

San Francisco Chronicle

FRIDAY, APRIL 9, 2010

High-speed rail to end at Transbay Terminal

BY JOHN WILDERMUTH

San Francisco's rebuilt Transbay Terminal will be the end of the line for the state's planned high-speed rail system, after the project's directors Thursday killed an alternative that would have built an underground station at Beale Street.

The board of the California High-Speed Rail Authority, meeting in San Jose, voted 6-1 to continue the study of the Transbay Transit Center and drop the Beale Street proposal.

The lone opponent was former San Francisco Supervisor and state Sen. Quentin Kopp, who complained that San Francisco officials were trying to jam the transit center through.

He was also the only dissenter on an earlier vote to accept a design for the terminal's train station that would require design waivers.

The vote wasn't about engineering, Kopp complained.

"This is a political act, predicated on a drumbeat of political activity," he said. The recommendations weren't based on politics, but on what was best for the rail system, said Robert Doty, who put together the plans for the downtown

terminal and for the route the high-speed trains will take between San Francisco and San Jose.

The Beale Street station, which would have covered an almost three-block area bounded by Beale, Main, Mission and Harrison streets, had too many technical problems, Doty said.

The underground construction could have threatened the footings of the Bay Bridge and would have forced the demolition of downtown housing. The right-of-way could have been difficult to obtain and the design made it difficult to get a steady stream of trains in and out.

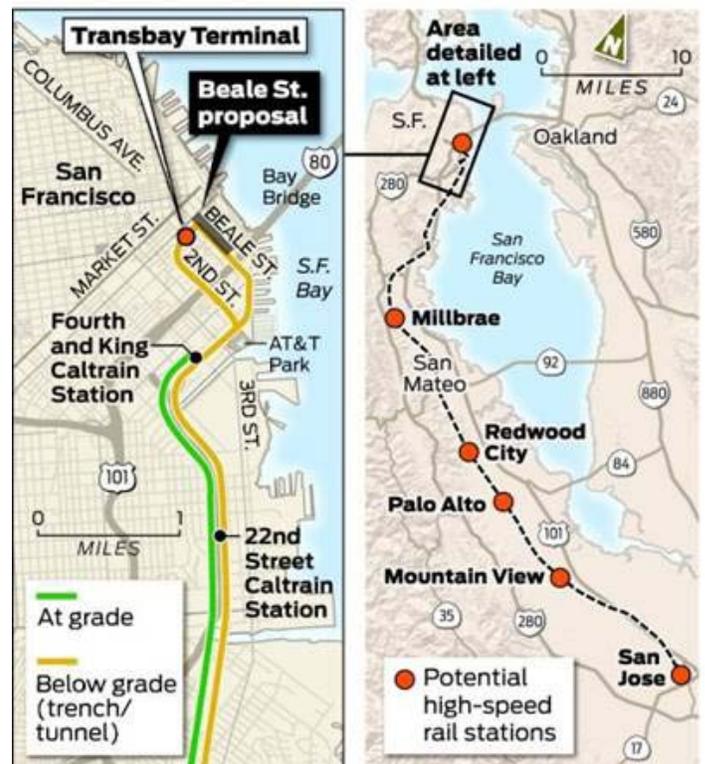
But even if those problems could have been solved, "the Beale Street option wouldn't have been any better than the Transbay Terminal, which has been at the center of San Francisco's planning process," Doty said after the meeting.

Construction of the Transbay Terminal could begin by August and the city already has been promised \$400 million in federal stimulus funds for the first stage of the project, which is expected to cost \$1.2 billion.

The vote came as welcome news to San Francisco officials, who see the new Trans-

High-speed rail proposal

A proposal to build an underground station spanning almost three blocks along Beale Street has been dropped by the project's board of directors, leaving the rebuilt Transbay Terminal as the last San Francisco stop on the route.



Source: California High-Speed Rail Authority Todd Trumbull / The Chronicle

bay Transit Center as a much-needed economic boost to the city.

"The terminal is ready to be under construction by August," said Jim Lazarus, vice president of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce. "It's a permanent solution for high-speed rail in San Francisco."

The estimated 40,000 jobs the construction project will bring brought out a stream of union leaders to back the Transbay Terminal plan.

"With 30 percent unemployment in the construction industry, we need those jobs," said Mark Kyle of the Operating Engineers union.

While the current Caltrain terminal at Fourth and King streets is too small for both Caltrain and the high-speed rail, it will be used as part of the system, Doty said.

There were few surprises in the plans approved Thursday for the San Francisco to San Jose segment of the high-speed rail system. The board settled on a route that follows the existing Caltrain system down the Peninsula, rejecting alternative routes along Highway 101 or Interstate 280.

Besides the San Francisco stations, the board also agreed to continue study of potential stations in Millbrae, where the rail system would link to San Francisco International Airport, and in downtown San Jose. They will also look at the possibility of putting a mid-Peninsula station in Redwood City, Palo Alto or Mountain View.

The board also agreed to delay any decision on whether to run the tracks underground through the Peninsula, a costly solution favored by many local cities.

“The train will run through the heart of our community and the physical division will destroy the city,” said Burlingame Mayor Cathy Baylock, an advocate of putting the trains underground.

While the plan approved Thursday didn't take costs into account, it will be different when a revised alternatives analysis goes before the board in two months or so, Doty said.

Many of the people who pleaded their community's case are convinced those decisions already have been made.

“It's one thing to listen, but another thing entirely to act,” said Kathy Hamilton of Menlo Park.