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Grand Central Station of the West

By Leah Harnack

The “Grand Central Station of the West,” the Transbay Transit Center (TTC) Project is a \$4.5 billion transportation and housing project that will be the heart of a new transit-friendly neighborhood. The project consists of three elements:

Replacing the former Transbay Terminal

Extending Caltrain and California high-speed rail from Caltrain’s current terminus into the new downtown Transit Center

Creating a transit-friendly neighborhood with homes, offices, parks and shops

The Five Levels of the Transbay Transit Center:

City Park – A public 5.4-acre rooftop park that will feature a wide range of activities, including an outdoor amphitheater, gardens, trails, open green space, restaurant and café, and bike facilities.

Bus Deck Level – A loop that surrounds a central passenger waiting area.

Second Level – Passenger and visitor area as well as administrative offices, retail services and amenities.

Ground Level – The primary circulation hub of the transit center. It will feature a Grand Hall with a prominent Light Column, allowing in natural light. The outdoor bus plaza will be located at the eastern end of the building.

Lower Concourse Level – The passenger connection between the ground floor and the train station platform.

Train Station Platform – Located two levels below ground, it will contain three platforms that will accommodate six train tracks

Phase 1 of the project consists of building the five-story transit center and the bus ramp connecting the center to off-site bus storage. The second phase of the project will complete the 1.3-mile extension of the Caltrain rail line from Fourth and King Streets underground into the new transit center.



Future Transit Connections:

Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District
Bay Area Rapid Transit
Caltrain
Golden Gate Transit
Greyhound
San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency
SamTrans
WestCAT Lynx
Amtrak
Paratransit services
California high-speed rail
TTC Leadership

Former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown would hold open-door office day where a limited number of tickets would be up for grabs on a first-come, first-serve basis. Residents would start standing in line as early as 2:00 a.m. to get one of the valuable tickets and then starting at 7 a.m. they could speak to him about anything on their mind.

One day, one of those in line was Maria Ayerdi-Kaplan, now executive director of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority (TJPA). An attorney with United Parcel Service (UPS), the company was looking to move her up to its corporate office in Atlanta, Georgia. A single mom that enjoyed being in court, she felt she needed to stay in San Francisco and working in the district attorney's, public defender's or city attorney's office would be the best fit.

She went with resume in hand to see Mayor Brown and told him she thought she would bypass the middle man, she's looking for a job in the DA or public defender's office and handed him her resume. There was a hiring freeze at the time but he liked her enthusiasm and as she had been working on transportation, he was in need of a transportation policy advisor and that, Ayerdi-Kaplan said, is how it all started.

While she was in that position, there was a disagreement as to what to do over a site; lawsuits surrounding a transit project. Ayerdi-Kaplan said, "He said here, you take care of this and the rest is history," she said of the new Transbay Transit Center (TTC).

As executive director of the TJPA, she is responsible for the design, funding and construction of the TTC.

Building the Foundation

The original Transbay Center opened for rail operations in 1936, roughly in the same footprint as the new terminal.

Before 1989 there was a double-deck freeway that ran along the Embarcadero and there were ramps everywhere, connecting to it. The freeway came down in the earthquake in 1989 and that made all the ramps obsolete. The ramps were owned by the state and they were made into parking lots with vendors maintained through the state of California.

Those properties were relinquished to the TJPA to use as a funding source and as those were sold off, it's created a building boom in the area.

The first modern study for the new Transbay Transit Center came out in 1967. Though it had been studied and debated for decades, Ayerdi-Kaplan said Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) believed in the vision

for the transit center and gave them the first money in the neighborhood of \$10 million so the planning and environmental work could begin.

“Working with Senator John Burton,” Ayerdi-Kaplan continued, “we got the state of California Department of Transportation to convey to us at no cost, 19 acres – 12 of which we could develop to build a new station.” The agreement with the state is the TJPA would use the proceeds from the sale of the property to build the project and then the tax increment that would generate over 45 years-plus could be used for soft and hard costs.

“One of the largest funding sources of the project is the land and that allowed us then to enter into numerous public-private partnerships to build the project,” said Ayerdi-Kaplan. One of the most famous ones, she said, was when they sold one of their properties to Boston Properties for close to \$192 million. Boston Properties is building the tallest tower in San Francisco at 1,070 feet, known as the Salesforce Tower. Attracting tenants, Salesforce Tower boasts a central downtown location with the 5.4-acre City Park at its doorstep and unparalleled access to all modes of public transportation.

Ayerdi-Kaplan said another innovative thing they’ve done in terms of financing is to execute a land agreement with the United States Department of Transportation for a TIFIA loan. “We pay the TIFIA loan with our tax increment.”

Value Capture Success

Back in August of 2012, the city passed legislation to create the Transit Center District Plan. The city made an offer to developers for the area surrounding the transit center, giving them the option to upzone a parcel, giving them more leasable space and the potential to generate more revenue.

Prior to the Transit Center District Plan, TJPA Legislative Affairs and Community Outreach Manager Scott Boule said the Salesforce Tower was zoned for about 550 feet but because of the plan, it will be 1,070 feet.

The plan only impacts the six parcels that did decide to upzone and Boule said, “They have to recognize that they’re bringing in a lot more people into a dense, urban area, so additional infrastructure is needed to support those extra people.

“In exchange for the economic benefit of upzoning, they had to agree to continue to contribute to the infrastructure costs necessary to support those taller buildings.” He continued, “The way they had to agree to do that was through participation in this Mella-Roos Community Facilities District (CFD).”

This project has been a catalyst for surrounding development with 19 buildings underway in the area immediately surrounding the transit center and then another eight residential buildings just south of that. Boule said, “In addition to catalyzing the development, the project has been able to generate substantial revenues for construction of those phases, so it’s really a model of true public-private partnership.”

After the Transit Center District Plan was enacted in 2012, it was 2-1/2 years of working through the creation of it; working with the city, the mayor’s office and the planning department. Illustrating the strength of support for the project, there was unanimous support throughout the entire process with the board of supervisors.

The final step to enact the CFD was in January when the mayor signed the legislation. Boule explained, “What the Mella-Roos says in terms of Transbay, it designates 82.6% of the revenues from this Mella-Roos special tax district to the Transbay program. Right now the city’s projection in terms of net bond

proceeds from revenues that the DFT will create is about \$807 million. So we're designated to receive 82.6% of that, which is about \$667 million. A portion of that will go to complete phase 1 then the bulk of it will go to phase 2."

Phase 2

While that is a big step forward for Phase 2, another huge step for phase 2 was when the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) designated the project as a regional priority in the regional transportation plan, Plan Bay Area, for the federal new starts program. Boule said, "Getting designated as a regional priority is essential to enter the New Starts pipeline and is something that had been a goal for many, many years for this project in terms of phase 2."

When the MTC helped in getting that designation in Plan Bay Area, they also committed \$300 million in future bridge tolls. After the phase 1 TIFIA loan for \$171 million is repaid, there's going to be another \$300 to \$400 million in tax increment that's going to be generated from the redevelopment area, which will go to phase 2. Plan Bay Area included a commitment for future high-speed rail funds of \$557 million. TJPA has \$105 million received from bridge tolls and local sales taxes, which has been used to do some initial design work.

Mega Construction

The TJPA is the operator-maintainer and it chose to utilize a construction management / general contractor (CM/GC), Webcor/Obayashi. Construction Management Oversight (CMO) is Turner Construction.

The first step was excavating 640,000 cubic yards of dirt, said Senior Construction Manager Dennis Turchon. Before the 1906 earthquake, there was a beach at First Street, one of the major roads crossing the site. TJPA sponsored an archaeological research project within the site where carefully selected locations became the focus of archaeological excavations. A variety of objects from porcelain and glass to prehistoric animal remains were found and preserved.

Construction in a dense, urban setting has led to some necessary innovations being that it's located in a seismic neighborhood environment. As Turchon said, "We have to be good neighbors.

"Besides all the access issues, we have to be very mindful of people trying to sleep at night and we have to be mindful of traffic during the day." One of the ways of getting the project done while being a good neighbor has been their night noise permit. They're very restrictive on contractors to make sure what they're doing at night absolutely has to be done at night. They also have many people doing outreach to communicate with people in the area.

Currently, more than 10,500 jobs in 20 states across the United States have been created by the Transbay Transit Center. "We are a Buy American project," explained Ayerdi-Kaplan, "so everything's being done in shops across the country."

Another immediate impact for job creation has been the workforce inclusion. They have done a lot of work to hire veterans, disabled veterans, woman-owned and minority-owned small businesses. On September 23, 2103, Ayerdi-Kaplan said they were the first public works project in the United States to hold LGBT business outreach.

Ayerdi-Kaplan said the contractors work with all of the unions and the various veteran's organizations, such as Helmets to Hard Hats and Swords to Plow Shares. She added, "We go out to the bases and to the

veteran's hospitals to recruit folks for the trades and for management. We also teamed up with the First Lady's Joining Forces, which works to help veterans across the country. We've got a very robust program in place.

In addition to the opportunities offered to small businesses, she said they require the contractors to hire students. They also hire in-house high school and college students as paid interns. "We place them in positions they're interested in," Ayerdi-Kaplan explained. "If they're interested in engineering, we place them with engineers. If they're interested in architecture, they work with the architects. There's finance, public outreach, public relations ... there are so many various disciplines that you can be involved in when you're talking about a project of this scale.

"We go out and work with many organizations, in particular organizations that work with inner city at-risk youth because we strongly believe, if you're building a public project and you're building it with public dollars, you should give back to the community."

They're in their eighth year now and she said before many students didn't understand what engineering was or what it took to build a project of our scale and now many have gone on to careers that involve projects like this. "We're really proud of that and what we've done. If you can touch just one life, I think you're successful."

More Than Transit

While the Transbay Transit Center will offer a centrally located facility with a variety of transportation options, it will also be a place to come shop, eat, relax in the park or enjoy art or educational opportunities. The amphitheater will seat 1,000 people for movies, plays, concerts or other educational events.

Learning about sustainability will be another element for visitors. It will be a LEED-Gold station, including things like an expansive geo-thermal system, storm water runoff reduction, water conservation, the rooftop park and the recycling of toilet water.

The TJPA has committed \$4.75 million to fund the acquisition of artwork. Phase 1 on the art program consists of the installation of five large-scale, permanent, commissioned artworks in the transit center. Depending on the availability of funding, Phase 2 of the art program may include opportunities for artists to create smaller-scaled works for the passenger lobbies, corridors, passageways, and other areas.

"Our 40-foot sculpture that will be in the front of the station, for example, is by Tim Hawkinson," explained Ayerdi-Kaplan. He's a very well-known local artist that will create a signature piece for the transit center, marking the grand entrance to the facility with an iconic image for the neighborhood.

Using demolished material salvaged from the former Transbay Terminal, he will construct a figure to welcome travelers to the new Transit Center. Approximately 41 feet high, the "guardian" is intended to help travelers navigate a safe journey.

Ayerdi-Kaplan stated, "It's more than your typical transit facility where you can go and take a bus or train. There will be so much more that it's going to offer."