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**THE TOURIST DESTINATION FROM HELL: AN EXPLORATION OF THE
MULTI-JURISTICIONAL SET-UP OF VISTA POINT PARKING LOT.**

by
GENNA D. GORES

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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Abstract

The Golden Gate Bridge, and the surrounding national parks, are one of the most iconic tourist destinations in the world. Although this area is idyllic in many ways, its underlying governmental set-up creates traffic problems on the US-101 highway that angers tourists and commuters alike. One piece of land that exacerbates the increasing congestion on this section of US-101 is the Vista Point parking lot that is just North of the Golden Gate Bridge. This parking lot's entrance is just off of the Northbound side of US-101, and during summer and holiday weekends cars will queue onto the freeway completely stopping the right-most lane. Vista Point presents a complex traffic problem to solve because of the multiple layers of overlapping governmental jurisdictions that actually govern this parking lot. Research for this thesis consists of 16 personal interviews with stakeholders involved in solving this congestion issue, and relevant studies and background information on all the political actors interviewed. This research results in an exploration of how these agencies work together to communally solve a traffic issue, and where disconnects occur during the overall planning process of Vista Point.

Keywords: Golden Gate Bridge, Congestion, Traffic, Regional Politics, Transportation.

Introduction

The Golden Gate Bridge stands as one of the most iconic landmarks in existence. The bright red suspension bridge is universally recognizable, and appears to be a perfectly maintained monument. However, the fantastical iconography and photographic documentation that contribute to its renown do not aptly represent the reality of the bridge's dysfunction. The reality is that the 1.7-mile span is one of increasing traffic and jurisdictional issues. Beyond being a stunning backdrop for hundreds of thousands of pictures, the Golden Gate Bridge is also a major traffic corridor for commuters, tourists, and travelers alike. The bridge at maximum capacity, the number of cars that can travel along the bridge before vehicles experience slowdowns below the speed limit, is around 9,000 total vehicles on the bridge each hour.¹ Once the number of vehicles on the road exceeds this maximum capacity, the bridge experiences congestion. From 2015 to 2017 weekend traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge increased immensely, and during busier weekends as many as 142,000 vehicles crossed the bridge on a single day. This Thesis addresses the difficulty of mitigating congestion on the Golden Gate Bridge; more specifically the problems that arise when autonomous government agencies need to coordinate and solve regional traffic issues at the local level, but transportation system decisions require input and permission from state level agencies.

One area that exacerbates the increased congestion on the Golden Gate Bridge, is a popular weekend tourist destination, Vista Point parking lot. This parking lot is relatively small, considering that it only has 125 parking spaces, and on average 265 vehicles enter the parking lot every hour between 10:00 AM-6:00 PM on a summer

¹ Joe Fitzgerald Rodriguez on September 26, 2016 1:00 am. "Despite efforts, Golden Gate Bridge traffic may be unsolvable." The San Francisco Examiner. September 26, 2016. Accessed December 06, 2017. <http://www.sfexaminer.com/despite-efforts-golden-gate-bridge-traffic-may-unsolvable/>.

weekend, which causes around 20 vehicles to queue up at a time waiting to enter.² This causes visible backups on the Golden Gate Bridge, only further increasing congestion. While solutions to this problem appear simple—close the parking lot, install an intelligent transportation system indicating the number of parking spaces available, establish a shuttle system, etc.—the current overlapping political structure that governs the parking lot adds layers of complexity that demonstrate the overarching challenges that come with intergovernmental coordination on any issue, but especially the transportation/land use nexus within the Golden Gate area.

The backups that occur from the Vista Point parking lot directly affect traffic flow on the Golden Gate Bridge, which makes it an issue the Bridge's management must address and thus implies to the public that this is solely the Bridge's responsibility.³ The Golden Gate Bridge is managed and maintained by the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD), a designated special district. Their jurisdiction only includes the Bridge itself and the toll plaza, which does not include Vista Point. When a transportation or traffic problem affects their part of the Highway US-101 corridor they have to work in collaboration with anywhere from one to seven or eight other agencies and stakeholders, depending on the nature and location of the problem. When addressing these other jurisdictional entities, in order to solve problems related to congestion, the GGBHTD does not have a set protocol or clear hierarchy. In regard to Vista Point, GGBHTD are not the managing agency, but still have a vested interest in solving the congestion issue the parking lot creates. Overall, this thesis hypothesizes that

² Mitchell, Chris, and Darren Brown. *Vista Point Transportation Study-Data Collection Summary*. Transportation Study. San Francisco, CA: Fehr & Peers, 2017. 19.

³ "Interview with Priya Clemens." Telephone interview by author. October 23, 2017.

the Vista Point parking lot exemplifies a bigger issue: that regions with multiple levels of governmental jurisdiction lead to dysfunctional power dynamics that creates pervasive bystander effect, and to solve future congestion in the Golden Gate Area clear lines of responsibility need to be established, specifically California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) acknowledging that this section of the US-101 corridor is under their jurisdictional responsibility.

Road Map

Part I of the thesis lays out the necessary historical and institutional background to exemplify the jurisdictional power dynamics and problems that led to the traffic problem on the Golden Gate Bridge, and how various factors in the governmental set up of the Golden Gate Bridge influence solutions to this congestion. In Part I, I provide an introduction into the current congestion problem in the Bay Area, which indicates that the issue at Vista Point is not isolated to just the Golden Gate Bridge. After I go into the brief history on the development of the GGBHTD, and how its designation as a special district directly affects the handling of the modern-day problems on and around the Golden Gate Bridge. Taking information from borrowed literature, I will also lay out the benefits and disadvantages of special districts, and how this designation gives us insight into why the Golden Gate Bridge's current governmental structure functions the way it does. The historical analysis presents that the prevalence of overlapping jurisdictions plays an intricate role in traffic planning in the Golden Gate Area. I identify primary actors involved in decision making, and where overlapping interests and stakes in the Golden Gate area create disjointed planning and traffic mitigation decisions. In the penultimate

section of Part I, I provide relevant details about the Vista Point parking lot, a contemporary traffic problem, and how the multiple levels of jurisdiction play a role in making a seemingly simple problem—from the outside—much more complex. Finally, I will present the study conducted for Vista Point with the goal of demonstrating the work already done to solve this issue, and set up how the overlapping jurisdictions worked together while conducting this study.

In Part II, I will explore the overarching question: how do multiple, overlapping governmental bodies identify, study, and solve a traffic problem? Because there are a multitude of stakeholders involved in decision making, I identify many of the political actors—both public and private. I interviewed representatives from each of these stakeholders: Caltrans, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, The California Highway Patrol, The Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, The Presidio Trust, Various District Supervisors, Transportation Authority of Marin, community organizers, and nonprofit interests. During these interviews, I emphasized the decision-making process, in regard to the focused traffic issue—Vista Point parking lot—analyzed in Part I. I focused on the development of the working group created for Vista Point, and the group’s collaborative work to solve the traffic problem, and then unpacked the interviews to string together the narrative that came after the dissolution of the aforementioned working group. In section II, I gathered opinions on whether the governmental set up of the Golden Gate Bridge Highway, and Transportation District is advantageous or not to greater regional planning in the Bay Area in comparison to Caltrans. Finally, I analyze and evaluate the qualitative data gathered through these field interviews, and attempt to explain the role, or lack thereof, of Caltrans.

Finally, in Part III, I will explain the responsibility of Caltrans in solving the congestion present at Vista Point, and how their role is integral to the process of managing the multi-jurisdictional area. Following this section, I will present various recommendations to help alleviate the current problems of traffic issues on the Golden Gate Bridge analyzed in Part I and Part II. These recommendations will include tangible solutions to the traffic problem that Caltrans suggested in their Vista Point report. Finally, I will conclude this thesis by addressing further research needed and the importance of defining power dynamics when multiple agencies have an interest over one piece of land.

Part I

Section I: Rising Congestion Problems in the Bay Area

The number of drivers is increasing in the Bay Area, California, and problems like Vista Point, are having greater effects on the flow of traffic than ever before. In 2015, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) released data that showed congestion and traffic increased in the greater Bay Area, and noted that across the region congestion delays—defined as time spent in traffic moving 35 miles per hour or less—increased 22 percent from 2014 to 2015 and 70 percent from 2010.⁴ This increase in cars and congestion on the road can be directly attributed to the recent economic success in the Bay Area. In San Francisco alone, from 2011 to 2015 the city added 101,451 jobs to the labor force, and the population grew from approximately 813,000 to almost 865,000

⁴ Rentschler, Randy . "Fresh Data on Bay Area's Vital Signs Show Big Jump in Freeway Congestion for 2015 | News." Metropolitan Transportation Commission. Accessed December 06, 2017.

people.^{5,6} This increase in jobs brought people to the Bay Area, and in 2010 the population in the Bay Area was approximately seven million people and at the end of 2015 the population increased to 7.6 million people.^{7,8} This type of fast growth is beneficial economically, but overall puts more commuters on the road without sufficient time to update and improve infrastructure.

With a booming economy, increasing population, and the average Bay Area commute time jumping from 24 minutes in 1980 to 31 minutes in 2015, clearly congestion is a region wide problem.⁹ Beyond more commuters, the Golden Gate area also suffers the consequences of increased tourism—the number of visitors to San Francisco increased 6.5 percent between 2013-2014.¹⁰ This increase in tourists added a new peak traffic time during weekend afternoon that was unprecedented, and planners have yet to study the new traffic patterns.

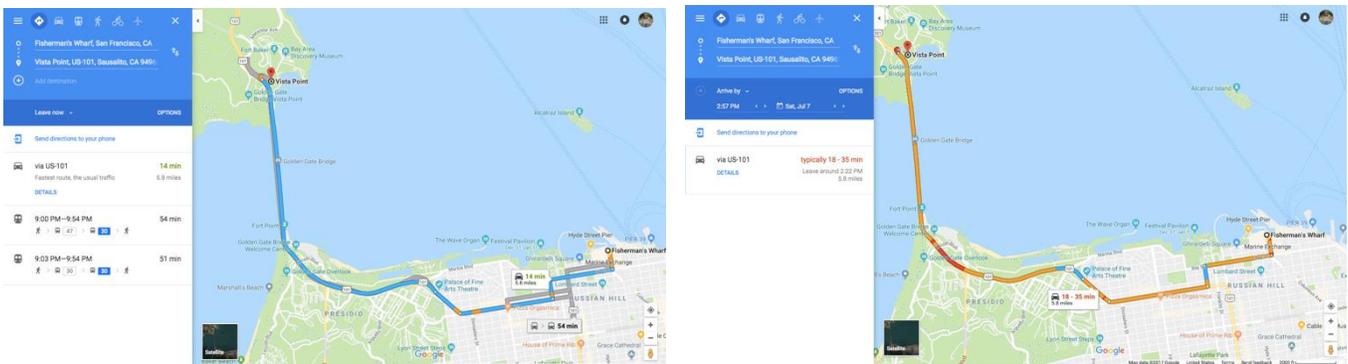


Figure 1. Commute from a common tourist destination to Vista Point during a non-peak hour and the new weekend peak hours. Source: Google Maps

⁵ Knight, Heather. "5 years of Ed Lee: How San Francisco has changed under the mayor." San Francisco Chronicle. October 09, 2015. Accessed December 06, 2017. <http://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/5-years-of-Ed-Lee-How-San-Francisco-has-changed-6559790.php>.

⁶ American Community Survey. Age and Sex. 2015. Raw data. San Francisco County, San Francisco.

⁷ Metropolitan Transportation Commission. San Francisco Bay Area Census. 2010. Raw data. San Francisco County, San Francisco.

⁸ Rentschler, Fresh Data on Bay Area's Vital Signs

⁹ "Commute Time." Commute Time | Vital Signs. September 2017. Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://www.vital signs.mtc.ca.gov/commute-time>.

¹⁰ "Golden Gate Boom: San Francisco Tourism Hitting Historic Levels." TravelPulse. April 24, 2015. Accessed December 07, 2017. <https://www.travelpulse.com/news/destinations/golden-gate-boom-san-francisco-tourism-hitting-historic-levels.html>.

The Golden Gate Bridge, and the surrounding area, faces increasing commuter and tourism congestion. The current governmental structure adds a level of complexity to solving this problem that many other bridges, freeways, and highways in the Bay Area do not have. The GGBHTD is set up as a special district means their jurisdictional reach is very localized. With such a regional traffic problem occurring in the Bay Area, the strains and consequences that stem from its designation as a special district are very clear for the Golden Gate Bridge. As the Bay Area continues to grow, so will highway corridor problems, and the GGBHTD will soon grow out of their financial and physical scope to solve problems that are outside of their jurisdiction.

Section II: The Golden Gate Bridge's Development as a Special District

In 1923, the conversations about a bridge connecting the North and South side of the Golden Gate started to arise, and from the beginning the bridge would be maintained and managed by a special district.¹¹ The initial idea of the Golden Gate Bridge came from local businessman who wanted to expand public enterprise to areas north of San Francisco, and during a time when regional planning and government did not exist in California or the Bay Area a special district was “an obvious, quick, and easy way to address major problems that existing local governments did not have the capacity or political will to take on themselves.”¹² Beyond the benefit of expediency that came with

¹¹ Dyble, Louise Nelson. *Paying the toll local power, regional politics, and the Golden Gate Bridge*. Philadelphia (Pa.): University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. Page 7.

¹² *Ibid*, 7

developing the Golden Gate Bridge as a special district, special districts are also public agencies that are run like businesses. They are autonomous government agencies that are run through a board and a general manager that can independently make decisions and maintain their own finances, with the hope that they will emulate the private sector allowing the agency to reap the benefits of a business.¹³ The GGBHTD was and still is the only bridge span run by a special district in the Bay Area, and this structure allows the Bridge a significant amount of independence. But the designation forces the bridge to walk the fine line between a private enterprise and a public entity.

The set-up of the GGBHTD mimics a privately-owned corporation. The law creating the GGBHTD says that the district will be run and maintained by a Board of Supervisors, and the representatives—the number determined by population size—are from the various counties that benefit from the connection the bridge creates.¹⁴ The next level down is the General manager who is appointed by the Board of Supervisors and manages bridge operations.¹⁵ Even though the GGBHTD is a localized entity they still maintain in their mission to “provide safe and reliable operation, maintenance and enhancement of the Golden Gate Bridge and to provide transportation services, as resources allow, for customers within the US-101 Golden Gate Corridor.”¹⁶ They are locally focused, but overall they serve as a public servant to help maintain, run, and handle congestion on US-101.

¹³ Ibid, Page 4-5

¹⁴ **The Commonwealth Club of California “The Golden Gate Bridge” (pg. 296)**

¹⁵ “Meetings.” Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District. Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://goldengate.org/board/meetings.php>.

¹⁶ “Mission Statement.” Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District. Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://goldengate.org/organization/mission.php>.

The fact that the Golden Gate Bridge is maintained by a special district is beneficial in many ways. During the interview process, many of the representatives discussed how the GGBHTD, when facing problems in their own jurisdiction, is very nimble, fast moving, and does not encounter the same bureaucratic obstacles that many other regionally focused agencies face. The District is financially independent, which means that resource allocation is simple. At the same time, for financial support they solely depend on, “[their own] operations (bridge tolls and transit fares), supplemented by government grant programs, investments and capital contributions, along with limited revenue programs such as transit advertising, concessions, and leases.”¹⁷ The GGBHTD has a small budget, around \$210.7 million in the 2016/2017 fiscal year, with limited access to more money from the government.¹⁸ According to Molly Graham at Transportation Authority of Marin, “bridge and roadway maintenance is completely in [the GGBHTD’s] control but their transit system [Golden Gate Transit] is more riddled with other bureaucratic systems.”¹⁹ This same issue occurs once they leave their land jurisdiction—the strengths that come with their set up as a special district are negated because the direct channels and protocols, to work with other agencies to solve problems are not in place. While the Bridge functions efficiently in their own district, as the highways expanded around them, development occurred in the surrounding area, and more agencies sprouted around the region—complexity and jurisdictional power issues ensued. Now with the district facing increasing corridor issues, their designation as a

¹⁷ United States. Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District. Office of the Auditor–Controller. *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report*. By Joseph M. Wire. San Francisco, California: Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, 2017/2016. 2.

¹⁸Ibid, Page 2

¹⁹ "Interview with Molly Graham" Telephone interview by author. October 18, 2017.

localized, special district makes it more difficult to address more regional problems financially and politically.

Section III: Relevant Details about Vista Point Parking Lot

The Vista Point parking lot is about a mile North of the Golden Gate Bridge lies just outside of the District's authority. This parking lot exemplifies the muddled power dynamic that the GGBHTD faces when dealing with its sister agencies and stakeholders. As stated before, Vista Point parking lot is a popular tourist destination with fantastic views of the San Francisco Bay and skyline. While this is a small piece of land, any change to this parking lot affects a plethora of agencies and stakeholders.²⁰



Figure 2. Google Image of the Vista Point Parking lot and the North Gate of the Golden Gate Bridge. Source: Google Maps

This parking lot notoriously causes a visible choke point on the Golden Gate Bridge. Because the entrance to this lot is directly off the northbound US-101 N freeway, when the lot is full, cars will queue up onto the active freeway while waiting for a

²⁰ Prado, Mark. "Vista Point weekend closures to continue through the month." *Marin Independent Journal* , September 8, 2017. Accessed December 7, 2017. <http://www.marinij.com/article/NO/20170908/NEWS/170909789>.

parking spot. When drivers pass by they can literally see the stopped traffic on the furthest right lane of northbound US-101 N. This, in combination with the freeway exit Alexander Ave., just north of the parking lot, can cause congestion along the entire northbound side of the Golden Gate Bridge extending back onto San Francisco streets.²¹ According to the Bridge Patrol captain, Lisa Locati, this parking lot has been a problem for the past forty years of her career and with the uptick of cars –growing commuters and tourists destined for the Marin Headlands and Sausalito—over the past few years the problem is only keeps getting worse.²²

What makes this parking lot interesting, governmentally, is that it is technically designated as H. Dana Bowers Safety Roadside Rest Area (SRRA). It is maintained and managed by Caltrans, and the land is owned and leased by the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.²³ Even though Vista Point is a rest stop, the parking lot transformed into a tourist hotspot due to its iconic views, and despite the parking lot’s proximity to the bridge, the GGBHTD has no direct control over the area. This poses a challenge because the traffic generated specifically from the Vista Point property—under the ownership and maintenance of Caltrans and GGNRA—directly affects the GGBHTD’s planning, and most of the complaints from drivers about this congestion go directly to the GGBHTD.²⁴

Beyond the direct congestion on the Golden Gate Bridge and in the Marin Headlands, and the management responsibility required by Caltrans, the congestion from this parking lot extends indirectly to many other agencies and stakeholders. It affects

²¹ Mitchell, *Vista Point Transportation Study-Data Collection Summary*, Page 1

²² "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

²³ United States. Caltrans. Caltrans Division of Research, Innovation and System Information. *Managing Parking Congestion at the H. Dana Bowers Safety Roadside Rest Area*. By Jeanne Gorham and Wingate Lew. Oakland : CTC & Associates LLC, 2016. 2.

²⁴ "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017.

operations for the California Highway Patrol (CHP), the Presidio Trust, San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, Transportation Authority of Marin, the City of Sausalito, and Community Members plus their political representatives. From the common observer, this problem should be solved by the Golden Gate Bridge—since it mainly affects their traffic management—but because all these agencies and stakeholders have an interest in the problem, it requires much more coordination than just the GGBHTD closing down the lot.

Section IV: Background on Primary Stakeholders in the Vista Point Working Group

Caltrans

The development of Caltrans began just before the turn of the 20th century when the first local roads were built. At the point in time California began creating agencies to help build, manage, and maintain those roads. Then in 1973 the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) became the agency that unified all “transportation functions under a single department.”²⁵ Caltrans manages 50,000 miles of state-owned highways, freeway lanes, with the mission:

“of providing a safe, sustainable, integrated and efficient transportation system to enhance California’s economy and livability, with six primary programs: Aeronautics, Highway Transportation, Mass Transportation, Transportation Planning, Administration and the Equipment Service Center.”²⁶

The agency has a goal to be an organization that values people and their partners with an emphasis on teamwork and leadership. They want to use this mindset to provide an

²⁵ Caltrans. "Important Events in Caltrans History." California Department of Transportation (Caltrans Title). Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://www.dot.ca.gov/paffairs/timeline.html>.

²⁶ Caltrans. "Get to Know Caltrans." California Department of Transportation (Caltrans Title). Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://www.dot.ca.gov/abouttct.html>.

integrated transportation system that is reliable and accessible for travelers.²⁷ Caltrans is the principal transportation agency in the state, and has many layers of management. The Vista Point parking lot, which is managed and maintained as a rest stop through their agency, is under District 4, which serves Sonoma, Napa, Solano, Marin, San Francisco, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Mateo and Santa Clara.²⁸

While the entirety of Caltrans budget is around \$10.5 billion, this is money for the entire state and includes those 50,000 miles of highway and freeway lanes.²⁹ Caltrans is the most bureaucratic of the stakeholders involved in Vista Point. Not only does the agency have an over-arching director, seven deputy directors, and then 12 other district directors, it is also held accountable to the Governor of California and must get approval from state politicians for major changes and budget proposals.³⁰ This type of accountability adds a complexity to their decision-making process because they must receive approval from many levels of their agency, which can slow down their traffic management. On the other hand, they are the most regionally focused agency and have the most power (due to their designation as a state department of transportation) involved in the Vista Point parking lot issue, which allows them to have the final say in traffic management decisions.

²⁷ Caltrans. "Get to Know Caltrans." California Department of Transportation (Caltrans Title). Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://www.dot.ca.gov/aboutct.html>.

²⁸ Caltrans. "District 4 - Oakland." California Department of Transportation (Caltrans Title). Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://www.dot.ca.gov/d4/>.

²⁹ United States. Caltrans. Legislative Analyst's Office. *The 2015-2016 Budget: Transportation Proposals*. By Jeremy Fraysse and James Hacker. Legislative Analyst's Office. 1-28.

³⁰ *Visio-departmentalorgchart_October2017.vsd*. PDF. Sacramento: State of California Department of Transportation, October 2017.

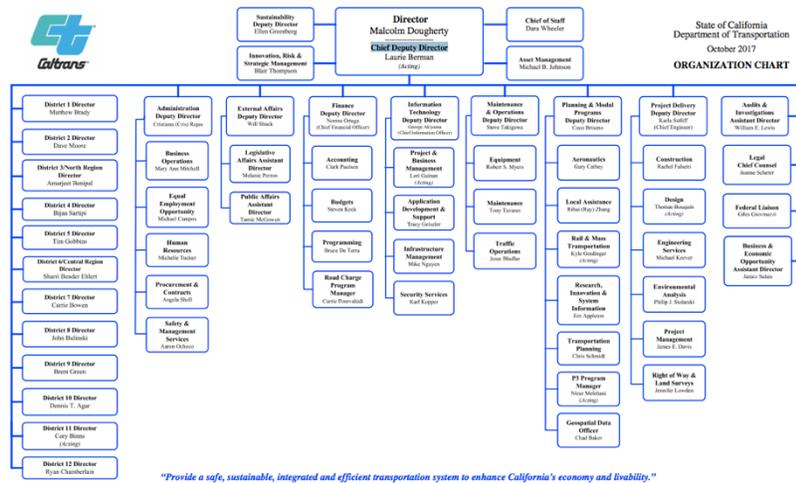


Figure 3. Organizational chart of Caltrans. Source: California Department of Transportation website

CHP

The California Highway Patrol was established in 1929 under a legislative act through the California State Legislature, and they got statewide authority to enforce traffic laws on all county and state highways.³¹ Their operations expanded over the years, and they now have the goal as an agency to “reduce collisions and fatality rates in California.”³² They work under two mission statements:

“The mission of the California Highway Patrol is to provide the highest level of Safety, Service, and Security.” and "the management and regulation of traffic to achieve safe, lawful, and efficient use of the highway transportation system."³³

³¹ California Highway Patrol. "The History of California Highway Patrol." The History of the California Highway Patrol. Accessed December 07, 2017. <https://www.chp.ca.gov/home/about-us/the-history-of-the-california-highway-patrol>.

³² California Highway Patrol. "The Mission of the California Highway Patrol." About Us. Accessed December 07, 2017. <https://www.chp.ca.gov/Home/About-Us>.

³³ California Highway Patrol. "The Mission of the California Highway Patrol." About Us. Accessed December 07, 2017. <https://www.chp.ca.gov/Home/About-Us>.

With this mission in mind, the Golden Gate Division of the CHP has a large stake in the Vista Point Parking lot.³⁴ They are the division that manages and regulates traffic around that area. They do not directly manage the parking lot, but the area of US-101 N that is affected right outside the parking lot falls under their jurisdiction to provide safety and efficient use of the highway.

GGNRA

Originally the Golden Gate National Recreation Area was military land used to station soldiers to keep an eye out on the coast line of the Bay Area. Currently, within their jurisdiction they have a few military operations such as the Coast Guard and a section of the Travis Air Force, but beyond that the land owned by GGNRA is no longer an active military site.³⁵ When the military decided that they had surplus land and wanted to sell off their property, the environmental activists of the 1950s and 1960s pushed for the conservation of the land and open space. In 1972 President Nixon signed An Act to Establish the “Golden Gate National Recreation Area (Public Law 92-589)”, which turned the control of the land to the National Park Service.³⁶

The GGNRA currently manages and maintains Crissy Field, the Presidio, the Marin Headlands, Stinson Beach, Fort Mason, Ocean Beach, Fort Funston, Sweeney Ridge, and Mori Point.³⁷ The park operates under the Federal Department of the Interior’s National Park Service policies and guidelines, and follows the General

³⁴ "Golden Gate Division." California Highway Patrol. Accessed December 07, 2017. <https://www.chp.ca.gov/Find-an-Office/Golden-Gate-Division>.

³⁵ "Parks For The People." National Parks Service. Accessed December 07, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/goga/index.htm>.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ "Press Kit." National Parks Service. Accessed December 07, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/news/presskit.htm>.

Management Plan developed by the Federal Government.³⁸ They also uphold the mission statement that the:

“[GGNRA] is to preserve and enhance the natural, historic, and scenic resources of the lands north and south of the Golden Gate for the education, recreation, and inspiration of people today and in the future. In the spirit of bringing national parks to the people, we reach out to a diverse urban community, promote the richness and breadth of the national park system to many who are experiencing a national park for the first time, and foster broad-based public stewardship through various volunteer and partnership programs.”³⁹

Because this area attracts lots of tourism and travelers, this causes a multitude of transportation issues at the national sites. According to the General Management Plan in 2014, “looking back at the 1980 General Management Plan and where the park is today, there appears to be only one major goal yet to be fully accomplished—the ambitious transportation proposals contained in the document. Lack of funding and jurisdictional issues have hindered their accomplishment.”⁴⁰ This statement exemplifies the fact that the GGNRA faces funding problems, because they must receive it from a federal agency, and that they face similar jurisdictional problems as the Golden Gate Bridge. The minute they exit their jurisdiction they immediately lose decision-making power.

The GGNRA also acknowledged the Vista Point parking lot in their long-range transportation plan. They deemed it an issue of Mobility, Access, Connectivity, Visitor Experience, and Safety.⁴¹ Unlike the Golden Gate Bridge, the GGNRA is not only run by

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ United States. U.S. Department of the Interior. National Park Service *Final General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*. Vol. I. San Francisco, CA: United States Department of the Interior, 2014. 18.

⁴¹ United States. National Park Service. Golden Gate National Recreation Area. *Fehr and Peers/Golden Gate National Recreation Area Long Range Transportation Plan*. 2015. <http://www.fehrandpeers.com/project/golden-gate-national-recreation-area-lrtp/>.

their own department, but their funding and policy come completely from the Federal Government, which is not only subject to its own issues but also constant changes in federal power. Overall their interests lie in making the national parks accessible to all and to preserve the land, and part of their accessibility issues lie in transportation issues. They are a stakeholder in Vista Point because not only do they own the land the parking lot is on, but the traffic in that area directly affects their daily operations as a National Park. Even though they are the property owners, they do not have any over-arching control over the operations of the parking lot.

These agencies are all stakeholders in the Vista Point parking lot, and GGBHTD must work with these agencies and groups when a problem arises outside their jurisdiction. The working group between these agencies is integral. Without collaboration, it slows down the process of problem identification, research, and proposal implementation for congestion issues like Vista Point.

Section V: Fehr & Peers Study for Vista Point

The study conducted for Vista Point, and the surrounding freeway exits, was paid for by the GGNRA and GGBHTD, and carried out by the engineering company, Fehr and Peers.⁴² The study was conducted during Summer of 2016, with constant input from each member of the working group, and finished in January of 2017. The study looked into four different traffic management strategies to help mitigate congestion at Vista Point parking lot, and also the area surrounding the parking lot. Only three management strategies were specifically meant for Vista Point, and they included:

⁴² "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

1. Vista Point 20-minute parking lot: This strategy put a 20-minute time limit on parking spaces in Vista Point, through a changeable message sign, but was not enforced by any authority. Fehr and Peers found that 80% of drivers obeyed the 20-minute limit, and the other 20% stayed longer than 20 minutes. Despite the actual limit working, it did not dramatically improve traffic queueing on the 101-US N.
2. Traffic control at Vista Point: This management idea stationed security officers at the entrance and throughout the parking lot encouraging patrons to move through the lot. This prevented circling, and made sure patrons did not wait for a parking space. This strategy led to shorter queues, but officers stated that “people hated us.” This strategy worked but it is labor intensive and creates animosity between managing officers and drivers.
3. Vista Point closure: The closure means completely closing down the parking lot to all personal vehicles. This option still allows buses, pedestrians, and cyclists to come to the lot, and utilized traffic control officers to manage the on and off-ramps for buses. Closing the parking lot eliminated the queue on the US-101 N.

After the study was conducted Fehr and Peers, with the help of the working group, developed a set of recommendations. They suggested a short-term solution that closed the parking lot on holiday weekends, summer weekends (May to September). They also recommended long-term permanent infrastructure improvements such as posting a 15-minute parking limit sign at the entrance, an intelligent transportation system to alert drivers of parking availability, restriping the lot to improve flow of traffic,

and assessing the possibility of a shuttle service.⁴³ After the conclusion of the study the working group ended too, and the GGBHTD went forward with the short-term recommendation to close the parking lot on holiday weekends.⁴⁴ GGBHTD had the funds and the most interest to keep traffic moving, so they opted to be in charge of the closures. Once these closures were conducted they would assess their success and report back to the working group via email.⁴⁵

Part II

Section I: Data and Methodology

The problems behind Vista Point parking lot are ongoing, and the stakeholders are still working towards a permanent solution.⁴⁶ Due to this being a current issue, I base most of my data and information off of thorough interviews with stakeholders and political actors involved directly or tangentially with the GGBHTD and Vista Point parking lot. Collecting qualitative data from interviews proved to be the best available data source because there are numerous agencies involved with the Vista Point parking lot, and it is critical to gain a multitude of perspectives on this issue to truly understand the nuances of this jurisdictional problem. Also, interviews offered a firsthand look into the planning process that occurred for a parking lot that receives limited public attention.

Trying to sift through the complexities behind the parking lot, I conducted 20 to 45 minute interviews that discussed the process behind trying to solve the traffic issues at Vista Point. During each interview, I inquired about the interviewees' background and

⁴³ Mitchell, *Vista Point Transportation Study-Data Collection Summary*, Whole Document.

⁴⁴ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

⁴⁵ "Interview with Bill Fraass." Telephone interview by author. November 22, 2017.

involvement with Vista Point, their ideal solution, whether their interests were met, information about data collection, and their general thoughts on the GGBHTD set-up as a special district. The selection process for who to interview stemmed from the original list of direct managers and land owners (Caltrans, GGBHTD, GGNRA) of the Vista Point parking lot. From those initial interviews, I was able to gather information about what other agencies, groups, and organizations had a potential stake in the decisions being made about the parking lot. There are many other representatives who could be interviewed for this thesis, but for the scope of this paper I chose to talk to direct actors involved rather than extend to local planning commissions who affect transportation planning in the area. I asked every participant who else I should be in contact with, and from this method I compiled a list of 16 organizations or representative to reach out to and speak with about the processes and challenges of the Vista Point parking lot (listed in the Appendix).

With this qualitative data, I put together the story that this one parking lot tells about the management of the Golden Gate Area, and what it says about land and traffic management with overlapping jurisdictions. The interviews gave me an understanding of the nuances, complexities, and power structures that arose from this traffic problem, and how governmental bodies can work together and collectively act to mitigate traffic.

Section II: Interview Results and Analysis

While conducting these interviews it became clear that Vista Point was more than just a traffic problem, but reflects the fragmentation of governmental authority in the Golden Gate. This fragmentation made the simple problem of Vista Point, which is

outside of the GGBHTD's jurisdiction, much more complex. After interviewing stakeholders and outside perspectives, it is evident that this is a multi-agency/authority problem. While examining the interviews, respondents reflected on their frustration and the pros and cons of the jurisdictional set up of the Golden Gate, and it soon emerged that fragmentation was the biggest inhibitor to a permanent solution. There were clear solutions proposed to solve this parking lot, these being reflected in the working group meetings and Fehr & Peers study, but these solutions were not explored further. This point after the dissolution of the working group meetings, when the GGBHTD tested temporary recommendations, is the moment when a multi-governmental system appears to fall apart.

Results Part I: The Working Group Meetings—A Collaborative Session

With congestion and safety issues occurring on US-101 due to Vista Point, and CHP putting in extra effort to manage this lot on a weekend by weekend basis, their interest to solve this issue pushed them to sponsor a Vista Point working group in the beginning of 2016. The CHP is an objective agency and according to Darren Brown at GGNRA, "They are the lead law enforcement agency that deals with the congestion and management on the bridge and at Vista Point. Because they deal with it on a day-in-day-out basis they stepped in to provide that role... because it was right in their face and they had to respond so often. They were a great agency to lead [the working group]."⁴⁷ The CHP had to deal with the congestion on the ground floor, and thus their interest to fulfill their mission— managing the traffic on US-101—they wanted to eliminate this obvious

⁴⁷ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

choke point on the freeway. According to Robert Mota, Commander of CHP Marin, CHP took on this role because they already spearheaded coalition meetings between many agencies in the Golden Gate Area, and since there are so many agencies at stake over this one parking lot, their preset channels and ability to coordinate these meetings made them an obvious leader.⁴⁸ No interviewee thought that CHP was an unqualified agency to lead these working group meetings, and that in many ways they were an unbiased arbiter for the stakeholders.⁴⁹ At the same time, Mota never saw CHP as having any stake in the planning process, but rather an agency who could bring all interest groups together to work collaboratively with one another.

Even though the CHP has no stake in the planning process, the congestion in that area violated their mission, and they knew that “with so many agencies it’s hard to get everyone together,” and work collaboratively.⁵⁰ They began discussions with Caltrans in 2014 and 2015 to try and address this issue, but did not get anywhere due to Caltrans’ limited interest.⁵¹ CHP wanted to solve the problem because this congestion put a burden on their agency, and since Caltrans was unwilling to work with them on their own, CHP decided to put all stakeholders in the same room.⁵² They determined what agencies to invite to the working group based on vested interests:

Caltrans (Wingate Lew): Caltrans is the manager of the parking lot, and any solution or changes to the area must go through their agency. Also, any closures require a permit through Caltrans.⁵³

⁴⁸ "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017.

⁴⁹"Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

⁵⁰ "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017.

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ "Interview with Wingate Lew." Telephone interview by author. October 3, 2017.

GGNRA (Darren Brown): They are the underlying property owners of the parking lot and that section of US-101. Also, closing Vista Point could potentially cause more traffic in the Marin Headlands—which is under GGNRA’s jurisdiction—because tourists will go look at views of the Golden Gate Bridge there instead.⁵⁴

Presidio Trust (Amy Marshall): Many of the roads managed by the Presidio Trust lead to the Golden Gate Bridge, and 40% to 50% of their roads are used for cut-through traffic—mainly going to the Bridge. Thus, any traffic on the bridge backs up into their jurisdiction.⁵⁵

CHP (Robert Mota): Their officers must manage the traffic on highway US-101, and immediate responses to the congestion caused by Vista Point falls under the management of CHP. Also, they receive criticism from the public about this problem.⁵⁶

Sausalito Police Department (Bill Fraass): The city of Sausalito receives a lot of tourists and there was a concern that changes to the parking lot, which would eliminate a popular tourist destination, would bring more traffic and visitors to Sausalito. This would increase traffic management and control from their police department.⁵⁷

GGBHTD (Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati): The back up from the parking lot extends onto the Golden Gate Bridge, which changes their expected weekend traffic patterns. Also, many citizens believe that the Golden Gate Bridge owns the

⁵⁴ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

⁵⁵ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

⁵⁶ "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017. and "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017.

⁵⁷ "Interview with Bill Fraass." Telephone interview by author. November 22, 2017.

parking lot and this leads to the GGBHTD dealing with most of the public outcry.⁵⁸

The working group met on a monthly basis (or as needed) till midway through 2016, and had the goal to understand every groups' interests and concerns, discuss potential solutions, test out those solutions, and then discuss what worked and what did not. According to all the participants, these meetings were very collaborative and demonstrated team work between the stakeholders. Darren Brown indicated that stakeholders had different thoughts on what the contributing factors and potential solutions were for this congestion and Vista Point, but the main goal for the group was to throw out ideas and work through a collaborative study that appeased everyone's interests—ultimately testing out recommendations that came from the collaborative Fehr & Peers study.⁵⁹ In Brown's interview he believed the objective of the working group was to keep all stakeholders in the loop. He also wanted to make sure the Fehr & Peers study was not just a National Park Service study, but rather a collective effort that allowed all participants to have a say in the final conclusions and recommendations for Vista Point.⁶⁰ This working group helped override the issues that could arise because this land has fragmented jurisdictional control. All the agencies had the opportunity to share their interests and thoughts, and thus solutions could address the consequences that this parking lot cause for all involved stakeholders.

During the working group, the participants collaboratively discussed potential solutions, which led to the study conducted by Fehr & Peers. The study was funded by

⁵⁸ "Interview with Priya Clemens." Telephone interview by author. October 23, 2017.

⁵⁹ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017. / "Interview with Amy Marshall." Telephone interview by author. October 13, 2017.

⁶⁰ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

the GGBHTD and GGNRA, with other stakeholders supplying funds to monitor their jurisdictional areas during the test weekends.⁶¹ Bill Fraass, explained that before every meeting the stakeholders would receive updates on the study to review, and there would be space at the meetings for every participant to comment and share their concerns about the study's results.⁶² Fraass also emphasized that as a secondary stakeholder, he never felt as if one group was more important than another, and every concern and stakeholder was integral to the planning process.⁶³ None of the interviews indicated or alluded to any tension during the working group, and that they all left the study on the same page.⁶⁴ The working group collectively worked together to find temporary solutions, and test them out to see if they actually eliminated congestion from the Golden Gate Bridge and US-101. The issues of multi-level agencies working together did not pose a problem, and all stakeholders seemed fine with GGBHTD and GGNRA taking the lead since they had immediate funds and interest to test temporary solutions.

Results II: Recommendations and Temporary Solutions

This study recommended that the best, short-term and immediate, solution was to close down the parking lot, and the working group decided that the GGBHTD would apply for a permit from Caltrans to close down the parking lot on specific holidays: Thanksgiving, Labor Day, New Years, and Christmas.⁶⁵ With the conclusion of the study and holiday closures agreed upon, the stakeholders dissolved the working group and

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² "Interview with Bill Fraass." Telephone interview by author. November 22, 2017.

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

⁶⁵ "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

communicated via email about important information following the closures.⁶⁶ The group decided to see how the closures played out before investigating a long-term/more permanent solution.⁶⁷ Darren Brown and Lisa Locati did not indicate any issues with Caltrans not leading this closure, which could potentially stem from the speed issue with Caltrans. GGBHTD being a special district means that the minute they have the “okay” to shut down the lot, they can (financially and bureaucratically). Versus if Caltrans took the lead they would have to go through a few more administrative levels and research—taking more time—to actually fund and manage the closures.⁶⁸ GGBHTD wanted immediate relief from this problem, because the congestion directly affected their traffic operations (plus they were receiving political pressure from San Francisco politicians), they were willing to bear the full costs—despite Caltrans being the manager of the lot.⁶⁹

Closing this parking lot required a permit from Caltrans, which the GGBHTD was able to acquire easily—they have the channels to get the permit when need be.⁷⁰ The caveat of the solution, though, was that the bridge had to put in full funding for the closures, and according to Captain Lisa Locati this amounts to about \$20,000 for a Saturday to Sunday closure (due to hiring enforcement on overtime).⁷¹ The GGBHTD conducted their first, fully permitted closure during the holidays in 2016, from December 23, 2016 through January 2, 2017, and these closures eliminated queuing on the Golden Gate Bridge.⁷² Then throughout the summer of 2017 the district saw even worse traffic

⁶⁶ "Interview with Bill Fraass." Telephone interview by author. November 22, 2017.

⁶⁷ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

⁶⁸ "Interview with Wingate Lew." Telephone interview by author. October 3, 2017.

⁶⁹ "Interview with Priya Clemens." Telephone interview by author. October 23, 2017. /"Interview with Angelina Yu." Telephone interview by author. October 13, 2017.

⁷⁰ "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² T. Miss. "Golden Gate Bridge Closes Vista Point & Strauss Plaza Parking Lots Mid-Day for Holidays, Adjusts Rideshare Rules." OurSausalito.com. January 02, 2017. Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://www.oursausalito.com/2016/12/21/golden-gate-bridge-closes-vista-point-strauss-plaza-parking-lots-holidays-adjusts-rideshare-rules.html>.

than the summer of 2016, indicating that the permit for holiday weekends was not enough. The excessive traffic forced the district to follow a non-agreed upon recommendation from the Fehr & Peers study: to conduct closures on all summer weekends (with an extended permit from Caltrans). With this permit, the Bridge was able to close down the parking lot during the weekends of August 2017 through Labor Day 2017. Overall, the unilateral power given to GGBHTD, without the approval of all agencies, is the moment where interviewees mentioned tension rising between the agencies. Vista Point changes and closures affects multiple government agencies, which tried to work collaboratively during the working group, and all of sudden one agency (that does not have full jurisdictional authority) has more power over the parking lot than other agencies.

Results III: Tensions Post Working Group

This extended permit did not go through the same process of collaborative work, and this stray from collective effort caused tension between Caltrans, GGNRA, GGBHTD, and CHP. GGBHTD acted in their best interest, to follow their mission of maintaining traffic flow in their section of US-101, and went ahead and acquired a permit to give themselves full power over closing the parking lot for those very congested summer months.⁷³ According to Robert Mota of CHP, this current solution has unintended consequences and it causes more traffic in the Marin Headlands, which puts unprecedented stress on the GGNRA, the park police, and CHP officers.⁷⁴ For the GGNRA, they chose not to comment directly on the tensions with the GGBHTD's

⁷³ "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

⁷⁴ "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017.

decision. GGNRA did make it clear, though, that they were in the middle of the process of solving this problem and the current status of the parking lot closures does not work in the best interest for all stakeholders.⁷⁵ The District believes, though, that the increase in traffic is not linked to the parking lot closures, and instead attributes the problem to capacity issues that the GGNRA is not addressing.⁷⁶ Lisa Locati pointed out that in the Fehr & Peers study, vehicle distribution during the closures were similar to the baseline weekend, and longer queues in other areas, like the Marin Headlands, could not be attributed to the closures.⁷⁷ The working group agreed to look into how these closures affected the traffic on US-101, and currently no one is conducting follow-up research. Thus, at this point, it is unclear whether the closures negatively affect GGNRA's jurisdictional area.

Currently, no one has followed through on proving these unintended consequences, and so the GGBHTD will continue to conduct closures (since they work for their agency). Even though GGBHTD took the lead on these closures, their designation as a special district means they only have funding for their jurisdiction, which, ultimately, the parking lot is not under.⁷⁸ With this in mind they do not have funding to conduct a study for a permanent solution, which would require more input factors than the Fehr & Peers study.⁷⁹

All the stakeholders interviewed did not believe that these closures were the end of the planning process, and many actors believed a long-term solution like a shuttle or better management of tourists in the Golden Gate Area was necessary. There is currently

⁷⁵ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

⁷⁶ "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

⁷⁷ Mitchell, *Vista Point Transportation Study-Data Collection Summary*, 23-34.

⁷⁸ "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

⁷⁹ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

a larger issue that many of the interviewees alluded to: Who will fund future studies and who is responsible to conduct and follow-through on these other suggestions? The last large project conducted by the GGBHTD was putting a new barrier on the Golden Gate Bridge, and during this project they made it very clear that Vista Point was not under their jurisdiction. They noted in 2013, with traffic modeling, that the ramp into the parking lot during peak weekday had almost the greatest difference between demanded use and cars actually served by the infrastructure out of the ramps assessed.⁸⁰ Despite this recognition that this ramp was a problem for their corridor, this report acknowledged this area as Caltrans' problem, since they manage the lot and have right of way over that section of US-101. The interviews unpacked that there is a stalemate for Vista Point: GGNRA is unhappy based on observed increased congestion in the Marin Headlands, GGBHTD will not give up power to close the lot at this point in time, and Caltrans is completely evading the issue.

Results Part IV: The Future of the Vista Point Parking Lot and Caltrans

All the interviewees could agree that the larger issue at hand is increased congestion in the entire Bay Area, and that this parking lot is not the “magic bullet” to fixing congestion in the Golden Gate Area.⁸¹ Much more needs to be done, but the current structure to fix this problem is creating unnecessary obstacles. Currently all the agencies are in a stalemate because none of the stakeholders have the funds/scope to lead the charge on a long-term solution or the interest to actually further address this parking

⁸⁰ United States. Aecom Transportation. Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District. *Traffic Engineering and Analysis Report Golden Gate Bridge Moveable Median Barrier Study*. CA: Federal Final Environmental Site Assessment, 2013. 25.

⁸¹ "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017.

lot. The groups whose missions are still violated by the traffic issue—GGNRA and GGBHTD—are not big enough agencies to actually address the Vista Point congestion on their own, and Caltrans wants nothing to do with a solution.⁸² The interviews demonstrate that this is an issue of the bystander effect and a struggle to establish clear power and responsibility lines. The data presented that these agencies worked well when in collaboration (the working group). While in the working group miscommunications and confusions of who is in charge were mitigated, because physically being in the same room allowed for vested interest and problems to be communicated directly.⁸³ After the dissolution of the group, power dynamics became muddled, which beget future confusion and misunderstandings of how to solve Vista Point congestion and approach long-term solutions.

The data above presents a major issue that creates concern for the future of this planning project: the role of Caltrans. As the managerial body of this parking lot, they are one of the primary stakeholders involved in the decision-making process of Vista Point. Despite their integral role, their agency appears to take little to no responsibility for funding, researching, and implementing a temporary or long-term recommendation. During the interview with the Caltrans representative, Wingate Lew, indicated that Caltrans only has the funding to treat this parking lot as a typical rest stop, and not a highly trafficked tourist location. Also, when discussing where Caltrans fit in the process of alleviating congestion from Vista Point he could not answer the question.⁸⁴ On top of that, he mentioned difficulties when trying to get approval for the GGNRA study's

⁸² Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

⁸³ "Interview with Robert Mota." Telephone interview by author. November 3, 2017.

⁸⁴ "Interview with Wingate Lew." Telephone interview by author. October 3, 2017.

recommendations from the director of District Four, and similar complications when trying to get a comment on his draft report for Caltrans. He speculated that the delay either came from a political issue or a worry that supporting the recommendations would commit Caltrans, financially, to the congestion mitigation strategies.⁸⁵ All of these answers demonstrates the distance that Caltrans wants to have from Vista Point. It is accurate that this parking lot does not function under its official designation as a rest stop, but that does not negate the fact that Vista Point is under Caltrans' jurisdiction. In regard to long term solutions, Caltrans is even more evasive when it comes to addressing this parking lot. Wingate Lew made it very clear that they would not fund a shuttle service, but would give the permit to GGBHTD to do what they will with the lot.⁸⁶

This indicates that Caltrans views themselves as a permission-granter but not responsible to find a long-term solution that works for other agencies. District Four “works with Bay Area regional partner agencies to...Provide the sound technical basis for decisions for projects, facilities and services to improve mobility.”⁸⁷ Not only is District Four ignoring this role that they claim to fulfill for the Bay Area, but they also do not even list GGBHTD as one of their partner agencies.⁸⁸ When looking at District Four’s “US 101 North Corridor System Management Plan”—released in June 2017, after the dissolution of the working group—they explicitly are only addressing congestion points north of the Waldo Tunnel (2.6 miles north of the Vista Point parking lot). The only time that Vista Point is mentioned at all in the plan is in one chart where they comment that

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ "Office of System and Regional Planning." California Department of Transportation District 4. Accessed December 07, 2017. <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist4/systemplanning/>.

⁸⁸ "Regional Agency Partners." California Department of Transportation District 4. Accessed December 07, 2017. http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist4/systemplanning/ctsp_partners.htm.

they have a Close Circuit Television Camera already installed in the parking lot.⁸⁹ This management plan emphasizes that Caltrans does not hold themselves accountable to fix this problem, despite the fact that they are the only body that could potentially have enough funding, power, and scope to actual implement long-term solutions like a shuttle service, an intelligent transportation system, etc.

Caltrans' authority over this parking lot is by far the most powerful, since they manage the lot and are a state agency with access to increased state funding, and they are choosing to remove themselves from the problem. It is unclear at this point in time the exact reasoning behind this decision, but nevertheless it forces the GGNRA and the GGBHTD to navigate the problem on their own. With the GGNRA, the interviewee, Darren Brown, did not indicate if they could fund a long-term solution, but the GGBHTD made it clear it is outside their scope.⁹⁰ At this point, it is unknown whether closing Vista Point actually fixed the congestion problem on US-101 or if it is masking a greater US-101 corridor congestion issue. Without data, that question cannot be solved. GGBHTD nor GGNRA manage the lot, and it is not in their budget or operational goals to handle this problem.⁹¹ Also, the GGBHTD cannot access public funding, like Caltrans—due to their designation as a special district—and must depend on their profits and federal grants to sponsor new projects. Without Caltrans involvement in leading a follow-up study, it is uncertain whether Vista Point parking lot can ever reach the permanent solution that all the stakeholders expected when leaving the working group.

⁸⁹ United States. California Department of Transportation. California Department of Transportation District 4. *US 101 North Corridor System Management Plan*. By Joseph Aguilar, Cesar Pujol, Ngzoi C. Ezekwo, Paul Svedersky, and Anthony Lee. Oakland, CA: State of California, 2017. 106.

⁹⁰ "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

⁹¹ "Interview with Priya Clemens and Lisa Locati." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

Beyond funding issues, another point of tension stems from the political maneuverability of the two agencies. The biggest difference between GGBHTD and Caltrans is their governmental setup, which adds another layer of complexity when working together. The GGBHTD is a special district that has a very narrow focus jurisdictionally, whereas Caltrans is a huge agency that has to focus on traffic systems throughout the state. Many of the interviewees had very similar opinions on the pros and cons of the two types of agencies. Being a special district, the GGBHTD is a more nimble and fast-acting agency.⁹² An example presented by Angelina Yu, was the fact that the Golden Gate Bridge was able to achieve electronic tolling before any other bridges in the Bay Area, which are regionally managed, because of the District's independence.⁹³ Also multiple people during the interviews believed that if the parking lot was solely managed by Caltrans nothing would be done about the congestion. If Caltrans had full management, it is possible that nothing would ever get dealt with on the Golden Gate Bridge. The Bridge having its own district allows traffic and maintenance issue to be addressed as they come along, and when the Bridge is in their jurisdiction they can focus on pinch points and execute mitigation plans efficiently with no question about funding (since it is from their singular operational budget).⁹⁴ This means they are used to a much faster process when it comes to congestion mitigation, which Caltrans is not. This is where political issues get in the way. What governmental set up is truly better equipped to handle this problem? No interviewee could answer this question or, like Darren Brown, has never thought about it.⁹⁵

⁹² Interview with Amy Marshall." Telephone interview by author. October 13, 2017.

⁹³ "Interview with Angelina Yu." Telephone interview by author. October 13, 2017.

⁹⁴ "Interview with Louise Dyble." Telephone interview by author. October 27, 2017.

⁹⁵ "Interview with Darren Brown." Telephone interview by author. November 16, 2017.

As for Caltrans, their benefits come from the fact that they are a regionally focused agency. They are thinking about a more macro-level traffic systems in California, and having this regional mindset means that agency coordination issues would not arise in the same way. Caltrans does not need to go through the same permitting process as the GGBHTD to make decisions, and they also are more prepared to think about the US-101 corridor in a holistic way, rather than just focusing on one section of the freeway (i.e. just the Golden Gate Bridge).⁹⁶ With this larger scope, though, issues with layers of bureaucracy and multiple levels of management can arise—ultimately slowing down the implementation of decisions. Interviews demonstrated that the Caltrans and GGBHTD operate very differently, and that this type of governmental disconnect greatly impacts how this parking lot can be managed.⁹⁷ Caltrans is the manager of the lot, and has a much larger and flexible budget, but GGBHTD has the independence and swiftness to solve problems more quickly. From the data, it becomes clear that there is not only frustration and conflicting opinions over who should actually have power over the lot, but what kind of agency is better suited to address Vista Point: Caltrans or GGBHTD?

Part III

Section I: The Importance of Caltrans

After the dissolution of the working group the roles, power, and responsibility of solving the congestion at Vista Point parking lot fell almost completely onto the GGBHTD. To appease their interest—keep traffic on their corridor flowing—they found it necessary to close down the parking lot during the later summer weekends of 2017.

⁹⁶ "Interview with Egon Terplan." Telephone interview by author. October 12, 2017.

⁹⁷ Ibid

This decision developed because the GGBHTD needed an effective solution quickly. While the GGBHTD does not believe these types of closures are the ultimate answer to the congestion problems occurring north of the Golden Gate Bridge, and acknowledge that this solution is theoretically temporary, the current jurisdictional issues pose too much of an obstacle for further planning to occur. With GGNRA's animosity towards the closures, and also their greater transportation issues discussed by Lisa Locati during the interviews, it is unclear whether a planning partnership could occur between just the two agencies. Also, without Caltrans inserting themselves into the planning process—an entire and very integral stakeholder—complete collaborative action can never occur. The congestion at Vista Point parking lot, from an outsiders' perspective, is simple, but unless an agency is willing to step up, fund, and take charge of the land the Vista Point parking lot will never surpass the short-term solution of weekend closures. Without the collaborative efforts that occurred during the working group continuing, this problem will persist. If passenger vehicles and traffic keep increasing, areas, like the Golden Gate, will only suffer further problems. The overlapping jurisdiction and muddled power dynamics that clearly caused overly intricate planning obstacles for Vista Point will continue, and as answers and recommendations to eliminate choke points on that section of Highway US-101 become more complex, so will the problem of collective inaction that is currently happening to Vista Point.

Vista Point presents two very different sides to the overall problem of collective actions: what works and what does not. Overlapping jurisdictions are very common, and Vista Point demonstrates that collaborative efforts, like working groups and joint studies, help reach a consensus that attempt to fit every stakeholders' interests. On the other hand,

Vista Point shows the quick downward spiral that occurs when collective action no longer persists. When the working group dissolved, so did open lines of communication that helped all actors stay on the same page. Vista Point could be a solvable problem, but is not one that can be dealt with through one of the agencies in that area. Until the agencies who still have a vested interest in the parking lot can come together and collectively act as singular, regional, unit, this parking lot will remain a contentious planning problem. The first suggestion from this thesis is to reestablish a working group to achieve step two of this process, a long-term and permanent solution.

Section II: Vista Point Recommendations

When considering future recommendations, all the best options were offered in Wingate Lew's report given to Caltrans upper management. He details the potential to incorporate better parking congestion management strategies such as electronic systems (intelligent transportation systems) that alert drivers to how many spaces are left in the parking lot, traffic operational improvements such as changing the on and off ramp or speed limits, and visitor demand management like a shuttle service or a parking reservation system.⁹⁸ These are all viable options, and would be a permanent solution worth looking into. Lew also offers next steps for researching these recommendations he provides. He says that Caltrans should learn more about the National Park Service's Congestion Management toolkit, look into the reservation system at Muir Woods National Park, explore parking space sensors at Weir Farm National Historic Site, contacting sites who use dynamic message signs (or changeable message signs), and

⁹⁸ Managing Parking Congestion at the H. Dana Bowers Safety Roadside Rest Area

investigate the use of a shuttle bus in conjunction with a dynamic message sign.⁹⁹ These are all viable solutions, but cannot be addressed until Caltrans puts in the time and research to actually look into congestion management strategies. Since reconstructing the lot is not viable, due to its location, congestion management is the only route to fixing this lot. Closures are not a permanent solution, and clearly do not work for all agencies in the Golden Gate—follow up research is required to address this issue, and it should come from Caltrans.

The Vista Point parking lot exemplifies a much larger issue occurring in the Golden Gate: an issue of a fragmented piece of land that faces a problematic governmental disconnect. Caltrans is a statewide agency that, underneath it all, must aid other agencies in making US-101 a functional highway system. GGBHTD is a special district with such a localized jurisdiction that solving a problem like Vista Point is inherently something they cannot manage on their own. They can operate the closures, for now, because it is in their interest to keep their section of the corridor physically moving, but Caltrans must pick up the problem from there. To actually complete one of the recommendations suggested by their own report or the Fehr & Peers study requires research that is beyond the jurisdictional and financial scope of the Golden Gate Bridge. Caltrans is the powerholder in over Vista Point and US-101, and must take responsibility for their land. Vista Point is a small problem, in the grand scheme of California traffic, but it speaks to the bigger problem that will arise as congestion gets worse: who is actually in charge of managing certain traffic corridors? In this case, Caltrans is the manager of the lot and the highway and should include it in their future system planning

⁹⁹ Managing Parking Congestion at the H. Dana Bowers Safety Roadside Rest Area

strategy. If they conduct the follow-up research that is necessary for Vista Point they could prove if it actually causes increased congestion. They also need to put together another working group for the Golden Gate Area, because congestion on this highway is ultimately their problem to solve.

For further research, it would make sense to explore the relationship between Caltrans and the GGBHTD and use empirical data to study greater congestion issues around the Golden Gate Bridge. Caltrans does not list GGBHTD as one of their planning partners, and this is an interesting factor that the interviews did not provide data on. GGBHTD has complete control over a section of Highway US-101, and it would make sense for them to be a partnering planning agency with Caltrans. With more time, I would look into why this agency coordination does not exist. Also, to further this project it would make sense to look at the Golden Gate area more regionally. Using data sources such as StreetLight Data, a transit data provider, one could explore congestion issues in the Golden Gate more regionally, and look into what is actually causing two hour delays on the Golden Gate corridor. Vista Point is most likely not the underlying factor for traffic in this area, and without proper collaboration between agencies and Caltrans taking responsibility for this section of the highway, congestion will persist and inter-agency tension will only get worse. To solve this problem Caltrans must take the lead on this project, and work with the surrounding agencies to create a comprehensive, well-researched, permanent solution to the congestion caused by Vista Point parking lot.

Appendix

Wingate Lew
District 4 CIR / HSR Transit Connectivity Technical Assistant
Caltrans (District 4)

Angelina Yu
Legislative Aide in the Office of Supervisor Sandra Lee Fewer
Board of Supervisors San Francisco (District 1)

Egon Terplan
Regional Planning Director
SPUR • Ideas + Action for a Better City

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