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S.F. Transit Center to tower over West

By: Bonnie Eslinger

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SAN FRANCISCO - Three different proposals for a new Transbay Transit Center all reached for the sky — at least 1,000 feet in the air — with a tower that included a hotel, shops, offices and residential units inside, adjacent to a rebuilt public transit terminal.

On Monday, the Transbay Joint Powers Authority unveiled proposed design concepts created by three architect/developer teams for what they hope will become the “Grand Central Station of the West.” If built, the skyscraper would become the tallest building on the West Coast, according to Transbay Joint Powers Authority board officials.

The revamped Transbay Transit Center is expected to unite regional bus lines, BART, and subsequently a Caltrain connection, together at First and Mission streets. Transit advocates also hope to eventually bring the state’s first high-speed rail line to the modernized public transportation hub.

Each design included a minimum of 3,400 new homes — of which 35 percent will be below market-rate prices — within a massive tower that will include retail, offices and hotel.

Rebuilding the Transbay Terminal, the first phase of the Transit Center project, is estimated to cost \$1 billion in already secured local, state and federal funding. The second phase, which would extend the Caltrain line from its station at Fourth and King streets, is expected to cost at least \$2.4 billion in additional funding. To date, \$500 million has been secured for the project, according to Transbay Joint Powers Authority Executive Director Maria Ayerdi, who added that establishing a design for the first phase of the project would help build funding momentum for the second phase.

Ultimately, The City’s vision for a newly rebuilt Transbay Transit Center is not just for a public transportation hub; it’s a plan for a whole new neighborhood. The planning department held a public meeting on July 25 to develop a comprehensive plan for a Transit Center District — including investigating possible changes to permitted building heights and density rules for the surrounding area. Such development would help generate revenue for the Caltrain extension, Ayerdi said.

Mayor Gavin Newsom said the new development high-rises were essential to growing The City’s housing, job growth and public transportation usage. He acknowledged that approving new height limits for the Transbay center’s tower and the surrounding neighborhood would be “controversial,” but said San Franciscans shouldn’t “fear this kind of change.”

The five-member Transbay Joint Powers Authority is scheduled to choose one of the three proposed designs at its Sept. 20 meeting.

The public can see models of the designs at City Hall today, or view them online at transbaycenter.org.

Project details

Transbay Transit Center project consists of three elements:

- 1) Rebuild Transbay Terminal at First and Mission streets, including a 1,000-foot tower
- 2) Extend Caltrain from Fourth and King streets to new Transbay center, with accommodations for future high-speed rail
- 3) Create a neighborhood around Transbay Transit Center that would include 3,400 new homes

CONSTRUCTION PHASES

- » Phase I: Transbay rebuild. Construction completed by 2014. Cost: \$983 million.
- » Phase II: Extension of Caltrain. Operational by 2018. Cost: more than \$2.4 billion.
- » Regional transportation systems that will connect at new center: Muni, AC Transit, Golden Gate Transit, Caltrain, SamTrans and Greyhound.