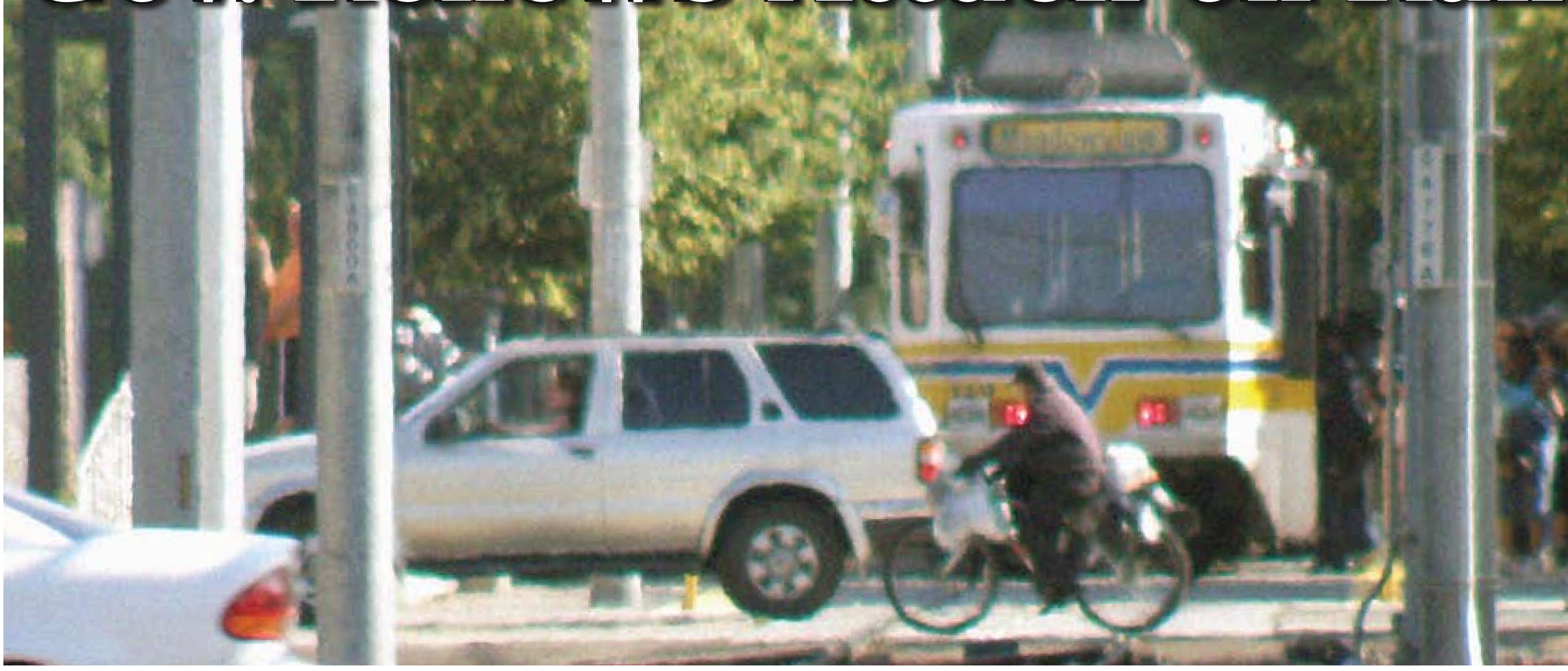
HSR DONE THE RIGHT WAY PAGE 4

California Rail News

Volume 22 Number 1 | Sacramento, CA | February 2010

Gov. Renews Attack on Rail



Sacramento light rail car during rush hour at Regional Transit's Broadway Station on the Blue Line.

Photo © by Richard Tolmach

by Richard F. Tolmach

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, in his budget released in mid-January, has launched yet another attempt to grab transit funds. It is an apparent attempt to undermine the latest victory by transit activists, a court action directing an April report by the state on repayment of $1.2 billion of protected rail and bus funds ripped off in the state budget process.

In mid-December, the Sacramento Superior Court issued its judgment in the California Transit Association (CTA) lawsuit regarding state transit funds. The finding specifically requires repayment to the Public Transportation Account of the funds diverted in FY 07-08 totaling nearly $1.2 billion, and, the state must report to the court by April 1, 2010 as to exactly how it will comply with this order.

Arnold has proposed a new, complex gas-tax swap that officials say will shrink transit funds by as much as $1 billion, provoke route closures and fare hikes for local bus and rail lines throughout California and also likely lead to the termination of most intercity rail service.

"The Governor is continuing to attack the funding sources of public transportation," said Bart Reed, executive director of the nonprofit Transit Coalition, which advocates for better transportation in Southern California. "Most counties have been cutting service left and right and jacking up fares. More cuts in funding means more cuts in service will occur."

Zev Yaroslavsky, Los Angeles County Supervisor and MTA board member, called the Governor's move "legally questionable,""wrong-headed" and "poor public policy." Yaroslavsky told the Los Angeles Times that the Governor's "scheme is likely to be overturned by the court, as it has in the past."

To avoid the likely future court loss, the Schwarzenegger administration has crafted an innovative legal dodge to grab the transit money in the new budget.

Schwarzenegger's new grab would eliminate all sales tax on gas including about $1 billion a year that currently goes to counties, and simultaneously impose a new per-gallon excise tax that the state would keep for its General Fund.

Estimates are that drivers would pay about 5 cents less per gallon at the pump. Excise tax is not subject to the voter-approved spending requirements for public transit, so that law would be evaded. Josh Shaw, plaintiff on the lawsuit and executive director of the California

(continued on Page Two)

INSIDE

TRAC
Train Riders Association of California

1025 Ninth Street #223
Sacramento, CA 95814-3516

Return Service Requested

MEMBERS, PLEASE CHECK THE RENEWAL DATE ABOVE YOUR NAME AND RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP IF THE DATE IS APPROACHING OR PAST

Non-profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Van Nuys, CA
Permit #987

FUND GRAB

(continued from Page One)

Transit Association told the Times, "It sounds like an end run around our litigation and our court's decision."

Ventura County Star's legislative writer Timm Herdt called the new approach "take the air out of their tires." He points out that using exise tax also allows Arnold to skip out on $836 million he would otherwise have to give schools.

Schwarzenegger's proposed FY10-11 budget also would end future Public Transportation Account funding for state-supported Amtrak service, putting the Pacific Surfliners, Capitol Corridor and San Joaquins in jeopardy once current PTA funds run out.

Transit advocates and local government groups announced last month that they are starting to gather signatures for a state constitutional amendment measure on the November 2010 ballot, to wall off transit and other local funds from Capitol politics. The Local Taxpayer, Public Safety and Transportation Protection Act of 2010 would prevent raids of local funding.

You can visit the advocates' web site at **www.savelocalservices.com** where there are links to request copies of the petition, a full text of the measure, and promotional materials to download. Key rail services may not be around by 2012 unless citizens tell the politicians to stop.

California Rail News

Published January 22, 2010.
Published 4 times annually by the California Rail Foundation in cooperation with the Train Riders Association of California

Laura Balderee, TRAC President

Signed articles represent the views of their authors, not necessarily those of the above organizations.

1025 Ninth Street #223
Sacramento, CA 95814-3516
Telephone: 916-557-1667
e-mail: trac@omsoft.com
www.calrailnews.com
www.trainriders.org

California Rail News encourages letters, comments, and reports on local issues. Please submit your material to California Rail News at the above address. Sorry, we do not guarantee return of photos or articles submitted. Deadline for material to be included in the next issue of CRN is February 15, 2010.

LOSSAN DRAFTS PLAN TO COORDINATE RUNS

The LOSSAN Joint Powers Agency Board has taken additional steps toward service integration on the San Diego-Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo corridor.

At its October 28 meeting, the Board reviewed and approved a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between agencies representing Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego Counties to begin service integration. The MOU followed a group process that produced a shared vision of the corridor, identified a budget of up to $1.2 million, determined a proposed timeframe and identified next steps.

CEOs of the three agencies have met four times via conference call to develop plans. The San Diego Association of Governments also submitted a request for $200,000 in federal stimulus planning funds to develop the business plan and is awaiting word from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The CEOs also met in early November and developed a budget and funding strategy, which was approved by the LOSSAN Board at their December 9, 2009, meeting.

At the November LOSSAN Technical Committee, Justin Fox of Wilbur Smith and Associates (WSA) gave a presentation summarizing its Corridorwide Strategic Assessment draft report that has been circulated to project partners.

The project goal is to articulate a long-term service vision extending to 2025, making corridor service more convenient by addressing passenger needs. Capacity constraints north of Chatsworth, Los Angeles to Fullerton, and south of Laguna Niguel must be investigated. Coordination among carriers was addressed as a challenge since the schedules do not connect well. Many connecting trips require two ticket transactions. Some markets are not served by existing service such as the Orange County to San Diego County commute.

Another issue is that high-speed rail will overlap portions of the LOSSAN corridor, and impact corridor services, particularly at Anaheim and Los Angeles. Existing corridor operators will become feeder service providors for high-speed rail, giving traffic to HSR at those points.

A summary of the service vision was shown, including: more frequency, addition of limited stop and express trains, timed transfers at key nodes, use of an interactive electronic fare collection system, integrated operations, and the addition of new services opening new markets. It was claimed the service vision would require a $6-8 billion investment by 2025, similar to the cost per mile of high-speed rail.

Existing LOSSAN structure focuses on coordination of planning efforts, but the strategic assessment calls for the agency to have corridorwide responsibilities and authority. LOSSAN member agencies have completed capacity modeling on various segments of the corridor, but no modeling has been done that looks at coordinating service on a corridorwide basis.

Fox and Steve Roberts of WSA said intercity operations would have reduced travel times and improved reliability by serving fewer stations, providing a premium service. Commuter operations would be maintained to integrate services focusing on the commuter market and adding additional Fullerton to San Diego service.

Suzanne Fike of Amtrak asked how LOSSAN would maintain the difference between intercity and commuter services. This is a concern because much of Amtrak's revenue south of Los Angeles is San Diego and Solana Beach travel, the last stations where Amtrak retains exclusive service to Orange County.

OCTA CEO Will Kempton added additional details of rail improvements on the corridor when he was the guest speaker at The Transit Coalition dinner meeting December 2. Kempton discussed the success of Measure M renewal, with 25% of the funds going to transit. Kempton also provided an update on implementation of 30-minute Metrolink service within Orange County.

OCTA will invest $450 million in the new service, which will debut in mid-2010, by building turnback facilities at Fullerton and Laguna Niguel. It will also procure 52 trailer cars and 7 cab cars for the service. In addition, OCTA will improve 52 grade crossings over 2 years, implement quiet zones, and build 7 grade separations along BNSF right-of-way, at a cost of $407 million.

Deepening sales tax losses now appear to have forced OCTA to scale back the initial service offer.

RAIL SAFETY COMES FIRST

State of California photo of Chatsworth press conference

GOVERNOR SCHWARZENEGGER PUT CALIFORNIA ON THE WRONG TRACK

by Senator Alan Lowenthal

Governor Schwarzenegger's decision reported in the *Los Angeles Times* to "spike" the part of California's high-speed rail application to the federal government for improving both passenger rail safety and travel times benefiting millions of train riders in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Ventura counties is unwise. By taking this stealth political maneuver, the governor is saying California has no need for safe, high-quality conventional rail. That's untrue.

Like the governor, I too support high-speed rail development, but that doesn't mean investments in conventional rail should be curtailed. What the governor doesn't recognize is none of the widely respected high-speed rail services in Europe operate in isolation from modern conventional passenger trains, since the service feeds passengers to the high-speed trains. To its credit, the Obama administration recognized this by specifying that high-speed service operates at 110 miles per hour or greater, thus putting upgrading conventional services on the same footing as the truly high-speed services. Only the uninformed separate the development of both rail services.

As the senator who marshaled the votes to pass California's high-speed rail bond measure out of a very reluctant Senate, my commitment to high-speed rail is unassailable, but I believe the governor is misguided. In fact, the governor's action is contrary to what he told me and a group of legislators, local officials, high-speed rail board members, and commuter rail operators when we met with him earlier in 2009. He told us there would be one state application for the $8 billion in President Obama's rail stimulus program and it would include both high-speed rail and conventional rail improvements.

Unfortunately, the governor's action eliminates the possibility of receiving funding from the federal stimulus program for installation of the most sophisticated railroad safety technology available, putting the lives of Amtrak and Metrolink riders at continuing risk. Had this technology been installed last September, it is unlikely that 25 people would have died in the Chatsworth crash of a Metrolink train. The governor also appears to be oblivious to the passenger rail service operating daily between San Diego, Los Angeles, and Santa Barbara on what is usually referred to as the LOSSAN Corridor.

Metrolink, Amtrak and Coaster operate trains in this corridor which carried ten million passengers last year, making this corridor the second most heavily traveled rail corridor in the country. Only the Northeast Corridor operating between Washington D.C., New York City and Boston attracts more ridership.

Since 1975, Caltrans and local governments in the LOSSAN Corridor have spent $934 million on upgrading the corridor with the goal of trains traveling between Los Angeles and San Diego in two hours. The federal government has contributed less than twenty percent of that amount in the corridor while it has spent billions acquiring the Northeast Corridor. The governor's action only ensures the dismal federal commitment will continue.

Caltrans and its partners set three goals when preparing the conventional rail portion of the stimulus application deleted by the governor: seek funding for installing positive train control for passenger safety, seek funds for shovel ready grade separations to improve motorist safety by reducing collisions between trains and motor vehicles, and seek funding for track and signal projects that would have brought substantial segments of the service up to 110 miles per hour, making the two hours travel time goal between Los Angeles and San Diego achievable.

All projects would have been constructed before 2017, the federal deadline for spending stimulus funds. And when the high-speed service begins in 2020, a very optimistic date, southern California would have an unparalleled regional rail network complementing the high-speed trains.

Unfortunately, it appears Governor Schwarzenegger's deceitful action has put California on the wrong track.

Senator Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach) chairs the California State Senate's Transportation and Housing Committee

Coast Observations

METROLINK LEADERSHIP change has CEO David Solow moving to a position focusing on safety, including work on implementing Positive Train Control and interoperability for the balance of the fiscal year and Eric Haley, formerly of Riverside County Transportation Commission, taking the CEO seat on an interim basis. Metrolink indicates it will begin searching for a permanent CEO… THE METROLINK BOARD at its January meeting made less drastic cuts in service than originally threatened in December, removing only two weekday Riverside–Oceanside trains and a few lightly used weekend runs… HIGH-SPEED RAIL AUTHORITY Executive Director Mehdi Morshed has announced his retirement on March 31. Speculation has been rife since Anaheim Mayor Curt Pringle gained the HSRA Chairmanship in July that Morshed was on his way out. Legal challenges, including needed legislation to allow hiring of an exempt CEO will mean a delay in finding a permanent replacement… FLORIDA'S CASH-STARVED TRI-RAIL system and its new Orlando SunRail project got a kick start from the state legislature, following negotiations with the AFL/CIO that settled labor issues, giving Democrats reason to join with Republicans in a funding plan for the two systems that also aims to leverage Federal high-speed rail funding. The Senate bill which easily passed 27-10 also establishes a new rail oversight "enterprise" at the state government level… RECENT FLORIDA ACTION has many industry experts saying that the Tampa-Orlando line has a lot of potential to claim $2.5 billion of the national high-speed rail pot. The project, formerly a dark (iron) horse, has pulled into a lead because it has fully completed environmental work, an Interstate 4 median route that is fully controlled by the state Department of Transportation, and a total project cost of $3.5 billion, meaning the project will have full funding if federal ARRA dollars are approved by the FRA… CHANGES IN AMTRAK financial reporting practices have made it nearly impossible for Caltrans to know which buses are profitable and which lose money, putting the agency in jeopardy with state laws prohibiting unfair competition with private bus companies… TRAC'S NEW PRESIDENT Laura Balderree attended the November Friends of SMART meeting and SMART board meeting to recommend a dedicated shuttle between the future San Rafael SMART station and the Richmond BART/Amtrak station… BOARD MEMBER AL SHADBOURNE has taken over the reins as TRAC Treasurer for 2010, replacing Randell Hansen… A NEW TRAC BOARD member was elected at the November 7 annual meeting in Ventura: Art Brown, Mayor of Buena Park… SENATOR JAMES R. MILLS, creator of the San Diego Trolley and the California rail program, took an unfortunate spill on one of his walks around San Diego. We wish him a swift recovery…

TO GO FAST, GO IN A STRAIGHT LINE

By Michael E. McGinley P.E.

Flash forward to 2020. Imagine you are planning a trip from Los Angeles to San Francisco and considering the choices of driving Interstate 5, flying or taking high-speed rail.

Driving? You'd surely take Interstate 5 because it provides a direct line; it is the shortest route and quickest drive.

Flying? Only an hour in the air, since a straight line over mountains and intermediate cities saves time and fuel.

Taking high-speed rail? Quicker than driving but slower than flying because the line veers far to the east to serve Lancaster, Fresno, and Merced.

Similarly, travel from the Bay Area to Stockton or Sacramento via high-speed rail takes longer than driving because the route starts with a wide arc to the south, via Gilroy, Pacheco Pass and Chowchilla.

Why won't the new rail line take the shortest, most direct routes?

The answer lies in rushed planning and conflicting goals. In its haste to package a high-speed rail construction project, the California High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) decided to make a single north-south route meander through every population center along the way, pleasing local supporters.

This wandering line makes some sense at political and local levels, but fails to meet California's regional and statewide travel needs. It also means the line fails to produce energy savings or greenhouse gas reduction.

HSRA continues to market its crooked, meandering line by postulating that it will operate at 220 mph and skip stops in many of the communities it runs through in order to attempt to compete with air travel.

That is a dubious bet. While 220 mph is attainable under ideal conditions, it is too noisy for urban areas. Also, on-line stations limit speeds and the HSRA line has curves and grades that limit the high speed to isolated areas with broad plains.

Perhaps one reason for the flawed HSRA plan was the pressure to create a simple, singular, one-size-fits-all concept to present to the politicians and voters. In the real world, the process of developing a high-speed rail network is done over decades and must recognize changing needs and conditions.

It is a nearly impossible task to distill a flexible plan into a ballot measure or to obtain blanket environmental clearance for a project whose details may change. Conventional political thinking is that the voters are impatient and supposedly want simple yes-no answers.

California has many transportation markets, only some of which overlap and can share infrastructure.

Rail routes can be optimized for regional service to communities on the east side of the San Joaquin Valley and Antelope Valley, or they can be optimized to compete with airline service and provide faster trips from the Bay Area to Los Angeles.

Trying to achieve both goals on the same rail facility results in destructive compromises and waste of capital.

HSRA chose to place its proposed line where it found political support and then tried to construct a business case for the line, pretending that the alignment had a direct, airline-competitive routing.

TRAC shares the concerns of the Legislative Analyst that the HSRA business plan is unsound. There is simply no realistic hope of getting enough ridership and passenger revenue to amortize even a fraction of the investment plus generate operating income because the line simply is not time-competitive on many trips and is too expensive.

Some observers say HSRA produced a vision that is not a shovel-ready system design, but more a starting point for a serious discussion of the state's need for rail infrastructure. For starters, here are some points to evaluate:

Serving Southern California:

The single biggest need for the state's rail transportation system is to close the Los Angeles to Bakersfield gap. The HSRA routing via Lancaster is too indirect to ever be a part of the state's core travel market between the Bay Area and Los Angeles.

HSRA adopted the Lancaster route because Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich demanded the service run via his district including the Antelope Valley. If it is built as planned, high-speed rail will simply not compete with airline travel times nor with highway travel cost between Los Angeles and Bakersfield. The meandering route is a fatal flaw.

A better answer is a high-speed line directly along Interstate 5 over the Grapevine plus independent, but linked, improvements to the local network to connect the Antelope Valley (and its future airport) to the Los Angeles area and to a statewide high-speed rail network.

Here we start to see the concept that the state needs a network of local and regional rail service, with high-speed rail as the backbone connecting them.

We begin to flesh out this concept by continuing and enhancing regional rail corridors throughout the state to put rail transportation within reach of many communities such as those along the San Joaquin, Capitol or Surfliner Corridors, plus extending corridors where practicable using existing rail lines.

Serving Northern California:

A parallel to the Grapevine gap is the San Francisco-Central Valley gap. A first step is to rebuild regional rail links via Dumbarton and Altamont to provide faster connections to the regional markets in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys and interlink the existing rail network with higher-speed rail facilities.

Closing the Grapevine gap and the SF-Valley gap would make possible step two, a direct, airline-competitive pure high-speed rail line following Interstate 5 and the Grapevine route over the Tehachapi Range. This direct backbone route bypasses many population centers, which is good for long, fast, non-stop service. It depends upon a robust regional system to serve existing communities.

TRAC favors using the most direct routes for high-speed rail, not the political stew HSRA is trying to sell to the public.

Michael E. McGinley retired from the post of Chief Engineer from Metrolink, following a long career in rail infrastructure that began at Southern Pacific. He is an independent rail engineering consultant and a member of the TRAC Board.

HUMOR NOT PLANNED

Business plans usually induce sleep or headaches, but the 2009 HSRA Business Plan inspires hilarity. The High-Speed Rail Authority can be credited with one of the most entertaining fictional works in recent memory. Here are some choice excerpts:

- The Business Plan says that the risk of ridership failure would be **"mitigated by policies that continue to draw people to reside in California and encourage high-speed rail as an alternative mode of transportation."**
- To avoid risk of failure to obtain credit from investors, the authority's strategy is **"to clearly communicate the project and obtain up-to-date feedback."**
- To mitigate risk that financial markets stop lending, the authority **"has to continually monitor the market and develop strong back-up strategies such as project segmentation."**
- To avoid risk that agencies don't provide funds, HSRA would assess **"how each government funding source affects the build-out of each segment."**

The above statements were quoted by the Legislative Analyst as examples of the Authority's thinking. In return, HSRA publicist Kris Deutschman excerpted the only positive quote by the Analyst, and incorporated it in a press release, spinning negative testimony into an endorsement:

"The revised plan includes at least some description of all the required elements in the 2009-10 budget, and provides more information than the previous version in some areas."

HSRA manages to showcase its most embarrassing shortcomings on key pages of the Business Plan. Page 72 has a daily traffic table titled "Braidings by Station, Initial Phase 2035." This is believed to be "Boardings" translated by Microsoft.

The data in the table is a much worse mistake than its title. In the warped HSRA world, small cities outrank multimillion-resident metropoli. Gilroy's interregional ridership will equal that of Los Angeles. The home cities of the two most recent HSR chairs, SF and Anaheim top the chart:

Station	Inter-regional
San Francisco Transbay	20,600
Millbrae	900
Redwood City	2,400
San Jose	4,700
Gilroy	3,800
Merced	5,600
Fresno	4,700
Bakersfield	5,300
Palmdale	5,500
Sylmar	3,300
Burbank	800
Los Angeles Union Station	3,800
Norwalk	3,000
Anaheim	19,100

Excerpt from Business Plan

The plan projects 10th-year California ridership will top 39 million, much higher than any European startup. By comparison, only 8 million rode Eurostar in its 10th year, only 6 million on Thalys, and 5 million on TGV-Nord and the Madrid-Seville AVE. HSRA has a very big dream.

Assemblyman Roger Niello (R-Fair Oaks) said he likes it when people make bold proposals like high-speed rail, but observed, "So did Don Quixote. I have huge concerns about this project."

Climate Changes for High-Speed Rail

By Robert Freehling

High-speed rail is enshrined in the state's official climate protection plan—it is responsible for 2.2 billion pounds annually of reduced carbon dioxide emissions by 2020. However, carbon savings depend on how many people actually use the service. In addition, there are certain "carbon costs" for high-speed rail associated with electricity to power the train, as well as construction and operation of the system.

These carbon challenges are not small, or easy to fix.

Carbonated Electricity Supply

A 2008 report commissioned by the High-Speed Rail Authority (HSRA), and authored by Navigant Consulting Inc., stated that the new rail service could save 12 billion pounds of carbon dioxide per year by 2030. This would appear to exceed the state's climate target for this project by a comfortable margin. However, the report also startlingly reveals that if the current grid power supply is not changed, the electricity it takes to power the train will cause just over 5 billion pounds per year of CO2 emissions—wiping out 42% of the carbon benefit of high-speed rail.

The report considered several ways to clean up the energy supply. One option considered by Navigant is to build clean energy facilities to power the electric trains. This would provide the best and most certain benefits, but it would require coming up with another \$1 to \$2 billion to pay for new infrastructure. Navigant also proposed going out on the market to buy renewable energy. This option, however, puts the Authority in direct competition for resources that utility companies will need in order to meet their state mandate to get 33% of electricity from renewable energy by 2020.

A significant hurdle to the "buy green" option is that setting up new contracts to buy power directly from independent suppliers is currently illegal in California. Navigant suggested a way around this problem, which would be for the Authority to create or join a Community Choice program, which allows local governments to set up clean energy programs that are then made available to all customers in their jurisdiction.

For example, San Francisco and Marin County are currently seeking new suppliers who would offer from 25% to 51% renewable energy, while avoiding contracts with coal or nuclear sources. Marin also wants a 100% green option for customers that voluntarily sign up for this extra service. This is a major environmental upgrade from PG&E's current mix of 14% renewable energy that comes packaged with nearly 25% nuclear, and some coal thrown in for good measure.

The problem with this solution is that high-speed rail is not a local jurisdiction covered by the state's Community Choice law. One fix would be to upgrade Community Choice law to include a broader range of government authorities, such as high-speed rail.

Another option is to buy Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) from renewable generators. These certificates are essentially energy derivatives that allow buyers to claim the right to the abstract "renewable" quality of the power, without actually taking delivery of a single green kilowatt-hour—and the actual power is sold to someone else. These certificates could be purchased in sufficient quantities to "offset" the emissions caused by carbon-spewing power plants that will continue to power the electric trains. This is completely legal, and there is a robust and growing market in renewable certificates. However, many people see buying offsets as equivalent to the medieval practice of buying "indulgences" from the Catholic church to pay for one's sins.

The Authority's new business plan projects an electricity rate of 17.5 cents per kilowatt-hour, which includes an extra 3.5 cents per kilowatt-hour added to usual utility rates for "using 100% renewable energy sources". However, the plan does not explain how the HSRA will obtain that electricity.

Decreased Ridership Erodes Benefits

The new business plan, released in December 2009 as a report to the legislature, has reduced projected 2030 ridership to 41 million—a steep decrease from the original forecast of 117 million, and the subsequent 93 million figure used by Navigant to derive 12 billion pounds of carbon dioxide reductions from reduced auto and air travel.

However, a major limitation of the Navigant study was that it only looked at direct energy use by trains and did not consider construction, maintenance, or full life cycle carbon cost for the facility, nor its energy generation requirements.

The new ridership forecast would reduce the net carbon benefit to 4 billion pounds annually, after accounting for carbon polluting electricity—only 1/3 of the original claim.

Ridership could be increased by better serving intermediate markets. The current proposed route would connect the Bay Area to rural, low population centers like Gilroy (garlic growing capital of the world). The small town of Chowchilla is the new prime candidate for being the major connection hub in the Central Valley.

This pushes the connection far south from the major markets in Stockton, Sacramento and other northern California destinations. While the plan attributes 2.2 million riders to this northern market, all this travel is either within the Central Valley, or to LA. Due to the lack of a direct train, high-speed rail travel from the north Central Valley to the highly populated Bay Area is forecast to be zero.

Key to producing rail traffic between the Bay Area and northern Central Valley is the rejected Altamont alignment. This alignment—supported by Sierra Club policy— avoids environmentally sensitive areas; it also saves the necessity of building two nearly parallel routes that will add billions of dollars in expense. The Altamont route adds minimal travel time from LA to the Bay Area, but would open up a major travel corridor. And since only 19% of ridership is projected by the Authority to go the full route between the Bay Area and LA, intermediate destinations are the dominant market growth opportunity.

Increasing ridership is also important because it will allow lower fares. This can create a beneficial cycle where low fares support increasing ridership. The business plan's baseline assumption of 41 million passengers assumes that fares are 83% of what airlines charge. If they can cut the fare to 50% of air fare, the forecast is boosted by an additional 17 million riders.

On the other hand, if the planning process locks in reduced market access, then fares will need to be higher. This can create a "vicious cycle", where high cost discourages millions of people from using the service.

Embedded Assumptions

Despite a 55% reduction in forecast ridership and no concrete plan for renewable energy, the Rail Authority is sticking by its 12 billion pound greenhouse gas reduction claim in their new business plan—with a new fudge factor called "over the longer term."

The question of how long the "longer term" will be is complicated by another problem: the amount of carbon emitted to construct and maintain the rail system. The UC Berkeley report says that construction alone will incur a carbon cost of 10 million metric tons—equal to 22 billion pounds.

Three scenarios were considered. In the first scenario, high-speed rail is loaded to maximum capacity, and the rail displaces cars, planes and current passenger rail at low capacity. In this case, high-speed rail pays back its "Carbon Debt" in 6 years. In the worst case, the high-speed rail has low occupancy, and displaces high occupancy cars, planes and passenger rail. In this case, high-speed rail never provides a carbon benefit.

The middle scenario is closest to reality, with all current modes of transportation assumed to be either near or above their actual measured capacity. For this case, the researchers found it would take 71 years to pay back the carbon debt. The middle scenario is what happens under real world conditions if high-speed rail operates at 50% capacity.

Building modern high-speed rail can provide functional, fast, accessible public transportation for millions of people. However, realizing the environmental benefits will depend on high ridership and fulfilling the green energy promise.

Robert Freehling is the Research Director for Local Power, Inc., a consultancy and renewable services company.

Useful Links on HSR and Its Climate Impacts

UC Berkeley Report:

http://www.iop.org/EJ/article/1748-9326/5/1/014003/erl10_1_014003.html

Renewable Energy Report:

http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/images/chsr/20090619123903_Report%20on%20the%20Use%20of%20Renewable%20Energy%20Sources.pdf

HSR Business Plan:

http://www.cahighspeedrail.ca.gov/images/chsr/20091223222521_CHSRA_Business_Plan_Dec_2009.pdf

Southern California Rail Transit Shorts

by Numan Parada

The Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) was adopted by the Los Angeles County Metro Board after months of debate on October 22. The plan includes a timeline for rail and highway projects, as well as plans for future bus operations and guaranteed money for bike and pedestrian projects.

To placate proponents of the Foothill Gold Line and the Crenshaw Transit Corridor, who objected to their projects being placed behind the Westside subway and the Downtown Regional Connector on the timeline, the Metro Board passed an amendment encouraging Metro staff to search for federal funds for these two projects. The agency is now lobbying the state and federal governments for funds.

In that regard, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced an effort to pool local Congressmembers in a coalition to pursue federal funding that would speed up the process. Villaraigosa expressed his desire to build these projects, including a portion of the Westside subway, at an accelerated timeframe of 10 years instead of the current 30 years outlined in Measure R and the LRTP.

In other news, Little Tokyo community members objected to a Downtown Regional Connector route that would intersect with 1st Street at ground level while lowering Alameda Street, to which the Connector would then dip below ground at the southwest corner of 1st/Alameda, where an Office Depot currently stands.

In response, Metro staff announced an entirely below-ground design that would move the rail junction to below the intersection and place a station under the southwest corner of 1st/Alameda (removing the current Little Tokyo station on the northeast corner). Metro must decide to include the $200-million change into the ongoing environmental review for the design to move forward.

The Metro Board voted to adopt light rail as the Locally Preferred Alternative for the Crenshaw Transit Corridor during its December meeting. Community reaction during public meetings on the 8.5-mile project was mixed. However, thanks largely to the efforts of Metro Boardmember Mark Ridley-Thomas, both the community and Metro warmed to the idea of light rail.

The route would include below-grade trenches below the south runways of Los Angeles International Airport and through Leimert Park, a direct connection to the Metro Green Line south of the airport, and an above-ground station at Aviation/Century. The project would cost $1.3 billion in 2009 dollars and would be completed by 2018. Due to community opposition to maintenance sites in Westchester and El Segundo, Metro will continue searching for sites during preparation of the final environmental document. The Metro Planning & Programming Committee recommended the light rail option in November.

The Metro Board also voted to launch a draft environmental study of extending the Green Line 4.6 miles from Redondo Beach to the Torrance Regional Transit Center, following the Harbor Subdivision. The vote comes on the heels of the recently-completed alternatives analysis that recommended extending the Green Line to Torrance. Measure R provides $272 million for the project, which the Board officially named the South Bay Green Line Extension.

For those anxious to see the Foothill Gold Line built and opened, a kickoff event for the extension was held in Monrovia on November 21. The Foothill Extension Construction Authority, which is responsible for building the light rail extension, is aiming for a 2013 completion date, although final financial details are forthcoming. The Metro Board agreed in October to run that line once it is operational.

Scenes from TRAC's Sunday November 8 excursion on the Fillmore & Western

All photos @ John Ulloth

Above: F & W Railway F-7A 101 pulling into Piru at the eastern end of the trip. **Above Right:** Mark Walbrun & Peter Espy of TranSystems enjoy the rare mileage as tracked on Mark's GPS equipped laptop. **Below Left:** VCTC's Mary Travis, a CalRail 2020 Conference speaker, recounting the trip details. **Below Right:** James Washington, a TRAC volunteer, in a pensive look out an open door window at the Santa Clara River valley's fertile fields.