Frisco Turns to Transit

San Francisco, California, and the nation built two of the engineering wonders of the World, in the Golden Gate and the Oakland-San Francisco bridges. As a result of this San Francisco land monopolists became alarmed. The fear grew that one could get to Oakland and Berkeley, over the Bridge, faster than he could get to parts of San Francisco not far removed from down-town. So the landed interests pressed for rapid transit, particularly subways.

Bonds for $49,250,000 are to provide the funds for the transit system. The proponents of the bond issue have pointed out that what is known as the Twin-Peaks Tunnel, built at a cost of $5,000,000, increased property values (possibly including improvements) to $157,000,000. Their publicity handout said: "Tax returns from that district now approximate $45,000,000—a 900 per cent return on our Twin Peaks tunnel investment."

What the publicity release did not say is that the original cost of the Twin-Peaks tunnel was covered by a levy on the land values to be created in the district, and not on improvements and tangible personal property taxes, taxes on food, clothing and shelter, the vast majority of which piles up on Mr. Citizen Consumer.

Now there comes another proposition before the people. Building the East Bay Bridge poured traffic into downtown San Francisco and gave the city a bit of congestion hard to handle, even in the comfort of a city, air-conditioned by God. "Dead End" streets became like civic sore thumbs. They must be removed, and streets opened.

Under land value taxation the job would be simple, for the buildings involved in most cases are of the "Model T" variety. But the conception of the privileged holders of their "future rights" make the proposition loom as a $2,000,000 Bond Issue which is now before the people.

The Civic League of Improvement Clubs and Associations of San Francisco came out in opposition to the bond issue. They said:

"Outlying districts paid for Twin Peaks, Duboce and Stockton Street tunnels and similar improvements, through special assessment levied on property benefited, and we can see no reason why owners of the most valuable real estate in the city, expecting enormous benefits from this 'improvement,' should not likewise be assessed nor can we see any reason for denial of State aid, comparable to that granted East Bay Bridge approaches."

And here, we see, an approval of the increment taxation principle. If good for "dead end" streets, why not for schools, parks, streets, public services, etc.? After all, products of labor are worth no more because of public improvements, their value varying with the costs of reproduction. Only land values are increased or maintained by public improvements. Is it not a simple matter of cancellation?

—N. D. Alper.