



Los Angeles Area
Chamber of Commerce

WEDNESDAY | Apr. 6, 2005

THE BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE:

Let the Bay Area Pay for Its Bridge



Coming up at the Chamber

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THU | Apr. 7
Connection Point:
Networking in Color
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THU | Apr. 7
Business After Hours Mixer
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FRI | Apr. 8
Education & Workforce
Committee Meeting
with Assemblymember Jackie Goldberg
and UTLA President-Elect A.J. Duffy
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TUE | Apr. 12
Referral Network
A Growing Companies Program
sponsored by Wells Fargo
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WED | Apr. 13
Technology Industry Council
featuring Oracle
[more info](#)

WED | Apr. 13
Executive for a Day
[more info](#)

FRI | Apr. 15
Accenture
Pancakes & Politics:
Mayor Jim Hahn
[more info](#)

SUN-WED | Apr. 17-20
Access Washington, D.C.
[more info](#)

MON | Apr. 18
Executive Briefing:
Hedging Business & Political
Risks in Latin America
[more info](#)

WED | Apr. 20
Power Hour Lunch Series:
Creating a Mindset for
Building Your Business, Part
1
[more info](#)

THU | Apr. 21
Export Seminar Series:
Legal Do's & Don'ts for
Exporters
[more info](#)

The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, with nearly 1,400 members, is the voice of business in L.A. County. Founded in 1888, the Chamber promotes a prosperous economy and quality of life in the Los Angeles region. For more information, visit www.lachamber.org

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Several months ago I used this column to introduce a huge train robbery underway in Northern California. Or should I call it a bridge robbery? Either way, a lot of money was involved and, until then, it was a relatively low-level theft.

But then, as people around the state began to learn about the issue, they kicked their feet and the bubbles began percolating under the Bay Bridge. But since then, has the problem been resolved? Predictably, no.

So, for all you politicians who say that transportation is your top priority, listen up. Caltrans says that for every day the Bay Bridge cost overruns do not get resolved, \$400,000 is lost and gone forever. We're now up to spending \$6.2 billion on a bridge that should have been completed long ago for half that amount.

For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, the bridge linking San Francisco to Oakland is in dire need of repairs and seismic retrofits. During the dot-com boom when the state was billions of dollars in the black, Bay Area politicians managed to secure \$3 billion in state transportation money to make the appropriate upgrades to this widely used corridor. Fair enough.

What should not have happened is a panel of Bay Area opinion leaders decided to use taxpayer money to build what can now be called the Disney Concert Hall of bridges. They decided on a design that was beautiful and ornate but does not fit within their budget. Billions of dollars later, the seismic projects are unfinished, and the costs keep rising while legislators squabble over who should pay for the overruns. If the bridge is completed with this design, it will cost L.A. County up to \$500 million from our own transportation budget.

Bay Area lawmakers have two options: stick with the expensive design and increase tolls to pay for the cost overruns, or take Gov. Schwarzenegger's advice and go with a simpler, less expensive design.

Unfortunately, they're taking neither route. Instead, Bay Area lawmakers are insisting that the cost overruns come out of Caltrans (meaning all state taxpayers).

This is unacceptable. The main function of a bridge is to get people across a body of water. If a group of people want to construct a showpiece bridge, they must plan fairly to pay for it--as San Pedro residents did recently with the Vincent Thomas Bridge, which is now illuminated with blue lights, making for quite a sight each night in L.A. Harbor. All of the money for this enhancement came from private sources.

I bring up the Bay Bridge cost overruns again, because candidates for local office have all pledged to improve transportation in Los Angeles. Proposals to synchronize traffic lights and limit street work during rush hour are ones we can all agree on. But these are simple solutions that don't cost a lot of money, nor do they make that much difference.

What does make a lot of difference is securing hundreds of millions of transportation dollars that are rightfully ours in the first place. We need to hear how the mayoral candidates are going to rally the L.A. delegation in the state capitol to hold firm in NOT paying for Bay Bridge cost overruns, and better yet, help to mediate a situation that is fueling more passion than a Dodgers-Giants game.

Bay Area lawmakers say they're working with the governor in hopes of reaching a compromise. If they want the expensive bridge as much as they say they do, they need to be prepared to pay more for it themselves in tolls, and possibly a bond or a tax hike. There is no reason for us to pay for it--we have enough transportation problems and can't spare a dime.

So next time you hear candidates for local office talk about adding a left turn lane to solve traffic problems, be sure to ask them why they're not talking about the bigger problem of Bay Area lawmakers taking transportation funds away from our neighborhoods.

And while you're at it, let your state legislators know how you feel about paying for the Bay Bridge cost overruns.

And that's the *Business Perspective*.

The Business Perspective is a weekly award-winning opinion column by Rusty Hammer, President & CEO, LA Area Chamber

L.A. Business THIS WEEK
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