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The Quake of '89

Traffic snarls expected to return

By Steve Johnson
Mercury News Staff Writer

The nightmarish transportation problems created by Tuesday's earthquake eased a little here and there Wednesday. But major problems will remain for some time to come, especially for those trying to get between San Francisco and

Oakland, and San Jose and Santa Cruz.

A lot of people stayed home, as officials urged, Wednesday. As

they return to their jobs today, serious traffic snarls are likely in some spots.

And while some officials praised

the way the transportation system held up, others said the shaker has provided a painful lesson.

Despite improvements to roads

and bridges in recent years, "when we have a severe jolt like yesterday's quake, we see how far we still have to go," said Robert Best,

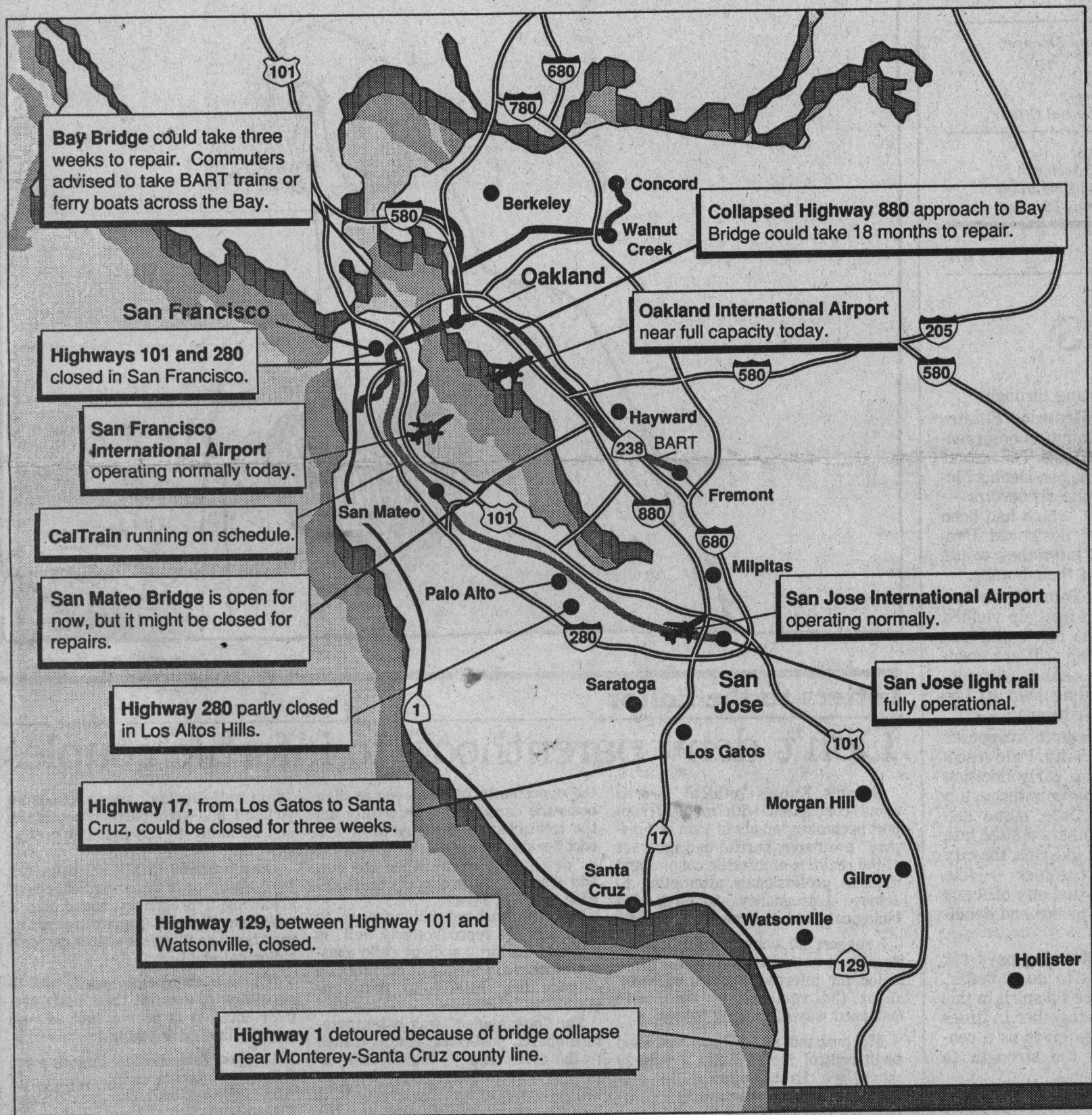
director of the California Department of Transportation.

The biggest headache has been dealing with the partial collapse of the Bay Bridge and its approach on Interstate 880. Caltrans officials said the severely damaged bridge could be closed for at least three

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On the roads and rails

As workers scramble to patch up damaged bridges, roads and the air terminals, Bay Area transportation inched back towards normal. But there was still a long way to go.



Ron Coddington - Mercury News

Workers will deal with blocked routes

TRANSPORTATION, from Page 1B weeks, while they try to repair it.

They plan to lift the collapsed section on the top part of the span and put it back into place, while reinforcing the bottom portion with steel beams.

Until that work is completed, some people can hitch a ride with the Bay Area Rapid Transit system. On Wednesday, BART officials promised to add more passenger cars to their trains.

Another option is to use the Red & White and Blue & Gold ferry fleets. They have started running two ferries between the cities every 45 minutes. The cost is \$4 one way.

But those measures won't eliminate the problems. The Bay Bridge approach on Interstate 880, which collapsed, may take up to 18 months to fix, said U. S. Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner. Even if the bridge is back in operation before I-880, commuters will have to squeeze onto the span and other approaches, such as Interstate 580.

San Mateo Bridge

With the Bay Bridge closed, motorists are depending on the 5½-mile-long San Mateo Bridge. But it

may not stay open. Checks have turned up signs of structural damage.

Bob Gore, assistant director of transportation for Caltrans, said it's not known if the bridge will be open today.

Over the mountains

The other major nightmare for Bay Area commuters continues to be Highway 17 between Los Gatos and Santa Cruz. Landslides and other quake damage have shut down the road.

Los Gatos Police Chief Larry Todd said Caltrans officials told him that Highway 17 could be closed for up to three weeks. There was some relief for commuters needing to get to and from the coast, however. The westbound lane of Highway 156, which links highways 101 and U.S. 1, initially closed by the quake, was reopened Wednesday.

Highway 129, which links 101 with Watsonville and the coast, also is closed.

Highway 9, a winding route that cuts through the Santa Cruz Mountains north of Highway 17, generally has remained open from Saratoga to Felton, although a gas leak caused it to be closed at the sum-

mit for a while Wednesday. From Felton, motorists must take Mount Hermon Road to Highway 17 to get into Santa Cruz.

The quake collapsed a bridge on U.S. 1, 1.5 miles north of the Monterey-Santa Cruz county line. A detour is routing traffic around that problem, but the Highway Patrol is urging people to avoid the route.

Santa Clara County

Most highways in Santa Clara County were in good shape. I-280, which the quake temporarily closed in both directions at Magdalena Avenue in Los Altos Hills, was reopened northbound on Wednesday. Only one southbound lane was reopened, however, and it's not clear when that section of the road will be completely restored.

San Jose's light-rail system, which had been temporarily knocked out of service Tuesday, returned to full operations Wednesday. And although CalTrain service between San Jose and San Francisco was shut down Tuesday night for inspections, officials say the checks have turned up no structural damage.

CalTrain service was cut back Wednesday, but it is expected to be back to normal today.

Operations at the three major airports also were expected to be pretty much routine today.

Broken water mains and other quake damage initially caused problems for 15,000 to 24,000 passengers at San Francisco International Airport on Tuesday. The airport canceled just about all incoming and outgoing flights, and many passengers had to sleep in cots at the airport or in makeshift quarters at local hotels.

But all flights except United Airlines' are expected to be operating normally today. United had damage at most of its 22 gates.

No major damage was reported at San Jose International Airport, although an underground pipeline that pumps aviation fuel directly to the airport was broken. As a result, the airport has arranged for trucks to deliver the fuel. Flight schedules should be normal today.

At Oakland International Airport, a 3,000-foot section of 10,000-foot-long main runway suffered cracks and other damage and the port initially suspended most operations. Flights were operating at 75 percent capacity Wednesday, and should be about normal today.