numerous errors.”⁴⁷ Anderson observed that the basic information was simply not available:

In no state has the legislature provided for an adequate, permanent, and continuous registration of information about the organization of local government... Neither has the national government imposed the duty of collecting this information on any of its agencies.⁴⁸

Despite the lack of precise figures, it is clear that there was a rapid increase in the number of special districts during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

The term “special districts” was introduced in 1942 as the Bureau of the Census made its first attempt at setting reporting standards for states. That year, the count of special districts was considerably lower than the total for “other civil divisions” reported in 1932. New requirements for the independence of governmental units eliminated many districts that were counted previously, legally distinct entities but functionally an arm of other local governments. In addition, the elimination of road districts as the state and federal governments took on their

⁴⁶ California reported 1,442 “other civil divisions (irrigation, reclamation, fire, lighting, cemetery, road, and various other districts)” out of a total of 5,310 political units. Bureau of the Census, *Financial Statistics of State and Local Governments: 1932.*, 158.

⁴⁷ William Anderson, *The Units of Government in the United States, an Enumeration and Analysis*, 1949 rev. ed. (Chicago: Public Administration Service, 1934, 1949), 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

responsibilities, though special districts in nearly all other categories increased in number.⁴⁹ It was the only recorded decrease in the twentieth century.

Proponents of public enterprise supported special districts early on, but as they gained popularity among lawmakers as a tool for addressing specific problems on a case-by-case basis, analysts began to stress the need for some sort of regulation or coordination. The National Municipal League sponsored some of the earliest critical studies; alarm about the growing numbers of special districts in metropolitan areas was sounded in the very first issue of the organization's *National Municipal Review* in 1912.⁵⁰ In 1918 another observer expressed concern in the *American Political Science Review* about the haphazard fashion in which these agencies were being created:

It would seem pertinent to inquire to what extent such creation of a special municipal corporation for each urgent improvement can be continued.... From a legal and constitutional standpoint there has yet been no limit to the number of such corporations that may be created over any given area nor to the public purposes for which they may be established. The question is largely one of legislative discretion and good sense. Unfortunately in the past special municipal corporations have developed through patchwork legislation in which there was no conscious attempt to understand the nature of the district nor to foresee the possibilities in its development.⁵¹

By 1925, critics were willing to go further: Thomas H. Reed, professor of Political Science at the University of California Berkeley and the first city manager of San Jose, advocated the wholesale dissolution of special districts in the name of governmental integration.⁵² In part as a reaction against special districts, a “regionalist” movement started to take shape, dedicated to reversing the trend toward metropolitan area governmental fragmentation.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

⁵⁰ John Nolan cited in G. Ross Stephens and Nelson Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 33.

⁵¹ Frederic H. Guild, “Special Municipal Corporations,” *American Political Science Review* 12, no. 4 (1918), 681.

⁵² Reed cited in Stephens and Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government*, 34-35.

⁵³ Also known as the “reform perspective.” For overviews, see Foster, *Political Economy*, 28-33; Stephens and Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government*, 29-50.

Paul Studenski, commissioned by the National Municipal League to undertake one of the first systematic studies of metropolitan governance, was one of the most influential early proponents of comprehensive regional government. In 1930, Studenski issued a critique of the political fragmentation of metropolitan areas that would echo across generations, asserting that it resulted in uneven standards of public services, “sectional treatment of problems that are essentially metropolitan, [and] in radical inequities in the tax resources of the several political divisions.”⁵⁴ Studenski called for reform measures, including the empowerment of counties, local government consolidation and annexation, the regional federations. He also suggested that special districts could continue to be a temporary solution to regional problems, but qualified this carefully: “Special metropolitan authorities have distinct limitations. They are essentially a makeshift. They do not offer a conclusive answer to the problem of integration of government of metropolitan areas.”⁵⁵ Studenski pointed out that special districts were generally created without much consideration of the overall interests of a given area, nor were they subject to significant public discussion or scrutiny:

In almost every instance the creation of a special metropolitan authority has come about as the result of some specific problem of the metropolitan area which had become especially acute and which had attracted the attention of the civic leaders and legislators. Such *ad hoc* districts have quite generally sprung from consideration of a particular metropolitan problem.⁵⁶

He also noted the advantages of such agencies for existing local governments:

The authorities of the central city may not have enthusiastically welcomed a new authority over them, but they have usually been quick to realize the advantages of an arrangement which did not embarrass their taxing and borrowing powers. The governing bodies of the minor municipalities on the other hand have no particular reason to oppose the creation of an authority which was not intended to abrogate their

⁵⁴ Studenski, *The Government of Metropolitan Areas*, 29.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 277.

independence, but which on the contrary would strengthen it by taking care of problems which might otherwise led to annexation.⁵⁷

Ironically, it was the very qualities that made the special district attractive to local politicians and legislators that provoked a chorus of condemnation from experts and intellectuals.⁵⁸

Studenski's observation proved to be prescient. Despite escalating criticism of special districts, the ideals of scientific administration, efficiency and rationality, and business-like government that were the ideological legacy of Progressivism remained compelling. Plus, their advantages as a tool for public administration were impossible to ignore; they were easy to establish, flexible, and could provide a quick fix to a variety of problems. Their business structure, hierarchical organization, and freedom from the uncertainties of legislation or the cumbersome bureaucracies of general-purpose government enhanced their appeal. In the short term, they were unrivaled as a tool for dealing with a crisis. By the late 1940s, the nationwide explosion of special districts was clearly apparent, particularly in metropolitan areas.

The federal public corporation re-appeared with the Great Depression; probably the most significant was the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, established by Congress at the behest of the Hoover administration in 1932. The RFC was swiftly recognized as an important tool and adopted as a key component of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.⁵⁹ Roosevelt

⁵⁷ Ibid., 278.

⁵⁸ Studenski's basic criticisms were repeated by many scholars in the 1930s. Stephens and Wikstrom note that "by the close of the 1930s a widespread consensus prevailed among scholars of metropolitan governmental organization that the fundamental problem of the metropolis was the fragmentation of local governmental structure, resulting in lack of a metropolitanwide political perspective, conflicts between local governments, and sever service problems. The only remedy for this condition involved the establishment of a metropolitan government." Stephens and Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government*, 39.

⁵⁹ The RFC, of course, was joined by a number of similar federal agencies with varying levels of autonomy and independence, comprising the famous New Deal "alphabet soup." Most of them were essentially bureaus, did not last long, and would not qualify as special districts by the 1952 census definition. However, Public Works Administration programs explicitly encouraged the creation of authorities by states to qualify for federal funding. Thomas Corcoran later described the other New Deal agencies as "'spin-offs' from an RFC prototype." Quoted in Arthur M. Jr. Slesinger, *The Age of Roosevelt: The Politics of Upheaval* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company Boston, 1960), 228. See also Albert M. Sbragia, *Debt Wish: Entrepreneurial Cities, U.S. Federalism, and Economic Development* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 128-133.

embraced the public corporation as a means for economic stimulation at the regional level, acting upon this with the creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which he famously praised as “clothed with the power of government but possessed of the flexibility and initiative of private enterprise.”⁶⁰ Federal public corporations had a feedback effect on local policy. Roosevelt encouraged the creation of more special districts around the country, issuing a letter to United States governors urging them to promote the creation of new public corporations at the local and metropolitan level in 1934, and later offering legal assistance and distributing model legislation for adoption by states to facilitate their creation.⁶¹ The widespread creation of housing authorities was an important outcome of New Deal policy, which encouraged them both with explicit recommendations and with funding.⁶²

⁶⁰ Franklin Delano Roosevelt quoted in Robert G. Smith, *Public Authorities, Special Districts, and Local Government* (Washington: National Association of Counties Research Foundation, 1964), 88.

⁶¹ Council of State Governments, *Public Authorities in the States: A Report to the Governors' Conference* (Chicago: Council of State Governments, 1953), 26. United States Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *The Problem of Special Districts in American Government* (Washington, DC: 1964), 12-13; Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 12-13; Victor Jones, *Metropolitan Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), 116; McDiarmid, “California Uses the Government Corporation,” 300.

⁶² Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 116-38; Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Table 1.2: Local Governments in the United States, 1942 to 1972.

	1942	1952	1957	1962	1967	1972	change
Local governments	155,067	116,756	102,341	91,186	81,248	78,218	-49.6%
School districts	108,579	67,355	50,454	34,678	21,782	15,781	-85.5%
Counties	3,050	3,052	3,050	3,043	3,049	3,044	-0.2%
Municipalities	16,220	16,807	17,215	1,800	18,048	18,517	14.2%
Townships	18,919	17,202	17,198	17,142	17,105	16,991	-10.2%
Nonschool special districts	8,299	12,340	14,424	18,323	21,264	23,885	187.8%

Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *1972 Census of Governments* (Washington, DC, 1973), 23.

Although the advent of World War II generally delayed the creation of new agencies, many states adopted enabling legislation to facilitate special districts on the recommendation of the Roosevelt administration and the Council of State Governments.⁶³ After 1945, the groundwork for metropolitan special districts was in place and their numbers exploded. They were stimulated by rapid population growth and the physical expansion of metropolitan areas during the post-World War II era, which led to increased demand for services and exacerbated problems such as pollution, sprawl, and traffic congestion. But their widespread adoption in metropolitan areas also reflected intellectual trends. Regionalism came into vogue among urban policy analysts and intellectuals, who condemned the fragmentation of metropolitan area governments. Prominent scholars and policy analysts called for metropolitan political unification by a variety of means: annexation, city-county consolidation and empowerment of urban counties, and the establishment of new government corporations

⁶³ Council of State Governments, *Public Authorities in the States*, 28.

authorized to undertake multiple functions and regional planning. The regional special district was the easiest and most obvious of these strategies from the perspective of local policy makers, and they were much more likely to win voter approval than more extreme reform measures. Regional special districts provided the means for developing transportation infrastructure, controlling pollution, and providing utilities to rapidly growing incorporated and unincorporated areas, taking on problems that were often outside of the capability or desire of individual counties and municipalities to address.⁶⁴ New regional agencies appeared around the country, but few had authority and power enough to approach the task of planning and governmental coordination at the metropolitan level. There are exceptions: both the metropolitan areas of Portland, Oregon and Minneapolis-St. Paul successfully established comprehensive regional governments, expanding their jurisdiction and powers in the 1970s. However, these agencies were atypical; Donald Norris points out that together they represent only 0.6 percent of metropolitan areas in the United States, and that they often fell short of expectations.⁶⁵ Generally, reform efforts in the 1960s failed and the regional special districts that were created had to be pared down to make them politically palatable and non-threatening to existing local entities. The census statistics on special districts in this period clearly represent the multiplicity of new agencies with regional jurisdictions but strictly limited purposes and authority.

Simultaneously, revenue bonds became the predominant means of funding public enterprise; special districts were usually no longer endowed with the authority to assess taxes,

⁶⁴ Bollens notes that two major metropolitan special districts were created in the St. Louis area, the Bi-State Development District (1949) and the Metropolitan Sewer District (1954), only after attempts for annexation, city-county consolidation, and the creation of a regional federation all failed. Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 61-64.

⁶⁵ Donald F. Norris, "Prospects for Regional Governance Under the New Regionalism: Economic Imperatives Versus Political Impediments," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2001), 561.

nor were their bonds secured by local governments.⁶⁶ This shift distinguished the “authority” as a loose subcategory of the special district form. This was especially the case for discrete large-scale projects such as bridges, mass transit systems, water and sewer systems, and dams, all of which required a very large initial investment. Instead of tax assessments, never popular politically, bonds could be issued and redeemed over a period of years with the agencies’ own revenues. The financing of special districts through user fees was justified by long-held moral attitudes regarding taxation, the belief that the beneficiaries should pay for services and opposition to any redistributive fiscal policies. Its predecessor, the special assessment district, taxed property owners in urban and suburban neighborhoods for local improvements (such as the installation of sewers or the construction of streets and sidewalks) based on the expected increase in value of property.⁶⁷

Revenue bond financing became one of the distinctive characteristics of metropolitan area districts.⁶⁸ While more of a risk for investors and therefore more expensive for the issuer, this financing allowed for even greater independence from political considerations. Typically, the redemption period for special district bond issues in the 1950s and 60s was forty years, and often, the agency was slated for dissolution with their redemption.⁶⁹ The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey became an important institutional model as it increased its scale and power in the 1940s and 50s, reflected in the names of new public corporations. It managed to expand its operations without outside subsidies, relying on the revenues of its

⁶⁶ Smith, *Public Authorities, Special Districts, and Local Government*, 31.

⁶⁷ Robin L. Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1833-1872* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Terrence McDonald, *The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy: Socioeconomic Change and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1860-1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁶⁸ Many define authorities as distinct from special districts, but the boundaries are unclear; Gail Radford calls authorities the “offspring” of special districts, I treat them as one variant, distinguished by their financing exclusively by revenue bonds. Those that meet the requirements for independence are counted as special districts in the census of governments. Radford, “Beyond Political Culture,” 14.

⁶⁹ Smith, *Public Authorities, Special Districts, and Local Government*, 40.

existing facilities, primarily toll roads and bridges, to finance new projects and enlarge its jurisdiction. Its example raised expectations for financial autonomy in new special districts, particularly those involving metropolitan transportation, and increased reliance on revenue bonds. While most special districts have always been single-purpose, the majority of the few multiple-purpose special districts in the United States are in metropolitan areas, intended as limited, functional stand-ins for comprehensive metropolitan government.

The rapid growth in special districts reflects their compelling pragmatic advantages as well as their lasting ideological appeal. Metropolitan areas were facing a variety of critical problems caused by the rapid growth following World War II. Special districts were already a well-established institutional form for local government, with successful precedents in metropolitan areas. The formation of a special district quickly relieved pressure on local officials to address regional problems or to undertake large-scale projects. If their purpose and scope was sufficiently restricted, they did not impinge on the jurisdiction or autonomy of existing governmental entities. Victor Jones explained some of the reasons for creating limited regional special districts from a home rule perspective:

[C]ity and county officials look upon special districts as useful devices by means of which city and county officials may avoid the creation of a general purpose regional government, shift the cost of a service or regulation to taxpayers outside the county or municipality, lay the burden of supporting a particular service upon those who benefit from it, meet a crisis without disturbing current organizational arrangements, or take a particular matter ‘out of politics’ by encapsulating it in an independent single-purpose organization. It is an easy and painless way of eating one’s regional cake and having one’s local cake too.⁷⁰

Even so, special districts allowed for the coordination of policy and planning at least within the boundaries of their mission; planning advocates generally lent their qualified support as a step toward more comprehensive metropolitan government. They also minimized the financial

⁷⁰ Victor Jones, “Regional Councils and Regional Governments in the United States,” (paper presented at the National Conference of the American Society for Public Administration, Detroit, 1981), 10-11.

involvement of existing governments, particularly as revenue bonds became the predominant source of funding. Local governments could pool their collective credit to underwrite the financing of special district projects. Generally, they absolved elected officials from the need to appropriate funds or compromise their ability to take on debt for other reasons. They were not political liabilities—because they were usually headed by appointed officials and administered by nonpartisan professionals, they were insulated from electoral politics, and often avoided public scrutiny and controversy associated with policy-making at other levels of government. And, the corporate organization of these agencies remained an important selling point, particularly to the business interests that often backed their establishment.

Table 1.3: Special District Finances and Distribution, 1942-1972. Financial figures in billions.

	1942	1952	1957	1962	1967	1972
ALL LOCAL GOVERNMENTS						
local governments, United States	155,067	116,756	102,341	91,186	81,248	78,218
outstanding debt of local government	\$ 15.7	NA	\$ 39.3	\$ 58.8	\$ 81.2	\$ 120.7
revenue of local governments	\$ 7.7	NA	\$ 28.9	\$ 43.1	\$ 64.6	\$ 114.8
SPECIAL DISTRICTS						
special districts, United States	8,299	12,340	14,424	18,323	21,264	23,885
special district outstanding debt	\$ 2.4	\$ 3.7	\$ 6.6	\$ 11.7	\$ 17.2	\$ 25.0
special district revenue	\$ 0.1	\$ 1.0	\$ 1.7	\$ 2.6	\$ 3.8	\$ 6.8
METROPOLITAN AREA SPECIAL DISTRICTS						
metropolitan special districts	1,097	2,661	3,180	5,411	7,049	8,054
outstanding debt of metropolitan special districts	NA	NA	NA	\$ 8.3	\$ 12.2	\$ 19.5
metropolitan special district revenue	NA	NA	NA	\$ 1.8	\$ 2.9	\$ 5.1
PROPORTIONATE LOCATION, DEBT, AND REVENUE						
special districts as percentage of local governmental units	5.4%	10.6%	14.1%	20.1%	26.2%	30.5%
percentage of local governmental debt carried by special districts	15.3%	NA	16.8%	19.9%	21.2%	20.7%
special district revenue as percentage of all local governmental revenue	3.9%	NA	5.9%	6.0%	5.9%	5.9%
percentage of special districts located in metropolitan areas	13.2%	21.6%	22.0%	29.5%	33.1%	33.7%
percentage of total special district debt carried by metropolitan special districts	NA	NA	NA	70.9%	70.9%	78.0%
metropolitan special district revenue as percentage of all special district revenue	NA	NA	NA	69.2%	76.3%	75.0%

Sources: United States Bureau of the Census, *Governmental finances in the United States, 1942* (Washington, DC, 1945); United States Bureau of the Census, *Special District Government in the United States* (Washington, DC, 1954); United States Bureau of the Census, *1957 Census of Governments* (Washington, DC, [1957]); United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of Governments: 1962* (Washington, DC, 1963); United States Bureau of the Census, *1967 Census of Governments* (Washington, DC, [1967]); United States Bureau of the Census, *1972 Census of Governments* (Washington, DC, 1974).

Even as their numbers increased almost exponentially, concern about the long-term consequences of these agencies was growing. Following the lead of Studenski and the National Municipal League, a number of prominent scholars took up the cause of regional government to offset ever-increasing governmental fragmentation. Victor Jones pointed out in several influential essays and lectures on metropolitan government that the more special districts increased in number, the less likely it was that centralized, comprehensive metropolitan government could be established. John C. Bollens published one of the first comprehensive analyses of special districts in 1957, condemning them for being “uneconomic,” calling their rapid proliferation a “piecemeal, unintelligent attack on the problems of government... hinder[ing] the orderly development and sound utilization of the resources of an area.”⁷¹ The federal Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) took on the challenge of finding ways to address the problem of governmental fragmentation in metropolitan areas in 1959. Noting that the “bewildering pattern” of local government had been compounded by the growth of suburbs and the uncontrolled creation of new agencies, the ACIR issued model legislation for regional governmental coordination in 1961, urging states to take action.⁷² In 1964 it issued a report on the “Problem of Special Districts” specifically, recommending measures to reduce their numbers, restrict their creation, and “insure effective control” over existing agencies.⁷³ Luther Gulick, known as the “dean of public administration,” also condemned metropolitan area governments for fragmentation.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 255.

⁷² Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *Governmental Structure, Organization, and Planning in Metropolitan Areas* (Washington, DC, 1961), 14.

⁷³ Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *The Problem of Special Districts in American Government* (Washington, DC, 1964).

⁷⁴ Luther Halsey Gulick, *The Metropolitan Problem and American Ideas* 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1962).

Max A. Pock summed up the scholarly consensus on special districts in metropolitan areas in the 1960s:

[The] designation “metropolitan problem” has principally come to serve as a synonym for the proliferation of ineffectual units of local government which, either co-existing side by side or overlapping each other with limited territorial jurisdiction, are pitifully inadequate to the task of rendering urban services or performing regulatory functions that peremptorily demand area-wide jurisdiction and control.⁷⁵

The central irony to all of this criticism was that most of these scholars and experts still supported the creation of new special districts, provided that they were sufficiently large and powerful. Gulick in particular was an enthusiastic supporter of metropolitan authorities. They recommended the consolidation of existing districts into larger units or the creation of multifunction districts or authorities designed to have the scope and authority to carry out regional planning mandates and coordinate the programs of other governmental agencies.⁷⁶ The tragedy was that either the resulting efforts for metropolitan government and planning through comprehensive special districts failed outright, or the proposed agencies were modified and scaled back to such a degree that they ended up contributing to the problem of governmental fragmentation that they were designed to remedy.⁷⁷

From 1942 to 1952, the total number of special districts in the United States went from 8,299 to 12,340, an increase of around fifty percent. During the same ten years, special districts in metropolitan areas more than doubled; they doubled again in the next decade, increasing from 1,097 in 1942 to 5,411 in 1962. Special districts in metropolitan areas tend to be bigger and more powerful, with broader functional and geographic scope than those in rural

⁷⁵ Max A. Pock, *Independent Special Districts: A Solution to Metropolitan Area Problems* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Law School, 1962), 1.

⁷⁶ For example, Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 260-61; Council of State Governments, *The States and the Metropolitan Problem*, 122-23.

⁷⁷ By the 1970s, it was widely agreed that the results of two decades of efforts for metropolitan political integration or regional government were abysmal. In 1973 the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations issued a general condemnation of the previous reform efforts. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *Substate Regionalism and the Federal System* (Washington, DC, 1973).

areas. Multi-county special districts gained numbers starting in the 1920s but exploded after World War II. By 1963, they represented nearly one-half of all special districts in metropolitan areas. In 1962, while less than a third of all special districts were located in metropolitan areas, nearly fifty-seven percent of multi-function special districts were.⁷⁸ By 1972, two-thirds of multiple-function special districts were in metropolitan areas.⁷⁹ Much more significantly, by the 1960s metropolitan area special districts represented more than two-thirds of the debt and revenue of all special districts. Between 1962 and 1972 the revenues of special districts in the United States increased by 166 percent, from just over \$2.5 billion to \$6.8 billion, and their collective outstanding debt more than doubled, going from \$11.6 to \$24.9 billion.⁸⁰ Striking as those increases may be, metropolitan area special districts outpaced the rest: their revenues went from \$1.8 billion in 1962 to \$6.9 billion in 1972, and their outstanding debt went from \$8.3 billion in 1962 to \$19.5 billion in 1972. These figures also reflect the fact that special districts have gotten a much higher, and ever-increasing, percentage of their revenues from their own sources (as opposed to taxes or outside appropriations) than other types of government.⁸¹ Their financial self-sufficiency and capacity to take on debt have always been central to their purpose and attractiveness.

By the late 1960s, a concerted effort to counter special districts was underway in metropolitan areas around the country. Not only were efforts for comprehensive metropolitan area government backed by prominent scholars, they also had the support of industry and business, represented at the national level by the Committee for Economic Development, which published a series of reports starting in the late 1960s urging measures to consolidate

⁷⁸ Bureau of the Census, *Census of Governments: 1962*, 11.

⁷⁹ Bureau of the Census, *1972 Census of Governments*, 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁸¹ Bollens, *Special District Governments*, 67-71; David K. Hamilton, *Governing Metropolitan Areas: Response to Growth and Change* (New York: Garland, 1999), 181-84.

and strengthen metropolitan level government.⁸² The federal government stepped in as well, adding requirements for regional planning to subsidy programs, starting with housing and transportation. The Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1968 encouraged and funded efforts for greater governmental coordination at the regional level; it was followed by the Office of Management and Budget Circular A-95, which provided federal funding for regional planning.⁸³ A variety of proposals for city-county consolidation, regional federations, and new, broad based and powerful government corporations resulted. With a few notable exceptions, these efforts failed. Rather than the elimination or coordination of regional agencies, new entities took on task of planning with little independent agency, generally lacking the authority to develop or implement policy, often in the form of voluntary Councils of Government (COGs) comprised of existing local governments were restricted to advisory roles.⁸⁴ By the 1970s, it was widely agreed that the results of two decades of efforts for metropolitan political integration or regional government were abysmal. As Willis D. Hawley put it in 1976, the metropolitan reform movement had an “almost unblemished record of failure.”⁸⁵ In 1973, the ACIR assessed the outcomes of programs for which it was a leading advocate:

During the 1960s, fragmentation was accelerated by federal areawide grants and planning requirements, by some State governors and legislators being unwilling or unable to grapple with the need for systematic multi-functional planning and development at the State and substate regional levels, and by many county and city officials remaining steadfastly reluctant to change the jurisdictional status quo and reorganize local governments to meet demands for regional services effectively... [T]he major byproduct of these policies were a rapid growth in special districts and authorities, the creation of a multitude of limited-purpose multicounty planning and

⁸² Stephens and Wikstrom *Metropolitan Government*; Richard A. Walker and Michael K. Heiman, “Quiet Revolution for Whom?” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 71, no. 1 (1981): 67-83.

⁸³ Hamilton, *Governing Metropolitan Areas*, 153-55.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 233-34; Melvin Mogulof, *Governing Metropolitan Areas: A Critical Review of Councils of Governments and the Federal Role* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1971); Nelson Wikstrom, *Councils of Governments: A Study of Political Incrementalism* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977).

⁸⁵ Willis D. Hawley, *Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976).

administrative bodies that often operated as separate agency fiefdoms, the establishment of regional councils that usually could not implement the plans they formulated or keep in check the activities of either special districts or substate districts, and the propping up of non-viable general purpose local government units.⁸⁶

The Council of State Governments released a report describing what had become a widely-recognized reality in metropolitan areas: federal programs requiring regional planning were actually increasing the governmental fragmentation and decentralization that they were designed to counteract.

Each areawide program, focused on a narrowly defined problem, carries its own set of requirements for designating geographic boundaries and composition of the local board or agency which may administer it. It has become increasingly difficult to use the same boundaries or to call upon local officials in a coordinated attack upon interrelated problems.

This proliferation of programs and requirements has fragmented local leadership and created a maze of overlapping and duplicative efforts. It has spawned a “functional autocracy” of local agencies, boards and constituencies which is self-perpetuating and resistant to external control by local elected officials or the electorate. Units of local general government are faced with a highly independent system of multi-jurisdictional special districts. Attempts by local elected officials to tailor a coordinated attack upon interrelated areawide problems have been thwarted by their inability to exercise policy control over these federally initiated areawide boards and agencies.⁸⁷

One of the ironic consequences of the effort for metropolitan area government in the late 1960s and the early 1970s was the effective reinforcement of the fragmented structure of local government in metropolitan areas. Existing agencies, including both special purpose and traditional governments, consolidated their forces to fight them, which they did through COGs and by supporting measures for new agencies with only nominal planning authority as an alternative to the creation of comprehensive metropolitan area governments. They also had to increase the capacities of local government to address the problems that generated public

⁸⁶ Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, *Regional Decision-Making: New Strategies for Substate Districts: Substate Regionalism and the Federal System* (Washington, DC, 1973), 11.

⁸⁷ Council of State Governments and National Governors’ Conference Committee on Executive Management and Fiscal Affairs, *Sub-State District Systems* (Lexington, Ky., 1971), 3-4.

support for metropolitan area government in the first place, such as pollution, congestion, and the need for services for rapidly growing populations and to meet new federal planning requirements; the rapid increase in the numbers of regional special districts in the period between 1962 and 1972 reflects the solution that was adopted as an alternative to metropolitan government which might infringe upon local autonomy or threaten “home rule” interests. It is in this context that the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District managed to secure its perpetual existence with its expansion into transportation.

Special Districts in the San Francisco Bay Area

The story of regional special districts in the San Francisco Bay Area demonstrates the continuity in special district development from the Progressive era through the 1970s. It also reflects or predicts general, national trends on the question of metropolitan area government. As elsewhere, support for municipal ownership and public enterprise first expressed itself at the level of city government—San Francisco established the first municipal railway in the country in 1900, and around the same time initiated the damming of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in the Sierra. In 1911, a crucial piece of legislation in the history of California government was signed into law: the Municipal Water District Act. The legislation was drafted and introduced into the state legislature by Assemblyman George Harlan specifically to enable the cities of Marin County, just to the north of San Francisco, to pool their resources to construct dams and develop new water sources. Harlan’s inspiration was the Boston area Metropolitan Water and Sewer District, revealing national cross-currents in the development of the special district as an institutional form. In 1912, the Marin Municipal Water District came into being, but the significance of the legislation did not end there. It provided the model for the

Municipal Utilities Act of 1921, which led to the formation of the Bay Area's first major regional special district, the East Bay Municipal Utilities District (East Bay MUD) in 1923, including Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. This agency constructed a major aqueduct in 1929 to bring the water of the Mokelumne River, one hundred miles to the east in the Sierra, to the Bay Area, and expanded its responsibilities to include sewage treatment in 1944.⁸⁸

The 1911 act was also the template for the 1923 Bridge and Highway District Act, drafted by Harlan. The construction of the Golden Gate was the primary aim of this legislation. No other bridge and highway districts were ever created, in part because of changing state policy; in 1929 the legislature instructed the Department of Public works to acquire all toll bridges in California, and from that point on, even major bridges were constructed by the state as part of the highway system. But the bridge district's close connection to the Municipal Water District provides the agency with a direct kinship to an impressive number of special districts in California as the 1911 legislation had enabled the creation of forty nine municipal water districts throughout California by 1963.⁸⁹

In the meanwhile, a variety of small-scale special districts were created to provide services in the Bay Area. In 1948, John Bollens tallied the special districts in the region, including the Marin Municipal Water District and the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, and came up with a total of 222, though many of these would not be considered independent by census standards.⁹⁰ "The numerous political units that the people in the San Francisco Bay region must watch over are a tremendous burden to any conscientious voter,"

⁸⁸ John C. Bollens, *The Problem of Government in the San Francisco Bay Region* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Administration, University of California, Berkeley, 1948), 95-96; Ora Huth, "Regional Organization in the San Francisco Bay Area—1970" (paper presented at the Regional Conference--1970, Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1970), 10-11.

⁸⁹ Assembly Interim Committee on Water. *Study of Water District Laws* (Sacramento, 1964), 20.

⁹⁰ Bollens, *Problem of government*, 29.

Bollens remarked. “Democracy can function at its best when there are only as many units of government as can be most effectively controlled by popular will. The longer certain units of government continue to exist, the more firmly entrenched become the most interested in seeing their unit continue to operate as an independent body.”⁹¹

More slowly, regional and multi-county special districts also gained in number. The East Bay Regional Park District was established in 1934.⁹² The state legislature created the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Pollution Control Board in 1949 (later renamed the Regional Water Quality Control Board). The Bay Area Air Pollution Control District, including six of the nine eligible Bay Area counties, followed in 1955.⁹³ A group of well-connected activists managed to win enough support in 1969 for the creation of a permanent San Francisco Bay Consideration and Development Commission (BCDC) with significant regulatory powers.⁹⁴ The same year, the San Francisco Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Board was also granted permanent status and the authority to plan and regulate for the Bay Area and portions of three counties to the east that were part of the bay watershed. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, armed with the power to approve federal grant applications from the region’s many other transportation agencies, was created in 1971. In addition, many more multi-county special districts appeared in the post-War period that did not encompass the entire nine-county metropolitan area, including the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (1957) and the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (1956).

Much of the controversy surrounding special district government has been played out in specific efforts for governmental reform in the San Francisco Bay Area over the last

⁹¹ Ibid., 100.

⁹² Ibid., 98.

⁹³ Huth, “Regional Organization in the San Francisco Bay Area—1970”; Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: Metropolis in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 297.

⁹⁴ Huth, “Regional Organization in the San Francisco Bay Area—1970,” 7.

century. The creation of special districts was one part of the large-scale, nationwide reorganization of government that marked the Progressive era. As special districts became a fundamental and increasingly significant element of government over the course of the twentieth century, they shaped local politics and policy—even the functional imperatives of government. Pragmatic considerations may have contributed to the popularity of special district, but their institutional form was shaped by ideology. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District is representative of a multitude of autonomous governmental agencies; its greatest historical significance is as a special district, not in the construction of a bridge. Rather than an outcome, a tool, or a strategy, special districts should be treated as a subject, recognized as independent agents actively influencing the politics and government of metropolitan areas in the twentieth century United States.

II

Opening the Gate

The Construction of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District

At last the mighty task is done;
Resplendent in the western sun,
The bridge looms mountain high...

To north, the redwood empire's gates;
To south, a happy playground waits,
In rapturous appeal;
Here nature, free since time began,
Yields to the restless moods of man,
Accepts his bonds of steel.

Launched midst a thousand hopes and fears,
Damned by a thousand hostile sneers,
Yet ne'er its course was stayed;
But as of those who met the foe
Who stood alone when faith was low,
Ask them the price they paid...

An honored cause and nobly fought,
And that which they so bravely wrought,
Now glorifies their deed;
No selfish urge shall strain its life,
Nor envy, greed, intrigue or strife,
Nor false, ignoble creed...

—Joseph B. Strauss, “The Mighty Task Is Done,” 1937.

The Golden Gate Bridge was a daring project at the time of its inception, a daunting engineering challenge undertaken through an innovative institutional form. The bridge was intended to promote economic development in northern California and to secure the status of San Francisco as the center of the regional economy. Its supporters hoped that it would help

the rural counties to the north prosper in a world increasingly dominated by the automobile, opening the region for suburban development and tourism. San Francisco proponents believed that by providing access to new potential suburbs and a vast northern hinterland, it would help ensure San Francisco's place among the great cities of the United States. A powerful coalition of politicians, newspaper publishers, local business and real estate interests undertook a tenacious, decade-long campaign to realize the Golden Gate Bridge.

While few questioned the desirability of a bridge, many questioned its feasibility and cost. Most controversial, however, was the form of its proposed financing and administration. The creation of a special district to undertake the uncertain and risky project represented an innovative application of a relatively new institution. As an organization, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District manifested an alliance of ideological Progressives with a belief in public enterprise and pragmatic conservatives interested in realizing a risky but potentially immensely rewarding undertaking. It was an autonomous agency with independent revenues and a controversial representational structure, a novel element of Bay Area government that, as the product of a compromise between two very different political factions, almost no one approved of entirely. Conceived of as a tool, a pragmatic compromise for realizing an ambitious public project, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway quickly took on a purpose and agency of its own, bolstered by the institutional autonomy and freedom from oversight that its founders hoped would protect it from corruption. As soon as it was incorporated, it had the resources to promote its interests as an agency; with the passage and sale of its construction bonds, its independence was secure. With the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge, the organization reached its maturity as an institution, securing the wellspring of its power: tolls.

The Redwood Highway

At its inception, the Golden Gate Bridge was the most important mile of the Redwood Highway, a crucial link in the northern California route intended to integrate the region and stimulate its economy.¹ In 1920, California north of San Francisco was sparsely populated and largely undeveloped. All over the country, small-town boosters were scrambling for roads, and northern California leaders were determined not to be left behind.² Automobiles were heralded as the future of transportation, their widespread adoption and eventual ascendance seen both as highly desirable and probably inevitable. The California Highway Commission was established in 1910 in response to these expectations, funded with \$18 million in bonds.³ The federal government also acted to support road construction, passing the Federal Aid Road Act in 1916, creating the Bureau of Public Roads and appropriating \$75 million to fund it.⁴

Northern California boosters hoped that the development of the region's roads would translate immediately into rising real estate values, population growth, and suburban development, imagining tourist-filled autos streaming out of the bustling San Francisco metropolis and infusing picturesque forests and coastlines with money. In order to realize this vision they needed more than just roads—they needed much better access to San Francisco. Prior to the ascent of the automobile, the San Francisco Bay was actually a major advantage to regional transportation, allowing for cheap and easy shipping of a variety of products to the

¹ In 1925, the president of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association asserted that “the building of a bridge across the Golden Gate is the greatest improvement to the Redwood highway that could possibly be considered.” *San Francisco Examiner* July 25, 1925.

² Starting in the first decade of the century, a “good roads” movement took shape, comprised of small town boosters agitating for the improvement of roads and highways to accommodate the increasingly popular automobile. Stephen B. Goddard, *Getting There: The Epic Struggle between Road and Rail in the American Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 50-64; Peter J. Ling, *America and the Automobile: Technology, Reform and Social Change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 38-60; Bruce E. Seely, *Building the American Highway System: Engineers as Policy Makers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

³ John Robinson, *The Redwood Highway... Its Origins and Development* (Sacramento, 1964), 13.

⁴ Seely, *Building the American Highway System*, 47.

markets of San Francisco. Suddenly, the bay became a barrier. Ferries were already transporting thousands of cars and trucks by the 1920s.⁵ The Northbay Counties Association was formed in 1920, both to compete for state and federal subsidies and to advertise to potential motorists.⁶ Soon after, the organization was renamed the Redwood Highway Association, and its efforts were focused on funding a major north-south route intended to be the primary artery for automobiles.⁷

To be sure, at the time most of northern California was hardly wilderness. As their name suggests, the members of the Northbay Counties Association—Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Humboldt, Del Norte and Josephine County in Oregon—were already economically oriented toward San Francisco. The best evidence of the region’s potential for development was probably Marin County, just across the Golden Gate. Marin was a peninsula extending southward toward San Francisco, ridged with mountains sheltering the bay. The fog and mist that often blanketed the county, particularly in its western areas, made its pastures especially productive—since the days of the Gold Rush, Marin was known for its dairy products. Its dramatic, rocky shoreline, pastoral beauty, and easy accessibility had already made Marin a favorite retreat for the leisure class of San Francisco. Starting in 1896, pleasure seekers could enjoy views of the Bay from the prominent Mount Tamalpais on a twisting

⁵ Most of the ferries on the bay were operated by railroad companies (including the extremely unpopular Southern Pacific) and it was clear by the end of the 1910s that they were facing major financial trouble. There was little chance for their expansion. Besides that, the ferries were seen as unreliable and dangerous. These perceptions were later encouraged by bridge backers’ propaganda. E.g., *Sausalito News* October 24, 1930; *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* November 3, 1930; “Bay Bridges,” *The Commonwealth*, September 15, 1925; George H. Harlan, “The Saga of the Ferries,” *Sausalito News* 1941; Sydney W. Taylor, “Traffic Analysis and Report of the Traffic Engineer by Sydney W. Taylor, Jr., vol. 2, *The Golden Gate Bridge at San Francisco California* (San Francisco, 1930), A19.

⁶ Clyde Edmondson, *Building the Redwood Empire... An Epoch of the Adventurous West* ([1937]), carton 49, Redwood Empire Association records, MSS C-A 398, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, (hereafter cited as REA Records); [Edmondson], “Summary References--Redwood Empire Association (1942), carton 49, REA Records.

⁷ Redwood Empire Association, *Brief History of the Redwood Empire Association* ([San Francisco]: Redwood Empire Association, [1936]).

railroad devoted to sightseeing.⁸ Most significantly, Marin already hosted a small population of commuters, many of whom left San Francisco after the earthquake of 1906 and took advantage of several ferry lines to downtown San Francisco. Its promoters described Marin as a “mecca for the homemaker, where suburban life in a beautifully wooded and flowered countryside may be combined with business of the metropolis.”⁹

Napa and Sonoma Counties boasted thriving agricultural economies. With 52,090 residents in 1920, Sonoma was the most populous county north of San Francisco. Sonoma was also the ninth biggest agricultural county in California, producing dairy, poultry, beef, vegetables, and apples. The county led the state in the production of eggs.¹⁰ Some of the best-known and oldest California wineries were located in Sonoma, their products marketed by a powerful San Francisco consortium.¹¹ Resorts, served by rails, attracted significant numbers of pleasure-seekers. Among them was the legendary Bohemian Club, a favorite retreat for the rich and powerful from across the country. Napa, while smaller both in population and in area than its coastal neighbor, also had significant vineyards and productive pasture land.¹² While some Napa and Sonoma products were shipped to eastern markets, the vast majority were consumed in San Francisco, shipped via Petaluma at the southern end of Sonoma County, on ferries operated by the region’s railroad corporation, Northwestern Pacific.¹³

⁸ Ted Wurm and Alvin C. Graves, *The Crookedest Railroad in the World: a History of the Mount Tamalpais Railroad and Muir Woods Railroad of California*, Rev. ed. (Glendale, CA: Trans-Anglo Books, 1983).

⁹ Redwood Empire Association, *Brief History*.

¹⁰ Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States* vol. 4, part 3: Agriculture... (1922), 350-362; Demographic Research Unit California Department of Finance, “Historical Census Populations of California State, Counties, Cities, Places, and Towns, 1850-2000,” (Sacramento, [2001]) <http://www.dof.ca.gov/HTML/DEMOGRAP/Histtext.htm>; Frank Anthony Speth, “A History of Agricultural Labor in Sonoma County, California” (M.A. Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1938).

¹¹ Ernest P. Peninou, *History of the Sonoma Viticultural District: The Grape Growers, the Wine Makers and the Vineyards* (Santa Rosa, CA: Nomis Press, 1998).

¹² The population of Napa County in 1920 was 20,678.

¹³ Simone Wilson, *Sonoma County: River of Time* (Chatsworth, CA: Windsor Publications, 1990).

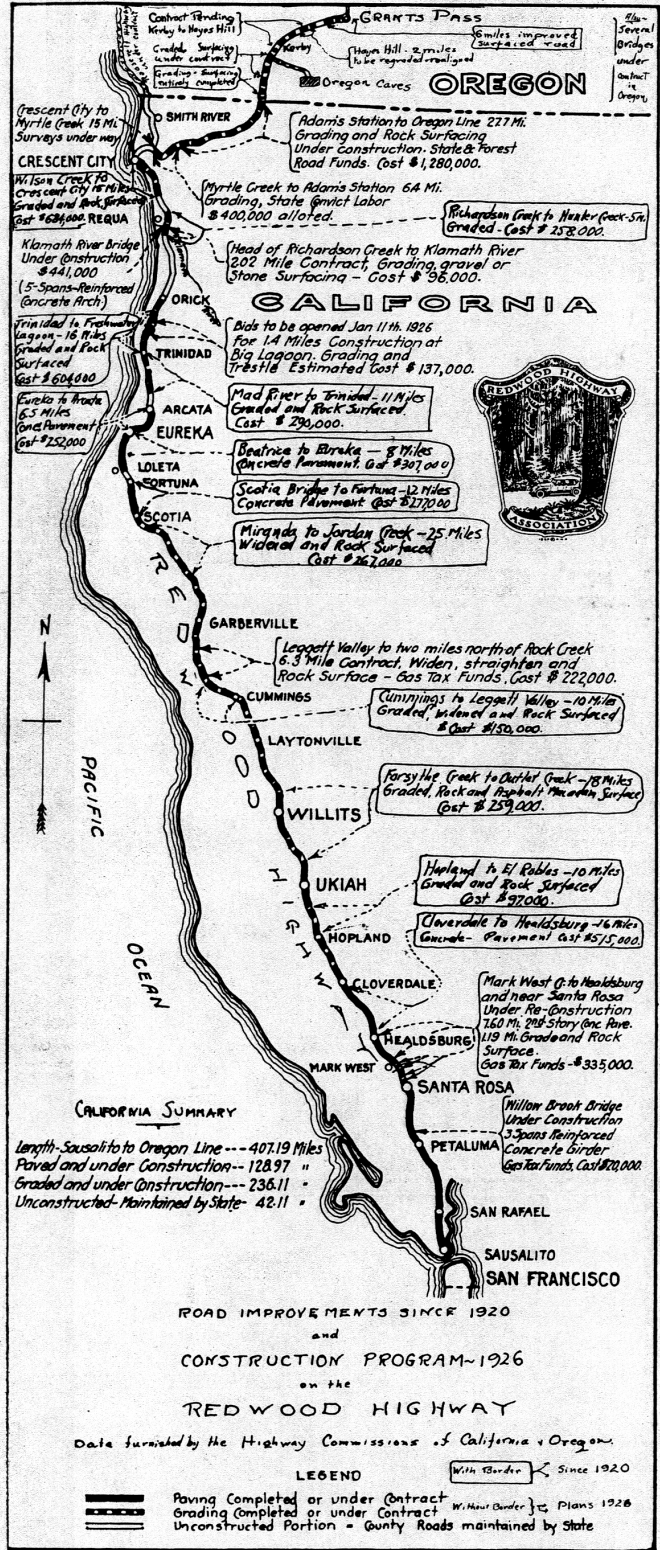
Timber dominated the economies of Humboldt and Mendocino Counties, whose vast, dense redwood forests were harvested via an ever-expanding network of rails and ports. In the nineteenth century, mill towns sprang up along the Pacific coast, responding to the demand for lumber in San Francisco. Bay Area cities had been constructed in the late nineteenth-century, depleting much of the readily-available local timber. High rates of urban growth continued along with demand for timber, and by the turn of the century Humboldt and Mendocino had become major sources of prized redwood lumber. The 1906 earthquake added to the need for lumber for reconstruction, fueling the growth of the industry and the population of the region.¹⁴ By 1920, the combined population of Mendocino and Humboldt topped 60,000.¹⁵

Del Norte, the association's northernmost California county, was the most remote and inaccessible. While Del Norte had some logging activity, in 1920 its economy was sluggish with little prospect of growth; it had only 2,759 residents, no rail service, and only a single, mostly unpaved road traversing it.¹⁶ Its only major town, Crescent City, relied primarily on shipping for transportation through the 1920s. Del Norte partisans hoped fervently that the Redwood Highway, including the Golden Gate Bridge, would change this.

¹⁴ For a history of the timber-dominated economies of Humboldt and Mendocino counties and demonstration of their tight integration with San Francisco markets and capital, see James Michael Buckley, "Building the Redwood Region: The Redwood Lumber Industry and the Landscape of Northern California, 1850-1929" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000).

¹⁵ California Department of Finance, "Historical Census Populations of California."

¹⁶ *San Francisco News* February 17, 1932.



A FEW PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Tremendous improvement of the Redwood Highway and its laterals. See map.

More adequate transportation services across San Francisco and San Pablo Bays.

\$500,000.00 secured from the State and Federal Governments to bridge the Klamath River, replacing the antiquated "raft ferry" service.

Prominent exhibiting of two reels of motion pictures, showing scenic attractions of the Redwood Highway.

40,000 three-color Redwood Highway folders issued in 1921 containing a large, pictorial map, featuring the Redwood Highway, and the attractions in each county along this route.

Distribution of multiple thousands of four-color strip maps of the Redwood Highway to the traveling public annually.

A continuously expanding program of publicity, ---advertising the scenic attractions and resources of the Redwood Highway Empire---through editorial news releases, pictorials, motor-logues, bulletins, contact with tour bureaus, and other media.

Routing of numerous caravans over the Redwood Highway, obtaining valuable publicity therefrom.

Thirty-nine Redwood Highway Foster and Kleiser bulletin boards placed at strategic points on the Pacific Coast.

Traffic over the Redwood Highway increased. For example the following:---

- a. 1922-23---traffic double that of 1920-21, (772 cars daily average.)
- b. 1923-24---gain of 30% over 1922-23, (1000 cars daily)
- c. 1924-25---gain of 22% over 1923-24.

Map 2.1: Map from Redwood Highway Association, *Your Harvest from More Tourists Vacationists Settlers in the Redwood Highway Empire* [1925].

The Redwood Highway was designed to link these diverse economies, to provide an alternative to shipping and rails, and to open all of them to tourism and population growth. The highway was slated to run north from San Francisco, inland through Marin County and Santa Rosa in the Sonoma Valley, then heading northwest through Mendocino County along the south fork of the Eel River toward Eureka on Humboldt Bay. From there, it traced the Pacific coast, crossing the treacherous Klamath River (which was bridged in 1926), on its way to Crescent City. Then, the route turned inland toward Grant's Pass Oregon, traversing some difficult, mountainous terrain on the way; even in the 1920s the average speed on the highway did not exceed five miles per hour.¹⁷

Along this course were all of the major remaining stands of coastal redwood north of San Francisco; boosters named the route after the majestic tree in hopes maximizing its appeal to potential sightseers. By 1917, the entire route from Sausalito to Crescent City in Del Norte had been surveyed and was passable by automobile in good weather.¹⁸ However, construction on the highway had stalled by 1920; while El Camino Real running south from San Francisco was paved, little progress was being made on the Redwood Highway.¹⁹ Redwood Highway boosters described the route:

Prior to 1925 many portions of the original Redwood Highway were nothing more or less than the old type of dangerous, one-way, sometimes impassable dirt roads—replete with deep chuck-holes, washboard surface—extremely crooked and often impassable in the winter...

There was no bridge across the Klamath River; traffic had to be moved across this wide stream in a four-car “ferry”—merely a raft with a gas engine. This contraption served what little traffic there was—when and as tide conditions permitted...

¹⁷ Robinson, *The Redwood Highway*, 5.

¹⁸ Susan R. Schrepfer, *The Fight to Save the Redwoods: A History of Environmental Reform, 1917-1978* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 8.

¹⁹ Robinson, *The Redwood Highway*, 14.

For several miles just south of Crescent City there was no highway. Motorists had to drive over the sand beach and take their chances on a tricky tide. Many a car was lost in the Crescent City surf by motorists unfamiliar with tide conditions.²⁰

While the challenge of traveling north may have appealed to many an early automobile adventurer, these conditions would never support a steady stream of tourists. The creation of the Northbay Counties Association marked the advent of a major, large-scale long-term effort to change this, to realize ambitions for growth and tourism through the development of transportation infrastructure.

From early on a major part of the Redwood Highway campaign and the key to the hopes of its promoters was bridging the Golden Gate. All of these counties had a compelling interest in improving links to San Francisco—with a population of 506,000 in 1920 (four times the population of the Northbay counties combined) and an important port, the city was indisputably the political and economic center of northern California. It was also the key to public financing for the bridge—the real estate of San Francisco, though just a tiny peninsula in comparison to the expanse of forest, farmlands, and rolling hills to the north, was immensely more valuable in securing bonds. The city represented 85% of the assessed value of the bridge district at the time it was created in 1928. Despite its preeminence in northern California, San Francisco leaders were very concerned about the status of their city. It was clear that the city had not recovered from the destruction of the 1906 earthquake with as much vigor as they would have liked.²¹ Los Angeles had surpassed San Francisco in population and other indications of prestige by 1920, including number of automobiles. Almost as disturbing,

²⁰ Redwood Empire Association, *Brief History*.

²¹ For a discussion of dominance of the city in the nineteenth century and the growing status anxiety of San Francisco's civic elite, see Judd Kahn, *Imperial San Francisco: Politics and Planning in an American City, 1897-1906* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 5-27, 57-79, 154-76. See also Roger Lotchin, "The Darwinian City: The Politics of Urbanization in San Francisco Between the World Wars," *Pacific Historical Review* 48 (1979), 357-81

Oakland, San Francisco's East Bay sibling, was gaining on the peninsular city, attracting commerce and traffic from northern California and the central valley and steadily improving its port facilities.²² Efforts to establish regional government or to expand the jurisdiction of San Francisco had been largely unsuccessful, but adding a new link to the very promising rural expanse to the north was a likely way for the city to maintain its status.²³

By 1920, the effort for a bridge had a momentum of its own. James H. Wilkins, a Marin County commuter, first took up the cause in 1916. Wilkins was a reporter for the *San Francisco Bulletin*, a Progressive daily which advocated public enterprise, and had a degree in engineering from the University of California, Berkeley.²⁴ In a lengthy front-page feature, Wilkins argued that “the vast Bay region will never be complete without a bridge across the Golden Gate.”²⁵ At once, he pointed out the advantages of an “empire” for San Francisco and the compelling benefits of a bridge for the counties to the north:

The northern coast counties... with potentialities barely surface scratched, contain a present population that has passed well beyond the two hundred thousand mark. These counties are growing faster, on the basis of merit alone, than any other part of northern California. They offer room and opportunity for at least two million people. Nature has, in a way, tied their fortunes, beyond recall, to San Francisco. That city must always be their final market place—their clearing-house. Nothing can be more

²² The population of San Francisco increased from 416,912 to 506,676 between 1910 and 1920 (by 22%), the population of Los Angeles went from 319,198 to 576,673 (81%), and the population of Oakland went from 150,746 to 216,261 (43%). For a discussion of the booster ethos in San Francisco during this period, see Lotchin, “The Darwinian City.”

²³ I. M. Barlow, *Metropolitan Government* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991), 237-49; Kahn, *Imperial San Francisco*; Lotchin, “The Darwinian City”; Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: Metropolis in Perspective*, Second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); James E. Vance, *Geography and Urban Evolution in the San Francisco Bay Area* 2nd ed. (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1985). The efforts of San Francisco boosters to revive the city and restore its status resulted in a number of regionalist organizations, including the Greater San Francisco Association and a San Francisco Regional Plan Association. The Commonwealth Club was especially active in promoting regional planning and regional public enterprise. These organizations helped gain approval for the Hetch Hetchy project and spearheaded a number of annexation efforts and a proposal for organizing the Bay Area into a number of boroughs. Most of the efforts to consolidate with the East Bay failed and resulted in antagonism and intensified rivalry. The formation of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was the few successful efforts to unite localities for a common purpose in this period.

²⁴ Stephen Cassady, *Spanning the Gate* (Mill Valley, CA: Squarebooks, 1979), 13; Richard Thomas Loomis, “The History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1958), 9-10.

²⁵ *San Francisco Bulletin* August 26, 1916.

important to San Francisco... than the speedy development of a region whose business comes to it automatically, which can never be diverted elsewhere. And nothing can hasten that development more effectively than by opening them to the free circulation of modern life by a bridge across the Golden Gate.²⁶

Wilkins predicted that the bridge would easily pay for itself, pointing out that there was already considerable traffic between Marin and San Francisco via ferry.²⁷ The bridge across the Golden Gate be “the greatest advertisement in the world... the most stupendous, awe-inspiring monument of our modern civilization,” and it was an economic necessity to the northern counties. Soon after the publication of this article, Marin County went on record in favor of a bridge.²⁸ Though the advent of war delayed his efforts, Wilkins began actively promoting the project again in 1918, speaking throughout the region and pushing for legislation, even commissioning plans for the bridge to present to local leaders.²⁹ San Francisco Supervisors officially pledged to support enabling legislation in 1918.³⁰ The *San Rafael Independent*, Marin’s largest daily, gave the most enthusiastic endorsement to Wilkins’ proposal. At the instigation of the Marin County daily, a meeting of Marin’s civic leaders was called in August 1919 and resulted in the first formal organization dedicated specifically to promoting the bridge.³¹ The Marin Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge predicted that the project would “mean a threefold increase in the values of property throughout the county.”³² Among its members was the powerful William Kent, the largest landowner in Marin, former

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ In 1919 ferry companies reported 123,300 vehicular crossings between San Francisco and Marin. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies* by Joseph B. Strauss, vol. 1, *The Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco, California* (San Francisco, 1930), 1, A19.

²⁸ Loomis, “History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge,” 13.

²⁹ Ibid., 11-13; *Marin Journal* April 28, July 14, 1921.

³⁰ San Francisco Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 16,241, November 12, 1918, box 8, Charles Derleth Papers, DERLETH, Water Resources Center Archive, University of California, Berkeley, (hereafter cited as Derleth Papers, WRCA).

³¹ Loomis, “History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge,” 16-17.

³² *Marin Journal* August 7, 1919.

United States Congressman, and a well-known and respected Progressive.³³ Supervisors Andrew J. Gallagher and Joseph Lahaney attended the meeting to speak for San Francisco.³⁴ Other northern county booster organizations promised to rally behind the project once Marin started “the ball rolling.”³⁵ This meeting helped set the stage for broader cooperation: Kent and the rest of the Marin committee met soon after with Gallagher, Lahaney, and San Francisco City Engineer Michael M. O’Shaughnessy to plan the next step, an expert assessment of feasibility.³⁶ Their recommendation, along with the endorsement of San Francisco Supervisor Richard J. Welch, led to another unanimous vote by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, this time directing O’Shaughnessy to solicit bids and initial plans for the crossing.³⁷

Significantly, O’Shaughnessy, one of the most important of the bridge’s early proponents, was a commuter, residing in Mill Valley in southern Marin. Northern California partisans had a much more vital and immediate interest in the proposed bridge than did San Francisco officials, and they were the ones who provided the impetus for the project, pushing tenaciously for its realization through years of unexpected delay. Through the Northbay Counties Association and other civic alliances, a regional network of businessmen, real estate interests, and local politicians began to coalesce, growing in power and influence. They provided the leadership, the resources, and the tenacity necessary to realize the ambitious bridge.

³³Richard Walker, *The Country in the City: Urban Environmentalism in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵*Marin Journal* July 24, 1919.

³⁶*Marin Journal* August 14, 1919.

³⁷W. J. Fitzgerald to M. M. O’Shaughnessy, August 28, 1919, in Loomis, “History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge,” 220.

Public Enterprise in San Francisco

No matter how determined or how enthusiastic northern California boosters were, it was obvious from the beginning that no bridge could be constructed without San Francisco's support. Clearly, there was enthusiasm for the proposal in San Francisco, but its political context was very different in the city than it was in the counties to the north. While the unanimous resolutions of 1918 and 1919 seem to suggest that the city's leadership was united behind the project, there was considerable doubt as to whether the expensive and risky project could be justified in terms of its benefit to the city. More significantly, there was no agreement on the means by which a bridge should be undertaken. While in the North Bay counties the campaign for the bridge was a natural extension of efforts to improve roads in the interest of tourism and development, in San Francisco the bridge was understood as a large-scale public works project. At the time that the Golden Gate Bridge project was initiated, San Francisco was embroiled in controversy over these projects, the role of the local state, and the principle of public enterprise.

San Francisco Progressives stood solidly on a platform of municipal ownership of utilities and the promotion of development through public works. The election of James Phelan as mayor in 1897 inaugurated an ambitious program of construction. Phelan had the support of Progressive Governor Hiram Johnson, as well as many other members of a patrician elite that supported public enterprise and an active state. Phelan's primary goal was to provide ample public water and power to support the city's growth by damming the Hetch Hetchy Valley hundreds of miles away in the Sierra. He also initiated the construction of a municipal railway in 1900, the first public rail system in the country. However, his public projects were temporarily abandoned after he left office in 1901. The municipal railway, opposed by the

existing transportation interests, languished. While Phelan continued to pursue the effort to dam Hetch Hetchy even out of office, opposition both by conservatives who viewed the huge scale and cost of the project with alarm and by preservationists such as John Muir who sought to protect the valley itself, effectively blocked the federal authorization necessary to initiate construction.³⁸

The 1911 election of James “Sunny Jim” Rolph as mayor revived the public infrastructure projects initiated at the turn of the century by Phelan. San Francisco Progressives, including William Randolph Hearst, lobbied intensively for the 1913 Raker Act, prevailing over the objections of environmentalists. The act authorized the city to undertake the massive project and stipulate that the power and water that it would generate be owned and distributed publicly. Rolph recruited O’Shaughnessy, a highly regarded engineer who had worked for San Francisco previously, to build the monumental Hetchy Hetchy system, promising him a free hand in its design and administration and the full support of the city in financing the project. As city engineer, O’Shaughnessy quickly became among the city’s most influential public officials, earning the informal title of “the Chief” and working closely with Rolph in advocating new projects.³⁹

San Francisco’s large public works projects began to generate a backlash in the 1920s.

While the municipal railway had overwhelming public support in 1912, it generated

³⁸ On the Hetchy Hetchy project, see Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 100-17; Warren Hanson, *San Francisco Water and Power: a History of the Municipal Water Department and Hetch Hetchy System* (San Francisco, 1985); William Issel and Robert Cherney, *San Francisco, 1865-1932* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 174-76, 82-84; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 275-89. Discussions of San Francisco Progressivism as it evolved from the late nineteenth century through the 1920s include: Phil J. Ethington, *The Public City: the Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); William Issel, “Business Power and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1900-1940,” *Journal of Urban History* 16, no. 1 (1989), 52- 77; Issel and Cherney, *San Francisco, 1865-1932*; Kahn, *Imperial San Francisco*; Terrence McDonald, *The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy: Socioeconomic Change and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1860-1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

³⁹ Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 84-89, 276.

controversy due to its cost, speculation about graft and corruption, and opposition by existing streetcar companies.⁴⁰ Voters were consistently rejecting bond issues for its extension by the end of the 1920s. The first phase of the Hetch Hetchy project, the construction of O'Shaughnessy Dam, began in 1914 and was dramatically over budget by its completion in 1923. The *Chronicle* began to mock "More Money" O'Shaughnessy after repeated additional bond issues. It was clear that funding the rest of the project, including the aqueduct required to actually bring the water to the city, would require a struggle. Conservatives argued that politicians, specifically the San Francisco Supervisors, were out of their league when it came to the administration of infrastructure and that large-scale undertakings were better left to experienced businessmen.⁴¹ Both sides favored the expansion of infrastructure, but the issues of public or private administration and the proper role of local government were very much contested.⁴² While Republicans had dominated San Francisco politics since the Civil War, an increasingly powerful Progressive wing of the party was supported by the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *Call-Bulletin*, both owned by William Randolph Hearst. The *Examiner* proclaimed support for municipal ownership in a byline on its front page. This faction faced off against conservatives led by the de Young family, which owned the *Chronicle*, and the chamber of commerce.⁴³

In addition, another major bridge proposal competed for the attention of San Francisco public enterprise advocates. By 1921 thirteen applications for a transbay link from San Francisco to Oakland had been submitted to the board of supervisors. The project was put on

⁴⁰ Issel and Cherney, *San Francisco, 1865-1932*, 81-82, 172-74; Anthony Perles, *The People's Railway: The History of the Municipal Railway of San Francisco* (Glendale, CA: Interurban Press, 1981).

⁴¹ E.g., *San Francisco Chronicle* January 12, 1929.

⁴² Issel and Cherney, *San Francisco, 1865-1932*, 182-84.

⁴³ For a lively discussion of the politics of San Francisco newspapers and details about the dynasties that controlled them, see Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco*.

hold when the War Department refused permission for a crossing that might interfere with navigation into the bay's major ports. This did nothing to deter San Francisco transbay bridge proponents, who continued to request reconsideration and new hearings on the matter throughout the decade. However, a tug-of-war between conservatives and Progressives crippled the effort. Conservatives favored granting a franchise for the project to one of the scores of private companies that had submitted plans.⁴⁴ The Progressives on the board of supervisors were determined to keep any new span public, arguing that the interest from the private sector only indicated its potential for profitability, and that any revenues should benefit the people directly.⁴⁵ A Progressive sweep in the election of 1925 put municipal ownership advocates in control of the county government and left little doubt that the bridge would be built publicly. However, the opposition was formidable, including competing applicants for a private franchise, shipping interests, and the Southern Pacific Railroad, which controlled most of the ferry lines in operation on the bay at the time as well as much of Oakland's waterfront. Conservative Joseph R. Knowland, former congressman and publisher of the *Oakland Tribune* also opposed a public bridge. East Bay officials refused to agree upon a location for the eastern terminus, and without their endorsement, no specific plans could be presented to the War Department.⁴⁶ After a decade of struggle and two delegations to Washington, one to negotiate with War Department officials and another to support an unsuccessful bill to

⁴⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 17, 1926, January 4, July 29, 1927, April 6, 1928, December 27, 1926, September 20, 1927, July 9, 1928; *San Francisco News* June 20, 1927; *San Francisco Bulletin* June 21, 1928.

⁴⁵ *San Francisco News* September 21, 1927; *San Francisco Examiner* August 11, December 18, 1926, July 31, 1928, August 2, 1928; *San Francisco News* July 28-29, 1927, September 21, 1927, July 31, August 1, 1928; *San Francisco Chronicle* August 9, 1927; *San Francisco Call and Post* July 28, 1928.

⁴⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 28, 29, 1927; *Oakland Tribune* August 28, 1926, January 28, 1927.

overrule them, the San Francisco had made little progress toward realizing a bay crossing to Oakland.⁴⁷

Even as the effort to build a San Francisco-Oakland crossing stalled, the private construction of several other major bridges proceeded without delay. As was the prevailing practice, local governments granted private companies franchises with the right to collect tolls to make their investment worthwhile. In 1923 the American Toll Bridge Company was franchise for a span over the Carquinez strait, and it was completed in 1927; the same company built the Antioch Bridge across the mouth of the San Joaquin River at the bay's inland extreme, which opened to traffic in 1926. The Dumbarton Bridge Company completed the first transbay bridge to accommodate automobiles, twenty-six miles south of San Francisco, in 1927.⁴⁸ The ideological commitment of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to public ownership delayed the construction of a San Francisco-Oakland crossing, indirectly contributing to the refusal of the War Department to grant permission for the span. The Bay Bridge became a reality only after the state took over the project in 1929. The creation of the California Toll Bridge Authority removed the administration and control of the project far enough from the influence of elected officials to satisfy most conservatives. By that time there was the prospect of federal financing for large scale, self-liquidating public works projects.

⁴⁷ A complete account of the pre-1929 effort for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge has yet to be written. This sketch of the issue is primarily based on a survey of newspaper coverage. Newspaper files on the subject include: box 15, John Debo Galloway Papers, GALLOWAY, The Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Berkeley, (hereafter cited as Galloway Papers); and box 12, Charles Derleth Papers, WRCA. Also see "The Bay Bridge Situation," *San Francisco Business*, March 17, 1926; John D. Galloway, "The Transbay Bridge Project of the City of San Francisco," (1929); Franck Havenner, "Reminiscences: Oral History Transcript," ed. Corrine L. Gilb (1953), 76-80; M. M. O'Shaughnessy, "Our Bridge Problem," *San Francisco Business*, March 9 1927, 15, 33; C. H. Purcell, Charles E. Andrew, and Glen B. Woodruff, *Designing and Building the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge* (New York: Engineering News-Record, [1937]), 1-2; San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, "The San Francisco Bay Bridge Problem," *The City*, March 28, 1927, 49-81; Sydney W. Taylor, Jr., "The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge" *Transactions of the Commonwealth Club of California* 20, no. 7 (1925), 266-271.

⁴⁸ Frank M. Courtelyou, "The Dumbarton Bridge" *Transactions of the Commonwealth Club of California* 20, no. 7 (1925), 251-254.

President Herbert Hoover took a personal interest in the Bay Bridge, helping to win necessary approval for the project and to secure its financing with a loan from the federal Reconstruction Finance Corporation in 1931.⁴⁹

The effort to bridge the Golden Gate would probably have had a very different fate had it been left entirely to San Francisco. After all, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge was a much more sensible project. The financial success of the Golden Gate Bridge as a self-liquidating enterprise depended upon speculation, a gamble that the rapid growth and development of the North Bay that its boosters fervently hoped for would actually materialize. A Golden Gate Bridge could never attract sufficient traffic to cover the cost of construction if the region remained as sparsely populated as it was. The Bay Bridge connected two major cities that were already economically interdependent and generated millions of ferry crossings a year, both foot passengers and automobiles. In 1927 there were eighteen different applications for a bridge franchise from private companies eager to profit from a San Francisco-Oakland crossing themselves.⁵⁰ The ongoing battles over other municipal projects made it clear that the problems of organization, administration, and finance for the Golden Gate Bridge had to be solved outside of San Francisco.

In contrast with the proposed San Francisco-Oakland crossing, there was little interest from the private sector in the Golden Gate Bridge. Not only was the financing of the Golden Gate Bridge highly speculative, its engineering feasibility was also in doubt. Its physical location presented formidable geological challenges; the bridge was to connect two steep, rocky shorelines, spanning rough waters that rushed through the deep, narrow outlet of the San

⁴⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 24, 1928, November 27, 1928. For more on the financing and construction of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, see Charles P. Burgess, *San Francisco-Oakland Bay Toll Bridge Revenue Bonds* (San Francisco: Kaiser and Co., 1938); Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area*, 212; Starr, *Endangered Dreams*, 326-28.

⁵⁰ *San Francisco Business* March 9, 1927.

Francisco Bay to the Pacific Ocean. Conducting soundings at the behest of the state legislature in 1920, the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey declared the project unfeasible due to inadequate bedrock and unstable currents.⁵¹ While early estimates were in the range of \$100 million, the San Francisco Supervisors held a reasonable cost to be \$25 million.⁵² It seemed that the bridging the Golden Gate would be prohibitively difficult and costly.

The answer to the technical and financial problems of bridging the Golden Gate seemed to appear in the person of Joseph B. Strauss. In 1919, O'Shaughnessy contacted a number of prominent engineers to submit plans and bids for the project.⁵³ Strauss showed the most interest in the Golden Gate Bridge. Strauss was an experienced bridge builder who had won some recognition for an innovation in bascule bridge design. He worked with O'Shaughnessy previously in designing a ride for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, and constructed a small cantilever bridge for San Francisco.⁵⁴ Strauss graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Cincinnati, but never received any advanced training as an engineer. Instead, he gained practical knowledge of the field in an iron foundry that

⁵¹ Allen Brown, *Golden Gate: Biography of a Bridge* (Garden City, NY Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), 13; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 27; John van der Zee, *The Gate: the True Story of the Design and Construction of the Golden Gate Bridge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 39.

⁵² Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 14.

⁵³ O'Shaughnessy recalled, "I subsequently addressed letters to four or five distinguished engineers, including Mr. Gustav Lindenthal of New York, who is the most experienced engineer in the country of long span construction, Mr. Ralph Modjeski, who has the largest bridge experience of any engineer in the United States and is the recognized leader on all large span construction, Francis C. McMath, president of the Canadian Bridge and Iron Company, Detroit, and Joseph B. Strauss, with whom I had previous experience on a short span bridge. Mr. Strauss has considerable experience with short span bascule bridges, but never to my knowledge attempted previously any design over a 700-foot length span. I received replies from all of those gentlemen. Mr. Lindenthal wrote a most exhaustive letter to me on June 22, 1920, in which he estimated the cost of the bridge within \$56,000,000 without cost of rights of way and without interest during construction." M. M. O'Shaughnessy, "Statement by M. M. O'Shaughnessy, City Engineer, on Golden Gate Bridge," October 11, 1930, box 50, Galloway Papers.

⁵⁴ Brown, *Golden Gate*, 13, 226.

specialized in bridge materials, a series of jobs with engineering companies and the Chicago Department of Sanitary Engineering, and finally as the head of his own bridge building firm.⁵⁵

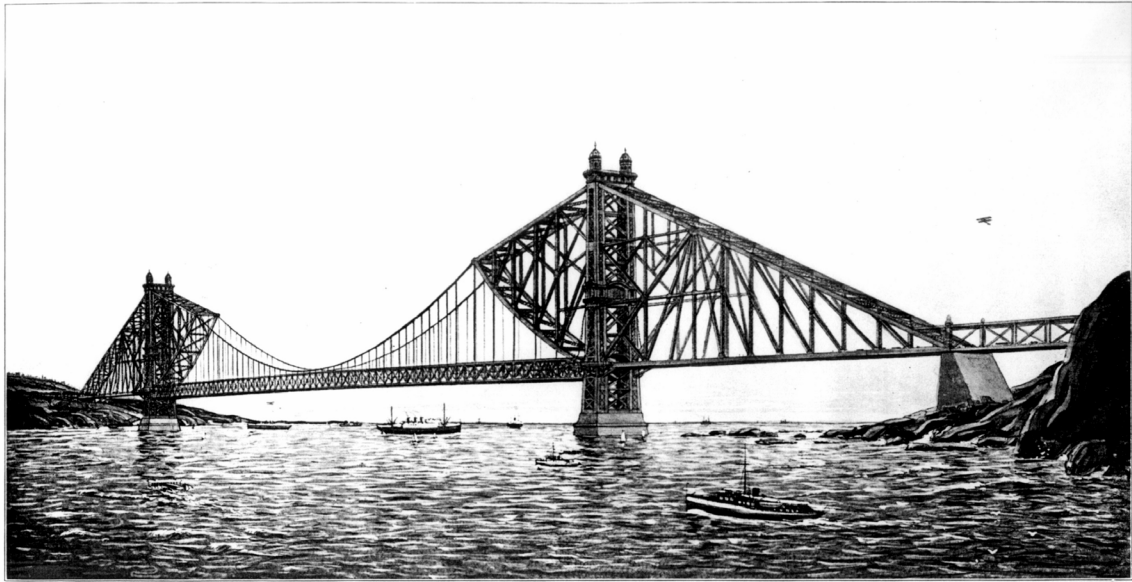
The prospect of building a bridge across the Golden Gate inspired intense interest in Strauss. In his eagerness, Strauss discounted the warnings of other engineers and the discouraging results of 1920 soundings, quickly developing plans for a cantilever-suspension hybrid bridge. Strauss' awkward design caused O'Shaughnessy considerable apprehension. O'Shaughnessy remarked later that Strauss' design "had a greater resemblance to an inverted rat trap than to a bridge and lowered considerably my estimate of [his] capacity for designing a large bridge."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Strauss and O'Shaughnessy released his design along with formal cost estimates in a privately printed booklet in 1921.⁵⁷ Strauss argued that beauty came at a price, and indeed, his \$17 million bridge was dwarfed by the next lowest estimate of \$56 million.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Van der Zee, *The Gate*, 30-38.

⁵⁶ O'Shaughnessy, "Statement on Golden Gate Bridge." Allen Brown, in his otherwise laudatory history of Strauss and his bridge, described these initial plans: "It was a hybrid bridge, a mongrel bridge, an ugly bridge... It looked as if it were supported in the mouths of two grotesque beetles crawling out from either shore, and those beetle-shaped supports for the cantilever sections were so weighty, so ponderous, so view-blocking that Strauss felt it necessary to justify his design..." Brown, *Golden Gate*, 14.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Golden Gate*, 14; Henry Petroski, *Engineers of Dreams: Great Bridge Builders and the Spanning of America* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 276.

⁵⁸ Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 19.



PROPOSED GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.

Figure 2.1: Strauss' original design for a bridge across the Golden Gate. M. M. O'Shaughnessy and Joseph B. Strauss, *Bridging the Golden Gate* (San Francisco, 1921). Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Strauss began to promote the project on his own initiative. He realized immediately that the real support for the bridge lay not in San Francisco, and turned his attention to northern California, touring the region with O'Shaughnessy to present plans for the span.⁵⁹ There, the aesthetics of Strauss' bridge were not a cause for concern; local boosters were eager to rally behind any credible proposal to span the Golden Gate.

Public Enterprise in Northern California

By 1923 enough interest in the project had grown in the area outside the core counties of Marin and San Francisco to motivate the first legal steps toward its realization. Sonoma County banker Frank P. Doyle, president of the Santa Rosa Chamber of Commerce and one of the leaders of the Northbay Counties Association, called a meeting to discuss the bridge in

⁵⁹ Brown, *Golden Gate*, 14-15.

Santa Rosa, Sonoma's county seat.⁶⁰ The event was attended by 156 northern California civic and business leaders along with as many as 100 non-official supporters. Marin's official delegation included the entire board of supervisors and the officials of the Marin Municipal Water District.⁶¹ O'Shaughnessy presented the details of the engineering plans developed by Strauss. A Bridging the Golden Gate Association formed, headed by Sausalito attorney Thomas Allen Box of Sausalito. Sonoma's W. J. Hotchkiss, vice president of the California Packing Company, chaired its executive committee, which also included Doyle and James G. Stafford of Santa Rosa, San Francisco Supervisor Richard Welch, State Assemblyman Frank Coombs of Napa, and Captain I. N. Hibbard of San Francisco.⁶²

The members of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association were no ideologues. They wanted to bridge the Golden Gate by the most pragmatic and economical means possible. It was clear that the bridge had to be built publicly, and that financing the project would be difficult. Many of the bridge's San Francisco supporters were dedicated Progressives, including Welch, Rolph, O'Shaughnessy, and Wilkins. However, a public bridge also had to win the support of conservative northern California businessmen.

It was Marin County that provided the institutional means of bridging this political divide. Attending the 1923 meeting was an attorney already experienced in the formation of special districts, George H. Harlan of Sausalito. Harlan was the general counsel for the Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD), and had introduced the innovative legislation authorizing its creation as a state assemblyman in 1911. Its creation was approved by a six-to-one majority in 1912 with a mission of taking over the county's private water and power

⁶⁰ Total attendance was estimated at 300. *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* January 14, 1923.

⁶¹ *Marin Journal* January 11, 1923.

⁶² Cassady, *Spanning the Gate*, 22; *Marin Journal* January 18, 1923; *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* February 26, 1925.

companies, developing and expanding its water supplies, and acquiring watershed land. Its board of directors included some of the most powerful men of Marin, among them William Kent, O’Shaughnessy, and Robert Trumbull, a major Marin county landholder and another prominent Golden Gate Bridge booster.⁶³ The success and relative popularity of the MMWD made the politics of public works in Marin County very different than they were in San Francisco. The MMWD, Marin’s major experiment in public enterprise, had a strong record of public support, in contrast with San Francisco’s many ventures. It took over for several private water companies that were failing to expand their facilities to accommodate growing demand for water. The MMWD passed its first bond issue easily in 1915, and completed its first major improvement, the Alpine Dam, in January 1919. In addition, its early revenues were greater than anticipated, and the acquisition of watershed land proceeded rapidly. The organization won a major victory in 1920 with the passage of a \$500,000 bond issue to expand its operations and watershed holdings was approved by a five to one majority.⁶⁴

The California Bridge and Highway District was modeled directly after the enabling act for the MMWD, the California Municipal Water District Act of 1911.⁶⁵ The basic purposes of the MMWD—to accommodate growth and development in Marin County by developing an ample and high-quality water supply—were very similar to what boosters hoped to accomplish with the bridge. Many of the board members of the MMWD were major players in the bridge campaign from the very beginning. Harlan adapted the enabling

⁶³ Marin Municipal Water District, *Story of the Marin Municipal Water District* by Leo L. Stanley and Thomas T. Kent ([Novato, CA: Marin Municipal Water District], 1960).

⁶⁴ Marin Municipal Water District, *Marin Municipal Water District* by John Burt ([Novato, CA: Marin Municipal Water District], 1931); Clifford Flack, *Marin Chronology 1880-1930* (n.p., [1961]), 452, Anne T. Kent History Room, Marin County Free Library Civic Center Branch, San Rafael; Marin Municipal Water District, “An Historical Summary of the Marin Municipal Water District,” ([Novato, CA: Marin Municipal Water District], 1972); Marin Municipal Water District Board of Directors, *Report* (n.p., 1916).

⁶⁵ George Harlan to Francis V. Keesling, September 13, 1929, box 61, Francis V. Keesling Papers, M0100, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, (hereafter cited as Keesling Papers, M0100); Joseph B. Strauss, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 22.

legislation for the MMWD to authorize the creation of multi-county bridge and highway districts. Coombs introduced the bill in Sacramento. Only a few months after the formation of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association, the California Bridge and Highway District Act passed by a large majority along with a joint resolution urging the War Department to grant permission for the span.⁶⁶

The California Bridge and Highway District Act set out a rather complex process to establish a new agency. The enrollment of counties started with an application for an ordinance by the board of supervisors of a prospective member county. A petition signed by at least ten percent of registered voters of the area slated for inclusion in the district was also submitted, either with the application for an ordinance or following its passage. After petitions had been filed by all prospective counties, the law provided that individual property owners' protests against inclusion be considered and decided by local superior courts, which would have the authority to exclude specific lands from the district and to determine its boundaries. Once legal challenges had been settled, the California secretary of state would issue a certificate of incorporation. At that time, the agency had the authority to assess taxes. No public vote on the question of membership, the creation of the agency, or its initial funding was required.⁶⁷

Construction bonds, however, required a vote and approval by a two-thirds majority. The citizens of the district had to be reasonably expected to support the bridge at the polls. Harlan anticipated that any public enterprise would be controversial in the more conservative counties north of Marin, and so designed the process of enrolling counties to minimize public discussion and controversy. The enabling legislation gave counties a limited time to pass an

⁶⁶ Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 30; *Statutes of California* 45th reg. sess. (1923) ch. 228, 452-464; A.J.R. 2, 45th reg. sess. (Ca. 1923).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

ordinance for membership once an application for enrollment had been submitted. Harlan advised Hotchkiss to confront supervisors immediately after the enabling act became law:

The Bill has a provision that if the boards of supervisors do not pass the ordinance within sixty days from the date of filing the application, then the matter may be submitted to the electors of the county at an initiative [sic] election... they can hem and haw about the matter for only sixty days... The threat behind the failure to act is the calling of an initiative election in the county, which will cost the county many thousands of dollars. Rather than call such an election, most of the boards of directors will pass the ordinances, and it gives you a basis to start from, where you are not in the position of crawling as a supplicant before the throne.⁶⁸

Bridge backers designed the bill to make enrollment difficult to delay or deny. They wanted to secure the membership of counties in the bridge and highway district before there was much chance for opposition to organize and air objections to its power to tax, its representational structure, or the scope of its authority.

The proposed agency did have impressive powers. It was authorized to acquire “real or personal property of any kind,” and explicitly to purchase or construct “bridges,... roads, tunnels, railroads, streetcar lines, interurban lines, telephone and telegraph lines, foot paths, viaducts, toll gates, toll houses, subways, and all other forms of property necessary or proper to the construction, operation, maintenance or supervision of its works.”⁶⁹ Once it was incorporated, a bridge and highway district would have the right of eminent domain, the power to condemn private property, and to set “rates and tolls and traffic charges” independently. It could incur debt at its own discretion, and, with a public vote, even issue new bonds for other projects. The district could also assess taxes on the property of the district. Initially, charges were limited to ten cents per \$100 per year to support investigation, administration, and

⁶⁸ George H. Harlan to W. J. Hotchkiss, June 27, 1923, box 80, Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District, Iron Mountain Storage Facility, South San Francisco, (hereafter cited as IM Facility). The records of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District have not been organized or formally cataloged. The records used in this dissertation were stored either in the district secretary’s vault (DS Vault) at the main Bridge District offices in San Francisco or at the private Iron Mountain Storage Facility (IM Facility) in South San Francisco.

⁶⁹ *Statutes of California* 45th reg. sess. (1923) ch. 228, 452-464.

operating expenses, but there was no limit on assessments to cover deficits after the bond issue. The act required that any surplus revenue at the end of the year be returned to the counties of the district, making it impossible for the agency to acquire reserves and making property taxes in lean years all the more likely. Despite boosters' assurances that the bridge would pay for itself, it was easy to predict that these provisions would arouse anxiety among property owners.⁷⁰

These powers were not accompanied by any significant accountability, either to the state legislature or to the public. Once the initial bond issue was approved by voters, the agency would have both the discretion and the resources to undertake any of a wide variety of enterprises with utter independence. The clause requiring the return of surpluses added an incentive for expenditure and expansion, and there were no provisions for dissolution with the retirement of its bonded debt. Instead, the entity was explicitly granted the power of perpetual succession. It was left to the auditor to establish a system of accounting to "completely at all times show the financial condition of the district," but there was no requirement for review or outside auditing.⁷¹ The general manager of the district wielded "full power to employ and discharge all subordinate officers, employees and assistants at pleasure, prescribe their duties and... fix their compensation" and "full charge and control of the construction, maintenance and operation of all works of the district."⁷² The general manager was the only officer required to report directly to the district directors, appointees who served four year terms. The board of directors could only meet three times a month and were allowed only minimal compensation and travel expenses, effectively limiting their involvement in day to day operations and administration.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

The most significant way in which the proposed bridge and highway district varied from the water district model was in its representational structure. The MMWD was much more democratic: unlike a bridge and highway district, a majority vote of the citizens of a proposed municipal water district had to authorize its creation. Five of its directors were elected at-large, and although each city or county in the water district appointed one director (a total of eight at the time of its creation), they were all subject to recall.⁷³ Bridge and highway district directors, in contrast, were all to be appointed by the supervisors of the member counties, and could not be recalled. Bridge district representation was loosely based on the populations of member counties, but strongly favored the smaller counties. San Francisco, whose population was nearly ten times greater than the next populous county being considered for inclusion, was limited to five representatives. It was almost certain to end up with less than a majority on the board of directors.⁷⁴ In addition, based on the close ties with county-level government and their involvement in promoting the project, local business leaders expected to be well-represented in the leadership of the new agency. Harlan and the other bridge boosters did their best to ensure that the Golden Gate Bridge, of necessity a public project, was insulated from politics and closely tied to the business interests of its northern counties.

The California Bridge and Highway District Act presented a more corporate and less political organizational model for the construction and administration of a bridge than did the Municipal Water District Act. The institutional architects of the agency intended it to operate as a business. They designed the organization to function independently, headed by a powerful executive and an appointed board of directors, in the realm of local government but

⁷³ *Statutes of California* 39th reg. sess. (1911) ch. 671, 1290-1302; Marin Municipal Water District Board of Directors, *Report* (1916).

⁷⁴ If all eight of the counties originally slated for bridge district membership had enrolled, the board of directors would have had thirteen members. All of the counties would have had one representative except Sonoma with two and San Francisco with five.

outside the sphere of direct public accountability. While the creation of a special district had the support of Progressives such as Rolph, its organizational form represented the adaptation of the principle of public ownership to placate the concerns of conservatives who doubted the competence of public officials to administer and manage large-scale enterprise. Harlan observed that many northern California officials had little experience with such projects: “the supervisors of the various counties, other than San Francisco, Sonoma and Marin, know very little about the bridge project, and intend to be very cautious.”⁷⁵ The spectacle of San Francisco’s municipal public works projects, plagued as they were by contention, inefficiency, budget overruns, and the constant need to present new bond issues for public approval, alarmed northern California boosters. However, the technical and legal problems associated with bridging the Golden Gate, as well as its uncertain prospects for financial success, simply made it untenable as a private undertaking. It could only be accomplished with the support of the state, its financing possible only secured by local property taxes. Conservatives’ eagerness to profit from the construction of a bridge prevailed over their mistrust of public enterprise, and they lent their support to the creation of a special district, designed as it was to insulate the project from the turmoil of San Francisco politics. Absolute independence from political oversight and interference and insulation from electoral politics were the qualities that they hoped would ensure the bridge district’s efficient operation, profitability, and resistance to corruption.

Creating the Bridge District

The leaders of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association toured northern California in the spring of 1923 to promote the project; according to one account, Box and Hotchkiss

⁷⁵ George H. Harlan to W. J. Hotchkiss, June 27, 1923, box 80, GGBHTD IM Facility.

traveled over two thousand miles in a two-week speaking tour.⁷⁶ Strauss and O'Shaughnessy also testified on behalf of the bridge, presenting preliminary plans both in San Francisco and in the northern counties. Meetings attracted ever-larger crowds of local boosters and public officials; representatives of twenty-seven different counties attended a San Francisco rally in June.⁷⁷ "You will have to keep the counties out of this district, rather than urge them to come in, it will be such a money maker," Hotchkiss predicted.⁷⁸ By September 1923, when the enabling act went into effect, representatives of the Association were poised to circulate petitions and persuade northern California county supervisors to commit to the district.

The campaign stopped short, however, when Colonel Deakyne of the Army Corps of Engineers declared his opposition to the project, announcing that a prohibition on a bridge north of Hunter's Point (at the southern end of San Francisco) issued in 1921 after applications for a Bay Bridge were presented, would also apply to the Golden Gate span.⁷⁹ Bridge boosters were forced to delay action to win the necessary permission for the span before enrolling counties. Originally, Bridging the Golden Gate Association members expected that the bridge district's initial tax assessments would pay for detailed engineering plans. They had assurances from Strauss both that a bridge was feasible from an engineering standpoint and that the Secretary of War and several members of Congress had promised him personally that the span would be granted the necessary permissions.⁸⁰ Obviously, Strauss had not communicated with Deakyne, who commented with a tone of indignation that the "scheme to place a bridge across the Golden Gate... has not yet reached my office."⁸¹ His objections

⁷⁶ Brown, *Golden Gate*, 16.

⁷⁷ *San Francisco Bulletin* June 26, 1923.

⁷⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* June 24, 1923.

⁷⁹ *Marin Journal* June 14, 1923; *San Francisco Chronicle* June 24, 1923; Purcell, Andrew, and Woodruff, *Designing and Building the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge*, 2.

⁸⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 16, 1923.

⁸¹ *Marin Journal* June 14, 1923.

meant that money had to be raised privately to pay for plans adequate to win War Department approval. It was not until 1924 that they were ready to forward to Washington. Eager boosters packed a hearing in San Francisco on May 16 to testify on behalf of the project.⁸² Finally, in December the War Department granted conditional permission with the stipulations that all government and military traffic be exempt from tolls and pending approval of the final plans.⁸³

A year and a half after the passage of the enabling act, members of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association could finally start the process of enrolling counties. They specified the eight most likely candidates: San Francisco, Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Mendocino, Humboldt, Lake, and Del Norte. While representatives from all over northern California had expressed interest in the project during the early campaign, the enabling act required the district to be contiguous. The counties had to have a convincing interest in the construction of the bridge, and their population had to have enough enthusiasm to approve a bond issue after the district was formed. In just over a month Sonoma, Mendocino, and Marin, had all passed ordinances to enroll. Napa joined them on April 14. The supervisors of Humboldt, Lake, and Del Norte delayed decisions on the question of membership, as did the bridge district keystone: San Francisco.⁸⁴

As Harlan explained to Hotchkiss, the enabling legislation was drafted with the goal of speed in mind to avoid the organization of significant opposition before the membership of

⁸² The *Chronicle* reported that there were several hundred representatives from counties and civic associations from all over northern California and “not one with a voice against spanning of the Gate.” *San Francisco Chronicle* May 17, 1924.

⁸³ Secretary of War John W. Weeks to Chairman, Commercial Development and Trans-Bay Bridge Committee, Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco, December 20, 1924, in *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 93-G. See also *San Francisco Examiner* June 24, 1923; *San Francisco Chronicle* June 24, 1923.

⁸⁴ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Legislative Chronology* (San Francisco, [1937]), box 66, Keesling Papers, M0100.

counties was established, and local officials were eager to sign on.⁸⁵ The effort for bridge district enrollment had a very different tenor in San Francisco. From an economic and business standpoint, the city had much less to gain. San Francisco was already a major metropolis, and any increase in real estate values resulting from the bridge was expected to be marginal. Nonetheless, boosters were concerned about preserving the status of the city and public enterprise advocates including Rolph and O'Shaughnessy were eager to take on new projects.

After submitting an application for membership to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors on January 26, Bridging the Golden Gate Association members launched a speaking campaign on behalf of the bridge, and appealing to the pride and ambition of its partisans.⁸⁶ Soon after, delegates from all over northern California made the case for joining the bridge district, emphasizing that the bridge would pay for itself, that the bond capacity of the city would not be affected by the bridge district's debt, and that the city stood to gain an empire.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ George H. Harlan to W. J. Hotchkiss, June 27, 1923, box 80, IM Facility.

⁸⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 27, 1931, January 31, 1925; *San Francisco Examiner* January 17, 1925.

⁸⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 14, 1925.

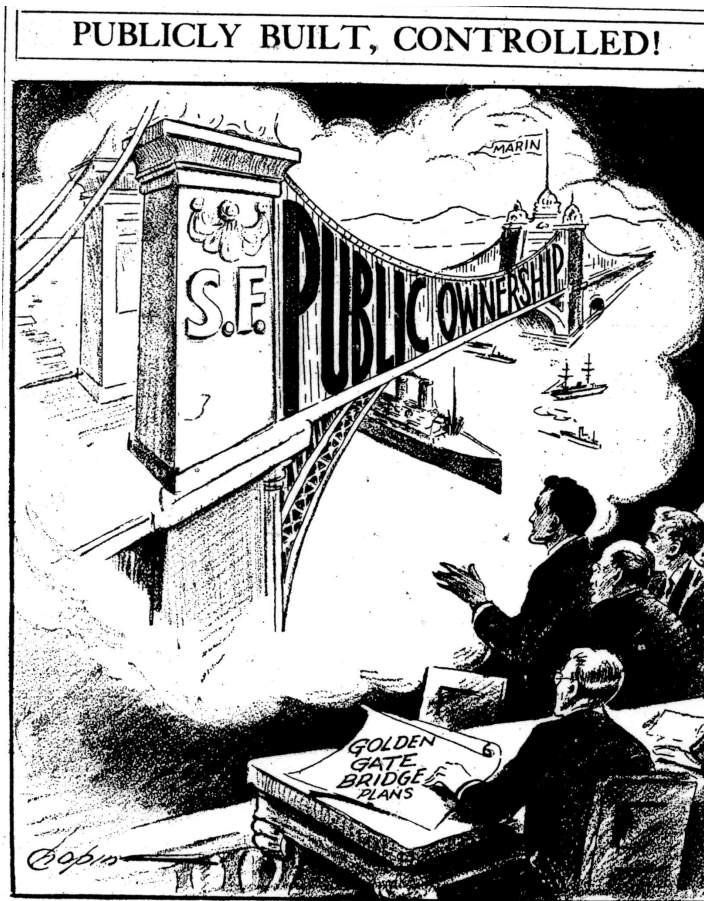


Figure 2.2: *San Francisco Examiner* March 27, 1925.

However, there were many in San Francisco who expressed concern about the wisdom of creating a bridge district before answering questions about the engineering feasibility and economic viability of a bridge. The supervisors voted to postpone their vote on enrollment pending further study; Welch called the decision a “slap in the face.”⁸⁸ Doubt about the project only grew: O’Shaughnessy, unexpectedly reversing his stance, appeared before Commonwealth Club in April asserting that improvements to San Francisco’s own highways

⁸⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 12, 1925.

and infrastructure should take precedence.⁸⁹ The *Chronicle* agreed, arguing that the city already had too many public works obligations and more dire needs:

No one questions the desirability of a bridge across the Golden Gate. At the same time this is so big an undertaking that we must be dead sure we know what we are about before we sign on the dotted line... The city of San Francisco is committed to many great projects, costing large sums. We must finish Hetch Hetchy, which will take many millions more. We are embarked on a great school building program. We have before us extensions of the Municipal Railway urgently needed to provide for city growth. We have talked long about cutting down Rincon Hill. We need reservoirs and firebreaks to ensure safety to the vast ranges of wooden buildings in the western part of the city exposed to constant breezes. We are in pressing need of more sewers...

And we need a bridge between San Francisco and the Oakland shore.

What shall come first? The question is serious. The city is not far from its legal bonding limit. We can undertake no enterprise which by any possibility will impair our power to raise the money to finish Hetch Hetchy.⁹⁰

The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce added another voice for caution on the project, and a vote was delayed.⁹¹

Despite the skepticism in San Francisco, northern county bridge boosters persisted, presenting their case again in March—Coombs threatened that they would consider a bridge to Oakland rather than San Francisco. The *Examiner* enthusiastically repeated boosters' promises that the bridge would "pay for itself" with toll revenue and accused "obstructionist" supervisors of surreptitiously maneuvering for a "privately-built, privately-owned toll bridge."⁹² The paper added a reference to the city's bygone glory to make its point:

If the Supervisors want to create with one stroke a perpetual monument that will make this city's name ring around the world and renew the magical fame which the Golden Gate enjoyed in the days of '49, they have only to vote in favor of joining the Bridge District.⁹³

Convinced, by April the San Francisco Supervisors were ready to sign onto the project even without further studies on the viability or cost of the project.

⁸⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 3, 1925.

⁹⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 4, 1925.

⁹¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 27, 1925.

⁹² *San Francisco Examiner* March 25, 1925; Brown, *Golden Gate*, 24-25.

⁹³ *San Francisco Examiner* March 24, 1925.

The one obstacle to the enrollment of San Francisco that could not be overcome with rhetoric, however, was the representational structure of the bridge district; San Francisco comprised 85% of both the population and the property value of the proposed bridge district, and its officials wanted more than a minority on its board of directors. After negotiations, northern county bridge boosters agreed to amend the enabling legislation to guarantee San Francisco the right to appoint half of bridge district directors. On April 13, San Francisco passed an ordinance to join the district.⁹⁴

San Francisco's public commitment to the Golden Gate Bridge was accompanied by a parallel partnership with the northern California civic organizations behind the campaign for the bridge. Soon after the vote to join the bridge district, San Francisco united with the members of the Redwood Highway Association in the Redwood Empire Association.⁹⁵ The REA represented an institutional innovation, remaking its predecessor—a simple association of local businessmen and politicians—into an innovative quasi-governmental organization. By integrating business interests with local government, the REA claimed legitimacy as a policy-making entity, with the goal of tapping into public revenues. Although the REA was a private corporation, it was designed to function as an association of governments, a self-described “non-profit intercounty government instrumentality.”⁹⁶ Its inclusive supervisors' unit was responsible for determining “highway and legislative” policy for the REA “officially on behalf

⁹⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 6, 1925; San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, “The Proposed Golden Gate Bridge,” *The City*, January 25, 1928. The Bridge and Highway District Act was amended on May 23, 1925 to read: “any county or city and county having a population of more than five hundred thousand the number of directors appointed shall be equal to the total number of directors appointed from all of the counties or cities and counties within the district having a population of less than five hundred thousand.” *Statutes of California* 46th reg. sess. (1925) ch. 387, 714-722.

⁹⁵ Edmondson, *Building the Redwood Empire*; Edmondson, [Resumé], (1942), box 49, REA Papers; [Edmondson], Summary References--Redwood Empire Association.

⁹⁶ Edmondson, *Building the Redwood Empire*.

of constituent taxpayers.”⁹⁷ Its leaders pointed to their involvement in arguing that the REA was a legitimate beneficiary of local tax money, that it “operat[ed] strictly in the public interest.”⁹⁸ REA funding came from annual appropriations from its member counties, and, to a much lesser extent, subscriptions from individual business members and dues from local civic and business associations.

The REA combined lobbying efforts with advertising, all with the end goal of promoting tourism and development. The organization’s members monitored activities in Washington and Sacramento, sending representatives to testify at hearings, assisting in drafting new legislation, and orchestrating letter-writing campaigns. They drafted resolutions and statements of policy, circulating them for adoption among various public and private organizations. In short, the REA worked to unify and direct the voice of northern California behind its program for development and tourism. It was a means by which “a definite highway and legislative program may be established, completely official in nature, in order to present a united front... [to win] the millions of dollars needed for highway improvement and for other public-interest projects.”⁹⁹ The addition of San Francisco to its membership made it one of the most influential civic organizations in California.¹⁰⁰ Most of the bridge directors were or quickly became members of the organization: Doyle and Trumbull were both founding members. Once the agency came into being, bridge district contributions were consistently the REA’s largest single source of revenue. The two organizations, forged in alliance, only became more intimately connected as time went on.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ Redwood Empire Association, *Supplemental Analysis--Based on Historical Fact* (n.p., [1959]), carton 49, REA Records.

¹⁰⁰ The Redwood Empire Association successfully fought off an attempt by the state chamber of commerce to displace it in 1938. See Gail D. Apperson to Lantz B. Smith, December 29, 1936, carton 137, REA Records; [Redwood Empire Association], *Analysis of State Chamber Interference with and duplication of Redwood Empire Association Work*, ([1936]), REA Records.

Challenging the Bridge District

Despite their new success in San Francisco, bridge boosters discovered soon after the city's enrollment that opposition to the project had coalesced in northern California. When they turned their attention to Humboldt and Lake Counties, they discovered that property owners, farmers, and timber interests had awoken to the prospect of new taxes and the negative implications of rising property values for industries that depended upon easy access to inexpensive land. Although the counties that had already signed on represented the vast majority of the property of the proposed district and were probably sufficient to finance the bridge, bridge boosters could not just quit the campaign after San Francisco agreed to join; they had to apply to all of the counties listed in the original applications. Harlan explained their dilemma:

In my opinion the failure of the County of Humboldt to join the district would not invalidate the formation of the district if the provisions of the act are otherwise complied with... This does not relieve the sponsors of the district from the necessity of applying to the Board of Supervisors in every county named in the original ordinances passed in Marin and Sonoma Counties, and proceedings must be started in Humboldt, Del Norte, Lake, Napa and Mendocino and either terminated by the lapse of time above provided for or favorably passed. In my judgment the elimination of a county by failure to pass the ordinances would not result in rendering the proceedings taken in other counties invalid.¹⁰¹

Bridging the Golden Gate Association members, faced with growing opposition, hoped that the District would hold up to legal scrutiny even without all of the counties originally slated for membership. In July, as expected, Humboldt Supervisors announced that they would not pass an ordinance to join, arguing that the construction of a bridge was an undertaking "properly belonging to San Francisco."¹⁰² As the *Examiner* speculated on their recalcitrance,

¹⁰¹ George H. Harlan to W. J. Hotchkiss. June 6, 1925, box 80, DS Vault.

¹⁰² *San Francisco Examiner* July 25, 1925.

it lent credibility to fears that pressure to restrict lumbering operations would accompany tourism:

The people of Humboldt want the bridge and want their county to help build it. But the lumbermen are afraid that the added use of the Redwood Highway as a tourist road and the added nearness of Humboldt County to the outside world, will lead to public agitation against the cutting of the redwood trees. One of them declared, at the recent public hearing, that the automobilists would “get a passing glance at our great lumbering industry and go back home and call us vandals.”

If this be true reasoning, then the redwood interests ought to demand that the whole Redwood Highway be ploughed up or obliterated, for it is that road which taps their territory. It is only the industry with a guilty conscience which needs to fear or resent publicity...

The people of California love the redwoods, and rightly. They do not think the redwood forests should be slaughtered; they do demand, and with justice, that some of the finer groves be forever preserved for the wonderment of posterity.¹⁰³

Already, the San Francisco-based “Save-the-Redwoods League” was pressuring the timber industry to scale back its operations. The “burned stumps and denuded lands” witnessed by influential motorists along the Redwood Highway helped inspire the League’s organization in 1918.¹⁰⁴ Humboldt officials avoided mentioning the implications of tourism for the timber industry directly, but contended that the benefits of a bridge were not worth the risk of tax assessments. The officials of Lake County, which was not directly along the route of the Redwood Highway anyway, also declined to pass an ordinance. Del Norte was the last to join with a three to two vote in August, although its enrollment was something of a mixed blessing. The fact that Humboldt failed to join meant that Del Norte was noncontiguous with the rest of the district.¹⁰⁵ Although the Bridge and Highway District Act had been amended in May to

¹⁰³ *San Francisco Examiner* September 3, 1925.

¹⁰⁴ Schrepfer notes that in the 1920s, promoting roads and facilities to allow for easy access to the redwood groves for automobile tourists was an important strategy of preservationists to win support for the establishment of parks and preserves. Schrepfer, *The Fight to Save the Redwoods*, 20.

¹⁰⁵ Later, financial analysts pointed out that the timber interests in Del Norte (which represented approximately one percent of the district’s assessed valuation) and already had a very high rate of tax delinquency, so had little

allow for a noncontiguous district (along with the change in representation for San Francisco) opponents later presented this in court as part of the case against the agency's legitimacy.¹⁰⁶

To make matters worse for bridge boosters, Mendocino property owners and timber interests began to agitate for withdrawal from the bridge district. The county's grand jury issued a report recommending the move after hearing testimony on the possibility of taxation to support the bridge. 180 of the original petitioners signed a counterpetition, enough to bring the total below the required ten percent, despite the pleas of A. R. O'Brien, the editor of the county's *Ukiah Republican Press*, on behalf of the project.¹⁰⁷ The Mendocino Supervisors officially rescinded their decision to join the bridge district with a new ordinance. All of this was presented to the Secretary of State Frank C. Jordan with a request for withdrawal. As a result, Jordan refused to recognize the bridge district until the California Supreme Court ruled on the question of Mendocino's membership. Mendocino representatives pled vehemently before the court that the proposed district was unjust and undemocratic:

[T]he voters of the various counties involved have no opportunity to say whether they shall or shall not join it... the board of directors is empowered to impose an arbitrary tax rate on the various counties without giving them any say in the matter whatever... [the district] board of governors is appointed, not elected, [and] not subject to recall.¹⁰⁸

Despite these objections, Harlan and Coombs argued successfully that in the original application, ordinance, and petition for Mendocino's enrollment had complied with every provision of the law and could not be rescinded. The court ruled that membership in the bridge district was irrevocable.¹⁰⁹

to lose. Blythe & Co. Inc., *Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District California* (New York, Chicago and Los Angeles: Municipal Statistics, Inc., 1934), 13.

¹⁰⁶ *Statutes of California* 46th reg. sess. (1925) ch. 387, 714-722.

¹⁰⁷ E.g., *Ukiah Republican Press* August 7, 1929; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 10.

¹⁰⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 10, 1925.

¹⁰⁹ *Doyle v. Jordan* 200 Cal. 170 (1926).

Though it ended with a victory for bridge boosters, the case delayed the project for nearly a year, and in the meanwhile all activities on behalf of the Golden Gate Bridge were either on a volunteer basis or financed with private contributions.¹¹⁰ Moreover, frustrated bridge boosters faced still more legal challenges before the bridge district could be incorporated. By October 1927 property owners, mostly from Napa, Mendocino, and Sonoma, had filed over two thousand protests against inclusion in the district.¹¹¹ These individuals, many of them farmers or ranchers, were supported by agricultural and timber interests as well as ferry companies.¹¹² Over several months of hearings, they testified before Siskiyou County Superior Court Judge C. J. Luttrell that their property would not benefit from the construction of the bridge. Their attorney argued that amendments to the bridge district act after the enrollment of the counties nullified their agreement to join, and that the bridge district was unconstitutional because “it deprives citizens of their property without due process of law.”¹¹³ Luttrell ignored the question of the bridge district’s legitimacy but asserted that the bridge did not pose a significant financial risk: “the cost of construction will not be prohibitive as compared with revenues reasonably to be expected from the operation of the bridge, and said project is feasible both from the standpoint of an engineering and financial undertaking.”¹¹⁴ However, Luttrell did release property owners in Napa and Mendocino who would clearly not benefit from the bridge (large swaths of timber land in Mendocino, representing sixty-five percent of the county’s assessed valuation, and wooded hills of little value in Napa were excluded) and explicitly upheld the refusal of Humboldt and Lake Counties to act to join the

¹¹⁰ Harlan to W. J. Hotchkiss, June 6, 1925, box 80, Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District, District Secretary’s Vault, San Francisco (hereafter cited as DS Vault).

¹¹¹ Brown, *Golden Gate*, 26.

¹¹² The California Farm Bureau filed a brief in support of the Napa County protestors. *Wheatley v. Superior Court of Napa County* 207 Cal. 723 (1929).

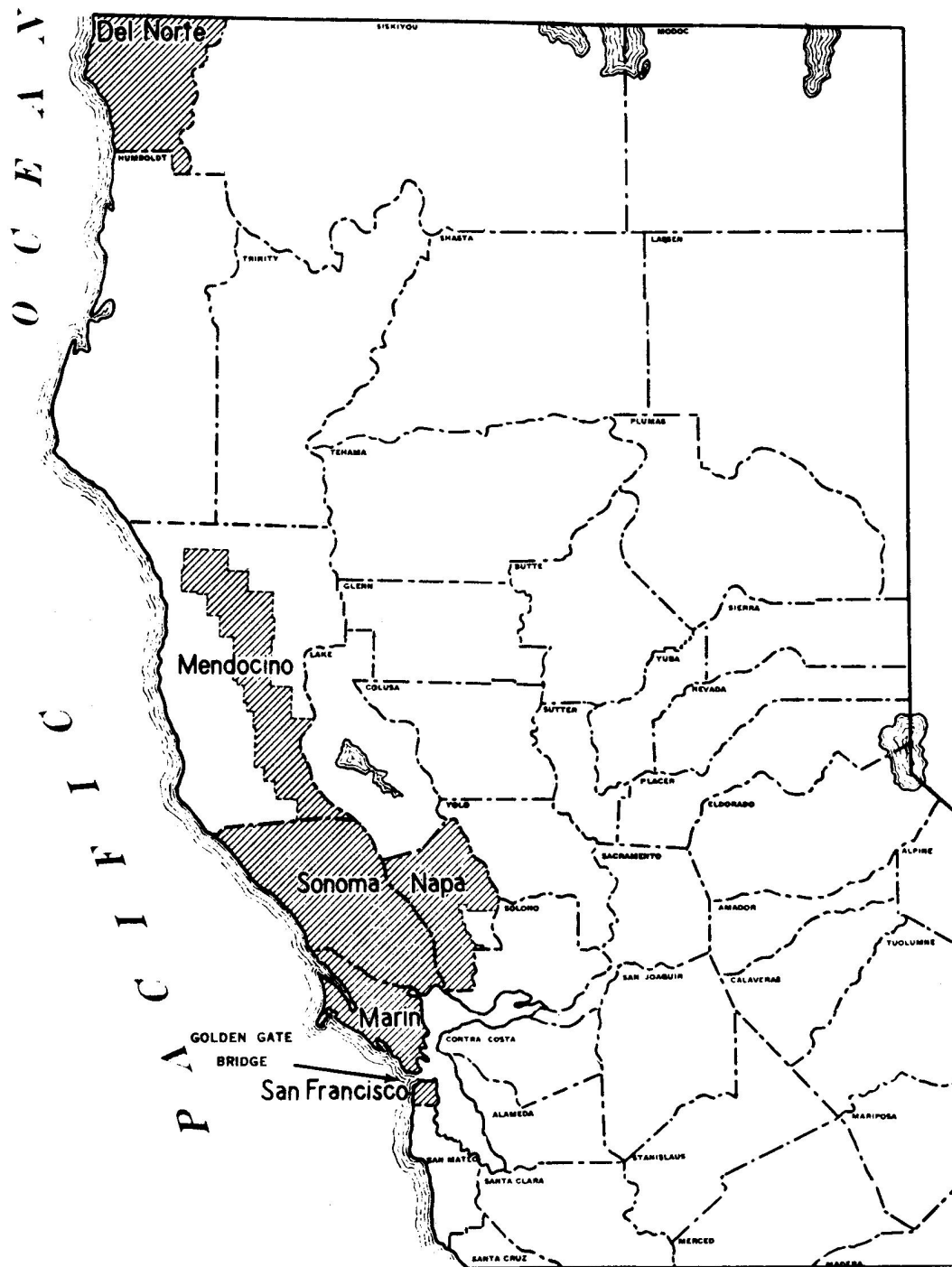
¹¹³ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 25-26, 1927, February 2, 1928.

¹¹⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 2, 1928.

district.¹¹⁵ The secretary of state finally issued a certificate of incorporation for the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District on December 4, 1928, officially establishing the boundaries of the new, autonomous agency.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 4, December 5, 1928; *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* November 7, 1928; *San Francisco Examiner* December 4, 1928. For a physical description of the district, see Blyth & Co., *Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District*.

¹¹⁶ Later, as the bridge district faced the scrutiny of the United States Supreme Court, the Act was amended to allow for a non-contiguous district. Early court decisions upholding the legality of the district ignored the requirement in the original bill. *Statutes of California* 49th reg. sess. (1931) ch. 70, 77-80.



Map 2.2: Map of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. From Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Long Range Planning Survey* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1958, 1959).

Almost immediately after the incorporation of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, the alliance between San Francisco Progressives and northern California business interests began to collapse. From the perspective of local real estate interests and businessmen, the representational structure of the district had a major flaw: there was no explicit provision excluding elected officials from the board of directors. To a certain extent, particularly in the northern counties, bridge boosters were able to persuade county supervisors to follow the recommendations of local chambers of commerce and real estate boards. For example, R. H. Trumbull, a leading Marin “capitalist and agriculturalist,” one of the county’s major landholders and a director of the MMWD, was unanimously endorsed by the Marin Real Estate Board and promoted enthusiastically by Marin’s papers.¹¹⁷ He outmaneuvered Wilkins, the bridge’s first important promoter, a well-known Progressive and by then the mayor of San Rafael, who withdrew his name from consideration. Frank P. Doyle, one of the leading members of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association and a prominent business leader was appointed by Sonoma County along with Joseph A. McMinn, a county supervisor, member of the REA, and president of the First National Bank of Healdsburg. Mendocino County appointed newspaper man A. R. O’Brien, who had been an outspoken and vigorous bridge promoter throughout the effort. Del Norte appointed a dairyman, Henry Westbrook, Jr., one of the largest landowners in the county.¹¹⁸

While these appointments were announced without much controversy, San Francisco’s were bitterly contested. Shocking conservatives, the board of supervisors appointed three of

¹¹⁷*San Rafael Daily Independent* December 12, 15, 27, 1928; *Marin Journal* December 27, 1928, January 24, 1929. Trumbull was one of the founding members of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association. In addition to his position on the district board, Trumbull was also a director two San Rafael banks, the Marin County Mutual and Loan Association, the Marin County Farm Bureau, and President of the Marin Milk Producers Board. Marin Municipal Water District, *Story*; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 10.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

its own as bridge district directors, all without business experience. The San Francisco politicians voted in were Supervisors Warren Shannon, W. P. Stanton (both of whom were prominent labor leaders) and Frank P. Havenner, all of whom had been elected in 1925 at the time of the Progressive sweep in the name of public enterprise. San Francisco also named long-time bridge advocate Richard Welch, who by then was a congressman. The *Chronicle* immediately attacked the appointments:

On principle it is vicious for Supervisors to appoint themselves to administrative commissions...

The presence of Supervisors on the Golden Gate Bridge directorate confuses their functions. The Board of Supervisors is a legislative body. It has no business with administrative functions. Wherever the charter gave it any administrative functions the charter went wrong. Administration is the weakest side of the Board's activities...

Regardless of the personalities involved, Supervisors have no business as directors of the Golden Gate Bridge District. The bridge should not be a political undertaking but strictly business. It should be on the hands of men who will look at it from the business point of view and not the political.

This indefensible self-appointment, if persisted in, will attach political stigma to the Golden Gate Bridge which, at a blow, will destroy public confidence in the project before it even starts. At best the project is problematic and uncertain... But as a majestic proposal it deserves better a better fate than to be killed by politicians.¹¹⁹

The *Chronicle* predicted that the representatives and boosters of the northern counties would be outraged by the political intrusion.¹²⁰ Hotchkiss verified this, expressing the opinion that the members of the Bridging the Golden Gate Association “owe their success largely to the fact that they desired to create and conduct a public utility free from politics, politicians, and political interference” and predicted that, if the appointments stood, the bonds would never pass.¹²¹ He stated flatly that “supervisors as directors could not do justice to their new posts

¹¹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 28, 1928.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Hotchkiss quoted in Brown, *Golden Gate*, 28.

[if] they carried out their work as city and county officials.”¹²² There were rumors of behind-the-scenes maneuvering by Tom Finn, a former state senator and San Francisco’s sheriff from 1910 to 1927, who no longer held office but led the Progressive wing of the Republican Party. Finn, dubbed “Boss Finn” by the *Chronicle*, was associated with Abraham “Murphy” Hirschberg, a prominent figure in San Francisco real estate who had ties to the labor-oriented *San Francisco News*.¹²³ The *Chronicle* interpreted the appointment of Stanton and Shannon as the result of the effort of Finn and Hirschberg to gain leverage on the bridge district and open up opportunities for patronage and lucrative contracts.¹²⁴ A last-ditch effort by Mendocino State Assemblyman R. R. Ingalls to dissolve the District failed in Sacramento. Ingalls protested that the San Francisco had made “a political football of the matter” in appointing elected officials.¹²⁵

In response to the outcry, the San Francisco Supervisors passed a resolution calling for all “political appointees” to quit the bridge board with a thirteen to one vote and the support of Rolph.¹²⁶ Shannon and Havenner resigned almost immediately. Welch and Stanton indignantly refused to step down. Shannon changed his mind and rescinded his resignation, accusing the San Francisco papers of inventing a public outcry when there was none.¹²⁷ Havenner was replaced by Francis V. Keesling, a prominent San Francisco attorney and

¹²² *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 26, 1928; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 12.

¹²³ Francis V. Keesling, who was a leading bridge director from 1929 to 1936, identified Warren Shannon, W. P. Stanton, and Richard Welch as “dominated” by Hirschberg and Finn. He also attributes both his own and William P. Filmer’s appointments to their influence, though both he and Filmer (president of the board of directors) resisted their interference later. Francis V. Keesling to A. R. O’Brien, January 13, 1933, box 65, Francis V. Keesling Papers, M1146, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, (hereafter cited as Keesling Papers, M1146); Francis V. Keesling, *Daily Calendar* (1929-1937), 2-3, Keesling Papers, M1146.

¹²⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 28, 1928.

¹²⁵ *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 27, 1929; *San Francisco Chronicle* March 6, 1929.

¹²⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 1, 1929; *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 3, 1929

¹²⁷ *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 25, 28, February 4, 1929; *San Francisco Chronicle* January 25, 1929. The *Independent* was the only paper to print Shannon’s statement on the matter.

insurance executive with impeccable business credentials.¹²⁸ San Francisco's other two appointments, insurance man C. A. Henry and William P. Filmer, the head of a printing and binding firm, were not questioned.¹²⁹ In the midst of the uproar over San Francisco's appointments, the late decision of Napa Supervisors to appoint their own president, Thomas Maxwell, as a bridge director garnered remarkably little comment.¹³⁰

The new bridge district board of directors appointed the agency's management and elected its principal officers. Filmer won the position of president and Trumbull vice president. Alan MacDonald, a well-connected electrical and mechanical engineer with experience as a contractor on large-scale construction projects (but not bridges specifically), was named general manager.¹³¹ Harlan was appointed attorney. Strauss won the contract for the engineering of the bridge and was appointed chief engineer, though he had to lobby intensively to do so.¹³² His bridge plans and credentials had been publicly questioned by the Joint Council of Engineering Societies of San Francisco in 1926, and the prominent professional journal, the *Engineering News-Record*, attacked his plans for the bridge in a biting 1927 editorial which was reproduced in full by the *Chronicle*.¹³³ Strauss secured the post in part by agreeing to a commission of four percent of the cost of the bridge, which had to cover all engineering costs and the salaries of the other engineers. It was well below the

¹²⁸ Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 164; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 11.

¹²⁹ *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 24, 1928; Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 163-64.

¹³⁰ *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 22, 1929.

¹³¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 11, 1929.

¹³² In 1935 Strauss was sued by H. H. Meyers, a Los Angeles promoter who claimed that he had a contract with Strauss for fifteen percent of his bridge earnings in exchange for helping him secure the position. Cassady, *Spanning the Gate*, 29; Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 55-57; Van der Zee, *The Gate*, 76, 226-27; *San Francisco Examiner* March 29, 1935; Keesling, *Daily Calendar*, 99.

¹³³ San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, "The Proposed Golden Gate Bridge," 21-22; *Engineering News-Record* December 1, 1927; *San Francisco Chronicle* December 9, 1927; Van der Zee, *The Gate*, 65.

minimum fee allowed by the rules of the American Society of Civil Engineers.¹³⁴ In addition Strauss agreed to the appointment of an official board of consulting engineers to help make up for his poor professional reputation. Leon S. Moisseiff and O. H. Ammann of the New York Port Authority were named to the engineering board, both leading engineers experienced in long span bridges, along with Charles Derleth, Dean of the College of Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley.¹³⁵ Once Strauss secured the position, he was able to draw upon the talent of his firm's staff to resurrect the bridge's engineering credibility. Although Strauss never hesitated in taking credit for all aspects of the bridge, it was actually designed by engineer Charles Ellis and architect Irving Morrow. Their plans for the graceful, all-suspension bridge that won such fame and praise in later years replaced Strauss' hybrid bridge in 1930.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ *San Francisco Bulletin* August 16, 1929; *San Francisco Chronicle* August 16, 1929.

¹³⁵ van der Zee, *The Gate*, 85-87.

¹³⁶ For an extended discussion of Strauss' relationship with the other engineers of his staff and Ellis' role in designing the bridge, see van der Zee, *The Gate*.

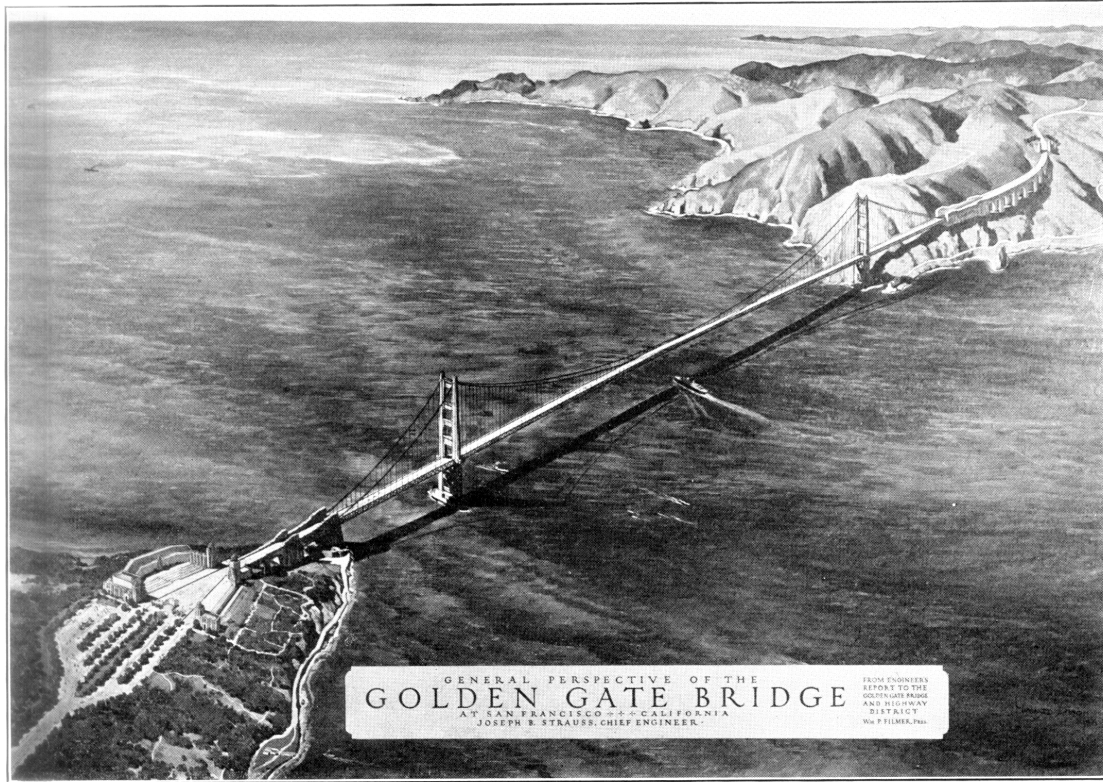


Figure 2.3: The revised plan for the Golden Gate Bridge was submitted in preliminary form to the directors on August 27, 1930 and released to the public in October, less than a month before the vote for the bonds. Courtesy of the Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Berkeley.

A number of important hurdles had to be overcome before a bond issue could be presented to the electorate. In October 1929, the War Department validated its 1924 provisional permit, overriding the concerns of lower ranking officers.¹³⁷ Though bridge district officials did their best to stop them, a second set of hearings on the bridge plan began at the end of June 1930 in San Francisco, in part as a response to the growing opposition of shipping interests to the project.¹³⁸ On August 9 a conditional construction permit was issued for the span, though only over the objections of the Army chief of engineers, and on August

¹³⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 18, 1929; *San Rafael Daily Independent* October 16, 1929.

¹³⁸ Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 60; *San Francisco Examiner* May 15, 1930; *Ukiah Republican Press* May 21, June 25, July 9, 1930.

27, final plans were submitted by the bridge district.¹³⁹ It was not until October 27, the week before voters went to the polls to approve the bond issue, that the War Department granted right of ways for the approaches to the span.¹⁴⁰

In addition to the reluctance of War Department officials, the bridge district continued to face legal challenges. Appealing Lutterell's 1928 ruling, opponents argued before the California Supreme Court that the bridge district was essentially a special assessment district, and that as such, the tax burden had to be determined relative to the benefit to the property owners resulting from the improvement. The Bridge and Highway District Act provided that all property in the district would be taxed equally in the case that assessments were needed and also allowed for the exclusion of vast areas of property that would irrefutably benefit from the project.¹⁴¹ The court upheld the legality of the bridge district, and refused to consider the justice of its provisions for taxation:

[R]egardless of the validity of the taxing provisions of the act, the district, when formed, may become a valid and constitutional agency of the state and that if the directors thereof have been given any unlawful powers, in a proper proceeding, when they attempt to exercise them, such exercise will be controlled or prevented by the courts.¹⁴²

The court determined that the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was a "quasi-municipal corporation," not a special assessment district.¹⁴³

This distinction had profound implications. A special assessment district, a common way to construct public infrastructure in the nineteenth century, such as streets, water systems,

¹³⁹ Cassady, *Spanning the Gate*, 32; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 93-A.

¹⁴⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 29, 1930.

¹⁴¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 1, 1929; *San Rafael Daily Independent* August 1, 1929.

¹⁴² *Wheatley v. Superior Court of Napa County*.

¹⁴³ The court remarked on the close relationship between the various special districts being authorized in California at the time: "We think the corporate structure under consideration here is analogous to a municipal water district, a public utility district, a municipal utility district and a metropolitan water district. The procedure for the formation and the operation of them all is strikingly similar." *Ibid.*, 726.

and sewage systems, was essentially a contract between the state and the residents of the district. Property owners agreed to pay an assessment based on the expected benefit to their property from the proposed improvement. This contract had to be fair, distributing the cost of the project according to the relative increase in individual property values, and the improvement had to be carried out in accordance with its specifications. No permanent agency or organization was created—once the improvement or improvements were complete, the contract had been fulfilled. That the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District had ongoing, permanent government functions in maintaining and administering the bridge distinguished it from special assessment districts. In finding that the bridge district was a quasi-municipal corporation, the California Supreme Court essentially sanctioned the creation of a new government agency, endowing the bridge district with many of the powers that a city might have. The court affirmed the boundaries of the district excluding parts of Napa and Mendocino. The ruling implicitly supported the agency’s ability to undertake new projects, to raise funds, to acquire property—all of the things “necessary to the full exercise of its powers” and its indefinite perpetuation. The court declined to rule on the validity of the bridge district’s taxing powers. In endorsing the creation of an independent agency on par with other forms of local government, the court separated the question of the legitimacy of the organization from the fairness and legality of its actions.¹⁴⁴ The United States Supreme Court threw out an appeal in March 1930.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Analysis of this decision is included in *Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District v. Felt*, 214 Cal. 170 (1931). Also see George H. Harlan to Francis V. Keesling, February 16, 1943; Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Final Report* (Sacramento, 1953), 13-17.

¹⁴⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 27, March 4, 1930; *San Francisco Examiner* February 27, 1930; *Marin Journal* February 27, 1930.

Once the legality of the bridge district had been affirmed and permission for the bridge secured, bridge district officials faced the challenge of financing. By 1930, the cost estimate for the bridge had been raised to \$27,165,000 from the original \$17,250,000. A margin was added, and officials prepared to present construction bonds in the amount of \$35 million to voters. After the War Department issued the construction permit for the bridge in August, bridge district officials announced that the bond issue would be on the ballot in November. It was the first, and only, public vote on the Golden Gate Bridge.

Even as the officials of the new Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District worked to establish the legality of the agency, doubts about the bridge were increasing among San Francisco business and civic leaders. In 1928, the Bureau of Government Research, a non-partisan affiliate of the chamber of commerce devoted to investigating and making recommendations on “public business,” released a cautionary report on the Golden Gate Bridge.¹⁴⁶ While recognizing the potential value of a bridge to San Francisco’s economy and to stimulating growth in northern California, it called the representational structure and powers of the proposed agency into question:

The Bureau is of the opinion that the organization and powers of the proposed Bridge District board... can and should be improved by further amendment relative to the method of choosing directors, the powers of taxation for district purposes, the powers of the district to incur indebtedness and to borrow money, equalization of assessments as a basis for district taxation, and the elimination of individual exemptions.¹⁴⁷

The bureau also reported that the engineering and financial studies that had been done were inadequate to determine the viability of the project: “In the present incompletely-formulated stage of the Golden Gate bridge project, no commitment can be justified beyond that of an

¹⁴⁶ Issel, “Business Power and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1900-1940,” 53-55.

¹⁴⁷ San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, “The Proposed Golden Gate Bridge,” 39.

impartial investigation of the project.”¹⁴⁸ However relevant these objections were, their timing meant that they had little influence. San Francisco and the other counties were already enrolled in the bridge district. The recommendations had little relevance to the bridge district’s legality. There was little bridge district critics could do to modify the agency to prevent the appointment of politicians to its board.

The passage of the California Toll Bridge Authority Act in June 1929 reinvigorated objections to the structure of the organization. The act made it the official policy of California “to acquire and own all toll bridges situated upon or along any part of the highways of the state, with the end in view of ultimately eliminating all charges thereon.”¹⁴⁹ Local financing was clearly not the only option for public projects of such magnitude, and federal financing was on the horizon for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. Even Coombs, the sponsor of the enabling act for the Golden Gate bridge, remarked that the financing as proposed put a “heavy burden on the small counties”:

[T]he bridge is planned as part of the highway system, and will be of vital importance to the Federal Government in its defensive plans for the San Francisco bay... The Federal Government should at least assist in the building, perhaps do all of the preliminary work.¹⁵⁰

The interests of the region, from the standpoint of many bridge district critics, would be best served by the funding and administration of a bridge by extra-local government.

The *New York Times* made an explosive contribution to the discussion of the Golden Gate Bridge in October 1929, praising the prospects and merit of the proposed San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge but deriding the Golden Gate project:

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁹ *Statutes of California* 49th reg. sess. (1929) ch. 763, 1489-1502.

¹⁵⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 15, 1929.

The Golden Gate Bridge is something else again. It seems to have had its origin in the dream of an artist... certainly the Golden Gate Bridge was not inspired by any present or prospective business possibilities.

...On one side, it is true, there is San Francisco, wealthy and populous. But stretching north of the Golden Gate is an area without a single city of more than a few thousand inhabitants, with some splendid farm and orchard land and with millions of acres of wild mountain land empty of human inhabitation except the forest ranger's cabin.

The northern counties hold some very fine people... There *is* plenty of room for growth, too. But 4,700 foot bridge spans cannot be suspended from moral character alone nor even from future hopes.¹⁵¹

This commentary brutally pointed out the basic flaw of the proposed bridge from a business perspective: the likelihood that it would become a major financial drain on the region.

Predictably, the article produced indignant responses—the REA was especially vocal in refuting the contention that the area north of San Francisco was a wilderness.¹⁵² The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce took these concerns more seriously, expressing doubts about the project's financial soundness in the spring of 1930, and taking heed of claims by shipping associations that the bridge would obstruct navigation on the bay and access to its ports. Chamber officials refused to take an official stance on the project, announcing a complete investigation; a few of its leaders even testified against the project at War Department hearings in July.¹⁵³

Opponents of the bridge district wanted to reposition the project within the public sphere to relieve the Bay Area of direct responsibility—to shift the burden of financing to the state and to assign the administration of the bridge to an entity that was much less directly connected with local politicians, more responsive to the regional business leaders as opposed to the small-time real estate interests and local boosters of northern California that had the

¹⁵¹ *New York Times* October 27, 1929.

¹⁵² *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* November 26, 1929.

¹⁵³ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 20, July 2, 1930.

most sway with rural county boards of supervisors. Questions about the advisability of a special district were coming from the San Francisco business elite and the conservative wing of the Republican party, represented by the *Chronicle*, the Bureau of Government Research, and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce.¹⁵⁴ Their concerns reflected a growing awareness of the importance of institutional structures to the outcome public enterprises as they gained acceptance across the political spectrum. The Hetch Hetchy project, the effort to construct the municipal railway in San Francisco, even early efforts to build a transbay crossing, had all been plagued by tumult and conflict of local politics. It was not the prospect of a publicly-financed and administered bridge that they were worried about, it was too much involvement in the project by local politicians.

Bridge Boosters Rally

Conservatives had little choice but to accept the institutional arrangements that had been made for the Golden Gate Bridge once the district had been incorporated. Immediately, the organization was a formidable force of its own, with the resources to counter the most vocal and powerful of its critics. Soon after the board of directors levied their first tax, they appropriated \$50,000 to fund the campaign for the bonds, creating an official bridge district information bureau headed by a full-time public relations officer.¹⁵⁵ Advertising for the bridge began to appear in local papers, on billboards, and over the radio.¹⁵⁶ A committee on information and publicity, formed in August 1930 made up of Filmer, Keesling, MacDonald,

¹⁵⁴ See Issel, "Business Power and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1900-1940"; William Issel, "'Citizens Outside the Government': Business and Urban Policy in San Francisco and Los Angeles, 1890-1932," *Pacific Historical Review* 57, no. 2 (1988), 117-45.

¹⁵⁵ *Rafael Daily Independent* October 16, 1929; *San Francisco Chronicle* October 18, 1929; Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 67.

¹⁵⁶ Strauss, "Golden Gate Bridge," 42.

Harlan, and Strauss, oversaw and coordinated efforts.¹⁵⁷ A volunteer speakers' bureau was organized, made up of bridge district officials, civic leaders and supportive engineers, which were provided with sample speeches and talking points.¹⁵⁸ REA leaders met with bridge directors, agreeing to take responsibility for planning and securing state funding for bridge approaches.¹⁵⁹

The campaign for the bonds was in launched August 1930 after the War Department granted a construction permit and the basic plans for the bridge had been finalized. The bridge district released a three volume report describing the project, including plans for the bridge, discussion of the foundation and geological studies, a toll schedule, traffic and revenue projections, and a variety of endorsements. It included an aggressive pitch for the bridge, promising jobs, growth and development of the Bay Area with San Francisco at its center. Above all, the directors' statement emphasized the bridge project's self-liquidation and the district's potential as a profitable public corporation:

Under the financing plan adopted, the Bridge District lends its credit only, and reliance is placed on the demonstrated ability of toll bridges to redeem their bonds...After the fortieth year, the bridge having retired its bonds and accumulated the substantial surplus of seventeen million-odd besides, will become free...

The user's tax of a toll bridge falls only upon THOSE WHO USE THE BRIDGE. Thus the visitor relieves the local taxpayer and pays his pro rata of the cost of the improvement. The toll bridge also, unlike schools and roads, is a DIRECT REVENUE PRODUCER...

[It] is an ASSET, and INCOME-BEARING investment, a profit-sharing public corporation, in which each taxpayer in the District is a stockholder and receives annual dividends.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, Minutes of the Regular Adjourned Meeting of August 27th, 1930, box 66, Keesling Papers, M0100.

¹⁵⁸ Charles W. Duncan to Board of Directors, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, September 10, 1930, box 61, Keesling Papers, M100; Keesling to A. R. O'Brien, January 13, 1933, box 65, Keesling Papers, M1146.

¹⁵⁹ *Ukiah Republican Press* December 11, 1929.

¹⁶⁰ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 27-28, emphasis in original.

The report promised that tolls would be more than adequate to finance the bridge; it confidently predicted surpluses based on traffic projections assuming population growth of 2.6 percent per year, the demise of ferry service, and an increase in automobile ownership to an average of two vehicles for a four person family.¹⁶¹ The prospective burden of tolls was mitigated with repeated promises that the state could easily take over the bridge once it was constructed and that tolls would be eliminated once its debt was retired.¹⁶² Responding to criticism that there were no specific guarantees with regard to the cost of the bridge, the bridge directors added a highly-publicized pledge that they would not begin construction unless the total of all contracts was less than \$35 million.¹⁶³ To help reassure the bridge's engineering critics, a letter endorsing the new plans for the bridge from Ammann, Derleth, and Moisseiff was included in the report along with positive reports from a geologist and a "regional planning engineer." The directors also played upon San Franciscans' fears of losing ground in terms of population and prestige, reproducing editorials from the *Chronicle* urging the city's leaders to take action to "keep pace" with other cities and the state as a whole.¹⁶⁴

By the end of September, it was clear that the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, despite its controversial nature, was the most likely and most pragmatic means to a Golden Gate Bridge. And, the bridge district's August report did a lot to reassure conservatives. The *Chronicle* was convinced to throw its weight behind the bridge bonds, finally issuing a warm recommendation on September 25, 1930. The chamber of commerce bridge committee released a guarded recommendation on October 2 noting that its

¹⁶¹ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Traffic Analysis and Report of the Traffic Engineer* by Sydney W. Taylor, (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1930), 28-29, A5.

¹⁶² Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies*, 27, 37, 100.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 24; *San Francisco Chronicle* July 2, 1930; *San Francisco Chronicle* October 27, 1930; *San Francisco News* October 27, 1930.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 32-35.

“investigation of the structural features met with difficulties” and that the question of the adequacy of the foundations of the bridge had yet to be determined. Despite lingering questions, they had been convinced by new bridge district numbers that “the bridge, as planned, could be operated from the start without becoming a tax burden on the public,” particularly if the directors kept their pledge to act only if construction bids were within budget.¹⁶⁵ After prolonged debate, the chamber of commerce concluded that the bridge was “worth a tax subsidy to fund operating deficits for a few years if these should occur” and voted unanimously to endorse the bridge.¹⁶⁶

The decision infuriated many members of the organization, including eight past presidents and members of the chamber’s “senior council.”¹⁶⁷ Soon after the vote, they formed a “Taxpayer’s Committee against the Golden Gate Bridge Bonds” to make a last-ditch effort to stop the project. The committee included John D. Galloway, a well-regarded local engineer, and the bridge district’s most visible critic, O’Shaughnessy.¹⁶⁸ Publishing ads and sponsoring speakers against the bond issue, they evoked the specter of large tax assessments if the bridge should not prove possible or profitable and pointed to the promise of state ownership and finance as an alternative.¹⁶⁹ One ad quoted from both the Bridge and Highway District Act and the California Toll Bridge Act to make a case for turning the project over to the state:

[The Bridge and Highway District] Act permits a self-appointed oligarchy to execute in perpetuity its own ordinances, without restriction or control... A new method of financing and building is provided by the California Toll Bridge Act, approved June

¹⁶⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 3, 1930.

¹⁶⁶ Fred R. Muhs to San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, October 10, 1930, box 50, Galloway Papers; San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Bridge Committee, *Report On the Results of the Investigation of the Proposed Golden Gate Bridge* (San Francisco: San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, 1930).

¹⁶⁷ *San Francisco News* October 9, 1930.

¹⁶⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* October 8, 1930; *San Francisco News* October 13, 1930; Loomis, “History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge,” 69; Fred R. Muhs to San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, October 10, 1930, box 50, Galloway Papers.

¹⁶⁹ E.g., *San Francisco Chronicle* October 26, 1930. For Taxpayers’ Committee fliers and advertisements, see box 12, Galloway Papers.

10, 1929. This law was passed for the express purpose of eliminating the irregularities, bribery and graft, that developed under the discredited private ownership and district plans... As the State must, under law, ultimately take over this bridge... the proper procedure is to take steps... to have this done RIGHT NOW. This will eliminate the delays caused by marketing bonds, getting contracts let within the bond limit, and with the strong probability of having to resubmit a much larger bond issue to the electors... As this plan is financed by Revenue Bonds, underwritten by the State of California, no tax burden can ever be imposed...

There have been issued from time to time, vague statements from certain of the bridge proponents, about: whispering campaign, Southern Pacific, Old Guard, shipping interests, ferries, side-walk engineers, anything to keep the public from gaining knowledge of the advantages of building under the California Toll Bridge Act, for that Act deprives them of the only incentive that the building of the bridge means to them, FAT SALARIES or EASY PICKINGS. If this bridge is built under the state toll bridge authority there will be no fat fees to promoters...¹⁷⁰

Elsewhere, the Taxpayers' Committee asserted that the overly political bridge directors had already abused their position with the formation and funding of the bridge district Information Bureau: "under the guise of giving out information about the project, the bridge directors [spent] thousands of dollars of your tax money to exploit this promotion through expensive advertising."¹⁷¹ They objected to the "unlimited power" of the directors, pointing out that the corporate structure of the bridge district and the explicit provisions of the enabling legislation meant that the bridge district had immense potential to expand its operations, "to buy and sell real and personal property, build railroads, electric roads, telephone and telegraph lines; to condemn property, to sue and be sued," and that bridge district property owners would have "no recourse" but to make up for deficits through taxes.¹⁷²

Attacks on the Taxpayers' Committee immediately became the basis of the bond campaign. Bridge supporters portrayed their opposition as acting on behalf of selfish, monopolistic Bay Area ferry companies, most prominent among them the Southern Pacific

¹⁷⁰ Advertisement: "The Truth About the Bridge!" *Sausalito News* October 31, 1930. Similar arguments were made in many other ads. E.g., *San Francisco Chronicle* October 30, 1930

¹⁷¹ Advertisement, *San Francisco Examiner* November 1, 1930.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

Company. The bridge district described opponents of the bonds as puppets: “Those whose interests lie in the preservation of outworn methods of transportation—the ferry boats—will do what they can to defeat progress, and mobilize every avenue of power, pull every string, and manipulate every wire of influence to sustain their rights and preserve their profits.”¹⁷³ They dismissed concerns about the financing of the bridge, arguing that they secretly still wanted a privately built bridge: “the attack on the method of financing the bridge is the last hook upon which the opposition can hang its hat... the argument that private capital should build the bridge is one of the very first advanced by the opposition, and its fallacy has been shown from the start. It is being revived at the eleventh hour to defeat the work of nine years.”¹⁷⁴

And they were not alone; San Francisco papers quickly labeled the Taxpayers’ Committee the “Old Guard” and attributed a variety of sinister motivations and associations to them. Alongside their ads, editorials and cartoons ridiculed their concerns. O’Shaughnessy was the most prominent target of the papers’ scorn. Even the *Chronicle*, which had been the only major paper to take his objections seriously in 1929, published a cartoon calling O’Shaughnessy’s objection to potential taxes “the year’s biggest joke,” referencing the Hetch Hetchy’s budget problems and repeated bond issues.¹⁷⁵

Final Confrontation

The most significant setback in the bond campaign was the October 16 report of the Section on Harbor Development and State Highways of the influential California Commonwealth Club. The report recommended against the bond issue, concluding that “a bridge across the Golden Gate is feasible, and... ultimately necessary, but we do not feel that

¹⁷³ Advertisement, *San Francisco Chronicle* October 22, 1930.

¹⁷⁴ *San Francisco News* October 9, 1930.

¹⁷⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 13, 1930.

the project as proposed has been proven timely from the economic standpoint.”¹⁷⁶ They also criticized the “undue haste” to bring the issue for a vote, little more than two months after the release of the final plans for the bridge: “We would have liked to have seen the district’s plans and estimates reviewed by an entirely disinterested body of technical experts before the people were asked to vote on the bonds.”¹⁷⁷ Strauss, Harlan, Derleth, and Sydney W. Taylor, consulting traffic engineer, were all scheduled to speak at the luncheon where this negative report was announced. Their speeches had been prepared and distributed in advance, all summaries of material included in the August bridge district report. They were followed by H.P. Melinkow, a statistician who presented figures refuting those of the bridge district. Melinkow made the point that, despite all of the assurances of bridge district representatives holding up examples of other toll bridges financed with revenue bonds, the Golden Gate bridge district bonds were general obligation bonds:

Why are not these revenue bonds? If the bridge is going to pay for itself, if it is not going to cost us anything, when, according to the proponents of the bridge and the report of the Chief Engineer revenue bonds are the best way of doing it—why were not these bonds made revenue bonds? Permit me to state a suspicion that perhaps these bonds could not be sold to the investing public because the investing public was not going to swallow any of the estimates or stories about the bridge paying for itself.¹⁷⁸

Melinkow proceeded to undermine the traffic and revenue projections of the District and the claim that the project would ease unemployment. Discussion after the presentation was dominated by opponents.

Bridge district officials, already fully engaged in the campaign to win the passage of the bridge bonds when the negative Commonwealth Club report was released, reacted quickly.

¹⁷⁶ “The Golden Gate Bridge,” *Transactions of the Commonwealth Club of California* 6, no. 9 (1930), 318-19.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

Strauss protested that bridge representatives did not have adequate time to respond to criticism:

[T]hese men calmly undertake in thirty days to make a destructive criticism of one year's careful study and analysis by a board of four engineers... The effrontery of such a procedure is no less remarkable than the unethical effort to create the impression that this project is dishonest and is to be regarded with fear and suspicion... I have thus far endured this campaign of misrepresentation and innuendo patiently, realizing that such methods are unfortunately not unusual whenever a public enterprise runs counter to a private monopoly.¹⁷⁹

When the Taxpayers' Committee began to publish excerpts of the report in advertisements against the bonds, Strauss wrote a letter of protest to the club, urging it to take an official stand on the issue.¹⁸⁰ While the Commonwealth Club never adopted the report of its section, it never officially endorsed the bridge, either.

Despite this setback, the bridge district more than matched the opposition in terms of newspaper ads and propaganda, building up to the vote with full-page ads:

San Francisco today occupies a unique position among American cities... hemmed in on three sides by water. Travelers to and from San Francisco by land must cross the water. This is the penalty she pays for possessing what has justly been termed the world's greatest natural harbor. For years she has struggled to expand with the handicap of inadequate water transportation. With the spectacular development of automotive transportation during the past 25 years, this handicap has made itself felt ever more keenly. Today the point has been reached when the ferries, groaning under their burdens, are no longer sufficient to take care of San Francisco's transportation needs. A means of rapid, continuous transportation must be provided, if San Francisco is to keep pace with her sister cities of the West. The Golden Gate Bridge offers the first real relief for a situation that has become intolerable. Its construction will once and for all time smash the barrier that hems in San Francisco on the north. It will open up the vast hinterland known as the Redwood Empire, furnishing safe and swift transportation to the newest national playground.¹⁸¹

The bridge bonds were approved by a landslide in Marin, Sonoma, and Del Norte, and with a three to one majority in San Francisco. They failed to win two-thirds of the vote in Napa, and

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 348; Joseph B. Strauss to William Fitch Cheney, October 24, 1930, box 61, Derleth Papers, WRCA.

¹⁸⁰ Strauss to William Fitch Cheney, October 24, 1930, box 61, Keesling Papers, M0100.

¹⁸¹ Advertisement, *San Francisco Chronicle* November 3, 1930.

in Mendocino the majority voted against them.¹⁸² However, a two-thirds majority in the entire district was needed, not in each county; the measure passed by a comfortable margin; the final tally: 145,057 to 46,954.

¹⁸² The bond vote totals were: San Francisco 107,040 to 33,264; Marin 12,704 to 1,901; Del Norte 1,449 to 208; Mendocino 874 to 1,020; Napa 3,554 to 1,929; Sonoma 11,693 to 2,235. *San Francisco Chronicle* November 5, 1930.

THE YEAR'S BEST JOKE

By Rodger



Figure 2.4: *San Francisco News* October 13, 1930.

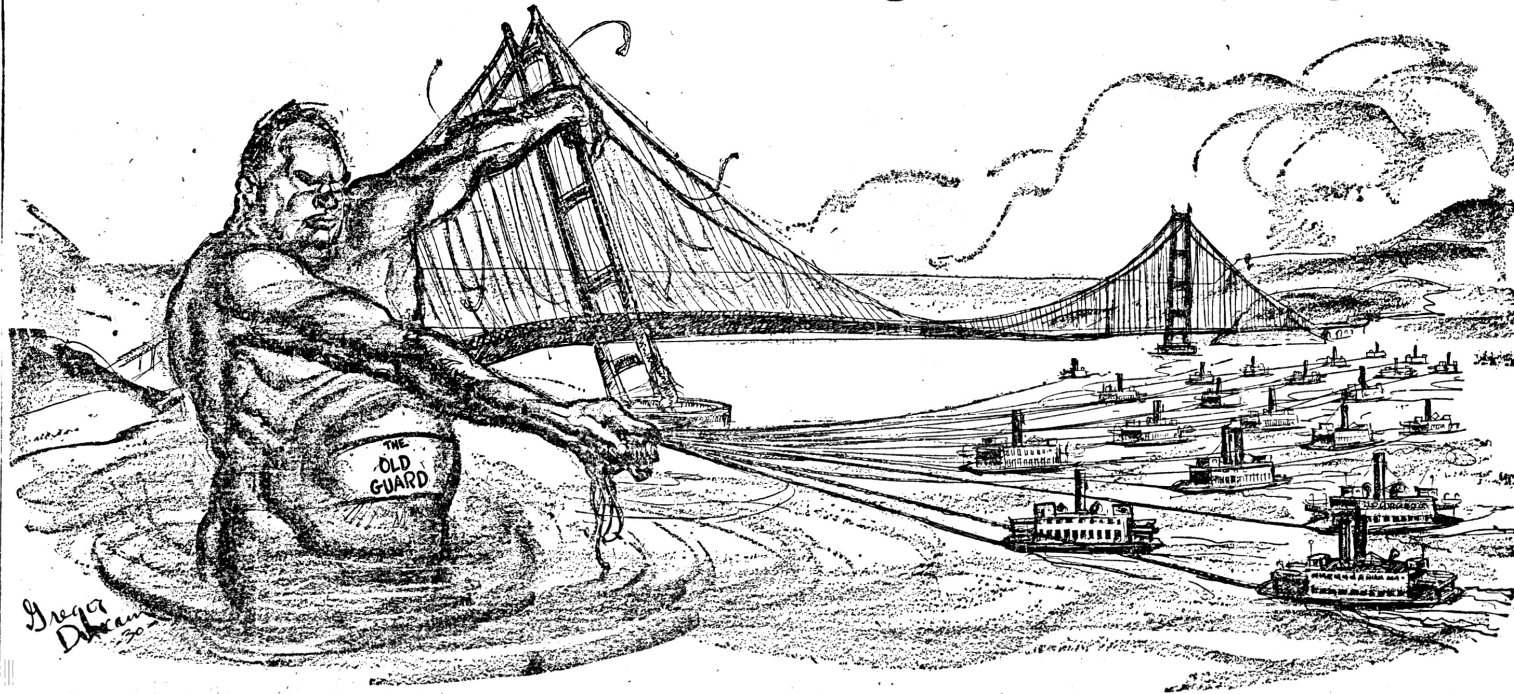
STICK TO YOUR OWN JOB!

By Rodger



Figure 2.5: *San Francisco News* November 6, 1930.

Will the Old Guard Wreck Our Bridge? ❖ ❖ *By Gregor Duncan*



In this cartoon, which will reward your careful study, Artist Duncan shows exactly why a loud minority in our community is fighting the Golden Gate Bridge Bonds. We would not suggest for one moment that any of the gentlemen of the Taxpayers' Committee is as ugly as the artist has pictured the "Old Guard" here, but the spirit of that opposition is uglier than any artist could show it. It is the selfish resistance of a ferry-boat mo-

nopoly to a great and necessary public improvement. That monopoly fears the bridge and is bent on defeating the bonds. Its friends quote figures to show that badly-placed toll-bridges lose money. It mentions the great profits—even greater than expected—earned by the well-placed Carquinez bridge to "prove" that estimates of success are merely guesswork. It is trying desperately to frighten the people of San Francisco into voting

against the Golden Gate Bridge Bonds.

Will the "Old Guard"—dead to the needs of a live and growing and eternally youthful city—succeed in defeating that bond issue? This newspaper does not believe they can. The Old Guard comes into the picture leading a string of ferry boats, representing that private opposition to public welfare and progress—and the voters will NOT be deceived!

Figure 2.1: *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* October 27, 1930.

Selling the Bonds

Before construction of the bridge could commence and the bridge district fulfill its *raison d'être*, the bonds so comfortably approved in the November election had to be sold. Potential financiers were much harder to convince of the viability of the project than were voters, especially as it continued to encounter engineering and legal challenges. By the time the construction bonds were sold, their profitability, security, and legality were iron-clad, though not necessarily to the advantage of the citizens of the bridge district.

Soon after the approval of the bonds by the voters, the bridge district turned to the state legislature to bolster their marketability. Harlan drafted two measures to be introduced in Sacramento at the beginning of the 1931 session: one a resolution in favor of immediate construction, the other to amend the enabling act to improve the salability of the bonds and the financial security of the bridge district. These bills had to compete with two other bills designed to invalidate the bonds entirely and to turn the project over to the state Toll Bridge Authority, but the bridge district prevailed without much of a fight.¹⁸³ The legislature passed a measure confirming and validating the bridge district, its boundaries, its directorate, and its bonds, and all of its actions to date. It added an argument for the urgency of the project based on expected population growth, the inadequacy of existing transportation facilities and the promise of relieving unemployment.¹⁸⁴

In addition to this affirmation, the legislature passed the most significant amendments to the Bridge and Highway District Act to date. They bolstered the security

¹⁸³ *San Francisco Examiner* January 20, 1931.

¹⁸⁴ *Statutes of California* 49th reg. sess. (1931) ch. 70, 77-80.

of the bonds by increasing the financial independence of the bridge district and buttressing its authority to assess property taxes. The requirements in the original act were simple: once operations had begun “no property taxes shall be levied except for deficits, either actually incurred or estimated from the fiscal year in which the same are levied.” It allowed for the creation of a sinking fund “so far as possible” but also required that “if from any cause the revenues of the district shall be more than adequate to pay all of the expenses of the district for the current year any surplus shall be divided... and apportioned to the respective counties of the district.” It stated “the intention of this act to require the district to pay the interest and principal of its bonded debt from the revenues of the district.”¹⁸⁵ The new amendments made the finances of the bridge district considerably more complex: the agency was required to maintain four mandatory funds: one to pay operating expenses, one to provide for repairs and depreciation; one to pay the interest on bonds; and another to provide a sinking fund for the payment of bonds. Each of these funds were to be provided for with either toll revenue or with taxes, and a year’s worth of interest on the bonds had to be maintained in the reserve interest fund regardless of deficits. The amendments also allowed the bridge district to borrow money against anticipated revenues and taxes. Finally, the construction of the bridge was explicitly separated from the liability of the bridge district taxpayers: “all taxable property of the district shall be and remain liable to be taxes as herein provided until the entire principal and interest of the bonded indebtedness of the district has been paid in full.”¹⁸⁶ These amendments were introduced as “urgency measures”

¹⁸⁵ *Statutes of California* 45th reg. sess. (1923) ch. 228, 452-464.

¹⁸⁶ *Statutes of California* 49th reg. sess. (1931) ch. 169, 239-241.

necessary to “public health and safety” and the relief of unemployment. Approved on April 17, 1931, they went into effect immediately.

Nevertheless, both engineering and legal problems continued to delay the sale of the bonds. Questions about the foundation of the south pier raised during early investigations caused concern. The bridge district authorized new borings at the site, the results of which satisfied a panel composed of the bridge district engineers, geologist Andrew Lawson of the University of California, Berkeley, and Allan Sedgwick, geologist at the of the University of California, Los Angeles. Robert A. Kinzie, a mining engineer, was added to the panel at the urging of George T. Cameron, a bridge director and the publisher of the *Chronicle*. All but Kinzie agreed that the foundations of the bridge were adequate.¹⁸⁷ While Kinzie’s findings resulted in several alarmed editorials in the *Chronicle*,¹⁸⁸ the bridge directors disregarded his objections, arguing that the endorsement of the other, much more qualified experts on the panel were more than adequate to proceed.¹⁸⁹ Based on revised plans submitted by Strauss in March, the bridge district issued a call for bids on construction contracts on June 17, 1931, accepting low

¹⁸⁷ Andrew C. Lawson to Board of Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, June 9, 1931, box 50, Derleth Papers, WRCA; Allan E. Sedgwick to Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, June 9, 1931, box 50, Derleth Papers, WRCA; Joseph B. Strauss to Board of Directors, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, June 10, 1931, box 50, Derleth Papers, WRCA. Kinzie characterized the rock at the south pier site as “badly decomposed and shattered serpentine,” comparing it to “plum pudding.” *San Francisco Chronicle* June 18, 1931.

¹⁸⁸ A June 17, 1931 editorial evoked the recent collapse of the St. Francis Dam, a major engineering disaster: “It would have been very gratifying if [the engineering reports] had been unanimous in approval of the bridge plan. The directors could have gone ahead on construction contracts with easy minds and clear consciences and the general public would have been satisfied and happy... The unqualified statement is presented that the shattered serpentine rock upon which it is proposed to build the south pier will not support the structure. The St. Francis dam in southern California was tied into shattered rock. The site had been approved and the dam had been built by excellent engineers. But it went out, causing the loss of scores of lives and of millions in property damage.” See also *San Francisco Chronicle* June 13, 1931. Other papers criticized the *Chronicle* for “publishing harmful propaganda against the Golden Gate Bridge.” *San Francisco Examiner* June 19, 1931; *San Rafael Daily Independent* June 19, 1931.

¹⁸⁹ *San Francisco Examiner* June 11, 18, 1931. For an inside prospective on Kinzie’s motives, see Keesling, *Daily Calendar*, 17-22.

bids well under the ceiling for the project that had been pledged during the bond campaign.¹⁹⁰

In the meantime, several private bids for the bonds were submitted to the bridge district directors in 1931. However, their terms were disappointing, and top financiers were insisting on a court test. The directors eventually rejected all offers, hoping to sell the bonds at a premium once their legality could be conclusively established.¹⁹¹ The bridge district constructed a “friendly” lawsuit to bring the issue before the California Supreme Court, anticipating only a brief delay. Much to the dismay of bridge boosters, bridge opponents immediately entered into the fray, filing *amici curiae* briefs challenging the constitutionality of the bonds.¹⁹² They argued that the bridge district violated the “‘inherent right’ of local self-government,” and therefore could not legally assess taxes. They also contended that the boundaries of the district created inequalities and violated the original conditions of the enrollment of counties. In addition, they objected to the 1931 Bridge and Highway District Act amendments that substantially changed the liability of taxpayers after voters had approved them. The case also attracted the attention of a few important bridge district allies. By 1931, there were several powerful agencies in the state whose character and powers were nearly identical to the bridge district: both the East Bay Municipal Utility District and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California entered opinions as *amici curiae*.

¹⁹⁰ Keesling to A. R. O’Brien, January 13, 1933, box 65, Keesling Papers, M1146; *San Francisco Examiner* June 18, 1931.

¹⁹¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 16, June 19, July 9, 17, 1931; *San Francisco Examiner* July 9, 10, November 17, 1931; Francis V. Keesling to A. R. O’Brien, January 13, 1933, box 65, Keesling Papers, M1146.

¹⁹² The briefs were filed by a prominent San Francisco lawyers on behalf of 92 entities and individuals, including Southern Pacific-Golden Gate Ferries Company. *San Francisco Examiner* August 14, September 16, 1931; *San Francisco Chronicle* August 14, September 16, 1931; *Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District v. Felt*; Loomis, “History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge,” 87-89.

After extended hearings the court upheld the bonds' legality and the district's taxing authority once again on November 25, 1931.¹⁹³ The lone dissenter objected to the 1931 amendments as "radical and revolutionary alterations in the liability of the taxpayers of the district, to their detriment":

[They] relegate revenue from the operation of the bridge to a minor place in the scheme and make the obligation of the taxpayers primary... the responsibility for the bridge, its construction and perhaps for a new bond issue are all lifted from the bondholders and shifted to the shoulders of the taxpayers.

The bonds, which were not readily saleable when voted, have been changed without consent of the voters for the purpose of making them merchantable... Progress in public improvements is laudable, but such progress should not be made at the expense of justice and fair dealing.¹⁹⁴

The majority of the court described the amendment as "of a procedural character," deciding that the original act conferred general taxing powers on the district, and that the changes did not substantially affect the liability of bridge district property owners who were responsible for any potential deficits from the beginning.¹⁹⁵ On the question of its boundaries, the majority remarked: "the possibility of one county which receives benefit from the project refusing to pass the ordinance was... known to all the boards of supervisors when they passed the ordinances."¹⁹⁶ The ruling reaffirmed the bridge district's status as a quasi-municipal corporation, and found its representational structure to be constitutional.¹⁹⁷ They added a decisive opinion on the legality of its taxing power:

In order to lay at rest any doubt as to the point... we now expressly hold that the power of taxation given to the district with its present boundaries does not violate the constitutional guaranty of equal protection. It is not an assessment district, where the tax must be levied in accordance with benefits actually received by the individual taxpayer.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 26, 27, 1931; *Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District v. Felt*.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 337, 340-341.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 323.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 324.

The court remarked on the compelling value of the bridge: “it will become an integral part of the Redwood Highway, linking the northern and southern parts of the state with one continuous modern avenue for traffic, and also part of the state highway entering two neighboring states... This court cannot lightly thrust aside a proceeding so important to the welfare of the citizens of the state.”¹⁹⁹

Opponents were undeterred by this unambiguous endorsement of the bridge district and the bridge; the Garland Company, a San Francisco ferry operator, along with the Del Norte Company, a northern California timber firm, immediately filed a federal appeal, requesting an injunction on the sale of the bonds.²⁰⁰ Outrage over the delay erupted in the Bay Area. Already, the bridge district had made two tax assessments, and the longer the sale of bonds was delayed, the greater the likelihood of a third. Bridge supporters charged that Southern Pacific, with an interest in the existing system of ferries and railroads, was behind all of the objections and financing the efforts against the bridge.²⁰¹ The corporation, which had been a political pariah in the state for decades, took little heed of the outcry, but consistently denied direct involvement in the case. Mass meetings of protestors resulted in the organization of a boycott.²⁰² A “Golden Gate Bridge Association” was incorporated to assist in the legal battle.²⁰³ Investigations of the company were ordered by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, along with a demand for make extensive improvements to its facilities. Accusations of collusion were eventually borne out in court hearings, when Southern Pacific executives testified that

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 315-316.

²⁰⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 29, 1931; *San Francisco Examiner* November 29, 1931.

²⁰¹ *San Francisco News* August 17, 1931; *Ukiah Republican Press* August 26, 1931.

²⁰² *San Francisco News* December 9, 1931.

²⁰³ *San Francisco Examiner* December 10, 1931; *San Francisco Chronicle* December 10, 1931; *San Francisco News* December 5, 10, 1931.

they had paid for Garland's legal representation. The sinister associations that had been attributed to bridge opponents during the campaign for the bonds had been corroborated, at least in the view of bridge boosters. In July, the federal court of appeals issued its ruling once again affirming the creation of the bridge district as an independent government agency and separating the question of its legitimacy from the legality of its taxing measures.²⁰⁴

More vitriol followed when the Southern Pacific-Golden Gate Company announced that it would appeal that decision to the United States Supreme Court. Finally, bowing to public pressure, Southern Pacific abandoned the effort in August. Southern Pacific President S. P. Eastman issued a statement asserting that the project was "largely a promotion" and "ill founded and ill-advised," though he supported the decision to end the legal battle against it.²⁰⁵ When the bridge district announced its dreaded third tax assessment, it had a deficit of over \$200,000 largely attributable to legal costs.²⁰⁶ Despite this, it finally had a virtually unassailable legal position from which to sell its bonds.

²⁰⁴ *Del Norte Co. v. Filmer; Garland Co. v. Filmer* 1 F. Supp. 8 (N.D. Cal. 1932); Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 90-99.

²⁰⁵ *San Francisco News* August 10, 1932.

²⁰⁶ Loomis, "History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge," 103.

TAKE OFF THE MASK! :: :: By Rodger



Figure 2.7: San Francisco News August 17, 1931

'IF IT'S A FIGHT YOU WANT!' :-: :-: 'By Rodger



Figure 2.8: San Francisco News December 3, 1931.



Figure 2.9: *San Francisco News* December 5, 1931.



Figure 2.10: *San Francisco News* December 12, 1931.

After failing to secure funding from the federal government through the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the bridge district issued a new call for private bids on the bonds in August. The district eventually sold all of the bonds to a syndicate headed by A. P. Gianinni, president of the San Francisco-based Bank of America.²⁰⁷ The initial \$6 million purchase in November 1932 was in part a publicity measure; Gianinni launched a “Back to Good Times” campaign, purchasing a variety of local bonds. The Golden Gate Bridge bonds were also a solid investment; a special court ruling was attained in order to authorize an interest rate of more than five percent, and initial purchases were made at a significant discount.²⁰⁸ Risk was minimal; the property in the bridge district would secure the investment regardless of the success of the bridge itself. With the sale of the bonds, the bridge district could finally initiate construction. On February 26, 1933, 100,000 people witnessed the symbolic start of construction in San Francisco, when Filmer, Strauss, and San Francisco mayor Angelo Rossi broke ground with a golden spade.²⁰⁹ Nearly a decade after the passage of the California Bridge and Highway District Act, construction was finally underway.

Conclusion

A. R. O’Brien, the editor of the *Ukiah Republican Press*, a steadfast supporter of the bridge, gently teased Harlan in 1929 for claiming that the fight for the bridge “had just begun.” He pointed out that the bridge district had been organized, incorporated, and

²⁰⁷ The other major firms in the syndicate were Blythe and Co., Inc., Dean Whitter & Company, and Weeden and Company. Bankamerica Company, Memorandum reviewing the history of the early financing of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1934, box 52-2, IM Facility.

²⁰⁸ Blythe & Co. Inc., “Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District California”; Loomis, “History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge,” 112-29. Later, the price of the bonds went up. \$3.2 million worth of bonds were sold over par in 1935. *San Francisco Chronicle* January 17, 1935; *San Francisco Chronicle* January 17, 1935; *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 16, 1935.

²⁰⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 27, 1933.

legally sanctioned, and that plans for the structure were being finalized. His editorial implied that achieving the public approval necessary to the financing was already certain, that the campaign did not represent a significant challenge: “We can no more stop the building of the bridge than we can stop the rising of the sun.”²¹⁰ The ease with which the bridge district won voter approval for the bonds suggests that he was right: the crucial moment in the battle for the Golden Gate Bridge was the incorporation of the bridge district, not the vote for the bonds. The agency came into existence with the ability to raise revenue even without a bond issue, the capacity to campaign and advertise, and the discretion to determine the timing of the vote. Once the bridge district had been created, it had ample resources and flexibility to ensure the necessary public approval for the project.

Subsequent accounts of the struggle to win approval for the bonds against the opposition of Southern Pacific suggest that the bridge district only barely managed to survive the onslaught of the corporation due to the financial strain of delay.²¹¹ This was not actually the case. The bridge district officials had the authority to fund its operations indefinitely, both with tax assessments and by incurring debt that would be covered by bond revenues later. If anything, they were in a better position to extend their legal battle indefinitely than were the private corporations challenging them; they had no stockholders with the leverage to rein them in. As long as they could prevail in court, and every decision indicates that there was strong judicial support for their cause, they were impervious to delay or mounting expenses. The bridge district had the flexibility to determine the timing of approval for its financing, to change its conditions after the fact,

²¹⁰ *Ukiah Republican Press* October 23, 1929.

²¹¹ Brown, *Golden Gate*, 53; Cassady, *Spanning the Gate*, 34; Loomis, “History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge,” 99; Strauss, “Golden Gate Bridge,” 45.

and to extend preliminary operations indefinitely funding with tax assessments. When the California Supreme Court designated it a “quasi-municipal corporation,” it affirmed the bridge district as a new unit of government. When the counties enrolled they committed themselves to a permanent association, not to a single project or a specific debt. They created an entity that could act on their behalf, to act independently and with the authority of government.

Decades later, Luther Gulick remarked that one of the fundamental characteristics of autonomous public organizations, their efficacy in accomplishing the task that they are assigned, was also one of their drawbacks:

When you set up a function in a single authority, that single authority knows it was designated by God to do a certain job—and its work is the most important task in the world. Nothing can stand in the way of what the authority is planning to accomplish. They don’t care if they bankrupt the town—they’re going to get their job done because that’s the only job they have to do.²¹²

The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was formed to finance, construct and administer the Golden Gate Bridge, and they had the authority to carry out their mission regardless of the time and expense involved.

²¹² Luther Gulick quoted in Robert G. Smith, *Public Authorities, Special Districts, and Local Government* (Washington: National Association of Counties Research Foundation, 1964), 38.

III

The District and Its Enemies

The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District resulted from an alliance of Progressives and conservatives, who created an organization that they expected to serve their mutual goals; Progressives hoped for businesslike management of an important publicly-owned facility, and conservatives wanted the quick and efficient construction of a bridge that would boost property values without undue political interference. Both sides were almost immediately disappointed with the organization. Though it fulfilled its purpose, it quickly became embroiled in Bay Area political controversies, just the thing its founders hoped to avoid. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was subject to criticism from the moment of the agency's incorporation, as well as pressure from opportunists hoping to secure profits or patronage. In addition, the bridge's backers all had objections to its administration. The organization was too political for conservatives, who wanted to make sure that business interests came first. It was too secretive and not representative enough for San Francisco Progressives and, later, New Deal liberals.

Initially, conflict at the bridge district among the directors and top officials reflected competing outside political factions: San Francisco businessmen and northern county representatives allied to fight off what they considered to be efforts by corrupt San Francisco politicians to seize control and exploit the bridge district. The battles between these two factions were nasty, dominating the politics of the bridge during the construction period. Soon, however, the directors' identification with the organization

and interest in its success began to overcome the divisions among them and their association with outside interest groups or political ideologies. As the bridge neared completion, they unified behind efforts for its promotion and fought off criticism as a group, defending the interests of the bridge district in unison, regardless of their outside affiliations. Collectively, they reinforced their alliances with other agencies, including the Redwood Empire Association, and entrusted more and more power to the bridge district staff.

This tendency was dramatically accelerated when, starting with the post-World War II surge in toll revenues, a coherent opposition to the agency formed, spearheaded by Jack McCarthy. An ambitious young state senator from Marin County, McCarthy was an outspoken and relentless critic of the bridge district, pressuring the agency to open its books, cut its costs, and lower its tolls. Most alarming, however, were his repeated, very serious attempts to dissolve the agency and incorporate it into the state highway system. In response, bridge district officials built up their fortifications, hiring a full-time lobbyist and increasing the power and importance of the public relations arm of the organization. The internal cohesiveness of the organization increased as pressure for reform intensified; a myth of heroic resistance and a sense of embattlement formed the foundation of an enduring bridge district culture.

Division

One of the reasons that the creation of an independent special district had been appealing to conservatives in the first place was the promise that such an organization could be insulated from electoral politics, ideally headed by nonpartisan businessmen and

managed by an expert, professional staff. The first departure from that ideal was the appointment of San Francisco Supervisors as directors in 1928, a move that inspired outraged protests from both Hearst's *Examiner* and its rival, the *Chronicle*. San Francisco business interests and civic organizations responded with a sustained campaign to remove the bridge district administration from political corruption, and specifically from the influence of "boss" Tom Finn and Murphy Hirschberg.

Early on, battles for control of the bridge district centered on the general manager, the most important leadership position of the agency with an enormous potential for power and influence. The general manager oversaw all of the operations and appointed all staff except the chief engineer, auditor, attorney, and secretary, but was the only official to report directly to the board of directors.¹ Alan MacDonald was the first to take the job, a partner in the San Francisco construction firm MacDonald & Kahn, one of the Six Companies Inc., an engineering consortium formed to build the Hoover Dam.² Though MacDonald's \$25,000 salary was a premium at the time, he only spent a few days a week working for the bridge district. MacDonald was a little too assertive in advocating for a few of the initial, rather poor bond bids, and he was reprimanded by one of directors for overstepping his authority and lacking "tact."³ The conflict over his administration became public when a resolution was introduced in a closed session to

¹ The California Bridge and Highway District Act defined this position: "The general manager shall have full power and authority to employ and discharge all subordinate officers, employees and assistants at pleasure, prescribe their duties and shall, subject to the Board of Directors, fix their compensation. He shall have full charge and control of the construction, maintenance, and operation of all works of the district, and shall be the executive officer thereof. The general manager shall report to the Board of Directors in accordance with such rules and regulations as they may adopt." *Statutes of California* 45th reg. sess. (1923) ch. 228, 452-464. In 1929, the board of directors specified that the general manager "shall approve or disapprove all demands presented against the District before the same are acted upon by the Auditing Committee." Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, Rules Governing the Proceedings of the Directors of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, [1930], box 66, Keesling Papers, M0100.

² *Engineering News-Record* January 5, 1933.

³ Keesling, *Daily Calendar*, 43.

give the directors' three-member construction committee direct authority over MacDonald. The next day, the resolution, which did not pass, was reported in the *News*. MacDonald's defenders denounced the proposal as "partisan maneuvering," underhandedly attempting to empower Strauss and secretly attempting to sabotage the bridge itself.⁴ MacDonald's opponents on the board of directors were led by A. R. O'Brien who charged him with leaking confidential board discussions to the press, attempting to assume "dictatorial powers," and being under the thumb of Hirschberg.⁵ Through MacDonald, the *Chronicle* reported, Hirschberg had "chiseled his way into the affairs of the Golden Gate Bridge District," and was bragging about his control over its operations.⁶ As evidence mounted that MacDonald was using his leverage to direct contracts and insurance commissions, so did pressure for his removal.⁷ The president of the Bank of America, representing the bond buyers, declared MacDonald's administration "inefficient" and insinuated that they would withdraw their support for the bridge project if MacDonald remained at the helm.⁸

⁴ *San Francisco News* September 21, 22, December 29, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner* September 22, 1932.

⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 23, 1932; *San Francisco Examiner* December 15, 1932.

⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 21, 1932.

⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* December 15, 1932.

⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* December 22, 1932; *San Francisco Chronicle* December 23, 1932.

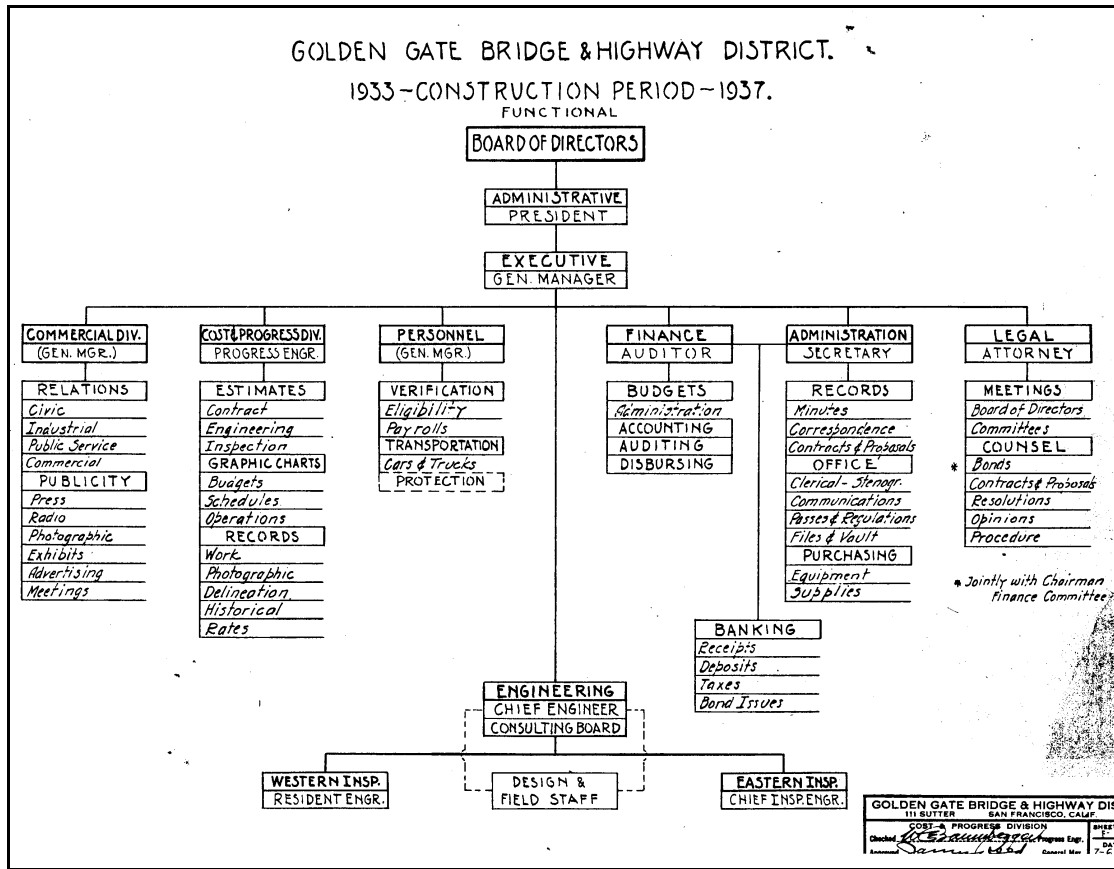


Figure 3.1: This organizational structure made all staff directly accountable to the general manager and made him the primary contact and source of information for the board of directors. Box 62, Keesling Papers, M0100. Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

The news broke that MacDonald insisted that all contractors bidding on bridge work take out surety bonds with Tom Finn’s insurance company, and refused to consider their bids if they did not.⁹ When a number of Redwood Empire insurance agents who approached MacDonald to urge him to divvy up the profits among firms throughout the district were “discourteously” ejected from his office, they went to the press. The

⁹ The *Chronicle* explained the importance of surety bonds: “The bids may be opened and contractors selected, but the sponsors or backers of the project must have some assurance that these contractors will be able to finish the job in the time specified and without default through financial difficulties... [T]he contractor furnish[es] a bond guaranteeing not only the performance of the contract, but also to assure workers and material supply firms that they will be paid promptly and regularly... The ‘performance’ bonds which means that the surety companies will complete the work if the contractor or contractors fail, amounts to 100 per cent of the total contract figure.” *San Francisco Chronicle* February 25, 1933.

Examiner reported on a scheme to monopolize the contracts whereby Finn stood to make \$100,000 in premiums.¹⁰ San Francisco supervisors William P. Stanton and Warren Shannon remained outspoken in their support for MacDonald, insisting that the effort to oust him was unjustified and a thinly veiled power-grab. The dire predictions of bridge district opponents had come true: there was strong evidence that the San Francisco politicians on the board of directors, associates of Hirschberg and Finn, were actively defending a corrupt general manager. Still, the bridge directors did not eject MacDonald outright; in an executive session, they voted to cut MacDonald's salary in half and require that he devote full-time to the project and move his office to the construction site. According to O'Brien, Hirschberg threatened that any director voting against MacDonald would not be reappointed. Immediately, MacDonald submitted his resignation, refusing to "attempt any job of such magnitude at such an inadequate compensation."¹¹

The incident renewed denunciations of politician directors, this time voiced most loudly by the *Examiner*, which also criticized the secrecy of bridge district meetings and operations.¹² It resulted in a shift of power to the board of directors who filled the leadership vacuum by appointing a three-man steering committee. Its members were Francis V. Keesling, a San Francisco attorney who had taken no public stand on MacDonald's ouster, George T. Cameron, publisher of the *Chronicle*, and Stanton, one of the San Francisco Supervisors who was identified with Hirschberg and an outspoken defender of MacDonald.¹³ The make-up of the committee indicated a contentious board

¹⁰ *San Francisco Examiner* December 25, 27, 1932.

¹¹ *San Francisco News* December 28, 1932.

¹² *San Francisco Examiner* December 19, 23, 1932, January 4, 1933.

¹³ Cameron was a prominent backer of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, as well, a member of the Hoover-Young Commission and later on its financial advisory board. *San Francisco Examiner* December 29, 1932; *San Francisco Chronicle* December 29, 1932, November 21, 1933.

of directors: Cameron and Stanton represented rival San Francisco political factions, and Keesling was carefully neutral. MacDonald's resignation raised questions about the level of power that a general manager should have, inspiring speculation that the board of directors were considering a commission-style administration, with a committee rather than a single administrator leading the organization and engineers in charge of day-to-day decisions.¹⁴ Filmer and Keesling dismissed this notion, defending the principle of a strong executive. "Besides," Filmer remarked, "the directors must have someone to check on the engineers and contractors."¹⁵

The committee chose James Reed to succeed MacDonald, a retired Naval officer. Reed was hired at about \$12,000 (paid on a per diem basis), the same amount that provoked MacDonald's indignant resignation.¹⁶ He was chosen in an atmosphere charged by the scandal; Keesling warned that any attempt to use political connections on behalf of a candidate would only work against him.¹⁷ This time, the directors declared, they were looking for an administrator, an "office man and co-ordinator of all activities, rather than a construction expert."¹⁸ Reed had training as a construction engineer and naval architect. He worked for many years as an engineer at a naval shipyard in Philadelphia and later at one in the Bay Area, the Mare Island in Vallejo. But Reed was also an accomplished administrator; after his retirement from the Navy in 1920, Reed

¹⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* December 29, 1932. Keesling noted the "unsatisfactory results and lack of accomplishment of Strauss... evidence of attempt to shift responsibility [to him] and necessity of protecting against it." Keesling, *Daily Calendar*, 58.

¹⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 30, 1932.

¹⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 19, 1933.

¹⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 31, 1932. Keesling vehemently denied rumors that Reed was a "Cameron man." Francis V. Keesling to A. R. O'Brien, January 13, 1933, box 65, Keesling Papers, M0100.

¹⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* December 30, 1932.

headed the Los Angeles Shipbuilding Company and at the time he was managing the Schlage Lock Company.¹⁹

However, Hirschberg associates were not the only ones eager to profit from the construction of the bridge. Curiously, the *Chronicle*, the mouthpiece of conservatism during the bond campaign and the most vocal paper in expressing concern that an independent special district might lead to corruption and graft, had been very mild in its criticism of MacDonald. After his resignation, it declared in a front-page editorial that his “high competence as a construction manager is unquestioned,” and the only problem with his administration was his inability to devote full-time to the project.²⁰ The reason for this uncharacteristic reserve soon became clear. During his tenure, MacDonald had “fought strenuously” in favor of furnishing all contractors with cement, proposing that the bridge district purchase the vast quantities that would be needed itself.²¹ Cameron, the publisher of the *Chronicle*, was heavily invested in cement, and it was understood that his company, Santa Cruz Portland Cement, would be the supplier. MacDonald seemed to be open to suggestions on questions of administration regardless of political affiliation.²²

When Cameron continued his efforts to secure an exclusive contract with the bridge district during Reed’s tenure, his egregious conflict of interest as a director came to light. Soon after MacDonald was discharged, Cameron treated several bridge directors and engineers to lunch, presenting them with materials promoting his product. Charles Derleth, a consulting engineer, was offended by the incident, and the board of directors

¹⁹ James Reed to Frank P. Doyle, January 16, 1933, box 1, James Reed Papers, JL012, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA (hereafter referred to as Reed Papers).

²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 29, 1932.

²¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 15, 1932.

²² Interestingly, soon after MacDonald’s resignation, his firm allegedly attempted to bribe a Los Angeles County supervisor. *San Francisco Examiner* February 8, 1933.

resolved to leave the purchase of cement to individual contractors.²³ But, the issue emerged again several months later when a rival company, Pacific Portland Cement, claimed that Strauss and Reed were illegally requiring contractors to purchase the rose-tinted “high silica” cement manufactured exclusively by Cameron’s firm.²⁴ Reed allegedly altered the construction contracts with a letter stating that the contractors would “assume no liability for any defects in structure or character of work which may be caused by or traceable to any inherent qualities in the high silica cement to be used.”²⁵ A protracted debate over whether or not the “pink” cement was actually a superior product did not produce a definitive answer.²⁶ Both companies filed lawsuits over the issue, and Cameron announced his resignation as a director in November, 1933. Ultimately, Cameron’s Santa Cruz Portland Cement prevailed; the bridge district stood by its insistence on high silica cement, and successfully fought subsequent lawsuits.²⁷

All of this controversy was reported with glee by the *San Francisco News*, always the stalwart supporter of Hirschberg and his allies, and with indignation in the *Examiner*. The scandal drew attention away from attacks on political influence on the board of directors and the allegations against MacDonald. Even as the “pink cement” scandal broke, a bill quietly introduced in 1933 to increase San Francisco’s representation on the board was narrowly defeated in Sacramento. Interpreted as an effort by “San Francisco politicians” to retake control of the board of directors, district officials acted quickly

²³ Charles Derleth to James Reed, May 9, 1933, box 1, Reed Papers.

²⁴ James A. Keller to George H. Harlan, September 11, 1933, box 62, Keesling Papers, M0100; *San Francisco News* September 13, 1933.

²⁵ *San Francisco News* September 14, 1933.

²⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 14, 16, November 5, 1933; *San Francisco Examiner* September 18, 1933; *San Francisco News* October 2, 4, November 29, 1933.

²⁷ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Facts Concerning Adoption of High Silica Cement (Pink Cement) by the Golden Gate Bridge & Highway District* (San Francisco, 1933), box 62, Keesling Papers, M0100; *San Francisco Chronicle* November 25, 30, 1933, May 5, 1934; *San Francisco Examiner* November 30, 1933, January 17, 25, February 1, May 5, 1934.

against the legislation, circulating a statement of opposition by the leading San Francisco civic groups.²⁸ It became clear that there were a variety of major political factions fighting for influence over bridge district affairs. The most obvious was the Hirschberg-Finn group, which had close ties to organized labor and was represented by the *News*. Cameron's *Chronicle* was associated with big business and traditional conservatives, and was not above meddling in bridge district affairs to promote its interests. Finally, a reform faction was spearheaded by Hearst's *Examiner* was the most consistently critical in the construction period, ostensibly dedicated to stamping out corruption and graft, possibly serving the political ambitions of its owner.²⁹ In addition, northern county representatives on the board of directors were eager to ensure that Redwood Empire banks and insurance agents get a "fair share" of the profits from doing business with the bridge district. All of these interest groups took every opportunity to suggest corruption by the bridge directors or officials who opposed them, resulting in relentless scrutiny of the bridge district.

The "pink cement" scandal provided one of the justifications for a new effort to gain control of the bridge district by Hirschberg and Finn in 1936, this time aimed at removing Reed's principle ally, Keesling. Without any warning, at a special session the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to replace Keesling despite his widely-recognized leadership and eight years experience as the chairman of the construction committee. Immediately, the move was condemned. The *Examiner* called it a "surprise

²⁸ A.B. 2378, 50th reg. sess. (Ca. 1933); George J. Presley et al. to Members of the State Legislature, May 2, 1933, box 61 Keesling Papers, M0100; *San Francisco Examiner* April 21, May 4, 1933; *San Francisco Chronicle* April 26, May 2, 3, 1933.

²⁹ Keesling speculated that Southern Pacific could be influencing the *Examiner*, whose editor, John Francis Neylan was associated with San Francisco real estate speculator [Herbert] Fleischaker, a "close personal friend of Shoup," its president. Until the end of the 1930s, the corporation continued to fight the bridge district, waging a rate war through its ferries until they went out of business. Keesling, *Daily Calendar*, 19, 65.

steamroller move,” the *Chronicle* a “coup,” and both laid the blame immediately on Finn and Hirschberg. The major Marin paper, the *San Rafael Independent*, represented the reaction of the northern counties, describing it as an attempt by San Francisco “political interests” to wrest control of the bridge in order to enable their “‘pork barrel’ and ‘log-rolling’ tactics.”³⁰ The *News* was the only paper that defended the decision, arguing that Reed’s incompetence had been “repeatedly demonstrated” and that the present bridge management had kept itself in power to the detriment of San Francisco taxpayers.

Keesling, because he supported Reed, was blamed for years of bridge district “bungling.”³¹ Keesling answered the charges against him:

The suggestion of inefficiency in the management of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District is purely political and it would serve no useful purpose to engage in controversy with politicians...

Whether the affairs of the bridge have been efficiently or inefficiently managed may be determined by the records, which are public.

This agitation is merely a part of the program to remove the general manager and appoint someone subservient to political manipulators.

When the Golden Gate Bridge has been completed, it will stand as a monument to integrity as well as efficiency.³²

Immediately, San Francisco business groups came to Keesling’s defense.³³ The San Francisco Civic League of Improvement Clubs, Chamber of Commerce, and Real Estate Board all took action, fighting for Keesling’s reinstatement.³⁴ They were not successful; a lawsuit filed on Keesling’s behalf failed, and their protests were ignored by a majority of the supervisors. After an angry debate, another Hirschberg associate, William D.

³⁰ *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 4, 17, 1936; *San Francisco Chronicle* December 14, 1936; *San Francisco Examiner* December 14, 1936.

³¹ *San Francisco News* December 10, 1936.

³² *San Francisco Examiner* December 5, 1936.

³³ *San Francisco Examiner* December 6, 1936; *San Francisco News* December 7, 1936; *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 7, 1936.

³⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 14, 1936.

Hadeler was appointed by a vote of six to five.³⁵ The *Examiner* accounted for the decision in no uncertain terms:

Tom Finn, sometime sheriff and political boss, and Abraham “Murphy” Hirschberg, real estate trader and string-puller, are out to control the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District... Hirschberg has been flitting through City Hall corridors gunning for Keesling—because he and Tom Finn ‘can’t get anything’ from the director. Several Supervisors declared that Hirschberg had been lining up anti-Keesling votes weeks ago by personal notification that the orders were out. ‘Go see Tom,’ he commanded certain Supervisors.

In explanation of the orders he told members of the board: “Finn and I can’t get a thing from this fellow, Keesling. We can’t get any insurance. And we can’t get any jobs. Tom needs jobs for the boys... Keesling won’t do anything for San Francisco”...

In the winning of disciples, Hirschberg revealed that removal of Keesling is but the first step in the renewed effort of the machine to gain control of the Golden Gate Bridge District.³⁶

Keesling himself professed that he “welcomed relief from service” after having been a leading director and intensely involved in bridge district affairs since its incorporation:

[My removal] was an action intended to punish me and humiliate me because I had devoted myself to assuring an efficient and honest business administration of the District affairs... As the work in which I have been interested is practically accomplished—in fact all the contracts of importance have been let—business has been transacted without any graft or chiseling.³⁷

Keesling’s fellow bridge directors were somewhat chagrined by his abrupt removal, even Hadeler’s allies—Keesling was honored as the “orator of the day” at the opening ceremony in recognition of his central role in its successful completion.³⁸

The charges that Reed was incompetent, which indirectly led to Keesling’s removal, were not entirely fabricated. Reed lost a number of battles as general manager, though his shortcomings as an administrator were not necessarily to blame. The

³⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 15, 1936.

³⁶ *San Francisco Examiner* December 9, 1936.

³⁷ Francis V. Keesling to Thomas M. Storke, December 29, 1936, box 67, Keesling Papers, M0100. For Keesling’s detailed response to the charges leveled against him, see Francis V. Keesling to Adolph Uhl, December 11, 1936, box 67, Keesling Papers, M0100.

³⁸ Francis V. Keesling to James Adam, May 3, 1937, box 66, Keesling Papers, M0100.

engineering viability of the bridge continued to raise questions even after construction commenced. Reed's efforts to secure funding from the federal Public Works Administration for the bridge were stymied by Bailey Willis, a Stanford professor of geology, who persistently and publicly insisted that the foundation of the south pier was inadequate to support the bridge and dangerously close to an earthquake fault.³⁹ Bridge district officials dismissed his objections as totally unfounded, pointing to the numerous studies that had been done on the issue and the support of the most prominent bridge engineers.⁴⁰ Willis's protests darkened the cloud of doubt already surrounding the project, and, as much as they denied any concern about the south pier, it did pose a number of unexpected problems for bridge engineers. Difficult conditions at the site, poor initial surveys, and finally the need to redesign the pier to reduce pressure on the bedrock resulted in the most significant delays of the construction period.⁴¹

³⁹ For detailed documentation of the controversy over the south pier, see folder 22 of the Derleth Papers, WRCA.

⁴⁰ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District Building Committee, *Investigation of Criticism of Foundation by Dr. Bailey Willis* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1934). In 1934, Reed remarked on engineering questions raised by Willis: "The most important thing for us to do is to discover whether or not they propose to hold up further consideration of our request for grant until the matter of the South Pier and Fender has been settled. If we could get a definite answer as to whether this South Pier and Fender is holding up action on the grant, or not, we would then be in a position to put the pressure to get this grant approved. If there is going to be any question about their ruling upon the sufficiency of the foundation, then I believe we should withdraw all Federal requests immediately, rather than have this question stirred up again at a time when our financing situation is considerably improved." [James Reed] to Francis V. Keesling, May 21, 1934, box 61, Keesling Papers, M0100.

⁴¹ The bridge district offered a special bonus to the contractors working on the south tower for completing their work ahead of schedule. A 1934 pamphlet on bridge construction described the conditions at site of the south pier: "Here the water is 100 feet deep and continuously turbulent because of the seven-mile-an-hour tide which sweeps in and out through the Gate. At times breakers twenty feet high crash at this point. It was necessary to level off the pier site by blasting rock over an area of approximately an acre under water, after which the rock was lifted by dredgers and carried out to sea to be dumped." Associated Oil Company, *Bridging the Bay: San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge* (n.p., 1934); John R. Ruckstell, "Radio Address: Financing the Golden Gate Bridge, KLX, Oakland," (Oakland, 1935), box 61, Keesling Papers, M0100; Leon S. Moisseiff to Charles Derleth, January 20, 1934, box 1, Reed Papers; Charles Derleth to L. S. Moisseiff, March 20, 1934, box 1, Reed Papers; Andrew C. Lawson to Joseph B. Strauss, December 24, 1934, box 80, GGBHD DS Vault; Charles Derleth to James Reed, May 5, 1934, box 1, Reed Papers; John Van der Zee, *The Gate: the True Story of the Design and Construction of the Golden Gate Bridge* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 210-18, 22-24.

The organizational structure of bridge district also hurt its requests for federal funding. Despite repeated applications and trips to Washington, Reed was unable to convince New Deal officials that the bridge district was indeed a public agency. They maintained that it was not sufficiently accountable to the public and the state. Privately, Reed suspected influential local opponents of continuing to work behind the scenes against the bridge. In 1935, bridge district officials decided to abandon efforts for PWA funding, focusing instead on winning unemployment relief money.⁴² The bridge district did manage to secure several Works Progress Administration grants for the construction of approaches, drainage work and the replacement of military structures destroyed by bridge construction in the Presidio and funding for the Sausalito lateral in Marin.⁴³

The provisions of Strauss's contract also led to questions about the competence of the engineering staff.⁴⁴ Suggestions that Strauss was not qualified to direct the project were compounded by the requirement that he hire and pay his own staff, a clear impetus for him to cut costs by commissioning less than preeminent engineers.⁴⁵ Several lawsuits highlighted the problem: Strauss won \$103,000 in 1934 for field inspections that the district claimed were his responsibility. After two years of increasingly hostile legal

⁴² James Reed to Board of Directors, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, October 30, 1935, box 65, Keesling Papers, M0100.

⁴³ A WPA grant for the construction of the San Francisco Lyon street approach was actually rejected by the bridge district because the labor requirements associated with it would cost the District more than the subsidy; the construction was eventually taken over by the City of San Francisco under a separate federal grant. *San Francisco Chronicle* February 21, 1936; *San Francisco Examiner* February 27, 1936; Bailey Willis to W. W. Felt, October 7, 1934; Willis to Edward Hyatt, November 23, 1934, Golden Gate Bridge District File, Department of Public Works—Director's Office, California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento (hereafter referred to as Director of Public Works Files); Loomis, 179-180; W. W. Felt to Earl Lee Kelly, October 15, 1935, Director of Public Works Files.

⁴⁴ Charles Derleth to Francis V. Keesling, September 29, 1934, box 1 Reed Papers; Charles Derleth to James Reed, May 17, 1935, box 1, Reed Papers.

⁴⁵ Derleth to Francis V. Keesling, January 26, 1934, box 61, Keesling Papers, M0100.

wrangling, Strauss was granted an additional \$262,500.⁴⁶ The litigation was costly, and undermined confidence in the administration of the bridge district. Reed was held responsible for losing the lawsuits; his opponents argued that the legal representation of the bridge district was inadequate and that he, as general manager, was responsible.

A prolonged battle over bus operations—a minority of the bridge directors fervently favored public transportation—led to charges that Reed’s lack of initiative put the district at the mercy of private corporations.⁴⁷ In addition, Reed had a hard time convincing the city of San Francisco to build the approach that it was responsible for and to improve the streets leading to the bridge—only one route through the city was ready for the opening ceremony.⁴⁸ Whatever the reasons for these problems, the minority of bridge directors associated with Hirschberg blamed Reed personally, airing their complaints publicly and vocally.⁴⁹ One opponent charged that “everything Mr. Reed handled soared in cost,” after he submitted an unexpected \$18,000 expense in 1937.⁵⁰ The *News* summed up Reed’s administration as “careless, extravagant and downright stupid.”⁵¹ However, the bridge was completed only slightly over schedule and with a

⁴⁶ *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 15, 1934, November 7, 17, 1936; *San Francisco News* January 14, 1937.

⁴⁷ Bus lines operated by the city of San Francisco, Marin County, and the bridge district itself were all rejected because of high expected costs. Coach service by Pacific Greyhound Lines from San Rafael to downtown San Francisco began soon after the opening of the bridge. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Interurban Passenger Service* by Lester S. Ready (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1936); Marin County Board of Supervisors, *Report on Marin County Interurban Passenger Transbay Service* by Lester S. Ready (San Rafael, CA, 1939); *San Francisco Chronicle* April 2, 9, 14, September 10, 11, December 3, 1936; *San Francisco News* September 10, 22, 25, 1936; *San Rafael Daily Independent* September 11, 14, November 20, 1936.

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of the problems posed by approaches, see Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Conditions Affecting Traffic Which Will Use or May Be Encouraged to Use the Golden Gate Bridge* by Sydney W. Taylor (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1935). See also *San Francisco Chronicle* March 12, 13, 1936; *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 14, 1936.

⁴⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 9, 1935; *San Francisco News* 12, 19, 25 September, November 13, 1935, January, 14, December 10, 1936; *San Francisco Examiner* September 26, 1935; *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 14, 1936.

⁵⁰ *San Francisco News* January 14, 1937.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

financial “cushion” of \$1 million left over from the bond issue. This is probably the best evidence for Reed’s efficiency and honesty as an administrator, whatever Hirschberg and Finn associates might have charged.

Although the Hirschberg-Finn group managed to remove Keesling, a simultaneous effort to replace one of the Marin county directors failed, and Reed remained in his post.⁵² However, the constant attacks proved to be too much to endure: Reed resigned immediately after the bridge opened in 1937, complaining that his service to the bridge district had represented a “material sacrifice,” and that the poor salary did not make his efforts worthwhile.⁵³ Immediately, a vicious fight among the divided bridge directors ensued, one of the nastiest internal conflicts in the agency’s history. After a long standoff, William Harrelson was chosen to succeed Reed over the Hirschberg favorite, bridge district resident engineer Russell Cone. The elderly Harrelson, a lifelong San Francisco politician, had experience as a contractor and civil engineer and had been an outspoken supporter of both the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in the 1920s.⁵⁴ He had recently retired as Bank of America vice president in charge of real estate. A. R. O’Brien, known for standing up for bridge district independence, charged that the job was a “pension” for Harrelson. He reacted to his nomination: “I don’t care whether the Bank of Italy or Mussolini is interested, but just the same... all should have their qualifications examined... I resent this being thrust down our throats.”⁵⁵ Although O’Brien normally sided with northern California conservatives, in this case he voted with Hirschberg allies supporting Cone, arguing that Harrelson at

⁵² *San Rafael Daily Independent* November 7, 9, 10, December 12, 14 1936.

⁵³ *San Francisco Examiner* July 28, 1937; James Reed to William P. Filmer, July 26, 1937, box 1, Reed Papers.

⁵⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 31, 1937.

⁵⁵ O’Brien quoted in Brown, *Golden Gate*, 143.

the age of sixty-five was too old for the position. O'Brien was convinced that Harrelson was a Hirschberg man, but Keesling may have helped change his mind, writing to assert that he was "no tottering old man" and "independent as a hog on ice."⁵⁶ Eventually, the northern county representatives and San Francisco businessmen in favor of Harrelson prevailed. As a compromise, Cone was appointed "maintenance engineer" at a salary only slight less than Harrelson's, and took over primary responsibility for engineering after Strauss' death.⁵⁷

While charges of machine politics at the bridge district ceased with the death of Tom Finn in January 1938, criticism of its administration, in particular the opposition to the appointment of politicians to the board of directors intensified. Harrelson presided for just three stormy years, during which he, like Reed, was constantly under attack for lax management and extravagant spending. Despite the promise of the position of general manager, which had been designed to facilitate strong leadership, the short terms of the first three appointees and the controversy that surrounded them meant that they had little opportunity to develop their influence and power. This would soon change, as external criticism of the bridge district began to outweigh the internal rifts among its

⁵⁶ A resolution to hire Cone was defeated on September 16, 1937, seven to five. For Cone were Doyle, Hader, Newhouse, O'Brien and Shannon, against: Brown, Filmer, Lutgens, Maxwell, McMinn, Trumbull and Westbrook. GGBHD Resolution No. 1427, September 16, 1937. It took several attempts to pass a resolution to hire Harrelson. *San Francisco Chronicle* August 6, 19, September 17, 30, 1937; *San Francisco News* September 17, 1937; Francis V. Keesling to A. R. O'Brien, August 16, 1937, box 65, Keesling Papers, M0100.

⁵⁷ Harrelson was hired at a salary of \$7500, Cone at \$7200; Harlan kept his \$1000 per month. San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, *A Report on Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District: Present Status and Future Outlook* (San Francisco: San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, 1938) 22, box 61, Keesling Papers, M0100. Strauss left the bridge district at the time claiming that he had made no profit whatsoever on the Golden Gate Bridge because of the terms of his contract. After the bridge was completed, the board of directors formally thanked him for "turning the bridge over to the people" and presented him with a gold pass for perpetual free crossings. They also voted to retain him as honorary "chief consulting engineer" at \$1 a year. *San Francisco Chronicle* September 30, 1937; *San Francisco Examiner* October 22, 1937.

directors. By the end of the 1940s, the bridge directors had begun to forge a lasting solidarity in defense of the bridge district's institutional interests.

Unification

However bitterly political rivals on the board of directors fought for control of the bridge district during the construction period, they consistently rallied against outside attacks on its interests. They also united to fight off attempts to compromise the institutional integrity of the bridge district or to undermine its financial success. Questions about administration and policies became more and more serious, and were accompanied by attempts to reform the agency or incorporate the bridge into the state Department of Public Works. The directors' allegiance to the bridge district began to outweigh their outside alliances, and camaraderie and solidarity among them improved; a sense of embattlement began to develop as part of an incipient institutional culture that increasingly determined the agency's response to its critics.

The first major battle that inspired bridge district associates to rally behind the organization took place during Reed's tenure. The state was responsible for constructing the main northern approach to the bridge which would connect it with the Redwood Highway. The approach included the costly Waldo tunnel in the vicinity of Sausalito. State officials identified the tunnel as one of the most likely projects to qualify WPA unemployment relief funds, due to the difficult, labor-intensive work required to penetrate the steep mountainside.⁵⁸ But a 1935 request for funding was rejected:

⁵⁸ The planned Waldo tunnel was declared to be "the most costly piece of highway in the state of California" in 1937, involving road construction at a steep grade on both sides leading to a 1000 foot tunnel. Part of the expense was due to the geology of the site: "This particular mountain area lacks the hard rock formation common to most mountain country of comparable topography, and the disturbance of its natural, somewhat doubtful state of equilibrium by the heavy cuts and deep fills required to produced fully

[The] Golden Gate Bridge is a private bridge in that it is neither a Federal nor State project... the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District has made no provisions for the bridge to become free to the people upon amortization of its bonds, and... the bridge is not operated under the State Department of Public Works.⁵⁹

Federal officials insisted on a change in the administration of the bridge before any federal subsidies for its approaches were approved.⁶⁰ Neither the California Attorney General's ruling that the Golden Gate Bridge was legally the property of the state nor arguments that the tunnel was part of a crucial military route swayed them.⁶¹ The California Director of Public Works Earl Lee Kelly listed the minimum requirements to win the grant: the bridge district had to agree to state audits and to support legislation guaranteeing that the bridge be made toll free once the construction bonds were paid off.⁶² He also requested that the bridge district "advance" \$700,000 to initiate construction, to be refunded once the federal funds came through.⁶³

Bridge district officials refused to concede any control to the state or to contribute any money for construction. Harlan protested that the requirements were illegal and impinged unjustifiably on bridge district operations:

It would mean that the Bridge District could not purchase a lead pencil or accept a nickel without the consent of Earl Lee Kelly or someone else from the State Department of Public Works. We must not lose sight of the fact that the bridge is

anticipated but unpredictable problems from slides. This situation, due to the close proximity of the bay, was aggravated by nature's deposit of soft clay over the underlying rocky formation to depths as much as forty feet." *San Rafael Daily Independent* March 12, 1937, May 25, 1937. California Department of Public Works, *Chronological Statement of Work Done Upon Waldo Grade in Marin County*, (Sacramento, 1935), Golden Gate Bridge District File, Director of Public Works Files.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ James Reed to Earl Lee Kelly, telegram, November 8, 1935, Golden Gate Bridge District File, Director of Public Works Files.

⁶¹ C. C. Carleton to C. H. Purcell, September 26, 1935; H. E. Cloke to Jno. H. Skeggs, September 5, 1935; Jno. H. Skeggs to C. H. Purcell, September 6, 1935. All in Golden Gate Bridge District File, Director of Public Works Files.

⁶² *San Rafael Daily Independent* November 18, 1935; *San Francisco Examiner* November 16, 1935.

⁶³ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 15, 1935.

being financed by money from the Northern Bay counties and that 85 percent of this money comes from San Francisco.⁶⁴

Local politicians and REA representatives rallied behind the bridge district, insisting that the state should build the tunnel as promised, regardless of federal funding, and that the agency had no obligation to make any concessions for the sake of state coffers. Kelly pointed out that the Bay Area would lose out on a \$1.7 million in relief funds because of their recalcitrance. He scaled back plans for the tunnel to three lanes rather than four, based on recommendations by state engineers.⁶⁵

It was at this point that the REA political machinery kicked into high gear; its top officials went directly to the governor to protest Kelly's decision. A torrent of criticism in Bay Area papers followed, much of which was aimed at Kelly personally.⁶⁶ Kelly countered accusations that he was trying to sabotage the bridge, claiming that he had "leaned over backwards" on behalf of the Golden Gate span, even sacrificing the interests of the Bay Bridge, which was "under [his] immediate jurisdiction."⁶⁷ He also threatened that if bridge district officials did not concede, the Redwood Empire was likely to get a "budgetary spanking" in road funding.⁶⁸ The attacks on Kelly intensified; he was accused of trying to "welch on the state's commitments," and rumors of his ouster began to make headlines.⁶⁹ Eventually, Kelly conceded the entire issue and paid for a four-lane tunnel, citing unexpected increases in gas tax funds and the importance of the project to

⁶⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* December 19, 1935.

⁶⁵ Earl Lee Kelly to Angelo J. Rossi, November 27, 1935, Golden Gate Bridge District File, Public Works Director Files; G. T. McCoy to Earl Lee Kelly, October 28, 1935, box 62, Keesling Papers, M0100.

⁶⁶ *San Francisco News* November 8, 14, 15, 21, 1935; *San Rafael Daily Independent* November 8, 21, 1935; *San Francisco Chronicle* October 24, November 9, 13, 14, 1935.

⁶⁷ Earl Lee Kelly, Introduction to Traffic Statement, November 8, 1935, Golden Gate Bridge District File, Director of Public Works Files.

⁶⁸ *San Francisco News* November 25, 1935; *San Francisco Examiner* December 4, 1935.

⁶⁹ *San Francisco News* November 19, 20, 1935.

the upcoming World's Fair.⁷⁰ Thanks to the enormous public outcry against Kelly and the Department of Public Works orchestrated by the REA, the bridge district got its four-lane tunnel and approach without making any concessions that might have compromised its autonomy.⁷¹

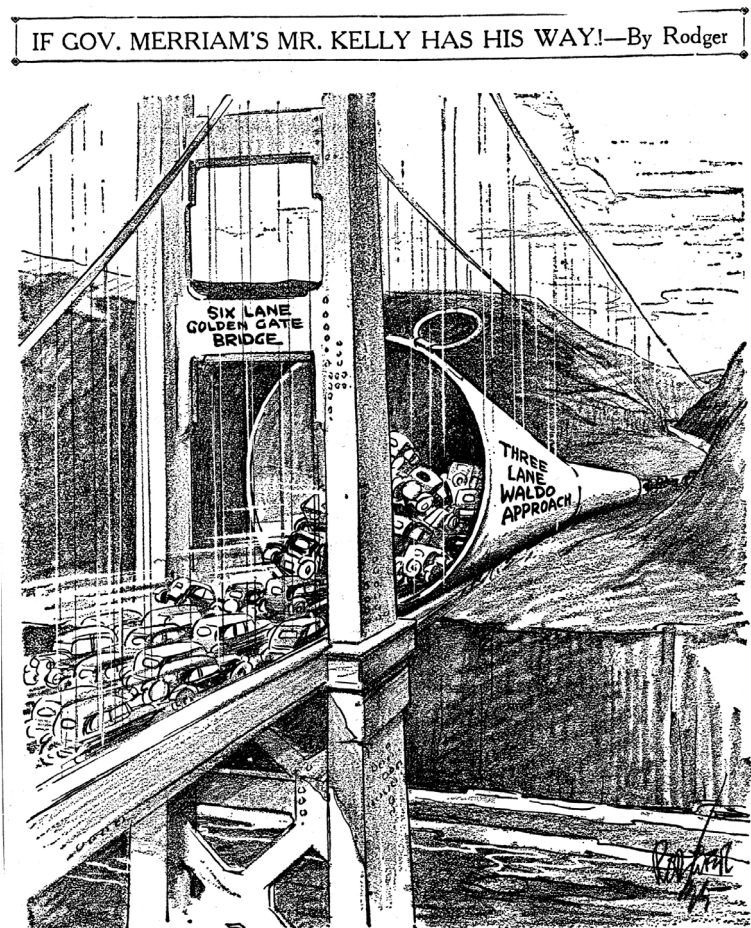


Figure 3.2: Cartoon published in the *San Francisco News* August 25, 1935 and distributed by the Redwood Empire Association.

⁷⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 12, 1935; Mort J. Donoghue, press release, Earl Lee Kelly Announces Four Lane Bridge Approach, December 11, 1935, Golden Gate Bridge District File, Director of Public Works Files; Richard Thomas Loomis, "The History of the Building of the Golden Gate Bridge" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1958), 148-51.

⁷¹ Other approaches were less political, but equally problematic; the city and county of San Francisco had committed to building the approaches to the southern end of the bridge, and although they were slow in appropriating funds for construction, they did manage to open one of the two routes to the bridge by the opening in 1937.

In addition to its political intervention, REA advertising was important to the good publicity that the bridge district enjoyed during the construction period. From early on, the REA was active in promoting the Golden Gate Bridge as an iconic representation of the twentieth-century West. It made extensive use of the image of the bridge in its nation-wide effort to promote the region as a desirable tourist destination. It provided “pictures, cuts and text for special editions of magazines and newspapers” and prepared announcements and radio.⁷² REA representatives underscored the parallel interests of the two organizations, arguing that anything that the REA did to attract tourists to the region or increase the North Bay commuter population would necessarily translate into toll revenues. They also pointed out the interest of the bridge district in surrounding roads and highways—by 1936, the organization claimed responsibility for \$54 million in state and federal appropriations for Redwood Empire highways.⁷³

The alliance between the bridge district and the REA began with the first meeting to discuss a bridge, was strengthened during the campaign for the bonds, but was cinched by the Golden Gate Fiesta celebrating the opening of the bridge in 1937. Clyde Edmondson, general manager of the REA, was one of the principle organizers for the event, a “salutation and all-hail to the bridge which has been a dream of San Francisco since the city began.”⁷⁴ Two former newspaper men and REA publicists, Eric Cullenward and James Adam, directed the event.⁷⁵ Two years later the Golden Gate International Exposition offered another major opportunity for the REA to promote the

⁷² Redwood Empire Association, press release, May 17, 1937, carton 136, REA Records.

⁷³ George P. Anderson and Clyde Edmondson to Francis V. Keesling. December 2, 1936, box 61, Keesling Papers, M0100.

⁷⁴ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District Publicity Department, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District Press Release, January 28, [1933], box 65, Keesling Papers, M0100; *San Francisco News* December 9, 1936; *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 14, 15, 1936;

⁷⁵ *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 15, 1936; Keesling, *Daily Calendar*, 146.

bridge and with it tourism and growth in the Redwood Empire. However, the political functions of the REA were probably much more valuable to the bridge district than its advertising activities; starting with efforts on behalf of the Waldo tunnel, REA intervention in Sacramento proved crucial to protecting the interests of the bridge district. As soon as the bridge district started collecting tolls, it became the largest contributor to the REA, not only commissioning advertising and hiring its agents for its own publicity department, but also committing to the largest single annual contribution to the agency, starting with an appropriation of \$15,000 in 1938.⁷⁶

After the completion of the bridge, the district faced an entirely new set of problems. Try as they might, in the midst of the Depression REA and bridge district publicists could not generate the traffic that the bridge district had counted on to pay its debts. Growth in northern California had not met expectations, and the commuters that had to be the primary toll payers did not rush to their automobiles as quickly as traffic engineers had predicted. To make matters worse, the bridge district began a rate war with North Bay ferries, leading a reduction of the toll to 30 cents for several months, rather than the 50 cents that had been the basis of its original revenue projections. Continued delay on approach construction also contributed to shortfalls. As the first year of operations drew to a close, the bridge district had to draw upon the funds left over from the construction bonds to make its first bond payment.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Clyde Edmondson, memorandum regarding method of recording expenditures under contract by and between Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District and Redwood Empire Association in the matter of joint publicity, advertising, and traffic promotion campaign, January 12, 1938, box 91, IM Facility; Clyde Edmondson to Officers and Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, December 21, 1938, box 91, IM Facility; Clyde Edmondson to William H. Harrelson, April 6, 1938, box 91, IM Facility; Clyde Edmondson to William Harrelson. August 26, 1938, box 91, IM Facility; J. P. Kelly to William H. Harrelson, June 28, 1938, box 91, IM Facility.

⁷⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* April 9, 1938, January 27, 1938; *San Francisco Chronicle* January 29, 1938.

The opening of the bridge marked a new era of investigation for the bridge district, which ultimately did more to galvanize the organization against outside interference than to instigate reform. In 1938 the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce undertook the first in a series of official inquiries into bridge district administration, budget, and finances. Concern about deficits combined with frustration about the appointment of politicians to the board of directors finally prompted action. A special committee on the Golden Gate Bridge found “convincing evidence that the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District has been operated on an extravagant scale.”⁷⁸ Comparison with the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, which opened in 1936 just months before the Golden Gate Bridge, revealed much higher expenses for the Golden Gate Bridge, particularly when measured in terms of traffic volume—administrative costs were three times greater per vehicle crossings. The chamber committee criticized high painting and maintenance costs, advertising appropriations, and staff salaries.⁷⁹ It recommended that “officials of the Chamber of Commerce and other business groups” work to “see that only qualified persons of broad business experience *who do not hold public office at the time* be appointed as directors.”⁸⁰ And, it called for legislation to shift responsibility for the maintenance of the bridge to the state Department of Public Works.

⁷⁸ San Francisco Chamber of Commerce Special Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District to Board of Directors, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, September 21, 1938, box 22, IM Facility.

⁷⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 27, 1938.

⁸⁰ Emphasis added. Special Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District to Board of Directors, San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, September 21, 1938, box 22, IM Facility.

Table 3.1: Cost in Cents per Vehicle Crossing [1937-38]

<i>Expense Items</i>	<i>Golden Gate Bridge and Highway Dist.</i>	<i>San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge</i>	<i>Ratio of Unit Cost of Golden Gate Br. & Hwy. Dist. to San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge</i>
Administrative	5.2361	1.5811	331.20%
Operating	3.3729	2.242	150.40%
Repairs, Maintenance and Depreciation	1.8283	0.8268	221.10%
Deferred Maintenance	1.5038	None	150.10%
Total	11.9405	4.6499	256.80%

Source: Reproduced from San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, "Report of the Special Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District," September 21, 1938, box 22, IM Facility.

The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge quickly became a “measuring rod with which to test the management of the Golden Gate Bridge.”⁸¹ It won federal financing from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and additional funding from the Public Works Administration. The state was responsible for its maintenance, and gas taxes and other funds provided for its upkeep. Because of an agreement with the RFC, its toll revenues were devoted exclusively to debt service until 1952. The agency directly responsible for its administration, the California Toll Bridge Authority, a division of the Department of Public Works, was headed by an ex-officio board including the governor and the director of public works. Although there were significant differences in the financial structure of the two organizations, the most important of which was the funding of maintenance, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was constantly being compared to the larger organization with its much larger bridge. The most politically volatile contrast was their toll rates; the basic Bay Bridge toll started at 65 cents at its 1936 opening, and almost immediately dropped to 50 cents, also the original charge for

⁸¹ *San Francisco Examiner* September 28, 1938.

the Golden Gate Bridge. However, tolls on the Bay span continued to plummet, reduced to 40 cents in 1938 and again to 25 cents in 1940. Tolls on the Golden Gate Bridge remained at 50 cents until 1950. It was not until the end of 1955 that they were lowered to the same level as Bay Bridge tolls.⁸² As much as Golden Gate Bridge officials protested that their obligations and expenses were much higher than those of the state-operated bridge to the east, the toll-paying public cared first and foremost about the bottom line: they were paying a premium to cross the lovely span, twice as much as they thought they should. Golden Gate Bridge officials quickly came to loathe the inevitable comparisons.⁸³ But, the fact was that the Golden Gate Bridge was more expensive due to the institution that was responsible for its administration. Regardless of the competence or honesty of its management, it simply could not compete with a much larger state agency for subsidies or in the efficiency of its operations.

⁸² For information on Bay Bridge tolls, see Division of Highways California Department of Public Works, *Report on Examination of Statements Relating to Traffic, Revenues, and Revenue Funds, San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge* (Sacramento, 1937-1964); California Legislative Auditor, *Financial History of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge* (Sacramento, 1953). For early Golden Gate Bridge toll structure, see Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District *Preliminary Report on Long Range Planning*, vol. 1, *Long Range Planning Survey* by Arthur C. Jenkins (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1958), Table G-II.

⁸³ For detailed objections to the comparison see A. R. O'Brien, R. A. Thompson, and James E. Ricketts to Honorable Board of Directors, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, January 8, 1941, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District File, Randolph Collier Papers, LP 229 California State Archives, Sacramento (hereafter referred to as Collier Papers).

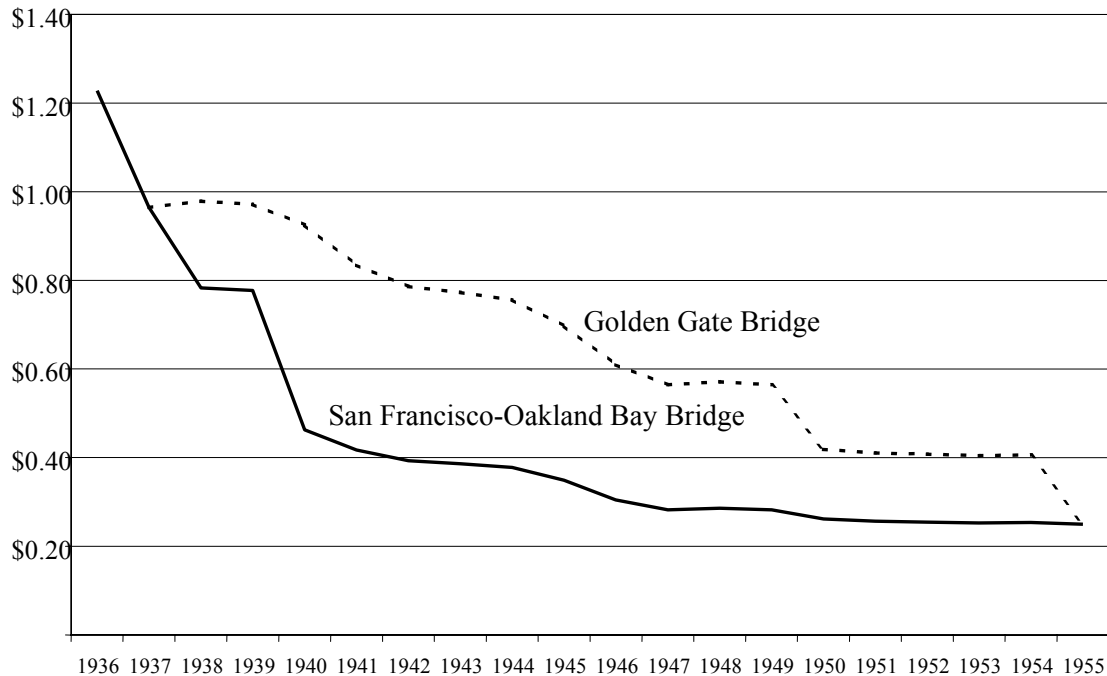


Figure 3.3: Comparison of one-way tolls for private automobiles on the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, 1936-1955, adjusted for inflation (base year 1955).

The bridge directors reacted with hostility to the chamber of commerce report. The district’s official reply disputed the findings point by point, called the conclusions of the chamber “preposterous,” the report “hastily and inaccurately drawn,” and (throwing the chamber’s greatest concern back in their faces) “politically inspired.”⁸⁴ They argued that the chamber ignored the many ways in which the Bay Bridge was subsidized by the state and their figures were misleading and inaccurate. O’Brien remarked that “Spain had her Don Quixote, he sallied forth and fought windmills. Today in California San Francisco has in her Chamber of Commerce a Don Quixote who fights bridges.”⁸⁵ The bridge district’s written reply insinuated that competing transportation interests (that is,

⁸⁴ A. R. O’Brien, Jr., A. M. Brown, and R. H. Trumbull to Board of Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. October 13, 1938, box 80, DS Vault. The chamber of commerce issued a rebuttal, in turn, see Charles Page to President and Directors of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, January 30, 1939, box 22, IM Facility.

⁸⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 14, 1938.

the Southern Pacific Company which was still operating ferries on the bay between San Francisco and Marin) were behind the report:

These same interests are now evidently seeking to destroy the usefulness of this great structure by retarding extension of approach roads, by raising toll rates on trucks in order to create a demand for a return of the ferries and by lowering toll rates on buses in order to permit a further extension of their controlled subsidiary.⁸⁶

Whatever the underlying motivations, all indications seemed to justify the concerns of the chamber of commerce, at least regarding the financial situation of the bridge district. Traffic continued to be disappointing. Auto ferry service between San Francisco and Marin ended in July 1938 (though there was a brief resumption of limited service by Northwestern Pacific Company until February 1941).⁸⁷ But ferry patrons did not immediately turn to the Golden Gate Bridge as expected; total crossings between San Francisco and Marin decreased by nearly ten percent in early months of 1939 compared to 1938. Overall traffic and revenue of the bridge did not decline because other categories of traffic increased (trucks and bus passengers) and tolls for commercial vehicles were raised. Nevertheless, it was clear that the bridge was losing private automobiles, the most important source of toll revenue. Other routes to San Francisco were becoming less expensive and more convenient; approaches were being improved for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, its tolls were steadily falling, and its traffic rising rapidly. Tolls on the Carquinez Bridge a possible route to the Bay Bridge from the Sacramento Valley, were also falling.⁸⁸ And tourist facilities were being developed and

⁸⁶ O'Brien, A. M. Brown, and Trumbull to Board of Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, box 80, DS Vault.

⁸⁷ Sydney W. Taylor to Board of Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, June 2, 1943, box 204, DS Vault.

⁸⁸ In 1940 the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District erected a sign directing motorists to their Bridge near a state sign pointing to the Carquinez bridge, hoping to divert San Francisco bound traffic. *San Rafael Daily Independent* October 9, 1940.

promoted in the Sierra Nevada that competed with attractions of the Redwood Empire.⁸⁹
The bridge district finished the 1938-39 fiscal year with a net loss of \$135,000.⁹⁰

In light of alarming traffic statistics and disappointing revenues, the chamber of commerce extended its investigation of the bridge district, declaring that “unless an earnest business-like effort is made to effect the fullest economy,” a new tax assessment would be unavoidable.⁹¹ In 1939, the chamber officially recommended that the bridge district slash its advertising and public relations budget and reduce meetings of the board of directors to one a month. It called for the elimination of four “redundant” offices and the reduction of a number of other costs including painting, the single largest maintenance expense on the span.⁹²

⁸⁹ San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, “News Bulletin: A Continued Golden Gate Bridge Deficit in 1939-1940,” (San Francisco, October 3, 1939); San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, “News Bulletin: Golden Gate Bridge Auto Traffic and Revenue,” (June 18, 1940).

⁹⁰ W. W. Monohan to W. H. Harrelson, October 25, 1939, box 22, IM Facility.

⁹¹ San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, “News Bulletin: A Continued Golden Gate Bridge Deficit in 1939-1940,” (October 3, 1939).

⁹² *San Francisco Chronicle* June 15, 1939; Ibid.



Figure 3.4: *San Francisco News* December 11, 1940.

Concern about unnecessary expenses was soon validated; adding insult to injury, the board of directors voted to erect a \$10,000 life-size statue of Strauss at the toll plaza.⁹³ This move was somewhat ironic, since bridge district directors and officials had taken pains to limit Strauss' authority as chief engineer and had spent thousands of dollars fighting his efforts to claim a decent compensation. However, Strauss' death conveniently provided the opportunity to cast him as the heroic visionary tirelessly

⁹³ *San Rafael Daily Independent* June 19, July 9, 1940; *Sausalito News* July 11, 1940; *San Anselmo Herald* July 4, 1940.

leading the fight for the bridge against sinister opposition, an image Strauss himself sought to cultivate. The story coincided with the identity that the bridge district itself was developing: an embattled, heroic institution fighting against relentless, selfish efforts to exploit toll revenues and wrest control of the bridge.

The Marin County grand jury denounced the expense, and accused the bridge directors of a “lack of concern for the best interests of the district and the taxpayers who compose it,” calling for a thorough state-level investigation. It also cited mounting evidence that toll collectors were chiseling due to lax management.⁹⁴ *San Francisco News* took up the challenge; in a series of three articles, it detailed some of the most offensive items on the bridge district budget. It pointed out that the administrative expenses were three times higher for the Golden Gate Bridge than for the Bay Bridge, and described a bloated office staff.⁹⁵ The *Examiner* published a poll of San Francisco residents who overwhelmingly supported a state take-over and stressing the fact that the bridge district had ignored all of the recommendations of the chamber of commerce for improving efficiency.⁹⁶ Suddenly, it seemed, everyone was against the bridge district.

Hoping to deflect some of the criticism, the Golden Gate Bridge directors initiated their own inquiry.⁹⁷ As the investigation got underway, bridge director Richard Welch, who rarely attended meetings because of his duties as a United States Congressman, was aggressively silenced by the president of the board when he tried to bring up the question of the directors’ hotel and travel expenses.⁹⁸ Welch went to the

⁹⁴ *San Rafael Daily Independent* July 18, 1940, October 24, 1940; *San Francisco Examiner* October 25, 1940.

⁹⁵ *San Francisco News* December 9, 1940, December 10, 1940, December 11, 1940.

⁹⁶ *San Francisco Examiner* December 10, 1940.

⁹⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* December 11, 1940.

⁹⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* December 19, 1940; *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 18, 1940.

press with figures showing that thousands of dollars were being spent to get the directors to meetings, and pledged to oppose any federal aid until economy measures were taken, much to the dismay of the rest of the directors. O'Brien charged that "Welch doesn't know what he's talking about. He doesn't attend enough meetings to know what is going on."⁹⁹ The district adopted a few symbolic cutbacks, only \$5,000 of the \$33,000 worth proposed by its own committee, the most significant of which was the reduction of board meetings from three to two a month.¹⁰⁰ The *Examiner* called the action "another demonstration of the incompetence, political pettiness, and 'public be damned' spirit" of the bridge district.¹⁰¹

Despite this ostensible reform, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and many of its supporters in both San Francisco and Marin Counties came to conclude that, even if bridge district management was reformed to improve efficiency, the only real solution to the problem of managing the Golden Gate Bridge was with the state. The operations of the California Toll Bridge Authority were considered above reproach. It was managed and operated by a professional staff headed by an experienced engineer. None of its toll money went to advertising, public relations, or lobbying. And, it did not have the close ties to local politicians. The region's papers began calling for state administration, and the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution supporting acquisition.¹⁰² Marvelous Marin Inc., affiliated with the REA, added its support for bringing the bridge under state control, making a significant break with the

⁹⁹ *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 8, 1941, January 9, 1941.

¹⁰⁰ *San Francisco Examiner* December 27, 1940; *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 8, 1941, January 15, 1941, January 16, 1941.

¹⁰¹ *San Francisco Examiner* January 16, 1941

¹⁰² *San Rafael Daily Independent* December 14, 1940; *Marin Journal* June 6, 1940; *San Francisco Examiner* October 17, 1939;

larger organization.¹⁰³ Backed by the chamber of commerce, several bills to realize this goal which were introduced in Sacramento in 1941.¹⁰⁴ The first required that the state pay for the maintenance of the bridge without a change in management.¹⁰⁵ This was essentially a request for an outright grant for the Golden Gate Bridge, and had no chance of passage—southern California was already agitating for a larger share of gas taxes, proportionate to the amount paid.¹⁰⁶ It was followed by a measure that provided for state operation of the span, although without subsidies for maintenance expenses or debt service.¹⁰⁷ The bridge district would still be responsible for the construction bonds, and the board of directors would be retained as an advisory board.¹⁰⁸ This bill held little hope that tolls on the Golden Gate bridge could be reduced, and also fell flat. However, a new trend was begun—every legislative session for the next two decades featured legislation to bring the Golden Gate Bridge under state control, though the sincerity and the viability of the measures varied considerably. The bridge district could not take its integrity and security as an institution for granted, and in response, it strengthened its defenses.

While would-be bridge district reformers failed in Sacramento, they won a minor victory in 1942 on another front. The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and its allies took legal action to redress what they considered to be the bridge district's greatest weakness, the appointment of politicians to its board of directors. At their request, the state attorney general declared in 1941 that holding dual offices was a conflict of interest. The opinion was ignored by most of the offending directors, who were backed by the

¹⁰³ *San Rafael Daily Independent* May 21, 24, 27 1940; *Mill Valley Record* May 28, 1940; *Marin Journal* June 6, 1940.

¹⁰⁴ *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 4, 1941, January 7, 1941; *San Francisco Chronicle* January 7, 1941.

¹⁰⁵ A.B. 531, 54th reg. sess. (Ca. 1941).

¹⁰⁶ *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 9, 1941.

¹⁰⁷ S.B. 1137, 54th ex. sess., (Ca. 1942).

¹⁰⁸ *San Rafael Daily Independent* January 13, 1941; *San Francisco Chronicle* January 14, 1941.

bridge district attorney, but did prompt Thomas Maxwell of Napa to step down.¹⁰⁹ A lawsuit against Marin's supervisor and bridge director, R. A. Thompson, was decided in favor of the defendant by a Marin County court, but in 1942 the decision was reversed by the California Superior Court: "Public policy requires that when the duties of two offices are repugnant or overlap so that their exercise may require contradictory or inconsistent action, to the detriment of the public interest, their discharge by one person is incompatible with that interest."¹¹⁰ Warren Shannon of San Francisco also hurriedly resigned. While the decision resulted in a slight shift in the composition of the board, it produced no obvious changes in the policies or administration of the bridge district. It did not preclude the appointment of politicians, either, as long as they were not bridge district county supervisors.

¹⁰⁹ *San Francisco Examiner* January 15, 1941.

¹¹⁰ *People ex. rel. Bagshaw v. Thompson*, 55 Cal 2d 147, October 27, 1942.

An Overhaul Job



The directors of the Golden Gate Bridge have voted to appoint a committee to investigate the high cost of management of this property of which they are the trustees.

The curious factor is that three directors voted against the economy move! For what reason? Anyway, the "waste-line" should be reduced, and quickly.

Figure 3.5: *San Francisco Examiner* December 16, 1940.

Balky



The plan of some of the directors of the Golden Gate Bridge to have an open expose and discussion on the expenses of the board is having tough going at meetings of the board.

Perhaps some of the other directors have reasons for keeping the figures dark—but they forget the bridge is a publicly owned project and the "stockholders" want to know what's doing.

Figure 3.6: *San Francisco Examiner* December 21, 1940.

Haunted

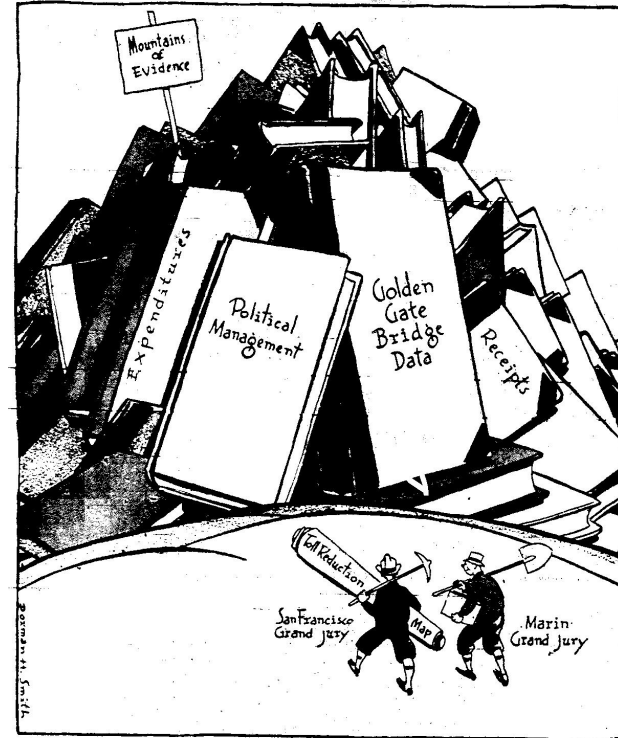


The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge has been operated soberly, as a profitable public utility, with economy to those who use the bridge, with a succession of toll reductions.

On the contrary, the Golden Gate Bridge has been intoxicated with politics, favoritism, extravagance. If it had the same management as the other bridge, its patrons should benefit too.

Figure 3.7: *San Francisco Examiner* January 25, 1941.

Exploring Party



The Grand Juries of San Francisco and Marin Counties are going to hunt for the joker in the Golden Gate Bridge books.

While about it, they should find a clew to reduced tolls and a suggestion for better management of the fine bridge.

Figure 3.8: *San Francisco Examiner* February 11, 1941.

In the meanwhile, chamber of commerce criticism and the outcry over the Strauss statue inspired a joint investigation of bridge district finances by the San Francisco and Marin County Grand Juries. In the course of the inquiry, the bridge district's own engineer, Russell Cone, made a scandalous suggestion. Cone testified that not only were the agency's finances actually sound, but that with a few budget cuts it could easily afford a toll reduction. Following the grand jury hearings, Cone was dismissed by the board of directors without any warning while he was out of town. Officially the nine to four decision was an economy measure, but no one took that explanation seriously.¹¹¹ One bridge director remarked that Cone "went behind our backs to show he knows more than the directors or the finance committee about operation of the bridge."¹¹² Apparently, the Golden Gate bridge directors would no longer tolerate such internal dissent; they were already under too much pressure from outside groups. Cone himself claimed no resentment:

My attitude has consistently been that the Golden Gate Bridge is a public institution that should be operated for the benefit of the public... I have urged that tolls be lowered as soon as possible. I firmly believe that this time is now at hand. If my dismissal results in bring[ing] about a toll reduction my personal sacrifice is worth the price.¹¹³

Cone's dismissal was widely condemned; both of the grand juries issued statements criticizing the action.¹¹⁴ Soon thereafter, the news broke that a report by Cone on potential safety problems with the bridge had been ignored and suppressed by the board

¹¹¹ *San Rafael Daily Independent* March 5, 1941, March 6, 1941; *San Francisco News* March 5, 1941.

¹¹² *San Francisco Chronicle* March 6, 1941.

¹¹³ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 7, 1941.

¹¹⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* March 6, 1941.

of directors eighteen months previously. A. R. O'Brien made the announcement that, according to Cone's findings, the bridge could be destroyed by a windstorm at any time, and the bridge district was doing nothing to address the problem.¹¹⁵ Cone had witnessed violent undulations on the bridge during a windstorm in 1938 that were similar to those that destroyed the Tacoma Narrows Bridge in Washington State.¹¹⁶ Though the scandal surrounding Cone's dismissal and engineering report overshadowed the announcement of grand jury findings on the bridge, they concluded that the bridge directorate was "squandering" its revenues with unnecessary and excessive expenditures, "show[ing] complete disregard for the sentiment of the public whose property it is handling... until it revises its attitude in this regard it cannot expect this body or the public to regard it with full confidence and with freedom from criticism and suspicion."¹¹⁷

Cone was not reinstated. Instead, civil engineer and transportation expert, Arthur C. Jenkins, was retained as a consultant. In addition, the directors created a new full-time position: public relations officer. They hired James Adam, an experienced San Francisco newspaper man, former REA publicist, and one of the directors of the 1937 Golden Gate Fiesta.¹¹⁸ Soon after, James Ricketts, the business representative for a number of San Francisco labor organizations and a director since 1938, was appointed to position of general manager with a unanimous vote, in sharp contrast to the sustained battles over his predecessors.¹¹⁹ These appointments inaugurated what was to become enduring bridge district traditions: turning to public relations in the face of criticism and

¹¹⁵ A. R. O'Brien, "Mismanagement of the Golden Gate Bridge," June 11, 1941, box 70, Keesling Papers, M0100.

¹¹⁶ Van der Zee, *The Gate*, 310.

¹¹⁷ *San Francisco News* April 5, 1941; *San Rafael Daily Independent* April 4, May 13, 15, 1941.

¹¹⁸ From the beginning, Adam was a magnet for criticism; the *Independent* remarked that he had no apparent responsibilities apart from distributing carbon copies of meeting notes. *San Rafael Daily Independent* February 28, 1941.

¹¹⁹ *San Francisco Examiner* May 23, 1942.

staffing the organization from its own ranks and with the associates of its closest ally, the REA.

Uncertainty and anxiety over the bridge district's financial condition increased as the first bond payment in 1942 approached. The bridge board of directors began to look for new ways to increase revenues, taking action to limit free government passes on the bridge.¹²⁰ Others began to devise more drastic strategies for reducing the risk of tax assessments. The district faced set, nonnegotiable annual payments regardless of the revenues or resources of the agency. Leland M. Kaiser, a municipal bond analyst representing a major public works finance consortium, added to the alarm about bridge district finances. He first approached the board of directors with a proposal for comprehensive refinancing in 1941, promising to reduce the annual payments and extend the retirement of the debt another ten years to 1981.¹²¹ Playing off themes that were already in the headlines, Kaiser argued that the bridge district was in dire financial straits and tax assessments were inevitable. Later, as he made his case to the state senate hoping to overrule the bridge district, Kaiser compared the traffic estimates and income that was predicted for the bridge in 1930 with the actual revenues of the bridge, revealing dramatic shortfalls.

¹²⁰ *San Rafael Daily Independent* March 12, 1941; *San Francisco Chronicle* March 5, 1941, March 13, 1941.

¹²¹ *San Rafael Daily Independent* June 18, 1941.

Table 3.2: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District: Comparison of Official Revenue and Expense Estimates Made Prior to Construction of Bridge with Actual Operating Expenses.

Year Beginning July 1	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	Total	1942 (Part. Est.)	Grand Total
Estimated average toll per vehicle	\$ 0.843	\$ 0.843	\$ 0.843	\$ 0.843	\$ 0.834	\$ 0.734	\$ 0.814	\$ 0.734	\$ 0.800
Actual average toll per vehicle	<u>0.540</u>	<u>0.495</u>	<u>0.492</u>	<u>0.518</u>	<u>0.521</u>	<u>0.514</u>	<u>0.511</u>	<u>0.525</u>	<u>0.514</u>
Difference	\$ 0.303	\$ 0.348	\$ 0.351	\$ 0.325	\$ 0.322	\$ 0.220	\$ 0.303	\$ 0.209	\$ 0.286
Toll Revenue, estimated	\$ 2,154,000	\$ 2,325,000	\$ 2,457,000	\$ 2,582,000	\$ 2,705,000	\$ 2,671,000	\$ 14,894,000	\$ 2,778,000	\$ 17,672,000
Other revenue, estimated	<u>26,200</u>	<u>18,400</u>	<u>30,200</u>	<u>46,300</u>	<u>65,900</u>	<u>90,000</u>	<u>277,000</u>	<u>76,800</u>	<u>353,800</u>
Total Revenue, estimated	\$ 2,180,200	\$ 2,343,400	\$ 2,487,200	\$ 2,628,300	\$ 2,770,900	\$ 2,761,000	\$ 15,171,000	\$ 2,854,800	\$ 18,025,800
Toll revenue, actual	\$ 310,341	\$ 1,594,958	\$ 1,903,373	\$ 2,124,158	\$ 2,282,314	\$ 2,292,945	\$ 10,507,989	\$ 2,380,000	\$ 12,887,989
Other revenue, actual	<u>2,478</u>	<u>5,850</u>	<u>11,829</u>	<u>27,756</u>	<u>18,901</u>	<u>16,474</u>	<u>83,288</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>103,288</u>
Total revenue, actual	\$ 312,819	\$ 1,600,808	\$ 1,915,202	\$ 2,151,914	\$ 2,301,115	\$ 2,309,419	\$ 10,591,277	\$ 2,400,000	\$ 12,991,277
Revenue deficiency	\$ 1,867,381	\$ 724,592	\$ 571,998	\$ 476,386	\$ 469,785	\$ 451,581	\$ 4,579,723	\$ 454,800	\$ 5,034,523
Operating expenses, estimated	\$ 250,000	\$ 275,000	\$ 300,000	\$ 325,000	\$ 350,000	\$ 350,000	\$ 1,850,000	\$ 350,000	\$ 2,200,000
Operating expenses, actual	<u>31,782</u>	<u>395,564</u>	<u>526,323</u>	<u>520,187</u>	<u>508,729</u>	<u>468,360</u>	<u>2,450,945</u>	<u>484,000</u>	<u>2,934,945</u>
Excess of actual over estimated	\$ (218,218)	\$ 120,564	\$ 226,323	\$ 195,187	\$ 158,729	\$ 118,360	\$ 600,945	\$ 134,000	\$ 734,945
Available for debt service, estimated	\$ 1,930,200	\$ 2,068,400	\$ 2,187,200	\$ 2,303,300	\$ 2,420,900	\$ 2,411,000	\$ 13,321,000	\$ 2,504,800	\$ 15,825,800
Available for debt service, actual	<u>281,036</u>	<u>1,205,244</u>	<u>1,388,879</u>	<u>1,631,727</u>	<u>1,792,385</u>	<u>1,841,059</u>	<u>8,140,332</u>	<u>1,916,000</u>	<u>10,056,332</u>
Excess of estimated over actual	\$ 1,649,163	\$ 863,156	\$ 798,321	\$ 671,573	\$ 628,515	\$ 569,941	\$ 5,180,668	\$ 588,800	\$ 5,769,468

Source: Table by Leland M. Kaiser, presented to the Senate Interim Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge in Sacramento, December 1942. The estimations were made in the 1930 Report of the Chief Engineer and the figures for the years up to 1942 are from the Annual Reports of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District.

Kaiser asserted that revenues would not improve after the war: “The public has gained the mistaken impression that the war has lessened its earnings because of gasoline rationing, rubber shortage, and general war conditions.”¹²² The problems of the bridge district, he argued, went to the very root of its financial structure, which was too inflexible to allow for lean years or budget shortfalls. Kaiser compared the Golden Gate Bridge’s financing unfavorably to that of other major bridges and tunnels including the Bay Bridge, the Triborough Bridge and the Holland Tunnel, all of which had more flexible terms, other sources of revenue, or longer debt maturity. Not only would his plan allow for variation in payments, it would relieve the pressure on the bridge district and result in an immediate reduction in tolls.¹²³ Kaiser’s proposal attracted considerable attention, even winning the endorsement of the San Francisco Grand Jury.¹²⁴

The bridge directors refused to consider extending the term of debt and questioned whether they even had the authority to refinance. They denied any pressing need for refinancing, subsidies, or assessments, accusing “bond salesmen” of trying to saddle the district with new debt:

This so-called Kaiser plan has been in our hair for months and months. We were never permitted to read a newspaper that didn’t in some respect disparage the financial situation of the Golden Gate Bridge District, and I am inclined as I go along the streets to apologize for this poor old decrepit and broken down arthritic structure, this financial structure, that is ready for collapse, and it all stems from the desire of the bond firms in San Francisco to make \$300,000 by refinancing a bridge that at this moment doesn’t need refinancing. The refinancing

¹²² Leland M. Kaiser, *Report on the Golden Gate Bridge & Highway District* (San Francisco: Kaiser & Company, [March, 1943]), box 205, DS Vault.

¹²³ Special Senate Interim Committee on the Administrative Affairs, Financial Status and Modus Operandi of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Excerpts of Testimony* (Sacramento, December 15-17, 1942), 195-7, 16, box 70, Keesling Papers, M0100.

¹²⁴ *San Rafael Daily Independent* June 19, 1941.

plan... would cost the Bridge District \$9,000,000 additional in interest charges, and we don't need it and we don't want it.¹²⁵

Even to the bridge district's enemies, the primary attraction of Kaiser's plan was the promise of toll reductions; once closer analysis revealed that even with refinancing tolls were likely to remain at 50 cents the plan lost most of its appeal.¹²⁶ To the bridge directors, particularly those from the counties north of Marin, improving the likelihood of a toll reduction was not a priority, anyway. The bridge district auditor pointed out that "basically the problem is one of policy—whether or not it is preferable to pay a premium in the future for the privilege of cutting tolls at this time."¹²⁷ The board of directors rejected his proposal with an eight to three vote.¹²⁸ The main effect of Kaiser's efforts was to add to the public scrutiny that was already threatening the bridge district.

In response to local demands for investigation, the state senate appointed a committee at the end of the 1941 legislative session to investigate the "administrative affairs, financial status and modus operandi" of the bridge district.¹²⁹ The committee, headed by San Francisco Democrat John F. Shelley, held several lengthy hearings in 1942 and 1943 that included severely conflicting testimony regarding the agency's finances. On the one hand, bridge district officials testified that, due both to wartime shortages and to the use of government passes on the bridge for as many as 43 percent of total crossings, the district could not even consider a toll cut at the time. "I don't think

¹²⁵ John L. McNab, testimony, Special Senate Interim Committee, *[Hearing] in the Matter of Administrative Affairs, Financial Status and Modus Operandi of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (Sacramento, March 8, 1943, 76-77).

¹²⁶ San Francisco Bureau of Governmental Research, "News Bulletin: Golden Gate Bond Refinancing Proposed," (San Francisco, July 1, 1941).

¹²⁷ Roy S. West to Board of Directors, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, June 20, 1941, box 204, DS Vault.

¹²⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* February 14, 1942.

¹²⁹ Senate Interim Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report* (Sacramento, 1943), 5.

we can get by 1944 without an assessment,” testified President Hugo D. Newhouse early on in the hearings.¹³⁰ His gloomy prediction may have been intended to assist in the effort in Washington D. C. to pass a bill nullifying its agreement to provide free passes for government officials in exchange for the use of military land for its terminus.¹³¹ But he soon came to regret the remark; when Kaiser suggested that the bridge should be refinanced and presented his proposal to the committee, bridge district officials changed their story. When hearings resumed a few months later, the new bridge district president, William Hadel, asserted that profits exceeded the previous year by \$170,000 and that there was no financial crisis on the horizon.¹³² Hadel testified that “naturally at the beginning of the gasoline rationing the outlook for the Golden Gate Bridge looked very, very bad but this has changed very, very rapidly.”¹³³ Traffic went up on the bridge, in part due to the opening of a major shipyard in Marin with workers commuting from San Francisco until housing was constructed for them later in the year.¹³⁴ Close examination of the many reserve funds that had been established in 1931 indicated that the bridge district was already squirreling away significant amounts of money, and had an “unencumbered reserve fund” of \$1,500,000 available to cover its bond payments.¹³⁵

The bridge district attorney remarked that “all of this trouble about the financial affairs of

¹³⁰ Special Senate Interim Committee on the Administrative Affairs, Financial Status and Modus Operandi of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Excerpts of Testimony* (December 15-17, 1942), 4, box 70, Keesling Papers, M0100.

¹³¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 17, 1942, March 10, 1943.

¹³² W. D. Hadel, statement, March 4, 1943, box 204, IM Facility.

¹³³ Special Senate Interim Committee, *[Hearing] In the Matter of Administrative Affairs, Financial Status and Modus Operandi of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (March 8 1943), 45, box 204, IM Facility.

¹³⁴ Marinship, on the shores of Richardson Bay in southern Marin, began production in June, 1942, employing 17,500 workers. Initially, most of its workers lived in San Francisco, but by the end of 1943 hastily constructed housing in Marin City reduced the number commuting over the bridge. The committee questioned the bridge district auditor about the shipyard traffic, pointing out that it was most likely temporary. *Ibid.*, 52-54; Charles Wollenberg, *Marinship at War: Shipbuilding and Social Change in Wartime Sausalito* (Berkeley: Western Heritage Press, 1990), 4, 86.

¹³⁵ *San Francisco Examiner* January 22, 1943.

the district stems from the ambition of a bonddealer to make a... commission.”¹³⁶

Hadeler announced a few months later that the district was in “the best financial condition since its opening to traffic.”¹³⁷ Understandably, Shelley expressed frustration about inadequate data provided by bridge district representatives and their failure to cooperate with the investigation.¹³⁸

While the hearings of the senate committee investigating the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District inspired a slew of bills in 1943, its final report reflected the uncertainty about the status of the bridge district. They noted that wartime conditions made predicting its financial future impossible, and supported legislation to allow the bridge directors to “alter their financial program by whatever method they deem best under conditions existing at the time.”¹³⁹ Accordingly, legislation supported by the bridge district to increase its capacity to manage and alter its finances and incur new debt was passed unanimously by the state legislature and promptly signed into law.¹⁴⁰

Hadeler announced their passage with the remark that “the management is efficient and the financial position [of the district] is sound... the bill enacted by the Legislature will be very helpful in the event that the occasion ever arises for refinancing.”¹⁴¹ While the senate investigation found bridge district management to be adequate and the cost of maintaining the bridge to be “very reasonable,” it cited the importance of the bridge to

¹³⁶ *San Francisco Examiner* March 9, 1943.

¹³⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* May 27, 1943.

¹³⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* January 22, 1943.

¹³⁹ Senate Interim Committee on Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report* (Sacramento, 1943).

¹⁴⁰ *Statutes of California* (1943) 45th reg. sess., ch. 286, 1243-1260; ch. 509, 2050-2051; ch. 543, 2089-2090.

¹⁴¹ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Summary of Golden Gate Bridge Bills Passed by 1943 Legislature* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1944).

the state as a whole, and recommended “legislation which will open negotiations for the state to take over the Golden Gate Bridge and operate it eventually toll free.”¹⁴²

All in all, the 1943 legislative session was a complete victory for the bridge district. What began as an attempt to investigate its operations by would-be reformers who were convinced of its mismanagement only resulted in an increase in the autonomy and power of the agency. Bills to incorporate the bridge into the state highway system or at least to shift responsibility for its maintenance and operation were introduced in every legislative session through the 1940s but got nowhere.¹⁴³

In the end, all of the public scrutiny in the decade after the opening of the bridge did little to improve its management, increase efficiency, or reduce expenditures. It was true that revenues were below expectations, and that the imperative debt payments meant that property assessments might be necessary to meet them. But rather than make significant budget cutbacks, refinance, or endure outside interference or reform in order to tap into state and federal subsidies, bridge district representatives stalled. Even in the leanest years, bridge district reports were resolutely upbeat and optimistic. Despite the hopeful figures presented in the senate hearings in March, revenue shortfall for fiscal year 1943-44 was the worst yet, traffic over the bridge declining 11 percent from the previous year.¹⁴⁴ Bridge representatives attributed their problems primarily to the extensive use of free government passes on the bridge, which were restricted to the military in 1944, and

¹⁴² Senate Interim Committee on Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report*.

¹⁴³ S.B. 966, 55th reg. sess. (Ca. 1943); A.B. 1147, 56th reg. sess. (Ca. 1945); S.B. 1400, 57th reg. sess. (Ca. 1947); A.B. 27, 57th reg. sess. (Ca. 1947); A.B. 1630, 57th reg. sess. (Ca. 1947); SB 1517, 1949 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); A.B. 76, 1949 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); A.B. 1376, 1949 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); A.B. 395, 1949 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); A.B. 2889, 1949 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.).

¹⁴⁴ Crossings declined from 5.4 million in 1942-43 to 4.8 million in 1943-44. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Annual Report* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1943-1944).

also cited wartime rationing.¹⁴⁵ They counted on increased post-war traffic revenues to bail them out of their financial and public relations conundrum. Even if they were successful in getting state and federal aid, they knew that it would come with increased oversight and regulation. Alternatively, if bridge district representatives waited too long to reduce tolls or were forced to impose another major tax assessment in order to meet bond obligations, public opinion might turn against them enough to make the wholesale dissolution of the bridge district politically viable, even inevitable. The leadership of the bridge district took a calculated risk, betting that improved post-war traffic would make up for budget deficits before the autonomy and independence of the institution was compromised. It was a gamble that paid off handsomely.

Fortification

The end of the War marked a permanent shift in the fortunes of the Golden Gate Bridge. While criticism of the bridge district continued to emphasize high tolls, misuse of funds, and lack of accountability, no longer could the region's civic elite accuse the agency of failing to meet their basic criterion of success: profitability. The end of wartime rationing meant a bonanza for the bridge district: actual revenues surpassed expected revenues for the very first time in fiscal year 1945-46. Traffic on the bridge went from 4.8 million vehicles in 1944-45 to 6.7 million in 1945-46, an increase of nearly 30 percent. Traffic on the bridge would not see another decline for nearly three

¹⁴⁵ In 1944 the bridge district was successful in getting federal legislation to eliminate most of the passes, reducing the number of free crossings by nearly two thirds (from 2,200 per day to fewer than 800 per day) and contributed to a nine percent increase in total revenues for 1944-45, despite another decline in total traffic.

decades.¹⁴⁶ Revenues improved dramatically; the bridge district started building up reserve funds and reported a surplus in 1945-46. Temporarily, improved fortunes quieted criticism.

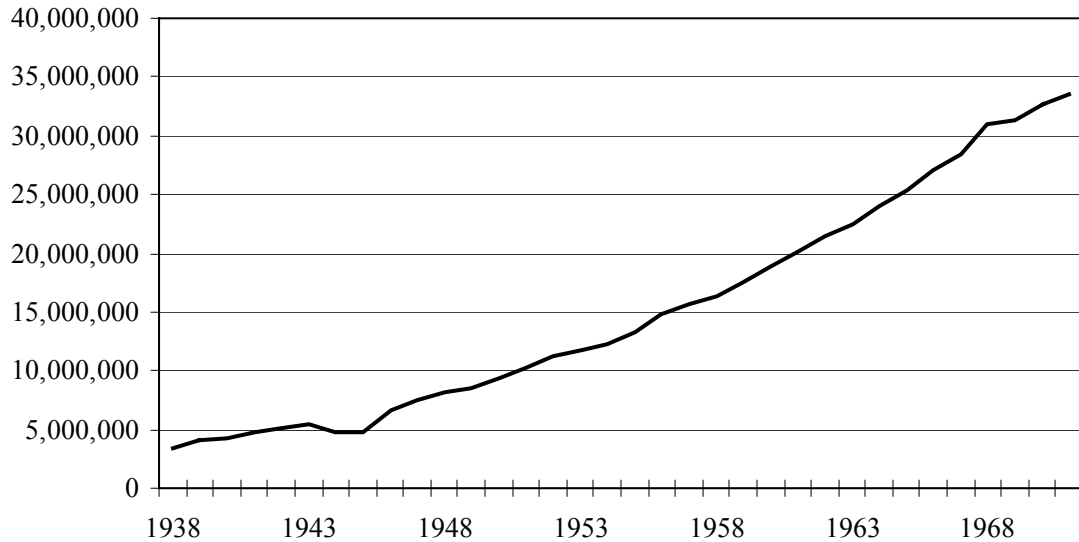


Figure 3.9: Golden Gate Bridge annual crossings through 1971. Figures from Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Annual Reports* (1937-1972).

The increase in bridge crossings reflected rapid growth in Marin County. In 1940, the county was still rural, and the construction of the bridge had not produced the growth that boosters had hoped for. Even with an influx of shipyard workers during World War II the county added only 33,000 residents in the 1940s. But starting in 1949 Marin's population started to climb steadily, increasing by nearly 70 percent in the following decade. Most of that growth was concentrated in the southern reaches of the county. As its commuter population grew, so did the county's influence in Sacramento.

¹⁴⁶ The next decline in traffic occurred in 1973-74, when traffic volume dropped from 43.6 million to 32.8 million.

Dissent against the policies of the bridge district spread, especially as ample toll revenues and generous expense accounts made the agency seem fat and sassy. As happy as bridge officials were to report better revenues and a comfortable surplus, Marin's commuters were equally unhappy about its high tolls. Public antagonism toward the bridge district directors and the institution in general grew as repeated demands for a reconsideration of its toll rates were ignored.

What was missing in Sacramento was a sincere and ambitious reformer, willing to take on the campaign for reform and toll reductions as a personal crusade. Until 1950, the best spokesman for the district's critics was Assemblyman Richard McCollister, who represented the commuters of southern Marin. He sponsored regular bills to incorporate the bridge into the state Department of Public Works, as well as periodic resolutions encouraging the district to lower tolls. While McCollister's persistence was beyond question, but his fervor and sincerity were not. The bills he introduced were vague and left crucial questions unanswered; an observer in Sacramento noted that he "never attempted to have them withdrawn from the committee."¹⁴⁷ McCollister's 1947 bill to reform the bridge district was typical. In abstract terms, it called for the bridge to "go into the state highway system," but lacked any provision for refinancing district debt; the Division of Highways was to take over responsibility for its maintenance so that tolls could be reduced. The board of directors would be retained as the administrative body directing bridge affairs, reconstituted as a subdivision of the state Department of Public Works. McCollister described it as "an attempt to place the Golden Gate Bridge on an equal footing with the San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge and bring about a reduction in

¹⁴⁷ Marin County Board of Supervisors, *In the Matter Of: Petition Requesting Adoption of Resolution for State Acquisition of Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (San Rafael, CA, 1952), 34, box 204, DS Vault.

tolls.”¹⁴⁸ Despite the vague language of the bill, the measure had the active support of the northern California chambers of commerce and eighty-five smaller North Bay civic organizations, as well as the bridge directors’ own legislative committee.¹⁴⁹ It had been explicitly designed to meet the requirements for reorganization set forth by the district, and the language of the bill had been provided by John L. McNab, attorney for the district. But, the bridge board of directors refused to endorse the bill, and McCollister refused to fight for it.¹⁵⁰ He withdrew it from consideration, citing the bridge district’s lack of support as the reason for its defeat:

I will not let my friends in the legislature take the blame for the failure of this bill. The fault lies with the bridge directors, who have repeatedly tried to obstruct toll reduction efforts by the people. We have met their every legal objection but the bridge directors still do not wish their little kingdom disturbed. These directors had hoped to see the bill defeated here in the legislature so that they could shift the responsibility onto us.¹⁵¹

Despite McCollister’s professed disappointment, the bill never had a real chance of success, regardless of the official position of the bridge district. McCollister’s denunciation of the bridge district was little more than bluster. Given the political climate in southern Marin at the time, there was no way that he could survive politically if he was not critical of the bridge district. Later, McCollister explained his view of the prospects for bridge district reform:

If the official in charge of the agency, on which you wish legislation, neglects or takes no part in the discussion, tries in no way to help and is on the other side of the table, it is doubtful if it would pass. It is necessary that the Bridge Directors

¹⁴⁸ Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Public Hearings* (Sacramento, February 26 and 27, 1951), 113.

¹⁴⁹ *Daily Independent Journal* April 14, 1949. The Marin and Sonoma Chambers of Commerce “campaign[ed] vigorously for this bill during 1949 until it became obvious that the bill was doomed to defeat,” according to later testimony. *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Daily Independent Journal* February 26, March 10, 1949.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Independent Journal* April 14, 1949.

desire a change. In previous years there has been absolutely no visible support from the directorate themselves.¹⁵²

McCollister's expectation that his legislation should actually garner the support of the board of directors either signaled his naiveté or indicated that his actions were primarily symbolic gestures of sympathy for his commuting constituency.

In the late 1940s, commuters' clubs sprang up all over Marin County with the express purpose of working for toll reductions; they added to the cacophony of protest by local taxpayers' associations, chambers of commerce and local politicians on the issue of bridge tolls. Marin citizens quickly discovered that there was no effective way to influence district policy. The president of the Mill Valley Commuters Club described the experience of testifying before the board of directors:

You identify yourself carefully and fully, make your statement and sit down. After this you might as well go home. Your statement has been listened to politely and completely ignored. You have no further opportunity to question the board's action...¹⁵³

Frustrated Marin citizens accused the directors of "high-handed incompetence" and an infuriating "public-be-damned" attitude.¹⁵⁴ Observers reported that it was impossible to obtain a record of proceedings or votes, and that all meaningful discussion was conducted behind closed doors.¹⁵⁵ In June 1950, the bridge district announced a long-awaited toll reduction, but not for commuters: it reduced the rate for commercial trucks but did not change the toll for private automobiles. This precipitated a formal alliance between the associated chambers of commerce of Marin and the Federation of Marin County Commuters' Clubs in favor of a toll reduction. Bridge directors agreed to hear their

¹⁵² Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Public Hearings* (Sacramento, February 26 and 27, 1951), 116.

¹⁵³ *San Francisco Examiner* June 13, 1950.

¹⁵⁴ *Daily Independent Journal* June 20, 1950.

¹⁵⁵ *San Francisco Examiner* June 13, 1950.

complaints on July 1, 1950, and while the dramatic meeting included much shouting, it failed to convince the directors to change toll rates.

Protest seemed to have no impact on the selection of bridge directors, either. Several public meetings were devoted to criticizing Marin's unpopular director, Matt Graham, who was accused of being unresponsive to the public, extravagant with his expense account, and one of the primary opponents of toll reductions. According to the *Independent Journal*, the Marin Supervisors received a "flood" of letters recommending other candidates for the job as Graham's term expired in 1950.¹⁵⁶ Although all of Marin's newspapers opposed his reappointment, he was confirmed for another four years without dissent by the county supervisors. Marin's papers accused them of "turning their backs on public clamor for a change in bridge policies and "condoning the reckless waste of public funds."¹⁵⁷

Though Marin's political establishment was unsympathetic to efforts for bridge district reform, protestors could rely on the support of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and leading newspapers, which continued to criticize bridge administration for inefficiency and extravagance. San Francisco papers featured repeated exposés on bridge district spending, including the elaborate furnishings of the district offices, unrestricted expense accounts for directors and staff, its public relations, advertising and lobbying budgets, redundant staffing, and failure to entertain bids on contracts.¹⁵⁸ San Francisco replaced three out of five of its bridge district representatives in 1950, with a

¹⁵⁶ *Daily Independent Journal* November 20, 1950.

¹⁵⁷ *Daily Independent Journal* June 20, November 20, 21, 25, 1950; *Mill Valley Record* November 16, 23, 30, 1950.

¹⁵⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 30, 1950.

mandate to “convert this corporation from a closed one to an open one.”¹⁵⁹ San Francisco Supervisors officially went on record in support of a state take-over in January 1951, provided that they were relieved of all responsibility for the bridge.¹⁶⁰ Critics of the bridge district, with a variety of motivations, were beginning to form a powerful bloc in Sacramento.

John F. “Jack” McCarthy, elected as Marin’s state senator in 1950, built his career on the discontent of Marin County toll payers, filling the void of leadership in Sacramento on the question of the fate of the Golden Gate Bridge. He became their champion, the most popular politician in the county, and the arch enemy of the bridge district. McCarthy launched his first campaign in the midst of a virtual siege on the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District by the residents of Marin County. When McCarthy won his seat in the state senate he was twenty-six years old and the youngest senator ever to take office in the state. Only five years earlier he had left professional baseball to work as the Marin County manager of his father’s construction company. Settling down in Kentfield with his new wife, Ursula Mulligan, Jack began work overseeing the construction of Dominican College in San Rafael, Marin Catholic High School in Mill Valley, and the reconstruction of the old San Rafael Mission. His father, Robert, was an Irish immigrant and a self-made man who had earned his fortune as a leading contractor for the Archdiocese of San Francisco at a time of rapid expansion. Robert was well connected in Sacramento, personal friends with Henry J. Kaiser, and chairman of “Democrats for [Earl] Warren,” California’s Republican governor.¹⁶¹ By the late 1940s, he had expanded his business to Marin County, focusing on residential

¹⁵⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 30, 1950.

¹⁶⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 12, 1952.

¹⁶¹ *Daily Independent Journal* November 25, 1950.

development and transportation infrastructure. The elder McCarthy had a tangible interest in seeing that Marin's potential for growth was realized, and he had the connections and resources to be a powerful backer of his youngest son's new political ambitions.

Jack McCarthy won his first election by a narrow margin in a four-way race, beating out a prominent member of Marin's political establishment. His closest opponent was T. Fred Bagshaw, chairman of the Marin County Board of Supervisors, former mayor of Mill Valley, and president of the supervisor's unit of the REA. Bagshaw had a long list of political positions in Marin and had recently retired as the publisher of the *Marin Journal*. From 1940 to 1943, when a court ruling against county supervisors serving as directors forced his resignation, he served as a bridge director.¹⁶² Both Bagshaw and McCarthy ran as independents. Neither of two candidates who had the endorsement of the county political parties represented a significant challenge.¹⁶³ McCarthy's victory was an upset; apparently a healthy campaign fund and extensive newspaper, radio and billboard advertising made up for his lack of experience. McCarthy made headlines by reporting a campaign expenses of \$6,375, nearly all of which was donated by his immediate family. Bagshaw spent \$539.82.¹⁶⁴

Marin's political landscape at the time was divided, with "provincials" in the northern areas and "cosmopolitan" communities in the south, as one local historian has observed.¹⁶⁵ The population of the northern areas was oriented around San Rafael, economically engaged with agriculture, and socially and politically integrated with the

¹⁶² The *Marin Journal* merged with the daily *San Rafael Independent* in 1948.

¹⁶³ *Daily Independent Journal* November 24, 1950.

¹⁶⁴ *Daily Independent Journal* November 25, 1950.

¹⁶⁵ Evelyn Morris Radford, *The Bridge and the Building: The Art of Government and the Government of Art*, Rev. ed. (New York, 1974).

rural areas of northern California. The “cosmopolitan” areas, dominated by commuters, identified more with San Francisco, and had a more progressive political orientation.¹⁶⁶ McCarthy, a newcomer from a San Francisco family, represented a break with the county’s ruling coalition, what was known to its opponents as the “courthouse gang.”¹⁶⁷ His youth and energy probably appealed to many southern Marin commuters, most of whom were new to the county; many local political regimes were upset as the rapid growth of the 1950s transformed the political landscape of the Bay Area.¹⁶⁸ At the same time, McCarthy was from a prominent Catholic family—an association that won him support in the well-established Catholic communities associated with Marin’s agricultural economy. In later campaigns, McCarthy emphasized his Irish-Catholic heritage by using a shamrock logo in his ads.¹⁶⁹ McCarthy ran as a “business man.” He promised to fight against communism and called for “economy,” but supported increased taxation for schools, highways, and hospitals to accommodate growth.¹⁷⁰ While McCarthy favored the incorporation of the Golden Gate Bridge into the state highway system, this was not remarkable: so did the rest of the candidates.¹⁷¹ A Sausalito resident remarked that “being for state control [of the Golden Gate Bridge] these days is a little like being against sin.”¹⁷² It was not a prominent part of McCarthy’s initial platform. His first, narrow political victory represented an affirmation for the promise of growth and development symbolized by the youthful son of a contractor, as well as a protest vote against the political status-quo, personified by Bagshaw.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Walker, *The Country in the City: Urban Environmentalism in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

¹⁶⁹ E.g. *Pacific Sun* September 21, 1966.

¹⁷⁰ *Daily Independent Journal* October 11, November 2, 1950.

¹⁷¹ *Daily Independent Journal* October 11, 1950.

¹⁷² *Sausalito News* February 22, 1951.

Jack joined his elder brother in Sacramento, Robert I. McCarthy, a Democrat who had been elected to the assembly representing San Francisco two years earlier. Robert I. was a decorated Army officer who returned from the War to earn a degree in law from the University of San Francisco and quickly became a partner in a San Francisco firm. In contrast, Jack's education was modest. He left the University of San Francisco twice, once to serve three years as a wartime Merchant Marine and again for professional baseball. During his time in construction, he took classes in engineering at Heald College, but never earned a degree.

Senator McCarthy was probably quite conscious of his youth, inexperience and lack of formal education, as well as suggestions that his father had bought him a position in the legislature.¹⁷³ Whatever the reasons, he was greeted with open arms by the Republican leadership in Sacramento and took advantage of his opportunities. Immediately, he was given a choice position on the senate transportation committee. One week after taking office, McCarthy was named chairman of the Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System. Facing the intractable and unpopular Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was the first challenge that presented itself; it was a real chance to prove himself as a legislator. It was a challenge that he accepted eagerly.

Comprised entirely of senators from the counties of the bridge district, McCarthy's committee was charged with investigating the operation of the Golden Gate Bridge and developing recommendations to settle the disputes that had already produced so many poorly designed and conflicting bills. McCollister, who was deliberately

¹⁷³ The *Independent Journal* suggested that Robert McCarthy would soon be known as "the father of our legislature." *Daily Independent Journal* November 25, 1950.

excluded from the committee, was offended but undeterred in reintroducing the same legislation for a state takeover that failed in 1947 and 1949.¹⁷⁴ As chairman, McCarthy expanded the committee's purpose to include investigation of the "possibility of obtaining lower tolls, both for commuting and for transient traffic."¹⁷⁵ While McCollister may have been guilty of empty posturing, the sincerity of McCarthy's vigorous campaign for reform became apparent over the course of the two-year investigation.

The committee undertook to develop a "full and complete picture of the present financial structure of the Golden Gate Bridge, its operating and maintenance costs, its toll structure and the possibility or probability of future toll reductions."¹⁷⁶ Hearings were hastily called for February but revealed nothing new. The committee questioned bridge management, representatives of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, and various other officials about administration expenses, salaries, the cost of paint and other administrative details, covering the same elements of the bridge district budget that the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce had been criticizing since 1938.

The hearings hinted at the force of Marin commuters' discontent and the extent of the grassroots opposition to bridge district policy. The Sausalito Citizens Council's chairman condemned the "flagrant disregard of good business principles and public

¹⁷⁴ McCollister complained that McCarthy was deliberately moving in on his leadership position on the issue. It was widely suggested that the decision to create a Senate rather than joint committee was done deliberately to exclude McCollister. The *Chronicle* reported that, upon the creation of the committee, McCollister "dashed in with a series of bills." *San Francisco Chronicle* February 5, 1951; Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Public Hearings* (Sacramento, February 26 and 27, 1951), 115.

¹⁷⁵ Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Partial Report* (Sacramento, 1951), 7.

¹⁷⁶ Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Public Hearings* (Sacramento, February 26 and 27, 1951), 3.

opinion on the part of the bridge management.”¹⁷⁷ The council’s spokesman made reference to the persistent allegations of bridge district extravagance:

The freedom with which public funds are spent for elaborate quarters, for self preservation, for consultants’ fees and the favoritism accorded to selected groups cannot be overlooked. Such actions brought public criticism in the press and elsewhere but no effective correction has come from the Boards of Supervisors which appoint the bridge board... At our general meeting... the ninety five persons present voted unanimously for State control of the bridge. This action is an expression of their rejection of the policies of the bridge management and a demand for the more competent control which they believe will result from the operation of the bridge by State authorities.¹⁷⁸

Sausalito citizens were joined in this opinion by representatives of the Mill Valley Commuters’ Club, Marin County Taxpayers Association and the chairman of the Golden Gate Bridge Committee of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Marin, Francis L. Newton.¹⁷⁹

While there was strong support by various civic organizations and the public at large in Marin and San Francisco for a state takeover of the bridge, no local officials were willing to support it without a provision for the complete absolution of local fiscal responsibility. The most radical position was that of the county of Marin, expressed in somewhat cynical terms by its chairman, Bagshaw: Marin would support “turning the bridge over lock, stock and barrel to the State of California” if the counties of the bridge district were “relieved of any possible tax levy at any future date.”¹⁸⁰ Bagshaw left no room for an endorsement of state operation without complete relief of financial responsibility, regardless of the possibility of savings through greater efficiency in its administration. Even with such a provision, none of the smaller, northern counties would

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 88.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 88-89.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 110, 37.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 95.

support a take-over in any form. Marin County officially favored maintenance of the bridge by the state, but other district counties opposed the diversion of gas tax funds that it would involve.¹⁸¹ Edward C. Hael, chairman of the board of supervisors of Mendocino County, explained its position: “We feel this way up there, if the state took over the operation of the Golden Gate Bridge, they would lower the tolls and our County is opposed to that. We want the reserve fund to be built up and not to lower the tolls by the use of gasoline tax money. Under the Collier-Burns Act we would lose out on road improvement in our Northern Counties.”¹⁸² Northern California interests feared that gas tax revenues that otherwise might be used improving rural roads and highways might be diverted to pay for bridge maintenance.

It was clear that massive state appropriations would be required in the assumption of total fiscal responsibility for the bridge, and the state constitution required a public vote for any new debt greater than \$300,000.¹⁸³ The only practical way to bring the bridge under state operation would be to keep the primary liability for the bonds at the local level. The state legislature, acting through the California Toll Bridge Authority, could step into the administrative position that the bridge board of directors now held, but they refused to consider a significant revision of the terms of the district’s bonded debt, as Bagshaw and the other county representatives demanded.

The initial report of the committee sanctioned bridge district administration, and though it included a resolution that “legislation be advocated looking toward the eventual inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge in the state’s highway and toll bridge system,” it was

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ California Senate Interim Committee on San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Rapid Transit Problems, *Final Report* (Sacramento, 1957), 11-13.

not directly critical of the bridge district.¹⁸⁴ Noting the \$12 million in reserve funds and its current revenues, the committee found that “every indication is that the bridge district will be able to meet all of its obligations in the years ahead and have substantial reserves when the bonded indebtedness is finally liquidated in 1971.”¹⁸⁵ McCarthy must not have been involved in drafting the text, because the tone of approval was in direct conflict with his understanding of the problem; it was exactly these ample reserves and surpluses that offended him and his Marin County constituents. During the initial hearings, a representative of the state legislative auditor testified that the cost of operating the bridge would be reduced by nearly a million dollars annually under state control. Following up on this testimony, McCarthy initiated a complete investigation of Golden Gate Bridge operations. The results, released over a year later, provided the most credible evidence for district mismanagement to date, breathing new life into the stale campaign for a state take-over of the bridge.

In 1952, in the midst of his first reelection campaign, McCarthy announced the legislative auditor’s report on the Golden Gate Bridge, promising new legislation for the transferal of the bridge to the state department of transportation. McCarthy claimed that the report provided long-awaited proof of the “wanton extravagance” of the bridge

¹⁸⁴ The only new criticism that arose out of the hearings was of the failure of the bridge district to use the \$5 million in state funds that had been made available in 1947 as a loan for the improvement of the northern approaches (specifically the expansion of the Waldo tunnel). The money, which was being held in reserve, had not been used because bridge leadership felt that it was not sufficient to complete the project (their estimate was \$12 million). The bridge district wanted to construct an entirely new road, and though the Department of Public Works had recommended that the money be applied to widening the present road and adding a divider, there was no indication that anyone at the bridge district was interested in undertaking small-scale improvements. As the delay continued, Marin politicians began to agitate for some sort of decision, arguing that there was no chance of action by the state as long as the funds remained available. McCarthy’s committee backed them up in its official report, calling for the bridge district to act to use the funds. Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Public Hearings* (Sacramento, February 26 and 27, 1951), 97-98.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

district, revealing “peculiar” accounting methods and excessive expenses.¹⁸⁶ The accusations came at a bad time for the agency, which had recently made headlines by approving an unprecedented \$1.2 million operating budget, including substantial increases for public relations.¹⁸⁷ The bridge district also persisted in its refusal to lower tolls, despite record-breaking traffic, income, and profits for the organization. Bridge directors ignored continued commuter protest, criticism by the press, and even a resolution by the state legislature urging them to lower tolls to 25 cents.¹⁸⁸ In addition, the issue of paint purchases for the bridge, which were left to the general manager and were not submitted for any competitive bidding (in direct violation of the district’s own official rules and policies), had recently exposed a growing rift between the majority of directors and an “embryo economy bloc” comprised of three recently appointed directors, Phillips Davies and Jesse Colman of San Francisco, and Marin’s Leland Murphy.¹⁸⁹

The legislative auditor’s report finally provided detailed figures to back up bridge district critics. According to the report, the operating budget of the Golden Gate Bridge could immediately be reduced by more than ten percent upon its incorporation into the California Toll Bridge Authority. The largest single expense to be eliminated would be the bridge’s annual advertising budget, then at \$33,300. Abolishing the budget for public relations would save another \$16,100. The board of directors, the secretary to the board, and the position of general manager (whose duties would be assumed by a “resident engineer”) could all be eliminated under state management, resulting in savings of over

¹⁸⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 17, 1952.

¹⁸⁷ *Daily Independent Journal* June 14, 1952; *San Francisco Chronicle* June 14, 1952. The projected cost of paint increased by 15%, but the Board of Directors voted down a resolution submitted by Coleman calling for competitive bidding.

¹⁸⁸ *Daily Independent Journal* March 29, July 24, 28, 1952.

¹⁸⁹ *Daily Independent Journal* June 19, 1952.

\$50,000. Immediate probable budget cuts identified by the auditor totaled \$132,939. This figure did not include increased efficiency in various daily operations or considerable savings expected on paint purchases with competitive bidding. Even without consolidation, the report included detailed calculations that revealed that the bridge toll, then at 40 cents, could be reduced to 25 cents under its current management and still produce comfortable reserves for the district.¹⁹⁰ The findings verified longstanding concerns over excessive expenditures on paint, the district's largest maintenance expense. The report presented independent quotes from major paint suppliers that were more than a dollar less per gallon than the prices paid by the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District.¹⁹¹

While the tone of the auditor's report was subdued and the numbers it cited relatively modest, its implications were inflammatory. The region's papers quoted the report at length, and it increase demands for immediate state control. District public relations officer James Adam denounced the findings of the legislative auditor, calling them "misleading" and the comparison with the Bay Bridge "unfair." He pointed out that the Bay Bridge's maintenance was paid from state gas tax funds, and that expenses of the Bay Bridge "have been absorbed by various state agencies and... do not appear as charges against the Bay Bridge." He claimed that the high cost of painting the Golden Gate Bridge was more due to the cost of labor than price per gallon for paint, and because of "fog, sun and wind," the Golden Gate Bridge required "a far different quality of paint"

¹⁹⁰ California Legislative Auditor, *Materials Relating to the Operation and Financing of the Golden Gate Bridge* (Sacramento, 1952).

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

and more frequent painting.¹⁹² Adam questioned McCarthy's motivations for releasing the report, accusing him of being a "publicity seeker" who was in "absolute ignorance of the financial and legal responsibilities of the Golden Gate Bridge."¹⁹³ McCarthy responded in kind, accusing Adam of working against the economical management of the bridge because his full-time position as public relations officer was an unnecessary expense that needed to be eliminated.¹⁹⁴

McCarthy seized upon the figures in the auditor's report with an almost gleeful enthusiasm. He launched a campaign for state control, resolving to tour northern California to present his proposal in person to all of the boards of supervisors in the bridge district.¹⁹⁵ Though the rest of the bridge district counties declined to hear McCarthy, the Marin supervisors immediately invited him to present his ideas. McCarthy excitedly reviewed the auditor's figures, emphasizing their reliability: "When I say to you that the representative who wrote this report... is a very conservative individual, I mean conservative."¹⁹⁶ McCarthy claimed that surplus district revenues were being squirreled away "arbitrarily" in miscellaneous accounts, making them seem less significant than they really were.¹⁹⁷ McCarthy suggested that the bridge district was exaggerating its predictions of upcoming maintenance and engineering problems facing

¹⁹² Peter A. Gasser to Honorable Board of Supervisors County of Napa, October 27, 1952, box 204, DS Vault.

¹⁹³ *Baywood Press* September 18, 1952.

¹⁹⁴ *Daily Independent Journal* January 29, 1953.

¹⁹⁵ *Sausalito News* September 18, 1952.

¹⁹⁶ Marin County Board of Supervisors, *In the Matter Of: Petition Requesting Adoption of Resolution for State Acquisition of Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (San Rafael, CA, 1952), 10, box 204, DS Vault.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

the bridge.¹⁹⁸ He emphasized the failure of the general manager to get competitive bids on paint.¹⁹⁹

Adam, who was invited by the Marin supervisors to confront McCarthy, countered his allegations of inefficiency and poor administration point by point, citing the results of previous investigations and the preliminary report of McCarthy's own committee. He asserted that "there has been no juggling of any reserve fund," and acknowledged that "the Bridge District today has approximately \$14,000,000 in reserve... [but] it still owes \$31,200,000 in bond principal, and it still will have to pay out, regardless of what happens, some \$16,600,000 in interest alone on those bonds before they finally mature in 1971."²⁰⁰ Adam professed neutrality on the question of state control, but introduced the emotional appeal that was to become the cornerstone of the defense of the bridge district in the decades to come:

The people of Marin County and five other counties voted and had the faith and courage to vote \$35,000,000 in bonds to build that bridge, a bridge which... would cost over \$100,000,000 to replace today. The people now have a voice in the operation of the Golden Gate Bridge, through their directors appointed by the Boards of Supervisors of the county. If the State of California took over the bridge, the California Toll Bridge Authority would be the administrative agency, and the bridge board has taken the position as far as the tolls are concerned that they would keep the tolls at the lowest possible basis consistent with the financial obligations and their obligations to the taxpayers of the district, whose property, whose homes are pledged as security to the bridge... [I]n the event the bridge should be destroyed the burden of meeting the bond principal and the bond interest in the case of any deficit would fall back upon the taxpayers of Marin County and the other counties of the district.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ A windstorm had caused alarming oscillations on the bridge in 1951 and a study was underway to assess the damage. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Alterations of Golden Gate Bridge* by Clifford E. Paine, Othmar Herman Ammann, and Charles E. Andrew (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1953).

¹⁹⁹ Marin County Board of Supervisors, *In the Matter Of: Petition Requesting Adoption of Resolution for State Acquisition of Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (San Rafael, CA, 1952), 34, box 204, DS Vault.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

With this, Adam evoked local pride in the bridge and the interests of “taxpayers of the District” whom he equated with property owners, *not* with toll payers. He emphasized the extent of the risk that had been assumed with the passage of the bonds; security was the main reason for the directors’ reluctance to lower tolls. His suggestion that bridge directors were closer and more responsive to the residents of the bridge district must have sounded hollow to many, considering the frustration of commuters at the unresponsiveness and aloofness of the board. But, his appeal to home rule was powerful, and state control was not a welcome prospect for local politicians. He was addressing county supervisors, the group that would lose control over the appointment of directors if the state took over the bridge. Toll payers, of course, had little stake in maintaining the existing administrative structure of the district, particularly since it precluded state subsidies for operation that benefited toll payers on other bridges. Adam won this battle, although the supervisors commended McCarthy for having “enough ambition...and enough guts to go in and fight.”²⁰² However, McCarthy’s crusade for bridge district reform had just begun.

By the time McCarthy’s committee was ready to hold its second set of hearings in November 1952, it was easy to see that that the bridge district was facing a full-force political assault. But, bridge district leaders no longer accepted criticism passively. Facing a credible, determined opponent, they were fully prepared to fight for the interests of the organization.

The tone of the exchange between the youthful McCarthy and bridge district officials reflected antagonism that had been building for some time. General Manager Ricketts had been patronizing and dismissive toward McCarthy, ridiculing him and calling

²⁰² Ibid.

him “my boy Jack,” even as he took his seat as chairman of the senate committee. Adam accused him of being a “crackpot” for suggesting lower tolls in 1951.²⁰³ McCarthy had also been infuriated when plans he was backing for a new bridge to extend eastward from San Rafael to Contra Costa County were delayed by Adam’s interference in Sacramento, on what he considered to be a flimsy premise: the new bridge might compete for its traffic and tolls.²⁰⁴ The hearings opened in San Francisco with a full press contingent and a tone of thinly veiled hostility.

Most of the testimony at the hearing was devoted to refuting the findings of the legislative auditor, Robert M. Stelmack, who reviewed and explained his findings in detail. He was followed by Edmond G. Brown, the state attorney general, who testified that the state could take over the bridge legally.²⁰⁵ The principal witness on behalf of the district was General Manager James E. Ricketts. Ricketts read aloud the bridge district’s official response to the legislative auditor’s “incomplete and erroneous” report, refuting the evidence of inefficiency and challenging the legality of a state takeover: “nothing could be done that would impair the contractual rights of the holders of bridge bonds.”²⁰⁶ Ricketts followed his prepared statement by repeating the charge that McCarthy, in advocating for toll reductions and instigating the investigation, was “ignorant and uninformed.” Angry, McCarthy defended himself: “to find out a 25-cent toll is feasible is

²⁰³ *Sausalito News* October 25, 1951.

²⁰⁴ McCarthy lodged a loud protest with the Marin County Board of Supervisors. They immediately confronted the bridge board of directors with a demand that their Sacramento agent “cease and desist” from obstructing the construction of the long-sought span. Bridge district directors protested that Adam was not acting at their direction, but the move was not uncharacteristic for Adam, who was given free reign in Sacramento and an ample expense account. *Daily Independent Journal* February 26, 1952.

²⁰⁵ *Daily Independent Journal* November 18, 1952.

²⁰⁶ Statement of James E. Ricketts before the Senate Interim Committee on Golden Gate Bridge Operations, San Francisco, November 18, 1952, box 204, DS Vault.

not ignorance. I think it is good business.”²⁰⁷ An observer described McCarthy’s response to Ricketts’ testimony:

Senator McCarthy excoriated Mr. Ricketts personally, as well as his handling of bridge matters. In his criticism, Senator McCarthy included the Board of Directors. The items under attack included Mr. Ricketts’ expense accounts, his use of a Bridge District car from home to work, the failure of the Board to ban gasoline trucks from crossing the bridge (that is, trucks with a capacity of over 600 gallons), the building up of financial reserves to huge proportions on an arbitrary basis without lowering toll, the change from weighing trucks to counting axles for toll purposes at a sacrifice of revenue, and the practice of purchasing paint without securing competitive bids.²⁰⁸

The committee discussed the issue of paint prices and bidding procedures at length, as well as the ample salaries of top bridge district officials, particularly Ricketts and Adam. Later, earlier accusations by a committee representative that the bridge directors were “political hacks” building up a “financial dynasty” were debated and quoted liberally in editorials and headlines the next day.

The hearings in San Rafael and San Francisco were a major boon to McCarthy, inspiring detailed coverage in Marin papers including large photos of a dashing young senator, with an open and innocent face, confronting Ricketts and Adam, neither of whom were at all photogenic. In a photo spread published by the *Independent Journal*, Ricketts appears to be a thin, hunched old man with small, closely set eyes, greasy hair and bad teeth. Adam provided an equally unappealing counterpoint, his corpulent frame leaning back in a chair as he stared menacingly at the camera.²⁰⁹ After the hearings, the *Sausalito News* polled its readers and reported that eighty-four percent supported a state take-

²⁰⁷ *Daily Independent Journal* November 19, 1952.

²⁰⁸ B. J. Talvacchia to Howard C. Wood, November 20, 1952, Golden Gate Bridge District File, Director of Public Works File.

²⁰⁹ *Daily Independent Journal* November 11, 1952.

over.²¹⁰ The *San Francisco Examiner* concluded that bridge administration was rife with “costly politics.”²¹¹ All in all, the hearings were a rout for the bridge district and a triumph for McCarthy, at least in terms of public relations.

At the start of the next legislative session, McCarthy sponsored a number of bills to reform the bridge district. The keystone to his program was Senate Bill 558, which called for the incorporation of the bridge into the state highway system and the abolition of the board of directors, but McCarthy also made several more restrained moves to reduce bridge tolls.²¹² Spurred by continuing reports of record traffic and revenues for the bridge district, McCarthy introduced a resolution calling for the reduction of commuter tolls to 25 cents on “a trial basis,” which passed easily as it had the year before.²¹³ McCarthy brought the same resolution to all of the county boards of supervisors in the district, winning the overwhelming approval of both Marin and San Francisco, which, as he pointed out, represented more than ninety percent of the property value behind the bridge district.²¹⁴ San Francisco and Marin papers supported McCarthy, the *Chronicle* declaring that the directors “should divest themselves of the hoarding obsession.”²¹⁵ The bridge’s own traffic engineer, Arthur C. Jenkins, reported that a 25 cent bridge toll would still leave a surplus of nearly \$16 million by the time the bonds were retired. Based on his figures, the district financial committee unanimously

²¹⁰ *Sausalito News* December 15, 1952.

²¹¹ *San Francisco Examiner* November 21, 1952.

²¹² S.B. 558, 1941 leg., ex. sess., (Ca. 1942).

²¹³ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 19, April 18, 1953.

²¹⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 5, 1953; *San Francisco Examiner* May 14, 1953.

²¹⁵ *Mill Valley Record* March 7, 1953; *San Francisco Examiner* March 19, 1953; *San Francisco Chronicle* March 20, 1953.

recommended lowering the toll.²¹⁶ But, as McCarthy put it, the bridge directors told them all “to go jump in the Bay.”²¹⁷

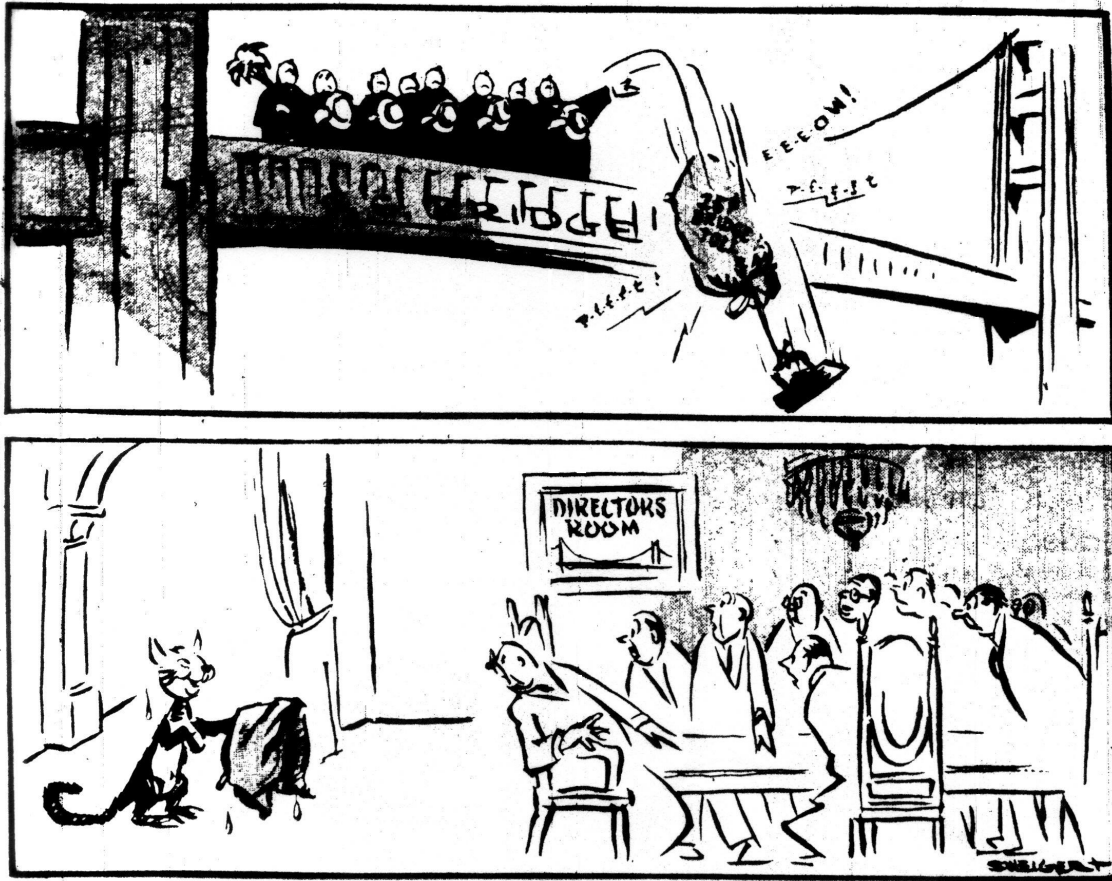


Figure 3.10: Cartoon published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* May 22, 1953. The bag being thrown from the bridge is labeled “25¢ bridge toll.” Courtesy, *San Francisco Chronicle*.

The bridge district, dominated by the northern counties, was oblivious to the figures and to bad press in San Francisco and Marin. The directors voted eight to five (both Marin directors and three of seven San Francisco directors dissenting) to keep the 40 cent toll when finally confronted with a plan for a six-month trial reduction in May.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 21, 1953.

²¹⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* May 14, 1953.

²¹⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 9, 1953. The board resolved to “withhold further reductions until such a time as the total of outstanding insurance covering the destruction or damage of the bridge, plus reserves on hand equals the outstanding bonded indebtedness of the Bridge District.”

McCarthy transformed his original resolution for a toll reduction into an ultimatum by the state legislature to lower tolls.

As McCarthy was agitating for toll reductions, the bridge district approved a \$3.5 million plan for strengthening the bridge developed by consulting engineer Clifford Paine.²¹⁹ Paine's recommendations garnered the criticism of district Engineer John G. Little, who questioned the information on which they were based. After submitting his reservations in a letter to the board, Little was promptly fired by the directors, saying that they cannot have "second guessing" on engineering issues, echoing the justification for Cone's dismissal in 1941. Paine took over the position.²²⁰ McCarthy immediately accused the bridge district of cooking up an excuse to avoid reducing tolls, arguing that the project should be reviewed by a "panel of independent engineers" before the "tremendous" expenditure was approved. McCarthy charged Paine with being "too proud" to subject his work to criticism.²²¹ McCarthy introduced a new bill in Sacramento to forcibly halt the project for further study.

By Adam's reckoning, thirty bills were introduced in 1953 that directly affected the bridge district, and McCarthy was the primary sponsor of eleven. In a major reversal of previous policy, the bridge district board of directors voted to adopt an official position on the majority of them.²²² They sent representatives to the boards of supervisors of member counties asking them to officially declare their stance, as well.²²³ This time, Adam had explicit orders to work against reform in Sacramento (in the past the board had

²¹⁹ Paine was one of the original engineers involved in the construction of the bridge. For an account of his involvement, see Van der Zee, *The Gate*.

²²⁰ *Daily Independent Journal* March 28, 1953.

²²¹ *San Francisco Examiner* January 18, 1953.

²²² *Daily Independent Journal* March 14, 1953.

²²³ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 16, 1953.

denied any involvement in directing the activities of Adam). Only four years before, such direct engagement with legislation was taboo for the bridge district, its representatives unwilling to publicly oppose even the most radical reform for fear of exacerbating accusations of “politics” on their agenda. Before McCarthy’s arrival, McCollister, who was deferential to the directors and completely ineffective in Sacramento, was the primary champion of reform; there was no need to risk direct intervention in Sacramento. McCarthy pulled no punches in his public denunciations of the board of directors and bridge district policy. In 1953, the directors voted twelve to one to fight SB 558, the most sweeping reform bill. They were joined in the effort by the Redwood Empire Association, which presented resolutions in Sacramento against “the state’s expropriation of the Golden Gate Bridge” from all of the district counties except Marin. As part of their all-out effort to defeat the bill, the bridge district adopted its first significant toll reduction, voting to increase the discount for commuters by introducing a twenty-trip ticket for six dollars, or 30 cents a crossing. Previously, the discount toll was 37 cents.²²⁴

The institution of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District had undergone an important transformation—no longer were they so eager to deny the political orientation that the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce had made its central criticism of the bridge district in the 1930s and 40s. Instead, its representatives argued that the agency’s engagement in local and state politics was justified in defense of the interests of its constituents. It should be kept in mind, however, that its constituency was not understood in terms of voters or even patrons; it was understood as the property owners, and even more directly, the counties of the district as represented by local boards of

²²⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 11, 1953.

supervisors. One observer pointed to the problem: “there would be a great deal of difficulty in passing any legislation doing away with the bridge’s Board of Directors because the directorships were political plums rewarded for political favors... The boards of supervisors of the counties in the district naturally do not want to lose any of their patronage.”²²⁵

Despite the flurry of reform bills in the aftermath of the senate investigation and hearings on the Golden Gate Bridge, no major changes were implemented in the organization or management of the bridge district. SB 558 was tabled by the senate transportation committee, effectively killing the reform effort. McCarthy was furious, calling the bridge directors “vindictive characters” manipulating the circumstances to defend their narrowly defined interests:

The recent action of the Bridge Finance Committee in deciding to make a slight reduction in commuters’ tolls was merely a scheme to quiet me down. In effect they said: ‘Give the commuters a lower toll and he’ll shut up.’ Well they can’t get away with that, and I’m going to yell all the louder for a 25-cent toll.²²⁶

Adam asserted that there “has been absolutely no public demand for this reduction” before the senate transportation committee, which approved it with a ten to one vote anyway. The bill passed by a twenty-three to four vote in the senate and fifty-five to four in the assembly.²²⁷ Governor Warren stopped the measure with a veto, arguing that it would set a dangerous precedent for state interference in the affairs of local government.²²⁸

By June 1953, when McCarthy submitted his committee’s final report, it was already obsolete. The report recommended that the Golden Gate Bridge be included in

²²⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 20, 1952.

²²⁶ James Adam to James E. Rickets, April 10, 1953, box 52, DS Vault.

²²⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 23, 29, June 7, 1953.

²²⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 10, 1953.

the state highway system, concluding that the bridge was “not being operated by the present management in an efficient and businesslike manner to the best interest of the public.”²²⁹ Finally, McCarthy had an official condemnation. But his committee was no longer behind him—only two of its six members, all of whom represented bridge district counties, were willing to endorse the report. The poor showing of legislation for reform probably undercut McCarthy; committee members lost their will to join a losing battle and risk attracting the enmity of the bridge district.

While McCarthy’s early efforts to reform the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District may have been a flop in Sacramento, they did pay off for him in Marin. The *Independent Journal* praised his effort on behalf of the measure to lower tolls:

[T]he final failure of the bill dims not one sparkle of Senator McCarthy’s success in pushing it through the state legislature. His achievement was phenomenal. Carried on the final bill were the names of practically every foe who had fought so bitterly his earlier gate bridge bills. He completely won over all but one of the senators in every county in the Bridge District. He reduced opposition in the Assembly to a whisper. This after his earlier series of bills dealing with the bridge met tragic death in those legislative halls.... All in all it was a remarkable study in perseverance, organization, and persuasiveness.²³⁰

McCarthy could take credit for motivating a few minor changes. In March 1953 the bridge district accepted bids for paint for the first time.²³¹ The board of directors, once it had weathered McCarthy’s storm of legislation without compromise, voted to reduce tolls by ten cents, and McCarthy claimed it as a personal victory, the direct result of the pressure that he had brought to bear on the district on behalf of Marin’s commuters. Ultimately, however, McCarthy probably did more to strengthen and unify the bridge

²²⁹ Senate Interim Committee on Problems Concerning the Inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge into the State Highway System, *Final Report* (Sacramento, 1953), 9.

²³⁰ *Daily Independent Journal* July 10, 1953.

²³¹ *Daily Independent Journal* March 14, 1953.

district against outside interference, particularly against any state intervention in its affairs, than he did to change its policies.

McCarthy tried again to incorporate the bridge district into the California Department of Public Works, introducing legislation in 1955, but with even less success. It closely followed the most significant toll restructuring for the bridge to date, the introduction of a 60 cent round-trip auto toll.²³² This took the wind out of his efforts for a 25 cent toll. McCarthy's bill to require the reduction narrowly won approval by the senate but never made it to the assembly.²³³ This time, neither the Marin nor the San Francisco Supervisors were willing to back him, actually sending representatives to Sacramento to testify against the legislation.²³⁴ McCarthy ended up withdrawing the bill from consideration, claiming that he had been convinced that it would hurt Marin's credit rating, but pledging to pursue the issue of toll reductions in the future.²³⁵

The bridge district directors voted in a 25 cent toll soon after McCarthy dropped his legislation and right before they announced a \$2 million net profit for the fiscal year.²³⁶ McCarthy won some credit for the decision, even attracting national attention for his reform crusade, but there were also suggestions that he had struck an agreement with the bridge board of directors to get off their backs in exchange for a toll cut.²³⁷ The best evidence that McCarthy's crusade against the bridge district was a success were his election results. He won easily in 1956; by 1960 he was the biggest vote-getter Marin, bar none.²³⁸

²³² *San Francisco Chronicle* December 31, 1954.

²³³ *Daily Independent Journal* May 19, 1955.

²³⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 26, 1955; *Daily Independent Journal* April 26, 30, 1955.

²³⁵ *Daily Independent Journal* June 11, 1955.

²³⁶ *Daily Independent Journal* August 27, October 15, 1955.

²³⁷ *Business Week* coverage mentioned in the *Inedependent Journal* September 2, 1955.

²³⁸ *Daily Independent Journal* November 14, 1960.

After 1955, three new causes displaced bridge district reform from the top of McCarthy's agenda: regional rapid transit, a second San Francisco-Marin crossing, and transportation planning for the greater San Francisco Bay Area. He waged unsuccessful though strong campaigns for the chair of the Republican state central committee in 1954 and for president pro tem of the senate in 1955.²³⁹ McCarthy also made good on his early campaign pledge of staunch anti-communism, becoming increasingly vocal on the subject in the mid-1950s.²⁴⁰ But McCarthy did not stop wrangling with the bridge district. He began collaborating on an entirely new strategy, a full-scale assault in the form of a new, comprehensive Bay Area transportation agency, the Golden Gate Authority. McCarthy had truly found his nemesis. As a passionate advocate of transportation he could not avoid conflict with the bridge district, whose interests conflicted with his primary goals. McCarthy saw improved transportation infrastructure as the surest route to development and growth for Marin County, making it the ideological and practical foundation of his political platform.

McCarthy was not the only one who benefited from his campaign against the bridge district. James Adam built his own career in fending off McCarthy's efforts for reform; his appointment as general manager in 1954 secured the institutional transformation that he helped engineer. In reference to the "policy of promoting constructive public relations," James Adam described the benefits of his work as legislative representative:

It is well to recall that the Golden Gate Bridge was conceived and constructed in the face of tremendous obstacles by selfish interests and opponents, who deliberately set out to create public hostility toward the project. Controversy

²³⁹ *Daily Independent Journal* July 21, 23, 1954, May 10, 1955; *San Francisco Chronicle* July 25, 1954, August 2, 1954.

²⁴⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 7, 1953.

flared throughout the construction period and even after the bridge was opened to traffic, with the result that public thinking was confused, and even part of the press was hostile.

It is gratifying to note that the public relations activities of the District over the years have definitely improved public opinion and there has been fostered and maintained a highly satisfactory relationship between the District and the press and with city, state and federal agencies.²⁴¹

While Adam's assessment of public opinion at the time may have been overly optimistic, it expressed a new interpretation of the bridge district's past that was already shaping its policies: the idea that the bridge district was an embattled institution and it was the duty of its representatives to fight to protect its assets and autonomy.

Conclusion

Two catalysts transformed the bridge district in the 1950s. Probably the most important was the dramatic reversal in bridge district fortunes. After World War II, the Golden Gate Bridge was no longer a liability; it was an immensely profitable asset, with toll revenue far surpassing expenses and immense reserves that only continued to grow. The bridge district and the counties that controlled its board of directors had a tremendous stake in maintaining their control of these revenues; before 1945 they had more of an interest in being absolved of blame for potential property taxes. The second was John F. McCarthy, who never created a crisis big enough to generate significant institutional restructuring, but did contribute to public hostility toward the district. Sustained attacks on the district, both the local denunciations and negative publicity and in the form of legislation in Sacramento, motivated its representatives to cultivate broad institutional ties to outside organizations and interest groups. Procedures were established, precedents were set, and the capacity of the Golden Gate Bridge and

²⁴¹ James Adam to William J. Varley, April 24, 1950, box 204, DS Vault.

Highway District to pursue institutional goals in the political sphere increased substantially. The political engagement of the organization became an assumption, part of its culture, and an important element of its institutional agency.

This shift in bridge district policy was long in coming, and was rooted in the very origins of the organization. The close relationship between the Redwood Empire Association and the bridge district was one of the first stages in the development of an institutional basis for defining and defending the interests of the bridge district. A rationale developed, based on an emerging institutional myth; a narrative that helped give the district an identity as an institution and provided a powerful justification for actions in defense of its interests. This myth helped in identifying the enemies of the bridge district and assigning them sinister motives. And, it strengthened the association between the property owners of the northern counties and its administration by a special district by crediting them with brave and selfless assumption of risk in building a spectacular bridge that was an asset to all of California. It evoked “home rule” values, posing the state government as a hostile and foreign body that would usurp local authority and funnel bridge revenues out of the area. It emphasized, inaccurately, that state and federal governments refused to lend the bridge district aid or support. A third important basis for the defense of the institution was the public relations arm of the bridge district, which was expanded and strengthened dramatically in the 1950s. Even before McCarthy came on the scene, the controversial public relations and advertising budget of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District were consistently supported by the board of directors. The role and power of James Adam more than any other individual was instrumental in

developing this aspect of bridge district operations, first as publicity director and later as general manager.

At the core of the conflict between Adam and the bridge district on one side, and McCarthy and other Bay Area proponents of reform on the other, were mutually exclusive conceptions of the role and purpose of the bridge district. Both sides agreed that the bridge should be operated based on business principles. But they differed on the question of how the bridge should be administered and whom it should serve. McCarthy and his allies saw toll payers as the most important constituency of the bridge district:

[T]he Bridge District is in splendid financial condition at the present time and... a toll reduction could benefit the bridge user, who is, after all, the one who is paying for the Bridge, and it would not impair the finances of the District in any way... There is no business that can be called a good business if you can not show a net profit at the end of the year—but the Golden Gate Bridge was built by the public for the public and therefore the public is rightfully entitled to receive some benefits of the proceeds realized through efficient and economical management.²⁴²

Adam and other bridge district representatives, particularly those representing the northern, rural counties of the district, understood their primary responsibility to be to the property owners (the “taxpayers”) of the district, as expressed unambiguously in 1950:

The Bridge Board has taken the position that its first obligation is to the taxpayer of the District, whose property is pledged as security for the bridge’s financial success. It is the taxpayer, and not the user of the bridge, who would have to meet any financial deficit that might occur... you can be very certain of this: the majority of the Bridge Board is NOT going to gamble with the possibility of levying an assessment against the taxpayers of Sonoma County or any other county to satisfy the selfish whims of any particular group of bridge user for lower tolls than are justified. Your directors are taxpayers, themselves, in their respective counties.²⁴³

²⁴² Radio broadcast, “California Commentaries” ([San Francisco], KNBC, September 19, 1952), box 204, DS Vault.

²⁴³ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *The Golden Gate Bridge* by Charles W. Reinking (Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1950).

The interests of these property owners were in more than just the bridge, they were in the institution of the bridge district, in its function of serving and representing them in terms of regional transportation policy. These conflicting ideas sparked a long and nasty war for control of the Golden Gate Bridge; McCarthy's siege was just a single battle. Over the course of this struggle, the bridge district transcended these interests, taking on an institutional agency that overrode the intentions of its founders. It was a conflict that transformed the bridge district, with important consequences for the entire Bay Area.

IV

The Defeat of the Golden Gate Authority

In 1958, backers of a Golden Gate Authority for the San Francisco Bay Area set out to solve the region's persistent and growing transportation problems, provide indefinitely for growth and development, and establish the foundation for general regional planning. By creating an all-encompassing agency to coordinate transportation services and infrastructure, the Bay Area's most powerful industrialists and most respected intellectuals asserted that the authority would improve the region's economic prospects as a whole, securing its future as a thriving and prosperous metropolis. The Golden Gate Authority promised to transform the region by transforming its government, shifting the locus of policy making to a metropolitan level. However, as much as it was a promise of growth and prosperity for labor, business, and real estate interests, it was a threat to existing agencies and governments. The authority plan rested on bridge tolls; the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge were the key to its finances. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District led the opposition to the measure, which would have led to its dissolution. Bridge district officials mobilized all of their resources against a powerful regional coalition headed by the Bay Area's most prominent businessmen and politicians who supported the authority, and won.

Transportation infrastructure had been a central concern for regional planning advocates, public policy experts, and civic organizations in the Bay Area since the first decade of the twentieth century. The design and the achievement of a Bay Area transportation system had been the goal of a number of unsuccessful regional planning and government efforts.

These included an early “Greater San Francisco movement” backed by the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce; a short-lived San Francisco Regional Plan Association supported by the Commonwealth Club in the 1920s; an effort to institute comprehensive county-based planning in 1935; and a proposal for a Bay Area Regional Planning Commission backed by the State Planning Board 1941.¹ More specific proposals included the ambitious 1942 Reber Plan, which described a number of massive structures designed both to accommodate traffic and shipping and to provide for the fresh water needed to support large-scale industry and development.²

It was in the field of transportation that a lack of regional coordination was most apparent. Between 1940 and 1960, the population of the Bay Area more than doubled, and traffic was increasing even faster. Although the state highway commission built miles of new freeways with gas taxes and federal funds, the lack of local input on their planning and design contributed to public outrage at the environmental and neighborhood destruction resulting from their construction. The desirability of endless growth was coming into question and transportation facilities required to accommodate traffic increases were being delayed by local opposition. A number of planned bridges to match new freeway capacity, including a second crossing to Marin County, were stalled by local controversy, adding to frequent bottlenecks

¹ John C. Bollens, *The Problems of Government in the San Francisco Bay Region* (1948), 112-13; T. J. Kent, Jr., “Regional Planning and Metropolitan Government Proposals for the San Francisco Bay Area,” (paper presented at the National Convention of the American Institute of Planners, Seattle, July, 1959); Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: Metropolis in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

² The Reber Plan, decisively rejected by a joint Army-Navy board in 1946, inspired several more proposals for infills and the construction of barriers in the Bay. For an interesting overview of these proposals, see California Department of Transportation, Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *A Progress Report to Department of Public Works on a San Francisco-Marin Crossing of San Francisco Bay* (Sacramento, 1962). Also see David R. Long, “Mistaken Identity: Putting the John Reber Plan for the San Francisco Bay Area into Historical Context,” in *American Cities and Towns: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Joseph F. Rishel (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1992).

and congestion.³ The airports of the region were not coordinated, despite their close proximity, and also suffered from congestion. The four public port facilities were in direct competition with each other for traffic, and total tonnage into the bay was in decline. The wholesale abandonment of the region's trolleys, transit railroads, and ferries was an obvious disaster. Part of the solution was promised by the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, created in 1957, but at the end of the 1950s its funding still had to be approved by a very uncertain public vote and its trains were not expected to run for at least another decade. Golden Gate Authority proponents sought a single, regional agency to coordinate transportation, self-financing and independent. They hoped that it would increase the efficiency of existing facilities and streamline the decision-making process for new construction.

The Proposal

As the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District's coffers grew in the post-World War II boom, so did the intensity and ambition of its critics. State Senator John F. McCarthy's ongoing efforts to dissolve the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District and incorporate it into the California Department of Transportation contributed to the general mood of frustration about Bay Area transportation problems. Even after repeated setbacks, McCarthy was not ready to abandon his campaign against what he saw as the corrupt and wasteful administration of the Golden Gate Bridge. Instead, he raised the stakes. Appointed chair of the Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems in 1957, McCarthy used the opportunity to develop the Golden Gate Authority proposal. Similar proposals had been considered in the past, but never followed by legislation. A regional "harbor district" was studied by the Commonwealth

³ See Seymour Mark Adler, "The Political Economy of Transit in the San Francisco Bay Area 1945-1963" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1980), 31-54; Richard M. Zettel, *Urban Transportation in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies University of California, 1963), 21-28.

Club of San Francisco in 1912 but dismissed as politically impractical; when the idea was revived in 1934 as a “regional port authority,” it was again rejected by the organization.⁴ In 1951, the state legislature took up the idea, and a special committee to study the matter concluded that the “development of the San Francisco Bay Area is now being seriously retarded by the lack of a proper agency to provide more adequate transportation facilities.”⁵ Although they supported the creation of a Bay Area Regional Authority responsible for comprehensive planning to act as an “over-all planning agency for the entire Bay area,” nothing came of their recommendations until the issue was revisited under McCarthy’s leadership.⁶ Members of McCarthy’s committee toured the facilities of the New York Port Authority, accompanied by several other interested Bay Area officials, including James Adam. In January 1958, in an informal report, the committee presented an incipient plan to create an agency that would incorporate the Bay Area bridges, harbors, and airports into a single, independent, self-supporting agency, similar to its New York model. McCarthy described the report as an “introduction to an idea and a discussion of the possibilities,” strategically to be developed further in consultation with potential supporters.⁷ The Golden Gate Authority’s commissioners would be selected locally, answering the home rule factions’ objections to state control that had stalled so many of McCarthy’s previous proposals.⁸ Finally, the ever-increasing revenues of the Golden Gate Bridge would be freed to support new transportation infrastructure, McCarthy’s overriding ambition. This time McCarthy did not immediately go

⁴ Bollens, *Problems of Government*, 120-21; Terry Hoy et al., *The Use of the Port Authority in the United States: With Special Reference to the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: The Bureau of Public Administration, 1959), 3.

⁵ Senate Fact-Finding Committee on San Francisco Bay Ports, *Ports of the San Francisco Bay Area: Their Commerce, Facilities, Problems and Progress; Final Report* (Sacramento, 1951);

⁶ Planning Subcommittee on Bay Area Regional Problems of the Assembly Committee on Conservation, and Public Works, *First Progress Report* (Sacramento, 1952), 102-03.

⁷ John F. McCarthy to Edgar Kaiser. July 15, 1958, carton 48, Edgar F. Kaiser Papers, BANC MSS 85/61 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter cited as EFK Papers).

⁸ Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Discussion on Area Transportation Facilities* (Sacramento, 1958).

ahead with legislation, as he had so many times in his previous attempts to restructure the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. Instead, he returned to the Bay Area to seek support and funding for the elaboration and development of the concept.

McCarthy turned first to business, creating the Committee for Trade and Transportation Development of the Bay Area to study and issue recommendations on the proposal, co-chaired by Robert Nahas, an Oakland builder and developer and president of Oakland's chamber of commerce, and Joseph Martin, Jr., a San Francisco attorney and member of the city's public utilities commission.⁹ Much to McCarthy's advantage, the Golden Gate Authority concept also managed to inspire the enthusiasm of Edgar F. Kaiser, heir to the industrial empire built by his father, Henry J. Kaiser. The Golden Gate Authority concept piqued Kaiser's interest, both as a businessman with a concrete financial interest in transportation infrastructure and as a public figure. As the newly elected president of the Bay Area Council he was in an ideal position to promote it. The BAC was headed by twenty-five trustees representing the business and industrial elite of San Francisco and a secondary board of governors including more than one hundred labor leaders and representatives of local civic groups.¹⁰ Its mission statement emphasized the values that the Golden Gate Authority represented; the private association was established to "coordinate and unify the efforts of public and private agencies leading to the successful completion of bay area development activities... [and] to analyze and take action on recommended projects that will further the economic, industrial, commercial, civic or cultural growth of the area."¹¹

Edgar was well-groomed to advocate for public enterprise; both his career and his

⁹ California Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report Recommending the Creation of a Golden Gate Authority in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 124.

¹⁰ Kaiser became Chairman of the Board of trustees and appointed Stanley McCaffrey President of the BAC when it was reorganized by Kaiser on Jan. 24, 1961. *Trends* 16, no. 1 (March 1961), carton 47, EFK Papers.

¹¹ Frank E. March quoted in Bollens, *Problems of Government*, 115.

family's business were founded on government largesse. From its origins in the early twentieth century, the Kaiser Industries Corporation won contracts for some of the largest and most lucrative public works projects in the West, designing and building roads, freeways, bridges (including the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge), and ships. Kaiser Industries provided everything from the raw materials for these projects (cement, concrete, sand, gravel and even steel) to administrative and technical expertise. Edgar's career was launched in the midst of the New Deal; he left his studies at the University of California, Berkeley to cut his administrative teeth on as shovel foreman on the Hoover Dam in 1930. He moved up the ranks in his father's rapidly expanding empire, leading crews on the Bonneville Dam and serving as general manager of the Grand Coulee Dam construction by the end of the decade.¹² During World War II, Edgar managed the Kaiser shipyards in Portland, Oregon. After the War, he took control of the floundering Kaiser automobile manufacturing enterprises, compounding his personal interest in the development of transportation infrastructure.¹³ In 1956, the senior Kaiser surrendered the helm of what was by then a billion dollar empire, and Edgar became president of Kaiser Industries and a leading industrialist in his own right.

Edgar F. Kaiser prided himself on social liberalism and positive labor relations. A Progressive Republican in the venerable Bay Area tradition, Kaiser supported governmental involvement in promoting social welfare; he was one of the movers behind a company pre-paid health plan that served Kaiser workers starting in 1938.¹⁴ He also believed in state promotion of economic development and growth; the Golden Gate Authority could be an instrument for this goal, with the potential to harness the resources and energy of the Bay Area

¹² *Oakland Tribune* April 1, 1969; *San Francisco Examiner* October 25, 1964.

¹³ "Kaiser-Frazier: 'The Roughest Thing We Ever Tackled'" *Fortune Magazine* July 1951; *Business Week* June 12, 1954. Both in carton 4, EFK Papers.

¹⁴ Rickey Lynn Hendricks, *A Model for National Health Care: The History of Kaiser Permanente* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

in the interests of a unified plan for growth. Obviously, Kaiser had an ideological as well as financial stake in a regional agency that could coordinate the construction of new transportation facilities in the Bay Area.¹⁵

Kaiser was eager to use his leadership position at the BAC to support the vision of regional government presented by McCarthy, and had already initiated a study of the authority proposal when they met privately in July 1958. McCarthy laid out a strategy for the authority, with the goal of introducing legislation no later than February 1959 (before a reapportionment of the legislature that would shrink the representation of northern California). The Committee for Trade and Transportation would help publicize the project, recruiting members and support from regional business, labor, and professional groups. Under Kaiser's leadership, the BAC would adopt the concept, financing a major study and attracting corporate support. McCarthy would spearhead the effort in Sacramento.¹⁶ Accordingly, the BAC conferred \$60,000 for a study of the authority by the New York engineering firm Coverdale & Colpitts. Their recommendations were unanimously endorsed by the BAC in December 1958. The Coverdale & Colpitts report stressed the effect of transportation problems on the entire Bay Area, arguing that the region "as a whole has suffered from the lack of cohesion and regional planning brought about by its division into a multitude of independent agencies."¹⁷ It argued that an agency that could transcend local geographic and political boundaries was crucial to maintaining the region's economic health and vitality. The report described an agency that would base its finances upon bridge toll revenues, coordinate and upgrade the region's ports

¹⁵ For biographical information on Kaiser, see cartons 3 and 4, EFK Papers.

¹⁶ John F. Consulting Engineers Coverdale & Colpitts to Edgar F. Kaiser, President and Chairman of the San Francisco Bay Area Council, July 16, 1958, carton 48, EFK Papers; John F. McCarthy to Edgar Kaiser, carton 48 EFK Papers.

¹⁷ San Francisco Bay Area Council, *Report on a Proposed Public Authority for the Bay Area* prepared by Coverdale & Colpitts (San Francisco: San Francisco Bay Area Council, 1958), 1-2.

and airports for more efficient operation, develop new transportation facilities, and “plan for the further development of the Bay Area, not only upon economic and industrial lines, but in connection therewith, to provide residential, recreational and social facilities of value to all the citizens of the community.”¹⁸ It was the authority’s potential as a general regional planning agency—or a possible mechanism for future regional planning efforts—that was most important and most controversial.

Ports at San Francisco, Oakland, Redwood City, Richmond, and Stockton, would be coordinated and administered jointly, allowing for mutually beneficial development and the pooling of resources instead of the prevailing cutthroat competition. Unified management of the airports at San Francisco and Oakland would help in the accommodation of rapidly increasing air traffic, eliminate redundancy, and reduce capital expenditures. No communication between the two airports had ever been attempted. And, most significantly, regional transportation infrastructure necessary for the sustained growth could be planned and financed without public subsidies, difficult political negotiations, or the interference of state or federal agencies. Intra-regional competition, redundancy, and waste would be reduced “to strengthen local competitive position with respect to other metropolitan areas,” one of the primary goals of the BAC.¹⁹ The possibility of including the BART District in the authority was also seriously considered (Coverdale & Colpitts estimated that, with projected revenues and assets, the authority could take on the project independent of the public subsidies that were slated for it), but it was ruled out because of high costs and political difficulties. Instead, the report recommended close coordination with BART and possibly an eventual merger.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 135.

¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

Not surprisingly, the BAC's proposal specified a corporate management structure "to give a business administration to what are essentially business functions."²¹ Noting that gubernatorial appointments were common among existing authorities (including New York's) but generally unpopular, the report suggested that appointments to the governing board be made by county supervisors as recommended by chambers of commerce, similar to the procedure of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. The authority had to be "protected" from political pressures while maintaining broad geographic representation and the cooperation of local political officials. A professional staff headed by a general manager would be accountable only to the directors.

According to the report, much more important than the means of appointing its governing board to an efficient were steady revenues and secure assets:

In order to retain its autonomy and independence, it must be self-supporting. Its activities must eventually be capable of paying their own way, even though in the beginning they may be on the marginal side. The moment an Authority finds the need to rely on subsidies from political bodies, it finds itself subject to political considerations and its value as a businesslike concern disappears.²²

The authority would be tax-exempt and have the power of eminent domain. But, bridges were the key to its financial independence. The authority's bonded debt would be secured by bridge tolls, just as the New York Port Authority relied upon its bridge and tunnel tolls to underwrite its bonds and to subsidize other, less lucrative ventures:

[T]he welfare of the Bay Area would be better served by having [state-owned Bay bridges] under a Bay Area Authority and, furthermore, their earning power, if freed from restrictive debt covenants, would go far to establish the credit of a Bay Area Authority, just as the transfer of the Holland Tunnel was the first step in the success of the New York Authority. This could only be accomplished... by refunding all the present bonds by an all-inclusive bond issue supported by a general reserve, along the lines of the financing of the Port of New York Authority. Such a base presumably would also be used to finance an additional bridge when needed and to strengthen the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 7.

credit of the ports and airports, thus relieving the taxpayers of any burden in connection with these facilities.²³

The majority of the authority's enterprises would obviously not generate profits. The public would foot the bill somehow. The report dismissed the tax burden of user fees, as well as the political implications of the prospect of indefinite bridge tolls.²⁴ This would quickly become the primary objection of the authority's opponents. All but one of the Bay Area bridges were under the control of the California Toll Bridge Authority, a state agency that was subject to a legislature and governor amenable to turning over these assets in the name of regional transportation planning. All except the Golden Gate Bridge.

The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge were both generating considerable surpluses by the end of the 1950s, and traffic volumes were increasing steadily. The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, which Kaiser dubbed the "Great Fat Golden Cow," dominated the ledger.²⁵ The revenues from tolls on the span were ample enough to retire its \$73 million in construction bonds in 1952, eighteen years ahead of schedule. Nevertheless, the Golden Gate's revenues made it a strong second in net income, despite debt service. The district's bonds were not callable, and it had already built up a considerable surplus. The report showed the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge to be earning \$8.6 million and \$2.6 million in 1957 (after debt service), respectively, predicting that net income would continue to increase in both cases.²⁶ Together, these two bridges represented nearly eighty percent of the net income of the facilities that the authority was to incorporate. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was estimated to have assets totaling \$58 million

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Edgar F. Kaiser, Address to the San Francisco Downtown Association, February 16, 1959, carton 50, EFK papers.

²⁶ San Francisco Bay Area Council, *Report on a Proposed Public Authority*, 43, 129.

(including the bridge itself and the district's considerable reserve funds) and the Bay Bridge \$103 million.²⁷ The value of all Bay Area bridges (including the Dumbarton Bridge, the Carquinez Straights Bridge, and the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge) totaled \$225 million dollars in 1957, nearly sixty percent of the value of all facilities slated for the authority.²⁸

The potential of the Golden Gate Authority as a functional metropolitan government was also crucial to its appeal. While it was possible for the state to take on the task of regional planning, as Coverdale & Colpitts observed, it was not politically feasible or even desirable:

[I]t is obviously impossible for the State, comprising 58 counties and 157,000 square miles, an a population of 14,500,000 persons, to dedicate itself to the welfare of the nine counties of the Bay Area... there are bound to be many differences in interests, some of which must necessarily be inimical to the interests of the Bay Area.

The San Francisco Bay bridges, for instance, seem to us to constitute a problem purely local to the Bay Area, and it seems highly anomalous that their control and planning should be in the hands of a political agency of the State Government.²⁹

The transportation crisis was immediate and evident, demanding coordinated action, and providing the political climate to allow for the establishment of a broad and powerful institution like the proposed Golden Gate Authority. Because transportation planning relates so intimately to questions of land use, economic development and housing, once decisions regarding transportation were being coordinated and regulated by a regional agency, it would be a small step to develop a general metropolitan plan. Issues of property rights could be sidestepped by coordinating regional development through transportation planning. For the BAC, which had been actively promoting regional planning for the sake of development since 1944, the concept of an authority was a strategic breakthrough. New projects by the authority would require detailed, in-depth studies of regional issues. Using the field of transportation to address regional problems also had important precedents elsewhere, which were discussed in

²⁷ Ibid., 40.

²⁸ Ibid., 127.

²⁹ Ibid., 132.

the Coverdale & Colpitts report, most significantly the New York Port Authority, which was generally seen as an efficient, highly successful agency in 1958, and had already been the basis for the creation of the Port of Massachusetts Authority and the Delaware River Authority.³⁰ The Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans set the example for appointments based on recommendations by local civic organizations rather than appointments by the Governor.³¹

On December 4, the Trustees of the BAC met to discuss the Coverdale & Colpitts report. Kaiser enthusiastically endorsed their findings after a brief presentation: “As you are aware, other Bay Area groups too have sensed this need for action, for a bigger solution to our problems. Let’s be honest with ourselves. Some of them in fact have come into existence in the belief that the Bay Area Council itself would not accept its proper leadership role.”³² Kaiser and the BAC were self-consciously embarking upon a campaign not only to restructure the administration of transportation to promote growth and prosperity, but also to secure the place of business and industry at the helm of regional government.³³

The recommendations of the Coverdale & Colpitts report were bolstered by another study conducted by the prestigious Bureau of Public Administration at the University of California, Berkeley. Its report also stressed the authority’s potential to become a general regional government. If a multipurpose district to administer all region wide functions could not be created, the report suggested, “this district could, at the proper time, assume each new governmental function requiring regional treatment. One large metropolitan district could take

³⁰ Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report Recommending the Creation of a Golden Gate Authority in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Sacramento, 1959), 83-85.

³¹ San Francisco Bay Area Council *Report on a Proposed Public Authority*, 7-8.

³² San Francisco Bay Area Council, Press Release, December 10, 1958, carton 48, EFK Papers.

³³ Norm Nicholson to Edgar F. Kaiser, December 1, 1958, carton 47, EFK Papers.

care of all the Bay Area's needs for regional coordination."³⁴ This was the vision of Kaiser and McCarthy for the Golden Gate Authority.

However, many of those who were behind the authority were sure to balk at the prospect of comprehensive planning. In late January, the Committee for Trade and Transportation Development of the Bay Area issued its report. It cautioned against the hasty creation of the authority, urging that the incorporation of facilities be negotiated gradually, on a case-by-case basis, and stressed the necessity to protect its business-like administration, a broad representation of interest groups and geographical associations among its governors, and freedom from political encumbrances by the exclusion of elected officials. It also warned that "the authority must not serve as a regional planning agency outside the scope of transportation problems."³⁵ Many of these concerns were prescient of the debate to follow, but they went unheeded.

Working closely with Kaiser and advisors provided by the BAC, McCarthy drafted legislation that followed the recommendations of the Coverdale & Colpitts report.³⁶ The initial bill, introduced on February 9, 1959, provided for the rapid acquisition of transportation facilities, with the transfer of San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge on July 1, 1960. The other Bay Area bridges would be acquired as soon as their debt could be

³⁴ Terry Hoy et al., *The Use of the Port Authority in the United States: With Special Reference to the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Administration, March, 1959).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁶ Norm Nicholson to Chad F. Calhoun. January 31, 1959, carton 47, EFK Papers. "Edgar assembled a fine crew of legal and financial experts to help Jack McCarthy (at McCarthy's request) work out legislative details. This team included Drs. John Sly and William Miller of Princeton University, recommended to us by Austin Tobin, Executive Director of the Port of New York Authority, George Harrington, the San Francisco bond Attorney, Milton Cross and Dennis McCarthy of First Boston Corporation, John Inglis of Blyth & Company, Oliver Merrill of Sullivan Cromwell in New York, Frank Durkee, former head of the California Public Works Department, and Paul Marrin, [the BAC's] attorney, whose fine common sense make him an excellent referee in the work of these experts. Separately and together the groups met many times with Edgar and I and Bill Downing [Kaiser's personal assistant], Nahas and Martin applying what we hope was common political horse sense to the situation." Downing was the former administrative assistant to John F. McCarthy and devoted his full time to authority proposal as Kaiser's representative. Stanley E. McCaffrey to S. D. Bechtel March 13, 1961, carton 47, EFK Papers.

refinanced. The authority was empowered to negotiate the transfer, lease or sale of regional ports and airports by negotiation with their respective administrators. The authority including the nine Bay Area counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma, was to be governed by thirteen commissioners. Each county would have one commissioner, chosen by the board of supervisors from two nominations by the county's conference of mayors and recognized business, labor, and civic organizations. The mayors both of San Francisco and Oakland would have one appointment, and the governor would choose one commissioner each from San Francisco and Alameda Counties.³⁷ The legislation made no mention of regional planning.³⁸

The Campaign: Round One

The BAC launched an intensive, well-funded campaign for the authority, or, as Kaiser's assistant on the project put it, "an old-fashioned, a six-month political slugfest."³⁹ The Coverdale & Colpitts report was released to the public with an enthusiastic speech by Kaiser and a gushing press release from the BAC. Both the BAC trustees, whose membership "reads like the who's who of Bay Area business," the release boasted, and the BAC's Board of Governors, composed of labor leaders from around the Bay Area, had endorsed the report unanimously. Kaiser called for the Bay Area to "sweep away its cobwebs with this plan and move forward boldly and profitably... resolving the transportation problems which until now have threatened to stifle and choke off its economic greatness." Kaiser anticipated the opposition of local governments: "a sensible halt is being called to the economic Balkanization

³⁷ Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report*, 64.

³⁸ S.B. 576, 1959 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.)

³⁹ [William Downing], "Mr. Kaiser's Activity on Behalf of Golden Gate Authority," December 17, 1959, carton 48, EFK Papers.

of the Bay Area, while the political integrity of the Counties is preserved inviolate.”⁴⁰ He promised that the overall efficiency and economy of the regional transportation system would be improved by consolidating the administration of these facilities, and tax subsidies for transportation would be eliminated.

Letters from Kaiser were hand delivered to all of the BAC trustees asking for personal input on the question of representation for the authority.⁴¹ Speeches and presentations by BAC leaders were scheduled with business and civic groups around the Bay Area, including the legislative committee of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District.⁴² During the first few months, Kaiser met with the editors and publishers of five Bay Area newspapers, and maintained close contact with the region’s labor leaders.⁴³ After the legislation was introduced, Kaiser delivered a speech before the San Francisco Downtown Association that was covered by all of the major papers, and published in full in the San Francisco *City-County Record*. Kaiser also addressed the East Bay Division of the League of California Cities in Richmond, and the Southern Alameda County Board of Realtors.⁴⁴ In addition, he personally contributed to the lobbying effort in Sacramento. The BAC also organized the “Citizens for a Golden Gate Authority” to assist in the campaign, starting with the members of the BAC.⁴⁵ In his speeches, Kaiser stressed the need to actively direct the economy of the region in order to manage population growth and ensure continued prosperity, and to do it on a regional scale.

⁴⁰ San Francisco Bay Area Council, Press Release, December 10, 1958, carton 48, EFK Papers.

⁴¹ Among those who responded were S.D. Bechtel; D.J. Russel, President of Southern Pacific Company; Elliot McAllister, Chairman of the Board of the Bank of California; the President of the Crown Zellerbach Corporation; T.P. Coats, Chairman of the Board of First Western Bank; H.H. Fuller, President of Bethlehem Pacific Coast Steel Corporation; L.B. Worthington, President of Columbia-Geneva Steel; and Norm Sutherland, President of Pacific Gas and Electric, carton 48, EFK Papers; Draft of confidential letter to BAC Trustees to be hand-delivered on Monday December 29, December 24, 1958, carton 47, EFK Papers.

⁴² Frank E. Marsh, “Statement of Frank E. Marsh, Executive Vice President, San Francisco Bay Area Council, before the Legislative Committee of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District,” ([San Francisco], [1959]).

⁴³ Nicholson to Chad F. Calhoun, carton 47, EFK Papers.

⁴⁴ Kaiser, Address to the San Francisco Downtown Association; Edgar F. Kaiser, Remarks at Dinner Meeting of East Bay Division of League of California Cities, Richmond, CA, February 26, 1959, carton 47, EFK Papers.

⁴⁵ Edgar F. Kaiser to S.D. Bechtel, January 16, 1959, carton 47, EFK Papers.

Kaiser answered the objections of local political interests by arguing that the authority would localize state-controlled bridges, and that the imperative for regional-level action would lead to even greater state interference in Bay Area affairs unless the authority was adopted. “We need economic home rule in this area. And that is what the Golden Gate Authority will provide. It will transcend boundaries businesswise, without in any way abrogating them politically.”⁴⁶

The Coverdale & Colpitts report and the storm of publicity that accompanied it took the bridge district by surprise, but it was not long before its public relations arsenal was mobilized to resist this latest assault in the ongoing siege on its autonomy. The initial reaction of the bridge district directors was far from militant. The Golden Gate Bridge board met just two days after the release of the Coverdale & Colpitts report, and discussions on the proposal revealed a mixed reaction. Director Reinking was open to the suggestion of an authority:

In my opinion the New York Authority has done a wonderful job for the State of New York in traffic. The State of California will have more trouble in transportation in the future... A good Authority, in my opinion, is going to be the answer someday, whether on a toll-free basis or other. Whether the Golden Gate Bridge fits in or not, that will have to be determined. It will be wonderful when we get this terrible congestion of the bay area straightened out.⁴⁷

Director Del Carlo, introduced to the idea by Kaiser himself, was more wary, and concerned about the issue of accountability:

If we set up an authority of this kind, we will eventually run into bureaucrats not the 5 or 7 men originally appointed. There has been a history of this in the New York Port Authority it is well-run, but the authority cannot be touched—they do as they see fit... These authorities get away from the check and balance system that we have in our system of government today... I believe the competitive spirit is very important... Remove that and the Authority becomes a Frankenstein.⁴⁸

Before long, as the immediacy of the threat to the district became clear, even this ambiguous level of support disappeared among the associates of the district.

⁴⁶ Kaiser, Address to the San Francisco Downtown Association, 7.

⁴⁷ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, Memorandum of Minutes, December 12, 1958, [San Francisco].

⁴⁸ Ibid.

After James Adam and President Del Carlo presented passionate arguments against the authority, pointing out that the bridge district would be dissolved, the directors unanimously resolved against the inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge in the authority. The district's staff, led by consulting engineer Arthur C. Jenkins (who was intimately involved with district policy questions and public relations) and James Adam, who was officially in charge of public relations, did not waste any time in countering the BAC's publicity campaign. Letters to all of the boards of supervisors in the district went out urging resolutions against the authority, and by the end of March, the supervisors of Sonoma, Mendocino, Napa, Del Norte, Lake, and Humboldt had all passed resolutions opposing the authority. The only dissenting county within the bridge district was Marin, which passed a resolution supporting the authority by a four to zero vote (one supervisor walked out in protest, but stated later that he was not opposed to the idea in principle).⁴⁹

On March 12, Dan London, president of the bridge district, appeared in person before the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to persuade them to join the official opposition, but they did not act upon the measure until much later.⁵⁰ On the same day, Director Matt Graham broadcast the board's objections over Marin County's Radio KTIM, placing the blame squarely on McCarthy and playing the district's best card, the issue of tolls:

Senator McCarthy from our own Marin County, mind you, admitted before our Board of Supervisors in open meeting that he does not favor a toll free Golden Gate Bridge....and I can say to you in all sincerity that I firmly believe a substantial reduction in tolls on the Golden Gate Bridge can be made in the not too distant future if traffic continues to increase and as our bonded debt goes down....But under McCarthy's bill, tolls on the Golden Gate Bridge could be increased...[and] diverted to

⁴⁹ James Adam, General Manager's Report, March 13, 1959.

⁵⁰ Dan London, Comments on SB No. 576 before the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, March 12, 1959, box 94, IM Facility.

other projects. Let's keep the Golden Gate Bridge on a home rule basis, for the benefit of all the people of Marin County now and in the future.⁵¹

Marin County had always been the epicenter for bridge district criticism. Its many commuters bore the brunt of the bridge tolls, and many felt that a second bridge from San Francisco to Marin County was necessary for the development of the North Bay but required a regional or state agency for its financing, which the district vehemently opposed. Although it was clear that the county was divided on the issue, some of the most powerful of Marin organizations lined up in favor of the authority. Clearly, the promise of the elimination of the bridge district and support for development in Marin outweighed concern about perpetual tolls. Resolutions for the measure were passed by the Marin Board of Supervisors, the City Council of San Rafael; the Chambers of Commerce of San Rafael, Novato, and San Anselmo; the Marin Development Foundation; and the Marin County Labor Council.⁵²

By the time hearings began on the Golden Gate Authority in Sacramento, lists of resolutions both for and against the authority were growing long. Besides the northern bridge district counties, the cities of Fairfield and Ukiah passed resolutions against the take-over of the Golden Gate Bridge, as did the Marin and Sonoma County Taxpayer's Associations, the Redwood Empire Association, the California Automobile Association, and the Sonoma Chamber of Commerce. The Teamsters Joint Council of the North Bay made a statement against the authority, as well as the Building and Construction Trades Councils of Marin, San Francisco, and Sonoma-Mendocino; and the Central Labor Councils of Sonoma and San Francisco. Labor interests of Marin County generally opposed the creation of an authority, in part because of the prospect of perpetual tolls, emphasized by the bridge district propaganda.

⁵¹ Matt A. Graham, radio broadcast (KTIM, [San Rafael], March 12, 1959), box 84, IM Facility. Emphasis in original.

⁵² List of Organizations Which Have Endorsed the Authority, March 30, 1959, carton 48, EFK Papers.

Also, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District contracts were much more likely to go to Marin workers than they would be if a region-wide agency was taking bids. The labor unions of the East Bay, up against the Oakland Port Commission, which was vehemently anti-labor and against collective bargaining, had nothing to lose and possibly a lot to gain. The BAC's rhetoric and membership reflected an eagerness on the part of its members to develop a mutually beneficial partnership between the industrial leaders and labor representatives. Kaiser's active courting of labor leaders reflected that policy, and won him the balance of their support. Most Bay Area newspapers supported the authority, but the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* (whose circulation included all of the rural northern bridge district) opposed it vehemently.

That so many organizations took a stand on the issue of a Golden Gate Authority so early on reflected the intensity of the campaign and the attention devoted to the issue by both the regional and the local press of the Bay Area. As the authority was being promoted, radio programs addressing the question were broadcast regularly, and front-page coverage and passionate editorials on the issue were common. This was the most important Bay Area story from its introduction in late 1958 until its final defeat in 1961. The next big story was the referendum for the massive BART bond issue of 1962. Transportation problems were on the top of the regional agenda.

Cities and Counties Weigh In

While the cities and counties within the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District had the most to lose, local politicians did not take lightly any possible threat to their authority or autonomy. Already, the menacing potential of regional special districts to supercede cities and

counties was becoming apparent to local political interest groups. The existing special districts of the Bay Area, the Bay Area Pollution Control District and the Bay Area Rapid Transit were based on a principle of federation, were governed by members of boards of supervisors or city councils, and had very little jurisdictional overlap with or authority over local governments. Even so, local government had been among their principle opposition. The Golden Gate Authority, with its expansive authority and capacity for planning, was quite another matter.

The League of California Cities, led by a coalition based in Berkeley, embodied the opposition by local government to the Golden Gate Authority. The League appointed a “Metropolitan Organization Analysis Committee” which distributed a set of principles for judging proposed metropolitan agencies:

The right of local self-determination should remain with the citizens acting through their closest units of local government.

The best interests of the people... require the maintenance of strong, healthy cities which have the right of home rule...

Local municipal affairs, involving policy making, enforcement of laws and regulatory measures and governmental activities, are not proper subjects for inclusion in regional or metropolitan government and should be retained by the cities....

Functions and service performed by a city or a county should not be removed from a city or county and incorporated in a regional or metropolitan agency without the consent of the city or county.

Centralization or consolidation of services does not necessarily result in efficiency, economy, or better government.⁵³

In addition, they called for the requirement that all metropolitan agencies “provide for local control and direct local responsibility through a governing body responsible to the cities and counties within the district and selected by and serving at the pleasure of the legislative bodies of the cities and counties.” Executive Director Richard Carpenter delivered a restrained

⁵³ League of California Cities, *A Statement of Principles on Metropolitan Problems* (n.p., 1959), vol. 4, [Collected ABAG Materials], 94 01101, Institute of Governmental Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter referred to as ABAG Materials).

presentation of the League's position before the Senate Transportation Committee, protesting the potential development of a master plan for the area through the authority, the composition of the governing body to exclude county and city officials, provisions for the collective bargaining or employees, and lack of "protections... for the governmental agencies which will be a part of the authority."⁵⁴ Carpenter called for a public vote to approve its creation and the issuance of its revenue bonds.⁵⁵ These requirements were in direct conflict with the principles of business administration that the BAC hoped to promote; they were a powerful assertion of home rule principles and a rejection of the idea that metropolitan government should be independent of local politics.

The league's statement of principles was distributed just as a meeting of all Bay Area mayors and city managers was called. Edgar Kaiser attended the meeting, ready to present an impassioned speech to convince the assembly of the authority's advantages, but he was never heard.⁵⁶ Instead, speakers overwhelmingly opposed the authority, including Wes McClure, city manager of San Leandro:

It is particularly significant that the committee that originally studied and recommended the Golden Gate Authority proposal had not a single representative of local government. This was not happenstance, it was deliberate. And it was perhaps natural, therefore, to cast the Authority proposal in the image of an undemocratic supergovernment--a self-supporting, independent agency with plenty of money to do a particular isolated job, and with no control or check-over program by local governments of the general public... [This] ill conceived and only partially matured proposal is now in the process of being sold to the general public and local government officials in an apparently well-financed and well-organized crash program of "sweetness and light" publicity and personal visitations...

I recall a speech made about a year ago by one of our fine citizens of our business community (who incidentally is now actively supporting the Golden Gate Authority). At that time he cautioned that we should be careful to see that in metropolitan organization we do not develop a monster instead of a healthy child.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report*, 143-44.

⁵⁶ *Oakland Tribune* March 21, 1959; Kaiser, "Draft--Statement for Edgar Kaiser, Mayors' Meeting, March 20" ([1959]), carton 47, EFK Papers.

It is ironical that the State Legislature is being asked to adopt not merely a monster, but a financially healthy monster, which, with built-in financing from all the lucrative revenue producing facilities of the area, can independently go its merry way without regard to other emerging metropolitan problems and without regard to local government.⁵⁷

Two resolutions were passed at the meeting, one to request that the legislature defer the bill for further study, and a motion to form a nine-county metropolitan council to study and oppose the authority. The Planning Committee on Metropolitan Bay Area Problems resulted, and met regularly over the next several months. Their efforts to create an alternative to the authority were generally discounted by the regional press. The *Examiner* analyzed their efforts:

For years the most vocal critics of any and all forms of regional government for the Bay Area were provincial officeholders, each intent on perpetuating his own little political domain. Now that the necessity of regional governmental forms has become apparent even to them, they are taking a new tack. What they could not prevent they propose to control.

Spearheaded by the League of California Cities, they are busy selling the idea that elected officials drawn from their ranks—that is, the ranks of local mayors, city councilmen and county supervisors—should make up the governing bodies of regional institutions such as rapid transit and the proposed Golden Gate Authority.

In our view no worse fate could befall the Bay area's expanding effort to meet regional needs with new regional forms of government...

Were typical officeholder to make up the regional bodies, those bodies would be torn asunder by the very evils of home town protectionism, log rolling and back fence quarreling that they are designed to prevent.⁵⁸

In response to this editorial, the league's director sent a letter to all mayors, city managers, and councilmen of the Bay Area arguing that local elected officials deserve to be eligible to govern regional bodies, pointing to the long record of success of local governments in providing often costly municipal services. Carpenter suggested that the self-sustaining authority might not be as effective in solving expensive problems:

⁵⁷ Wes McClure, "The Development of a Metropolitan Government Structure in the San Francisco Bay Area," (paper presented at the Meeting of Mayors of Cities of the Nine Bay Area Counties, Berkeley, CA, March 24, 1959), box 94, DS Vault.

⁵⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* April 14, 1959.

There is no magic in taking the only revenue-producing facilities of local government and placing them in an authority and then having the authority show a successful operation. The Port of New York Authority probably is one of the notable examples of how this can be done, but I am sure that even the proponents of the Golden Gate Authority will recognize that the non-revenue producing problems of local government in the New York Metropolitan area must still be solved and no one has suggested that the Port of New York Authority is going to solve them.⁵⁹

It was from the seed of this controversy that the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) grew. During this initial round of hearings for the Golden Gate Authority, the individual protest of city and county representatives of the Bay Area probably had little impact on the legislative process in Sacramento. The League's planning committee called a conference on metropolitan transportation problems in February 1960 to discuss possible alternatives to the authority for regional transportation planning.

Senate Bill 576

In March, both the Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems and the Senate Transportation Committee held hearings on McCarthy's bill to create the Golden Gate Authority, Senate Bill 576.⁶⁰ Testimony by Kaiser summed up the BAC's early campaign:

We did not take the creation of the Golden Gate Authority lightly. To the contrary, having had the cooperation of experts in every possible field in determining (1) would an authority work to the advantage of California and the Bay Area and (2) could an act be drafted to make its creation physically possible, we launched the most intensive drive possible to take this vital question to the people, the organizations and the local government bodies of the nine-county Bay Area....

We have been in contact with over 8,000 individuals and organizations in a period of three months to tell the Golden Gate Authority story. As the authority is explained and detailed, support has been almost universal.

⁵⁹ Richard Carpenter to Mayors, Councilmen and City Managers of Cities in the Nine Bay Area Counties, April 23, 1959, in Institute for Local Self Government, *ABAG Appraised: A Quinquennial Review of Voluntary Regional Co-Operative Action through the Association of Bay Area Governments*, Rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA: Institute for Local Self-Government, 1967), Exhibit 5B.

⁶⁰ S.B. 576, 1959 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.)

In this short period of time, nearly 300 community leaders have joined the Citizens Committee for the Golden Gate Authority. These people come from throughout the Bay Area. There are labor men, business men, governmental officials, housewives, farmers, Democrats, Republicans and men and women from every other walk of life who have joined us in this effort....

Practically everyone tells me while they are in favor of the principle of the Authority, many of them who have a self interest in a bridge or an airport are for the authority for the other fellow. Just leave our bridge or airport or seaport out of it, they way, and we'll support you to the hilt....

Frankly we find that attitude extremely encouraging, because what these people are saying is that the Golden Gate Authority is good for the Bay Area. We simply believe that if part of the idea is good, the whole idea is a lot better.⁶¹

Despite Kaiser's rosy description of near-consensus, the negative reaction of local interest groups associated with the transportation facilities threatened by the authority was vigorous.

Along with the League of California Cities, opponents of the authority included the Oakland Port Commission, whose executive director Dudley W. Frost cited the principle of home rule:

We are not going to give up our future by default.

"Home rule" is now given as one of the compelling reasons for the creation of the nine-county authority.

We have home rule now.

The Port of Oakland is a product of home rule. If anything, the legislation you are considering would wipe out the home rule of the Port of Oakland.

I think the "home rule" term has been used primarily in connection with bridges...but, as a practical matter, we must, under the proposed legislation, apply it to our harbor, airport and industrial development as well.

We have nothing to gain and everything to lose in this respect.⁶²

Concern for Oakland's port vied with the local desire to take control of the Bay Bridge from the state.

Dan London, president of the bridge district, addressed the transportation committee:

⁶¹ Edgar F. Kaiser, quoted in Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report*, 140-41.

⁶² Dudley W. Frost, "Statement of Dudley W. Frost, Executive Director, Port of Oakland." In Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report*, 144-45. For a discussion of home rule ideology in the Bay Area during this period and later, see Victor Jones, "Bay Area Regionalism: Institutions, Processes, and Programs," in *Regional Governance: Promise and Performance*, ed. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (Washington, DC, 1973).

Neither the State nor Federal government nor private capital would have anything to do with the original promotion of the Bridge District...but now that the bridge is a great success, it is proposed by the proponents of this bill to tap our future revenues for other projects, in which the people of the district could have no material rights or interest at all.⁶³

London presented the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District resolution against the authority, protesting that the rights of district's bond-holders would be violated by the transferal of the bridge, and that the bridge district counties of Mendocino and Del Norte would not be represented at all. London stressed the fact that the authority would impose perpetual tolls on the bridge to subsidize facilities outside of the district. However, the motives of the bridge district representatives were under intense scrutiny. The *San Francisco Chronicle* predicted that tolls would never be eliminated on the Golden Gate Bridge, anyway, not mincing its words:

The opposition of the Golden Gate Bridge directors is approaching hysteria. They want to protect their empire... The claim that the Golden Gate Authority would end the prospect of a toll-free Golden Gate is a shabby deception. The directors could be relied upon to keep the tolls and their empire.⁶⁴

However skeptical the San Francisco press was about the bridge district by that time, its argument against the authority was credible; any chance that there was for a free bridge would be eliminated.

As hearings continued, almost all of the negative testimony led to amendments. The bill was altered to provide for the acquisition of the bridge district and its properties only after its counties had been reimbursed for their initial tax contributions and enough money had been set aside to retire all of the construction bonds. However, any time was too soon for Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District officials. By the end of March, all of the mandatory acquisitions of locally controlled transportation facilities (ports and airports) had been

⁶³ Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report*.

⁶⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 4, 1959.

removed from the bill except the Golden Gate Bridge.⁶⁵ In order to stop local bickering over representation, the bill was also amended to allow for gubernatorial appointments, fanning the flames of local opposition.⁶⁶ These alterations, along with many others, began to undermine the credibility of the proposal while doing little to assuage its opposition.

In the meantime, representatives of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District continued to pressure the San Francisco Supervisors to oppose the authority, the only county board in the district that had not taken an official stance with regard to the bill. On March 12 London addressed the board of supervisors again, reciting the familiar arguments against the measure. He asserted that the Golden Gate Authority was unconstitutional, and warned that passage of the measure would be “tantamount to establishing perpetual tolls on the Golden Gate Bridge.”⁶⁷ He objected to the BAC’s publicity campaign directed by a “paid firm of campaign managers,” failing to mention the bridge district funds that had been devoted to lobbying and campaigning (\$25,000 per year to the Redwood Empire Association, plus a budget of \$10,000 for public relations).⁶⁸ London also stated that “it would appear that...the only objective in attempting to take over these two bridges is to divert their financial advantages to the development of another crossing or crossings between San Francisco and Alameda,” or to subsidize BART, a purpose that would not benefit the residents of the bridge district.⁶⁹

Warnings about the unconstitutionality of the bill finally raised an alarm. San Francisco city attorney Dion Holm, parroting the position of the bridge district, issued a statement questioning the validity of the measure because of the contractual obligations of the

⁶⁵ Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report*, 10.

⁶⁶ Brown held a press conference making this announcement. *Independent Journal* April 24, 1959.

⁶⁷ Dan London to San Francisco Board of Supervisors, March 12, 1959, box 204, DS Vault.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

bridge district to their bondholders. Holm also raised strong objections to the take-over of the San Francisco Airport, which he claimed would soon start to generate revenue, and pointed out that San Francisco would have a smaller proportion of representatives at the authority than they did on the Golden Gate Bridge board of directors. Kaiser met with San Francisco officials, including Holm, reportedly agreeing to compromise on the issue of the inclusion of the San Francisco airport. The next day, Kaiser issued a public statement: “So that there will not be any misunderstanding, the Bay Area Council does not favor and will not support any efforts to eliminate facilities from the authority or to restrict its operations to toll bridges only.”⁷⁰ Kaiser called Holm’s legal objections “extremely disturbing,” pointing out that a large team of legal experts that had been working on the project for months under the auspices of the BAC.⁷¹

By this time, observers agreed that San Francisco’s position was crucial to the outcome of the hearings. Senator McAteer of San Francisco, who supported the authority, remarked that “if San Francisco doesn’t approve this plan, it is dead.”⁷² Supporters of the bill remained hopeful until San Francisco passed a unanimous resolution against the bill on April 20.⁷³ They held “significant objections” to SB 576 and promised support only after nine amendments, including that San Francisco be paid the full market value for its airport and be guaranteed half of its directors.⁷⁴ Although the Port of Oakland Commission had withdrawn its opposition on the same day, Alameda County, which had about the same population as San Francisco at the time, would never agree to let San Francisco dominate the governing board.

⁷⁰ Senate Interim Committee on Bay Area Problems, *Final Report*, 140-41.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Oakland Tribune*, March 25, 1959.

⁷³ San Francisco Board of Supervisors, Resolution Endorsing Senate Bill No. 576 Provided Amendments Proposed by City and County are Adopted, San Francisco, April 20, 1959.

⁷⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* April 21, 1959; *San Francisco Chronicle* April 21, 1959.

McCarthy responded by asking the committee to delay its vote on the bill so that it could be amended again after negotiations with San Francisco.

On April 24 Governor Brown went on record in favor of the authority, and the sooner the better. “Reasons can be found for delaying anything, but I am not so much afraid of getting ahead of ourselves as of falling behind.”⁷⁵ But, it was already too late. After six intensive months of active debate SB 576 had been amended over 100 times, and though its basic structure was still intact, its independence, power, and scale of the proposed agency had been eroded considerably.⁷⁶ The bill would never be approved by the transportation committee, and if it did, the endless debates and amendments would only continue in the senate and assembly. Attorney Albert M. Monaco summed up the situation from the perspective of the bridge district partisans:

These changes represent a substantial admission that the bill has been hastily prepared and has not adequately explored the basic concepts behind the proposed statute or the real probabilities of consolidating the ports and airports... Proponents of the bill have not shown any pressing necessity for adoption of the bill as proposed or any pressing necessity for its adoption as recently amended...substantial doubt is cast upon the soundness of the desire to take over the Golden Gate Bridge at this time.⁷⁷

The *Chronicle*, the most enthusiastic supporter of the authority among the region’s papers, commented that “the demise of the Authority proposal—as amended and re-amended by the Legislature—may prove a mercy killing.... [It] was so thoroughly emasculated in terms of representation, of power, function and duty, that enactment might have created more problems than it solved.”⁷⁸ Courting the San Francisco Board of Supervisors paid off—the Golden Gate Bridge was out of jeopardy, at least for the time being.

⁷⁵ Governor [Edmond G.] Brown, Statement Re: Golden Gate Authority, April 24, 1959, carton 48, EFK Papers.

⁷⁶ Golden Gate Authority Commission,[Minutes of] Golden Gate Authority Commission Meeting, Sacramento, December 1, 1959, box 94, DS Vault.

⁷⁷ Albert M. Monaco, “Status of Senate Bill 576,” ([San Francisco], April 21, 1959), box 94, DS Vault.

⁷⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 27, 1959

McCarthy revamped the original bill to provide only for a study group and it passed easily. The new Golden Gate Authority Commission was made up of the authority's proponents, including Kaiser; Robert Bradford, California director of public works; Thomas Carlson, Contra Costa Attorney; Joseph L. Eichler, a Palo Alto developer; William M. Malone, San Francisco attorney; Sam Eubanks of the San Francisco-Oakland Newspaper Guild; and Leo Strauss, a Marin resident and outspoken critic of the bridge district.⁷⁹ A fourteen-member Advisory Council was headed by Nahas and Martin, the founders of the Committee for Trade and Transportation, and included one bridge district director, Leland S. Murphy.⁸⁰ The legislature appropriated \$250,000 for further study of the Golden Gate Authority concept, for public hearings on the measure, and for a viable bill to be introduced in 1961.

Second Round: The Golden Gate Authority Commission

The formation of the Golden Gate Authority Commission was ultimately a victory for the opponents of the authority. Its mandate to study the issue and conduct public hearings throughout the Bay Area not only provided a public forum in which to voice objections, but also gave the opposition time to organize and consolidate its forces. It also gave local politicians the time and impetus they needed to develop an alternative to meet the political demand for regional planning that was behind the authority's popularity, one that would not threaten the autonomy of local governments and institutions, by forming the Association of Bay Area Governments. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District rallied counties and cities, intensifying pressure on its members to toe the line.

⁷⁹ *Independent Journal* June 30, 1960; "Marin Sounding Board Program: Golden Gate Authority Commission," (San Rafael, 1960), box 104, DS Vault.

⁸⁰ Golden Gate Authority Commission and Advisory Council, *Directory of Members* ([Sacramento, 1959]), Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers, California State Archives, Sacramento (hereafter referred to as Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers).

The Golden Gate Authority Commission held twelve public hearings in the San Francisco Bay Area between February and August, 1960, representing each of the facilities to be incorporated into the authority. The first two hearings focused on state toll bridges, and testimony indicated that state representatives would not oppose the authority. The director of public works, whose department included the California Toll Bridge Authority, made it clear that he believed that the authority's jurisdiction should not be compromised by petty local protests. He remarked, "if the Golden Gate Authority idea is a good one for the Bay Bridge, it is a good one for the Carquinez Strait bridges; if it is a good one for those bridges, it is good for the San Mateo Bridge, and it is a good one for the Golden Gate Bridge."⁸¹

There were few objections to the inclusion of most facilities in the Golden Gate Authority. The Port of San Francisco, which was state-owned, could easily be incorporated as long as its bonded indebtedness was taken over. The Port of Richmond, owned by the City of Richmond but leased to private shipping companies, would also pose little problem as long as the leases were re-negotiated favorably (Richmond's profits were negligible). Redwood City's port, in contrast, netted the city \$700,000 during the previous year, and its representatives wanted its full market value plus a public vote before turning it over to the authority. The City of San Jose, whose Municipal Airport was slated for expansion in the decade to come, raised concerns about adequate representation, but expected that the authority would relieve its financial burden. Solano County Senator Luther E. Gibson, along with representatives of the City of Vallejo, and Solano and Napa Counties, opposed the inclusion of the Carquinez Bridge because of tolls, but that facility was state-owned and there was little they could do about it.⁸²

⁸¹ Golden Gate Authority Commission, [Summary of All Public Hearings Held by the Commission], 3, Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers.

⁸² Ibid.

The Oakland Port Commission presented a greater challenge. Both Oakland's port and airport were run by five commissioners who were nominated by the mayor and appointed by the city council, serving without compensation for six-year terms. An executive director and a chief engineer oversaw operations. The commissioners maintained an independent legal department and a public relations department.⁸³ Strong support for the authority was voiced by the Alameda Labor Council, executives of several important shipping companies, the powerful Bechtel Corporation, and the Oakland Chamber of Commerce. However, the executive director of the Port of Oakland, Dudley Frost, presented a list of twelve demands, including equal representation for Alameda and San Francisco Counties, the oversight and approval of of port commissioners on all negotiations for the takeover, the simultaneous transfer of the San Francisco and Oakland airports, comparable rights and benefits for employees of the port, and the elimination of provisions for collective bargaining. Most of these conditions were met by the new legislation. In January 1961 both the Port of Oakland and the Oakland City Council endorsed the Golden Gate Authority.⁸⁴

Passionate testimony was also heard at hearing on the governmental aspects of a regional Bay Area authority in Berkeley. C. B. Hutchinson, mayor of Berkeley and probably the region's most prominent defender of home rule, offered a critique based on the principles adopted by the League of California Cities. Hutchinson asserted that while a region-wide governmental body was needed, both of a general nature and to address transportation questions in specific, the authority had neither the right representation for the region nor the proper combination of facilities. Hutchinson insisted that locally-elected officials were the best qualified and the most effective representatives of the Bay Area for developing and

⁸³ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Report* prepared by Ernst &Ernst (San Francisco: Golden Gate Authority Commssion, 1960), 131-39.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

administering regional planning agencies. Rather than grouping the administration and financing of bridges, airports, and seaports, Hutchinson argued that transportation planning should involve bridges, highways, and mass rapid transit. He also held that the authority would complicate the formation of a more comprehensive regional planning agency. As such an alternative, Hutchinson suggested the newly-conceived Association of Bay Area Governments:

This organization...arises from the awareness of local government officials of the many large problems, needs, and functions that extend beyond existing county and city boundaries. It is the purpose of this association to make studies of these needs and problems... and then make recommendations to each county and city in the area for action to be taken for the general good of the entire area.⁸⁵

Following Hutchinson, Bill MacDougal, representing Bay Area county supervisors, also testified against the authority and in favor of ABAG, “a brave experiment in full partnership between cities and counties.”⁸⁶ Questions from the commission members concerning the purpose and intent of ABAG grew antagonistic. They pointed out that the city and county representatives were opposing regional “supergovernment” while at the same time proposing to administer one themselves. Thomas Lantos, and economist at San Francisco State University, pointed out the narrowness of the distinction of representation that ABAG advocates were making:

In essence, SB 576 proposed a governing commission which would have been picked almost exclusively by local mayors and boards of supervisors. Mayors and supervisors, however, were not eligible to serve on the commission, probably because the authority is an attempt to curb the [influence] of cities and counties in regional matters. One doesn’t ask a dying man to prescribe his own cure. He would have done so long before, if he could have.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Transcript of Public Hearing: Governmental Aspects of a Regional Bay Area Authority* (Berkeley, CA, June 8, 1960), 5, Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

While city and county representatives opposed the authority but insisted on their support for different regional government and planning at the hearing, for the most part experts and civic groups supported the proposal. The single exception to this was Eugene C. Lee, Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, who protested that a fundamental problem with the authority was being ignored. Lee complained that the financing of the authority determined its essential structure and priorities:

The marriage between bridges on the one hand and air- and seaports on the other, is not dictated by either romantic attachment, necessity, or even platonic relationship. But simply by the fact that one partner would have sufficient financial resources... Now, it may make sense to tell the commuter that his tolls are to continue into eternity to meet the over-all transportation needs of the region as a whole, particularly including mass transit. But there seems little justification, economically, socially, or politically, for compelling the commuter to subsidize into the indefinite future two specialized segments of the economy, namely, airports and seaports. Overwhelming political resistance to such a proposal seems to me both assured and justified.⁸⁸

Lee's testimony was heard without comment. This financial relationship, of course, was intentional and considered fundamental to the authority's success as a corporate governmental body by its principal advocates in the business community. To them, it was an unquestioned assumption that improved transportation facilities were essential to the prosperity of the region, and would ultimately benefit everyone. Bridge tolls were an easy resource to identify, a secure source of revenue, a proven basis for financing public works. Even McCarthy, previously a tireless defender of commuters' interests, saw no conflict of interest if tolls were going towards the cause of development.

Hearings on the inclusion of the Golden Gate Bridge were held in San Rafael in May and in San Francisco in August. The San Rafael hearing included testimony from George P. Anderson, Golden Gate Bridge Director from Mendocino County, executive board member of the Redwood Empire Association, and one of the original advocates for the construction of the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 48-49.

bridge in the 1920s. Anderson read two bridge district directors against the authority. The questions that followed resembled a hostile cross-examination, and summed up the criticism of the bridge district that had been building for years. Carlson's questions involved the inefficiency of administering the Golden Gate Bridge separately from all other transportation facilities, with the district's full staff, legal team, insurance funds, well-paid director and chief engineer, and high maintenance costs relative to other, comparable bridges. Anderson protested that other bridges, especially the Bay Bridge, had high "hidden costs," which increased "the further away you get from local control."⁸⁹ When the Golden Gate Bridge's large surpluses were mentioned, Anderson pointed out that the bridge's bonds were non-callable, and one of the district's first obligations was to protect the interests of its bondholders. The commission members made it clear that they believed that the district was impeding the construction of new facilities in the North Bay. Anderson agreed on the necessity for a second crossing to Marin, though he insisted that "it ought to be constructed by the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, and not by a competing agency."⁹⁰ The "competing agency" was the California Toll Bridge Authority, and the rivalry between the two agencies that Anderson's remark demonstrated directly supported the case for consolidation based the elimination of inefficient competition between facilities.

Leland Murphy, the only other bridge director present, claimed that the bridge directors would never oppose the bridge's incorporation if it were approved by a vote of the people, but as it was, the bridge was being confiscated. Murphy responded to questions about district's public relations and lobbying expenses by pointing out that McCarthy had spent equivalent money on promoting the bill. The response by Downing, Kaiser's representative at the

⁸⁹ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Transcript of Public Hearing: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (San Rafael, May 12, 1960), 15, Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

meeting, was quick and forceful. He pointed out that “not one penny” was spent by McCarthy or the Senate Committee on Bay Area Problems for the promotion of SB 576, but that all of the promotional efforts were conducted by the BAC with private funds.⁹¹ The Golden Gate Bridge’s advertising and lobbying money was public. The comparison highlighted an important and long-standing bridge district idea, that the district was the equivalent of a private corporation owned by shareholders in its member counties, and should be administered as such. It was this assumption that infuriated the commission members, who saw the policies of the bridge district as flagrantly defying a clear public interest that the agency should serve.

Anderson’s testimony was followed by statements in support of the authority by the chairman of the Marin County Board of Supervisors, the mayor of San Rafael, the vice president of the Greater San Rafael Chamber of Commerce, the Marin Industrial Development Foundation, and the Marin County Labor Council. By the end of the hearing, the hapless Anderson had been thoroughly berated. The next day, the “hot dispute” was covered by both the *San Francisco Examiner* and the *Marin Independent Journal*.⁹² City council members from Fairfax in Marin witnessed this testimony, and as a direct result passed a resolution favoring the dissolution of the bridge district.⁹³

Understandably, the district’s strategy and tactics for opposing the authority were re-examined after this meeting. Jenkins observed that neither the Golden Gate Authority Commission nor its advisory council were at all sympathetic to their objections, and recommended that the district appeal to the legislature directly.⁹⁴ The bridge district did not make any statement at the San Francisco hearing in August, but this time Anderson was

⁹¹ Ibid., 30.

⁹² *Independent Journal* May 13, 1960.

⁹³ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Transcript of Public Hearing: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (San Francisco, August 10, 1960), 31-32, Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers.

⁹⁴ Arthur C. Jenkins to James Adam, August 15, 1960, box 85, IM Facility.

accompanied by all of its heavy-hitters, including Adam, Jenkins, and the district's two attorneys. A parade of authority advocates testified to the importance and advantages of including the Golden Gate Bridge. Adam was presented with a list of hostile questions regarding the finances of the bridge district.⁹⁵ A representative of the state attorney general offered the opinion that it was legally the property of California, based on the enabling 1923 legislation. This produced emotional testimony from Anderson: "And let me tell you another thing...The Golden Gate Bridge belongs to the people of the District whose property is mortgaged to pay those bonds.... we claim, and we hold, that the Golden Gate Bridge belongs to the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District."⁹⁶ Both the commissioners and the bridge district representatives accused the other of having preconceived, unjustified prejudices. Anderson complained about being humiliated during the previous hearing in San Rafael. At the close of the meeting, it was clear that the commission would fight to the end to dissolve the bridge district and that the bridge district would oppose the authority with its dying breath.

The bridge district continued its intensive campaign against the authority, but it did not go unnoticed. A San Francisco radio commentator remarked: "It seems likely that the district directors feel that they have built up a tidy little empire and, by gum, they don't want to let it go."⁹⁷ The *San Francisco Examiner* lambasted the district in a three-day series criticizing the district's extravagant spending and waste, including its expensive lobbying efforts against the Golden Gate Authority bill. James Adam, whose professional background was in public relations, alone spent \$3,711.22 on lobbying efforts in Sacramento between January 1 and June 30, 1959. And, Adam's salary was much higher than his counterpart at the California Toll

⁹⁵ For Adam's written response see Golden Gate Authority Commission Minutes of Meeting October 4, 1960, Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers.

⁹⁶ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Transcript of Public Hearing: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (San Francisco, August 10, 1960), 25, Golden Gate Authority Commission Papers.

⁹⁷ Ed Salzman, radio editorial (San Francisco, KFAX, August 18, 1960), box 85, IM Facility.

Bridge Authority, which ran six bridges without spending anything on lobbying. The series concluded with a strong call for the legislature to take the opportunity to dissolve the bridge district at all costs.⁹⁸

However, the opposition to the Golden Gate Authority was consolidating. The Joint Exercise of Powers Act of California allowed for the contract between government agencies to perform functions for which they were authorized independently. In February, 1961 ABAG finally had the membership it needed to become a legal entity when San Mateo County voted to join along with Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, and Santa Clara, even though neither San Francisco nor Oakland would enroll until several years later. It held its first formal meeting on February 3, 1961, and Mayor Hutchinson of Berkeley, “practically father of this organization,” according to newspaper coverage, was elected temporary chairman.⁹⁹ ABAG’s initial statement of principles described the interest of its members in the absolute protection of home rule, “county boards of supervisors and city councils are, and should continue to be, the top policy makers in local government, directly concerned with all services and regulations affecting public safety, health and welfare in their communities.”¹⁰⁰ Finally, the local politicians, including the representatives of counties as well as cities, could speak with a single voice. ABAG continued the campaign against the Golden Gate Authority where the League of California Cities left off, but with a much more powerful platform. Although by the end of 1960, both sides were using “home rule” rhetoric to argue their case,¹⁰¹ ABAG could also argue that it could fulfill the need for metropolitan planning without new “supergovernment” organizations like the authority; it would not matter if transportation was fragmented if ABAG

⁹⁸ *San Francisco Examiner* August 14, 15, 16, 1960.

⁹⁹ *Oakland Tribune* February 4, 1961.

¹⁰⁰ Wilber E. Smith to Wesley McClure, August 15, 1961, vol. 1, ABAG Materials.

¹⁰¹ *San Francisco Examiner* November 2, 1960; *San Francisco Chronicle* November 2, 1960.

was in charge of regional coordination. Its formation supported the case that the authority was unnecessary.

The hearings of the Golden Gate Authority Commission were successful from the perspective of the authority's proponents, who were still optimistic at the end of 1960. They were extensively and favorably covered by the press, and although the testimony included plenty of opposition, a pattern of general support but particular objections was clearly developed. A technical report by the firm of Ernst & Ernst, completed in December, reviewed the financial status of the facilities to be included in the proposal and concluded that a regional transportation authority was politically viable and urgently needed and that a more comprehensive planning agency for the Bay Area should follow as soon as possible.¹⁰²

The commission's final report, published in February, outlined the specific recommendations of the commission for new legislation. The counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Solano would be immediately included in the commission, and Santa Clara, Sonoma and Napa could be incorporated upon petition. Intractable opposition in Sonoma and Napa, well-orchestrated by the bridge district, resulted in their exclusion, along with Santa Clara. The boards of supervisors of the six remaining counties—including Marin—were all on record as supporting the proposal.¹⁰³ The board of the commission would have eighteen members, for the most part appointed by county boards of supervisors: three from San Francisco (one to be appointed by the mayor); three from Alameda (one appointed by the Oakland City Council); two from San Mateo; two from Contra Costa; one from Marin; and one from Solano. The director of the state department of public

¹⁰² Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Report* prepared by Ernst & Ernst (San Francisco: Golden Gate Authority Commission, 1960), 131-39.

¹⁰³ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Preliminary Report on the Feasibility of a Regional Transportation Agency for the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Authority Commission, 1961); Max Page, "Four Ways of Looking at City Building in America," *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 6 (1999), 848-59.

works would also serve, along with at-large representatives from the “West Bay” and the “East Bay,” to be appointed by the governor. The governor would also appoint a representative from the bridge district, but only until the outstanding bridge bonds were retired.¹⁰⁴ Local officials would be allowed to serve on the board of the commission, though the report pointed out that this was “permissive rather than mandatory, since it is felt that lay members are likely to feel more freedom from local commitments and view the region more objectively than elected officials from the same locality.”¹⁰⁵

Among the commission’s problems was increasing criticism of the New York Port Authority, and authorities in general, in the national press. A congressional inquiry into mismanagement and waste by the Port Authority was initiated in 1961.¹⁰⁶ Although the commissioners felt that the most important problems of the New York Port Authority were avoided by the representative structure of their proposal and the authority’s explicit provisions for future mass transit, the agency’s name was changed from the Golden Gate Authority Commission to the Golden Gate Transportation Commission.

The Golden Gate Transportation Commission would have responsibility for regional transportation planning, control over all state-owned bridges in Bay Area, and would take over the Golden Gate Bridge by 1963. Local highways were to be controlled by the state, including those then under the aegis of the bridge district. The commission would have to negotiate for the region’s seaports and airports individually. The report stressed that the commission “will be an extension of local government rather than a superimposed level of authority.”¹⁰⁷ It also

¹⁰⁴ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 9.

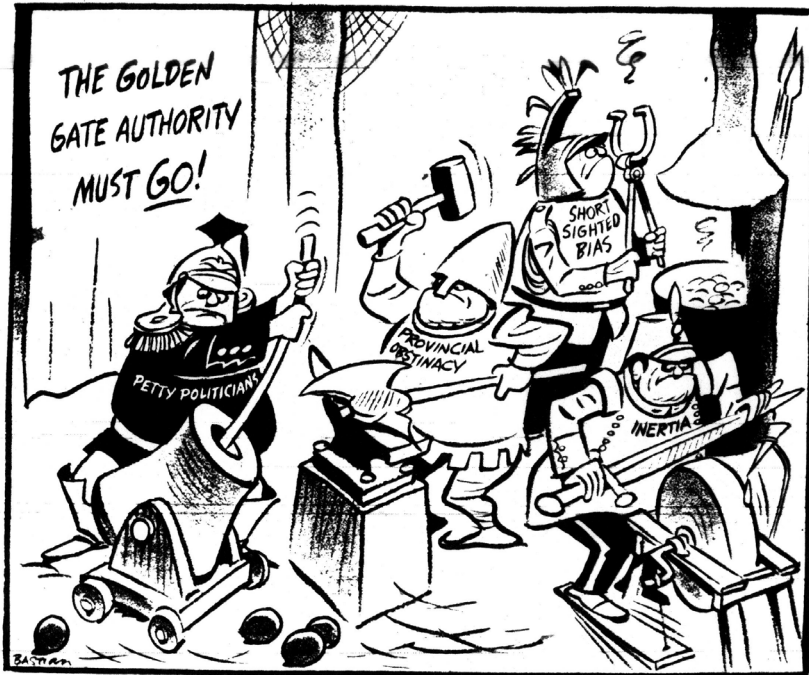
¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 16. Many of the Commission members feared that this would reduce the “quality” of the governing Board, but decided to compromise on this issue for the sake of winning more local support. William S. Downing to Edgar F. Kaiser, December 16, 1960, carton 48, EFK Papers; William S. Downing, memorandum, “GGA Situation and Miscellany” [1960], carton 48, EFK Papers.

¹⁰⁶ See Doig, *Empire on the Hudson*.

¹⁰⁷ Golden Gate Authority Commission, *Preliminary Report*, 16.

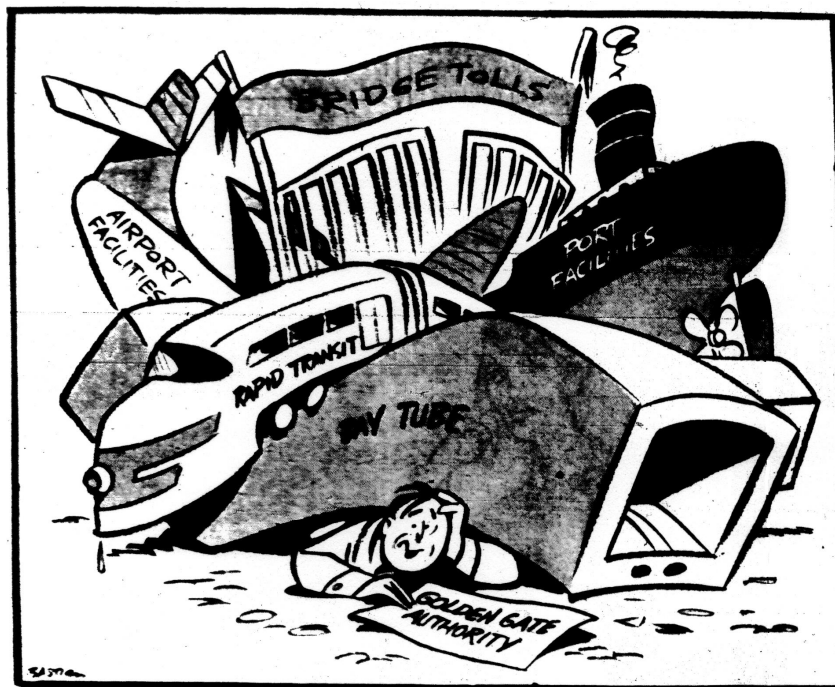
argued for the eventual fusion of BART and the commission, and the resulting bill required that the agency submit recommendations for a merger to the legislature.

These recommendations were incorporated into Senate Bill 853. The bill represented a compromise between the original SB 576 and its heavily amended version after senate transportation committee hearings. It was meant to fulfill the goals of the BAC without completely alienating the local politicians, now represented by ABAG. However, the new bill remained distasteful to home rule defenders, and did nothing to conciliate the partisans of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District; short of eliminating the Golden Gate Bridge from the proposal entirely, which was out of the question as far as the commission or the BAC was concerned, it is doubtful that anything would reduce their animosity.



Trouble brewing in the Balkans

Figure 4.1: *San Francisco Chronicle* February 11, 1959.



"Let's try it again"

Figure 4.2: *San Francisco Chronicle* May 27, 1959.

The Final Showdown: Senate Bill 853

McCarthy introduced Senate Bill 853 in 1961. One Marin County commentator predicted that, as the effort for a regional transportation agency was obviously approaching a conclusion, “the bridge folks will come out swinging.”¹⁰⁸ True to form, the bridge district intensified its campaign against the authority. A copy of the bill was sent to all of the bridge directors and district counties, along with a letter mentioning that Randolph Collier, state senator from Del Norte and Siskiyou Counties, would preside over hearings in Sacramento. A detailed and highly critical “summary digest” of the bill, prepared by attorneys for the district, followed. The directors passed another unanimous resolution condemning the Golden Gate Transportation Commission, accompanied by a press release. This was mailed to counties, congressmen, and city councils all over the Bay Area. On the same day, bridge board President Matt Graham addressed the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, stressing the financial interest and potential tax liability that San Francisco had in the Golden Gate Bridge. Marin’s two bridge directors, Graham and Leland Murphy, spoke before the Marin County Supervisors on April 18, finally winning over this last bastion of resistance. One concurring supervisor remarked, “the directors have made some errors, have had some criticisms, but have made money for the people of the six counties and have decreased tolls. I think we’d be very foolish to slap them in the face, and also this bill smacks of super-government.”¹⁰⁹ By a vote of three to

¹⁰⁸ Radio broadcast (San Francisco, KQBY, March 8, 1961), box 94, DS Vault.

¹⁰⁹ *Independent Journal* April 18, 1961. Marin County’s remarkable shift, from unanimous support for the district to unanimous opposition, reflected the polarization of the supervisors in an escalating power struggle in the county over land use, growth, and transportation, as well as the success of the bridge district’s propaganda. Two of the Supervisors who voted to condemn the bill would soon face a recall election. See chapter five, below.

two, Marin County condemned SB 853. In early May, the text of a speech by Graham to the Sausalito City Council was mailed to cities around the Bay Area. Yet another bridge district resolution, condemned the assembly version of the bill, was sent to all Bay Area counties, the governor and other officials in Sacramento, all state assembly members from the region, and Senator Collier.¹¹⁰ No one could deny the will of Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District to live.

Still, the BAC was a formidable opponent. By all indications, public opinion was on their side. The major newspapers of the Bay Area had all endorsed the bill, including the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Oakland Tribune*, the *Marin Independent Journal*. Jenkins remarked on their wholehearted support:

“Obviously, the heavy contributors of advertising will have the advantage... All one needs to do is look at the personalities behind the Golden Gate Authority to draw a conclusion from where the advertising money most freely flows.”¹¹¹ The list of resolutions and endorsements for the authority was at least as long as that of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District; the most populous counties, prosperous chambers of commerce, and serious civic groups were on the side of the Golden Gate Transportation Commission. SB 853 passed easily in the assembly by a vote of fifty-four to fourteen. Only two of the eighteen Bay Area assemblymen opposed the measure.

However, the highest hurdle remained: the Senate Transportation Committee still had to approve the bill before a final vote. By the time hearings commenced the bridge district had organized a parade of bridge defenders ready to testify. And, they were met

¹¹⁰ M. A. Graham, remarks before the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, San Francisco, April 3, 1961, box 94, DS Vault. All of the resolutions, letters and press releases issued by the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District during this period can be found in box 94, DS Vault.

¹¹¹ Arthur C. Jenkins to James Adam, September 16, 1960, box 85, IM Facility.

with a friendly reception. Collier, the chairman of the committee, introduced Anderson as “and old time man like myself, a friend of many, many years for the last 40 at least.”¹¹² Anderson, representing both the bridge directors and the Redwood Empire Association, acted as the facilitator for the case against the bill, calling a long list of witnesses whose (frequently conflicting) testimony touched on every possible criticism of the bill. Collier refused to limit the length of the presentation against the bill or to allow hostile questioning (despite McCarthy’s best efforts), and hearings were extended several times. Several of the witnesses for the bill had to appear three times before they were heard, and some never spoke at all. The proponents of the Golden Gate Transportation Commission summarized their case rather than demonstrating it, citing public opinion, listing resolutions and describing the results of the twelve Bay Area hearings. They had definitely been upstaged by the bridge district’s showing.

After two weeks of hearings, the bill was again delayed—a six to six vote of the Senate Transportation Committee effectively shelved the measure.¹¹³ If it had been actually defeated, it may have had a chance to be reintroduced through another committee during that session. Instead, two more hearings were scheduled before another vote of the committee. It was clear by that time that there were sufficient votes to pass in the senate but that it would never make it to the floor. The bill’s supporters vented their rage:

Senators dominated by rural thinking and suspicions acting in concert to defeat a measure necessary to the orderly growth of a metropolitan area... the most promising of all the effort made through the years to unify the Bay Area economically, and to lay the foundations for a form of metropolitan government... Despite the fact that five of the six affected Bay Area counties supported the bill, the measure was dumped by a 6-6 tie vote. And where did those opposition votes come from? The senatorial districts of Del Norte-Siskiyou,

¹¹² Senate Transportation Committee, *Transportation Committee Hearing on Senate Bill 853* (Sacramento, May 11 1961), 4.

¹¹³ *Transportation Committee Hearing on Senate Bill 853*.

Humboldt, Solano, San Joaquin, Tulare and Santa Barbara Counties.... In population terms, the Senators supporting the measure represented approximately 8,800,000 people, those opposed represented 900,000.¹¹⁴

The measure never made it for a second vote, and this time, the bill was truly dead. The *Examiner* placed the blame on the rural senators on the Senate Transportation Committee, the provincialism of San Francisco officials like Dion Holm, and the “imperial directors of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District.”¹¹⁵ Collier was consistently singled out as the dragon slayer.¹¹⁶ Kaiser explained this to the trustees of the BAC:

The bill was not brought to an official vote at the June 8 meeting of the Senate Transportation Committee. Several of the favorable votes were absent, and we had not been able to line up the additional vote necessary to give us a majority of the Committee members. Therefore, Assemblyman Jerome Waldie and Senator Jack McCarthy decided that it was wiser to ask that the bill be held in Committee, thus precluding the chance for Senate Collier to place the bill with his standing Interim Committee...

Various people attempted to convert the one necessary vote, including the Governor’s office, Bay Area Council staff, Legislators, lobbyists, and other leading proponents of the bill. We were unable to accomplish this, however, for a variety of reasons. Senator Collier, through his position as Chairman of a powerful committee, asserts considerable influence on committee members. Lobbyists who are normally friendly with Senator Collier also worked to hold the line. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District undertook a well-financed lobbying campaign against the bill. Some of the so-called supporters of the bill gave it mere lip service. And the Senators supporting the bill hesitated to reassign the bill to another committee, thus bypassing Collier, for fear of losing more votes than we would gain....far more than anyone else, Senator Collier was responsible for blocking passage. He has been a bitter and formidable foe since the program was first proposed in 1959, and has never really indicated the reasons for his opposition in any detail or with any conviction...¹¹⁷

Collier’s motivations were not quite so opaque as Kaiser suggested. As the chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee he had a personal interest in maintaining control of

¹¹⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* May 15, 1961.

¹¹⁵ *San Francisco Examiner*, June 12, 1961.

¹¹⁶ Victor Jones, *Government of the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, 1964), 51.

¹¹⁷ Kaiser, *Report on GGTC Bill to All Bay Area Council Trustees* ([June 15, 1961]), carton 47, EFK Papers.

state facilities, and he pointed out during the hearings that “this bill is proposing to take millions of dollars of state property and turn it over to a commission and gives no one in the rest of the state any voice in the matter at all.”¹¹⁸ Although his stake in the state-owned bridges was abstract, Collier’s political interest in supporting the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District were tangible and immediate. The *Ukiah News* and Sonoma’s *Press Democrat* strongly opposed the dissolution of the district, and multiple resolutions by the Del Norte Board of Supervisors, the Del Norte Chamber of Commerce, the Business and Professional Women’s Club of Ukiah, and several town meetings confirmed the strong public support of the district among his constituents.¹¹⁹ Collier represented the smallest and most remote county in the bridge district, and the loss of its bridge director would be a painful one. In such a rural area, the board of supervisors is a powerful political entity, and such a prestigious sinecure was a rare asset. Collier’s record on highway construction had won him the love and devotion of the Redwood Empire Association boosters.¹²⁰ The dissolution of the bridge district could destroy that solid political base for Collier—most definitely not a risk worth taking. In addition, the thousands of dollars that the bridge district was spending on lobbying had to go somewhere—no doubt, Collier benefited both politically and financially for his assistance to the bridge district.

After the close of the 1961 session, Collier was honored by the bridge district with a special “victory dinner,” where he described and explained his efforts against the

¹¹⁸ Senate Transportation Committee Hearing, April 25, 1961, box 104, DS Vault.

¹¹⁹ *Ukiah News* April 23, 1959.

¹²⁰ Collier had strong record of supporting state highway construction. The Collier Burns Act, passed in 1947, launched a massive construction boom in California with gas tax revenue.

Golden Gate Authority to the board of directors and top staff members.¹²¹ McCarthy, in a Marin radio interview, remarked that he was “very sentimental” about the defeat of the measure, and explained the circumstances that Collier was also aware of:

Chairman Collier you know of the committee is very close to the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. They spent I would say sixteen to seventeen thousand dollars on lobbying. They had many counties to the north, Sonoma Napa Lake Humboldt, Mendocino concerned with the \$25,000 of the Redwood Empire Association. Their public relations man and the staff worked very hard to create this feeling. It was a wrong way to spend funds to create that emotional feeling.¹²²

Clearly, this was a complicated issue involving many diverse interests on both sides. Its defeat indicates the crucial importance of the bridge district in actively orchestrating the opposition. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District representatives actively recruited and coordinated testimony for the transportation committee hearings. By the standards of the day, the district’s lobbying expenditures were lavish, especially for a public agency. In this case, the bridge district’s long-term efforts to build support among the electorate and local politicians paid off handsomely; the agency had secured a powerful ally in Randolph Collier.

Home Rule Champions: the Association of Bay Area Governments

The Golden Gate Authority or Transportation Commission, ironically, shared many of the characteristics that made the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District such

¹²¹ Dan E. London, “Report of Publicity and Advertising Committee to the Board of Directors: Reply to Allegations of State Senator John F. McCarthy Relating to Administrative, Financial and Managerial Affairs of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District,” Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, December 6, 1962, box 204, DS Vault. McCarthy called it a “victory dinner.”

¹²² Radio broadcast, “Marin Sounding Board Program,” (San Rafael, KTIM, June 25, 1966), box 94, DS Vault.

a formidable opponent. Both the BAC and bridge district officials embraced a corporate model of administration. A 1958 bridge district planning survey made this very clear:

Although the Golden Gate bridge is publicly owned and operated, and is a nonprofit entity, it is essentially parallel to a private corporation as to its functional mission... Operation and administration of the Golden Gate Bridge is big business and must be conducted as such if the interests of the public are to be fully protected.¹²³

The paramount consideration in protecting the independence and effectiveness of both agencies, from the perspective of their proponents, was their financial success. Bridge district officials frequently measured the success of the agency and defended its legitimacy with reference to the very surpluses that helped fuel criticism against it. The only facilities that were never exempted from mandatory incorporation by the authority or transportation commission were those that generated revenue: bridges. Both agencies were intentionally insulated from political pressures and the influence of other governmental agencies. The Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was created by the state legislature with broad powers and no oversight or accountability; its officials could use toll revenues as they saw fit, testing only the limits of public opinion. A Golden Gate Authority or Transportation Commission would have had even greater institutional autonomy than the bridge district, as it would have been provided with eternal revenues and an almost unlimited capacity to build new facilities, increase its powers, and expand its jurisdiction. While the bridge district required public approval for any new bond issue, the Golden Gate Authority did not. The bridge district faced the possibility of dissolution with the retirement of its construction bonds and the end of its primary purpose in 1971, but the Golden Gate Authority would have the agency to take

¹²³ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District *Long Range Planning Survey*; Page, "Four Ways of Looking at City Building in America."

on new projects and new responsibilities indefinitely. It would be a powerful engine for growth and development: self-financing, independent, and inherently interested in expanding its powers through new projects and new responsibilities.

After the defeat of SB 853, still hopeful proponents of planning the Bay Area, previously focused on the authority, somewhat reluctantly turned to ABAG as the most promising agent for regional governance. The BAC announced its support for ABAG in the same publication that conceded the defeat of the authority:

[T]he council pointed out the problem which occasioned the recommendation [for the Golden Gate Authority] still exists and grows increasingly acute, that action to solve it is still essential, and pledges its continuing interest to achieving a solution.... Following up on its interest in this subject, the Council is pleased to cooperate with officials of the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG)...¹²⁴

Kaiser's stint as president of the BAC ended with the election of Stephen D. Bechtel in 1961, the head of another Bay Area corporate giant invested in the construction of transportation infrastructure and public works.¹²⁵ In his abdication speech, after three years as head of the BAC, Kaiser cited the public support for the Golden Gate Transportation Commission and the formation of ABAG as evidence of an emerging spirit of regional cooperation.¹²⁶ ABAG, formed in the interests of avoiding authoritative regional planning, was left as the most viable organization to perform that function in the Bay Area.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ San Francisco Bay Area Council, "Report of the Year's Activities for 1961," ([San Francisco]: 1961).

¹²⁵ SFBAC *Trends* 16, no. 3 (May, 1961), 1, carton 47, EFK Papers.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁷ Privately, BAC partisans were worried about ABAG's implications and agenda. After the antagonistic statement of the Berkeley City Council to the Golden Gate Transportation Commission on January 24, 1961, Downing wrote, "This is a rough draft [response] to Berkeley's statement. And while it has been very difficult, I have tried to use a conciliatory tone because I am afraid they could hurt us in this new ABAG organization." Downing to Thomas Carlson, February 2, 1961, carton 47, EFK Papers.

ABAG was designed at a time when local officials opposed regional planning and government absolutely, and its structure and laws reflected that. ABAG was an entirely voluntary organization, and any city or county could withdraw its membership at any time.¹²⁸ Dues were assessed based on population. All recommendations by ABAG required a majority vote of both the county and the municipal representatives of the general assembly, which was composed of one representative from each member county and city and met twice a year. The executive council, which developed recommendations to be presented to the general assembly, met four times a year and included a representative of each county and one mayor or city councilman from within each county. Seven standing committees, assisted by a five-member professional staff, met informally to discuss specific regional problems. ABAG's stated purposes were to "review governmental proposals" and to "study metropolitan area problems."¹²⁹ It did not include the mechanisms for developing policy or taking action.

ABAG's very limited powers and awkward structure prevented its development into a planning body with any real authority. Ten years after its formation, when the local political climate was much more favorable to extra-local planning efforts, several attempts to expand the function and role of ABAG had no chance of success.¹³⁰ It is doubtful that the organization would have survived at all if it were not for 1966 legislation requiring the review of certain federal grants by a regional planning agency. Yet, its very existence thwarted attempts to create an entirely new regional agency to fill

¹²⁸ Sonoma County's citizens approved withdrawal from ABAG by a three-to-one margin in 1970 after the publication of its first (non-compulsory) regional plan. Solano County never joined. The City of Oakland and the City and County of San Francisco did not join until 1964.

¹²⁹ Institute for Local Self-Government, *ABAG Appraised*.

¹³⁰ Victor Jones was a consistent defender of ABAG's potential to "evolve" into a planning agency, e.g., Jones, *Government of the San Francisco Bay Area*, 64-80; Jones, "Bay Area Regionalism: Institutions, Processes, and Programs," in *Regional Governance—Promise and Performance*, edited by Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (Washington, DC, 1973).

that role, as its critics pointed out.¹³¹ Once ABAG had been formed, proposed regional planning agencies not only had to overcome the inevitable resistance of local officials, but they also had to compete against an agency that, despite the crippling limitations of its form and structure, aspired to fulfill that role and fought to maintain its status as the region's premier planning agency.

Had the Golden Gate Authority come into being, the San Francisco Bay Area would, without a doubt, be a very different place. The central city would be linked by many more bridges and transportation routes to a surrounding area with much greater density and intensive industry than now exists in the Bay Area. This was what authority advocates hoped for; the agency, with its autonomy, independence, and vast resources would definitely have been a much more formidable opponent for the growth control movement in the 1960s than the state Department of Public Works turned out to be.

But this account is not intended to speculate on the fate avoided or the opportunities missed by the Bay Area. Instead, it describes what actually *did* come out of the struggle over the authority, including the formation of ABAG, the continued and persistent fragmentation of transportation agencies in the Bay Area, and the triumph of local political interests over advocates of regional governance. The narrow defeat of the Golden Gate Transportation Commission was a major victory for the status quo. It demonstrates how the fragmentation of metropolitan area governments was a self-perpetuating pattern; growing numbers of special districts supported the home rule cause as they allied with local governments. This dynamic was crucial in determining the outcome of efforts for metropolitan area government in regional planning in the late

¹³¹ T. J. Kent, Jr., "City and Regional Planning for the Metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area," (Berkeley, 1963).

1960s. The struggle against the Golden Gate Authority, as a powerful regional agency, was a prelude to a larger struggle, both in the San Francisco Bay area and around the country, against even more ambitious proposals for metropolitan level government were defeated by the collective weight of existing local government.

The success of the bridge district in opposing the region's elite, its most powerful businessmen with the backing of some of the most prestigious scholars of the time and ample funding from the BAC, is a testament to the power of special districts. The bridge district was up against the Bay Area growth machine on a grand scale, and it was clear that the institutional interests of the bridge district itself were at stake. It was by no means a tool for outside interests in this struggle—it effectively generated its own support, rallied politicians to its cause, was an active participant and an important coordinator of the coalition that came together to oppose the authority. The defeat of the Golden Gate Authority was a triumph for the bridge district and a crucial victory for home rule in the San Francisco Bay Area.

V

Bay Area Rapid Transit Versus the Golden Gate Bridge

Until 1962, there was every reason to expect that Marin County would be part of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system. Local officials, civic associations, the media, and the general public all favored extending rails to the North Bay. The Redwood Empire Association and its subsidiary, Marvelous Marin Inc., both dedicated to promoting tourism and development, unequivocally supported rapid transit. Marin County real estate and business associations eagerly anticipated a windfall from the population growth it would encourage. Initial plans for the BART system included a line to Marin in its first stage of construction, and called for its eventual extension farther north to Sonoma County. BART engineers confidently endorsed the engineering feasibility of adding rails to the Golden Gate Bridge. It was not until the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District opposed rapid transit on the bridge, or, more accurately, opposed the encroachment of another governmental entity into its territory, that rapid transit for Marin County came into question.

What is most remarkable about the story of Marin County and BART is the direct conflict of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District with the desires of its most loyal backers, North Bay boosters and real estate interests, at a time when the district was fending off the most serious effort for its dissolution. Negotiations regarding rapid transit on the bridge began at the same time that the campaign for a regional Golden Gate Authority was at its peak. Unlike the Golden Gate Authority, BART to Marin enjoyed the support of the bridge

district constituency and the local political establishment of the North Bay. Politically, bridge district officials could not directly oppose BART—even the board of directors was divided on the issue. Nevertheless, the prospect of rapid transit rails on the bridge posed a direct threat to the autonomy of the bridge district, introducing a rival public agency into its jurisdiction, one that could potentially reduce toll revenues, or even worse, make a claim on them to subsidize rapid transit operations. In addition, bridge district officials, particularly traffic engineer Arthur Jenkins, questioned the advisability and desirability of a new rapid transit system from a public policy perspective, both for the bridge district and for the Bay Area as a whole. While Jenkins could do little to prevent BART from becoming a reality, he could mobilize the resources of the bridge district to stop its extension to the North Bay. In their effort to stop BART on the Golden Gate Bridge, bridge district officials turned to the authority of engineering experts to defeat the proposal rather than political maneuvering and campaigning. This struggle illustrates the power of special district officials acting behind the scenes to influence public policy, taking advantage of the resources, independence, and protection from public accountability of an autonomous public corporation.

Marin County and Mass Transportation

The original backers of the Golden Gate Bridge expected it to stimulate growth and development in the North Bay, particularly in Marin County. Marin's boosters envisioned the transformation of their county from a largely rural area with a primarily agricultural economy to an important suburban extension of the San Francisco metropolitan area. They saw the bridge as just one element in the extensive transportation system that was needed to support growth. In the post-World War II period, this expectation became a reality, but it was apparent

as the bridge neared capacity that better access to San Francisco was required to continue Marin's growth.

During the bond campaign of 1930, Golden Gate Bridge promoters promised voters that the bridge would include streetcar lines.¹ Nevertheless, after the bridge was funded and approved, rapid transit plans were ruled out, though not because of engineering or safety considerations. At the time, mass transit was in a rapid decline across the country, and Bridge engineers voted unanimously in favor of an all-automobile bridge because "it was useless to provide surface tracks in view of the non-existence of facilities on either on either side to connect with them." Answering the protests of Marin boosters, Bridge engineers suggested that "the future addition of rapid transit tracks" was still a possibility, even though it was an unjustifiable additional expense at the time.² Consulting engineer Charles Derleth noted: "I cannot see that present Marin County populations will justify franchises except for modern buses. But the people are clamoring."³

Once the Golden Gate Bridge was opened, however, Marin's embrace of the automobile was swift and decisive. Ferry patronage, as with other forms of mass transit throughout the region, declined rapidly, and the last ferry left from Sausalito on February 28, 1941.⁴ For the Bay Area as a whole, it was estimated that the number of individual trips by automobile increased by forty-three percent and the total number of automobiles rose by forty-

¹ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Supplementary Report on Rapid Transit* by Charles Derleth, Jr. (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1935), box 204, DS Vault.

² *Ibid.*; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, Minutes of meeting of the board of engineers, December 11, 1934, box 63, Keesling papers M0100; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Special Report on Rapid Transit—Golden Gate Bridge* by Joseph B. Strauss (Chicago: Strauss Engineering Corporation, October 10, 1935), box 204, DS Vault.

³ Charles Derleth to O. H. Ammann, October 20, 1934, box 1, Reed Papers.

⁴ Mel Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: Metropolis in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 238.

four percent in the five years between 1954 and 1959.⁵ In the 1950s, traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge, increasing at a rate well beyond anyone's expectations, demonstrated that Marin's residents were keeping up with their neighbors. Regular reports of new traffic records appeared on the front page of local newspapers alongside calls for lower tolls.⁶ Traffic rose by forty-eight percent in the year after the end of World War II, and continued to climb by an average of ten percent a year. 5.8 million autos crossed the bridge in 1946. In 1952, the number topped 10 million, in 1959 nearly 16 million crossed the Golden Gate and the numbers continued to rise.⁷

Twenty years after the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge, Marin boosters were again clamoring for rails to San Francisco. With the creation of the Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, another chance presented itself. John F. McCarthy, assigned to the Senate Interim Committee on San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Rapid Transit Problems (in addition to heading a Senate Committee on the Golden Gate Bridge), helped establish the BART Commission in 1951. After a number of studies and public hearings, a permanent Bay Area Rapid Transit District was created in 1957, an agency with striking similarities to the bridge district. BART District was authorized to issue general obligation bonds for a regional rail system with a two-thirds public approval. Like the bridge district, its governing board was appointed by the officials of its member cities and counties, initially including Marin, San Mateo, San Francisco, Alameda, and Contra Costa.

⁵ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, *Rapid Transit for the Bay Area: A Summary of Engineering, Financial and Economic Reports Submitted to the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District* prepared by Stone & Youngberg ([Oakland, CA]: San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, 1961), 10.

⁶ *Independent Journal* May 16, 28 1955, March 8, 1957, April 10 1959.

⁷ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Statistical Report on Traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge and Approaches* by Arthur C. Jenkins and Robert L. Davidson (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1965).

The BART District presented a two-phase plan for constructing a regional rail system. The North Bay line was included in the first stage, but it was always somewhat tenuous. Property taxes were expected to secure BART's initial bonds and provide a crucial source of funds for its construction, capital costs, and operation. Of all of the counties included in the initial plans, Marin had by far the lowest assessed value, \$135,000 in 1956. The next lowest was San Mateo at \$520,000, and both San Francisco and Alameda topped \$1 million.⁸ Though toll revenue from the Golden Gate Bridge was expected to subsidize construction, extending BART to Marin would be very expensive. Predicted construction costs for the Marin line alone ranged from \$122 million to \$137 million in 1956, and represented more than twenty percent of the total project.⁹ Marin County property comprised only three percent of the assessed value of all Bay Area counties, and only four percent of the value of the five counties to be included in the first phase of construction.¹⁰

The promise of tolls from Marin County commuters helped offset these disadvantages. Marin County's median income was second only to San Mateo's among the BART District counties, and the system was designed to attract exactly the sort of well-paid, professional workers that Marin County exported on a daily basis.¹¹ Initial BART studies predicted that Marin's commuter population would increase significantly.¹² Between 1940 and 1960, the combined population of the two counties directly to the north of the Golden Gate Bridge, Marin and Sonoma, increased by 141 percent, from 120,000 to 294,000. Marin alone

⁸ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Report on Organizational and Financial Aspect of a Proposed Rapid Transit System for the San Francisco Bay Area* by J. Knight Allen, Morgan Sibbett and the Stanford Research Institute (Sacramento, 1956), 21.

⁹ M. N. Quade to San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, October 9, 1959, box 204, DS Vault; California San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Report on Organizational and Financial Aspect*, 47-48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹ Seymour Mark Adler, "The Political Economy of Transit in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945-1963" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1980), 302.

¹² San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Regional Rapid Transit* prepared by Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Hall, and McDonald (Sacramento, 1956).

increased by seventy-one percent between 1950 and 1960, its population going from 85,600 to 146,800; much of this growth occurred in the southern reaches of the county, with easy access to San Francisco via the Golden Gate Bridge.

The first preliminary report of the BART Commission in 1953 described the transportation prospects of Marin based on the current population and development predictions:

The expected growth is in the eastern portion of the county, principally on a strip about four miles wide extending along U.S. Highway 101 between Novato and the Golden Gate Bridge. Approximately 50 percent of these travel by private cars and the remainder by Greyhound buses, the latter being the only public interurban transit service... U.S. Highway 101... is, in effect, the county's only means of ingress or egress...

If the predicted population increase is realized, and if transportation follows the existing pattern, five highways of the capacity of U.S. Highway 101 would be required to accommodate traffic. Even if the land were available for these highways, it would be a very wasteful use of the land. The cost of the construction of the highways and necessary bridges would be tremendous, and a solution would not be reached since the traffic would be funneled into another congested area.¹³

Pacific Greyhound buses were still vital to Marin's commuters, but their North Bay patronage was dropping steadily, from 7.3 million passenger trips in 1947 to 5.2 million in 1951.

Greyhound lost \$1.5 million on its Marin service in 1950.¹⁴ A fare increase, approved by the Public Utilities Commission in March 1956, brought ridership even lower, and soon Greyhound was looking for a way to end its service.¹⁵ The BART commission's report asserted that "the expected growth of Marin County poses a transportation problem that is insolvable except by some system of mass transit." The commission anticipated that the attractions of high quality service, convenience, and reliability of rapid transit trains, and the

¹³ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Preliminary Report* (San Francisco: San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, 1953), 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 35; Adler, "Political Economy," 99.

¹⁵ Senate Interim Committee on San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Rapid Transit Problems, *Final Report* (Sacramento, 1957).

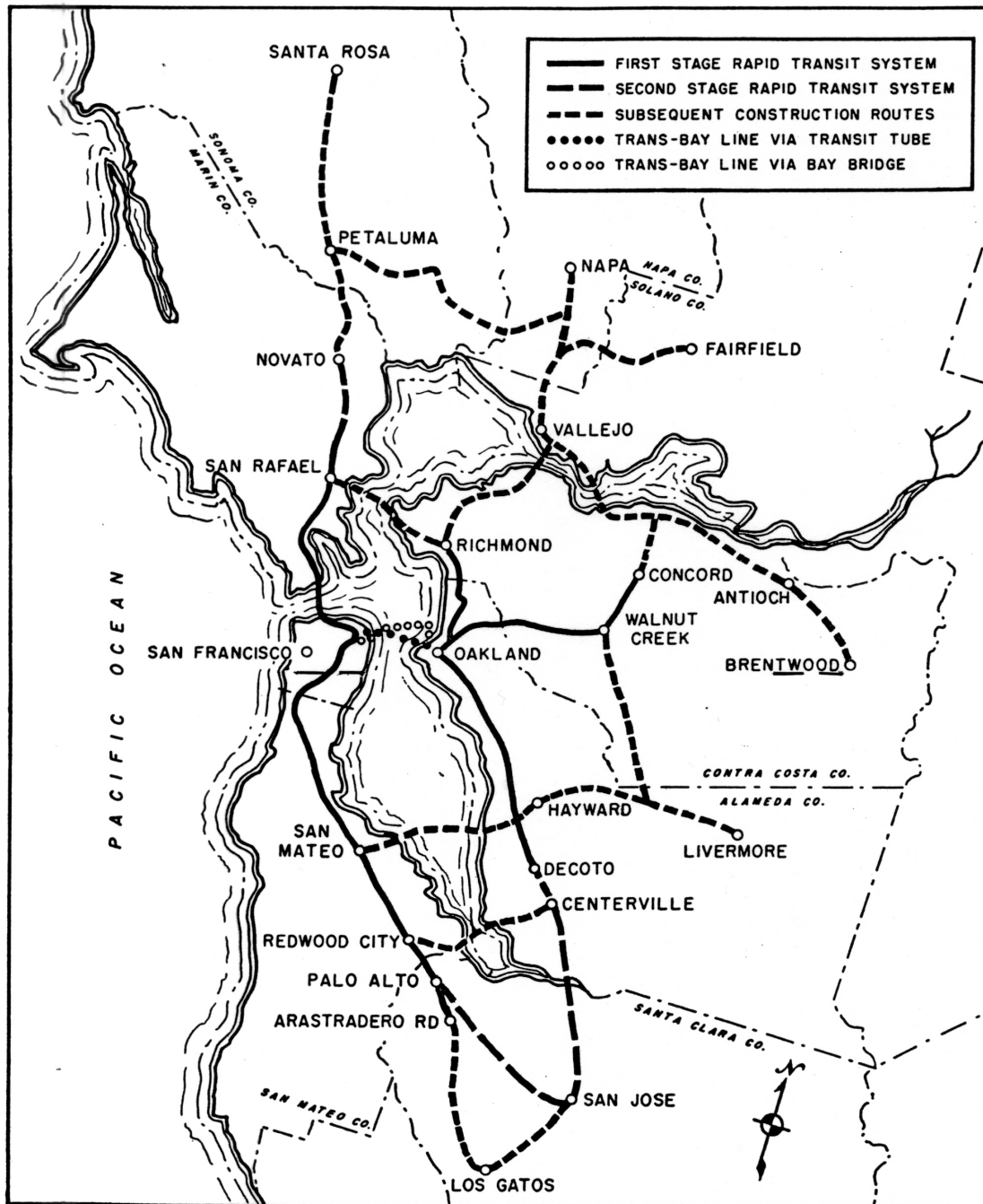
increasing difficulty of commuting to San Francisco by automobile, would offset the traditional aversion of Marin's affluent population (as well as that of other suburban communities) to mass transportation: all of the financial projections and plans for the system were based on this assumption. In addition, BART studies predicted that future residential development would center around rapid transit stations, their construction not only encouraging growth but also literally shaping it.

The question of engineering feasibility for the Marin line first arose in 1955. Marin County boosters were dismayed by an unexpected announcement that Marin would not be included in first stage construction after all because of uncertainty that the Golden Gate Bridge could accommodate trains and the high probable costs if it could.¹⁶ An uproar ensued both north and south of the Golden Gate, as San Francisco papers and the *Independent Journal* proclaimed the northern line vital and irreplaceable. Almost immediately, Marin was back on a "questionable list" for the system's first stage plans pending further investigation.¹⁷ Just months later, BART engineers confidently reported the results of new studies, concluding that rails could be easily and safely installed below the deck of the Golden Gate Bridge. Prudence required the reconstruction of sidewalks, roadways and railings resulting in some obstruction of traffic during construction, but the engineers found that a "considerable reserve capacity exists in the Golden Gate Bridge."¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Independent Journal* May 12, 1955.

¹⁸ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Technical Report on the Golden Gate Bridge* prepared by Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Hall & McDonald (Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission: October 3, 1955), quoted in Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Preliminary Report on Long Range Planning*, H7-H11.



Map 5.1: San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Proposed Bay Area Rapid Transit System* prepared by Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Hall, and McDonald, Engineers (Sacramento, 1956).

The first comprehensive plans for BART—the product of a four-year, \$600,000 study—detailed a three-phase plan for a nine-county transit system. The bold, colorful and extremely oversized report, released in 1956, was designed to demand attention and win public support. With nearly one hundred maps, tables and illustrations, it covered all of the basic elements of a comprehensive regional plan, including analysis of land use (current and future), regional natural resources, demographic patterns and projections, a detailed portrait of the region’s economy, and analysis of Bay Area commute patterns and traffic. “The Bay Area is still young enough,” the report concluded, “for its over-all economic development to be purposefully molded into a desired pattern, according to the long-range needs and desires of its population.”¹⁹ The BART system was designed to transform the Bay Area.

A Marin County line, traversing the Golden Gate Bridge and reaching beyond San Rafael nearly to the northern border of the county, was included in the first-phase “minimum plan,” and the text of the 1956 report gave no indication that there was any doubt of its practicality. All of the proposed alterations to the bridge “could be accomplished with a minimum of interference with highway traffic...without undue difficulty and without diminishing in any way the structural strength” of the bridge. “The addition of rapid transit to the Golden Gate Bridge is feasible from an engineering and construction viewpoint.”²⁰ However, all of the financial tables at the end of the report included subtotals for the first phase of the project excluding Marin County. The *Independent Journal* warned of the danger that Marin would be left out at the last minute:

In the tabulation of costs the bookkeepers have handily added up a subtotal excluding Marin... in short, the consultants have made it easy, almost suggested, that Marin be eliminated from the first step. They have shown how the first construction can be

¹⁹ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Regional Rapid Transit*, 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

trimmed more than a \$100,000,000 by merely leaving out the Marin service... We must not let this happen.²¹

Some of the fears of Marin's boosters were no doubt allayed when McCarthy was appointed chairman of the Senate Interim Committee on San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Problems.²² In charge of drafting legislation for BART, McCarthy made sure that Marin was reinstated. In 1957 the state legislature approved the Bay Area Rapid Transit District and charged it with developing final plans for the system and with winning approval for its financing. It included five of the nine Bay Area counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, San Francisco, San Mateo, *and* Marin. Once the decision had been made to include Marin in the district, BART officials had an important stake in making sure that rails would reach Marin County. The agency had to win approval for its construction bonds and initial property tax assessments by a two-thirds majority in order to finance the project. Marin County's voters had to be convinced that they would get the rapid transit that, as part of the bridge district, they would be paying for. If they weren't, their opposition could put the entire project in jeopardy.

Survival Through Rubber Tires

Soon after releasing its plans, BART Commission representatives formally requested permission to install rails on the Golden Gate Bridge; they were answered with a long and imposing list of conditions. George Anderson, president of the bridge district, replied with a rather terse agreement to cooperate:

There are a multiplicity of legal aspects, constructional details, financial involvement, bonded debt obligations and the public welfare, all of which are responsibilities of this Board... This District is desirous of being cooperative to the fullest extent in aiding your Commission in its efforts to carry out its responsibilities. On the other hand,

²¹ *Independent Journal* January 6, 1956.

²² Senate Interim Committee on San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Rapid Transit Problems, *Final Report*.

however, the District does not feel obligated to incur any expenses over and above those resulting from the normal course of business.²³

The struggle against BART on the Golden Gate Bridge reveals the basic dynamics of power at the bridge district. On this question there was a fundamental rift between the board of directors and the management. Strong support for rapid transit among the politicians, land owners, and business interests within the district translated into support among the directors, as well. Most of them were enthusiastic about BART. In contrast, bridge district management opposed the project as a major threat to the autonomy of the organization. Arthur Jenkins, consulting and traffic engineer, also had significant philosophical and political objections to the project. The successful campaign against BART was orchestrated by the two most influential bridge district officials: General Manager James Adam and Jenkins, working from within the sheltered administrative hierarchy of the agency. Stopping BART was politically delicate; even the directors required convincing of the inadvisability of BART on the bridge. Every effort was made to stop the BART project without utterly destroying the modicum of public support that the district still enjoyed at the time. Rather than wage an overt, public campaign against the project like the one against the Golden Gate Authority, bridge district officials engineered the defeat of BART to Marin County covertly.

Jenkins had tremendous professional credibility in opposing BART. Adam pointed out Jenkins' expertise to the board of directors:

Our traffic engineer, Mr. Jenkins, is particularly well qualified as an expert on the subject, having spent most of his time while with the State Public Utilities Commission for eleven years on matters involving the transit problems of the San Francisco Bay Area. He is a member of a special committee appointed by the American Society of Civil Engineers to study this problem, and was recently named chairman of a

²³ George P. Anderson to Harry A. Mitchell, November 15, 1956, box 87, IM Facility.

committee of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce to review proposed rapid transit legislation.²⁴

Jenkins was already an important figure in California transportation policy, though he never sought or received much publicity. He was instrumental in stopping transit to Marin as a behind-the-scenes actor who was both empowered and motivated by his affiliation with the institution of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. In this case, Jenkins interpreted the interests of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District in terms of his own ideals and opinions, but always, the financial security and autonomy of the agency was his primary concern.

Jenkins' professional history was intertwined with the decline of mass transit in California. Jenkins graduated with a degree in engineering from the University of California, Berkeley in 1931. From 1931 through 1942, Jenkins worked for the California Railroad Commission (which later became the California Public Utilities Commission), steadily making his way up the ranks of its engineering staff. Jenkins witnessed first-hand the downfall of private mass transit companies as they suffered uniform financial disaster. He recalled,

[It] was my primary responsibility to handle the engineering and economic aspects of the problems brought before the Commission in its regulatory capacity.... a transportation company could not increase its fares, extend or curtail its passenger rail lines, extensively reduce or substantially incur any financial obligations without first receiving authority of the State Public Utilities Commission. Therefore, all of these transportation systems...fell within my responsibility in handling their many applications wherein financial relief was sought....

In each instance where abandonment of a rail line was proposed by the transit companies, there was great opposition by public and city officials, and in some cases the counties and the state. Long series of hearings were held before the State Public Utilities Commission in processing these abandonment applications.

The same was true with respect to substitution of buses for rail lines in the interest of economy. Throughout this process of transformation, the public as individuals indicated its choice by shifting to the automobile.²⁵

²⁴ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, minutes of committee of the whole board of directors meeting on the subject of rapid transit, San Francisco, November 8, 1956), box 204, DS Vault.

While working for the Public Utilities Commission Jenkins conducted studies of transit issues in both the Bay Area and Los Angeles.²⁶ Early on, Jenkins expressed a clear skepticism about the future of mass transit, supporting the replacement of streetcars and rails with buses. In 1939 he delivered an address on “The Future of Urban and Interurban Transportation” to the University of Southern California Institute of Government:

The rubber-tired trackless vehicle has established itself permanently in the field of passenger transit and its continued growth and development can be expected ... not only in providing service to new areas but in replacement of existing rail service. Due to its rapid development during recent years and the traditional place in society occupied by the rail car, the motor coach has not met with full public approval, but when the masses are acquainted with its desirable features and the strides being made in engineering and research in an attempt to develop a vehicle which will afford the maximum comfort, speed, safety, durability, and adequacy of service, the existing resentment will be for the most part dispelled.

Along with the machine age has come the automobile which is at present the most important industry in the country. It has entered the field of passenger transportation with devastating effect upon mass transportation carriers and widespread beneficial effect upon the country as a whole...²⁷

Jenkins held a firm belief that transportation was undergoing a transformation, and that prolonging the life of older technologies, namely, streetcars and passenger railroads, was merely delaying the inevitable at the expense of both private corporations and taxpayers.

After leaving the Public Utilities Commission, Jenkins served briefly as the general consultant and transportation manager to the Key System Transit Lines in Oakland, which operated an extensive though rapidly declining streetcar system in the East Bay including rails on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge.²⁸

²⁵ [Arthur C. Jenkins] to Charles [W. Reinking], June 15, 1960, box 87, IM Facility.

²⁶ Adler, “Political Economy.”

²⁷ Arthur C. Jenkins, “Future of Urban and Interurban Transportation” (paper presented at the 11th annual session of the Institute of Government, University of Southern California, June 15, 1939), 10.

²⁸ Jenkins, Arthur C. *Report on Preliminary Considerations to Improving the Net Earning Position of Key System Transit Lines* (San Francisco: Jenkins & Associates, 1948); Arthur C. Jenkins “Outline of Education and

Jenkins started an independent private practice as a consulting engineer in 1948. Simultaneously, he took on the position of bridge district traffic engineer and was elected to the executive committee of the Redwood Empire Association. At the time, transit companies all over the country, many of which were established as part of land speculation and development schemes rather than independent profit-making ventures, had already succumbed to competition to the automobile or were in the process of going out of business. Overcapitalization, poor management, neglected equipment, onerous fare regulations, labor problems, public antagonism, along with the rapid loss of riders to private automobiles all contributed to transit's financial ruin.²⁹ Private companies were begging to be released from the obligations of their charters, and cities were bleeding money trying to keep failing operations going.³⁰ Over the next decade or so, Jenkins helped clear some of the ruins of private transportation companies and facilitate the process of eliminating streetcar lines and railways in favor of buses in San Diego, Fresno, Phoenix, Long Beach, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland, often appraising the property of failed transit operations as they were about to be liquidated or sold.³¹ As a financial advisor, Jenkins consulted with many troubled

Experience" [1949], box 6, Arthur C. Jenkins Papers, HE4491.K47 J4, Harmer E. Davis Transportation Library, Institute of Transportation Studies, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter referred to as Jenkins papers).

²⁹ See also Arthur C. Jenkins and Pacific Electric Railway Company, "Before the Public Utilities Commission of the State of California: A Report on Statistical Data and Trends Applying to the Transit Industry of the United States," (Los Angeles, 1948), box 5 Jenkins papers. There is an extensive literature on the decline of mass transit in mid-century United States, and much of it stresses the popularity of the automobile and the political and financial difficulties faced by private mass transportation enterprises. See for example, Sy Adler, "The Transformation of the Pacific Electric Railway: Bradford Snell, Roger Rabbit, and the Politics of Transportation in Los Angeles." *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1991), 51-86; Paul Barrett, *The Automobile and Urban Transit: The Formation of Public Policy in Chicago, 1900-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); Martha J. Bianco, "Technological Innovation and the Rise and Fall of Urban Mass Transit," *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 3 (1999), 348-78; Scott Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Stanley Mallach, "The Origins of the Decline of Urban Mass Transportation in the United States, 1890-1930," *Urbanism Past and Present* 8 (1979), 1-17; Zachary M. Schrag, "'The Bus is Young and Honest': Transportation Politics, Technical Choice, and the Motorization of Manhattan Surface Transit, 1919-1936," *Technology and Culture* 41 (January 2000), 51-79.

³⁰ Arthur C. Jenkins, "Professional Biography of Arthur C. Jenkins," 1963, box 85, IM Facility.

³¹ Jenkins, "Professional Biography." The Harmer E. Davis Transportation Library at the Institute of Transportation Studies Library at the University of California, Berkeley includes dozens of reports and studies

public and private transit operators, including Pacific Greyhound Lines, the only company providing service between San Francisco and the North Bay after the ferries went out of business.³²

Jenkins was a central figure in the famous transformation of Pacific Electric Railway into a bus system in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, working on PE's case as a representative of the California Railroad Commission in the 1930s, and in the 40s and 50s as a private consultant. In tracing the decline of the PE, historian Sy Adler describes Jenkins' position on transit: "the era of rail transit, indeed, of transit generally, was drawing to a close and PE ought to grow old as gracefully as possible while it bowed to the realities of technological progress represented by the automobile."³³ In 1949 Jenkins developed a "modernization plan" for the complete elimination of PE rails and substitution of buses, and expressed his frustration at the public opposition to the transformation:

The theory so often propounded that retention of rail lines enhances public values and adds intrinsic importance to the community serves is as obsolete as the rail equipment itself. We are confronted with a normal and natural transformation in the course of events in the field of transportation...

There is no other industry... which is and has been so consistently and so persistently beset with militant opposition in its efforts to follow the natural course that good business judgment dictates, in attempting to maintain a reasonable margin between revenue and cost of providing service. It is inconceivable that anyone could advocate the preservation of outmoded facilities whose cost of operation far exceeds the revenues earned and insist upon further heavy capital investment to insure the preservation of such a losing project.³⁴

done by Jenkins for public and private transit operators throughout California, both in the general collection and in the Arthur C. Jenkins papers.

³² Arthur C. Jenkins, [Biography], box 6, Jenkins papers.

³³ Sy Adler, "The Transformation of the Pacific Electric Railway: Bradford Snell, Roger Rabbit, and the Politics of Transportation in Los Angeles," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1991), 60-63.

³⁴ Pacific Electric Railway Company, *Report on Operations, Facilities, Organization, Financial Status and Modernization Program of Pacific Electric Railway Company, Los Angeles, California* by Arthur C. Jenkins (San Francisco: Arthur C. Jenkins & Associates, 1949), 7.

Jenkins presented appeals on behalf of the Pacific Electric Railway Company to municipal, state and federal regulating bodies for permission to abandon rail lines and replace them with bus service, arguing that the abandonment of PE rail lines in favor of buses was in the public interest.³⁵ Jenkins firmly believed that mass transportation's best hope—whether public or privately administered—was “survival through rubber tires,” or the adoption of an all-bus system using existing infrastructure.³⁶

Jenkins also influenced San Francisco's Municipal Railway system and a 1949 subway proposal. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors commissioned Jenkins to study the city's transit management.³⁷ Jenkins declared the subway unnecessary and expensive, lending the weight of his expertise to the project's opponents. Instead of a subway, Jenkins advised that express buses and traffic control techniques be adopted by Muni to alleviate traffic problems.³⁸ The subway was defeated.

In a letter to Bridge Director Charles W. Reinking, a member of the rapid transit committee, Jenkins explained that he was not “antagonistic toward rail rapid transit per se,” but explained his lengthy personal involvement with its decline and failure:

During the past 29 years, my engineering activities have been devoted primarily to passenger transportation and vehicular traffic... [In the 1930s] Pacific Electric Railway Company in the Los Angeles Metropolitan area was the largest interurban electric system in the world. It was owned and controlled by the Southern Pacific Company.... In the San Francisco Bay area there was an extensive system of electric interurban

³⁵ Pacific Electric Railway Company, *A Report on Statistical Data and Trends Applying to the Transit Industry in the United States*, by Arthur C. Jenkins ([Los Angeles], 1948), 6; Arthur C. Jenkins, “Before the Interstate Commerce Commission: Report on A Modernization Program Passenger Transportation Operations of Pacific Electric Railway Company Replacing Nonprofitable Passenger Rail Service with Modern Coach Service and Abandoning of Certain Portions of Rail Lines,” (Los Angeles, 1950); Arthur C. Jenkins, “In the Matter of the Application of Pacific Electric Railway Company, Los Angeles, California for the Authority to Make Certain Changes in Passenger Rail and Motor Coach Service, Operations, and Facilities Pursuant to Franchise Ordinance No. 90344,” (Los Angeles, 1950).

³⁶ Pacific Electric Railway Company, *A Report on Statistical Data and Trends Applying to the Transit Industry in the United States* by Arthur C. Jenkins ([Sacramento]: Public Utilities Commission of the State of California, October 13, 1948), 6.

³⁷ Adler, “Political Economy,” 30.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29-30.

passenger rail... serving the East Bay cities and a fairly extensive system in Marin County, both operated by Southern Pacific Company.

[T]here were in addition to the interurban electric railway systems, hundreds of miles of local streetcar lines. This same pattern existed throughout the entire United States in all of the larger cities and in many of the smaller ones.

It is important to note that all of these operations were conducted by private enterprise. None, to my knowledge, with the exception of perhaps one or two back East, were publicly owned.³⁹

Jenkins described the connection between real estate interests and transit operations: “In those days the rail lines came into existence first and then the population and residential development followed.”⁴⁰ However, the development of cities in California had been dramatically changed by the automobile which allowed for individual, flexible long-distance transportation at a relatively small cost. The demand for automobiles was matched with the construction of roads and highways:

Population distribution is widely dispersed. Commercial activities had followed population. Shopping centers and commercial enterprises have sprung up in many outlying areas to meet the convenience demand of dispersed population. This pattern is difficult to serve with rail transportation.... Bus lines can come much closer to meeting this requirement due to their flexibility and ease of maneuvering over existing streets, roads and highways.⁴¹

Jenkins detailed the abandonment of rails on the Bay Bridge after public officials took over the system only to let it deteriorate further:

The unfortunate part of this whole picture is that the public, which had the means at hand for at least partially solving the mass transit problem did nothing whatsoever in a constructive way. It was obvious long ago that mass transit service under private ownership could not survive. This prediction was made by me on numerous occasions prior to World War II. Public officials seemed to think that somehow the matter would follow its natural course and a solution would be forthcoming....⁴²

Because mass transit had been abandoned wholesale rather than rehabilitated by public entities while it was still intact and operational, according to Jenkins, the opportunity was entirely lost

³⁹ Arthur C. Jenkins to Charles W. Reinking, June 15, 1960, box 87, IM Facility.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

for viable mass transit systems. Bad public policy decisions regarding mass transit were being followed by worse:

[T]he next illogical step of our public officials is to propose reconstructing an entire new rail rapid transit system superimposing its routes upon essentially the same trunk lines as formerly existed under the old rail system. Instead of the population and commercial activities being controlled by rail lines, there has been a mass dispersal patterned after the convenience of the private automobile.⁴³

Jenkins believed that the only hope for rapid transit would be another cycle of development along its route, assuming that the inconvenience of traffic and congestion would become sufficient to motivate a return to high density living. He predicted an eventual shift of population back to cities, but not one rapid or significant enough to justify the high costs of the proposed Bay Area Rapid Transit system. He explained efforts on its behalf as the result of misguided and naive public officials, adding that:

Persons appointed to transportation and traffic committees, commissions and boards are likewise, in general, completely uninformed as to the problems with which they are confronted. In attempting to discharge their responsibilities, they reach out for assistance and in many cases obtain services that are not in tune with local problems, and unfortunately become influenced unduly by political pressures and local influences.

In all of our major cities, particularly in California and specifically Los Angeles and San Francisco, many millions of dollars have been spent on so-called engineering surveys to solve transportation and traffic problems. The solution has not yet been found, and I have grave doubts as to whether the presently proposed rail rapid transit system for the five counties surrounding the San Francisco Bay provides the nucleus for such a solution.⁴⁴

At the risk of offending his audience, Jenkins implied that the bridge district's own directors were among those likely to be unduly pressured and influenced. Jenkins had spent years trying to free Pacific Electric from its passenger rails; he was not about to let the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District entangle itself in the same treacherous financial web. Jenkins had

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

personal experience with mass transit, a deep understanding of its history and a pessimistic view of its future. As an expert who was not beholden to any political interests, Jenkins understood himself to be able to make much better decisions on behalf of the agency than its directors were. And, he was not above a little behind-the-scenes maneuvering to achieve the policy outcome that he believed was in the best interests of the general public as well as the bridge district

Jenkins reviewed the 1956 BART engineering study on the installation of rails on the Golden Gate Bridge and concluded that, technically, it was probably possible. Nonetheless, he pointed out that engineering feasibility was not enough, that the directors should take it upon themselves to consider its potential consequences for the agency and its constituents, particularly the proposal's "feasibility as it relates to the financial obligations of the district and the possible adverse effects upon the interests of the people making up those counties within the district, who are tax-bound to carry out any deficit burden that might arise."⁴⁵ In a ten point preliminary argument against rails, Jenkins suggested that the project would not be profitable in connecting residential Marin with San Francisco, citing the dismal history of such ventures. Jenkins also argued that "the human aspects involved in such a project are of great importance and perhaps more so than the purely technical and engineering elements." The directors needed to maintain an awareness of their larger obligations:

The responsibility for safe-guarding the financial integrity of the District and the safety of the patrons making use of the bridge, as well as the safety of the prospective rapid transit passengers, is a burden that would fall squarely upon the District... This responsibility is not one of a temporary nature that can be brushed off upon submission

⁴⁵ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Summary Review of Technical Report on Rapid Transit Facilities as Recommended for Installation on the Golden Gate Bridge by Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Hall & McDonald, Engineers, In a Report to The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission* by Arthur C. Jenkins (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1956).

of a technical report. It is a burden that must be carried continuously throughout the life of the bridge.⁴⁶

Jenkins reiterated his assessment of the possibility of rapid transit for the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District in his extensive *Long Range Planning Survey*, which had been commissioned by the district in 1957 as part of an attempt to address growing public demands for mass transportation.⁴⁷ The *Survey* was intended as a demonstration that the district could plan for and meet the transportation problems of the North Bay without outside interference or a greater regional planning organization. It was also an early, practical attempt to explore the capacity of the district to develop new enterprises and to assess emerging threats to its autonomy and revenues.

Jenkins discussed several possibilities for the bridge district to operate mass transportation, including rails and buses. He suggested the possibility of installing a second deck for automobile use, noting that some sort of “corrective measures” would have to be taken to avoid overwhelming traffic congestion in the near future.⁴⁸ The district’s interests required not only action to reduce traffic, but that it be taken by the district itself, not some competing agency. Jenkins described the BART plans at length, noting that the engineering feasibility of the project should be “carefully checked.”⁴⁹ However, his objections to the proposal system had primarily to do with its expense:

Rail rapid transit on the Golden Gate Bridge may prove to be engineeringly feasible, but there is grave doubt as to its ability to meet the test of financial responsibility...

Unless conditions should change radically to show concrete evidence of a tendency for the public to shift back to mass transit from private automobiles, there appears to be

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The three volume *Long Range Plan* was completed in 1959, and though it was announced at a press conference in October, it was never officially released to the public. The *Independent Journal* announced in a front-page headline, “Gate Span Improvement Plan Ignores Transit.” BART District officials took offense at the omission according to later coverage. *Independent Journal*, November 13, October 30 1959.

⁴⁸ Jenkins, *Preliminary Report on Long Range Planning*, H1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., A5.

little prospect of a rapid rail transit line...being operated within the foreseeable future, on a self-sustaining basis financially.

In view of this doubtful prospect of financial success, such a project would require public subsidy and would not appear to be a logical type of public enterprise in which the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District should participate financially.⁵⁰

True to the ideological foundations of special districts, Jenkins held financial considerations at the heart of the bridge district's interests. And, considering Jenkins' intimate experience with the decline of private transit systems, his objections were justified.

The Bridge District Responds

Publicly, the reaction of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District to the prospect of rails on the bridge was measured. Even as Jenkins was making his case against rails, bridge district representatives consistently insisted that they were open-minded about the proposal and would cooperate fully with BART. Informal negotiations between the two large special districts began in 1959 and, on the whole, relations were cordial. One BART official reported that "we received a very warm welcome from the Directors of the Bridge District and I am sure we can look forward to full cooperation from them."⁵¹ In May 1959 John C. Beckett, one of Marin's BART directors, presented the basic case for rapid transit over the Golden Gate Bridge at a joint meeting of both agencies: "We see our job as being one of full partnership with all of the other agencies dealing with transportation problems in the Bay Area—city and county planners, Bridge Districts, parking authorities, private transportation concerns, the State Division of Highways, and others," Beckett said magnanimously, but "the only economically feasible method of gaining access from San Francisco into Marin County in the foreseeable

⁵⁰ Ibid., H11.

⁵¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, August 13, 1959.

future would be to provide facilities on the Golden Gate Bridge.”⁵² Beckett addressed the issue facing the bridge district as he saw it, engineering feasibility, as well as the problem facing the BART District, financing, and hinted that bridge tolls might be used to subsidize the project.

The BART District also appealed to Marin County officials. BART engineers met with local politicians in Sausalito, Mill Valley, Corte Madera, Larkspur and San Rafael—all of the Marin cities on the BART.⁵³ Marin’s BART director addressed the Redwood Empire Association in October, warning that rapid transit plans would require the cooperation of the bridge district:

We consider this matter to be of extreme importance, for we believe Marin and the other North Bay counties should be linked to the remainder of the regional rapid transit system. We are convinced that it is feasible and possible to use the present bridge for rapid transit purposes, and we believe nothing should deter whatever further studies are deemed necessary to convince the officials of the Bridge District.⁵⁴

Although the REA took no official stand on the issue, the *Independent Journal* continued to urge the bridge district to comply.⁵⁵ It also announced the positive results of a BART opinion poll in August: “In Marin county 24.1 per cent had formed an opinion [on BART] and 87.7 per cent favored it.”⁵⁶ Marin BART proponents did not face any significant opposition other than the bridge district.

The BART District initiated direct communication with the bridge district in August 1959 and informal meetings continued throughout the year. Very little concern among bridge district directors was evident when the BART’s first official request for permission to install

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bay Area Rapid Transit District, *Route Selection and Development Status Report* (Oakland, CA, Bay Area Rapid Transit District, 1959).

⁵⁴ DeLasaux, “Redwood Empire Association [Report],” October 23, 1959.

⁵⁵ *Independent Journal* October 24, 1959.

⁵⁶ *Independent Journal* August 19, 1959.

rapid transit on the bridge was delivered in September 1959. However, behind the scenes the alarm was rising. Bridge district officials knew that they could not oppose BART directly without facing withering criticism. Already, the district was unpopular in Marin, its finances and tolls under close scrutiny, and its legitimacy under relentless attack by McCarthy. A direct campaign against rapid transit would only rally the public behind BART and provide fodder for the bridge district's enemies.

Jenkins was the acting chief engineer and primary policy maker for the bridge district, though his role was not reflected by his official title until 1964.⁵⁷ His influence was secured by his close working relationship with Adam, whom he advised on every important decision in extensive and detailed correspondence. Adam kept Jenkins informed of every new political development relating to the bridge district, and Jenkins provided Adams with analysis, interpretation, strategy, and policy. Adam kept a tight grip on bridge district operations. He also had an immense personal influence over the board of directors. Nevertheless, Jenkins guided Adam, clearly acting as the brains behind the operation of the bridge. They were a closely coordinated team, and their partnership lasted for two decades. Jenkins expressed his concerns to Adam directly shortly after BART's official request:

To those of us who are so closely associated with the bridge as to its structural characteristics, financial aspects and fundamental obligations, many of the questions raised by outsiders have obvious answers.

It appears to me that the Bridge District is in a vulnerable position if it maintains a policy of complete "hands off" with respect to this controversial subject...

The District, of course, retains the ultimate decision as to whether or not the bridge should be made available for rail rapid transit, even if technical studies indicate the engineering feasibility thereof. It would also retain the right to render an adverse decision based upon conditions other than purely the structural balance of stresses and strains...

⁵⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 15, 1964.

[M]y frank personal opinion is that Marin County is not now ready for rail rapid transit and will not be ready within the next decade. The real issue in this controversy, in my mind, is not the ability of the Golden Gate Bridge to accommodate rail rapid transit or the decision of the Board of Directors, whatever it may be relative thereto. The fundamental issue is the economic feasibility of rail rapid transit between San Francisco and Marin County...⁵⁸

Jenkins questioned the motives of the BART District in publicly emphasizing the issue of engineering feasibility:

If the Transit District is conclusively convinced that the Golden Gate Bridge can accommodate rapid transit, then why should they make such an issue of it?

If the big issue in this controversy can be established by the Transit District as hinging around the decision of the Board of Directors of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, then whatever weaknesses exist in their position and in the engineering surveys thus far developed can be hidden behind the cloak of attack upon the Bridge District.⁵⁹

Of course, at this point it was the bridge district that was making “such an issue” of engineering feasibility. This letter suggests that Jenkins perceived a siege upon the district, and understood the issue as a battle between two opposing institutions.

On November 5 Adam and Jenkins met informally with BART District General Manager John M. Peirce and Chief Engineer Hoover. Obviously, Peirce and Hoover were making a bid for the support of bridge management before formally presenting their case to the board of directors, as Jenkins noted: “Mr. Peirce expressed his desire that the technical matters and procedural aspects be thoroughly discussed at staff level before preparing a suggested letter of reply... [and] that a draft of the letter be reviewed by Mr. Adam before its final submission.”⁶⁰ Adam rebuffed this offer, pointing out “on several occasions” that his responsibility was to the bridge district “and the public it represents.” Jenkins was more direct, voicing his principle reservations:

⁵⁸ Arthur C. Jenkins to James Adam, October 16, 1959, box 83, IM Facility.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Arthur C. Jenkins, memorandum, Subject: Conference on Rail Rapid Transit on Golden Gate Bridge, November 5, 1959, box 85, IM Facility.

1. Engineering feasibility of altering the existing structure to accommodate rail rapid transit.
2. The probable effect of rail rapid transit upon the financial status of the District and its bond redemption and bond interest obligations.
3. Distribution of responsibility as between the two Districts, in the event that rail rapid transit facilities are installed on the bridge and passenger service is operated.⁶¹

Although the first issue was the only objection that the district made publicly, it was really the last two points that most concerned its top officials. The financial and administrative elements of the proposal were crucial to the district as an institution, if not to its toll payers, whose overriding desire for rapid transit had already been clearly expressed. These were concerns that BART District representatives could do nothing about.

Top officials of both agencies finally agreed on an independent study to determine engineering feasibility. The BART District agreed to pay for a mutually agreeable “engineer or engineering firm, recognized as being an authority on suspension bridges.”⁶² The bridge district rejected the three firms suggested by the BART District, and the bridge district’s nominee, a firm specializing in suspension bridges headed by D. B. Steinman, was selected.

Jenkins commented on the situation: “Obviously, there is no valid reason for lack of cooperation of the bridge district with the Transit District in developing the essential features of rail rapid transit as related to the Golden Gate Bridge.”⁶³ Jenkins recommended to Adam that the bridge district stay as closely involved in the engineering study as possible, making

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Bay Area Rapid Transit District, minutes of meeting of the board of directors, December 10, 1959

⁶³ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Brief Analysis of Issues Relating to Installation of Rail Rapid Transit Facilities on the Golden Gate Bridge as Proposed by the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District With Suggestions as to Engineering Procedure* by Arthur C. Jenkins (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1959), 8, box 33-1, IM Facility.

sure that district engineers were directly involved.⁶⁴ Jenkins detailed several ways to influence the outcome of the study, including this suggestion:

The Bridge District select one of the engineering firms suggested, with the understanding that this firm be employed by the Bridge District and not the Transit District, and would be working under direction of the Bridge District throughout the entire study thereby creating a counterpart on behalf of the Bridge District of the studies that have previously been conducted by engineers of the Transit District. The Bridge District's final decision would then be based upon the results of the new study. This would be done with the understanding that all costs incurred by the Bridge District would be reimbursed by the Transit District.⁶⁵

The BART District was making it clear that “so far as it is concerned, feasibility of rails on the Golden Gate Bridge has been established conclusively by its own engineers, and that the only reason for further consideration is an attempt to convince the Bridge & Highway District of such feasibility.”⁶⁶ The bridge district had to publicly counter this suggestion, Jenkins asserted, and had to do it credibly:

This places the Bridge District in the position that if it refuses to participate, the Transit District can put the question squarely as to why the Bridge District is not satisfied with the engineering analysis already made by the Transit District Engineers. If this question is asked, then a direct answer must be given and the Bridge District must be prepared to point out specifically wherein it finds weaknesses in the Transit District's analysis. The Bridge District is not in a position to do so because it does not know enough about the technical aspects to point out any such deficiencies.

We must therefore adopt a procedure that will give recognition to the importance of the engineering aspects of the problem.⁶⁷

The bridge district needed time to develop an acceptable reason for denying rail transit, and Jenkins knew that engineering feasibility was the most vulnerable part of the proposal. The financial, economic and institutional drawbacks that he believed were the most important disadvantages would not even effectively persuade the board of directors. “It therefore can

⁶⁴ Arthur C. Jenkins, memorandum, Subject: Rail Rapid Transit-Procedure, December 7, 1959, box 85, IM Facility.

⁶⁵ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Brief Analysis*, 5-6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

only be concluded that the bridge district must approach the problems on a more carefully planned basis aimed at the engineering problems involved rather than general policy.”⁶⁸ Jenkins made it clear that the district’s agreement to an independent engineering study would buy the bridge district time to develop its own engineering objections with enough authority to convince the press of their legitimacy, and through them the public. “When considering this aspect of the problem,” Jenkins explained, “it should be recognized that the Transit District is equipped with three major engineering firms, whereas the Bridge District has no engineering organization. The matter becomes... an issue involving the matching magnitude of engineering organizations, where judgment is likely to be rendered in the press.”⁶⁹ To Jenkins, the final answer to the question of BART on the bridge had already been decided—it just needed to be justified.

Closely following this agreement came a disturbing revelation for bridge district partisans regarding the financing of a rapid transit connection to Marin. In a statement to the BART board of directors one of Marin’s BART directors made it clear that the BART District expected funding for the Golden Gate Bridge crossing to come from its tolls. With subsidies covering the costs of the Golden Gate Bridge alterations “the remainder of the Marin rapid transit line can be logically financed by the resources of the area directly served.”⁷⁰ As far as BART was concerned, the problem of Marin was solved. The finances added up, and they were confident that the Steinman study would definitively answer all engineering questions. Beckett pointed out that “the Golden Gate Bridge is a tremendous asset belonging to the people living within the bridge district. It is this asset that offers our best hope of area

⁶⁸ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Brief Analysis*, 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ John C. Beckett, Report to the Board of Directors, December 10, 1959, box 85, IM Facility.

improvement at the least cost to the people.”⁷¹ Once again, bridge tolls were being targeted to support regional transportation infrastructure, just as with the Golden Gate Authority proposal. What Beckett did not seem to realize was that, as much as those associated with the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District appreciated this asset and would have liked to extend the district’s life, they wanted even more to protect it from being appropriated by a rival agency like the BART District. Adam forwarded a copy of Beckett’s statement to Jenkins.⁷² Beckett, oblivious to the concerns of the closest associates of the bridge district, unintentionally solidified their opposition.

The Gronquist Report

As BART officials expected, the Steinman study was in the affirmative. A preliminary report proclaimed the installation of rails on the bridge “feasible and practical,” though it recommended further aerodynamic tests. Echoing previous studies, Steinman pointed out that “design loadings and allowable stresses adopted were conservative, understandably so in view of the pioneering nature of the structure.... By present-day standards, therefore, there is considerable reserve strength in the bridge.”⁷³ BART officials wasted no time in promoting Steinman’s findings in Marin County with radio features and public presentations.⁷⁴ Adrien Falk, the president of the BART District board of directors, asserted that “the Marin plan depends on the bridge... the country’s very best engineering brains have studied the use of the bridge for transit and all indications to date point to the feasibility of carrying trains under the

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² James Adam to Arthur C. Jenkins, December 16, 1959, box 87, IM Facility.

⁷³ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, *Golden Gate Bridge Rapid Transit Investigation: Semi-Final Report* by D. B. Steinman (Oakland, CA: San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, 1960), 3.

⁷⁴ *Independent Journal* June 16, 1960.

present highway deck.”⁷⁵ As engineering studies continued, BART officials canvassed Marin County, keeping the *Independent Journal* and receptive civic groups current on engineering developments.

The wind tunnel tests to confirm these findings were undertaken by C. H. Gronquist, a partner in the same firm. Gronquist’s findings were intended to be decisive based on the results of the wind tunnel tests.⁷⁶ Gronquist listed his conclusions:

1. The addition of rapid transit facilities is feasible and practical.
2. The most advantageous location of the tracks is immediately above the plane of the lower lateral system and adjacent to and symmetrical about the longitudinal centerline of the bridge.
3. The aerodynamic investigation has shown that the aerodynamic characteristics of the bridge can be improved over those for the present condition of the bridge by modifying the sidewalk, while at the same time adding rapid transit facilities to the structure.
4. The weight saving resulting from modification of the sidewalk will partially offset the increase in dead load produced by the rapid transit facilities.⁷⁷

Gronquist estimated that the installation of rails on the bridge would cost around \$9 million, slightly less than previous figures.

The Gronquist report was enthusiastically received in San Francisco and Marin.⁷⁸ A bill was introduced in Sacramento authorizing the use of Golden Gate Bridge tolls to subsidize the project.⁷⁹ However, this time the bridge district was ready with a public answer to the BART proposal. Clifford E. Paine, the nominal chief engineer of the bridge district, suddenly appeared on the scene from semi-retirement in Michigan. Paine was one of the bridge engineers to work during the construction period under Strauss. Credited as one of the designers of the Golden Gate Bridge, he had considerable authority with the general public.

⁷⁵ *Independent Journal* June 23, 1960.

⁷⁶ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, *Golden Gate Bridge: Final Report on Engineering Feasibility of Proposed Rapid Transit Facilities* by C. H. Gronquist (Oakland, CA: San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, 1961).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁸ *Independent Journal* July 15, 1961.

⁷⁹ *Independent Journal*, April 20 1961.

Paine issued an aggressive refutation of Gronquist's findings in July 1961. Without judging the technical merit of the engineering aspects of this decision, the language of Paine's report suggests that his conclusions were questionable. "The size and importance of the Golden Gate Bridge demand that its design loads and unit stresses be conservative," and though he agreed with Gronquist's calculations for the most part, Paine insisted that his standards of safety were too lax. Differences in calculations of various loads on the towers were "not significant and resulting unit stresses are not appreciably different," Paine stated, but his calculations differed on cable unit stresses, which he considered unacceptable.⁸⁰ Paine ruled out the alteration of sidewalk areas and the replacement of the concrete roadway with open grating to reduce the weight of the bridge "because the reconstruction involved would interfere with traffic... [and] because riding over long lanes of open grating is obnoxious to automobile drivers and passengers."⁸¹ The sidewalk was used for maintenance, and its ample width "avoids the necessity of using a much needed traffic lane for the purpose." Paine did not consider the possibility that the need for the lane might be reduced by traffic relief from rapid transit, a prospect that had much more horrifying implications for the district (reduced toll revenues). Paine also pointed out that high-heeled shoes might get caught in an open grating sidewalk. Responding to suggestions for alteration of pylons Paine objected that "[s]uch mutilation of these excellent structures might be condoned only in an emergency," and "the margin of safety built into the bridge should not be whittled away."⁸² Paine observed, "The plan may seem feasible and simple on paper, but it will be difficult to carry out. All work

⁸⁰ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Proposed Operation of Rapid Transit Trains over Golden Gate Bridge* by Clifford E. Paine (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1961), 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 14.

must be done without interference with traffic. It is certain that even under the closest, expert supervision the structural integrity of the pylon would never be restored.”⁸³

Engineering, construction practice, and aesthetic disputes aside, Paine’s first and principal objection to BART’s proposal was that it would lower the center of the bridge below the “navigation clearance line” required by the original War Department permit. Gronquist had already suggested that the BART District apply for an amendment for the original permit, but Paine ridiculed this suggestion. “Does anyone think that the Department of the Army is going to establish clearances and say that ‘now and then these clearances may be reduced...[?]’”⁸⁴ At the time, there were no objections by the shipping industry to the project, and the political climate was increasingly favorable toward mass transit in Washington, D. C.. Nevertheless, Paine’s judgment was firm: “This infringement on clearance is not permissible and cannot be remedied. It is a prime consideration, and it alone rules out any possibility of carrying rapid transit trains over the Golden Gate Bridge.”⁸⁵

Shortly thereafter, Jenkins responded to a request by one of the bridge directors, Peter Gasser of Napa County, for background and Jenkins’ own analysis of the issue and the possibility of further engineering reviews. Jenkins provided a lengthy discussion of the political and economic as well as engineering issues involved. Jenkins suggested that the engineering studies that had already been conducted were thorough and that no new revelations would be made, but that votes would be simply added to one side or the other. Jenkins made it clear that the issue was not one of engineering feasibility, pointing out that

⁸³ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁴ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Comments by Clifford E. Paine, Engineer Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District on Supplementary Report by Carl H. Gronquist August 1961 on Engineering Feasibility of Rapid Transit Facilities on Golden Gate Bridge* by Clifford E. Paine (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1961).

⁸⁵ Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Proposed Operation of Rapid Transit Trains over Golden Gate Bridge*, 19.

even Paine had agreed that, technically, “the added load could be carried within the design limits of the structure.” However, Jenkins stressed the other issues at hand:

It might be considered improbable to consider in advance what the probable finding of such a panel of consultants would be, but based upon thorough knowledge of the past history in this controversy, it would be my guess that at least the majority would favor the Gronquist finding. This issue has gone beyond the stage of better engineering logic as relating to stresses and strains and loading characteristics of all, which are subject to calculation and predictions based upon accepted formula.

In this instance it is my opinion that [we] must go beyond the pure mathematics of engineering design and contemplate the human side of engineering... After all of these calculations are done, then the controlling issue is the interpretation of human judgment.⁸⁶

Paine’s was seventy-three years old at the time, and Jenkins mentioned that there had been “inference... that the age of Mr. Paine is such as to cast some shadow of doubt upon the reliability of his findings.”⁸⁷ Paine was never directly involved with negotiations with the BART District—the engineering interests of the bridge district were always assessed and represented by Jenkins. John Van der Zee, in his critical study of the engineering aspects of the bridge, reports that Paine was adroit politically, but even during construction worked as “a detail man, and organizer and administrator... not a theorician.”⁸⁸ Van der Zee disputes claims that Paine was a contributor to the design of the bridge, which were exaggerated as time went on and Paine did nothing to discourage.

Paine’s findings were quickly rebutted by Gronquist. Gronquist reviewed and discredited all of his objections, and refused to modify or adjust any of his original conclusions. “The Golden Gate Bridge when built almost thirty years ago, was, and is today, the outstanding suspension span of the world.” Gronquist wrote, “The magnitude of span and height of towers, in its majestic appearance and in the excellence of its design, this bridge

⁸⁶ Arthur C. Jenkins to [Peter A. Gasser], 1961, box 87, IM Facility.

⁸⁷ Van der Zee, *The Gate*, 315.

⁸⁸ Van der Zee, *The Gate*, 156.

demands universal respect. To impair its life, its present usefulness or its appearance would be unthinkable.” Gronquist presented his entire rebuttal before a skeptical board of directors on August 25. Paine, in response, made it clear that he was steadfast in his opposition to the alteration.⁸⁹

Despite the engineering stalemate, the directors of the bridge district passed a resolution adopting Paine’s findings by a vote of nine to four, citing safety concerns. They also rejected the possibility of further studies: “a joint engineering board of review to pass upon the Gronquist and Paine reports would not resolve or reconcile any differences of opinions expressed in these reports.”⁹⁰ BART, accordingly, was informed of the board’s final decision and that there would be no further negotiations.

Falk, whose good faith efforts to negotiate had been rebuffed, reported the negative vote to the BART directors in tones of frustration and anger:

As fully reported in the press, the bridge directors summarily closed the door to the development of any further facts concerning the adequacy of the bridge to support rapid transit.

Our position was—and is—that a difference of opinion between two engineers should not be allowed to stand as a conclusive determination in a matter of such vital importance to the public.

If the difference of opinion between engineers that existed back in the 1930’s had been treated in the same manner, the Golden Gate Bridge would not link San Francisco and Marin today.

We certainly are not, as some bridge directors glibly and erroneously charged Tuesday, asking anyone to “gamble” with lives or with the safety of the bridge. Such comments, in my opinion, could only have one purpose; to divert attention from the main issue—to inject an emotional and inflammatory element into a decision that should have been based only on engineering facts and figures and determination to fulfill the public trust.

⁸⁹ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, “Meeting of the Rapid Transit Committee With the Committee of the Whole of the Board of Directors of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District,” (San Francisco, September 5, 1961), 4, box 87, IM Facility.

⁹⁰ The resolution identified Paine as the “chief designer of the Golden Gate Bridge.” Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, “Resolution No. 5484 Opposing Rail Rapid Transit Facilities on the Golden Gate Bridge,” (San Francisco, September 5, 1959).

Whether or not they realized it, the bridge directors made a decision of vital import to the San Francisco Bay Area. By their 9-to-4 vote, they summarily deprived Marin County of the benefits of rapid transit for the foreseeable future. Let there be no mistake: The bridge board must accept full responsibility for this amputation. It is not chargeable to any action or lack of action on our part.⁹¹

Falk recommended that the boards of supervisors of Marin and San Francisco appoint a new, impartial board of engineers to review the two reports, and that the BART District fund the review itself if the bridge district was unwilling to contribute. The next day, San Francisco newspapers quoted “the usually mild-mannered” Falk angrily accusing James Adam of a Machiavellian plot: “somewhere along the line there was a lot of by-play in this action that was not open, frank and full.” Falk accused Adam of manipulating the vote by asking the bridge insurance agents if the trains would “affect the insurability” of the bridge, exaggerating the significance of the affirmative answer to intimidate the board into voting against trains.⁹²

Falk was not alone in his dismay at the decision. Letters and resolutions flooded the bridge district offices demanding that directors reconsider their decision and comply with the BART District’s request for an independent engineering study. The Marin County Board of Supervisors, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, the Marin Industrial Development Foundation, the Marin County Real Estate Board, the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Association of San Francisco, the Mill Valley Commuters Club, the Novato Chamber of Commerce and City Council, the City Council of the Town of Ross (in Marin), the San Francisco Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Bay Area Council and the newly formed Association of Bay Area Governments, as well as dozens of individuals, contacted the district demanding that the decision be reconsidered with varying degrees of outrage.⁹³ A handful of

⁹¹ Adrien J. Falk, Report of President Relating to Golden Gate Bridge, Minutes of the 80th Meeting of the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, September 7, 1961.

⁹² *San Francisco Chronicle* September 8, 1961.

⁹³ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, Rapid Transit Communications, 1961, box 204, DS Vault.

individuals expressed their support of the district, but the vast majority, along with the newspapers and media, were appalled at what seemed to be a hasty and arbitrary decision.



Figure 5.1: Longstanding San Francisco directors Diviny, Del Carlo, and Hadeler pictured defending their fortress under the banner, “Progress, Stay ‘way From Our Portcullis” *San Francisco Chronicle* September 13, 1961.

The board of directors agreed to revisit the issue of engineering feasibility in light of the overwhelmingly negative public reaction to their decision against rails, despite the impassioned dissent of Director Peter Gasser of Napa. “From reading the newspapers during the past two weeks or so, it would appear that some members of this Board, who voted at the last meeting on the majority side, intend to switch their vote in favor of submitting the question of rapid transit on the Golden Gate Bridge to a board of outside consulting

engineers,” Gasser observed. “I am thoroughly against such action.”⁹⁴ Using arguments and information provided by Jenkins, Gasser described in detail the effects of a fire on the bridge, a high wind, and the “panic, the hysteria, the conditions that would exist on the lower deck of this bridge if a ten-car train should meet with a major accident.”⁹⁵ In attempting to sway the indecisive directors with the most persuasive arguments he could muster, Gasser indicated one important consideration in evaluating Paine’s report, his “years of closest association with this bridge in its design.” He argued that reopening the question to discussion would be an insult to Paine and the memory of Strauss, as well as a waste of time and public money:

[0]In their wisdom these original designers incorporated a factor of safety into this bridge... how can we now, merely in the light of subsequent design practices, say that these engineer designers were wasteful in specifying more steel than was necessary to carry the load.

I personally do not believe that their judgment was poor. I think it was good...

[W]e should place more reliance upon the personal judgment of the man who participated in the original design of this bridge and at that time carried on his shoulders the full responsibility for the successful performance of the structure....

Can you say today, that in the light of the responsibility that has fallen upon this man, that he would look lightly upon the tampering with the bridge in any way that might possibly, even by one iota, reflect upon the safety margin as it now stands.

The main question now facing us, gentlemen, is whether or not the decision of this Board is going to hinge around, first, the cold and impersonal features of engineering design and mathematics, and secondly, mere majority numbers of engineers.

Gentlemen, you have heard of the term intuition. Although it might seem out of place in a discussion of engineering design and feasibility, I would like to caution you that the responsibility you will be taking upon your shoulders is one that should be guided by the human aspects of engineering as well as the engineering handbook aspects.⁹⁶

As Gasser’s appeal unintentionally suggested, Paine’s association with the bridge made his relationship to the installation of rapid transit a problematic one, and the directors knew that

⁹⁴ Peter A. Gasser, *Golden Gate Bridge and Rapid Transit* (San Francisco, September 29, 1961).

⁹⁵ Jenkins also reviewed a draft of Gasser’s speech before it was presented to the board. Arthur C. Jenkins to [Peter A. Gasser, 1961,] box 87, IM Facility.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

his opinion was less than definitive. However, despite Gasser's efforts, even the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was not immune to public pressure.⁹⁷ The decision to accept Paine's report and conclusively deny BART's request evoked a massive public outcry, and the position of several of the directors was in immediate jeopardy. Essentially political creatures, the directors were forced to retreat and agree to an impartial engineering study.⁹⁸

BART officials, meanwhile, were much more concerned with time pressures than with public opinion in the North Bay. Already, bridge district opposition had delayed the public referendum on BART. In addition, other negotiations on the routing and design of the system prevented them from finalizing plans. Cost estimates were rising; BART officials were anxious to finalize plans and win approval. As soon as Paine's findings were announced, BART engineers and consultants went to work on a four-county system excluding Marin. By the end of October, despite the fact that the bridge district agreed to yet another engineering study, the BART District had adopted a revised engineering plan that eliminated the North Bay line from first-phase construction. The project could not be delayed any longer; the BART District was running out of money and delays were undermining its public credibility. In order to make the state primary election in June, plans had to be approved by the end of March, and though BART officials were careful to emphasize that Marin would be reinstated if an engineering review proved favorable, they proceeded at full speed with the revised four county system. New public hearings had to be held and the new plan approved by all of the BART District boards of supervisors before the deadline.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Gasser distributed copies of his statement at the meeting, along with a copy of the single supportive editorial published on the decision, in his own *Napa Register* September 27, 1961.

⁹⁸ Broadcast, "Let's Ask the Experts!," (San Francisco, KCBS radio, September 4, 1961).

⁹⁹ San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, Minutes of the 81st Meeting of the San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District September 14, 1961); San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District, Regular Meeting of the Board of Directors, October 13, 1962.

An Authoritative No

Although the delays caused by bridge district recalcitrance had already effectively eliminated the threat of rails on the Golden Gate Bridge, appearances and public relations demanded that the final engineering study be carried out. Once again, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District and the BART District agreed upon independent engineers to study the question of rapid transit on the bridge. This time bridge district officials went to great lengths to take the initiative in funding and directing the study. They insisted on directing every element of the approval process, acting to initiate the application for a waiver of clearance requirements to the Army, to solicit a list of recommendations for candidate engineers, and to pay all expenses of the engineering review.¹⁰⁰

At a meeting of the board of directors, Director Ben Lerer of San Francisco mentioned previous discussions that had taken place on the subject of this “impartial engineering board:”

I might just recall we discussed the payment and I think we all felt without any reflection on anybody, that perhaps if we paid for it, we would feel better that we can select the colleges that could name the engineers and they would have no obligation to anyone in this matter. If the Rapid Transit District pays for it, they may feel some sort of an obligation to them, and again I say without any reflection on anybody. We discussed it and we thought that we should pay for it.¹⁰¹

Apparently, this strategy was effective. The three engineers selected by the bridge district and agreed upon by the BART District were O. H. Ammann, Frank M. Masters, and N. M. Newmark, all well respected bridge engineers. The scope of their study, submitted to the bridge district in February 1962, was “in accordance with the understanding arrived at between the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District and ourselves” at an informal meeting held in

¹⁰⁰ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, Excerpts from Board of Directors Meeting Re: Rapid Transit, October 13, 1961, box 204, DS Vault.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

San Francisco in January.¹⁰² Later in 1962, James Adam's former assistant asserted that the engineers had been "thoroughly brief[ed], screened, and interviewed" before they were hired for the review.¹⁰³ Bridge district officials carefully defined the purpose of their study to encourage a negative decision:

The general statement and scope of this study adopted by the Board of Directors of the Golden Gate Bridge & Highway District... indicates that it is the prime concern of the Board of Directors that, whatever changes and additions are contemplated, the bridge must be preserved in a first class condition, with a conservative margin of safety, to serve highway traffic for which it was intended and designed.

The question as to what constitutes a conservative margin of safety is a very complex one, involving many more or less uncertain and indeterminable factors which depend largely upon established practice and individual judgment...

Any increase in the adopted permissible primary stresses may mean encroachment on the margin of safety. The significance of the encroachment is dependent on the magnitude of the increase and on the number of fluctuations of variations in stress that may be produced.¹⁰⁴

Not surprisingly, the final report, issued in April well after the BART district had finalized its four-county plan, was negative. As the *Independent Journal* reported, an "authoritative 'no'" had finally been achieved by the bridge district.¹⁰⁵

The directors accepted the report and asserted that trains would never run across the bridge, but not without dissent.¹⁰⁶ Two of Marin's directors, T. J. Delasaux and M. J. Lamperti expressed their opinion clearly as to why the report was negative. DeLasaux quoted fellow Marin director Leland Murphy as asserting that "we are going to pay for the review because we want to control what's in that report."¹⁰⁷ At the next board meeting, Murphy

¹⁰² O. H. Ammann, Frank M. Masters, and N. M. Newmark to James Adam, February 5, 1962, box 87, DS Vault.

¹⁰³ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 7, 1962.

¹⁰⁴ O. H. Ammann, Frank M. Masters, and N. M. Newmark, "Golden Gate Bridge Rapid Transit Study by Engineering Board of Review: Proposed Scope of Investigations," ([San Francisco], 1962).

¹⁰⁵ *Independent Journal* December 15, 1962.

¹⁰⁶ Studies for rapid rail transit to be administered by BART were initiated in the late 1980s but rejected because of vehement opposition from Marin County environmentalists, who by then dominated the politics of the county.

¹⁰⁷ *Independent Journal* April 13, 1962.

angrily denied saying this, loudly threatening to sue DeLasaux and Lamperti. Another director remarked on their vocal dissent: “forgive them for they know not what they say.”¹⁰⁸

Well before the final engineering report on rails on the Golden Gate Bridge was released, it was obvious that Marin County missed its chance to be part of first stage plans, and BART officials began pressuring its board of supervisors to withdraw. BART officials wanted to prevent Marin from voting on the issue—because of the dim prospects for a North Bay line they were likely to balk at the prospect of tax assessments. In May 1962 Marin County Supervisors reluctantly complied with BART officials demands for them to withdraw. A week later, they threatened to change their minds in a somewhat pathetic attempt to recover some of the taxes that they had already paid to the BART District.¹⁰⁹ They also hoped that by staying in the BART District the inclusion of the North Bay in second-phase construction could be assured. But it was too late: BART officials were adamant about excluding Marin voters from the public referendum. Marin was no longer in the BART District and had lost its chance for rapid transit.

After Marin was eliminated from first-phase plans, BART officials were confronted with a new problem: the San Mateo County board of supervisors voted to withdraw from the district in January, arguing that the system favored San Francisco’s downtown at the expense of San Mateo commercial interests and was not worth the price of increased property taxes. The elimination of San Mateo was a financial blow, significantly reducing BART’s tax base and requiring yet another revision of BART plans. After the fact, BART officials linked the elimination of Marin and San Mateo, arguing that without San Mateo, the expense of a North

¹⁰⁸ *Independent Journal* April 27, 1962.

¹⁰⁹ *Independent Journal*, May 5, 10, 11, 15 1962.

Bay line was prohibitive and that was why Marin had been excluded.¹¹⁰ In fact, BART officials began pressuring Marin to leave the system well before San Mateo voted to withdraw; their later interpretation may stem from a refusal to recognize the bridge district's engineering objections as legitimate. Political considerations, specifically the viability of the pending bond issue, were foremost in the minds of BART engineers and officials in requesting that Marin County withdraw.

Once the rejection of transit to Marin was irrefutable, the *Independent Journal* editorialized that "we need transportation; nobody's planning for it." After two large-scale, regional efforts to alleviate transportation problems had been decisively defeated by the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, escalating traffic congestion remained:

Marin County must now face some facts. As of this moment there is no study under way to provide a transportation system for Main residents.

Rapid transit trains can't cross the Golden Gate Bridge.

No new major highways or other means of transportation are being considered... And yet Marin County must have adequate transportation.¹¹¹

Marin County was isolated in terms of regional transportation policy, excluded from an active part in the anticipated future of development and growth based on BART. The Golden Gate Bridge remained its only link to San Francisco, a narrow ribbon of highway that made it a functional part of the metropolis. Ironically, the policies of the bridge district worked against the original intentions of the boosters who had created it; rather than facilitating growth and development, it became a transportation bottleneck, actively preventing the expansion of transportation infrastructure within its jurisdiction.

Scholarship on the early history of BART accepts the official explanation of Marin's exclusion from initial plans for the system as the direct result of San Mateo's last-minute vote

¹¹⁰ Adler, "Political Economy," 300.

¹¹¹ *Independent Journal* April 16, 1962.

to withdraw from the district in 1962. Scholars have also speculated that class-conscious landowners concerned with tax liabilities opposed the project, as they did in San Mateo.¹¹² Examination of the actual circumstances of Marin County's withdrawal suggests that there was ample support for BART in the county, even when the engineering feasibility of trains on the bridge was in dispute. Moreover, bridge district records clearly indicate that the question of BART on the bridge had been decided long before San Mateo withdrew, and even before BART officials revised their plans to exclude Marin. Marin County did not get BART because of the institutional threat that it posed to the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District.

Although the Golden Gate Authority had been defeated a few months earlier, the continuing existence of the district was still uncertain. The district's reluctance to allow trains on the span was exactly the sort of policy that made it so unpopular and motivated McCarthy's efforts to dissolve it. From Jenkins's perspective, the institutional instability that sharing the span with the BART District would create was not worth the boost in public opinion that rapid transit might create. Many years would pass before trains would run, whether or not they ran to Marin, and it was doubtful that such cooperation would mollify the bridge district's critics in the meantime.

The successful effort to stop BART by bridge district officials working against public opinion suggests that that the organization had developed a powerful institutional identity, independent of associated interest groups. Of course, the interests of the organization were subject to the interpretation of its officials, who viewed them through the lenses of their own ideologies and prejudices. Nevertheless, these officials pursued goals and policies that were

¹¹² San Mateo officials saw BART as a boost to the development of San Francisco's downtown at the expense of San Mateo commerce, as well. See Stephen Zwerling, *Mass Transit and the Politics of Technology: A Study of Bart and the San Francisco Bay Area* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974). Interestingly, Adler suggests that the relationship between Southern Pacific's profitable freight operations coincided with concern for the industrial development of San Mateo to defeat BART in the County. Adler, "Political Economy," 301.

defined primarily with consideration for the integrity and security of the organization as a whole. The fact that Arthur Jenkins was so influential in defining policy for the bridge district demonstrates the extent to which special districts can empower their administrative staff and at the same time insulate them from political pressures or public scrutiny. The Progressive era faith in expertise and professionalism in this case led to a decision that was unpopular but was, at least in Jenkins' expert opinion, justified. Jenkins believed that preventing BART rails on the Golden Gate Bridge was in the best interests of the bridge district as an institution, its constituency, and the public at large. His influence raises the question of who should be making public policy; special districts were intentionally designed to take decision-making out of the political sphere and put it in the hands of expert administrators and technocrats like Jenkins.

In some ways, Jenkins was vindicated. The bridge district maintained its authority and integrity, and Marin avoided having to pay for enormous cost overruns and high operating subsidies that the BART counties had to contend with. On the other hand, Marin County mass transportation advocates ultimately had to settle for buses and ferries, and were eventually forced to turn to the bridge district to operate them. While the installation of rails on the Golden Gate Bridge was reconsidered again in the late 1960s and the 1980s, it was never financially or politically viable again. Regardless of how it is judged, the decision against BART to Marin County demonstrates the independent agency and power of a public corporation.

VI

James Adam: Boss of the Golden Gate Bridge

Following its successful campaigns against the Golden Gate Authority and BART on the bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District descended into the worst period of scandal and public antipathy in its history. In the 1960s its image went into a steady decline. While bridge district policies generated considerable controversy, it was the questionable accounting, expenses, and administrative practices of its management that tarnished the agency's reputation the most. Accusers laid the blame for many of these abuses on the bridge district's irascible and authoritarian general manager, James Adam.

As intended by their Progressive era creators, special districts are generally insulated from the pressures of public opinion and electoral politics. Ideally, this enables their expert, professional administrators to act independently and assertively in the public interest without undue pressure from less than honorable elected officials or other outside interests. This insulation turned out to have adverse effects, as well; even outright corrupt special district officials could avoid being held accountable for their actions and policies, and were often immune to pressure to clean up their operations. In the case of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, the most unpopular of its general managers, James Adam, effectively used the resources of the bridge district to sustain his undisputed and nearly absolute control over the agency for two decades. The bridge district's resources and autonomy allowed him, for the most part, to avoid personal consequences for mismanagement or questionable decisions and policies. His administration sunk the bridge district into a mire of notoriety and scandal by the

end of the 1960s. That the agency survived Adam's administration largely unscathed by reform is more evidence for the durability and enormous strength of special districts.



Figure 6.1: James Adam circa 1958. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

From Public Relations to General Manager

Adam was originally a newspaper man, having worked for the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *Oakland Tribune*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He made an unsuccessful bid for the state assembly in 1932, and was the chief political writer for the *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* during World War II.¹ Adam's first job for the bridge district was as publicity director for the Opening Day Fiesta, and he was hired on as a part-time public relations officer in 1939. He also served a brief stint as warden at Folsom State Prison in the 1940s, winning the position in part through bridge district connections; A.R. O'Brien was a member of the state prison board and Adam was one of its administrators when a scandal forced the resignation of Folsom's previous warden.² Adam joined the district full time in 1948 as public relations officer and lobbyist, working closely with General Manager James Ricketts.

Adam's role at the bridge district was always controversial. In 1952, his activities were questioned when a dissenting San Francisco director pointed out that his expenses exceeded \$400 for a single month in Sacramento. Colman called for the elimination of his position: "This is an absolutely unnecessary expenditure of the bridge district's money... It makes it look like we can't get any consideration in the legislature without Adam... We don't need to hold cocktail parties and take the legislature to dinner to get their help. It's wrong."³ Nevertheless, a record \$1.2 million administrative budget for the bridge district passed with only two dissenting votes, including an increase in public relations appropriations and a raise for Adam.⁴

¹ *San Francisco Examiner* June 11, August 2, 1932; *San Francisco Call-Bulletin* November 8, 1944.

² *San Francisco Examiner* November 30, 1943, January 13, 1944.

³ *San Francisco Examiner* June 16, 1952.

⁴ *Independent Journal* June 14, 1952.

At the time, California lobbyists were notorious for their influence in Sacramento. Reforms intended to reduce the power of political parties in the Progressive era vastly increased the influence of private interest groups and their representatives.⁵ Generating a national scandal, lobbyist Artie Samish bragged of his power to a reporter from *Colliers Magazine*. He described frequent parties, sumptuous dinners, free-flowing liquor, and large cash campaign contributions, all at the expense of his various clients, most prominent of which was the California State Brewers Association. He was a skilled behind-the-scenes manipulator, using a network of informants to keep a close watch on everything that was going on related to the legislature. A photo of Samish smiling with a dummy on his lap which he called “Mr. Legislature” in the interview shook the Sacramento establishment to its foundations.⁶ In 1950 the legislature voted in new requirements that all lobbyists register and file annual expense reports, and in 1953 Samish was imprisoned for tax evasion.⁷ Nevertheless, little actually changed: members of the “third house of the legislature,” as Jenkins called Sacramento lobbyists in a 1960 memo to Adam, maintained their power.⁸ Adam was much more discreet and probably less powerful than Samish, but no doubt he used many of the same strategies to fight off McCarthy’s efforts for reform and to promote the interests of the bridge district.

When Ricketts, who was nearing the mandatory retirement age of 70, announced his intention to resign in 1953, Adam was the favorite candidate for the job. When the bridge directors were considering the appointment, they were still embroiled in a debate over

⁵ Carey McWilliams, *California: the Great Exception* (New York: Current Books, 1949), 192-213.

⁶ *Colliers Magazine* August 13, 20, 1949; Arthur H. Samish and Bob Thomas, *The Secret Boss of California: The Life and High Times of Art Samish* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1971).

⁷ Winston Winford Crouch, John Constantinus Bollens, and Stanley Scott, *California Government and Politics* 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

⁸ Arthur C. Jenkins, memorandum to James Adam, September 16, 1960, box 85, IM Facility.

expenses. The negative publicity stirred up by McCarthy attracted attention to bridge district Cadillacs, the annual \$25,000 appropriation for the REA, and the issue of whether a representative in Sacramento was really necessary.⁹ It also resulted in several new appointees on the board of directors who vocally supported cost-cutting measures. In 1953, the bridge district spent at least \$33,000 for advertising, and in addition Adam was paid \$16,000 a year in salary and expenses.¹⁰ To make matters worse, Ricketts was involved in a traffic accident while using a bridge district car for personal business; when he billed the district for damages, it made front page news.¹¹

The *Independent Journal* suggested that Adam won support for his appointment from the “economy bloc” on the board of directors with the promise that he would eliminate the position of public relations director.¹² Adam was finally appointed general manager by a ten to three vote; the dissenting directors favored bringing in an outside man, preferably an engineer.¹³ Phil Davies of San Francisco complained the appointment was “a framed deal, worked out in advance, without giving opponents a chance to consider... some other qualified person for the job.”¹⁴ The vote in favor of Adam—without any considering of outside candidates—affirmed a heavy-handed approach to defending the interests of the organization.¹⁵ At the start of the following legislative session, despite the understanding that he had with the directors at the time of his appointment, Adam managed to win approval for a new lobbyist. One director explained that it would “reflect upon the prestige of the general

⁹ *Independent Journal* January 29, June 27, 1953.

¹⁰ *Independent Journal* January 29, 1953; *San Francisco Examiner* July 30, 1953; *San Francisco Chronicle* August 1, 1953.

¹¹ *Independent Journal* October 19, 21, 31, 1953.

¹² *Independent Journal* July 28, 1953.

¹³ *Independent Journal* April 10, 1954.

¹⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* April 10, 1954.

¹⁵ *Independent Journal* April 10, 1954.

manager if he registered as a lobbyist.”¹⁶ Former State Senator Gerald O’Gara was tapped for the position, who had reportedly “pulled all the stops” in fighting against McCarthy’s bill for bridge district dissolution in 1953.¹⁷ O’Gara was succeeded by former speaker of the assembly Gordon Garland in 1959.¹⁸

Adam’s own conception of his role as general manager was informed by his work in public relations. In a 1955 presentation before the American Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association, Adam equated the operation of the bridge district to that of a private corporation. While it did not face significant competition for its services, unlike most commercial enterprises, it did face important political challenges. Adam emphasized the wide variety of responsibilities assigned to the general manager, describing public relations work as the most important among them: “each person paying a toll at the bridge plaza is a potential friend or enemy and it is a highly essential function of administrative management to exert every effort through all means at his disposal to make friends and favorably influence people.”¹⁹

Almost immediately after becoming general manager, Adam was accused of misrepresenting the finances of the bridge district and misleading the public. Less than a month after he officially took the helm, he presented a report to the directors claiming that the bridge district had suffered an operating loss of \$169,634 in the previous year, despite record traffic and an increase in overall revenues. Adam explained that the loss was due to a major maintenance project. However, the *Independent Journal* called his bluff:

Actually, the net revenue for the year was a profit of about \$164,000, even the auditor’s annual report showed that. Yet the figures were released in such a way that two reputable newspapers were sucked into reporting the bridge as losing money.

¹⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 12, 1955; *Independent Journal* February 12, 1955.

¹⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* May 15, 1953.

¹⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 22, 1963.

¹⁹ James Adam, “Administration of Highway Toll Facilities” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association, 1955), box 19, IM Facility.

Why?

The reason is obvious. Bridge directors are setting the stage to once again refuse realistic requests for a cut in the cash toll...

General Manager James Adam emphasized an “operating loss” in his semi-monthly report to the board. Differences between operating income and net income is interest and profits the district receives from investments, deposits and other sources other than tolls. Last year this difference totaled more than \$330,000, enough to turn the “operating loss” into a profit.²⁰

Despite Adam’s alarming report, bridge revenues continued to improve, and its reserves grew steadily. By the end of the year, the bridge district finally bowed to public pressure cut tolls, offering a 60 cent round trip ticket.²¹ By the end of 1955 tolls were on par with those of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge for the first time at 25 cents, and the Golden Gate Bridge’s discount commuter toll was actually lower than that of the Bay Bridge by two cents. However, Marin County commuters had many other things to complain about—and not only bridge district policies that resulted in the rejection of BART trains or the defeat of the Golden Gate Authority. Before long, Adam himself was at the center of scandal, his management and administration subject to increasing scrutiny.

²⁰ *Marin Independent Journal* August 6, 1954.

²¹ The bridge district adopted a 30 cent one way fare a month later. *San Francisco Chronicle* December 31, 1954, January 4, 29, 1955.

GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE AND HIGHWAY DISTRICT

Pr 5-572

ORGANIZATION CHART

JANUARY 1957

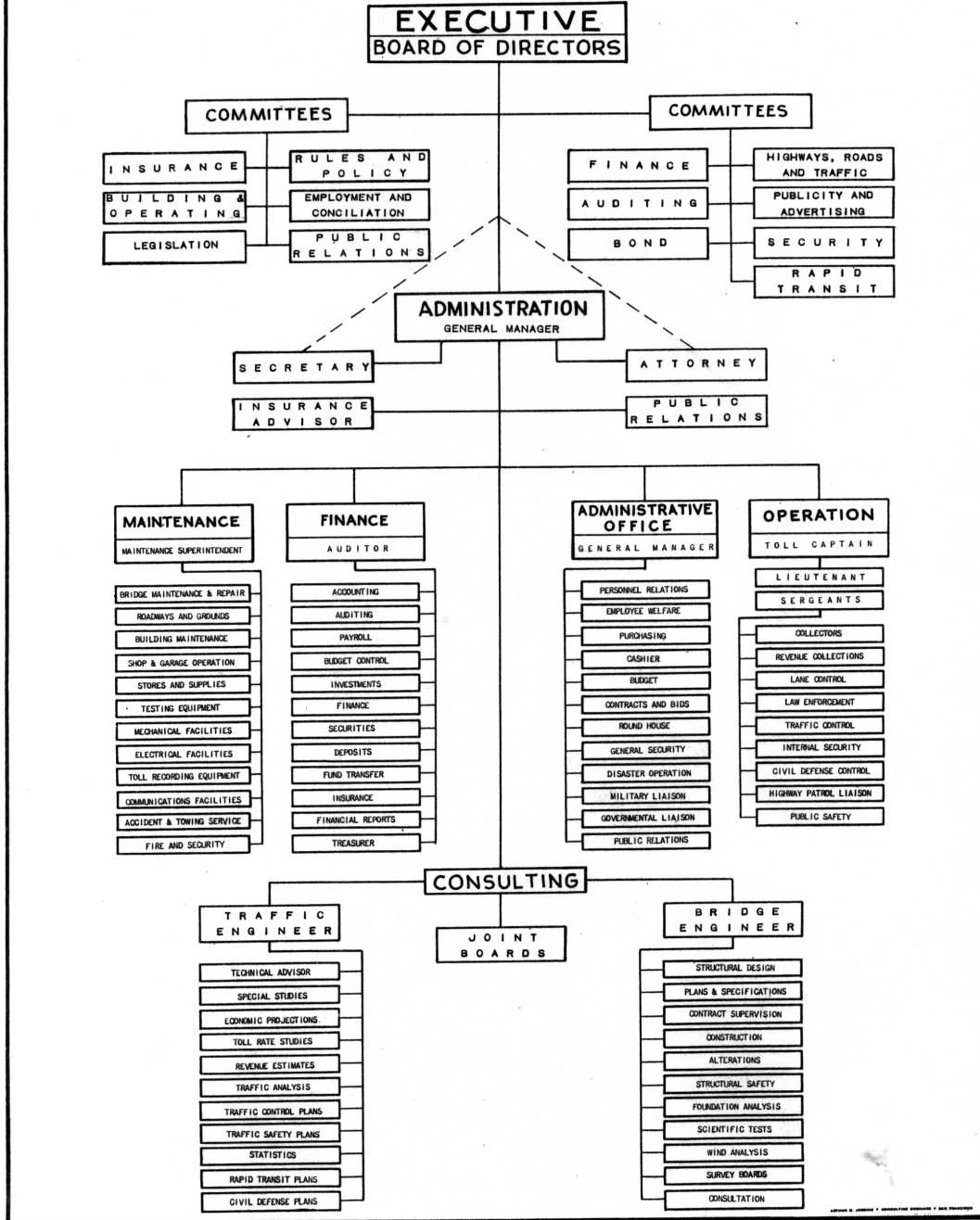


Figure 6.2: The broken lines indicate that the secretary and attorney were appointed by the board and directors and required to report to them directly, although they were still under the direction and supervision of the general manager. Note the subordinate position of the auditor. Source: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, box 57-1, IM Facility.

In 1956, Adam's heavy-handed management style made the news. District Secretary Ruth Dow, who had worked for the agency for nineteen years and had been its secretary for eleven, was fired. Adam did not have the authority to discharge Dow himself; while the general manger had complete authority over the rest of the bridge district employees, which numbered approximately 150 at the time, the secretary and attorney were both officially hired by and accountable directly to the board of directors. Disregarding this, Adam changed the locks on Dow's office door and the combination of the district's vault after she wrote a letter to the directors criticizing him. Two months later in a closed meeting, the directors officially dismissed Dow, citing "general incompatibility." Adam claimed that it was a unanimous decision; directors told reporters that there were four dissenting votes until it was agreed to give Dow an additional six months' pay. After reporters were allowed to return to the meeting, one director snapped: "Adam is not Mr. Golden Gate Bridge... he is just an employee."²² After the fact, the directors approved detailed minutes presented by Adam that indicated they were the ones who had originally given Dow notice. Dow hired an attorney, but never sued or discussed her side of the story with the press—no doubt, she struck a deal with the bridge district.²³

A 2 a.m. incident a few months later indicated that Adam might well have considered himself "Mr. Golden Gate Bridge." News of a four-car pileup on the span inspired Adam to rush to the scene to help police. When he started setting flares to divert traffic near a large pool of gasoline, he was ordered to leave. He objected loudly and ultimately was given a four-

²² *San Francisco Examiner* April 14, 1956.

²³ *San Francisco Examiner* April 28, 1956.

man escort. Apparently, this was not the only such incident; police had stripped his official car of its siren after reports that he was using it to speed across the bridge a few months before.²⁴

Bridge of Gold

Adam perpetuated the policies that led to the accusations of inefficiency and extravagance early in the 1950s that inspired McCarthy's first crusade for dissolution and toll reductions. As the battles over a Golden Gate Authority and rails on the bridge commenced at the end of the decade, the same problems were again featured on the front pages of Bay Area newspapers. A *San Francisco Examiner* exposé, titled "A Bridge of Gold," decried lavish bridge district spending and high salaries under Adam's direction in 1960. Among other things, it pointed out the directors' habit of enjoying expensive meals at district expense at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, which was owned by bridge district President Dan London.²⁵ Adam, according to the report, got a salary of more than \$21,000 plus another \$3,149 in expenses; his counterpart at the California Toll Bridge Authority, who was an engineer, had no expenses and was paid \$15,876.²⁶ The familiar comparison was still unfavorable for the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, and the series made a new case for a state takeover just as new legislation for the Golden Gate Transportation Commission was being prepared in Sacramento. Unruffled, Adam won approval for a new \$12,000 position at the bridge district a few months later and appointed William Hendricks of San Rafael as assistant to the general manager. Among his duties was to fill in for Adam while he was in Sacramento unofficially tending to the legislature.²⁷

²⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* October 8, 1956.

²⁵ *San Francisco Examiner* August 14, 1960.

²⁶ *San Francisco Examiner* August 15, 1960.

²⁷ *Marin Independent Journal* November 28, 30, 1960; *San Francisco Chronicle* November 29, 30, 1960.

In 1962 (just in time for the bridge's twenty-fifth anniversary celebration) more accusations were made by the *Chronicle* in another series, "Our Plush Gate Bridge." This time, the charges of extravagance and waste by the district were much more serious. The paper reported high, undocumented expenses and dubious accounting practices. Adam claimed \$13,340 in personal expenses for 1961, but could only produce receipts for \$1,993. Many of his expenses were not included in this total; for example, he charged airfare for a trip to the east coast to a different bridge district account. He also withdrew \$1,104 in cash from a revolving fund.²⁸ The *Chronicle* reported that Frank M. Masters of the engineering firm Ammann and Whitney, who was one of the engineers who had done the final independent review of rapid transit trains on the bridge, had been hosted by the district at the St. Francis while vacationing in San Francisco with his wife, even though he conducted no business on the trip.²⁹ The report detailed various means of extra compensation for directors beyond the legislated allowances, including routine travel compensation and entertainment expenses.³⁰ Each director received full medical benefits and \$10,000 of life insurance, while employees, including those with hazardous work such as painters, were provided with only \$2,500. In addition, the report questioned the justification for providing deluxe travel accommodations for a seven week trip to Europe for Adam and two directors so they could negotiate for insurance from Lloyd's of London in 1958.³¹ The final article in the series revealed that the bridge district had spent \$625,591 on unspecified advertising in the previous year, even as it faced growing congestion problems. The Bay Bridge, in contrast, spent a total of \$2,772 for

²⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 24, 1962.

²⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 25, 1962.

³⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 24-27, 1962.

³¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 25, 1962.

advertising in twenty-five years.³² The article also pointed out that the district's annual financial reports were significantly abbreviated in the late 1950s; there was no breakdown of expenses available to the public.

An outraged *Chronicle* editorial followed the exposé, calling for investigation of the bridge district's "free spending":

[bridge district] directors traditionally have managed bridge affairs as though the project were their own private little principality, and in truth no one has felt any real responsibility to peer over their shoulders. If gravy were being ladled out in the form of payments and perquisites, no higher authority felt called upon to notice the spots on the neckties.

In such an atmosphere, the directors and Manager Adam have operated on what might be described as the honor system, drawing sizeable checks to pay expense accounts that were curiously uninformative.³³

The Marin County Grand Jury initiated its own investigation of the bridge district, announcing that they were "extremely shocked... We as taxpayers feel that a complete investigation into the unchecked and unaccounted for spending of public funds is mandatory and at this point long overdue."³⁴

³² *San Francisco Chronicle* May 27, 1962.

³³ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 29, 1962.

³⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 30, 1962.

Table 6.1: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District Advertising Appropriations

Year	Redwood Empire Association	California Mission Trails	Californians, Incorporated	San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau
1937-38	\$9,162.25			
1938-39	15,000			
1939-40	12,000			
1940-41	7,500			
1941-42	10,000			
1942-43	7,500			
1943-44	10,000			
1944-45	15,000			
1945-46	25,000			
1946-47	25,000			
1947-48	25,000	\$1,500		
1948-49	25,000	1,500		
1949-50	25,000	1,500		
1950-51	25,000	1,500		
1951-52	25,000	1,500		
1952-53	25,000	1,500		
1953-53	25,000			
1954-55	25,000			
1955-56	25,000			
1956-57	25,000		\$5,000	
1957-58	25,000		5,000	
1958-59	25,000		7,500	\$1,000
1959-60	25,000		7,500	1,000
1960-61	25,000		7,500	1,000
1961-62	25,000		7,500	1,000
1962-63	25,000		7,500	1,000
1963-64	25,000			8,500
1964-65	25,000			8,500
1965-66	25,000			8,500
1966-67	25,000			8,500
1967-68	25,000			8,500
Total 6/68	\$661,162.25	\$8,500	\$47,500	\$47,500

Source: Figures from table of same name produced by the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. Box 126, IM Facility.

Jack McCarthy, who was campaigning for lieutenant governor at the time, also responded to the challenge of reining in bridge district spending.³⁵ No doubt, he was still smarting from the recent defeats on rapid transit and the Golden Gate Authority at the hands of the bridge district. McCarthy had a new ally in Hendricks, who resigned from his position as assistant to the general manager after two years. In a press conference called by McCarthy, Hendricks claimed that he left the bridge district “as a matter of self-respect and integrity.”³⁶ He accused Adam of keeping information from the board of directors, refusing him access to bridge district reports, and asking him to disseminate “misinformation” to the public. Hendricks described the “mess at the Bridge District” as “an iceberg, with only a small portion showing above the muddy water.” He claimed that Adam denied him any direct contact with the directors, and “since there was no way of reaching [them], I felt it was my responsibility as a citizen to do something about it.”³⁷ Hendricks offered details, describing a decision by the board rejecting the low bid on commute tickets; failure to entertain any bids on significant contracts; a misappropriation of engineering funds by which Adam gained \$10,000 to use at his discretion; a system installed allowing Adam to eavesdrop on employee conversations; and a close relationship between the accounting firm that did annual audits and the district, including common legal counsel. “The capper,” Hendricks recalled, “was when the board spent the afternoon at the races at the Sonoma County Fair.”

At lunch, they entertained 50 ‘friends of the District’ at the Flamingo Hotel. All the guests were told the two Sonoma County members of the board were paying the bill. But it just wasn’t so. The bill came to the bridge auditor from the Flamingo, and it was promptly paid.³⁸

³⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 29, 1962.

³⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 28, 1962.

³⁷ *Independent Journal* November 27, 1962.

³⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 28, 1962.

McCarthy followed Hendricks' allegations with an inventory of eight serious and familiar charges: irregular audits, misappropriation of funds, excessive fees and expenses, secret meetings, and "gross misuse of public funds for lobbying."³⁹ He concluded the presentation with a call for Adam's dismissal.

Adam accused Hendricks of "personal vindictiveness" and claimed that he had been fired for "incompetence and neglect of duty."⁴⁰ President Dan London refuted the charges point by point, denouncing McCarthy's "campaign of continuous public abuse and harassment," his "intemperate and violent attacks to undermine the confidence in Board management actions," and "willful and personal vilification [of] the Bridge District."⁴¹ London asserted that the board of directors was fully in control of administration, management, and policy. Though he did not defend Adam in his official response to McCarthy, he called McCarthy's demand for Adam's dismissal "unstatesmanlike," adding that Adam was "one of the most capable executives I have known—one of the hardest working men I have known."⁴² The board of directors voted to commission a complete report on its accounting procedures from the firm that had been in charge of its financial reports and auditing since 1937, Arthur Young & Co.⁴³ Predictably, the firm's auditors found "no evidences of any irregularities in the accounting procedures," but did recommend that the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The next day, Hendricks produced an acknowledgment of his resignation, signed by Adam. *San Francisco Chronicle* December 11, 1962.

⁴¹ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. Publicity and Advertising Committee, *Reply to Allegations of State Senator John F. McCarthy Relating to Administrative, Financial and Managerial Affairs of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* by Dan E. London (San Francisco, 1962), box 127, IM Facility.

⁴² Dan E. London to Honorable Board of Directors, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, December 14, 1962, box 204, DS Vault.

⁴³ *San Francisco Chronicle* June 28, October 12, 1962.

bridge district stop paying a flat fee for travel expenses for meetings and start requiring receipts.⁴⁴

The Marin County Grand Jury investigation involved nearly a year of hearings and investigation, which were faithfully reported in the press.⁴⁵ It was the first major probe of the internal affairs and day-to-day operations of the agency that went beyond accounting procedures and expenses. In the course of testimony, it came out that in 1947 and 1949 Adam successfully lobbied for legislation that not only eliminated the requirement that the bridge district return its surplus funds to the member counties, but also made the bridge district auditor accountable to the general manager rather than to the board.⁴⁶ Among those called to testify were Adam, the bridge district auditor, and several of its directors. Ruth Dow also appeared before the grand jury but refused to discuss her testimony with the press.⁴⁷

The grand jury concluded that, though criminal charges could not be justified, “many of the past and present procedures of the bridge district warrant severe censure.”⁴⁸ The report criticized the “lax attitude” of the board of directors, finding the power structure and the decision-making process of the district severely off balance:

To begin with, the jury feels that responsibility for proper management of the Bridge District is a joint one, shared equally by the general manager of the bridge, the board of directors of the Bridge District and the boards of supervisors of each of the counties which comprise the Bridge District.

The Board is the governing body of the District and should review activities of the bridge with greater care, not abdicating its authority to the general manager.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ *Marin Independent Journal* November 9, 1962; *San Francisco Chronicle* November 9, 1962.

⁴⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 2, 14, 15, 19, 1962;

⁴⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 15, 1962; *Statutes of California* (1947) 57th reg. sess. Ch. 440, 1340-1341, ch. 617, 1624; 58th (1949) reg. sess. Ch. 1227, 2157-2158.

⁴⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 19, 1962.

⁴⁸ Marin County Grand Jury, *Special Report on the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* (San Rafael, 1963), 29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

The grand jury reserved its harshest criticism for Adam. The investigation confirmed that his personal expense accounts, over \$5,000 per year, were “approved with cursory examination and insufficient substantiation.”⁵⁰ The jury questioned the propriety of Adam’s “public relations expenses,” over four thousand dollars in 1961, especially in light of the fact that the district had a lobbyist on the payroll as well. The jury also questioned Adam’s honesty as an administrator:

Testimony demonstrated that the general manager fails properly to advise the board on all situations... Editing the minutes of the board meeting is not the proper function of the general manager. The actual minutes as reported by the secretary should be presented to the directors by the secretary as actually recorded and corrections and/or omissions should be made at the regular meetings.

Further, ample evidence has been presented to show the general manager has, at times, altered official documents, e.g., personnel records, and has acted in violation of board rules and policies with respect to invoices.⁵¹

The jury recommended that an independent firm conduct an annual audit, and that the district auditor be made directly accountable to the board of directors rather than the general manager. It also criticized the bridge district’s “free and easy” attitude toward public money, calling for an end to “luncheons and dinners not essential to bridge business, paid hotel bills offered as gratuities, excessive legislative costs and large sums spent for advertising.”⁵²

The grand jury findings created a stir at the bridge district. Newly elected President Ben K. Lerer of San Francisco demanded that the district auditing committee start “hold[ing] its meetings in the open—instead of in an anteroom off general manager James Adam’s private office.”⁵³ He managed to convince the directors to pass a resolution to limit lobbying expenses. The directors questioned its extremely uncomfortable and reluctant auditor, whose

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 12, 1963.

testimony had been an important source of information for the grand jury. When asked whether he had encountered any “dishonesty,” he was either aggressively interrupted by a director or refused to answer: “My duty is a legal duty, and the interpretation of dishonesty is a moral one. I can see there are various interpretations on what constitutes dishonesty. I have nothing to say on the matter.”⁵⁴ A few months later the auditor was forced to resign.⁵⁵

The investigations generated an enormous amount of coverage in Marin and San Francisco papers, and the public scrutiny did make a difference. The *Chronicle* reported smugly when the bridge district annual report was released in July that its officials had a “tough year.” Adam’s personal expenses dropped from over \$13,000 the previous year to \$1,984 (and he had receipts), and his incidental expenses and “once lively” revolving account claims were reduced to next to nothing.⁵⁶ In addition, McCarthy introduced a new series of reform measures in the 1963 legislative session; one bill reinstated the requirement that the district return excess profits to the member counties, another made the bridge district auditor accountable to the board rather than the general manager.⁵⁷ McCarthy also tried to institute a term limit for the directors and a requirement that they submit annual reports to their boards of supervisors.⁵⁸ A fourth bill, which observers agreed had the best chance of passage, called for a regular outside audit.⁵⁹ The board of directors passed resolutions opposing all of the legislation; one director remarked that an outside audit was “an insult to the board... I don’t know why we have to have a nursemaid.”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 26, 1963.

⁵⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 13, 1963.

⁵⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 18, 1963.

⁵⁷ S.B. 183, 1963 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); S.B. 184, 1963 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.)

⁵⁸ S.B. 610, 1963 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); *Independent Journal* March 1, 1963.

⁵⁹ S.B. 611, 1963 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); *Independent Journal* May 7, 1963.

⁶⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 11, 1963.

Despite McCarthy's best efforts and his increasing influence in the legislature (he was elected senate minority leader in 1961), none of the bills made it out of committee: the bridge district, too, had increased its sway in Sacramento. As in previous years, the agency responded to public criticism by bolstering its political fortifications. In addition to the effort to clean up accounts at the bridge district, its officials also moved to strengthen the public relations and lobbying arms in the wake of these investigations. The district's lobbyist in Sacramento was experienced and savvy. A solid majority of directors were willing to back him up and increase his salary to make up for new restrictions on his expense account, despite widespread condemnation.⁶¹ Leland Murphy, one of Marin's directors, made it clear that he felt McCarthy was responsible for creating the need for the expenses: "We have a senator now that has done nothing but slur the directors and try to abolish the district... [The] people that built the bridge would have been swindled out of it. We have kept the district alive."⁶² Adam could depend on the loyalty and support of the bridge district directors, many of whom had been members since the construction period. They were used to public criticism, and expressed pride in the organization and a loyalty to its staff. Admitting that the agency was poorly administered or even corrupt would be admitting to their incompetence as its leadership, or even worse, compliance in the abuse of its resources and funds.

The bridge district had several other things in its favor. Its reserves were growing steadily; the district reported a net profit of \$2.7 million at the end of the 1964 fiscal year.⁶³ McCarthy could no longer wave the red flag of high tolls; the bridge district's ample reserves finally led to commuter tolls that were lower than those of the Bay Bridge, and the basic one-way automobile toll was on par with the Bay Bridge through the 1960s. Support for the bridge

⁶¹ *Marin Independent Journal* March 8, 1963; *San Francisco Chronicle* March 9, 1963.

⁶² *Independent Journal* April 3, 1963.

⁶³ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 1, 1964

district remained strong in the northern counties. Only in Marin and San Francisco were the investigations and accusations against bridge district management taken very seriously.

Sonoma County's *Press Democrat* expressed the typical northern county attitude:

The return of robins is accepted as the first harbinger of Spring—and whenever State Senator Jack McCarthy hits the headlines with a bunch of charges about the way the Golden Gate Bridge is operated it's an infallible reminder that the California Legislature will begin another session within a few weeks.

The gentleman from Marin County is the legislative front man for those who want to get the state's hooks on the multi-million dollar reserves.⁶⁴

Bridge district operations were consistently praised in the northern counties and its financial solvency and growing reserves applauded.

Even so, the bridge district moved to reinforce its political ties to rural northern California through its reliable organizational partner, the Redwood Empire Association. By the end of the 1950s, REA had an aging membership and had lost much of its influence; its relationship with the bridge district had become less symbiotic and more dependent. However, largely because its association with the bridge district, the REA was revitalized under the leadership of Carney Campion in the 1960s. Not only did the bridge district continue to pay dues to the organization, it remained its biggest advertising client. Even as promoting the bridge became harder and harder to justify due to increasing congestion, the bridge district began employing REA officers and public relations agents. In 1964 an REA officer began attending all of the bridge directors' general meetings and most of their committee meetings to "assist in reporting and interpreting actions of the Board of Directors and their resultant decisions on policy and programs that are of general interest."⁶⁵ The REA released almost daily announcements of "bridge anniversaries; emergency service; toll collectors plight; traffic

⁶⁴ *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* December 3, 1962.

⁶⁵ Carney J. Campion to E. W. Fraser. June 21, 1965; Edwin A. Frediani to Redwood Empire Supervisors, Golden Gate Bridge Directors, Legislators, County Officials, Executive Board, News Media, May 17, 1968, Collier Papers.

oddities, etc.”⁶⁶ The effort to court better relations with the press may have been an attempt to deflect some of the scrutiny of San Francisco and Marin papers, but it was more likely meant to encourage more coverage of bridge district operations by local, northern county papers, which had sympathetic editors but no regular correspondents. The general manager of the REA, Carney Campion, presented a comprehensive list of publications to receive press releases, including all Northern California papers, television and radio stations, as well as national press services.⁶⁷

After the 1963 investigations McCarthy turned his attention away from the bridge district; always an advocate for the development of Marin County, he devoted himself to supporting the construction of a second crossing to Marin, even relaxing his enmity momentarily to offer a fleeting endorsement for a plan to add an additional deck to the bridge in 1965.⁶⁸ McCarthy was making an effort to move up in the GOP hierarchy; in addition to his duties as senate minority leader, he was busy with a campaign for the position of lieutenant governor and faced an unusually strong challenger for his seat at home. He made a well-publicized trip to Washington with Richard Nixon and there was speculation that he was considering a bid for governor or United States senator. In 1966 he was at the peak of his popularity, winning by a two to one margin in Marin County against a well-known challenger.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Campion to E. W. Fraser, box 126, IM Facility.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ S.R. 242, 1965 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.)

⁶⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 10, 1966.

Racism at the Bridge District

Even without McCarthy's criticism, Adam was not out of trouble for long. More serious violations came to light, setting off a new round of investigations and accusations. In July 1965, Adam refused to hire James Haugabook, an African American painter, after requesting candidates from Local 4 of the Painter's Union of San Francisco. Adam did hire the white painters who applied for the job at the same time, several of whom had less experience than Haugabook.⁷⁰ Haugabook had worked as a foreman and had been a journeyman painter in the union for six years. He had experience working at heights and with structural steel on scaffolding similar to that used on the bridge.⁷¹ The local charged Adam and the district with discrimination, bringing the case before the California Fair Employment Practice Commission. After five months of investigation, the FEPC ordered the district to hire Haugabook and "compensate him for time lost due to discrimination."⁷² In an unusual move, Adam challenged the ruling, initiating a public hearing. After just one day of testimony, the board of directors ordered him to settle the matter. Adam agreed to hire Haugabook but without admitting any liability, and the board of directors pledged to adopt an official non-discrimination policy.⁷³

⁷⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 8, 1966.

⁷¹ California Fair Employment Practice Commission. *In the Matter of the Accusation of Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, Board of Directors of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, and James Adam, General Manager of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District: Reporter's Transcript* (San Francisco, September 11-15 1967) 134-40, private collection of James Haugabook.

⁷² *San Francisco Chronicle* December 21, 1965.

⁷³ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 8, 9, 1966.



Figure 6.3: Leading this march were (left to right) Jimmie Lee Wilkins, James Haugabook, and Paul Powell. This photo was printed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* on May 26, 1967, a day before the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the bridge. Reproduced courtesy of the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Unfortunately for the bridge district, the uproar coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the bridge's opening. Parties and luncheons to celebrate were cancelled, and Bay Area papers instead covered angry denunciations of the district by union representatives and officials of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who called for Adam's dismissal. A protest march across the bridge was the only public event to mark the end of its third decade.⁷⁴

Charges of racism continued. Soon after Haugabook was hired, another painter, Jimmie Lee Wilkins, filed a complaint against Adam and the bridge district. Wilkins was the first African American skilled worker on the bridge, winning the job just days after Haugabook filed his first complaint. Wilkins was "pointed to as an example of their non-discrimination practices" during the FEPC hearing.⁷⁵ Harry Bigarani, a high-level painters' union official and San Francisco housing commissioner, testified that he had recommended Wilkins for the job and that Wilkins had worked with him in 1949. Wilkins himself never testified at Haugabook's hearing. Instead, an incident at the bridge district offices led to his dismissal. Wilkins was called off the bridge to discuss the hearing with Adam, the bridge district attorney and secretary on the day that he was supposed to testify.⁷⁶ When he arrived, he informed them that he did not have any experience as a painter before he started at the bridge and was not willing to lie about his experience to the FEPC. At the request of the bridge district attorney, Wilkins signed a statement admitting to falsifying his original application. Wilkins offered to resign to "save any embarrassment to the bridge and to... the

⁷⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* May 25, 1967; *San Francisco Chronicle* May 23, 24, 25, 1967.

⁷⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 22, 1966.

⁷⁶ California Fair Employment Practice Commission, *In the Matter of ... Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District*, 90-92.

other people involved whom were trying to help me.”⁷⁷ Wilkins was told to go on vacation while the hearings proceeded. Wilkins was officially fired two days later, right after Haugabook went to work, by a special delivery letter with his final paycheck at 11:50 p.m. It was the day before the end of Wilkin’s six-month probationary period, when it was customary for painters to go on permanent status with medical benefits and paid leave.⁷⁸ Soon after his dismissal, Wilkins had a change of heart, and charged that bridge district officials “who wanted him hired to mitigate Haugabook’s charges of discrimination,” had instructed him to lie about his experience and told him what to write.⁷⁹ Union officials contended that Adam had hired Wilkins expressly because he did not have previous experience and would be easily dismissed later.⁸⁰ Wilkins submitted a written complaint to the board of directors and was re-hired two weeks later.

NAACP officials helping Wilkins held a press conference to point out the obvious conflict between Wilkins confession and Bigarani’s testimony under oath before the FEPC. They accused Bigarani of conspiring with Adam “to perpetuate racially discriminatory employment practices,” and pointed out that Wilkins was 15 years old and attending high school in Tennessee at the time Bigarani said he was working with him. They claimed that Adam wanted a worker with no experience so that later he could be fired for incompetence.⁸¹

Wilkins and Haugabook worked on the bridge for another year, but they were under close surveillance the entire time; for the first time supervisors were required to fill out

⁷⁷ Ibid., 87.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 30, 97, 160, 215.

⁷⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 22, 1966.

⁸⁰ *San Francisco Examiner* May 30, 1967.

⁸¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 27, June 3, 8, 1967.

performance evaluations on every painter.⁸² Haugabook recalled being subjected to unusually difficult working conditions on the bridge:

My first day on the bridge I was assigned to work with the sandblasting crew... with Paul Powell. Mr. Powell was sandblasting underneath the roadway, on occasions work was done on a swing stage 500 feet above the bay underneath the roadway. At the time I had no clue in terms of work replacement. I found out later that the bridge never placed a new employee in such an advance working condition.

There are 4 rolling scaffolds that roll on tracks under the roadway, which is relative[ly] safe. This is where new employees are assigned on their first tour of duty. Two things were going on here with my assignment with Paul Powell. Number one Mr. Powell was a union shop steward, and I discovered later that he did not side with the bridge on race issues. That explains why he was working the most difficult area on the bridge. Secondly since... I was an experienced painter before I went to work, I suppose they wanted me to prove it right off the bat.⁸³

Paul Powell was a steward for the Painter's Union, and one of the first people to befriend Haugabook.⁸⁴ He complained to one of the foreman that Haugabook and Wilkins had not been granted permanent status after more than a year on the job.⁸⁵

Wilkins noted that after he came back to work on the bridge, he was subject to much closer supervision: "they started keeping work sheets, on a day to day basis. And I found out that they never did that to anybody else."⁸⁶ He also described close scrutiny of his work: "[T]here was a little spot left on a—on a knee brace out there... It was just a spot that wasn't painted. It had been cleaned for painting but it had been left... And so the Paint Superintendent came out and we were told in front of witnesses that he demanded that the foreman write this down—that he write all this stuff down."⁸⁷ His sandblasting was subject to new criticism, as well; he recalled that the first time he attempted this difficult work, no effort

⁸² California Fair Employment Practice Commission, *In the Matter of ... Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District*, 197-209, 57.

⁸³ James Haugabook to Louise Nelson Dyble, March 7, 2003.

⁸⁴ California Fair Employment Practice Commission, *In the Matter of ... Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District*, 346-47, 536.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 546.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

was made to show him how to do it. Wilkins' foreman "just put the helmet on me and he said, 'Blast this section here.' And that was it."⁸⁸

Despite various warning signs, Wilkins and Haugabook were surprised when Adam terminated them both in March 1967. At the same time, he fired Paul Powell, who had testified to safety violations on the bridge in January 1966.⁸⁹ Powell expressed his opinion of the situation:

I am one of the alleged "incompetent" painters recently fired from the Golden Gate Bridge... After five years of alleged "incompetence" I was appointed union shop steward.

In the discharge of my duties, I continued showing my "incompetence" by urging the bridge district management to accord fair and equal treatment to the two Negro painters they were forced to hire in 1966 under an FEPC ruling.

...When I testified to the whole truth in an Industrial Accident Commission hearing on behalf of a bridge painter seriously injured in a fall... damag[ing] the case that the management had built up against the injured painter...

Management can only take so much "incompetence" so I was fired on April 28 along with my two Negro union brothers... The moral: "Don't be so incompetent that you try to stick up for your fellow man."⁹⁰

Powell's lawyers charged that Adam fired him to show that "he didn't just fire Negroes."⁹¹

Union officials also contended that Powell "had an unblemished record until he spoke out as a citizen against the racial policy of James Adam."⁹²

Despite the protests of NAACP representatives and union officials and several heated bridge district meetings on the subject—during which TV coverage and "any discussion of racial discrimination" were forbidden—the board of directors voted 12 to 2 to uphold Adam's authority to fire employees at his discretion, refusing to entertain any further debate on the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 80.

⁸⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 1, 1967.

⁹⁰ *San Francisco Examiner* [May 1967], private clipping file of James Haugabook.

⁹¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 1, 1967.

⁹² *San Francisco Chronicle* May 19, 1967. Later, union officials claimant that "one of the main charges used against Paul Powell is that he picked the wrong place to sit on the rail" in practicing the longstanding painters' method of relieving themselves on the job. The only toilet facilities at the time were at the toll plaza. *San Francisco Chronicle* June 3, 1967.

matter.⁹³ San Francisco attorney John E. Dearman, the first African-American to serve as a director, was appointed in 1966 and served four years.⁹⁴ Dearman called the meeting “one of the ugliest scenes I have ever attended and a disgrace to all of us.”⁹⁵

Haugabook and Wilkins filed a new accusation against Adam and the bridge district with the FEPC, initiating another investigation of Adam’s hiring practices. Commissioner C. L. Dellums, a well-known and respected Bay Area civil rights leader, expressed dismay at the bridge directors’ refusal to negotiate a settlement: “they made it crystal clear that their minds are closed... they said the men were fired and were going to stay fired, and they didn’t want to talk about it.”⁹⁶ Dellums noted that there was ample evidence of discrimination and remarked that it was “almost unbelievable that it was a public agency that was the first employer to flatly refuse to cooperate with an FEPC representative.” Adam was “guilty of serious abuse of his office,” according to Dellums.⁹⁷ The attorney hired to represent the bridge district and Adam in the case, George Bahrs, took the position that the California Bridge and Highway District Act specified that the general manager had “complete control over the personnel and the operations of the bridge” and that the directors’ hands were tied in the matter; they could not influence his decisions or reprimand him in any way short of dismissing him.⁹⁸ Dellums

⁹³ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 28, 29, 1967.

⁹⁴ Dearman was a friend and law partner of Willie Brown, at that time a state assemblyman. When Dearman was dropped from the bridge district delegation by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors only two years later in order to make room for a Supervisor to serve (as was required by the 1968 reform bill), Brown vowed revenge. Dearman was assigned to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission instead, an organization that Brown described as “less than powerless.” *San Francisco Chronicle* December 20, 1968, December 16, 1970.

⁹⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 29, 1967.

⁹⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 20, 1967. Dellums was one of the founders of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and became West Coast Regional Director of the NAACP in 1948. He was appointed to the FEPC at its creation in 1959 and served on the commission until 1985.

⁹⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 22, 1967.

⁹⁸ California Fair Employment Practice Commission, *In the Matter of ... Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District*, 12, 638-39; California Streets and Highways Code, sections 27150-27151 (as of 1968): “The General Manager shall be the Executive Officer of the District. He shall employ and discharge all subordinate officers, employees, and assistants, prescribe their duties... and fix their compensation. He shall have full charge and

agreed, asserting that the “only remedy [for the district] would be for the directors to fire Adam.”⁹⁹

At trial, before a large audience and a television crew, Wilkins described the circumstances of his application. He had been working in a car wash in Oakland when Bigarani, approached him and asked if he was afraid of heights. When he applied in the negative, Bigarani told him to go out to the bridge and apply for a job.¹⁰⁰ When he turned in his application, Adam let him know that the position was temporary, “you might work a year or two years,” Wilkins remembered him saying.¹⁰¹ Wilkins caught on to the work quickly despite his lack of experience; after a week, he was keeping up with the rest of the crew. One of his foremen wrote a statement later that “I could see that he had not done this type of work before... He said there is a lot of difference between this and washing cars. Jim is a willing worker and works hard at it. At the last he was keeping right along with the rest of the crew.”¹⁰²

Haugabook got less glowing reports; repeatedly, witnesses testified that he was a slow and inconsistent worker. There were allegations that he failed to operate equipment correctly, resulting in damage and losses, and ignored safety procedures.¹⁰³ According to some of his fellow workers Haugabook was afraid of heights; the bridge district lawyer suggested that he was caught sleeping on a scaffold.¹⁰⁴ However, six painters testified, despite fears of retribution, that both Wilkins’ and Haugabook’s work was as good as any of the other

control of the construction, maintenance, and operation of all works of the District. The General Manager shall report to the Board in accordance with such rules and regulations as the Board may adopt.”

⁹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 20, 22, 1967.

¹⁰⁰ California Fair Employment Practice Commission, *In the Matter of ... Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District*, 21-23, 116-17.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 156-93, 228-30, 325-27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 384-85.

painters.¹⁰⁵ When Adam testified, he asserted that poor workmanship was the main reason that all three painters were fired. When daily evaluations were entered into evidence, the lawyer for Wilkins and Haugabook protested: “They set up a system here to try to catch these painters [and] make a record for the basis of their subsequent dismissal of them.”¹⁰⁶ Evaluation reports on the painters stopped immediately after the three were fired. Adam also claimed that the final straw in the decision to fire Haugabook was finding that, upon investigation, some of his claims of experience on his original application were false. However, it was also revealed that Adam knew that some of the white painters had falsified their applications but had not fired them.¹⁰⁷

After two weeks of well-publicized testimony, Adam was convicted for discrimination against Wilkins, but (with a split vote) the FEPC dismissed Haugabook’s complaint and absolved the board of directors.¹⁰⁸ Union officials protested the decision to clear Adam in Haugabook’s case: “The FEPC is a farce, used only to dull the militancy of those who believe in constitutional government.”¹⁰⁹ The commission refused to consider charges that Powell was also the victim of discrimination. Supported by his union, he filed a separate lawsuit, which was quietly settled by the district.¹¹⁰

In the course of the hearings it was discovered that the bridge district failed to adopt a non-discrimination policy as it had agreed to do in the 1966 settlement with the FEPC and Haugabook. The third African-American skilled laborer to be hired, Maurice Harris, began work as a “painter’s helper” just before the trial. Union representatives charged that he was

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 398, 413, 53-54, 76-78, 527, 39, 48-49, 51-53.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 257.

¹⁰⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 14-16, 1967.

¹⁰⁸ California. Fair Employment Practice Commission, *Report* (Sacramento, 1967-1968); *San Francisco Chronicle* December 6, 9, 1967; *San Francisco Examiner* December 5, 1967.

¹⁰⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 19, 1967.

¹¹⁰ Powell sued the District for reinstatement and \$500,000 in damages, and settled for \$25,000. *San Francisco Examiner* May 21, 1968; *San Francisco Chronicle* May 30, 1967.

another token and held another demonstration on the bridge. One protestor commented that “Adam believes he’s God and he owns the bridge.”¹¹¹ After the 1967 trial, the bridge district hired a consulting firm to do a thorough study of its hiring practices and to recommend changes. The result was a condemnation of bridge district procedures—the report revealed that each department of the district had different hours, promotion guidelines, and evaluations. Based on recommendations, the board of directors adopted an employee appraisal form and agreed to start using examinations for promotions, but refused to adopt an official non-discrimination policy or a formal grievance procedure; these were postponed until after Adam’s retirement.¹¹² In 1968, when Dearman presented a plan to give summer jobs to six Black youths that was understood as a gesture of atonement, the directors voted it down.¹¹³

Rust Bucket

A secondary result of the FEPC hearing were new concerns about Adam’s management of the bridge itself. A number of painters testified that sloppy methods for painting were encouraged by foremen. Instead of carefully removing all rust before applying a new coat of paint, they claimed, they regularly “smooth and smother” rust in problem areas to keep up their pace.¹¹⁴ One painter called the bridge a “rust bucket,” another remarked that it was “absolutely a mess up there.”¹¹⁵ Bridge district lawyers used this contention to try to prove the incompetence of the discharged workers, even taking the commissioners, witnesses, and court reporters to the bridge to view poorly painted sections. However, they ended up encouraging

¹¹¹ This demonstration included Assemblyman Willie Brown. *San Francisco Chronicle* August 24, 26, 1967.

¹¹² *San Francisco Chronicle* June 8, 1968; *San Francisco Examiner* June 8, 1968.

¹¹³ *San Francisco Chronicle* June 15, 1968.

¹¹⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 14, 1967.

¹¹⁵ California Fair Employment Practice Commission, *In the Matter of ... Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District*, 483, 515.

more damaging questions about the condition of the bridge and adequacy of maintenance operations. According to several witnesses, badly designed suspender boxes where the vertical cables attached were impossible to properly clear of rust. All that could be done was simply to smother them with paint, and they were undoubtedly deteriorating beneath it. “[T]his Golden Gate Bridge... is supposed to be like a tooth,” one painter reflected, “well I sure as heck hate to have my tooth done that way.”¹¹⁶ A full inspection of the bridge which the directors commissioned during the hearings revealed that the painters’ assessment of the bridge’s condition was accurate. In 1969, engineers recommended \$200,000 worth of repairs and urged the bridge district to replace the faulty cable boxes immediately.¹¹⁷

Painters testifying before the FEPC also suggested that the safety equipment provided by the bridge district was inadequate, some of it as old as the bridge itself. In the midst of the FEPC hearings, a worker fell to his death while painting the bridge when his safety line snapped six feet from his belt.¹¹⁸ An official REA press release claimed that it was the first accidental death on the bridge since its opening; further investigation uncovered another death in 1958 and serious injuries from falls in 1961 and 1965. Union officials accused Adam of ignoring their concerns about safety on the bridge, which they had been complaining about for years, and demanded his dismissal.¹¹⁹ The “senseless death... is an extreme example of Mr. Adam’s arrogant disregard for human life and the community we live in,” they claimed.¹²⁰ Though a state investigation found no “gross” safety violations and ruled the death

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 518.

¹¹⁷ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Golden Gate Bridge, Report on Inspection of Condition and Major Structural Units* prepared by Ammann & Whitney (San Francisco, 1969).

¹¹⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 26, 28, November 22, 1967.

¹¹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 27, 1967.

¹²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 28, 1967.

“accidental,” it added considerably to the district’s ongoing public relations disaster.¹²¹ After the fall, the bridge district adopted formal safety procedures for the first time.¹²²

Only the Names Have Changed

Even in the midst of all the bad press and intense scrutiny of its operations the board of directors voted to approve several questionable expenditures. A new Cadillac limousine was added to the district fleet for use by top staff and directors, and the need for more than a half a million dollars worth of luxurious new furnishings for the board room at the toll plaza met with no debate.¹²³ The free life insurance for directors increased from \$10,000 to \$100,000.¹²⁴ Once again, the bridge district’s refusal to entertain bids for contracts and purchases reared its ugly head. The bridge district was purchasing paint at a premium, arguing that it could not be purchased competitively because “it is very necessary to use the best material.”¹²⁵ Paul Peterzell of the *Independent Journal* declared that “all that glitters is gold when the Bridge District buys.”¹²⁶ The district released a statement asserting that the law required competitive bids only on construction or repair contracts, not maintenance or paint.¹²⁷ A statement by the Marin County Grand Jury on the matter condemned the practice and called for legislation to “close the loophole” in the law that allowed the bridge district to avoid competitive bids.¹²⁸ Even after the grand jury’s statement the board of directors voted nine to four to ratify their existing contract for paint without bids.¹²⁹

¹²¹ Redwood Empire Association, press release, October 27, 1967, box 126, IM Facility.

¹²² *San Francisco Chronicle* November 22, 1967.

¹²³ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 9, 1967.

¹²⁴ *San Francisco Examiner* April 4, 1968.

¹²⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* June 1, 1968.

¹²⁶ *Marin Independent Journal* September 15, 1967.

¹²⁷ Marin County Grand Jury, *Report* (San Rafael, CA, 1967).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* June 1, 1968.

The inspection contract following the FEPC hearings was also awarded to Ammann and Whitney. After conducting the inspection, the firm won another \$320,000 contract for repairs and reconstruction without any competitive bids. Legally, the bridge district was required to open all repair contracts over \$5,000 to bids, but Adam argued that this work was actually an extension of the inspection. A lone dissenting director protested vehemently: “there have been some strange maneuverings, but this one has to rank as the worst and the squirreliest yet.”¹³⁰ In less than a year, Ammann and Whitney were paid \$680,000 in fees without ever having to compete with other firms with a bid.¹³¹ Clearly, reform had to be forced on the agency.

Again and again, year after year, the bridge district had been charged with a lack of accountability, inefficiency, poor management, and general extravagance. Adam himself was the locus of controversy, subject to regular denunciation for dishonesty and arrogance. By the late 1960s, James Adam had become a pariah, and after the FEPC trial and controversy over bidding procedures, he was ravaged by the regional press. An editorial in the *San Francisco Examiner* described his career at the bridge district:

The inner workings of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District—Ye Feudal Fief—are so determinedly despotic that they have a certain charm, the charm of consistency... Jim Adam, who went from press agent to lobbyist to manager-lobbyist, to manager WITH lobbyist, has come as close as anybody to owning and operating the Golden Gate Bridge as a private preserve. And in most consistent fashion, Jim is properly feudal about the whole highhanded business.

It can be said in general that EVERYBODY connected with the Golden Gate Bridge, and most especially Jim Adam, gets paid more by far than anybody connected with any similar operation in the state. That’s in straight salaries. The perquisites of a fiefdom, the happy extras, are even more lavish.¹³²

¹³⁰ *Marin Independent Journal* May 31, 1968.

¹³¹ *Marin Independent Journal* May 30, 1968.

¹³² *San Francisco Examiner* March 22, 1968.

The *Chronicle* noted that the bridge district had “under Adam’s tutelage shown consistent disregard for public opinion, for public policy and for the public good.”¹³³ One commentator remarked that the consistent position of the directors was “their general manager, Mr. Adam, can do no wrong.”¹³⁴ Criticism was also directed generally at the bridge district. In 1968, the *Independent Journal* described a 1940 incident when a director was ruled out of order for attempting to discuss excessive spending during a board meeting, noting that the same thing was still going on at the bridge district: “only the names have changed in the last forty years.”¹³⁵ Dick Nolan, a regular editorialist for the *Examiner*, made a sarcastic assessment of the state of the bridge district and the mental health of its officials:

Nowhere in all this broad land is there a public agency whose neuroses are so lacerated as those of the Golden Gate Bridge & Highway District...

The income rises, inexorably. A silver tide of two-bits chokes the toll gates and inundates the board room. Try as they will (and as they must) the management and the directors cannot boost expenditures to meet income. Failing in their natural function as bureaucrats, they are haggard, haunted men.

It is a shattering thing.

Weakened by years of shoveling quarters, they are at last reduced to sitting hopelessly on the board, flipping mere spoonfuls and sobbing hysterically.

After you have exhausted your imagination on absolutely astonishing salaries, expense accounts, elaborate headquarters and furnishings, limousines, a parade of the most expensive engineering consultants available, plots, charts, studies, reports, paperwork beyond belief—well, you have done your best, and your best is not good enough.

There drifts the damnable surplus, mocking, inexhaustible. So you go mad. That’s what you do. Mad, do you hear? Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! Mad!

And you hire a lobbyist.¹³⁶

While Nolan’s assessment was extreme, it reflected the level of outrage that Adam’s administration had created. Garland’s \$16,000 salary and unlimited expense account, previously charged more than \$30,000 in a single year, were again approved in time for the

¹³³ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 13, 1968.

¹³⁴ Jules Dundes, radio editorial, KCBS San Francisco, December 7, 10 1962, box 127, IM Facility.

¹³⁵ *Independent Journal* June 14, 1968.

¹³⁶ *San Francisco Examiner* March 4, 1968.

1969 session of the state legislature.¹³⁷ By that time, facing the retirement of construction bonds in 1971, the bridge district directors had much more to worry about than spending its surpluses, redeeming its public image or keeping the abuses of its general manager in check: the threat of the agency's dissolution was more serious than ever before.

Those who remember Adam uniformly describe him as an uncompromising, iron-fisted boss who maintained absolute control over the bridge district. Under Adam's administration, from 1953 to 1968, there was an obvious pattern of lax oversight, loose spending, and cozy relations with contractors and politicians. Adam was uncompromising in protecting his personal authority, but there are also indications that he saw his role at the bridge district as more than just its ruler. While personal stubbornness and refusal to compromise harmed his own reputation and exposed him to prosecution and public condemnation, Adam worked doggedly to defend what he believed to be the best interests of the bridge district, even when they transcended his immediate, personal interests. His long struggle against the FEPC was probably motivated primarily by bigotry and racism, but Adam also considered his authority as general manager to be an important issue. In asserting his power to determine personnel policies, to hire and fire employees at his discretion, Adam was also defending bridge district autonomy, at least in his own mind.

Though the source of his authority was very different, in many ways Adam had as much discretion and personal authority as the nineteenth century urban bosses who were some of the primary targets of Progressive reformers. It was an ironic consequence of the institutional structure of special districts, designed to reduce the power of these politicians, that their officials also turned out to be susceptible to corruption. The abuses that they were

¹³⁷ *San Francisco Examiner* April 4, 1968.

designed to eliminate could be facilitated by special districts' autonomy, independent revenues, hierarchical structure, and insulation from politics.

VII

Transportation, Regional Government, and the Survival of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District

People will turn to their local governments more and more to protect themselves and their communities from unwanted, predictably destructive, large scale public works, such as freeways and projects required by the seemingly never ending expansion... They will make use of their local governments also to bring about modifications in the plans for clearly necessary and beneficial regional projects where such plans have failed to give sufficient consideration to community values and local environmental conditions. Thus, stronger local governments will be needed and will develop to check the natural tendencies of regional agencies to continually expand their range of authority and to automatically defend their already authorized projects, some of which as initially proposed will, when reconsideration is compelled, be shown to be as harmful as they are well intentioned. —T. J. Kent, 1971.¹

At the end of the 1960s, the bridge district underwent a dramatic rebirth. As pressure increased for the agency's reform, the decade witnessed a major revival of efforts for dissolution. Indeed, proponents of dissolution had a new reason to hope, and bridge district officials to worry; the bridge district's construction bonds, its fundamental *raison d'être*, were to be retired in 1971. Even as the management of the bridge district descended into disrepute under James Adam and its abolition seemed imminent, the agency took on new responsibilities that ensured its survival. In order to understand the apparent paradox—that the bridge district successfully expanded its operations and guaranteed its perpetuation just as its reputation was at its worst—one must understand the political tumult of the Bay Area and the larger struggle over the question of regional government. The agency survived because it was able to step

¹ T. J. Kent, "Home Rule and Regional Government for the San Francisco Bay Area: A Statement Presented to the Committee on the Future of the League of California Cities," (Berkeley, 1971), 3.

into a gap in existing government, working in alliance with other local governments to sustain the status quo against efforts for planning and comprehensive Bay Area government.

The bridge district faced a crisis of legitimacy stemming both from its public image and the impending loss of its primary purpose, but its problems were dwarfed by a much larger crisis facing the San Francisco Bay Area. As in metropolitan areas around the country, transportation problems added to the urgency of ongoing efforts for regional planning and government. The consequences of rapid, low-density suburban development in the Bay Area were obvious by the 1960s: traffic congestion, the disappearance of open space, and environmental destruction. Concern about the immediate environment and public health accompanied the increasingly obvious effects of pollution in metropolitan areas.² Until the end of the decade, there was broad agreement that the existing network of local governments in urban areas was failing to meet the challenges posed by sustained growth and development. Federal legislation designed to encourage localities to address metropolitan area problems on a regional basis included planning requirements that led to the creation of new areawide special districts. Transportation policy was no exception: the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1962, the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, and the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966 all included requirements for regional transportation planning.³

Although a large-scale transportation authority for the Bay Area had been defeated, several other agencies had regional planning or regulatory responsibilities. In addition to the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, a Bay Area Transportation Study Commission (BATS

² Samuel P. Hays and Barbara D. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Adam Ward Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³ David K. Hamilton, *Governing Metropolitan Areas: Response to Growth and Change* (New York: Garland, 1999).

Commission) was created in 1963 to make policy recommendations and develop a regional transportation plan. The Bay Area Air Pollution Control District was created in 1955, and had significant authority to control emissions.⁴ A group of well-connected activists managed to win enough support in the state legislature for a temporary San Francisco Bay Consideration and Development Commission (BCDC) with some regulatory powers in 1965; the same year the San Francisco Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Program, also an independent agency, was charged with recommending a permanent regulatory body to take on the task of pollution control.⁵ In addition, there were numerous multi-county special districts that did not encompass the entire nine-county metropolitan area, including the East Bay Municipal Utility District, the East Bay Regional Park District, and the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District.

In 1966, Melvin B. Lane, chairman of the BCDC, addressed a letter on the subject of “governing the Bay Area” to the leaders of the other four area-wide agencies in existence at the time. Lane spelled out the enormity of the decision facing these agencies, whether to fight for their continued individual existence or to advocate for the creation of a centralized regional government:

Metropolitan government is already here—in the form of our agencies and others that serve sizeable parts of the Bay Area. The question is no longer whether there should be regional government in the Bay Area; the fact that several regional agencies exist has already answered that question. The real problem we face is this: what form should regional government take in the future.

The existing regional agencies, together with the Association of Bay Area Governments as a voluntary association of local governments, have served the people of the Bay Area well over the past several years. But the question remains as to whether this system of fragmented responsibility will be adequate in the coming years of intensive population growth in the Bay Area...⁶

⁴ Scott, *San Francisco Bay Area*, 297.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 314-17.

⁶ Melvin B. Lane to T. Louis Chess, President, Association of Bay Area Governments, Bay Area Pollution Control District; Adrien Falk, Chairman, Bay Area Rapid Transit District; Nils Eklund, Chairman, Bay Area Transportation Study Commission; Grant Burton, Chairman, Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, April 13, 1966, vol. 4, ABAG Materials.

Lane rightly assumed that the public corporations of the Bay Area could play a crucial role in the impending regional power struggle. There was strong support for more authoritative, comprehensive planning and coordination. However, a new growth control movement, an increasingly powerful coalition of environmentalists, conservationists, and neighborhood activists opposing continued development, began to question the motivations behind efforts to establish regional government. By the end of the 1960s, regional politics had reached a turning point, and it was evident that the structure and institutional forms that were adopted at that time would determine the future of Bay Area government. Though the bridge district was only a minor player in the titanic political struggle that was taking shape, its survival as an agency depended on the outcome. Bridge district representatives were able to secure its future by forging new alliances, and by taking on new functions that were crucial to the regional governmental system that ultimately prevailed. By the end of the decade, the fate of Bay Area government had been decided in favor of a decentralized network of limited-purpose special agencies, including a permanent role for a newly reorganized and even more powerful Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District.

Responses to Growth in the Bay Area

Ongoing efforts to initiate some sort of regional planning in the San Francisco Bay Area had their roots in the dramatic growth following World War II. Rapid metropolitan area development, while welcomed and celebrated at first, was expected to continue relentlessly for decades to come. Making provisions for its accommodation and for mitigating its side effects would clearly require unprecedented governmental coordination and a massive commitment of public resources. New transportation infrastructure would ensure that the framework to

support future development would be in place as it occurred. However, battles over regional planning reflected conflict over the desirable future of the Bay Area.

The population of the Bay Area as was booming, even by the standards of a region that had been growing rapidly since the Gold Rush. Most of the increase occurred in small cities or unincorporated areas, compounding its impact, particularly on the region's transportation system.⁷ The total urbanized land in the Bay Area grew steadily and population density dropped—in other words, development in the region after World War II was primarily suburban, facilitated by private automobiles.⁸ The South Bay, particularly Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, experienced the fastest growth in the decade of the 1950s, but the North Bay was not far behind. Marin ranked third among the nine Bay Area counties. Marin's total population increased by nearly seventy percent, going from 87,700 residents in 1950 to 148,800 in 1960; Marin and Sonoma together added more than 100,000 new residents. By 1963, forty percent of Marin's workers were commuting out of the county.⁹ Paralleling these numbers, by the 1950s traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge had increased beyond even the most optimistic predictions of its original promoters. The 9.4 million crossings of 1950 was nearly double the annual total that financial planners had projected in 1930, and traffic continued to increase steadily, by around seven percent annually, throughout the 1960s.¹⁰

There was broad agreement that even more traffic was on the horizon. Two major studies predicted staggering growth and intensive development. As part of its initial effort for

⁷ Walter P. Hollmann, "The Metropolitan Picture in California to 1980" (paper presented at the Conference of the the Governor's Metropolitan Commission [Sacramento], 1959), 7.

⁸ Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, *Bay Area Transportation Report* (Berkeley: Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, 1969), 10.

⁹ Richard M. Zettel, *Urban Transportation in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies University of California, 1963), 14.

¹⁰ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report of the Chief Engineer with Architectural Studies* by Joseph B. Struass, vol. 3, *The Golden Gate Bridge at San Francisco California* vol. 3 (San Francisco, 1930); Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Statistical Report on Traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge and Approaches* by Arthur C. Jenkins and Robert L. Davidson (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1965).

approval of a rapid transit system, the Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission undertook a comprehensive study of the land use and development possibilities facing the region in 1956. In 1959, Army Corps of Engineers released a report with detailed population and land use projections by the United States Department of Commerce. Both studies predicted that rapid growth would continue in the Bay Area, particularly in its suburban areas, and both asserted that the construction of new transportation infrastructure was necessary and urgent.

The BART Commission study presented high and low projections for the Bay area through 1990, estimating that the Bay Area would add from two to four million people in thirty years going from approximately 3 million in 1954 to between 4.8 and 7 million in 1990. Their report projected that Marin and Sonoma Counties, both with populations of just over 100,000 at the time, would double or triple in size.¹¹

¹¹ It should be kept in mind that this report was intended, in part, to reassure lawmakers that the BART system was financially feasible and its future revenues depended on the assumption that its construction would stimulate the development of new population centers around its stations. San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission, *Regional Rapid Transit* prepared by Brinckerhoff, Parsons, Hall, and McDonald (San Francisco: San Francisco Bay Area Regional Rapid Transit Commission, 1956), 18.

Table 7.1: Summary of Population Projections for San Francisco Bay Area: 1960, 1990, 2020. Figures in Thousands.

	1960	1990	2020
Bay Area total	3,752	7,425	14,410
San Francisco	793	938	1,018
South Bay counties	2,448	5,099	9,674
Alameda	954	1,673	2,854
Contra Costa	396	961	2,140
San Mateo	441	933	1,749
Santa Clara	657	1,532	2,931
North Bay Counties	511	1,388	3,718
Marin	152	347	790
Napa	67	193	655
Solano	141	362	1,116
Sonoma	151	486	1,157

Source: Table reproduced from U. S. Department of Commerce, *Population Projections for the Nine-County San Francisco Bay Area* (1959).

Three years later, U. S. Department of Commerce statisticians reported that the growth in the Bay Area had followed the high BART projections. They forecast a period of even more growth, depicting a region about to undergo a wholesale transformation. The Army Corps of Engineers plan was predicated on the expectation that the population of the nine county Bay Area would nearly double by 1990 and double again in the thirty years after that, going from 3.8 million in 1960 to 14.4 million in 2020. The population of the North Bay, including the counties of Marin, Sonoma, and Napa, would grow by 172 percent, adding nearly a million new residents by 1990. Concurrently, the report predicted that agricultural acreage in the North Bay would decline and industrial land would increase. Most new development would be residential and commercial, starting in Marin and moving north:

Southern Marin County is most accessible to the Bay Area's economic core. Because of this, and its physical attractiveness, southern Marin has virtually become a dormitory for San Francisco. If local interests are successful in their purpose, the present character of development will be maintained indefinitely...

Significant future growth of Marin, Napa, and Sonoma Counties is most likely to be concentrated in the southern portions bordering the Bay. For a considerable part of the study period, the character of this growth is likely to be predominantly, but not exclusively, suburban. As the southern reaches of Marin County and the northern East Bay residential areas become more crowded, the Bay Area's expanding population will find the lower portions of Sonoma and Napa Counties increasingly attractive for residential development.¹²

Major highways provided the "skeleton" for determining the location and timing of development in the plan.¹³ The plan did not include any specific provisions for mass transit but it did assume new bay crossings and the realization of all state freeway plans. In short, the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Army Corps of Engineers expected that the counties north of the Golden Gate would swell with automobile commuters. Through the end of the 1960s, these projections were generally accurate, and urgent calls for metropolitan government and regional planning were based upon them. But the consequences of development undermined the assumptions and policies that facilitated it, generating a political backlash.

Of course, the relationship between transportation infrastructure and development was a two-way street. The land use patterns predicted for the Bay Area in the 1950s depended upon new transportation infrastructure to accommodate automobiles. And until 1959, transportation policy clearly supported these predictions; state and federal plans for road and freeway construction in the area were backed by ample funding, and there was little reason to doubt that they would be realized. California had long been a leader in the nation-wide drive to accommodate the automobile, and state engineers had been actively promoting urban freeways since the 1930s. In 1947, the Collier-Burns Act provided funding specifically earmarked for road construction by the state with one of the earliest gas taxes in the United States, and included a special commitment to construction in the San Francisco and Los

¹² United States Department of Commerce, *Future Development of the San Francisco Bay Area 1960-2020* (San Francisco, 1959), 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, D-2, Plate 1.

Angeles areas.¹⁴ In 1956, Congress passed the federal Interstate and Defense Highway Act and appropriated \$27.8 billion dollars to establish a Highway Trust Fund, infusing local and state construction programs with cash.¹⁵ California's politicians and public works officials were poised to tap into federal subsidies; existing plans were consolidated in a highly ambitious, comprehensive statewide program, the *California Freeway and Expressway Plan*, which was officially adopted by the legislature in 1959.¹⁶ The state plan was a landmark in planning for growth in California, and it made urban areas the focal points of construction; it included an entirely new freeway system to open the Pacific coastline of Marin for recreation and development. In the five years after the creation of the federal interstate program, spending on freeways in the state more than doubled.¹⁷ Another major boost for Bay Area growth was also expected from BART. And, the prospects were still good for the Golden Gate Authority, designed to mobilize the region's resources to expand transportation infrastructure. Other initiatives, including a new bay crossing south of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and a second crossing from San Francisco to Marin via Angel Island, were "in the pipeline," according to state engineers, their funding secure and their planning underway.¹⁸

However, these plans for transportation infrastructure were increasingly at odds with local politics. Two decades of rapid growth took a toll on the environment and on standards of living, and a critical reaction against it started at the grassroots level. Bay Area transportation reached a watershed in 1959, when this backlash was clearly expressed in San Francisco. In

¹⁴ David W. Jones, *California's Freeway Era in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: Institute of Transportation Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1989).

¹⁵ For discussions of the federal freeway program, see Tom Lewis, *Divided Highways: Building the Interstate Highways, Transforming American Life* (New York: Viking, 1997); Mark H. Rose, *Interstate: Express Highway Politics, 1939-1989*, Rev. ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

¹⁶ California Department of Public Works Division of Highways, *The California Freeway System: A Report to the Joint Interim Committee on Highway Problems of the California Legislature* (Sacramento, 1958).

¹⁷ Jones, *California's Freeway Era in Historical Perspective*, 240-41.

¹⁸ California Department of Public Works Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *A Preliminary Report to Department of Public Works on a San Francisco - Tiburon Crossing of San Francisco Bay* (Sacramento, 1957).

California, state agencies could not simply ignore local governments and proceed with construction; any road closing had to be approved by local authorities.¹⁹ The San Francisco Supervisors put a sudden halt to the construction of freeways in the city in the famous “freeway revolt.” With a unanimous vote, the leaders of San Francisco declared it the official policy to oppose all new freeway construction, including federally-funded interstate projects already underway.²⁰ With less fanfare, local dissent halted other Bay Area transportation projects as well. Opposition to the construction of second Marin-San Francisco crossing stopped state efforts to build it in 1957 and again in 1961. Public protest also prevented the construction of two east-west freeway routes that were planned for Marin and a major expansion of the Shoreline Highway along its Pacific coast. In Napa County, local activists determined to protect the county’s agricultural land from suburbanization blocked a new freeway through the agricultural Napa Valley. Dissent in Santa Clara County resulted in the county’s exclusion from BART in its planning stages. In San Mateo County, local opposition stopped three planned freeways. These incidents heralded the emergence of what would become an incredibly powerful regional political coalition made up of environmentalists, conservationists, and growth control advocates.²¹

A political transformation was taking place in the Bay Area, reflected in public protest against the construction of new transportation infrastructure and the debate on comprehensive regional government and planning. In the 1950s and 60s, the reality of rapid growth and the

¹⁹ Zettel, *Urban Transportation in the San Francisco Bay Area*, 34.

²⁰ See William Issel, “‘Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City’s Treasured Appearance’: Environmentalism, Politics, and the San Francisco Freeway Revolt,” *Pacific Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (1999), 611-646; Jones, *California’s Freeway Era*.

²¹ L. Martin Griffin, M.D., *Saving the Marin-Sonoma Coast: The Battles for Audubon Canyon Ranch, Point Reyes, and California’s Russian River* (Healdsburg, CA: Sweetwater Springs Press, 1998); Issel, “‘Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City’s Treasured Appearance’”; Stephanie Sabine Pincetl, *Transforming California: A Political History of Land Use and Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Richard Walker, *The Country in the City: Urban Environmentalism in the San Francisco Bay Area* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

expectation for more in the future was a central public concern. However, there was increasing disagreement on what the goals of regional government should be, who should be represented, and how it should function. Growth control advocates quickly recognized that planning could serve their goals as easily as it could serve those of industry and business. By the mid-1960s there was widespread interest the future of regional planning in the Bay Area and general recognition that a major and fateful decision was imminent.²²

By 1960 there were three Bay Area political camps on the issue of regional planning and government, and the divisions between them grew as debate intensified. Traditional advocates of growth included the region's major business and civic associations, chambers of commerce and downtown associations, as well as organized labor and industry, represented at the most elite level by the Bay Area Council (BAC). These interest groups wanted to plan to accommodate and encourage development, either through a powerful regional transportation agency or through some other multi-purpose organization. Their agenda was, for the most part, supported by the region's state and federal representatives, including McCarthy and the political establishment in Sacramento. They believed that continued growth was not only inevitable, but it was also desirable and necessary for the prosperity of the region. In 1959 the state office of planning was created within the department of finance to advise and coordinate state-level and local planning efforts, charged with dividing the state into regional planning

²² Stan McCaffrey, president of the Bay Area Council remarked in 1967: "it is certain that there has been more discussion of regional government months than in all previous years in the Bay Area. It has not only been actively considered by ABAG... but has been the subject of widespread discussion by the Commonwealth Club of California, the League of Women Voters, the Bay Area Council, on television and radio, in newspaper articles, as well as in countless speeches and other forms of public discussion." San Francisco Bay Area Council, *Review of Background Developments and Present Status of Consideration of Governing Regional Problems in the San Francisco Bay Area* by Stan McCaffrey (San Francisco: San Francisco Bay Area Council, 1967). Another contemporary analysis of the issue: Stanley Scott and Willis D. Hawley, "Organizing to Solve Regional Problems in the San Francisco Bay Area," *Public Affairs Report* 9, no. 2 (1968).

districts and developing a comprehensive plan.²³ Governor Pat Brown, a strong and outspoken proponent of development, growth, and planning, appointed the Governor's Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems to make recommendations on transportation infrastructure, housing, pollution, and local governmental structure.²⁴ He also appointed an elite, industry-led Coordinating Council on Urban Problems to develop specific recommendations for planning legislation.²⁵ The commission held a series of conferences to discuss the implications of rapid growth and strategies for regional governance, ultimately coming to a consensus on the need for an agency to coordinate local governments in metropolitan areas.²⁶ The commission issued this recommendation in 1961, just as a proposal for a "Bay Area Regional Planning District," developed by the Bay Area Federation of Planning Councils and backed by the BAC, was gaining support in the state legislature.²⁷

ABAG represented the second major Bay Area faction on the issue of regional planning, as the flagship organization of a home rule coalition including cities and counties as well as a growing number of special districts and other local governmental agencies interested in maintaining their autonomy and independence. When the question of a regional planning district came under serious consideration, ABAG moved to preempt it, voting in 1962 to "undertake the responsibility of advisory regional planning" themselves.²⁸ Of course, the emphasis for ABAG was always on the "advisory" quality of its action. Over time, ABAG developed close working relationships with the BCDC, the Air Pollution Control Board, the

²³ League of Women Voters of San Francisco, *Resource Material on Bay Area Problems* (San Francisco: League of Women Voters, 1960).

²⁴ Governor's Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems, *Purposes and Responsibilities* (Sacramento, 1959).

²⁵ Pincetl, *Transforming California*, 140-42.

²⁶ Governor's Commission on Metropolitan Area Problems, *Meeting Metropolitan Problems* (Sacramento, 1960).

²⁷ Bay Area Federation of Planning Councils, *Regional Planning for the Bay Area: Proposed Regional Planning District Legislation* (San Francisco: Bay Area Federation of Planning Councils, 1960); T. J. Kent "Regional Planning and Metropolitan Government Proposals for the San Francisco Bay Area" (paper presented at the National Convention of the American Institute of Planners, Seattle, July, 1959), 6-13.

²⁸ Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area*, 314.

East Bay Regional Parks District, as well as the bridge district. ABAG represented the local interests that successfully defeated the Golden Gate Authority, and the same interests hoped to minimize the impositions of regional planning by maintaining control over it.

Also opposing the efforts of the pro-growth establishment was the emerging growth-control movement, made up of a wide variety grassroots organizations and local activists. This movement was the force behind the 1959 San Francisco freeway revolt, which left in its wake an enduring network of activists, various neighborhood associations, and a secure growth- and traffic-control majority on the board of supervisors. It included influential park and open space advocates, whose accomplishments included the establishment of the Pt. Reyes National Seashore in 1962 and a major expansion of parkland in the East Bay. Citizens for Regional Recreation and Parks, established in 1958 (renamed People for Open Space and later the Greenbelt Alliance) was involved in the development of the ABAG regional plan as well as other local planning and zoning measures, and was particularly influential in preserving open space in Marin County. With similar goals for San Francisco and San Mateo Counties, the Committee for Green Foothills on the Peninsula was formed.²⁹ The Save the Bay Association, an alliance of well-connected citizens, devoted themselves to stopping the loss of wetlands and the filling of the bay, assisted by the Marin chapter of the Audubon Society, created in 1959. These and other newly-minted organizations joined forces with more venerable organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the Sierra Club in agitating for environmental regulations, planning, and growth controls, not only to rein in growth and establish guidelines for new development, but also to focus attention on repairing some of the damage that had already been caused to the region's environment and landscape. Increasingly, these values were adopted by the governmental institutions and local officials of the Bay Area. In Marin, a

²⁹ Walker, *Country in the City*.

long struggle for control over planning and development policy resulted in the decisive victory of conservationism and growth control in the county, which by the end of the 1960s had displaced McCarthy and the longstanding pro-growth establishment in the county. San Francisco's planning department and board of supervisors were both committed to controlling traffic and staving off freeways throughout the decade. This coalition won several important legislative victories at the state level in the 1960s, including the creation of the Bay Area Conservation and Development Commission to plan for, control and regulate development along the shores of the bay in 1965, and the passage of the Williamson Act to preserve farmland threatened by development the same year.³⁰

Unlike ABAG, which was interested planning only to prevent the imposition of strict regulations on localities, growth-control advocates generally looked to planning with great interest and hope. T.J. Kent, Jr., one of the founders of the Department of City and Regional planning at the University of California, Berkeley, was a leader of the conservation movement and had a strong faith in planning's potential to counter the negative aspects of rapid growth and development.³¹ He expressed the fears of these multifarious organizations and individuals when confronting development in 1963:

Without a regional plan, the so-called "natural" forces of economic development will overwhelm the best efforts of local governments to control them... Speculative land development forces now operate on a metropolitanwide basis. They are commanded by men of great enterprise and ability. These men—the builders and doers of today—will wipe out the vineyards of the upper Napa Valley and fill it with suburban tracts; they will overrun the Livermore Valley; they will mop up Stinson Beach, Bolinas, and the Olema Valley. They will spread to the northeast, beyond Vallejo and Fairfield

³⁰ Griffin, *Saving the Marin-Sonoma Coast*; Issel, "Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City's Treasured Appearance"; Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: Metropolis in Perspective*, 310-37; Charles Wollenberg, *Golden Gate Metropolis: Perspective on Bay Area History* (Berkeley: Institute of Government Studies, 1985).

³¹ Kent was one of the founders of People for Open Space, and a primary advocates for the BCDC. He worked as a planner both in Marin and in San Francisco in the 1940s, and in the 1960s he served on the Berkeley City Council. He also helped organize ABAG in 1961. Walker, *Country in the City*.

toward Sacramento; to the south, below San Jose to Hollister; and to the west, beyond Santa Rosa to Sebastopol and the Pacific Ocean.

Industry will follow the suburban flood. Freeways will precede the initial wave of surging growth, and more freeways will follow. Predictably inadequate bridges for trucks and automobiles will be constructed crisscrossing the Bay... Bay tidelands will be filled. The central districts of San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose will become inaccessible, and will decay.³²

Kent viewed transportation infrastructure as the forerunner of destructive development. Kent worked to establish an alliance between ABAG and Bay Area growth control advocates, hoping that ABAG could not only prevent the realization of some of the planning efforts designed to encourage growth, but also to adapt regional planning to serve growth control and environmentalist goals at a local level.³³ It was an unlikely partnership, between largely conservative home rule defenders and sometimes radical environmentalist activists. The primary purpose of ABAG, at least during its early years, was to defend local autonomy against state and regional oversight and regulations, not to promote any new regional planning goals. However, they faced of a well-defined common enemy: the pro-development establishment, manifested in the BAC. Their alliance would require a transformation in the political assumptions of the members of ABAG, most of whom were still stalwart supporters of growth and development in the early 1960s, even though they opposed regional government to coordinate it.

Although it was not until late in the decade that ABAG and the growth control coalition actually joined forces, nevertheless pro-growth regional planning advocates suffered a series of defeats, starting with the Golden Gate Authority or Transportation Commission. They also began to run into delays caused by environmentalist opposition to new development. In 1963 a bill to create a state commission to oversee and encourage comprehensive

³² T.J. Kent, Jr., *City and Regional Planning for the Metropolitan San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, 1963), 1-2.

³³ *Ibid.*

metropolitan area planning was narrowly defeated. Instead, the Knox-Nisbet Act, a rival proposal supported by ABAG for very limited planning and governmental coordination at the county level, became law. The act required each individual county to develop and adopt comprehensive plans, and it left the substance and enforcement of these plans to localities. County-level Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs) were established to coordinate local governmental policies with regard to annexation, incorporation, and special district formation. While the Knox-Nisbet Act was a step toward governmental coordination, this measure was a far cry from regional planning.³⁴ Supporters of a regional planning agency were dealt another blow when ABAG won critical federal sanction in 1962, designated as the agency responsible for review of grant applications by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.³⁵ Now eligible for federal planning subsidies, ABAG began work on its own regional plan, releasing a preliminary draft in 1966.³⁶ In addition, two new Bay Area agencies were established on a temporary basis in 1965 to develop plans to deal with specific regional problems, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and the San Francisco Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Board. Both initiatives were intended to regulate development and control its side-effects, but both were seen as potential obstacles to the creation of multipurpose metropolitan government. While the BAC and its allies still hoped for comprehensive regional government, the needs that it would meet were quickly being addressed on a piecemeal basis through agencies with limited authority and jurisdiction.

³⁴ Pincetl, *Transforming California*, 141-42.

³⁵ Association of Bay Area Governments, *The Emergence of a Regional Concept (1910-1973)* ([Berkeley]: Association of Bay Area Governments, 1973); Ora Huth, "Regional Organization in the San Francisco Bay Area—1970" (paper presented at the Regional Conference—1970, Berkeley, 1970).

³⁶ Association of Bay Area Governments, *Preliminary Regional Plan* (Berkeley: Association of Bay Area Governments, 1966).

However, pro-growth regional planning did win a few limited victories in the early 1960s. The one project that garnered the support of environmentalists as well as growth advocates, regional rapid transit, won a resounding endorsement at the polls in 1962 when Alameda, San Francisco, and Contra Costa county voters approved BART construction bonds with a large majority. The temporary BATS Commission, created in part to fulfill the planning requirements of the recent Federal-Aid Highway Act, also represented a limited victory for pro-growth planning; it was an opportunity to restart efforts for Bay Area bridge and freeway construction that had been put on hold by local opposition and the failure of the Golden Gate Authority. The thirty-seven member commission was comprised of appointees of the governor and representatives of Bay Area counties and cities, and was structured to facilitate the participation of a broad range of governmental agencies and organizations, including civic associations and private interest groups. The legislature left the question of the funding to the agency itself, failing to make any significant appropriations for its study. Fortunately for the effort, the federal Urban Mass Transportation Act (UMTA) introduced requirements for “a continuing comprehensive transportation planning process carried on cooperatively by states and local communities,” and provided funding for regional transportation planning. In order to meet the requirements of the Urban Mass Transportation Act, the BATS Commission entered into a formal working agreement with ABAG and the state department of public works, forging a coalition that bolstered its authority and the credibility of its planning efforts.³⁷ The BATS prospectus suggested that a clear and compelling regional transportation plan was the key to winning back public support:

Lack of such a plan is reflected in lack of general public acceptance of the disruption necessary to develop individual components of the new system—freeways, rail transit,

³⁷ Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, *Progress Report* (Berkeley, CA: Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, 1965).

new bridges, etc. Even the best planned and engineered systems cannot be undertaken without public understanding and confidence that both the construction inconveniences and the new patterns will be worthwhile.³⁸

It immediately undertook a comprehensive review of all existing economic and land use plans and studies, looking to the high growth projections of the 1956 BART Commission study as a starting point for transportation planning.³⁹

In addition to developing a transportation plan, the temporary BATS Commission was charged with recommending a means by which its regional plan could be refined and updated, and the function of transportation planning continued indefinitely. Some sort of permanent regional transportation agency was required, both in response to public pressure for planning and in order to fulfill federal requirements. But nagging questions remained unanswered: how would transportation planning relate to comprehensive regional planning? Could the BATS Commission and other regional special districts be successfully incorporated into a new multipurpose regional government, and was it even desirable? If it was, what form should it have? These questions, widely debated, made the future of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District uncertain.

The Golden Gate Corridor

The controversy surrounding Bay Area regional planning and transportation policy in the 1960s shaped the metamorphosis of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. Even as it joined ranks with ABAG to fight off any encroachment on its autonomy by pro-growth regional planning measures, the bridge district undertook a program to expand the capacity of the Golden Gate Corridor for private automobiles that would bring more traffic into San

³⁸ Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, *Prospectus for a San Francisco Bay Area Transportation Study* (Sacramento: California Department of Public Works, 1962), 6.

³⁹ Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, *Bay Area Transportation Report* (Berkeley, CA: Bay Area Transportation Study Commission, 1969).

Francisco and encourage continued growth in Marin County and the North Bay. Responding to congestion and escalating threats to its institutional integrity, bridge district officials pursued two means of expanding the bridge's capacity and the agency's responsibilities: the construction of a new Golden Gate crossing and the addition of a second automobile deck to the bridge. Both projects faced stiff local opposition, but by the end of the decade the bridge district had a third strategy for ensuring its continued existence that would both alleviate some of the congestion on the bridge and win the approval of local conservationists: mass transportation. The expansion of bridge district operations and the agency's perpetuation were possible because of the outcome of the struggle over regional planning and government.

The Golden Gate Corridor "transportation problem" was of primary concern to the BATS Commission and a major policy battleground.⁴⁰ While traffic congestion was epidemic throughout the Bay Area, there was no relief in sight for the commuters of Marin. Growth in the North Bay continued to exceed expectations. Improvements to Highway 101 encouraged residential construction along its route. The income of North Bay residents was rising steadily, reinforcing their preference for automobiles over other modes of transportation. Since automobile ferries had stopped operation in 1941, mass transportation for the Golden Gate Corridor was provided almost exclusively by a few decrepit Greyhound buses that were steadily losing riders and money.⁴¹ The Golden Gate Bridge was clearly becoming an impediment to continued growth.

Congestion on the bridge was approaching a critical levels. In his 1959 *Long Range Planning Survey*, Arthur Jenkins noted that the capacity of the bridge was already being tested

⁴⁰ California Legislative Analyst, *The San Francisco-Marin County Transportation Corridor Problem* (Sacramento, 1967).

⁴¹ A commuter ferry made a single round-trip daily from Tiburon to San Francisco in the 1960s, under the operation of Harbor Carriers, Inc. California Department of Public Works Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *San Francisco-Marin Crossing* (Sacramento, 1967), 21.

with 17.5 million crossings annually. He recommended a \$10 million “modernization program” that involved updating the design of approaches, replacing obsolete toll facilities, and improving traffic safety and control devices and methods. Jenkins predicted that a series of small improvements could increase the capacity of the bridge by as much as twenty-five percent. But even with these changes, traffic on the bridge would reach its “maximum potential” of 25 million crossings per year by 1970.⁴² The bridge district took action. In 1962 it adopted a system to allow the direction of the bridge’s central lane to be reversed to accommodate lopsided rush hour traffic.⁴³ New toll collection facilities also improved efficiency, and the bridge district considered an experimental one-way toll system.⁴⁴ The bridge district worked closely with the embattled state Division of Highways to widen approaches, and succeeded in winning a second Waldo tunnel.

Obviously, these measures were of limited value, and concern about Golden Gate Corridor traffic intensified. In the 1960s, traffic volumes rose much more quickly than Jenkins had predicted; Golden Gate Bridge annual crossings surpassed the 25 million mark in 1965, five years earlier than forecast. The traffic nightmare that Jenkins had foretold in 1959—endless delays and long hours of traffic saturation—was a reality. Jenkins described the situation in 1965:

⁴² Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Financial Analysis and Projection*, vol. 3, *Long Range Planning Survey* by Arthur C. Jenkins (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1959), 4-6.

⁴³ Rubber markers were used to reverse the lanes, a proposal for traffic arches rejected because of its cost and architectural impact on the bridge. *Independent Journal* March 12, 14, April 9, 1964; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Annual Report, 1962-63* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1963)

⁴⁴ Two way tolls were recommended by the state as early as 1960, but were viewed with skepticism by bridge district officials. Adam opposed one-way tolls, predicting in 1967 that “toll-free northbound traffic would cause traffic to merge at high speed beyond the toll plaza, and would endanger the movement of rescue vehicles... very little time, if any would be saved in passing cars through toll gates.” James Adam also worried that one-way tolls would encourage joy riders circling the bay without paying tolls; Jenkins dismissed them as not worth the effort. *Independent Journal* July 10, 1962; Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Bridge Board Upholds Deck Survey, 7-5,” October 13, 1967, box 126, DS Vault.

During the past five years the average increase in rush hour traffic has amounted to between 4 and 5 per cent per annum, and total traffic of between 5 and 6 per cent. Increases in rush hour traffic during the last year, however, have been on the order of 7 per cent. If the annual increase in rush hour traffic is computed on the basis of average increases... total southbound traffic in the morning and northbound traffic in the evening maximum rush hours would reach a grand total of 6,000 vehicles. This total is equal to and probably more than the practical capacity of four lanes in a single direction...⁴⁵

Traffic on the bridge was actually exceeding the estimated maximum practical capacity of the structure by mid-1966.⁴⁶ President Dan E. London made an unequivocal assertion in 1963: “We are confronted with a critical problem of increasing capacity... and there are only two ways of [addressing] it: The first is to build a second deck on the Bridge for light vehicles. The second is to build a new bridge.”⁴⁷ District officials dismissed the potential of mass transportation improvements to alleviate traffic pressures: “Relief of substantial magnitude can only come through major alteration of the bridge or radically changing the travel habits of people. The latter holds little promise.”⁴⁸

In seeking to ease congestion, the bridge district leaders were also fulfilling a more fundamental, institutional imperative: the survival of the district. The biggest problem facing the district by the mid-1960s was not its poor public relations, management problems, or even the tumult and uncertainty of Bay Area politics. It was not the threat of regional planning or government, or the increasingly powerful traffic- and growth-control movements. The biggest problem was the agency’s impending redundancy with the retirement of its bonds in 1971—it was survival that drove its policies in the 1960s.

⁴⁵ Arthur C. Jenkins, “Engineering Proposals for Second Deck on the Golden Gate Bridge,” September 23, 1966, box 205, DS Vault.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Dan E. London, “Remarks,” March 14, 1963, box 127, IM Facility.

⁴⁸ L. E. Castner, “Presentation to Bay Area Transportation Study Commission,” November 5, 1965, box 83, IM Facility.

In 1966, the possible termination of the bridge district came to the attention of the board of directors and the public at large. The *Chronicle* described an alarmed directorate confronted with the possibility of dissolution, and clamoring for a legal opinion on “whether the district lives or dies” after the retirement of its bonds: “Directors of the Golden Gate bridge district, debating a second deck, discovered yesterday that if they don’t spend more money on something by 1971 the district might be dissolved.”⁴⁹ McCarthy spelled out their dilemma in less flattering terms, accusing the bridge district of “empire building” in its efforts to build a second deck or a parallel crossing, motivated by the desire to “prevent the district from having enough money to pay off its obligations and go out of business. They will spend to survive.”⁵⁰ This imperative—the belief that the bridge district had to find some new obligation to ensure its perpetuation—made the steadily increasing traffic on the bridge something of a double-edged sword. The aging bridge needed expensive repairs and maintenance; some of its physical components were approaching obsolescence. Rush hour was getting longer, frustrating Marin commuters who were always the bridge district’s most vociferous critics. But the traffic crisis on the bridge was also important as a rhetorical weapon, evidence for the urgent need to expand the operations of the bridge district and to undertake new construction projects, regardless of the unpopularity of the institution and its questionable administration. The traffic crisis presented a solution for the bridge district’s impending redundancy, a reason to expand its operations.

Bridge district proposals for a second deck and for a second Marin-San Francisco crossing were both detailed in 1958 in the *Long Range Planning Survey*, a primary goal of

⁴⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 8, 1966.

⁵⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 26, 1966.

which was the “preservation of the district’s financial integrity.”⁵¹ Suggestions that the bridge district might undertake the construction of a second crossing were, from the beginning, intended to prevent direct competition by the state. Marin County representatives had been agitating for a second crossing from San Francisco to Marin since the 1940s. A new San Francisco-Marin bridge via Angel Island seemed likely; the state legislature appropriated \$50,000 for the first engineering study in 1955.⁵² Jenkins predicted that the competition for tolls posed by an Angel Island bridge would be a financial disaster for the district:

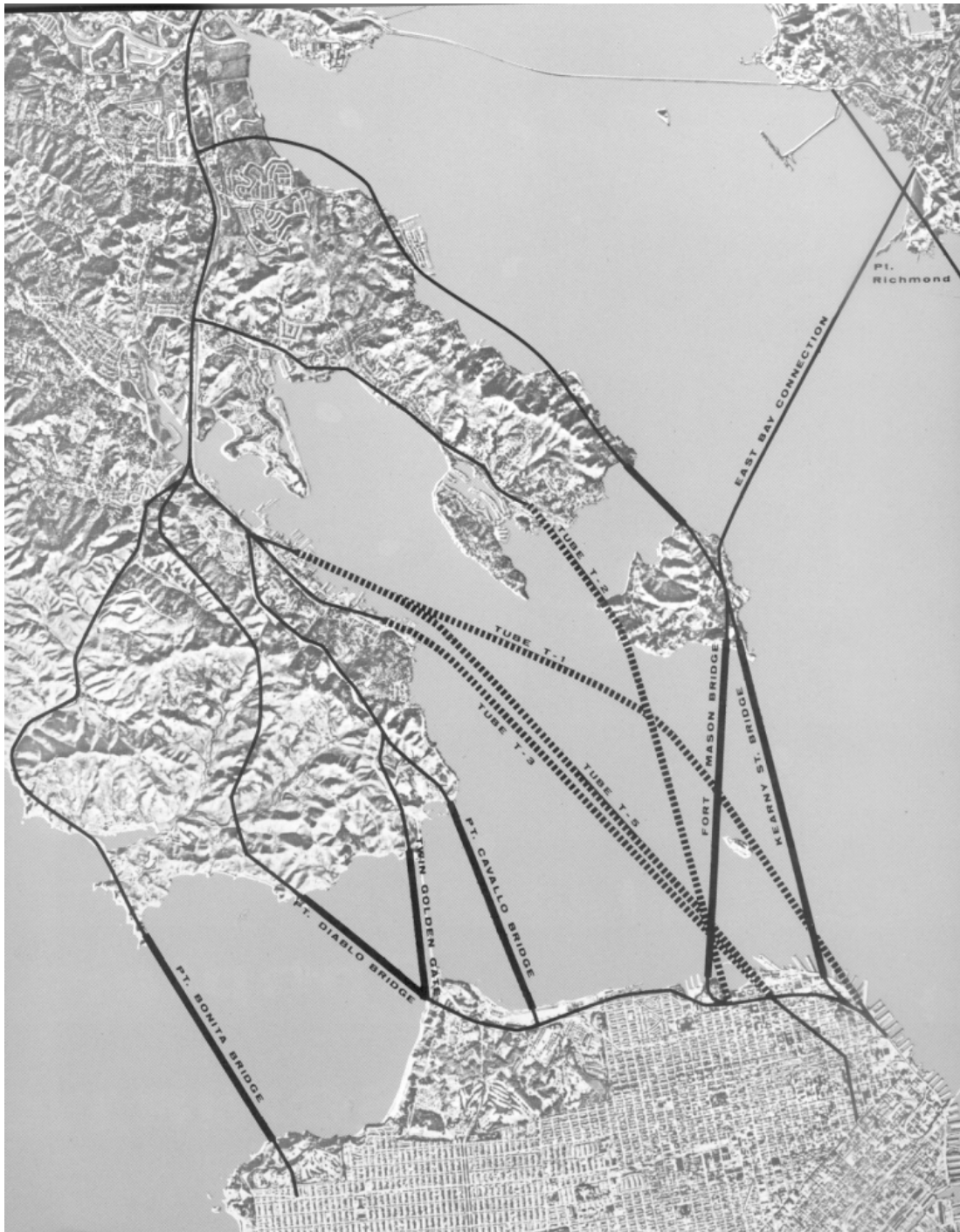
If such a bridge is built, it will result in a division of traffic between the Golden Gate Bridge and the new structure. This would have two effects: one, to reduce the annual revenue of the Golden Gate Bridge if tolls were equal; and the other would be to militate against successful financing of the new bridge if its toll rates are set at a higher level than those on the present bridge in order to amortize the new investment. There would be an economic conflict of serious magnitude affecting both bridges.⁵³

The best solution, Jenkins argued, would be to delay the “necessity” of a new crossing (the assumption at that time being that eventually traffic pressures would “force” public officials to build) by accommodating more traffic on the existing bridge through the development of a mass transit system or the construction of a second deck, and if that is not enough, for the bridge district to build the second bridge itself.

⁵¹ Arthur C. Jenkins, “Outline of Elements Recommended for Inclusion in a Long-Range Planning Program,” January 16, 1956.

⁵² California Department of Public Works Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *Preliminary Report to Department of Public Works on a San Francisco - Tiburon Crossing of San Francisco Bay* (Sacramento, 1957).

⁵³ Jenkins, “Outline of Elements,” 5.



Map 7.1: This map, developed by the Department of Public Works in conjunction with the BATS Commission, illustrates the major plans considered for bridges, transit tubes, and vehicular tubes in the Golden Gate Corridor up to 1967. California Department of Public Works, Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *San Francisco-Marin Crossings* (San Francisco: 1967).

In 1956, the design and location of an Angel Island span won federal approval.⁵⁴ Jack McCarthy, a member of the senate transportation committee, was the project's primary backer. Immediately, there was an outpouring of public vitriol against the proposal. No one wanted a bridge to cut through their neighborhood, and on both sides of the bay—the Marina District in San Francisco and the wealthy inhabitants of the Tiburon peninsula in Marin—influential residents fought the proposal, staging protests and organizing committees and action groups. The editors of the *Chronicle*, spearheading the movement to stop freeway construction in San Francisco, also opposed a second crossing with a series of highly critical editorials.⁵⁵ Tiburon residents also supported a plan to make Angel Island a state park, anticipating tourism revenue from the project.⁵⁶ Arguing that a bridge landing would ruin the Island's potential for recreational use, the state Department of Parks and Recreation added its opposition to the bridge.⁵⁷ McCarthy, as always a stalwart promoter of growth, risked his popularity with the residents of southern Marin by backing the bridge.⁵⁸ Despite his efforts, funding for the span was rescinded. In 1961 new plans were developed by the state for an Angel Island span with revised landings (avoiding existing residential areas in Marin), but opposition was just as bitter and vehement, and once again the project was abandoned.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *San Francisco-Marin Crossing*, 23.

⁵⁵ The San Francisco planning commission officially opposed the span, the residents of the Tiburon were adamantly against it, and of course the San Francisco Board of Supervisors protested. The state parks department objected to the use of Angle Island as a landing.

⁵⁶ *Independent Journal* October 8, 1966.

⁵⁷ Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *San Francisco-Marin Crossing*, 109.

⁵⁸ E.g. *Independent Journal* January 5, 1968.

⁵⁹ California Department of Public Works Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *A Progress Report to Department of Public Works on a San Francisco-Marin crossing of San Francisco Bay* (Sacramento: Department of Public Works, 1962).



Figure 7.1: *San Francisco Chronicle* September 25, 1961.

Despite overwhelming Bay Area opposition, support for the construction of a new bridge persisted in Sacramento. In 1965, there was a face-off over yet another San Francisco-Marin bridge study. Two bills were introduced to continue the effort for an Angel Island bridge. One provided funding for a “full study of the San Francisco-Marin traffic problem,” specifically including the “feasibility of rapid transit,” by the Department of Public Works; another bill, introduced just a few days later by Senator Randolph Collier and co-authored by McCarthy would have made the project entirely the responsibility of the bridge district.⁶⁰ McCarthy’s desire to make Golden Gate Bridge tolls available for new transportation infrastructure briefly overrode his aversion to bridge district administration. The measure allowed the bridge district to issue new bonds for the purpose without a public referendum. Although the latter bill was conceived and drafted by bridge district officials in collaboration with the Redwood Empire Association, it only won the approval of the directors by two

⁶⁰ S.B. 905 1965 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.)

votes—an indication of shifting sentiments among them on the question of traffic control and the desirability of expanding the capacity of the Golden Gate corridor. The only San Francisco director to vote for the bill was William Hadelor, the most senior member of the board and staunch supporter of Adam; the remaining six opposed it.⁶¹ The legislature passed both bills (there was considerable support for the bridge district proposal because of the promise that the project would be subsidized by the tolls of the existing structure) but Governor Brown rejected the idea of assigning responsibility to the bridge district, ultimately vetoing Collier’s bill. The *Examiner* accused Collier and bridge district officials of “devious tactics,” remarking that they “have been caught once again trying to expand their limited domain into a perpetual empire.”⁶²

Although its overture to take over the construction of a second crossing was rebuffed, bridge district representatives had little reason to fear a new state-controlled bridge. Soon after the third state study began, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors again rejected freeway plans for the city, including a revised proposal for a Golden Gate freeway that was to be the primary route from the bridge to downtown San Francisco as well as the destination for traffic coming from Marin across the Angel Island span.⁶³ Without this connecting freeway, the idea of a new bridge dumping traffic directly onto the crowded streets of downtown San Francisco was ludicrous.⁶⁴ Accordingly, the third state report on a second San Francisco-Marin crossing, released in May 1967, deemphasized plans for a bridge. Instead, state engineers recommended a two phase approach to expanding traffic capacity between San Francisco and Marin, starting

⁶¹ Hadelor was appointed as a director in 1935. *Independent Journal* September 25, 1964, April 24, May 1, 1965. Senate Bill 905 was introduced March 31, 1965.

⁶² *San Francisco Examiner* June 14, 1965.

⁶³ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 22, 29, 1966.

⁶⁴ Issel, ““Land Values, Human Values, and the Preservation of the City’s Treasured Appearance.””

with a second deck and improved approaches for the Golden Gate Bridge and a new “bus rapid transit system” with dedicated lanes.⁶⁵

The 1967 state report was both an acknowledgement of the enormous obstacles to any new Golden Gate corridor crossing and a major endorsement of the bridge district’s second decking plans, which were already well defined. Initiated by Jenkins in 1959, the bridge district approved an engineering feasibility study for a second traffic deck, right on the heels of the decision against allowing BART trains on the bridge.⁶⁶ James Adam described the investigation as a direct “outgrowth of the inability of the Bridge to accommodate rail rapid transit lines.”⁶⁷ For a number of reasons, a second deck was more attractive and more pragmatic than the construction of a second crossing. Obviously, a second deck was less expensive, but it was still expensive enough to require new bonds and ensure the need for continued tolls. Building a new bridge would mean wresting control of the project from the state, which was untenable politically due to the unpopularity of the district. The district’s enabling legislation clearly provided the authority to undertake the second deck but not a new bridge. Most importantly, bridge district lawyers held that the second deck could be financed as an improvement to the existing bridge; a private loan to fund it would not require a public vote or the approval of the legislature.⁶⁸

Avoiding the necessity of a public vote for a second deck on the Golden Gate Bridge was increasingly important—opposition to the project was growing steadily in both San

⁶⁵ Division of Bay Toll Crossings, *San Francisco-Marin Crossing*, 107-10.

⁶⁶ The study was undertaken by the New York engineering firm of Ammann and Whitney, whose engineers had been among the original designers of the bridge. O. H. Ammann was one of the three-member engineering review board that ultimately ruled against rapid transit on the bridge. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Feasibility of Installation of a Lower Deck for Automobile Traffic on Golden Gate Bridge* prepared by Ammann and Whitney (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1964); *Independent Journal* April 27, 1962; August 24, September 28, October 19, 1962.

⁶⁷ James Adam to Paul C. Zucker, April 12, 1967.

⁶⁸ Jerome B. White to Board of Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, December 21, 1965, box 127, IM Facility; Jerome B. White to James Adam, May 19, 1964, Collier Papers.

Francisco and Marin. Although the proposal was intended to help relieve traffic problems and to soften criticism of the bridge district's decision against rapid transit, it ultimately added to its public relations problems. McCarthy touched upon the main attractions—and the glaring flaws—of a new bridge or a second deck: “The board could perpetuate its [existence] and block progress for another 50 years if allowed to build and operate another bridge... And where would the cars go at each end of a double-decked Golden Gate Bridge?”⁶⁹ Similar denunciations followed: growth and infrastructure advocates including McCarthy, accused the bridge district of deliberately undermining state efforts for a second crossing with their proposals for new construction.⁷⁰ Somewhat ironically, they were joined in their opposition to a second deck by San Francisco's anti-traffic coalition and by Marin County's ascending growth control movement.

⁶⁹ *Independent Journal* May 1, 1962.

⁷⁰ *Independent Journal* October 11, 1962.



"Don't jump! Don't jump!"

Figure 7.2: The figure representing the Golden Gate Bridge directors is holding an umbrella labeled "second deck plan." *San Francisco Chronicle* September 14, 1966.

The engineering feasibility of the second deck was established to the satisfaction of bridge district officials and the majority of directors in 1964. Ammann and Whitney was commissioned to study possibility, and concluded that the construction of a four lane lower deck on the bridge would require "only moderate changes in the existing structure."⁷¹ They compared the added stress of a second deck to that anticipated from trains:

In the case of rapid transit on the lower deck the axial stress in the wire cables was calculated by the Board of Review to be 97,500 lbs. per sq. in., nearly 12,000 lbs. or 12% higher than what the Board considered to be a conservative limit for this traffic. For automobiles the maximum calculated stress is 91,500 lbs. or only one and one-half percent higher than the conservative limit laid down by the Board for vehicular traffic... The most critical stresses from rapid transit in the tower shafts exceed the

⁷¹ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Proposed Installation of Rapid Transit Trains on Golden Gate Bridge* prepared by Othmar H. Ammann, Frank M. Masters, and Nathan M. Newmark (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1962).

permissible stresses by up to 14%, whereas those from automobiles are only 7% above the conservative permissible stresses.⁷²

They explained that the difference was analogous to “a group of elephants running full speed across the bridge” as opposed to a “group of gazelles.”⁷³ But the negative public response to the bridge district’s plans for a second deck—coinciding with the escalating scandals generated by its administrative and accounting practices—intensified. Undaunted by protest, in 1965 the board of directors made the construction of a second deck official policy by a vote of eleven to two.⁷⁴ Adam mobilized district resources behind the second deck, dedicating funds for lobbying, promoting the plan with fliers at the toll booths, issuing a call for support to all associates and employees, and soliciting endorsements from civic associations and local governments within the district.⁷⁵ The supervisors of all five of the northern counties endorsed the proposal at his urging, including Marin by a vote of three to two.

By June 1966, the bridge district had two preliminary plans: one submitted by Ammann and Whitney, another, unsolicited plan from Tudor Engineering Company of San Francisco, which had been a major contractor on the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge.⁷⁶ The plan approved by bridge district engineer Clifford Paine was that of Ammann and

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *Independent Journal* August 6, 1964; *San Francisco Chronicle* August 15, 1964.

⁷⁴ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, “Status of Current Planning for Design and Construction of a Second Deck of the Golden Gate Bridge”, October 27, 1966, box 82, IM Facility.

⁷⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* June 11, August 27, 1966; Arthur C. Jenkins to James Adam, September 6, 1964.

⁷⁶ Tudor Engineering Company, *Double-Decking Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, California: Preliminary Feasibility Report* (San Francisco: Tudor Engineering Company, 1966); James Adam to Board of Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, June 1, 1966; Milton Brumer to James Adam, April 1, 1966, box 19, IM Facility; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, “Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Re: Tudor Engineering Company Presentation of its Design Concept of adding a Second Deck to the Golden Gate Bridge,” March 24, 1966; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *A Report on a Study of: The Ammann & Whitney Report, August 1964 [and] the Tudor Engineering Company Report, March 1966; Relating to the Installation of a Lower Deck for Vehicular Traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge* by Clifford E. Paine (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1966).

Whitney.⁷⁷ Ammann and Whitney called for a relatively modest addition, a four-lane lower deck with limited clearance and vehicle weight restrictions and the elimination of one lane on the upper deck at a cost of approximately \$41.5 million. Tudor described a five-lane lower deck with the promise that it could be finished by 1971 for a total cost of \$35 million, fulfilling every wish of the bridge district. Their plan called for the replacement of existing upper roadway and sidewalks with steel grating to reduce weight. Amman and Whitney estimated that, with allowances for maintaining adequate traffic flow on the bridge during construction, the second deck could not reasonably be opened until 1981; Tudor promised theirs could be completed by 1970.

Amman and Whitney insisted that the Tudor proposal was “pie in the sky.” In addition, Paine wrote a report endorsing the Ammann and Whitney plan: “In view of the certainty that a new crossing will not be built for many years the writer feels that the urgency of the traffic situation justifies [the directors] in expending from the reserve strength of the bridge,” he wrote.⁷⁸ Apparently, his concerns about the additional weight of rails on the bridge did not apply in this situation. After examining the Ammann and Whitney plan, a local bridge engineer called it “so ridiculous that it actually defied my imagination... the second deck idea is not now being given an engineering evaluation, but a political evaluation.” He contended that adding a second deck to the bridge was feasible, even advantageous from an engineering perspective, but that the New York firm had submitted a “makeshift, jerrybuilt design... that is

⁷⁷ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Feasibility of Installation of a Lower Deck*; Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *A report on a study of: the Ammann & Whitney report, August 1964.*

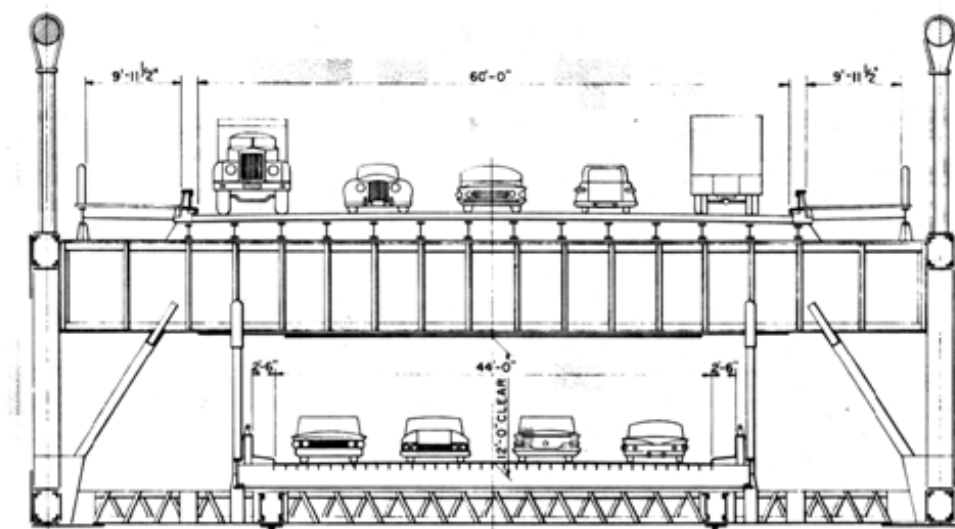
⁷⁸ Paine and Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *A report on a study of: the Ammann & Whitney report, August 1964; the Tudor Engineering Company report, March 1966; relating to the installation of a lower deck for vehicular traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge.*

absolutely the worst thing they could do.”⁷⁹ One of his main objections was that Ammann and Whitney did not include plans to reduce the weight of the existing roadbed.

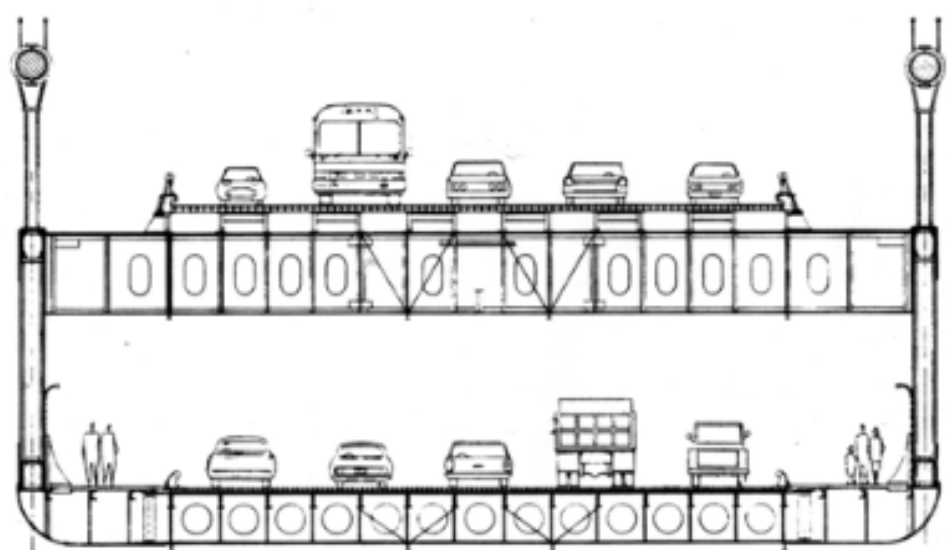
Somehow, Ammann and Whitney convinced the bridge directors that the extra \$6.5 million for their lower-capacity deck was worth it, and the Tudor plan was rejected. The Ammann and Whitney plan effectively eliminated the political advantages of the project for the bridge district in terms of congestion relief because of the long delay until the new lanes were opened. But the most important advantage of the project remained.⁸⁰ The district released financial estimates for the deck in October, announced plans to borrow the entire \$45 million needed for the project, despite the fact that district reserves at the time were approaching \$30 million, not including sinking funds. The district auditor estimated that, with modest fare increases, new debt for the second deck would take twenty-six years to repay.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ The desire of the bridge directors to take on more debt in order to stave off dissolution with the requirement of construction bonds was regularly noted in a matter-of-fact tone in press coverage of the second decking discussion. For example: “One aspect of the [second decking] problem is that if the district does not go further into debt by the time its construction bonds are all paid off in 1971, the Legislature could dissolve the district and made the bridge a toll-free State thoroughfare.” *San Francisco Chronicle* June 2, 1966.



AMMANN PLAN



TUDOR PLAN

Figures 7.3 and 7.4: Arthur Jenkins, "Engineering Proposals for Second Deck on the Golden Gate Bridge" (presented to the Redwood Empire Association, September 23, 1966), box 82, IM facility.

Despite the determination of bridge district leadership, a showdown on the second deck was imminent. Controversy and scandal had already eroded the loyalist majority on the board of directors. Senior Marin Director Matt Graham, a staunch supporter of Adam and the second deck, was voted out of his position in 1962 and replaced with Thomas Hardcastle, who favored bridge district dissolution and comprehensive regional government. San Francisco director Daniel F. Del Carlo, another consistent supporter of Adam, was replaced in 1962 after two decades at the bridge district.⁸¹ Dan London, a San Francisco director since 1952 was voted out in 1965, despite his efforts to garner support among the San Francisco Supervisors. In 1966, John Dearman, who expressed reservations about a second deck and explicitly supported the dissolution of the bridge district after the retirement of its bonds, took the seat of Joseph Diviny, a San Francisco labor leader who had been on the bridge board since 1950.⁸² Marin director Leland Murphy, who had been critical of district expenses in the 1950s but was a vocal defender of Adam, lobbying expenses, and second crossing plans by 1964, was replaced with former Marin county planning commissioner and growth control advocate, George Ludy.⁸³

Among the new appointees was San Francisco attorney Stephen C. Leonoudakis, who immediately became the most outspoken and critical of the directors, regularly voicing loud but lonely protests on policies and questioning the honesty and competence of its management. When the Ammann and Whitney report on a second deck was submitted to the board, Leonoudakis angrily pointed out that it was only slightly less burdensome than a deck for rails would have been. “If a second deck was wrong two years ago, then it’s wrong today,” he

⁸¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 8, 25, 1962.

⁸² *San Francisco Chronicle* December 20, 1968

⁸³ *Independent Journal* November 21, 1962, April 3, 1963, December 2, 1964; *San Francisco Chronicle* November 21, 28, 1962.

shouted to unresponsive colleagues.⁸⁴ Leonoudakis, with environmentalist convictions and a penchant for attracting attention, was clearly the voice for reform of the bridge district and the representative of the San Francisco traffic-control movement. He ignored pressure from Adam and the other directors. He was the vanguard of a new directorate, and would lead the transformation of bridge district policy.

The confrontation between the two factions finally took place in 1967 when the board of directors faced a critical vote on a second deck. Meeting in Santa Rosa, in the absence of three San Francisco directors, the board of directors voted to commission final engineering plans from Ammann and Whitney with a vote of ten to one.⁸⁵ A year before, when the first engineering study of a second deck created an uproar in San Francisco and alarmed its supervisors, district officials assured them that their approval would be sought and attained before any further action was taken.⁸⁶ The unexpected 1967 decision to pursue the project was a slap in the face to San Francisco. The *Chronicle* summed up the response in the city:

With their customary enthusiasm for any scheme that might prolong the life of their cozy little principality, directors of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District have almost unanimously to spend \$265,000 of accumulated toll revenues for an engineering and cost study of a second deck for their bridge.

San Francisco's supervisors are irritated at what they call the "typical headlong manner" in which the directors thus set out to augment the capacity of a bridge which is already carrying peak-hour traffic that overtakes and clogs its approaches at both ends.

"Maybe," says Supervisor Terry Francois, "they have plans for all the traffic a second deck would create—but we haven't."

...The Supervisors' annoyance was clearly intensified by the fact that the second deck resolution was introduced by a San Francisco director, Dan London, and had the support of two other San Francisco directors... The three favoring votes were cast despite a solemn promise made to the board a year ago that San Francisco's directors

⁸⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 15, 1964.

⁸⁵ The one dissenting vote came from Dearman, who protested that there was a "lack of communication" with San Francisco on the issue. *San Francisco Chronicle* July 29, 1967.

⁸⁶ [Arthur C. Jenkins] to Dan E. London, October 7, 1966, box 82, IM Facility; Redwood Empire Association, press release, "No Bridge Deck Without S.F. Supervisors' OKEH," July 28, 1966, box 126, IM Facility.

would not approve preliminary plans for a second deck until the Supervisors and city boards had been consulted and given their consent and advice.⁸⁷

Anger over the decision increased when a contract with Ammann and Whitney was signed despite protests from Dearman and Leonoudakis.⁸⁸ President John E. Nelson of Mendocino County commented: “maybe this... will cause the San Francisco Supervisors to quit playing politics, get off their duffs and get something done about freeway approaches.”⁸⁹ Nelson could not have made a more inflammatory remark. The project already had the support of the state Division of Highways and there were suggestions that bridge district representatives were conspiring with state engineers to force new freeway construction on San Francisco.⁹⁰ Opponents of the second deck began joining the ranks of labor protestors picketing meetings. The directors finally agreed to public hearings and to presenting the second deck plans to the San Francisco Supervisors, but by that time it was too late to mitigate opposition.

Neighborhood groups that had been formed to oppose freeway construction in San Francisco

⁸⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 2, 1967.

⁸⁸ Helen Jack, secretary of the district, noted that the contract was signed after a regular meeting of the board, but only after all of the directors had left the building: “I don’t know why.” *San Francisco Chronicle* August 8, 1967.

⁸⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 8, 1967.

⁹⁰ Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Bridge Board Upholds Deck Survey, 7-5,” October 13, 1967, box 126, DS Vault. Clearly, there was an affinity; the bridge district had been working alongside state engineers to convince San Francisco to approve plans to widen approaches for the bridge for years. *San Francisco Chronicle* June 26, 28, July 4, 1963. Arthur Jenkins’ frustration about the recalcitrance of San Francisco freeway opponents rivaled that of the state Division of Highways. Responding to an ad by a neighborhood group against the Golden Gate Freeway, Jenkins composed this letter to San Francisco papers: “Here you have it! The means by which the small—very small—segment of the public gains or attempts to gain its advantage over the far greater representation by use of the... “money be damned” process of buying spin in the local press to give you a “forced enema” on the issues of a program of traffic control that will without valid challenge benefit the greater majority of the people including those residents the article helped to influence to take the path of opposition... San Francisco is not self sufficient as to its economy and its tax roll! This city is dependent upon its reputation as one of the important and controlling financial centers of the world! ...these narrow minded, financially indifferent individuals who make up less than one percent of the population, in their effort to preserve their self-styled sanctity as residents of Telegraph Hill, Nob Hill, and other such areas who have nothing to do but sit [and] look at the scenery, searching for freeways that may mar their view, try to inculcate the masses through costly advertisements. [T]hey do not know what they are talking about and... they are deliberately spending their unlimited funds to influence you to join their ranks as opportunists... Use your own judgment on this issue-don’t let the hill dwellers tell your story for you.” Arthur C. Jenkins to [San Francisco Chronicle], May 26, [1965], box 84, IM Facility.

banded together as the “Freeway Crisis Committee” to fight the second deck.⁹¹ Southern Marin property owners formed the Marin Transportation Action Committee to “prevent overdependence on the automobile from destroying the amenities of life in Marin County.”⁹² Representatives of Marin and San Francisco organizations opposing the project overwhelmed the hearings: testimony against the second deck was presented on behalf of the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association, the Telegraph Hill Dwellers Association, the Marin Property Owners’ Association, the League of Women Voters, San Francisco Beautiful, Marin Transportation Action Committee, San Francisco Women’s Chamber of Commerce, the San Francisco Chapter of the Sierra Club, the San Francisco Council of Women’s Clubs, the Marin Civic Improvement Property Owners’ Association, the California Roadside Council, and several San Francisco unions.⁹³ San Francisco Mayor-elect Joseph L. Alioto, who campaigned on a platform of traffic control, appeared before the bridge district to urge that the second deck project be abandoned in favor of a bus- and ferry-based transportation system, as did Marin Supervisor and conservationist Peter Behr.⁹⁴ The San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted unanimously against the project, requesting that the bridge district cancel the contract with Ammann and Whitney, and promising to remove any directors that voted for a second deck.⁹⁵ Marin County reversed its position on the second deck; for the first time, with a three to two vote, the board of supervisors declined to affirm their support.⁹⁶

By the end of 1967 the solidarity of bridge directors and support for James Adam had been severely undermined by ongoing scandal. New appointments to the bridge district board

⁹¹ *San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner* August 6, 1967.

⁹² *San Francisco Chronicle* October 25, 1967.

⁹³ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 18, 1967.

⁹⁴ Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Alioto Speaks, Gate Span Deck Halt Confirmed,” November 24, 1967, box 126, IM Facility.

⁹⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 3, 1967; Redwood Empire Association, press release, “S.F. Freeway Lack May Block Gate Span Deck,” October 27, 1966, box 126, IM Facility.

⁹⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 8, 1967.

finally resulted in a solid majority on the board of directors who were willing to oppose Adam. On November 24, 1967, Leonoudakis, who was credited with leading the campaign against the second deck, introduced a resolution to cancel all plans in favor of a system of mass transit.⁹⁷ Nine Marin and San Francisco directors voted for the resolution as a bloc against four northern county directors.

The defeat of a second deck forced the entire board of directors to reexamine their strategies for protecting the bridge district. The agency no longer had any viable alternative but to embrace mass transportation. The agency could no longer beat environmentalists and growth control advocates, who had effectively taken over its board of directors, so it joined them. After the split vote to shelve plans for the second deck, the directors voted unanimously to study the prospects for a district owned and operated bus and ferry system.⁹⁸

The *Chronicle* called the decision against a second deck on the Golden Gate Bridge “one of the worst setbacks ever sustained” by James Adam.⁹⁹ Two weeks later, the FEPC convicted Adam of racial discrimination. Shortly thereafter, the San Francisco-Marin majority found the leverage it needed to oust him: Leonoudakis discovered that official bridge district policy required its officials to retire at the age of seventy and that Adam was only months away. Adam left still insisting on the need for a second deck.¹⁰⁰ District engineer Arthur Jenkins also resigned, saying he needed a vacation.¹⁰¹ Adam’s chosen successor for general

⁹⁷ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District Resolution 6526, November 24, 1967.

⁹⁸ The resolution, which was introduced by Dearman, was adopted at the next meeting of the board of directors on December 15. Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Ferry Studies Sought by Gate Span Board,” December 15, 1967, box 126, IM Facility.

⁹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 25, 1967; Redwood Empire Association, press release “Alioto Speaks, Gate Span Deck Halt Confirmed,” November 24, 1967, box 126, IM Facility.

¹⁰⁰ Traffic had gone up nearly seven percent since 1966 which indicated, Adam asserted, “the urgent necessity of providing additional vehicular capacity... before the situation becomes intolerable.” Redwood Empire Association, press release, “New Manager Named for Golden Gate Bridge,” July 12, 1968, Collier Papers.

¹⁰¹ Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Engineer Leaves Golden Gate Bridge,” March 31, 1967, box 126, IM Facility.

manager, Robert E. Shields, who had been appointed chief engineer after Jenkins resigned, was rejected in favor of Dale W. Luehring, an Air Force colonel in charge of traffic management at a local Army facility.¹⁰²

Mass Transportation

After the defeat of the second deck, all indications seemed to point to the bridge district's dissolution. McCarthy's name was at the top of a growing list of the agency's including William T. Bagley, elected to the state assembly representing Marin County in 1960, regional planning and government advocates John Foran, George Moscone, and Eugene McAteer, and a majority of San Francisco and Marin County Supervisors. The state legislative analyst released a report in 1967, in the midst of the battle over the second deck, stating that "the present organization and authority of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway district is inconsistent with solution to the corridor problem," and recommending that its revenues "be made subject to the appropriating power of an agency with a broader responsibility than that currently delegated to the Bridge District."¹⁰³ Undermining the influence of the bridge district in Sacramento, the state legislature was reapportioned in 1968, reducing considerably the representation of rural northern California.

In 1968 the idea of a Golden Gate Authority was revived by Bagley with Assembly Bill 855, co-sponsored by Foran, a prominent supporter of regional government. Privately, Bagley acknowledged that its chances for success were remote.¹⁰⁴ He also introduced legislation creating a smaller agency to take over the operation of the Bridge, a San Francisco-

¹⁰² Luehring's first significant decision was the introduction of one-way tolls on the bridge, which were an immediate success. *San Francisco Chronicle* June 17, 1968; *San Francisco Chronicle* July 13, August 9, October 20, 22, 1968, January 11, 1969.

¹⁰³ California Legislative Analyst, *San Francisco-Marin County Transportation Corridor Problem*.

¹⁰⁴ William T. Bagley, "Press Release," (1968). March 5, 1968.

Marin Transportation District.¹⁰⁵ Bagley explained both measures as efforts to put pressure on the bridge district for reform and to “unstack the deck” against commuters.¹⁰⁶ Bagley also hoped to “haul [the bridge directors] back into the realm of reality” and establish a position in Sacramento from which to negotiate institutional reform of the district.¹⁰⁷

Bagley was successful; AB 855 was amended to reform the bridge district, adding two new directors from San Francisco and one each from Marin and Sonoma Counties. It negated the 1942 superior court decision that made county supervisors ineligible to serve on the board, requiring that nearly half of the directors be elected officials.¹⁰⁸ The bill also required competitive bidding on all contracts over \$5,000, not only for construction and repair but also for all maintenance, alteration and inspection activity.¹⁰⁹ The senate and the assembly both approved the bill unanimously.¹¹⁰ For first time since its creation, the bridge district underwent significant reform, despite the opposition of Collier and Garland in Sacramento and the outraged objections of its officials.¹¹¹ The reorganization reinforced the majority of directors favoring mass transportation and against more traffic in San Francisco. Leonoudakis went from being a solitary voice of dissent to one of the principle instigators of district policy.

Although the bridge district was no longer impervious to reform, the organization retained its most fundamental characteristics. Its new leadership had just as much of a stake in ensuring its survival and independence as Adam and his supporters; they also developed

¹⁰⁵ Assembly Bill 2057, California State Legislature 1968.

¹⁰⁶ Bagley, press release, March 5, 1968, carton 5, William T. Bagley Legislative Papers, BANC MSS 77/109 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter cited as Bagley Papers)

¹⁰⁷ William T. Bagley to Eugene C. Lee. March 12, 1968.

¹⁰⁸ *People ex rel Bagshaw v. Thompson*, 55 Cal 2d 147, October 27, 1942.

¹⁰⁹ Bagley, press release, March 5, 1968, carton 5, Bagley Papers.

¹¹⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 23, 31, 1968; *Independent Journal* July 30, 1968.

¹¹¹ Collier did his best to undermine Bagley’s bill, trying to have it transferred to his Transportation Committee and introducing another reform bill to divert support, but he was not successful. *San Francisco Chronicle* July 6, 9 1968; *Independent Journal* July 27, 1968, July 30, 1968, August 21, 1968. Adam, as he had in the past, issued a letter to all employees of the bridge district urging them “in order to protect your own best interest... write a letter to the authors of these bills.” James Adam to All Employees, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District March 15, 1968, carton 5, Bagley Papers.

loyalty to the institution and a defensiveness of its policies, even early troublemakers like Leonoudakis. Though their priorities and goals reflected the changing political landscape of the Bay Area, the new board of directors still opposed the prospect of dissolution; having gained control of the institution, they were not about to let it die. As Steve Leonoudakis expressed his understanding of the bridge district's new purpose, "we are not there just to paint the bridge every year... the first priority of the district is not to the auto, but to mass transit."¹¹² While the influence of the bridge district in Sacramento may have been at its low point in 1968, the fundamental bases of its institutional power were still intact: tolls, surpluses, and autonomy. It retained all of the pragmatic advantages of the special district as a policy tool, augmented by the financial resources and reserves that it had accumulated over the years. Even as the bridge district faced redundancy, it still had the potential to be an extremely useful mechanism for realizing the policy goals of localities struggling to solve transportation problems.

Meanwhile, the issue of traffic congestion in Marin posed a difficult set of questions regarding land use and the future of the county. The only thing that the county's environmentalist growth control advocates and its pro-development establishment could agree on was the need for improved mass transportation. It was the continuing search for a solution to Marin's transportation problems that created an opportunity for the bridge district to make itself indispensable as an element of regional government.

¹¹² *San Francisco Chronicle* December 15, 1967.

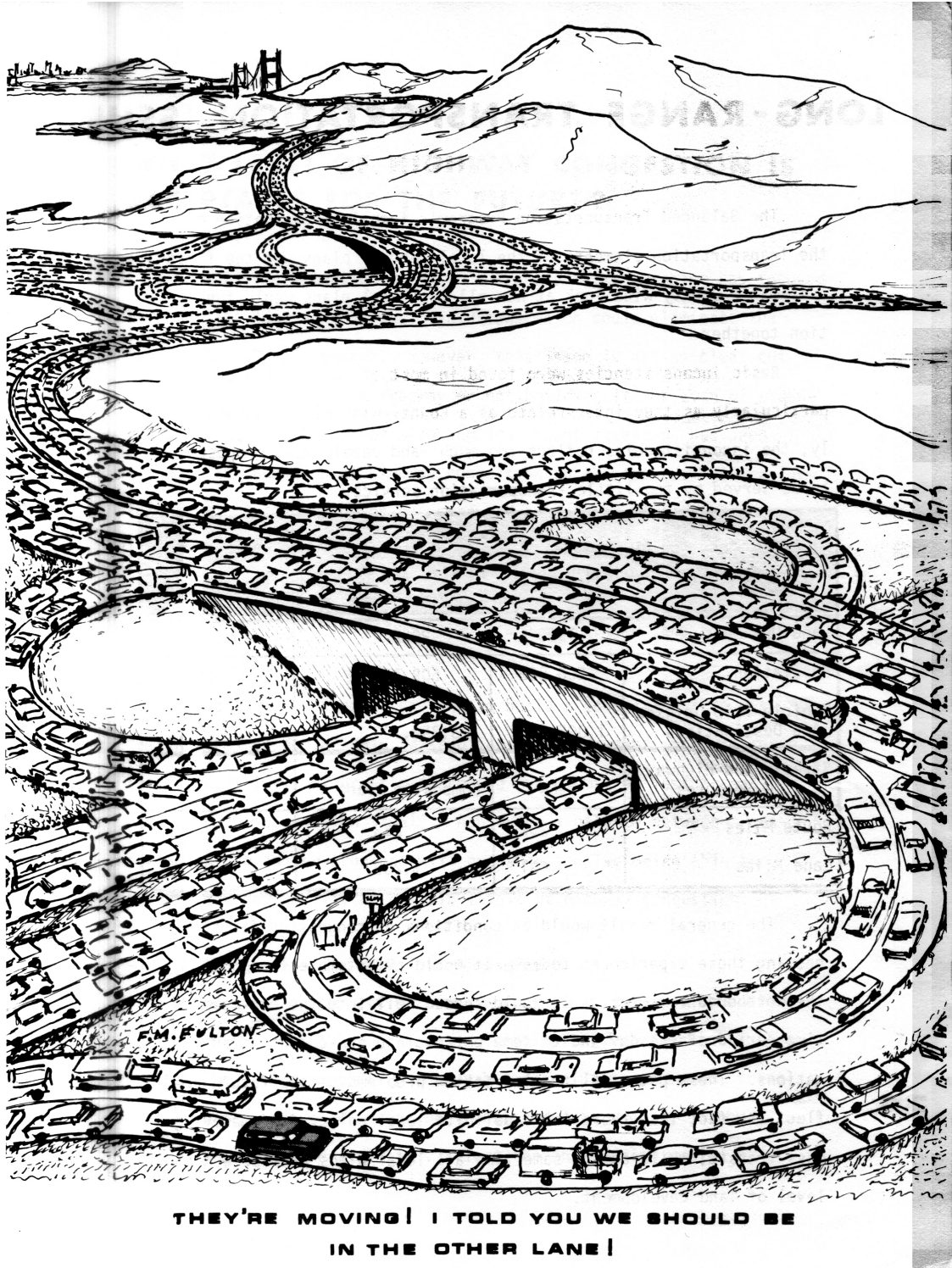


Figure 7.5: This image reflects the urgency of Marin County efforts to establish a viable mass transportation system. Note the Golden Gate Bridge, top left. Cartoon from Marin County Planning Department, *An Evaluation of Local Plans: Balanced Transportation Program* (San Rafael, 1970).

In 1963, soon after Marin County was forced out of the BART District, its board of supervisors voted unanimously to create their own transportation agency.¹¹³ The state legislature passed enabling legislation for a county transportation district, but much to the dismay of the county's beleaguered mass transportation supporters, Governor Brown refused to sign the bill, arguing that a new agency might present an obstacle to the BART District's future as a regional agency.¹¹⁴ In 1964, as the situation in Marin worsened and public pressure for action increased, the governor acquiesced to the agency as an "interim solution to the transit problem... pending inclusion of Marin County into the Bay Area Rapid Transit District."¹¹⁵ In the next election, Marin voters approved the Marin County Transportation District (MCTD) by an eighty percent majority.

Marin County Transportation District was directed by the county supervisors plus two representatives of Marin cities; it was not an independent special district, but rather an effective extension of the county. It was authorized to issue revenue or general obligation bonds. The MCTD's primary goal was to revitalize the county's bus system, both local service and inter-county commuter lines. At the time, Greyhound was petitioning the state for permission for fare increases and service cutbacks in the North Bay to help reduce its annual \$500,000 losses.¹¹⁶ After considering several alternatives, including the continuation of Greyhound service with new subsidies, the MCTD resolved to develop an entirely new, publicly owned and operated mass transportation system, one that would replace Greyhound's

¹¹³ *Independent Journal* April 9, 1963.

¹¹⁴ A.B. 2628, 1963 leg., reg. sess. (Ca.); *Independent Journal* July 29, 1963.

¹¹⁵ A.B. 75, 1963 leg., ex. sess. (Ca.) The measure was endorsed by the BART District. San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District Resolution No. 340, February 27, 1964, carton 2, Bagley Papers.

¹¹⁶ Greyhound also faced major labor relations problems, including a crippling strike in 1966. For analysis of Greyhound operations, see Marin County Transportation District, *Report on Public Transportation in County of Marin* prepared by Coverdale and Colpitts (San Rafael, CA, 1966); Robert L. Harrison, "The Financial Resources of the Marin County Transit District" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1968), 3.

service entirely.¹¹⁷ From the beginning, the problem of attracting riders was a major concern. It was widely agreed that among the reasons for the decline in Greyhound patronage was poor service and aging, uncomfortable coaches. Planners were eager to ensure that the quality of service was adequate to lure riders. The MCTD hoped to tap into UMTA funds to capitalize a new system, and resolved to “persuade the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District to pay at least a fourth of the county’s share.”¹¹⁸

Early on, bridge district officials cooperated with the MCTD, supporting its plans for inter-county buses and promising subsidies for studies and operations.¹¹⁹ They agreed to join a “Tripartite Transportation Committee” dedicated to promoting interagency cooperation on transportation policy with San Francisco and Marin in 1963.¹²⁰ In 1965, the bridge district attorney affirmed the legality of appropriations to support MCTD bus operations.¹²¹

Only a few months later, the attitude of the bridge district toward Marin’s transportation efforts changed dramatically. On December 15, after the rejection of the second deck, the district directors voted unanimously to investigate bus and ferry operations themselves. Suddenly, the MCTD was a competitor. When the Tripartite Committee began to meet in 1967, tensions were high. While the first resolution passed by the tri-partite committee was unanimous, supporting the exclusive dedication of toll surpluses to subsidize

¹¹⁷ Studies of the problem commissioned by the MCTD include, *Report on Public Transportation in County of Marin*; Marin County Transportation District, *Public Transportation Survey for Marin County* prepared by Charles E. De Leuw and Cather and Company De Leuw (San Rafael, CA, 1964); Paul J. Fanning, “Report to the Board of Directors, Marin County Transit District: Presenting a Plan of Transit Operation for Marin County,” (San Rafael, 1965); Marin County Transportation District, *Basic Considerations of Transit Planning Marin County Transit District* by Arthur C. Jenkins (San Rafael, CA, 1967).

¹¹⁸ *Independent Journal* July 21, 1965, January 6, 1966.

¹¹⁹ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District Resolution No. 6003, August 28, 1994.

¹²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 11, 1963.

¹²¹ Arthur C. Jenkins to James Adam, December 28, 1965, box 83, IM Facility; [Jerome B. White] to Board of Directors Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, September 3, 1965.

mass transportation in the Golden Gate Corridor, it led directly to conflict.¹²² The resolution was intended as a statement against any new region-wide transportation commission with any claim to bridge tolls, but it left the question of which agency should administer a new mass transportation system unanswered. Meetings of the Tripartite committee quickly deteriorated into a forum for recrimination. By the end of the year, the Marin County Board of Supervisors officially endorsed new legislation to dissolve the bridge district and to create a “San Francisco-Marin Transit District” to take control of its operations and revenues.¹²³ Supervisor Thomas Storer expressed the sentiment of Marin local officials after only three months of meetings: “the continuance of the Golden Gate Bridge & Highway District, as it is presently constituted, is virtually an unmovable obstacle in the path of achieving any realistic, meaningful solutions to the Marin-San Francisco transportation problem.”¹²⁴ A special report on the “Current Status of Rapid Transit on the Golden Gate Bridge,” suggesting that the 1962 decision against BART should be reviewed, was adopted by the Tripartite Committee over objections of the bridge district’s representatives.¹²⁵ After a few months, the bridge district quit the committee. Upon his resignation, one director remarked that “not one constructive thing has been accomplished,” and objected to the “unwarranted, vicious and cheap political attacks upon the Golden Gate Bridge Board” by Marin County members.¹²⁶ Bridge directors accused the MCTD of being disorganized and lacking purpose, reminding them that the bridge district had committed to financial contributions two years earlier, but the Marin agency still

¹²² Tri-Partite Transportation Committee, minutes of meeting, February 14, 1968, Collier Papers; Tri-Partite Transportation Committee, Resolution No. 1, February 14, 1968, Collier Papers.

¹²³ A.B. 2057, 1967 leg., ex. sess. (Ca.); *Independent Journal* October 24, 1968.

¹²⁴ Thomas T. Storer to Marin County Transit District Board of Directors, March 14, 1968, carton 5, Bagley Papers.

¹²⁵ Technical Sub-Committee of the Tri-Partite Transportation Committee, *Current Status of Rapid Transit on the Golden Gate Bridge* (San Francisco: Tri-Partite Transportation Committee, 1968), carton 5, Bagley Papers.

¹²⁶ Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Bridge Member Quits Tripartite Group,” June 12, 1968, box 126, IM Facility; Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Demand Gate Bridge Quit 3-Agency Transit Study,” June 14, 1968, box 127, IM Facility.

had not even adopted a plan of action. When, at the end of 1968, the bridge district released a plan for operating a bus system it suggested that the MCTD be dissolved, or, at most, stay in existence as “a source of tax revenue that would be helpful... in financing the composite needed improvements.”¹²⁷ In other words, Marin could provide the bridge district with subsidies, not the other way around.

Jenkins detailed the case against MCTD operation, arguing that the bridge district had the staff, experience, financial resources, and initiative that were required for the successful development of a mass transportation system, all of which the MCTD lacked. Primarily, Jenkins emphasized the fiscal resources at its disposal:

The Bridge District already has the authority to set vehicular toll rates on the bridge, and with jurisdiction over the transit operation it would fix passenger fares on the buses. It is the relationship of balancing these two vital functions that may ensure the success of the basic venture... Functions of a toll bridge are in close proximity to those of a public transit operation. Both are public service enterprises and both rely upon revenue from users to offset the costs of providing service. In one major respect they are different in that the transit system will normally operate at a deficit and the toll bridge at a profit. It is this difference which comprises the composite compatibility that cannot be attained under exclusive operation by a tax supported district.¹²⁸

Another compelling advantage was the promise that bridge district reserves would be used for the operations’ initial capitalization and that its toll revenues would make the system “comfortably self-sustaining without major tax burden upon residents of the district.”¹²⁹ It was a difficult case to dispute in terms of the pragmatic goal of establishing mass transportation. Federal UMTA funds were earmarked for capital investments, but required matching funds

¹²⁷ Jenkins, who provided the bridge district’s analysis, also left open the possibility that the MCTD “set up and coordinate an intra-county transit system as a separate branch of county government. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Prospective Participation in a Public Transit System by the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District* by Arthur C. Jenkins (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1968), 53.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

and assurance that the system's operations would be supported locally; the MCTD had not taken action to raise any of this money.

Despite the potential for problems and conflict, the promise of immediate action to address the Marin-San Francisco transportation problem, backed by the enormous financial resources of the bridge district, was too compelling for Marin County officials to resist. In February 1969 the MCTD reversed its position on bridge district dissolution, endorsing Jenkins' plan for a bridge district bus system (though they did not comment on his suggestion for the fate of their agency).¹³⁰ The Tripartite Committee voted unanimously to support legislation to allow for bridge district transit, and its San Francisco members managed to convince the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to do the same. Finally assured that the bridge district was willing to commit its resources to local ferries rather than accommodating more and more traffic headed for the streets of the city, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors rescinded their support for efforts to dissolve the bridge district and voted to back its transformation into a mass transportation agency.

Regional Governance

In the meanwhile, the struggle over regional government set the stage in Sacramento for the bridge district's move into mass transportation. Changing attitudes toward growth undermined support for regional planning and comprehensive government, both of which were traditionally associated with policies associated with growth and development.

Environmentalists, conservationists, and property owners allied to form a powerful political bloc against pro-growth regionalism. The composition and orientation of many local governments in the Bay Area changed, as well, increasingly influenced growth control and

¹³⁰ *Independent Journal* February 6, 1969.

conservationism. The alliance envisioned by T. J. Kent in 1963 became a reality; the traditional nemesis of regional government, local officials represented by ABAG, and the emerging growth control coalition came together against metropolitan government as it had been understood by the BAC and other proponents of development.¹³¹

Changes in ABAG regional plans indicate the influence of growth control advocates. Released in 1966, the ABAG *Preliminary Regional Plan* was developed in close association with the predominantly pro-growth BATS Commission and presented a future of population increases, expanding suburbs, and rapid regional development that the growth control coalition feared.¹³² The *Regional Plan 1970:1990* was very different. It included radically reduced population projections, earmarked large swaths of land for permanent open space where development had been envisioned, and eliminated several planned bridges and freeways.¹³³ While the ABAG plan was entirely advisory (it was officially “approved” rather than “adopted” by ABAG’s general council), it did provide guidelines for activists working for local growth control measures, particularly in Marin County. The alliance may have changed ABAG goals but it served the basic interests of the ABAG constituency: it determined the strategies adopted by growth control advocates, who took on a “home rule” orientation, seeking to shape the future of the region through regulations and restrictions on development at the local level. This was very much a complementary arrangement: one of the central goals of Bay Area growth control advocates was to stop the expensive, large-scale public works

¹³¹ T. J. Kent, “Home Rule and Regional Government for the San Francisco Bay Area” (statement presented to the Committee on the Future of the League of California Cities, 1971); San Jose (CA) Planning Department, *Metropolitan Open Space and Regional Government: Next Steps in Shaping the Metropolitan Future of the San Francisco Bay area - 1970-2020* by T. J. Kent (San Jose: San Jose Goals Committee City Planning Department, 1968).

¹³² Association of Bay Area Governments, *Preliminary Regional Plan* (Berkeley, CA: Association of Bay Area Governments, 1966).

¹³³ Association of Bay Area Governments, *Regional Plan 1970: 1990, San Francisco Bay Region* (Berkeley, CA: Association of Bay Area Governments, 1970).

projects (such as urban freeways and new bridges) that made centralized regional government necessary in the first place.

Contributing to the demise of efforts for centralized Bay Area government was a dawning awareness of the enormity of the institutional obstacles that existing governmental agencies represented. Scores of conferences, studies, and committees sought to resolve the question of regional government and planning for the Bay Area in the late 1960s.¹³⁴ The BCDC, the Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Board, and the BATS Commission all issued final reports in 1969 stressing the urgent need for *regional* but not *comprehensive* agencies to take over their functions. Their recommendations were a clear indication that the future of Bay Area government was in a system of complementary agencies (either single-purpose or multi-purpose) working on a cooperative basis.¹³⁵ Essentially, they endorsed the perpetuation of their current status and position within the existing governmental structure. These agencies advocated for a vision of decentralized regional governance that began to compete with the longstanding goal of comprehensive government. ABAG adopted a report in 1967 calling for the creation of a “regional home rule council” made up of local elected officials appointed by their peers; essentially, it was a proposal to make ABAG an official regional government, rather than simply an advisory board with federal sanction.

The 1969 session of the state legislature turned out to be decisive. The effort to create a new comprehensive government for the San Francisco Bay Area was spearheaded by Assemblyman John T. Knox and his Joint Committee on Bay Area Regional Organization.

¹³⁴ E.g., Conference sponsored by the University Extension and the Institute of Governmental Studies on behalf of the Joint Legislative Committee on Bay Area Regional Organization, “Bay Area Regional Organization: Scope and Shape,” University of California, Berkeley, September 14, 1968; Conference Sponsored by the Institute of Governmental Studies, “Regional Conference—1970” University of California, Berkeley April 18, 1970

¹³⁵ San Francisco Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Program and Kaiser Engineers, *Final Report to the State of California* ([San Francisco]: 1969), II-23.

Knox introduced Assembly Bill 711 to establish a democratically elected, multipurpose regional agency that would carry out comprehensive planning and take over many of the functions of existing agencies. Bagley sponsored a competing measure devised by ABAG to extend its power, reshaping it into a “regional home rule agency” headed by city and county officials.¹³⁶ The rival proposals sparked a paralyzing debate on the issue representation: should regional government be directly accountable to the public or insulated from the corrupting influence of electoral politics.¹³⁷ Traditionalists, including the BAC, argued that any new agency should be insulated from electoral politics, while Knox hoped that democratically elected representatives would use the agency to carry out a program of growth control. The chances for Bagley’s measure were hurt considerably by scandal in 1968, when the assistant to ABAG’s executive director was caught embezzling nearly \$500,000 in federal funds.¹³⁸ Neither bill made it out of committee, and both were strongly opposed by existing agencies and attacked by advocates of regional government as either misguided in terms of representation or too weak to carry out effective regional planning.

By the end of the decade, advocates of regional planning began pursuing their goals on a piecemeal basis through existing single-purpose regional agencies.¹³⁹ Knox co-sponsored a

¹³⁶ ABAG formed a Goals and Organization Committee in 1965 to study the issue of regional government, concluded that ABAG should be transformed into an “umbrella agency” to oversee and advise existing regional agencies. In 1967, a bill to allow ABAG to take over the functions of the BCDC failed. The 1969 bill, Assembly Bill 1846, would have made ABAG an advisory agency for existing regional special districts and would have given it the power to “function in... problem areas in order to meet regional needs,” including planning, pollution control, conservation, and regional parks and open space. Association of Bay Area Governments Goals and Organization Committee, “Regional Home Rule and the Government of the Bay Area,” April, 1966.

¹³⁷ Supporters of Bagley’s proposal argued that Knox’s agency represented a “takeover” of local resources; Knox’s supporters argued that any regional government should be democratically elected, not appointed by counties and cities as ABAG and its allies wanted. Stanley Scott, “The Regional Jobs to be Done and Ways of Getting them Accomplished” (paper presented at the Regional Conference--1970, Berkeley, 1970).

¹³⁸ Victor Jones, “Bay Area Regionalism: Institutions, Processes, and Programs,” in *Regional Governance—Promise and Performance*, ed. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (Washington, DC, 1973), 79; Revan Tranter, *ABAG: A Concise History--Celebrating 40 Years of Service* ([Berkeley]: Association of Bay Area Governments, 2001).

¹³⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 19, September 16, 1970.

bill to make the BCDC a permanent agency with the power to regulate development along the shores of the bay. A Bay Area Regional Transportation Planning Committee continued the work for transportation planning started by the BATS commission, and the San Francisco Bay Water Quality Group took over for the temporary Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Board. Legislation was also passed to require the inclusion of Napa, Solano and Sonoma counties in the Bay Area Air Pollution Control District, which had refused to join when it was created in 1955. These measures reduced the need for general-purpose regional government and reinforced the existing, fragmented structure of Bay Area government.¹⁴⁰

Similar policies were adopted to provide for regional transportation planning. The formation of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) was an important turning point. In 1969, the BATS Commission released its final report with two major elements: a general plan for transportation infrastructure in the Bay Area and recommendations for an institution to continue the task of regional transportation planning. The BATS Commission presented an ambitious program for expanding transportation infrastructure, generating considerable opposition.¹⁴¹ But its other major recommendation, that a new, permanent regional agency be created to continue to plan for the Bay Area's transportation needs, was taken as a given. Federal requirements made some provision for regional transportation planning imperative, whether it be the ambitious, auto-oriented plans that BATS proposed or the more environmentally conscious mass transportation goals to reduce air pollution and chronic traffic congestion. The BATS Commission described the decision faced by Bay Area policy makers: would these functions become part of a new regional government, either of the

¹⁴⁰ On 1969 legislation: Huth, "Regional Organization in the San Francisco Bay Area--1970"; Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: Metropolis in Perspective*, 315-17.

¹⁴¹ The *San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner* described its plan as the "Orwellian Future by BATS." July 13, 1969.

type envisioned by Knox or based on an expansion of ABAG? Or would a new single-purpose regional agency be established to carry them out as part of a federation of regional special districts? While there was still hope for multipurpose regional government in 1969, lawmakers agreed to delay the decision.¹⁴² By 1970, it was obvious that the prospects for a comprehensive regional government, or even an “umbrella agency” to coordinate and oversee the functions of existing regional agencies, were distant.¹⁴³ Efforts continued to fashion a regional agency that could win sufficient support, and proposals became progressively weaker.¹⁴⁴ Based on the recommendations of the BATS Commission, the state legislature created the MTC in 1971.

The MTC was designed above all to minimize opposition, in deference to the Bay Area “home rule” faction. Existing regional transportation agencies in the Bay Area had a lot of collective sway; the BART District, the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit), the San Francisco Municipal Railway (MUNI), and the newly empowered Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District all opposed any agency with significant authority. The goal for the MTC was to avoid impositions on localities and existing agencies while fulfilling federal requirements for regional planning; it was “created with just enough authority to fill the vacuum of planning responsibility in the gaps between agencies but not enough to mold the

¹⁴² A bill to create a Metropolitan Transportation Authority, based on BATS recommendations and introduced by Foran, was deferred in 1969.

¹⁴³ Stanley Scott described “umbrella agency” as an alternative to a multi-purpose regional government shortly after the defeats of 1969. Stanley Scott, “Choosing Representatives for a Bay Area Umbrella Agency: Another Possibility,” in *Adapting Government to Regional Needs: Report of the Conference on Bay Area Regional Organization, April 18, 1970*, ed. Stanley Scott and Harriet Nathan (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1971).

¹⁴⁴ Knox introduced several more bills intended to expand ABAG or merge it with other regional agencies including but none of them were successful. By the end of the 1970s, the effort was abandoned. Donald N. Rothblatt and Victor Jones, “Governance of the San Francisco Bay Area Revisited,” in *Metropolitan Governance Revisited: American/Canadian Intergovernmental Perspectives*, ed. Donald N. Rothblatt and Andrew Sancton (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1998).

outcome of implementation or to command the operation of local authorities.”¹⁴⁵ Of its nineteen commissioners, fourteen were appointed by various local Bay Area governments, one by ABAG directly, and one by the BCDC. Three nonvoting members represented the state Business and Transportation Agency, the Department of Transportation, and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Their presence indicated the agency’s primary purpose: to satisfy federal planning requirements. The MTC had the capacity to plan, to make recommendations, to approve projects by other agencies requesting federal funding, but no authority to initiate or operate any transportation programs. It was strictly an advisory body, it had no independent source of revenue or power to tax. The agency depended upon state and federal subsidies for its planning functions. The MTC was required to submit a comprehensive regional transportation plan for the Bay Area to the state legislature by 1973. While it could draw upon the BATS study and data for this task, the limited timeframe imposed by the legislature was a strong indication of what was expected of the agency—not much.¹⁴⁶

In the same year that the MTC was created, the state legislature failed to extend the life of Knox’s Committee on Bay Area Regional Organization. Over the next decade, efforts for multifunction regional government in the Bay Area lost momentum. This outcome was in line with nationwide trends. ABAG’s status as a regional planning agency, recognized by HUD

¹⁴⁵ David W. Jr. Jones, Robert Taggart, and Edith Dorosin, “*The Metropolitan Transportation Commission: An Innovative Experiment in Incremental Planning; a Cautious Experiment in Regionalism*” ([Palo Alto]: Stanford Transportation Research Program and the Center for Interdisciplinary Research, Stanford University, 1974), 38.

¹⁴⁶ Mel Scott concludes that the lack of MTC authority ultimately had a conservative, pro-growth effect on the Bay Area: “the agency does not guide local and regional growth through its decisions; it tends to authorize transit services after growth has taken place.” Scott, *The San Francisco Bay Area: Metropolis in Perspective*, 322. See also James Houston Banks, “Political Influence in Transportation Planning: the San Francisco Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s Regional Transportation Plan” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1977); Jones, Taggart, and Dorosin, *The Metropolitan Transportation Commission*; Metropolitan Transportation Commission, *The Metropolitan Transportation Commission: A New Regional Agency* ([Oakland, CA]: Metropolitan Transportation Commission, 1971).

since 1964, was reaffirmed by the federal government in 1968, when it was granted A-95 funding. By bolstering existing, decentralized institutional structure of metropolitan areas that had arisen from the efforts of “home rule” advocates to stave off the threat of authoritative regional government, federal legislation effectively undermined efforts for the creation of new regional governments in metropolitan areas nationwide. Meanwhile, intellectual support for metropolitan government collapsed in the 1970s. Academics began to extol the virtues of decentralized government, applying the principle of free market competition, questioning the idea that centralized, multipurpose government or comprehensive regional planning was necessary to manage metropolitan area problems.¹⁴⁷ Bay Area policy makers were no exception to the trend; efforts for regional government were largely abandoned by 1975. For better or for worse, the fate of Bay Area regional government had been decided in favor of a decentralized network of limited-purpose special agencies.

Perpetual Tolls

The bridge district was in an excellent position to take advantage of the situation in Sacramento in 1969. It moved quickly to secure state authorization to initiate mass transportation operations.¹⁴⁸ Though the California Bridge and Highway District Act specified that the agency may acquire “railroads, streetcars [or] interurban lines...” new legislation was required to allow the agency to operate and subsidize a ferry system. However, they had too many enemies to dictate its terms. Collier introduced a bill to give the bridge directors full

¹⁴⁷ See Hamilton, *Governing Metropolitan Areas: Response to Growth and Change*, 193-201; Samuel Nunn and Carl Schoedel, “Special Districts, City Governments, and Infrastructure: Spending in 105 US Metropolitan Areas,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 19, no. 1 (1997), 59-72; G. Ross Stephens and Nelson Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47-50, 105-21; Todd Swanstrom, “What we Argue About when we Argue About Regionalism,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2001), 479-96.

¹⁴⁸ *Independent Journal* February 19, 1969

discretion over their mass transportation operations and the authority to issue new bonds without public approval, but it was defeated in favor of Assembly Bill 584, sponsored by Foran. Signed into law on August 22, 1969, the bill officially created the “Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District.” It granted the bridge district the authority to “study, construct, acquire, improve, maintain, and operate any and all modes of transportation.”¹⁴⁹ The bill included several restrictions and requirements: only a limited percentage of toll revenues and reserves could be spent to subsidize transportation, no further studies of a second deck would be allowed at least until 1972, and the bridge district had to submit regular reports on its operations to the legislature and a long-term plan by 1971 for approval. It “encouraged” the bridge district to include a number of alternatives in its plan, and specified that the abolishment of the agency be one of them. Despite its caveats, the bill represented a decisive victory for the bridge district in the battle for mass transportation and the war for its survival—it effectively halted all efforts for dissolution.

The bridge district took immediate action. Ferries had the backing of influential Marin County environmentalists and commuter groups, the majority of the San Francisco supervisors, and the transformed board of directors.¹⁵⁰ Leonoudikis and Dearman both supported them passionately.¹⁵¹ In part because of the reluctance of San Francisco directors to allow any new traffic headed into downtown, including commuter buses, the bridge district made ferry operations its top mass transportation priority.¹⁵² Soon after the passage of the

¹⁴⁹ *Statutes of California* 1969 reg. sess, ch. 805, pp. 1625-1627.

¹⁵⁰ The San Francisco chapter of the Sierra Club, People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area, San Francisco Beautiful all endorsed the Bridge District’s ferry plans. Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District, *Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Proposed Expansion of Ferry Services Between San Francisco and Marin County* (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1971).

¹⁵¹ Redwood Empire Association, press release, “Ferry Studies Sought by Gate Span Board,” December 15, 1967, box 126, IM Facility; Thomas T. Storer, press release, October 26, 1965, box 127, IM Facility.

¹⁵² The San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution opposing any bridge district bus operations in 1969. *San Francisco Chronicle* September 19, 1969.

Foran bill, the board of directors voted to commission plans and cost estimates for an entire fleet of state-of-the-art, first-class ferries and new dock facilities from a Seattle naval architecture firm.¹⁵³ The bridge district's first real operation as a transportation agency was to charter a single ferry between Tiburon and San Francisco while its private operator was negotiating with its striking workers in November 1969.¹⁵⁴ The operation attracted enormous public attention and praise, particularly in San Francisco, and even yielded a small profit for the bridge district. Soon after, the board of directors voted to purchase their first boat, a used San Diego vessel to be remodeled and renamed the *M. V. Golden Gate*, at a cost of over \$700,000.¹⁵⁵ It started service between Sausalito and San Francisco in August 1970. Foreshadowing problems and expenses to come for bridge district ferries, the cost of remodeling the *Golden Gate* was nearly twice what was originally estimated.¹⁵⁶ In addition, despite having been completely overhauled, it broke down on the first day of regular commuter service and required a week of high-profile repairs before service resumed.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, there was ample public support for more ferries on the bay, especially in San Francisco, and the board of directors remained enthusiastic, crediting the small operation with relieving traffic pressures on the bridge.¹⁵⁸

Winning approval for buses took longer—the issue pitted San Francisco representatives against Marin and the other northern county directors.¹⁵⁹ Despite the “unequivocal opposition” of San Francisco supervisors to any buses into the city, both bridge district officials and the board of the MCTD remained convinced that an improved commuter bus

¹⁵³ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 5, 1969.

¹⁵⁴ California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Final Report* (Sacramento, CA, 1975), 8-9.

¹⁵⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 25, 1970.

¹⁵⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* June 12, 16, July 11, 1970.

¹⁵⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* August 15, 18, 19, 24, 1970.

¹⁵⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 4, November 14, 1970.

¹⁵⁹ *Independent Journal* September 16, October 17 1969.

system was the most cost effective and immediate means of alleviating the Golden Gate Corridor traffic crisis.¹⁶⁰ A guarantee the bridge district would establish a full-scale ferry system (at twice the estimated cost of the buses) in addition to its bus operations won over reluctant San Francisco supervisors and bridge directors.¹⁶¹

The reality of a bridge district bus system turned the tables on negotiations with Marin officials. Now, the MCTD had to use its limited financial resources as leverage to influence the bridge district's transportation policies. Making the best of the situation for Marin meant getting the maximum benefit locally from the bridge district's new enterprise. Despite lingering hostility, MCTD representatives entered into talks with the bridge district, hoping that it would take on responsibility for local as well as intercounty bus service. The MCTD had the authority to contract for service through other agencies, and the potential power to assess property taxes. It could also offer crucial support for federal funding. After a year of difficult negotiations, the MCTD, the county, and the bridge district adopted a formal agreement for bus service. The bridge district agreed to follow the detailed bus plan that the MCTD had already developed for local service in Marin.¹⁶² It also promised efficiency: the agency would be operating a commuter bus system in any case, and its administrative capacity, capital investments, and staff could readily be adapted to local service. In exchange, both the MCTD and Marin County would make annual payments to the bridge district to cover the operating deficits of local service. Calculating the total amount of deficit incurred by local operations was difficult, in part because much of the service was to be provided by buses that were ultimately destined for San Francisco, but a formula was adopted to determine Marin's

¹⁶⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* September 16, 17 1969; Dale W. Luehring to the Board of Directors, Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, February 14, 1969.

¹⁶¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* November 6, 15 1969.

¹⁶² Marin County Transit District, *Optimum Bus System and Summary of Water Transportation Study: Staff Report* prepared by R. L. Banks, and Associates, (San Rafael, CA, 1969).

contribution. The bridge district took complete responsibility for transbay operations, agreeing to provide necessary subsidies for both ferry and bus service. Also as part of the deal, the MCTD officially endorsed the bridge district's application for UMTA funding for both its bus and ferry operations, effectively renouncing any claim to federal funds.

Even as it negotiated the final agreement with MCTD, the bridge district proceeded with preparations for interim bus operations. As promised, it backed its plans with cash. In 1969, capital costs for the system were estimated at between \$4 and \$6 million, and annual deficits were projected to be over \$10 million. Bridge district officials intended to finance much of it with the reserves that had been building up for decades. Jenkins had been arguing from the beginning that significant investments for high quality service were essential to ensuring success: "A modern bus system with first-class, new equipment and extended service routing, with moderate passenger fares that are competitive with the cost of operating personal autos, will without question capture a substantial portion of present peak-hour auto passengers. It must be a model operation..."¹⁶³ Accordingly, the bridge district ensured that its purchases were up to that standard, paying a premium for its first two buses to provide ferry feeder service.¹⁶⁴ Local bus operations began in Marin County with seven new coaches. The board of directors voted to extend bus operations to Santa Rosa and add some local service in Sonoma, as well. By 1971, the capital costs of the system were estimated at \$9.3 million (buses plus three bus terminals and depot facilities). The bridge district applied for a UMTA grant to cover two-thirds of this, but in the meanwhile it tapped into its reserves.¹⁶⁵ By the end

¹⁶³ The board of directors even considered coffee and cocktail service on the buses. Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Report on Prospective Participation in a Public Transit System*, 27; *San Francisco Chronicle* March 20, 1970.

¹⁶⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* October 10, 1970.

¹⁶⁵ In part because of protest from MTS, the federal grant was not approved until 1972, after the purchase had been financed with bridge district reserves.

of the year, the bridge district owned 132 new General Motors buses. On January 1, 1972, it took over all of Greyhound's existing lines, which at the time were serving 4,000 commuters a day. Almost immediately, the number of transbay bus riders exceeded expectations, and after only two months of service, bridge district officials began calling for a bigger fleet.¹⁶⁶ Twenty old buses from the Greyhound fleet were replaced with even more luxurious vehicles to complete the 152-bus fleet called for in the MCTD plan to provide local service and to make the journey across the bridge.¹⁶⁷ By the end of 1972, the bridge district had been granted nearly \$8 million by the UMTA to offset the costs of its initial purchases and to add an additional thirty buses to its fleet.

Ferries created the worst financial problems for the bridge district. The initial cost estimate for a four terminal system was \$14 to \$17 million for equipment and facilities along with annual \$2 million subsidies (including interest on new bonds to finance the system).¹⁶⁸ The system was to go into full operation in 1974. As high as these figures seemed at the time, cost overruns began almost immediately, and price quotes for the ferryboats rose almost month to month. By 1972, when the UMTA approved a grant of \$12.6 million, the total cost estimate was \$19 million.¹⁶⁹

The bridge district set up a non-profit corporation to finance the ferry system in order to avoid the necessity of a public referendum. Frustration at the decision was expressed by Donald Van Dyke, head of the Marin County Taxpayers Association:

¹⁶⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 1, February 25, 1972.

¹⁶⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* February 25, 1972.

¹⁶⁸ The directors voted to approve a contract with Philip Spaulding for the ferries. Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, *Golden Gate Commuter Ferryboat System: San Francisco-Marin Crossing* prepared by Philip F. Spaulding and Associates (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, 1970); *San Francisco Chronicle* August 6, 1970; *San Francisco Chronicle* December 12, 1970, January 29, May 29, 1971.

¹⁶⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 31, 1972.

The conversion of the District from its original purpose... has been accomplished by the exercise of raw political power, not by convincing the people in the District that this change was necessary and then accomplishing it with their approval. Perhaps the greatest shame of all is that the money spent in Sacramento to for the legislative actions necessary to assure continuation of the District forever really belonged to the people who were being carefully excluded from having any say in the matter.

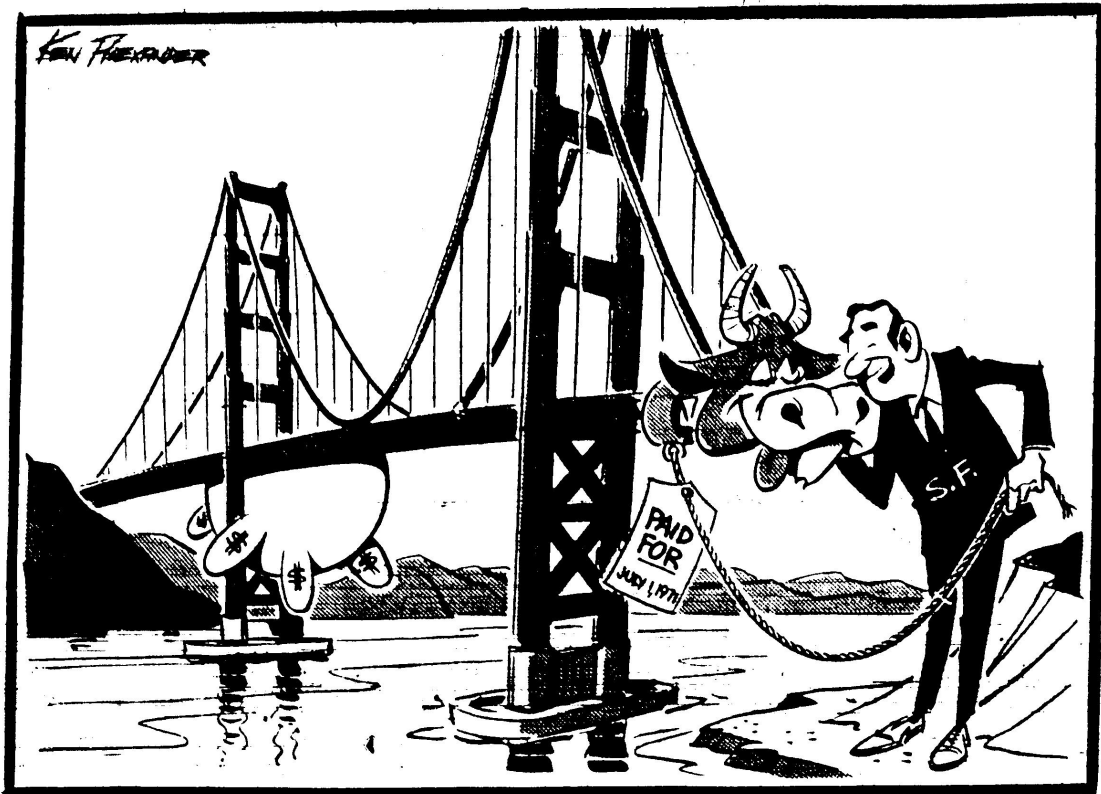
The District's continuing program to further [its] life by expanding into transit through the state Legislature rather than by authorization of voters in the District and the insistence that funding of transit program be accomplished by the issuance of "non-profit corporation bonds" rather than voter approval bonds constitute some of the more recent examples of your total lack of regard for what the people want.¹⁷⁰

Van Dyke a municipal financing consultant who had advised the California Toll Bridge Authority, asserted that the bridge district, by going into mass transit, was risking tax assessments without public authorization.¹⁷¹ He published a series of full-page ads in the *Independent Journal* hoping to stimulate concern about the bridge district's transportation enterprises. Marin commuters responded at the largest public hearing in Marin County to date, attended by over 700 people. The vast majority were infuriated by another example of bridge district hubris. An unsympathetic environmentalist Marin weekly described the attendees as a "rough, uninformed, obstreperous segment of the Marin populace, expressing its outrage at the recent hike in commute tolls."¹⁷² But it was clear that, despite Marin's new pact with the bridge district, the agency remained a villain to Marinites. The concerns of dissident Marin county taxpayers and commuters never garnered much sympathy among the solidly anti-traffic San Francisco supervisors, or the majority of bridge district directors. Disregarding the various expressions of outrage from Marin commuters and San Francisco conservatives,

¹⁷⁰ Donald M. Van Dyke to Lowell Edington. July 20, 1971, box 156, IM Facility.

¹⁷¹ Gerald S. Noble to Editors, Golden Gate Bridge District Counties. May 3, 1972, box 156, IM Facility.

¹⁷² *Pacific Sun* February 11, 1970.



“Bless your sweet, crowded, profitable, paid-for heart . . . I think I’ll keep you”

Figure 7.6: *San Francisco Chronicle* May 16, 1971.

the bridge district issued \$10 million in revenue bonds through its new non-profit subsidiary.¹⁷³

When the last of the construction bonds were paid off and the bridge district continued to collect tolls, the *Chronicle* announced that it represented “vindication today, tomorrow, and presumably forever for the skeptical motorists who refused over the years to believe the old promise that the bridge would be toll-free once its bonds were paid off.”¹⁷⁴ Before taking on mass transportation, the bridge district was an insular well-integrated institution with a single

¹⁷³ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 10, 1971.

¹⁷⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* July 1, 1971.

orientation, fewer than two hundred employees, and a fairly cohesive leadership.¹⁷⁵ Suddenly, it became an expansive bureaucracy with three major departments and a slew of intermediate managers. The board of directors was more removed from the day to day operations of the organization than ever, and the general manager, now one of very few officials in a position to view the overall status of operations and budget issues, had more relative power and even less oversight and accountability.

The bridge district faced a future of guaranteed financial liabilities. In addition to the costs of establishing and operating mass transportation, it predicted several big engineering expenses related to the bridge itself. The study initiated in the midst of the uproar over hiring practices was released to the public in January 1970 with estimates that the bridge required \$10 million worth of repairs in the coming years, including a complete replacement of vertical suspension cables.¹⁷⁶ The bridge district was also planning a \$3.3 million toll plaza modernization.¹⁷⁷ In addition, the long-range plan submitted by the bridge district to the legislature as required in 1971 included \$301.5 million in new transportation projects for the following decade, including a system of exclusive bus right-of-ways, the construction of underground busways in San Francisco, and ultimately, a second deck on the bridge devoted exclusively to transit.¹⁷⁸ These expenses and projects ensured the usefulness of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District indefinitely.

¹⁷⁵ Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, "Organization and Personnel," April 28, 1964.

¹⁷⁶ Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, *Golden Gate Bridge, Report on Inspection of Condition and Major Structural Units* prepared by Ammann & Whitney (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, 1969); *San Francisco Chronicle* January 31, 1970, August 14, 1971.

¹⁷⁷ Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, *Toll Plaza Modernization, Preliminary Engineering Report* prepared by PBQ&D, Inc., Engineers. (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, 1970).

¹⁷⁸ Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, *Golden Gate Corridor: Long Range Transportation Alternatives: Engineering Report* prepared by Kaiser Engineers (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, 1970).

The adoption of a decentralized network of regional agencies as the permanent structure of Bay Area government was a necessary prerequisite for the redemption of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District as it ultimately occurred. The reform of the bridge district in the late 1960s would have been meaningless if it was not for larger political and institutional changes that created the opportunity for it to become a permanent part of Bay Area regional government. Seen in isolation, the bridge district cannot be described as a major power in the struggle over regional planning in the late 1960s, but it was part of an alliance of regional agencies and local governments whose influence was decisive. By the end of the 1960s the survival of a variety of multi-county or area-wide special districts in the Bay Area required that their functions and jurisdictions be protected from incorporation into regional government. In fighting off the efforts of ambitious regional government advocates, working with general-purpose local governments (cities and counties) under the aegis of “home rule” ideology, they represented a formidable obstacle to any change that would threaten their institutional interests.

Conclusion

From the moment of its incorporation in 1928, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was much more than a tool. It was a political agent, an institution that pursued its own agenda independent of outside political, social, or economic interests, and it had ample autonomy and resources to do so. Its associates and officials understood themselves as its defenders, and the bridge district developed a compelling culture and identity that determined what they considered to be appropriate action on its behalf. Bridge district representatives engaged in battles to defend the agency's autonomy and independence, even its very existence, starting with the 1930 campaign for approval of its construction bonds and continuing through its move into transportation in 1969. A score of public figures questioned the advisability and legitimacy of the agency; Jack McCarthy was the most vocal and persistent critic in a long series of opponents and would-be reformers. Regional planning advocates including Edgar F. Kaiser and later, William T. Bagley continued criticism of the bridge district's representational structure and lack of accountability, and insulation that started with the objections of M. M. O'Shaughnessy and members of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. The relentless conflict and scandal associated with the bridge district reflect the fact that the agency had clearly defined and independent interests and goals. Its officials were willing to use all of the resources at their disposal to pursue and defend them, regardless of public opinion or the opposition of the its own allies. They actively worked to maximize the power and influence of the organization and to fend off threats to its integrity and security.

The consequences of bridge district policy and the actions taken to defend its interests as an institution were varied in their implications for the San Francisco Bay Area. The first, and most obvious, result of the creation of this special district was the local financing of the Golden Gate Bridge. As soon as the bridge district was incorporated in 1928, its associates had an overwhelming interest in ensuring that the organization would realize its purpose. O'Shaughnessy and others questioned the skewed representational structure of the bridge district favoring rural northern California and argued that it would be cheaper and more advantageous to the Bay Area and to all counties of the bridge district if the state took over the project. Early critics also pointed out that bridge district operations were subject to little oversight or outside accountability. By 1929 there were many possible means of bridging the Golden Gate. Once the bridge district was incorporated and made its first property tax assessments, it had the resources as well as the autonomy and initiative to fend off competition. The expediency of special district administration, the assurance of quick action and easy financing, were too compelling, and the idea of a bridge too popular and promising to resist. The bridge district met its critics with a powerful public relations campaign magnified by the enthusiasm of the region's press for the daring project. And build the bridge it did—a striking, bold bridge that quickly became an icon for the beauty of northern California. At least in the first few decades, the bridge fulfilled its intended purpose, opening northern California to development and tourism, and bolstering the status of San Francisco as the region's political and economic epicenter.

The creation of the bridge district had a variety of political consequences for the Bay Area. Despite the success of the bridge, the critics of the agency were never silenced. All of the disadvantages of special districts, built into the fundamental institutional structure of the

bridge district, became apparent. The financial independence and business orientation of the institution translated into controversy over high tolls despite growing budget surpluses in the late 1940s and 1950s, as did policies designed to protect its security, including lobbying, advertising, and public relations. The unbridled power of its general manager resulted in persistent questions about the integrity and honesty of its administration and repeated investigations, but little actual reform. Bridge district officials enjoyed almost total discretion over its funds, and only rarely were their expenses and indulgences subject to public scrutiny. However, once the bridge was built, there was little hope either of turning bridge administration over to another entity or significantly reforming the bridge district.

The creation of the bridge district also had important consequences for the landscape and physical development of the Bay Area. In preventing rapid transit to the North Bay and stopping the Golden Gate Authority, it defied regional business and industry as well as its most loyal constituents, northern California boosters and real estate interests. The financial autonomy of the institution enabled its representatives to wage aggressive campaigns, both covert and overt, to influence regional policy. The bridge district became an obstacle to growth and the bridge a major traffic bottleneck. This was ironic in light of its original purpose: the organization that was intended to promote growth and development in northern California became an obstacle to new transportation infrastructure, jealously defending its toll revenues, jurisdiction, and autonomy from any encroachment by another agency. Its embrace of mass transportation represented a political shift for the bridge district but not a departure from its consistent, overriding primary objective: the protection of its institutional security and autonomy. Bridge district representatives allied with various factions in regional politics over

the decades, but always ultimately came out on the side that best served the interests of the institution as they understood them.

The ability of the bridge district to adapt to the shifting politics of the Bay Area while maintaining, even strengthening, its institutional integrity, helps explain the durability of special districts in general; although they develop persistent institutional characteristics and resist reform, they are flexible and resourceful enough to survive major changes in their political environment. In addition to its significance as an independent agent in Bay Area politics, the history of the bridge district reflects important national trends. The creation of this public corporation to construct, finance and administer the Golden Gate Bridge was one outcome of a major shift in political ideology with regard to the form and function of the state that began in the nineteenth century, apparent in the rapid expansion of bureaucracy and in the new profession of public administration. At the same time, the bridge district manifested the ambitions and aspirations of local boosters, who sought a pragmatic means of promoting economic development and growth. The agency represented a rejection of centralized government, of state and federal authority, as well as an effort to reduce the influence of local elected officials, who were seen at best as incompetent to administer public enterprises.

At the same time, the bridge district was an indication that an expanded role for the local state had gained acceptance across the political spectrum. Its creation heralded the rise of special districts as the predominant institutional form of regional government in the United States, on the vanguard of a transformation that ensured the enduring decentralization and fragmentation of metropolitan area government in the United States. Progressive era values of rationality, efficiency, and expertise shaped the institution. Special districts' advantages as instruments for addressing regional problems or accomplishing large-scale projects without

threatening the autonomy or authority of existing governmental agencies propelled their proliferation in metropolitan areas.

This history ends in 1971, when the expansion and entrenchment of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District had been accomplished through mass transportation. It was around that time that efforts for centralized regional planning and government in metropolitan areas around the country began to lose their momentum. An important reason for their failure was the proliferation of limited-purpose special districts; as in the San Francisco Bay Area, these agencies actively opposed the creation of comprehensive regional government, defended their institutional interests and autonomy. In addition, special districts always presented a compelling, low-risk, and easy alternative for addressing regional problems. They were an extremely effective means of providing services, realizing public works projects, and enforcing regulations on a limited, circumscribed basis. Limited-purpose special districts undermined the urgency of campaigns for comprehensive regional planning and government because they were so effective functionally—they solved problems and achieved their goals. That their numbers multiplied so rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in metropolitan areas, even as leading scholars and policy makers condemned them, was the result of their compelling advantages as short-term solutions to regional problems. However, once they were created they took on their own set of interests, transcending the intentions and purposes of their creators.

The creation of regional special districts, both in the Bay Area and in metropolitan areas around the country, contributed to the defeat of efforts for metropolitan government. Overwhelmingly, efforts for regional government in the 1960s and 1970s failed, although one they were largely unlamented once public choice theory eclipsed regionalism. Almost

uniformly, limited-purpose special districts took over imperative areawide functions and planned on a limited basis and councils of government were formed to develop voluntary regional plans to fulfill federal requirements. In its major elements, the story of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District and Bay Area regional politics represents the story of special districts and regional planning in metropolitan areas in the United States as a whole.

In the 1990s, the negative consequences of governmental fragmentation in metropolitan areas came to the attention of urban policy analysis and federal officials. The “new regionalism” as it was termed, urged greater governmental coordination for metropolitan areas, but with much more emphasis on voluntary cooperation and less on the consolidation and elimination of existing agencies. These ideas were very different from regionalism of Bollens, Jones, and Gulick; they were modified and heavily influenced by the principles of public choice. New regionalists such as David Rusk, Myron Orfield, Robert Cisneros, and Anthony Downs argue for the coordination of existing governments rather than the creation of new general purpose entities, for cooperation rather than consolidation.¹ Rather than government, they call for “governance” in metropolitan areas, both in the interest of promoting social justice and a more equitable distribution of resources, and in order to compete in a global economy with other metropolitan areas. However, as Norris explains, “while regional cooperation is almost certainly better than conflict, cooperation is the weakest of all

¹Henry Cisneros, *Interwoven Destinies: Cities and the Nation*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1993); Anthony Downs, *New Visions for Metropolitan America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 1994); Myron Orfield, *Metropolitica: a Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1997); David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993). For analysis of the contemporary debate, see Frances Frisken and Donald F. Norris, “Regionalism Reconsidered,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2001), 467-78; Donald F. Norris, “Prospects for Regional Governance under the New Regionalism: Economic Imperatives Versus Political Impediments,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2001), 557-71; H. V. Savitch and Ronald K. Vogel, “Paths to New Regionalism,” *State and Local Government Review* 32, no. 3 (2000), 158-68; G. Ross Stephens and Nelson Wikstrom, *Metropolitan Government and Governance: Theoretical Perspectives, Empirical Analysis, and the Future* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47-50, 105-21; Todd Swanstrom, “What we Argue About when we Argue About Regionalism,” *Journal of Urban Affairs* 23, no. 5 (2001), 479-96.

institutional responses to metropolitan problems.”² However, even these modest goals may be too ambitious in the face of the opposition of local government, including special districts. Ultimately, regionalism cannot succeed without authority, something that existing agencies refuse to compromise.

The key to understanding the political history of metropolitan areas in the United States is recognizing the resilience of their institutions. Social and economic forces, political movements and ideologies, culture and ideals have all had a role in shaping the institutions of government, as have the imperatives of a changing economy. But once new governmental agencies are created they take on their own independent interests, their own agency. They transcend the forces and the social groups that initiated their creation in as much as their degree of independence and autonomy allows. The legacy of Progressivism is indelibly inscribed in metropolitan government through the collective power of special districts.

The history of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District suggests that governmental organizations, given sufficient autonomy and resources, can and should be understood as independent agents in regional decision-making. I discuss the relationship between individuals and organizations in order to make a case for promoting state institutions from the status of tools for social and economic interest groups to active, primary interests in and of themselves, actually initiating policy. Understanding the internal dynamics of organizations is crucial to understanding the political and social history of the twentieth century. March and Olsen observe: “Most of the major actors in modern economic and political systems are formal organizations. The bureaucratic agency, the legislative committee, and the appellate court are areas for contending social forces, but they are also collections of standard operating procedures and structures that define and defend interests. They are

² Norris, “Prospects for Regional Governance,” 560.

political actors in their own right.”³ This history is about much more than the intricacies of the institutions of the local state or the shape and flow of power in metropolitan areas. It is also about the implications of bureaucracy, both as an expression of optimistic modern ideologies that emphasize rationality, efficiency, and professionalism, and as the basic form of the modern state.

Max Weber famously described modern rationality, the culture of acquisition and the ascent of capitalism as an “iron cage,” a system taking on an independence and permanence, exceeding the capacity of the society that created it to control or eradicate it. Less well-known is Weber’s contention that bureaucracy—and most powerfully state bureaucracy—is the “only really inescapable power” in modern life:

State bureaucracy would rule *alone* if private capitalism were eliminated. That private and public bureaucracies, which now work next to, and potentially against, each other and hence check one another to a degree, would be merged into a single hierarchy... An inanimate machine is mind objectified. Only this provides it with the power to force men into its service and to dominate their everyday working life as completely as is actually the case in the factory. Objectified intelligence is also that animated machine, the bureaucratic organization, with its specialization of trained skills, its division of jurisdiction, its rules and hierarchical relations of authority.⁴

Weber’s analysis of the rise of the modern state is highly pessimistic; he suggests that efforts to diminish the power of bureaucracy once it is in place are largely futile. The case of special districts in the context of metropolitan government certainly supports this viewpoint.

Questions regarding regional government always involve the desirability of one form of bureaucratic administration over the other, with issues of representation, justice, and the public interest at the core of the debate over the relative merits of these forms of organization.

However, these debates were secondary to the actual decision making process once agencies of

³ March and Olsen, “The New Institutionalism,” 734, 738.

⁴ Max Weber, “Bureaucracy and Political Leadership,” in vol. 2, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, 1978), 1402.

regional government were established. State agencies often put considerations of power first, power for the purpose of protecting their interests as institutions. The persistence of these organizations has little to do with political ideals or administrative theories and a whole lot to do with the resources at their disposal and their capacity to act in their own interests.

In recent decades, an interdisciplinary body of scholarship on the development of the modern American state has reintroduced questions about its role and significance into historical discourse. But the overwhelming focus of this work has been on the process of transformation and the specific moments in which it occurred, primarily during the Progressive era and as the result of New Deal policies. The emphasis of political historians has generally been on the national state, of urban historians almost exclusively on the city. The fragmentation and decentralization of metropolitan government in the United States does not diminish its power and importance. If anything, the varied and numerous organizations that make up local and regional government in the United States are the most immediately relevant element of the state to the everyday lives of ordinary people. They are omnipresent, but most are taken for granted. They play a vital role in the decision-making process, but are relegated to the status of tools in analysis. The larger institutional context, the broader, national political landscape, and the long-term consequences of these transformations have not received the attention they deserve. The state, not only in periods of change but also as an unavoidable, ubiquitous presence in modern life, should be a primary consideration in any analysis of twentieth century United States history.

The history of politics and government in United States history presents a special problem—it is not always easy to identify the residence of power in a complex system of government based on values of federation rather than centralization and unification. The

United States has a decentralized but nevertheless ever-expanding and incredibly influential local governmental apparatus. The public corporation, central to this apparatus since the mid-twentieth century, is an especially powerful and resilient institutional form, and its adaptation to fulfill regional functions in metropolitan areas had profound consequences. The multifarious collection of special districts that became the *de facto* form of metropolitan governance in the late twentieth century probably represent more collective power than any metropolitan agency envisioned by the most ambitious regionalists. But their structure, intentionally shielding decision-making and policy from public interference or scrutiny, makes them all too easy to overlook in analysis of the state as a whole.

Epilogue: The Bridge District Since 1971

After its move into mass transportation, the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District never again enjoyed the bounty of its early years. Despite the immediate popularity of bus operations and high hopes for its ferry system, mass transportation operations turned out to be a financial disaster for the agency. While the bridge district did manage to win millions in state and federal subsidies for the capital costs of establishing its new system, little money was available for subsidizing mass transportation operations. Cost overruns and deficits quickly exceeded the wildest predictions of the most parsimonious taxpayers' advocate, even as toll-paying traffic on the bridge failed to meet projections. Not included in its original estimates for buses and ferries was the additional administrative staff required to manage these operations. The bridge district staff expanded dramatically, adding a bus manager in 1971, a ferry manager in 1972, plus office staff and

consulting engineers for both systems.⁵ Bus drivers for the new operation did not come cheaply, either; Greyhound drivers were hired at their existing salary levels, taking over their pensions, and recognizing their seniority. The bridge district had long been known to pay its employees well, and this policy did not change. The average salary of bridge district drivers was well above that of drivers for other public bus systems in the Bay Area.⁶ The agency's severe financial problems in the 1970s added to its general public relations problems; its new purpose and leadership did not result in a corresponding change in its institutional culture or its relationship with the public.

Bridge district buses never lacked for riders, but their financing was complicated and contentious. In taking on responsibility for local service in Marin County in addition to its new transbay operations, the bridge district was stepping into a political quagmire. From the first year of operations, the Marin County Transportation District objected to the formula used to calculate its contribution to local bus service operational expenses, and managed to negotiate a lower payment than what was called for in the original contract between the two agencies.⁷ There were a number of reasons for the defiance of Marin officials. Financial constraints made coming up with the full amount of their contractual contribution unpalatable: Marin's annual state allocations for mass transportation went directly to the bridge district, and MCTD officials were very reluctant to assess a property tax to cover the difference. In addition, they were very aware that Marin residents had always paid the majority of tolls, and felt entitled to support for mass transportation. Not only that, but the bridge district received

⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* January 30, July 20, 1972.

⁶ Bridge district officials publicly misrepresented drivers' salaries, fearing criticism that they were excessive. California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Preliminary Report* (Sacramento, 1974), 45.

⁷ California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Final Report* (Sacramento, 1975), 76-81.

\$55 million in federal subsidies for its mass transportation capital costs, much of which was slated for Marin County.⁸ Marin County agreed to forgo most federal transportation subsidies in the 1970 agreement, but the amount of money available for mass transportation programs was increasing steadily and the bridge district was getting a lion's share, in part due to its enormously overbudget ferry program.⁹ In 1969 it seemed to Marin officials that letting the bridge district take over local bus service would be a good deal, but the money that they passed up, both federal UMTA funds and California Transportation Development Act (TDA) appropriations amounted to a lot more than had originally been expected. In short, regardless of their original agreement, Marin officials thought it was only fair that the bridge district make up for any expenses that exceeded the state TDA appropriations that they were already turning over to the bridge district.

Problems with the ferries added to conflict between the bridge district and the MCTD. The bridge district commissioned four separate studies of the proposed ferry operations between 1969 and 1974, all of which severely underestimated either the cost of equipment and docking facilities or the potential patronage of the system or both.¹⁰ Ultimately, the bridge district settled for a scaled-back system with three terminals and four ferries at more than twice the projected cost of the four-terminal, seven-vessel system they had originally contracted

⁸ California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Preliminary Report*, 6.

⁹ The UMTA, recognizing that cutting off funds for the ferry system before it was operational would be an enormous waste of public resources, continued to increase its appropriations for the bridge district, but the more money it received, the less was available to other projects in the region or in California as a whole. United States General Accounting Office, *Increased Cost of Implementing Commuter Ferry System on San Francisco Bay* (Washington, DC, 1975).

¹⁰ San Francisco-Marina Water Transportation Study Committee, *Feasibility study of San Francisco - Marin Ferry System* prepared by Arthur D. Little Inc (San Francisco, 1969); California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Preliminary Report*, 12; Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, *Report on Proposed Operational Plan for Integrated Bus-Ferry Service* prepared by Kaiser Engineers (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, 1971); Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, *Golden Gate Commuter Ferryboat System: San Francisco-Marina Crossing* prepared by Philip F. Spaulding and Associates (San Francisco: Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District, 1970).

for.¹¹ A federal investigation of ferry operations in 1975 suggested that inflationary pressures were the least of several reasons for the inaccurate estimates, including “poor initial estimates,” the exclusion of several essential expenses, and changes in the specifications of the ferries (their design was upgraded several times for maximal comfort and speed).¹² The bridge district ended up spending more than two thirds of its federal mass transportation capital grants on the ferry system, even though it had the potential to serve only a small fraction of the riders of the bus system. In addition, ferries required approximately twice the subsidies per passenger, 70 cents per trip as opposed to 44 cents for bus passengers in 1974.¹³ Marin officials argued that the ferry system was a luxury that was not worth its enormous expense, primarily a recreational facility for San Francisco tourists that did little to relieve congestion on the bridge or contribute to the North Bay economically or in terms of a sound transportation system. The Marin County Grand Jury expressed the frustration of Marin commuters: “It is felt that the... Bridge District Board cannot effectively protect the interests of the thousands of Marin County commuters while concerning themselves with the spiraling costs of production and maintenance of the Larkspur Ferry System.”¹⁴ As bridge district reserves dwindled, Marin officials had little sympathy and felt no obligation to increase taxes to raise funds to subsidize local buses when so much money was being sunk into ferries. The Marin public got a chance to express their opinion on bridge district operations directly in 1975, when they were faced with a ballot measure to increase the local sales tax to help improve the bus system; the measure was resoundingly defeated.

¹¹ United States General Accounting Office, *Increased Cost*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4-27.

¹³ California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Preliminary Report*, 54.

¹⁴ Marin County Grand Jury, *Final Report 1974-1975* (San Rafael, CA, 1975).

At the time that the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District entered into the transportation business, its finances had been in the black since the end of World War II, and it had added to its reserves every year. For the first time in 1971, it began to deplete these reserves. The district contributed one third of the capital for transportation facilities and equipment, supplementing UMTA funding. In 1969, its reserves stood at \$27.4 million, but by 1974, they were down to \$17.7 million; that year, bus operations incurred a deficit of \$5.9 million, and the ferries \$800,000.¹⁵ At first, the bridge district tried to offset these losses with toll increases. Commuter coupons, offered at a significant discount to daily riders since the early 1950s, was reduced in 1969 and eliminated in 1974, and the tolls were raised from 50 to 75 cents in 1974, this first actual increase in its history.¹⁶ By 1979, mass transportation had drained the agency's reserves and, for the first time since the opening of the bridge, it faced a budget deficit. In 1991, the toll on the Golden Gate Bridge was raised to \$3, three times that of other California bridges.

In addition to its problems with mass transportation, there were many other reasons for the continued unpopularity of the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District. A 1977 toll increase was ruled illegal after revenues were quietly diverted to support San Francisco transit operations; the judge called bridge district activities "deceptive, unfair, and misleading," and required refunds through a temporary toll reduction.¹⁷ The agency was plagued by labor problems, including a three month strike by its bus drivers in 1976 and a similar confrontation

¹⁵ California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Preliminary Report*, 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷ The decision was appealed and later the case was settled out of court with toll discounts. *San Francisco Chronicle* February 20, April 20, 29, 1978, February 10, June 28, 1979; *San Francisco Examiner* February 20, 1978.

with ferry workers in 1979.¹⁸ More accusations of discrimination in hiring surfaced.¹⁹ It was revealed that officials routinely deferred maintenance on the bridge in order to solve short-term budget problems.²⁰ Years of traffic accidents and frequent suicides on the bridge have led to accusations that it does not do enough to ensure public safety. Periodically, grieving relatives file lawsuits demanding the construction of a suicide barrier on the bridge; the thousandth suicide from the bridge drew attention to the issue in 1995.²¹ After a toddler fell to his death in 1997, through a gap between the sidewalk and the rail on the bridge that violated state safety regulations.²² Activists, including former Bridge District Director and State Senator Quentin Kopp, have waged a number of unsuccessful campaigns for a central traffic divider on the bridge and improvements on some of its most dangerous approaches (one was dubbed “blood alley”).²³ One commentator called crossing the bridge “San Francisco roulette.”²⁴

One of the most spectacular disasters in the history of the bridge district was the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the bridge. Inadequate planning for as many as 800,000 people attending the dawn bridge walk meant that those that managed to get onto the bridge were

¹⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 9, 10, May 29, June 15, 1976, July 7, July 25, October 15, 1979, October 21, 1979.

¹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 1, 2, 1975; *San Francisco Examiner* May 24, 1975; *San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle* February 8, 1981.

²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle* March 6, 1988.

²¹ *San Francisco Chronicle* May 27, 1977, August 18, 1994; July 11, 12, 28, 1995, December 22, 2002. For a recent discussion of the issue, see Tad Friend, “Jumpers: The Fatal Grandeur of the Golden Gate Bridge” *The New Yorker Magazine* October 13, 2003.

²² *San Francisco Examiner* December 24, 1997.

²³ *Examiner and Chronicle* January 30, 1977; *San Francisco Chronicle* October 7, 1972, November 3, 1972, August 16, 1981, December 11, 1982, March 22, December 23, 1983, December 25, 1983, March 10, 1984, June 13, 1988, June 26, 1996, July 18, September 5, 1996, July 2, 2001; *San Francisco Examiner* October 14, 1972, October 14, March 23, 1972, November 10, 1981, February 19, 1985, June 27, June 28, 1996.

²⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 21, 1988. San Francisco’s other major paper, the *Examiner*, has been at least as critical of the agency since 1971, particularly with regard to the bridge district’s ferry operations. The two papers merged in 2000. *San Francisco Examiner* June 20, 1966, January 30, 1967, May 3, 1970, July 5, 1971, February 6, April 29, 1972, August 1, 1972, June 3, June 11, 1973, August 7, 1974, March 6, May 3, June 22, 1975, May 3, December 4, 1976, March 28, 1977, May 28, 1985.

stranded for hours, unable to move in any direction. The weight of the densely packed crowd caused the normally arched roadbed of the span to sag visibly in the middle, raising the question of structural damage. The non-profit organization formed by three of the bridge directors to organize the celebration failed to raise enough money, and the bridge district ended up paying over \$1 million of its unpaid debt, despite promises made earlier that public money would not be spent on festivities.²⁵ Later investigation revealed that organizers also failed to obtain liability insurance for the event.²⁶ The bridge district hired a new, permanent public relations officer soon after the fiasco.

Little changed in terms of the culture and orientation of the agency, the shift in its leadership and its embrace of mass transportation. Stephen Leonoudakis, originally a troublemaker on the board of directors and a vocal critic of the agency, became one of its most enthusiastic boosters and dedicated defenders, earning the nickname “the Admiral” for his tireless support for the ferry system.²⁷ Throughout its crisis of traffic congestion and budget deficits, the bridge district faithfully continued its contributions to the REA and the San Francisco Visitors’ and Convention Bureau. One analyst noted in 1974 that the bridge district was the second largest contributor to the REA and the only “district entity” paying dues; by that time it was also a major sponsor of the San Francisco Convention Bureau.²⁸ Even with the purge of old boys and the end of Adams’ reign, the influence of the northern counties remained; the strongest indication of this was REA general manager and public relations

²⁵ The “Friends of the Bridge” was formed and controlled by the bridge district for the “historical glorification and edification of the bridge.” The organization was also charged with establishing a museum, though that has not been achieved. California Office of the Auditor General, *A Review of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District and the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Golden Gate Bridge: Report* (Sacramento, 1987); *San Francisco Chronicle* June 26, 1987; *Examiner and Chronicle* June 21, 1987.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *San Francisco Business* April 1, 1981.

²⁸ California Legislative Analyst, *Analysis of the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District: Preliminary Report*, 56-57.

officer Carney Champion's appointment as general manager in 1984 over the strong objections of San Francisco directors.²⁹ History repeated itself, as once again a public relations man already closely associated with the bridge district was named to lead the agency.

The bridge district continued to fend off efforts for its dissolution or reform. However, these were no more successful than previous efforts; even the powerful Speaker of the Assembly Willie Brown, who led efforts for dissolution or reform in 1981 and in 1988,³⁰ was no match for the "well-connected lawyers, lobbyists, and legislators" defending the bridge district, as the *Chronicle* noted in its 1994 exposé.³¹ Echoing decades of similar protests, it blasted the agency for its lack of accountability and skewed representational structure. The nineteen member board of directors was a "bastion of white men," it contended, with only five women and one minority member. The positions were "choice political plums," with perks including thousands of dollars in travel expenses (not only for meetings, but also for annual conferences as far away as Portugal and Hong Kong) and "hobnobbing with powerful politicians." Many of these political appointees had occupied their posts for decades, even inheriting them across generations: "at the Bridge District, they call this the value of experience. Critics call it the politics of exclusion." One was quoted calling the bridge district "the last vestige of bossism," another called it "a perfect example of the type of self-perpetuating, inaccessible, obsolete, fiscally abusive bureaucracy we're increasingly subject to as citizens." The counties in the bridge district had backed the 1930 bond issue for the construction of the bridge, but since the redemption and the radical transformation of the

²⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle* December 15, 1984.

³⁰ *San Francisco Examiner* April 22, 29, June 25, 1981, December 24, 1987; *San Francisco Chronicle* April 25, May 26, 1981, June 10, 1988.

³¹ *Chronicle* July 6, 1994.

bridge district, the *Chronicle* contended, “the officials from the northernmost counties acknowledge that their areas have few legitimate ties to the bridge.”³²

The *Chronicle* cited charges of inefficiency and extravagance, particularly in its transit operations. Despite budget shortfalls, the bridge district was acquiring new assets, purchasing 151 miles of railroad right of ways in northern California and a \$6.2 million high-speed ferry expected to add \$1 million to its annual transportation costs. The high salaries of its top staff also attracted attention; the general manager of the Golden Gate Bridge earned twenty percent more than the director of the California Department of Transportation, who was in charge of all of the state’s nine other toll bridges as well as many other facilities. To top it all off, the bridge district was under investigation at the time by the FBI and the San Francisco District Attorney for “bid-rigging, skimming, contract improprieties and financial illegalities.” An inside informant tipped off law enforcement officials, accusing the bridge district of misappropriating federal mass transportation funds among other things.³³ That nothing ever came of the investigation did little to satisfy the agency’s opponents.

In 2002, the bridge district announced that it was facing a financial crisis, its debt mounting rapidly and its budget deficit critical. A number of major maintenance projects, including a complete resurfacing of the bridge roadway and earthquake retrofitting, added to the strain of greater than expected losses by transportation operations, representatives explained. Existing financial problems were exacerbated by costs associated with the terrorist attacks of 2001 and a slumping economy.³⁴ To help make up for shortfalls, the toll on the bridge was raised from \$3 to \$5, despite loud public protest. Ken Garcia, one of the *Chronicle*

³²*San Francisco Chronicle* July 6, 1994.

³³*Independent Journal* November 17, 1992.

³⁴*San Francisco Chronicle* February 6, March 23, April 3, 25, 2002

reporters responsible for the 1994 exposé, penned an editorial soon after the increase was announced:

You don't need to be a native to look out at the Golden Gate and see for whom the bridge tolls.

It tolls for the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District, a quaint, insular agency that seems more than content to keep itself wrapped permanently in a fog.

At the district, bridge tolls are the coin of the realm, a fast pass to longevity and comfort for a transit authority unlike any other in the West. And the years have proved one thing beyond doubt—few agencies are better at taking commuters for a ride.³⁵

The \$5 toll did not resolve the district's budget crisis, nor did donation boxes installed a few months later to encourage visitors to help out.³⁶ In 2003 the bridge district reduced bus and ferry service sharply, weakening the already anemic North Bay mass transportation system. Commuter discounts were eliminated, layoffs announced, and bus service further cutback in July 2003. Bridge district officials predicted that an \$8 toll was on the horizon.³⁷

Accusations against the management of the bridge district and objections to its policies range from trivial to serious, but regardless of their validity or justice they have had little or no influence. The agency seems oblivious to protests, public hearings, outraged editorials, and even legislation. Obviously, its invulnerability is not due to a lack of persistence or determination on the part of its foes. The basic qualities of the bridge district, resulting both from its institutional structure (autonomy, hierarchy, independent financing) and from the culture and attitudes associated with it, persist.

To millions around the world, the image of the Golden Gate Bridge is instantly recognizable; it is a monument to human ingenuity, an architectural masterpiece, a siren song for the cosmopolitan pleasures of the San Francisco Bay Area. But for the thousands of

³⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle* June 4, 2002.

³⁶ *New York Times* November 29, 2002.

³⁷ *San Francisco Chronicle* April 7, 25, 2003; *Independent Journal* March 1, April 2, 26, May 21, 2003.

commuters that pay its toll every day, the bridge represents something very different. The agency created to finance and construct the bridge has collected tolls since 1937 and now controls all modes of transportation from San Francisco to the North. Growth and prosperity were not the only legacies of the Golden Gate Bridge; Marin commuters and the San Francisco Bay Area as a whole paid a heavy toll for the ambition of Northern California boosters. Along with the beautiful bridge came an agency which may well endure as long as the structure it was created to build.

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