

SAN FRANCISCO

Around the Bay by Rail

by: Corky Whitlock

It was a trip that's been on my mind for a number of years, but has only recently become "do-able" with a minimum of fuss. I am referring to riding the rails completely around San Francisco Bay. I tried to do this trip a few years back, but train connections made the journey next to impossible to accomplish in one day.

Larry Ede and I began the trip at 4:30 am on a January morning in Yuba City California, not far south from Hal Riegger's home in Gridly. [see story about Hal elsewhere in this issue.]We drove (about an hour's drive) south to Sacramento, found parking at the Amtrak station and purchased tickets to Richmond on the 6:05 am westbound Capitol.

The train left exactly on time and we had an enjoyable ride to the Bay behind an Amtrak California F-59. The cars are very comfortable, with lots of legroom, and the coffee was excellent and inexpensive.



We exited Amtrak in Richmond and went into the concourse below the tracks and purchased tickets on Bart from Richmond to the Embarcadero Station in San Francisco. Richmond is the only location where the Amtrak Capitols and Bart interchange. Back on the platform, it was only short wait for a Westbound Bart train.



The ride into the city was uneventful, but the train became more and more crowded with each station stop. After the trip under the Bay, we exited Bart at the Embarcadero station.

It took us a bit of time to get our bearings, but we finally sought out information from a real-live person, and figured out how to purchase SF Muni tickets from the machines. No matter how much advance planning you do, rush hour in an unfamiliar underground station tends to confuse you. People were helpful and directed us to the Muni N line platform, where we eventually caught a Muni light-rail car (more like a modern-day trolley) bound for the CalTrains station. This fairly recent Muni extension was not in place when I tried to do this trip a few years ago.



Nothing fancy about the CalTrains station, but they sure do have a lot of trains lined up. When you come from an area of the country without commuter rail, the number of trains to be seen in a large metro area tends to boggle the mind.

Once again, we purchased our tickets from a machine. This time I got brave and used a credit card. The train crew was standing at the gate, and were very helpful. Larry parted with a couple of his St.Paul, Buffalo and Thunder Bay lapel pins to keep them happy.

There weren't a lot of people on this train, but it was headed southbound to San Jose well after the northbound rush hour. We had an enjoyable ride. There is much construction happening along the Caltrains right-of-way, and no trains are currently running on weekends due to the improvements being made in the Caltrains infrastructure.



Caltrains now interchanges with the new Bart extension in Millbrae. After years of planning and construction, Bart now goes to San Francisco Airport. So, it's possible to get from the airport into the city by rail (Bart), or San Jose / Santa Clara by rail. (Caltrains.)