BWA: A better estuary crossing is a top priority project in the city’s Bike Plan, and a west-end bicycle and pedestrian bridge is a top tier project in the Caltrans District 4 Bike Plan. Are you supportive of a west-end bicycle and pedestrian bridge? If so, what have you done to date to support its development? What will you do, as a council member to support it?

City Council Candidates:

Stewart Chen:
If you are referring to the Oakland – Alameda Embarcadero- Marina Village crossing, I am fully supportive of this new bike/ pedestrian path. I am actually extremely excited about this new pedestrian drawbridge. I walked across the Estuary from inside the tube once and it was such a horrible experience.

John Knox White:
I support this 100%. As a Planning Board member, I ensured that the Alameda Landing development site maintained a site for both a potential bridge and a new tube that would not be precluded by the development plans.

We know that 78% of people commuting from Alameda to the inner East Bay, including Oakland, are driving by themselves. This short commute is one where walking and bicycling are a viable option. Couple this with the fact that Oakland's surface parking lots are being redeveloped into housing and office buildings, trips to downtown Oakland and the inner East Bay are the lowest hanging fruit for removing vehicles from the tubes and mitigating the traffic impacts of future development. Additionally, while well over 80% of people commuting to San Francisco from Alameda are using transit, most use BART and access these stations via a personal vehicle. This is a second group of tube users who would be provided a new choice for getting out of the traffic.

As the Transportation Commission Chair, I worked with City of Alameda staff and Alamedans to identify options for crossing the estuary by walking and bicycling. A proposed bridge was identified as a long-term solution. At the time, I supported working with the Coast Guard to address their concerns before moving forward with a crossing solution. This project needed to be reprioritized by the city, and that’s why I worked with Bike Walk Alameda and Community Action for a Sustainable Alameda (CASA) in successfully calling for prioritizing this crossing in the recently adopted Transportation Choices Plan (TCP). Through all of this, I have worked to connect with and convene meetings with key stakeholders to identify a solution that can start moving forward now.

The council gave direction in the TCP to prioritize studying this project and moving it forward in 2017. Since that time, little actual work has occurred and after nearly a year, no council members have asked for updates. I believe that there need to be specific, time-constrained and measurable goals when the council sets a priority; the City Manager should ensure that a work plan is developed and major milestones reported back out. As a council member, I will work to
ensure this becomes a more common practice, especially around these kinds of transportation issues that are at the heart of quality of life in our city.

Robert Matz:
A better estuary crossing is not only a top priority in the City’s Bike Plan, it is essential for all Alamedans. In September of 2009, an Estuary Crossing Study (Final Draft) was published by the City of Alameda. That study, at page 55, states: Water Shuttle/Taxi – An intermediate solution that will meet the project objectives with consideration of the planned developments on both sides of the estuary. The water shuttle/taxi was determined to be the high-priority alternative for bicyclist and pedestrian crossings. (emphasis added). The cost of the water shuttle/taxi option was $2.65 million dollars, and it would cost $2.5 million dollars to operate annually if service was provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (less if the hours and days of operation were lessened). Let’s compare this “high-priority alternative” to the pedestrian/bike bridge, which was only listed as a “potential long-term alternative” to other projects. Not only would such a bridge impact the boating community in Alameda (already hard hit by the Marina Project), it would also require the approval of the Coast Guard, and the involvement of the City of Oakland and transit authorities. The costs of this project: $8 million for design, $5 million for administration, $500,000 to $750,000 for environmental review, $1 million dollars for mitigation costs on soil, $5 million dollars for impact on businesses in Jack London Square, $500,000 for utility relocation, $150,000 to $200,000 for public outreach, and, drum roll please...$60,000,000 for direct construction costs. The bridge would cost $1.5 million dollars to operate in 24-hour, seven day a week service were provided.

Alameda has $235 million dollars in unfunded pension liability, $300 million dollars in deferred maintenance. Unless fully funded from other sources (regional, transit monies, developer impact fees) we cannot afford an $80 million-dollar bike/pedestrian bridge. We have a cheaper alternative that could meet the stated need which could be implemented more quickly. A water shuttle/taxi would help get bikes and people off the island without using the tube. And water shuttles and taxis could also reduce the number of cars through the tube.

If elected to Council, I would support efforts aimed finding out what, if anything, the Coast Guard needs from Alameda to make its decision as to whether they would approve such a bridge. In the meantime, I would support directing resources to implementing a water shuttle/taxi option; it’s the cheapest, quickest, and least complicated project.

Jim Oddie:
Yes, I am supportive. I voted to approve the Transportation Choices Plan at the 1/16/18 agenda that included this item as a transportation priority project. The next steps are to fund a project study report to determine the specifics and feasibility of the additional crossing. I will continue to support this and work with staff to find funding for the project study report, including lobbying our local county and state leaders, and prioritize the report. I also want to make sure the developer
of the property where the bicycle/pedestrian bridge would “land” in Alameda plans for the bridge in its project.