



PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENT SUMMARY



ALCATRAZ FERRY EMBARKATION ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

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INTRODUCTION

The National Park Service (NPS) is in the process of preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) related to establishment of a long-term embarkation site for the Alcatraz Island ferry service. As part of the EIS process, the lead agency releases a Notice of Intent (NOI) notifying the public of the proposed project and solicits public input regarding the scope and content of the EIS through a public scoping process. Typically, individual comments are not directly responded to, but instead help shape the EIS's scope and analysis. This Public Scoping Comment Summary presents a summary of the comments received during the public scoping period, June 1, 2012 through July 31, 2012, for the Alcatraz Ferry Embarkation EIS. While not all comments received during public scoping are included in this report, all comments will be considered by NPS in preparation of the EIS.

Background

The NPS currently operates a ferry service for visitors to Alcatraz Island at Pier 31½ in San Francisco under a short-term (10 year) lease with the Port of San Francisco (Port). NPS seeks to establish a new long-term (50 years or more) ferry embarkation site for passenger service between the northern San Francisco waterfront and Alcatraz Island. The embarkation site would be designed to welcome and serve existing and future Alcatraz Island visitors as well as connect visitors to the history of Alcatraz Island, Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), and the national park system in general. NPS is also studying the feasibility of expanding ferry connections between the Alcatraz ferry embarkation site and existing piers in Sausalito and/or at Fort Baker. This element could improve cross-bay connectivity and accommodate existing and future visitor demand for travel to Muir Woods and the Marin Headlands, thereby enhancing the operational effectiveness of the GGNRA.

In accordance with Section 102(2)(C) of the NEPA of 1969, and pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations Parts 1500–08), NPS has initiated the environmental impact analysis process for the proposed project. The Alcatraz Ferry Embarkation EIS will evaluate the development of a waterfront embarkation site, driven by the following current conditions:

- Due to federal concessions law, NPS is required to competitively re-bid the Alcatraz Island ferry service operator concession contract every 10 years. Only ferry service providers with leased pier space have been qualified to bid for the contract. Recent moves have led to confusion for visitors and inconsistencies in the delivery of visitor services and hindered the ability for the NPS concessioners to

build upon previous site improvements. Identifying a long-term site will avoid future moves as future ferry service concession contracts will require the operator to embark from the designated site.

- The short-term nature of current and previous leases between the Port and NPS concessioners has resulted in less ability to reinvest at the embarkation site, on Alcatraz Island, and at other GGNRA sites due to uncertainty related to future revenue needs.
- NPS strives to provide a quality visitor experience at every facility. The current site does not meet NPS standards due to its temporary condition. Several aspects of the facility need improvements to welcome and prepare visitors for their trip to Alcatraz Island. At present, the informative displays are not open to people who are unable to make the trip but would like to learn about the island and the larger GGNRA.
- The current facility does not provide an opportunity for expanded ferry service to other GGNRA areas such as Muir Woods via a shuttle bus from Sausalito.

The following sites were identified prior to public scoping as possible embarkation locations in San Francisco:

- Fort Mason Piers 1 and 3
- Piers 31½ (redesigning the current location), 41 and 45 along the Embarcadero and at Fisherman's Wharf

If a Port site is selected, a review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) would also be required.

PUBLIC SCOPING COMMENT SUMMARY

The NPS published a NOI on June 1, 2012, commencing the planning process to establish a long-term ferry embarkation site for passenger service between the San Francisco waterfront and Alcatraz Island. The NPS held open houses in San Francisco and Sausalito on June 26 and June 28, 2012 to explain the project and solicit comments. The comment period closed on July 31, 2012. Over the 60-day comment period, a total of approximately 90 correspondences were received not including informal comments received at the open houses. The majority of comments were from unaffiliated individuals representing themselves as residents or as part of a business interest. The remaining comments were from businesses, including the current operators at Piers 31½, 41, and 45, as well as the following agencies and organizations who submitted letters:

- Alcatraz Cruises
- American Craft Council
- Aquatic Park Neighbors
- Blue Bear School of Music
- City and County of San Francisco
- Dolphin Club
- Family Winemakers of California
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region IX
- The Fisherman's Wharf Restaurant Association
- Fort Mason Center
- Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD)
- The Long Now Foundation
- Marina Community Association
- Presidio Environmental Council
- Red and White Fleet
- San Francisco Bicycle Advisory Committee
- San Francisco Maritime National Park Association
- San Francisco Department of Parks and Recreation
- San Francisco Tour Guide Guild
- South End Rowing Club

In sum, the most common comment was the preference to keep the embarkation site within Fisherman's Wharf and the Embarcadero to support existing businesses and tourism. The second most common comment was related to perceived negative effects of locating the embarkation site at Fort Mason. A number of commenters also expressed concern over perceived negative effects of ferry traffic on safety and water quality in Aquatic Park should the facility be located at Fort Mason. Summaries of major comments are below.

Comments on the Proposed Project and Alternatives

Overall, a number of commenters requested that NPS continue to operate the ferry service from Fisherman's Wharf, specifically at Pier 31½. Reasons included supporting the current symbiotic relationship between NPS and local area tourism; better overall access to existing public transportation, parking, and mass transit; closer proximity to other major San Francisco attractions; and capacity of the Fisherman's Wharf area to manage drop-off/pick-up areas for tour groups.

Commenters, including San Francisco Supervisor Mark Farrell, were also largely opposed to locating the embarkation site in Fort Mason, citing expected traffic congestion, lack of available parking, community safety concerns, loss of community character, loss of access for smaller merchants and local events due to congestion in the area, and increased vessel traffic in Aquatic Park. However, several parties voiced support for the Fort Mason alternative and perceived benefits to local businesses.

Fisherman's Wharf

Commenters were concerned about the negative effects to current merchants at Fisherman's Wharf that currently cater to Alcatraz Island visitors if the embarkation site were to be relocated to Fort Mason. In addition, NPS received 16 comments opposing the proposed move to Pier 45 within Fisherman's Wharf. Comments largely focused on:

- **Pier 31½.** Commenters pointed to existing symbiotic connections between NPS's operation and area business that would be compromised if the embarkation site was relocated outside Fisherman's Wharf. Alcatraz Cruises suggested revisions to the concept plans including changes in access (curb alignment, drop off zones) and addition of more ferry docks.
- **Pier 45.** Commenters noted potential rough sea conditions at the site, which could affect operations, and suggested a breakwater would be needed. Commenters also voiced concerns over the proposed Pier 45 location because this alternative would likely displace the Musée Mécanique, a private museum currently housed on Pier 45. In addition, one group noted that the USS *Pampanito* at Berth 45 was not shown in the correct location in project figures and the existing support facility is absent. This group also specified logistical issues with moving the USS *Pampanito* if needed. These facilities would influence where the embarkation site could be located. Red and White Fleet (the current operator at the site) commented on their concern over being displaced.

Fort Mason

Supervisor Farrell, several Fort Mason Center (FMC) resident programs, and numerous neighborhood residents voiced opposition to the proposed Fort Mason alternatives because those commenters believed these alternatives would cause significant transportation and congestion issues, and alter the dynamic of the area from a local neighborhood to a major tourist attraction. Some local merchants as well as event planners that use FMC for special events also commented. Comments largely focused on:

- **Traffic and Noise.** Residents expressed concern over the level of traffic and noise that would accompany an embarkation site at Fort Mason.
- **Parking.** Numerous residents were concerned that current parking capacity was already taxed and could not accommodate additional user groups. Special event representatives claimed current parking levels would not be able to accommodate their events if competing with Alcatraz Island visitors, and therefore questioned whether their events could continue to take place at Fort Mason. Commenters questioned where NPS would locate additional parking because it has been sought previously with no success, although some special events have arranged to use Marina Middle School yard. Parking west of Fort Mason, including lots managed by San Francisco Recreation & Parks, is already in high demand. Overall, this was a significant portion of the comments.
- **F-Line Extension.** Commenters noted that extending the F-Line streetcar service would not alleviate parking and traffic issues because many of the expected users would not originate from central San Francisco. Supervisor Farrell also noted previous environmental analysis that identified significant traffic impacts associated with the F-Line extension. Others wanted to know if NPS would commit to building the F-Line as part of an Alcatraz facility.
- **Tourism.** Merchants were concerned that current businesses catering to the local population would be displaced by shops catering to tourists (i.e., souvenir shops) and that their current shops (Safeway) and local residents would be overwhelmed by visitors to Alcatraz Island.
- **Water Quality.** Residents and local users of Aquatic Park voiced concerns that additional vessel traffic in Aquatic Park would degrade water quality.

A few individuals and organizations supported the move to Fort Mason for the reasons below. Fort Mason Center expressed concerns about impacts to their campus programs; however, were open to discussing possible alternatives.

- NPS’s operation would bring tourists to the area to support local business.
- Fort Mason provides an opportunity for a more authentic park orientation.
- Fort Mason would provide a long-term, permanent location enabling service continuity and infrastructure investment.
- Fort Mason would provide a rent structure that would allow a greater proportion of revenue to reinvest in public facilities.

Sausalito Ferry Option

NPS received a letter from GGBHTD (Golden Gate Ferry) stating that they have sufficient terminal and vessel capacity to expand ferry service between Sausalito and another Bay area terminal. However, they explained that any expansion of service would require further environmental analysis. They voiced concerns regarding introduction of additional private operators at the Sausalito ferry terminal, because they lack control over their schedules and activities. GGBHTD needs to maintain some degree of control over arrivals and departures so that the core Golden Gate Ferry services are not adversely affected. Therefore, they insist that any additional ferry service at this location be provided by GGBHTD.

Additional Alternatives

NPS received specific comments regarding additional project alternatives. The following suggestions were made:

- Fort Mason Access
 - Provide seaside connection (water taxi) from Aquatic Park to Fort Mason
 - Provide F-Line streetcar connection from Fort Mason to Fisherman’s Wharf
- Fort Mason Parking
 - Provide shoreline parking between the Crissy Field Warming Hut and its parking lot, as well as at Fort Point NM
- Pier 45
 - Configure a set of new docks along the pier to permit Red and White Fleet to remain in their current location
- Additional Embarkation Alternatives
 - Pier 39
 - China Basin
- Sausalito Embarkation Site
 - Include buses to Muir Woods

Comments on the Planning Process and Scope of the EIS

As part of public scoping, NPS asked the public to identify any specific impacts that the planning team should study. The most prevalent response was the need to analyze parking and traffic at Fort Mason. NPS also received two focused letters from government agencies.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

FEMA sent a standard NOI response letter requesting that NPS review the current effective countywide Flood Insurance Rate Maps for the City and County of San Francisco. FEMA also identified resources to help NPS adequately analyze flood hazards associated with the proposed project and alternatives.

San Francisco City Department of Parks and Recreation

The San Francisco City Department of Parks and Recreation requested that the following factors be considered in the Draft EIS for the Fort Mason Piers alternatives:

- Wave mitigation measures to protect the East Harbor from the effects of ferries
- Impact of the ferries on access for boaters entering the East Harbor for both berthing and fueling
- Parking needs and management for ferry passengers who arrive by car, both during regular activities and during special events held on the Marina Green
- Traffic and circulation studies of the increased car traffic to ensure continued safe and convenient access to the San Francisco Marina, including Marina Green, and to Moscone Recreation Center at Laguna and Bay

Comments Regarding Specific Impacts

A number of comments requested specific analysis related to perceived negative effects to an existing resource. For example, members of the Dolphin Club (a recreational group located at Aquatic Park) expressed concerns that changes to water quality and safety may affect their swimming events, and requested such effects be studied. The full list of requested environmental impact analysis topics included:

- Air quality
- Water quality and water safety
- Stormwater capacity and controls
- Trash and the ability for the facility to be zero waste

- Contaminated sediments
- Energy usage of vessels
- Bicycle and pedestrian access
- Infrastructure that accommodates new ferry docks at Fort Mason
- Historic resources
- Ferry wake effects on existing marinas in the Marina District
- Climate change
- Light pollution in the Fort Mason area

Need for Concurrent California Environmental Quality Act Analysis

NPS received two comments regarding the need for a concurrent CEQA analysis. Supervisor Farrell and the Marina Community Association (a local non-governmental organization) submitted significant comments with overtones of legal challenges. Comments included:

- By not completing CEQA review, residents of the Marina District will be limited in regards to their opportunity to be heard and intimately involved in the environmental review.
- By excluding the possible choice of Fort Mason from a CEQA review, NPS is placing Marina residents at a disadvantage when compared to other San Francisco neighborhoods. The environmental impact caused by parking and traffic problems will be at least as bad and probably worse at Fort Mason because the Marina District is not yet as commercial a location as the other piers. And while other residents of San Francisco will be able to be heard by the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, Marina residents will be denied that democratic opportunity.
- EISs under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process do not need approval from the San Francisco Planning Commission or the Board of Supervisors. Opponents would need to appeal the results of the EIS to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C., and through the Federal Courts.
- The fact that a project is reviewed under NEPA by a federal agency does not eliminate the responsibility of the City/County to comply with CEQA.
- The Draft EIS should include a section regarding the relationship to other plans and necessary environmental permits to address these comments.



As the nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has the responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering sound use of our land and water resources; protecting our fish, wildlife, and biological diversity; preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places; and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to ensure that their development is in the best interests of all our people by encouraging stewardship and citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.