

Planned 38-Geary slashes run into TL buzz saw

BY TOM CARTER

Muni's plan to eliminate five stops from the lumbering 38-Geary bus line east of Van Ness is facing heavy opposition and creating a neighborhood tug-of-war between Richmond District riders who favor the proposal and Tenderloin business interests and residents who don't.

The 38-Geary, plying one of the heaviest traveled corridors in North America, carries 50,000 passengers each weekday. The 38, admittedly the transit system's weakest-performing sister, follows what Muni calls a tight, outdated stop pattern. In peak hours, the jammed accordion bus oscillates along at 5 mph, swaying in and out of traffic like a stuffed caterpillar, taking mainly Richmond residents downtown and back home.

The plan to eliminate five of the 19 stops on outgoing Geary and incoming O'Farrell between Van Ness and Powell would cut 2-3 minutes off the route time. It is something that long-suffering Richmond riders, who bear the brunt of bus irregularities, feel they deserve. But it has incensed a number of TL residents, who protested at a Department of Public Parking and Traffic hearing on June 4.

The cuts are part of a larger package of proposals called the Inner Geary Transit Improvement Project developed over 12 months by DPT and Muni. With efficiency and reliability the goals, they would widen the transit lane and color it, reduce double parking by increasing the number of yellow zones (for an average loss of four parking spaces per block), shorten bus passenger-loading time by installing bus bulbs, and retime lights to smooth traffic flow. Most of the \$400,000 cost would be borne by Proposition K funds that renew the half-cent sales tax. The changes, if approved by the Board of Supervisors, would begin in October.

The protesters had no truck with the rest of the package, just reducing the number of stops.

"These changes were never taken lightly," Muni's Jay Primus explained. "But the tighter stop pattern we have now is an anachronism. We would remove five stops so that every other block is a stop. People would have to walk another 480 feet, and that's within Muni standards of 800 to 1,000 feet."

"This takes away stops in a hilly, long block area," said resident Ed Evans, whose concerns are with the disabled and seniors. Evans objected

to the added distance between stops, a hardship for someone in a wheelchair and the aged and infirm. Although there is no count of disabled in the TL, 1 of 7 city residents is physically or mentally disabled and it is assumed a higher concentration live here because of lower rents and the SROs.

Kim Nguyen, who said she was representing 500 residents in the Little Saigon business area around Geary and Larkin, wanted the two stops closest to the district restored. She said they were vital to the economic health of the area officially designated by the city in January.

Community planner Richard Allman complained that the hearing hadn't been adequately advertised. He said the cuts were an affront to the Tenderloin from yet another city department. Despite high residential and commercial use, the TL "has a continual problem of (being) treated as a non-neighborhood," Allman said. When he said the changes would inconvenience the neighborhood, Muni planner Steve Patrnick replied that the transportation in the Tenderloin wouldn't be "as bad as Bernal Heights" and that the plan does "increase service to the Richmond."

"He just trashed all the disabled and seniors in the area!" said resident Michael Nulty, who followed Patrnick to the mike. "I'm appalled at that kind of thinking."

Resident Bruce Windrem opposed the cuts because densely populated areas are where stops are needed most, he said. "How did people come up with the idea of having fewer stops?" he wanted to know.

Bill Barnes, Supervisor Chris Daly's aide, said that Daly's office had received "about three dozen phone calls" on the issue, most disapproving.

Hearing officer Julie Lichtenfeld said that because of the opposition she would pass the proposal on without recommendation to the Municipal Transportation Agency board. She had earlier volunteered that three minutes saved on the route didn't seem like a "huge" gain.

A number of people who were there in support and had not yet spoken were upset. At least two live in the Tenderloin, Kurt Shuck of 860 Geary and Marshall Foster of 537 Hyde. Lichtenfeld then allowed all of them their mike time, and support ranged from Proposition K people to Rescue Muni, the organization favoring a light rail system for Geary.

Shuck, middle-age, who lives at Geary and Hyde, agreed the stops

were too close together and offered that Geary is a pretty level street. The 38 now is simply too slow for him to use. He says on a weekday he can beat it to the Transbay Terminal on a bicycle and sometimes walking.

Richmond resident David Vasquez, who has done work with Rescue Muni, was the most outspoken, fed up as he was with the transportation to his neighborhood long being "so bad."

"I'm appalled that people in the Tenderloin think they should get special treatment," he said. "Why should they get it? Big deal! The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. One or two blocks (more) is not going to kill anyone in the Tenderloin."

The next week, the petition against the 38-Geary cuts had gathered 220 signatures and by the end of June had close to 300 including five former candidates for District 6 supervisor. (<http://www.petitiononline.com/38Geary/petition.html>) The petition points out the neighborhood's density, the steep access

routes to Geary Street and the many people with limited mobility.

Muni runs the 38L express for speed, the petition observes, and the other proposed improvements for the corridor should "make the difference in reliability." It objects to the neighborhood being treated as one "that people go through," and not an area of "real people with real needs."

Every intersection designated to lose a stop has from one to three groceries on its corners. On O'Farrell at Larkin, Tong Chee has been operating his T&M Market for 12 years, 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. The 38's riders get off right at his open door where he stacks the Chronicle and Chinese newspapers. Many pause before disappearing mostly north and south past scores of Larkin shops and restaurants.

"Lot of people here buy things," Tong says. "Chips and newspaper."

The MTA board secretary anticipates that the Inner Geary plan will be on the agenda when it meets in City Hall on July 20. The MTA oversees the DPT and the Municipal Railway. ■



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MENDELSON 1992

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Space is still available in many Fall Semester 2004 noncredit classes starting Wednesday, August 18th at City College of San Francisco's **Aleman Campus**. Listed below is just a sampling of day noncredit classes offered at 655 Geary and 4301 Geary Street. Noncredit classes are **FREE** and you can enroll by attending the first class meeting. You can also enroll after the start of the semester. New students are required to complete a noncredit application.



SAMPLING OF FALL 2004 FREE NONCREDIT COURSES

CRN#	Course Title	Days & Times	Location
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80096	ESL Begin Low 2	MTWThF 10:15-12:15 p.m.	4301 Geary
83744	ESL Begin High 3	MTWThF 8:15-10:15 a.m.	4301 Geary
80109	ESL Begin High 3	MTWThF 10:15-12:15 p.m.	4301 Geary
83741	ESL Listen/Speak 3/4	MTWThF 12:15-1:15 p.m.	4301 Geary
80933	Keyboarding Begin	MTWThF 9-10 a.m.	655 Geary
80934	Keyboarding Begin	MTWThF 10-11 a.m.	655 Geary
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