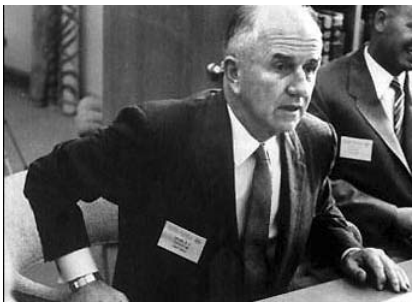
THE UNCERTAIN SIXTIES



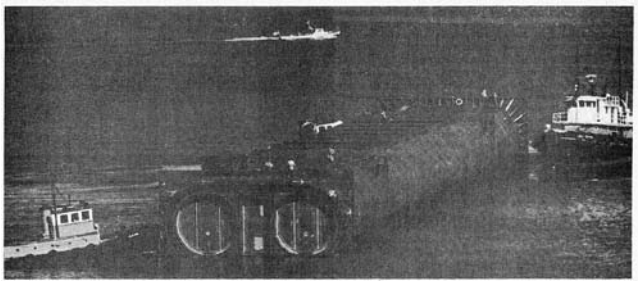
Chairman Stephen D. Bechtel

In April 1960, the Council celebrated its fifteenth anniversary at a dinner at the Saint Francis Hotel. Edgar Kaiser presided over a sober appraisal of the Council's present status and future direction. Kaiser was not bashful in singling out the previous year's Golden Gate Authority fight as a setback for regionalism. "We discovered how difficult decisions are when they must be made both on sectional levels and on Bay Area levels," he told members. Kaiser's native optimism returned as he outlined the role he felt the organization must play. Golden Gate Authority or no, Kaiser concluded, "there is a far greater need today for the fulfillment of the Council's purpose, than when it was founded."

In the early '60s, the fresh Kennedy breeze was airing out the nation. At the Bay Area Council, change was similarly in the wind. After a decade-and-a-half at the helm, Executive Director Frank Marsh announced his resignation. Similarly, in 1961, Edgar Kaiser, who had served an unprecedented three terms as Council Chairman, turned the gavel over to Stephen D. Bechtel, CEO of the international construction firm bearing his name.

The Golden Gate Authority fight taught an important lesson. The Council, under Bechtel and Marsh's successors, Colonel John S. Harnett, and Stanley McCaffery, would spend the sixties taking a more "bite-sized" approach, which aimed nonetheless at creating a regional authority. The new strategy was to support the empowerment of "special purpose" bodies. These would address specific regional issues without setting off the warning bells of Bay Area regionalism's parochial opponents. When the time was right, these bodies could then be combined into that full-blown regional authority.

As a part of this retooled "Trojan Horse" stratagem, in 1961, the Council supported the creation of the Association of Bay Area Governments, a research and planning organization of the region's nine counties and 101 cities. In 1963, the Council successfully fought for legislation to create the Bay Area Transportation Study Commission (BATSC). In 1965, this Commission undertook a $5 million study, the most extensive – and expensive – of its kind, that produced the region's first omnibus surface transportation plan. A later University of California report credited the Bay Area Council "with convincing a hesitant legislature to establish BATSC in the face of fierce opposition by local interests."



Construction of BART

That same year, the Council sponsored legislation creating the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and in 1970, promoted legislation to create the Metropolitan Transportation Committee (MTC). Throughout the sixties and into the seventies, Steve Bechtel continued to be a driving force at the Council moving BART from sketch to integral regional rail service. Throughout the upcoming decades, the Council would continue to be a central mover in the expansion and extension of BART to SFO and beyond.

Real, effective regionalism was a constant in the collective thoughts of the Bay Area Council; in 1962, for example, the organization held its first "Bay Area Outlook Conference" which through the sixties became an anticipated annual event. In the late sixties, the Council strengthened its regional environmental presence by establishing the Bay Area Environmental Award. The goal of the award was to "recognize significant contributions to the preservation or enhancement of the Bay Area environment."

BART to SFO plans

This commitment to a healthier environment is a theme that still resonates. Under the leadership of Board members like the Gap's Donald Fisher, the Council has worked to inculcate a strong corporate commitment to a sustainable environment and economy. "We have saved a lot of trees, through more efficient heating, lighting and other environmental programs," says Fisher about his own corporate environmental programs. "We thought it was a good idea to disseminate our best practices through the Bay Area Council's broad reach of regional companies."

THE SALUBRIOUS SEVENTIES/ THE ENTERPRISING EIGHTIES

1970 marked the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Bay Area Council. If comprehensive regional governance was not fully realized, there were important wins the organization could point to as the new decade began. The MTC was "open for business;" in September 1972, BART began service on a 26-mile stretch between Oakland and Fremont; air and water quality were being managed at a regional level; and many of the recommendations of the Bay Area Transportation Study Commission had been implemented.

Angelo Siracusa
the "Godfather of Regionalism"

By the early '70s, the Council was executing its new mission statement, "Building a Better Bay Area" and under the taut leadership of new President, Angelo Siracusa, the organization was zeroing in on two big political concerns, regional planning and the growing housing shortage. Throughout the '70s, under the chairmanships of the Bank of America's, A.W. "Tom" Clausen, Kaiser Industries', Eugene Trefethen, Jr. and Arjay Miller, Dean of the Stanford Business School, the Council would play a crucial role in the day-to-day workings of the region. The organization was counted on to develop and pass legislation, lobby state and local officials and act as a key member of important regional agencies. As vice chairman of both the BCDC and MTC, Council President Siracusa remained a