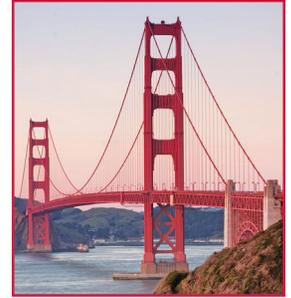




BAY AREA MONITOR

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Energized by Renewables

By Leslie Stewart

The Bay Area may currently be witnessing a classic example of a tipping point. In 2002, the California legislature passed Assembly Bill 117 (Migden), allowing California communities to purchase and re-sell clean energy to residents and local businesses, a practice known as community choice aggregation. However, until recently only one such program existed in the Bay Area: Marin Clean Energy, which launched in 2010. Now, in the short time since the *Bay Area Monitor* last covered this issue in 2013, Sonoma Clean Power is up and running, CleanPowerSF in San Francisco announced a start date in May, and four additional counties — San Mateo (Peninsula Clean Energy), Santa Clara (Silicon Valley CCE Partnership), Alameda, and Contra Costa — are exploring the option.

For most consumers in California, clean energy use is limited to what is available through their utility, and perhaps what they generate through a rooftop solar system. If they depend solely on a utility like Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), the utility decides how much solar, wind, nuclear, or hydroelectric power goes into their wires. Community Choice Energy (CCE) programs are designed to give customers an alternative with more renewable energy, usually for a lower price, with an option to pay slightly more and get 100 percent renewable energy.

State regulations require all utilities, including CCEs, to provide 20 percent renewable energy now, and 33 percent by



Workers from RichmondBUILD install panels at Solar One, a 10.5 megawatt solar farm in Richmond. When completed this November, the project will contribute electricity to Marin Clean Energy, the region's first community choice energy program. photo courtesy of Marin Clean Energy

the year 2020. PG&E currently provides roughly 28 percent renewable energy to its customers. However, San Mateo County Sustainability Fellow Kirsten Pringle, who has been helping coordinate the formation of Peninsula Clean Energy, noted that some of PG&E's renewables portfolio comes from nuclear power. "Peninsula Clean Energy is not going to have any nuclear," she said.

Peninsula Clean Energy and other proposed CCEs are modeled on the successful programs in Marin and Sonoma. Program startup usually takes about two years, beginning with an exploratory group of jurisdictions — several cities plus the county to cover unincorporated areas — and a technical feasibility report. San Mateo is partway through the process; it began outreach in the fall of 2014 and completed its report in July 2015.

Based on this report, participating jurisdictions will vote on creating a new Joint Powers Authority (JPA) that will be

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Energized by Renewables (from page 1)

responsible for administering the program by purchasing the energy from traditional and renewable sources to serve its customers. In December, Atherton voted to join the San Mateo County JPA, followed by the City of San Mateo. Pringle expects that between 11 and 15 cities will join, explaining that “most cities have Climate Action plans and for a lot of cities that’s the reason to join, because this will decrease greenhouse gases.” Another reason is to encourage “green jobs” generated by industries such as solar installation, particularly if the CCE makes a commitment to buy locally.

Once formed, the JPA submits a plan to the California Public Utilities Commission, starts purchasing power, and then sells that power to customers. Like any other utility, professionals experienced in the energy field actually run the program. Charles Sheehan, spokesperson for CleanPowerSF, noted that the program’s administrator, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, has already been operating as an energy utility “for almost 100 years.” Barbara Hale, an assistant general manager at SFPUC, added, “We have more expertise than other CCEs.”

The infrastructure — wires, poles, meters — remains with PG&E, but the consumer has the assurance that the energy going into the grid for their use comes from the mix of clean power sources they’ve been promised. PG&E charges CCE customers a delivery fee for the use of its infrastructure. The customer sees one bill covering charges from both PG&E and the CCE program.

By law, all CCEs are “opt-out” — when one is formed, all customers in the participating jurisdictions become CCE customers, unless they choose to opt-out at the beginning (or later, for a fee). In San Mateo, Pringle said, “We think the opt-out rate will be lower than 15 percent based on experience in Marin and Sonoma.” Even with recently increased grid-usage fees from PG&E, Pringle expects that Peninsula Clean

Energy fees will be lower than PG&E, “at least for launch.”

The same is true in San Francisco, which postponed its start date from October 2013 to May 2016. In the meantime, according to Hale, “changes in the electric market have been favorable to the program.” San Francisco’s basic “Green” account is 35 percent renewable California-sourced power and will cost slightly less than PG&E’s rates. The 100 percent renewable “SuperGreen” level will cost up to two cents more per kilowatt than PG&E’s rates. Hale thinks it will compete well against Solar Choice, PG&E’s clean energy plan, promising, “It’s a better product and, for now, it’s cheaper!”

Unlike most CCEs, not all San Francisco customers will join CleanPowerSF at once; energy purchases will be made in stages, with some customers added in May and more in August. The first customers will be those who have already indicated they will waive their right to opt-out. “We are enrolling everyone who raises their hand,” said Hale, “but the typical San Francisco resident doesn’t know anything about this program.” CCEs can also include current customers doing net-metering — selling back surplus power to PG&E — but Hale said, “We will be more purposeful and strategic in enrolling those customers” to ensure that switching the contracts won’t cost them extra PG&E fees.

With interest in CCEs on the rise, Marin Clean Energy has already added some non-Marin jurisdictions to its JPA, including Richmond, Pinole, San Pablo, and El Cerrito (all in Contra Costa County), Benicia (Solano County), and the County of Napa. The City of Lafayette sent a letter of interest to Marin Clean Energy in August, even though Contra Costa County recently asked for participants in a study. “Our Environmental Task Force looked at CCEs for over a year. They prefer Marin Clean Energy because it’s already established. There would be no upfront cost, and

About the *Bay Area Monitor*

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Alec MacDonald, Editor • Linda Craig, LWVBA President

there are known factors,” said Megan Canales, an assistant planner with Lafayette. “If we go with Contra Costa, we don’t know how long it will take.” On January 25, the city council voted to partner with Marin Clean Energy. Canales mentioned that although it is unlikely, MCE could choose not to accept an application from her city “if Lafayette joining would raise rates for MCE’s existing customers, or strain the supply of renewables so that the mix of renewables versus nonrenewables is affected.”

It might seem that straining the supply of renewable energy could be a real concern. However, Pringle noted, “There is a lot of renewable energy on the market because of the huge demand, from utilities because the state raised the requirements, as well as CCEs.”

San Francisco has seen the same growth in renewables. “There is definitely a lot being constructed, and part of what motivates a lot of people to participate is the emphasis on renewable electricity,” Hale reported. “When we went out to bid, we got 52 bids — quite robust. Some were from projects that said, ‘If you take our bid, this is what we will build for you.’”

If technical studies continue to confirm that supplies of renewable power will be available at or below current rates, it is possible that by the end of 2017 the majority of electricity customers in the Bay Area will be served by a CCE.

One benefit will be to the environment. Replacing other



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forms of energy use with greenhouse-gas-free electricity will likely improve Bay Area air quality (although no studies appear to have been done to confirm this, due to the difficulty in projecting amounts of locally-sourced clean power). Air quality regulators have taken notice of this upside. In fact, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District helped Marin Clean Energy get off the ground with an allocation of \$75,000 from its climate protection grant program back in 2008.

Perhaps the major selling point, however, is embodied in the word “choice.” Pringle pointed out, “This program provides access to renewable energy for people who can’t afford solar, or are in multi-family housing where the owner can’t or won’t add it.”

“From the customer perspective, who’s making the decisions about your power supply?” Hale asked. “It’s your locally elected officials. The money you spend with us is money that will be reinvested in San Francisco — you’re ‘shopping locally’ for your electricity.” 

Leslie Stewart covers air quality and energy for the Monitor.

How Restoring Wetlands Will Prepare Us for Sea Level Rise

By Robin Meadows

After California’s worst drought in 500 years, we’re finally enjoying a rainy winter thanks to one of the strongest El Niños on record. Droughts interspersed with drenchings are nothing new for us — these extremes are part of our normal weather cycle — and periodic wet years are nothing we can’t handle. But that’s about to change. In coming decades, sea level rise will amplify the storm surges and ultra-high “king” tides that send waves crashing over levees.

Making matters worse, sea level rise will also weaken the Bay Area’s resilience to floods. Tidal marshes edging the bay take the oomph out of waves and soak up water like sponges. However, according to a 2015 State Coastal Conservancy-led report, we stand to lose most of this natural flood protection to rising seas. The cost of an extreme storm to the Bay Area is estimated at \$10 billion.

“Many of our salt marshes will be drowning,” said San Francisco Estuary Institute scientist Jeremy Lowe. “When

they’re under water too long, the plants will start dying off and then we’ll have mudflats.” And while mudflats also help control floods, they are not nearly as effective.

Marshes won’t be the only things drowning. We’ve built cities and roads all the way down to the bay, and as it goes up, they will start to go under. “We need to start thinking about how to live with the bay as it moves,” Lowe said. Sea level rise is projected at roughly one to five feet by the year 2100, and our cities and roads can’t be easily reengineered to keep up with it. But our marshes can.

Tidal Marshes Then and Now

We have time, but we must start now — it takes decades to restore a tidal marsh. Fortunately, we’ve been restoring marshes here for about 40 years, so we’re good at it. Altogether, the bay needs 100,000 acres of tidal marshes to do the job.

continued on page 4

Restoring Wetlands (from page 3)

This is just over half their historical area circa 1800, before we started diking and draining them for agriculture, salt ponds, and other uses. Marshes around the bay were down to 40,000 acres in 1998, and since then about that many more have been restored or are in the works, leaving about 20,000 to go. Other reasons to restore these wetlands include that they help purify water, and provide habitat for at-risk species such as the California clapper rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse.

Most of the original marsh was in low-lying lands fringing the North, Suisun, and South bays, and that's where most of the restoration is too. Of course the Central Bay also had wetlands, but they were smaller due to steep, rocky shorelines. Even so, the East Bay can still be a key player in adapting to sea level rise.

Giving Wetlands Room to Move

As the water creeps higher, marshes will need to shift inland. In the East Bay, a \$2 million experimental levee — part of a \$9 million project at the Oro Loma wastewater treatment plant in San Lorenzo — is testing a new way of giving wetlands room to move. The site used to have a wall-like levee right along the bay, which would have blocked wetlands from moving inland. Now, the levee is a gently sloping wedge that stretches up from the bay; this will let marshes migrate up the slope as sea level rises. “We hope to expand this upland restoration to the whole shoreline of the East Bay,” said Lowe, who directed the project.

The sloping levee mimics the gradual transition from wetlands to uplands and should, like natural marshes, slow waves from storms and king tides. “It's a cool idea,” said UC Berkeley environmental engineer David Sedlak. Grasses, sedges, and other native plants will stabilize the levee, keeping the soil in place and building it up. To give the plants a head start in their manmade wetland, they will be irrigated with effluent from the wastewater treatment plant.

Native plants could also purify the effluent of nitrate, a nutrient that can cause harmful algae blooms. Most of the

nitrate in the bay is from urine. “It comes from us,” Sedlak said, adding that our wastewater treatment plants do not remove nutrients, and that retrofitting them to do so could cost more than a billion dollars.

The Latest in Marsh Restoration

More traditional marsh restoration also needs to prepare for sea level rise, and a new project in Sonoma County's Sears Point incorporates a sloping levee as well as what we've learned from previous restorations. The Sonoma Land Trust is restoring nearly 1,000 acres of diked agricultural land on the bay side of Highway 37. In addition to keeping water off the highway, the new sloping levee's uplands will give wildlife a place to go during king tides.

Sears Point was diked and pumped dry 140 years ago, and exposure to air made the soil decompose and subside. It will be rebuilt naturally over the next 20 to 30 years, as tides bring in sediment. “We're relying entirely on the bay and tides to bring in six feet of soil,” said project manager Julian Meisler.

Sediment won't settle out when water is choppy, though. “The site is nearly three miles long and that's enough for the wind to make waves,” he said. “We need calm conditions.”

The old way to break up waves was finger-like peninsulas extending from the shore into the restored marsh, but these also let predators like coyotes trot in. Instead, the Sears Point project is dotted with more than 500 island-like mounds to break up the waves.

Letting the tide rebuild the marsh will cut costs but, at nearly \$18 million to buy and

reengineer the land, the project is still expensive. The same holds elsewhere around the bay. To help raise funds for the remaining wetland restoration we need, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority has placed a region-wide, \$12 parcel tax on the June 7, 2016 ballot. The tax would raise \$500 million over 20 years, enough to build 20 miles of new levees and restore an estimated 15,000 acres of wetlands. 

Robin Meadows covers water for the Monitor.



Last October, an excavator breached an old levee at Sears Point to initiate restoration of farmland back to tidal marsh.

photo courtesy of Sonoma Land Trust/Corby Hines

To Protect Open Space, Stewards Focus on Photographic Technology

By Elizabeth Devitt

For more than a century, photographs have helped protect open space in California, inspiring conservation by capturing the grandeur of nature. In the late 1800s, Carleton Watkins' mammoth plate images of Yosemite influenced President Lincoln to preserve that wilderness area. Years later, Ansel Adams' landscape portraits of the southern Sierra Nevada were credited with getting national park status for Kings Canyon. These days, photos are still boosting land stewardship in the Bay Area — although perhaps not in ways those photographic pioneers could have envisioned.

Motion-triggered cameras, smartphones, and social media now make it possible to continuously monitor animals, plants, and environmental changes. The pictures generated by these new technologies provide data that can guide land management for the benefit of wildlife and people. Sometimes, they manage to be breathtaking, too.

"Cameras can show us the secret life of places," said Monica Stafford, the community ambassador program director for One Tam, an initiative created to bolster protection of Marin County's Mount Tamalpais.

Since 2014, more than 100 cameras have been placed around Mount Tam to gather information about the diversity of wildlife in that area. Instead of tracking animals one by one, these electronic eyes catch the bobcats, coyotes, bears, and other hard-to-follow critters (like the occasional river otter) whenever they wander by.

The project has already collected a million-plus photos. A combination of researchers and trained volunteers sift through the pictures, amassing data that helps assess biodiversity across the landscape. One Tam partners — Marin County Parks, the Marin Municipal Water District, California State Parks, the National Park Service, and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy — hope the gathered knowledge can improve management of the lands.

The Mount Tam cameras are one of seven Bay Area projects,

in place or in the works, using the Wildlife Picture Index. This method of taking photos with a grid-based pattern of cameras was first developed in the tropics to better account

for biodiversity. In the Bay Area, this data-collecting technique was first launched by scientists at the Pepperwood Preserve, just north of Santa Rosa.

"It's like having 21 biologists sitting there watching all the time," said Pepperwood Foundation President Lisa Micheli about the 21-camera array sited on the 3,200 acre property.

Photos from the cameras help fill in critical gaps about the state of wildlife on the large landscape.

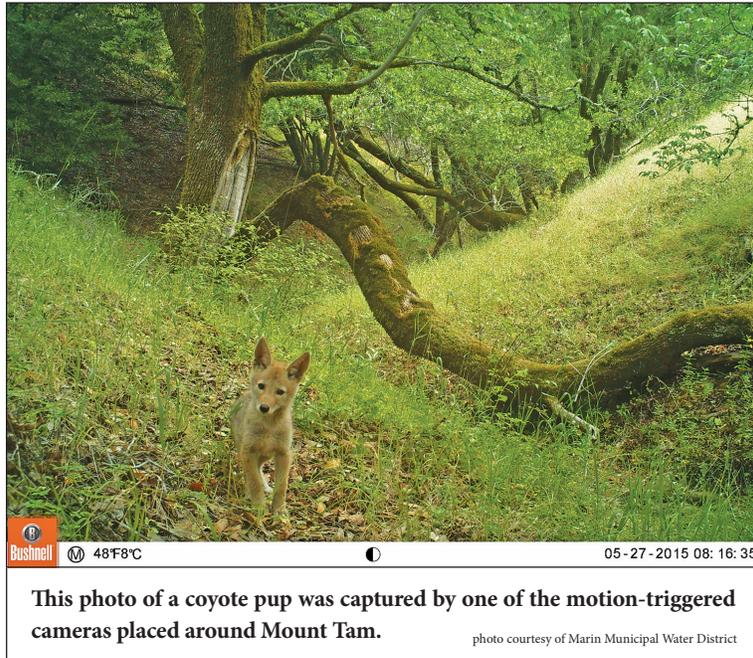
"We do all this work to restore critical habitats for wildlife, but we don't have a lot of data about how the wildlife is doing," said Micheli. "It's hard to count animals when there are no fences on these lands," she noted.

Who shows up in these pictures? Mule deer, bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, and opossums make the expected cameos, according to Micheli, who added that people are surprised by how often black bears and pumas enter the frame. A few rare sightings include a badger (thought to be long gone from the area), a porcupine, and spotted skunks.

Eventually, Micheli hopes to create one large dataset from all the Bay Area camera grids. "That could help resolve regional questions about the important places we need to protect, such as the critical corridors that need to be kept open between fragments of open space," she said.

Many of these open spaces are also prime spots for human recreation. To learn about how non-motorized human activities might affect wildlife, Michelle Reilly, a conservation biologist at Northern Arizona University, set up camera traps around eight Bay Area counties.

For three years, Reilly collected photos from 150 motion-activated cameras set at selected spots in 87 protected areas. She used these images to analyze how 10 species changed



Photographic Technology (from page 5)

their land-use patterns when people were hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, or walking with dogs in the same territory. The cameras showed that most animals in the study were affected, to some degree, by human activities. In varying ways, wildlife either shifted the times they used people-populated areas, or avoided these places altogether.

In some cases, those findings could be considered good news. For instance, Reilly found that mountain lions were most likely to avoid areas where hikers were present, and that striped skunks tended to avoid people with dogs. But this can also be bad news. When animals make lifestyle adjustments to avoid people, it can interfere with their ability to find food, a place to rest, or mates.

“In no way does this mean people shouldn’t be recreating out there,” Reilly emphasized. She hopes images can help land managers make better usage plans for the properties they oversee. For instance, if a space needs to accommodate both mountain lions and hikers, then land managers should try to set aside core areas that don’t have trails for people, leaving room for mountain lions to retreat.

A camera in hand can also provide a lot of information. That’s one lesson students learn during the TeenNat Summer Internship at Pepperwood Preserve. A free point-and-shoot camera helps introduce the 13- to 17-year-old interns to the power of pictures in science and conservation.

In one project, the students make research plots and photograph the biodiversity they find. They learn how to upload scientific-grade images to iNaturalist.org, the online social network that shares photos among nature-lovers and scientists around the world.

“The students see the connections right away. When they put up data [onto iNaturalist.org] they’re interacting with the scientific community from Sonoma County all the way to the head of Global Biodiversity Information Facility, the largest repository of biodiversity information in the world,” said Sandi Funke, the education director at Pepperwood.

Digital photography and social media networks have also helped turn hikers on Mount Diablo into citizen scientists.

After the Mount Diablo Morgan Fire in 2013, the grassroots organization Nerds for Nature, in collaboration with Mount Diablo State Park and the Wildlife Society, installed a change bracket system to monitor the landscape’s recovery. At several sites along the mountain’s trails, hikers could place their smartphone or camera in an angle bracket, take a picture, and post it to Twitter, Instagram, or Flickr. Nerds for Nature harvested the pictures and posted them on the Web, creating a time-lapse slideshow of Mount Diablo’s blackened earth becoming green again.

This “monitoring change” project was based on the idea of U.S. Geological Survey scientist Sam Droege, who saw angle brackets as a way to capture images of the same height, angle, and direction in one spot over time.

“I really like using existing social networks for these projects, because someone can post a photo that 100, 200, or 1,000s of followers can see. So you get this amplifying network of awareness,” said Dan Rademacher, a Nerds for Nature cofounder. “You can’t do anything with an image locked away in a camera.” 

Elizabeth Devitt covers open space for the Monitor.

Ferries Plan Upgrades as Ridership Swells

By Cecily O’Connor

The number of Bay Area residents taking a ferry is rising, an increase that’s likely to continue as operators add new boats and routes, and upgrade infrastructure to ensure smooth sailing.

Ferry ridership jumped during 2015 as commuters sought relief from roadway congestion and packed BART trains, based on figures from two regional operators.

San Francisco Bay Ferry — which runs between Vallejo, Oakland, Alameda, San Francisco, and South San Francisco — shuttled 973,572 total passengers from July through October last year, a 20 percent increase over the same period the previous year.

Golden Gate Ferry — whose vessels sail out of Larkspur, Sausalito, and San Francisco — logged 2.54 million total riders for its fiscal year ended June 30, up nearly 3 percent from the previous fiscal year. Larkspur alone experienced 11 straight months of ridership growth as of December 31.

“Demand is high,” said Jim Swindler, head of Golden Gate Ferry. “If it gets much higher we’d have to look quickly at what to do to accommodate it. Right now, we’re keeping up with it.”

The increase is driven by the need for fast, reliable, and convenient commute options as the Bay Area economy thrives and sends more people to work. Another driver is commute

pattern shifts, as parts of the East Bay and Silicon Valley join San Francisco as the region's primary employment centers. Waterfront development in San Francisco also is making ferry access attractive to mitigate regional transportation constraints.

"I expect ridership will continue to grow, and people might be more outspoken [in] calling for ferry service around the bay as more waterfront developments are completed," said Emily Loper, policy manager at the Bay Area Council, where she conducts research and analysis for the water transit committee.

To keep pace with demand, ferry operators and transportation planners will need to consider first- and last-mile terminal connections to ensure water commutes are competitive with other transit modes, Loper added. Facilitating those connections includes a c c o m m o d a t i n g bicycling and walking as alternate ways to reach terminals, which also aids in regional pollution reduction.

Some residents first turned to the open water when BART closed the Transbay Tube for repairs last summer, said Ernest Sanchez, spokesperson for the Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA), which runs San Francisco Bay Ferry. Bay Bridge delays also compel riders needing a backup.

"Ferries have been quick to respond and serve their role as part of the public transit mix," Sanchez said. "That has put us in the public eye."

The result is often crammed terminal parking lots, overcrowded vessels, and more time to board or disembark. In response, WETA stepped up its operating budget for fiscal year 2015-2016 to ease overcrowding and extend some added ferry service for part of last summer and fall. Golden Gate Ferry raised its 2015-2016 budget as part of ongoing investments in its fleet and service.

Operators have looked to fare hikes to help cover these mounting expenses. Golden Gate Ferry officials recently proposed a 4 percent increase beginning July 1 to combat

a \$34.6 million, five-year projected deficit. Meanwhile, San Francisco Bay Ferry increased ticket prices last July as part of a five-year program to offset expected rises in operating costs.

Even prior to these increases, ferry fares have generally been higher than other transit modes. One tradeoff for the additional expense is that water transit offers a lot of enjoyment, with comfortable, high-speed boats that sell coffee in the morning and cocktails at night, among other perks. The weather, too, is fairly calm year-round, which makes service reliable and ideal for taking in local scenery before and after a hard day of work.

"The ferry is arguably one of the more beautiful ways to get across the bay," said Priya Clemens, Golden Gate Ferry spokesperson.

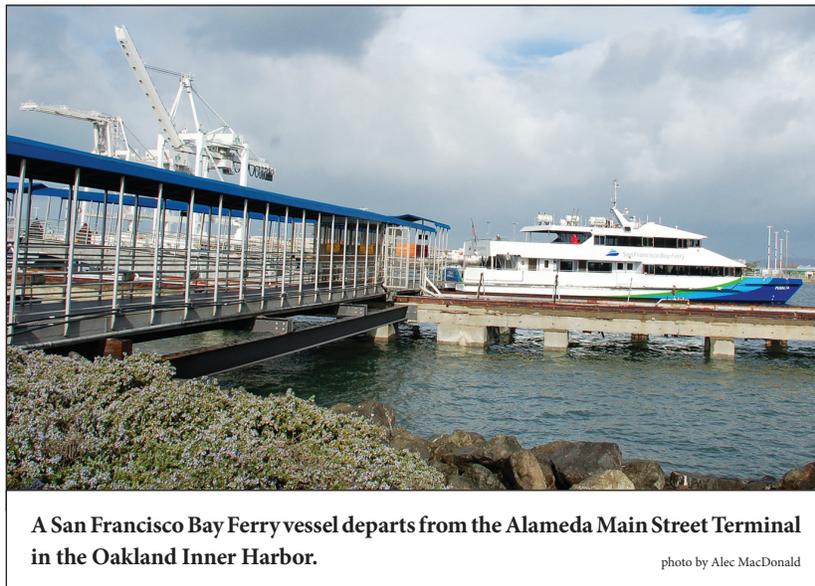
San Francisco Bay Ferry's fleet will rise to 14 vessels from the current

lineup of 12 by 2018, the result of five new boat additions that will replace three retiring ones. Two of the vessels now under construction, at a total cost of \$33.5 million, will each hold 400 passengers, accommodate 50 bikes, and travel at a speed of 27 knots (31 miles per hour). New vessels meet or exceed federal, state, and regional emissions standards.

The operator is planning a \$45 million Richmond-to-San Francisco project in 2018, serving about 100,000 Contra Costa County residents the first year. A San Francisco-Treasure Island route will eventually follow. To accommodate current and future ferry service, the San Francisco Ferry Building will expand to include up to two new berths, a \$65 million project.

Other projects include a \$31 million North Bay maintenance facility at Mare Island in Vallejo and a \$35 million Central Bay maintenance facility at the former Alameda Naval Air Station.

At Golden Gate Ferry, marketing is a priority to promote Marin County outings and fill empty reverse commute seats, Swindler said. Later this year, the operator might take over



A San Francisco Bay Ferry vessel departs from the Alameda Main Street Terminal in the Oakland Inner Harbor.

photo by Alec MacDonald

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Ferries Plan Upgrades as Ridership Swells (from page 7)

Tiburon service from Blue and Gold Fleet, which sells 216,000 Tiburon commute tickets annually. Golden Gate Ferry is currently studying the idea, and held a related open house and public comment hearing in late January. Comments from the events were “positive,” Clemens said, adding, “The only concern was if there would be a gap in service, and the answer is no.”

In the meantime, Golden Gate Ferry is working on American Disability Act access improvements at terminals in Sausalito and San Francisco, and is in early planning stages for similar enhancements at the Larkspur Terminal in addition to parking lot upgrades. Golden Gate Ferry’s seven-vessel fleet includes two recently refurbished high-speed boats, for about \$22 million total, now in operation.

In ferries’ wake is Tideline, a water taxi service. It’s also filling seats and in discussions about partnership opportunities with Bay Area municipalities and housing developers who are building adjacent to the shoreline. The goal is to accommodate and move more residents, especially in areas unserved by transportation options, said Nathan Nayman, president of Tideline Marine Group, which operates the taxi.

Tideline has completed 1,000 trips since inception in 2012, serving more than 4,000 passengers in and around the North Bay, East Bay, and San Francisco, according to Nayman. “We’re another safety valve that’s helping relieve some of that pressure for people moving in and around the bay,” he said. 

Cecily O’Connor covers transportation for the Monitor.

Nominations Still Open for MTC “Excellence in Motion” Transportation Awards

Every two years, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission solicits nominations for exceptional contributions to Bay Area transportation. The “Excellence in Motion” awards recognize positive impacts on mobility in the region. Nominations for the 2016 awards are due April 4. Winners will be selected by a jury representing MTC and the community. Awards will be presented in the fall of 2016.



Nominations can be for an individual, organization, jurisdiction, agency, firm, program, or project. All eligible nominees must have been active or under way during the two-year time frame from April 2014 to March 2016. To learn more information about the awards and to submit a nomination, visit mtc.ca.gov/awards or contact Terry Lee at tlee@mtc.ca.gov or (510) 817-5952.