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Ayerdi-Kaplan propelled a San Francisco infrastructure hub

By Scott Blair



Developing the Transbay Transit Center in San Francisco has been a nearly two-decade crusade for Maria Ayerdi-Kaplan, executive director of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority (TJPA). Hired in 1998 by Willie Brown, then the city's mayor, she fostered consensus among disparate stakeholders to replace an aging bus terminal with a new \$4.5-billion facility that links bus, train and high-speed-rail lines in its downtown core.

Ayerdi-Kaplan also spearheaded TJPA's complex and creative financing method, which included more than 15 different cash

sources, to foot the enormous construction bill. The biggest boost came when the California Dept. of Transportation transferred 19 acres to the authority at no cost. The resulting land sales, which included public-private partnerships with developers to maximize the value of properties near the new station, provided a key revenue stream and dramatically lifted real estate development in the burgeoning area south of Market Street.

The method reflects the entrepreneurial spirit of the Bay Area. "We are very unlike any other public entity that's building a major project of the scale of Transbay. We didn't have a fixed income stream," Ayerdi-Kaplan says. "I set up the organization to operate like a savvy start-up business."

While the area's bustling construction activity has led to project cost increases and fueled some local criticism, crews recently completed structural steel on the ¼-mile-long terminal, and the project remains on track to finish at the end of 2017.

HT Tran, president and CEO of Anvil Builders, a site subcontractor, praises Ayerdi-Kaplan's "grit" and successful hiring of ex-military workers. She is "able to stand her ground, know what she is fighting for and be very even-keeled," says Tran, an Iraq War veteran and ENR's 2015 Award of Excellence winner. Also, her efforts to include the LGBT community—a first for a public project in the U.S., says Ayerdi-Kaplan—spurred agencies in California and other states to follow suit.