

## Miriam Lens

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**From:** Sherman Lewis  
**Sent:** Monday, September 22, 2014 11:02 PM  
**To:** Francisco Zermeno - Forward; CityClerk; Al Mendall; Greg Jones; Barbara Halliday; Fran David; Marvin Peixoto; Sara Lamnin; Elisa Marquez  
**Subject:** Route 238 Corridor Improvement Project Report

Comments on Route 238 Corridor Improvement Project –

Report on Status and Accomplishments of September 23, 2014

[partial first draft]

*“regional transportation improvement project”*

**“Regional”** is not defied. The routes are in the ACTA LOS monitoring network. The Usage Study reported that 5 percent of peak hour traffic on Foothill north of A St. was regional, that is, both trip ends were outside of Hayward. The rest is local (small) and trips with one trip end in Hayward (most). The Loop does not carry much regional traffic, which is on the interstates, but parallel arterial routes like the Loop carry a small regional load and establish traffic equilibrium at the margin based on comparative congestion delay.

*“severely congested and barren thoroughfare”*

Vehicle congestion can be defined by **link speed during peak hour, intersection LOS, travel time budgets, and popular perception.**

**Link speed** during peak hour is measured every year by ACTA using floating cars. I can supply more detail, but the Loop streets have never been congested in more than ten years of monitoring. The reason is that the links are urban arterials designed to operate at a certain speed, and the speeds measured have always been D or better. Only level F counts as congested in the CMA law. Loop streets were, in fact, less congested than some links on El Camino, Camino Tassajara, E. 14<sup>th</sup>, San Pablo, and other similar arterials in built up areas.

**Intersection LOS** looks at delay at red lights, with waiting through two red lights as LOS F. The typical solution is to make the intersection bigger, which can solve a problem if there are no economic and land use forces creating induced demand. Often these forces re-congest the intersection over time. Widening a bottleneck works for a while but new bottlenecks are created because overall traffic increases. Traffic increases because of numerous subsidies and indirect prices which lower the cost of driving by 50% or more. A number of things are needed, like better land use planning to balance jobs and houses, parking charges, congestion fees, unbundling, deregulation, carbon tax, gas tax restoration, closing corporate tax loopholes, and ending fossil subsidies. Oddly enough, congestion itself induces restraint and can be the best local policy pending state and federal pricing reforms.

**Travel time budgets** provide excellent insight into congestion. People decide where to live, where to work, and what trips to make based on acceptable anticipated travel time, considering all factors—congestion, different modes, and cost. Walk trips become viable only where there is enough density for short distances, supportive design, and greatly reduced threats from traffic. People don't try to live close to work; they try to optimize among income, travel time and housing value. Congestion reduces trip lengths and makes land use more efficient. Thus, while less efficient than pricing reform, it can be more efficient than expanding roads.

**Popular perception** drive political decisions, and elected officials use traffic consultants to rationalize irrational decisions. Take link speed, for example. We know that Loop streets have always worked close to their design speed, uncongested, but people perceive congestion anyway. The reason is psychological—people expect to keep moving and hate red lights. The block length on the Loop network is longer than usual, so speed is good up to the light. The good speed on the block averages with the wait time at the light to show the street works correctly, but psychologically, people don't look at average link speed, only at red light delay. Wide streets add to the expectation of faster movement, and a distant destination adds more to the perception. The psychology reverse on narrow streets and close to destinations, where people expect to slow down.

Yet, really, the problem is less psychological perception and more the extreme commitment to one solution, more pavement. If people wanted pricing reform and understood congestion, we would have the level of congestion we want, no more no less. American culture creates the problem and embraces a solution that makes the problem worse. To make matters worse, **we can't see the solution when it is being implemented** because we can only see visible traffic, and not the traffic that isn't there. Downtown San Francisco would have stagnated many years ago were it not for BART, buses, car pools, and high bridge tolls, so that most of the traffic that would be on the Bay Bridge is not there.

*“severely congested and barren thoroughfare”*

The Loop has made the streets more barren than they were before by eliminating parking and medians, increasing traffic speeds, and widening pavements, with wider, more dangerous pedestrian crossings and reduced life on the sidewalks. Without people, parking, and safety, and with more fast traffic, most fronting businesses are marginal or vacant. While Loop reform will help, revitalization will also depend on more friendly lighting, landscaping, bulb-outs, narrower cross walks, façade upgrades, transit, housing downtown, and policing.

*“attractively designed facility”*

The problem with the loop is not in its design, but its function. It is very well-deigned for cars. If I were a car, I'm sure I would find it attractive, almost as good as a freeway. However, if the function is to serve downtown revitalization, walking, and transit, the Loop is counter-productive.

*“repeated legal challenges finally doomed construction of Caltrans Route 238 bypass”*

The Foothill Freeway to Fremont, and the Bypass to Industrial Blvd., was doomed by **lack of funds**, dishonesty on a ballot measure, and increasing unpopularity, not litigation, which only created a rationale for elected officials to solve the problem. People who think otherwise just don't know the record and embrace the myths that have grown up around the long history. I have the documents. In 1979, MTC killed the Freeway. MTC granted Hayward its request to keep the Bypass, on condition that Hayward would come up with the funds. Hayward was completely unwilling to tax itself and, in fact, had a formal policy of getting money from others, exactly what MTC would not, and did not, allow.

In 1986, there was **dishonesty on a ballot measure**. The Hayward mayor and the Chair of the Board of Supervisors conspired to describe the bypass as a project along Mission and Foothill even though everyone involved knew it was going through homes and hill open space to the east. They knew the Bypass was dangerously controversial and did not want it to sink the county sales tax measure with far less controversial projects. Everyone in government then acted as if it were perfectly OK to take the money from the Mission Foothill project and spend it somewhere else. The Courts decided that elected officials could not take money voters had approved for one project and spend it on something else.

The Bypass became **increasingly unpopular** due to unrelenting criticism over many years. I would have liked it to be unpopular because of the pricing and congestion ideas explained above, but most people did not care about that, and they still don't. People didn't like the Bypass because they did not want a big new freeway in their

neighborhoods, did not want more traffic and pollution, and did not want many houses and much open space to be destroyed.

*"Route 238 Project was selected as a replacement project"*

The City Council decision to use Measure B funds for something legal could have considered any transportation project in Planning Area 2, based on the LATIP law and Measure B Expenditure Plan amendment procedures. However, there was so much political and psychological inertia behind doing something on Mission and Foothill that alternative needs, such a truck bypass around the airport, or a truck stop, were never considered. The City then retained a consultant who used methods of analysis know by experts to be wrong to justify the Loop. The problem was no so much in predicting what the Loop would do as it was in predicting what would happen with no project, for many technical reasons caused by fallacies in 4 step UMTA-based computer modeling. (Alameda County, lacking Bypass trauma, used its share for unrelated pragmatic projects.)

*"Constructing a facility that will accommodate current and future traffic demands as permitted by funding constraints"*

Future **traffic demands are predicted to be high** based on assuming continued subsidies for autos. Planners do not discuss the policies that cause more traffic because they are unaware of what those policies are. The capacity model dominates thinking; the pricing and congestion models are ignored. Past projections of traffic are never revisited to see if they came to pass. Large traffic increase are predicted as inevitable for political reasons, to create consensus to build more highways. This is not hard to do, since voters know even less about traffic than public officials. However, traffic growth will not exceed congestion-induced restraint based on travel time budgets, so new, free, street capacity creates the demand it pretends to meet, a self-fulfilling prophesy.

*"Improving access to the Cal State University campus in Hayward"*

There is an alternative to increasing road capacity, which is a rapid bus shuttle service supporting walking-oriented redevelopment on Mission and Carlos Bee, which would probably support more access with less traffic than the Loop. This alternative was never studied.

[draft as of 11pm, more tomorrow]

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