STUDIES ON THE LOMA PRIETA EARTHQUAKE
NO. 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Earthquake Effects on Employee Transportation

Anna K. Bennett
David D. Little

November 1990
The University of California Transportation Center

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Earthquake Effects on Employee Transportation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Abstracted from the report of the same title

The University of California Transportation Center
University of California at Berkeley
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report results from the efforts of many people and organizations. The willingness of the six firms which are the subjects of the case studies -- Bank of America, Bechtel Corporation, Chevron Corporation, Lockheed Missiles & Space Company, Pacific Bell, and Pacific Gas and Electric -- to share their experiences in coping with employee commuting problems after the October 1989 earthquake, made this report possible. We gratefully acknowledge the effort contributed by these firms and by their individual staff members who so patiently gave of their time to answer our questions.

The assistance we received from the individuals who served as liaisons with each of the firms was invaluable. They briefed us on their company's transportation programs and introduced us to the staff members who participated in the study. They continue to support our work by making themselves available to answer any questions readers of this Executive Summary may have regarding specifics of their company's transportation program. The individual company liaisons are:

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At Chevron, Fred Schetz served as liaison with the study until his retirement in June 1990. His contribution to our study is also gratefully acknowledged.
Stephen Shoji was extremely helpful as the liaison between Lockheed and our study. He has since moved to another position in the company.

Lawrence Kanter and Donald A. Schinske, both graduate students in the School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, assisted in conducting interviews and preparing drafts of their findings, which were integrated into the report. Their skills in gathering and presenting data collected in personal interviews were a valuable contribution to the project.

The Bay Area Council, New Ways to Work, RIDES for Bay Area Commuters, the Institute of Transportation Studies Extension, and the University of California Transportation Center all contributed to the support of this project. We thank all of the individuals and organizations who assisted us.
EARTHQUAKE EFFECTS
ON
EMPLOYEE TRANSPORTATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Loma Prieta earthquake of October 17, 1989, dramatically increased travel times on several major transportation routes in the San Francisco Bay Area, causing employers to make adjustments to accommodate employee commuting problems. This study examined the responses of six large firms in the Bay Area to employee transportation needs after the earthquake. The objectives were to:

1. Showcase the efforts of selected Bay Area employers in responding to their employees' transportation needs after the earthquake;

2. Identify any long term impacts on employee transportation programs resulting from the firms' responses to the emergency and

3. Detail policy issues that arise when employers implement transportation programs for their employees, in response to both emergency and everyday commuting situations.

Data were collected in a series of interviews with individual managers and a single focus group meeting at each firm. Company officials designated by their chief executives as liaisons for the study were asked to introduce the researchers to approximately ten line managers in their firms. The managers participated in a structured oral interview on the subject of commuting alternatives used by their employees and, then, were each asked to name one employee from their department to participate in a focus group meeting. The information gathered from these two sources formed the basis for the case studies. Six firms participated: Bank of America, Bechtel Corporation, Chevron Corporation, Lockheed Missiles & Space Company, Pacific Bell, and Pacific Gas and Electric.
THE COMPANIES

Bank of America

Bank of America set up a transportation hot line following the October 17 earthquake and encouraged employees to use public transportation and ridesharing. Managers and employees were asked to work together to arrange flexible work schedules or alternative work sites where needed to alleviate commuting problems.

Most of the managers and employees interviewed at Bank of America thought that commuting modes returned to their pre-quake patterns once the Bay Bridge reopened. People who had switched to Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) or the ferries returned to driving alone. The earthquake did not have a significant impact on Bank of America's employee transportation policy. Most commuting alternatives are implemented in the company's relatively autonomous departments, rather than companywide. A more substantial effect was on the company's disaster preparedness program, where some deficiencies exposed by the Loma Prieta earthquake have since been corrected.

The October 17, 1989, earthquake had a significant impact on commuting alternatives at Bechtel. To address employee transportation problems after the earthquake, Bechtel management implemented a program of alternative work schedules, staggering start times from 6:00 to 9:00 a.m.¹ Although Bechtel did not implement as extensive or varied a program of commuting alternatives as some other Bay Area firms, the long term effect of the earthquake on employee commuting alternatives was greater at Bechtel. For other firms whose management had previously allowed commuting alternatives, the earthquake expanded existing programs. At Bechtel, where there were no such programs, the earthquake served as the impetus for trying new alternatives. The new climate of acceptance of alternative work schedules has created a potential for exploring other work scheduling opportunities at Bechtel.

At Chevron, the lasting impact of the Loma Prieta earthquake was on commuters' knowledge and opinions of commuting alternatives. Having been forced to use alternatives to single-occupant vehicles

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¹ Often called "flextime," but both Bechtel and Lockheed specifically avoided referring to their programs as "flextime" because management felt the term implied that employees might be free to vary their work hours from one day to the next.
such as BART, ferries, and vanpools, many commuters had their negative impressions of these modes dispelled.

Chevron's policy toward alternative employee commuting options was relatively progressive before the earthquake. The company's extensive vanpooling efforts and willingness to allow compressed work weeks and working at home during the month after the earthquake attest to Chevron's leadership in assisting employees with their commuting problems. The fact that the earthquake did not impact company transportation policy indicates the advances the company had made prior to the earthquake, rather than any lack of responsiveness to employees' commuting problems.

At Lockheed, the most widely used commuting alternative in the month immediately following the earthquake was flexschedule. Prior to the earthquake, flexschedule had been used very sparingly with hourly employees because their schedules were heavily regulated by union contracts.

Providing charter bus service from Santa Cruz to the Sunnyvale facility during the month Highway 17 was closed was a significant response Lockheed made to employee transportation needs resulting from the 1989 earthquake. Although the earthquake did not result in long term change in employee commuting patterns, the company continues to explore employee transportation alternatives that can be implemented within the limits of restrictive government accounting procedures. The Lockheed Employee Transportation Service has provided both a fixed-route mini-bus and a radio-dispatched demand-responsive service around the company buildings since the 1970s. The company is currently working with the county transit authority on improvements in both bus and light rail service that will make public transportation an effective commute alternative for more Lockheed employees.

Of the six companies studied, Pacific Bell experienced the greatest impact from the Loma Prieta earthquake. As a telephone service provider, the company faced an exceptional demand for service as a result of the earthquake. At the same time, damage to company facilities in Oakland and the resulting need to relocate employees created unusual commuting problems.

Pacific Bell's San Ramon transportation center generated daily listings of road conditions, ridesharing information and transit and
ferry schedules following the October 17 earthquake. Upper management allowed individual department heads to decide the specific alternatives to be used in easing their employees’ commuting problems. In the weeks following the earthquake, the majority of employees worked their regular schedules, though work days were often extended. Employees who could be spared were urged to take vacation days immediately after the earthquake, although these numbers were minimal. Transportation alternatives used by Pacific Bell after the earthquake included continuation of the existing transportation program with additional shuttle services and enhanced use of flextime, compressed work weeks, carpooling, vanpooling and telecommuting.

At Pacific Gas and Electric, flextime was in widespread use before the quake and proved to be a valuable tool in lessening commute times afterward. While some employees continued starting to work earlier or using BART, once the Bay Bridge reopened, many returned to their regular schedules and modes of commute.

Although greater than its impact on actual commuting behavior, the earthquake did not bring about a change in the direction of the company’s commuting policy. Like Chevron, Pacific Gas and Electric had a progressive commuting program prior to the earthquake and it continues to develop. The earthquake expanded the program to previously untired limits and appears to have alleviated some management fears regarding commuting alternatives such as flextime.

COMMUTE ALTERNATIVES

All six of the firms studied used some type of alternative work scheduling in response to their employees’ transportation problems after the earthquake. Some of the companies directly provided commuter transportation. Other transportation alternatives—including compressed work weeks, car- and vanpooling, alternative work sites and telecommuting—were also used. All of the companies studied had provided transit information to their employees before the earthquake and those services were expanded during the emergency. Table 1 shows which transportation alternatives were used by each of the firms in the month immediately after the earthquake and which
TABLE 1. TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES USED AFTER THE LOMA PRIETA EARTHQUAKE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Alternative</th>
<th>Bank of America</th>
<th>Bechtel</th>
<th>Chevron</th>
<th>Lockheed</th>
<th>Pacific Bell</th>
<th>Pacific Gas &amp; Electric</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Alternative Schedule</td>
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<td>Rideshare Promotion</td>
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<td>Short Term</td>
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<td>Shuttle Service</td>
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<td>Telecommuting</td>
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Alternative/flexible work schedules were the most widely used commuting alternative among the six companies studied. Managers reported they thought the use of flexible scheduling improved employee productivity, morale and punctuality and that absenteeism declined when workers could exercise some choice in their work schedules. Employees reported they appreciated flexible scheduling because it allowed for reduced commuting time, greater ease in making arrangements for dependent care, more time at home and for personal business, and more uninterrupted work time. Alternative

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2Transportation alternative used in the month immediately following the Loma Prieta earthquake; that is, while the Bay Bridge and Highway 17 were closed.

3Transportation alternative continuing to be used after January 1, 1990.
schedules were also useful in adapting to specific work situations, such as dealing with projects and customers located in different time zones.

In other cases, flexible scheduling was incompatible with project or customer needs. Employees whose work had to take place in tightly scheduled shifts, such as check processors at Bank of America and operators at Pacific Bell, could make little use of alternative schedules. Changing work hours disrupted existing car- and vanpools. To incorporate both flexible schedules and carpooling into a companywide program of commuting alternatives requires careful and continued coordination.

The widespread preference for earlier start times often caused problems in keeping offices staffed at the end of the day. Workers who started work early complained that they felt pressured to work beyond their scheduled quitting time and that they were expected to work longer days than those who started later. Some employees expressed a fear that management viewed leaving before the firm's normal closing time as evidence of lack of commitment, regardless of the hour they started work. Managers saw their work schedules extended at both ends to cover the longer company work day.

The managers interviewed reported they took a "hands off" approach to implementing the alternative schedules, allowing workers to decide among themselves how to coordinate their schedules. Managers thought that giving their employees freedom to determine their own schedules had a positive effect on morale. The "hands off" approach also kept the manager out of possible conflicts among the employees over preferred start and end times.

Flexscheduling evoked some expressions of an "us versus them" attitude--workers' voicing suspicions that upper management did not trust them and, conversely, managers' feelings that some workers might take advantage of the alternative schedules to reduce their work effort. In general, employees channeled these feelings into efforts to prove the company wrong by making an extra effort to show that alternative scheduling would not adversely affect productivity.

At Pacific Gas and Electric, some workers, mainly represented by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Engineers, had been working compressed weeks (four ten-hour days or rotating twelve-
hour shifts) for several years prior to the earthquake. Immediately after the earthquake, Chevron management sought to offer the compressed work week to a wider range of employees than just those in executive and administrative positions, but found no provisions for temporary exemption from the California Industrial Welfare Commission orders limiting the application of compressed work weeks in the private sector. Thus, the use of compressed work weeks at both Chevron and Pacific Bell was confined to employees exempt from the orders.

Formal efforts to promote ridesharing by the companies met with little response from employees. The widespread general preference for sharing rides with friends, relatives, co-workers and neighbors, but not strangers, was not much diminished by the Loma Prieta earthquake. Overall, commuting by private automobile or van became more difficult in the month following the earthquake. One reason that corporate efforts to promote carpooling fell on deaf ears may have been that BART was the first choice of those who were forced to change modes.

Nevertheless, transportation problems after the Loma Prieta earthquake forced many workers who had not previously considered carpooling to experiment with it. A major benefit of car- and vanpooling reported was the camaraderie that developed among riders in the month after the earthquake. With continuing aftershocks and widespread publicity about the fatalities resulting from the collapse of the Cypress structure on Interstate 880 in Oakland and the section of the Bay Bridge, many commuters, fearful about the safety of bridges and highways, preferred sharing rides to driving alone. Managers reported that carpoolers seemed better adjusted and ready to work when they arrived at the office.

Employees participating in car- and vanpools expressed some of the same career concerns as those who used alternative work schedules—that they might find themselves forced to leave an important meeting before it ended in order to meet their vanpool and that such actions might be perceived by their supervisors as indicating a lack of dedication to the company. These fears, whether real or imagined, led some workers to say they were reluctant to join a car- or vanpool because it might hinder their career opportunities.
Before the earthquake, vanpooling had been widely used by workers who commuted into San Francisco from outlying areas such as Solano County and Benicia. The introduction of alternative work schedules after the earthquake forced some of these vanpoolers to readjust their work hours in order to continue ridesharing. Most of these vanpools were privately operated, with no employer participation. Of the six firms studied, only Chevron was involved in a company vanpool program. Fares charged riders cover the capital and operating costs of the van, but Chevron lowers the riders' costs by making the initial purchase and obtaining insurance. Chevron provided financial incentives to these vanpoolers to use BART for trans-Bay commuting in the month the Bay Bridge was closed.

Lockheed's charter bus service from Santa Cruz to its Sunnyvale campus during the month Highway 17 was closed was the most dramatic example among the firms studied of employers directly providing transportation services during the emergency. Other firms added shuttle service between transit stations and work sites.

For the month following the earthquake, Pacific Gas and Electric ran two vans between the nearest BART station and its Harrison Street office in San Francisco. Ridership is sufficient to keep one of the shuttles operating. Pacific Bell had provided commute hour shuttle service between the Lafayette BART station and its San Ramon site prior to the earthquake. In the month after the earthquake, Pacific Bell increased the shuttle service between BART and San Ramon, and instituted a midday van shuttle between San Francisco and San Ramon. Ridership on the shuttle between the Lafayette BART and San Ramon declined after the reopening of the Bay Bridge, but still continues higher than before the earthquake.

Because of damage to one of Pacific Bell's buildings in downtown Oakland, a group of operators had to be permanently relocated after the earthquake. They were first temporarily relocated to various sites, until the company concluded, in January, 1990, that they could not return to their former work site. Some of the workers who were forced to relocate complained of increased commuting times and problems with dependent care arrangements. Managers felt that the unfamiliar work sites resulted in lost productivity.

There were other, more positive, experiences with relocation. A group of Bank of America administrators who normally commuted
daily were housed on-site at a Pleasant Hill training complex during the week. Other small groups of Bank employees benefited from being able to switch their work sites from San Francisco to Concord or vice versa to ease commuting problems.

Two weeks after the earthquake, Pacific Bell issued a telecommuting policy which allowed many managers to work off-site on a part-time basis. At firms where telecommuting was not an officially approved option, a number of managers expressed doubt that telecommuting would work in their departments. They cited needs for direct contact between managers and their employees and for frequent informal meetings as reasons they thought telecommuting could not provide a productive work environment.

Pacific Bell’s experience with their new telecommuting policy suggests these problems are not insurmountable. Technology like the telephone, fax machine and modem allow for direct exchange of information between the central office and remote sites. Pacific Bell telecommuters typically work away from their offices only two or three days a week, leaving the other part of the week open for face-to-face contact with co-workers and supervisors. Issues of trust seem to become less critical as the workers and their supervisors adjust to telecommuting.

Use of mass transit increased substantially after the October 1989 earthquake in the companies participating in the study. All of the firms promoted employee use of public transportation through dissemination of route and schedule information or sale of transit tickets. Chevron and Bank of America set up temporary hot lines where employees could call for the latest commuting information and ridematching services. Pacific Bell distributed bulletins daily to their employees with updated commuting information.

Participants in the study praised BART’s reliability and extended hours of service. Many commuters who switched to BART had never used the system before and reported they were glad they had been forced to use it. There were complaints about the overcrowding on BART trains in the month following the earthquake. Avoiding the crowded trains and the shortage of parking at BART stations were the reasons many employees said they chose flexible schedules with early start times.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Two different recommendations emerged from these case studies. The first is directed to employers and others concerned about effective implementation of employee transportation programs. The second calls for further research.

All of the firms participating in the study were relatively large, with employees numbering in the thousands. The method used to conduct the study, interviewing managers (individually) and their employees (collectively), revealed glaring inconsistencies in employees’ understanding of the transportation programs their employers made available to them. On several occasions in the focus group meetings, employees debated the existence of a particular policy affecting commuting. Line managers’ reports were sometimes far removed from the practices described by company transportation managers.

Supervisors play a critical role in implementing change. If the change is in an area they do not consider important, they are unlikely to take more than token action. Providing training and guidance for supervisors is a necessary part of implementing employee transportation programs. The handbook developed by Pacific Gas and Electric to guide managers in increasing the use of flexible schedule alternatives and the management training that Pacific Bell is developing to assist in implementing its telecommuting policy are examples of the types of efforts that must be made to ensure that policy changes are actually implemented. No matter how well designed a company’s employee transportation program may be, communicating it to the entire organization is a continuing challenge.

The compressed work week—whether consisting of four ten-hour days, nine working days in two weeks, or other variations—can be a useful tool for managing transportation demand because it reduces the number of work trips commuters make. California Industrial Welfare Commission regulations, however, restrict private employers’ use of this type of alternative scheduling. Changing a regularly scheduled work day to exceed eight hours must be approved by a vote of two-thirds of the affected work unit. Once the new schedule is adopted, it must remain in effect for at least twelve months and can only be reversed at the initiative of the employees.
Some of the comments heard from workers in this study about how exhausting they found the longer work days and the problems they posed with dependent care arrangements suggest that the traditional role of labor regulations in protecting workers from overly long hours may not be obsolete. Managers also expressed concern that workers were not as productive in the final hours of an extended work day. As air quality concerns increase pressure upon employers to reduce single-occupant vehicle commute trips by their employees, the question of whether California regulations affecting use of the compressed work week should be eased needs careful examination.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

With the reopening of the Bay Bridge and Highway 17, commuting patterns began to shift back toward single-occupant vehicles. The consensus among the persons interviewed was that about 10 to 15 percent of those who had switched their commuting modes in the month after the earthquake continued to use the new mode into the spring of 1990. In August of 1990, BART reported that its ridership remained at a level of ten percent above ridership before the October 1989 earthquake.

Even though commuting patterns did not show dramatic change six months after the earthquake, there is a residual effect in terms of commuters' experiences with a greater range of alternatives to single-occupant vehicle commuting. Both management and workers found benefits in flexible scheduling. Commuters gained new and positive impressions of public transit and vanpooling as a result of the earthquake. Nevertheless, the allure of independence and privacy has drawn most commuters back to their automobiles, despite their best intentions.

Official changes in company policies regarding employee transportation as a result of the earthquake were limited. (1) Bechtel sanctioned use of alternative work schedules by its San Francisco office employees during the month following the earthquake, rescinded the policy once the Bay Bridge reopened, then reinstated the alternative work schedule option after positive feedback from employees and their managers. (2) Pacific Bell promulgated a telecommuting policy for its managers in early November. This had been under
development for some months; thus, while it offered some relief to post-earthquake commuting problems, it was not a direct result of the earthquake. (3) The post-earthquake experience with transportation alternatives led Pacific Gas and Electric Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board Richard A. Clarke, in February, 1990, to commend his department heads and their employees for the way they adapted to the transportation crisis and to encourage continuing support of flexible work hours, public transportation and ridesharing.