

MOVING SHORELINE



Moving Shoreline

Oakland's 19-mile shoreline underwent continual change after the Gold Rush, as marsh and tideland was reclaimed for development. The natural shoreline now lies buried under dredged bay sediments and landfill. Here, by the Emeryville border, the West Oakland marsh once extended as far inland as San Pablo Avenue. The first reclamation projects in the area occurred in the late 19th century, when the marsh was filled for train tracks, factories, and houses. The elevated freeways mark the site of the old marshland shore.

Emeryville

Marshy land, garbage dumps, and raw sewage flowing into the bay made this part of Oakland a backwater district for many years. Early residents included a community of Scandinavian seafarers. The city of Emeryville, north of here, was incorporated in the 1890s. For much of its history, Emeryville flourished as a blue-collar town of steel mills, factories, and canneries. It was also known as a "City of Vice" rife with racetracks, lottery shops, speakeasies, and brothels. Though factories and legal card clubs still exist, the city is now known for its upscale lofts and high-tech firms.



The Emeryville Race Track in 1912.



The Key System

The streetcars, trains, and ferries of the Key System, or "Key Route", once provided East Bay commuters with reliable transportation to San Francisco. From home to office, the trip could be made in less time than it takes to drive today. Though the railroad system was officially known as the San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose Railway, the name "Key Route" was coined in reference to the shape of the company's ferry pier. The pier had ferry slips at its end that resembled the teeth of a key. The pier itself represented the shank of the key and east bay cities formed the key's handle.





A Key System train and the Key Route logo. The train is heading towards Oakland, 1939.

From the beginning of its ferry service in 1903, until the opening of the Bay Bridge to trains in 1939, the Key Route dominated public transit in the East Bay in competition with the trains and ferries of the Southern Pacific. The Key System yards and shops, where the orange and silver trains were repaired and sometimes built, were located in Emeryville, adjoining the three-mile-long ferry pier. The pier lay alongside the site now occupied by the Bay Bridge. By 1949 motorbuses had replaced streetcars on local lines, though transbay Key trains continued running on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge until 1958. The tunnel visible to the west is a remnant of the old interurban train system.

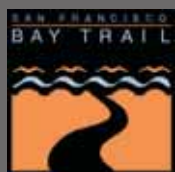
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KEY

-  OAKLAND BAY TRAIL
-  YOU ARE HERE
-  LOCATIONS OF HISTORICAL MARKERS



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For more information on the history of Oakland's waterfront, visit the Oakland Library's History Room and the Oakland Museum of California.