



PRESIDENT'S CORNER



By Jon Golinger

In 1954, the Municipal Railway threatened to eliminate the 39-Coit, a bus route that then, as now, weaves its way through the heart of North Beach and Telegraph Hill. Six local residents organized their neighbors to speak out about the necessity of a public-transit option in the neighborhood, and they saved the 39-Coit. Out of that citizens' organizing effort was born the Telegraph Hill Dwellers.

Our neighborhood has fought since then to preserve and expand public-transit access to this most dense corner of our intense city. Even for residents who own cars, having the option to use the 41-Union to get to work on Market Street, the 39-Coit to schlep groceries up the Hill, or the 30-Stockton to make it to a Giants game can make a huge difference on a hectic day. Fewer cars cramming onto congested streets is better for our health and our environment.

That's why it is so disturbing that our representatives at City Hall keep slashing bus service, raising fares and pouring good money after bad into the Central Subway project, which one newspaper recently called "one of the most expensive mistakes city officials have ever made." The proposed 1.7-mile Central Subway line would begin at an above ground station South of Market at Fourth and Brannan streets, then travel underground with a stop at Moscone Center, bypass Market Street, stop at Union Square, then end with a stop at Stockton and Washington streets in Chinatown. Possible future plans would extend the Central Subway to Washington Square in North Beach and Fisherman's Wharf.

In July, the Civil Grand Jury issued a scathing 58-page review of the project entitled: "Central Subway: Too Much Money for Too Little Benefit." Based on seven months of research and interviews, the Grand

Jury report exposed major flaws in Muni's plans. Among the Grand Jury's findings:

With Muni already facing a \$2.5 billion capital shortfall, spending an additional \$1.6 billion in taxpayers' money for the short 1.7-mile Central Subway would severely strain an already overloaded system and lead to more cuts in bus service.

Muni's funding plan for the Central Subway is overly optimistic and fails to take into account the huge cost overruns that have plagued other Muni construction projects.

Because the Central Subway would be a stand-alone line, not directly connected to any other Muni Metro lines, the 1,000-foot distance that passengers would have to walk through underground tunnels to connect to other lines would make it extremely difficult and potentially unsafe to navigate, especially for seniors and the disabled.

Ignoring these concerns — and despite deep uncertainty about whether federal funds will be provided — the Board of Supervisors recently voted to spend an additional \$57 million in local tax dollars to purchase two oversize tunnel-boring machines to begin digging tunnels for the project. Muni plans to bore the deep tunnels to Washington Square, resulting in major construction and disruption on Columbus Avenue and along the Square in the next few years.

Many who regularly ride Muni and have seen neighborhood bus lines eliminated and others perpetually threatened, watched fares increase and then increase again, and waited patiently for improvement of the slow and chronically overcrowded 30, 45 and 8X buses, share similar concerns. After hearing from proponents and opponents of the project, in August 2009 THD's Board adopted a motion stating that, "THD is a pro-

public transportation organization, but does not support the Central Subway Project for the following reasons: 1) the cost is significantly disproportionate to the stated benefits; 2) the project fails to serve the transportation needs of the city at large; and 3) the project creates potential adverse impacts to Chinatown, North Beach, Washington Square and their historic resources. THD encourages the city to redirect its commitment toward improving and expanding existing surface public transportation systems, thereby increasing the benefit and reducing the cost."

The Sierra Club — as much a pro-public transit organization as any — agrees. The Sierra Club recently urged Muni "to reject any capital investment that will add to its financial shortfalls. Muni should prioritize its capital investments to improve service delivery, increase ridership and provide the maximum benefit for each dollar invested. The Transit Preferential Streets [bus line improvements] along Stockton should be at the top of the list. The club urges Muni to find alternative uses for unspent Central Subway funds."

While the Central Subway appears to have unlimited resources and political juice behind it and some initial construction has already begun, the Civil Grand Jury's new report shines a powerful spotlight on a project that simply appears not ready for prime time. With federal funding thrown into question by the national financial crisis, the time is ripe to fix this problem. Instead of spending \$100 million per one-tenth mile on what appears to be a classic government boondoggle, it would seem to be much wiser for City Hall to spend scarce taxpayers' dollars helping residents and visitors in our neighborhood get out of their cars and onto the buses.

IN MEMORIAM



DR. MARION MEYERSON 1935-2011

Beloved wife of Bernard Meyerson and long-time THD member and leader. She will be warmly remembered and deeply missed by all of us on the Hill.

THD BOARD MOTIONS

FOR THE MONTHS OF APRIL-MAY 2011

Motion from 4/19/11 THD Board Meeting:

THD supports the appeal of categorical exemption from environmental review for 726 AT&T above ground utility boxes on S.F. streets. (Passes Unanimously)

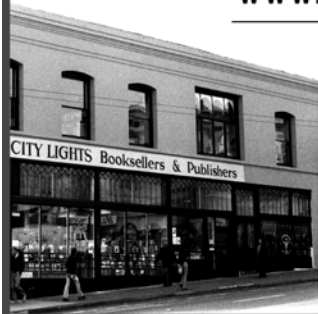
Motion from 5/17/11 THD Board Meeting:

The THD Board approved the new revised budget as proposed. (Passes unanimously)

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