



The Evolution of the Cal Park Hill Tunnel

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The Cal Park Hill Tunnel that connects Larkspur to San Rafael was originally constructed in 1884 by the North Pacific Coast Railroad. Previously, rail traffic from Sausalito had to follow a route through Mill Valley, downtown Larkspur and San Anselmo with a spur line to San Rafael. The original tunnel was built for a single track but was widened and enlarged in 1924 to accommodate two lines running parallel to each other as pictured above. This undated photograph probably dates from the 1940s. There is an automobile seen just above the train's smokestack that resembles the cars of that decade. Also, the billboard partially visible through the train's smoke (remember billboards?) resembles ads from the 1940s for Griesedieck beer, a St. Louis brewing company's pale lager. By this date, the rail line had become part of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad's network.

According to Marin County's website, the train tunnel was operational through the 1970s, carrying freight after passenger rail-service ended in the 1960s. By the 1980s, the tunnel had been closed at both ends and over the next 10 years suffered cave-ins and fires to its wood-lined interior. By the year 2000 local sustainability groups, most notably the Marin County Bicycle Coalition, were advocating for a repair and reopening of the tunnel for bicycle and pedestrian use. A feasibility study was completed in 2002 with the participation of the county and planning began on the *Cal Park Hill Tunnel and Pathway Project*. Twenty-seven million dollars in funding was secured from regional, state and federal programs, with nearly half of the money coming from the Bay Area's Regional Measure 2 (SMART - Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit). In December of 2010, work was

completed on the project and a decades long dream of providing a viable and safe bicycling and pedestrian path became a reality.

In April of 2018, SMART received federal funding dollars to begin construction of a 2.2 mile extension of their passenger rail service from downtown San Rafael to Larkspur Landing. This critical extension, completed in December of 2019, connects north bay passengers to the Larkspur Ferry terminal and the city of San Francisco.

Today, as this author can attest, the 1106 ft. Cal Park Tunnel accommodates not only passenger rail service, but also provides a reliable, well-lit and safe alternative for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel to and from the San Rafael and Larkspur/Corte Madera area.

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