2.11 UNDER RAMP AREAS

Within the project area is a network of unused spaces existing below the aerial bus ramps that serve the Transbay Transit Center. Rather than remain as detrimental spaces, these spaces could be reclaimed and transformed into a neighborhood amenity. Currently under the ownership of the Transbay Joint Powers Authority, they could be developed for public and private uses. There will be some modifications and additional ramps constructed as part of the Transbay Transit Center project that can be addressed as the designs for the center progress.

One option is to judiciously infill these areas with structures that provide new usable space, thus making an eyesore an amenity. By reusing the existing structures, LEED® credit could be given for individual development projects, supporting a more sustainable strategy for small infill development. There are good built examples where new spaces have been inserted under older viaduct structures to create entirely new block frontages. This would effectively transform what is a “one-sided block” to a more pedestrian-oriented “two-sided” block along Clementina and Essex. Infill uses could include studios that support art, fashion and culture. Small businesses can get a foothold in these urbanized workshops bringing more creative entrepreneurs to the neighborhood.

Glass enclosed showrooms or studios can be integrated into the ramp structures to create an active pedestrian frontage (Viaduct at Avenue Daumesnil, Paris).

A second option is to consider outdoor uses—as permitted by column spacing and overhead clearances—to add recreational hardcourts or pedestrian mews as envisioned in the Design for Development. Column spacing and overhead clearances will determine which hardcourts are viable. Below the Howard Street loop ramp, a pedestrian mews could be developed with landscaping, lighting and public art to make these mid-block passages inviting places to walk and to improve pedestrian connections across a very long block.

The ramps that pass over Howard Street and Folsom Street act as natural gateways into the Transbay neighborhood. While currently they pose the least inviting place for the pedestrian, these zones can be transformed with lighting, art and new surface treatments into pleasant places to walk under as one enters or leaves the neighborhood.

The range of possible under ramp improvements is shown in the concept plan here, which maximizes open space and recreational uses. Retail is limited to the street frontage at Howard. As development progresses in the area, specific uses at each under ramp site should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Open air uses can include a weekly marketplace (Borough Market, Southwark Street & the London Bridge bridgehead).
1. Opportunities include infilling under the ramps with enclosed spaces for arts and cultural uses, or incubator workshops for emerging industries (like fashion design), recreational hardcourts or a pedestrian mews.

2. The areas below the Howard loop ramp, and below the Folsom off ramp along Essex and Clementina can become neighborhood amenities.

3. Examples of under bridge structures that could be infilled with neighborhood markets and restaurants (59th Street bridge, New York).

4. Existing bus ramps create unseemly places for the pedestrian as on Howard east of Second Street.

5. Sketch showing improvements that can be artist-designed to become gateways into the Transbay neighborhood with improvements such as panelized finishes at the ramp underside, uplighting, signage, and murals infilling the columns along the sidewalk.
2.12 PUBLIC ART

The team collaborated with the Arts Commission’s Program Director to consider a range of opportunities for public art in the Transbay neighborhood. It was desirable to reflect the unique qualities of the district in the public art program, thus reinforcing the neighborhood’s special identity. Taking into account the dominant nature of the Transbay Terminal, and proposed Transbay Transit Center high-rise development, lent credence to considering a public art program that focused its commissions on mobility and transit in the project area’s public realm. Using this transit as a unifying theme provides a range of opportunities for transit-related improvements that would be enjoyed by transit users, regional visitors, residents while adding unique gateways and wayfinding elements to the streetscape. If done consistently, the public art program would signal one’s presence in the Transbay neighborhood.

As it currently exists, there are little to no transit amenities, and no consistency in informational signage amongst the various bus operators with stops in the area surrounding Transbay Transit Center. The public art program could require artist-designed transit stops in the neighborhood. These elements could include bus shelters, seating, special paving, bike racks and wayfinding pylons or kiosks. Transbay Park and the linear parks along Main and Beale provide additional opportunities for public art. These elements could be sculptural or playful and would help improve the experience of the transit user and pedestrian.

Funding for the maintenance of the public art, along with the streetscape and open space improvements, will possibly be provided through the creation of a Mello-Roos Community Facilities District.

Public art will take the form of artist-designed transit amenities, reinforcing the unique character of the neighborhood (Hannover, Germany).
2.13 WAYFINDING

If coming to San Francisco from the Bay Bridge, one can land first in the Transbay neighborhood. This requires effective signage to guide visitors and residents to major city districts and venues often beyond the Transbay neighborhood. At the same time, there needs to be appropriate district signage to guide visitors to local amenities and public parking sites. As part of implementing any major streetscape and open space components, it will be important to develop in parallel a district wayfinding program that sets a graphic standard for the neighborhood. This is especially critical because when faced with no clear directional signage, drivers will get lost or circulate needlessly in the Transbay neighborhood. This will not be acceptable as the area is transformed into a more vibrant neighborhood.

A wayfinding program should be designed as a comprehensive program for the neighborhood, or for the larger South of Market area and coordinated at a larger scale of the City. Ideally it would be undertaken by a City department so it could be implemented in a broader scale.

Examples of wayfinding elements necessary for a developed Transbay neighborhood; district maps and clear signage for both drivers and pedestrians are essential to reducing unnecessary vehicular movements (Downtown Walks Program, Los Angeles. Photos courtesy of Hunt Design)