CHAPTER 2

INTERNAL TRANSPORTATION IN EAST BAY REGIONAL PARKS

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Introduction

Internal transportation refers to the concept of moving people within the confines of an area via public vehicle. In regard to parks, it refers to transporting persons from one area to another inside the park proper. For the most part, internal transportation has been regarded as a luxury--a feature of the park that adds to its variety, but by no means something essential. In accordance with this view, such transportation has often taken the form of hayrides, stagecoaches, or trains. Recently, however, the recreational aspects of such service have been played down considerably to make way for other pressing social considerations.

Reasons for Being

Today park users and park officials alike increasingly regard internal transportation as a necessity due to the rapid growth of the population in the Bay Area. Primary reasons for this interest include: 1) the 1976 Tyler study, a need and demand survey of the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD), points out that the 65 years and older age class is significantly underrepresented in park use. Internal transportation, coupled with effective access to the parks would contribute to balancing their numbers with those of other age classes; 2) increased traffic congestion, noise, pollution, and other environmental impacts associated with driving one's car through a park are becoming less tolerated as well as less practical: less tolerated from the standpoint of not considering such features part of the natural park experience, less practical in terms of the limited number of personnel having to deal with increasing numbers of accidents, emergencies, and tie-ups; 3) another conclusion of the Tyler report regards the substantial number of residents concerned with the personal safety issue and its influence on their decision whether or not to use the parks. The report states that "of all the specific suggestions for improvement offered by park users, this single item was mentioned more frequently than any other."[6] Since internal transportation consists of one or more vehicles traversing the length or width of the park several times daily, this affords an inexpensive yet highly effective security force--the watchful eyes of dozens of sightseers and park personnel on board. Using this to complement the park's own security system could do much to alleviate the fears of potential park users.

Opening Chord

Internal shuttle service was introduced in Redwood Regional Park in Oakland in 1972. This was the first of its kind in the EBRPD system, and as such, was implemented with limited services. The shuttle runs from 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. summer months only. It covers a stretch of approximately 0.9 miles (1.4 km.)

starting from the parking area inside the Redwood Gate entrance and continuing southwest into the interior of the park. The park itself is a bit over 3 miles (4.8 km.) in length from gate to gate (Figure 1).

The primary objective in establishing shuttle service at Redwood was to distribute picnickers from congested areas near the parking area to less-crowded areas further within the park. The shuttle route traverses all the picnicking area in the southwest portion of the park, and is reportedly successful in accomplishing this aim, though no quantitative ridership profiles have been taken by the District.[3]

Future plans include increasing parking lot space out to the Redwood Gate entrance and adding weekend shuttle runs year-round.

Second Movement

Point Pinole Regional Shoreline has been the second phase of development of internal transportation in the EBRPD. The emphasis is to provide a means of access to the fishing pier from the parking lot 1.5 miles (2.4 km.) away, which is too far to walk for the largest user segment--the elderly. The route (Figure 2) traverses the width of the park, and thus also provides a significant contribution to park security.

The internal transportation units currently in use are:

1. a tractor unit pulling two trailers which hold approximately 35 persons each;
2. a 12-passenger van used during periods of inclement weather;
3. two back-up tractors and one back-up trailer; and
4. back-up service with local bus companies in the event of early morning or late evening peak periods.

The shuttle leaves the parking area on the half hour and the pier on the hour. At present, hours of operation are 8:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays, and 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekends and holidays. These hours are subject to change in accordance with the extension of daylight hours during spring and summer months.

Analysis

Planning internal transportation requires not only c apital, but perceptive insight and experience as well. Though on paper the Pt. Pinole system appears to be a sound and successful enterprise, six months of continuous operation has revealed a myriad of problems heretofore not experienced by the Park District, and has magnified others which have surfaced only intermittently at Redwood Park. This is understandable to some degree since the Pt. Pinole shuttle is the District's first attempt at a full scale year-round operation. The following logistic and social problems are in the process of being studied at Pt. Pinole, and their solutions should prove beneficial in planning for future internal transportation.

Logistics Problems and Considerations

An initial concern of the Park District is the glaring lack of public utilities at the site, which results in the absence of badly needed electrical maintenance and security lighting. There is also no corporation yard. At the present time, the shuttles are transferred at night to the front lot of a nearby private corporation yard. The company (Koppers, Inc.) has no formal contract with the EBRPD. Although the lot does provide 24-hour security, the pavement is scattered with chuckholes

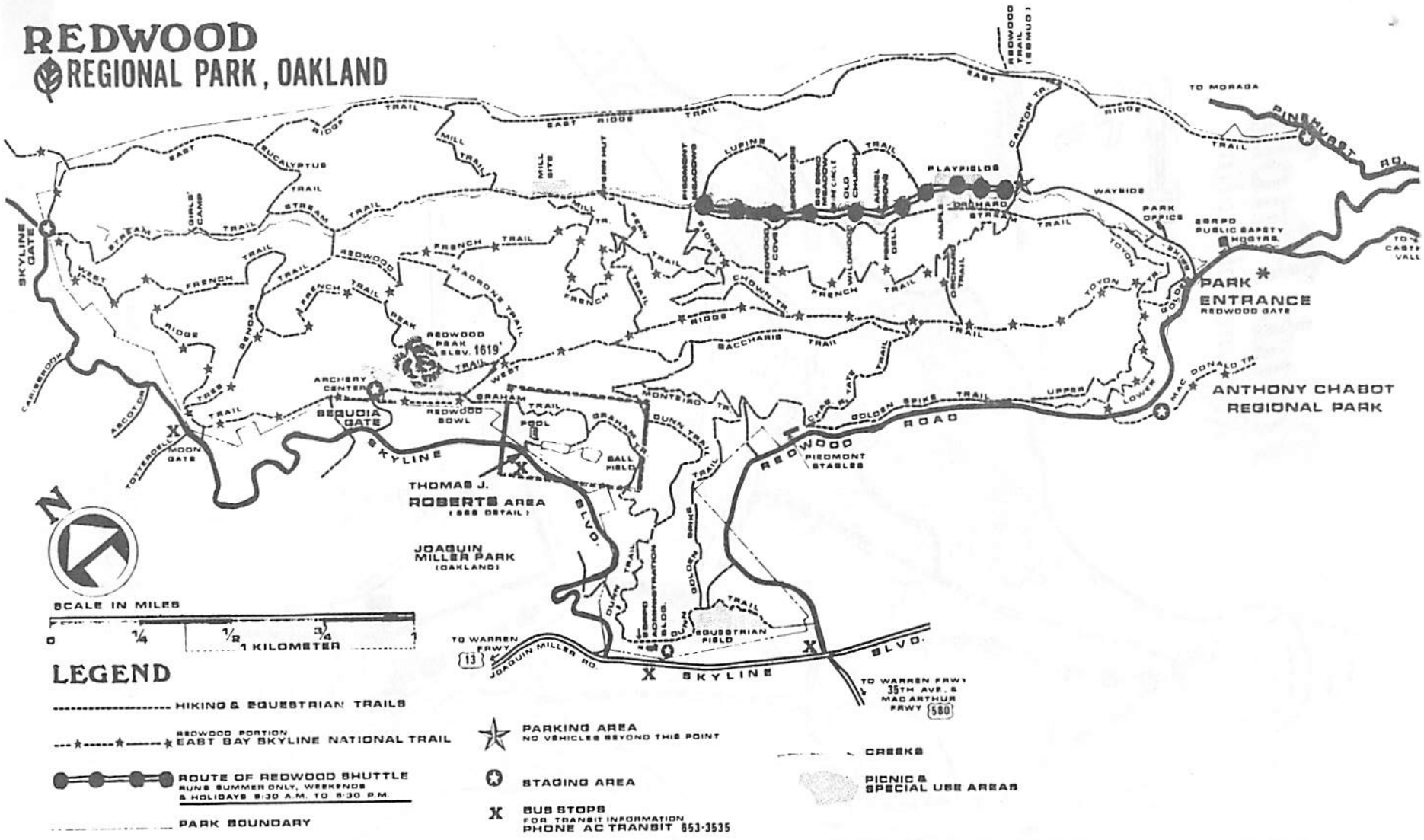

Figure 1. Map of Redwood Regional Park
Source: East Bay Regional Park District

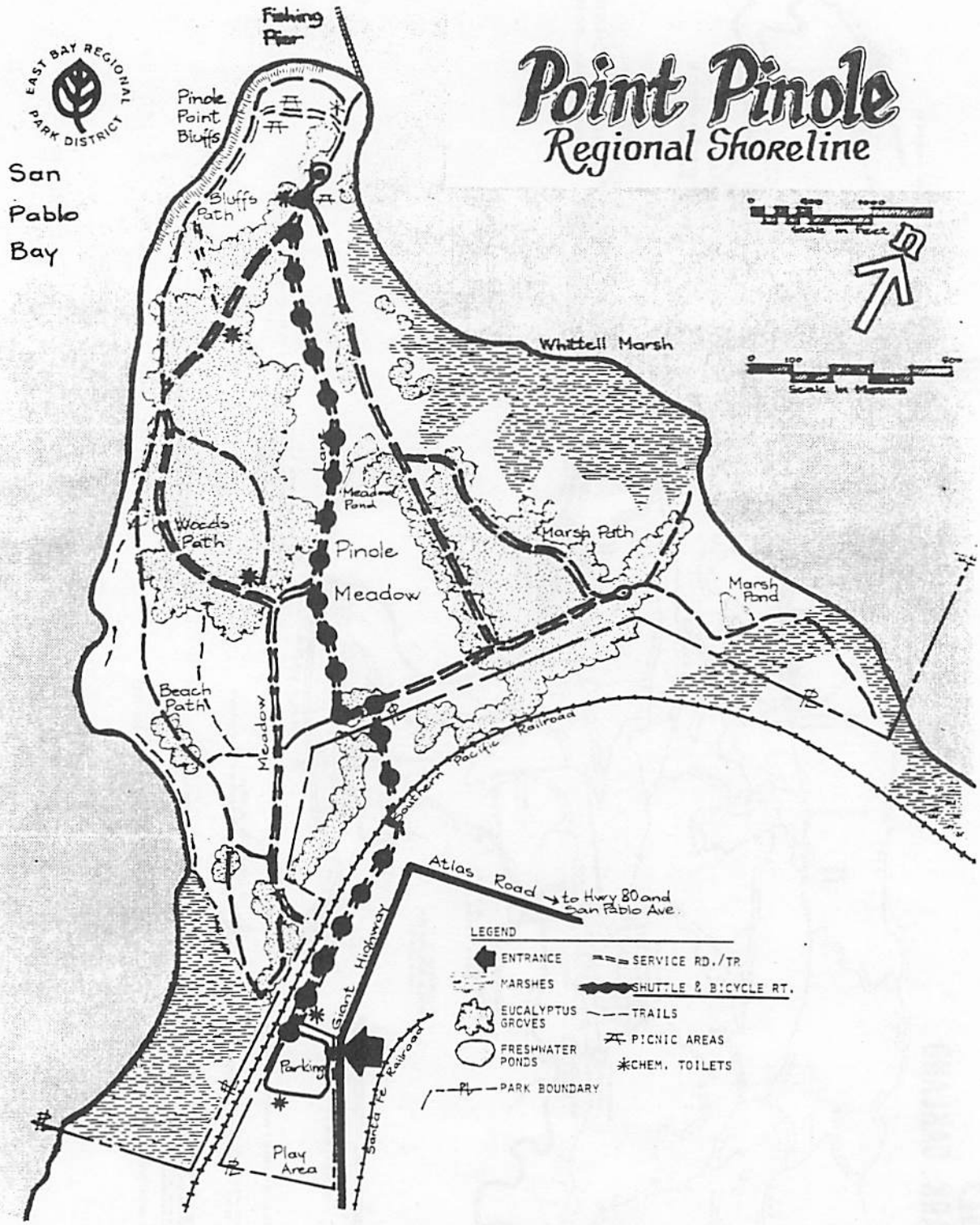

Figure 2. Map of Pt. Pinole Regional Shoreline
Source: East Bay Regional Park District

and no overhang or garage is available to protect the vehicles from the elements.

In addition, the park grounds pose a serious danger at night to lingering park users and their automobiles. A high amount of vandalism is reported, including puncturing of tires, sugar in the gas tank, and snipers.[2] This is also influenced, no doubt, by the lack of utilities.

There are also problems with the shuttle system itself. For example, a high rate of tractor breakdown is reported (the magnitude is uncertain, however, due to lack of record-keeping).[2] Major factors contributing to this failure rate are the poor road conditions inside the park and exclusive use of American-made vehicles. As Park Manager Ray Flores points out, there is simply no American-made transportation that is reliable--currently, the shuttle system at Yosemite utilizes a Mercedes engine which reportedly shows a much lower rate of failure than its American counterparts.[2] Another problem is that the trailers are designed for human transport only. At Pt. Pinole people bring with them fishing poles and related fishing paraphernalia. This reduces the number of people the shuttle can transport, and poles protruding from the windows are dangerous to hikers and those passing close by the moving shuttle.

Finally, tractors must be refueled every four hours, and fuel is stored at Koppers corporation yard. This, along with the time taken for emergency repairs (there is no resident mechanic available), and travelling to and from Kopper's yard in the morning and at night represents a loss of as much as three man-hours per day.[2]

Social Problems and Considerations

Perhaps the biggest problem any planner of internal transportation must face is that many people are in a hurry to recreate. They want to get to the picnic tables or fishing pier in as little time and with as much convenience as possible. This is translated in today's thinking as "driving one's car" there. By prohibiting cars inside the park, these demands are transferred to the internal transportation available.[2] Thus, a user-oriented transportation system must have high availability which includes closeness of the system to the parking lot and frequent departures from this point. The system must be punctual. In this world of appointments and tight schedules, my observations and those of the Park District indicate that people's demands for punctuality are often unknowingly extended to transport for recreation. In this respect, speed and travel time are important. Although scenery is nice, the time required to reach a specific destination is a contributing factor to the system's success.[4]

Comfort also plays a role. This refers to the geometry of the vehicle entrances and exits, width of the aisles, presence of air-conditioning, and is especially important in regard to segments of park-users such as the aged and handicapped. As stated earlier, safety and security are a primary concern. With large numbers of passengers, prevention of passenger accidents and protection of passengers from crime should be given the utmost consideration.

Another social observation one must reckon with is that people do not always use the available services for their specified intentions. For example, while a parking lot is intended to hold the autos of those

using the park, many times it is used as a drag strip for motorcycles or late-night make-out spots for teenagers. In regard to the shuttle system at Pt. Pinole, a few hours of observation reveal many people riding it continuously with no intention of exiting at the pier, while children use it to stage games. The District considers this an important problem, as it may seriously affect the primary purpose of the system by, for example, reducing transit speed or decreasing the comfort of passengers.

A final social consideration illuminated at Pt. Pinole is the conflict between recommended actions and those actually taken by park officials. For example, while the public is prohibited from driving cars through the park proper, park officials are frequently observed doing so. One doesn't teach a child to stop smoking in a family full of smokers, and similarly, one doesn't support a desired action by behaving contrary to it.

Looking Ahead

Though experience may be the best teacher, planning transportation also involves imagination and insight. Specifically, this entails looking five to ten years into the future and considering potential changes in major areas such as energy supplies and costs. As gas and oil prices continue to rise and supplies diminish, other alternatives assume greater importance as possible fuel sources such as coal, kerosene and alcohol.

Changes in user demand should also be considered. Increased demand projected for both Redwood and Pt. Pinole will doubtless require an increase in personnel, shuttles in use, and shuttle-run frequency. Climatic and weather patterns must be considered. Long spells of inclement weather may justify the building of shelters and supplying enclosed transport modes.

Future changes in the age distribution of the users are important. Demographers believe that we shall see a progressive increase in the 65 years and over segment, and thus physical modifications of the shuttles that contribute to the comfort of this group should be undertaken. Finally, trends in the socio-economic level of surrounding areas should be taken into consideration as well. A declining neighborhood may warrant increased security measures including additional personnel, lighting, and physical safety measures.

In keeping with this policy of looking towards the future, the Park District is already eyeing a number of alternatives to its present system at Pt. Pinole for implementation within the next five years. These include: 1) switching to a higher-horsepowered engine that will allow for increasing the number of trailers presently in use; 2) switching to a conventional bus mode; or 3) switching to an historical train mode. The flexibility afforded by individual trailers is important. Since user-turnout varies with time of day and season, a system with flexible capacity can absorb high turnouts as well as cut costs during low turnout. A conventional bus, on the other hand, affords the most protection from the elements and reduces personnel needed to one driver only. Finally, a train is more in keeping with the historical perspective of the area (trains used to carry dynamite to the pier) and the tracks needed for such an undertaking are already present. Thus, as in all questions of choice, a cost/benefit analysis must be undertaken to assess adequately the above alternatives, though it is clear that not all benefits can be

quantitatively assessed and that some are subject to extreme variability with changing social attitudes.

Marketing Approaches

Just like the park in which it is located, internal transportation is valueless if it is not used. Therefore, any consideration of building and maintaining such a system must include successful marketing and advertising campaigns to attract turnout. Such advertising programs must focus on the level of public awareness, the media, content recall, and the impact of the message on target groups. To date, the most effective advertising for internal transportation in the EBRPD (and the means used most often) has been word of mouth--people taking to heart advice given by neighbors, close friends, and relatives whom they trust.[3] This can be traced back to effective public relations by park personnel which leaves the park user with a favorable impression. Such public relations is accomplished by aiding people on and off the shuttle, engaging in small talk and explaining points of interest on route, and showing genuine interest in their work.

Typically, user growth of newly established parks has been fairly slow via word of mouth, and perhaps some advertising should be employed (assuming funds are available) to stimulate the initial growth rate. This could be accomplished via market segmentation--aiming advertising and media campaigns to particular segments of the population. A recent survey on factors that influence the use of public and personal transportation modes in the Orange County Transit District made the following observations: "Over 2/3 of the respondants recalled Orange County Transit District advertising; most aware were men, the young, and those with the highest incomes. Awareness of direct-mail advertising was greater for women, but was similar for all income groups except the highest, for which it was lower. Men and the young are more aware of billboard advertising than women or the old, older age groups are more aware of newspaper advertising than those in the youngest age group, and men and the younger age groups are more aware of radio advertising than women or the older age groups."[1] This certainly suggests various strategies to adopt depending on the segment of the population the District wishes to focus on and the uses of the park they wish to promote. For example, a park like Pt. Pinole, whose main attraction is the fishing pier, might receive the greatest benefit by employing extensive newspaper advertising, thereby increasing turnout of older men and women who are now the principal users of this park.

Concluding Remarks

One comes to the close of such a discussion with the thought-provoking question, is it all worth it? Is the maintenance of a shuttle system at Pt. Pinole worth the over $60,000 per year being spent on it? Is it worth considering implementation of such systems at additional park sites in the Park District with the skyrocketing costs that will have to be faced?

The Park District itself does not have to contend with this problem--it is obligated only to such undertakings as specified in the Master Plan: ". . . the Park District . . . should emphasize the development of alternative transportation systems to and within the parklands" (p. 5).[5]

Yet, this question should be of concern to the taxpayer who has the power to amend such directives. Essentially, it boils down to how many park users want such service, and how badly they want it (in terms of

how much they are willing to spend for it).

It is this author's opinion that internal transportation is the best alternative at the present time to deal with the far-reaching problems spoken of earlier, such as equilibrating park-user turn-out or decreasing pollution. In this respect, I feel the Park District is doing an outstanding job in the development and improvement of its internal transportation systems at Redwood and Pt. Pinole. However, I predict that walking or bicycling will eventually supplant the motorized alternative as the financial burden becomes increasingly unbearable for the private citizen.

References Cited

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