



SAN FRANCISCO PLANNING DEPARTMENT

General Plan Referral

Date: June 20, 2017
Case No. Case No. 2017-005411GPR
Natoma Street Pedestrian Bridge

Project Location: 542-550 Howard Street

Block/Lot No.: 3721/136

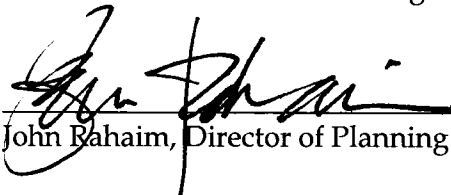
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Recommendation: Finding the project, on balance, is **in conformity** with the General Plan; contingent upon approval of a design for Transbay Parcel F development that provides public access to the bridge as described in the Transit Center District Plan and San Francisco Planning Code.

*Recommended
By:*


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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

As part of the development of Transbay Parcel F at 542-550 Howard Street, a pedestrian bridge is proposed over the Natoma Street right-of-way. The bridge would connect the fifth floor of the Transbay Parcel F development to the Transbay Transit Center's rooftop park. The Transbay Parcel F development will provide public elevators that connect the bridge to the Natoma Street sidewalk and an ungated pedestrian passage connecting Natoma and Howard streets.

As of writing, the development at Parcel F has not been finalized nor approved. Although the general concept of providing access to the bridge via an elevator accessed from Natoma Street is described in the General Plan Referral application, specifics related to the design of public access to the proposed bridge were not included. The final design of public access to the bridge will be integral to its function and success, and as such, the recommendation of this General Plan Referral is to find the project in conformity with the General Plan, but making this recommendation contingent upon approval of a design for the Transbay Parcel F development that provides public access to the bridge as described in the Transit Center District Plan and San Francisco Planning Code.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PRESENT USE

The Project Site ("Site") is the air space above Natoma Street which would be occupied by a pedestrian bridge associated with the development of Transbay Parcel F (542-550 Howard Street).

The Project Site is located within the Downtown Core, and more specifically, within the Transit Center District Plan (TCDP) area. Development in the vicinity consists primarily of high-rise office buildings, interspersed with low-rise buildings. The Transbay Transit Center building site is located immediately north of the project site and extends from Beale Street westward almost to Second Street. Anticipated for completion in 2019, the five-story (three above ground) Transbay Transit Center will provide an one-million-square-foot regional bus and rail station with a five-acre public park atop the building. Numerous other high-rise residential and office buildings are planned or under construction in the surrounding area.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The project was fully evaluated in the Transit Center District Plan and Transit Tower EIR, certified by the Planning Commission on 5/24/12, Motion No. 18628, Case Nos. 2007.0558E and 2008.0789E.

GENERAL PLAN COMPLIANCE AND BASIS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The proposed encroachment permit for a pedestrian bridge over the Natoma Street right-of-way is found, **on balance**, in conformity with the General Plan, as described in the body of this Report.

Note: General Plan Objectives are shown in **BOLD UPPER CASE** font; Policies are in **Bold** font; staff comments are in *italic* font.

URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE 2

**CONSERVATION OF RESOURCES WHICH PROVIDE A SENSE OF NATURE,
CONTINUITY WITH THE PAST, AND FREEDOM FROM OVERCROWDING.**

POLICY 2.8–Maintain a strong presumption against the giving up of street areas for private ownership or use, or for construction of public buildings.

POLICY 2.9–Review proposals for the giving up of street areas in terms of all the public values that streets afford.

POLICY 2.10–Permit release of street areas, where such release is warranted, only in the least expensive and least permanent manner appropriate to each case.

The proposed street vacation will only vacate air space above Natoma Street, preserving the right-of-way below for public use and circulation.

Although the General Plan maintains a strong presumption against giving up street areas (including air rights), the General Plan also outlines criteria for when such proposals may be considered favorably. The proposed Natoma Street pedestrian bridge does not violate any of the public values listed in Policy 2.9; specifically, it does not result in any detriment to vehicle or pedestrian circulation, eliminate street space or open space that could otherwise be used differently, have an adverse effect upon the General Plan or related area plans, or obstruct/diminish any significant view.

The proposed pedestrian bridge meets the criteria for approval listed under Policy 2.9; specifically the three criteria quoted below:

Release of a street area may be considered favorably when it would not violate any of the above criteria and when it would be:

- Necessary for a significant public or semi-public use, or public assembly use, where the nature of the use and the character of the development proposed present strong justifications for occupying the street area rather than some other site;
- For the purpose of permitting a small-scale pedestrian crossing consistent with the principles and policies of The Urban Design Element; or
- In furtherance of the public values and purposes of streets as expressed in The Urban Design Element and elsewhere in the General Plan.

The proposed pedestrian bridge over Natoma Street meets each of these criteria by providing public access between the street and a significant new open space amenity (The Transit Center Park) and is in keeping with the concepts developed in the Transit Center District Plan.

POLICY 4.11—Make use of street space and other unused public areas for recreation, particularly in dense neighborhoods, such as those close to downtown, where land for traditional open spaces is more difficult to assemble.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would make use of street space for recreation by transforming a small portion of Natoma Street’s airspace into a public open space amenity that provides an important access point to the new Transit Center Park.

RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

OBJECTIVE 3—IMPROVE ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY TO OPEN SPACE

POLICY 3.1—Creatively develop existing publicly-owned right-of-ways and streets into open space.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would use the Natoma Street right-of-way to create a public access point to the rooftop Transit Center Park.

POLICY 3.5—Ensure that, where feasible, recreational facilities and open spaces are physically accessible, especially for those with limited mobility.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would improve physical access to the new Transit Center Park for those with limited mobility via a new public elevator providing access to the bridge from Natoma Street sidewalk.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

POLICY 2.4—Organize the transportation system to reinforce community identity, improve linkages among interrelated activities and provide focus for community activities.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would improve linkages between the Transit Center Park and adjacent uses at the new development at 542-550 Howard Street and—via the proposed public elevator—to all the uses accessed via the street below.

OBJECTIVE 23—IMPROVE THE CITY'S PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION SYSTEM TO PROVIDE FOR EFFICIENT, PLEASANT, AND SAFE MOVEMENT.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would enhance the pedestrian circulation system by providing an efficient, pleasant, and safe connection between the at-grade public realm and the roof-top public realm provided by the Transit Center Park.

TRANSIT CENTER DISTRICT PLAN

OBJECTIVE 3.1–MAKE WALKING A SAFE, PLEASANT, AND CONVENIENT MEANS OF MOVING ABOUT THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT.

OBJECTIVE 3.2–CREATE A HIGH-QUALITY PEDESTRIAN ENVIRONMENT IN THE DISTRICT CONSISTENT WITH THE VISION FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF A WORLD-CLASS CITY.

OBJECTIVE 3.3–GRACIOUSLY ACCOMMODATE INCREASES IN PEDESTRIAN VOLUMES IN THE DISTRICT.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would enhance the pedestrian environment in the Transit Center District by providing a convenient and direct link between the Transit Center District’s at-grade public realm and the roof-top public realm provided by the Transit Center Park.

OBJECTIVE 3.11–ENHANCE ACCESS AND MAXIMIZE THE VISIBILITY OF THE TRANSIT CENTER’S FUTURE ROOFTOP PARK FROM THE SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS, ESPECIALLY NEIGHBORHOODS TO THE SOUTH.

Policy 3.17–Ensure that highly-visible, welcoming, and grand means of public access to the Transit Center Park are provided directly from key public spaces and buildings adjacent to the Transit Center.

Policy 3.19–Permit buildings to satisfy open space requirements through direct connections to the Transit Center Park.

OBJECTIVE 3.12–ENSURE THAT PRIVATE OPEN SPACE BOTH ENHANCES THE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE NETWORK AND ACHIEVES THE PLAN’S OPEN SPACE GOALS.

OBJECTIVE 3.13–PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY AND ALTERNATIVES TO MEETING OPEN SPACE REQUIREMENTS THAT ACHIEVE THE DISTRICT’S OPEN SPACE VISION, AND THAT ENHANCE AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO PLANNED PUBLIC SPACE, PARTICULARLY THE TRANSIT CENTER PARK.

Policy 3.22–Permit and encourage buildings to satisfy open space requirements through direct connections across Minna and Natoma Streets to the Transit Center Park.

The proposed pedestrian bridge directly meets Objectives 3.11 through 3.13 of the Transit Center District Sub-Area Plan. As envisioned by the plan, the proposed bridge would provide a highly-visible and easily accessible access point for the Transit Center Park.

PROPOSITION M FINDINGS – PLANNING CODE SECTION 101.1

Planning Code Section 101.1 establishes Eight Priority Policies and requires review of discretionary approvals and permits for consistency with said policies. The Project is found to be consistent with the Eight Priority Policies as set forth in Planning Code Section 101.1 for the following reasons:

Eight Priority Policies Findings

The proposed project is found to be consistent with the eight priority policies of Planning Code Section 101.1 in that:

1. That existing neighborhood-serving retail uses be preserved and enhanced and future opportunities for resident employment in and ownership of such businesses enhanced.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would not displace any neighborhood-serving retail uses and would not otherwise adversely affect existing neighborhood-serving retail. The pedestrian bridge would increase the number of pedestrian connections between the rooftop Transit Center Park and the street (via a public elevator accessed on Natoma Street) and thus create better access to existing neighborhood-serving retail uses from the Transit Center.

2. That existing housing and neighborhood character be conserved and protected in order to preserve the cultural and economic diversity of our neighborhood.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would not negatively affect housing or existing neighborhood character.

3. That the City's supply of affordable housing be preserved and enhanced.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would not displace any housing or affect the City's supply of affordable housing.

4. That commuter traffic not impede Muni transit service or overburden our streets or neighborhood parking.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would not impede Muni service or overburden local streets or parking. The bridge would increase access points to the Transit Center and would therefore promote the use of the Transit Center and the Muni transit services provided therein.

5. That a diverse economic base be maintained by protecting our industrial and service sectors from displacement due to commercial office development, and that future opportunities for residential employment and ownership in these sectors be enhanced.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would not adversely affect the industrial and service sectors; it would not displace any industrial uses or occupy land designated for such uses.

6. That the City achieve the greatest possible preparedness to protect against injury and loss of life in an earthquake.

The proposed pedestrian bridge will be constructed in compliance with all relevant building and safety standards, including those related to earthquakes.

7. That landmarks and historic buildings be preserved.

The proposed pedestrian bridge would not affect any landmarks or historic buildings, and would connect two entirely new buildings.

8. That our parks and open space and their access to sunlight and vistas be protected from development.

The pedestrian bridge would not cast any shadows on parks and would only shade a small portion of the Natoma Street right-of-way. The pedestrian bridge is anticipated as part of the Transit Center District Sub-Area Plan as an integral element of the neighborhood's public open space network.

RECOMMENDATION:

Finding the Project, on balance, in-conformity with the General Plan; contingent upon approval of a design for Transbay Parcel F development that provides public access to the bridge as described in the Transit Center District Plan and San Francisco Planning Code.