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Land Use and Economic Development Committee
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA
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Re: the Transportation Plan for the Eastern Neighborhoods

Dear Supervisors,

The San Francisco Planning and Urban Research (SPUR) has been following the Eastern Neighborhoods planning process since its inception and is excited to see it nearing completion. As a good government and good planning advocacy and education organization, SPUR supports the gist of the plan's recommendations for improving the quality of urban life and sensibly increasing the number of people who can live and work in San Francisco. SPUR promotes urbanism as an appropriate response to sprawl and climate change.

SPUR has carefully reviewed the transportation components of the Eastern Neighborhoods plan and would like to offer the following comments and observations.

First, we should note that much of the transportation infrastructure needed to support increased activity in the Eastern Neighborhoods is already in place. Mission Street has a subway (BART) and very frequent surface transit along Mission Street. Third Street has light rail. The Central Subway is paid for and will be operational in 2016, extending rail service from Chinatown (and probably North Beach) to Visitacion Valley. The entire neighborhood is flat and easily accessible by bicycle. While SPUR has some recommendations on how best to take advantage of the existing infrastructure, we wish to emphasize that the plan's proposals for increased job and housing density are actually quite conservative considering the *existing* infrastructure and in some areas (particularly those adjacent to the two BART Stations within the plan) we would have preferred to see even greater densities. That said, there is definitely a need for some thoughtful additional planning about transportation in the Eastern Neighborhoods. SPUR supports the proposal to have the MTA and the SFCTA initiate a thorough study of the plan area and the implications the plan presents for transportation capital investment and operating costs.

Even without the study, we know that some improvements must be made. SPUR makes the following recommendations for transit improvements and issues that the study should address.

Enhance the Mission Street corridor. The SFMTA's Transit Effectiveness Project contemplates the improvements necessary for Mission Street to carry the additional passenger trips the plan encourages. These are highly cost-effective improvements that are already assumed in the TEP's budget. They should be expedited.

- Increase the frequency and capacity of surface transit. The TEP proposes a near doubling of the amount of service on Mission Street within the current SFMTA budget.
- Increase the speed of transit on Mission Street. The SFMTA's toolbox for speeding transit is robust, including all of the following that should be applied to Mission Street: running the limited-stop, rapid service all day long; consolidating stops on the locals; building queue jump lanes for the bus to get around intersection traffic; and strengthening the transit priority at signals; building elegant and dignified "stations" instead of just bus stops; converting entirely to low-floor vehicles; and implementing pre-paid boarding. The combined effect of these measures could speed up the average Mission Street bus trip so much that it could carry substantially more people at little to no extra cost.

Enhance the 16th Street corridor. The 22-Fillmore line should be re-routed to remain on 16th Street from the Mission to Third Street, as recommended by the TEP. Transit preferential treatments should be implemented and rapid (limited-stop) service in place to shuttle people from Mission Bay to the Mission Street transit spine. Ideally, the transfer point between the 16th Street buses and the T-Third is at that very intersection instead of two blocks north. The plan should consider consolidating the Mariposa and Mission Bay T-Third stops into a single stop at 16th Street, which would reduce operating costs for both the 22-Fillmore and the T-Third. We recognize that this would put the T-third stops further apart than supported by Muni's current stop spacing standards, so it should not be done without careful consideration or unless Muni changes those standards.

Add a plan policy to support a new Caltrain stop at 16th Street. As part of Caltrain's 2025 Plan and the California high speed rail project, the Caltrain corridor is slated for electrification and the addition of express tracks. This investment provides the opportunity for Caltrain to provide a "metro" service in the Eastern Neighborhoods using the local tracks, while the express tracks continue to provide regional and intercity high speed service.

Build the bicycle network. The flat geography and low-volume streets of the eastern neighborhoods make it one of the most bicycle-friendly neighborhoods in the city already, with bike-to-work rates as high as six to seven percent in some Census parcels, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. Using cities with similar geography and land use as examples, bicycle trip rates will be as high as 15% in this neighborhood if the streets are designed safely. Most of the district's non-through residential streets should be traffic-calmed, slowing motor vehicle speeds to 15-20 mph. Bicycle lanes and paths as proposed in the draft bicycle plan should be provided. This would add bike lanes on all or portions of Potrero Ave., Mississippi St., Illinois St., Cesar Chavez, Kansas, 23rd Street, 17th Street, and Division. The Mission Creek bicycle path will provide a car-free route from the Mission District to the Embarcadero.

Retain the Removal of Density Controls from the Residential Transit-Oriented (RTO) zoning category. In some ways, buildings and land uses have more of an impact on transportation than streets. Densities high enough to support transit prompt frequencies that attract passengers who otherwise would drive. Easy, cheap parking encourages driving despite the ease of transit use. Requiring parking drives up the cost of housing and forbids the creation of new, affordable-by-design units in existing buildings. To reduce driving and housing costs with a single action, we fully support the Planning Commission's decision to eliminate residential density controls in the Eastern Neighborhoods RTO districts..

Direct the Transportation Authority to begin a study to expand Bus Rapid Transit to Potrero Avenue. Potrero Avenue has been identified as part of San Francisco's Rapid Transit Network. A BRT Expansion study should analyze the costs and benefits of expanding BRT to Potrero Avenue. This street carries a high volume of transit passengers. These passengers would benefit from BRT treatment.

Conclusion

The Eastern Neighborhoods already contains some of the best transit infrastructure west of the Mississippi. The proposed zoning does a reasonable job of capitalizing on these investments. However, there is more that could be done. Short term support of proposals in the TEP followed by more substantial transit investments on 16th Street and Potrero will go a long way towards enhancing our rapid transit network.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 415-781-8726, ext 113.

Sincerely,



Gabriel Metcalf
Executive Director