

Opinion: Berkeley is California's scapegoat

By Joe Mathews

Thank you, Berkeley.

Recent headlines should remind us Californians of yet another way we are lucky. Our state has the world's best scapegoat: you.

You—our most distinguished public university and all the people, institutions and neighborhoods surrounding it—serve as a punching bag for angry people of all manner of ideological preoccupations. The right and the center can pin all of California's liberal sins real and imagined, on you. And the left sees a reactionary threat in everything, from police action on or near campus, to the presence of law Professor John Yoo, who justified torture under President George W.,. Bush.



Joe Mathews

Yes, California as a whole takes a lot of critical blows. But can you imagine how much more bloodied the rest of our state would be if we didn't have you around to absorb so much abuse?

In recent months, as a furious world chokes on its own populist vomit, it's been deeply reassuring to see you play your familiar role as California's sacrificial lamb.

First, you suffered widespread condemnation from President Trump and the media—both for your decision to cancel a speech by the Breitbart News provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos, and for the anarchist, anti-fascist violence (from arson to window smashing) that prompted the cancellation.

You and Berkeley police have patiently dealt with pro-Trump provocateurs who hold rallies near campus to start fights—as well as the anti-Trump counter-protesters who took the bait. And most recently, you've taken incoming from the left for permitting the right-wing diva Ann Coulter to speak on campus, before you got roasted by the right for canceling her appearance because you couldn't guarantee her safety.

You can't win any of these fights, of course, which is why you're such an easy target. And yet you endure—which is precisely what makes you so valuable to California. We Californians should be grateful to you for keeping so many cranks focused on you, instead of on our own neighborhoods and campuses.

When I think of you, I can't help but recall the work of the late philosopher Rene Girard, a professor at your rival Stanford (so I'll understand if you take him with a grain of salt). Girard wrote that modern society has become addicted to scapegoating, in part because it has value—in bringing people together and reducing the scale and damage of violence. “When human groups divide and become fragmented, during a period of malaise and conflicts, they may come to a point where they are reconciled again at the expense of a victim,” he wrote.

Indeed, you, as California's great scapegoat, are a protector of many vulnerable people. Just look around at the rest of the country and the world, where elected leaders and voting publics are scapegoating whole classes of people—migrants, Muslims, Mexicans. We haven't had the same level of scapegoating in California, and one reason for that is you take such a heavy helping of the racists' rage.

You're such a good scapegoat because you've had so much practice. Ronald Reagan built the most successful American political career of the last half-century on scapegoating you; he ran for governor declaring he would clean up "the mess at Berkeley" and made you a leading symbol of "a leadership gap and a morality and decency gap" in the country. In 1969, he sent the National Guard to deal with unrest around People's Park.

Of course, his successor, Jerry Brown, liked to poke you, too, even though he was a graduate. And pretty much every governor since then has taken swipes, both rhetorical and budgetary, at you. Legislators blame you for everything in higher education—you charge too much and admit too many out-of-state students—even though it's the Legislatures' systematic disinvestment in universities that forced you to pocket more of those higher, out-of-state tuitions.

If I were you, on the business end of so much blame-shifting, I'd be tempted to point out that Berkeley isn't all that different from other big public universities. But you won't make this argument in part because you know from long experience that perception is reality. After all, Bishop George Berkeley, the Irish philosopher for whom you are named, argued that even the objects we see in the world are really just ideas, made real only by the minds of those who perceive them.

Since the scapegoating of Berkeley is about your critics and not you, there's not much you can do about it. Except steel yourself for more.

Girard, the Stanford philosopher, said that as humans experience more identity-based conflict, scapegoating increases. "We easily see now that scapegoats multiply wherever human groups seek to lock themselves into a given identity—communal, local, national, ideological, racial, religious, and so on," he wrote.

I'm sorry, Berkeley. Times being how they are, California is going to need you to shoulder even more blame.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Opinion: EDC supervisors need financial advisor

By Larry Weitzman

Sometimes repetition is a good thing. We did it in school to learn spelling and the times table, athletes do drills over and over again to create what they call muscle memory. Whatever it is, many people swear by it. So, I am going to repeat Jorge Santayana's perhaps most famous statement (or at least it is attributed to him): "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it."



Larry Weitzman

That oft quoted remark has failed to impress our El Dorado County Board of Supervisors and that was obvious at the first public budget meeting for the year 2017-18. The bottom line is our budget is out of control and is only going to get worse. Our roads are falling apart at an accelerated rate, and while

the board pays lip service to this fact and claims it is a high priority (it is the highest priority of the county after public safety), they failed to do anything about it as they keep saying they have no discretionary money within the \$154 million of the discretionary budget and that includes our public safety budget. Eighty percent of that \$154 million consists of salaries and benefits. Of the total budget of about \$657 million, only that \$154 million is discretionary spending, i.e., the balance of the \$500 million is mostly money from state and federal programs and can only be spent as such.

For three hours and 40 minutes the budget was presented in a 25-page PowerPoint and for most of the meeting there were lamentations about our crumbling roads with no answers, except the one answer I have warned you about since the very ill-advised 15 percent countywide raise for most employees except the sheriff's department, new taxes which were discussed at length at this board meeting. Most of EDC's fiscal problems are a direct result of that 15 percent raise. Without getting into a discussion of how the raises should have been made and distributed, that raise has cost the EDC over \$60 million (in additional salaries and benefits) and it is rising. Also, there has been some new hiring in the last four years as well, including the newly hired public "spin doctor" at a cost of \$150K annually.

EDC needs to recognize and admit they made a mistake. While only one board member, Brian Veerkamp voted for it, and while the rest of the board is newly minted since then, this board has been warned of the impending disaster coming as a result of this raise. Once the board recognizes spending needs to be cut, then there is hope for EDC. And here's why.

Several other things transpired during the meeting worth noting. First, ACAO Shawne Corley who made the presentation, said that salaries and benefits, without considering raises, are increasing at the rate of 4 percent a year just because of

step and merit increases and retirement contributions. And with the CalPERS pension crisis of a lowering discount rate and increasing unfunded liabilities, that is going to get worse. Additional CalPERS retirement contributions required from EDC alone will cost EDC over \$60 million over the next six years.

But then Corley said that for every 1 percent rise in salary and benefits, revenue must increase by 1.5 percent. If salaries go up 4 percent, revenues must go up 6 percent to keep pace with salaries. Revenues are not going up that fast. EDC is headed for a train wreck and very soon, perhaps as little as two years, considering CalPERS issues.

Meanwhile, there is no money to fix our dilapidated roads. Part of CAO Don Ashton's recommendations is to fund reserves to board policy levels, \$8.5 million to general reserves, \$5.3 million to contingency and \$5 million to capital projects and deferred maintenance. About \$19 million in total savings.

As to the roads, Supervisor Sue Novasel was happy that the "loan shark" gas tax bill (SB1) passed the state, saying, "We specifically supported this bill ... it is somewhat of a solution from the state with \$6.9 million to be received, with \$2-\$3 million by November 2018." Supervisor Michael Ranalli said SB1 was like a "plea bargain ... as we are desperate for that money, pushed against the wall." Ranalli you made this bed by abandoning your promised conservative principles.

SB1 is the new gasoline and vehicle registration tax that will cost us effectively 200 percent interest. For every dollar we receive, we have to pay \$3. It's like borrowing a \$100,000 on your home and having to pay back \$200,000 every year as interest. That is the effect of the new gas tax and Novasel and Ranalli are OK with that. Ranalli went on to say, "Roads as a priority are up there, I have a sense of urgency and willingness to solve our problem ... we need to find a creative

way to deal with it." You call SB1 creative? In fact, Ranalli voted to spend \$12 million on plush new digs for himself and now says roads are a priority?

Ranalli (and Novasel) and in fact the whole board was told two years ago that the budget was heading for a train wreck by this column and other county officials many times over. They were told spending was out of control and they were living on savings. They obviously didn't listen.

Now to the worst part of the meeting, new proposed taxes. Here's the current new list: Solid waste franchise fees, \$750,000. One of two new sales taxes, \$6,000,000. Motor vehicle registration fee increase, \$2.2 million and a 20 percent increase in the transient occupancy tax, \$500,000. That's about \$220/year for a family of four. And this is on top of the new SB1 gas and motor vehicle registration tax that will cost a family of four about \$600 a year and probably a bit more for El Dorado County residents as we own more motor vehicles per capita.

While there was much talk of new (tax) revenues by the board members, especially from Ranalli, Novasel and Supervisor John Hidahl there is a ray of light as our capable CAO was directed by the board in addition to putting away the reserves of \$19 million above, to find \$300,000 for new district attorney facilities and more important to find \$2-\$3 million for road maintenance, plus a few other items. Finally, that will mean spending cuts of about \$4-\$5 million. Ashton knows how and what to do, but will the board be able to follow through? Ashton understands this is only the beginning, but you have to start somewhere. Now let's see if the board will follow Santayana's axiom so they will understand how they got to the edge of the cliff.

Larry Weitzman is a resident of Rescue.

Editorial: Don't mess with national monuments

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the April 26, 2017, Sacramento Bee.*

Donald Trump is all about states' rights – that is until it comes to California and its national monuments.

On Wednesday, the president signed a potentially disastrous executive order, directing Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to review the status of 24 federally protected swathes of land and water. Although we won't know much more until this summer, the order could lead to the reduction or even elimination of monuments designated by three previous presidents.

On the potential chopping block is Berryessa Snow Mountain National Monument, a spectacular stretch of wilderness about 100 miles north of Sacramento. Monuments on Trump's list also include Giant Sequoia, Sand to Snow, Carrizo Plain, World War II Valor in the Pacific and Mojave Trails.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Calif. gas tax should be canned

By Ted Gaines

Here are a few facts that should give pause to anyone supporting California's new gas tax: Caltrans is overstaffed by 3,500 people, wasting \$500 million every year that could be going to roads; California diverts a billion dollars in "weight fees" into the general fund annually, which should also be paying for roads; Californians already pay some of the highest gas taxes in the country but have some of the worst roads, which points to an efficiency problem.



Ted Gaines

It's plain to see that the fake funding crisis used to push the new taxes through the legislature was really a crisis of political priorities. The money is there – without the new taxes – to pay for modern, smooth roadways up and down the state.

Still, the Legislature has a default position, and that's to pickpocket taxpayers and businesses at every turn. Hence the new tax to backfill the waste and diversions that should be paying for roads right now.

Gov. Jerry Brown, oblivious to the actual effect the bill will have on businesses and families, tried to deflect criticisms of the new tax's cost by noting that it will set back the average family about \$10 a month.

Are my rural constituents, who drive 45 minutes to get to the grocery store, supposed to be happy because of that average? Are my suburban commuters putting 80 miles a day on their cars supposed to be happy with that average? It will be meaningless to them, as they will pay hundreds of dollars more a year in

gas taxes and registration fees to pay for roads that their tax dollars already could have and should have paid for.

Because of this government decision to raise gas taxes 12 cents a gallon, diesel 20 cents, and add an additional registration fee of \$25-\$175 on each vehicle (and that is just a partial list of the new charges), everyone in the state can expect to pay more for everything they buy, from school clothes to groceries to laptops. Not because the items are better, but because California legislators are attaching a premium to everything with their relentless search for tax dollars.

These new taxes and fees aren't one-time charges. They go on forever under the current bill, and will start increasing, indefinitely, starting in 2020.

I want a first-class infrastructure for our state and am willing to pay for it, but not twice. That's what this cynical bill does to our citizens. It forces them to pay a second time for roads that their tax dollars already could have built. It's backfilling an imaginary shortfall to cover up government failure.

A state that can afford to waste tens of billions of dollars on the colossally expensive and worthless high speed rail is not a state starving for money. To California's majority party, though, every problem looks like a deficit and every solution looks like a tax. It's killing the middle- and lower-classes in the state.

Our state has the 48th-worst tax climate already, but this gas tax proves, yet again, that legislators can't leave unwell enough alone.

Sen. Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Opinion: Full school day doesn't make the grade

By Joe Mathews

Many mornings, I think my state senator has the best policy idea in California.

At other times, I think he's missing the point.

The idea involves the sleep of schoolkids, and the state senator is Anthony Portantino, who represents the San Gabriel Valley.



Joe Mathews

Portantino has won plaudits for a bill requiring middle and high schools to start the school day later—no earlier than 8:30am. The bill is grounded in research showing that a later start would reduce tardiness and absenteeism, thus increasing school funding (which is tied to attendance) and improving academic performance.

My two older sons' school starts at 8:10am. So, at 8:02am on many days, Portantino's bill has such obvious appeal that I wonder why he doesn't extend its protection to elementary schools.

Some days, just eight minutes before school starts, I must climb to the top bunk to wrestle my oldest son, a second-grader, out of bed, so we can race three blocks to his classroom. Sometimes I dive deep into the lower bunk to pull out my middle son, a kindergartner. I've strained my back with both maneuvers. Yes, I could wake them earlier—but this causes conflict, and doesn't necessarily get them out of bed. I try to get them in bed at 8:30pm so they'll wake up earlier, but they just stay up reading Harry Potter and Captain Underpants books. So another 20 minutes of wiggle room, courtesy of state law, sounds pretty good.

But then I remember that the real problem in California education is not how early the school day starts.

It's how early the school day concludes.

Put simply, California's idea of a full day of school is—in reality—far less than a full day. The state requires only half-day kindergarten, which amounts to just three hours and 20 minutes, about the length of a pro football game. And the full day for higher grades doesn't equate to a full work shift for parents and other caregivers. First- through third-graders are required to have only four hours and 40 minutes per day. It's five hours for grades four to eight, and six hours for high schoolers.

School districts are free to do more. But given funding challenges, they often can't. The calendar at our local elementary school is thus typical. My kindergartner is with his teachers from only 8:10-11:30am. My second-grader is in class until 2:25pm four days a week; on Friday, there's often early dismissal at 1:05pm. These shorter school days happen in a California that, following American tradition, guarantees just 180 school days a year.

This has the feel of hypocrisy (are children really our top priority?) and missed opportunity. Despite the low reputation

of California education, our teachers and schools have made big gains in achievement over the past generation. So many of the teachers I've encountered in California schools are nothing less than magicians. Why can't we give our kids more time with them?

The biggest answer is money: more days and hours of school would cost more, and California's rickety school funding regime struggles to pay for the instruction we currently have. But extensive research shows we should find a way to fund more instructional time. Dozens of studies of campuses with longer school days and school years have found that such schools do better, especially in serving students considered to be at-risk. The chain of charter schools known as KIPP has become a national model by increasing learning time with a school day that extends more than eight hours, typically from 7:30am to 4pm.

Extending the school day would help address the state's shortage of reliable childcare and might even blunt the effects of inequality, since better-off parents can fill off-school hours with enriching activities. My wife and I are fortunate to be able to spend more than \$700 a month to put both boys in our district's after-school program, and to plunk down another \$1,500 for after-school enrichment classes in robotics and Mandarin. It's unfair that other parents can't do this.

Up in Sacramento, there's talk about legislation to exempt teachers from some taxes. That's fine, on one condition: it comes with an increase in the length of the school day and school year.

What would that look like? Well, 9 to 5 was good enough for Dolly Parton. And if a longer day means the kids come home tired, so much the better. Maybe they'll get to bed on time, and wake up early enough that I don't have to wrestle anyone out of his bunk.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.

Opinion: Wars, politics and the anti-vaccine movement

By Peter Hotez

It once was stated that, “man’s weakness is not achieving victories, but in taking advantage of them.” Indeed, this is the case for global infection control. Throughout history we have so far eradicated only a single major infectious disease threat, a feat accomplished through the leadership of physician D.A. Henderson, who passed away in 2016 at the age of 87.

Beginning in 1966, Henderson led a global effort based at the World Health Organization (WHO) to accelerate smallpox vaccinations. In an extraordinary campaign that required vaccinating people in the poorest and most remote areas of the world (and detailed in his book “Smallpox: The Death of a Disease”), the disease vanished, with the last known naturally transmitted case of smallpox occurring in 1977.

Ever since, we have made great strides in the global control of infectious diseases, and even progress towards disease eradication, but frequently the endgame has been disrupted by an unexpected turn of events. In a recent book, I estimated that most of the world’s poverty-related neglected diseases are paradoxically found in the G20 nations. There are at least a half-dozen diseases for which disease elimination or eradication would be feasible were it not for war or national turmoil, political malaise, or a growing anti-vaccine

movement.

Some of the most dramatic examples of game-changing disruptions in disease control have been noted for human parasitic and tropical infections. During much of the 20th century, tremendous strides were made in the elimination of the highly lethal Gambian form of African sleeping sickness (human African trypanosomiasis or "HAT") through a combination of case detection, treatment and tsetse fly control. Many of the methods used to wipe out sleeping sickness were developed by Eugene Jamot, a French physician working in Cameroon who pioneered the use of portable and movable treatment teams during the early 20th century.

By the 1960s, Gambian HAT was near elimination in many African nations. But when hostilities, and civil and international conflicts broke out in Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and elsewhere, public health control was interrupted, so that by the 1990s the incidence of HAT had returned to pre-Jamot era levels. More recently, as tensions have eased and mass treatment and tsetse control efforts have been reinstated, we have seen a 73 percent reduction in deaths from HAT between 1990 and 2010. With only about 10,000 cases of HAT remaining, we may still yet see the global elimination of this deadly disease.

War, conflict and political instability also have halted or interrupted other global efforts to eliminate or eradicate parasitic diseases. Breakdowns in health systems in Venezuela are resulting in resurgences of malaria and Chagas disease. Public health disruptions from the ISIS occupation of Syria and Iraq have allowed the number of cases of cutaneous leishmaniasis, a disease transmitted by sandflies and often associated with a disfiguring ulcer on the face[RJ1] , to skyrocket and spread into neighboring countries. The only good news is that although wars in the Sudan almost derailed global guinea worm eradication efforts led by the Carter Center, the Centers for Disease Control and WHO, through the perseverance

of these organizations, this disease may soon become only the second disease ever eradicated[HPJ2] .

Next to war and political instability, probably the next most corrosive factor thwarting public health gains against infectious disease is simple absence of political will. During the 1950s and '60s, under the auspices of the Pan American Health Organization, an ambitious effort to control yellow fever and dengue resulted in the eradication of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito in more than a dozen Latin American and Caribbean countries. But lapses in mosquito control efforts and other factors allowed *Aedes aegypti* to re-establish, resulting in the reintroduction of dengue into the region during the 1980s. Now yellow fever has returned to Brazil, where it could gain access to *Aedes* mosquito populations and threaten urban centers.

Perhaps the most disheartening examples of infectious disease control going off the rails are instances in which there are deliberate attempts to block vaccination efforts. Today, the transmission of polio has been halted everywhere except in Afghanistan and Pakistan (and before that northern Nigeria) due in part to concerted efforts by religious extremist groups to kidnap or assassinate vaccine workers.

And now in the United States and Europe we have anti-vaccine groups who allege links between vaccines and autism, despite massive scientific data showing conclusively there are no links or even any plausibility for vaccines causing autism.

A particular concern is the resurgence of measles, because it is one of the most contagious of all the vaccine-preventable diseases and often is the first to re-emerge following a decline in vaccine rates. But really any one of the major childhood illness targeted for vaccination could re-appear. Measles was eradicated in the United States in 2000. However, it returned to California in 2015, and now the state of Texas is especially vulnerable because tens of thousands of children

are not being vaccinated for non-medical exemptions. Globally, between 1990 and 2010 there has been an 80 percent decline in measles deaths and for the first time the number of young children who die of measles globally has dropped below 100,000. However, there are concerns that an American-led anti-vaccine movement could now derail this achievement and possibly even lead to a reversal of sustainable and global goals for health and poverty reduction.

We need a concerted effort by global leaders to close current gaps and explore final steps to eliminate our great plagues. To do so will require international cooperation by the WHO member states, especially the 20 wealthiest economies comprising the G20 nations. Taking on the considerable political and social hurdles will become one of the great international challenges in freeing populations from the tyranny of epidemics or pandemics.

Peter Hotez is dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, where he is also director of the Texas Children's Hospital Center for Vaccine Development. He is the author of "Blue Marble Health: An Innovative Plan to Fight Diseases of the Poor Amid Wealth" (Johns Hopkins University Press).

Letter: Volunteers special to Barton Health

To the community,

This week is National Volunteer Week (April 23-29). Barton Health would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our incredible team of volunteers for all they do to support our

patients and help our physicians, nurses, and staff.

Our volunteers enhance the patient experience at Barton Health. Our biggest group of volunteers, the Barton Auxiliary, greet and guide our patients and their families at the hospital. They assist with special events, host the Comfort Cart, and help with activities behind-the-scenes. Since 1960, the Barton Auxiliary has raised more than \$7.6 million for health and wellness services in our community.

The Auxiliary members and other volunteers are also an integral part of Skilled Nursing. They assist on field trips and bring their pets, music, and other talents to energize our Skilled Nursing residents.

In addition, volunteers play a role in making positive changes for the health system. Community members offer their input as Patient and Family Advisors. Others serve on steering committees and boards for Barton Health and the Barton Foundation. Volunteers also support the Barton Foundation's efforts to raise funds for health and wellness. They participate in fundraising events and many are donors themselves.

We are thankful for the time and energy our volunteers put into making our events and our health system run smoothly. Their efforts do not go unnoticed and are greatly appreciated.

Molly Hucklebridge Coolidge, communications specialist Barton Health

Editorial: Onerous bill would fiscally drown cities, counties

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the April 18, 2017, East Bay Times.*

California's cities and counties, weighed down by ever-mounting retirement costs, are barely keeping their heads above water. Now the state Legislature is considering an onerous bill that would ensure many of them drown.

AB1250, introduced by Assemblyman Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, D-Los Angeles, would effectively prohibit most local governments from contracting out for key services. It's a union-driven bid to force the hiring of more public employees, complete with their unaffordable high benefit costs.

Never mind that local governments are struggling to meet current obligations, or that public employee pension benefits have already saddled taxpayers in California with at least \$374 billion of debt.

Read the whole story

Letter: Casino workers help at Bread & Broth

To the community,

Serving their first of two Bread & Broth Adopt A Day of

Nourishment sponsorships for the year, the HEROs employee organization from Harrah's and Harveys casinos hosted the Monday meal served at St. Theresa Grace Hall on April 17. Having the HEROs sponsor a B&B dinner is always a treat. Wearing their bright red HEROs T-shirts, the HEROs sponsor crew always shows up ready to help and bring smiles to the faces of the dinner guests.

"Thank you for the opportunity to serve our community," wrote Darlene Winkelman, who has volunteered at many of the HEROs Adopt A Days. "This experience is very heartfelt. It was our pleasure to spend time assisting those less fortunate than ourselves. Thank you and God bless!"

In addition to Winkelman, HEROs members Jacalyn Andrews, Jeff Colameco and Randall Sumner arrived early to pack the food giveaway bags and spend the next three hours working side by side with the B&B volunteers at the dinner event.

B&B would like to express our sincerest thanks to the long time and much appreciated support that the Caesars team members have so generously provided to our food outreach program. Feeding those who struggle with hunger and providing them with a safe, warm and welcoming place every Monday is truly an incredible act of kindness.

For more B&B information, join us on Facebook.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Opinion: Golden Gate Bridge

needs rail service

By Joe Mathews

If California is as serious about public transit as its leaders claim, why isn't there rail service across the Golden Gate Bridge?

There's no good reason why our state's iconic span must devote its six lanes to cars. For more than 50 years, engineering studies have shown that the bridge could accommodate trains.



Joe Mathews

Today, there is no more glaring hole in California public transportation than the one across the Golden Gate Bridge.

North of the bridge, Sonoma and Marin counties are about to open the first phase, from Santa Rosa to San Rafael, of their SMART light rail service. SMART, which includes a bicycle-pedestrian pathway, will eventually serve a 70-mile corridor from Cloverdale to Larkspur, just 10 miles up the Highway 10 from the Golden Gate.

South of the bridge, San Francisco is spending billions to construct the Transbay Transit Center, a Grand Central Station of the West. Eventually it is supposed to be the northern terminus of high-speed rail.

But there is no plan for a train to connect the new SMART train with the new giant transit station. That's a shocking failure for Bay Area do-gooders who love to lecture the rest

of us on the need to go boldly into the future. What in the name of progressive enlightenment are you waiting for?

The idea of a Golden Gate Bridge train is not new. Such service was envisioned as part of the original plan for the BART system. Michael C. Healy, in his excellent new book "BART: The Dramatic History of the Bay Area Rapid Transit System," recalls that Marin County leaders in the early 1960s badly wanted to be part of BART.

But in 1961, the governing authority of the Golden Gate Bridge balked at allowing trains, claiming that they would put too much stress on support cables. BART's own engineering studies found that the bridge was plenty strong enough, but the bridge authority wouldn't budge. In the end, BART dropped Marin from its plans, to the frustration of several county officials.

The dream didn't die. In 1990, renewed talk of BART to Marin led to a study that found the bridge could handle trains. But the multibillion-dollar cost of taking BART to the North Bay ended the conversation.

In this history, there's a lesson even more dramatic than the Golden Gate: There are huge costs when California skimps on infrastructure. A bridge train to the North Bay would have been easier and cheaper in the 1970s than now, and so for 40 years North Bay commuters have paid a rapidly rising price—in traffic, in tolls, time, and in the extortionate cost of parking in San Francisco.

There is real wisdom in the phrase that Healy attributes to Bill Stokes, the founding father of BART: "Build it now. It will never be cheaper."

That's why a train link over the Golden Gate Bridge would still make sense today. Yes, such a plan would be attacked—this is the Bay Area and this is California, after all. Preservationists would say an iconic American landmark is being sullied. Marin's anti-growth zealots would argue a train

would encourage new development in their idylls. Pointy-headed accounting types would cite the cost and point out that most commuters in the North Bay are going to jobs in the North Bay, not in the city.

And those who follow BART closely will argue that that system is at a difficult crossroads, and needs to focus on maintenance and other pressing projects, like a second tube under the Bay between Oakland and San Francisco.

To all such objections there is one answer: Why is the Bay Area thinking so narrowly and with so little vision for the future? As an Angeleno, I can't resist pointing out to Bay Area friends that in the realm of public transit, we in Southern California are surpassing you, having passed sales tax increases to fund a transformational 50-year plan for a regional system that makes yours look like a disjointed joke. Are you really going to let yourself be embarrassed by L.A.?

Imagine how powerful a symbol of California's connected future a Golden Gate Bridge-traversing train would be. It would draw commuters and tourists alike, making the planet's greatest bridge even greater.

Such a train could be the inspirational showpiece for what the Bay Area badly needs: a new regional plan for transit that connects all nine of its counties. You've come to this bridge, California. It's time to cross it.

Joe Mathews writes the Connecting California column for Zócalo Public Square.