

Bicycle activists win 1, lose 1 in space battle

Rachel Gordon, Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writers

Friday, February 6, 2009



Bay Area bicycle advocates stepped up their campaign Thursday to make it easier to commute on two wheels, winning one battle to get more space for bikes on Caltrain but losing their latest skirmish with the state to allow cycling across the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

Caltrain directors approved a plan Thursday to increase onboard bicycle capacity on its trains. Meanwhile, at a meeting of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, Caltrans officials rejected a test program to allow bikes and pedestrians on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge.

The vote by the Caltrain board came after heavy lobbying by commuters who are fed up with the increasing risk of getting bumped off of trains when all the bike racks on the rail cars are full.

"It's very hard to plan your day when you don't know whether you'll get on the train. If I liked to gamble, I'd go to Vegas," said Paul Schreiber, a software developer who commutes between the 22nd Street Station in San Francisco and both the Sunnyvale and Mountain View stations on the Peninsula. He said he gets bumped every week or two.

Caltrain reports space problems on about 1 out of 10 runs, according to Chuck Harvey, Caltrain's chief operating officer. The trains now can handle 16, 32 or 64 bicycles. Cyclists aren't sure until the trains pull into the stations how many bikes will be allowed on board.

Under the new policy, the Bombardier cars, which now have rack space for 16 bikes, will be re-outfitted to carry 24. The older gallery cars, which now hold 32 bikes, will be reconfigured for 40.

With the change, the total available bike slots in the peak commute period will increase from the current average of 2,300 to 2,900, said Caltrain spokeswoman Christine Dunn.

A total of 272 seats will be removed. The retrofit would cost about \$200,000 and take eight to 12 weeks to complete. Harvey said he hopes work can start in April.

The board also set a goal of having two bike cars per train during the morning and evening commutes.

For bicyclists who have been battling for three decades for the right to pedal across the 4-mile Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, Caltrans' refusal was just the latest defeat. Last February, a consultant recommended a movable barrier that would allow the shoulder of the bridge to carry cars during commute



Pirate Treasure In Mexico

More in Travel

- [Beachside Progreso is easy on the wallet](#)
- [Riviera Maya resorts cater to your every whim](#)
- [Readers share top tips for Mexico travel](#)

hours then convert to a bike lane. But Caltrans officials refused, saying it would create unsafe conditions for drivers.

The Bay Area Toll Authority, which oversees operation of the state toll bridges, tried to broker a compromise. With traffic across the bridge down, there's no longer a need for a third lane of traffic, so they suggested installing temporary concrete barriers on the upper deck of the bridge for a couple of years to test its safety and popularity.

"We would be increasing the chance of accidents and decreasing the level of safety for thousands of travelers on this bridge," said Richard Land Caltrans' chief engineer.

Bike and trail advocates said a lane across the span would be a vital link in the Bay Trail and the regional bicycle lane network. Caltrans, they argued, is favoring cars while ignoring the growing interest in bicycling.

Since Caltrans gave up plans to add a third lane of traffic to the bridge, it no longer needs a permit from the commission. So the commission cannot compel Caltrans to give bicyclists access. Robert Raburn, director of the East Bay Bicycle Coalition, said after the meeting that he was frustrated by Caltrans' intransigence, but would keep fighting.

"We've met our match," he said, "but we'll be back. We're not going to drop this. We're going to keep pushing."

E-mail the writers at rgordon@sfgate.com and mcabanatuan@sfgate.com

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/02/06/BA5C15OF4N.DTL>

This article appeared on page **B - 2** of the San Francisco Chronicle

San Francisco Chronicle Sections

[© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc.](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Feedback](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Contact](#)