Federal pressure to get California’s High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) to scale down its 800-mile fantasy rail project into a buildable first piece may have been useful, but the Borden to Corcoran piece selected by HSRA (see p. 4) is a catastrophic choice that has already exposed the agency to ridicule from Bakersfield to Washington.

The proposed $4.15 billion line has a higher cost per mile than most European high speed routes, but provides no near-term benefits. It also duplicates existing BNSF trackage where positive train control equipment currently being installed between Bakersfield and the Bay Area will allow 90 mph Amtrak service by the end of next year.

California has better potential uses for the funding. The same funds could speed up trains much sooner and serve markets 30 times the size of Fresno.

For example, a new line to close the gap in California’s rail network over Tehachapi Pass would slash travel time for most California north-south trips and eliminate the universally-hated double transfer to and from the Bakersfield-Los Angeles Amtrak bus. This would go a long way toward making rail a feasible alternative to interregional auto travel.

An 80-mile segment built between Lamont (near Bakersfield) and Sylmar in the San Fernando Valley, along with minor upgrades to existing track could immediately demonstrate the California market for fast trains. It also has genuine independent utility, even if a statewide high-speed rail network is never built, by speeding Bakersfield–Los Angeles travel, cutting hours from current schedules.

At present, it takes an average of 3-1/2 hours from arrival at Los Angeles Union Station on a Pacific Surfliner to departure from Bakersfield. A direct train could reduce that to a 1 hour trip, saving 2-1/2 hours each direction.

A direct train would also save rail passengers the current long Union Station walk to an uncomfortable bus connection and likely attract 200 new riders per departure, most of them going far past Bakersfield.

The strength of Southern California traffic to the north is currently crippled by the interminable transfers, bad-smelling buses and an un-airconditioned wait on the spartan Bakersfield platform.

Converting the segment from bus to rail would turn the 12 daily San Joaquin trains into money-losers into cash cows. If San Joaquin trains ran through Los Angeles to San Bernardino and/or San Diego, it is likely that a 16 to 20 daily train service would be self-supporting.

Unlike the wandering 130-mile route selected by HSRA to link Bakersfield and Sylmar, the 80-mile route studied by the

(continued on Page 2)
Providing direct Los Angeles trains in the first stage is a more attractive project with far broader public support than the HSRA’s ill-fated Borden-Corcoran idea. Vertical control in Southern California and the Bay Area have little affection for public works in the Central Valley, but they understand projects which could finally bridge the rail gaps between the two regions.

Stubborn insistence by the HSRA on a wasteful project that doesn’t have a near-term benefit could take down the whole California high speed rail enterprise. This would be a needless tragedy, and set back the cause of rail for decades.

On the other hand, quick action to redirect the funds for a link between the Central Valley and Los Angeles has worthwhile economies and statewide political appeal. It may take hard work, a new reform-minded Governor and increased participation by private capital to turn HSRA’s lemon into a workable plan, but we believe the effort is well worth it.

LOSSAN: BREAKING DOWN WALLS CONSTRUCTING NEW BARRIERS

By Paul Dyson

I have written over the years about the mess at Oceanside, and how three different passenger rail agencies manage to confuse and misinform passengers about train service from that station. Now the situation is about to go from bad to worse.

In spite of a bid from Metrolink that would have saved about $2.5 million over 10 years (the two agencies are still arguing about the sums involved) the North County Transit District, operator of the Coastal and Sprinter passenger rail services in San Diego County, has opted to set up its own dispatching center for its two routes.

Among other implications, this arrangement will mean that an Amtrak train from Los Angeles to San Diego will now have yet another hand off between dispatch offices, (Metrolink – BNSF – Metrolink – NCTD) with further loss of reliability. No doubt the NCTD dispatch will take care of “its” trains, often to the detriment of the Intercity service and reactive delays all along the line. NCTD seems to be of the opinion that since we already have hand offs with BNSF another one won’t matter.

The LOSSAN Board recently engaged consultants HNTB and Gene Skoropowski to try and make sense of this situation and recommend ways for the agencies to work together to make improvements. NCTD has decided to march to a different drum and is of the opinion that the most important part of the corridor lies within the borders of San Diego County. NCTD has opted for the parochial approach, in spite of having at least a moral obligation to passengers traveling across the county boundary.

Was NCTD motivated to rush this decision through before Skoropowski could report and most likely highlight the failings of the current arrangement and recommend regional rather than county-level control?

In the opinion of this writer, the NCTD has no business running passenger trains at all and their organization should be dissolved, with responsibility handed over to an expanded SCRRA organization. We need regional, not county, solutions to regional mobility needs.

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You may also join by going to the TRAC website (trainriders.org) and clicking on the PayPal tab.

Join TRAC Board

Two experienced professionals, Paul Dyson and Lewis Ames, each with decades of rail industry experience, have joined the TRAC Board.

Dyson grew up in Surrey, southwest of London, in an area of a steam-operated cross country route of British Railways. He joined BR in 1968 and graduated from the Stuendship Training scheme and City of London College.

This was followed by various management positions in the operating department of BR in south and west London. He served on committees handling the impact of the introduction of the diesel High Speed Train service on the Western Region.

Dyson came to the US in 1980 and has had a varied career in the railway, trucking and intermodal businesses including owning a railway trucking company. He worked for Southern Pacific railroad until 1995, GATX leasing, and Wabash RoadRail, and for the past 8 years as an independent consultant.

Dyson has also been President of RailPAC since 2006. He resides in Burbank and is chairman of the City of Burbank Transportation Commission.

Lewis Ames was President of San Jose’s Modern Transit Society for 10 years, was the dinner speaker at TRAC’s 2nd annual conference and was active in promoting SkyTrain alternatives including bicycling, carpooling, and use of intercity rail. He started his career working on implementation of the first San Jose light rail line as the Senior Transit Analyst for Supervisor Rod Diridon. Ames played an active role in successful federal, state and regional grants initiatives, consultants and skilled craftsmen in a $5 million restoration of six vintage streetcars.

He subsequently worked for Metro North Railroad leading the capital planning, site planning and environmental clearances on its first new extension as well as leading integration of business planning with its operating budget of a $600 million. Ames practiced as a consultant with Krupp and Engineering including work on the start up of the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Board integrated program where all of the recommendations for the start up were fully implemented. His work also included Project Manager of the first Joint Caltrain PTC9 and Amtrak System Safety Program Plan that was fully implemented.

He has authored papers for the TRB on the history and success for success of light rail start up, is a member of the TRB Light Rail Committee and is an expert on shared use and multi-modal operations. Ames is currently the New Starts / Financial Manager of the Central Subway project for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency. He lives in San Francisco.
On December 6 at Los Angeles Union Station, Metrolink Board Chairman Keith Millhouse pulled the cork on a “champagne” bottle of confetti to christen the first cab of a new safer fleet of commuter cars.

Metrolink, the Southland’s commuter rail provider, unveiled its new state-of-the-art cab and passenger cars equipped with collision-absorption technology at a series of stops as part of a Whistle Stop Tour across Metrolink’s fire-county service area. Scheduled stops included: LA Union Station, Glendale, Moorpark, San Bernardino, Downtown Riverside, and Santa Ana. The events were attended by Metrolink board and staff leadership, members of the public, media and regional dignitaries.

Downstairs seating; seats have higher backs for extra comfort and better back support.

The new cars dubbed the Guardian fleet by Metrolink and manufactured by Hyundai Rotem include energy-absorbing retractable couplers, a crumple zone and tables designed to minimize passengers injuries if an incident were to occur. Additionally, the cab cars have an elevated train engineer compartment, providing enhanced visibility and safety for the engineer; both cab and passenger rail cars have higher seat backs providing extra comfort and back support for passengers.

“We are excited to present the safest rail cars in America. Our new Guardian Fleet cars are a major component of our plan to be the safest passenger railroad in the nation. These safety-enhanced cars will save lives in the event of a collision. These cars were developed in collaboration with the world’s leading safety experts. We are pleased our passengers will be the first to enjoy the peace of mind knowing they are riding in these industry-first rail cars,” said Millhouse.

The cab cars stand 15 feet 11 inches high, 85 feet long and weigh almost one hundred fifty thousand pounds. With a stainless steel exterior, the new Guardian cars do not need to be painted.

"Here at Metrolink, we wake up in the morning and go to sleep at night with safety on our mind. We are honored to provide our employees, customers and the region some of the safest rail cars in existence,” said Metrolink CEO John Fenton. “Our board’s commitment to safety is evident in their recent decision to purchase 20 more Guardian cars.”

An initial group of cars has been put into service across the Metrolink System. As more cars are assembled, tested and approved for service, they will be used to augment Metrolink’s current fleet. All 137 cars are expected to be in service by late 2012.

In accordance with “Buy America” program, Metrolink Guardian Fleet cars are being assembled and tested at the agency’s Eastern Maintenance Facility in the City of Colton. Over 100 jobs have been created for Southern Californians. Over the past several months, Metrolink employees and contractor crews have been trained to operate the new equipment including the train’s controls and new safety features.

Whistle Stop Tour nears trainweb.org headquarters in Fullerton Photos by Chris Guenzler © 2010 Trainweb.org

A cab car has energy absorbing retractable couplers, and a crumple zone to maximize crash safety. Photos by Chris Guenzler © 2010 trainweb.org

MAJOR PROGRESS ON LOS ANGELES’ “30/10” transit expansion including 20 miles of new rail still seems solid despite Republican calls to void major financial commitments to transit. L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has key support from Obama officials for his initiative. Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), who chairs the Senate committee which will write the next omnibus transit bill, survived a tough electoral challenge. According to the L.A. Times, John Mica (R-FL), the incoming chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, likes the mayor’s proposal because it involves innovative finance that commits the city to transit success... ACCESS TO THE DAVIS AMTRAK station may be impaired by a West Bank-style impenetrable security wall on the south perimeter of the station, if plans by Union Pacific go ahead. Davis community leaders are trying to broker a deal which will improve safety without walling off of court of the University

The California Zephyr at the Richmond Intermodal terminal served by the Coast Starlight and the California Zephyr at the Richmond Intermodal terminal served by BART starting November 8. Kudos to Amtrak for putting service back to one of California’s most productive stations... CAPITOL CORRIDOR AND SAN JOAQUIN trains set rider-ship records in November, 142,961 for the Caps and 85,736 for the Valley. The San Joaquin’s are at their historic high: 981,504 for the past 12 months.

California Rail News October 2010–January 2011
California’s High-Speed Rail Authority board voted on December 2, 2010, to officially begin construction on the proj- ec ted project through the Central Valley. The line includes portions of Mariposa and Madera Counties, where the proposed route is a linear corridor near Fresno, Hanford and Corcoran.

The Authority’s stance is that they just need to have a vision or usable segment thereof, including an estimate of cost and maintenance facilities. Even without these basics, the cost is $79 million per mile, more than double the cost per mile of existing Florida HSR. The Act requires larger scale infrastructure, but even then with these basics, the cost is $79 million per mile, more than double the cost per mile of existing Florida HSR.

Authority board member Rod Diridon of San Jose hopes to stem the bleeding from the Authority’s self-inflicted wound at today’s meeting. He wants to assure the 20-mile segment to be built, reassure Merced of an early connection and make sure the “Chowchilla 1” start of the branch toward San Joaquin is a priority. We hope that enough to get critical allies back on board, for the_To-Fresno project will go smoothly in the Central Valley, where it’s immensely popular, it will never be completed.

$4.3 Billion for Isolated Track

By C. Kenneth Onuki, Editor/Publisher (Onuki was the UMTA Administrator under Presidents Nixon and Ford.)

Innovation News Briefs 12/4/2010

On December 2, the California High Speed Rail Authority approved a staff recommendation to begin construction of California’s first high-speed rail line in the Central Valley, with a 6.5-mile stretch of track in Central Valley, from Borden in Madera County (project 1055, 000/Ed Note: the California High Speed Authority does not use the small for US census estimate it is but less than 500 residents), through Fresno to Corcoran (project 1450) north of downtown Fresno. By Autobahn’s Bill Alsh, the Authority’s CEO and the segment would make the “best use of the $4.3 billion currently available for construction funds.” But the Board also unashamed a storm of criticism and controversy.

Congressman Dennis Cardoza, representative in the Central Valley in which the project is to be located, strongly condemned the decision as wasteful and seriously flawed. “I support the project and am 100% in favor of full-speed passenger rail service. But I need to hear from the people who live on this project. I need to hear from the California State law Assembly Transportation Committee,” he said.

But the Authority’s decision to build the Central Valley first was the supersedence and support among Valley interests. However, for a re-negotiated Fresno corridor, there was widespread disarray at the December board meeting, some of it spawned by the Authority’s self-inflicted wound at today’s meeting. He wants to assure the 20-mile segment to be built, reassure Merced of an early connection and make sure the “Chowchilla 1” start of the branch toward San Joaquin is a priority. We hope that enough to get critical allies back on board, for the_To-Fresno project will go smoothly in the Central Valley, where it’s immensely popular, it will never be completed.

Central Valley Route Selection and Violations of AB 3034

As expected, December 3rd, the High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) released its final report on the hybrid selection, labeled option 1, between Binion and Corcoran segments (which we believe is the primary reason for the $4.33 billion dollars. It straddles two cities, Fresno to Corcoran, and includes parts of both Madera and Fresno Counties.)

The selection certainly represents low ridership cities. Corcoran, as a small Central Valley town you’ve never heard of, instead of being a symbol of wasteful government spending. It will strengthen the congressional critics’ contention that the rail project will forever wear the label “Boondoggle.” And it will have been well earned.

According to State Attorney General Spasoje, who was not asked to determine the legality of the staff recommenda- tion prior to the meeting in October, “The part of ‘boondoggle’ selection was not a usable segment within the demand. The $3 billion was a ‘boilerplate segment’ which would later be defined when the Authority went to the legislature for funding.

During the meeting Rod Diridon said, “Let me stress them in the motion which I am going to offer that I’m using that word to describe construction project of the Authority. The $3 billion was a ‘boilerplate segment’ which would later be defined when the Authority went to the legislature for funding.

But the fact is AB3044 does not allow for a smaller seg- ment to be built, and is not a part of any of the construction project or the building. It states, Constitution and the California State law Assembly Transportation Committee is solely in the discretion of the legislature. An area of state law which appears to be a viola- tion in the section that says that the “corridor or usable seg- ment must be to retain its power to make “executive earmarks.” And it will strengthen the congressional critics’ contention that the rail project will forever wear the label “Boondoggle.” And it will have been well earned.

$3 BILLION ELEVATED SEGMENTS BALLOON COSTS OF THE SYSTEM

California’s High-Speed Rail Authority announced on December 2, 2010, for the first time in history, that the knife-edge decision on which of several potential routes through the Central Valley had encountered in the more densely settled San Francisco Bay Area. California law provides that the project will never wear the label “Boondoggle.” And it will have been well earned.
TRANSIT agency named itself, it raised the opposition from early supporters of the network. Constraints have raised concerns and even the question is whether SMART can ever deliver its bright promise. Spotswood rail service using low-cost stations and Metrolink following the Northridge earthquake as an example of rapidly expanded rail services using low-cost stations and leased rolling stock from other operators.

The SMART Board and its consultants should similarly adopt a businesslike approach and work out how to make the best use of the limited funds available. It's a waste of money to build only half of the high cost project and hope that 'something will turn up' to fund the rest. The results are an uncertain service that SMART could do little to achieve the objective of reduced congestion," said Dyson.

Dyson and others have suggested leasing instead of buying rail equipment to conserve capital and allow earlier implementation. With Metrolink taking delivery of new equipment, it will have a surplus of commuter equipment. Other West Coast systems, as well as private firms, may also have railcars and locomotives that can be leased.

Dyson also points out that significant savings compared to building a maintenance facility may be obtained by doing heavy repairs at existing shops off line. Alstom may be interested in doing such work in its Mare Island facility.

He asks whether using cheaper, low level platforms would have a significant impact on station dwell time, and would the slightly increased journey times have a negative impact on ridership? If so, the question is: is the trade-off tolerable?

Dyson believes the citizens of Sonoma and Marin Counties could still have the system they voted for, slightly more frugal packaged. He is disappointed that the Board is not looking at alternatives.

Citizens frustrated about the SMART Board's lack of receptiveness toward alternate concepts or open discussion of issues have seized upon the flaws in the process that have resulted in the project's construction phasing. A Brown Act lawsuit may be in the offing. SMART has made itself a target for anti-tax campaigners and those who do not share the vision of a robust North Bay transit alternative to the automobile. A taxpayer challenge could be fatal to the project.

SMART needed a thorough deliberate process to enable it to move forward with community support, but chose instead to rush through the decision to purchase and install DMU commuter equipment to run out a completed financial plan. The recent decision to delay bond issuance several months leaves time for the careful consideration of remaining options, if SMART is smart enough to do so.

The California Rail Foundation was founded in 1987 to promote modern rail and bus technology, including high-speed rail. Since that time we have held 26 Annual Conferences and co-sponsored an annual conference that educates on rail, CalRail 2020.

We never believed it would be easy to build California high-speed rail, but we understimated just how much fraud megaprojects apparently attract. The project now has a broken budget because of tens of billions of dollars of pork including 200 miles of wasted route and unneeded viaducts in the Central Valley. It appears to be the same model used on the Peninsula and Los Angeles County segments.

Taxpayers are being offered only overly ex- pensive trains that move freight away from the platform by the CPUC rules which protect brakemen hanging off the side of a boxcar from hitting the platform. A 34” gap is required between platform and train, which must be filled by a bridge plate, as was used on the Spriter, or a gauntlet track, which moves freight trains away from the platform by the required amount. The CPUC is determined to observe this 34” rule, whether it still protects working brakemen or not.

Dyson cited the 1994 expansion of Metrolink following the Northridge earthquake as an example of rapidly expanded rail services using low-cost stations and leased rolling stock from other operators.

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HSR Peer Review Group Summary Comments

These summary peer review group comments on HSRA's 2009 Report to the Legislature, were transmitted by Chairman Will Kempton this month:

Authority Staffing

Though not an explicit part of the 2009 Business Plan, one of the consequences of discussions with the Authority that the staff level now permitted is totally inadequate to oversee a project of this magnitude, no matter what business model is ultimately chosen. Moreover, the changes in public sector management of major projects is that staffing levels and compensation are not always related to the needs of the agency managing the project. The Authority would plan, finance and build the project according to the Authority's specified plan and construct the system, and construct the system, and the Authority would design, finance and construct the system, and construct the system. These summary peer review group comments urge the Authority, the Governor and the Legislature to ensure that the Authority has access to the staff numbers and compensation needed for managing the project; anything less will ensure major problems of budget control, accountability and scheduling. Thus, we suggest that the Authority and legislature consider other organizational approaches, such as public corporations, that would improve the ability of management to secure adequate staff and reliable funding.

Business Model

The Authority should focus immediately on selection of an appropriate "business model." "Business plans," "strategic plans" and "business models" are not synonyms. The Authority must understand that the business model must be a clear statement by the Authority of the roles to be played by all involved parties concerning the project's ownership, construction, financing and general management. As the project moves toward implementation, the selection of an appropriate business model, though a complex task, will have great bearing on the project's implementation and success. There appear to be five general business models that might be used in California, though there are many variations due to local, state and federal restrictions. The existing massive imbalance between the numbers of Authority staff and consultants has been the source of continuing criticism; the problem will be much exacerbated as the project moves into implementation. We urge the Authority, the Governor and the Legislature to ensure that the Authority has access to the staff numbers and compensation needed for managing the project; anything less will ensure major problems of budget control, accountability and scheduling. Thus, we suggest that the Authority and legislature consider other organizational approaches, such as public corporations, that would improve the ability of management to secure adequate staff and reliable funding.

Management of Risk and Uncertainty

All "mega projects" such as High Speed Rail (HSR) carry significant risk and uncertainty. Community opposition to the project proposed alignment between San Francisco and San Jose, as well as the early stage of the system's overall design status (among many other issues) will cause the cost of the project to fluctuate. Further contributing to the project's uncertainty will be the expected change in the estimated cost variability in each of the project's components. The Authority should make the necessary adjustments in these areas based on the project's stage of development. By doing so, the Authority will provide the public a better understanding of the reliability and variability of the engineer's estimate. Applying traditional mechanisms to the engineer's cost estimate, such as percentage contingencies, etc., will not engender continued confidence in the project. In addition, we encourage the Authority to conduct more detailed and transparent sensitivity analyses of the impact on expected outcomes of variations in demand, revenues, investment costs, operating costs and project timing. The transfer and allocation of risk is a critical concern to the Authority and should be assessed. The context of the business model, the Authority should investigate project risks and determine who will bear them, aligning with the notion of why a particular risk allocation model was selected.

The Financial Gap between Currently Available Resources and Total Project Cost

There is a considerable uncertainty and unavailability of federal funding combined with the state's structural deficit, over-reliance on federal funding and budget unpredictability. In light of the public concern over government spending, how will the Authority close the gap between any funding resources and the project's total estimated cost? What will the Authority's course of action be if the funding gap cannot be closed? The group suggests that if the project experiences a shortage of funding resources, it should: (1) concentrate the funds available by completing operating segments; and (2) reassess the business model, given the ability and willingness of the involved parties to raise money. The group has also identified concerns related to the operable segment issue and the absence of a credible financial plan. The Authority apparently must now focus federal resources on a single segment, requiring a choice between demonstrating HSR in the short run and independent utility if the project is not completed. The lack of a clear financial plan is a critical concern. The group fully realizes that developing a credible financial plan is difficult depending, as it does, on a large number of decisions not yet made and on factors beyond the control of the Authority. In a deteriorating budget climate in which even large and highly beneficial projects are abruptly canceled, the Authority recognizes the "chicken and egg" nature of the conundrum: the Authority cannot get private investment without a solid prospect that the project will go forward; conversely, without private funds, the Authority cannot make the project go forward. Failure to arrive at such an agreement will put the project's forward progress in jeopardy.

Need for a Revenue or Demand Guarantee

According to the Proposition 1A bond measure, any public "operating subsidy" is prohibited, making demand or revenue guarantees legally questionable. However, discussion of a revenue or demand guarantee for the private sector in order to attract private investment must be seen in the context of the business model adopted by the Authority. For example, if a demand guarantee were offered to an operator whereby the operator was required to design, build, finance, and operate the system as well as buy back all the line at the end of the term, the demand risk might have to be assumed by the Authority through a revenue guarantee unless the demand estimates were pegged so high that the profitability of the system was beyond a doubt. Conversely, if the system were designed and built by the Authority, with the Authority buying and leasing the rolling stock and not changing the operating fee for the use of the system, with operator's revenues applied to covering only the operation and maintenance costs, the need for a demand guarantee and subsidy might well not arise. Obtaining an agreed definition of the term "operating subsidy" has become critical. A recent report, "The Financial Risks: California's Prop 1A Program for High-Speed Rail" published by the Legislative Analyst's Office and the Legislative Analyst's Office and the State Auditor, to complete an analysis of any issues regarding the demand models so that a mutually agreed estimate can be reached along with ranges of uncertainty. Failure to arrive at such an agreement will put the project's forward progress in jeopardy.

(continued on Page 8)
significantly affect the legal viability of the project and the choice of business model. The “Financial Risks” study highlights the confusion between financial analysis, the basis for private involvement, and economics, the basis for public involvement. The study makes a series of critical comments on the 2009 Business Plan and deserves careful attention and response from the Authority, as we share many of the same concerns. The study is, however, limited to financial analysis, while leaving aside all of the reasons—consumer surplus, reduction of congestion on rural and urban highways, airports and airways, reduction of pollution and carbon emissions, and reduction of accident costs, among others—that would be in the Authority’s interest to evaluate public involvement in the project. The treatment of public benefits was much more detailed in the 2008 Business Plan than in the 2009 Business Plan. One of the most important issues in the overall evaluation of the project, and the close interrelation of public benefits with demand forecasts, we strongly encourage the Authority to undertake a thorough and updated treatment of public benefits and costs in the 2010 Business Plan and to link these results with the agreed definition of “operating subsidy.”

ROW and Alignment Availability

While different types of service can run on the same track, the Review Group agrees that freight and high speed rail should not operate on the same track. There remains significant uncertainty in the cost and the availability of ROW as well as alignment issues. While we understand that the level of cooperation has improved, any lack of cooperation, or resistance by Class I Railroads regarding the joint use of urban rail segments as well as the project’s need for long and straight alignments, will be problematic. The Authority should recognize the risks involved in the high cost of the high speed rail project in California revealed that the cost of elevated track was approximately double the cost for at-grade track and the cost of tunnels was double that of an elevated configuration. Any decisions made by the Authority in this area will have significant financial implications for the project. The analysis concludes the financial risk for speeds and seismic-related issues. Specifically, train speeds in China, due to safety reasons, mandated that the track be grade separated, either in tunnel or elevated. Also, given the seismic concerns in California, larger foundations will be needed, resulting in higher system costs, perhaps by as much as 60 percent. The Authority needs to make a clear statement on these issues.

San Diego Associated Governments (SANDAG) and Caltrans District 11 are seeking public comment on a plan to spend $3 to $4 billion to widen a 27 mile stretch of Interstate 5 along the coast between Oceanside and Del Mar (a few miles north of San Diego). Highway traffic congestion and commute times on this 8-lane highway now is and likely to get worse in the future. This route parallels the Pacific Surfliner and Coaster rail passenger service.

"Immediately investing about 30% ($1.2 billion) of this amount in the rail corridor," points out TRAC Board Member Mike McGinley, "would increase capacity equal to two new freeway lanes and reduce train travel time; this is the alternative that should be constructed first. Building the rail corridor to a higher capacity will be a significant mitigation for the congestion due to the freeway construction and will offer citizens alternatives to automobile travel."

Pacific Surfliner train service between San Diego, Los Angeles and Oxnard (with some trains extending northward to San Luis Obispo) is the nation’s busiest commuter corridor, with 12 round trips daily and 7,100 daily riders. Coaster is a commuter rail service between Oceanside and San Diego that was created by voter-passed bond measures 108 and 116 in 1990. It operates 10 daily round trips and carries 4,300 daily riders. All these trains operate on the LOSSAN (Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo) corridor, a mostly single-track railroad. Service is constrained by the lack of double track to let trains in both directions operate freely and by speed restrictions caused by winding track and unstable soils on the Miramar grade.

While SANDAG has studied various rail improvements in the past: completion of double track in the County’s replacement of obsolete wooden bridges, and alternatives to cut the Miramar grade (including a tunnel that would shorten and straighten the line making it time-competitive with the freeway). These improvements have not made it into the current study, which is a throwback to the era of freeway planning without viable alternatives considered.

Under California environmental law, it is no longer permissible to plan highway expansions without studying feasible alternatives. While added highway capacity may be desirable, it cannot be the only choice offered by SANDAG to citizens, especially given the significant negative impacts to all the coastal communities. Below is a preliminary budget example of how much 30% of the $4 billion foreseen could be invested in a project that would add four trains per hour for carrying at least 500 passengers each in each direction through the corridor, the functional equivalent of adding an express lane in each direction not just to Del Mar, but all the way to San Diego.

Some of the projects proposed in the planning and funding stream for SANDAG and Caltrans, however a much bolder program is needed to firmly establish this corridor as an efficient, safe, environmentally-friendly alternative to simply adding more lanes to an 8-lane freeway.

Building more freeway lanes makes a multi-decade commitment that citizens will always have access to cheap petroleum, cheap parking places, and are willing to spend hours of their lives every day driving. The rail alternative will give all citizens the opportunity to travel in a mode that uses less energy, reduces our dependence on imported oil, and allows people to use their travel time to read, compute or even nap.

To make this plan work, the “last mile” problem needs to be addressed. Two aspects of this suggestion are first, to expand parking at the stations in the north part of the line and second, to enhance connections with the various transit lines throughout the corridor. One example of a better connection is the proposed San Diego Trolley station and transfer to Lindberg Field (San Diego airport).

The highway project claims “no increase in energy” for a project that facilitates a huge increase in highway travel. This is a questionable assumption. The rail alternative can truly offer energy savings because every rail passenger who chooses to leave the automobile behind does reduce motor fuel use.

The highway project is described as needing “some taking” of land to add the additional lanes, which will draw some objections from affected communities. The rail option will also require some taking of land in the Miramar hill area, with manageable environmental impacts.

Perhaps the most serious challenge to adding a second track to this line will come from the communities of Del Mar (where the tracks run along an ocean bluff that has been co-opted as a hiking trail) and Carlsbad (where the tracks pass through the downtown area). Both of these local communities are sheltered from the freeway impacts and would see infrastructure investment in their neighborhood as a negative. Political leadership will be needed to bring these communities into the larger regional community that needs better transportation and needs alternatives to more freeway lanes.

**A RAIL OPTION FOR S.D. I-5 CORRIDOR**

| Purchase 12 train sets @ $24 million | $288 million |
| Maintenance Yard at Oceanside | 100 |
| Parking garages at 5 stations @ $30m | 150 |
| Miramar Hill second track | 260 |
| Double Track 5 other segments @ $70m | 350 |
| Local transit interface improvements | 52 |

**Rail Option Estimate**

$1,200 million

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**By Michael E. McGinley P.E.**

**Peer Review**

(continued from Page 7)