

Letters to the Editor:

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Wednesday March 11, 2009



MAYOR BATES MAKES

COURAGEOUS VOTE

Editors, Daily Planet:

On Feb. 25, Berkeley Mayor Tom Bates took a courageous stand to protect jobs and guard social justice in our communities. Mayor Bates represents the cities of Alameda County on the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MTC), which is responsible for spending billions of dollars of transportation money in the Bay Area every year.

The MTC staff originally brought forward a disastrous proposal for how to spend the \$1.4 billion in transportation money from the federal stimulus that is designated for the Bay Area. The proposal suggested diverting \$225 million that would otherwise go to support transit operations and instead spend the money on expansion projects. These expansion projects would have come at the expense of existing service. This is like building an addition to your house while it is in foreclosure.

Genesis, a regional faith- and values-based community organizing group in the Bay Area, took an early stand against the MTC's proposal. Clergy and leaders in Genesis said that it was wrong for the MTC to cut funding needed for AC Transit and BART service.

Every job created through construction of new projects would have meant two transit operations jobs lost. Furthermore, these service cuts would hit hardest those who need public transit the most, the thousands of youth, seniors, and working class people who depend on operators like AC Transit as their only means of transportation.

Through the activism of Genesis and its allies such as Urban Habitat, along with the leadership of Mayor Bates, the MTC eventually restored all but \$70 million of the money they originally proposed to divert from transit operations. Further still, even when all the other MTC members were satisfied to still allow the \$70 million to be diverted, Mayor Bates had the courage to cast the single vote against the diversion.

Genesis salutes the courage and wisdom of Mayor Bates and will now turn its attention to some of the other Commissioners who would do well to see things as he does.

Rev. Scott Denman

President, Genesis

Rector, St. John's Episcopal Church