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Cyclists push for cleaner crossing Riders complain Posey Tube

Kelly Rayburn

ALAMEDA -- A bicycle ride through the Posey Tube is unhealthy, dirty and dangerous.

That is the message the cycling advocacy group BikeAlameda is carrying as it ratchets up its campaign for a better estuary crossing for those interested in traveling on bike or foot between Alameda's West End and Oakland.

A new estuary crossing is BikeAlameda's top goal, and while completion of such a passage is likely years away, there already have been some successes in the group's campaign.

Alameda City Council members recently directed staff to apply for two grants to study possibilities for such a project. And Catellus Development Corp. agreed to include a water taxi between Alameda and Oakland for at least a year as part of its Alameda Landing development.

"We're slowly chiseling away," said

BikeAlameda president Lucy Gigli. "And it's really, really exciting." Earlier this week, BikeAlameda released the results of a study it conducted in October to gauge how many cyclists brave the tube.

What it found: In one day, four times as many cyclists use the Park Street Bridge as the tube, even given the tube's proximity to destinations such as Jack London Square, downtown Oakland and Chinatown.

Gigli and others weren't surprised.

The 0.8-mile tube, with a roughly 3-foot-wide bike and pedestrian path, is not ideal for cyclists. Far from it.

The green-tiled walls are covered in soot. Car exhaust hangs heavy in the air. A waste-high railing is all that protects people from vehicle traffic. If two cyclists cross paths, one has to lift his bike over the railing to let the other person squeeze by.

"It's horrible," said Michael Sullivan, who biked through the tube for years on a daily commute from Oakland to Alameda.

Sullivan went so far as to wear a gas mask with a charcoal filter when riding under the estuary. Now that he lives in Alameda, where he still works, he avoids the trip altogether, he said.

The City Council's action, taken in November, is seen as a first step toward an estuary-crossing alternative.

The city is applying for two grants -- one state and one county - - of \$100,000 each.

City Councilman Frank Matarrese, who bikes to Berkeley about twice a week to see a client of his biotechnology consulting firm, said he is happy with the city's action.

"The more we can do to get people out of single-occupancy cars, the better," he said.

If funding can be secured, the study would be conducted by an outside firm and, at minimum, weigh three possibilities: building a bicycle and pedestrian bridge, modifying the tube, or developing a water shuttle for cyclists and pedestrians.

The latter possibility is to be included in Catellus' Alameda Landing project, a major mixed-use development that includes up to 300 new homes and hundreds of thousands of square feet in retail and office space. The City Council approved the project last week.

Catellus agreed to a yearlong trial period for such a service. Completion of the project is still years away.

In the meantime, city Public Works Director Matthew Naclerio said the ultimate fix may be something people haven't come up with yet.

"We're hoping that as we get more people involved around the table, the creative juices will start flowing and we might come up with something we haven't even thought about," he said.

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