

**KEY SYSTEM**

**TRANSIT LINES**

**SAFETY  
COURTESY  
SERVICE**

**HOPKINS ST.**

**BERGIE'S  
F TRAIN  
BOOK**



## Key System History



Unit 162 exiting the Solano Tunnel in Berkeley

The Key System, originally called the San Francisco, Oakland & San Jose Railway and nicknamed the Key Route, was founded in 1903 by Francis Marion Smith, a.k.a. Borax Smith for his fortunes in borax (most familiar for the brand “20 Mule Borax”). Smith came to the East Bay in 1881. He saw the East Bay's potential in the real estate market. To sell his remotely located land, Smith decided to use trains. Trains would provide future homeowners access to San Francisco.

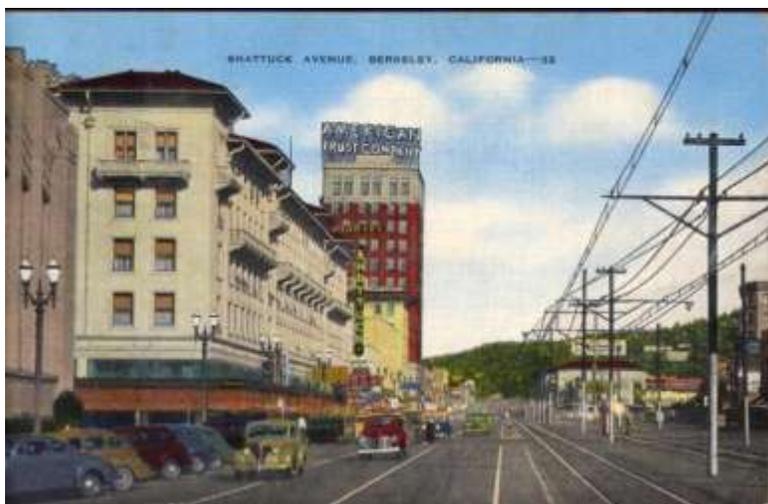
In addition to his dreams of connecting the East Bay with San Francisco, Smith and his colleagues dreamed of lines to San Jose and Sacramento. However, Smith soon abandoned his dreams of connecting to Sacramento and San Jose when real estate sales and ridership did not meet expectations. In 1913, unhappy investors forced Smith out of the company.

The Key System, in addition to its many local street cars, had six main transbay lines to San Francisco. The name Key Route comes from the skeleton key shape that the transbay lines formed. The ferry slips formed the teeth of the key, the 17,000 foot long pier formed the shaft, Oakland formed the bottom loop of the handle, Piedmont the middle and Berkeley the upper loop.

Trains initially used a pier and ferries to move passengers to San Francisco, but later, trains used the Bay Bridge. In 1946, just after the war, the Key System, which was locally owned, was sold to National City Lines, a company that owned most of the nation's biggest streetcar systems. The Key System, because of declining ridership ceased operation of trains on April 20, 1958 and converted to buses. Two years later, in 1960, the Alameda Contra Costa Transit District ([AC Transit](#)) purchased the Key System from National City Lines.

### Line F “The F Train!”: Berkeley via Adeline and Shattuck

The Berkeley line, the Key Route's first line, was built to compete with the Southern



Pacific's steam locals. The first run left from University & Shattuck in October of 1903. The Berkeley lines success prompted the Southern Pacific to electrify their lines to better compete with the Key System.

Competition was fierce between the Southern Pacific and the Key System. In 1933, the two railroads worked together to get rid of duplicate service on the Shattuck Avenue and Sacramento / California Street corridors. In 1941, the Southern Pacific ended its interurban service to Berkeley and the rest of the East Bay. In response, the Key System took over many of its former lines, including the Southern

Pacific's line from downtown Berkeley to Thousand Oaks and Solano Avenue. The F line was the Key's most successful line.

Here is information on the the rest of the Key Lines in alphabetical order:

### **Line A: Downtown and East Oakland**



Line A connected East and Downtown Oakland with San Francisco. Line A went through a number of different routings over the years.

Originally, trains ran across the Bridge, down Louise Street and then down Poplar Street. Line B trains switched off at Poplar Junction (24th Street) and cut through lots to get to Grand Avenue. Line A trains turned onto 12th Street from Poplar passing by the notable Shredded Wheat Factory. They then ran down 12th to Downtown Oakland, across the Lake Merritt Dam, turned left onto First Avenue and then used private right of way to reach its

terminus at the Central Car House. The private right of way from First Avenue & East 14th Street to the Central Car House at 3rd Avenue & East 18th Street still exists today.

In 1941, the Southern Pacific ended their Red Train operations in the East Bay. From April 1941 until 1950, Line A ran to Havenscourt Boulevard in East Oakland via East 14th Street and Bancroft Avenue. Between 1950 and 1958, the line terminated at 12th & Oak Streets due to the reconstruction of the Lake Merritt Dam.

### Line B: Grand Avenue - Trestle Glen

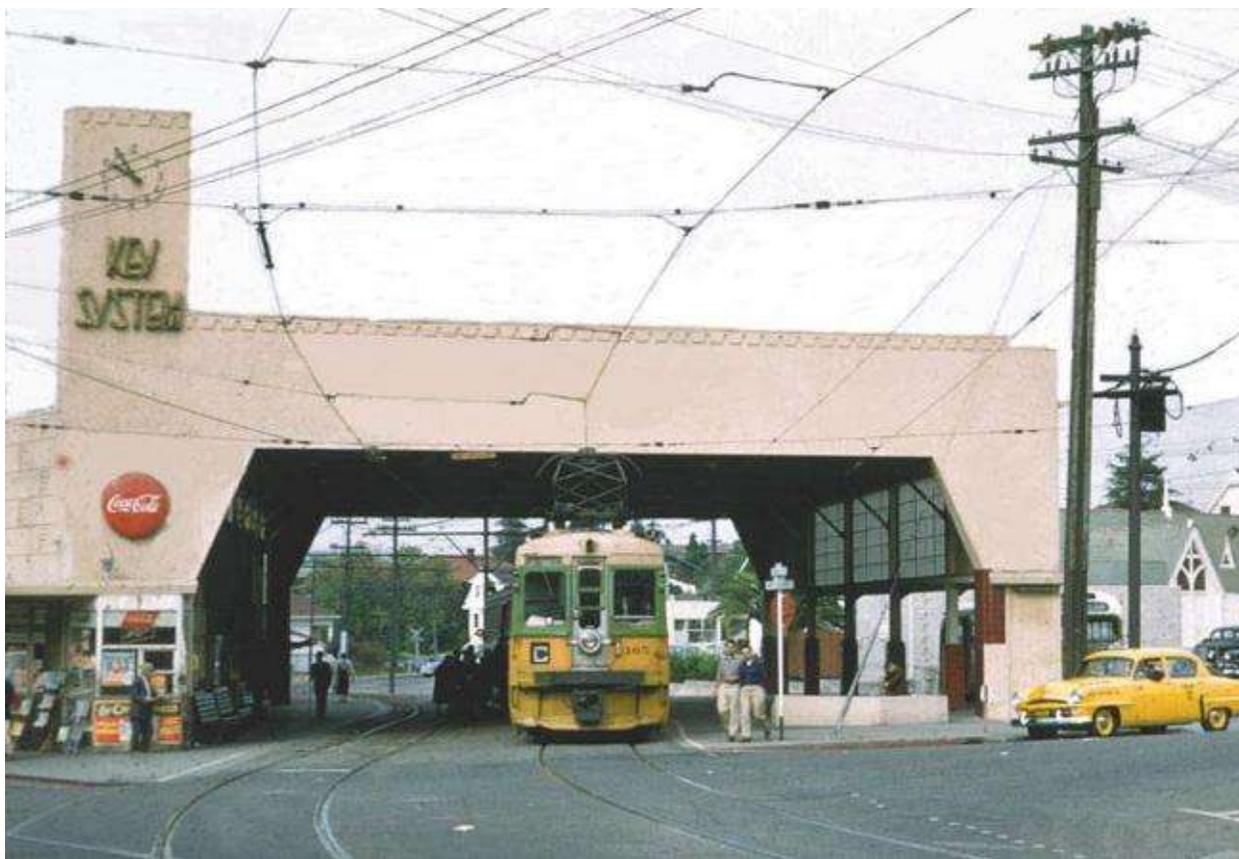


Before the Key System started using the Bay Bridge, Line B was called the 22nd Street line. It originally terminated at the Key Route Inn at Grand and Broadway in Uptown Oakland, but was later extended to down Grand Avenue to the Trestle Glen neighborhood to develop the property there.

Many remnants of Line B still exist today. First of all, AC Transit still operates the Line B bus. Second, if you walk up Trestle Glen Road from Lakeshore towards Grovesnor, look at

the backyards of the houses on the left. You will be able to see the graded right of way and the old line poles that held the electric wire for the trains. Second, at the corner of Trestle Glen and Lakeshore, take a look at the modern bank building and notice its curved shape. The building is curved because it was built the Line B right of way where the tracks curved off of Lakeshore into Trestle Glen. If you visit the parking lot on the Longridge side of the building, you can get a close look at one of the many remaining trolley poles along the right of way.

### Line C: Piedmont



Piedmont Station used to be the terminus of Line C until it was extended to Latham Avenue. The left side of the station still exists today.

After the success of their first route to Berkeley, the Key System constructed a second line to Piedmont Avenue. Piedmont Avenue was largely undeveloped so the line provided a great opportunity to make money through real estate development. Service started on June

1, 1904 when fares to San Francisco were 10 cents. The line ran from the Emeryville Shops at 40th & San Pablo via 40th Street to 41st & Piedmont where the station was.

Holly Place Station on Line C in Piedmont was on the Piedmont Extension, which extended from 41st & Piedmont Avenue to Oakland & Latham Avenue. The extension opened for service on November 21, 1924. The extension used some of Line 10's streetcar tracks and went along part of the proposed and unbuilt line to San Jose. Some transbay trains had through service to Oakland Avenue, others uncoupled a car that ran to the terminus and other trains stopped at Piedmont Station where passengers would have to transfer to a 900 type streetcar that would take them to the end of the line. Though much of the station area and the sweeping view of the track between people's houses has been turned into backyards, Holly Place station is a great place to visit. If you print out the vintage picture, you will surely recognize all of the houses when you are there.

## Line E: Claremont



The Key System built Line E to bring people to the Claremont Hotel. Service from the Claremont Hotel site started in 1910, five years before the hotel opened. The hotel, which was not opened until 1915 due to financial problems, was built by friends of Borax Smith, including Frank Havens. The original plan originally entailed bringing trains into the lobby of the hotel, but this never happened. The trains still got very close, however. They stopped between the tennis courts just outside the hotel. Not stopping inside of the hotel is in contrast to the Line B's Key Route Inn, where trains did enter the hotel.

Marty Carr remembers riding Line E trains across the Bay Bridge:

I was born in 1945 and lived near the "E" line in Berkeley. I used to ride the Transbay line to medical appointments in San Francisco. I always had an interest in railroads in general. One of the fond memories I had was riding the train as it approaches the Transbay Terminal on a warm day. The bridge units did not have air conditioning and we would open the window. I remember smelling the coffee roasting from the Hills Bros. plant.

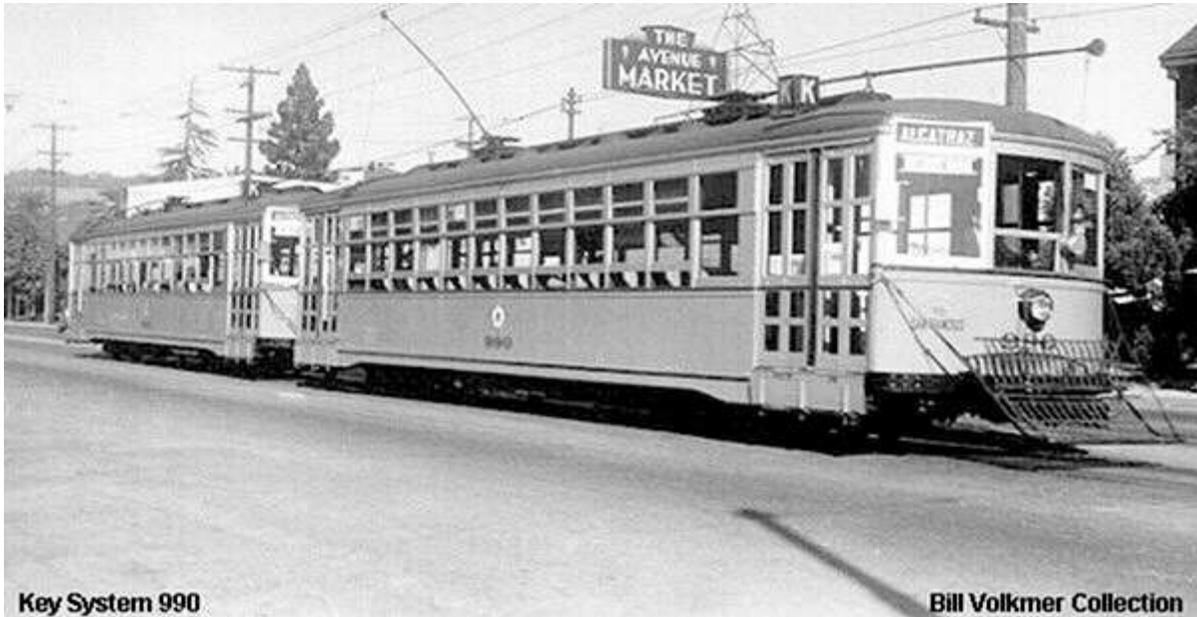
### Line H: Sacramento Street



This line was taken up in 1941 so that its track could be used on the Richmond Shipyard Railway. It had the poorest ridership in the system.

## SHUTTLES TO TRANSBAY LINES

### Line K: Alcatraz - Telegraph



This free connecting shuttle connected to Line F at Alcatraz and Adeline. It ran up Alcatraz to College and then down Bancroft to Shattuck. The shuttle provided patrons of the Key System's Transbay lines a way to get to downtown Berkeley and the UC Campus in a time when it was competing with the Southern Pacific's Red Cars.

### Line G: Westbrae

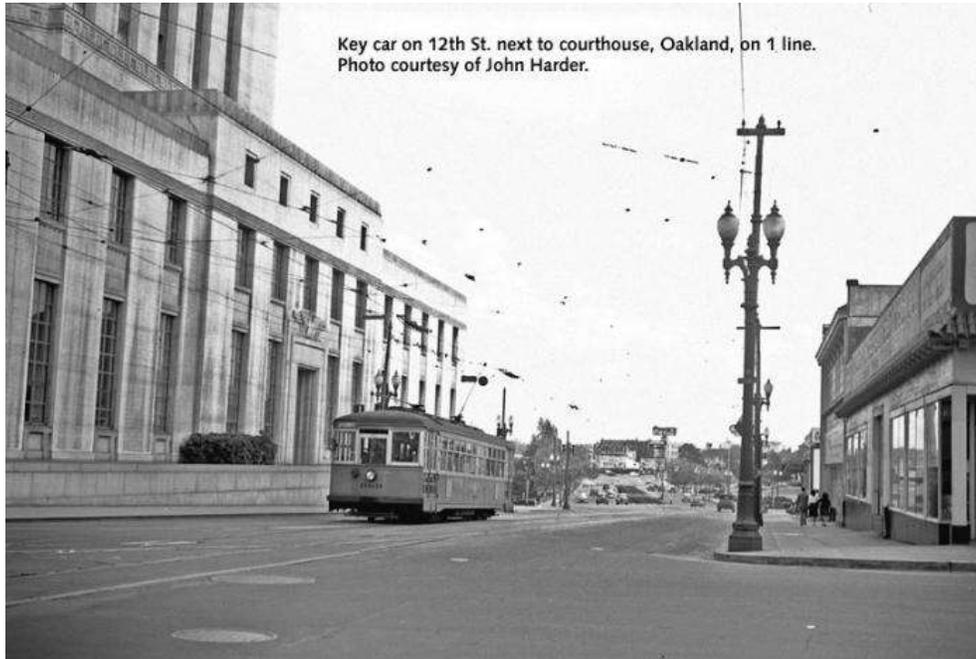


This free connecting shuttle connected to Line H at University and Sacramento. It ran to Gilman via private right of way next to the Santa Fe tracks.

## Local Streetcar Lines

In addition to the 'Letter' lines, the Key System operated local streetcar lines until 1948

### Line 1: East 14th Street



### Line 2: San Pablo



**Line 3: Martin Luther King Jr Way (Grove Street)**



**Line 4: Telegraph - Shattuck - Euclid**

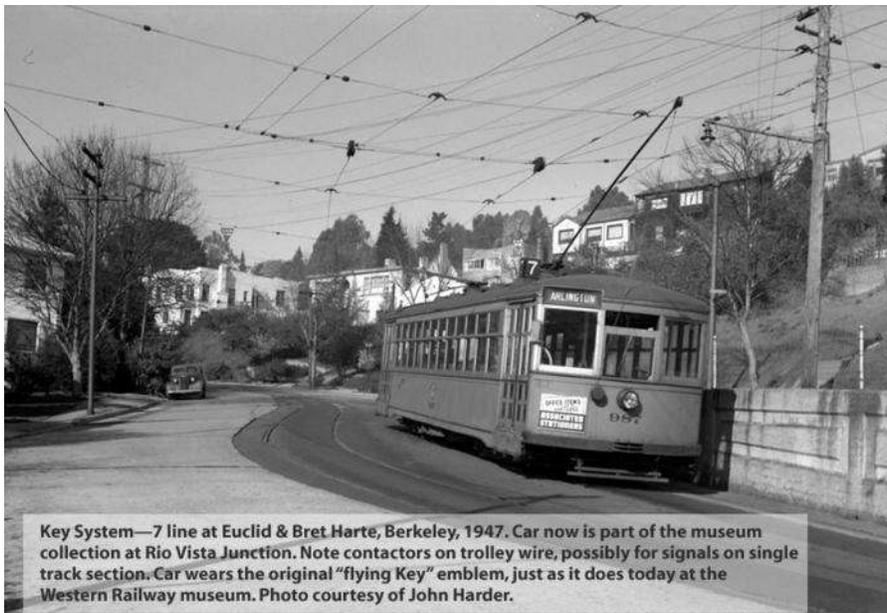


Line 5: Telegraph

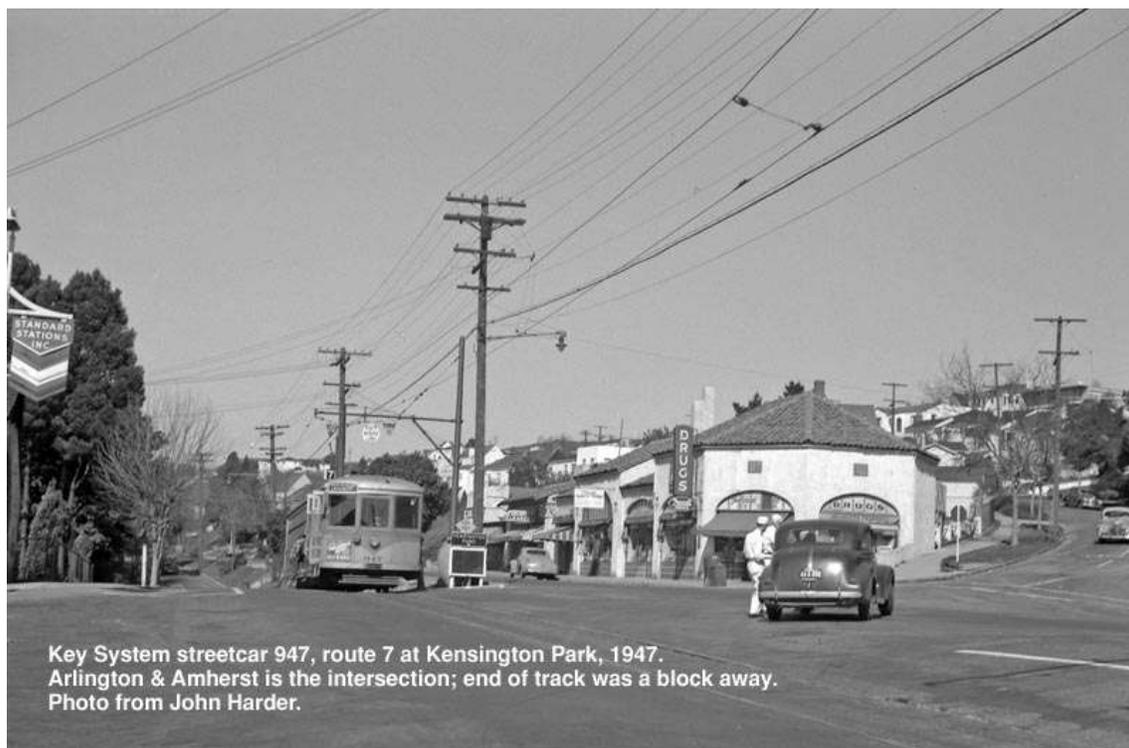


Line 6: Broadway - College - Arlington

(Okay, I couldn't find a pic of the #6 so here is a #7 on the same route)

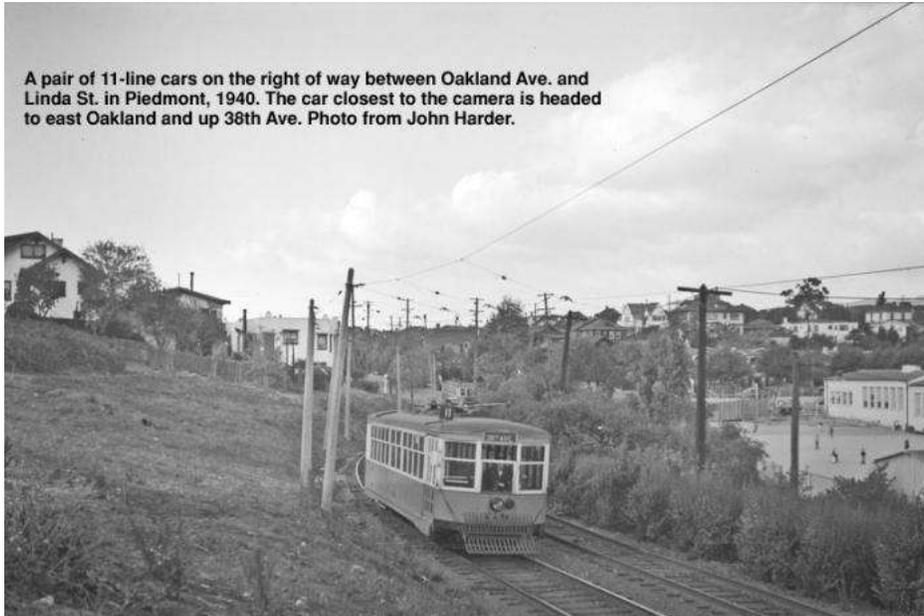


**Line 7: Arlington - Euclid**



**Line 10: Piedmont - Hopkins**



**Line 11: Piedmont Avenue - 38th Avenue****Line 12: Grand - 16th Street Station**

**Line 18: Park - Downtown Oakland - Grand - Lakeshore**



# KEY SYSTEM IN THE NEWS

## News clippings regarding the Key System

Sunday, January 22, 1933

### Hoover-Roosevelt Debt Plan Under Attack in Senate

WASHINGTON, Jan. 21.—(UP)—The plan agreed upon by President Hoover and President-elect Roosevelt to speed up debt negotiations with Great Britain was hailed as of world-wide significance by some congressional leaders today but

### Key Route System Tied Up When \$100,000 Fire Damages Long Pier

OAKLAND, Cal., Jan. 21.—(UP)—A spectacular fire which severed one of the main connecting links between San Francisco and Oakland, swept through a section of the Key System railway trestle, extending two miles into San Francisco bay, today. Thousands of commuters were delayed two hours while fireboats and fire equipment loaded onto flatcars were concentrated on the task of quenching the flames.

The fire for a time threatened to reach the terminal structure where several fire boats were moored. Key System ferries were at a standstill, and electric trains connecting the pier terminal with Berkeley and Oakland were jammed with commuters, most of whom returned to the Southern Pacific pier to continue their trips across the bay. Damage was estimated in excess of \$100,000, and service was not expected to be resumed until Monday.

### Women May Drive Buses; Company Conducts Exams

OAKLAND, Calif. April 7—SP—Tests conducted by the Key System have shown women are capable of taking the places of men as bus drivers if the need should arise, it was revealed today. Chief Inspector Dan Franklin after conducting tests with his wife Edna, his daughter, Miss Virginia Scotland and another woman, said: "Ten of the opinion women could handle the machines as well as men."

### Ferryboat Service Coming To End In San Francisco

By BUD SPRUNGER  
SAN FRANCISCO (AP)—Ferryboat service—once as much a part of San Francisco as fog, cable cars and the smell of roasting coffee—ends tonight when the San Leandro arrives at the Oranin Ferry Building from the Oakland train mole will be a small army of nostalgic bay bulls, many of them former commuters who have long since been chased off boats that ran from many points across the bay. They have been watching the ferry lines disappear for almost 20 years and this is the absolute end.

SP was not alone. Among the other firms was the Key system, which operated the two biggest and finest boats, the Peralta and the Yerba Buena. Key, primarily an East Bay trolley and bus service, ran passenger boats exclusively from its own mole to the ferry building. The Yerba Buena and the Peralta, built in 1917, were huge, orange, turbo-electric, steel boats—each with a good restaurant, a bank of bombastic, a huge newsstand and a few club-type parading machines. Key started in 1903 and quit in 1929 when the Bay Bridge was completed. The Peralta was towed north to Puget Sound, streamlined and renamed. The Yerba Buena hung on longer as government property. Burnished the Ernie Pyle, she headed stagers from San Francisco to Camp Shoshone until 1924. Most of the boats carried commuters.

### Key System Sees Cuts In Service

San Francisco—AP—The Key System says it will have to make drastic cuts in its service unless it gets permission to charge higher fares and to discontinue running trains on the Bay bridge.

SP, which hung on the longest, finally convinced the Interstate Commerce Commission and the California Public Utilities Commission that the cost was too high. After 40 years of SP ferries, train passengers now will be put aboard buses in the East Bay and transported across the San Francisco Oakland Bay bridge into the city. In the past, tourists got their first view of the city and its hills from the deck and the landing was a noisy affair with fog horns, yelling deck hands and raucous sea gulls. In 1929, the peak year, the SP plied 45 white boats and in that year carried 42,211,526 passengers and 8,137,000 automobiles. That was before the depression and the Bay, Golden Gate and Richmond-San Rafael bridges. Although it had the largest fleet,

Despite fog and crowding, there never was a serious collision from the time John Rowd started the first boat to Sausalito in 1825.

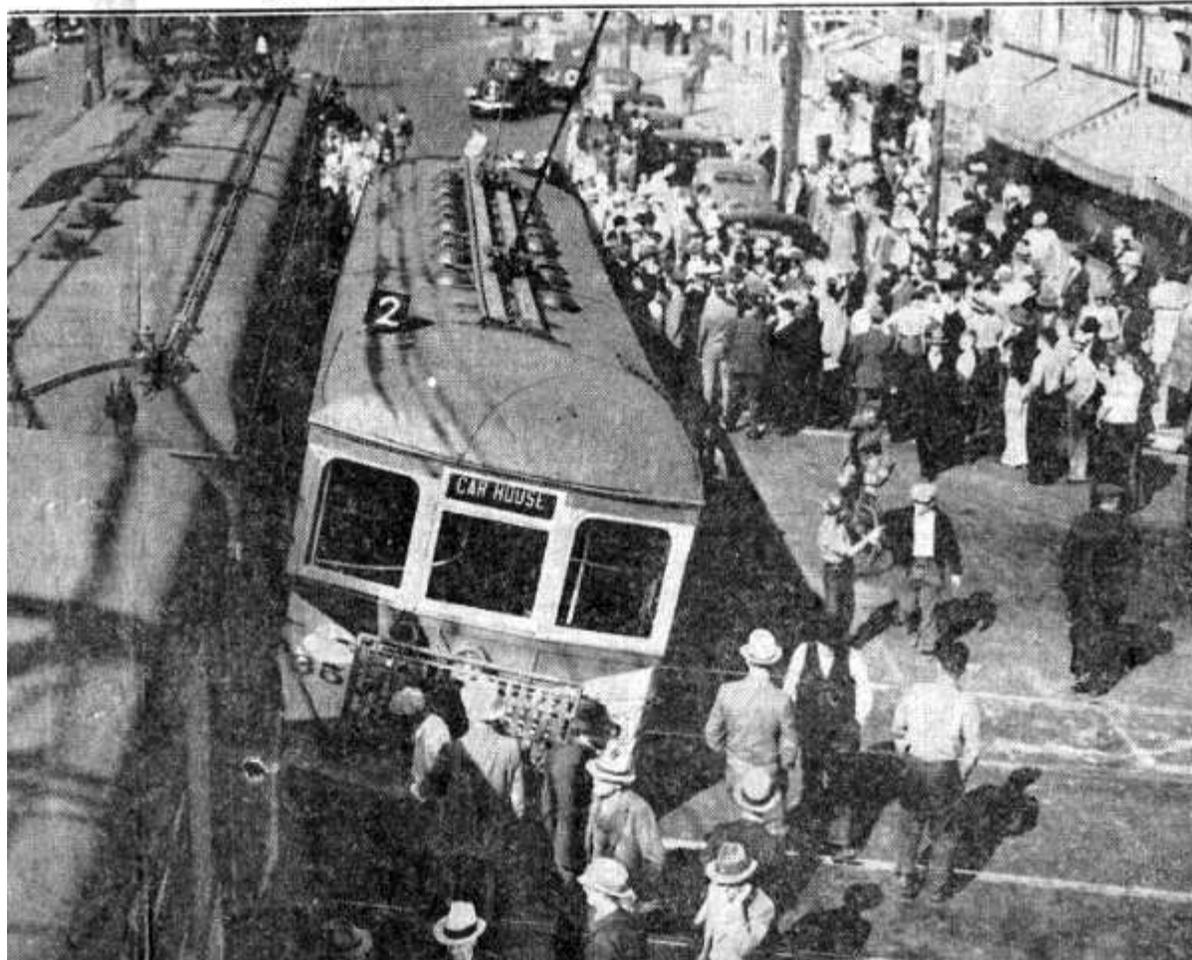
### Faubus After Third Term In Arkansas Test

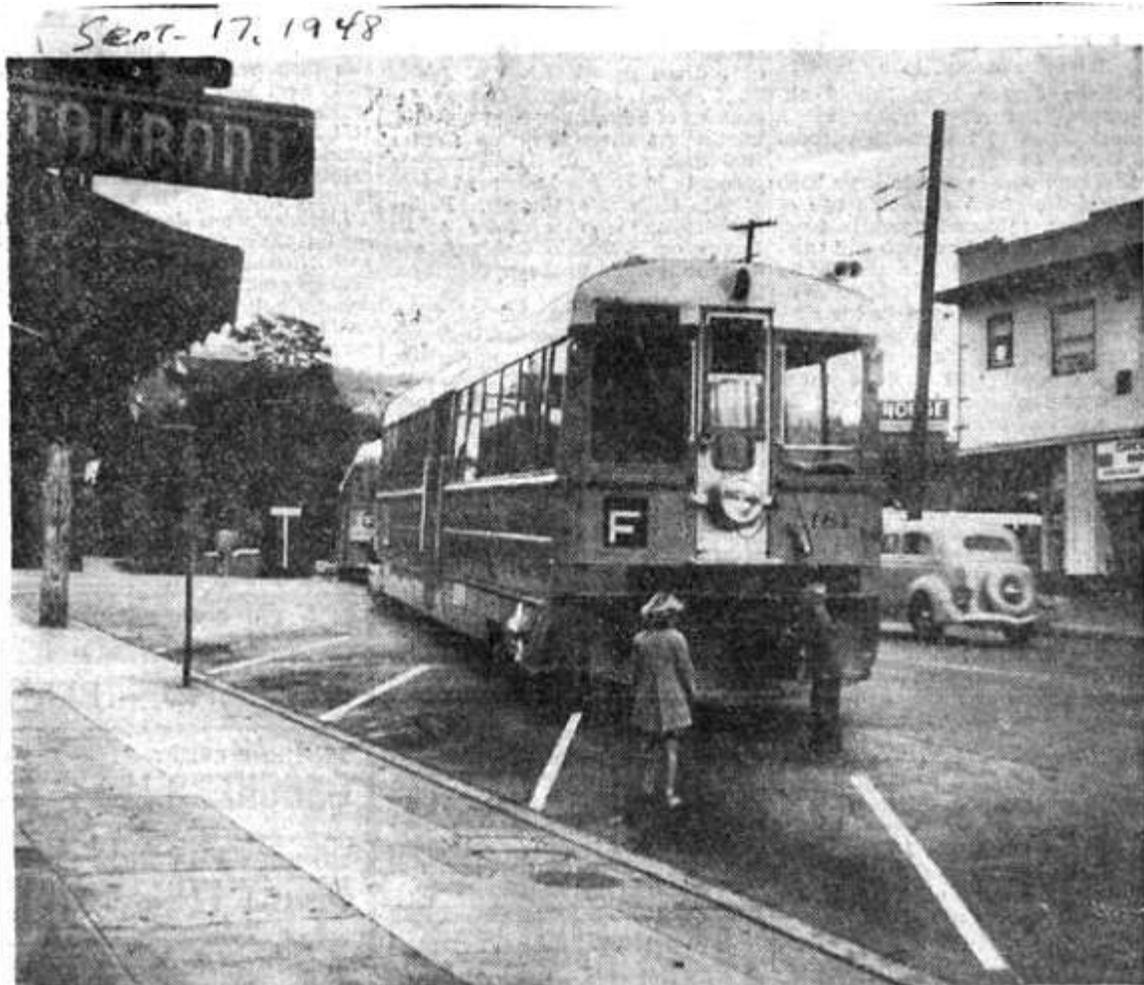
LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP)—Gov. Orval Faubus is hoping that his stand in the Little Rock integration crisis will sweep him to a third term. Democratic nomination is today's priority. Faubus, who ordered state troops to block school integration, faced two opponents. He strongly Democratic Arkansas nomination is equivalent to election.

SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER: SUNDAY, JULY 26, 1936

# Where Death Held Throttle

## SCENE FOLLOWING COLLISION OF ONE-MAN CAR AND TRAIN





Residents near Berkeley's Solano Avenue business district awoke this morning to find this wayward Key System "F" train stretched across the intersection of Solano Avenue and The Alameda. The accident occurred after the train's brakes and power failed and it rolled through a barricade into the middle of the intersection.—Tribune photos.

**CARRYING TRADITION** — The ferryboat Berkeley, one of the last two ferryboats on San Francisco Bay, leaves San Francisco's Ferry Building at the foot of Market St. for the run to Oakland. The Bay Bridge, over which replacement buses will operate, looms in the background. Southern Pacific ends a tradition of 95 years of San Francisco ferry service Tuesday night when the ferry San Leandro leaves San Francisco at 11:40 p.m. for the last time. At one time, all traffic from north and east entered San Francisco by ferry. The Berkeley, first propeller ferry on the bay, was built in 1896 and helped evacuate refugees from the San Francisco fire and earthquake in April, 1906. She is noted for the stained-glass windows on her upper deck. Beginning Wednesday, all mainline trains will be met by buses which will carry passengers the last few miles to San Francisco from the end of the railway at Oakland.

## Colorful Ferry Runs Will End In Frisco

By G. C. LEE, Jr.  
Herald Staff Writer

One of the most glorious traditions of the City by the Golden Gate goes out of existence Tuesday when the last of the San Francisco Bay ferries, ties up at Oakland Pier for the last time.

The San Leandro will make the last trip, midnight ending a tradition of 95 years of ferryboat service on San Francisco Bay.

With San Francisco already an established town in 1863 because of the California gold rush, the need developed for a connection with Oakland, and the first ferry, the Kangaroo, inaugurated daily service.

From a humble beginning, the fleet grew to upwards of 55 boats in 1929, the height of San Francisco bay ferry service. The Southern Pacific Railroad largest ferryboat operator, owned 43 boats.

At times the bay was crisscrossed with foaming wakes as the ferries plied from San Francisco to Oakland, Alameda, Berkeley, Richmond and Sausalito.

But the opening of the Bay Bridge in November, 1936, gradually brought about the end of local ferry service. Automobile ferries fought the Bay Bridge on the Oakland run until May, 1940. Local commuter service ceased to Oakland and Alameda Jan. 15, 1938 when the Bay Bridge was opened to electric train operation.

The Golden Gate bridge, completed in May, 1937, killed auto ferry service to Martin County in 1938 and passenger service in 1941.

The last of the auto ferries stopped running in September, 1956, when the Richmond-San Rafael bridge was opened to the public.

The last ferry run has been operated by the Southern Pacific Railway to bring mainline train passengers from Oakland Pier, the end of the railway, across the 4-mile run to San Francisco.

Until 1956 two boats were operated on a half-hour schedule to meet all trains, but gradual elimination of passenger service made only one boat necessary and the last schedule called for one boat making 15 crossings a day.

The San Leandro, scheduled to make the last run was built in 1923 for the Key System, SP's rival in the local transportation business. It was the first electric turbine ferry ever to be built.

Her sidekick, the venerable Berkeley, was built in 1896 and helped evacuate passengers from San Francisco during the days of fire and earthquake in April, 1906. She is most noted for the beautiful stained-glass windows on her upper deck, the product of the shipbuilders art which has long since vanished.

## Showdown On Bridge Trains Near

Hearings on Plea To Reconsider Order Open Tomorrow

By DAVE HOPE

A decision on the most drastic change in transbay travel since abandonment of the ferryboats will be sought at hearings to be held by the State Public Utilities Commission here tomorrow and in San Francisco Tuesday.

The commission already has authorized Key System to discontinue its transbay train service and substitute motor coaches, but the change has been held up by demands for reconsideration of the PUC order.

After the pending hearings, the PUC will either reiterate its previous decision, sounding the end of transbay train service, or reopen the entire program for additional consideration.

That is the sole issue to be decided now. A fact sheet issued by the PUC emphasizes that the purpose of the hearings is to hear evidence and argument only on whether Key System's petition for a change from trains to buses should be reopened for further hearing.

### POINTED PHRASE

The fact sheet significantly capitalizes the word "only" and underlines the phrase "should be reopened for further hearing."

# Major Test Today in Bus, Train Row

Reconsideration of PUC Coach Ruling Sought at Hearing

The Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District brought up its big guns today in its fight to obtain reconsideration of a State Public Utilities Commission order permitting Key System to substitute motor coaches for trains on the transbay service.

Robert E. Nisbet, attorney-secretary for the District, called Lawrence Livingston Jr., San Francisco planning consultant, to support the District's contention that the Bay Bridge railway should be retained as the hearing resumed in the San Francisco State Building this morning.

Under questioning by Nisbet, Livingston estimated that it would take 10 years to construct the rapid transit plan now under consideration by the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, but that the transbay section could be built in five years.

### URGES IMPROVEMENTS

In the meantime, he said, existing facilities should be improved if possible. George E. Thomas, attorney for Key System, moved to eliminate Livingston's testimony on grounds that it presented nothing new and did not relate to the train-bus substitution. The motion was denied by Commissioner Matthew J. Dooley, who is presiding over the hearing.

Nisbet said he will call Charles DeLeuw, consulting engineer for the District, to testify later today.

Livingston aided in the preparation of the Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Hall and Macdonald report for the Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission that recommended a transbay tube and subway system for rapid transit, but said train tracks on the Bay Bridge might be used in a "minimum" operation. Livingston served as consultant on physical planning.

# Two Cities Split On Bridge Trains

City Councils of Richmond and Berkeley today took opposite stands on the Key System proposals to replace transbay trains with motor coaches.

Richmond will support the plan at a hearing before the State Public Utilities Commission next week, while Berkeley will oppose the change.

# U.S. Ready To Rescue Polar Party

AUCKLAND, New Zealand, Jan. 7.—P.—U.S. Rear Adm. George Dufek said tonight he may fly to the South Pole with a team of Americans to stand by for a rescue mission if Dr. Vivian Fuchs runs into trouble crossing the Antarctic.

Fuchs and his 12-man British team is trekking slowly across the continent in the face of hazardous conditions. The 1,200-mile expedition erupted into a rift yesterday between Fuchs and Sir Edmund Hillary of New Zealand. Hillary advised Fuchs to halt his march at the pole and fly the rest of the way. Fuchs cast aside the advice and said he intended to go all the way overland.

Admiral Dufek, who leaves for the U.S. base at McMurdo Sound tomorrow, said he would go to Fuchs' rescue only if the British expedition leader requested help. He said Fuchs seemed to be making good progress.

"If Fuchs decides to call it a day after reaching the pole,

The Richmond City Council voted 5 to 4 last night for a resolution calling for removal of rails from the Bay Bridge. Advocates argued that if the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District is permitted to operate trains on a shuttle system across the bridge, Richmond commuters will be forced to transfer and will lose the direct bus service they now have to San Francisco.

The Berkeley City Council voted today to maintain its position in favor of retaining train service as is now operated.

The Berkeley vote came after Director J. Howard Arnold of the transit district, Robert E. Nisbet, attorney-secretary for the district, and Allen Matthew, attorney representing rail commuters, urged opposition to the Key System plan.

All agreed that the proposed shuttle system would not be satisfactory.

The Richmond action was taken after four members of the council urged that no stand be taken.

Councilman John Sheridan said he feels the rail removal is a necessity for better transportation and said rapid transit could not be handled on the bridge rail lines.

Councilman Leo Viano moved for removal of the rails and substitution of buses.

# All-Bus Plan For Bridge Reaffirmed

The way is clear for Key System Transit Lines to replace its Bay Bridge trains with buses on April 20 as scheduled.

The State Public Utilities Commission turned down the latest attempt to block the changeover yesterday in San Francisco.

A plea for a rehearing on earlier rulings giving Key permission for the change was denied. The Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District, the city of San Francisco and three Eastbay improvement clubs had asked for reconsideration.

Robert K. Barber, transit district president, said a special meeting may be called to decide what further action will be taken by the district.

### POSSIBLE APPEALS

Directors already have ordered their attorney to investigate possible appeals to the State Supreme Court or other legal action.

The PUC first approved the switch from trains to buses on March 12, 1957. Abandonment of the trains will make possible removal of the train tracks and reconstruction of the bridge as approved by the State Legislature.

Following a full-scale rehearing, the PUC reaffirmed its year-old order approving the change last month.

In turning down the request for a second rehearing, the PUC said "no good cause has been shown for the granting of a rehearing."

### APRIL 20 DATE SET

The April 20 date for the changeover was set by Key System and the State Department of Public Works which will direct the bridge reconstruction work designed to provide up to 35 per cent more traffic capacity.

The Thousand Oaks Improvement Association, the Claremont Improvement Club, Inc., and the Kensington Improvement Club had joined with the transit district and San Francisco in the futile appeal.

Barber said he was disappointed with the PUC decision because "we think that a transit program using the rails on the bridge is sound."

## Key Trains Face Bus Replacement

SAN FRANCISCO, Jan. 24, (UP)—The Key System asked the state public utilities commission today for permission to replace all of its trains on the Trans-Bay Transit lines with buses, claiming continuation of rail service would require an additional \$3,000,000 in track improvements.

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## Final Arguments Tuesday On Plea for Bridge Trains

Final arguments of the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District's plea for reconsideration of a State Public Utilities Commission order permitting Key System to use motor coaches instead of trains on transbay routes have been set for 1:30 p.m. next Tuesday.

Commissioner Matthew J. Dooley, who ended four days of public hearings yesterday the entire commission will hear the arguments, because of the importance of the controversy.

The Transit District is seeking to prevent abandonment of train facilities, contending it plans to take over Key System operations and would operate the trains.

### ORDER HELD UP

The commission has already granted Key System's petition to substitute motor coaches, but the order has been held up by the district plea for reconsideration. Commission engineers have determined that better service at less cost would be provided by buses, and have noted that abandonment of trains would permit the state to proceed with remodeling the Bay Bridge to increase its vehicular capacity, and clear the way for repair of badly damaged track areas in Oakland streets.

Mayor Clifford E. Rishell was the principal witness at the final session of the hearing yesterday, urging the PUC to refuse reconsideration of the train-bus controversy.

All arguments in favor of trains were fully considered before the commission issued its order last March, Rishell said.

"The present rail facilities in the Eastbay and on the bridge do not adequately serve the people of the Bay Area. In fact, it is doubtful if the present rails on the city streets of Oakland can be used much longer and be safe," Rishell declared.

### ANSWER HALTED

J. Howard Arnold, director of the Transit District, asked: "What steps have you taken as mayor to force the Key System to keep the tracks in repair?"

Rishell started to answer but was halted by a ruling that the question was irrelevant.

The Oakland mayor warned that public operation of the transit system will force a

burden on taxpayers, noting San Francisco's experience with a prospective \$6,300,000 deficit which must be paid by property owners.

He noted that the State is prepared to pay for alterations to the Bay Bridge with bridge tolls, and that Key System would remove street tracks, both at no cost to taxpayers.

This was challenged by Deputy City Atty. Bernard Ward of San Francisco. "Are you aware where the money comes from for the bridge?" he asked.

Rishell replied that the bridge job would be financed by the people who use the bridge and would benefit from relief of traffic congestion. He stressed that tolls would not be increased, and reiterated that the property owner would not be required to pay.

### \$700,000 FEES CITED

Furthermore, Rishell declared, Key System now pays some \$700,000 a year in franchise fees and taxes. "If this tax income is lost, the cities in the Eastbay have no recourse but to raise the money from its citizens by some other form of taxation," he said.

He contended that PUC studies have determined that buses will provide better service than trains, at an operation cost reduction of \$750,000 a year which would save commuters from a fare increase.

Rishell urged the PUC to reaffirm its order permitting replacement of trains by motor coaches and noted: "I believe that unnecessary delays, red tape, and referrals represent inefficiency and waste. Delay in getting a final decision is responsible for more bad public relations in government than any other one thing."

A. O. Olsen, chief engineer for DeLeuw, Cather and Co., consultants to the Transit District, attempted to explain discrepancies in cost estimates for transit plans recommended to the District.

Major emphasis was placed by George E. Thomas, attorney for Key System, and Oakland City Atty. John W. Collier, on a \$196,000 difference in depreciation costs for the local system.

### EXPLANATION CHANGED

Olsen first said the difference resulted because the engineers were not aware the Dis-

trict is a public agency and would figure depreciation differently from a private company.

When it was noted the report clearly designates the District as a public agency, Olsen changed his explanation to say there was a difference in the percentage of interest figured on depreciation costs.

Quizzed on that point, Olsen finally gave up. "I regret that I do not have all the facts at my disposal," he said. "There is no satisfactory explanation."

Fred E. Reed, Oakland realtor, and James M. Leaver, spokesman for North Oakland groups, strongly supported the change from trains to buses.

### DELAY URGED

George S. Hill, San Francisco consulting engineer, agreed that abandonment of trains would enable action to relieve transbay traffic congestion, but urged delay in removal of the rails until a rapid transit tube can be built.

"We need rapid transit as soon as possible," he declared.

Opposing the shift from trains to buses were Otto L. Zeus, secretary of the Thousand Oaks Improvement Association; Arthur R. Hellender, representing the Central Labor Council of Alameda County; F. V. Stambaugh, president of Oakland Local 192 of the Carpenters' Union; and J. Howard Arnold, Transit District director.

## Graduation Dinner Party at John Muir

SAN LEANDRO, Jan. 21—A dinner party for students graduating from the John Muir Junior High School will be held tomorrow night in the school cafeteria.

Speakers for the promotional exercises on Thursday at 8 p.m. are Sharon Glidewell, Barbara Fernandes, James Canario and Darleen Costa.

## Bay Bridge Trains to End Runs April 20

Key System transbay trains will cease operation on the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge on April 20 and be replaced by motor coaches. It was announced jointly by the transit line and the State Public Works Department today.

## Schedules for New Bridge Buses Drawn

Key System trains are lurching through their final days as preparations near completion for the change next Sunday to transbay bus service.

The transit firm today announced routes and schedules for the bus operation, promising faster and more frequent service than has been possible with trains, and offering express trips for commuters at peak periods.

There still is a possibility that an appeal to the State Supreme Court might stall the program, although the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District, chief advocate of continued train service, refused to approve court action last night for the second time.

### TERMINAL BIDS

Ready to start remodeling of the Bay Bridge into a freeway-type structure with greatly increased traffic capacity, the State Department of Public Works yesterday opened bids for the first phase of the project—the start of conversion of the Terminal Building into a bus station.

The low bidder was the Macco Corporation of Paramount, Los Angeles County, at \$236,615. Indications are that the award will follow quickly and work may start within a few days.

### INITIAL PROJECT

The initial contract calls for removal of tracks and trolley system on the loop through the terminal and grading of roadbed ballast. A second contract will pave the ramps leading to the building, and a third will complete conversion so that buses, now required to load on San Francisco streets, will be housed entirely in the building.

Oakland, Calif., April 1, 1958

## The Tribune Forum For Readers' Opinions

### THIS IS YOUR TOWN

#### BUT MORE WILL COME

I killed a lot of ants today,  
But more will come;  
Ten flies with swatter I did  
slay,

But more will come;  
The weeds that in my garden  
grew.

I hood them out, all but a few,  
But more will come.  
I very often miss my bus,  
I fume and sputter, also cuss,  
But more will come;  
A girl I whistled at today  
Gave me the sign to "fade  
away."

But more will come;  
All of us here some day must  
die.

And how we'll hate to say  
goodbye—

But more will come.  
—OTTO BEHRNS

POETS DINNER  
SPEAKER CHOSEN

#### Prefers Trains

Editor: If the Key System trains between Oakland, Berkeley and San Francisco are discontinued, it will certainly prove that the public, in this case, the daily commuters, is as usual of no account.

At peak hours, the trains are made up of four two-section cars—each car holding as many seats as two buses. Will this mean an unwieldy line of eight buses, clogging up traffic? Or, more likely four or five, into which layers of passengers will be packed like sardines for one-half to three-quarters of an hour. This is just one of many objections to the substitution of bus service for train service.

To me, as a commuter, the Key trains are convenient, comfortable, and economical, and I am writing to the East Bay Rapid Transit System, at the Claremont Hotel, Berkeley, to protest the imminent removal of the rail system . . .

—JOAN EMERSON,  
Berkeley.

### Sad

Editor: Its so sad to think that the Key System trains had to be abandoned after all these years as I sure liked that service very much for its roominess.

Now we have to depend on the buses and they are not large enough to accomodate all the commuters that work in San Francisco. That's my idea of it, so maybe the transit company will regret the removal of the trains.

—GRACE HARRIS,  
Oakland.

## Key Bridge Buses To Save Time

Timetables for transbay bus service, scheduled to replace bridge trains April 20, indicate some time savings and generally more frequent service for commuters.

Key System Transit Lines is distributing new schedules on trains and at the San Francisco terminal building.

Generally the routes will be the same as those now used by the trains, with three added express routes at peak periods.

The B express will travel non-stop to San Francisco from Lakeshore Ave., using MacArthur Blvd. One F express will go down University Ave. from Shattuck Ave., and another will use College Ave. to Alcatraz Ave., Stanford and Powell Streets, both then using the Eastshore Freeway.

Rush hour headways will be 8 to 11 minutes on the A line, 4 to 5 minutes on the B, 2 to 4 on the C, 4 to 5 on the E, and 1½ on the F. At other times buses will run about half the now established intervals for trains.

The Bay Bridge has been named one of the "Seven Civil Engineering Wonders of the U.S." by the American Society of Civil Engineers. It also has been named a commuting wonder of the world by those 8 a.m. and 5:15 p.m. travelers who wonder if they will get home undented. . . Congestion on the span will be eased—it is hoped—through spending of \$35,000,000 to remove tracks and renovate the lower deck of motor travel. Key System transbay trains will cease operation April 20 to make way for the change. They will be replaced by diesel buses, featuring sturdy straps instead of seats for late arrivals.

16 \*\*\*\*\*Oakland Tribune, Sunday, April 20, 1958

## LOOK OUT FOR BUS TURNS ON LOWER BRIDGE DECK

Bay Bridge Drivers beware. There's a new traffic signal on the lower deck of the bridge.

Transbay, through traffic on the lower deck will have to come to a full stop on the red signal at Yerba Buena Island while eastbound Key System buses make left turns onto the island. The change was necessary when Key trains stopped running today.

Automobile drivers who use the lower deck during peak hour diversion periods will be affected as well as trucks which use the lower deck at all hours.

## Bay Bridge Train Runs End Today

Continued from Page 1

Oakland area much as it is today: a community spread south and north along the hills in an arc, of course, spreading north and south from the ferry terminal at the foot of 40th St. then Yerba Buena Ave. which he had sent jutting 3½ miles into the Bay.

By 1904, the shiny steel rails stretched along 40th St. They made possible transportation to Piedmont—where Smith and Frank Havens, with their usual foresight, had planned residential development and built a park. Incorporation of Piedmont as a city followed in 1907 and commuters have been traveling to their offices along the line ever since.

### TRAIN CROWDED

The last trip along that line was sad, exuberant, quiet, noisy, confused and orderly—simultaneously. For if the train had been as jam-packed each night as it was when it pulled away from its Oakland Ave. terminal at 6:42, three minutes late, every Saturday night, the Key System would be buying new trains and not abandoning the old.

The Key hasn't had people fly from Los Angeles just to pay it 50 cents for a ride across the Bay; business never before has been that good.

Motorman Garfield Martinez n, 524 Mangelis Ave., San Francisco, never has made such a trip in the 14 years he's held his right hand on the dead-man control and left hand on the air brake of the Bridge trains. Agd conductor David Hudson of 1084 35th St., who says that he usually gets "the opera and theater crowd" on Saturday night, never has seen such a mixed group of passengers.

### RAIL FANS, TOO

The departure of the train was as noisy as the present Cuban revolution. Teen-aged

rail fans—and they made up the majority of the standing-room only crowd—had helped themselves to the explosive signaling torpedoes which they knew, as avid rail fans, to be stored under door-side seats of the train. The torpedoes exploded with every few feet traversed by the train's front wheels.

Ira Swett, a Los Angeles radio and television man, and James A. Spencer, a locomotive fireman from Los Angeles, said that at least nine electric rail enthusiasts had come from Southern California just to ride the last trains. Addison Laffin of 2119 Marin Ave., Berkeley, secretary of the Bay Area Electric Railroad Association, said that scores of fans planned to pay farewell respects to the trains.

### SPECIAL OCCASION

For others aboard, the last ride had special meaning. Mrs. Mary Mayes, a Peralta Hospital nurse, wore a large orchid corsage for the train ride, the gift of an East Oakland florist who had been a patient. Her husband, Lloyd, auto plant employee, and son, Lloyd Jr., II, wanted to make the trip because they wanted to participate personally in a bit of Oakland history.

Patty Sauer, 17, of 5578 Taft Ave., and Kitty Callo-way, 17, of 21 Mayer Place, both Holy Names High School students, and their friends raced to the train in shorts after an afternoon of swimming: "We just wanted to be the last to cross the bridge," they said.

Ray Nichols, 82, of 4523 Oakhill Road, former president of the Oakland Real Estate Board, was saying goodbye to something that represented part of his boyhood, his youth and his adult life.

Nichols was attending the Piedmont Avenue School when



ERA'S END—Chris N. Andersen (left) who took first Key train across the Bridge, came out of retirement to pilot last train this morning. He's with M. P. Samuelson, motorman who will be driving a bus after today.

the first electric car ground its way down the street to the Key Route Pier. The school-children were aboard, an excursion treat that he still remembers vividly. Last week, the boys and girls of the school—who have received a tooted hello from every train that has passed for generations—took the trip to San Francisco to say goodbye.

"It's kind of a shame," Nichols said. "But then I haven't been riding these trains for years. I just wanted to say farewell—but I don't like the idea of riding home tonight on a bus."

Householders along the rail

right-of-way between Oakland and Piedmont Avenues came to their backyards, front porches and sidewalks to wave the trains goodbye. Motorman Martinez saluted them in return.

The air horn on Train Unit 182 blasted its last warning—and farewell—continuously along the line.

The last Key train left Oakland at 2:23 a. m. today and buses took over the service this morning.

The switch to buses also means that for the first time in nearly a century the Eastbay is without local rail service on city streets.

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# Oakland Tribune

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TOPS IN FEATURES

VOL. CLXVIII

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, MONDAY, APRIL 21, 1958

13 D

NO. 111



END OF THE LINE—Key System bridge trains, replaced now by buses, rest among the weeds in West Oakland yards. A contract for clipping out the tracks and electrical connections on the ramps leading to the Key terminal in San Francisco has already been let and another for paving the ramps for bus use will soon be advertised.

## Old-Timers, Rail Enthusiasts Take Last Key Train Ride

Continued from Page 1  
to board the trains, patronage of which has steadily declined in recent years. Passengers boarding the last service wanted the best seats toward the front of the cars.

trans-Bay and services. E. Stan Flantz of 2134 18th Ave., traffic engineer who has been worrying about the feasibility of 42 more miles which will be replaced today with 80 buses in the Key fleet of 300,

flashed through green light signals on its way back from San Francisco. This was an program since Anderson, retired Key engineer, took the first train across in September of 1938. On the trip to San

based law suit, reaction and shippers workers bawled their way to seats in the overcrowded and standing-room-only coaches of World War II "Things were rough, and rough, and you'd see just about everything on these cars then," he said.

**MEETS WINNER**  
The last train made a last stop—marked by a red light—in Oakland, at its head car crossed Broadway, policemen yanked the emergency brake and the long train stood

year-old train out the winner in its struggle with competitive motor transportation. Mrs. Drew Blomman of 3536 Panama Ave., Albany, had the first of the Key System's new 3100-series motor coaches, the first A Line motor coach, waiting to pull out on the first cross-Bay trip.

The Key System today pulled out with a sense of foreboding about the yard and about the new bus turn-around over the tracks.

And the bus left with paying passengers for San Francisco.

Bring your jewelry and watch carefully.

## U.S.F. Man Wins Award

Dr. Mel Gorman, University of San Francisco professor of chemistry, has received a National Science Foundation Faculty Fellowship to study the historical and philosophical aspects of atomic theory at an University of California in Berkeley. Gorman, who has been at USF since 1931, will spend three months at U.C. this summer.

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## SEARS

NATIONAL HARDWARE WEEK

When America Shops and Saves!

There were a number of lastists — and electric train enthusiasts were bound to make them all. Although they spent all day riding the trains on the A, B, C, E and F lines, they missed the honest-to-gosh last train of them all. The last train of them all, if this is of historical significance, was a three-unit one which pulled out of the Key Yards, adjacent to the Oakland Army Terminal, on a mission necessary to make bus operation possible.

### LOAD OF GRAVEL

The six cars of the train, which would have been carrying passengers a few days before, were used yesterday as locomotives to pull nine cars of gravel to the Key's former loading platform at Yerba Buena Island, where Treasure Island sailors and civilians boarded and disembarked. The gravel was used as fill for a new bus turn-around over the tracks.

One of the longest Key trains operated for the past eight years, it carried so many passengers Key System General Superintendent Donald J. Potter remarked: "If we could get these kind of loads, we would never have taken off the trains."

There were four two-car units in the 260-ton train and one rider, looking back as the orange cars snaked down off the bridge into the San Francisco Terminal, said, "My gosh, the other cars are still in Oakland."

For the first time since World War II perhaps, people ran and pushed and scrambled

Continued Page 13, Col. 1

## NOISY WAKE

# Key Trains Get Farewell From Fans

By RALPH CRAIB

Commuters went to San Francisco by bus this morning. For, at 3:55 a.m. yesterday, the last Key System Transit Lines bridge train pulled explosively out of the 12th and Oak Sts. end of the line for the yards and almost certain scrapping.

It was a noisy wake for both of Oakland's trans-Bay train lines. So noisy, in fact, that Oakland Police received more than 50 phone calls from irate, newly-awakened residents protesting the wide-open horn blasts and clanging warning bells of the last cars of the A and B lines.

### TORPEDOES

Teen-agers who took over the last runs provided the explosions and the toots and the jangles. As rail fans, they knew where the rail signaling torpedoes were kept—and they had clamped them along the tracks at terminals on both sides of the Bay.

12 D. Oakland Tribune, Wednesday, April 16, 1938

# Eastbay Rail Transit Era Bows to Automotive Age

By ROY CHINN

On a bright January day in 1913, the first train to leave the ferry terminal in San Francisco Bay that had been a dream since the days of the Central Pacific became a reality. Sunday it dies.

At the same time an era of Eastbay transit service will end. Ferry trains, victims of declining patronage, will be replaced by motor buses.

The elderly clerk of steel who has been on the job for just as long as the rails of transit will see the end of his career as the ferry boat's whistle blows in two decades.

In transit transportation the ferry is only the end of a chain. It is the beginning of the change marks the passing of an era.

For the first time in nearly a century Oakland will be without local rail service on city streets. The tramway cars are all that are left. This last streetcar ran in 1936.

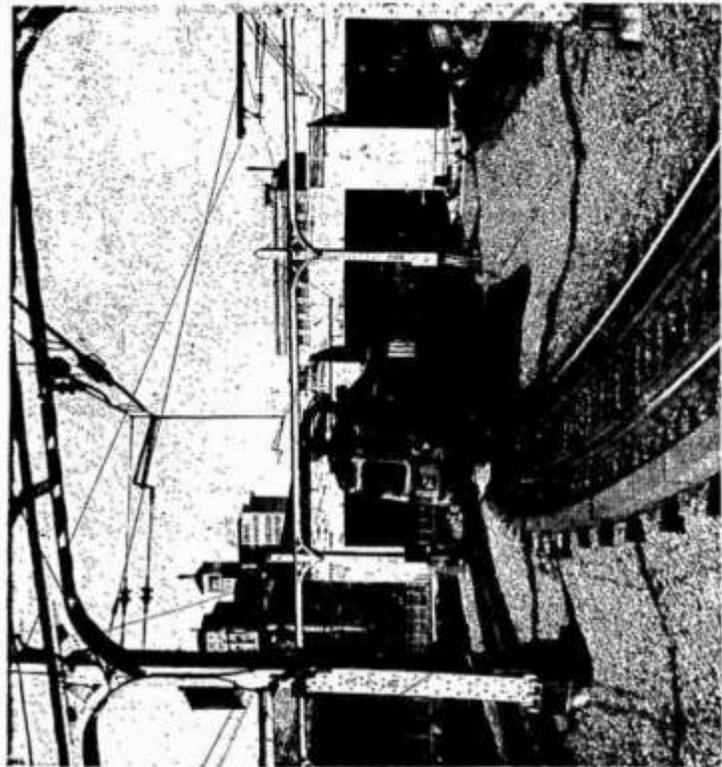
It was an era of local and interurban transit systems. An era that opened horizons of travel and commerce. It was an era of transportation engines built with the local service in mind.

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ON WAY TO OBLIVION—Key System's trolleybus line will be replaced by buses Sunday. That will end nearly 20 years of trolleybus rail service and usher a century since terminal, which will be dismantled for buses.

# Advisory Unit To Be Set Up On Transit

A 15-member engineering advisory committee will be formed by the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District to help the district draft a plan for a public-operated local transit system.

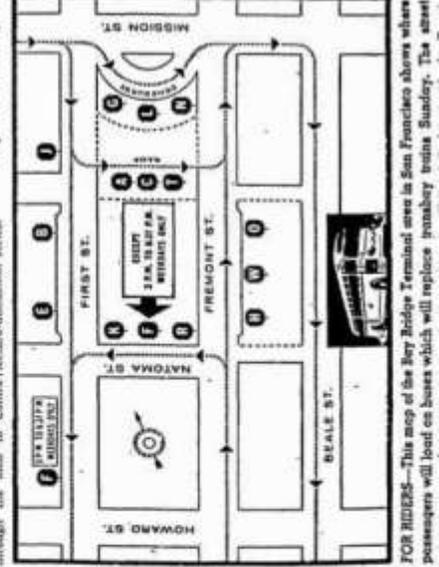
The committee would work with J. E. Werthington, the district's consulting engineer, on the plan. The plan will be completed in time to put a bond issue before voters in November.

Director approved a contract with DeJano, Calkins & Co., the local engineering firm, to study the Bay Bridge for transit needs and recommendations for services.

# Key Conversion to Reroute Several Lines This Sunday

Conversion of train service to trolleybus service on the Bay Bridge to motor bus operation this Sunday, together with the inauguration of a new one-way street pattern in downtown Oakland, has made it necessary to reroute several local Key System lines.

Barber noted that for the past several months directors have spent a large part of their time on the question of substitution of buses for Bay Bridge trains. The district has opposed the change. The new contract was made possible because of the broader problem facing all of the district.



FOR RIDERS—This map of the Bay Bridge Terminal area in San Francisco shows where passengers will board on buses which will replace trolleybus Sunday. The street



# Oakland Tribune

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OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 1958

27 E

## PUPILS ON FIELD TRIP MARKING END OF ERA

## 250 Children Bid Trains Goodbye



**LAST RIDE**—First graders from the Piedmont Ave. School board a Key System train for a trip to San Francisco and return as an era of electric train travel in the Bay Area nears an end. Trains will cease running across the Bay April 20.

The 250 pupils of the Piedmont Ave. School are saying goodbye to an old friend.

They're taking a trip in a classroom on iron wheels as a farewell, an educational one, to a visitor that has given a tooted greeting to them every hour during their classes.

The callers have been the trans-Bay electric trains of the Key System's C Line—the school is the only one in Oakland with a train stop at its front door—which have been going by the school ever since F. M. (Borax) Smith, the 20-mule team man, built a rail line that built a city, Piedmont.

### LAIID IN 1876

Rails were first laid up Piedmont Ave. in 1876 when the Broadway and Piedmont Railroad Company put in its horse cars that provided service from Oakland to Mountain View Cemetery. The school was first built in 1891, six years before the area was annexed to Oakland.

For more than half a century, commuters have been traveling over that same route. Borax Smith built tracks from his Bay mole along 40th St. to Piedmont Ave. and 41st St. in 1904 and the tracks were extended into Piedmont not long after. The C Line was responsible for the city of Piedmont, which was incorporated after

the tracks gave it direct ferry connections to San Francisco. And so the youngsters of the school are saying goodbye, for the trains won't be running in another nine days. Their farewell—for generations of school boys—is not just a train ride to San Francisco.

### BIT OF HISTORY

For, as Principal Ralph Kerchum says, the youngsters in elementary grades are supposed to be learning about the transportation and economy of the Bay Area. Each class of about 30 children is taking the trip after careful briefing about the things they're expected to see.

But it isn't only that, Kerchum adds. "These youngsters will remember this trip for the rest of their lives, for it is a bit of the history of their city that they have participated in."

And the familiar air horns and clanging bells of the big orange trains will be silent forever soon. They'll be heard only in the memories of school boys and girls.



THE END—The big Bay Bridge Terminal, in San Francisco, where 250,000 commuters have boarded or left trains, was a quiet and lonely place last night minutes after the last C Piedmont Ave.-40th St. train pulled in from its final trip across the bridge. Tribune photos by Howard Etker



FIRST AND LAST—Ray Nichols, past president of the Oakland Real Estate Board, was aboard the first train on the 41st St.-Piedmont Ave. line as a schoolboy. Last night, he made the cross-Bay trip on last train.

## Plan to Improve Streets Slated

The biggest street improvement program in Oakland's history is linked to today's abandonment of transbay train service.

If plans drafted by City Engineer John A. Morin are approved, four major projects will be under way this summer, converting 12th St., West Grand Ave., and 40th St. into main boulevards, and rebuilding Poplar and Louise Streets.

This would mark the start of a three-year program for removal of train tracks and reconstruction of more than 10 miles of badly broken streets.

Morin said he will present his plans for city council approval as soon as negotiations with Key System and the Oakland Terminal Railway, to establish their share of the cost, are completed.

The transit firms are obligated to remove rails and rebuild the track area. The city will do the additional work necessary to bring the streets to top standards.

Glen Stanley, Key System president, said an early agreement is certain.

**FIRST PROBLEM**  
"Right now we have our hands full with the change from trains to buses," Stanley said, "but as soon as this problem is taken care of, we will be ready to talk about track removal."

"We will cooperate with the city to the fullest extent possible."

Morin said engineering work for the various projects is virtually complete, and financing of the city's share of the work is assured from gasoline tax funds.

The four projects on which work could start immediately are:

Twelfth St., from Union to Oak. Key System will remove the existing tracks and rebuild the roadbed. The city will resurface the side areas.

### BIGGEST JOB

West Grand Ave., from Telegraph Ave. to Poplar St. This is the biggest of the four jobs, calling for widening into a six-lane boulevard with two parking lanes and a median strip. Property needed for the widening has already been acquired and plans have been filed with the State Division of Highways for gas tax allocation. Morin said this will probably be undertaken in two contracts, the first for the section from Telegraph Ave. to Brush St. The second phase will extend from Brush to Poplar, connecting with the already improved portion between Poplar and Cypress.

Fortieth St., from Broadway to Adeline. This will also become a six-lane boulevard, with some curb setbacks but no property purchases required.

Poplar and Louise Streets. The two tracks on these streets are now used jointly by Key System, Western Pacific, and

## NEW ONE-WAY STREETS IN EFFECT TODAY

Two new one-way streets will go into effect in the Oakland central business district at 7 a.m. tomorrow and new parking regulations will be enforced in the Trestle Glen area as a result of the discontinuance of transbay train service.

Completing the one-way street grid in the business area, 13th St. will be one-way for eastbound traffic from Market St. to the 12th St. Dam, and 12th St. one-way westbound from the dam to Market St. The Key System's A train operating in both directions on 12th St. previously held up the directional plan adopted several years ago.

In the Trestle Glen area, parking will be allowed on only one side of streets on which buses substituted for the B train will travel.

The route starts at Lakeshore Ave. and Longridge Road and goes east on Longridge to Grosvenor Place, south on Grosvenor to Holman Road, west on Holman to Trestle Glen and west back to Lakeshore.

Santa Fe under the Oakland Terminal Railway franchise. With Key System stepping out, the railroad companies have indicated they will rebuild the street with a single track, adequate for their freight operations. Negotiations for a new franchise are now being conducted by City Atty. John W. Collier.

### Camp Fire Apron Tea This Saturday

The Camp Fire and Horizon Girls of the Hotalak-Aiukle

group of St. Paul's Episcopal Church will hold an apron tea on Saturday from 3 to 5 p.m. in the church parish house, 114 Montecito Ave.

SHOP MAJOR'S DAY SAT MONDAY NIGHT 7TH

Oakland Tribune, Sunday, April 20, 1958 CCCC★ 15

# Key Line Rail Conductor Takes Progress in Stride

Key System's trains are more than steel and electric power to the men who run them—the conductors and motormen who have rocked across the Bay Bridge thousands of times.

"The trains become part of your nature . . . the rattle of the wheels . . . the shaking and swaying . . . the vibration and sound. We'll seem lost without it."

John D. Clair thought back over almost 30 years of service

as a motorman and conductor with Key System, on streetcars and transbay trains.

"I could close my eyes and tell you the precise point we are passing over by the sound and the sway. You get to know the lines, you see."

And the riders. Conductors get to know them, too. Some are half-recognized, to be greeted with a nod and a smile.

"Yes. I know my commuters. Many I've known for years,

met their children and seen them grow up."

Clair recalls as one of his "most cherished memories" his friendship with an attorney who died about three years ago. "He had been commuting since 1890, long before Key System was formed in 1923. I visited him at his home quite often. He gave me a lot of information about the Bay Area over the years. He was just one of the hundreds of friends I've met on the trains."

Clair, who lives at 1535 E. 19th St., remembers clearly when Key's two-man streetcars ran out to Pt. Richmond and the ferry. That was in early 1920 when he started on the old Northern Division.

## Motorman of First Bridge Train Also Drives Last One

By ROY GRIMM

Not many men rub shoulders with their own past. And not many men play a big part in events that have meaning for thousands of others.

But Chris N. Andersen came out of retirement early today to pilot the last Key System train, the 12:23 a.m. A Line service, across the Bay Bridge.

And he was at the controls of the first train on the route two decades ago.

Andersen piloted the first train across the Bay Bridge in September, 1928. The late Frank F. Merriam, then Governor of California, took the controls for part of the way under Andersen's guidance.

Andersen also was at the controls of the No. 1 unit when two 7-unit trains took the first passengers from 2nd St. and Broadway to the new San Francisco terminal on Jan. 14, 1933.

And, yesterday, the veteran transportation executive admitted to another Bay Bridge train trip — one that's not in the history books.

"We streaked a train across the day before that official test run on Sept. 23, 1933. We wanted to make sure we got the Governor across OK," he recalled.

Andersen, now 74, retired in 1947. He and his wife, Helen, who celebrated their 50th anniversary last year, live at 42 Diablo Circle, Lafayette.

He spent all of his working life in transportation, starting at a quartermaster on the

Oceanic Steamship Company's 64 Mariposa plying between

San Francisco and San Francisco Bay

before coming through the Golden Gate the day after the

1906 earthquake and fire. Of the change to buses, he said, "I never dreamed the trains would come off the bridge. But then you can't stop progress. It will work out when they get the kinks out and the public gets used to the new schedules."

Andersen can remember the day when he had 3,600 men working under him on Key's ferries, trains and streetcars in 1939. Before the bridge trains, the ferries took almost 14,000,000 passengers a year across the Bay.

In the hey-day of the trains, they shuttled as many as 26,500,000 passengers to San Francisco and back. That was in 1945—but patronage has declined steadily and only 3,270,000 persons used the electric trains last year.

## Oaklander Found Dead in Auto

SAUSALITO, April 19.—Police said that William L. Hutchins, 27, of 433 Perkins St., Oakland, was found dead in his automobile near here today from exhaust fumes. A

vehicle, Police said he had committed suicide.

Officers said they found Hutchins, former operator of a bankrupt real estate firm, dead in his automobile parked on Rodon Ave. in the Sausalito hills.

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KEY SYSTEM TRAIN arrived in Reno last week to become the property of Nevada Heritage Assn., Inc. President of the association, Dr. Linden Rushmer is shown peeping from cab window while John A. Tinkham, vice president, handles the throttle, left. The Key System trains which served the San Francisco bay district have been dropped, and the train which was carried here by Southern Pacific is stored at Bender Warehouse while heritage association keeps it in custody, (Gazette Photo)



# When Trains Ruled the East Bay

## Here's What Happened to the Half-Hour Commute

*by Jeff Swenerton*



There has always been something about a train. From the romance of the open observation decks on the Coast Starlight to the narrow swath Amtrak cuts through the cool evergreens on its way through the Sierra, the view always changes when you're aboard. But Bay Area trains haven't always been just for weekend trips to Reno. Heavy-gauge trains used to be the way people got around the East Bay in the days before AC Transit buses and BART. They were the backbone of our mass transit system for nearly 100 years, with dozens of routes and hundreds of cars, and when they were discontinued in the late 1950s, almost all evidence of their reign was swept away.

It is quaint today to think of large trains running the length of major avenues in the East Bay, but by the mid-1940s the Key System, a privately held commuter railroad with routes from San Leandro to Richmond, had nearly 70 miles of track on dozens of lines, including two that ran across the bay after the Bay Bridge opened in 1936. It is a system that gradually faded out in the late 1950s, the victim of deferred maintenance, an ill-timed workers' strike and a postwar boom that gave more families the ability to afford their own cars. But the postwar economy also brought a massive influx of people who depended on the trains to get them around while the area was experiencing its first pinch of congestion. In 1940, the region had just under a half million people. Two decades later, the population had more than doubled. A widespread transit system like the Key had served a crucial role, even as new highways and roads were being built.

## Rise of the Electric Trains

In the early 1900s, there were several private companies providing interurban rail service, but because the towns outside of Oakland were sparsely populated, and the roads



closely spaced, the different companies' trains ran along parallel streets, often separated only by a single block. And with their limited service, they competed fiercely for passengers. The longest-running trains were operated by Southern Pacific, whose steam-powered commuter lines had been running since 1863 and whose spur line between Oakland and the Berkeley station at

Shattuck Avenue and Center Street significantly reduced the travel time of the existing horse-drawn carriage service, which took 90 minutes to make the trip. But the steam trains were aging and were much slower than the newer electric trains operated by other independent operators. The sleepy communities of Berkeley and Piedmont, remote from the East Bay financial center of Oakland, began to complain about the noise and smoke from Southern Pacific's coal-driven locomotives.

The opportunity for better, cleaner rail service was recognized by a coalition of wealthy landowners called the Realty Syndicate, which owned vast tracks of Berkeley, Piedmont and Oakland, and sold the land to real estate developers to build houses for the burgeoning population. They knew something that we are still learning today—that areas well-served by transit are worth more and develop faster—and so, in the spirit of good sense coupled with a healthy entrepreneurship, they began buying up the existing smaller train operators, some of whom had been around since the early 1890s, in an effort to consolidate service into a single competitor to Southern Pacific.

The main investor and the man who dreamed up the new railroad was Francis Marion Smith, the Borax King. He made millions running borate-mineral mining operations in the Mojave desert beginning in the early 1870s, and was the founder of 20 Mule Team Borax.

He eventually settled in Oakland, building a massive estate, which he called Arbor Villa, across the street from what is now Oakland High School. His optimistically named San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose Railway began service in 1903 and offered not only electric railcars, but also a dedicated ferry terminal for swift connections to San Francisco.

## Train to Transbay Ferry

The pier he built, used for connecting rail passengers with its fleet of ferryboats heading for San Francisco's Ferry Building, snaked 3 miles out into the bay from Oakland, at a point just south of the current Bay Bridge. The enormous pier was built with 2 miles of earth fill and a final mile of wood trestle and was fed by six rail lines that spread out into Oakland and Berkeley. The length of the pier and its location gave it an advantage over Southern Pacific (which had a smaller pier off Adeline Street in West Oakland), and its electric ferries, painted bright orange, were able to make the crossing in 15 minutes—three minutes faster than its rival.



The ferryboats were luxurious, with inlaid tile floors and carved wooden benches; some of the original boats had stained-glass windows on the upper deck. The restaurants onboard served coffee in the mornings, and the food served in the evenings was renowned, especially the corned beef hash and apple pie. There was always a bar on board (except in Prohibition years), along with snack bars, soda fountains, shoeshiners and newsstands. In 1930 a record 60 million ferryboat passengers crossed the bay.

## The Bay Bridge

The Bay Bridge would prove to be the beginning of the end for train and ferry service. The bridge was built to carry both cars and trains, with half the lower deck partitioned off to accommodate two rail lines that were shared by the Key System, Southern Pacific and

Sacramento Northern. Train service on the bridge began in January 1939, two full years after the bridge opened to cars, but the damage had already been done to transbay ferryboat service. In the first year the bridge was open, there was a drop of more than 3 million ferry passengers. Car ownership was booming, and between 1930 and 1950, the number of cars in the Bay Area more than doubled, to more than a million.



The local trains were suffering too, and in 1948, all the train lines except those with service to San Francisco were mothballed. In 1951, the California State legislature created a 26-member committee to develop a long-range transportation plan for the Bay Area that considered future growth. The Key System, whose ridership had also been suffering for several years, was not to be part of that plan, which focused on providing bus service instead. Because of falling ridership overall since the mid-1940s, the Key trains were getting shabby, and repair costs were

mounting. “It was a good system, though a little beat up at the end,” says John Stashik, an El Cerrito resident who maintains an extensive collection of Key System photos. East Bay cities also wanted their streets back, and the fixed train tracks were seen as obstacles to traffic. “Cities wanted to do their own thing,” says Stashik. “And buses were cheaper to operate, with less infrastructure.” The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Commission finally delivered its plan in 1957, which said, “a regional rapid transit system is essential to prevent total dependence on automobiles and freeways.” That same year, engineering planning began on what would become BART. A year later, the Key System ran its last train, and many of its former routes were picked up by buses in the newly formed AC Transit system. “It was obvious the Key System was rapidly losing its market share to the private automobile and because of shifts in population to the suburbs,” reports a two-volume history of the system by the late Harre W. Demoro, a former San Francisco Chronicle reporter. Local historian “Key Route Ken” Shattock, who helped produce a documentary on the trains, also places some of the blame on sprawl. “Although the Key System battled the

rise of the private automobile and bus manufacturers by running beautiful, streamlined orange-and-silver trains over the Bay Bridge,” he says, “decentralization, encouraged by freeways and bridges, doomed the rail system.”

There was also another player in the demise of the Key System and other city railways nationwide: General Motors. Between 1936 and 1950 General Motors, along with Firestone and Standard Oil of California, bought out electric train systems in nearly 50 cities—including Los Angeles, New York, Detroit and St. Louis—through a holding company called National City Lines, and replaced those trains with buses. In 1946, National City Lines acquired a majority stake in the Key System, which stopped all local service two years later. Oakland and Berkeley’s city councils vehemently opposed the destruction of the Key line trains (though the chamber of commerce endorsed it), but the new owners were adamant that the only way to save the ailing Key System was to convert to buses. In 1948, the Supreme Court ruled against GM in *United States v. National City Lines Inc.*, which said that GM was monopolizing sales of buses and supplies to its subsidiary companies. GM was fined a paltry \$5,000, and each of its executives one dollar.

## Replaced by BART

Since the trains were taking up space in congested roadways, there was pressure to open the lanes to cars—especially on the Bay Bridge. Mike Pechner, a “railfan” in Fairfield who is the familiar voice doing the weather on radio station KCBS-AM, 740, says, “There was so much pressure from the public and Caltrans to remove the tracks, it forced them to build the [BART] tunnel.” Forty years later, with congestion and delays continuing to rise along commuter corridors, a 1998 plan to resurrect local train service across the Bay Bridge was floated to voters by the mayors of Berkeley, Emeryville, Oakland and San Francisco, but it fizzled out.

While the infrastructure-heavy Key System, like other competing train systems, eventually proved too



expensive to maintain over time, the absence of its trains is felt every day in the Bay Area. In 2006, congestion overall increased 6 percent, according to a recent study by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. The worst spot is no surprise: “Among the ‘Top 10’ list of congestion hot spots, the morning commute on westbound Interstate 80 from Hercules to the Bay Bridge retained its longtime hold on the top spot in 2006, with an average 12,230 daily vehicle hours of delay.”

Traffic planners know that adding and widening traffic lanes only softens congestion for a moment, until the effects of a growing population overwhelm the gains. With longer commutes, more new residents, and housing developments accessible only by freeway, traffic will only get worse without alternatives to driving. In 1957 you could catch a train by the Alameda County Courthouse every half hour and be at the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco in 30 minutes, even during commute hours. The same speedy trains served hundreds of stops throughout the East Bay. Today, after a half-century of road building, our only option for getting around quickly is BART. After yet another hour of sitting on Interstate 80, it makes you wish we really could make 'em like we used to.

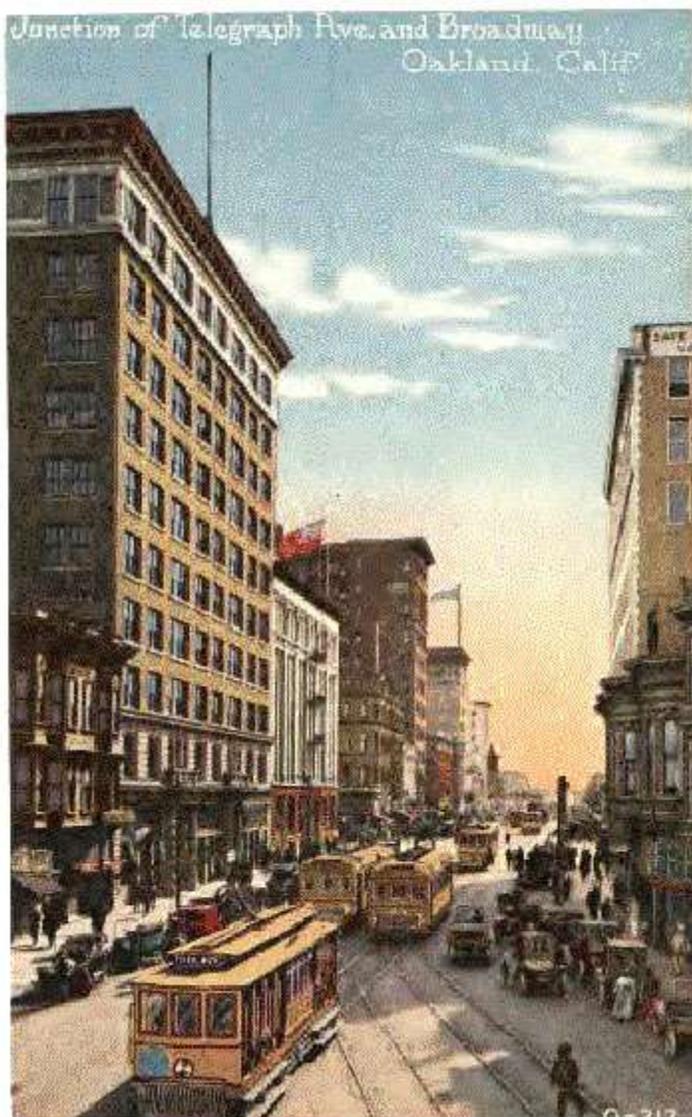
# Paving the Way for Buses—The Great GM Streetcar Conspiracy

## Part I – The Villains

*By Guy Span*

Almost everyone accepts that GM plotted to buy up some transit companies and replace streetcars with new GM buses. This is considered the "Great Transportation Conspiracy" that finally ended up as a subplot in the cartoon hit "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" (and the main plot of a PBS docu-fictional entitled "Taken For A Ride"). Did GM actually buy electric traction companies and replace streetcars with buses? You betcha. Was it an illegal conspiracy to destroy streetcars? The United States government said no and acquitted the participants on that charge.

So who were the real heroes and villains in this story? One of the most recent villains is Bradford C. Snell, a researcher whose delusions of paranoia seem nearly limitless (at least in print). His 1974 report to the U.S. government was entitled "American Ground Transport—A Proposal for Restructuring the Automobile, Truck, Bus and Rail Industries." In it, he says his report "... demonstrates ... General Motors to be a sovereign economic state whose common control of auto, truck, bus and locomotive



production was a major factor in the displacement of rail and bus transportation with cars and trucks."

Snell's 1974 report goes on to craft a plausible case for a vast conspiracy to destroy clean, economic, and user-friendly streetcars with ugly, smelly, and uneconomic buses so more people would buy cars. But there's more! He also finds GM guilty of building diesel locomotives to eliminate electric freight railways and run up the operating expenses so more railways would either go bankrupt or raise their rates, thus benefiting the truckers (who would buy GM trucks). Snell's report also accuses GM of collaborating with the Nazis during the war, defeating honest research into petroleum alternatives such as steam, steam turbine, and electrics. In fact, according to Snell, transportation in the modern 1970s was in such bad shape and so lacking in alternatives because of the machinations of GM.



To set this piece in its proper time frame, it is necessary to understand that this was an era of oil shortages, big gas guzzling cars, bankruptcy of nearly all the major northeastern railroads, the takeover of long-distance rail passenger services by a quasi-governmental agency (Amtrak in 1971), and a time when only five cities in the country still retained streetcars. Snell set out to connect all the dots with little regard for the facts. It was a good story, so he told it and in turn did a major disservice to the history of transportation in America.

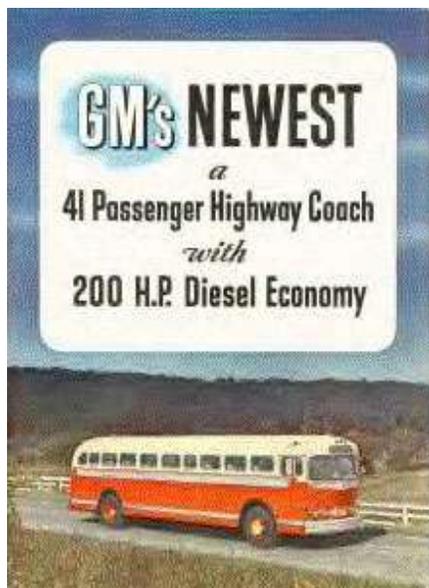
While the breadth of Snell's inaccuracies is too large to deal with here, it must be pointed out that inside each there was usually a kernel of truth. Some were just patently false. For instance: "The New Haven's (railroad) replacement of its electric locomotives with GM diesels generated higher operating...expenses and substantial losses in passenger and freight revenues. During 50 years of electrified operation, it had never failed to show an operating profit."



The inconvenient facts: The New Haven was in bankruptcy from 1937 (the last year it could afford to buy newly-built electric locomotives) to 1947. By the time diesels rolled around, the

New Haven used them to replace older and less efficient steam engines. Contrary to Snell's implications, it retained electrification of its main line from New Haven, CT, to New York City, and under New York City law, all its passenger trains operated into the city using electricity. The New Haven Railroad reentered bankruptcy in 1961, not because it bought GM's diesels, but because its franchise required operating lots of money-losing commuter and passenger service.

So for Snell, the New Haven was a microcosm of all railway profitability and the cause for it all was GM using its traffic muscle to foist off GM diesels on railroads that might have considered other alternatives. (Snell alleges railroads were forced to buy the diesels or lose GM's significant freight business.) With railroads in trouble financially, they were offering poorer service at higher rates making trucking more successful. And the truckers would buy from GM. In Snell's mind (and nowhere else), it was all a plot. The next worst piece of revisionist history that Snell offers up is the motorization of New York City streetcars. Like the New Haven story, we find a gram of truth amid all the outrageously misleading claims. According to Snell, GM's ownership of New York Omnibus in 1926 paved the way for the elimination of the surface transit lines. According to Snell, "At that time, as a result of stock and management interlocks, GM was able to exert substantial influence over (New York) Omnibus. John A. Ritchie, for example, served as chairman of GM's bus division and president of Omnibus from 1926 to well after motorization was completed." This is all true. But what did it have to do with the "busstitution" of New York's transit lines? As it turns out, nothing. GM was simply moving in on a situation where it could sell some buses. The real villain of this piece was a Tammany Hall hack mayor, John F. Hylan, supported by the Hearst Papers. William Randolph Hearst had been supporting a populist campaign against the so-called "Traction Trusts" for years and his crony was probably just following orders. According to Zachary Schrag, author of "The Bus is Young and Honest," Hylan had been fired from the Kings County Elevated in 1897 (for studying law on the job) and had his own personal animosity toward the transit companies.



At that time, there were a number of independent transit companies operating on the surface streets. By the 1920s, they all had one thing in common—a five-cent fare that didn't pay the bills and the lingering public animosity stirred up by the Hearst paper. And the bills were extraordinary. In a scene soon to be repeated across America, these lines were struggling to pay special franchise taxes, pay for their own snow removal, and pay to repave the street to eight feet outside their tracks—all legacies of the horse car days.

Any appeal to Mayor Hylan was rebuffed. Bankruptcy and receivership didn't help. In 1923, Gerhard Dahl, president of the reorganized B.M.T., published "Transit Truths" to gain some public sympathy. Dahl's words serve to highlight the relationship between transit and Hylan: " ... the B.M.T. has met with the bitter, personal and unfair opposition of Mayor Hylan." And from a letter to Hylan: "For seven years, you have been misleading and fooling the people in this community... For seven years, you have blocked every effort at transit relief. You, and only you, are to blame for the present...deplorable condition of the whole transit situation. You have used the transit situation as a political escalator. You have been willing to sacrifice the comfort, the convenience and even the necessities of the people of this community to your selfish political interests. You are persisting in that course." Unfortunately, this broadside changed nothing.

Finally in 1924, New York Railways gave up and offered to rip up some 46 miles of tracks and substitute busses. NYR was hoping to avoid upcoming paving costs and perhaps get around the 25-year-old nickel fare. Hylan made them eat crow and admit that buses were superior to electric traction. After that, it was just a question of when the buses would arrive.

Note that this all occurred years before GM had any involvement in New York City. So when GM arrived on the scene, a political battle had been fought and lost by electric traction. Since New York was the most modern city in America, this one change would help create the mindset that streetcars and rapid transit were old and inefficient. Certainly GM worked assiduously to support the concept that buses were "modern" and in particular, to control three of the five independent operating companies. In turn, this control would be used to influence the type of buses purchased.



Snell's report completely misses a critical juncture in history. Rather than dreaming up a scheme to replace traction with buses, GM was introduced to such a concept by the arch villains Hylan and Hearst. As a result, by 1933, the first Manhattan line was converted to buses and except for the Third Avenue Railway (which hung on until 1946) the last was converted in 1936. New York City finally achieved its "modern" buses and despite the efforts of the electric traction industry, the rest of the country would soon follow suit.

Snell's report can also be misleading (apparently intentionally so). Snell says, "In 1940, GM, Standard Oil and Firestone assumed an active control in Pacific (City Lines)... That year, PCL began to acquire and scrap portions of the \$100 million Pacific Electric System (of Roger Rabbit fame)." This statement implies that PCL was getting control of Pacific Electric, when in reality, all they did was acquire the local streetcar systems of Pacific Electric in Glendale and Pasadena and then convert them to buses. Many superficial readers jump on this statement as proof that GM moved in the Red Cars of the Pacific Electric. The ugly little fact is that PCL never acquired Pacific Electric (it was owned by Southern Pacific Railroad until 1953).

Thanks to the Snell report, we now have the makings of a good controversy. Many researchers blindly quote Snell, passing his paranoid, incorrect, and misleading research off as fact. Penny Mintz, who as a student wrote an article for the New York University Environmental Law Journal (1994), fell into this trap and quoted Bradford C. Snell nine times. On the Web, one can find seventeen papers accusing GM of conspiracy based upon Snell's mendacious imaginings (not including one in Polish and another in French). Interestingly enough, four papers ignore Snell and use other evidence to point to a conspiracy, most notably an excellent article by Al Mankoff. Five others take Snell to task and prove there was no conspiracy, including Professor George Hilton's thoughtful article in *Transportation Quarterly* 51, No.3. The Snell report is even the basis for the PBS movie "Taken For A Ride," which does indeed live up to its title.



Competent scholars are outraged at the abuses in Snell's report and are happy to expose its nature. Once arguing against Snell, they find themselves firmly in the non-conspiracy camp. Pro-conspiracy theorists rely on Snell and look like idiots. Thus it appears as if Snell's work is more effective at polarizing opinions (generating heat) than it is in adding any light. If someone wants a real conspiracy theory, how about Bradford Snell in the pay of GM to make up preposterous stories so a real conspiracy would be overlooked?

(Part II will look at what GM actually accomplished with National City Lines (and others), examine the handicaps of streetcars, and introduce you to one of the heroes in this story—E. Jay Quinby.)

# Paving the Way for Buses – The Great GM Streetcar Conspiracy

## Part II – The Plot Clots

*By Guy Span*

In Part I, we found that General Motors (GM) was introduced to the concept of buying up transit and replacing it with "modern" buses thanks to the animosity towards transit of New York Mayor Hylan and newspaper owner William Randolph Hearst back in the 1920s. In 1974, Bradford C. Snell presented a paper to the Senate Judiciary Committee accusing GM of collaborating with the Nazis, wiping out electric railways, bankrupting the rest (to sell more trucks), buying up streetcars to replace them with smelly buses (that people wouldn't ride so they would buy cars) and in general being completely responsible for the miserable state of modern transportation. Because Snell's charges were so obviously erroneous, respected historians and GM were able to laugh them away. Snell's paper served only to polarize opinions and reliance upon its questionable erudition placed most pro-conspiracy theorists firmly on the lunatic fringe where they could be safely ignored.



So let's set the wayback machine to 1933, just as new GM buses are about to show up on the streets of New York. And when they arrived, the reception was generally favorable as the buses could deposit their riders at the curb and not in the middle of the street (at safety islands, like streetcars). The buses were new, clean, and mostly comfortable (if smaller than the streetcars they replaced). For the operators, they came without the baggage of the past including no franchise taxes, no requirement to pave the center of the street, no

requirement to remove snow and thus (in an artificially unfair competition) were cheaper to operate. GM invested in three of the New York City operators and they unsurprisingly then selected GM buses.



The year before buses arrived, GM (significantly) formed a new subsidiary, United Cities Motor Transport (UCMT) and looked around to gobble up transit companies to replace its equipment with GM buses. There were only a few smaller systems for sale so GM did indeed acquire them and substitute buses. With so little on the market, UCMT approached the city of Portland, Oregon, in 1933 to replace its streetcar system with buses. However, the voters in Portland said no and UCMT was censured by the American Transit Association for its obviously self-serving role. UCMT operations soon folded up.

Given the handicaps of streetcars with the onerous paving requirements, special franchise taxes, and other burdens, why were not more for sale? The answer is found in the symbiotic relationship the streetcars had with the companies that owned them – the electrical generating companies and some connecting steam railways. The local power company built many of the early streetcar lines. The local generator then sold bulk electricity to the streetcar company and made a nice profit on that sale. If its subsidiary streetcar company could also make money, so much the better. If not, the losses could be covered through a deduction of the utility's federal, state, and local taxes. In a sense, streetcars, through this arrangement, were subsidized.

So until and unless GM could pry streetcars away from their parent utilities or connecting railroads, very few lines would come up for sale. What happened next is the seminal event, the turning point



where electric transit met its Waterloo. GM clearly couldn't force the utilities to sell its transit lines, but the Federal Government sure could. And it did, through the passage of the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935. This is contained in Title 15 Chapter 2 (c) and it is an incredibly complex law. But it had the suspiciously useful (to GM) effect of stripping transit lines away from their utilities (mandated to be sold by 1938) and forcing them out on their own, to either live or die. And once separated from their subsidies, many died on their own at the end of the depression, without any further assistance from GM.

So for the pro-conspiracy theorists, research into the role played by GM (if any) in the structure of the Utility Act of 1935 would go a long way to show that GM was indeed the "man behind the mirror." In fairness, the utility trusts had cost investors huge sums in the depression era bankruptcies. Indeed, many had perpetuated Enron-type machinations through the complexities of holding companies. The Utility Act would clean up these problems and have the possibly unintended side effect of eliminating rapid rail transit. The government was there to help you and General Motors.



In any event, the Utility Act now put a large number of transit companies on the market. In 1936, GM formed National City Lines and aggressively began to buy transit companies and substitute diesel buses for streetcars. Meanwhile, the transit companies themselves were looking for ways to avoid the extra costs foisted off on them from the days of horse cars. The quickest way was to substitute buses for lighter density lines. Even with the extra costs, high-density lines were still cheaper to operate electrically. Small cities across America began to change to buses. And where GM was not involved, they would buy from Brill, Ford, Mack and even GM.

National City Lines, with partner Firestone Tire and Phillips Petroleum, Atlantic City Lines (with the same) and Pacific City Lines with Standard Oil (replacing Phillips) and Mack Truck added went on to acquire some 62 transit companies and killed streetcars on 23 of them. It also partially eliminated streetcar lines in Baltimore, Los Angeles (city), Oakland, Philadelphia, and St. Louis.

That's the official count of National City Lines and associates. But that is not the full count. Other cities had suspicious investors involved. Most notably, Pacific Electric in the greater Los Angeles basin. PE had been losing money for years and parent Southern Pacific Railroad despaired of ever being able to beg the Public Utilities Commission to let them stop service. The savoir for Southern Pacific was Western Transit Systems, with Jesse Haugh as president.

Haugh was a former official with Pacific City Lines and wandered into town with a \$500,000 down payment and \$1.8 million in working capital (a considerable sum in those days). But the sale had an interesting structure. Haugh did not buy (he rented) the downtown subway terminal, nor did he buy substations or certain wires or other parts related to electric operations. The rent was not due to start for two years, so he cleverly had a cost structure that forced an apparently reasonable application to the PUC to end rail service. His Metropolitan Coach Company was unabashedly pro-bus. And right away he applied for abandonment of the lines running into the subway terminal.

Haugh apparently had a very friendly relationship with his former employer, Pacific City Lines. Right after his purchase, he needed new buses (to close the Subway Terminal) and the National City Lines subsidiary, Key System, allowed Haugh to purchase its just arrived order (brand new GMs painted for the Key System). These were then sent down to Metropolitan Coach and repainted for service in LA. Given that Haugh had such a cozy relationship with National City Lines, it is fair to say that his financial backers were likely involved with GM (although no one has proven a connection). And Metropolitan Coach bought a lot of buses from GM. It is ironic that one of the frequently misstated "facts" from the Snell Report (Snell implies that Pacific City Lines was buying PE in 1940) may actually have some basis in truth through the affiliation of Haugh.



In 1946 another event occurred which allowed the introduction of one of the few heroes in this story. Meet E. Jay Quinby, a mercurial rail fan, former electric traction employee,

retired Lieutenant Commander in the Navy (World War II), and home builder of a battery-powered electric Volkswagen. His contribution to this story was to hand publish and expose the owners of National City Lines (GM, Firestone, and Phillips Petroleum) and he addressed it to "The Mayors; The City Manager; The City Transit Engineer; The members of The Committee on Mass-Transportation and The Tax-Payers and The Riding Citizens of Your Community." In 1946, he sent his 36-page analysis, which began: "This is an urgent warning to each and every one of you that there is a careful, deliberately planned campaign to swindle you out of your most important and valuable public utilities—your Electric Railway System."

Quinby's "manifesto" would go on to link National City Lines (and its subsidiaries) to parent owners Firestone Tires, General Motors, Phillips Petroleum, Standard Oil of California, and Mack Truck. And he delineated how National City Lines bought transit companies and deliberately replaced streetcars and trolley buses with GM diesel buses.

Quinby's arguments went on to detail how and why streetcars and rapid transit were preferable to buses. He pointed out that the supposed advantage of delivering passengers to the curb impeded the flow of traffic (the rear end of the bus stuck out into a traffic lane in practice), eliminated curb parking at the bus stop and that 50% of the passengers would still have to cross the entire street. Streetcars, he noted, behaved predictably and kept to their tracks, letting passengers off at islands and the passengers would only have to cross one-half the street. They used no curb space and carried 60 seated passengers in comfort (with room for 40 more standees) instead of 48 in cramped seats (and standing). Most particularly, he said, they are clean and not emitting poisonous carbon monoxide, which in quantity would render the air unfit to breathe.

Quinby's prophetic words extended to the following: "You will realize too late that the electric railway is unquestionably more comfortable, more reliable, safer and cheaper to use than the bus system. But what can you do about it once you have permitted the tracks to be torn up? Who do you think you can find to finance another deluxe transit system for your city...?"

With almost sixty years of hindsight, we can now answer that question. The taxpayers of the Bay Area funded billions for BART. The Feds (and locals) funded billions and billions for new electric transit systems in San Jose, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Dallas, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Denver, Portland, and others—all cities whose systems had been unwisely removed. Quinby was right. And more than being right, he tried to do something about it and nearly succeeded.



Quinby's charges would finally bestir the government to begin an investigation into National City Lines and its owners and subsidiaries and suddenly the opposition changed their tactics (in a clear admission of guilt). NCL Subsidiary Baltimore Traction Company quickly bought 165 buses from the Brill Company and Los Angeles Railway bought 40 new PCC streetcars (like the "modern" ones on today's F line in San Francisco).

Thanks to Quinby's warning, the Feds eventually took GM to trial and convicted them not for ripping out streetcar lines, but rather for controlling these companies to monopolize sales of its products, a violation of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act. The participants were each fined \$5,000 (plus court costs) and senior executives were each fined \$1.00. And that was that. Unfortunately, no one sought an answer to Quinby's most penetrating question (referring to the 1935 Public Utility Holding Company Act), "WHO IS BEHIND THIS CAMPAIGN TO SEPARATE THE OBVIOUSLY ECONOMICAL COMBINATION OF ELECTRIC RAILWAY AND ITS POWER PLANT?"

National City Lines and Pacific City Lines merged in 1948 and continued their practice of "bustitution." Streetcars continued to suffer under the multiple handicaps of special franchise taxes, property taxes on private right-of-ways, paving charges for the center of streets, private snow removal costs, fixed fares, and bizarre rules where, for example, some companies had to provide city lighting along tracks in the street. There was no question that it was harder to make money as a rail transit provider and the bus could use the city-provided streets literally for free.

Yet even in that environment a study of transit systems between 1935 and 1950 by David J. St. Clair found that buses were indeed superior in operating expenses on lighter density lines. Even then, the comparison was not entirely fair, as the older streetcar company provided free transfers to its buses (from streetcars), paid



extraordinary charges, and received a single fare regardless of distance traveled. Substituting buses, the transit operator frequently eliminated transfers and instituted a zone system that charged based upon the distance traveled. St. Clair studied the profitability of each system, not rules they operated under. Interestingly enough, he found that trolley (electric overhead wire) buses were the most profitable on medium density lines and electric railways the best on high-density lines. Yet city transit planners chose buses.

City planning was a relatively new field in the 1930s and few accredited institutions taught the subject. However, one such accredited institution did and it was GMI (General Motors Institution which took over the Flint Institute of Technology in 1926). And you can imagine what the fledgling city planners learned: traffic engineering (buses are good; railways are bad). Each year a new crop was turned loose on an unsuspecting country. And dutiful to the education received, they did indeed select modern buses for their towns. To be fair, other institutions (such as M.I.T.) taught city planning, but GM was the only company to buy such a school.

Where the tactics of buying transit, inserting tame planners, and using trained National City Lines stooges failed, GM would act directly. Reportedly, the outgoing Tampa City Council was bribed with Cadillacs to vote to scrap its municipal transit system. Other times, finance leverage was exerted upon companies. According to Freedom of Information Act

(F.O.I.A.) documents, the transit system's bank would get a visit from GM promising deposits if the bank would lean on the transit company to not buy more streetcars. Converting to bus was easy, with the local banks assistance and, of course, easy financing from GMAC (General Motors Acceptance Corporation). GMAC was founded in 1919 to help auto dealers finance the bulk purchase of new cars and its role quickly grew.

Allegedly, it was easy money from GMAC that convinced the gangsters in control at Twin Cities Transit to scrap its modern PCC style streetcars (to pocket the scrap sales) and buy buses. The crooked officers eventually were convicted of swindling and fraud, but by then the modern streetcars in Minneapolis and St. Paul were burned for scrap.

While GM was engaged in what can only be described as an all out attack on transit, our government made no effort to assist traction whatsoever and streetcars began to fade in earnest after the Second World War. In 1946, the government began its Interstate Highway program, with lots of lobbying from GM, arguably the largest public works project in recorded history. In 1956, this was expanded with the National Interstate Highway and Defense Act. Gas tax funds could only be spent on more roads. More cars in service meant more gas taxes to fund more roads. And we got lots of roads.

More and better roads doomed the interurban electric railways and they fell like flies. Outstanding systems like the Chicago North Shore Line (which operated from the northern suburbs into Chicago on the elevated loop until 1962) were allowed to go bankrupt and be scrapped. The Bamburger between Salt Lake City and Ogden failed with its high-speed Brill Cars in 1952. Today, arguably only two of the vast empire of interurban systems survived: The Philadelphia and Western Suburban Railway – aka the Red Arrow Lines (now a part of SEPTA) and the Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railway (now state owned). And highways had everything to do with this extinction.

The United States government, state agencies, and local communities allowed these systems to fail. In the District of Columbia, Congress ordered the elimination of streetcars over the strong objections of the local owners and managers. The government was doing its part.

So let's not forget the words of Charlie Wilson when asked if there were a conflict with his former employer (GM) on his possible appointment to Secretary of Defense in 1953. He replied, "I cannot conceive of one because for years, I thought what was good for our country was good for General Motors, and vice versa."

Clearly, GM waged a war on electric traction. It was indeed an all out assault, but by no means the single reason for the failure of rapid transit. Also, it is just as clear that actions and inactions by government contributed significantly to the elimination of electric traction. This was good for GM but not particularly good for our country. E. Jay Quinby and the rapid transit companies lost the war when it mattered and now Quinby's 1946 prophetic question has come back to haunt us: "Who will rebuild them for you?"



# Commander Edwin J. Quinby and the Great Streetcar Conspiracy

MARCH 31, 2011

by Arthur Goldwag



“Cranks are noble,” says Charles P. Peirce, author of *Idiot America*, “because cranks are independent. Their value comes when, occasionally, their lonely dissents from the commonplace affect the culture, at which point the culture moves to adopt them and their ideas come to influence the culture.”

A footnote in Jane Jacobs’ **Dark Age Ahead** has gotten me reading and thinking about Commander Edwin Jenyss Quinby (1895-1981). Brilliant, eccentric, and very likely a crank, Quinby was one of those rare conspiracy theorists who was right.

One of Quinby’s formative experiences, according to this on-line **tribute**, was seeing the visionary scientist and inventor Nikola Tesla demonstrate a remote controlled submarine in Madison Square Garden. A Marconi radio operator on a tramp steamer (and later a Commander in the Naval Reserve), Quinby would be one of the first electrical engineers hired by RCA. He went on to patent a slew of inventions himself, but his life-long passion was for railroads and trolleys. He’d scandalized his wealthy parents when he took a job as a conductor and motorman on an interurban trolley that ran between Patterson, New Jersey and Suffern, New York after graduating from college; in 1968 he published the definitive history of the line, *Interurban Interlude , A History of the North Jersey Rapid System*.

In the 1950s, he was instrumental in efforts to save the paddlewheel riverboat The Delta Queen; he spent the final years of his life developing a prototype for an electric car in his basement. A 1960 **article** in *American Heritage* magazine describes the remote-controlled steam-powered calliope he created for the Delta Queen. At the time, he was also developing

a calliope that could be installed on a trolley car—he'd helped set up a trolley museum in Branford, Connecticut so he had access to forty of them—"a kind of 'trolleyope,' which will use compressed air from the brake pump (the panting organ under the floor that used to go thump-thump thump when the cars paused) to play airs on various trolley bells, horns, and whistles." Amazon lists a quaintly-titled book he published in 1974 (out of print and unavailable) that reflects the whole range of his interests: *A Few Glimpses of the Passing Scene: Involving the Strange Combination of Steam Calliopes, Steamboats, Pipe Organs, Telegraphs, Cables, Radio, Electric Railroads and Gyro Monorails* .

Quinby earned his footnote status in history in 1946, when he wrote a 24- (or 26- or 37-page—different accounts provide different numbers) pamphlet, ran off dozens of copies on a mimeograph machine in his basement, and mailed it to Congressmen, mayors, and city managers across the country. "This is an urgent warning to each and every one of you," it began, "that there is a carefully, deliberately planned campaign to swindle you out of your most important and valuable public utilities—your Electric Railway system! Who will rebuild them for you?" Quinby was a well-known figure in the subculture of 'juicefans' (trolley enthusiasts). As far back as 1934, he'd founded the Electrical Railroaders' Association, a group that, according to Colin Divall and Winstan Bond's *Suburbanizing the Masses: Public Transport and Urban Development in Historical Perspective* (Ashgate, 2003), "had an explicit political agenda, not merely to preserve and publish information on electric railways, but also to lobby on their behalf wherever they were threatened."

The threat Quinby had uncovered was a deadly one. In short, General Motors and a consortium of other large corporations, working through holding companies like National City Lines, had been buying up streetcar companies, scrapping their electric trolleys, and then locking the cities into contracts that required them to buy buses, parts and fuel from themselves. *Mass Transportation* magazine (which had named National City Lines' president E. Roy Fitzgerald its Man of the Year) ridiculed Quinby and his manifesto. "Edwin J. Quinby took full advantage of the great American privilege of the free press to feed the lunatic fringe of radicals and crackpots springing up like weeds in the United States today," Ross Schram wrote in a five-page cover article headlined "The Queer Case of Quinby." "The

document, printed on cheap paper, is natural fertilizer for suspicions, for disunity. What is the Quinby pattern? Was he used by some strange political influence?"

A year later—thanks in no small part to Quinby's efforts—National City Lines, Inc., American City Lines, Inc., Pacific City Lines, Inc., the Standard Oil Company of California, the Federal Engineering Corporation, the Phillips Petroleum Company, the General Motors Corporation, the Firestone Tire & Rubber Company and the Mack Manufacturing Corporation were all indicted on anti-trust and conspiracy charges, along with seven executives: E. Roy Fitzgerald and Foster G. Beamsley of NCL; H.C. Grossman of General Motors; Standard Oil of California's Henry C. Judd, L.R. Jackson of Firestone Tire & Rubber; and Frank B. Stradley and A.M. Hughes of Phillips Petroleum. They were convicted in 1949 and received slaps on the wrists. Each corporation was fined \$5000; the executives were fined just \$1. America's trolleys continued their march to extinction.

Whether or not GM and its cohorts killed the trolleys by themselves or merely hastened their demise, there can be no doubt that they had spearheaded an illegal conspiracy that placed their corporate interests ahead of the public's. Quinby's mimeographed pamphlet might have looked and read like ravings from the fringe, but it was anything but. Just because you're paranoid, as the saying goes, it doesn't mean that people aren't out to get you.

Yesterday's *New York Times* reported that Bashar al- Assad "labeled pro-democracy demonstrators as either 'duped' or as conspirators in a plot to destroy the nation." Syria's unrest, the ophthalmologist turned dictator said, was manufactured by saboteurs who want "to fragment Syria, to bring down Syria as a nation, to enforce an Israeli agenda." Now *that's* a conspiracy theory.



# Nature's Unsung Helper

by *Chris Carlsson*



**Figure 1 - Stephen O'Brien, gardener at Transbay Terminal since 1958.**

Stephen O'Brien has been coaxing an oasis out of a most unlikely environment for a long time: the small green patches at either end of the ground level Mission Street frontage of the Transbay Terminal. He started back in 1958, when the old Key System train tracks that used to bring East Bay electric streetcars to the Transbay Terminal were being torn out. The Transbay Terminal in those days was a crucial commuter hub, bringing passengers from all over the East Bay. If you've

ever ridden the F bus from Berkeley to San Francisco, you've ridden on the descendant of the same-lettered streetcar that once transported you from downtown Berkeley to downtown San Francisco just a minute longer than BART does today!

O'Brien is having his last day working his gardens at the Transbay Terminal today. His company's contract with Caltrans has ended, and he has been transferred to the State Building or the PUC building grounds. He's almost 80 years old and if he doesn't like his new posting, he'll probably retire soon. It'll be hard to match the half century he's spent cultivating the quiet, almost invisible oases at the Transbay Terminal. I heard about O'Brien from my friend Susanne Zago:

"Every morning I step out of the Transbay Terminal, one of the ugliest places I've ever been, and I notice this small green space as I leave. Sometimes it was completely trashed, but the next day I'd look in and it would be restored to its pristine condition. I looked at the trees, surprisingly mature, wondering what was planned for them as they build the new Transbay Center. I started asking around, and no one knew. One day I met this man who was in the space and it turned out to be Stephen."



Figure 2 - July 20, 1953, Key System train awaits on platform in Transbay Terminal



Figure 3 - Passengers boarding Key System train, June 8, 1948.



**Figure 4 - A natural oasis at 1st and Mission.**



**Figure 5 - Beneath this 45-year-old pine lies a hidden patch of nature, nurtured for a half century by Stephen O'Brien.**



Figure 6 - A garden flourishes in a forgotten corner.

Stephen O'Brien knows what's going to happen. His 52 years of nurturing these garden spots will be bulldozed with the rest of the old 1939 Terminal, making way for the new tallest building in San Francisco and a multi-billion dollar [transit center](#). The project has been gestating for years. I once had an office at 37 Clementina, which is only about a block away, and I remember the original plan in the late 1980s to bring Caltrain into the city center at 1st and Mission in order to connect to BART and MUNI, establishing a true regional transit hub. The Caltrain extension was deep-sixed by transit planners. Years went by, during which BART was extended to the airport and MUNI extended its N-Judah by building waterfront tracks around to 4th and Townsend (massively subsidizing the Giants' "privately financed" stadium). Now they've resuscitated the Caltrain extension, in order to bring High-Speed Rail into the center of downtown. The profligate waste of resources is breathtaking. But as long as engineering firms and contractors and building trades workers are all keeping busy, it's good for the economy right?

Anyway, as we go through our daily lives it's easy to not see the little patches of nature struggling to gain a foothold in the aptly named concrete jungle. I spoke to O'Brien on Wednesday

and learned a bit about his long service at this deeply layered historical site. He told me when he showed up in 1958 there were just brown patches where today there is dense foliage and tall trees. I went to look for old photos at the Main Library's [online collection](#), and as you can see from these pictures, the spots that Stephen has been maintaining have always been "green," albeit nothing like what he's helped them become.



**Figure 7 - In this December 27, 1939 photo taken in the first year of the Transbay Terminal's operation, you can see the two garden spots laid out from the beginning.**



**Figure 8 - By August 10, 1964, Stephen O'Brien had been watering and attending this garden for almost six years**



**Figure 9 - October 8, 2009, just months before demolition.**

O'Brien has an interesting history himself. He's got an Irish name but on his mother's side of the family, he has an English grandfather and a German grandmother. His English grandfather once owned a dairy ranch on the western slopes of Mt. Tamalpais before selling it off for \$500! O'Brien grew up in Tomales Bay, and as a young man he jumped at the chance to purchase a lot in the newly subdivided Inverness back in the 1940s: \$25 down and \$25 a month until he'd paid off the \$1,000 price. Today his lot is the only one left in Inverness that hasn't had a house built on it.

He told me about the barber who used to have his business inside the Terminal. After helping him sink his plumbing O'Brien got free haircuts for a long time. There used to be three different restaurants inside too, including the James Gray Company restaurant, and shoeshine and shoe repair were also thriving businesses there. Continental Trailways bus service once used the station in competition with Greyhound, just as other train lines once ran across the Bay Bridge along with the Key System, until the Bay Bridge was converted to motorized vehicles only.

O'Brien was in the basement a few years ago and saw that the vast underground space was still as good as new. Nevertheless, it's all coming down soon. He noted that the rebuilding of the Fremont Street ramps from the Bay Bridge had probably saved his gardens for an extra seven or eight years. The gnarly pine tree closest to First Street was saved from a nearby State Building, when O'Brien transplanted it from a discarded planter. It's grown to be 20 feet tall and while it's oddly shaped there's no denying that it seems to be thriving with its roots in the ground! The twin pines at either end of the Terminal were planted more than 45 years ago and though they've grown rather tall, they're dwarfed by the skyscrapers that have continued the southward march from downtown. O'Brien told me about the various birds, LBB's, gulls, hawks, and pigeons that have made this mini-habitat a resting spot. Varieties of butterflies have found a home here too.



**Figure 10 - The eastern end of the Terminal plaza.**

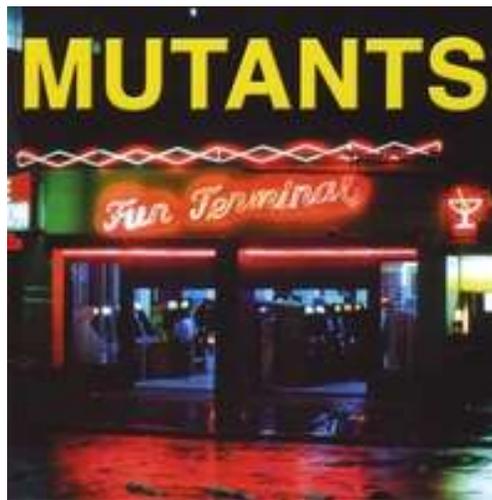


**Figure 11 - The Millennium tower dwarfing the 45-year-old pine tree at Fremont and Mission.**



Figure 12 - To the west, this ungainly monster dominates a hearty pine tree that was saved from a discarded planter by Stephen O'Brien.

Who remembers that the highrise in the photo above was built on the site of the old arcade known as "Fun Terminal"? The same "Fun Terminal" that gave its name to the seminal album by local rockers *The Mutants* back in the early 1980s?...



**Figure 13 - Fun Terminal! Right across 1st Street from O'Brien's Garden back in the 1970s-80s**

Stephen was philosophical about losing his half-century's work. It makes him sad, of course. O'Brien's gardens have survived in surprised juxtaposition to the changing neighborhood that surround them. Easy to overlook, his gardens are larger examples of the persistence of nature even in a highly built environment. For those of us who haven't noticed the garden spots as we've scurried by, preoccupied with the day's work or the domestic dramas ahead, their imminent disappearance (they will no longer be maintained, but should stand for a few months more at least) might serve as a cautionary note. Shouldn't we stop and smell the flowers? And shouldn't we honor the essential work of the invisible toilers in our midst, people like Stephen O'Brien who has selflessly and without ulterior motive kept these little patches of urban greenery flourishing for decades? Stop by today and say thanks to Stephen O'Brien!



**Figure 14 - In 1953, pigeons had the roost of the lawn...**



Figure 15 - Going, going....

## Terminal History



Figure 16 - November 1965 view looking southeast over the Transbay Terminal

San Francisco's Transbay Terminal was built in 1939 at 1st and Mission Streets as a California Toll Bridge Authority facility in order to facilitate commuter rail travel across the lower portion of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. It was paid for by Bay Bridge tolls, which were then 50 cents per automobile. At the time, the lower deck of the Bay Bridge was not only used for automobile travel, but also hosted two rail tracks on the south side. The rail portion was run principally through the Key System.

The Terminal was designed to handle as many as 35 million people annually with a peak 20-minute rate of 17,000 commuters that were transported in 10-car trains at headways of 63.5 seconds. In its heyday at the end of World War II, the terminal's rail system was transporting 26 million passengers annually. After the war ended and gas rationing was eliminated, the Terminal's use began to steadily decline to a rate of four to five million people traveling by rail per year. In 1958, the lower deck of the Bay Bridge was converted to automobile traffic only, the Key System was dismantled, and by 1959, the inter-modal Transbay Terminal was converted into a bus-only facility, which it currently is today.



**Table of Contents**

Key System History..... 1

    Line F “The F Train!”: Berkeley via Adeline and Shattuck..... 2

    Line A: Downtown and East Oakland ..... 3

    Line B: Grand Avenue - Trestle Glen ..... 4

    Line C: Piedmont..... 5

    Line E: Claremont ..... 6

    Line H: Sacramento Street..... 7

SHUTTLES TO TRANSBAY LINES ..... 8

    Line K: Alcatraz - Telegraph ..... 8

    Line G: Westbrae..... 8

Local Streetcar Lines ..... 9

    Line 1: East 14th Street ..... 9

    Line 2: San Pablo ..... 9

    Line 3: Martin Luther King Jr Way (Grove Street) ..... 10

    Line 4: Telegraph - Shattuck – Euclid..... 10

    Line 5: Telegraph ..... 11

    Line 6: Broadway - College – Arlington..... 11

    Line 7: Arlington - Euclid ..... 12

    Line 10: Piedmont – Hopkins ..... 12

    Line 11: Piedmont Avenue - 38th Avenue..... 13

    Line 12: Grand - 16th Street Station..... 13

    Line 18: Park - Downtown Oakland - Grand – Lakeshore..... 14

KEY SYSTEM IN THE NEWS..... 15

    News clippings regarding the Key System..... 15

When Trains Ruled the East Bay ..... 31

    Here's What Happened to the Half-Hour Commute..... 31

    Rise of the Electric Trains..... 32

    Train to Transbay Ferry..... 33

    The Bay Bridge ..... 33

    Replaced by BART ..... 35

Paving the Way for Buses–The Great GM Streetcar Conspiracy ..... 37

    Part I – The Villains..... 37

Paving the Way for Buses – The Great GM Streetcar Conspiracy ..... 43

    Part II – The Plot Clots..... 43

Commander Edwin J. Quinby and the Great Streetcar Conspiracy ..... 53

Nature’s Unsung Helper..... 57

    Terminal History..... 68

