



PHOTO BY JIM KNOWLES

BART board of directors candidate Fred Wright Lopez thinks San Leandro's stations need more attention.

By Jim Knowles

San Leandro Times

Fred Wright Lopez says the two BART stations in San Leandro are run down and plagued by too much crime and he wants to do something about it.

Lopez is running for the BART board of directors in District 3, which includes most of San Leandro. His goals are to remodel the stations, reduce crime, and make it more accessible for seniors and the disabled.

“Why is it that the San Leandro stations are not being treated the same way as other stations?” Lopez asks.

For example, he points out the steps at the San Leandro BART Station still have the old, grey, metal edges. But stations in Lafayette and other cities have the bright yellow strip with the bumpy surface to make it safer for the elderly or people with disabilities.

Lopez says he will be a voice on the BART board for San Leandro. He wants to increase the cleaning schedule at BART stations and on trains, and have a grading system for stations and restrooms.

The 63-year-old Lopez has a disability himself with low vision, being legally blind, a result of an accident while he worked as a lawyer with the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. He was unloading evidence boxes at Dulles Airport on Washington, D.C. when a cord broke and the cargo slammed into his eyes.

Lopez continued to work with the ATF, advising agents on their investigations. But eventually he felt his eyesight impaired his ability to do the job as well as he thought he should, since he had to refer to law books for various states at a moment's notice, sometimes in the middle of the night, though he is an avid reader and uses a screen to enlarge type to make reading easier.

The candidate says he's noticed that the Bayfair Station's disabled exit leaves somebody out in the parking lot, another thing he wants to correct. Lopez says he wants the BART website to give crime information, along with how to get from Point A to Point B.

"For example, if you're going to Bayfair Station at 11:30 at night, people should know about the crime rate," Lopez says.

In crime statistics, Bayfair and San Leandro stations rank high.

“BART has 43 stations and Bayfair ranks in the top 5 and San Leandro ranks in the top 10 in category 1 crimes (more serious crimes such as robberies),” Lopez says.

So Lopez wants more police patrols at these stations, and better ways for BART riders to contact the police using technology. He would like to set up a system where people can send a text directly to BART police from their cell phone.

Lopez says lot of women are groped on BART, from what he’s heard, and by texting a message to BART police a woman can report the offense without calling attention to herself.

He praises San Leandro for the crosswalks by the San Leandro BART station that chirp and count down the seconds that you have to walk across the street, and for the brick crosswalks because the color difference helps people with low vision.

“Those crosswalks are excellent,” he says. “They’re clear and they let you know how much time you have to cross. For me, that’s literally a life-saver.”

Lopez has been an advocate for seniors and the disabled at BART board meetings, and now he wants to sit on that board. He owns a house in San Leandro and is in the process of moving here from Lafayette, which is also in District 3.

The districts are gerrymandered by the BART board, a practice Lopez wants to stop. District 3 includes San Leandro, San Lorenzo, a bit of Castro Valley, the Oakland and Berkeley hills, downtown Berkeley, the Cal campus, North Berkeley, Albany, El Cerrito, Canyon, Orinda, Moraga and Lafayette.

Around 73 percent of San Leandro is in District 3, and the other 27 percent is in District 4. That’s another change Lopez wants – keeping cities whole, in the same district. As it is, if your town’s BART station needs attention, you have to go to two different board members.

The District 3 seat was formerly held by Bob Franklin who resigned last summer to take a job with BART. The board appointed former AC Transit and County Supervisor Mary King to fill the spot until a new representative is elected in November.

In addition to working for the ATF, Lopez was a civil rights' attorney and a United States Attorney in Arizona. He's a graduate of U.C. Berkeley in history, and graduated from U.C.'s Bolt Hall law school. He's a member of the Hispanic National Bar Association, the American Immigration Lawyers Association, the National Blind Lawyers Association, among other organizations.

One of his favorite jobs was his first assignment with the ATF where he had to meet with Napa Valley winemakers, because the government regulates the industry and has to approve the wine labels.

"Somebody at the San Francisco office told me 'these are our customers,'" Lopez recalls with a laugh, "When they offer you wine, you have to drink it."