

## IN THE BEGINNING

The first meeting of what California State Reconstruction and Re-Employment Commission Chairman, Alexander R. Heron called his “Bay Area Team,” took place in Berkeley on August 9, 1944. At this meeting, Colonel Heron, and his deputy, the renowned builder, David Bohannon, addressed a group of business leaders, mayors, city managers, and county supervisors. Representing Governor Earl Warren, Heron and Bohannon urged that “the whole Bay Area pull together to seize on post-war opportunities.”

Not quite everyone was onboard what the press had already dubbed the “Bay Area Council.” During the Council’s formation, ambivalence to regional aspirations was faintly but persistently heard. The issue concerned whether South Bay counties considered themselves – or felt themselves considered – an integral part of a unified Bay Area. Capturing that hesitance was a letter from the editor of the San Jose Mercury News who averred “while I cannot subscribe wholeheartedly to the outline of your plan, I would like the opportunity of sitting in.” Thus was reflected the delicate, decades-long minuet over which counties should and should not be included in a greater Bay Area in terms of transportation, census data, Federal aid, housing, water, air and open-space policies.

## THE FATEFUL FORTIES

At war’s end, the Bay Area regional puzzle seemed to be fitting nicely together. This was particularly true in regards to industrial policies to help avoid the feared – and some economists felt, inevitable – post-war recession. These policies, it turned out, were identical to the economic goals embodied in the new Bay Area Council, chartered in August 1945, “to develop cooperation and unified action in commercial, industrial, civic and cultural fields in the Bay Area.”

Confidence was the predominating note sounded by the Bay Area Council at its start, an optimism mirroring the tenor of propitious times: With a World War won and the entire planet assembled in San Francisco for the creation of a United Nations, what could possibly stand in the way of a more unified Bay Area?

Striking this note of ebullience was Frank E. Marsh, named the Bay Area Council’s first President & CEO on September 1, 1946. Marsh, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce’s Washington rep, possessed both impeccable New Deal credentials and the backing of the Bay Area’s most powerful business leaders, many of them already on the Council’s Executive Committee. The roster was a Bay Area Business Who’s Who, and included top officers of Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Transamerica, Standard Oil of California, Pacific Gas and Electric, Bechtel, Kaiser Industries, Clorox and others. Together, the Council’s directors quickly raised the \$100,000 yearly budget dedicated, Frank

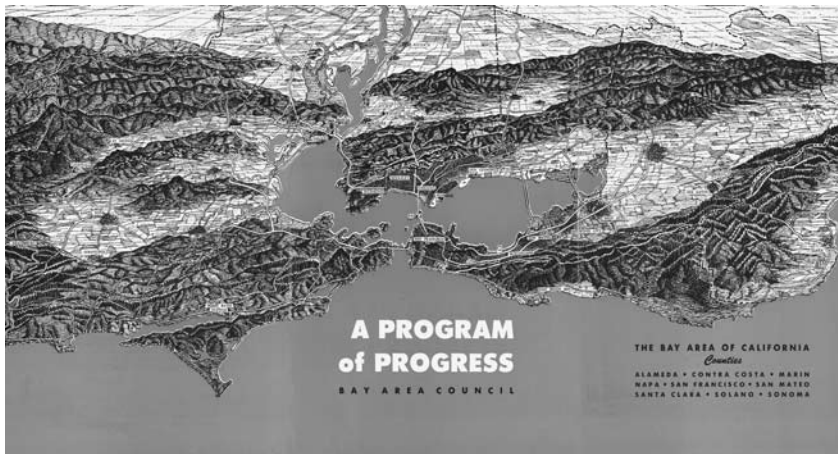


Frank E. Marsh

Marsh declared, “to the proposition that the economic opportunities of all counties and municipalities in the Bay Area are not only interrelated, but interdependent.”

The bottom half of the Bay Area’s forties was a heady time. The economy prospered, so much so that in June 1947 the Christian Science Monitor ran a special report garishly headlined, “San Francisco Bay Area Forges Postwar Era of Industrial Might.” Reporting on the thousands of new industrial plants

ringing the Bay, the Monitor suggested that a new gold rush was on, a westward dash by manufacturers intent on gaining their share of millions of new Pacific Coast customers. With this widespread and burgeoning growth, it was evident to Council leaders that San Francisco could no longer claim to be both the Bay region’s corporate head and its industrial heart. Frank Marsh even suggested that given a choice, he would establish Bay Area Council headquarters “in the



Creating a Bay Area identity

middle of the Bay on Treasure Island.”

Under Marsh, the Bay Area Council was becoming a newsmaker, with the peripatetic CEO popping up all over the region to give his talk, “Bay Area Unlimited,” a call for regional cooperation and labor/management comity.

As the fateful forties drew to their close, the Council issued a series of “meaty” reports on post-war issues including the reuse of Federal property in the region, an analysis of port and trade issues, and an early call for the creation of a regional transportation authority. The Council under Marsh also produced a series of artful brochures plugging regional life and commerce. Underlying all of these projects was the strategic goal of strengthening the shared cultural, economic and social experiences of the region’s citizens.



The Bay Area Council helped hundreds of companies, like this one, locate in the nine counties in the 1940’s

According to its charter, the Council's primary mission was to coordinate regional economic development. As the forties progressed, however, the organization found itself increasingly drawn into issues related to the unhealthy fallout from badly planned or too-rapid growth. Earlier than most peer organizations, the Council recognized that rapid industrialization could bring with it challenges including housing shortages, traffic gridlock, and air and water pollution. By the late '40s, the Council was acting as one of the very first regional environmental watchdogs. It issued, for example, a warning about the reuse of substandard "temporary" wartime housing around the Richmond and Vallejo shipyards. These developments, the Council report warned, could – and in fact did – create low opportunity enclaves.

Nascent slums were a byproduct of what was shaping up as a full-tilt, post-war regional boom. Another was the rapid increase in auto use in the Bay Area in the late '40s, bringing with it Los Angeles-scale traffic congestion. The Bay Area Council played a leading – and ultimately successful – role in the push for new Bay spans, including the Dumbarton and Richmond/San Rafael bridges.

In a highly prescient study, the Council proposed building an electric rail tunnel on the Bay floor between San Francisco and Oakland. In lieu of a new "Southern Span" Bay Bridge, this would enable the removal of trains from the existing Bay Bridge's lower deck, which could then be dedicated to auto traffic. This early transit report was the precursor to the Bay Area Rapid Transit Study of the early '50s, a subject that would become an important Council focus.



The Richmond-San Rafael Bridge is one of the many civic projects instigated by the Bay Area Council.