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To: Jeffery Bingham, Parsons Transportation Group

From: Karla Marlow and Joe Drennan, GANDA

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**RE: Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Task B3-10b
Natural Resources Technical Memorandum**

Garcia and Associates (GANDA) was contracted by Parsons Transportation Group (Parsons) to conduct a technical study of natural resources for the Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project in San Francisco, California. The focus of this study was to identify potential impacts to natural resources as a result of the project. This technical memorandum summarizes the existing conditions of natural resources in the BRT project area and identifies potential impacts to those resources including vegetation, wildlife, and waterways in the proposed project area.

Methods

Prior to conducting a field survey of the project area, we reviewed the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB; CDFG 2007) and the California Native Plant Society (CNPS 2007) Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants for occurrence records of special status species and habitats in the project area. Special-status species are plants and animals that are legally protected under the state and/or federal Endangered Species Acts or other regulations, as well as other species that are considered rare enough by the scientific community and trustee agencies to warrant special consideration, particularly with regard to protection of isolated populations, nesting or denning locations, communal roosts, and other essential habitat. Special-status classifications include species that are:

- Listed (rare, threatened, or endangered) and candidate species for listing by the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG);
- Listed (threatened or endangered) and candidate species for listing by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS);

- Species considered to be rare or endangered under the conditions of Section 15380 of the CEQA Guidelines, such as those identified on lists 1A, 1B, and 2 in the Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California by the CNPS;

Other species that are possibly considered sensitive or of special concern due to limited distribution or lack of adequate information to permit listing or rejection for state or federal status, include those on lists 3 and 4 in the CNPS Inventory or identified as animal “Species of Special Concern” by the CDFG. Species of Special Concern have no legal protective status under the state Endangered Species Act, but are of concern to the CDFG because of severe decline in breeding populations in California.

In addition to these state and federal regulations, the City and County of San Francisco has tree protection regulations that cover street trees, significant trees and landmark trees. Removal of any of these requires a permit (SFGOV 2006). The Landmark Tree Ordinance provides protection for specific trees that are exceptional due to their size, age or quality. More recently, legislation has been added to protect significant trees, a designation that includes protection for trees on private property (SFDPW 2006a).

The CNDDDB review included the San Francisco north 7.5-minute USGS quadrangle map that encompasses the project area. We also reviewed the USFWS database of threatened and endangered species for San Francisco County (USFWS 2008). Database records were evaluated and supplemented by our professional opinion based on previous biological surveys conducted in the project vicinity. Other relevant literature and web pages reviewed include: Van Ness Avenue BRT informational web page (SFCTA 2007a), Van Ness Avenue BRT Fact Sheet (SFCTA 2007b), Van Ness Avenue BRT Feasibility Study (SFCTA 2006), the San Francisco General Plan (SFGOV 2007), Van Ness Avenue Enhancements Project (SFDPW 2007), Landmark Tree Ordinance (SFDPW 2006b), Port of San Francisco Construction Storm Water Permits and Procedures (SFGOV 2004), and Construction Site Runoff Prevention Procedures (SFPUC 2007).

In addition to background review, a survey of the project area was conducted on November 13, 2007 by GANDA biologist Karla Marlow. During the survey, the entire project was traversed on foot and notes were recorded on the habitats types and other natural features observed in the project area. An additional survey was conducted on June 10, 2009 by GANDA biologists Joe Drennan and Marina Riviuccio. The purpose of this survey was to assess an extension of the route from Lombard Street to North Point Street.

Results

Existing conditions

The project area is a busy transportation artery of San Francisco that extends north and south on Van Ness Avenue from North Point Street at the north end to Mission Street at the south end. The total distance is approximately 2.2 miles. Van Ness Avenue also serves as State Route 101 connecting freeways at both the north and south. The project is crossed by 32 major streets that run east and west, each with traffic lights and pedestrian crosswalks. Van Ness Avenue is lined with buildings that include residential and commercial properties, as well as churches, theatres,

and San Francisco City Hall. Automobile, bus, and pedestrian traffic is heavy throughout the project corridor.

Vegetation

The Van Ness Avenue corridor is wholly developed with little or no indigenous vegetation. Vegetation consists of ornamental trees and shrubs planted along the sidewalks and within the median strip. There are no parks or greenways within the project area. There are six blocks that lack a landscaped median. Landscaped areas along the median corridor and sidewalks have been planted with a variety of trees and shrubs installed as part of the Van Ness Avenue Enhancements Project (SFDPW 2007). Most of these plantings feature ornamental species not native to California such as Eucalyptus trees including Desert Gum (*Eucalyptus rudis*), Silver Dollar Gum (*Eucalyptus polyanthemus*) and Beautiful Leaf Eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus calophylla*). Other planted species include Linden (*Tilia* sp.) and London Plane Tree (*Platanus x acerifolia*). Plantings along the median are mostly colorful, hearty plants such as Lily of the Nile (*Agapanthus* sp.) and other ornamental varieties (SFGOV 2007).

On March 14, 2006, a 17-foot Cork Oak (*Quercus suber*) was planted on the median at the intersection of Jackson Street and Van Ness as part of an Arbor Day celebration. The tree was dedicated to civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks and is considered a significant tree protected under the Landmark Tree Ordinance (SFDPW 2006b).

Wildlife

Planted trees in landscaped areas can provide marginal suitable refuge for several bird species during seasonal nesting and migration periods. Developed areas with landscaped vegetation can provide habitat for some wildlife species such as Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), house finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), Brewer's blackbird (*Euphagus cyanocephalus*), mourning dove (*Zenaida macroura*) and American crow (*Corvus branchyrhyncos*). Additionally, several raptor species such as red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) and peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) are known to occur within the city limits. These raptors may use building and trees for perches while foraging for Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*), an abundant prey species in the city.

A search of the CNDDDB database for the San Francisco north 7.5 minute quadrangle map provided a list of 12 special-status animals. None of the animals reported are known to occur within or near the project area. Of the 12 records reported, only two monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) overwintering sites are known to occur within a mile of the project. One site at Telegraph Hill and another near Fort Mason are the nearest occurrences, but are outside the project area (Figure 1).

Other special-status animal records reported by the CNDDDB include California red-legged frog (*Rana aurora draytonii*), western pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*), and American badger (*Taxidea taxus*). All of these records are located in Golden Gate Park and are more than 1.5 miles from the project area (Figure 1).

Raptors are common in San Francisco and in the Van Ness BRT project area. Peregrine falcons have been regularly observed perched on the CSAA building located at 100 Van Ness Avenue since the mid to late 1980s (personal communication, David Gregoire, Research Associate with the Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group, 1/16/08). More recently, they have been observed (and photographed) at City Hall, in addition to the CSAA building at 100 Van Ness Avenue (see Glenn Nevill Photography <http://www.raptor-gallery.com/01-01-08/index.htm>). The peregrine falcon is a California state endangered species, and until 1999 was considered endangered under the Federal Endangered Species Act. There is no evidence that peregrine falcons or other raptors have nested on these building; although peregrine are known to nest on buildings in urban settings (e.g. the PG&E building at 201 Mission). Although peregrine falcons and other raptors are likely to be present in the project area; the project is not likely to have any direct or indirect effects on these species, due to the limited nature of proposed construction which will be confined to the street and sidewalk area.

Waterways

There are no wetlands, seasonal or perennial watercourses, or riparian areas within the project area. However, the Van Ness Avenue corridor is considered a major storm water catch basin in San Francisco. Van Ness Avenue crosses numerous storm drains between Mission and Lombard streets. Within the corridor, storm drains are located on corners of every intersection, always at curbside, and are all equally important in capturing rainwater for drainage into the city's sewer system (personal communication, Ken Sin, SFDPW, 12/17/07). As part of the Port of San Francisco's Storm Water Management Program, 'No Dumping' markers are imbedded in concrete adjacent to many storm drains along Van Ness Avenue.

In addition to its own storm water management program, the City of San Francisco is required by Federal, State, and local laws to implement programs that reduce the discharge of pollutants to the local storm drain system (SFPUC 2007).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Van Ness BRT project area has no special status biological resources that could be impacted by the project. There are no wildlife or plant species or protected habitats within the project area. However, median and sidewalk vegetation within the construction zone provides potential habitat for nesting birds. Disturbance to any active nests can be avoided or minimized by conducting pre-construction surveys for nesting birds and/or trimming or removing vegetation during the non-nesting season (September 1 to January 31).

Waterways in the project area include only storm drains that fall under the City of San Francisco jurisdiction. Since runoff from construction projects creates a major source of pollution, developments such as the Van Ness BRT will likely be subject to certain requirements to avoid runoff into drainage systems. Requirements can vary, but permitting may be necessary if a project involves clearing, grading, or excavation that causes soil disturbance on one or more acres (SFDPW 2007). Development of a stormwater pollution prevention plan (SWPPP), plan review, stormwater treatment measures, runoff monitoring, and increased site inspections may be required. Regulations require the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs), construction methods used to keep pollutants out of sewage treatment system and sensitive local water bodies

(SFPUC 2007).

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Personal Communications:

David Gregoire. Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Group. Phone conversation on January 16, 2008 with Joe Drennan regarding historic raptor observations in San Francisco.

Ken Sin. Department of Public Works. Conversation with Karla Marlow on December 17, 2007.



Figure 1. Van Ness Bus Rapid Transit CNDDDB Occurrences. San Francisco County, California

Wildlife Occurrence

-  American badger
-  monarch butterfly
-  western pond turtle,
-  California red-legged frog

