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San Francisco,
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*Views of the Park Commissioners
on Extension of Municipal
Railway Through
Golden Gate
Park / 1916.*

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HON. EDWARD I. WOLFE,

Chairman Public Utilities Committee of the Board of Supervisors, City Hall, San Francisco, Calif.

Dear Sir :

The Board of Park Commissioners has had under consideration the request of the Supervisors presented by your committee for the privilege of constructing and maintaining across and within Golden Gate Park an extension of the Municipal Railway, for the avowed purpose, among others, of affording increased transportation facilities between the Richmond and Sunset Districts, which are separated by the Park.

The Commissioners have carefully examined the proposed plan and route presented by the City Engineer, and have taken into consideration all the arguments which have heretofore been presented touching the public convenience to be subserved by the construction and operation of the proposed extension.

A similar request was heretofore made by the Board of Supervisors, and was denied by this Board, with the suggestion that if a railroad was to be constructed across the Park at all, it should be by a route other than the one then under consideration.

The modified plans now under consideration do not alter the situation or remove the fundamental objections raised to the former application.

While regretting the necessity of declining to authorize the extension of the roadway as now requested, we feel that there is no public convenience to be served which would justify the damage which the park would suffer if the extension of the road were permitted as now proposed. We are

therefore of the unanimous opinion that the request should be denied.

In presenting the pending application, you represented that the Park Commissioners were appealed to by the Supervisors "as a matter of courtesy," which suggests the inference that the Board of Supervisors claimed the right to cross the park without the consent of the Park Commissioners.

We must respectfully beg to differ with you with reference to the jurisdiction of this Board over the City Parks. The charter in distinct terms confers upon the Commissioners the *complete* and *exclusive* control, management and direction of these public recreation grounds, and the *exclusive* right to erect and superintend the erection of all structures thereon. With reference to the management and control of the parks, this Board is clothed with the same power as the Board of Public Works in its particular province. It is an independent body clothed with exclusive powers, and it was so intended by the people when the charter was adopted. If it were not for this exclusive power, the Supervisors would be at liberty to extend through Golden Gate Park every public street which is now intercepted, without the consent or permission of the Park Commissioners.

We cannot believe that in adopting the charter any such result was contemplated. It is hardly pertinent to inquire into the reasons for conferring on the Board of Park Commissioners the exclusive control of the city parks. Having accepted office under the provisions of the charter, we think it incumbent upon us to obey it in letter and spirit.

We wish it understood that the Board of Park Commissioners is not averse to permitting the municipal railway to cross the park, but we must insist that the route selected must meet with the sanction of this Board. This attitude of the Park Commissioners has heretofore been exhibited, by consenting to the running through Mission Park of the Church Street line, and by tendering to the Board of Supervisors a route

through Golden Gate Park, by the way of Twentieth Avenue which affords a central route, with an easy grade.

A few of the reasons which prompt us to decline the request of the Supervisors may be noted:

1. The destruction of the beauties of this part of the park, one of the most important and highly cultivated sections. It would require the removal of 345 trees, and substitute scars and blemishes which could not be hidden.

2. The danger to human life at grade crossings, of which there would be four—one at Fulton Street, another at Lincoln Way, and two others at drives and foot paths within the Park boundaries.

3. The vertical retaining wall (25 feet high by nearly 400 feet long) intended to strengthen and sustain the border of Stow Lake, which is over fifty feet above the sub-grade of the proposed railroad. It will be impossible to beautify this wall and the space above it, as there would be no room for terraces, consequently it must remain bare, making not only a blot on the landscape, but, acting as a sounding board, will reflect the noise of the moving cars toward the bandstand, drowning the sound of the music, probable to such an extent that it would be necessary to remove the music stand to some other location. Even if it were possible to eliminate the retaining wall from the construction of the railroad, the noise of the cars would still interfere with the pleasure of the audience in the music.

4. The public convenience of intercommunication between Sunset and Richmond Districts would be best served by the construction of a more central route, to-wit: Twentieth Avenue, which route would meet with the approval of this Board.

5. The proposed route will cross a space 700 feet square set apart for museum extension on the unit plan, one unit of which is now about to be constructed.

6. The request made by the Supervisors has met with protests from individuals and clubs, which are entitled to more

than perfunctory consideration. Among them are the following:

Forum Club,
California Club,
Laurel Hall Club,
Haight and Ashbury Improvement Club,
North of Panhandle Improvement Club,
Vittoria Colonna Club,
Peralta Heights Improvement Club, and
Public Ownership Association.

It may be noted that the last Association named based its protests mainly on economic lines, asserting that such an extension of the Municipal Railway would result in a loss to the City, and would therefore tend to discredit municipal ownership of utilities generally. With this, however, the Park Commissioners have no concern.

In support of the application we have received only one endorsement, and that from the Park Richmond Improvement Club, which may be said to represent public opinion in the Richmond District. Undoubtedly a similar opinion is entertained in the Sunset District, as these two districts are the ones to be especially benefited by the proposed extension.

7. The Parks are to be administered in the interest of all the people and not a part. It is the duty of the Board to see that the Parks are not commercialized or utilized in the interest of any particular locality when that interest is not in harmony with the purposes and objects for which public parks are established and maintained.

8. Where the public convenience suggests the propriety of crossing the park with a street railway, and there are two routes over which it might be constructed, one which will seriously injure the Park, and its highly adorned and improved areas, and the other which will not produce this effect, the judgment of the Board should be exercised in favor of the latter, particularly when it appears that the same result as to facilities of intercommunication may be accomplished.

We have communicated with the Park authorities of numerous typical cities of the United States, with a view of ascer-

taining their views and practice in the matter of permitting street railways to cross the Park.

We find it to be almost the universal practice to inhibit the cutting up of parks with street railways. The problem of getting people into the Park is solved by transportation facilities to its boundaries. In some of them, notably in Baltimore, the Commissioners operate a phaeton or motor bus line, with such success that a street railway extending into the Park was abandoned and the tracks torn up.

We may quote for your information some excerpts from the responses sent to us by the authorities of the various municipalities, the list below being *all* that have been received, except Boston, which has street railways running through its parks, and which are said to be public conveniences.

CINCINNATI. (Board of Park Commissioners.)

The Board has at various times gone on record as strongly opposing the establishment of any railway, not only in our parkways which are in process of construction, as the hard lines of the tracks do not harmonize with Park conditions and the road bed cannot be made ornamental.

NEW YORK. (President of the Park Board.)

We have never had a trolley line crossing the Park on the Park level, and I do not believe that such a road would be approved by the public.

NOTE: The roads are sunken, and in many places so concealed from view that the running of cars is only noticeable through the noise.

DETROIT. (Dept. of Parks and Boulevards.)

We have never permitted it. In our largest park we maintain a motor bus service and we find it better and self-sustaining.

BALTIMORE. (Dept. Public Parks and Squares.)

The proposition was to tunnel through with surface stations in the interior for the accommodation of park users, but it never amounted to more than a suggestion because of the fact that the increasing use of motor vehicles for hire as well as by owners made unnecessary an extension of street railways in the parks for Public Convenience, and left only the gain to private land owners as a reason for the project. (Italics are ours.)

CHICAGO. (West Chicago Park Commissioners.)

As far as possible it is the policy of the Park Commissioners not to have parks cut up by street railways, and have not opened up any street car lines through the parks where they were not originally located previous to the purchase of the property.

ST. LOUIS. (Commissioner of Parks and Recreation.)

Where street car lines pass through Park property in the St. Louis Parks, the condition is usually very ugly and unsightly and at no time during my experience have I seen a street car line in a public park, either in this city or any other city, which in my opinion has an added attraction to the park, or of sufficient benefit to the people as a whole to compensate the unsightly condition in the park property. There is considerable agitation on the part of one of the societies interested in the Art Museum, which is located in one of the large parks of this city, and they are trying to force the construction of a street railway in order to obtain transportation to this building. The Park Commissioner has taken a very decided stand against this railway line on the grounds that it will not add in any way to the beauty of the park, and will in fact be an unsightly and unsafe addition to the park.

MINNEAPOLIS. (Board of Park Commissioners.)

I believe that the public, who is making use of street car lines, is also entitled, to a certain extent at least to the benefit of attractive park scenery. It goes without saying that the location and construction of the tracks must be under the supervision of the proper park authorities.

These views we think accord with the best park practice in the United States, and are in harmony with the judgment of the Park Commissioners of this city.

We trust that the Board of Supervisors will see its way clear to adopt the Twentieth Avenue Route, in which event that Board will have the hearty co-operation of the Park Commissioners.

Respectfully yours,

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS,
(Signed) By CURTIS H. LINDLEY,
Acting President.

JAMES de SUCCA, Secretary.

San Francisco, California, May 4th, 1916.

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