

Balboa Park Station Comprehensive Plan September 2002

Bay Area Rapid Transit District



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Chapter 1 Introduction

A VISION FOR BALBOA PARK STATION

This Comprehensive Station Plan sets out a vision for Balboa Park, allowing the station to realize its potential as both a neighborhood center and one of the most important transportation hubs in the entire Bay Area. It provides an overview of the challenges facing the station at present, and outlines proposals to overcome them – alleviating overcrowding, improving safety, and enhancing access for all users. Above all, the vision is to firmly establish the station at the center of the neighborhood, creating a place that provides shelter and amenities for BART and Muni passengers, and housing and services for local residents.

This plan, naturally, emphasizes the improvements that will be funded and undertaken by BART itself. However, it also encompasses the plans and proposals from other partner agencies, such as the San Francisco Planning Department and Muni. The aim is to create an integrated, holistic plan that is not narrowly focused on ‘BART’s problems’, but serves as a guide and expression of intent to planners, developers and the wider community. BART’s own projects are intended to work within the framework of the City’s overall neighborhood-wide planning efforts.

While the plan is sweeping in scope, it is also realistic. Construction work has already started on a range of improvements to increase capacity, including installing more faregates and a new escalator. While some other elements of the plan are more ambitious, they have been subject to extensive scrutiny by the community, and in many cases, funding is the only obstacle.

Many of the longer-term improvements, however, are presented as conceptual plans, rather than firm proposals. They are likely to undergo considerable refinement before they are finally implemented – for example to take full advantage of proposals from developers. To this extent, this Comprehensive Station Plan should be regarded as a ‘snapshot in time’ and a living, breathing document, rather than a blueprint to be followed religiously.

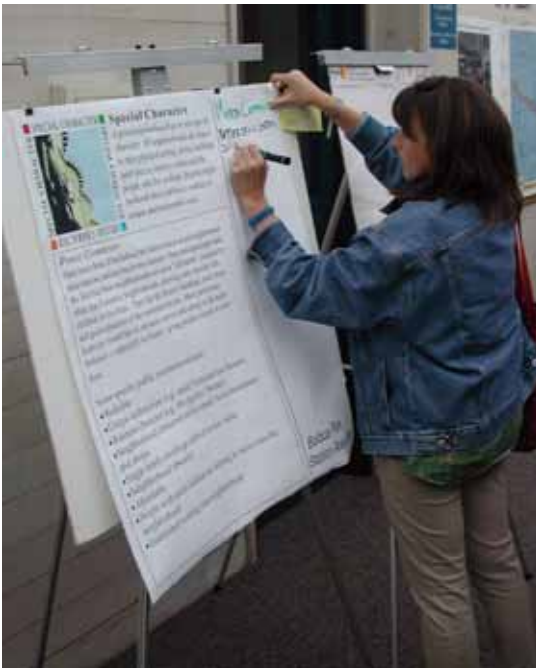


This Comprehensive Station Plan sets out a vision for the station as an integral part of the Balboa Park neighborhood.

Why Balboa Park?

There are four key reasons why Balboa Park is in this 'first wave' of Comprehensive Station Plans:

- Immediate safety and capacity issues that need to be addressed
- The range of other issues facing the station, from passenger amenities to integrating BART and Muni services and promoting new development
- The opportunity to coordinate with the City of San Francisco's own community planning effort in the neighborhood
- The sheer number of people using the station – Balboa Park is the fifth busiest station on the BART system



Better Neighborhoods 2002 has brought together local residents and merchants and staff from across City departments to map out the future of Balboa Park.

STATION PLANNING AT BART

The Comprehensive Station Plan for Balboa Park, along with similar efforts at Union City and Pleasant Hill stations, is a prototype for many more BART stations over the coming years. The plans set new ground in cutting across different BART departments, and integrating BART's plans with those of the surrounding community. Each vision is a joint vision, reflecting the objectives of both BART and the wider community. The process builds on relationships with local cities, developers, non-profit organizations, residents and businesses, encompassing their ideas and allowing them to develop their proposals with a good understanding of BART's intentions.

Comprehensive Station Plans will help to stimulate and realize opportunities for access improvements and transit oriented development, which might otherwise go to waste. They will also help to avoid problems that might emerge with an unplanned approach – such as a failure to recognize capacity constraints – and help to coordinate construction to minimize disruption to passengers and local residents. While the comprehensive plans are intended to supplement, not replace, detailed engineering studies, in many cases they provide cost estimates to support grant applications, where the boundaries of a project can be reasonably defined.

PLANNING PROCESS

For the past two years, the San Francisco Planning Department has been working with the community to develop the Balboa Park Station Area Plan – a common vision of how the station and wider neighborhood should evolve and grow. Balboa Park is one of three parts of San Francisco to benefit from this process, under the City's Better Neighborhoods 2002 program.

BART’s Comprehensive Station Plan has been developed in tandem with the City’s neighborhood plan. In effect, BART has used the City’s workshops, meetings, walking tours and other efforts to reach out to the community to develop this plan. This has two key advantages:

The plans of BART and the City of San Francisco are integrated and form a coherent whole. In this way, BART’s efforts can most effectively contribute to the wider community vision, and BART and the City can clearly understand each other’s goals and plan projects to maximize future possibilities.

Local residents and other community members do not need to turn up for two sets of meetings and workshops covering substantially the same issues.

The Better Neighborhoods 2002 planning process is now reaching its conclusion. The final draft of the plan will be published this year, and environmental review work will be completed to enable the City’s Board of Supervisors to approve the final version.

CITY AND COMMUNITY GOALS

The City’s Better Neighborhoods 2002 program is founded on the promotion of eight elements of a good urban neighborhood:

Walk to Shops

Safe Streets

Getting Around Easily

Housing Choices

Gathering Places

City Services

Special Character

Part of a Whole

Key stakeholders

The support of key stakeholders such as BART, the City, other public agencies and community groups has been crucial to developing this plan. They include:

Internal BART Departments

- Station Area Planning
- Transit System Development
- Financial Planning
- Customer Performance
- System Safety
- Engineering
- Real Estate
- Operations

External Stakeholders

- San Francisco Planning Department
- San Francisco Department of Parking and Traffic
- San Francisco Department of Public Works
- Muni
- City College of San Francisco
- Lick-Wilmerding High School
- Caltrans
- Public Utilities Commission
- OM Business League
- OM Neighbors in Action
- Cayuga Improvement Association
- Geneva Office Building Working Group
- San Francisco Organizing Project

Community members also worked with City staff to develop a concise set of additional goals, specific to the Balboa Park neighborhood:

Improve the transit function and create a real neighborhood around the station

Create a safer and more comfortable environment for pedestrians

Provide more housing opportunities for a range of income levels

Improve the section of Ocean Avenue around the Phelan Loop

Provide a wider range of shops and services

Explore ways to improve the parking situation

BART's GOALS

BART's Strategic Plan, adopted in 1999, outlines a clear vision to guide the organization into the 21st century. The plan sets out specific goals and strategies in seven broad areas:

- The BART customer experience.**
- Building partnerships for support.**
- Transit travel demand.**
- Land use and quality of life.**
- People of BART.**
- Physical infrastructure.**
- Financial health.**



One of the community's key goals is to improve the transit function and create a real neighborhood around Balboa Park Station.

While this Comprehensive Station Plan addresses all of these areas, some stand out as particularly crucial. The plan itself has been developed in close partnership with the City of San Francisco and the local community, emphasizing the “partnerships for support” objective. The

major issues addressed here, meanwhile, involve transit travel demand, through improving access and increasing capacity to

cope with growing ridership, and promoting transit oriented development to maximize ridership and quality of life in the neighborhood.

A REGIONAL SMART GROWTH PERSPECTIVE

At a regional level, serving as a complement to these local plans, is the Smart Growth Strategy being developed by the Association of Bay Area Governments. The project aims to develop a common regional strategy for land use for the next 20 years, helping to guide local development decisions and transportation investments. The public workshops have provisionally identified the Balboa Park area as a key site for more intense housing and commercial development, centered on the station.

For more details of the Smart Growth Strategy/Regional Livability Footprint Project, please refer to www.abag.ca.gov/planning/smartgrowth.

Chapter 2 Balboa Park Station Today

STATION FUNCTION AND LOCATION

Balboa Park today is one of the most important transit hubs in the entire Bay Area. Located in southern San Francisco between Ocean and Geneva Avenues, it is the busiest BART station outside downtown San Francisco, handling more than 22,000 passengers per day. The station is served by 11 Muni bus and street-

car lines, and its location next to I-280 makes it a convenient drop-off point for passengers arriving by car.

Balboa Park BART

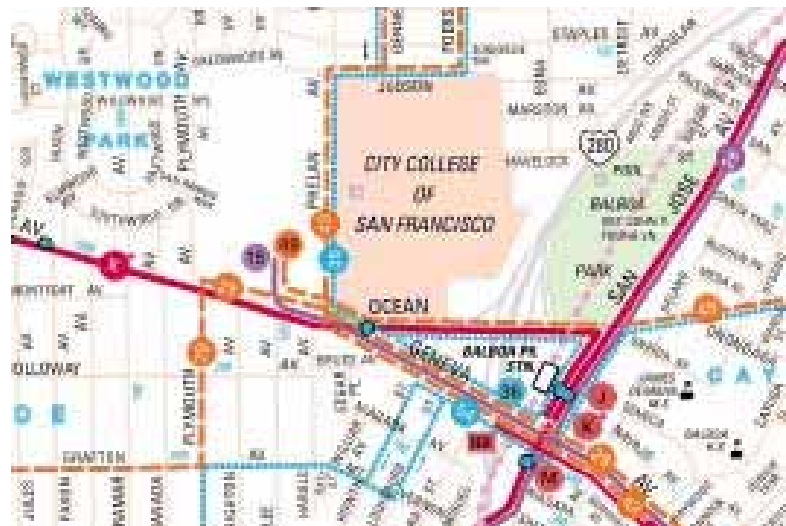
- 12 minutes to downtown SF
- 18 minutes to SFO
- More than 22,000 riders on an average weekday
- The busiest station outside downtown SF

Balboa Park will only rise in sig-

nificance when the long-awaited BART service to Millbrae and San Francisco International Airport begins. It will be heavily used by city residents commuting to Silicon Valley, taking advantage of the convenient cross-platform connection to Caltrain at Millbrae. Balboa Park will also be the first station within the San Francisco city limits for passengers taking BART from the airport. Further into the future, planned BART extensions to Warm Springs and San Jose will also lead to more passengers using Balboa Park station.



The BART station is surrounded by I-280, Muni yards and the park – Balboa Park – itself. City College lies nearby and is an important source of ridership.



Balboa Park is a key transfer point between BART and Muni services.



The BART station is sandwiched between I-280 to the west, and Muni's maintenance facility to the east.



More than half of Muni riders at Balboa Park are transferring to BART.



Figure 2-1: Catchment area of Balboa Park Station (home origins only). As well as attracting riders from a large swath of southern San Francisco, many San Mateo County riders also travel from Balboa Park, bypassing Daly City station. The reason is probably cost: Balboa Park is the last station at which Muni Fast Passes are valid.

WHO USES BALBOA PARK STATION?

Balboa Park is heavily used by peak-time commuters. The vast majority of riders from Balboa Park (86%) are traveling for work purposes, and a similar proportion (87%) use BART 5 or more days a week, compared to the system-wide average of 72%. City College is also an important source of ridership with 22% of passengers at the station traveling to school.

Riders in the morning commute are overwhelmingly headed for downtown San Francisco. More than 70% of riders travel with a Muni Fast Pass, which is valid at all BART stations within San Francisco. Balboa Park is the last station at which the Fast Pass is valid, meaning many riders from San Mateo County prefer to travel from Balboa Park rather than Daly City. Using a Fast Pass rather than individual BART tickets can cut their travel costs by more than half.

Like other BART stations, Balboa Park attracts a large number of “choice riders” – those who could drive, but actively choose to take transit instead. Half of Balboa Park riders have a car available to make the trip, in line with the system-wide average of 57%.

Another measure of usage is the “propensity to use transit” indicator. This expresses passenger numbers as a proportion of residents and jobs in the station’s catchment area. By this measure, Balboa Park is highly successful in attracting passengers, with a propensity to use transit nearly one-third higher than the system-wide average (Figure 2-5).

The convenience and reliability of service may explain why Balboa Park also registers the third highest rider satisfaction rating of any BART station, after Glen Park and 24th Street Mission, with 43% stating that they are “very satisfied” with BART services. Just 5% say they are dissatisfied.

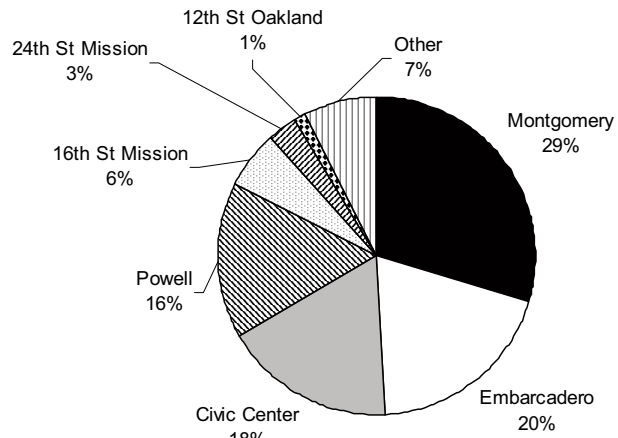


Figure 2-2 Destinations of riders from Balboa Park (6-10 AM). More than 80% of riders from Balboa Park in the morning commute are headed for downtown San Francisco, with a total of 91% exiting in San Francisco.

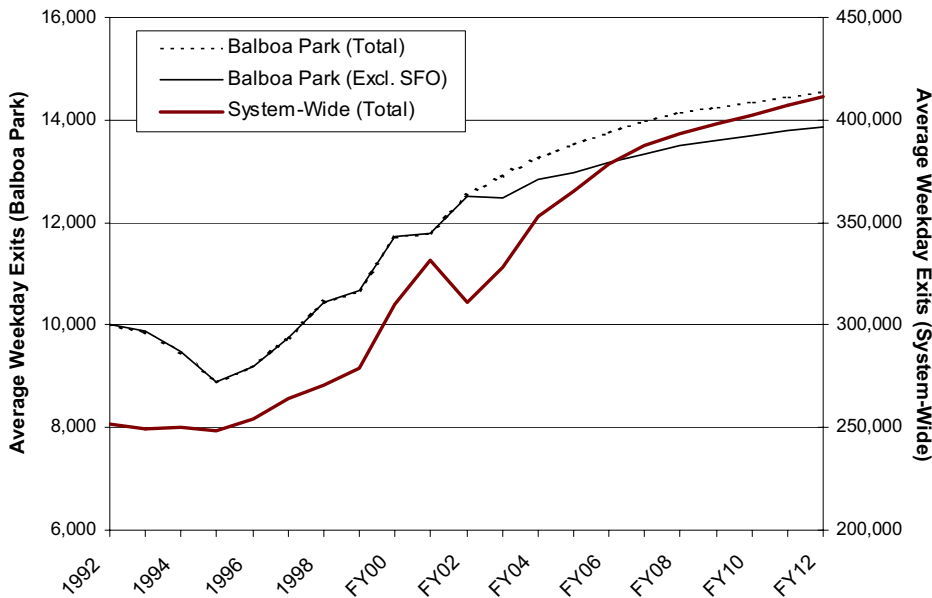


Figure 2-3: Balboa Park’s ridership has risen by 25% over the past ten years, slightly above the BART average of 23%. Over the next ten years, ridership is expected to climb a further 16%, to 14,500 exits on an average weekday, with 4.6% of these traveling to stations on the SFO extension.

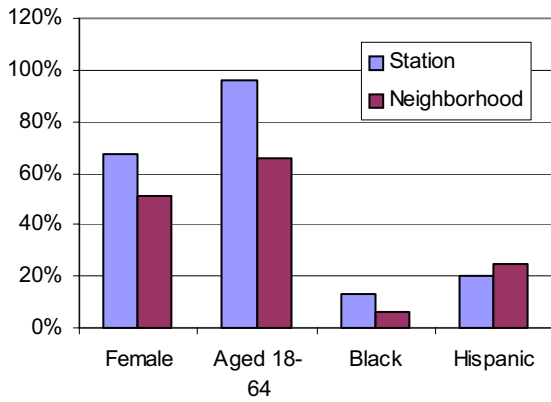


Figure 2-4: Demographics of Balboa Park Riders. Women and working-age adults are over-represented at Balboa Park BART, compared to people living within 1 mile of the station.

BART riders at Balboa Park are more likely to be female, of working age and have higher incomes than residents in the surrounding neighborhood. In terms of race, BART has a slightly higher proportion of black and Asian/Pacific Islander riders, and a lower proportion of Latinos, compared to the neighborhood as a whole.

A significant proportion of Balboa Park riders (8%) identify themselves as disabled, in line with the systemwide average of 9%. As well as wheelchair users and others with mobility difficulties, this category includes those with mental, visual and hearing impairments.

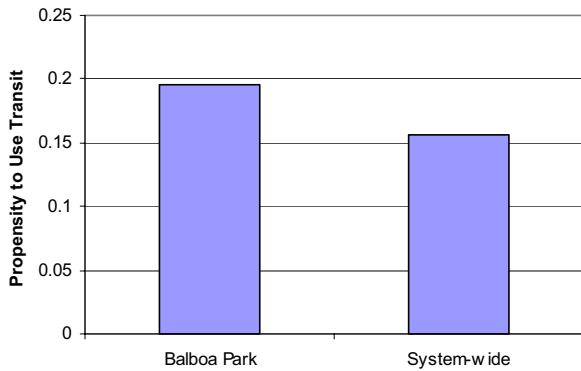


Figure 2-5 Propensity to Use Transit: People living and working near Balboa Park are more likely to take BART than at other stations on the system.

Source: BART Ridership Forecast Model. Transit propensity = 2000 Station Entries and Exits/Catchment Area Population and Employment.

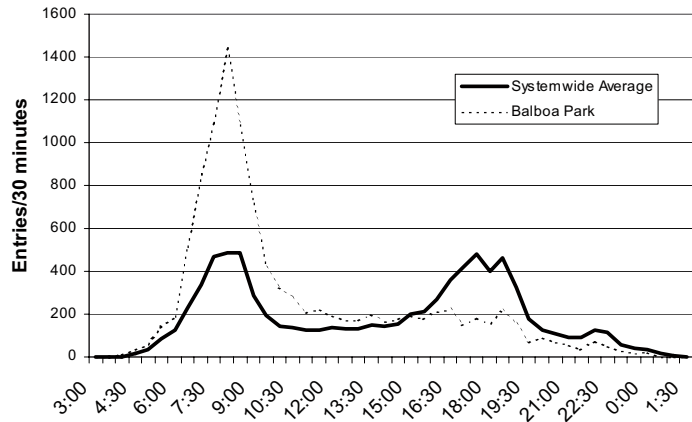


Figure 2-6 Time of Day Entries: The morning commute accounts for a far higher proportion of riders at Balboa Park compared to most other BART stations. The number of people entering the station peaks between 8 and 8:30 AM.

HOW RIDERS GET TO BART

Nearly half of riders in the morning peak get to Balboa Park station by transit – more than double the BART average. Car is the second most popular means of access, with many riders dropped off and others parking on residential streets around the station, given the lack of dedicated BART parking facilities. Of those who arrive by automobile, 58% are dropped off, 27% drive alone and park, and 14% drive and ride with another passenger.

Balboa Park is also an important interchange for Muni. More than half of those boarding Muni bus and streetcar services at the station arrive by BART. A further 29% of Muni riders are transferring between different Muni lines. Most of the Muni bus lines stop on Geneva Avenue outside the station, with the 49 stopping on Ocean Avenue. The K and the J streetcars terminate between the BART station and the Muni maintenance yard, while the M streetcar terminates on San Jose Avenue.

Two employer shuttles, to the Crocker Park and Sierra Point areas, also serve Balboa Park. However, these are likely to relocate to San Bruno station when the BART extension to San Francisco International Airport and Millbrae opens.

Balboa Park station is served by eight Muni bus lines and three streetcar lines:

Line 15 to Geneva Avenue and 3rd Street, including Visitacion Valley

Lines 26, 88 and M to Ocean View, Merced Heights and SFSU

Lines 29 and 43 to Crocker Amazon

Line 49 to Mission Street and to City College

Line 54 to the Excelsior, University Mound, Portola, Silver Terrace, Hunters Point and Ocean View

Lines 26 and J along San Jose Avenue and Glen Park

Lines 29 and K along Ocean Avenue to the Ingleside and Westwood Terrace

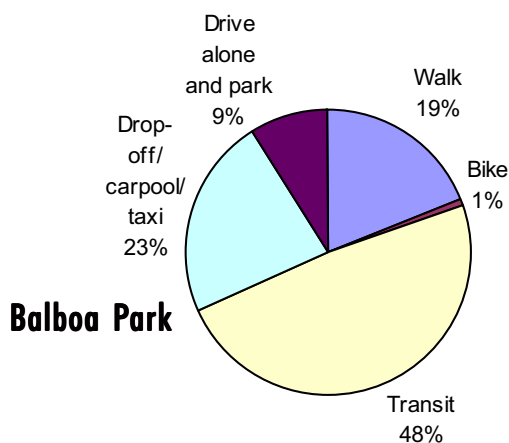
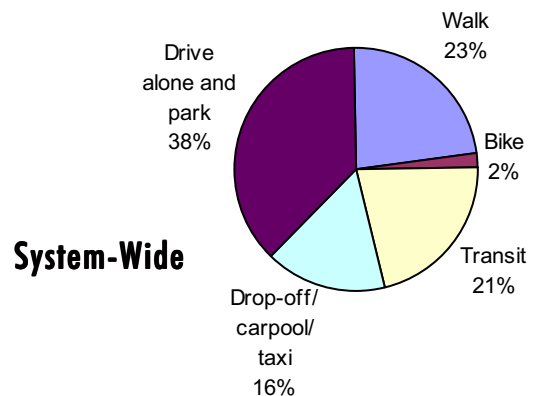


Figure 2-7 Mode of Access to Balboa Park Station: While more than a quarter of riders get to Balboa Park by car, the average for other BART stations is 54%. Figures are for AM peak for both home and non-home origins.



THE STATION IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Residential development in Balboa Park is characterized by single-family homes and a high proportion of households with children, at least compared to the San Francisco average. Approximately 63,000 people live within a mile of the station.



Single-family homes characterize the Balboa Park neighborhood.

While there are just 1,500 jobs in the same one-mile radius, large areas are devoted to industrial and institutional land uses, reflecting the neighborhood's history (see panel). Muni owns the Green maintenance facility alongside the station, the Upper Yard on the south side of Geneva Avenue, and the Geneva Yard on the east side of San Jose Avenue, behind the historic Geneva Office Building. The eponymous Balboa Park and its sports facilities, meanwhile, lie across Ocean Avenue from the station.



The reservoir is currently used for City College parking.

Balboa Park is also home to many educational institutions. City College of San Francisco and its 60,000 students lies just a few blocks away from the station, and has ambitious plans to expand to the west over a disused reservoir, and to the south down to Ocean Avenue. San Francisco State University,

meanwhile, is less than two miles to the west. There are also several middle and high schools in the neighborhood. The closest, Lick-Wilmerding, lies just across the freeway from the station, while others include Balboa High, Riordan High and James Denman Middle.

Commercial development is centered on Ocean Avenue, which west of Phelan Avenue is a bustling retail corridor serving predominantly local needs.

San Francisco's First Streetcar Suburb



The Market Street Railway's Line 10 Streetcar at Balboa Park, 1911.



Electrical Shop at Elkton Barn, 1912.

Photos: San Francisco Historical Photograph Collection

The history of Balboa Park is inextricably woven with the history of transit in San Francisco. Many of the problems facing the station today can be traced to their historical roots.

The old Southern Pacific railroad line to San Jose ran through Balboa Park, to be followed by the streetcars in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, the neighborhood was one of the city's first 'streetcar suburbs', opened up to development as the electric streetcars brought it within an easy commute of downtown San Francisco. The first streetcars came to San Francisco in 1892, and the Elkton Shops, constructed in 1907 on the site of Muni's current maintenance yard at Balboa Park, were the heart of the Market Street Railway's repair and overhaul facilities. At the turn of the century, the neighborhood was still very lightly settled, but now the maintenance functions compete for space in one of the most transit-accessible parts of the region.

The Southern Pacific right-of-way – one of the few relatively flat routes into San Francisco – was taken over by the Interstate 280 freeway, with many homes demolished to accommodate the widening. As well as the severance caused by the freeway, this layout also means that the BART station is essentially wedged between the freeway and the maintenance yard, with very little scope to expand.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Balboa Park station lies below grade on two levels – the concourse level, which houses the faregates and ticket machines, and the platform level below the concourse. The main entrance to the concourse is via an escalator or stairs from the north side of Geneva Avenue. There is also an underpass to the south side of Geneva Avenue, and a side entrance directly from concourse level to the Muni J and K streetcar stops. This side entrance also is used by many people to access Ocean Avenue, via an informal path alongside the Muni streetcar tracks.



A newspaper table...



...and a refreshment van are the only amenities for passengers.

The windswept, spartan environment faced by passengers at present, however, hardly befits the station's role either as a regional transit hub or a local neighborhood center. It is overcrowded and offers few amenities for passengers. Links between BART and Muni services are extremely poor, and passengers wait for streetcars in an area that feels more like part of Muni's adjacent maintenance yard than a real transit station. Pedestrian links to bus stops and key local destinations such as City College, meanwhile, are poorly signed, and are characterized by uneven sidewalks and conflicts with buses, streetcars and automobiles.

What affects station capacity?

The capacity of a BART station, or the number of riders that it can safely and comfortably handle, is determined by two key factors:

- **Station equipment.** This includes the number of faregates, ticket and AddFare machines, elevators and escalators.
- **Station space.** This includes the amount of space available on platforms and stairs and queuing space in front of faregates.