

From: Susan Schwartz <susanschwa1236@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, May 18, 2025 6:46 AM
To: McNulty, Liza
Subject: Comment on Scope of Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Berkeley Water Transportation Pier Ferry
Attachments: Berkeley Water Transportation Pier Ferry Scoping Comment Schwartz 051725.pdf

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To: Liza McNulty and staff of the San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA)

From: Susan Schwartz, 1236 Oxford St., Berkeley, CA

Please accept and acknowledge receipt of the attached comments on the scope of the Environmental Impact Report for the Berkeley Water Transportation Pier Ferry project.

Thank you.

From: Susan Schwartz
1236 Oxford St.
Berkeley, CA 94709
May 17, 2025

To: Liza McNulty, PE, Project Manager City of Berkeley Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Department
2180 Milvia Street, 3rd Floor Berkeley, California 94704
By Email: lmcnulty@berkeleyca.gov

Re: Scope of Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Berkeley Water Transportation Pier Ferry

Dear Ms. McNulty and staff of the San Francisco Bay Area Water Emergency Transportation Authority (WETA):

This comment addresses environmental impacts involving “Hazards and Hazardous Materials” that the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Berkeley Water Transportation Pier Ferry must address. I write as a long-time resident of Berkeley and general supporter of the ferry system, not representing any group.

The project creates hazard well beyond simple negligence, because all traffic in or out must thread through a single, narrow, half-mile bottleneck, with no alternative or emergency route. This could trap large numbers of people. It also could cut off a substantial portion of Berkeley’s police vehicle fleet, crippling emergency responses.

The project as out lined is expected to draw large and increasing numbers of people and vehicles, at earlier and later hours than now, to a peninsula

- Jutting a half mile into the Bay
- Built of unconsolidated fill supported by rip-rap
- Subject to well documented tsunami and earthquake hazard
- In the face of sea-level rise reasonably likely to reach 5’ by 2100 (the standard the East Bay Regional Park District is using for the North Basin Strip and Virginia Extension just north).
- with **only one exit or access route: low-lying University Avenue.**

This is reckless. **The project could easily work against its stated objective “Provide options for emergency response and transportation services in case of an emergency**, such as natural or human-caused event that disables roads, other transit, bridges, and/or tunnels.” Significant numbers of people in new hotels, restaurants, and other commercial activities envisioned, as well as ferry users and those using the area’s parks now, could easily be trapped, injured, or killed. The ferry, too small for crowds or emergency vehicles, could not help them.

This danger must be considered in terms of both immediate impacts of the pier and ferry and cumulative impacts of the City of Berkeley’s Waterfront Specific Plan (WSP). The WSP envisions commercial redevelopment of the Marina area with multiple hotels and restaurants. It was begun in conjunction with the ferry/pier plan and is being prepared in tandem, with approval hoped for in 2026. The WSP relies on the ferry as a draw -- Meetings and presentations made clear

that the existing hotel struggles due to distance from other Berkeley centers of interest; the ferry may attract San Francisco visitors looking for lower-cost accommodation. **Bringing significantly more people to this vulnerable spot at late hours and overnight will make escape more confusing and difficult.** .

University Avenue now backs up and moves at a crawl when public events draw heavy traffic.

In an earthquake, tsunami warning (such as recently occurred), or actual tsunami, drivers trying to escape would likely cross the medians into oncoming lanes, blocking emergency vehicles. **An earthquake that ruptures pavement or creates a sink, or a single stall or wreck, could compound disaster. Since much of Berkeley's police fleet is kept at the Marina, it might not be able to get out or even be reached.**

As sea-level rise and climate change continue, risk will increase. The strip of land south of University is eroding rapidly in several areas. Wind and storm already wash large logs and wrack to the base of the low rise to the Bay Trail spur and University Avenue (see photo below and link above). Large, windy, rainy storms are increasing due to climate change. The resulting high tides and effective sea-level rise, often called storm surge, will in the foreseeable future wash spray or even waves onto trail and road.



Above; Debris washed close to Bay Trail spur south of University by December 8680 storm. Logs washed close to the trail from storms in previous years remain;

Alternative emergency routes, as well as the shoreline strip south of University Avenue's right of way, are part of McLaughlin Eastshore State Park. **The City of Berkeley is in early stages of discussing alternative emergency access routes with the East Bay Regional Parks District,** which administers the park.

The most obvious alternative access is the old Virginia Extension dump road, edging a steep drop to the Bay. This road already floods at normal high tides. Growing erosion notches its edge, and boulders that armor the steep slope have visibly moved downhill (see photos below and the linked

slide show). The Park District has also envisioned an inland route through the habitat area known as the Meadow. Given present fiscal realities, complex and time-consuming permitting, and absence of engineering studies, **this current EIR, and the ferry project, cannot rely on promised coordination with other agencies.**



Above: Gouges and erosion along Virginia Extension

This EIR and project should not proceed without:

- Unqualified, documented assurance from its Fire Department, other staff, and respected regional and state experts that no alternative entry and exit is needed, or
- **Clear, fully permitted plans for such a route, financed as part of the project and scheduled for simultaneous or earlier construction as part of the project.**

I look forward to seeing these matters adequately addressed in the Environmental Impact Report. Please acknowledge receipt of this comment.

Sincerely,

Susan Schwartz

1236 Oxford St., Berkeley, CA 94709