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## Caltrain bolstering on-board bike space

By Mike Rosenberg  
Daily News Staff Writer  
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Caltrain crews soon will begin ripping out seats from their train cars to make room for more bicycle racks, the first in a series of moves intended to bolster capacity for frustrated bikers.

At a meeting Thursday the Caltrain Board of Directors authorized the "interim" solution to the problem of hundreds of bicyclists who get "bumped" (left at the station) whenever a train's bike racks are full.

The board decided that the number of bike racks in gallery cars should increase 25 percent from 32 to 40, while the number of racks in bombardier cars should soar 50 percent from 16 to 24. To free up space for the racks, the number of seats on the bottom floor of gallery cars should drop from 16 to eight and in bombardier cars from 19 to 11.

In all, the total available bike slots for the entire day should swell 28 percent from 4,000 to 5,152. During peak commute times there should be 27 percent more slots, for a total of 2,930.

A total of 272 seats will have been removed.

The changes will be made during the next two to three months and should be visible by April, said Chief Operating Officer Chuck Harvey. The work and new racks should cost about \$200,000.

"It's not everything the bike community wants, and it's not everything that we want," Harvey said. "But it is doable."

Bike advocates wanted even more racks, but agency officials don't want to remove too many seats because Caltrain cars have become crowded during commute hours,

with ridership smashing records last year.

Just 2,400 of the agency's roughly 40,000 daily weekday riders take their bikes on board, but they are the only passengers who have reported being bumped. Bumping sometimes happens on only nine of the 98 trains the agency operates each day, particularly southbound trips in the morning and northbound trips in the evening, Harvey said.

Bicyclists, represented at the meeting and in talks with the agency by the San Francisco and Silicon Valley bicycle coalitions, claimed a minor victory after the meeting. The increase in bike racks would only modestly improve the problem of bumping, they said.

Still, they were encouraged by Caltrain officials' comments that this would only be an incremental solution and they would revisit the issue again starting next month.

Andy Thornley, program director for the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition, said he is now convinced the Caltrain staff and directors "get it." In

the past, he said, the bumping problem — and their concerns about it — had been mostly ignored. Now it appears likely the agency will form a formal bicycle advisory commission that would meet regularly and adopt a bicycle plan in coming months.

The coalition's proposal to increase bike capacity by 96 percent, however, was rejected by Caltrain.

"People will still get bumped," said Shirley Johnson, an advocate from the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition who commutes to Foster City via Caltrain and bicycle. "But we're very excited because this is an interim step."

Some 19 bicyclists spoke at the meeting and 259 sent e-mails to the agency complaining about the problem.

Bicyclists said they also worry the bikes could be stolen in the new configuration because they would be left on the lower level while riders search for seats on the upper level. Bike theft has not been a problem, and installing a security

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system to monitor the racks would cost in the "mid to upper six figures," Harvey said.

Board chair Don Gage said the capacity issue will be revisited next month and at future meetings. He said it is possible that the waiting time for trains at stations could increase because it takes longer for bicyclists to board, and Thursday's decision was a compromise because there are already constraints on the system for all riders.

Board member Ken Yeager said the group at a future meeting may consider increasing the number of bike slots in the bombardier train to 32, which was Harvey's proposal.

In June, after 18 months of researching the bike capacity issue, Caltrain released a report that, among other things, recommends adding bike parking and improving accessibility. But the plan angered cyclists because it did not address on-board capacity. In response, Caltrain Executive Director Mike Scanlon vowed in October to explore adding bike capacity.

Last fall Burlingame cyclist Scott Wildy put a face on the issue when he was arrested for allegedly defying a conductor's order to remove his bike from a full train. Wildy pleaded no contest to disturbing the peace in January and his punishment was limited to a \$281 fine.

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