

Council Gets Inside New Bay Bridge in China

It's a tale few will ever have, or live to tell. A small portion of early-arrivers from the more than 60 delegates on the Bay Area Council trip to China this week got to actually stand inside of the massive steel structures that will become the tower of the new Bay Bridge. Within a few months, once the tower is sealed and rises majestically out of our Bay, anyone left inside will be there for eternity.

Walking beneath seas of ship loading cranes and in fabrication warehouses so long they seem better fit to a Star Wars movie, we traveled to the mind-blowing facility where the steel for the Bay Bridge is being constructed in Shanghai.

Greeted by officials from Caltrans, the Bay Area Toll Authority, American Bridge-Fluor and Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries Co., we got an in depth look at the whole project from the Chinese side. The relationship between our two countries and two economies was transparently on display and well discussed. Also apparent was the immense pride both the Chinese and U.S. workers and managers have working on the project. Likely because we see it in person or on TV almost everyday, we forget how special the Bay Bridge is. The bridge is an irreplaceable piece of our economy, transportation infrastructure and social fabric. One of the most traveled spans in the nation, it carries more than two million vehicles per week. Unfortunately, if not replaced, it faces a 70 percent chance of collapse in the next 20 years. In its new form this engineering marvel will be the world's largest self-anchored suspension span. Rising 525 feet above sea level and embedded in rock, the single-tower span is designed to withstand a massive earthquake. It is the single largest public works contract in California history.

On July 12, the first tower pieces will arrive in the Bay Area from China. They will be a monument to the collaboration between two of the greatest economies and civilizations the planet has seen. We should pause and celebrate - and the Council will work to arrange a get-together on July 12. Plan to be there!

