

Taking a Toll on Eden

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Settlers came by wagon train from Kentucky to the east bay in 1850. They named their new home Eden, and it surely was, with pretty hills, rich soil, and good weather. Eden Township appears on maps of Alameda County in 1857. In terms of modern boundaries, Eden is roughly from I-580 south to the Dumbarton bridge, and from the shoreline east across the bay hills almost to I-680.

Eden is the geographic center of the bay. Like the hub of a wagon wheel connected to the rim by spokes, Eden has more numbered interstates (four) and more bridges (two) than any other place on the bay. This central location makes Eden everyone's drive-through country.

The drive-through traffic takes a toll on Eden. I-880 originally had a border of trees so broad the interstate seemed to be in a forest. Trees that did not die from air pollution were bulldozed to widen the roadway leaving space only for concrete sound walls. The noise pollution is around the clock. To say the free-ways and bridges are congested does not do justice to the word. Traffic spills onto local streets looking for shortcuts and causing blocks-long backups at major intersections.

In spite of the central location, Eden is not a destination. Corporate offices do not line the freeways, and startups do not fill warehouses along the bay. The bayshore is a sore point. Much is a federal preserve of mudflats important to birds. The relatively small, unpreserved shoreline has an ugly power plant, which was inexplicably permitted by the local Assemblyman when he was a city councilman. The smoke stacks keep away new housing and high-tech businesses.

Because the people of Eden do not get high-tech jobs, they earn the lowest

incomes of Southern Alameda County. For example, the median annual household income is \$61k in the Hayward School District of the Eden area, which is half the \$118k in the Pleasanton School District of the Amador Valley. The local Congressman called it shameful Eden does not have schools like he attended in the valley. He sponsored legislation to assist businesses, but the basic problem is better education, which would prepare Eden children for higher-paying jobs.

The main resource Eden does have is location. It is time to use Eden's status as drive-through country to benefit Eden. For example, bay area governments drew \$93 million from the Hayward bridge to San Mateo in 2014. That money should stay in Eden and go to Hayward schools. It could almost double the instructional budget of the school district, which is mostly salaries. Hayward could pay to hire the best teachers in the bay area, and they could earn enough to buy homes here.

The state is building toll roads everywhere. All the cities with toll roads in their backyards would easily support a referendum to spend the tolls on local schools. The vote would not even be close, because tolls are collected anyway, so there is no increased cost to drivers. A referendum is a constitutional amendment, which supersedes word games about whether tolls are taxes or fees and where they can be spent. Presently the toll money is spent God-knows-where, but I think, God would prefer to spend it in Eden.