Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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The Bridges and the San Francisco Bay Oral History Project: Series History

The Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, launched a new oral history series on the history of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in May 2012. At that time, ROHO entered into an agreement with the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) to conduct approximately 15 oral histories, totaling about 30 hours of interviews, on the history of the Bay Bridge, the San Francisco Bay, and bridges in the surrounding region.

This project was a collaboration between ROHO, OMCA, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). This project was designed to fulfill the historical mitigation requirements associated with the dismantling of the eastern span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. The series coincided with, and contributed to, the research phase and design phase of an exhibit at OMCA on the social and environmental history of the San Francisco Bay.

This project provides a new set of resources widely accessible to students, scholars, and the public interested in the San Francisco Bay. Interviews focused on the men and women who spent a good portion of their careers working on the bridge, whether as painters or engineers, toll-takers or architects, labor or management. Beyond the human dimension of the bridges, these structures also connect geographic spaces, providing conceptual linkages between cultures, environments, and political discourses. This oral history project, then, explored the role of the iconic bridges in shaping the identity of the region, as well as their place in architectural, environmental, labor, and political history. This project enhances the historical understanding of the San Francisco Bay and the natural and built environment that helps define the region.

The Bay Bridge Oral History Project launched with an investigation of the history of the bay and the architectural, social, and political history of the bridges that span the waters of the region. Planning meetings attended by representatives of ROHO, OMCA, Caltrans, BATA, and MTC began in mid-2011. In these meetings, representatives of the various groups discussed the topics that should be covered in the interviews as well as the kind of people who should be interviewed. Although there were no known individuals who worked on the construction of the Bay Bridge (1934-36) still living, a foremost goal of the project was document the construction of the bridge and its early years, especially before the bridge was altered in 1959 with the removal of rail tracks on the lower deck. Beyond that initial goal, interviews were sought with individuals who would be able to share unique experiences related to the bridges from a variety of personal and professional vantage points: from laborers involved in maintenance of the bridge through bridge engineers who worked on the design on the new eastern span. The primary focus of this project was to dig deeper into the complex history of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and its changing relationship to human communities and the environment.

The project interview staff at ROHO consisted of Sam Redman, PhD, and Martin Meeker, PhD. The project interviewers were assisted by David Dunham, technical specialist, and Julie Allen, editor.
Interview #1 December 17, 2012
Begin Audio File 1 bayol_greg_01_12-17-12_stereo.mp3

01-00:00:06
Meeker: This is Martin Meeker interviewing Greg Bayol. Is that correct pronunciation?

01-00:00:10
Bayol: Yes.

01-00:00:18
Meeker: The seventeenth of December, 2012. We’re here in Daly City, California. This is for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge Oral History Project. I just want to begin actually getting you to say your name and your date and place of birth.

01-00:00:35
Bayol: Greg Bayol. I was born October 21, 1947 in San Jose, California.

01-00:00:43
Meeker: Can you tell me a little bit about the kind of community that you were born into?

01-00:00:48
Bayol: I was raised in the suburbs of the East Bay, in Concord and Pleasant Hill, at a time when suburbs were just coming out. Where I lived was still surrounded by walnut orchards and farms and so on, so it was kind of a transitional period at that time. I grew up in that until I went off to school.

01-00:01:13
Meeker: Were you raised by both of your parents?

01-00:01:15
Bayol: Yes. Standard family. My mom worked a little bit, but it was primarily just my dad.

01-00:01:21
Meeker: What kind of work did your dad do?

01-00:01:23
Bayol: He was an accountant for various firms over his work life.

01-00:01:31
Meeker: What kind of work did your mother do when she was in—

01-00:01:33
Bayol: She worked in a factory one time, and—gosh, a couple of other places, but nothing for a long period of time.
Meeker: Did you have siblings?

Bayol: Yeah, twin sisters and an older brother.

Meeker: Okay, so four kids in a family, and you were where in that?

Bayol: I was in the middle. My brother was older, five years older than me. Still is five years older. My sisters are a year and a half younger than I am.

Meeker: Tell me a little about your experience in school. What kind of activities did you like? What sort of subjects in school were you particularly attracted to?

Bayol: Everything was kind of standard in elementary in the beginning, and then once into high school, I played sports, but not a great athlete or anything, but enjoyed it quite a bit. Enjoyed math and science, and enjoyed school in general. I had a really good time there. No major problems or anything.

Meeker: Were you raised in the kind of household that it was expected that you were going to go to college?

Bayol: Yeah. It’s funny, because my brother, he was a dyslectic. So he was limited. My sisters were girls, so my parents didn’t expect them to go on to college, but I was expected to, because I had good enough grades. Also at the time was the Vietnam War time, so I was definitely going to go to college. I had no desire to be drafted. I came out of school thinking in terms of math or engineering. In fact, at that time, I wanted to work for the Division of Highways, which is now Caltrans. That was my goal.

Meeker: Civil engineering, or structural engineering or something like that.

Bayol: Yeah. But when I got out of high school, I went to Diablo Valley College and got interested in biology, so things went different directions at that time.

Meeker: What year do you graduate high school?
Bayol: Sixty-five.

Meeker: Sixty-five, okay. So this is a pretty transitional year, I think, in the culture of the Bay Area. Actually, I grew up down in the South Bay in a similar kind of suburb, and I remember growing up, and you’re right, there were still the orchards, and then the malls started to move in and everything. What was your experience of that? You were in the Concord/Walnut Creek area, is that right?

Bayol: Yeah.

Meeker: During that period of time that you were growing up in the fifties and first part of the sixties, what were some of the major contextual changes, maybe landscape changes, that you observed?

Bayol: The thing I remember about how I spent my time as a kid, for one thing, was going—we had separate towns. You had downtown Concord. It was a specific place. You had Walnut Creek, San Francisco. I loved to travel there. In fact, probably late fifties, when I was about twelve, thirteen, I started taking weekend bus rides into San Francisco with my friends, and we’d go all around the city. My intention at that time was to move there someday. But then, what was happening out there, the lay of the land was changing, because the housing projects were coming in, and the strip malls, and then the malls. It was all happening. When you’re in the middle of it, you don’t see it. But now I look back and I see it was a major—there were kids driving tractors a block from my house, tilling their farms and stuff. That was just about at that time when that was going away. Then what was happening, I think socially—very vivid recollections of the kids in my high school growing their hair long. It was the Beatles. The Beatles came, and so everybody—their hair got longer. There was one kid who had hair to his shoulders. You just couldn’t believe it. The parents were just appalled. Then drugs started creeping into things. After my two years at Diablo Valley [College] and I went over to San Francisco State, I actually moved over to the city and saw what was happening. That was the Haight-Ashbury time. I avoided it mostly—you go to concerts and go to demonstrations and all that was happening. And it was a special time. I look back on it. I would say, compared with the kids today, there’s no—the spirit that was there at that time. I don’t think it exists, certainly to the extent it does today. I think we knew at the time that it was a special time. A lot of things were happening. I mean, with health. I remember going to a lecture at Diablo
Valley—I think his name is Jeff Smith, the guy who started the Haight-Ashbury Clinic—to talk to us as students about health. Venereal disease was just—the pre-AIDS sort of issues. But they were out there. This is stuff you saw and heard about every day, and it was a change. Another thing, I was a psych major also at one point. People were more honest. In fact, when I was in school, we would have these Friday night get-togethers, where you’d sit around. They were called focus groups—not focus groups, but places where you can sit down and just talk out stuff. I’m not aware of that today.

01-00:08:11
Meeker:   Encounter groups?

01-00:08:12
Bayol:    Yeah, encounter groups, that’s it. Right. Where we could tell each other what we thought of each other.

01-00:08:18
Meeker:   Was this something that was formal that you participated in?

01-00:08:20
Bayol:    No, it was very informal. In fact, I was kind of a nerdy guy, at least maybe in that group or whatever. There was maybe twelve of us. Twelve, maybe fifteen. There was one girl. We were high school and then right out of high school. We would meet once or twice a month and talk about philosophy and music and all these intellectual things. I was just really lucky. It was the luck of making these friendships. We would go over these things. One thing we did was we would send people out, each one of us, to investigate something. One of the ones I remember very vividly was we would go to different churches and ask pastors and priests why we should belong to their church. I remember going to this Catholic priest. “Why should I be a Catholic?” He said, “Because if you don’t, you’re going to go to hell.” And he was serious. He didn’t laugh.

01-00:09:32
Meeker:   I was raised Catholic, so I’ve heard that before.

01-00:09:35
Bayol:    My wife and daughter are Catholic. LMU daughter. I think there was a time of tuning in—it started out with the nonconformity of the hippie years. Not hippie, but the beatniks in North Beach and all that. This, “I’m not going to be like everybody else. I’m going to be myself and be different and be unique.”

01-00:10:02
Meeker:   One of the interesting things that you’re saying is that you graduated high school out in Diablo Valley in 1965, and then you went to junior college there
for two years, and I imagine you were probably still living at home during those two years?

Bayol: Yes.

Meeker: Sixty-five to sixty-seven. But it sounds to me like there was a great deal of seepage from what was happening in San Francisco, all the way across the bridge, all the way across the coastal range, out into more of the interior valleys. You were even getting visits from people who were running the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic. It sounds like there was even kind of this culture amongst you and your friends of kind of exploring and questioning and seeking, I guess. Is that accurate?

Bayol: Yeah, it was. It started for me because when I was, oh, about twelve years old, I was a Lutheran, and the pastor decided that I should be a minister. So I went to school with him. It was a one-on-one training with the idea that when I got into high school—the one thing I did do was I took German in high school, but beyond that, it fizzled out. But the idea of learning about that sort of thing, and then at the same time, with all these social changes that were going on—and it was a big deal. You’d read in the [San Francisco] Chronicle—I remember seeing pictures of the hippies sitting on cars, smoking marijuana, and what a terrible thing it was. Then trying to figure it all out. I mean, what is it? These people were from all over the country. There’s documentaries being done now that really look into that and try to figure out what was going on. I don’t know. It was a different time. It was really a different time. There was this migration. One thing was the role of the Chronicle. The Chronicle was a Northern California newspaper, and the Oakland Tribune was more of a local paper, and not quite, I don’t think, of the caliber of the Chronicle. The Chronicle had a little higher, I think, better reputation. It kind of joined us all. We read the Chronicle, it was mostly San Francisco news at that time. That’s what they were reporting.

Meeker: So in ’67, when you start to attend San Francisco State, did you move to San Francisco?

Bayol: Yeah, I moved into the dorms.
Meeker: Oh, you did? So you lived on the dorms on campus just right out here. What was that like? Were you there for two years then, is that right, before you finished?

Bayol: There’s a story to how long I lasted. It was a difficult time, because I was having, looking back, very minor stress and anxiety issues. I don’t even know why it passed. I got into mild drugs. Marijuana. Never much more than that. In my second year there, everything fell apart, because the school had a lot of violence and the demonstrations and the—

Meeker: This was the third world revolt or—

Bayol: Yeah, it was black studies—

Meeker: Yeah, the ethnic studies.

Bayol: Ethnic studies department. I remember sitting in a classroom, my statistics classroom, for my psych major, and about three or four Black Panthers came walking into the room and set pistols down on the table, and they said, “You are going to go out and listen to the speech by our brothers.” The professor said, “Let’s all go.” We did. In another incident I was sitting in a classroom, and some guys came in and lit a fire and burned up a piano. It was pretty scary. So I dropped out. I missed my last semester. I came back ten years later.

Meeker: By dropping out, this was really sort of a response to the sort of tumult of what was happening at the university? It just seemed like it wasn’t a conducive environment in which to learn?

Bayol: Yeah, there was that aspect of it, because I think if there hadn’t been all of that, I probably would have stayed, but it was also something else happened. The draft lottery, and I got a good number. For people who don’t know, people were getting drafted. You couldn’t plan your life. That was the whole idea. The first thing they did was they had us take an exam. So we all had to pile into, I remember, my high school gym, and go in there and take an exam to see whether you were really academic, or whether you were just a flake and
trying to get out of the draft. That just never went anywhere, so they decided, well, we’ll have a lottery, so then you’ll know. You’ll get a number and you’ll know if you’re going to get drafted or if you’re going to skate. I got a number of 195. It was based on your birthday, so there were 366 numbers. I got this one. It was a borderline number at the time, but quickly became clear that I wasn’t going to get drafted. They only went to ninety, I think. Then you’re only exposed for one year, and then once that’s passed, then you’re free and clear. Well, that’s what happened with me. So I didn’t have to go to school, so I didn’t go to school, and I got a job, actually, at what became Caltrans.

01-00:16:00
Meeker: Let’s talk about that then. This was 1970, and I guess you started in the highway maintenance and construction division? Is that right?

01-00:16:07
Bayol: Actually, I started in the mailroom and then went to engineering records, and then right of way records. This all happened very quickly.

01-00:16:15
Meeker: Why don’t you tell me, how was it you decided to seek a job with the California Department of Transportation? Is that what it was called?

01-00:16:22
Bayol: No. At that time, it was called the Department of Public Works Division of Highways.

01-00:16:26
Meeker: Okay. Department of Public Works Division of Highways. Why did you decide to apply for a job there, and what was the application process like?

01-00:16:34
Bayol: My roommate at my house—I lived on Hemway Terrace off of Fulton, right next to USF. My roommate had a good friend whose mother was the head of the State Personnel Board, which was the hiring—still to this day. They’re still the same name. They did the hiring. You go in and take a test, and then see if you can get a job. This roommate said, “Hey, Ms. Ryan”—her name was Ryan—“told us to come on down because they’re hiring.” So we went in. We waited a few minutes, went into a room. There was like twenty people in there. We took a little test. We waited a few minutes. They came in and said, “Okay, you got a job. Go over to the Division of Highways and be interviewed.” So I did, and I got the job. My friend got a job at the Public Utilities Commission, and another friend got a job at another place. They were just hiring like crazy. I went over there and I got the job. I went to the mailroom, and then moved along. My job title was clerk, male only. M-A-L-
E. At that time, there was a rule that women could not be required to lift more than twenty pounds. But working in the mailroom, you had more lifting, so they had a classification of male only. They only allowed males for that job. Anyway, I made $377 a month. It was Clerk I, then I got a Clerk II.

Meeker: How did your job functions change during that period of time?

Bayol: In the mailroom, it was basic mailing, delivering stuff around, and going on driving runs around the city. It was a fun job. I had a good time and learned a lot. Learned a lot about the organization, more than you might think, just having all these papers, and being curious and reading mail and stuff. Then they had this opening in engineering records, and that was going in and providing plans to the engineers. They would come down. They're working on a project on a given route, and then you’d provide them with the plans to the route so they could make changes to it.

Meeker: Almost like a librarian kind of job.

Bayol: It actually is a librarian job. It was good, too. It was good learning, because I learned a lot about how to read plans and all that. Then from there, I went over and I got some kind of a promotion, and I went to the right of way records, which are just property maps. They’re not like the engineering plans. Then I did that. That was the same kind of work, but just different materials.

Meeker: Was this all in the same location, same office building?

Bayol: Just a block or two away. One was at 150 Oak, at Franklin, and then the other place was at the Fox Plaza building on Market and Polk. That was educational. I learned a lot about property and I wrote deeds. Got into that. This is all happening within a two-year period. Then I went to maintenance, and I worked in maintenance for one year, highway maintenance. I was hired for San Francisco, which covered Marin, so I went up to Marin and I worked out of Mill Valley and Highway One. I was landscape maintenance on it.

Meeker: What precipitated the move from an office position to a maintenance position?
Bayol: More money. In fact, it paid a lot more at that time. I was probably making about $600, $700 a month, and this one paid $1,000.

Meeker: Thirty percent more.

Bayol: Yeah, it was a big raise.

Meeker: Would you have been maintenance worker one or something like that? That was the category?

Bayol: Exactly. Landscape Maintenance Worker I.

Meeker: Landscape. You would have been doing—

Bayol: Litter pickup, primarily, but you also prune and lop these trees; watering.

Meeker: Maybe just kind of walk me through what a typical day would have been like on a job as a maintenance worker/landscape.

Bayol: We worked out of a shed in—the one that I worked at the most was in Mill Valley. It’s right at Highway 1 and 101. Still there. This location is still in operation there. We would go in. We had a small crew. There was like three or four of us on the landscape crew, and then there were the highway maintenance guys. It was a totally different—because we were all new. They were still in this hiring mode, I guess. But these guys, the maintenance worker guys, they were tough. They were big guys, and they wore these overalls. They were kind of scary. I’ll never forget this. The employee newsletter came along, and it had promotions. It had my name, and they said, “Greg, you’re in here for a promotion.” This guy says, “If that’s a promotion, what in the hell were you doing before?” Just never forget it. I said, “Well, I was a clerk.” You get a group and then you go out, and you either drive down the median, picking up litter, or you can be doing some planting. We did that, too. Cleanup. It was a good thing, camaraderie and all that. You knew it was dangerous, too. There was always that aspect. You’ve got to learn it quick, because you can make a mistake and it can cost you. Fortunately, it never happened during that job. We had some accidents, not involving us.
Meeker: Not involving your team, but you heard about them?

Bayol: Also, we were on the road one time when a car went off the road right next to us. It was pretty frightening.

Meeker: Close call then.

Bayol: Yeah. Which reminds me of the other thing: we picked up dead animals. We had to get rid of the carcasses.

Meeker: What was the process for that?

Bayol: It got controversial a few years ago. Up on 101, right through Sausalito, it goes up, gets up in the hills a little bit. There are little turn-offs. We would get a deer or a dog, and we’d put it in our truck, then we’d drive it up to this part and drive off, and then toss them down into a pit, and throw lime on them, and they would just disintegrate over time. There was no one around. It wasn’t near any homes or anything like that. So there was that. In fact, there was a guy on the crew who wanted—he said if ever there was an animal, he wanted to be called out to pick it up, because he was trying to become a vegetarian and he wanted to get turned off by the raw meat. Yeah, we had some crazy things. That was pretty regular. Then the sad part—you don’t think of this, but it happens a lot—we’d get a call from somebody and say, “Have you seen a German Shepherd?” “Yeah. He’s gone.”

Meeker: Because they would have collars on or something?

Bayol: If they didn’t have a collar. If they had a collar, we would contact people, but most of the time, they didn’t. That happened a couple of times, where it was pretty emotional. The family would come into the yard, and we’d provide them their dog and so on. But I worked there, and then I also worked in San Francisco and worked on freeways here. That was pretty scary.

Meeker: In San Francisco?
Bayol: Yeah.

Meeker: Just because of the tightness of quarters and—

Bayol: There’s no room.

Meeker: No median.

Bayol: Right.

Meeker: What kind of training did you receive, safety training? Was it like a formal process, or were there guys who maybe had been working in this position longer that kind of just gave you the necessary pointers?

Bayol: Actually, both. We had formal training. Being landscapers, we didn’t get—like, how to put in a lane closure—we didn’t really get the specific training, but we were told about the rules and so on, and what to watch out for. But it was not to the extent it is today. In fact, a couple years ago, I was a safety officer, and training was part of my purview. It really wasn’t extensive, although they did provide formal training. As a landscaper, it was mostly to do with, as far as safety goes, was the safety of the chemicals. We had to learn how careful we had to be. Now it’s just completely different. They don’t use anything toxic at all, hardly. But at that time, we used some pretty—

Meeker: What were you using?

Bayol: Agent Orange, literally.

Meeker: For just removal of—

Bayol: Spraying weeds. We had Diquat and Paraquat. Very handy. I think they worked really well, but they can be dangerous. So there was a lot of training on that. If you’re going to use this chemical, you’ve got to put out this {time?}, you’ve got to mix it at this rate, and all that stuff. It was very formal. The working out on the roadway part, that’s more the—they send you out with
a crew who would tell you how to do things. On the weekends, I could work in maintenance, in regular highway maintenance. We started Sunday mornings at 2:00 a.m. We would put in closures. When this was presented, great, it was overtime, it was money. Very vivid memory of this. The boss, the superintendent, says, “Do you want to work Sunday?” I say, “Sure, that’s great.” He said, “Okay, we start at 2:00 a.m. You got to get up early.” I’m thinking, okay, really early in the morning. It didn’t dawn on me that that’s not just early in the morning, that’s late at night. I lived at Fillmore and Washington, lived on Washington, and the yard was at San Bruno Avenue near Utah, Utah and Sixteenth. Very convenient, the twenty-two Fillmore bus goes from Washington to Fillmore. It drops me right at the thing. I thought, hey, that’s terrific, I can just hop on the bus. So I’m getting on the twenty-two Fillmore at one o’clock in the morning, this skinny little white kid. I stood out. It was scary. That first ride and only ride, because from then on I didn’t do it. Then you get out there and you put in the closures. It’s late at night, and a lot of drunks. They told us stories, but nothing ever happened while I was working out there.

01-00:28:49
Meeker: Horror stories about cars careening into the—

01-00:28:52
Bayol: They say that drunk drivers will—and this apparently happened recently, an accident—if they see lights, they tend to go to them. So the trucks would be parked, and they would see, and they’d drift off and hit them. At that time, we had what are called shadow trucks.

01-00:29:12
Meeker: They would go to them because maybe they thought that they were following another car?

01-00:29:15
Bayol: Right, yeah. They weren’t judging the speed of things and realizing they were coming up very fast. So we put out a lot of flares and the cones. You really overdo it, try to make it as safe as you can.

01-00:29:31
Meeker: So then, by, let’s see, 1975, you go to work for DMV. What—

01-00:29:39
Bayol: Well, there’s one missing thing there. About ’73, I went to work in construction. This was another promotion, a minor one. I did materials testing. I would go out and test asphalt and base rock. That was a really great experience. I loved it. You drive around and you see these highways, but you
really don’t have a concept of, or even think about, how the heck they build them. If you’re a materials engineer—or I was a technician—you learn the details. I worked in Concord on Highway Four. Worked in Novato, and I worked out in Sea Ranch. They were building two bridges out there. Every time I go up there, I go and look at them because I worked on them. It’s kind of fun. Learned a lot, and it gets very exacting. The testing methods are very complex and exacting.

Meeker: Can you walk me through that a little bit? You described sort of testing the materials, you would think that there would already be a pretty established knowledge about what works or what doesn’t, or is it just you already know what works and it’s just testing the quality of the specific materials that it’s using?

Bayol: The simplest {manner?} is just a straight, paved road. The first thing they do is they grade it. When you grade, you’re allowed that level. It’s called original ground, OG. You go out and you don’t have to test it or anything, but you can tell if there are big trees in it or big boulders. You can’t have that. It’s not allowed. That’s called deleterious material, and it has to be removed. Otherwise, then they come in with a base material, which is so much gravel, basically, but it has to have so much percentage of half-inch rock, so much percentage of quarter-inch rock, so much percentage of sand, so much percentage of dust, literally. We go out and take samples of it, take it back to the lab, and run it through these—we have shaking machines, and they grade everything, and so you can get the percentage of each size. The bottom base, which is called AB2, aggregate base, is pretty loose. You get leeway. Then you go up to the next one, which is the base, which goes right under the pavement, the concrete or the asphalt. That’s very exacting. You have to use rock from—it’s usually river rock, the nice round stuff and all that. Then you have the cement and—

Meeker: Where do you get these materials?

Bayol: There are rock plants. There are places. You don’t see them like you used to, because they’re kind of hidden away. They’re ugly. Kaiser is one of the providers, they’re a big one, and McGuire and Hester, and Ghilotti Brothers, and Shamrock up in Marin. The contractors go in with their big trucks and they’re loaded up, and they create it the same way. They use the shakers and they sneak in so much percentage of that rock, so much percentage of that.
That’s the first thing, and then you have to go and test whether it’s compacted. These rollers that come in, vibratory rollers, and the steamrollers and all that, they flatten it all out. It has to be compacted to a certain level. That’s a really serious test. We had to learn all about that. It’s done with a nuclear gauge. What you do is you go out and you take a sample, and you put it in a container, take it back to the lab, and then you—well, when you’re out in the field with a gauge, you measure the density of the road bit. Then when you take it back, you take that same material that they used, and you try to make it—how do I say this? You try to compact it to the maximum. The material you got in the field has to be, on the final lift, like 90 percent of the best compaction you can get. In the lab, what you do is you pour the stuff into a tube, and you pound it. Using math and measuring, you determine how compacted it is.

Meeker: When you’re getting the samples in the field, are you kind of getting a core sample of the roadway?

Bayol: Yeah. You dig it out.

Meeker: You dig it out?

Bayol: Yeah. Finish with this. So then you compact it. In-place density versus the lab density, and it should be 90 percent the lab. You’re going to get it more. You’re going to compact it more in the lab. If it’s not, then they’ve got to compact it some more, and that is very expensive. In fact, we were bribed all the time.

Meeker: Really? By the contractors?

Bayol: By the contractors. Yeah. The guy says, “Hey, if we pass this test, I’ll bet you there’ll be a case sitting in your truck tonight.”

Meeker: No kidding. Wow.

Bayol: I’m not aware of anybody taking anything. They did it at DMV, but that’s another story. So we do that. When you’re doing concrete pours, especially on bridges, that’s very involved and—
Meeker: So I imagine the different kinds of roadways are going to have different regulations about density.

Bayol: It’s pretty much standard. If it’s going to be concrete, it’s going to be a certain formula. There’s a book, and there’s only two or three different versions of it. Back then, you’d have the base, which is kind of the cheap rock, but then the concrete, which is very expensive. Cement is expensive. It was like—what did they say?—seven tenths. They measured not in inches, but in tenths of a foot. Bizarre. Today, the concrete is like two feet thick, with the idea they don’t ever have to come back and fix it. I mean, for many years. Fifty years. When I was working, it was a period of time when—it actually got peaked out later, but the roads were starting to fall apart because the fifties was the beginning of the interstate, and they were doing a lot of new roads. It got to the point, though, in ’55—so you go ’65, ’75—about twenty years, and then things have to be replaced.

Meeker: Do you find that there is kind of this twenty-year cycle that happens on this?

Bayol: Yeah, but it’s going to be a longer cycle because of the new materials. All along the way, they’re always improving. It was always neat, because California was the—they did everything. They invented everything. They were the highway builders. If you read a Norwegian manual on how to build, it would say California test method, CST, everywhere. Or CTS, whatever it was. I was working up in Geyserville. We did an experiment there with some stuff on the shoulders. We put in concrete shoulders. They don’t do that. It was too expensive, but they tried it to see how that would be. Also, you have contrast issues.

Meeker: That actually is one question. I’ve always wondered, and I’m not quite sure if you have the knowledge for this, but how is it determined whether a roadway would be concrete or asphalt?

Bayol: It’s a couple of things. One is the location. If it’s remote, often they’ll use concrete, because you don’t need a hot plant. The asphalt has to be made in a plant with a mixer that heats up the oil. You can build one and take it out remotely, but it’s very expensive to do that. With concrete, with PCC, or Portland cement concrete, you can just have a concrete plant anywhere, and
what’s nearby. When we were working up at Geyserville, the Russian River is right there and there’s tons of—literally—of river rock, which is the best to use, rather than taking—

01-00:39:23
Meeker: For concrete?

01-00:39:23
Bayol: Yeah, than trying to break up rock. So that will be one thing. Another is how much money you’ve got, because concrete is more expensive, but it lasts a lot longer. When we were building—I remember 101 down south of San Jose, the Monterey Highway, the Gilroy Bypass—when we were building that, we decided we were going to build with asphalt, or at least a certain section of it. I got a call. Here I am—what was I?—a public affairs guy at the time. He says, “I’m with so-and-so, Portland Cement Concrete. Why aren’t you building this road out of concrete? You know asphalt doesn’t last.” In fact, in the business, it’s referred to as flexible pavement. That’s another thing, because it can—

01-00:40:14
Meeker: Asphalt is?

01-00:40:14
Bayol: Asphalt is, yeah. It’s a little easier to work with. Concrete is really troublesome. You’ve got to do everything exactly right.

01-00:40:24
Meeker: So there’s this kind of decision making. With the concrete, it lasts longer, but it’s also more brittle, so it might not last as long, and with asphalt, it’s cheaper, but it generally wouldn’t last longer unless it’s lasting longer because there’s a good deal of—I guess the ground might move or something like that, in relation to the roadway.

01-00:40:49
Bayol: Yeah. That’s another thing you’ve got to test. I worked on a drill rig, where you go out and you drill. You go down and you test the soils to see how they’re going to hold the road up, and that helps determine whether you’re going to go with asphalt or PCC. You prefaced it by do I have the knowledge. My knowledge is very limited. I’ve asked that question myself many times. It’s not easy. I don’t think it’s a clear-cut decision.
I’m curious, when you’re out at someplace relatively remote like Sea Ranch, is this a day commute that you go out there, or do they put you up in a motel out there or something like that?

Yeah, they did. It’s both. Sometimes I’d commute. It was a four-hour drive. I’m trying to think if it was from home. They put me up in Geyserville. I had, actually, a motel in Santa Rosa. Then when went out to Sea Ranch, a couple of times I stayed there at Sea Ranch, which was very nice, but it was the only thing around. Or you can get paid and then camp. That’s what some guys did.

Oh, really?

Yeah, just camp out and take your per diem.

Wow, that’s interesting. As long as it wasn’t coming down in sheets, I guess. You were in this position until ’75?

Right, in November. Actually, I got laid off twice. I got a layoff notice. They made a technical mistake. They had a party for me and everything. It was really great. Then I get a notice like two days later. I said, “Hey, I’m not going.” That was in, I think, August. Then November, I got the real layoff notice.

What was happening at the time? Why were there layoffs?

Mr. Brown—same governor we have today—had this notorious director of transportation, Adriana Gianturco her name was. She was very much all for transit and all that, and she decided that Caltrans couldn’t afford to employ so many people, so she was going to cut them back. It was a major accounting error as it later turned out. In fact, Brown himself has said that it was a mistake, because he laid off 2,500 employees at Caltrans.

Out of roughly?
Bayol: At that time, about 15,000. So it was a good hunk. I guess I had about five or six years, so I was prime target for this.

Meeker: Last hired, first fired kind of thing.

Bayol: Yeah, exactly. They had a little bit of a formula, but it basically came down to that.

Meeker: I was raised down on South Bay, and I remember it was about this time that there was that freeway overpass, the famous one that was unfinished. Is that the same—

Bayol: They called it Stonehenge. No. It was actually unrelated. It was funny, because the idea was, when they were building the interchange, 101 – 680 – 280, the idea was, well, we’re going to come in here and put in—they’re called direct connect ramps. The ramp is like it is today. There’s no merging or anything. They had this great idea, why don’t we, since we’re out there disturbing everything, we’ll build the middle of this and we’ll come back. They said okay. They figured they were going to be coming back in a year. Well, they didn’t come back in a year, because they ran out of money. It wasn’t the same money, but it was just that things were having—still to this day. There’s less gas tax because the cars are more efficient. The collections had gone down. People were driving less, you have a downturn in the economy, and all that stuff was adding up, and projects like that got delayed.

Meeker: This period of time, this five years, your first period of time with Caltrans, coincided with the initial gas crisis. Did that have any impact on the work of Caltrans from where you sat?

Bayol: No. The thing I remember about it was that they were trying to raise the gas tax, and we got very involved, and very carefully too. I hope I get all the dates right. It was probably a little after that. A guy named Bob Best, he was our director, director of transportation, and he was from the Pacific Foundation. He was a lawyer. Anyway, he came up with this idea to raise the gas tax. We got very involved in providing information to people about what that means. What we’re going to get for it, and how much it’s going to be raised, and how much will you be willing to raise it, and all that. We had to be careful, because
it was put on the ballot and we couldn’t, of course, endorse or anything. We could only answer questions. We couldn’t endorse or argue for it, even though it meant our jobs in a sense. I mean, it could. But that was a little later—

Meeker: You could answer questions in a certain way.

Bayol: Yeah. Yeah. We got in trouble sometimes. We did a lot of public speaking, me and my people who worked for me, and people would stand up at a meeting and say, “What are you doing talking about—you shouldn’t be doing that.” Really, they were very careful. “I’m just answering questions.” I think that was a little after I came back from DMV. Anyway.

Meeker: Given that we do have a bit of limited time, I kind of want to skip over your DMV period, unless there’s something you’d like to say about it in particular? You were there for a couple of years, but then it sounds like when you got an opportunity to go back to Caltrans, you did.

Bayol: No, there wasn’t much. It was an experience. I enjoyed it. It was nice meeting people. I had some interesting experiences. I gave Francis Coppola a driving test, and Patty Hearst. Who else? Eldridge Cleaver.

Meeker: Wow. What office were you working out of?

Bayol: San Francisco and Los Angeles. I was trained in, actually, the Santa Monica office. That was fun, because every day a movie star would come in. My comment was always, “Everybody’s got to get their license renewed.” A whole bunch of people there. That side of it was fun. I worked with fun people. It was not the kind of atmosphere, because what had happened with DMV was it was like a place for retired military. The guy who had headed up, a guy named Keith, for years, had been a general. When he wanted to staff, he called his friends, and so the upper echelon of DMV was military. It kind of gave it that kind of a flavor, and it was still hanging around when I was there, but it was on its way, fortunately, and they’ve changed quite a bit.

Meeker: You were giving driving tests. Was that the main job that you were doing there?
Bayol: Yup. I’d work at the counter doing written tests, and then take people for rides. Or they’d take me for a ride.

Meeker: So to speak.

Bayol: I got robbed one time. A guy stuck a knife into the car and said, “Give me your money,” while I was giving a driving test. He was actually robbing the driver. He had this knife and he says, “Give me your license,” was what he was saying to this guy, with the whole idea, as soon as the guy got the wallet out, he was going to grab it. So I leaned over and I said, “He doesn’t have a license. He’s taking a driving test.” Anyway, the guy got his money. Not mine, fortunately.

Meeker: It was the DMV over on Oak Street, I guess?

Bayol: Fell and Baker, whatever, yeah.

Meeker: So then, come 1977, what do you see, an opportunity back at Caltrans, and you apply for it?

Bayol: Yeah. What had happened was the layoff was being undone and we were getting called back as we were laid off. We were going in order. There was something that hung mine up, because the guy ahead of me wouldn’t take a job, so it got delayed a little bit. When I was working in construction, I made friends with this guy. We did things. We played basketball. He’s a very interesting guy. He told the public affairs people that I was available and I could write. I said, “Got a guy who can write. You ought to hire me.” So that’s what they did. I don’t know the order of things, but anyway, that’s how I ended up working for a man named Bob Halligan.

Meeker: He was the public affairs chief?

Bayol: Yes.
Can you describe a little bit, in the last couple minutes on this tape, how the office is organized?

We were under a thing called the executive assistant to the district director, and the executive assistant had—it was odd, but he had delineators. They’re the people who draw the plans—at that time. It’s done differently now. He had them, he had our audio/visual, and he had—it was called press and publications. That was the office that I worked in. I had my boss. Then there was a secretary, and then there was another position, this woman. So there was the two of us, and we wrote. We wrote newsletters about the projects that were distributed to businesses and the public, and then we did an employee newsletter, and we wrote news releases and answered questions from the press on occasion, although Bob Halligan, the boss, he did most of that at that time. But I got into it pretty quickly. That’s how it was organized. It changed while I was there. We took in the front desk, the walk-in people, which can be very complicated. An engineer will come in from a private company, saying, “I’m doing a project on El Camino Real, and I need the plans. Where are they?” We would have to have the knowledge to find what he needed.

So you became sort of a public service branch, almost like a plans or librarianship, in addition to—

Yeah. In fact, it was related, in a way, to that job that I had had years ago. But that took some technical training. They were going back and forth on this, because they didn’t want to have engineers doing non-engineer work, or even technicians doing non-technical work. Here I was, an information officer, and they’re going to put me, and I would take the place of a tech so he could go up and draw plans. That was in a transitional period when I was there. I worked for a little while, and then I left, because there was no promotion. It was a dead end. I knew it. I went to work in administration, and I worked in the training office. Oh, yeah. I managed buildings. I managed the Transbay Terminal and all of the toll plaza buildings.
This is Martin Meeker interviewing Greg Bayol. This is tape number two. You were just providing a bit of an overview of your career with Caltrans post-1977. I’m wondering if you can maybe just do a quick rundown so I can get a clear sense about the different offices, because I thought that you were in public affairs the whole time, but it sounds like you kind of moved into a couple different directions. I guess you started out as an information officer first, in the Office of Press and Publications.

It was called Press and Publications, yeah.

Sounds like you were there for a short period of time, then you moved into another position within Caltrans.

Yeah, I went into the administration. I did various things. Things were just kind of in chaos, in a way, in that department, so I was getting shuffled around. By that time, I had a master’s in education. I wanted to go into the training office, because my emphasis was in curriculum for adults, adult education. It never really worked out. They had just established a new office. Then I went into it, and I started working, but it was more clerical work than training work. I wasn’t designing any training or anything. I was filling out forms and buying videos. Anyway, I looked around for something else, and I ended up doing this building manager job, which was pretty good. I was stationed at the Transbay Terminal, and I took care of that building plus other buildings around the Bay Area, including the toll plaza buildings, and I supervised the janitors. It was pretty mundane, but the surroundings were interesting. I enjoyed working at a terminal, because I worked with our planning department in trying to make the place more, I don’t know, enjoyable for people who were taking the bus, AC transit buses, in and out of the city, because our ridership was dropping off.

This would have been what years, roughly?

I hope I have them right, but it seems to me this was ’79 to ’81, ’82. Maybe a little after that. Maybe in the early ’80s. Because there’s a milestone time. There were some rewarding things about that. I got some projects done that were pretty good.
Meeker: The Transbay Terminal is now no longer.

Bayol: I know, it’s sad.

Meeker: This is part of the larger constellation of pieces of the Bay Bridge. From your perspective as the person who supervised the building for a number of years, can you tell us a little bit about the building, its function, its architecture, what kind of people used it? Then maybe some of these issues that you were confronting to make it a more pleasant place for people to use.

Bayol: For one thing, there were two views of the place. There were those who thought it was dirty, full of homeless, it was unpleasant. Then there were those of us who spent some time there who really appreciated it. At that time, it was like 20,000 a day going through. Its peak was 60,000. There was a time, back in the days when the Key System ran through, but that dropped off. That’s why they ended up taking the rail off of the bridge and running buses. There was a lot of activity. There were businesses, there were restaurants. There was a shoe repair and a confection place. A little like a drugstore kind of thing. All this stuff, it was all right there and self-contained. And there was a bar. The bar was very controversial, because it was felt that it was seedy and dangerous. But the real thing was because most of the customers were black. If you were to walk in that, and you close your eyes to that aspect, just like any other bar. They never had any violence or anything beyond what a normal bar. It was kind of funny, because it got really crowded starting at four o’clock to five o’clock, six o’clock, and then everybody leaves. It was just that after-work crowd that went in there.

Meeker: Happy hour.

Bayol: Yeah. That closed. People wanted to change the atmosphere of the terminal. The architecture of it was incredible. It was just as it was built in 1940. These beautiful benches. They were worn by this point. The tile terrazzo floors. If you notice and you look around, you could see. Then the immediate neighborhood was pretty good. There was an arcade across the street, which was a lot of trouble at night, just with people who had been drinking and not caring too much about everybody else. What was happening was it was going to be torn down. It was going to be torn down from 1955 until it finally did get
ton down, but they were always having a project. Oh, we’re going to build these tower buildings, and we’re going to have the terminal in the bottom, and we’re going to do this, and we’re going to do that. So when you say, “The valves don’t work. We can’t turn off the water if there’s a problem, if there’s a leak. I want to put in new values,” and then said, “No, no, no, we’re not going to touch it, because they’re going to tear this place down.” This is in 1981, early eighties.

Meeker: You said it opened up in 1940?

Bayol: Uh-huh, ‘40. It was after the Bay Bridge.

Meeker: So it opens up in 1940, and has this connection through the Bay Bridge with the Key System terminal. It’s basically a Key System terminal on the west side of the bridge. You say that by 1955, there’s already a discussion about it no longer being useful. Is that largely because of the end of the Key System line, and they replaced the tracks with bus lanes?

Bayol: Fifty-five, it hadn’t happened yet. They took out the Key System. They switched the bridge over in ’58. It was Mayor Alioto, so this was maybe—

Meeker: Late sixties.

Bayol: That was late sixties when he—

Meeker: Yeah, he was mayor, I believe, beginning in ’67, ’68.

Bayol: His proposal, the U.S. Steel towers. It would have left the terminal there. It still would have been there. It would have been reconstructed, I assume. I forgot your exact question.

Meeker: Just following up on what you were saying about this building always being endangered from almost the beginning.

Bayol: Something happened. When bus ridership went down, and it just kept being less attractive to people. Although when I was a kid, I used to go there when I
took the bus over to the city. The bus went to two places. It would go through the terminal, and then it would go to Seventh and Market, to the Greyhound station. Sometimes I’d get off at the terminal. I loved it. It was neat. It was a neat building.

Meeker: It was kind of an urban introduction to the city or something. One of the reputations, of course, was, like you said, it was kind of just a place for homeless people to spend the night. It was open all night.

Bayol: The homeless were a real problem, because they moved in, and you’d come in there at ten o’clock at night, it’s just full of people sleeping on the benches and the floor and everything. What they did, wisely, I think, is that they locked the doors. That was simple. I forget what time they locked, but you could still get a bus. Greyhound moved in. That was another thing that helped. They built a terminal inside the terminal. That really cleaned things up.

There’s another crazy thing that happened, was the pigeons. I don’t know if I was working there. I wasn’t. I was in public affairs, and the reason I got involved in public affairs. We had pigeons everywhere. They’re a mess. They’re just terrible. You couldn’t get rid of them. This guy proposed to us, he had heard about it, and he says, “I have this grain, and if you feed it to the pigeons, they get disoriented and they can’t fly to their nests, where they spend their time and get their food. They’ll go everywhere else, but you won’t see hardly any at the terminal anymore.” Said okay, so we did a little contract with him. The state did, I didn’t. Anyway, they put this meal out on the roof of the terminal, and then the birds ate it, and they all died. They didn’t just die. They would be flying around and then come to the ground, and through the terminal, maybe staggering, and then they’d plop over. Perfect for television. The TV reporters were there. “Caltrans is killing all the pigeons.” People were coming out of the woodwork, lambasting us like crazy. We were terrible. But the pigeons were gone.

Meeker: I imagine that a lot of your career is involved with Caltrans and interacting with the public. One of the broader issues, and this is something I imagine we’ll talk about more in a little bit, Caltrans is a state agency and owns a lot of property around the state within other communities, within the city of San Francisco, for instance. So there’s two basic entities, governance entities: the state of California and the cities of California. I wonder, when you were handling the management of the Transbay Terminal, what kind of issues were brought up in relationship between the city of San Francisco and Caltrans as
an office of the state of California? For instance, the federal government doesn’t need approval for its designs to build a new federal building in San Francisco. Was there anything along those lines happening vis-à-vis the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco?

Bayol: There was. It was like this interface that we had with them with transit, primarily. The streetcars would come up at that time before Muni Metro was built. In fact, they still do. Well, they don’t now, I guess. It’s gone. But up until they tore it down. The streetcars would come up onto the second floor of the terminal and sit and wait, and then they’d go on. The streetcars were okay, but then they ran the buses. This is talking about many years ago, but they started running buses. Well, the buses are a mess, because there’s diesel dripping. So we had to maintain that, and we were always battling with the city. We’d say, “Hey, it’s your stuff. You’re causing the problem.” That stuff wrecks the roadway. There was that. The big attitude then was, with Caltrans and local, was that we knew we were the superior agency, in the sense that we could do what we wanted a lot of times, but we always asked for permission. You always go into it with that. You don’t want to get into it with your neighbor. Cities, they’re tough, and they have a point of view. It’s like Berkeley or something. In Sunnyvale, you can do a lot of stuff, but in San Francisco you can’t. You’ve got to get the okay. We would have meetings with SPUR and stuff. I remember going there and talking to them about the designs of the new terminal, the several that happened on my watch. We always went into it with, I think, that idea, and I think we were pretty consistent. I don’t know how it is now. You have to kind of know what’s happening behind the scenes, but at that time, you would never do anything without getting local permission. It’s like the trees on El Camino Real in Burlingame. We could go in and take them all down. It’s what we should do. It would be much safer. But we go to Burlingame, Burlingame says, “No, you can’t take the trees down, because they’re too beautiful.” Yeah, but they’re going to fall and kill somebody one day. You want to take liability? We do do that sometimes. You have to accept—

Meeker: Share liability. Interesting. Kind of moving on, after managing the Transbay Terminal, is that when you got back into public affairs?

Bayol: Yeah. What happened was ’86 came along, and my friend Bob Halligan, who I had worked for, said, “Do you want to work on the fiftieth anniversary party?” I said, “Sure. Love to.”
This is the fiftieth anniversary of the Bay Bridge?

Yeah. The setup was that we would have a consultant come onboard to raise money for the parties, and then we had the retirees and this guy, Mike Foley, who unfortunately passed away about five years ago, but he would have been a great interview too, because he was the head of the Bay Toll Crossings. All the bridges. He came in and he ran that side, and then I was brought in to supervise the office staff, which was only a few people. We would do invitations, do news releases, and answer any press inquiries. I would help our contractor, who was trying to raise money. I would help them with their things. We had an office in the terminal, and I worked there for, I don’t know, probably close to a year.

Maybe you started about ’85, a year in advance of the celebration.

Yeah, it would have been probably into ’85. Maybe a little into ’86. It’s coming back to me. What a job. It was fun. There was hardly any work.

Then you moved out of public affairs again?

No. After the party, there was an opening in public affairs, and I went for it and got it.

Oh, okay, so the party was a special project outside of public affairs. Then after that was over, then you got started in public affairs again.

Right. There were some gaps in there. I think I went to work somewhere else for a little bit, but it was just holding pattern. Then they had the opening.

Let’s talk about the fiftieth anniversary. It’s a big deal, but there’s a lot of moving parts in it that I’d love for you to talk about. One is sort of the financing of this. Another is, what are the plans? What’s going to happen? Another is, what’s actually being celebrated at an anniversary? Then maybe the final one, and we’ll kind of maybe go through these, is the elephant in the bridge world here, which is, a year later, you’ve got the Golden Gate, which everyone seems to like a lot more. Why celebrate the Bay Bridge when the
Golden Gate anniversary is coming up a year later? Maybe you can tell me a little bit about, when you were brought in, what kind of plans were on the table? Was the goal really to have this sort of major celebration?

Bayol: One of the things that Mike Foley really emphasized, and Halligan also had a lot to say about, was that what we were going to do was celebrate the people who built the bridge. That was the idea. We wanted to always keep them out there, because we knew, I think instinctively, you’re going to get criticized if you’re—and in fact, I took a number of phone calls from people saying, “Why are you spending all this money on this party when there are homeless in San Francisco?” Our answer always was, “We want to honor these people,” and there were quite a few who were around that we gave a big dinner to. We did that. But in order to do all this and to draw attention to the bridge, we brought in this company. Koster Kennedy was their name. It was a man and a woman. The deal was they worked straight commission. They weren’t going to be paid anything. And if they didn’t raise any money, they didn’t get any money. We did that tax thing, we formed a nonprofit, so that everything could be handled with them. We didn’t have to worry about the conflict with the state and using state funds and so on. In my job here, I am a state employee. I’m being paid by the state, and the people in my office were being paid by the state. We had a copy machine. We had telephones. But beyond that, that was about it. We didn’t spend any more than that. Well, Koster and Kennedy didn’t have a lot of luck raising money, but we ended up emphasizing—and they helped a lot, got to hand it to them—doing things that didn’t cost anything. In fact, one of my things was to get this antique car club together so we’d have this on the anniversary. They drive across the bridge and all that. That was done. These guys love to show off their cars, so that wasn’t a problem. They went to various places to try to get money, and they did get a little bit from Clorox. PacBell, I think, gave them some money. Then we went to Philips Lighting. Caltrans put up the lights, the architectural lighting they call it. Everybody loved it. So then we decided, how are we going to keep these lights? We had this thing at the toll plaza called Keep the Change. The toll at the time was seventy-five cents. You’d go up, you’d pay your toll, and then you get your quarter back. There’s a bucket sitting there, and you just throw the quarter in the bucket, or, which we wanted them to do, was say, “Keep the change,” and then they put the money in the bucket. Otherwise, you’re going to have quarters all over the ground, no matter how big of a receptacle you put there. Anyway, we raised a little bit of money that way. Not enough to pay for it, but Philips Lighting came in, and they provided the lights, I think. There was stuff going on we don’t know. How much was maybe worked in from another
project? I’m not saying that that’s what happened, but it was pretty expensive. I wish I could remember the name of this company, because they came in and gave us the cable, the wiring. So Philips gave us the lights, and this company in San Leandro—starts with an “A”—they gave us the cable, and then we had one of our guys—in fact, I can’t remember his name either—he designed it. He did the design work on the lights, which was—

02-00:22:46
Meeker:  The engineering on it.

02-00:22:47
Bayol:  The engineering. Unfortunately, they had to cut some corners on it in order to get it in in time, and later on we had to change it. What it was was you couldn’t turn the lights off all together. They were on different circuits. What happened was the night—they have this thing where you turn off the lights. It’s for some charity or something. They wanted all the lights to go off at a certain time. We couldn’t do it. We tried. Anyway, they rewired it. Now it’s all fixed. Where were we?

02-00:22:35
Meeker:  Talking about raising funds and everything—

02-00:22:38
Bayol:  Yeah, and then KNBR came in and they gave us a lot of publicity. I did interviews with them about it, and they put up a big balloon at the toll plaza. It was pretty good. It said, “Happy Birthday, Bay Bridge,” and it had KNBR on it, but it wasn’t too imposing. The people working at the bridge, the painters, they all had this decision of painting this candle on the center anchorage, and they wanted it, and they did. It was painted on canvas, I guess, and then hung. So that was done. Then we had this dinner for the ironworkers and the other people who worked on the Bay Bridge, and that was at the Officer’s Club on Treasure Island. Oh, and the Navy. Oh, God. The Navy came through. They were just amazing. If you needed anything, they would—Admiral Tony his name was. We had meetings over there and stuff. What he did for us, the biggest thing, was he got us barges for the fireworks. Because the fireworks had to be put on barges, and they floated off the piers, off the Embarcadero, where they launched. It was the greatest fireworks show, I swear. Everything was just perfect. Here it is in November. I forget the date, but it was in November. It was like seventy-five degrees. It’s dark early, because it’s November, which was nice. Great, great night. It was just terrific. We all went out on boats.
Meeker: Was there any sense that you were trying to raise funds and do all this work against the impending Golden Gate Bridge celebration?

Bayol: That came up. I’ll tell you, the attitude was different. The guy that was working with me was an independent. What he did, he had this company called the History Company, and he made postcards and stuff like that. He came to us and he said, “Will you let me sell these with the”—sure, we don’t care. That’s fine. He went to the Golden Gate Bridge, and they said, “Yes, you can sell these. But you need to pay us $10,000 for the rights to use the Golden Gate Bridge.” That was happening all over the place. People would come to him and say, “Hey, those guys over there are really”—and they were going to have a $20 million event, and all of ours was, well, you know. Then this funny thing happened. The Carquinez Bridge had had a celebration. The guy who put it on, he has a hardware store in Benicia now. His hardware store was in Crockett. He worked with us a lot, with the Carquinez and all that. Then all the word came out that the Golden Gate Bridge wasn’t able to raise enough money to do what they really wanted to do. They did the lighting, but there was a lot of other stuff that was skipped. The Golden Gate Bridge has this terrible reputation of being very mercenary and all that. So he went to a meeting of the Golden Gate Bridge, a public meeting, about the party, about their celebration, and he wrote them a check for a thousand dollars and gave it to them, just to try to embarrass them.

Meeker: Oh, really?

Bayol: Yeah. He says, “Here, this will help your party.” This is money he raised for the Carquinez.

Meeker: When you’re talking about celebrating the bridge, I’m always curious about what is it that’s being celebrated. Is it the engineering marvel of the bridge? Is it the people who built it? Is it the people who died building it? Is it the people who’ve worked on it since then, who’ve died since then? Is it just marking a transformation in transportation in the area? Is it all of the above? What are people discussing when there’s a sense about what’s actually being celebrated or commemorated?
I think it is all of the above. We hit on all of those points. Now, we did talk about the people who died, but we didn’t want to emphasize that. We got into some real problems about naming them. There was a guy who died. It was something like he was drunk and he fell off the boat on the way to work. Do you include him? It became one of those things. Then finding everybody was—which is really what we wanted to do. We wanted to celebrate those—I think that was really at the top, was to celebrate the people who built the bridge. But just to back up a little bit, at that time—and I think we’ve lost it in the sense of the respect for that engineering marvel. It was incredible. There was nothing that came near it. When I answered the phone at my job, and people have a question about the bridge, you could tell them, “This is the longest bridge in the world. It has the deepest bridge piers ever built. It was built in the middle of the Depression. It is the workhorse. It carries more traffic than all the other bridges combined in the Bay Area. The money raised from the tolls go to fix all the other bridges.” It’s just one thing after another about how incredible this thing was. Then you start getting into some of the details of how they built it. It was built on fir logs, holding it up under the mud. From 1936 until 1989, it was never damaged by an earthquake. There were a lot of earthquakes. Then it got hit by a crane. It was sitting on a barge. As my boss, Mr. Halligan, called it, when the ship hit the span. He loved that. That’s a great story. Okay, just real quickly. This barge is going along, and the Coast Guard is up there, and they have radar for the Bay Area. I mean, the whole bay. They’re looking down at their radar. The guy, he showed me this whole thing, the whole setup. They can see this barge coming along, and it goes to go under the Bay Bridge. They’re watching it, and it doesn’t go under. It turns around and goes back. The guy went, “Wow. Why is he turning around?” So they go out and they see it hit the bridge. They had to close it. They had to close the bridge. But they were able to do the repairs and all that. When was this? It would have been about 1978 or so. So it was a crane. Was it one of the cranes that’s over in the Oakland—
Bayol: No. No, this was like a building crane. I should explain. Normally, you would think a crane would be laying down, but it wasn’t. It was straight up. In order to balance, apparently, on the barge they were using, it had to be up. So they thought they could clear the bridge, but they couldn’t. It didn’t. Now, we moved those other cranes. We’ve had three or four of those times. I used to work those. They come really close. In fact, the last one that went under, when it went under the Golden Gate Bridge, the ship was underwater. You could see the water was—and it’s moving. It’s designed to do this. It just goes. The water is coming over the deck, the main deck of the ship. It has a big tower on it that’s above the water, but it just—so that it could fit.

Meeker: That’s remarkable. That’s crazy.

Bayol: But just to get back to that, this thing about this marvel, this engineering marvel, Civil Engineering magazine named it one of the seven [engineering marvels of the world]—but since took it off of that list. There was real pride in it and to be working with it. I know the people that worked on the bridge, even the tow truck drivers, took pride in it. It’s kind of funny, but anybody connected to it knew that it was a special—

Meeker: I’m thinking, in 1986, this is in the middle of Reagan’s presidency, and at this point in time, we’re starting to see somewhat of the dismantling of the New Deal welfare state that was created by FDR and played a role in the building of the bridge. I’m wondering if there was ever any discussion about celebrating public works and what government can do for you. If that was ever brought into the public affairs language around the commemoration of the bridge, either in ’86 or in the sixtieth non-anniversary in 1996.

Bayol: I don’t think it was in those terms, but it was there. The bridge cost seventy-seven million dollars to build. We borrowed the money from the federal government. I think it was more, at that time, talking in terms of the Depression. Here it put all these people to work. The issue of people working on the Bay Bridge and then going to work on the Golden Gate, too. These guys worked on both bridges. One of the biggest public works projects in the history of the country, and being so successful, and being done in such a short time. They built it in three years. It’s taken us forever to build the replacement over there. For good reasons. It all makes sense. People did talk about it in those terms. I don’t think there was the animosity today about government
programs. You name a program, and somebody is there immediately to put it down. I think at that time, it was kind of accepted that this is what government did for you. They built things so it would make your life better. That was kind of a given. But there’s people, they talk about taking the trains off, putting the ferries—the Bay Bridge, what they did, the tolls on the bridge were, when they opened, I think it was sixty-five cents. It might have been extra for more passengers or something.

Meeker: Or axels, I think.

Bayol: Yeah, axels, you pay more. People were still taking the ferry. What the bridge people did, Bay Toll Crossings at the time, they lowered the bridge toll, and they kept lowering it and lowering it to put the ferries out of business. They also got legislation put in that said you can never have a ferry competing with the Bay Bridge.

Meeker: I didn’t know that.

Bayol: In fact, it became a problem when, after the earthquake, we were running ferries from Alameda and from Berkeley. Well, the Berkeley ferry was too close to the Bay Bridge, and legally it couldn’t be run. The legislature fixed it. But yeah, it was—

Meeker: Interesting. The next obviously big thing that happens after ’86, from what I understand, is what you just mentioned, the 1989 earthquake. What role were you playing in the office at the time of the earthquake?

Bayol: Chief of public affairs. Oh, no, I’m sorry, I wasn’t chief yet, because that was in ’90. I was the public information officer. Working for Bob Halligan still.

Meeker: Okay, so he was the chief of public affairs. I’m curious, is this chief of public affairs for—his position—for all of Caltrans?

Bayol: No, just the Bay Area.

Meeker: Just the Bay Area. Okay, so it’s the district office then, right?
Bayol: Yes.

Meeker: Had the district office moved to Oakland yet or—

Bayol: No. We were still at Oak Street. We moved there in ’92.

Meeker: The earthquake hits in 1989. Can you just tell me where you were when the earthquake hit, and then how it was that you were asked to help in the response to it?

Bayol: That day, we had driven back from Los Angeles and actually stopped at San Juan Batista and looked at the San Andreas earthquake fault exhibit that they have there. Then we drove home, and we’re sitting around with the TV on, waiting for the game to start, and the earthquake hit. I remember my TV rocking back and forth, and leaping to keep it from falling over. I didn’t turn on any radio or anything, and the TV was off. But I stepped outside and I checked with my neighbors to see if everything was okay. My in-laws lived a few blocks away, so we walked to their place to see if they were okay. On the way there, there were some people sitting in the back of a pickup truck. They had a portable TV, and I’m walking by, and they showed the picture of the Bay Bridge with the road deck. I couldn’t believe it. I was absolutely shocked. That just couldn’t happen. I thought, oh my God, I’ve got to get to work. When was it? Five fifteen in the afternoon or whatever. We went back home. I got my car and drove down. No lights. The signal lights weren’t working and everything was out. Every incremental moment, you realize, this is serious. This ain’t just a little shaker. You knew, you felt it, it was pretty big. I got to the office and they were setting up everything. They had generators to run things, generators to run the communications equipment that we had, because we had major radio, at that time, system set up. We just started answering the phones, and also finding out where the damage was. I remember there was one guy, one of our traffic engineers and highway ops people, they would connect with their people to see what roads were closed and what was affected. As time went on, we got a list, and it was a few pages long, of damaged roads. The district director was there, Burch Bachtold. He had us all in a room, and he said something that was really smart. He said, “If anybody offers us any help, take it. Don’t ever turn anything down, because we don’t ever want to be in a position of not having something that we could have had.” Which was a very smart thing, because it played on later. When we needed
steel to fix the bridge, we had people offering, and we did, we got stuff delivered. It was never used, because it didn’t work out.

Anyway, God, for the next week or two, it was eighteen-hour days, and answering questions—had we moved over to California Street? Yeah, we had offices at 3333 California and at 150 Oak, but Oak Street was where our communications was, so that was where I needed to be. We were taking calls from the press from around the world, literally, and doing interviews. Oh, one of the things that was a real problem in the beginning was that we didn’t know how many casualties there were, so we were trying to do an estimate, and we were talking to different people. To law enforcement, to fire departments and so on. The Cypress [Structure Freeway], of course, was the big one. That was really the most difficult thing to handle, to explain, and everything. But that was where most of the fatalities were. Someone, and to this day I don’t know who it was and how this happened—but one of the headlines was “2,500 people were killed.” Well, it was, fortunately, a huge exaggeration. Japanese TV came in, and they described themselves as the Japanese equivalent of *Sixty Minutes*. I should have known then this isn’t who I wanted to talk to. Reporters do this. This is very common. In fact, most of the time, I enjoy this method of interview, and that is they’re very friendly. “Why did you say there were 2,500 people killed when there was only sixty-four?” Like I say, I appreciate that, because it really puts you up. You feel your adrenaline. If you can answer it, then you’ve accomplished something. It was a difficult question, though.

02-00:42:42
Meeker:
How did you respond?

02-00:42:44
Bayol:
I said, “There was a miscommunication issue.” What we did, we sat and figured out the time of the day. It was five o’clock in the afternoon on a—was it a Friday, I think? And how many cars would be on the Cypress Freeway. We overestimated, and the reason was the game. People had left early to get to the game, so the traffic wasn’t as [heavy]—and that may or may not have been the main reason. But the traffic was low. We were lucky in that regard.

02-00:43:24
Meeker:
So that 2,500 figure was actually given to the media?

02-00:43:29
Bayol:
Yeah. I don’t know where they got it, though. The people that I was working with, we never talked about fatalities. It wasn’t really our place to. It was like in Oakland, the response to the wreckage and the injuries and the deaths and
everything. The fire department and the police department were there. That’s their job. One of their big jobs was [to] go up on that deck, on the Cypress, and start looking for bodies and for people and trying to save—and they did save that one guy. But our [Caltrans] job was to be engineers. Is it safe to go up? They say, “Well, no. You’ve got to stay off.” Then say, “Okay, we could go up now.” They put these ladders up, and this was a while later, and you have an earthquake. We kept having aftershocks. So you’re up on a thing that’s falling to pieces and it’s shaking. Pretty scary. Anyway, the Cypress was really the focus. That was one of the focuses. Then you have the Bay Bridge. I don’t know how many people are aware of what happened at the toll plaza—you can’t imagine it. That was that when the earthquake came, the pavement sunk and the bay came in, and it was flooded. Then the pavement went back up again and the water receded. But it ruined cars and people were stuck. They couldn’t drive. They had to come in and remove them.

Then a really terrible thing happened, actually. What was going on was that our structural engineers, based in the Bay Area, they were sent out. This is automatic. They go out and check all the bridges to see if they’re damaged. They went to a bridge, one of the—when I say bridge, I mean highway bridges, overpasses and so on. There’s a bridge right near the toll plaza, near the Oakland Army Base. It’s all been replaced by now. Some guy, some engineer, went there and said it was okay. Well, our chief engineer, structural engineer, Bob Bridwell, went out there to double-check, and it was damaged. Dangerously damaged. They couldn’t allow traffic on it. He was livid. He just went crazy. He’s a very emotional guy and pretty demanding guy, anyway. You’ll probably hear his name. I hope you would. He was something. That was bad, that was really bad news. He walked the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge. Just walked from one end and went down the other deck and went the other way, looking at everything to see if it was okay. All of this activity, it was just reactive. “We’ve got to do this.”

02-00:46:42
Meeker:
I’m wondering, to what extent was there an established plan? Did you have an established protocol for dealing with tragedies or disasters in the public affairs office prior to 1989?

02-00:47:03
Bayol:
I’d have to say no. I’ll tell you, there was one thing, and that’s notification within the organization. If something happens, you don’t want the director or the governor, in some cases, not to be onboard and know what’s going on. There was that. This became more formalized later for other, different reasons, but if there’s a big traffic backup, you’ve got to let the director know.
You’ve got to let the governor’s office know. That became a big thing under Pete Wilson, because he got embarrassed by a big mess down in L.A. one time. There were similar things. It was more like that. Afterwards, it got much more formalized. We had regular drills. I think everybody learned something. Then you get 9/11, of course, and then things got even more—

Meeker: Was this formalization process, do you think, a result of the 1989 Loma Prieta quake, or was it something else?

Bayol: No, definitely. I think the ’89 quake was handled—I can’t think of any gaps. I think we did a really good job in keeping people informed.

Meeker: Except maybe that 2,500 figure.

Bayol: Yeah, that sort of thing. To formalize it afterwards was really good. But things changed a lot. Technology changed tremendously. We were using cell phones that had just been invented. In ’89, they were just coming out. We had these huge bags that were batteries. It was really funny when you think of it. And these phones that the batteries lasted like five minutes. They were terrible. But now, we have a traffic operations system in Oakland and one of the largest TV screens in the west. You can find out what’s going on anywhere. All these cameras that are everywhere. It’s really changed.

Meeker: So maybe in 1989, you really had to have human intelligence going out, checking all of the locations to determine what major damage spots were, but now it could possibly be done simply by looking at these cameras?

Bayol: No. The big advantage would be someone could go out, see something, and then call you. Call back. This, we had radios, so that was okay. But now, with phones, you can call anybody, and they can call the director if there was something really serious.

Meeker: Again, I wonder why, in the day or so after the earthquake, I wonder what kind of information you were working off of. It sounds like you were fielding out calls from dozens, if not scores, of reporters around the world. Were you given sort of a briefing sheet, where these are the five things you can talk about, and these are the five things you can’t, or is it just—
Bayol: Never. There was a major, major change in Caltrans, and that was, at that time, before that time and after that time for quite a while, we were on our own. We were given the respect that we knew what we were doing, because we were knowledgeable about the organization. That has changed. That changed in the middle of my job. Just like you said, “You can talk about this, you can talk about this, but you can’t talk about that.” That was just unheard of at that time. When I was working in public affairs initially, one of the things that I was very proud of, of the organization, is that no one ever told me that I couldn’t talk about something. My first story I ever did, we were doing retrofits on the bridges, and we messed up. Well, it’s not really a mess-up. The design of the retrofit didn’t work, and they had an earthquake down in Whittier, and there was a failure. So I’m getting asked questions. No one came and said, “Don’t talk about it.” Today, they would.

Meeker: What precipitated that kind of change, do you know?

Bayol: A guy named Dennis Trujillo, who worked for Governor Davis. He instituted a policy that he said, “You call me first before you answer the reporter. You get a call from a reporter, let me know, because I’ll call him back.” Things like that.

Meeker: Do you know if these kinds of changes were happening overall and within other kinds of offices doing public affairs work? Not just in Caltrans, but maybe in state government overall. Was this part of a larger trend or—

Bayol: It brings up an interesting point, because I think Caltrans changed a lot, but at that period when I was there, they were a little arrogant. Arrogant in kind of a positive way. We did things differently because, first of all, it’s a professional organization. You have all these professional engineers. Everybody is really well-educated. Even in my position, we felt that we all handle things. Then it became these other agencies were much stricter. Their public affairs offices, outside of Highway Patrol, were very similar. Very professional organization. Had a lot of respect. But you go to the Department of Health or something—well, certain parts of it—they’re going to want to keep tighter reins on their staff. That’s just an impression I have. There’s probably a lot of aspects to it. If someone were to call up and ask me a question about something, even a very controversial area, I could walk down the hall to the engineer who’s working on it and ask him the question, and then walk back and answer it. I
don’t have to go to the district director. I didn’t have to go to my boss or anything.

02-00:53:40
Meeker: But you attribute this change to this one particular manager?

02-00:53:45
Bayol: That’s when it all started. Yup. Absolutely.

02-00:53:48
Meeker: There was no precipitating event or anything like that?

02-00:53:53
Bayol: No, no, I don’t think so. I can’t think of it. It was just his style. Our first meeting with him, I realized, uh-oh, things are going to be different. Then I got in trouble time after time. “I saw a story in the paper today and you didn’t tell me about it.”

[End of Interview]
Okay, today is the 7th of January. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Greg Bayol for the San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge Oral History Project. And this is interview session number two, tape number three. And it looks like we are all go. So let’s pick up where we left off last time and we got into—just to revisit it we got into somewhat of your career in the public affairs office at Caltrans. And you provided basically an overview of a lot of the work that you did and I think that we got up to the point of talking about 1986 and the fiftieth anniversary. And did we talk much about that or not? I can’t quite remember.

I think we got started but we didn’t get into what some of the, I think, events were that we did.

Yeah. Well, maybe you can start off today by giving a bit of an overview of the work that you did with that particular celebration and the degree to which you think that it sort of resurrected or rehabilitated the reputation of the Bay Bridge in the mind of the people of the Bay Area.

Yeah. The fiftieth anniversary was coming up and it was decided with the efforts of Bob Halligan, who was my boss at the time, to get people together to celebrate the importance of the bridge and the history of it and all the things that it meant to the people of the Bay Area. And of the terms at the time was, which has kind of come and gone, but it was always the work horse bridge of the Bay Area. The Golden Gate Bridge was the beauty and the Bay Bridge was the working one. The Gray Lady and all these terms. And so when we went to celebrate we wanted to include people who worked on the bridge, number one, so we went back through the retirement records and so on to try to find out, try to get names. And we went to the union, structural steel workers, and got them. And we had dinners planned where they would attend. We did a lot of media work, interviews with people.

But anyway, the way it started was Bob got some of us together and hired a fundraising outfit and they went out around the Bay Area to different companies and tried to raise money. It didn’t really go great. We did get some money but most of the donations were in kind donations and things like—there was a decision made to string the bridge with lights, architectural...
lighting as you see today. And so initially we put up these temporary lights and we got the wires, the light bulbs donated by Bay Area companies. I’m trying to think of some of the other things. The crews working on the Bay Bridge painted a candle on the center anchorage and so on. So as we approached the date we were having more and more events. And then the day of the anniversary, November 12, 1986, the fiftieth anniversary, we had vintage cars, which was one of the things that I worked on. Worked with a vintage car club and got these people involved. That was really great because we drove across the bridge. KNBR did a lot of things for us.

But actually, the head guy, the chief of the project who was brought back out of retirement, was Mike Foley, who had been the head of Bay Toll Crossings, which was the organization in the state under Department of Public Works that took care of all of the toll bridges, which is a separate entity from other bridges. And it gets technical. But he was quite a guy. He got the Coronado Bridge in San Diego built and other projects. He was the head of Bay Toll Crossings when the Bay Bridge was reconstructed to shift traffic from two ways on the top and two ways on the bottom with railed—removed the rail and make the bridge as it is today, one direction on top, one direction on the bottom.

03-00:05:18
Meeker: So he went back to the 1950s?

03-00:05:19
Bayol: Yes. And, in fact, he was a civil engineering student at Berkeley when the Bay Bridge was being built and he would come and he would visit the project at that time. So that’s his timeframe and had lots of interesting things to tell about that.

03-00:05:39
Meeker: Do you recall some of the things that he might have said?

03-00:05:43
Bayol: Well, my recollection was that he would go to school during the day and then when the opportunity presented itself he would go over and watch the construction of the bridge. And he told us things about how they use rivets and what that meant in the modern age. Now it’s kind of gone. It’s an old-fashioned technique. And talking to the engineers, getting to know the engineers. Art Elliot was one of the guys who he knew who passed away just maybe shortly after the fiftieth anniversary. And so on. He really loved the bridge. And I think when you talk to engineers like Mike Foley or some of the other guys whose names I can’t—I mean they really talk endearingly about it.
They just see it as something that was done—it was designed fairly quickly, depending on when you want to start. It started with the automobile dealerships of San Francisco donating money to do a study of what it would take to build a bridge and that was the first step. Unless you want to go to back to Emperor Norton who was kind of—

03-00:07:10
Meeker: Decreed that there should be a bridge.

03-00:07:11
Bayol: Right.

03-00:07:12
Meeker: Right, yes.

03-00:07:12
Bayol: But this was a little more serious. And that money was used to look at the soils. Can you build on that bay and bay bottom and all that. And it was determined that it could be done. So that got the ball rolling and that was early twenties. So construction began in, I believe, thirty, it would have been ’32 or three. And it was done in ’36. That is just unheard of today. You couldn’t get a guardrail put in that quickly.

But to go back to the celebration. So Mike got people together, people that he knew would help out and we tried the fundraising. Let’s see. So there were these different ideas. And one of them was that we didn’t have the money to put—but at the time the tolls—I may have mentioned this already but the tolls were a dollar. I mean seventy-five cents. So the idea was that they started this campaign called Keep the Change and the change was the lights on the bridge. They had been put on there for the celebration and in order to keep them, what they did is they put a coffee can out and a person would get their quarter change. They could drop it in the coffee can and it would go towards putting permanent lighting on the bridge. And there was a guy, Calvin Jung was our electrical engineer, and he designed the lighting and we got donated lights from Philips Lighting and I think we had to pay for the cabling. It all got kind of murky at the time. You’d ask somebody, “Well, who’s paying for this?” “Well, {we don’t really know that?}.” They didn’t want to get too specific about how things were done.

And then the big night and I think I was starting to talk about this, was the fireworks show, which required—we really wanted to put on this fireworks. We got that donated by Souza Brothers. The family name was Souza. It was called Pyro Spectacular and that’s the name of the company. And they were
willing to donate but there were certain things they needed. They needed a platform and a perfect platform is a barge. So we talked to the Navy and the Navy with Admiral Tony agreed to accommodate us. Now, of course this was done sort of—not out openly but it all came together. They got the barges out there, Pyro Spectacular put the fireworks. It was the biggest fireworks show ever on the West Coast. That’s what they were saying. And it was incredible. And the most incredible thing about it was that first of all we invited everybody. A million people tried to come. Not everybody made it because they got clogged up in the Bart tube trying to get up and there were such crowds that some of them, I think, were still stuck in trying to get out and get off Bart trains and so on. So it was quite a traffic jam. And then there were people out on the Bay. There were boats. A lot of private boats and then there were cruise boats out. Now, I was on one of the red and white fleet boats watching this and here it was November 12th but it was like the middle of the summer in LA. The temperatures felt like, my memory is like it was eighty or eighty-five. And it probably wasn’t that warm but it was very pleasant.

Meeker: Do you remember having conversations with your colleagues, who recognizing it’s mid-November in the Bay Area, that maybe the celebration should have been earlier or postponed? Considering weather considerations and this is an outdoor event?

Bayol: There was a discussion about changing the time but it wasn’t so much based on weather. There were other issues going on about not competing with other events, I think.

Meeker: Like football games or something?

Bayol: Yeah. And I think that it slid it by one day. That’s just a vague memory coming back. I don’t remember talking about because of the time of the year. I think it was just a risk and they would just go with it and it turned out to be a fabulous night.

Meeker: I’m trying to remember, did they allow people to walk on the bridge like they did with the Golden Gate?

Bayol: No. I shouldn’t say that. People were allowed to walk. No, no, no, you know what I’m thinking? I’m getting it confused with the reopening after the
earthquake. At that time people were allowed on but not just anybody. It was like a celebration with the press and people who worked for Caltrans and officials and so on but they didn’t allow just people to come on. But I think there were people allowed but it had to be kept to a minimum.

Meeker: Yeah. Are you aware of what happened with the Golden Gate Bridge?

Bayol: I saw it. Oh, yeah. Yeah. The mistake with the Golden Gate Bridge was that they hadn’t figured on the load of people standing, pedestrian load. They always go by the truck and traffic. The traffic load, which are less than pedestrians. And, in fact, I have been told that they change the criteria now when they design a bridge. It’s based on the loads of pedestrians rather than vehicles. Now, what happened at the Golden Gate was the catenary, the curve of the road bed, flattened out because of the load of the people standing there. The bridge had had just a year or two, just a short time prior to the event, the anniversary event, had the connectors between the suspender cables, the vertical cables, and where they attached to the bridge had been strengthened. And had that not been done there could have been a catastrophe.

Meeker: Yeah. Well, that’s what I understand. I understand that that’s the one point in time that it’s come closest to collapsing, was when those thousands of people were on it.

Bayol: Yes. It was pretty scary. In fact, I was in the room and they were discussing what they were going to do. And the idea—

Meeker: Discussing what they were going to do as far as how to clear people from the bridge?

Bayol: Yes, right.

Meeker: Because they saw it.

Bayol: Or whether they should or not. Because they didn’t want—

Meeker: A stampede.
Bayol: Exactly. It was a question of, well, we can’t tell people, “Hey, everybody off the bridge.” [laughter] You’d have a panic. So they just decided to go with it because the bridge had loaded itself. It was completely covered with people. And it was surviving. It hadn’t failed. So I think the decision was, well, it’s going to make it, so—

Meeker: So you were in the room when that decision was made?

Bayol: Yes.

Meeker: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Bayol: We had a room where we had engineers, we had the planners for the event, and we were handling the press. I had a little room adjacent to kind of the war room type place.

Meeker: But can you actually explain the organization of this? Because it’s not a Caltrans bridge, so was Caltrans contracted to do the PR work or—

Bayol: No. No, we were just invited to help out and because it’s a state highway we do have certain responsibilities. And then my connection was only dealing with the press. In fact, I was sitting next to Bay City News. They were adjacent to me and there might have been another reporter from—I don’t recall but the room was pretty crowded. And then we had this room where the engineers were and the decision makers and everything. And the issue at that time started out—we would go to meetings and we’d say, “Well, how many people are going to come?” Well, they made an estimate and they said, “Well, judging from other events of this type we expect to have,” and my very clear recollection was, “We expect to have forty to forty-five thousand people.” That’s a lot of people. Well, 400,000 people came. [laughter] It was a bad guess. But our job was in this war room was how do you get the people to the bridge and off of it. And so we’re dealing with the city, the muni lines, and we had this whole thing planned out about how the muni would go out Geary, load up their bus, then they’d turn and come back and go to the Golden Gate and they’d let people off on the road that runs along the coast there just south of the Golden Gate Bridge. And people would unload and then they’d come up over this hill. They just didn’t stop coming. I remember because the room I
was in had windows that looked up and you saw, oh, the people are starting to come and they just kept coming and coming and they just never stopped. Literally never stopped until they couldn’t—

03-00:17:15
Meeker: I was one of those in high school. Yeah. [laughter]

03-00:17:20
Bayol: It was quite a day. And then, oh, I don’t know, there was a fight and there were incidents going on.

03-00:17:31
Meeker: You mean by the people who attended the festival?

03-00:17:33
Bayol: Yeah. And it wasn’t anything major. I think in the individual cases they may have been but overall it was a pretty peaceful thing. And so that was why Caltrans was there and why I was there, my boss Bob Halligan, our traffic engineer, Ann Hanson. And our maintenance engineer, Jerry Hauke was there. I remember Jerry Oliver, another traffic guy.

03-00:18:05
Meeker: Do you recall any post-mortem being done about, one, the decision to allow the bridge to be open to pedestrian traffic given that it wasn’t designed to hold that kind of load? Like the engineering decision. And then, too, the decision to not clear the bridge at the time that it was happening.

03-00:18:29
Bayol: I don’t recall specifically. I can’t imagine that they didn’t talk about it because I know that later on it was certainly referred to. What we did, in fact, it was the direct result of that. We had these races on the Bay Bridge called foot span, I think it was called. But what they did was that they cut off the bridge so that you could only use half of it. They wouldn’t allow the entire bridge—and so that kept the loads down with the Golden Gate Bridge in mind. So it did have an effect, so there had to have been some decision. And then when they were designing the new Bay Bridge they brought that up, like I said, with the idea of considering the pedestrian loads rather than just vehicle loads.

03-00:19:23
Meeker: So the new span, the eastern span of the Bay Bridge, is designed so that it would allow that kind of pedestrian load.

03-00:19:30
Bayol: Right.
Meeker: Interesting. Understanding that maybe evaluation on foot would be necessary at some point or—

Bayol: Well, it’s just the mentality of the engineer. You want to be able to anticipate the worst and plan for it. It’s like with the Bay Bridge it was planned for winds. They always talked about wind loads and the Bay Bridge really stood up to the wind loads. So did the Golden Gate. In fact, the Golden Gate Bridge, before that day when the roadway flattened out, there was a storm and there were hurricane force winds and they had to close the bridge. That was the only time, other time when they closed the bridge because of weather. And they have talked about it. I don’t believe they’ve ever had to do it again. I know we closed the Benicia Bridge because of winds. So it became an issue and consideration in these bridges. And then we’ve had failures. I think there was one, is it Michigan that had a bridge failure?

Meeker: In Minnesota.

Bayol: Okay. Anyway, it was done in Australia. That’s where Chuck Seim went down to advise them about why it had failed. Now, our bridges in the Bay Area, they have fenders, so if a ship comes by and hits it, it has some protection. In Florida, the Tampa Bay Bridge got hit by a ship and it went into the water. They didn’t have any fenders.

Meeker: Interesting. So back a little bit to some of the people that you contacted. The laborers, the union members who worked on the original construction. Were you able to find a good number of these individuals?

Bayol: They found quite a few. I didn’t work directly on finding, except once they did find somebody and if they were—I was like calling up the car club people. But what they did was they went to the public employees’ retirement system and they were able to get a list of names there. And my recollection is that CalPERS agreed to do the contacting to avoid privacy issues. And then they went to the ironworkers and got names. And I think that went well. Because when we had the party, which was the big dinner at Treasure Island, it was well attended. A lot of people there. Yeah, I’d say at least a couple of hundred.
Did you have any opportunity to interact with any of these individuals and get from them a sense of what they thought of the bridge fifty years later?

Yeah. There was this one guy, George Cienfuegos, we talked to him at length because I had set up this interview for him to go on this show. It was Al Hart, or Al Hart’s son. I forget. He had this show and he did an interview with him and so I set that up and so I got a lot of information from him and talked to him about what it was like working not only the Bay Bridge but he worked on the Golden Gate also at the same time and this was kind of an interesting aspect to it. That here the idea economically behind it was, well, here, we’ll have these big public works projects and we’ll put people to work in the middle of the Depression, which is really true, but it was the same people on both bridges. Which they did. I believe later on they had rules. You can work so many hours but we want to employ as many people as possible. So he talked about that. Gosh, I can’t think of anybody else specifically that I talked to.

Okay. Well, let’s move on to three years later, the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, and you go from this real high point and the bridge’s history, a real celebration and kind of re-acknowledgment—I remember when the lights went on the Bay Bridge and people started to remark about its beauty and it’s reputation was sort of rehabilitated from simply the workhorse to having a more central place in people’s hearts, I guess, in the Bay Area. And then you’ve got the 1989 earthquake, which is the biggest earthquake in the region since 1906 and a portion of the eastern span fails. Where were you? What kind of work were you doing at the time and where were you specifically when the earthquake hit?

Okay. Well, I was at home getting ready to watch the baseball game, like a lot of people. But I want to go back a little bit. When we talked about the Bay Bridge, up to that point, up to ’89, we talked in terms of the superlatives. It’s the deepest bridge pier. It’s the widest bridge. The widest roadway of a bridge. The tunnel is the biggest bore tunnel in the world ever built. The links and all that. We always talked in those terms.

Longest cantilever span and give—
Bayol: Yeah, right. It was the longest cantilever span. It was the longest high level bridge in the world. Now, Japan surpassed that. But even with that, then you put it in context. Yeah, it’s 1980 or whatever it was. This is what we did in 1930s with the equipment that we use and everything was a lot less sophisticated than what we use today. So that was kind of the mentality of it. We were really proud of the bridge. Proud of how well maintained it was, too. In fact, we always would say the Golden Gate Bridge isn’t maintained. They didn’t paint it. They went ten years after construction before they did its first paint job and in that time the bridge corroded. They had a lot of damage. And after that they had more damage corrosion and so on because their maintenance, we felt, was less than—because we didn’t have those problems. We had problems, we found out after the earthquake. Because when that section, the incline, after the earthquake, if you had gone under that, and you can because it goes out over dry land before it hits the Bay, find a lot of bolts, rivets.

Meeker: Oh, really?

Bayol: Yeah. That had popped out and had to be replaced. The bridge withstood it. So anyway, where I was is I was coming home from Los Angeles. I stopped in San Juan Bautista and saw the San Andreas Fault exhibit and all that. And then came home, sat down, started watching the game and the crackling and the shaking started. And I didn’t know what had happened really. I just thought it was another earthquake. I had felt earthquakes that were about the same.

Meeker: And was it here in this house?

Bayol: No. I lived in the Sunset District in San Francisco at 38th and Judah.

Meeker: Okay. But still on pretty solid ground there?

Bayol: Yeah. I don’t think it’s the best. It’s not rock. In some parts it is. But came out of my house afterward and just looked up and down the street and asked if everybody was okay and things were. They thought actually there was some damage, especially to the house across the street. And it was caused by the people had their garage door openings had been—there was dry rot and so
they had gone in over the years and put in steel beams. But what happened is, in the earthquake, that steel beam was moving and it would cause the house next to it to fail.

Meeker: Oh, wow.

Bayol: Now, that happened in spots around Sunset, especially along Lincoln. There was a bar there. And so those all had to be repaired. Anyway, but as things are, you walk up the street and that’s what we did because my in-laws lived up the street and we didn’t have cell phone or anything so we just walked up. Everything looked fine. People were walking around. And I saw these people in the back of a pickup truck looking at a portable television. And I looked down at it and there was an aerial photograph of the Bay Bridge with the piece of road falling. So I turned to my wife and I said, “Well, I better get to work. This looks pretty serious.” And I later talked to a guy named Paul Hensley who was one of the engineers, the higher-ups, and he said that when he saw that picture his heart sunk. He said it couldn’t happen. It just could not happen.

But so anyway, we drove down to Oak and Franklin where my office was. Well, it was where the response group got together. And we sat down and went to work. Initially there were things like finding batteries. That was one of our lessons. We had batteries but batteries are locked up so how do you get the batteries? Well, the person who’s got the key is an administrator, has no reason to come into the office. It was just little things like that. And you don’t have a flashlight or you had been using it long.

Meeker: So the power had all been—

Bayol: The power was out. But we had a generator. The generator went out, although it was tested every Thursday. A pain in the ass because this diesel engine starts up outside your office window once every week, yet this time it didn’t work.

But Caltrans is pretty setup for responding. They’re a response organization anyway. We’re not quite fire police but we’re up there because things happen and we did—so we did have kind of the mentality, at least, of responding to an emergency. So we brought in a generator. It was on the back of a truck. Plugged it in and we got one corner of the building operating within, I’d say,
two or three hours of the earthquake. So I could go in. The phones, of course, were working and we started contacting people, getting information from around the Bay Area, what was happening, putting together a list, different locations and so on. And then once our numbers had gotten out then we started getting press calls. And that became my job for a number of days afterwards.

Meeker: So it was really assembling data, information about problems, failures, et cetera, and then translating that information, confirming press reports and talking to them, giving statements and so forth?

Bayol: Right.

Meeker: Yeah. And that happened for a number of days, I guess?

Bayol: At least. Okay, the Bay Bridge, of course, [we asked,] what are we going to do? How are we going to get it opened again? And the boss, the district director for our district, Burch Bachtold had us in a room and was giving instructions. “We’re going to do this. We got to get these things open as quickly as possible. Do everything you can. Let’s be creative and all that.” But the Bay Bridge quickly became static. We know it happened, we know it’s going to be a while. Of course, we had to decide how are we going to get people across the Bay. That night, the night of the quake, a guy named George Gray, who was one of our transportation people, transportation planners, he called up Washington State and said, “We need ferries. Can you spare them?” And so they sent down—my recollection is four ferries but I’m not sure. And one of them, at least, I think came from San Francisco. But in the meantime we had to rig up some place that we could offload people and so there was this ferry terminal thing built at the ferry building very quickly—

Meeker: Was it an auto ferry or just a pedestrian?

Bayol: No. No, they weren’t auto ferries. But we also had the red and white fleet and the blue and gold fleet boats that we would use because they could be rigged up pretty quickly to use the existing piers. And then at the same time I thought, “Well, we need ticket takers so we’ll use the toll collectors from the Bay Bridge because they got nothing to do.” So they were brought in to—
Meeker: Where on the Oakland side, the East Bay side?

Bayol: I believe it was in Alameda because Alameda had a ferry terminal. And otherwise the pier in Berkeley I think was considered but I don’t know if they ever were able to use it. I just don’t recall.

Meeker: And so this requires coordination between Caltrans, because the various sort of boat operators?

Bayol: Yeah.

Meeker: Probably the local mass transit organizations, right?

Bayol: Yes, right. Because you had to get the people to the terminals. Like working with AC Transit and on this side with Muni, which was okay because they were already setup pretty much. So there was that as far as dealing with the Bay Bridge. But the thing that was not static, it was changing, was the Cypress [Structure Freeway] because they were having to remove bodies. They had to have the equipment to get the concrete out, to do all these operations that were very dangerous given that the structure had collapsed in most of it. There was one, called a bent, one section of that double deck freeway that was left in the middle, that didn’t fail. Everything in each direction was pretty much destroyed. So every day there was something happening, something to report about a change in what was going on there. They were looking for bodies for one thing and then also because of the aftershocks and having to work around that when it could have further collapse. They had to have structural engineers there to determine what was safe. We later found out that the reason why it failed the way it did was that it was built on two different types of soil. Some very solid, where it really gets put down and, you know, they do drilling down pretty deep next to kind of muddy material so that the less substantial soil, the thing just rocked and it just would slam into what was next to it and then that would fail. But that took quite a while to figure that out. There was this book they put together called *Race Against Time* I think was what they called. They needed to find out what caused it. Why did the Cypress fail? It shouldn’t have. And there were a lot of people, gadflies out there telling us that, “I know why it failed. Because you guys didn’t build this part right,” or something. And that was another thing,
having to defend ourselves, because we were in a position of we had these facilities that didn’t make it. And it goes down to Watsonville. We had a bridge failure down there, Struve Slough Bridge, which was very scary because there was a highway patrol car on the bridge when it happened, when it failed. And the piers holding the bridge up just went right through the roadway. The roadway came down. Famous pictures of this in our archives. There was that.

Meeker:

How does a person involved in public relations approach a situation like this in which PR is usually trying to get an approved message out? The goal is to at the very least explain what happens in dispassionate terms. Probably more so to try to defend the organization or keep it in a positive light at the same time that in fact something really terrible happened. With the failure of the bridge, the Cypress Structure, you have deaths of many, many people. As an individual who was working in the office this time how did you sort of balance those two pulls about sort of recognizing that things went wrong and kind of needing to admit to that, I guess, but then also not letting that sort of blame game get out of hand maybe.

Bayol:

Yeah. Well, it was difficult. At times it was pretty tough. But at the same time there was this evolving thing happening and it became really apparent as you sat there and you’re answering the phones and you’re getting different questions, different calls from different people and you’re reporting. It was fascinating. It was really a great lesson in the business of more public information, which sounds mundane but it can be very, very tricky. For instance, a guy calls up and says, “I understand that the bridge on Santa Cruz Seventeen, Highway 17 at Santa Cruz failed and it’s blocking the road and people can’t get through.” Okay. So then you get, “Oh, really? Okay, well, I’ll check that out.” Then you get a call and somebody says, “How are things up on Highway Seventeen in Santa?” Do you say, “Well, I heard there’s a bridge down?” Well, it turns out you can’t. You quickly learned you could not say those things. You could not trust anybody’s report until you verified it. So it starts with that. Just that mechanical part of the job. Of knowing the facts.

Meeker:

How did you verify something then?

Bayol:

We had this list that was put together by our traffic operations people because they did this sort of thing. They were set up to respond to events actually. Like Sears Point Raceway causes terrible traffic problems. So they put out the
traffic is backed up here, here, and here. So they did a similar thing. And so they would have it so we could go and have a person there who is the expert. This is the guy you want to talk to if you want to know what happened here.

03-00:40:57
Meeker: Is it like a geographic region that they cover or a particular kind of event or—?

03-00:41:01
Bayol: It could be geographic but it was just where the earthquake had most of its effect, which was the city of Santa Cruz, which was wiped out. There was a bridge in Santa Cruz also. It took many years to get the money to fix it. And the traffic people who worked that area would then report, although in Watsonville, too, that was wiped out.

03-00:41:30
Meeker: So when you say traffic people, are these Caltrans employees?

03-00:41:32
Bayol: Yeah.

03-00:41:32
Meeker: Would you trust reports from the CHP, as well?

03-00:41:34
Bayol: No, only from Caltrans. They could maybe get something from CHP but we would want to get it from our people.

03-00:41:41
Meeker: So you had this stable of Caltrans employees spread out throughout the region?

03-00:41:46
Bayol: Right.

03-00:41:47
Meeker: And they were reporting back to HQ?

03-00:41:51
Bayol: Yeah. To their superiors there. So that became very important as far as verifying stuff. Because a lot of bad information [circulated]. And there was a photo on the front page of the [San Jose] Mercury News that was very disconcerting because it said that a road was closed and it wasn’t. And it was a sign on the back of a truck. “Seventeen closed, use something else.” It wasn’t true. And it also had a phone number, which was the phone number of one of
the guys in my office. So that phone was no good anymore. And we were short phones so that was bad.

And like I say, this whole thing was evolving because when you get started it’s just chaos. You don’t know where. And then things start to fall into place. You know where the problems are. You know where you’re dispatching people. You know how you’re attacking it. And then things kind of go to another level and that is like talking to people who—it’s like we’re all in this together. I never got the feeling that people were going, “Caltrans, how could you guys let this bridge fail?” It wasn’t like that. It was more like, “How are we going to fix it? What should I do? I have to get to work on Monday. What should I do?” Well, the only way, you take a ferry, you go down to the San Mateo Bridge. That’s what you’re up against. Also, they ask people to close down and they did and kept the highways not as crowded. But that’s the kind of a feeling I got. I never felt like we were under attack.

Now, it did happen, of course, because time passes and the press, of course, they want to ask more questions, they want to get more details. And then the things come out and I know the Mercury News did a story on us, when was the last time the Bay Bridge was inspected? “Well, it was within the last eighteen months because that’s our policy.” And, say, “Well, prove it.” So here we are having to go through records and at the same time trying to respond to immediate questions and then having to do the research. Well, we found it and we could show that it had been. But one of these things is notations. “Next inspection, check to be sure, blah, blah is done.” And so that, of course, becomes the story, the things lacking and all that.

Now, the Bay Bridge, we argued, or didn’t argue but we would just say that the Bridge lasted for more than fifty years without any damage from earthquakes and so it really was doing its job. And then a question arose: Was that section of the Bay Bridge meant to be a fuse? Was it meant to fail in order to save the rest of the Bridge? I don’t think that question has ever been fully answered. I’ve heard people say, “No, that’s absolutely ridiculous, they would never do that.” And other people say, “No, it makes perfect sense.” So I don’t know. Now, this day they know.

03-00:45:28
Meeker: So this is a question that’s still debated, as far as you know, by structural engineers?

03-00:45:32
Bayol: Yeah. Well, it was the last time I was a manager.
Meeker: Yeah. I think I’ve come across different answers to that question, as well, because I think I’ve asked that to people in these interviews. And it’s a little uncertain. It seems to me like maybe both. That, yes, if something was to fail, that was to fail rather than the whole thing fail. But it wasn’t designed to fail. Do you see what I’m saying?

Bayol: Right. Now, the new bridge is. It does have fuses in it. If the maximum credible quake comes or something close to it those piers are going to fail, but they’re going to be easily—I shouldn’t say easily but they can be quickly repaired and the bridge put back online in short order. That’s the plan.

Meeker: Which piers are we talking about?

Bayol: The supports for the bridge on the incline. It’s not open yet but that’s the idea. And there’s a lot going into this. The level of sophistication of engineering is just, oh, God, light years ahead of this. And that’s that if you look at the way the piers are put in the water, the first one is shallow and the next one goes fairly deep and the next one goes halfway in between that. They’re all different because when the shaking starts they’re going to dissipate everything by having them at different depths and strengths and so on.

Meeker: Yeah. So I’m wondering, when you get these questions from journalists about matters that should be really directed toward engineers, how then do you, as the person working the public relations department, engage with the engineers? Are you ever concerned that, one, you’re not communicating the questions directly or properly? Maybe they’re not answering in a way that’s comprehensible. Maybe they’re equivocating. Maybe they’re dissimulating. They’re not telling the truth exactly. So how do you manage that relationship, not necessarily between you and the journalists, although I want to hear more about that, but between you and the experts within Caltrans?

Bayol: Well, the way it worked for me was preparation in anticipation of the questions. I always worked closely with our engineering people, whether it was repairing the Benicia Bridge and I knew the guy over there. “Why? What are you doing? How is this going to be different than what was there before?” In fact, the Benicia Bridge is a good example because there was damage to the Benicia Bridge from the Loma Prieta that we weren’t aware of for a while.
And it later was discovered and it was addressed. And we had other issues out there. We had the sides of the bridge. But I talked to the structural people. The details are important to an extent but since you’re dealing with the press, they can’t get too detailed. Sometimes you’re talking to a civil engineering magazine but then it becomes a different thing. But if you’re talking to the [San Francisco] Chronicle and the Oakland Tribune it’s different. So you have to put it in language that they can understand, which is going to be a little bit more than what the readers are going to get, what they’re going to see. But what would happen is if I get asked a question that’s going to be technical, I’ll go to the engineer and I’ll ask him. I’ll say, “What is the answer to this?” And then they can explain it. Now, sometimes I would say, “Do you want to talk to them?” I would say 90 percent of the time is no. “No, that’s your job. I don’t want to talk to them.” There were engineers who liked to talk to the press and sometimes they wanted—if it’s an issue that is important, maybe they’re professionally or emotionally involved, they want to step out and get it clear. But most of the time they trusted us.

And that was a change. I talked about that before. There was a change in that trust. We worked there. We worked side by side with them whenever anything would—one problem was we wished they would let us know in advance more often of a coming problem. But even if they didn’t, you’re never blindsided as long as you stay in the loop on stuff. You attend the meetings. Whenever I got a question I would never call. If it was complicated or something I would always go to them, go to their office and talk to them. And in doing that, it was kind of a joke because I would come walking in and they’d look up and they’d say, “Oh, my God. You’re here. What happened? What broke or what terrible thing do I have to explain?” But usually it was something pretty innocuous. But it changed with the Gray Davis takeover and when he became governor and his people. It became a thing where if we got a call from the press then we had to refer that to the top guy and get an okay. It became very complicated and tedious.

03-00:51:41
Meeker: To the top guy in Sacramento?

03-00:51:42
Bayol: No. Well, sometimes. But usually just the district director. And he had to be notified and then we were instructed as to how to answer the question and it was more of not the technical side of it but what do we want to protect? What information do we want to hold back and what information do we want to let out?
Meeker: Well, since you brought this up, this was the late 1990s, is that correct, when he came in? I’m trying to remember.

Bayol: It had to have been.

Meeker: Was there anything in particular other than the arrival of Gray Davis and the new administration in Sacramento that precipitated a change in policy around public relations?

Bayol: Well, it was one specific person, a guy named Dennis Trujillo, who was the public affairs officer for—I can’t remember his title. But it was like that. And he basically sent down word that before answering any press questions, that we would have to go through them. And also that employees that weren’t in public affairs, that they could not talk to the press at all. That was not allowed. I’m a little confused about whether this had been issued before or whether it was brand new and it was called DD Nineteen. It was called Deputy Directive Nineteen and it says, “Nobody talks to the press unless they’ve been given permission by the public affairs officer.” And it even said that I couldn’t talk to the press until I’ve gotten the okay. So it really tightened things up.

Meeker: Was Trujillo bringing in a different culture from a previous workplace or was there an understanding that things had been going wrong at Caltrans public relations and it needed to be retrofitted, if you will?

Bayol: I asked that question. I said, “What have we been doing wrong?” “Oh, no, nothing. You’ve been doing fine. We just want to do it this way.” Oh, one of the things was when Pete Wilson, and it may have even been Deukmejian, but I know Pete Wilson. Every time we got a new governor—I go back to Ronald Reagan—but you would get this message. I forget how we send them. I guess a letter or something or a phone call. And they would say, “We want to know every one of your press contacts.” They didn’t say they wanted to not have you answer it. But they said, “Every time you have a press contact, send it up to us.” And we would just kind of laugh because what we would do is we would do it and it killed them because we would send them everything. By following the rule to the letter, the rule dies. It was like automatic. So we would get this thing.
Meeker: So you were talking to hundreds of contacts a week probably?

Bayol: Yeah. It’s maybe not that kind of a number but up there. So you get the call from the *Press Democrat* in Santa Rosa, I think, and it says, “There’s a big controversy because they’re going to take down a redwood tree on the River Road.” And so you send them this thing and they look at it and go, “I don’t care about that.” So then things change and they say, “Uh, just send us the important stuff.” And once that happened, you’re on your way. It’s going to evolve into not having to report it. But when Davis came in, it changed because we had to report and they stuck to it. In fact, they would call us and say, “I want more. How come you don’t have more information? We need more details.” Okay.

Meeker: Did you get a sense that this was particular or peculiar to Davis himself?

Bayol: Yeah. Yeah. I think from what I heard was that he was very particular about that stuff. He always wanted to know. And I think most leader types, they don’t want to be blindsided and they don’t want to be surprised and that has always been there. This actually was a mistake I made one time. But we had a project here in San Francisco after the earthquake of reconstructing I-280. And the project got really complicated and we couldn’t widen the road because we had businesses that were in the way. We had to buy the business or we’d have to get an easement and blah, blah, and all this craziness. So the project went from it’s going to be done in two months that it’s going to be done in six months. So I was talking to a reporter at the *Examiner*. He said, “Oh, yeah, that 280, are you guys going to have some kind of—you’re open in a couple of months.” I said, “Oh, well, it’s going to be six months now.”

Oops. Kiss that after—because the *Examiner* was an afternoon paper. And I’m walking down to get lunch and it came out at one o’clock and there it is on the front page. “280 delayed.” [laughter] And that was a mistake. I really did on my part. And so then I get the call. “How come you didn’t tell us that this was coming out?” “I’m sorry.” I should have in cases like that.

And it’s also a news sense. And I don’t know if I ever really had it. I don’t know why they run the stories that they do on the news. They’re not the ones that I would pick. And so I just provide them Caltrans information and answer the questions, whatever, then try and anticipate what the bosses ought to know about. And that really served us well. And after the Davis administration came in, it got very tedious and difficult and the creativity was terrible.
Meeker: This is Martin Meeker interviewing Greg Bayol. This is tape four. So let’s move on in talking about the response to the collapse of the Bay Bridge and the long process about retrofitting and then deciding that retrofitting wasn’t adequate and it needed to be rebuilt. And I’m really interested in this process from the point of view of you working in public relations and I’d like you to walk me through this process. Not only are you having to communicate these various decisions, which involve multiple millions, and ultimately billions of dollars, to the people of California, but I imagine, and from what I understand about some of the other things that we should probably talk about as well, like the Cypress freeway reconstruction and the reconstruction of the central freeway in San Francisco and the tunnel over near Half Moon Bay around Devil’s Slide. You’re having to engage with community people. And I don’t know the degree to which you participated in these kinds of community meetings and have to gather people together and get consensus about the kinds of decisions that Caltrans is making. I know this is many questions, but can you just start out by talking about how decisions were made or at least communicated to you and how you were supposed to communicate the original decisions about opening up the Bay Bridge and understanding that there was a quick fix but then there was going to be a longer fix, whether that was replacement or retrofit. And how do you communicate that process to the people who are going to be driving on the bridge, knowing that it’s not entirely safe, I guess?

Bayol: Well, I think at that time, in regards to the Bay Bridge and the other repairs that were being done around the Bay Area in response to the earthquake damage, you kind of had to just give this overall viewpoint and that was, “We need to make our facilities safe and that’s the number one issue. We don’t want to have to go through this again.” So what we’re doing now, somebody’s saying, “The bridge collapsed, okay, now you have this fix. What are you going to do?” Okay. Well, we’ve contracted with the University of California at San Diego and Dr. Priestly, I think his name was, “and we have contracted with UC Berkeley and Lawrence Livermore Lab and we’re bringing the experts, the very best people there are. These are the best engineers in the world. You’re not going to get better ones.” We’re talking. And not only from the academic community but from the private side, too. EQ was an engineering company. The guy’s still around. And we’re going to get the best, so we’re going to have the best answers to this. So that was always our
position. Now, you may not be able to say, “Okay, we’re going to build a cable-stayed bridge,” but it did come to that. It came to the point, okay, “Well, now, so what are you going to do?” And the first thing we did was looked at how to retrofit the east span. And it became apparent during testing at UC Berkeley with Dr. Astaneh who became not our friend, but he did the testing of the steel to see whether it could be retrofitted. He rebuilt the beams using the formulas that were in place back in the thirties to recreate these beams and then test them to see what kind of stresses they could withstand. And it became apparent not only from his work, but there were others, and our own people in Sacramento, structural engineers, that to retrofit that cantilever and through truss bridge was going to be very complicated. It was just too many moving parts. Everything’s going in every direction. To try to control it was just not in the cards. The best thing was replacement. Now, that was a giant leap. It didn’t happen overnight and there were a lot of people consulted and a lot of talk among the engineers and the political side. Because it was going to cost. The decision of not replacing the west side was that the suspension bridge was more stable and we could retrofit that and we did. And we felt that we could do it and do it safely.

The other thing about the east span was that the foundations were—although they withheld fine for fifty years the bridge is on Douglas Fir piles and so it would be better to strengthen those I think just psychologically.

Meeker: Understanding that those could decay and rot.

Bayol: Yeah. But they’re still holding up right now.

Meeker: Yeah. And this is one of the interesting questions that I imagine would have come down to you and your colleagues. The bridge already failed once and there was understanding after, I imagine, about some of the continued problems with it. It’s on the wood piles. The western span needed retrofit, as well, so clearly there was some damage there. How do you communicate to the public that—suspend disbelief, the bridge, unless we’ve got a 9.0 or a 10.0 earthquake, God forbid, the bridge will stand and it will stand for the next fifteen, twenty years, and so you should still feel safe driving over it even though it’s failed once. How do you communicate that? Were there ever conversations about, gee, we’ve got this weird situation where it’s almost like we’re selling a product to a group of people and it’s like selling a pinto. It’s probably not the best comparison but here’s a product, a consumer product,
the bridge, that people have to buy, that failed once? And how do you assure
the people that need to use this product every day that it is still basically safe?

Bayol: Well, one of the things, the immediate things about the repair of the span that
failed, link E9. The E9 span failure. Was that we could show on the plans of
the bridge, and usually done with drawings, how that bridge worked and that
this section sat on top of that and there was like a six inch overlap. So when
the things began to shake a little bit, falling is a very real possibility. But it
had to be able to move. It couldn’t be static, otherwise you’d have failures
elsewhere. So what we’re going to do, and we put pictures in the Chronicle of
it, in all the papers, actually, showing that this overhang was going to be
extended to the point where that’s not going to be an issue anymore. And
similar things are going to be done throughout the bridge. Now, we found
more and more as we went along. And then we came to the conclusion that
trying to undo all this or to strengthen is just out of the question. Now, on the
west side we went from rivets to bolts because bolts are stronger.

Meeker: These high-tension bolts, right.

Bayol: Yeah. So I think you did it incrementally. You could say, “This is how we’re
going to fix this,” and then now the question is how are we going to fix the
entire span, the east spans? And we’re looking into it kind of thing. Because it
takes time to make a decision and then we make that decision and then people
will come with a question, “Yeah, but is it safe now?” Well, if it weren’t safe
we wouldn’t let you on it was our mantra. That’s all. We wouldn’t. If it
weren’t safe we wouldn’t. It would be closed. Which was true. And we did a
minimal retrofit. We did some strengthening, we did that change on the failed
span. We didn’t put any dampeners. We did on the west side. But then things
started moving along. What are we going to do when we came up with the
replacement and then we started seriously looking into that and at the same
time the political side got involved. Quentin Kopp said this decision of what
kind of a bridge it’s going to be is going to be made by locals and, “Caltrans,
you’re just going to follow the direction that they send you.”

Meeker: Well, I want to get into that decision process and that’s really interesting.
Whereas at some points in time your job required you to be very general and
not provide all that much information because, as you said, newspaper articles
are short and people’s attention spans are also short. But in some case it
sounds like it actually made sense for you to give a great amount of detail,
such as the bolt was not long enough and that’s why it failed and this is the engineering reason and we’re going to add this much and so therefore something that would actually require a little attention to make people feel safer about their experience. Is that an adequate or an accurate description of sometimes going less detail, sometimes more detail?

Bayol: I think what the process is—I handled things a little differently. I wanted to give as much information as possible right from the get-go because you know there’s certain—especially depending on what reporter you’re talking to. Honestly, if you’re talking to a television reporter you can tell him just about anything and they say, “Fine, I got my shot.” And they’re gone. But if you’re talking to a newspaper reporter, especially then, because I think it’s too bad newspapers have shrunk so much, but you start out by saying, “Yeah, that failed and we’ve got a fix for it.” And then if they go away, they say, “Thank you, goodbye.” But a lot of times they don’t. They say, “What do you mean you got a fix? What are you going to do?” “Well, we’re going to have it built a new way.” So they come back. “What do you mean new way? What are you going to change?” Okay, so that’s fine. But you usually know going in that if I get Benny Evangelista at the Chronicle or Michael Cabanantuan the other one. They’ll keep at you because they’re knowledgeable enough. They’re tuned in. And so you may as well tell them right from the start this is what you want to know because I know what is newsworthy here. People want to know about the safety issues and so on. So I think that’s kind of how that process went. And I think even at that time, as much as people were already saying, “My God, the earthquake happened years ago and you haven’t done anything,” they were saying that but I think they still trusted us. After the earthquake, Caltrans was looking really good because we were so responsive around the Bay Area. I was doing shows, radio, like every day, like on KNBR. They always start out with, “You’ve been really great and doing all this stuff.” And it was really terrific. Now, that dropped a little bit because things were slow in moving. So there wasn’t that attack yet. That hadn’t started. So we still had some—

Bayol: —credibility and support from the general public.

Meeker: Credibility.
going to be a cable stay and now it’s a suspension. And you mentioned Quentin Kopp, who said this is going to be a local decision maker about how it’s done. And I know historically, and I love your comment on this, and that is Caltrans is a state agency and I think that it has a reputation, at least, of not being so concerned about local concerns and really maybe treating the local communities in the same way sometimes the federal government treats states.

04-00:14:28
Bayol: Right.

04-00:14:29
Meeker: And that we’re higher up the food chain and that we don’t really have to answer to you, we answer to a higher power. And those higher powers are, one, traffic flow, and two, I guess, our budget. But then there have been more recent experiences. Like I said, the Central Freeway, the redesign of the Bay Bridge, and then also the Devil’s Slide bypass where the community, the local people, have really attempted to marshal their own political power and hold little sixties mau-mauing in some cases to—

04-00:15:13
Bayol: A little bit.

04-00:15:14
Meeker: —influence the direction of and the decisions of Caltrans. And so it sounds like you’re a little skeptical of my interpretation here, so I’d love to hear your response to that, particularly in relation to the decision about replacing the eastern span.

04-00:15:31
Bayol: Okay. Well, with the Bay Bridge, our engineers, I’m talking about Brian Maroney especially, Denis Mulligan, these guys who were really at the ground level. There was Sacramento but these guys were—well, Maroney technically was out of Sacramento but he worked locally. And their position always was safety. We’ve got to get the project, we’ve got to get it done quickly because—and there was the book done called *Racing Against Time*. And that was we had to get these bridges in order before we have the next quake because we’ll have a catastrophe if we don’t. That’s a possibility. Although we’re not going to say specifically. I don’t think they ever said. But they may have had a list. If we have a big earthquake, this is going to fall.

So anyway, we went into the big retrofit program. This was going on simultaneously, where we did column wrapping. We learned things from the Northridge quake and the Whittier. The Whittier quake was the big one
because that taught us certain things about highway bridges. And this is before ’89. So that was really our impetus. So we proposed, with Denis and Maroney, they came out and they said, “Okay, we can have a skyway, we can have a cable stay. One tower cable stay, two tower, and a symmetrical cable stay or an asymmetrical cable stay, all these variations.” Well, we didn’t want people to see it. We held it back for a while because we wanted to ease it out. Well, when it hit the papers—

Meeker: Ease what out? The various models?

Bayol: Yeah, the looks. Well, I don’t think people, the general populace, they probably picked one they liked. But Jerry Brown didn’t like one. He didn’t like any of them. Or did he? There was some political, I think from watching from my viewpoint. We had to say, “Let’s build a skyway,” because that’s our job. We build it. We’re not there to be building monuments. We’re building a highway. So that the skyway or the bridge without any superstructure is the way to go because it’s the cheapest and its efficient. Everything about it, it fits the bill and we can afford it. We could afford anything obviously.

Meeker: So like the San Mateo Bridge, that kind of thing?

Bayol: Yeah. And, in fact, this was kind of the thing that bothered a lot of the engineers. That’s what Jerry Brown said, “A freeway on stilts. That’s ugly.” But wait a minute. Have you ever seen the Coronado Bridge? It’s beautiful. It can be done. But that’s what we had to put out there. The barebones solution to the problem. Get it done, get it done quickly before the next quake. Well, then the people wanted other ones so we came out with these other options.

Meeker: When you say people wanted other ones, like why does Caltrans decide it needs to listen? What is the process?

Bayol: Because we were told to listen.

Meeker: By?

Bayol: Quentin Kopp. It had to be a local decision through MTC.
Okay. And the reason that he was central in this process was that he was what? Head of the transportation committee or something?

Right, right. He was the Senate Transportation Committee chairman.

Yeah. And so there are few people, I guess, who have some amount of power over Caltrans and it would be the governor and I guess the head of these state house committees.

Yeah, yeah. It’s kind of out of my area how that all works but there’s one comment on me I can make later about it. So that’s where we were, was having to build something that’s not only going to solve the problem that we’re faced with, which is building a safe facility but also has to be aesthetically attractive and all that. So then we came out with the others.

Now, what I did, part of my job, was to go around to public meetings like the Contra Costa Council. Went to their meeting and went to the City of San Francisco Board of Supervisors with what is affectionately known as a dog and pony show on the different bridge designs and then show them to people and then have people say what they liked.

Can you walk me through that dog and pony show just a little bit? Like what you would tell and if you like a particular agenda behind the various versions that you were showing?

Well, okay. There wasn’t any agenda. We were honestly just getting people’s opinion. Now, whether or not we would listen to it in the end, of course, that is a little beyond me. But somebody else will make that decision. It was like a PowerPoint only a little fancier. In fact, I’m a little embarrassed to say that I put it together at this point because it was crazy. But it had pictures of the various bridges, the statistics on them, how high the tower would be, and then how much it would cost, how long it would take to build, and all of these little things. And I had charts and stuff. And then something happened. Anyway, I went around with this and people they come. The question was always put to them, “Should we build a new bridge or retrofit the old one?” That was at that time. And so you’d finish the meeting and they’d say, “Build a new bridge,” because you had these nice pretty pictures and all that stuff.
But then something happened. It’s kind of funny. This guy calls me up and for the life of me I can’t remember his name. But he was with a company called Coryphaeus, which has since gone away. But they designed real time interactive gaming. That was their company and they were in Los Gatos. But this guy calls me up and he says, “I’m going to be in San Francisco at a meeting. Please come and see me.” Because I guess he found my name in quotes in the paper. So I go and see him and he says, “What I would like to do is work with you to develop a real time experience of driving across that new bridge. What it will be like.” And I thought, “Yeah, that’s great. Sure, I’d love to do it.” So I met with him. I went and got the plans. We had at that point had preliminary plans for all the different kinds of bridges. The cable stays and all that. And so I got them. They did this whole thing where you could get in your car and drive across the bridge and you could see just what it would look like in both directions. And we took that and we went to SGI, Silicon Graphics in Menlo Park to their big facility where they have 180 degree plus screen in a room, and we had Bill Lockyer there and Quentin Kopp and all the big guys and everything and we had a drive through. This is what it would be like. And they’re sitting and it’s just like real. And so then afterwards they said, “That’s the bridge we want,” and that was the cable stay bridge.

And then we also showed it at the design review committee in Oakland. I shouldn’t say that. We tried to show it. It was a very frustrating day. The power wasn’t compatible. The computer they had, which was a Cray, is from a Cray computer. It’s this thing. But anyway, we plugged it. You need 220. So we weren’t able to show it but we did have photographs and stuff. And so it kind of convinced everybody that they wanted to have this signature span as it became known as.

04-00:24:36
Meeker: So from what you’re saying it sounds like it was entirely a concern of aesthetics.

04-00:24:43
Bayol: At that point, yeah. Yeah. It just became aesthetics. And very frustrating to the engineers because behind the doors and out front, whatever the people want, we’ll do it. We’re here to serve. Honestly, he almost said that word for word that way. You’d come to a meeting, “Whatever you want.” And so we’d have our meeting and it was kind of the same thing.

So one thing led to another and then they got into this damn—it was so frustrating. This design competition. Well, Maroney just was beside himself—I hope he doesn’t deny it—but that’s not the way you build a project. You
don’t go out and ask everybody what they want. It’s just not going to work. All the problems, all the delays can all be kind of traced back to some extent to this idea of including everybody. They wasted weeks looking at these goofy bridges.

04-00:25:46
Meeker: Whose idea was the design competition?

04-00:25:48
Bayol: Well, it was pressure from outside. It was really people write letters to the editor and say, “Why don’t they do what they did wherever, down in Tampa, and just get a bunch of designs and then pick the best one?” So that’s what they did. And some of the designs were just jokes. They had the pizza bridge and they had this bridge that just was a freeform thing. It was just all whimsy, almost all. But there was one design by T.Y. Lin that was selected, although it didn’t look at all like what they ended up doing. But that was the one they decided to go with. Well, then there was a bit of a controversy because T.Y. Lin’s a local and T.Y. Lin was on the board. But our position, and I never had to answer this question, I was never asked directly. Denis Mulligan handled it. He would say, “Why one of your engineering people on the design review board is winner of the selection?” And Denis’s answer was great. He says, “We have the best engineers in the world working on this. The people who proposed are the best engineers. There’s got to be some overlap. You can’t help it.” So that kind of went away. But at the same time we were getting all the heat from Astaneh over at Berkeley and he was saying that the bridge wasn’t going to be safe. He started with that. I think his first thing was that the bridge could be retrofitted. But anyway.

04-00:27:40
Meeker: Why do you suppose he became such an antagonist?

04-00:27:44
Bayol: Well, our guess was that it’s because he didn’t get picked.

04-00:27:48
Meeker: To retrofit?

04-00:27:50
Bayol: He didn’t get picked for the design either. Because he had a design, too. He teamed up with an architect and he came up with a design that was—God, I can’t remember the name of the bridge. But it was going to be built up in Auburn. It’s the—
Meeker: Oh, the Ruck-A-Chucky?

Bayol: Yes, the Ruck-A-Chucky Bridge. And he wanted to do a similar thing. That was a T.Y. Lin.

Meeker: Yes.

Bayol: And, in fact, it’s in the Lawrence Hall of Science. They have a big nice photo.

Meeker: Yeah. It’s often described as the most famous bridge that was never built.

Bayol: [laughter] Yeah. So he was going to do something like that. And then when they came up with the single tower suspension or self-anchored suspension bridge, he said that that wasn’t a safe design so—

Meeker: Interesting.

Bayol: Yeah. Well, the big thing that happened at this point in the game was once we had a design selected then we had to begin studies. And that’s when the big confrontation came. The City of San Francisco, Willie Brown, wouldn’t let us on Yerba Buena Island to do soils sampling.

Meeker: What happened with that?

Bayol: Well, because BRAC was going on, the base realignment or whatever—

Meeker: Base Realignment and Closure. Yeah.

Bayol: Yeah. And in that transition period, under BRAC the city, the local entity was in charge. They’re like the senior. They make all the decisions. So Brown came to us first of all. And I was there when his request came in and I was working with Steve Hulsebus, was the engineer’s name, and he said, “Brown said he wanted to have an off-ramp on the east side of the bridge, on the north
side.” It’s all a mess now because it’s under construction. But if you want to
go to Treasure Island or Yerba Buena Island when you’re heading left you
exit on the left. Well, he wanted to have an exit on the right. We said, “Well,
we’ll never build that because you’ve got the Nimitz House that’s in the way,
and it would be a substandard design. We can’t fit the proper.” And so he
says, “No, no. Just draw it for me.” So they did. They put together a set of
plans, about three sheets of these, and showed it to him. And then just out of
the blue he said, “I don’t want you guys on the island.” And said, “Why?”
“Because your plans are going to interfere with my development plans.” And
that’s about all he said. He never got specific. So we had to kind of guess.
Now, the people I’m talking to about this, Denis Mulligan and Steve and the
district director, they’re telling me kind of what’s going on. They may have
known more. But there was a large brick building there that was going to
become a brew pub and that became kind of the joke. He won’t let us build
our bridge so that he can have his brew pub. But he never gave us a straight
answer.

So anyway, this year passed. In fact, Denis went over his head and went to the
Navy. He went to the Secretary of the Navy in Washington, met with him, and
they had a very contentious meeting, as I understand it. That’s the way Denis
told it. And they said, “No, the decision is up to the mayor and so go back.
You work with the mayor.” Well, then Denis found a law. Denis was a genius.
He always would find out things. There’s a lot of examples of it in his career.
But the federal Department of Transportation could be the lead agency if
there’s a transportation project involved. So he went to the attorneys and
that’s what ended up happening. Caltrans took possession of the island, in
effect, made it possible to do the studies and get to work on the bridge and the
mayor was kind of pushed aside.

And I guess the brew pub never happened.

Well, it may yet when they get the bridge all done. Annemarie Conroy was the
representative for the city and she would get up and say, “Wait. We have
plans for the island and you’re going to ruin them.” And we’d say, “Well, why
are we going to ruin them?” It was just a big breakdown in communication.
There were other things going on and you really didn’t know. But she said,
“Oh, no, if you build this thing your bridge is going to overshadow the Nimitz
House and the Nimitz House is a historical place and all that.” And it was
funny because we didn’t have to do an environmental document for some
reason but we were doing one way anyway. And one of the things was the
historical side, finding out that Nimitz didn’t like the house anyway and spent most of his time at his house in Berkeley, not on the island. And he didn’t like it for other reasons, because people threw their garbage over the side of the bridge and it would land in his front yard. It’s all gone now but they had a chain link fence lying down so if anybody threw anything it would catch and it wouldn’t make it down to the Nimitz House. But that was baloney. So anyway, they got started on the design and the details of how they would build it and went from there.

04-00:34:30

Meeker: One of the details was the eventual decision to build a bike lane kind of attached to the side of it. And I came across one discussion about this and people were talking about how much it cost to build these bike lanes. And I can’t remember what bridge: maybe it was the Dumbarton Bridge where they have one and they realized that maybe fifty people a week were using it and the expense was millions of dollars? And so each person riding it was basically costing the state hundreds of thousands of dollars each week or something along those lines.

04-00:35:08

Bayol: Right.

04-00:35:09

Meeker: It was crazy. Were you involved in any of the discussions about building the bike lane or not building the bike lane, and were you dealing with the “bike lobby” in Oakland or the East Bay?

04-00:35:25

Bayol: Very interesting time. Okay. First of all, as far as putting a bike lane on the Bay Bridge, it was required, because of Lockyer’s Bay Trail and BCDC [Bay Conservation and Development Commission]. BCDC says if you’re going to build a bridge, a new bridge or if you’re going to change a bridge, then you’re going to need to address the issue of a bike lane. You either have to or you have to have a good reason why not. It’s like a 4F sort of situation where if you ain’t going to do it you got to have a good reason why not. So that was kind of a done deal. On the Bay Bridge, as far as the east span having a bike lane, that was never, I don’t think, ever questioned.

04-00:36:19

Meeker: So there was never any consideration about the fact that it wasn’t going to go all the way across the bay?
Bayol: Oh, very much so. See, they looked into the idea of extending it to the west side and they looked at different designs. Steve Hulsebus, again, he did the study. And they’re either doing one now or they’re looking at it again. Lots of problems because once you get to Yerba Buena you got to get around the island for one thing.

Meeker: That it seems to me would be the easiest part.

Bayol: It is. It probably is because then the other part is how do you do it? Do you hang the path underneath the bridge or do you cantilever it out the side of the bridge? And then you run into aesthetics issues because this is a historic structure. How do you address those? And the cost was just really high and at a time when there was pressure to report low costs because that’s where the political pressure is coming from.

I talked regularly to a guy named Alex Zuckerman, who was the head of the Bay Area Bike Coalition. And it was funny because he knew I knew who to talk to. That’s what he could get from me. So if there was a question like the Dumbarton—the Dumbarton was an interesting thing because my recollection was fifty was the high number. When we did a count we got like four. And the coalition did a count and they get more. We went back and forth on that stuff. And that was because they wanted us to put a bike path on the San Mateo Bridge, which was not done. At that time, I think the primary reason was cost. We were limited in cost on that one.

Then you have the tunnel. You brought up the Devil Slide Tunnel. That’s a really interesting thing. The tunnel, that roadway started failing when they built it, which was in 1906. They had the earthquake and some of it fell in, so they had to rebuild it. There’s a chronology. It’s like 1910 it falls in the ocean, 1912 it falls in the ocean. It’s just like one winter after another. So the idea was to build this bypass and the proposal for a tunnel came along. But we rejected it out of hand saying, “Look it.” And I remember being in a meeting where someone said, “The reason why we’re not going to build a tunnel is—just think of it this way. We pay for freeways by the mile. We pay for tunnels by the foot. You figure it out. They’re expensive.” And they’re finding out. It ain’t built yet. But I remember going on radio. I was interviewed by the newspaper down there because they were demanding a study of building a tunnel. And I said, “Okay, we’ll study it and then find out that we can’t build it.”
So then my boss, Joe Brown, who is a cantankerous old guy, we got along just fine though, he made a deal with the locals down there. He said, “Okay, we’ll look into the tunnel. We’ll see what we can do. But we’re going to need to get money somewhere.” And Lantos got us some money. And anyway, I got a call from a paper and I said, “No, we ain’t going to build. It’s been studied to death and we’re not going to build a tunnel.” Well, he had made this deal and he called me into his office just screaming. He said, “What in the hell? You screwed me.” He says, “Now you’re telling we’re not? I just told these people we’re going to build a tunnel or we’re going to look at a tunnel and then you told them we’re not.” I said, “But, Joe, you got to tell me when you do these things.” [laughter] You see, I was confident in my knowledge. I thought I knew what was going on. In fact, I had just spoken to the designer, the guy just under Joe, Ernie Satow and asked him. Talking about. And when I went in and Joe is yelling at me and Ernie is there and Joe turns to Ernie and said, “Well,” he says, “you knew about this, didn’t you? Why didn’t you tell Greg?” And he says, “Joe, you didn’t tell me either.” [laughter] So it was very tense but at the same time kind of invigorating exchanges.

Then with the tunnel, this—oh, I can’t think of her name. Lonnie. Lonnie. Anyway, she lived in Berkeley and she was really fighting for the tunnel.

04-00:41:28
Meeker: Is that Lonnie Hancock?

04-00:41:28
Bayol: No. Oh, no. Not Lonnie Hancock. She’s the mayor, right? Was the mayor?

04-00:41:32
Meeker: Yeah, yeah.

04-00:41:32
Bayol: No. She was a Sierra Club person for that area. And I think she had a house down there, too. But she called me and she wanted some information about actually the Caldecott Tunnel. She wanted all this stuff and I had found some photos for her. It was really neat because we used to fight with each other. Our quotes in the paper, not face to face. But she’d say something, I’d say something. And then I had a meeting with the Sierra Club and I did a talk about why we were building the tunnel. And the perfect story that was written about it was by Harold Gilliam in the *Chronicle*. The whole story of the Devil’s Slide Bypass and why it was a bypass and not a tunnel or not something else. And as I got more and more into it and more and more into the history and stuff I realized they want this bypass because they do want to
turn it into a freeway someday. See, that was always the charge. “You guys want to build that so that you can turn it into a six lane freeway and then you can develop the coast side of San Mateo County.” I never saw it written, of course but after hearing the local stories.

Who do you think the people were who were eventually wanting that sort of development and creation of a freeway?

Well, I think the businesses down there may have. But I was in contact with one of the business owners, a guy named John Barbour and he owned the restaurants, Miramonte, and there’s like four right on the water that he owns. And it just drove him crazy. He says, “I never know when the road’s going to be open. You’re going to close the road, I go out of business.” So he said, “I don’t care if you build a tunnel or a bypass, just make it reliable.” And I think it was higher than that. I think these are like big time developer types.

I’ve never actually heard this reason before. So in addition, or maybe even more important than environmental considerations about putting a road through that particular piece of parkland, the idea was that a tunnel would actually slow development in that particular region?

Well, it would limit it, certainly—

Limit it, yeah.

—because you wouldn’t be able to expand it and that was the idea. They knew that once you have that tunnel in place you can’t widen it. You can’t widen a tunnel unless you put in another one like we’re doing in—over there we wouldn’t do that. But the question of the park, of course, comes up and it was finally determined in court that the park came after the freeway. But then other things came up. There were environmental issues. We had noise issues. The red legged frog and other things. When I would go to these meetings, there was a guy named Mitch Ried, Mitch Ried, he was a gadfly, a crazy guy. He called us every day, recorded phone calls with us. He was at all the meetings and he’d come in on his bicycle. And, well, you can imagine. [laughter] But he was a real diehard. In fact, when that tunnel opens, he should be there. That guy should be there. I may not be there but Mitch Ried should be there because he was a real pain, always bugging us.
Thinking about those kinds of people who have a deep personal investment in these kinds of projects that Caltrans is pursuing, other than people like Quentin Kopp and the Browns, were there any other people around the Bay Bridge that had those particular—maybe Astaneh would be another example of somebody who had a real kind of deep personal interest in the fate of what became of the new span or what was to become of the new span.

I had this conversation years ago with Mara Melandry. I forget her name. She lives in Berkeley. And we were talking about how with the Bay Bridge Project we didn’t have those people. We were wondering where are they, why don’t we have? The bicycle people, you’d go to the San Mateo Bridge meetings and there would be ten people there with their bikes in hand. But you go to the Bay Bridge meeting and they weren’t. Now, whether they had won that already, they knew they were going to get a bike path and maybe that was why. When we were developing the new bridge, individuals would call and they’d say, “Why are you spending money on a bridge like this and you could do something else?” And then Alex Zuckerman. He knew he was going to have that bike path as far as it was and he would push for the rest of it, to go the rest of the way. He would do that but he wasn’t around. He wasn’t around. And the same thing with the whole environmental issues of the Bay Bridge. There weren’t very many. They were minor. We had the eel grass issue which I’ve since found out is pretty important and that was addressed already and will continue to be. And the cormorants are there. There’s no major environmental impact, surprisingly enough. Now, Alex Zuckerman, sadly, he got hurt riding his bike on a closed upper deck of the Bay Bridge. We were doing some construction where we were doing the retrofit work, where we had to close the bridge and put in these steel supports. Yeah. Late one night, about eleven o’clock at night, he and the district director, Randy Iwasaki, and along with the deputy director Dan [McElhinney?], who was driving a car—Dan’s a really big guy, he wouldn’t have been able to ride a bike. They were riding and Alex’s bike went down into an expansion joint and he hit his head, even with a helmet on, but he hit his head and never recovered. He lived for a while, a year or so. But when it happened I got a call around midnight from Randy Iwasaki saying, “You may get calls from the press about this. Don’t say anything.” Because he was afraid I would find out from someone else, which I did. I did find out from someone else and just—

Was it an authorized ride on the bridge or—?
Well, the problem was it was Randy, who’s the boss, the district director, so he invited Alex to come out and to do this ride. Well, when Randy called me I said, “You can’t ride on the bridge. You’ve got expansion joints. You have to cover them.” Because we would have those races, the bike races on the bridge. And I said you always got to cover the—well, in fact, they stopped those because you can’t cover them. They move. So I said, “My God.” And he said, “Well, that’s what happened.” Fell in the thing.

That’s a pretty harsh story.

Yeah. That was terrible.

Another question about the bridge, and that is outsourcing a lot of the steel work to China. How was this decision made and were you still in the position of responding to the press when these contracts became public and had to say why they weren’t being fulfilled in the United States instead of overseas?

I think that was just toward the end. That question, of course, had come up on other issues. After the ’89 quake we did get steel delivered from I believe Utah. So we did get it. The timeframe isn’t there. Bethlehem Steel used to be in south San Francisco and we went to them and they were just planning their shutdown. And we went to them and said, “Hey, we will buy your steel for whatever.” And I think it might have been the Benicia Bridge or maybe the Antioch. But they said, “No, we’re shutting down. That’s it.” There’s not a lot of steel made in the United States. That’s one of the problems. The kind of steel that we needed. And the buy America clauses are very specific to the funding sources. So if there’s not a buy America then you have to go with your least expensive and that’s China. On the Carquinez Bridge there was the question of the bolts that were rejected. We had bad bolts. They were from China. Questions like that would come up. But I don’t think people realize how difficult it is, that you think, “Well, just, gosh, get American steel.” But American steel is pretty rare.

So from 2004 to 2006 you’re in the reconstruction documentation division, which is also related to the public relations office, correct?

Peripherally, yeah, yeah.
Meeker: Peripherally. Why was it that you moved again from one to the other?

Bayol: I’m trying to remember what incident it was that set it off. Oh, okay. Davis had come in. When Davis came in he put Kena Hudson, she worked for the Democratic party in New Mexico and so she was connected to Clinton and then connected to Davis. And he called her up and gave her my job and so what they did—because I was having these problems with Dennis Trujillo. And we all were. It wasn’t just me. And even Denis Mulligan. I would go into Denis’s office and he’d have Trujillo on the speakerphone and we would be kind of laughing about what—he says, “Okay, Denis, I want you to say this and say this.” He’s telling the pro what to do. So I got called into the office of the chief deputy, Andy Fremier, and he says, “Greg, do you still want to leave public affairs?” And I said, “Did I say I wanted to leave?” And he said, “Well, you’re having this trouble with Trujillo. Do you want to leave?” I said, “Well, no. I still like my job.” He says, “Well, you’re leaving.” And it was done just like that. It was like, “Do you want to leave?” “No.” “Well, you are.” That was it. So he says, “Well, we have something that—“

Meeker: How’d you feel about that?

Bayol: I’ll tell you, to this day it’s kind of laughable. I felt bad that I wasn’t going to be doing public affairs work because I really enjoyed it and I enjoyed working with reporters. I found that exciting sometimes, not all the time. But it was okay because I didn’t like Trujillo and this control thing that was going on. I couldn’t really do my job anyway. So he says, “Okay, the director, the district director, Bijan Sartipi, wants someone to be sure that all of this bridge work that we’re doing is documented. This is very important to him,” which was BS. I knew it when he said it. So I kept my same office, which was a pretty nice office. And he says, “But this is what you’re going to do,” and here’s your org chart and I get to hire like three people. So I hired one and then they said, “We’re out of money so you’ll just have to do it with the two of you.” Well, what happened was I got really involved and they didn’t expect that. But I built this museum and then I—

Meeker: At Caltrans, correct?

Bayol: It’s in the Oakland office.
Meeker: Yeah. With Ken Brown? Or did he participate in it?

Bayol: Well, Ken Brown didn’t help too much. It was my assistant that I hired, Keith Wayne. Keith Wayne. Wayne Keith. One of those. He helped me and I worked with Nelson Aguilar, who was the head of right of way engineering and he got all these exhibits and stuff for me and I worked with the graphics department and all that and we did videos and we did stuff. All kinds of things. This is kind of a neat little thing. And we had some artifacts that were kind of fun. So I did that and I was still working on that. But what would happen is that I would still be getting calls from reporters. And one of the reasons was because people weren’t as responsive as they should have been. And they’d say, “Greg, I can’t get this information. Can you help me?” And then one thing led to another and I helped the wrong guy at the wrong time and I lost that job.

Meeker: And this was about the welding, correct?

Bayol: Yes.

Meeker: This was the story in the *Oakland Tribune*?

Bayol: Yeah, Sean Holstege was the reporter.

Meeker: So in looking back upon it do you regret the information that you were given? Because I know you had also mentioned that for your role in documentation that you were simply just doing what was part of your job description there.

Bayol: Yeah. You see, I had gotten the call from a reporter and somehow my boss found out and he said, “Don’t talk to him.” He said, “You can’t do it. That’s not your job anymore.” So I said, “But wait a minute. These are my friends.” I said, “I mean, I don’t go to dinner with them or anything but we talk about our lives together, our families and so on.” So he said, “Well, in that case, I can imagine if it’s that and it’s no big deal.” Well, I translated that a little bit and I made a mistake in their eyes and that was when Sean Holstege had put in an information request. It wasn’t being acted on. It was being delayed and hung up and hung up. So I went to the person who’s over that section that does that
stuff, which used to be under me, and I said, “Sean’s not getting his stuff. He’s going to put something in there that Caltrans isn’t cooperating.” I said, “You ought to just help him out.” Well, all hell broke loose and my boss came in and said, “You’re no longer in toll bridge documentation.”

04-00:59:14
Meeker: Were you also frustrated with the reporter from the Tribune as a result of that? I’m curious.

04-00:59:23
Bayol: No. There was another incident, though, where I was. Something happened. I just don’t remember the details. Oh, shoot. It had something to do with the welding and he didn’t back me up on something. It was one of those. Then he left. He went to Arizona.

04-00:59:53
Meeker: The reporter did?

04-00:59:55
Bayol: Yeah.

04-00:59:56
Meeker: So basically almost out of this tape. I think we can wrap it up. There was one other question that I keep on forgetting to ask and I hate to end on this note but suicides on the Bay Bridge. Of course, there’s a huge amount of documentation and public awareness of it on the Golden Gate Bridge. But in the course of our interviews we discovered that actually it happens somewhat regularly also on the Bay Bridge, mostly by talking to maintenance workers and other sort of people who spend a lot of time on the bridge itself. In your public relations capacity how did you deal with these when they happened?

04-01:00:39
Bayol: We ignored it. It was a policy. One of the first things I learned when I went to work in public affairs, and I had a conversation with my boss, and he said, “As far as the suicides on the Bay Bridge we just don’t talk about them. We do not want to start.” Like the Golden Gate Bridge has found themselves in a trap which they’ve since gotten out of. And that is keeping a count and knowing that this is the hundredth suicide. There aren’t nearly as many because there’s no pedestrian walkway, though people have—they’ve stopped their cars and they’ve jumped. The number? I don’t know the number. And, in fact, we have been asked by the press to tell them what the number and we say it’s just something that can’t be put together. We’d have to do a lot of research of the archives. We just don’t want to get into doing that.
Now, when the Golden Gate Bridge, I think it was the 500th suicide, there was like a rash of them, people wanting to be the 500th. And at that point they said we ain’t doing this anymore so they don’t give out the number. And I don’t know how they report them or anything. Mary Currie, she’s the expert over there. But we didn’t give that a lot of attention.

Now, there were incidents that were dramatic. There was one where a guy was on the lower deck west of the island who had stopped his car and gone over the side and was going to jump and our maintenance people talked him out of it. And they grabbed him. The story, the way it was told to me, it was just really chilling. But they did. They literally saved the guy’s life.

Begin Audio File 5 bayol_greg_04_01-07-13_stereo.mp3

05-00:00:00
Meeker: This is tape five now with Greg Bayol and we’re just wrapping up. Did you have anything else to add about the stories about suicide or particular events, remarkable events that you had to communicate to the public about?

05-00:00:24
Bayol: Well, I think it’s something that you learn along the way. First of all, you come out with the idea that your job is to provide information to the public and they have a right to know what’s going on. And I really enjoyed seeing things in that light. If someone requires help from us in whatever sense, and in my capacity it was providing information, and I really respected that relationship. I think that was important. But there’s a limit and there are things that people—either it’s better if they don’t know, which doesn’t sound right but it’s true. For instance, we would have robberies at toll plazas, Okay. So someone would come up to a toll plaza, they’d point a gun, say, “Give me your money.” Gave them the money. Okay. The toll collector immediately calls the state police at that time. Now it’s highway patrol. So the state police would come and they’d say, “There’s been a robbery.” What do we do? Nothing. We don’t say a thing because we don’t want it in the press that there’s ever been a robbery at a toll plaza because one time we did. Somebody made a mistake. It was somebody out at the toll plaza. They initiated it. They called the press. They said, “There’s been a robbery here. They got $750.” Well, Christ, for the next three days they got robbed because now they know it can be done, they know how much money is there. And then there was the other one—

05-00:02:01
Meeker: They’re already in their getaway car.
Bayol: Yeah. And we caught these guys. It was called the pizza parlor robberies because they all worked in this pizza parlor. It was kind of fun. But they got them. We have cameras out there. So it got out that there had been a robbery and the TV guy says, “Well, you got those cameras there. Why don’t you just look at the tapes?” And the guy said, “Oh, man, those cameras are terrible. The pictures are so blurry you can’t tell who it is.” Oh, that helps a lot. [laughter] So the deterrent value of the cameras was gone.

And I think the thing with the suicides, too, was, first of all, they were infrequent. I would say during the period of time that I was working I knew about four maybe.

Meeker: So we’re not talking even one a year. We’re talking one every five years maybe.

Bayol: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. Because it just doesn’t lend itself to it.

Meeker: Is part of it just you don’t want copycats? You don’t want it to become a magnet? Like Golden Gate has become a suicide magnet in some ways.

Bayol: Yeah, exactly. And then you have to start thinking about how you’re going to prevent it like the Golden Gate Bridge is now going to have.

Meeker: So they are actually going to put something up?

Bayol: It’s my understanding they were going to put up some kind of a screen, a barrier of some kind. I’m not sure if they’re going to go through with that. And then let’s see. What else can I say?

Meeker: Well, now that we’ve got the new tape rolling, I guess in follow-up to our discussion around the fiftieth anniversary, in 1996 there was a sixtieth, not a signal anniversary, perhaps, but there was also no celebration to speak of. And I guess in the Chronicle somebody said, “Some people think this is a disgrace.” What are your thoughts in working with the public about how often these engineering marvels should be commemorated and what is it that is really being commemorated when we’re celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the bridge, for instance?
Bayol: Well, first of all, it’s difficult because you’ve got to have enough meaning to it to make it worth the expense of using public employees, because you’re going to have to do that one way or another. To do something that’s really not required. Now, the fiftieth anniversary, the seventy-fifth, and especially the way the Golden Gate Bridge did the seventy-fifth was just great. They planned it at a time of expansion. They built a new facility out there for visitors. A store and some other things. They redid the approach to the bridge for pedestrians. They did a lot of things. And they worked it into the seventy-fifth anniversary and it worked beautifully. That was perfect.

Now, the Bay Bridge in the seventy-fifth, we’re under construction and it’s not a pedestrian friendly place. It’s not some—where you can get people in and out easily. So I think that’s part of it. But I think the big thing is you have to really be careful, especially nowadays, in how you deal with public funds. And that’s another thing. In all my years at Caltrans, we were really careful with the people’s money. It was always like at the top of our agenda. Are we doing the right thing? Are we being efficient? Are we being fair to everybody? And not everybody believed that. Of course there were people there who said, “Spend what you want.” But the overall attitude was very frugal. I think it’s just too bad it’s not appreciated. It may not be that way as much as it used to be. So you’re there to provide the service and to do your best job and I think there was a lot more respect for public employees then than there is now. Today if you’re police and fire but everybody else is—it’s just really too bad that they’re—talk about how state employees are overpaid. They don’t tell the whole story. Like, for instance, the latest story was that public employees they say make more than the private sector. Well, you can do that because there are no hamburger flippers in state government. There are no maids or gardeners. Well, we have gardeners, I guess. But we don’t have those low paid positions. We start a little higher just because of the nature of the work. Plus, salaries are all based on people who live in Sacramento. Now, I live in San Francisco and my salary was terrible. It didn’t pay. But that side of the story isn’t told. All salaries are statewide, so my official civil service title was staff services manager two and I made $7,000 a month. If I lived in Eureka and I was a staff services manager two I’d make $7,000 a month and I’d live in a really nice house, probably on the beach.

Meeker: So looking forward to the opening of the new eastern span. Do you know anything about the plans? Will there be a celebration? Have you kept in touch with your colleagues back at Caltrans?
Yeah. I went, it was a few months ago, on a tour of the bridge and they mentioned that they are going to have—now, there was an article in the paper about spending nine million dollars for an opening ceremony. I guess Brown nixed that, which is good. There’s going to be enough. People are going to be wanting a celebration on their own. It’s going to be pretty easy to get cooperation from the public sector, radio stations and TV and all that. Just like we did when we reopened after the Loma Prieta. We had Tony Bennett come out and sing. All those TV trucks were out there and it was really a fun celebration. There were some people who were allowed on but also that it was on TV that night and people could see it. And I think something like that. And then just driving it. I think the initial experience is going to be incredible. When they’re heading west from Oakland going toward San Francisco and they go up that incline, they’re going to be looking right at downtown San Francisco now.

So it’s quite a change. And then coming the other way, of course, they’ll be able to see the East Bay, which they used to many years ago but now they can see it again. And I think it’s something that is worth celebrating just because it took so much to get over. There’s so many obstacles to get over and they were gotten over by people who were really dedicated. I remember having a conversation with Lenka Culik-Caro who’s an engineer who had the widening of the San Mateo Bridge, and I would go to her BCDC meetings with the bicycle people and they would be yelling at her. “We’re not going to let you widen this bridge unless you have a bike lane!” It’s just one thing after another. One attack after another. And then there’s the BCDC board which are attacking her, saying, “Why didn’t you study this? Why didn’t you do that?” I go into her office. I said, “Lenka, you stay with this project. How do you do it? How do you put up with all that?” She said, “Well, that’s part of the job,” and I guess it’s always been that way.

When I started out we used to go to public hearings in local areas. Like I went to the one for the building of 580 through Richmond and the locals would come out and just lambaste you because they picked that one little thing that might—for instance, over there was the Safeway. You had a bunch of houses here and you had the Safeway distribution center and the highway was going to go and we were going to take the houses. So somebody gets up and says, “Why are you taking the houses?” “Because if we take Safeway we’re going
to put 400 people out of work. What do you think we should take?” So it was
great to get out the information but people start out with this anger and it’s
good to be able to correct impressions and misinformation and all that.

05-00:12:30
Meeker: Well, that’s a good point. That might be a good point to end on but do you
have any final thoughts you’d like to add, maybe about the history of the
bridge or your thoughts about we’re going to lose one span or there’s this new
one that’s going to be available or maybe just in general about the period of
time you worked for Caltrans?

05-00:12:52
Bayol: Well, just about the bridge itself. I think a lot of people wanted to keep the old
one, which is not possible. The people should realize the Coast Guard doesn’t
allow it. It’s a hazard to navigation. So we’ll have to remove it. I don’t know.
When you look back at a bridge that was built with the level of technology
that the original bridge was built with and its mind boggling what they were
able to do in a shorter period of time and then end up with something as
beautiful as it is.

Another point. People are saying, “Okay, we don’t have to have a 500 foot
tower to build that bridge. It could have been a skyway.” But when you look
on the west side, those towers, they’re about 500 feet, I guess. They don’t
have to be that high. They could be lower and they’d look like hell. [laughter]
They’d look terrible. But there is an important part of it. Aesthetics is an
important part of the process and the project that is important. You don’t want
to overdo it. And there are some things that are planned. I don’t know if
they’re still going to go through with it but they were going to paint the tunnel
on the outside to have a nice entry up to the suspension, the west span.

But just in general, I think all of my years at Caltrans, starting from my first
day in the mailroom, that you always complain about—it’s, I think, the natural
part of working or dealing with superiors or whatever. But when you can sit
back and find those times when things worked and you got a lot of
satisfaction, you dealt with a lot of really, really fine people, really nice
people, and Caltrans, being an engineering organization with accomplished
people, and mostly pretty smart people, and a place that’s—I went. I saw
Garrison Keillor the other day, the other night. He did Prairie Home
Companion from here. And he said, “I walk around San Francisco and I look
at those buses and I see all those different people.” He says, “The diversity
here is amazing.” You can say the same thing about Caltrans. Maybe not
when I started in 1970 but certainly today. I can’t think of a nationality that
isn’t represented and that isn’t true everywhere. You get this feeling or this complacency or something when you’re in the middle of it. Yeah. Marshall McLuhan said, “We don’t know who discovered water but it wasn’t the fish.” Well, it’s the same thing. You think the world is open and free like where you work but it’s not. You go other places and you find that women don’t have the opportunities like they do at a place like that. And it was a real concerted effort by the people on top and it worked. It’s one aspect of that place that I’ll always have utmost respect for. Even though they’re going to send you to sensitivity training and you go, “Oh, gees I don’t need sensi—“ But it works and I don’t know. I’ve never known an organization, and I’m sure there are plenty out there, but the ones that I’ve dealt with don’t have the openness and the diversity that Caltrans did. And the ability to give people a chance to move up, even though I don’t pay very well.

05-00:17:03
Meeker: [laughter] Well, good. Let’s end there, and thank you very much.

[End of interview]